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Modern Leonidas: Spartan Military Culture in a Modern American Context

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And he who so falls among the champions and
loses his sweet life,
so blessing with honor his city, his father, and
all his people,
with wounds in his chest, where the spear that
he was facing has transfixed
that massive guard of his shield, and gone
through his breastplate as well,
why, such a man is lamented alike by the young
and the elders,
and all his city goes into mourning and grieves
for his loss.
His tomb is pointed to with pride, and so are
his children,
and his children's children, and afterward all
the race that is his.
His shining glory is never forgotten, his name
is remembered,
and he becomes an immortal, though he lies under
the ground,
when one who was a brave man has been killed by
the furious War God
standing his ground and fighting hard for his
children and land.[1]

(Tyrtaeus, 12.23-34)

The Spartan national war-poet Tyrtaeus wrote the above hymn in the seventh century BC as a dedication to the brave hoplites who gave their lives for Sparta. Its words are startlingly relevant to a modern American society currently at war; a society full of families who take great pride in their fallen soldiers. Yet its message comes across as superficial for so many men and women dying today in a war they no longer believe in; a war which will forever change who they are as individuals, how they interact with their families, and how they make minute everyday decisions about what to eat or what movie to watch. Though many do not consider themselves citizen-soldiers in the same sense as Spartans, who had to become soldiers to become citizens, they find similarities between

[1] Cited in Vaughn, P. 1991. "The identification and retrieval of the hoplite battle-dead." In *Hoplites: the classical Greek battle experience, ed.* Victor Davis Hanson, 40. London: Routledge.

their struggles in Vietnam or Iraq and the struggles of ancient elite brotherhoods like the 300 who fought at Thermopylae. On one hand, Sparta was a small community with a narrowly focused and persistent tradition in indoctrination that all of its citizens upheld and therefore it was easier for one to die for his "country," a term analogous to its brotherhood of hoplites. On the other hand, American soldiers since Vietnam have always represented a relatively tiny portion of the American population. To some extent they need to being willing to sacrifice themselves for their country and its interests, but where they most resemble the Spartans is in their undying commitment to the men they meet in basic training, serve alongside in combat, and shake the hand of in the streets back home.

Tyrtaeus' rallying cries praised valor and shamed cowardice and like most battle hymns today sung by the Marines or United States Military Academy, they persisted as the anthems of hoplites, ancient men in uniform, and were regularly recited by Spartan men in battle for generations to come.[2] They, along with a strict military discipline in the Spartan *agoge*, shaped Spartan culture and formed a common identity among its obedient and fervent members and followers. Being a member of the elite hoplite force meant that you had proven yourself as a warrior and that you had abandoned your previous identity in order to become a part of a group. Military doctrine in ancient and present times is built on the unwavering principle of solidarity and equality for the sake of the public's physical and ideological safety. In turn, soldiers are promised the glory sung above in the ancient verses of Tyrtaeus.

Paul Cartledge poses the question: Who were the Spartans, and why should we care?[3] With the continuation of the Iraq War modern ideas of courage and heroism,

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[2] Cartledge, P. 2006. *Thermopylae: the battle that changed the world*, 81. Woodstock: Overlook Press.
[3] Cartledge, P. 2003. *The Spartans: the World of the Warrior Heroes of Ancient Greece,* 9. New York:

concepts of security and obligation, and attitudes of superiority and arrogance seem immediately all-American; however their roots are found deeply embedded in the societies, values, and practices of the Classical world. This paper will focus on the traditions of unwavering commitment, forced conformity, and willing self-sacrifice of the Spartans and how twenty-five centuries of emulation and adaptation of their stock values of duty, honor, manliness, and courage have kept their legacy alive in poems, films, books, and in the minds of soldiers today.

In order to compare and contrast the current superpower status and influence of the United States of America and its soldiers with ancient Spartan military institutions and influence, I will discuss the foundations of Spartan education and training in the *agoge*; processes of indoctrination through conformity, ritual, fear, and "laconic" command; the upbringing of detached boys in an artificial family environment; and the upbringing and role of Spartan women. How much are we like the ancient society? And how similar or different are we politically, socially, and economically?

By examining the history of Sparta, its indoctrination, and the heroic results of campaigns like the Battle of Thermopylae, we will be able to better understand how events like Thermopylae and its legendary king Leonidas survive today as landmarks in European history. Authors, philosophers, and artists have adopted Sparta for a number of political and social reasons throughout history, whether it be to rally a country behind war or behind tyranny. The result has been a number of modern sources promoting a “spartan ideal” which enlivens ancient Greek ideas of courage, honor, and duty which can be heard in the words of American soldiers during and after the Vietnam and Iraq Wars. The moral make-up and military standards of education and training in America were born from

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Random House.

classical and European tradition and are enforced by institutions such as the United States Military Academy and United States Marine Corps today. With this historical background we will be further equipped to address the more pertinent issues which affect the psychology of the soldier: his homecoming, readjustment, and acceptance of civilian life. Lastly, interviews with three American veterans will offer insight into how they feel and think of the Spartans today, and how the elite group represents honor and encourages them to finish their jobs as soldiers.

For purposes of clarity I will be focusing on three specific time periods of Spartan and American history. For Sparta I will look at the period during the fifth century BC before and during the Battle of Thermopylae, and for America, the eras of the Vietnam and Iraq Wars. In terms of sources I will rely on what current knowledge of the Spartans we have from limited material remains and skewed textual evidence and will examine recent studies, accounts, articles, and films as sources for American society. In regard to terminology, at times I will be using the term "Spartiate" when referring to male citizens of Sparta and "Spartan" to refer to all others. I will also label Sparta as a *polis,* or city-state for the purposes of this paper, as I explain below. Current debates on this term and if it can be applied to Sparta, a unique case, can be referenced in the Copenhagen Polis Center studies.[4] These distinctions will be explained further in the following paragraphs.

Part I: The nature of material and textual evidence for Spartan society

Material

Thucydides' fifth century BC description of the city gives us some insight into how

[4] c.f. Hansen, M.H. ed. 2000. *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures: An Investigation Conducted by the Copeghagen Polis Center*. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Science

Sparta would have appeared to an outsider:

> *Suppose, for example, that the city of Sparta were to become deserted and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained. I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be... its appearance would not come up to expectation.*
>
> (Thuc. 1.10)

Thucydides, an Athenian historian writing about a conflict between his *polis* and the Spartan *polis*, seems on one hand disappointed at the Spartans' lack of investment in public monuments, temples, and civic buildings, all of which Athens was well known for. On the other hand, he draws a parallel to the small, but mighty cities of the Mycenaeans, recognizing that one cannot judge a city solely by its appearance, but only by its power.[5]

His description characterizes what we know about the Spartans through material evidence today. The bulk of the remains from the Geometric, Archaic, and Classical periods include: standard Lakonian pottery, small bronze votive offerings of horses, small bronzes of hoplites, a few bronze female figurines, bronze mirrors, and the foundations of the Temple of Artemis Ortheia. This temple, dated as early as 700 BC was used through the Roman period and was the location of a well known whipping ritual described by Plutarch.[6] This initiation ceremony for *agoge* members was thought by Plutarch to be a brutal step in the making of a hoplite warrior. Also extant is a Spartan shield, now in the Agora museum in Athens. It was taken by an Athenian soldier as a trophy from a captured Spartan in 425 BC.[7] Spartan shields were distinctly marked over their face with a large lambda, or upside-down 'v,' which stood for Lacedaemon, the geographical territory and ancestral land of the Spartans.

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and Letters.

[5] Thuc. 1.10. 1972. Suffolk: Penguin Classics.

[6] Cartledge, P. 2003. *Spartan Reflections*, 174-5. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Still one of the most intriguing and well-known pieces of Spartan sculpture is a torso of a helmeted and bearded, yet moustache-less hoplite made from Parian marble.[8] Found southwest of the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos on the Spartan Acropolis, the figure is probably the work of a Laconian sculptor and is dated to 480-470 BC. The fine quality of the stone, carving, and evidence for inlaid eyes, suggests a sculptor with keen stone-working and metallurgical skill. When it was first excavated in 1925 by the British School at Athens it was immediately named "Leonidas," the general of the 300 Spartans who stood against the Persians at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC. Today some scholars accept the title while others believe it to be either part of a statue group or the depiction of a different general.[9] Regardless of what label it truly deserves, the image of Leonidas is found in the statue and has even been recreated as a full scale modern model and erected in Sparta with inlaid eyes and all.

The shield, hoplite bronze figures, Temple of Artemis Ortheia, and rendering of "Leonidas" in marble help illustrate a picture of Spartan military society and what images were thought to be worthy of artistic depiction in Spartan culture. The limited physical remains along with the accounts of ancient writers are the only evidence we have today for the unique society of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, a society whose moral values and physical strength have been inspiration in various ways throughout history.

Paul Cartledge asserts that, Sparta still “remains one of the only two ancient Greek cities for which there is anything like the right kind and amount of evidence for the

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[7] Cartledge, *Reflections* 2003, Plate 10.

[8] Plut. *Cleom.* 9.2; for Ephors proclamation forbidding hoplites to wear moustaches.

