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Groundswell: The Veterans' and Survivors' March from Mobile to New Orleans

> ground•swell n. 1. A deep wide up-and-down movement of the sea, often caused by a far-off storm or an earthquake. 2. A strong growth of feeling or opinion that is evident but not always attributable to a specific source. 3. A sudden gathering of force, as of public opinion: *a groundswell of antiwar sentiment.* (Encarta World English Dictionary 1999)

March 19, 2006 marked the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. It also marked over six months of little or no rebuilding along the U.S. Gulf Coast. The combined humanitarian and economic devastation caused by the Iraq War and Hurricane Katrina are two of the greatest sociopolitical issues facing American society today. As billions of dollars flow from the national coffers to support the war in Iraq, relief and reconstruction on the Gulf Coast has been slow and inefficient. Areas in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were completely wiped out by the storm and floodwaters leaving debris and human remains in their wake. One veteran I spoke to who lives in the region described it as, "worse than downtown Baghdad." Meanwhile, after three years of occupation in Iraq nearly 2500 American servicemembers are dead, more than 17,000 are wounded, and little rebuilding has taken place there unless one counts the construction of permanent military bases. This says nothing of the thousands of Iraqi civilian casualties, coalition forces killed or wounded, and the continued damage to Iraq's infrastructure.

For these and other reasons, a growing number of Americans have expressed discontent with the Bush administration's domestic and foreign policies. Record low approval ratings are linked to the Iraq War and the slow response to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It is within this sociopolitical climate that the Veterans' and

Survivors' March to New Orleans takes on its significance. In conceptualizing the six-day event, the organizers sought to draw attention to what they saw as the Bush administration's two major policy failures by bringing together Americans who have suffered loss, trauma, and wounds both at home and abroad. Beginning in Mobile, Alabama on March 14th and culminating on March 19th in New Orleans, Louisiana, members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) along with other veterans' organizations, military family members, hurricane survivors, and relief workers marched in solidarity through the areas heaviest hit by Hurricane Katrina.

I conducted six days of ethnographic field research with members of IVAW who participated in the Veterans' and Survivors' March. The purpose of this research is to assess the attitudes and perceptions of individual members of IVAW in order to determine how they interpret its personal and political significance. Underlying my inquiry is the question of whether activism, dissent, and/or political protest are helpful in overcoming posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is my hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between an individual's participation in antiwar activism and his ability to overcome PTSD. Others have noted among Vietnam veterans a cathartic or redemptive quality to political protest allowing people to overcome trauma through venting their frustrations and making public their private suffering (Lifton 1973 [1992]; Shay 1994, 2002). I seek to test my hypothesis among recently returned Iraq veterans involved in the antiwar movement. In this preliminary study I found that for many in the group the Veterans' and Survivors' March was more than just a demonstration of antiwar sentiment or discontent with the federal disaster response but a pilgrimage of sorts with the goal of finding redemption and solace after experiencing the horrors of war and

trauma of loss. As I demonstrate below, while there has been excellent anthropological work done on militarism, trauma, and social movements no studies to date have drawn these strands of theory together to examine the lives of antiwar veterans.

This work is significant for three reasons. First, it documents the voices of those seldom heard in the mainstream media or anthropological work, namely veterans who oppose the war in Iraq. Throughout the project I enjoyed the cooperation of key personnel within IVAW, which allowed for unprecedented access to antiwar Iraq veterans. Second, it contributes to recent anthropological research on militarism in the U.S. by providing a direct ethnographic case study of the men and women who bear the costs of militarism in their bodies and psyches (Lutz 2001, 2002, and Forthcoming; Scarry 1985). Finally, it will provide IVAW organizers insight into how individual members interpreted the significance of the march and how well organizational goals were disseminated throughout the rank-and-file membership. Although the design of this research was not collaborative in nature, my own membership in IVAW and fourteen years of Army service gave me a measure of credibility among the other veterans that few researchers might enjoy. By combining ethnographic vignettes with selected photographs from the march, I will open a window onto the antiwar scene paying close attention to a nascent movement among recent combat veterans, war resisters, and conscientious objectors active in IVAW.

Historical Background

The Veterans' and Survivors' March is historically situated within the larger contexts of antiwar social movements, the delayed post-Katrina relief effort, and U.S. imperialism—the Global War on Terror being the most recent manifestation of this. These broad contextual factors are important for interpreting the significance of the march for at least three reasons. First, many of the organizers are themselves veterans of the Vietnam War and/or seasoned activists involved in peace and social justice movements since the 1970s. Their participation in the march bridges the gap between the former and burgeoning antiwar movement. The inclusion of veterans also provides role models, mentorship, and socialization for new activist-veterans of the Iraq war. Second, the futility of experiencing the fight against Communism in Vietnam helps put the current fight against Terrorism into historical perspective. The majority of Vietnam veterans participating in the march expressed outrage at the fact that another generation of youth is fighting a "war for nothing" during their lifetimes. Younger veterans make similar connections between Vietnam and Iraq when they speak out against the current war. Lastly, recent imperialist adventures abroad in the name of security at home, is putting tremendous pressure on domestic socioeconomic stability, which presents striking parallels between Vietnam and Iraq. The organizers of the march sought to emphasize these parallels by juxtaposing the Bush administration's role in the Iraq war and lackluster response to the Katrina disaster.

The war in Iraq has in many ways been compared to the Vietnam War in terms of its controversial reasons for beginning and continuing, devastating impacts on civilian populations and increasing lack of popular support over time. There are of course

significant differences between the two wars most notably Iraq's vast oil resources, the specter of another terrorist attack on U.S. soil, and the absence of a military draft. Supporters of the war cite the latter two in attempting to silence dissent. On the one hand they claim that fighting terrorism in Iraq safeguards the U.S. homeland, while on the other hand they say that everyone serving in the military does so voluntarily and thus has no recourse to opposing the war. Opponents of the war suspect an oil-driven agenda in Iraq, they view the occupation as inciting further violence, and support antiwar soldiers on the basis that the war violates international law. Another important difference is despite large mobilizations around the world prior to the beginning of the Iraq war, the contemporary antiwar movement is much less widespread than during the Vietnam era. These differences notwithstanding, the emergence of an antiwar Iraq veterans' organization has its historical precedents and marks an important milestone in resistance to the war.

There is a long tradition of veteran activism in the U.S. spanning from the post-revolutionary period to the present (Moser 1996; Waller 1944). Veterans have always responded to how they are treated upon return from their respective wars and struggled for access to benefits from the government. Perhaps the most salient example of veteran activism from recent history and the most relevant parallel to the present study is the organizing efforts of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Highlights from this period include the Winter Soldier Investigation, where combat veterans testified about war crimes they observed or committed in Vietnam; Operation Dewey Canyon III when one thousand Vietnam veterans descended on Washington D.C. for a week of protest and lobbying; and John Kerry's address before

the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Kerry 1971; Cortright 1975 [2005]; Ehrhart 1995; Moser 1996; Stacewicz 1997; Hunt 1999; Nicosia 2001). Although the movement among GIs and veterans started out small and in isolated pockets around the country, at its height of activity in the early 1970s VVAW boasted a membership in the tens of thousands and is still in existence today, based in Chicago (Moser 1996; Stacewicz 1997; Nicosia 2001).

