Cal Cain, Jessie Carney, Elias Bartlett

Professor Saraf

War Ecologies

14 May 2025

Militarized Objects: Consumption, Consumerism, and the

Integration of War Symbolism into Everyday Life

Our Field Trip is focused on militarized objects, consumption, consumerism, and the way these things intersect and interact with each other. In today's militarized political climate, it is essential to interrogate the underlying threads of the military in today's culture. In their introduction to the series *Ecologies of War*, Bridget Guarasci and Eleana J. Kim write, "The contemporary world is saturated by militarization." The series aims to "[extend] ethnographic attention beyond "war itself" to include forms of war that are often unrecognized as such—in everyday experiences [and] material effects." This quote is a jumping-off point for our trip through the militarization of digital cameras and CCTV, toys and play culture, and clothing.

The word militarization has two distinct meanings. The first describes the process of taking physical actions in preparation for war or increased military presence. Troops get sent in, military infrastructure is installed, traps are set, all in an effort to turn an environment into a tool of war. In our field trip we will be focusing on the second, slightly less colloquial definition, which is the process of intertwining an object with the physical structure or symbolic imagery of war for the purpose of public consumption or military use. The process of militarization, by this definition, can happen at lightning speed, but it often occurs gradually, over the course of many years, as societal paradigms are reshaped to adopt and rely on a normalized presence of war-related imagery and technology.

With its massive tech sectors and unparalleled budget allocations, many initial technological advancements take place within the military, leading to developments that eventually find their way into civilian applications. This hand-me-down cycle creates a complicated relationship between military and civilian technologies and tools, where the boundaries between military and civilian use become increasingly blurred. The internet itself, originally developed as a military communication network called "ARPANET," epitomizes how militarized technologies are contorted to fit civilian purposes while retaining aspects of their military origins in structure and functionality. For this cycle of advancement and adaptation to exist, there are two phenomena that must take place alongside it. These phenomena are consumption and consumerism, and they serve as the glue in a system of capitalistic trade between the military-industrial complex and civilian systems.

Consumption is also a common thread throughout our project. Our field trip examines the consumption of human movement, toys and media, and clothing. Consumption is defined as the use or expenditure of a resource. Our field trip deals with objects that require resources to produce, distribute, obtain, and use. Three common explanations for understanding why we consume are individual choice, cultural influences, and social influences (Hansen and Nielsen 8). Hansen and Nielson explore how people "consume goods to distinguish themselves from others" as well as "to achieve group belonging or to keep up with societal expectations" (6). Elias' examination of militarized clothing explores how clothing consumption is both a way for subcultures to align themselves with each other by customizing and altering clothing associated with the military into countercultural symbols. Yet their use of this militarized clothing also plays into its masculinization, serving to simultaneously align themselves with the clothing's representation of the military as the peak of masculinity.

Andreas Håkansson develops a theoretical framework that identifies three different ways that consumption is defined as excessive: overconsumption by consequence, by faulty procedure, and by value degradation. In the case of Cal's exploration of digital photography, more photographs are taken due to decreased costs and labor per photo, which is a value-degradation-fueled increase in consumption. Additionally, due to a false understanding of images as factual representations as well as their usefulness in preventing and punishing crime, CCTV cameras have become commonplace in public and, increasingly, private spaces in the US.

The third major element we tackle in this Field Trip is consumerism. Merriam-Webster defines consumerism as "the theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically desirable" as well as "a preoccupation with and an inclination toward the buying of consumer goods." When it comes to the militarization of everyday objects and lifeways, consumerism is always an essential aspect to consider. The United States military is inextricably tied up in the United States economy, which is dependent on consumerism.

The American ultra-consumerist mindset has long influenced the direction of this country's politics and policies. Ever since the emergence of the Cold War in the postwar period, American exceptionalism became tightly linked to the country's global consumerist approach. In 1959, then-vice president Richard Nixon and the General Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev held their Kitchen Debate, an event which succinctly illustrated fledgling American ultra-consumerism, set in stark contrast against the real existing socialism of the Soviet Union. Nixon referred to the planned obsolescence of American housing practices, stating that in America "houses last for more than 20 years, but, even so, after twenty years, many Americans want a new house or a new kitchen. Their kitchen is obsolete by that time....The American

system is designed to take advantage of new inventions and new techniques" (*The Kitchen Debate*).