[9] Kaltsas, Nikolaos ed. 2006. *Athens- Sparta,* 223. Catalogue from “Athens-Sparta” exhibit Onassis Cultural Center, New York, December 6, 2006- May 12, 2007. Publ. Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA) and National Archaeological Museum, Athens (Greece).

historian even to contemplate attempting a convincing social portrait in the round."[10] During the Classical period Athens and Sparta flourished, but in completely different ways and under completely different command. Athens was a strong naval power, a cultural and civic center for art, drama, democracy, philosophy, and athletics. While Athens boasts a rich body of archaeological and textual evidence, both resources which have made our understanding and appreciation of the *polis* relatively easy, such evidence for archaic and classical Sparta is severely limited.

As stated above, the city has few physical remains. Lycurgus the lawgivers' "unwritten laws" governing the Spartans are given as one reason why.[11] In Athens there are numerous legal and civic inscriptions not only extant, but securely fixed to a specific historical period by date or archon. Lycurgus believed that the Spartans were so devoted to their city that the laws became a part of them, and need not be inscribed. Others call attention to Plutarch's description of Lycurgus' prohibitions of engraved grave stelai.[12] An absence of these markers, which are well known in other parts of Greece, not only limits our knowledge of specific Spartans, but also our knowledge of how they were memorialized or imagined after death. In life, Spartans were valued as members of a close-knit and uniform community where individuality and luxury were discouraged. Maybe, with this lack of stelai, the Spartans were trying to send everyone a message of their solidarity. They would live as one city, army, and family, and die as one too.

If we look to the Spartans' lifelong obsession with the art of war-making we also find reason for a lack of non-military related objects. If they were too busy training and building

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[10] Cartledge, *Reflections* 2003, 3

[11] Pomeroy, ; Plut., *Lyc.* 13. 1997. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, Loeb Classical Library.

[12] Pomeroy 2002, 140

their army, and that was indeed their purpose for living, would it have been critical for them to devote their resources to artistic pursuits? On the contrary, it seems that Spartans would consider such pursuits or frivolities to be their last priority given their excellent reputation as paradigms for *andreia*, "courage" or literally 'manliness,' and as a people who lived a conservative lifestyle for the purpose of preserving their honor and honing their self-control.

Text

The majority of texts written about Sparta are of non-Spartans, however we can begin by briefly touching upon two archaic Spartan poets, whose lyric has given us some insight into Spartan culture.[13] In the mid-seventh century BC the martial poet Tyrtaeus speaks of the *Great Rhetra*, the first known charter-like document drafted for Sparta. Plutarch later believes this document to hold the laws of Lycurgus, even though Tyrtaeus never mentions him.[14] These *rhetra* are not given in any chronological order and translate only into brief tenets of Spartan law and governance later referenced and perpetuated by Plutarch.[15] The political system as we know it will be discussed later in more detail.

Alcman, a poet born either in Lydia or Lakonia, worked in Sparta during the archaic period and is thought to have possibly been a Spartan.[16] Late seventh century papyri suggests he lived in the second half of the seventh century[17] and he was well acquainted with Spartan culture as a choral director for Spartan girls. His lyrics played an essential part in *mousike*, the practice of ceremonial song and dance which was a part of

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[13] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 140
[14] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 64
[15] Plut., *Lyc.* 6
[16] Pomeroy 2002, 141
[17] Pomeroy 2002, 142, see note 7 references Paul Poralla. 1985. *A Prosopography of Lacedaemonians from the Earliest Times to the Death of Alexander the Great*, 2nd ed. Chicago, 18, no. 65.

female physical and mental education and preparation.[18]

The use of these two poets as reliable sources for Spartan history is both beneficial and detrimental. First of all their work is extant only in fragments. Pomeroy attributes the fragmentation of Alcman to twenty five centuries of natural deterioration and the select preservation of grammarians interested in the early Doric dialect. The longest fragment of Alcman's poetry preserved is *Partheneion* 1 and Tyrtaeus' work is likewise limited. Secondly, as we know from the debates about the historicity of Homer's Trojan War, poets are not reliable sources for chronology or history, but often times employ exaggeration and are selective about what points of view and events to portray. Third, the poets are writing in a time prior to that period (c. 480-360 BC) of Sparta's dominance and military power, which is the focus of this paper. For these reasons, we must look to contemporary and post contemporary sources.

The major extant textual sources which describe the core elements of the classical Spartan *polis* that are the root of our current understanding also pose a dilemma: they are not written by Spartans and they present no clear chronology.[19] They are Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, Xenophon's *Lakedaimonian Constitution*, and Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*. Spartans and their ideals are also echoed in the work of the "Lakonizer" Kritias (460-403 BC), an Athenian Sophist and follower of Socrates who was “backed by” the Spartans and who influenced Xenophon’s *Spartan Constitution*. Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* also reflect Spartan canons for education, exercise, and marriage.[20]

Thucydides described the Spartan *polis* as “not regularly planned and [containing]

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[18] Pomeroy 2002, 143; for evidence of persistence of such oral traditions reference Athenaeus who witnesses Alcman's songs being sung in Sparta even in the late Roman period

[19] Pomeroy 2002, 140

[20] Pomeroy 2002,. 148

no shrines or other buildings of great cost or magnificence."[21] Statements like these pronounce Thucydides' bias as an Athenian historian who played an active part as a general in the Peloponnesian War. As a general he faced defeat while fighting against the Spartan general Brasidas in 424 BC.[22] Instead of embracing Spartan mentality as "Lakonizers," or Spartan admirers do, he is more critical of their upbringing. He is sure to draw a line between Sparta's brand of "state-induced courage," which is forced on young boys and Athens' brand of "natural courage," a form both voluntary and successful.[23] While he conveys a contemporary historical and epic retelling of the Peloponnesian War, (431 to 404 BC between Athens and Sparta) and some insight into the role of the Helot in Sparta, he also aims to polarize the two city-states.[24] Some of his sources are also questioned by scholars, namely his use of sometimes unreliable informers.[25] Since the focus of this paper is the social and educational systems fueling the warrior society, not the specific military successes and defeats of the Spartans, it is more pertinent to discuss those sources who better inform us of the Spartan upbringing, Xenophon and Plutarch.

Xenophon (430-356 BC) was a prominent Athenian citizen of an upper class family and also a student of Socrates, but most importantly a "Lakonizer" and dear friend to the Spartan king Agesilaus II (ruled Sparta for almost forty years from the beginning of the fourth century).[26] When democracy was restored in Athens after the city's defeat in 404, he was forced into exile in Sparta where he first worked as a mercenary soldier in the barracks

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[21] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 14; c.f. Thuc. 1.10
[22] Finley, J.F. 1972. Introduction to Thucydides *Peloponnesian War*, 10
[23] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 80; Thuc. 2.39.1, 4
[24] Powell,
[25] Powell 1988, 219; c.f. Donald Kagan. 2003. *The Peloponnesian War* New York: Viking. for Thucydides historiography
[26] Pomeroy 2002, 148; Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 65

and alongside the king and his hoplites in Sparta's campaigns in Persia and Asia Minor.[27] Not only did Xenophon live on an estate granted to him in Olympia by Agesilaus, but he was honored with the opportunity of sending his two sons through the Spartan *agoge*.[28] Although he experienced Sparta first as an outsider, he actually lived in the city, practiced its style of warfare, and witnessed first hand its rigorous and brutal style of education.[29] Therefore he is considered a more accurate source than Plutarch. Xenophon's *Lakedaimonion Politeia,* or *Constitution of the Spartans,* gives us a contemporary detailed description of both the *agoge* and the military machine that had defeated the Athenians and dominated Greece until 371 BC. Despite Talbert's skepticism,
this text is widely accepted by other scholars as the work of Sparta's in-house Athenian.[30]

The third ancient source is Plutarch (c.50- 120 AD) whose *Life of Lycurgus* and *Sayings of Spartan Women* were written during the late first century AD. A Greek writer during the Roman period, Plutarch was best known for his philosophical and biographical works, not for historical accounts. He grew up in Chaironea and served as a priest at Delphi. Some of greatest literary influences were Xenophon, Aristotle, Kritias, Plato, and other antiquarians. Talbert and others also suggest that he had access to and utilized Spartan archives found in the city when writing his *Lives*.[31] In Plutarch's efforts to make sense of Lycurgan Sparta and its laws, he attributes the dual kingship, which began in the eighth century BC, the existence of the Perioikoi and Helot populations which dwelled

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[27] Talbert, Richard J. A. 1988. Introduction to *Plutarch on Sparta*, Appendix, 164-5. London: Penguin Classics.
[28] Talbert 1988, Appendix, 165
[29] Pomeroy 2002, 149; Xenophon would have also seen plays like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* popular in Athens, cultural constructs that also would have influenced his perceptions of Spartan society
[30] Talbert 1988, 166
[31] Talbert 1988, 5

outside of Sparta, and the Ephorate, a council of magistrates, to pre-Lycurgan Sparta.[32] Although reading the *Life of Lycurgus* gives us a sense of what Plutarch wanted his readers to know about the man, his laws, and how they governed Sparta, we can only make educated guesses as to what he may have left out or what he might have wrongly assumed.