As the Global War on Terror rages on amidst concerns over the imprecise mission and lack of an explicit exit strategy for Iraq a growing number of American combat veterans, war resisters, and conscientious objectors are speaking out against it. After serving their country honorably as part of an all-volunteer force many have experienced a form of cognitive dissonance vis-à-vis the war in Iraq that has had, in certain cases, a radicalizing effect (Lifton 1973 [1992]; Helmer 1974; Retzer 1976). Currently almost three hundred veterans, the majority of whom served in Iraq or Afghanistan, are active in a renewed antiwar movement struggling to end the very war they were ordered to participate in.[1]

In July 2004, while rotations of deployed troops were underway for Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom (OEF, OIF), the fledgling organization Iraq Veterans Against the War was formed. The nine founding members, all recently returned from service in the Middle East, met at a convention of Veterans for Peace (VFP) held in Boston and were encouraged by veterans of previous wars, most notably members of VVAW, to start their own organization. The founders decided that the sole criterion for membership in IVAW was service in the U.S. Armed Services since September 11, 2001 linking their opposition to the war in Iraq to the broader Global War on Terror. They

[1] There are currently 276 members of IVAW according to staff at the national office in Philadelphia.

formulated three unifying points in their mission statement including 1) immediate withdrawal of the troops from Iraq 2) support for Iraqi reconstruction 3) and increased support for returning veterans.

Members of this new organization, with support from older veterans and military families, immediately began touring the country speaking about their experiences and demonstrating against the war. The organization has gained significant momentum following Cindy Sheehan's standoff in Crawford, Texas in August 2005, doubling their membership and visibility (Sheehan 2005). At its present stage of organizational development IVAW membership is a small fraction of the troops that have served in OEF or OIF. Time will tell how long the Iraq war lasts and whether IVAW will reach a broader constituency or enjoy the success VVAW did in the past. It is noteworthy that IVAW was formed so soon after the invasion of Iraq.

Theoretical framework

The emergence of IVAW within the antiwar movement raises a number of interesting questions regarding 1) the militarization of U.S. society 2) trauma and resilience among veterans and 3) antiwar social movements, highlighting important continuities and disjunctures with the recent past. First, how has the hyper-militarization of American society since WWII contributed to young men and women joining the Armed Forces? Second, why does the experience of combat cause some veterans to adopt a radical political position or become active in the antiwar movement? Third, what role do members of IVAW see they play in the neo-antiwar movement? Finally, how does activism contribute to healing from PTSD? While I do not attempt to answer all these questions here, I do touch on the themes that emerge from them. The following is a

review of the relevant literature I draw upon to inform my analysis.

Militarism and Militarization

There is a growing body of anthropological literature on militarism and militarization in the U.S. (Ben-Ari 2004; Enloe 1990, 2000; Gill 2004; Lutz 2001, 2002, Forthcoming; McCaffrey 2002; Simons 1999). Lutz (2002) draws a useful distinction between the two terms defining *militarism* as narrow in scope and "identifying a society's emphasis on martial values" (2002: 725). Discipline, hierarchy, and masculine aggression are all elements in this conception of militarism. She contends domestic scholars seldom use the term militarism in reference to the U.S. thereby reproducing the discourse of America as a "peace-loving nation." Lutz locates militarism in the sphere of political discourse and points out that "warlike values have an independent ability to drive social change" (ibid). *Militarization* on the other hand "draws attention to the simultaneously material and discursive nature of military dominance" (ibid). It is processual in nature combining ideology, technology, economy, and the pursuit of power through force. In her book *Homefront*, Lutz (2001) shows how the militarization of American society during WWII and its rise to global power afterwards has had an enormous impact on the way wars are perceived domestically, the submersed naturalization of martial values in popular culture, and the response of the general public to foreign policy. Where her ethnography falters is in the absence of the soldiers' voices living in and around Fort Bragg, North Carolina. While Lutz's insightful examination of how the intersecting relationships of race, class, and gender shape military and civilian life in Fayetteville, the lack of soldiers' experiences with militarization in her account presents a lacuna I attempt to fill, in part, with this paper.

The Vietnam War presented a crisis of confidence in government on the part of the American public leading many to openly resist policies they viewed as not in the interest of the people (Freeman and Johnson 1999; Lutz 2001). The post-Vietnam period also significantly altered how veterans expected to be treated upon their return from war (Lembcke 2000). The Iraq War seems to present a similar set of circumstances once again calling the morality of U.S. military interventions abroad into question. Given these circumstances Lutz challenges anthropologists to engage in *ethnographies of empire* that account for and critically analyze the hegemonic forces of domestic and international processes that link military-industrial complexes with economies of violence (2002 and Forthcoming). Recent studies in anthropology suggest this work is already underway (Enloe 2000; Gill 2004; McCaffrey 2002). My work adds to this new ethnography of empire or anthropology of militarization by focusing on the foot soldiers of empire, the active military personnel and veterans.

Ben-Ari (2004) notes the importance of not only studying soldiers in the combat arms (infantry, cavalry, military police, etc.) but also support personnel (supply, medical, transportation, etc.) who make up the majority of the Armed Forces—anecdotal accounts estimate nine support soldiers for every one infantryman. He also highlights the increasing participation of women in the military that are seeing combat and the effects of militarization in a much more direct way (see also Enloe 2000); think of Jessica Lynch, the female soldier in a maintenance unit who was captured in the early days of the invasion of Iraq and subsequently rescued in a highly publicized Special Forces raid (Bragg 2003). Women serving in Iraq are seeing combat at unprecedented levels for the U.S. military, in ways unheard of during the Vietnam War. If this is the case, we should

expect to see a new wave of female soldiers who were wounded physically and/or psychologically among returning Iraq veterans. Indeed, among the founding members of IVAW is one woman, Kelly Doherty, who served in a military police unit in Iraq and is one of the organization's most active members.