Consumerism is designed to constantly replace the old with the new. It requires continual newness: new models, new versions, new ways of doing and selling and buying. This echoes the parallel constant development of military technologies—there must always be a new weapon being created to keep the military industrial complex running and expanding. Consumerism and militarism have become tightly bound forces, leading to a slew of everyday objects with military roots that have become ubiquitous. From toys to clothing to cars, an ever-broadening swath of consumer goods are inextricably linked to their military beginnings.

Bibliography

"Consumerism." *Merriam-Webster*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consumerism.

Accessed 12 May 2025.

Guarasci, Bridget, and Eleana J. Kim. "Introduction: Ecologies of War." *Society for Cultural

Anthropology,* 25 Jan. 2022, culanth.org/fieldsights/introduction-ecologies-of-war.

Håkansson, Andreas. "What is overconsumption?– A step towards a common understanding."

International Journal of Consumer Studies, 7 Oct. 2014, pp. 692-700.

https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12142

Kumar, Satinder, et al. "Overconsumption: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research

Agenda." *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 9 Feb. 2025,

https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.70026

The Kitchen Debate. CIA, 24 July 1959. Transcript.

www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1959-07-24.pdf. Accessed 12 May 2025.

Militarized Capture: The Digital Camera and CCTV

Caleb Cain

Photography's violent, colonial history is well-known, but the invention of the digital

camera is also tied to war and war-making. In 1961, at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory,

engineer Eugene Lally "described the use of mosaic photosensors to digitize light signals and

produce still images" in 1961, essentially developing the concept of a digital camera ("Image

Sensors Enhance Camera Technologies," Doherty). Although technically a civilian organization,

NASA was established in response to the Cold War in 1958 to produce superior space

technology to Russia (Larsen). Since NASA was researching methods of digital photography for

satellites, experimenting with cameras was likely part of their efforts to monitor and image space

during the Cold War. The first digital camera was built in 1975 by Kodak engineer Steve Sasson,

who incorporated Lally's research (Doherty).

CCTV cameras were first used by UK police departments during the late 1950s, but their

usage did not explode until the 1990s, rapidly dispersing to other parts of the world, especially

the US (Williams, Seckiner et al.). Today, CCTV cameras are so common that the average person

in London will be recorded by an estimated 300 cameras per day (Seckiner et al.). In my section

of our field trip, I will examine how digital cameras enable looking through surveillance and

photography, and how their current usage often engages in overconsumption. I first examine the

gaze that digital and CCTV cameras enable in the moment, then shift to explore the secondary

gaze: looking at photographs and CCTV footage after their production.

Cameras enable an extractive gaze from the photographer, especially if a photo is

portrayed as the only product of a photographic encounter. Scholar Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argues

that photographs are not "'discrete objects that can be owned by one person or institution"

because photography is more than "captur[ing] a bygone moment to which we are the latecomers'" (Azoulay in Alli). Working from a non-imperial viewpoint, Azoulay frames photography as "'a complex encounter,'" with the photograph as just one product of this interaction. She asserts that the encounter is complicated by the photographer's various imagined audiences and the photographed person's "'perceptions and aspirations of her own'" (Azoulay in Alli). Viewing the photograph as the sole result of the encounter "'blur[s] the inequalities, the patterns of exploitation, and the incommensurable expectations, aspirations, and modalities of participation inherent in a photographic event;" (Azoulay in Alli). Photographers and scholars Goldberg and Khalili concur, arguing that "a photo hides more than it shows, which is merely the physical and reflective light of the world." These arguments frame photography as a process, with much of the control in the photographer's hands despite their reliance on the people they photograph to create a product.

CCTV cameras bring up similar questions about audience, consent, and permanence. A common justification for installing CCTV cameras is that continuous monitoring will deter crime, and if crime still occurs, the cameras will collect information for later use as evidence to prosecute it (Seckiner et al.). But crime rates have not been substantially affected by the increase in security cameras (Seckiner et al.). This rationale also relies on a view of images and videos as factual and the camera as an arbiter of truth. But neither images nor the people analyzing them are immune to bias. With CCTV cameras, the angle of the camera and quality of footage both warp the images, making them difficult to use to link a suspect to the scene of a crime (Seckiner et al.).