Xenophon's accounts of Sparta should be read according to their historical context, a time before the Battle of Leuktra in 371 BC when the Lycurgan system was still alive and well and Sparta too was flourishing. Plutarch, on the other hand, is writing during the Roman period, but he is presumably describing the same historical period as Xenophon is writing about (end of the fifth and beginning of the fourth century BC). Plutarch, therefore, is forced to extrapolate from what he knows second hand from the past. Distanced by centuries of major political, economic, and social changes, he cannot help but see Sparta through the lens of the Roman era. On one hand he seems to be clinging to what he had heard and read (his main sources being the contemporary Greek Lakonizers Xenophon and Kritias) about the mighty Spartans of the Classical period, while on the other hand, he is ignorant of how those Lycurgan ideals have changed. Sparta was not thriving during the Roman period as it was in Lycurgan times with an obedient Helot labor force. It seems Plutarch was trying to recover what dignity the city once had as a fifth and early fourth century BC elite superpower. Powell suggests that Sparta intentionally tried to create its own histories in this later period to legitimize and suit the politics of the time.[33]

Xenophon is especially crucial for our understanding of the educational and military systems, and Plutarch for the upholding of Spartan Lycurgan values, which he,

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[32] Talbert 1988, 6
[33] Powell 1988, 240

more than Xenophon, passed on to modern writers with an interest in Sparta.[34] The adoption of these ideals in modern society will be discussed later in this paper when comparisons and distinctions are made between Sparta and America.

Part II: What does it mean to be a Spartiate?

> *You could see the gymnasia full of men exercising, the hippodrome full of horsemen riding, the javelin throwers and the archers at target practice... the marketplace was full of armaments and horses for sale, while the bronze-smiths and carpenters, iron workers, leatherworkers, and painters were all preparing military equipment. As a result you would truly have thought the city a workshop of war.*
> (Xen., *Ages*. I 26f)

In the above passage Xenophon remarks upon seeing his friend Agesilaos II, one of the best known Spartan commanders, preparing his men for battle at Ephesos. This vivid account captures a Sparta at its height in the beginning of the fourth century BC as a city at the ready for combat. Sparta dominated Greece until its defeat at Leuktra in 371 BC, and while it was developing as a strong military power its efficiency made it possible for a relatively small population of distinct Greeks to have control over the Greek world. In order to understand Spartan society and how the *agoge* indoctrinated its young Spartans, we must first look at the *polis* of Sparta, its geography, political and social organization, and myth-based origins.

Sparta lies in the Eurotas River Valley between the high peaks of Mount Taygetos to the west and Mount Parnon to the east. The city formed its center without city walls within the region of Laconia (or Lacedaemon) in the Peloponnese, which was not customary for a contemporary Greek city.[36] Sparta also controlled the largest territory of any city-state in all of Greece: the 8,000 square kilometer region of Lacedaemon including

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[34] Pomeroy 2002, 27 and 70
[35] Powell 1988,
[36] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 47

Messenia and Laconia, an area about three times larger than Athens's Attica territory.[37]

The Spartan *polis*: political and social organization

Thucydides attests that the Spartan *polis* was made up of loosely connected *komai*, or villages.[38] The term *polis* and it definition in ancient Greece has been the subject of extensive scholarly conversation published by the Copenhagen Polis Center in the 1990's. The word holds implications for both political organization and physical layout, but for our purposes it does not mean "city" in the sense that we now conceive of one. It is a term which can more accurately be described as a "city-state," or a group of people ruled by their own distinct political body and with some civic center which distinguishes them from the surrounding countryside. Sparta presents a unique example of a city-state, not meeting certain criteria that Athens, for example does, but scholars including Cartledge have classified it as a *polis*, for lack of a better word.[39] Unlike democratic Classical Athens, Sparta was governed by more than just an assembly or a king. According to the *Great Rhetra* and what we know of Lycurgus' reforms, the *polis* was governed by a group of magistrates, the *Ephorate*, two kings, a group of elders or senate, the *Gerousia,* and the *damos*, an assembly of Spartan male citizens.[40]

Like most other ancient Greeks, the Spartans sought to legitimize their past by linking to a divine ancestry, but also credited their foundations to one hero in particular, a man, or perhaps a myth, named Lycurgus.[41] His reforms, which are estimated to have been "written" around 650 BC, were very influential for both Xenophon and Plutarch, whose

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[37] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 25
[38] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 14; reference to Thuc. 1.10
[39] c.f. Hansen. *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*
[40] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 66; references the political organization laid out by Tyrtaeus in the *Great Rhetra*
[41] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 29

accounts of Sparta are riddled with references to him. Above all, Lycurgus was the reason for the Spartan ideology, the creation of the *agoge*, or literally "raising" of children like cattle, and the unique political system of the Spartans.

Sparta was perceived by ancient Greeks to be a monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy at varying times in history so that the function of its government is therefore, difficult to pin point.[42] The "laws" that have been passed down, whether by Lycurgus or reformers after him, are often referred to as *rhetra*, a kind of "saying or pronouncement- from a bargain or contract, through an oracle to a law."[43] According to Plutarch, "Lycurgus did not put his laws in writing... instead he reckoned that the guiding principles of most importance for the happiness and excellence of a state would remain securely fixed if they were embedded into the citizens' character and training."[44] Plutarch and Xenophon believed that this law and all others attributed to Lycurgus were sustained well past the lawgiver's existence.[45] Powell has suggested that the Battle of Leuktra in 371 BC could have marked the dissolution of Lycurgus's laws.[46] Around this same time Spartan domination in Laconia ended and with it the stability among the previously enslaved labor force of Helots in Messenia. To understand better the dynamics of these warring groups we must first define the different groups living in the greater region of Lacedaemon.

Spartiates, Spartans, Perioikoi, and Helots

The term Lacedaemonian refers to any person living in Sparta, Messenia, and Lakonia, the latter two being enslaved populations controlled by the Spartans.

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[42] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 32; Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 57
[43] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 64
[44] Plut., *Lyc.* 13
[45] Xen., *LP* 13. 1968. *Scripta Minora*, *Lakedaimonian Constitution*. Translated by E.C. Marchant. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library; Plutarch *Lyc.* 29
[46] Powell 1988, 220

Lacedaemonians were divided into three distinct, and in some cases, rival groups: Spartiates, Perioikoi, and Helots.[47] Spartiates were elite Spartan male citizens 20 years of age or older who had 1) participated in the *agoge*, the military and uniquely Spartan education system, 2) been elected to a common mess or dining group, a social organization created to promote solidarity and uniformity, and 3) had also maintained their grain contribution to that mess throughout their whole life.[48] For purposes of clarity the term "Spartan" will be used throughout this paper to connote both Spartiates and Spartans now that the specific distinction has been made for the record.

The other two populations consisted of the Perioikoi, literally "dwellers round about," and the Helots, who lived farther from the invisible city walls of Sparta and on the outskirts of the valley.[49] By 735 BC the Spartans had invaded the nearby region of Messenia and henceforth enslaved its native Greek populations.[50] The former were a class of craftsmen and tradesmen financially bound to the Spartans as partial citizens whose status granted them some personal freedoms including the management of their own affairs and households.[51] This group did not present a threat to the Spartans who dwelled in the city center, who, on the contrary, were always watchful of the Helot slave population which encircled them.

This Helot group of *douloi*, or slaves, was not of foreign origin but was a local Greek population enslaved by the Spartans when they first conquered the Eurotas River Valley and established their *polis* there in the eighth and seventh centuries BC.[52] The

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[47] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 14
[48] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 14
[49] Talbert 1988, 1
[50] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 13
[51] Talbert 1988, 6
[52] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 147; Pomeroy 2002, 171

Helot's sole purpose was to farm the *kleroi*, land allotments given to each graduate of the *agoge* to help fund his *syssition*, or mess. In essence, the helot farmed his ancestors land for the profit of his master.[53] Helots also played an important part as "the other." The ancient Greeks, like many modern cultural or societal groups, liked to pit groups against each other, whether it be Greek versus Barbarian, Lapiths versus Centaurs, male versus female, or Athenian versus Spartan, the general ideology being good versus evil and whose side are you on.

This feeling of superiority was what made a successful and vigilant Spartan warrior. Annual festivals and ritual beatings held as public social and community events aimed to make examples out of helots, to degrade and humiliate them, and to reveal their inherent lack of self control vividly illustrated by their cries out in pain or garrulity while drunk on unmixed wine.[54] Such traditions in ridicule persisted so that all young Spartans might learn what was virtuous and civilized about being Spartan and what was barbarian and condemnable about the slave population, which the Spartans needed to constantly see as an enemy.[55] Scheidel estimates that as many as 30,000 "able-bodied male Helots" existed in the early fifth century, outnumbering their Spartan counterparts four to one. If this estimate is accurate, in a strategic position for possible revolt.[56] Both the Perioikoi and Helots would have also served in the Spartan military when needed in times of crisis, but they would not have served as prestigious hoplites, as this was reserved for those who

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[53] Figueira, T. 2004. "The nature of the Spartan *kleros.*" In *Spartan Society,* Thomas Figueira ed., 64-65 Swansea: Classical Press of Wales.

[54] Plut., *Lyc.* 28; Hodkinson, Stephen. 2004. "Female property ownership and empowerment in classical and Hellenistic Sparta." In In *Spartan Society,* Thomas Figueira ed., 123. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales.