Combat or War-related Trauma

War-related trauma is an important component in veteran activism in part because some of the most outspoken critics of the Vietnam War, and I would argue the Iraq War, experienced the horrors of combat. Since the early 1970s there has been extensive research on the onset, diagnosis, and treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder as well as the social impacts of war (McNally 2003; Modell and Haggerty 1991). Two classic texts in particular, Lifton's (1973) *Home From the War* and Helmer's (1974) *Bringing the War Home* attempt to explain coping behaviors and antiwar sentiment among members of VVAW. Lifton, a noted psychiatrist, recounts in painful detail the experiences of Vietnam veterans through interviews and observations of 'rap sessions' or group therapy meetings, including the events surrounding the My Lai massacre. He is critical of military psychiatry, which sought to downplay the effects of war-related trauma (Young 1995: 109). The value of Lifton's contribution lies in his focus on lower-ranking soldiers thereby shifting attention away from officers who generally receive more consideration in accounts of war. Lifton also makes an important intervention with his analysis of the benefits of group support among antiwar veterans. In contrast to Lifton, Helmer approaches the veteran problem from a sociological perspective. He interviewed a broader political spectrum by including in his study members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and attempted to explain differences in political orientation. The limitation

to Helmer's study is an over-dependence on a single variable, namely veterans' socialization into affinity groups while in Vietnam. Retzer (1976) suggests both Lifton and Helmer take an overly structural approach to understanding shifts in political ideology among Vietnam veterans and proffers an alternative, more nuanced theory of pre-war attitudinal disposition, combat experience, and post-war exposure to political radicalism. All three works lay the groundwork for a more in-depth analysis of trauma and activism among Iraq veterans. Where these texts are lacking is in deep ethnographic details obtained through participant-observation among antiwar veterans' activities outside of the research or therapeutic setting. My interactions with IVAW members suggest that beyond talking about their traumatic experiences in therapy sessions, staying active politically and venting frustrations through public testimony also helps them overcome PTSD symptoms.

Allan Young's compelling anthropological examination in *The Harmony of Illusions* traces the development of PTSD as a psychological diagnosis and reviews research on traumatic memories and war neuroses from WWI to the present, uncovering the "mechanisms through which these phenomena penetrate people's life worlds, acquire facticity, and shape the self-knowledge of patients, clinicians, and researchers" (1995:6). He points out that while he does not deny the experience of war-related trauma, he questions the way PTSD as a category was pieced together by medical professionals under politically charged circumstances. He argues for a new understanding of PTSD as socially and historically constructed, "glued together by the practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented" (1995:5). Young challenges the idea that PTSD is timeless and universal. One cannot conduct ethnography

of antiwar veterans suffering from PTSD without engaging Young's argument. It is important to note, however, that the force of his contention is directed at mental health professionals that accept the PTSD nosology without problematizing the sociohistorical aspects of its creation. He admonishes researchers to recognize that PTSD developed in a particular context, under particular historical circumstances. Young's detailed descriptions of the quotidian events in a PTSD clinic exemplify good ethnography and serve as a point of departure for my own work. Not unlike Lifton and Helmer's work, however, Young's omission of veterans' lives outside of the therapeutic setting leaves the prospect of antiwar activism as a contributing factor in overcoming PTSD unexamined.

In a different way, Jonathan Shay (1994, 2002), a psychiatrist who worked extensively with Vietnam veterans, draws on his experience as a clinician and Homeric texts to illuminate the timeless nature of combat trauma. Shay's approach is unconventional compared to other psychiatrists in terms of his writing style and his analysis of coping behaviors (for alternative examples see Tedeschi et al 1995 and 1998). Through an insightfully written practice-based literary criticism Shay underscores themes he sees running through the experiences of ancient and modern day warriors. His work is useful for understanding the internal existential conflict PTSD sufferers are engaged in. Shay emphasizes the deep sense of betrayal soldiers undergo when they are faced with traumatic events that violate moral and cultural codes of what is considered right or just, what Homer calls *themis*. Much like Agamemnon's betrayal of Achilles' trust in the *Iliad*, Shay argues that military and state officials through incompetence, callousness toward the safety of ground troops, and defective equipment betrayed Vietnam veterans. Elements of this betrayal theme ran through the narratives of the Iraq veterans I

interviewed. Below I highlight their sense of moral outrage toward the futility they experienced while deployed in Iraq and link their emotional responses to war with their motivations for participating in the Veterans' and Survivors' March.

Resilience through Resistance

Anthropologists and other scholars concerned with social suffering have theorized the ways individuals experience the forces of structural and political violence in everyday life and how those individuals work collectively to ameliorate or subvert social suffering by challenging the structures of power (Kleinman et al 1997; Das et al 2000; Das et al 2001; Farmer 2005; Waterston 1999). As the previous section on PTSD demonstrates, veterans embody the wounds of war not only physically but also psychologically. Their struggles center on dealing with the horrors they witnessed or perpetrated, the sense of loss associated with the death of comrades, and the difficulties involved with transitioning back into civilian life. Under these circumstances veterans, like other groups suffering institutionalized trauma, are better able to cope in a positive way by cultivating resilience and maintaining social support networks (Mullings and Wali 2001; Paton et al 2003; Luthar et al 2000). One way to accomplish both tasks is through involvement in social movements based on identity, class, and gender affinities (Edelman 2001; Nash 2005; Freeman and Johnson 1999). It is my contention that through their involvement in the antiwar movement, some veterans are better able to overcome symptoms of PTSD. Similar to disaster survivors in Britain who organized themselves around their experiences, the veterans in IVAW that I work with "accepted and responded to the disasters they had been involved in and [are] now making a positive and active contribution in informing, campaigning and educating others" about the realities of war

(Eyre 1998). Beyond their outreach to the general public, IVAW members seek to actively oppose governmental policy toward Iraq openly resisting the military through desertion and conscientious objection, and the state through civil disobedience. These everyday forms of resistance motivate and shape the experiences of IVAW members (Scott 1985, 1990). The Veterans' and Survivors' March serves as an example of how these veterans are cultivating resilience through resistance.

Methods

The Veterans' and Survivors' March provided an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between trauma and activism through a mixed method ethnographic approach. First, I conducted participant observation at a number of locations and events including 1) the initial press conference 2) the march staging area 3) along the march route 4) rest stops 5) overnight campsites 6) and the culminating rally in New Orleans. My twofold role as both an active member of the organization and a researcher allowed me to gain an insider's view of how IVAW members interact, participate in engaging political discussions, and reflect on the broader social significance of the event. I recorded written and audio field notes along the way, which helped to capture the ethnographic context for my research. Second, I performed semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with six of the thirty-six members of IVAW participating in the march. I followed a line of questioning that sought to elicit their motivations, goals, benchmarks for success, and how they interpreted the significance of the march. Although members of all the participating organizations were accessible, my focus for the purposes of this research was on the younger veterans of IVAW. Finally, I took

digital photographs at various points throughout the march to capture the devastation and document interactions among the veterans themselves and with hurricane survivors.

On the march

What follows are a series of daily ethnographic vignettes and my analysis of each day's events. Interwoven throughout the narrative are the words of veterans, survivors, and bystanders. My goal here is to try and paint a picture of the overall march, its successes as well as its contradictions. I pay close attention to interactions between Iraq veterans, their impressions of the march, and the reactions of local hurricane survivors. I include selected photographs as a form of visual anthropology to help illustrate the racial, class, and gendered contexts. The photographs are important too for conveying the extent of destruction along the Gulf Coast and the minimal reconstruction accomplished sixth months after the Katrina disaster.