CCTV recordings uniquely mark our place in the world and confine us to that space and time. Goldberg and Khalili examine the complexity of simultaneously existing in the world and

surveillance camera recordings with "the latter prov[ing] the existence of the former." There are many unsettling unknowns about CCTV footage: how long is it kept for, if the cameras are actively monitored, and if or when footage containing our bodies is reviewed. I argue that the prevalence of surveillance cameras reflects an obsession with documenting our locations and behaviors in case they prove to be useful in the future. Since surveillance cameras often record footage from several vantage points, more than could be individually reviewed without being sped up or could be stored easily, I believe our modern use of security cameras both produces excessive footage and requires overconsumption to make use of the footage.

Additionally, while security cameras have long been in businesses, parks, and other public spaces, recent increases of cameras in private spaces, especially outside and inside the home, reflect a similar, yet exacerbated, belief in surveillance preventing crime or wrongdoing. Pedraza and others argue that the policing of belonging within "private" spaces, as well as the division of "private" and "public" spaces, "demand[s] management, surveillance, and technologies aimed at fortified security" (6). The extension of surveillance cameras into "private" spaces like the home is often justified in this way: to protect those inside from unwelcome external forces or people, with cameras serving to maintain this constructed boundary. Furthermore, this similarly excessive use of cameras to document and exert control over privately owned spaces reflects two of the modes of overconsumption Andreas Håkansson identifies: overconsumption by value degradation and faulty procedure. Security cameras cost less and are more accessible than ever, leading to their increased consumption. Additionally, the false connection between image and fact ties into the belief that surveillance provides safety, fueling faulty and fear-based overconsumption of these cameras and the footage they capture. This expansion enables real-time and secondary looking into new spaces by new audiences.

Similar complications with archiving and future audiences are also crucial modes of secondary looking present in photography. The photographer has indefinite access and power to manipulate and release these photos to various audiences. Furthermore, as Azoulay explores, the photographer is shaping the photo with particular audiences in mind, who may exercise direct or indirect control over the production of a "final" image (Azoulay in Alli). This secondary gaze from photographers and other audiences is significantly entangled with the production and afterlife of the photograph.

Additionally, the shift from film to digital archiving practices reflects shifting consumption patterns. Bossen and others' study of news photographers' use of digital versus film cameras found that photographers took more photos on digital cameras due to the decreased cost of materials per photo, as they did not need more film to take more photos. More of their digital images were archived, but since digital photographers can delete images while working, a lower percentage of their total photo count was preserved (Bossen et al.). Digital cameras' capacity to consume more without increased time or cost has shifted how and which photos are archived. The archived photos are further refined by the photographer versus archiving most of the film roll. The role of the photographer in archiving photos has shifted, with their judgment deciding which photos are immediately deleted before they are reviewed or seen by others. The immediate feedback has shifted consumption patterns and permanence, leading to a "refining" of photos to an extent that was previously impossible. With cost exercising less of an effect on the number of images a photographer can produce, overconsuming through taking and storing large amounts of photographs is increasingly possible. Yet photographers seem to limit themselves and their archives to their "best" work, exercising a notable, partial restraint. With the ever-increasing presence of cameras and photography, overconsumption of bodies and surroundings is

increasingly ingrained in the everyday, documenting and surveilling in ways that reflect the militarized logics of the digital camera.

Work Cited

Alli, Sabrina. "Ariella Aïsha Azoulay: 'It is not possible to decolonize the museum without

decolonizing the world.'" *Guernica*, 12 March 2020,

https://www.guernicamag.com/miscellaneous-files-ariella-aisha-azoulay/.

Bossen, Howard et al. "Digital Camera Use Affects Photo Procedures/Archiving." *Newspaper

Research Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2006, pp. 18-32,

https://doi.org/10.1177/073953290602700103.

Doherty, Eamon P. *Digital Forensics for Handheld Devices*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.

ProQuest Ebook Central,

https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oberlin/detail.action?docID=981555.

Edmond, Gary. "Just truth? Carefully applying history, philosophy and sociology of science to

the forensic use of CCTV images." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and

Biomedical Sciences*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2013, pp. 80-91,

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1369848612000982 .

Goldberg, Ariel and Yazan Khalili. "We Stopped Taking Photos." *E-Flux Journal*, no. 115, 2021,

https://www.e-flux.com/journal/115/374500/we-stopped-taking-photos/.