[55] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003*,* 35

[56]

graduated from the *agoge* and who were of noble birth.[57]

Spartan dependency on their Helot slave population came in two forms. First, Spartan citizens had the luxury of outsourcing all agricultural labor to this population, which, under strict surveillance of their Spartan masters, worked the fields of various *kleroi* and fueled the economy of Sparta. Each Spartan citizen in return would contribute part of the *kleros* yield, 70 *medimni*, or bushels of barley to his mess as dues.[58] Second, the system also prohibited Spartan citizens from doing any work outside of their training in the *agoge* and lifelong military service thereafter.[59] Warfare was their career and the *agoge* their middle and high school education. It is no wonder that the Helots were kept under such a close eye, as any revolt on their behalf would jeopardize the working system which fueled not only Sparta's military capability abroad, but could also compromise its system of security and status as an elite warrior class.

How did the Spartans, a small group of loosely linked *komai*, under the ideological laws of Lycurgus and the mythical banner of Herakles take over the Greek world during the classical period? It helps to think about how they would have been perceived by other Greeks and the image they wanted to project. Given the nature of security in Sparta, the only way anyone outside of Sparta really got to witness her was in wars, when she was at her best.[60] Naturally, it is difficult to divorce Sparta at war from Sparta at home because both fit into military contexts. The persistence of the image of bravery, self-sacrifice, and brutality are passed on to us because of the creation of Lycurgus' *agoge* and its indoctrination of the young, which Plutarch and later writers idealized and glorified.

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[57] Talbert 1988, 6
[58] Figueira 2004, 65; Plut., *Lyc.* 8.4
[59] Xen., *LP* 7.2; Plut., *Lyc.* 24
[60] Powell 1988, 214

The role of myth in Sparta's foundation

The city was founded under the pretext of myth, and defined by what Tyrtaeus refers to as, "the Return of the Herakleidai," or the descendants of Herakles.[61] During the Late Bronze Age the Peloponnese was thought to be the Mycenaean heartland, home to the great king Agamemnon and Menelaos and their armies which fought in Homer's Trojan War.[62] After the fall of the great Mycenaean kingdoms when the great-great grandsons of Herakles "wrested the Peloponnese from Teisamenos, son of Orestes and grandson of Agamemnon," the Dorians ("Herakleidai") supposedly invaded the Peloponnese around 950BC bringing a new "Dorian dialect." The Spartans thenceforth declared their rulers descended from those heroes who drove out Mycenaean rule.[63] In Sparta there was a perpetual legitimizing link between the descendants of Herakles and the titular Spartan kings who held their position until the Hellenistic period.[64] These two kings ruled from two distinct houses, the Agiads and Eurypontids and the first recorded were Archelaos and Charillos ruling c. 775-760.[65] After the *agoge* was established, kings were exempt from participation, unlike every other Spartan, but they still played a military role as commanders of the Spartan hoplite forces in battle (i.e. King Leonidas I at Thermopylae).[66]

Myth was in the air the ancient Greeks breathed and it was in part their reality.[67] Its significance in everyday life and decision-making often altered mentalities and spurred change, altering the course of history. It was also deeply rooted in a particular location, in

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62 Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 27

63 Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 28-9; debate about the legitimacy of the "Dorian invasion" still continues, but for the purposes of this paper, the Spartans' belief in a mythic past is most pertinent.

64 Malkin 1994, 15, 17

65 Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 28

66 Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 44; Leonidas I was not destined to be king, but after Cleomenes I died with no heir, he was forced to take over.

Sparta's case, a land taken from the Mycenaean kings and founded by heroic ancestors. It was not uncommon for history and myth to be confused in ancient Greece. Actual historical events were frequently mythologized and their figures made into heroes or legends as we have seen happen with Achilles, Agamemnon, Leonidas, and even Lycurgus. At the same time ancient historians like Thucydides believed certain myths like the Trojan War were historical, only exaggerated by poets for literary purposes.[68] The picking and choosing of certain myths and histories to suit one's political or philosophical bias is a practice which has very early origins in Greece. Plutarch writing about Lycurgus is a great example of how reality and myth can be misinterpreted and how the product can be passed on to modern poets, artists, and historians writing about "spartan" ideals or traditions.

Life in the *agoge*

> *Altogether he accustomed citizens to have no desire for a private life, nor knowledge of one, but rather to be like bees, always attached to the community, swarming together around their leader, and almost ecstatic with fervent ambition to devote themselves entirely to their country.*[69]
> (Plut., *Lyc.* 25.3)

Our best source for a relatively clear description of the *agoge* is Xenophon, who wrote his accounts between the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the fourth century. The term *agoge* literally means "raising" or "leading" as in cattle and it seems that the Spartans meant to use this metaphor literally referring to the training program's leader as the *paidonomos*, or "Warden."[70] Spartan education in this "herd" spanned from the age

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[67] Malkin 1994, 3
[68] Malkin 1994, 5
[69] Plut., *Lyc.* 25
[70] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 83; Xen., *LP*. 2.2; Plut., *Lyc.* 16

of 7, when families willingly gave up their sons to be property of the state, and ended at the age of 18, when the now *paidiskoi,* or "boy-ish" men, underwent two years of national service, not unlike Athenian *epheboi*.[71] At the age of twenty the men had to be elected to a *syssition*, or common mess, in order to successfully pass. Thenceforth, each held his coveted lifelong post as a citizen soldier, warrior, and hoplite.[72] If one could not pay his mess dues, he could lose his citizen status because he would not be meeting the requirements of a member.[73]

It all began with an abrupt detachment from their parents at the ripe and impressionable age of seven. Thereafter, Xenophon describes the austere life of a Spartan boy: one lived without shoes, more than one garment, and more than just enough to eat, a life without the comforts customary for Athenian boys.[74] The ultimate goal as a pupil in the Spartan *agoge* was to graduate with what the Spartans called *andragathia*, manly virtue.[75] The *agoge* convinced boys that their unwavering obedience was all that made them worthy of citizenship. The long and brutal journey never came to an end but became a part of their every sinew, influencing their decisions on the battlefield and their moral structures. Granted with the title of Spartiate and received by the whole community as a proud son and protector of Sparta, one's existence at the young age of twenty came with a precious and heavy reputation to be upheld.

Spartan education and indoctrination was based on the idea that the community and

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[71] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 85 and 87
[72] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 88; Plut., *Lyc.* 24 “extended into adulthood”
[73] Ducat, Jean. 1999. “Perspectives on Spartan Education.” In *Sparta New Perspectives,* Stephen Hodkinson and Anton Powell, eds. 48. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.
[74] Xen., *LP* 2
[75] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 87 e.g Hdt. 5.42.1

solidarity of its citizen warriors, came before the individual family.[76] Just as the elders in Sparta were solely permitted to choose the fate of each young boy entering the *agoge*, Spartan life also began with the permission of the elders, not the father or mother. Plutarch speaks of the *Apothetae*, a peak of Mt. Taygetos where newborns "poorly endowed for health or strength" (αγεννες και αμορφον) were discarded by the elders.[77] If "proved well-built and sturdy" (ευπαγες και ρωμαλεον) the elders granted the child one of the 9,000 lots of land and instructed the father to raise the child.[78] Xenophon credits the Spartan eugenic breed as a product of both strong mothers and fathers.[79] Plutarch also attests that the children's nurses encouraged independence, frugality, and self-control, forcing them to eat all the food given to them, refusing to wrap them in swaddling clothes, and conditioning them to loneliness and fear.[80] So began the long and brutal life of a future Spartiate.

There is an uncertainty in our ancient sources as to the exact role and direct influence of both parents on Spartan children, especially male children living in messes for the majority of their lives. This leads us to inquire about the role of fathers who would have either been absent from their child's upbringing because of war or because they seemed to live primarily with their mess until retirement. The fathers devoted to a life of duty may not have played a decisive role in their son's and daughter's lives, but instead left their upbringing primarily up to the "Warden" of the *agoge* or the mother. In regard to boys, this lack of influence could be overruled by the strong authoritarian male population integrated into "mixed company," or mixed ages messes and the pederastic and father-like

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[76] Plut., *Lyc.* 24
[77] Plut., *Lyc.* 16.1
[78] Plut., *Lyc.* 16.1
[79] Xen., *LP* 1

relationships shared between older teenage and adolescent boys in the *agoge*, which proved to further indoctrinate by means of strict overseeing and disciplining.[81] Still the inability of the biological father to have a say in these matters seems to contradict one of the Spartan's most central practiced virtues, self-control.

The idea of parental abandonment seems foreign in the context of modern American war where the family tends to play a strong role as a support system, nurturing its soldiers before and during deployment and after homecoming. One must wonder how a Spartan mother or father would have defined "supportive" or if they had wanted to consider themselves nurturers at all, especially if it meant that they valued the psychological wellness of their sons and daughters.

Spartan mothers, on the other hand, were charged with producing and maintaining a strong and honorable Spartan society, whether it meant raising girls to rear only the best children or accepting nothing but victory from their sons and husbands.[82] Girls, who were raised not limited to domestic work and likewise not needing to weave as a means of income, were offered instruction comparable to Athenian boys, though not *agoge*-like. Their curriculum consisted of a typical Athenian boy's and included basic liberal arts, choral and dancing exercises, and athletic competitions like "running and strength" as Xenophon tells us.[83]

Life as a citizen warrior

Mess-life was integral for social organization, group unity and conformity, and

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[80] Plut., *Lyc.* 16
[81] Xen., *LP* 6.1-2
[82] Plut., *Sayings of Spartan Women*. In Plut., *Mor.* III. 1968. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.; passim; Xen., *LP*. 1.4

military organization. Individuality was foreign to Spartans. Their mentality and unique way of life was intentionally isolated and polarized by Lycurgus' reforms. He deemed it unpatriotic for a Spartan to freely travel abroad or adopt political ideas from other Greek states.