Day Zero (Monday, March 13, 2006)

My journey with this motley crew of seasoned activists, resilient veterans, and displaced survivors began early in the morning on March 13th when I flew from New York City to New Orleans. Arriving at Louis Armstrong International Airport, I picked up a rental van and met with an amateur photographer, Johnny Barber, who was interested in documenting the march. He spent the last two days traveling around parts of the Lower Ninth Ward speaking to local survivors and relief workers while taking pictures of the devastation. Johnny, an accountant by trade and fellow Buddhist, explained that he made regular trips to Palestine to document life in the West Bank and Gaza. He keeps an online photo gallery and blog of his travels and planned to do the

same for this trip.[2] Together we drove east two hours to Prichard, Alabama commenting on the incredible scenes of roof-less apartment complexes and mangled shopping mall signs along Interstate-10. What stood out most prominently were the utterly desolate towns we drove past and the complete lack of construction going on except for the occasional clean-up crew clearing downed trees from in front of chain stores and restaurants. As we would later learn, the majority of relief in the region came from grassroots organizations that formed after the hurricane. Church leaders in particular were instrumental in organizing the relief effort and took the initiative to bring in donated supplies from areas outside of the flood zone. An ecumenical coalition of previously rival churches came together in the absence of an effective federal response.

Figure 1: A member of Veterans for Peace

On the outskirts of Mobile we merged onto Interstate-65 north, exiting at the Prichard/Whistler Street off-ramp onto a muddy asphalt road. At the intersection of an unmarked street a rain-soaked cardboard sign leaning against a telephone pole read "MARCH THIS WAY" in runny black ink with an arrow pointing left. Following the sign, we made our way down a gravelly road winding past an old municipal stadium on the right and toward a rusty metallic-grey warehouse up ahead. Parking in the lot outside,

[2] Check out www.onebrightpearl.com.

we ventured around to the back entrance where we found a chain-linked fence with its gate rolled open welcomingly. A dozen cars and a hippie-style converted school bus were parked within the fenced area surrounding the warehouse. The hand-drawn peace symbols and "BRING THEM HOME NOW" signs on the vehicles clearly indicated they were part of the marching contingent. One of the cars, a black sport utility vehicle belonging to a member of VFP, had a striking yellow-on-black sign rigged up with PVC pipe that read "ABANDON IRAQ, NOT OUR GULF COAST" (Figure 1).

Inside the warehouse, which served as the headquarters and relief distribution point for a local grassroots organization called Saving Our Selves (SOS), volunteers were busy preparing for a press conference while veterans of varying ages greeted each other warmly with hugs and handshakes. At the center of the warehouse and just behind where the media had their cameras positioned a memorial display called Eyes Wide Open, consisting of pairs of combat boots and children's shoes each having names affixed on laminated tags representing American soldiers and Iraqi youth killed since the start of the invasion, set the backdrop for the press conference.

Representatives from all the participating organizations were assembled including members of IVAW, VFP, SOS, Military Families Speak Out (MFSO), and Gold Star Families for Peace (GSFP).[3] The media coverage was moderate with reporters and cameramen from the local Fox News affiliate, the Mobile Register newspaper, the BBC, several independent media outlets, and at least two documentary film crews. The speakers consisted of the main organizers of the march including Paul Robinson, a leader in a local African-American church, co-founder of SOS, and president of the Mobile

[3] MFSO is an antiwar organization of relatives of members of the Armed Forces. GSFP consists of families that have lost loved ones in the war of which Cindy Sheehan is probably the most prominent member. (See also their respective websites: www.mfso.org and www.gsfp.org).

Chapter of VFP; Vivian Felts, a local hurricane survivor and co-founder of SOS; Michael McPhearson, executive director of VFP and a Gulf War veteran; Ann Wright, a retired Army Colonel and former U.S. diplomat who resigned her position at the State Department in opposition to the Iraq War; Stan Goff, a twenty-six year Army Special Forces veteran, member of VFP and MFSO, whose son is in Iraq for a third time. Geoffrey Millard, an eight-year veteran of the New York Army National Guard that spent thirteen months in Baghdad, served as the spokesperson for IVAW. They laid out their basic plan explaining their intentions for the following six days. Each speaker stayed on message hammering away at the point that while people along the Gulf Coast suffered and waited for emergency relief funds, Iraqi people were also suffering and billions of dollars were being spent on an unnecessary war.

As the sun was setting on the hazy Alabama horizon, more and more veterans gathered in the warehouse. Following the press conference, which lasted about thirty minutes, reporters approached individual veterans, especially any in desert camouflage, for one-on-one interviews. Later in the evening a group of about fifty veterans and volunteers held a candlelight vigil outside of the warehouse followed by a late supper. The evening ended with a military style briefing on the route, health and safety issues, and points of contact for emergencies and other logistical necessities. Afterwards, everyone claimed a corner of the warehouse's cold concrete floor to bed down for the night, with some marchers arriving in the early hours of the morning from as far away as Colorado and Maine. There was a sense of excited anticipation all around with older vets chatting up the younger ones in groups of several people congregating in informal conversations about places of origin, driving times and distances, and military service.

This first day left me with a number of general impressions of the assembled contingent. First, the involvement of veterans in antiwar activism presents a paradox because while they oppose militarism they draw credibility to speak out from their military experiences. This was evident in the press conference and the military-style briefing. Combat veterans in particular identify with each other because of their shared experiences and a sense of "we were there" permeates their interactions. This seems to apply across generational boundaries creating a mutual bond among those who have survived the ordeal of combat. Second, nostalgia on the part of older veterans and romanticization of the 1960s peace movement by younger veterans contributed to an air of hopeful optimism among both groups regarding the impact of the march on ending the war. The feeling that history was being made and that events in the coming days would be momentous was not uncommon.

Day One (Tuesday, March 14, 2006)

Wake up was scheduled for zero six hundred hours (06:00 am) but few people stirred out of their sleeping bags until at least an hour later. The morning was chilly and overcast as we lined up our cars leading out of the warehouse gate for a short drive to the next rallying point. Carrying flags, banners, and peace signs we assembled in the parking lot of the Stone Street Baptist Church in Mobile to receive a benediction from the local pastor marking the official start of our six-day journey along a devastated stretch of highway running through the heart of the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The benediction at Stone Street Baptist Church

Uncertain of how predominantly white veteran peace protesters and mostly black hurricane survivors would be received in the Deep South and given the popular memory of the brutal treatment of civil rights protestors during the 1960s the benediction seemed to take on an added significance. As the marchers gathered around the middle-aged African-American pastor of Stone Street, a tall well-heeled black reporter from the local ABC News affiliate directed his cameraman into position alongside other documentary film crews and amateur photographers. One veteran happily commented on the fact that a mainstream news outlet was present. The surrounding marchers bowed their heads in silence as the pastor delivered his blessing in a distinctive Southern Baptist style complete with a call-and-response from other Christians in the crowd. "Yes Lord," and "Thank you Jesus," was heard at various points syncopating the rhythmic words of the pastor. After a group "Amen," the pastor received appreciative handshakes and pats on the back.