Larsen, Beatrice von Silva-Tarouca. *Setting the Watch: Privacy and the Ethics of CCTV

Surveillance*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oberlin/detail.action?docID=1772669.

Pedraza, Diana Pardo. "Introduction: The Domestication of War." *Catalyst*, 5 April 2023,

https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v9i1.39531.

Seckiner, Dilan et al. "Forensic image analysis – CCTV distortion and artefacts." *Forensic*

    Science International, vol. 285, 2018, pp. 77-85,

        https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0379073818300380

Williams, Chris A. "Police Surveillance and the Emergence of CCTV in the 1960s." *Crime*

    Prevention & Community Safety, vol. 5, no. 3, July 2003, pp. 27–37. *EBSCOhost*,

        https://doi-org.ezproxy.oberlin.edu/10.1057/palgrave.cpcs.8140153.

"Image Sensors Enhance Camera Technologies." *NASA Spinoff*, 2010,

        https://spinoff.nasa.gov/Spinoff2010/cg_3.html.

I have adhered to the honor code in this assignment. - Caleb Cain

Militarized Toys and Play Narratives

Jessie Carney

In this section of our field trip, I will be discussing the history and impact of

militarization on children's toys, with a specific focus on toy soldiers, and the child play

narratives associated with them. Images of war find their way into the everyday lives of children

from multiple different angles. Social learning theory, created by Albert Bandura, posits that,

from birth, we begin observing the world around us, taking in information, processing it, and

slowly but surely teaching ourselves how to be people. We learn to speak through listening, we

learn to walk by watching, and the same goes for essentially everything else. When people are

surrounded early in life by things like war imagery in schools, symbolism in media, direct

interactions with the military in the physical world, and so much more, it begins to influence how

we understand conflict and military systems from a young age.

Militarized toys and miniatures are believed to have existed in some form for millenia.

The first records of war-related toys and toy-like items date back to ancient societies. While it is

debated what the purpose of inclusion in these rituals was, soldier figurines have been found in

the excavation of tombs in ancient egypt (Je Weetwel, 2014). The first verified uses of soldier

figurines as children's toys occurred throughout the middle ages, among the children of

noblemen (Stahl, 2014). The evolution of contemporary war toys began in Europe, during the

industrial revolution. As tin and lead became more accessible and utilized materials, toys were

no longer limited to time-consuming handcrafted wood carvings and clay sculptures. This surge

of industrial access created an incentive for business and mass production of tin soldiers began in

1775 with the Hilpert brothers (TTS, 2019). As production grew, the immense positive market

feedback from families showed just how profitable the toy market and military toys within it

could be, leading to more entrepreneurs entering the growing industry of children's toys with a large sector dedicated solely to toy soldiers. The next major turning point in the timeline is the introduction of hollow-casting into toy crafting practices. British toy company William Britain began hollow-casting toy soldiers made from lead in 1893 (TTS, 2019). Utilizing hollow casting enabled toy companies to make cheaper toys at a faster rate. Toy soldiers became such a lucrative product that toy companies began producing add ons and accessories, diversifying the market and further contaminating children's entertainment with militarization.

After the world wars of the 20th century ended and production got back on track, there was yet another major shift in the landscape of militarized toys. As more technologically advanced violent conflicts came and went with never before seen international involvement, new opportunities surfaced for commercialization and an embrace of consumerism in the military toy market. With the evolution of oil systems in the early 1900s and the subsequent introduction of synthesized plastics into industrial sectors, the game changed once again. Plastic toys swiftly took hold of the market, their quick and cheap production allowing for the biggering of existing toy brands as well as the introduction of new companies. The web of militarization in children's tools of play grew to be wider-reaching and . Over the next several decades, contemporary major players like Hasbro, Mattel, and LEGO joined the playing field, leading many of the initial leading producers of simple toy soldiers to lose popularity as focus shifted to more interactive equipment. Today, militarized toys have become far more technologically advanced, with battery operation, hidden features, and interactive elements, they have become more enticing than ever for children.

