

Strategic Visions: Volume 21, Number II

Roth, Tanya L. *Her Cold War: Women in the U.S. Military, 1945-1980*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021.

Tanya Roth's *Her Cold War: Women in the US Military, 1945-1980* covers an often neglected period in women's military history: the post-WWII years through the creation of the All-Volunteer Force and the effects of 1970s-era social movements. Roth effectively traces ways in which ideas of intra-military gender equality were conceptualized, defined, and implemented. In highlighting "womanpower" during the Cold War, Roth demonstrates ways in which the U.S. military evolved due to servicemembers' own efforts, examining individual actions and experiences as catalysts of change.

Roth begins with the creation of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which codified "gender difference [as] the hallmark of defining equality in the Cold War defense system" (38). She examines how the military allowed for women's



participation in the military auxiliary corps, while reaffirming existing gender ideologies. Roth explores how servicewomen were made into "ladies," and white, middle-class, heterosexual femininity was reinforced in recruitment and training programs. While this argument is not new, Roth's in-depth look at the 1952 Miss America pageant as a recruitment campaign is a new means of examining the military's deployment of gender. This exemplifies Roth's argument that the military "[emphasized] womanpower as feminine and ladylike" to construct it as acceptable to the American public (53). In examining how the military created a public image of servicewomen using femininity and glamor, Roth uses oft-overlooked sources to reinforce arguments made by previous scholars about the military's emphasis on

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femininity and moral character through the 1950s and 60s.¹ Most notably, Roth's analysis of military-produced training videos and Hollywood films add to the plethora of sources exploring expectations of, and standards placed on, servicewomen. While prior scholars have often focused on printed training material and advertisements, she demonstrates how "connecting womanpower with being a lady was a careful construction" in an innovative manner (76).

In part two, Roth examines servicewomen's actual experiences. In analyzing changes concerning gender equality definitions in the U.S. military, Roth explores how individual servicewomen experienced limitations imposed by the military institution, and how each of these women attempted to mediate their effects. Concerning policies about rank limits,

pregnancy regulations, and quotas, Roth argues that, despite promises of equality, servicewomen were limited in jobs they could hold, and ranks they could reach. This included benefits and supplementary pay structures that were unavailable to women. In a 1970 statement on the military's utilization of women, Major General Jeanne Holm stated that the military excluded women from certain jobs for legal, cultural, and physiological reasons. Roth argues that these distinctions were "related more to assumptions rather than fact: beliefs about what women could or should do," not physical ability (99). The Cold War military's policies, Roth argues, limited its utilization of women, forcing them to negotiate their own meaning of equality. Servicewomen challenged policies regarding motherhood, ability, sex, and sexuality, fighting regulations that the military put into

¹ For example, Beth Bailey, *American's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009, and Kara Dixon Vuic,

Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Corps in the Vietnam War. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 2010.

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place in postwar years “to enforce their vision of equality, maintaining its foundation in gender difference philosophy that relied on heterosexuality,” that reinforced ideas of a mother’s place in the home (138). Roth’s use of individual stories adds strength to her analysis of how military policies concerning women played affected their experiences. In combining her own interviews with previously-recorded oral histories and secondary sources, Roth creates snapshots of actual effects of military regulations.

Roth’s last section is her strongest, analyzing how servicewomen created ideas of equality that diverged from policymakers’ definitions. This section does a fantastic job using interviews, archival documents, and secondary sources to explore changing circumstances for servicewomen. She examines the influence of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) as an advocacy

group bridging the military-civilian gap, that changed the Department of Defense (DOD) and the military institution internally throughout the Cold War, though “DACOWITS members never questioned the overarching femininity framework that shaped women’s military experiences” (158). Those questions, she argues, came from servicewomen themselves, as well as shifting gender ideology in American society. As an example, Roth examines *Frontiero v. Richardson*, a 1973 Supreme Court case challenging military regulations that prevented women from claiming spouses or children as dependents, except in rare circumstances. This landmark case challenged the provision of the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act that “simultaneously prevented women from becoming heads of households while ensuring women’s military service would not emasculate their husbands” (38). In agreeing that this policy violated the Fifth

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Amendment, the Supreme Court and litigant Lieutenant Sharon Frontiero, became agents for intra-military change. While Frontiero was not the first woman to argue against this provision of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, her legal victory amended a policy reinforcing traditional gender ideology. A major element in Frontiero's success was the context in which her case was heard. Roth notes three factors: the end of the Selective Service Act, expanding influence of the feminist movement, and progression of the Equal Rights Act (ERA). Despite the care to which the directors of the women's auxiliary corps took to distance themselves from the women's movement, Roth argues it became one of the most influential external forces on servicewomen's lives in the 1970s.

Roth explores other effects of feminism and the ERA on the military, arguing that expected passage of the amendment forced the military to conduct

their own assessments to address regulations and policies before the ERA was enacted. The military made changes permitting increased promotion opportunities, expansion of Military Occupational Specialties women could hold, and entrance of women into service academies and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs, leading the way for women's reserve units' disbandment and integration into the standing military. In one notable example of these changes, Roth looks at Section 6015 of the Women's Armed Services Act of 1948 which stated that women could not be assigned to combat aircraft nor naval ships besides hospital and transport vessels. In 1978, Judge John Sirica ruled in *Owen v. Brown* that this was unconstitutional, allowing for the navy to further utilize womanpower. Roth argues that "equality, particularly in terms of equal opportunity, had become the watchword of the U.S. military as a result of both

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servicewomen's pushes for internal change and the external influences of feminist activists" (192).

Roth points out that "removing the institutional structure of a segregated component system that functioned within the main military organization was one way to force male military leaders to pay attention to their policies on female utilization" (198). However, this was not entirely successful. Roth's book draws to a close in 1980, one year after women were allowed on Navy ships, with the USS Norton Sound and the investigation of nineteen women accused of homosexuality. Ultimately, charges against fifteen women were dropped, two were found not guilty, and two were discharged. While memory of the investigation faded from the media by 1981 and commanders argued for more women on board, Roth argues that the legacy of Section 6015 stood: "the navy was

moving conservatively, as was the rest of the military" (214).

While Roth's overarching project ends on a less promising note concerning the future of women in the military, her conclusion points to the advancements made since 1980. She argues that in the early 1980s, a "new definition of equality centered [...] on recognizing individual capability, regardless of sex" (217). While it mostly skips over the 1980s, Roth's conclusion recognizes expanding roles of servicewomen in the last thirty years. Nevertheless, she states, "gender and sexuality continue to be central elements of women's military experiences, affecting how servicemen and male superiors perceive them, their assignments, and their career opportunities" (220). Therefore, Roth reinforces an important point made in her introduction: servicemembers "continue to face the legacies of Cold War efforts to

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integrate women into the military” (17).

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