Following the benediction the march stepped off on a short three mile leg to the Mobile Veterans Memorial Park where a sound system was set up for a speak out event (Figure 3). There were few if any local people waiting at the memorial to hear the heartfelt testimony of the veterans, military families, and survivors. One Iraq veteran

quietly expressed her disappointment at the lack of attendance to me stating, “We’re talking to ourselves here.” Similar to the press conference at the warehouse volunteers set up the Eyes Wide Open display, in a pattern reminiscent of a military formation, facing the short three-step platform that served as a stage. Spokespersons from each organization gave short speeches with members of their respective groups standing behind in support. A young black poet from the local high school delivered a moving slam-style poem he wrote for the occasion, indicting the Bush administration for the war and for ignoring the Southern poor.

Figure 3: Iraq veterans speak out in Mobile

Cars driving by on the two-way street adjacent to the park seemed to take little notice of the gathering. One older veteran decided to stand on the curb and even between the lanes of opposing traffic to try to garner supporters. Holding a “Veterans for Peace” sign the ambitious protestor was yelling to curious drivers going past, “Stop and help us!” No one did, although some cautiously rolled down their windows while waiting for the traffic light to change and asked a few questions. Another driver in a shiny red pickup truck rolled down his window and yelled, “Why don’t y’all get a job!” Clearly the message of solidarity with hurricane survivors was not getting out as clearly as the

organizers hoped. A white Iraq veteran from California named Joe, who entered the Army on September 10, 2001 and served near Sadaam Hussein's hometown in Tikrit, would later quip, "We look just like antiwar protestors here to them."

Although the main banner for the march clearly drew the connection between Iraq and the Gulf Coast, the lettering was too small to read from a distance making it difficult to convince local residents that the march was anything other than an antiwar protest (Figure 4). Not only were Mobile residents not used to seeing antiwar protestors on their streets but this was a Red State with a majority of Republican supporters. On the one hand, coming to Alabama could be viewed as a bold move on the part of the organizers perhaps risking harassment or worse. On the other hand, the people of Mobile and other cities we passed through were in many ways divided on their experience of the hurricane and its aftermath. Class certainly played a role in determining who had the option to leave town and escape the storm, the means to insure their homes, and the capital to repair them by the time we arrived. These class differences influenced the way residents viewed attempts to critique and publicize the federal disaster response in the region. In general, poor and working class people were more sympathetic to the goals of the march. They related to the message of justice for the Gulf Coast while at the same time embracing the antiwar message. In fact, many of the local supporters had at least one family member who was in the military or even in Iraq.

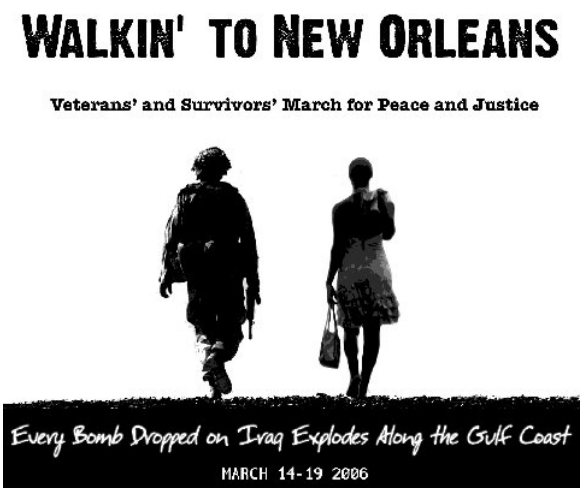

Figure 4: Main logo and banner for the march

Race also seemed to be a major factor in which passersby offered their support. This fact was not lost on Joe when he stated:

> Today I carried that banner and every single person who honked, waved, and held their fists out the window was black. Every single person who said, "Fuck you," "go home," "get out," or "get a job," if you heard that stuff, was white. Every single person here today, it went down that way, just straight down the color line, and it blew my fucking mind.

Joe expected, perhaps naively, to find very different race relations from what he observed in the South. However, he found that the most vocal supporters and the greatest number of local participants in the march were African-Americans. Meanwhile, the detractors were nearly all white including a father and daughter counter protest holding signs that read "God Bless W," referring to President Bush. When asked whether he noticed any similarities between Iraq and the Gulf Coast Joe replied after a long pause, "You can never tell who's going to support you and who's not." His expression of uncertainty speaks volumes about the expectations Joe carried into these two pivotal life experiences and the realities he was forced to confront; in Iraq the reality of insurgency despite claims

of liberation and on the Gulf Coast the reality of continued racial tensions in the aftermath of calamity.

Figure 5: Hurricane survivors speak out

At the end of the first day hurricane survivors from Coden and Bayou La Batre, Alabama held a press conference and speak out (Figure 5). Joe's perception that the color line is holding strong in the South was supported by a hurricane survivor named Ernestine from Coden who relayed an account of discrimination against blacks at a distribution center. She told of how Vietnamese residents refused to give supplies to blacks even though they had received support from black churches on a previous occasion. The reason given was that the supplies were earmarked for Vietnamese residents. Upon further investigation she learned that Coden residents, predominantly African-Americans, were being systematically excluded from relief. When she obtained a map used for relief planning by the City of Bayou La Batre, Coden was located outside of the designated disaster zone. Ernestine claimed that her family in Coden was left to fend for themselves following the hurricane. Stories like these are not uncommon along the Gulf Coast and illustrate how race and class shape people's everyday experiences. Another example of how discrimination shapes life and discourse in the post-Katrina South is the now infamous media image of two whites wading through waste-high flood

waters after "finding" food at a grocery store juxtaposed with a black youth "looting" food in New Orleans. The people of Coden and Bayou La Batre were familiar with these images and had firsthand knowledge of the racism behind them.

Day Two (Wednesday, March 15, 2006)

After an unexpectedly frigid night at a campsite provided by an African-American family that faired better than others in the area, I joined the other bleary-eyed marchers for bad coffee and to commiserate about the cold. Our camp was a colorful array of tents, buses, and cars spread out over a football field sized yard surrounding a modest single-storied house. Following the usual morning briefing from Stan, our unofficial first sergeant, we broke down the campsite and lined the vehicles up caravan-style for a convoy to the next starting point across the border in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The marching contingent received a relatively warm reception from the Pascagoula Police Department that provided an escort at the front and rear. One of the officers, a burly middle-aged white man, was a Vietnam veteran and expressed support for the march. He conversed freely with other Vietnam veterans saying he opposed the war and felt that Mississippians were forgotten in the media coverage of the hurricane's aftermath. He thought the idea of drawing national attention through the march was a good one.