As the single most impressionable cohort of humans at any given time, the stimulation and media children consume is incredibly important to their developing worldviews. The

militarization of children's entertainment media has ebbed and flowed over time. Ever-changing global tensions and means of production have led to fluctuating amounts of military presence on screen, franchises incorporating them into their narratives with varying degrees of subtlety. The G.I. Joe franchise, launched in 1964, marked a significant shift in how military themes were marketed to children, transforming war play into a commercially successful entertainment phenomenon (Strong National Museum of Play, 2025). The franchise's evolution from action figures to cartoons to movies helped normalize military aesthetics and values for young audiences. Not even seemingly innocent content and beloved franchises like the *Toy Story* movies are immune. The Green Army Men characters in *Toy Story* and their heroic portrayals contribute to the romanticization of military service in kids media. These toys are depicted as loyal, brave, and strong, reinforcing the idealized notions of military heroism while glossing over the realities of real-world conflict. Normalization of militarized characters in children's entertainment opened a new avenue of monetization for toy companies: franchise toys and personalized war gaming. War-ready versions of existing character toys hit the shelves and the previously separate world of video games was gradually dominated by war-related games centered on violent conquest.

Military toys don't just affect production and consumerism, they also play a significant role in shaping the way children view militarisms and violence on a moral and logistical level. One of the most problematic aspects of toy soldiers and their technical accessories, is that they allow for self inserts in child play narratives. This means that instead of using figurines to act out fictional characters and interactions, children can use the figurines as representations of themselves or even as troops under their command. A TV advertisement from the 1960s depicts children playing dress up accompanied by matching action figures and a toy battleship, with the

young boys in the commercial shouting military orders, "Battle stations!.. Landing craft ready!.. Rockets ready!... Guns ready!... All systems fire!"(Dixon, 2013) While this level of directness has died down in modern TV advertising, many of the original sale tactics (ie. smiling children, excited shouting, joyful competition, proposals of self-determination in play, etc) are still regularly used today. These play narratives and behaviors have become so normalized that there is little public motivation to strategically lessen them. Steps have been taken to diversify military toys and media, opposed to making efforts to demilitarize childhood generally. Consumerism in the toy industry, taught to us from a young age, along with the American economy gradually spiralling into late stage capitalism, has led to a widespread mindset of self-justifiable overconsumption that not only creates impressive amounts of waste, but also encourages children to expect a continuous replenishing and replacement of toys.

The oil industry plays a massive role in perpetuating systems of consumerism, colonization, and militarization through its pervasive influence on global economics and politics. The vast majority of children's toys and the packaging material used for them today comes from petrochemicals, a byproduct of the refining of crude oil. The United States' oil policies are blood-soaked and heavily intertwined with our history of unwelcomed international military activity. A very large percentage of American toys, militarized toys included, are made in locations outside of the U.S., with many having questionable business and labor practices (Tuquero, 2025). U.S. military presence and political power reaching into international territories combined with a lack of meaningful participation in international climate agreements, makes our nation a functional wrecking ball when it comes to fair and ethical trade practices. Battery operated toys contribute to the unethical material harvesting operations in the DRC (Gross, 2023), single use plastics used for toy packaging impact pollution and climate change

(Vasarhelyi, 2023), and the children indoctrinated by a highly militarized culture can go on to participate, militarily or otherwise, in practices of US exceptionalism. While the toy industry is not solely responsible for our nation's controversial material sourcing, trade, and production practices, it could not exist as it does today without the unfair advantage provided by American imperialism and a disregard for the potential and promised benefits of international collaboration.

Works Cited

Bedford, G. (2020). *Toy soldiers ... just child's play?* Egham Museum.

    https://eghammuseum.org/toy-soldiers-just-childs-play/

Chamberlain, G. (2018, December 6). *Revealed: Disney's £35 Ariel Doll earns a Chinese worker*

    1P. The Guardian.

    https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/dec/06/revealed-disney-ariel-doll

    -earns-chinese-worker-1p

Delson, J. (2013). *A brief history of toy soldiers from the Toy Soldier Company*. THE TOY

    SOLDIER COMPANY. https://www.toysoldierco.com/resources/toysoldierhistory.htm

Dixon, D. (2013, August 4). *War Toy TV ads from 50s and 60s*. YouTube.