> *For along with strange people, strange doctrines must come in; and novel doctrines bring novel decisions, from which there must arise many feelings and resolutions which destroy the harmony of the existing political order.*
>
> (Plut., *Lyc*. 27.4)

It makes sense, in light of the emphasis placed on this kind of loyalty that *agoge* boys would sleep, eat, learn, and train with those peers or elders who would ultimately be responsible for their safety in combat. Ancient commentators perceived of the military-barrack like *syssition* system as "democratic" because it was obligatory for all citizens (in Sparta, *homoioi*, or equals), except the sons of the two ruling kings.[84]

From the age of seven, boys were defined by their mess, a kind of artificial all-male family to replace the biological. According to Plutarch, who tends to be followed because of a lack of contemporary source estimations, each mess consisted of about fifteen males.[85] Singor suggests that there were about three *syssitia* for each *enomotia*, a group bound by an enforced "oath," and during the 5th century, a total of 240 *syssitia*.[86] Within each *syssiton* was a mix of young, middle aged, and older men, the older being responsible for shaping the minds of the younger through experience and guidance, but it is important to note that there is no evidence that men from the same family would be a part of the same mess.[87]

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[83] Ducat 1999, 58; Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 83

[84] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 85 cites Arist. *Pol*. 1265b41, 1271a34

[85] Singor, H.W. 1999. "Admission to the *syssitia* in fifth-century Sparta." In *Sparta New Perspectives*, S. Hodkinson and A. Powell, eds., 71. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.; cites Plut., *Lyc*. 12.3

[86] Singor 1999, 72 and 82

[87] Singor 1999, 72

Thus we see the perpetuation of a fraternity among citizens that is not reliant on association with one's family, but strictly defined by a soldier's ability to think and act as a part of a larger group and state. Again this duality is striking given the nature of the Spartan upbringing which instilled a fear and alertness in young boys which seems to promote skepticism and independence, rather than group unity. Allegiance to one's natural family seems inherent to us, an unspoken oath, but if we were yanked from that family and that family too has been indoctrinated in the same way, then we lose sight of that familiar bond and instead feel that we need to be bound to others who share the same experiences as us. We can easily see a parallel in modern day American military society where a soldier's acceptance into a non-biological brotherhood like a unit of the armed forces takes over as his/her new family and support system before, during, and after combat (i.e. Vietnam War and Iraq War veterans). Sparta's insistence on military supremacy and spirit for domination warranted the invention of an efficient and uniform branch of warriors who would defend the state with their lives while loyally looking after their fellow men in battle. The pederastic relationships they formed early in childhood as members of the *agoge* further guaranteed their loyalty and obedience on the battlefield. Those shirking their civic duties as soldiers would hold no future honors.[88]

Hoplites

> *Endure while looking at bloody death*
> *and reach out for the enemy while standing near*[89]
> (Tyrtaeus 12.11-14)

The term "hoplite" comes partly from the root word *hopla,* collectively meaning

[88] Xen., *LP* 3.3
[89] Cited in Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 81

"armor," but with emphasis on the shield. In battle hoplites wore a two-handled shield at all times "in an unalterably fixed position on [their] left arm[s]," and defending the right side of the hoplite standing to their left. Tight and coordinated phalanxes moving in unison were cloaked in red and wore their hair long, which Plutarch describes as "menacing" on the field. [90] This was the image an approaching army would see. Each member of this intimidating force was equipped with *panoplia*, a full set of equipment including: a large bronze-faced wooden shield with a lambda marking the face of it,[91] bronze helmet, bronze, leather, or linen breastplate, bronze abdominal guards and greaves, possibly ankle and arm guards, long thrusting spear tipped with an iron butt spike at one end and an iron head at the other, and a small dagger-like iron sword.[92] Hoplites were the final product of the *agoge*.

We use short blades because we fight close to our enemies.

As the above statement made by Antalcidas, an early fourth century BC Spartan general makes clear, the Spartan hoplite took the most pride in hand-to-hand combat.[93] something which would have been terrifying to soldiers not trained the Spartan way and a form of warfare foreign to modern day America.[94] Their brand of warfare was referred to in ancient Greece as *andreia*, meaning "manliness."

Hoplite formation and organization are attested in Xenophon's *Lakedaimonian Constitution.* Some small bronze figurines which depict hoplite armor can confirm to some degree phalanx formations used in battle and specific pieces of armor worn. Physical

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[90] Cartledge *The Spartans* 2003, 67; Xen., *LP* 11.3 cf.; Plut., *Lyc.* 22

[91] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006*,* 144.

[92] Cartledge *The Spartans 2003*, 67

[93] Anderson, J.K. 1991. "Hoplite Weapons and Offensive Arms." In *Hoplites: the classical Greek battle experience,* V.D. Hanson, ed., 27. London: Routledge.; quotes Plut., *Mor.* 241F

[94] Hölscher, Tonio. 2003. "Images of War in Greece and Rome: Between Military Practice, Public Memory, and Cultural Symbolism." *JRS* 93:5; Cartledge, *The Spartans* 2003, 67

evidence comes in the form of shields, like the one found at Argos from c. 700 BC and depictions on vases of relatively bloodless hoplite combat. One of the most well known examples of such vases is the Corinthian Chigi Vase from the middle 7th century BC which depicts two hoplite phalanxes facing each other in battle.[95] By 500 BC there was widespread adoption of the hoplite uniform and tactics in Greece.[96] Hoplite formations, which were synchronized to intimidate the enemy, remind one of the showy siege operations and maneuvers that the Romans later adopted from the Greeks and used against the Gauls in Alesia. Hoplite tradition, which persisted past technological advancements, was a symbol of wealth and devotion to military prowess. From its inception, hoplite uniform was very expensive and created a separation between those invested enough in the work or training to be able to afford the gear and those unwilling to become citizens.[97]

Xenophon, who fought as a mercenary in the Spartan phalanx, describes Spartan military camps as circular in plan for better defense of both enemies on the outside and enemies on the inside, a kind of home away from Sparta.[98] During battle men were expected to keep up with their regular regimen of gymnastics and the use of *enoplia*, or "marching songs," was essential for preparing soldiers for battle and for raising morale. The men, ruled by the king's executive power, were divided into different ranks and sub-ranks including six regiments of mixed hoplites and cavalry, *moras*, each having its own *polemarch*, four *lochagi*, eight *pentecosters*, and sixteen *enomotarchs*.[99] The military camps and the city of Sparta itself were designed to keep the worthy inside and the unworthy out. These encampments protected true, that is to say obedient Spartans not only

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[95] Anderson 1991, 18
[96] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 154 and 158
[97] Cartledge *Reflections* 2003, 158
[98] Xen., *LP* 12

from Helots planning revolt, but also from their own men with reputations of cowardice in battle, those posing threats to the ideology and cohesiveness of the state. This cultural divide within the city harbored not only resentment, but most likely psychological suffering induced by what today we would call the silent treatment. In this hostile environment where self-control promoted terseness in speech and discouraged wasted words, *tresantes*, or cowards, would find life unbearable

A life of silence: command vs. cowardice in Spartan culture

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines the term "laconic" as "using or involving the use of a minimum of words**;** concise to the point of seeming rude or mysterious." The word originates from the Greek *lakōnikos* a term describing the Spartan reputation for terseness of speech and the dialect spoken in Lakonia.[100] Ancient sources comment on various implications of silence. It derived from both an effective style of short, clipped, and military command speech and also proved to define the social, economic, and political status of the valiant versus the cowardly in citizen-warrior culture.

Agoge boys were instructed from an early age to conduct themselves with restraint of speech as obedient members of a unified group. Thucydides remarks on the austere Spartans' repugnance toward the flowery Athenians saying that they had "self-assuredness that their training was worth more than all the words of the Athenians."[101] Lycurgus required the young Spartan boys "to keep their hands under their cloaks, to walk in silence, not to look about them, but to fix their eyes on the ground."[102] This not only ensured that they would respect their elders, showing a strong sign of obedience, but it also tested their

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[99] Xen., *LP* 11

[100] Merrian Webster Dictionary Online, © 2006-2007 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

[101] David, Ephraim. 1999. "*Sparta's* kosmos *of silence.*" In *Sparta New Perspectives, S.* Hodkinson and A. Powell eds., 119. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.; cites Thuc. 5.69.2

self-control and emotional restraint. Irrational behavior was branded as both feminine and hostile, because it characterized the Spartan enemy Helots, who were considered to be unable to conduct themselves without emotion. Another example of how they were conditioned to submit quietly to authority and to vanquish pain is the brutal annual whipping ritual at the altar of Artemis Ortheia. Here in one "rite of passage" stage of their training, *agoge* boys were commanded by their superiors to steal as much cheese as possible from the altar while older boys loomed over them, incessantly whipping them into submission and ultimately shaping their tough shells for future battle.[103] Again, the self is suppressed for the sake of honor and self-discipline.