Further west along Highway 90 we entered the city of Gautier where the reception was less cordial. One resident, a white man in a pickup truck, felt compelled to stop his vehicle to get out and ask, "Why don't you stop complaining and stop to help?" His question illustrated the difficulty organizers had in conveying the purpose of the march to local people. After this encounter an IVAW staff member decided she would draft a handbill to pass out along the route that stated the main goals of the march and contact

information for the participating organizations. She also included the point that a veterans' construction crew had formed to assist with house mucking—mold removal from previously flooded homes—at different points along the Gulf Coast. The handbills seemed to generate further discussion between Gulf Coast residents and marchers especially the Iraq veterans. A number of locals confided that they had family in the military or even in Iraq. Their support was warm but tentative.

At midday we pulled in to the Mississippi Vietnam Veterans Memorial located in Ocean Springs (Figure 6). Of all the events along the route the testimonials given at the memorial were arguably the most moving and emotionally charged. The informal ceremony combined somber symbolism, intergenerational bonding, and inspiring political consciousness to create a space of tribute and remembrance. The marchers gathered at the entrance of the memorial to hear from VVAW and IVAW contingents. The older veterans emphasized the importance of staying connected with the antiwar movement in overcoming the trauma of Vietnam and expressed encouragement to see a new movement forming against the Iraq war. The younger veterans acknowledged the support from the Vietnam veterans and spoke briefly about their combat experiences. I was asked to speak and decided to use my father, a Vietnam veteran from the Bronx, as an example of the need to recruit more Hispanic veterans into the antiwar movement. My father, like many Vietnam veterans, had a difficult time readjusting to civilian life after his two tours in Vietnam and never sought professional help for his PTSD. Instead he turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with his nerves and nightmares. For many years he isolated himself from others and tried unsuccessfully to forget his combat experiences. I

reiterated the importance of staying connected to other veterans after war and encouraged the audience to reach out to Hispanic veterans despite any perceived cultural differences.

Figure 6: Mississippi Vietnam Veterans Memorial

After the two veterans' groups spoke, carnations were distributed to the marchers who were invited to enter the memorial to place them at the foot of two walls that contained the names and pictures of Mississippians who died in Vietnam (Figure 6). The haunting young faces staring out from the walls stirred many of the veterans and marchers to tears. Standing before the dark marble and granite structure groups of two or three people embraced silently reflecting on the names and images. Although reminiscent of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC the Mississippi Memorial powerfully captured the youthful innocence of Vietnam draftees through black-and-white portraits incorporated into the marble.

Slowly everyone gathered on the other side of the memorial waiting and consoling each other in whispered tones. A group of women veterans, all members of either VFP or IVAW, assembled in front of the crowd. Ann, the retired colonel, noted the erasure of women's contributions during the Vietnam War from popular memory and called on everyone present to recognize the increased military role women are taking in Iraq. Abbie, an Iraq veteran from Wisconsin, was sobbing in the background and chose

not to speak. After the women veterans spoke Stan introduced Victoria Cintra, an organizer with the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance (MIRA), to update the marchers on the plight of immigrants in the region. Her husband and another family of five who were having a difficult time finding housing and healthcare for their asthmatic son accompanied Victoria. She translated their account from Spanish into English and claimed there were many more families going through similar situations. Victoria was particularly critical of the American Red Cross and FEMA for their lack of support for immigrant workers.

Last to speak was Reverend Jesse Trotter, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church that hosted a special service and supper for the marchers. The service included more testimonials of hurricane survivors, hymns, and a performance by the children's choir. Following the service we were treated to a buffet of Southern-style home cooking, a welcome change from the previous camp meals. A neighboring congregation at New Light Church donated space in their gymnasium annex for us to sleep in overnight. It didn't take long for people to find the shower facilities on the second floor and a cue quickly formed. I waited nearly an hour for a much needed and thoroughly relaxing hot shower.

Day Three (Thursday, March 16, 2006)

Unlike the supportive veteran-officer in Pascagoula, the Biloxi Police were not happy to see us. On average the Biloxi cops were younger and more aggressive immediately enforcing strict rules for pedestrian and vehicular traffic on the four-lane highway we were walking on. Almost as soon as we entered Biloxi they began harassing marchers claiming we didn't have a permit and threatening drivers with tickets if they

drove too slowly behind the marchers thereby blocking traffic. At least one driver from Rochester, New York received a ticket for obstructing traffic. With little information regarding what was happening up ahead the nearly forty drivers of cars, vans, and buses behind the marchers were confused about how to proceed. This caused even further problems with traffic as people changed lanes to get ahead of the marchers. The convoy was broken up into smaller groups of befuddled drivers trying to figure out where was an appropriate place to pull over without getting stopped by the police. Meanwhile, the organizers were busy negotiating with the police sergeant in charge trying to work out a solution. After a half-hour of frustrating disorder they compromised to allow the vehicles to pull a couple of miles ahead of the marchers and wait in a parking lot. This particular stretch of highway was packed with hotels and casinos so there were plenty of empty parking lots to pull in to. When the marchers caught up with the vehicles they would take a rest stop and then continue down the road.

During this leg of the trip I was driving my rental van and experienced the chaos along with the other drivers. While waiting for the marchers to catch up at one rest stop I decided to try and find a gas station since I was running low on fuel. Coincidentally, as I was driving around Biloxi I came across a Veterans Center just down the road from Keesler Air Force Base and immediately pulled into the adjacent lot. I went inside under the auspices of asking directions to a gas station. A pleasant middle-aged African-American woman at the front desk welcomed me in and asked if I had an appointment with one of the counselors. After explaining who I was I inquired whether she heard about the march going on just a few blocks away from the clinic. She wasn't aware of the march but seemed intrigued by idea that Iraq veterans were protesting the war.

"We're seeing a lot of Iraq veterans here," she said in a solemn tone. Handing me several brochures she informed me of the clinic's hours inviting me to spread the word among the other veterans.

I returned from the fuel run and conducted an interview with Dave, an Iraq veteran who served with the 101st Airborne Division as a mechanic. His general impression of the march was positive although he was frustrated at what he described as a ridiculously inadequate relief effort. His sense of urgency was evident when he stated, "It doesn't take six months. If we can build a giant fucking base in Iraq in a month, we can help these people that have been living in tents for six fucking months." His observation conveyed outrage at the inverted priorities of government, which placed building for war abroad ahead of reconstruction at home. As a member of the Army Dave witnessed firsthand the rapid occupation of Iraq and the expedited way in which civilian contractors were able to establish large-scale military facilities within a few short months. Drawing on his combat experiences Dave made a striking comparison saying "looking right here in Biloxi, Mississippi it's the same fucking shit that I saw in that [Iraqi] border town. Absolutely, 100 percent annihilated. Some of these areas look so similar to it, besides the oak trees and the casinos—and the rebuilding of the casinos of course—it's all very familiar." In his eyes the haunting images of bombed out homes in the desert were reflected on the hurricane ravaged Gulf Coast.