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reeWHLqedIw&rco=1

G.I. Joe. The Strong National Museum of Play. (2025, March 25).

    https://www.museumofplay.org/toys/g-i-joe/

Gross, T. (2023, February 1). *How "modern-day slavery" in the Congo powers the rechargeable*

    battery economy. NPR.

    https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/02/01/1152893248/red-cobalt-congo-drc

    -mining-siddharth-kara

Je Weetwel, D. (2014). *Museum pieces - model of Nubian soldiers*. Museum Pieces - Model of

    Nubian Soldiers.

https://amun-ra-egyptology.blogspot.com/2014/12/museum-pieces-model-of-nubian-soldiers.html

Stahl, M. (2014, May 13). *Toy soldiers in the Monadnock Center Collection*. The Monadnock Center for History and Culture. https://monadnockcenter.org/toy-soldiers/

TTS. (2019, September 23). *History of toy soldiers*. Trains And Toy Soldiers. https://trainsandtoysoldiers.com/blog/history-of-toy-soldiers/

Tuquero, L. (2025, May 11). *What percentage of US Toys and Christmas goods are imported from China?*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/11/what-percentage-of-us-toys-and-christmas-goods-are-imported-from-china

Vasarhelyi, K. (2023, December 15). *The impact of plastic on climate change*. Environmental Center. https://www.colorado.edu/ecenter/2023/12/15/impact-plastic-climate-change

I have adhered to the honor code on this assignment.- Jessie Carney

Militarized Clothing: The Bomber Jacket and More

Elias Bartlett

In this section of our Field Trip, I will dive into military clothing, its impact on civilian fashion, and the effects it has on the way militarization is carried out in the everyday. My object of focus is the bomber jacket, the quintessential item of military clothing that has made its way into the mainstream. Military clothing carries a lot of visual meaning that we have subconsciously encoded into our understanding of it, and by putting the leather bomber jacket with all of the assumptions and preconceptions embedded in it under a microscope, that meaning can be teased out and understood.

I chose the bomber jacket specifically due to its ubiquity as military wear in the mainstream civilian fashion world. This style of jacket can be seen everywhere, on people from all walks of life. It epitomizes the extreme normalization of military aesthetics in everyday life. We often do not stop to think about the origins of clothing styles, but this lack of recognition of militarized clothing only further contributes to its ability to fade into the background and infiltrate the public consciousness.

The bomber jacket was first designed in 1917, then called flight jackets. The jacket went through several iterations over the next few decades, both during World War I and World War II and the interwar period. It became a mainstream fashion staple in the 1950s as it began to be featured in major motion picture productions such as being worn by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause (1955).* Bomber jackets persist as a classic style item to this day, manufactured in a vast array of materials and colors.

There is a long history of military clothing influencing mainstream fashion, from trench coats designed for soldiers in WWI becoming a staple of women's fashion to the invention of the

combat boot which has now become ubiquitous among civilians. This trend clearly shows the valorization of the military and consequently its aesthetics in the modern American era. In her dissertation on war, fashion, and their political intersections, Lauren Topor writes,

"Youths in cargo pants, men in flight jackets and parkas, fashion victims in safari jackets and sailor cabans are common sights on the everyday scene. Fashion runways feature periodic flurries of camouflage-print chiffon evening gowns, haversack vests in multicolored satin, and military greatcoats in cashmere with gilded buttons where, more than ever before, the initials of stylists are taking place of the insignias of royal families, empires, and dictators" (14).

This shift from militarized clothing pledging its allegiance to a dynasty or empire to designers and brands instead signifies the creep of late-stage capitalism into our militarized reality. No longer is the military's loyalty to a king or an emperor. Instead, it is to the endless flow of capital. In the case of the United States, the overarching capitalist nation-state is the ultimate domain to which citizens' loyalty must be pledged. The army uniform, or a version of it manufactured for civilian wear, is a unifying outfit, a declaration of being a part of the nation-state. The uniform and its associated ideology "[play] an essential role in fostering both a sense of belonging to the army and the nation across different social classes and geographical areas" (Roveri 195).

Circling back around to the bomber jacket, the garment itself is inextricably tied up in the image of the fighter pilot, and thus, American technological prowess. In his article *Scripting the Frontier: Drone Intruders and the Racial Politics of Unmanning,* Ivan Chaar Lopez deals with the concept of the fighter pilot as the cowboy: the quintessential image of rugged American masculinity. Using the example of a 1959 illustration of a fighter pilot astride his jet as if it were a horse, the cover of the November issue of *Naval Aviation News* magazine of that year, Chaar Lopez describes the midcentury depiction of the airspace of the Southwestern United States as a

new frontier that must be explored and conquered by this new type of cowboy. The bomber jacket is an essential part of the costume of the American military pilot, and thus the true American man must also wear a bomber jacket.