Emphasis was also placed on economy of words, something already illustrated by their lack of written laws.[104] "It was their wont never to talk at random, and to let slip no speech which did not have some thought or other worth serious attention," a principle which undoubtedly informed their style of military command.[105] It was thought that speaking as one was better than as two or more. One voice meant one citizen body and one conformed mind acting for the state and not for himself. One way this was manifest was through war songs sung while exercising or prior to battle.[106] These were often written by Sparta's famed poet Tyrtaeus and sung with the same spirit of heroism found in early Greek epics.[107] Plutarch speaks of sung lyric that both praises men who had died for Sparta and condemns *tresantes*, or cowards, who proved feeble in mind and body by avoiding their military duty. Hoplites marched in step with the war songs excited as "horses

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[102] Xen., *LP* 3.4
[103] Xen., *LP* 2.9
[104] Plut., *Lyc*. 20.1
[105] Plut., *Lyc.* 20.5
[106] Plut., *Lyc.* 21and 22
[107] Ephraim 1999, 119

prancing before a contest" and emblazoned by a firm belief in their purpose, mission, and state.[108]

> *...It was a sight equally grand and terrifying when they marched in step with the rhythm of the flute, without any gap in their line of battle, and with no confusion in their souls, but calmly and cheerfully moving with the strains of their hymn into the deadly fight.*
>
> (Plut., *Lyc.* 22.3)

Plutarch remarks that men focused in such an elevated state are likely to not feel fear or anger, but are filled with courage "believing... heaven is their ally."[109] This terseness of command and preparedness ("psyching oneself up") remind us of how American soldiers are trained to meet danger. The orders of their superiors (both military and political leaders) in training and on the front lines are reminiscent of the clipped, direct, and repetitive speech of the Spartans. Commands are spoken in a style which aims to get the point across, is based on an ideology of "good versus evil" (insulting both the enemy and the soldier and forcing them to man up for the job), and sticking to simple language which invigorates morale and is easily memorized. Modern American forms of drilling and command will be discussed later in this paper.

Where the majority of Spartans upheld their charge and benefited from the socio-political system of command as devout followers, some Spartans were not able or willing to fulfill their duty as citizen warriors.

***Tresantes*: Cowards in Sparta**

Xenophon's ninth chapter of the *Lacedaemonian Constitution* vividly describes the role of the coward in Spartan society. One of Lycurgus' foremost goals was to see to it that

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[108] Plut., *Lyc.* 22.1
[109] Plut., *Lyc.* 22.3

his citizens considered an honorable death preferable to a life of disgrace.[110] This life of disgrace derived from a lack of moral and civic virtue and *andragathia*. Xenophon reminds us that in other Greek states a coward was just "called a coward." He was allowed to attend the same public functions and places and to sit among the "brave," whereas in Sparta, everyone would be ashamed to live in a mess with a *tresas*, literally a "trembler."[111] This stigma barred one designated a coward from all the tenets of Spartan citizenship that were essential for survival. Often an "odd man left out," the *tresas* was banished from choral exercises, bound to make way in streets as a second class citizen, and obligated to give up his seat even to his junior.[112]

The visual image which come from this passive and threatened existence reminds one of the treatment of African Americans during the Jim Crow era. For a period lasting about one hundred years from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movements of the fifties and sixties, black Americans were constantly given the silent treatment, forced into segregation, and degraded as inferiors. This comparison helps us, if anything, to think about how cowards in ancient Sparta were perceived by their "superiors" as not any better than the Helots working in the fields. As in the case of their enslaved population, true Spartans were constantly reminded of how these inferiors could influence the minds of impressionable *agoge* boys and how they could disrupt the efficient and productive lifestyle of the Spartans with resistance, namely revolts. Persecution of *tresantes* was so severe that there dishonorable reputations also passed on to their families. They were not

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[110] Xen., *LP* 9

[111] The term "tresas" is first cited in Hdt. 7.231 in reference to Aristodamus, a member of the 300 at Thermopylae who seems to have avoided the "last stand"

[112] Xen., *LP* 9

allowed to keep wives and their sisters were not allowed to marry.[113] This stagnation also ensured that his bad blood and undesirable genes would not spread, just as deformed or weakling babies were thrown from the *Apothetae*.

The sources do not indicate whether or not the citizenship of *tresantes* was revoked, but Xenophon suggests that Lycurgus did not design the laws so that such men could easily get away with their disloyalty. Instead he ensured "that the brave should have happiness and the coward misery."[114] Each man was made to live with his actions for the rest of his life, whether honorable or dishonorable in the eyes of Sparta. And if a *tresas* smiled or made light of his offense, he was beaten by betters.[115] Consequently, we can see how someone with this unbearable social standing could be further weakened by the terrible silence and invisibility imposed on them by their city, their old friends and mess-mates, and their families. Accounts of modern day soldiers facing the same discrimination because of their inability to "make it" in the US Army, US Marine Corps, or United States Military Academy illuminate common psychological pressures faced by soldiers throughout history and will be discussed below.

David Ephraim suggests that Spartan suicide existed in the sense of self-sacrifice in battle for the state and because of psychological suffering as a *tresas*.[116] The *agon* of "win or die"[117] was prevalent throughout Sparta in the *agoge*, at the altar of Artemis Ortheia, and on the battlefield. The motivation for and reward of honor must have been too high a standard for some Spartans to reach. In the absence of ancient Spartans' first hand accounts

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[113] Xen., *LP* 9 passim
[114] Xen., *LP* 9.3
[115] Xen., *LP* 9 passim
[116] Ephraim 1999, 119; David, Ephraim. 2004. "Suicide in Spartan society." In *Spartan Society*, Thomas Figueira, ed., 28. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales.
[117] Ephraim 2004, 28

of soldiers during and after war one can only imagine how too much pressure could break a man. We can also only suppose how soldiers or veterans, stripped of all emotion in training reacted to war and after war on their return home.

The examples of Thermopylae (480 BC) and Sphakteria (424 BC) can help us to try and understand how defeat by group self-sacrifice and defeat by group surrender may have impacted how Spartans and non-Spartans viewed the military society.[118] If we call Leonidas I and his three-hundred men defenders of honor and heroes willing to die for their country, then what do we call the Spartans surrendering to the Athenians sixty years later? (an act almost unheard of given Sparta's reputation). Was it yet other another way of defending their city by deciding on this particular occasion as a group not to senselessly loose 120 precious hoplites preserving the lives and future careers of some of their elite forces?[119] According to Thucydides, one Spartan prisoner of war at Sphakteria, having been insulted by an Athenian, tries to justify the Spartans' actions by saying that "spindles (by which he meant arrows) would be worth a great deal if they could pick out brave men from cowards."[120] This insult of course referred to the Spartans attitude toward the feminine Athenians who did not possess the valor of hand-to-hand hoplite-style combat. The existence of suicide in Sparta among the ruling and presumably the inferior classes sheds some light on how far a man would go to defend his country or his own life.

Spartan Wives and Mothers

> *On her husband Leonidas' departure for Thermopylae, while urging him to show himself worthy of Sparta, [Gorgo] asked what she should do. He said: "Marry a good man and bear good children."*
> (Plut., *Mor.*, *Sayings of Spartan Women,* Gorgo 6)

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[118] Ephraim 2004, 28
[119] Thuc. 38-40
[120] Thuc. 40

Accounts of the role of Spartan females, as we know it, are the products of wealthy non-Spartan intellectual males. Plutarch's famous *Sayings of Spartan Women* aims to promote a Spartan society where females play an essential role in the indoctrination of their sons and where mothers are painted has brutal patriots.[121]

> *Another woman, as she was handing her son his shield and giving him some encouragement, said: 'Son either with this or on this.'*
> (Plut., *Mor*., *Sayings of Spartan Women* 16)

Plutarch recorded this statement without knowing just how popular it would become in millennia to come. It is most recently brought back to life in the 2006 action film the *300*, based on a graphic novel of the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC. The model Spartan mother warns her son that she either expects him to die in battle and to return home dead on his shield, as was customary according to Plutarch, or to return home with his shield in hand and ready and willing to defend his state again.[122] The brave, as Lycurgus emphasized should have happiness, while the cowards should lead a life of misery.[123] Other anecdotes included by Plutarch hint at feelings of resentment, anger, and disownment harbored by mothers whose sons fled from battle or died for reasons other than protecting the state in combat. Aelian, a Latin author reports that "Spartan mothers lamented in private if a son's corpse bore the majority of wounds on the back," presumably if they had fled from combat.[124] The son's good or bad reputation in such a small and community had a great impact on his family's name, political and economic status, and their measure of patriotism toward the state.

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[121] Pomeroy 2002, 37

[122] Plut., *Mor*., *Sayings of Spartan Women* 20, this causes some confusion because Spartans who died away from home were usually buried on the battlefield. Perhaps, it was literal, if possible, and figural, in the sense that if you didn't come back, you died with your armor.

[123] Xen., *LP* 9.3

Plutarch offers the testimonies of various prominent Classical and Hellenistic Spartan women such as Gorgo, wife to Leonidas and unknown or undatable women, which help to perpetuate chosen ideals about Spartan motherhood and fit into his perceptions of the society.[125] Surely mothers in ancient Sparta influenced their children's behavior, especially that of their daughters, who were not sent away from home, but we have to take Plutarch's portrayal and generalizations of the women with a grain of salt. He did not intend to construct female attitudes in different periods of Spartan history, but to sum up what he believes were the key values Spartan mothers cherished and upheld when raising and instructing their sons.