Coming from a working class family, Dave also recognized the disparities between those who were able to start rebuilding and others who were left with few options after the storm. He was particularly sensitive to tax-breaks that benefited the rich and attributed his early radicalization to opinions he formed about economic injustice.

Discussing the process that spurred him toward an antiwar position Dave said, “There came a point where I became very angered about the fact that there somehow was enough money for a tax break for people that make tens of millions of dollars a year but yet they didn’t have enough money for body armor. They didn’t have enough money to armor our vehicles. They didn’t have enough money for operational equipment.” He gave an example of a sergeant he knew who’s sidearm was defective. When he removed the magazine from the stock well of his 9mm handgun, the rounds just fell out. In recounting his experiences Dave was pointing out the absurdity of sending troops into harms way with faulty equipment while cutting government revenues to benefit wealthy people. In a similar fashion, he was critical of what he viewed as unnecessary suffering for hurricane victims exacerbated by the misallocation of economic and material resources to support the war. When asked about his goals for the march he said, “I was hoping by coming down here we could bring some national attention to what they are going through. Not just me being an Iraq vet against the war, but to really emphasize that there’s a war here at home too. It’s against the poor of America. I think it’s pretty obvious since I’ve been down here that that’s the case.”

In Long Beach, Mississippi another African-American Church hosted a special service for the marchers, which I skipped in order to conduct more interviews. I spoke with Stephen, an Air Force officer and conscientious objector to the Iraq War. Although not a combat veteran, Stephen’s story is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, as a graduate of the Air Force Academy he was among the few former military officers in the contingent. Second, during part of his training he spent time at Keesler Air Force Base and was thus familiar with the Biloxi-Gulf Port region of Mississippi before the hurricane

struck. Third, as a gay man who lived under the Don't Ask, Don't Tell regime Stephen had a unique perspective on military life, social norms, and the male-dominated atmosphere among IVAW members. Finally, having grown up in a deeply religious family his struggle with the moral implications of participating in the Iraq war led Stephen to forsake his military career and follow his conscience.

Stephen's involvement with IVAW began at a mass demonstration in Washington, D.C. on September 24, 2005. After successfully being discharged from the Air Force he sought an outlet to share his story and express his antiwar sentiments but felt that he didn't fit in with other peace groups. At the demonstration he "was biking around and…happened to see the boots and the crosses set up right by the Washington Monument," referring to a display of Eyes Wide Open and another memorial of wooden crosses meant to mimic a military cemetery. He met Ann Wright and learned about IVAW, later joining a contingent of veterans on a candle light march from the memorial display to the Vietnam Memorial. Stephen was elated saying, "I finally, after two and a half years of being alone, found other military people who were objecting to this war." Although Stephen described his time in the Air Force in negative terms he seemed to appreciate the camaraderie IVAW offered and identified with the other recent veterans.

When asked why he decided to attend the Veterans' and Survivors' March, Stephen said, "I liked the idea of comparing the devastation here in the Gulf Coast to the devastation that we've caused in Iraq. I think in many ways America is frustrated at the government, at the problems that are going on in Iraq. America was at one time frustrated at Katrina, but I think they've kind of forgotten that." He thought if doing the march could draw national media attention to the plight of hurricane survivors who were

gradually dropped from the headlines, then the effort was worthwhile and an organizational goal could be reached. On a more personal level coming to the march held a deeper significance for him. Stephen admits:

> I wanted to see the people in IVAW. They've meant so much to me in terms of my emotional growth, my ability to deal with being in the military; bridging that gap from having all those experiences for nine years, then completely cutting myself off from them because I disliked them so much. Not being able to talk about them because my friends had no idea what they were. It seems like when I've looked around and talked to other people IVAW is saving itself. Even if it does nothing else, we are saving ourselves, which is great.

The psychological trauma of hiding his identity as a gay man while in the Air Force led Stephen to dissociate himself from anything having to do with the military. However, meeting IVAW members allowed him to reclaim his identity as a veteran albeit in a subversive way. Importantly, Stephen attributes his and other members' redemption to the emotional growth they've experienced through interactions in a safe space where veteran dissent is possible and encouraged. He recognized that many of the people involved with the march were suffering in different ways and asserted that, "Helping each other is the best way to heal it."

Day Four (Friday, March 17, 2006)

In the morning everyone was excited to see a CNN trailer pull into camp. A correspondent from American Morning filed a live report on the march including footage collected the day before. The coverage was sympathetic presenting the marchers in a positive light. There was a congratulatory atmosphere in the camp as people received calls on their cell phones from others around the country saying they were watching the report on CNN. As everyone gathered for the morning briefing one of the organizers

announced, “We’re doing it folks!” The goal of reaching the masses through a national media outlet was being realized through the CNN coverage.

Following a drive to the next rally point we marched through a beach front community that experienced a forty-six foot storm swell that wiped out homes a quarter mile inland. The destruction in Waveland was overwhelming with little sign of the previously existing homes in some areas except for a spray painted board containing the address of where the house stood (Figure 7). Entering Slidell, Louisiana further along Highway 90 we were joined by a jazz marching band, which seemed to lift the spirits of the weary marchers. The final destination for the day was the campsite and headquarters of Bayou Liberty Relief, a grassroots organization of volunteer workers providing support and cleaning out mold from homes in the surrounding area. A veteran’s construction crew would form while were there to clean out houses in Slidell.

Figure 7: The remains of Waveland, MS

One particularly salient bonding experience among the Iraq veterans was in a teepee that was set up at the campsite. Packed elbow to elbow into the teepee and huddled on the floor were at least twenty people smoking and drumming in a circle. Providing entertainment between sessions of drumming was a hilarious veteran named Joshua, a California surfer-type, who was improvising shadow puppets on the canvas

wall of the teepee. Roars of laughter went up as Joshua shifted his hand into different shapes while providing narration in his distinctive mellow tone. From the jovial way he interacted with the other young veterans, one could hardly tell that Joshua had spent a difficult year in Iraq with the infantry. At home in Hawaii he volunteered his time to the GI Rights Hotline as a peer counselor advising active military personnel on how to obtain legal support and discharges of various kinds. Similar to other members of IVAW it was important for Joshua to help fellow veterans in order to wrestle some positive meaning from his experience in Iraq.