A phenomenon that exemplifies the American attitude towards military fashion is the army surplus store. They can be found in practically any city, selling surplus military wear for discount prices. This allows for easy dissemination of military attire to civilian wearers. When a nation clothes itself in the garb of its soldiers, it projects an image of united patriotism that is inextricably tied to military might. Every time someone purchases or wears a bomber jacket, it reinforces the idea that United States military power is a normalized and everyday thing.

The prevalence of army surplus stores is a visual, physical, and economic manifestation of the militarization of American culture: anywhere you go, there is a store where you can purchase clothing, accessories, and tools that promote and valorize the army. This ties into the capitalization on even further profit from the zeitgeist surrounding the United States military. In the US, war profiteering and war often seem synonymous as the country grinds its way into late-stage capitalism and profit is valued above all else.

Another interesting aspect of military aestheticization is its adoption by subcultures and countercultures inside of the United States. The punk subculture especially draws on military aesthetics despite their general anti-establishment values. Items like cargo pants, combat boots, camo of all kinds, and military jackets are staples of punk fashion, often "reclaimed" in some way through DIY alterations. These may include anti-military sentiments, express other political views, showcase bands, or be purely aesthetic in nature. This subversion of military attire also serves to demonstrate the role it is meant to play in American society: one of quiet assimilation

and dominance. Often, the mirror of an action can offer a deeper look into the underlying threads of the action itself.

Other subcultures that employ the use of militarized fashion and the leather jacket in particular include metalheads and bikers, both very stereotypically masculine groups. Much like punks, bikers and metalheads often also customize their jackets, metalheads to show off bands they like or have seen, and bikers to show affiliation with a particular motorcycle club along with other details of their affiliation or worldview. In all three of these subcultures, the jacket is an "in", proof that you've walked the walk. How better to proclaim one's affiliation with these historically male-dominated subcultures than to sport a jacket with its roots in the military, the very image of masculinity?

Military attire worn by counterculture movements can also be due to the fact that it is cheap and easy to find, something that ties back into the militarized culture of the United States. This clothing is easy to find because it has been tightly bound up into the society, culture, and daily life of this country. Camouflage is most likely the most widespread instance of militarized fashion, worn by people from all walks of life.

"[C]amouflage is worn by a variety of social groups because it has the potential to represent different viewpoints. On the one hand, wearing camouflage might manifest one's support for the national military and thus makes a strong appearance in clothing choices of patriots and military supporters. On the other, however, camouflage also manifests struggle and hardships and is thus worn by counterculture artists, hip-hop musicians, hustlers and skaters, and so on" (Roveri 198).

The ubiquity of camouflage softens its origins. When it is everywhere, people become used to it and even those who may oppose the military end up wearing it. As has occurred with other military garments, camo has become a staple of fashion, thus becoming mundane and common, meaning people often don't even consider its origins. The bomber jacket's mundanity

demonstrates this perfectly. This also illustrates the only path forward out of the intense militarization of our cultural zeitgeist, and it begins with recognition. If we are ever to remove the creeping threads of militarization from our everyday lives, the first step must be recognizing the places it has a hold, even in something as common as our clothing.

Bibliography

"A Brief History of the Bomber Jacket." *Michael Andrews*,

www.michaelandrews.com/the-history-of-the-bomber-jacket/. Accessed 3 May 2025.

Chaar Lopez, Ivan. "Scripting the Frontier: Drone Intruders and the Racial Politics of

Unmanning." *The Cybernetic Border: Drones, Technology & Intrusion*, Duke University

Press, 2024, pp. 29-58.

Roveri, Mattia. "Fashion in the trenches: how the military shapes the fashion industry." *The

Routledge Companion to Fashion Studies*, edited by Eugenia Paulicelli, Veronica

Manlow, and Elizabeth Wissinger, Routledge, 2021, pp. 193-200.

"Timeless Fashion: The Enduring Legacy of Military Uniforms on Fashion." *Fashion & Law

Journal*, 2 Sept. 2024,

fashionlawjournal.com/timeless-fashion-the-enduring-legacy-of-military-uniforms-on-fas

hion/.

Topor, Lauren. *War and fashion: Political views and how military styles influence fashion.* 2008.

Eastern Michigan University, Master's Thesis.

I pledge that I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment - EB