Although they could not take part in government, as the head of the Spartan household women played a crucial role in the indoctrination of both young women and men.[126] Plutarch relays that Lycurgus believed "a wife should speak only to her husband or through her husband" and likewise Xenophon upholds the belief that a husband must teach his wife how to speak.[127] But just because a wife's freedom of speech might be silenced in public, does not necessarily mean that she has no say in the household or in raising her children. Mothers also had inherent rights as citizens, though not citizen warriors because they were essential for procreation. Young women were encouraged to marry into families of sound economic standing and political ties.[128] Hodkinson suggests that female empowerment accompanied a gradual impoverishment of Spartiates which began in the 5th century BC when the population was most affected by war casualties and the loss of

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[124] Pomeroy 2002, 58
[125] Pomeroy 2002, 58
[126] Hodkinson 2004,122
[127] Pomeroy 2002, 9
[128] Pomeroy 2002, 46

brothers who would normally inherit family property.[129] As a result, there was an increasing number of heiresses who were allowed to inherit property, a decreasing number of marriages and births of potentially new Spartiates.[130] Xenophon, Plutarch, Polybius, and Nicolaus of Damascus all attest to polyandry, or the practice of more than one husband for each woman, as a tool for boosting the dwindling population.[131]

American mothers have formed a distinction from those in Sparta because of their closer bond and familiarity with their male children. Elizabeth Samet, English professor at West Point Academy captures this nature eloquently by saying, "We are kinder and gentler than the Spartans: we accept mothers of the war dead to grieve." However, when it comes to the mother's role as a promoter of the nation's interests and as a figure whose authority and wisdom sways the decisions of her child, we see more of a balance in Spartan and American maternal mentality. On the one hand we honor and respect family members who have sacrificed themselves in war with more freedom and less restriction than the Spartans, but on the other hand, "we also expect mothers of yet-living soldiers to sign on to the notion that only the possible deaths of their own children will somehow honor and validate the sacrifices that have already been made."[132] Consequently, more soldiers are sent away to unimaginable places and to face movie-like circumstances that they could not possibly be prepared for. In order to avoid letting those who have fallen die "in vain," duty to country and family indirectly causes hazardous surges in military deployment, most recently, to places like Iraq.

Commemoration and Death in Sparta

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[129] Hodkinson 2004, 121
[130] Hodkinson 2004, 121
[131] Pomeroy 2002, 47
[132] Samet, Elizabeth. 2007. *Soldier's Heart: Reading Literature Through Peace and War at West Point*,

> *Experience proves that the man who obstructs a war in which his nation is engaged, no matter whether right or wrong, occupies no enviable place in life or history.*[133]
>
> (General Ulysses S. Grant)

A lot of what we know about death and the commemoration of Spartans derives from relationships between family members, mostly mothers and sons and the mother's need to meet the expectations of Spartan social norms. It was already stated above that the popular belief of Spartan mothers was that their sons should only exist to serve and protect the state and that anything less was shameful. What socially enforced circumstances might have birthed this hardheartedness? Firstly, they were educated by Spartan women indoctrinated with the same feelings and values as Spartan men. Secondly, their role as worthy citizen wives meant compliance with state enforced laws about public and private grieving.

According to Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* 27 the lawmaker "made excellent arrangements for [Spartans'] funerals" instituting burial "within the city" or near the temples. Plutarch believed Lycurgus' goal was to raise young Spartans in an environment which never feared death but saw it as "familiar and normal."[134] The only places of burial outside of the city (the Caeadas gorge and previously mentioned Apothetai) were reserved for those children or adults who were unworthy of being Spartans. Similarly, American soldiers are not guaranteed a plot in an American military cemetery today unless they were “honorably discharged” from the service, that is to say, they did not avoid or betray their duty to their fellowmen and country.

Herodotus describes Spartan kings' funerals, which would have occurred in the city

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245. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

[133] Cited in Samet 2007, 245

[134] Plut., *Lyc.* 27

and would have included Spartiates as well as Perioikoi and Helots from the country. This ceremony ordered the participation of one man and woman from each household in Sparta to come out into the streets where they would "strike their foreheads with every sign of grief" and mourn for the ten following days.[135] Mourning prominent leaders and men in uniform such as soldiers, policemen, and firefighters is not much different in modern American ceremony which undoubtedly includes public participation and strengthens a family's, community's, or country's solidarity and loyalty. In Sparta it was important to honor one's leader, but at the same time to limit your mourning so as to not compromise your self-control and manliness by displaying irrational emotions. Plutarch says that Lycurgus allowed an eleven day period of mourning for a dead family member followed by "sacrificing to Demeter" and "abandoning their grief."[136]

Sparta's body of material evidence pales in comparison to a city like Athens', namely in the absence of grave stelai. One of our only sources for an explanation is Plutarch. Lycurgus did not allow the inscription of the deceased name on a grave marker unless the deceased had "died on campaign" or was "a woman who had died in labor."[137] If true, this says a lot about what significance women and male warriors had in Sparta and how they may have been regarded as more worthy of memorial. Interestingly, Herodotus and Pausanias the travel writer both account for a war memorial erected in Sparta commemorating the 298 fallen warriors at Thermopylae.[138] The inscribed lists which are no longer extant would of been unique given what lack of evidence there is for Spartan commemoration of any kind and they most likely would have been comparable to

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[135] Hdt. 6.58
[136] Plut., *Lyc.* 27
[137] Plut., *Lyc.* 27: See Talbert's note here: "The latter is an attempt to make sense of what is otherwise a confused section of text" and is plausible given the woman's role as a procreator.

inscriptions commissioned in Athens. If the monument did exist, it would have also said a lot about what the Spartans thought of Thermopylae, their 300, and their king as true and virtuous heroes. Today we look to the Vietnam Wall in Washington D.C. as a prime example of such commemoration. There, as in the lists mentioned by Herodotus and Pausanias, the army is not only remembered as a group, but each individual's name is recorded. Another important tenet to the Spartan code of honor on the battlefield was the preservation of the Greek tradition of respecting the funeral rites of the dead after battle. Anyone who has read Homer's *Iliad*, knows how crucial it is to be able to retrieve one's dead men and to give them a proper burial, and Thermopylae was no exception. According to Herodotus, Xerxes had Leonidas decapitated and mutilated beyond recognition, something which only emboldened the Spartans hate for the Persians.[139] Today the Geneva Convention prohibits an American soldier from such disrespectful and inhumane conduct, though instances in Iraqi prisons have shown a blatant disregard for upholding ancient Greek ethics.

Retrieval of fallen warriors would have been especially difficult given the bloody casualties of *hoplomachia* fighting at Thermopylae and the apparent lack of any identification. Two accounts of later writers Polyainos and Diodoros attest to Spartans wearing a bracelet concealing a small wooden stick, or *skytalis*, which had the name of the soldier inscribed on it.[140] If we can believe that these *skytalides* did exist, then Vaughn suggests that they are the earliest form of what we now call a "dog-tag" and would be the only evidence of such "tags" in the Western world until the era of WWI.[141]

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[138] Hdt. 7.224; Paus. 3.14.1
[139] Hdt. 7.238
[140] Polyainos 1.17; Diodoros 8.27.2 referenced in Vaughn 1991, 56
[141] Vaughn 1991, 56

It can be argued that the two groups inscribed and remembered in stone and inside the city were ultimately meant to be spokespeople for the city and its society, and a symbol of unwavering discipline and self-control, strict obedience and conformity, and self-sacrifice born of a unique and purposeful education. In order to address how America's military is committed to producing similar model soldiers we must look at the influences which have shaped the American mentality and value system and the institutions which uphold those traditions of honor, duty, and commitment today. Thenceforth maybe we can better understand how modern discipline, indoctrination, and training, though not copied directly from Lycurgus' laws, persist as manifestations of core Spartan traditions and practices in America.

Part III: Spartan tradition in American thought and practice

Thought

> *[There must] be a positive Passion for the public good... established in the minds of the People or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty; and this public passion must be Superior to all private Passions... all things must give way to the public.*
>
> (John Adams 1776)[142]

The above words of John Adams speak of a new America built on the foundations of great leaders like Lycurgus in Sparta, Cincinnatus in Rome, and George Washington in America. The Public comes before the individual. This is the battle cry of revolution and the beginnings of firm nationalism. After September 11, 2001 Americans conjured up similar sentiments about duty to one's country and what it really means to be American. On the Fourth of July when Americans gather in public parks and with their communities to sing the National Anthem and to celebrate our independence from Britain hundreds of

[142] Johnson, Richard R. 1988. "Hellas in Hesperia." In *Paths from Ancient Greece*, Carol

years ago, we tend not to think about how our government, Constitution, and rights were created from classical morals, values, and traditions passed down to us primarily from mother Britain itself. There will always be something inevitably and unavoidably European about American education, lifestyle, and military. Early European settlers, who were classically trained in grammar schools and universities, brought their interests in antiquity and its moral value to the New World, while army training derived from a strict British discipline founded on close-rank regiments marching in ancient Greek hoplite columns.[143] These soon-to-be Americans set the model for both intellectual thought and military training. By the 19th century the British public school system, founded by Thomas Arnold of Rugby was consciously modeled on Spartan military style education, and influence from it most likely traveled over the Atlantic.[144]

During and after the American Revolution classical texts were used selectively, whether for political or educational purposes. By the 1760's political leaders adopted a "political vocabulary deriving from antiquity" and often times Greece and Rome would be summoned up in speeches and debates as models of democracy and empire. All the while there existed a growing gap between those with a command of Latin and Greek who could read the ancient texts and those who could only read translations of Plutarch's *Lives* by Sir Thomas North or Homer's *Iliad* by Alexander Pope. Likewise, England's constitution had been derived partly from ancient writers like Polybius and Aristotle. Many American politicians like John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Wilson were fervent classicists and believed the moral value and intellectual theories of the ancients to be essential for

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G. Thomas, ed., 154. Leiden: E.J. Brill: See his note.