Demond, a recently returned Iraq veteran from New York City said, "This is the coolest fucking event I've been to since I came home," as he gasped for breath between laughs. After spending thirteen months in Iraq in the infantry, Demond had a difficult time readjusting to civilian life. He went through a deep depression and quit teaching children at a community near his home because he felt the experience in Iraq had changed him profoundly. He admits to isolating himself from friends and spending days at a time not leaving his apartment. However, when he met up with IVAW members in New York he began to let himself feel hopeful again. "I'm so glad I met you guys. I don't know what I would have done if I didn't meet you guys when I did. Nobody seems to understand what I'm going through right now. I can't talk to my family about what I went through over there." Losing close friends and witnessing the inhumane treatment of Iraqi civilians turned Demond against the war but he felt other members in his unit did not share his antiwar sentiments. Like Stephen, joining the organization offered an opportunity to heal deep psychological wounds in the company of like-minded veterans. Recalling his first meeting with IVAW members he said, "I really felt comfortable with

these guys, I really felt like I could relate to them and I was impressed by what they were doing…It really helped me focus, just talking to them." Demond described his participation in the march as taking a lot of negative energy and using it in a positive way.

Day Five (Saturday, March 18, 2006)

The next morning a veteran's construction crew went with volunteers from Bayou Liberty Relief to clean out houses in Slidell while the other marchers continued on toward New Orleans. Driving through Bayou Sauvage Wildlife Refuge we came across a striking scene of a boat that had smashed into a house (Figure 8). Seeing mile after mile of destruction over the last five days it became abundantly clear that it would take at least a decade for the communities we passed through to recover from the damage. Although the majority of media coverage following Hurricane Katrina focused on the failure of New Orleans' levees there was a deafening media silence regarding other parts of the Gulf Coast, the parts we were seeing on the march.

Figure 8: The house-boat

Nowhere was this truer than in the Vietnamese community we stayed in overnight, located on the outskirts of New Orleans, hosted by Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church. As we marched past a shopping center with Vietnamese stores and

restaurants bystanders smiled and waved. Some of the older men walked over to the street to converse with the passing veterans. Bill, a Vietnam veteran who made frequent trips to that country, spoke fluently with some local residents. Another resident, a young elementary school aged girl, stood near her mother and siblings while shouting greetings in Vietnamese to the marchers (Figure 9). Opposite from the little girl stood a four-foot-high wall of garbage piled on the median dividing the road. We later learned that FEMA representatives told community leaders to collect the garbage there until sanitation services were restored. Six months worth of garbage in the humid Louisiana heat filled the neighborhood with an unpleasant stench. In addition to extensive property damage Hurricane Katrina created environmental problems like the garbage pile lining the main road of this community.

Figure 9: Winning hearts and minds

In the evening we were treated to amateur performances of music and poetry by VART, the Veterans' Art collective. Fernando, a veteran from New York City, delivered a fiery poem about revolution that brought the crowd to its feet. During the show a spontaneous group of veterans and activists decided to visit the Lower Ninth Ward in order to meet immigrant workers staying at a camp set up in a public park. We were amazed to find a sprawling campsite where mostly Mexican workers, and in some cases

their families, were living in squalid conditions. One man who was hired in Maryland came with his pregnant wife, brother, and friend to repair houses in New Orleans. They expressed a number of concerns about safety, access to food and water, and healthcare. They were being charged three hundred dollars per month for their lot in the park. The practice seemed questionable considering the fact that it was a municipal park and there were no facilities available other than portable toilets. They complained of harassment when they left the compound for any reason and were forced to carry identification cards provided by the hiring corporation if they wanted to purchase items at the local grocery store. They also worried about reprisals from local residents because they were taking jobs at lower pay thereby displacing the local labor force. Offering what little support we could in medical supplies and bottled water we left the park feeling there was much more that needed to be done to help these people. Driving through the darkened streets of New Orleans we returned to the church to share our experiences with the other marchers.

Day Six (Sunday, March 19, 2006)

The following morning we drove to the National Cemetery in Chalmette, Louisiana where a tour of the grounds and veterans' speaking event was scheduled. The mood was somber not only because of the setting but also because it was the anniversary of the Iraq invasion. Several generations of service members represented each of the U.S. wars from World War II to the present. With rows of tombstones and crosses in the background each veteran briefly shared their experience of combat highlighting the futility of war in general and their opposition to this war in particular.

The final stretch of the march ended in Louis Armstrong Park also known as Congo Square. One to two hundred people, mostly college students on alternative spring

breaks volunteering with an organization called Common Ground, gathered in the park to support us (Figure 10). There was a celebratory atmosphere as the marching contingent turned into the square. The Fats Domino song and namesake of the march "Walkin' to New Orleans" was playing as smiling marchers filed in. People danced in the square as the next song, Edwin Starr's "War," played over the sound system. The crowd joined in on the chorus, "War, huh, yeah/What is it good for/Absolutely nothing." The organizers thanked the crowd for their support and gave brief statements about the successes of the march. Representatives from each participating organization were asked to give remarks. A program of musical performances followed the speeches as people milled about talking to vendors set up around the square. Meanwhile, journalists approached young veterans to get their impressions of the march. By the late afternoon the crowd had dwindled down to fifty people as marchers headed to catch flights home or to their hotel rooms in the French Quarter.

Figure 10: Dancing in Congo Square

For many of the weary travelers the six-day march was the continuation of a journey in search of peace and justice. The majority I spoke to vowed to use the energy generated on the march to spread the word about the human connections they made on

the Gulf Coast. Many of the Iraq veterans expressed interest in returning to the Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana to volunteer their labor toward the rebuilding efforts. There was also a sense that many of the veterans present experienced emotional healing from their interactions with other antiwar veterans. The strong bonds formed between and among Vietnam and Iraq veterans were apparent. Everyday on the march, conversations between veterans allowed them to bring their psychological trauma to the surface and deal with it in a welcoming environment. Expressions of grief, disillusionment, liberation, and hope were commonplace over the six days. For those dealing with PTSD having an alternative outlet to vent their antiwar sentiments is an important part of the healing process. The Veterans' and Survivors' March offered an intense opportunity to experience this form of healing through resistance and fostered a camaraderie that is similar to the kind of social cohesion encouraged in the military but based on a different set of goals. Going forward IVAW organizers intend to build on the successes of the march by cultivating relationships with grassroots groups along the Gulf Coast. They also attribute the growth of the organization to increased publicity since the march and to the safe-haven IVAW offers to antiwar soldiers currently serving in the military. Further work is needed to follow up with march participants and to document the ongoing efforts of IVAW.

Future directions

This project is exploratory and part of a larger study I plan to conduct for my dissertation research, which will examine how members of Iraq Veterans Against the War understand their dissent and resistance in the context of post-9/11 America. Given the fact that members of the armed forces are formally discouraged from thinking politically through regulations and informally through peer pressure and socialization, I

want to understand what motivates some soldiers and veterans to take up an antiwar position. Why are they able to overcome the psychosocial barriers to antiwar political dissention presented in the military and in everyday life? What factors contribute to the likelihood that a soldier or veteran will develop an antiwar position? Are there any discernable trends along the lines of age, education, race/ethnicity, class, gender or geographic origin? How do these variables intersect in the case of Iraq Veterans Against the War? These questions are beyond the scope of this current project, but conducting this exploratory research has helped me formulate the basis for my larger objectives.

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