[143] Frey, Sylvia. 1981. *The British soldier in America: a social history of military life in the Revolutionary period, 96.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

[144] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 202

modern political understanding. However, they relied mainly on the translations of British men who wrote during an age of empire.[145]

In a great debate between Athens and Sparta which came about during the Enlightenment and is still to this day discussed, the structure and makeup of the ruling bodies of the two ancient city-states became of particular interest as models of working governments based on core values. The only question in the 18th century was which canon to follow to ensure success. In America men were split into democratic and republican camps. The Massachusetts constitution of 1780 drafted mainly by John Adams favored a more mixed (Spartan), rather than purely democratic (Athenian) constitution and his *Defense of the Constitution* cited ancient authors such as Polybius, Dionysus of Halicarnassus, and Plato.[146] At the same time much knowledge about Greece came by way of Rome and writers like Plutarch.[147] In the same address John Adams claimed to both dislike Spartan manners, and at the same time admire them for incorporating military exercises into education.[148] This becomes more significant in later discussion of Adams' role with the United States Military Academy.

When the Neoclassical tradition in art and architecture came oversees to America a further appreciation of Greek material culture, order, and traditions came with it. Cities, people, and products gained Greek names like Leonidas, Sparta, and Athens and institutions of government and the military adopted ancient symbols and insignia. Though these neoclassical refined forms permeated up and down the east coast, the use of Greek and Roman imagery was received differently. Jean-Antoine Houdon's statue of George

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[145] Johnson 1988, 147-50
[146] Johnson 1988, 156
[147] Johnson 1988, 161
[148] Rawson, Elizabeth. 1969. *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought*, 368. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Washington as the Roman farmer and soldier Cincinnatus was acceptable to most because it represented a soldier and "man of the people," whereas Horatio Greenhough's Greek inspired Zeus-like Washington was widely disliked as an image of anti-republicanism. This rift represented an intellectual and economic gap between the "common man" and a Southern classically educated "elite." The practice of classical education in America during the 18th and 19th centuries proved to be useful and detrimental because it provided the common people with solid nationalist values and morals to model a working government on, and at the same time it created a disunity by alienating the "common man" who could not afford to learn Latin or Greek and who despised the old-fashioned institutions of the South.

In the southern states, where classical education was first established in America and continued to persist in a conservative and elitist society, attention to antiquity was not lost, but emphasized, particularly during the nineteenth century.[149] In defense of slavery the *Annals of Congress* stated, "the purest sons of freedom in the Grecian Republics, the citizens of Athens and Lacedaemon, all held slaves." Likewise in 1820 Southern debaters justified slaveholding by citing Rome, Athens, and Sparta for their success in combining liberty, democracy, and slavery.[150] Indeed the plantation society of the South was where aristocracy and democracy were reconciled, where a white elite class born from prominent families lived and had control over an eventually larger and intimidating group of slaves, and where economic stability was reinforced by the strong presence of military families and academies. This picture of a nineteenth century "republican government within an

[149] Rawson 1969, 369
[150] Rawson 1969, 369

agrarian society"[151] is a tempting model for Sparta's infiltration into the ideologies and practices of American during and after the Revolution.[152]

Practice

Western tradition states that it is a citizen's duty to serve and protect his country in wars. During the Revolution and the War of 1812, the burden of freedom fell to the typical enlisted or militia man.[153] Americans adopted this notion of the citizen-soldier in part from classically inspired British tactics and discipline. It is in the structure of this system and the makings of the American soldier that we find some of the most telling "spartan" traditions. In a later discussion of the United States Military Academy and the United States Marine Corps, we will see these traditions reinstituted for the modern day soldier.

During the eighteenth century, upon entrance into the British army men became a part of "a reconstructed society, separated from family, and usually unmarried."[154] They lived isolated from civilians and many came from a family tradition in serving in the military, just as many do now. Men without relatives in the army were often paired with an older soldier and comrade, whose experience and friendship would prove essential for the other's survival and the preservation of his moral conduct.[155] British monarchical society promoted hierarchy and according to Frey, there existed an acceptance of economic rank which helped to ingrain "habits of obedience," something Revolutionary Americans may not have accepted from the British but inevitably did accept from their military superiors.

> *The Spartans on their side spoke their words of encouragement to each other man to man, singing their war songs, and calling on their comrades, as brave men, to*

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[151] Johnson 1988, 153
[152] Rawson 1969, 370
[153] Lewis,
[154] Frey 1981, 117
[155] Frey 1981, 120

> *remember what each knew so well, realizing that the long discipline of action is a more effective safeguard than hurried speeches, however well they may be delivered.*
> (Thuc. 5.69)

The British and American soldier of the 18th and 19th centuries fought primarily in close-combat environments not unlike the Spartan hoplite. The killing range of the musket was only eighty to one-hundred yards which forced men into intimate theaters. Soldiers during the Revolution definitely saw their enemy and it was the objective of battlefield tactics to fight face to face with the bayonet,[156] just as it was in Sparta with the short sword. Today, combat soldiers rarely see or even know who their enemy is and where fire is coming from.

> *Sparta came on slowly and to the music of many flute-players in their ranks... this custom... designed to make them keep in step and move forward steadily without breaking their ranks.*[157]

In the 18th century soldiers marched shoulder to shoulder in tight formations and interlaced their knees and feet to form three compact battle lines, a stance referred to as "locking."[158] This intimate formation forced soldiers to depend on one another and strengthened group solidarity. While Spartans sang the hymn to Castor to the accompaniment of pipers,[159] soldiers during the fight for independence marched into battle to the sound of spirited drum and fife, cheering and "huzzaing," and with a common feeling of anxiety and invincibility. They were forced to decide between virtue and personal liberty, between self-sacrifice for the people and self-interest. "By standing firm

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[156] Middlekauff, Robert.
[157] Thuc. 5.70
[158] Middlekauff 2005, 507
[159] Plut., *Lyc*. 22.2

they served their fellows and honor; by running they served only themselves."[160] In order to identify current trends in military indoctrination and physical training it is necessary that we look at some present day examples in America. For these purposed I have chosen two of the oldest institutions: The United States Military Academy at West Point and the United States Marine Corps.

Upholding tradition in American military education and training

The USMA: Duty, Honor, Country

> *The students should enter the Service Academy about the time they reach military age while they are still young enough to be susceptible to those features of education and training which are directed primarily toward mental and spiritual discipline and to accept without cynicism the idea of a lifetime of loyalty and service to the Nation.*
> (*Report to the Superintendent,* 3, 1949)[161]

The Military Academy at West Point was founded in March of 1802 by an Act of Congress. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War John Adams had suggested the establishment of such an institution, which he came close to creating before his time ran out as president and the task fell to Thomas Jefferson.[162] It was founded securely on the classical principles of civic duty and moral courage which inspired its educated and affluent political fathers. "The mythology of the citizen-soldier lies at the heart of American military tradition." It was essential to the philosophy of the civilian founders of the Academy, Adams and Jefferson, because they feared the power and influence of standing armies.[163] The idea of being a "citizen-soldier" is appealing because it grants one the honor of being a man, a soldier, and a protector of democracy, while on the other hand,

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[160] Middlekauff 2005, 515

[161] Ambrose, Stephen. 1966. *Duty, honor, country; a history of West Point,* 329. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press: See note.

[162] Crackel, Theodore. 2002. *West Point: a bicentennial history, 29.* Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas.

it allows for a return home, to one's family, and to one's fields after the war is over. West Point and ROTC programs throughout the USA still promote this ideal and are sought after because of their military and academic training components.[164]

The enlistment at West Point increased greatly with the start of the War of 1812 and the new threat on the American way of life. Shortly after this period, the Academy hired its most well known superintendent Sylvanus Thayer (1817-1833), whose style of discipline and structured curriculum are still existing today. His specific brand of academic and physical discipline, called the "seminary-academy model," emphasized Athenian knowledge as virtue and Spartan living conditions, moral strength, and frugality in training. Lovell describes this model as a reconciliation of Athenian and Spartan ideals.[165] Acceptance into the old and prestigious institution is an honor and for many an inheritance, and successful completion of the four-year program guarantees not only a career as an Army officer but also a free college education. Sylvanus Thayer was well known for implementing a strong engineering-based curriculum, and West Point became the first institution to offer such a degree. By the end of the 19th century the "spartan" component of physical training was emphasized and the dominance of artillery enlistments brought on the slow demise of the Academy's engineering focus.

According to Stephen Ambrose, "the academy stands *in loco parentis* not only over the mental but the moral, physical, and so to speak, the official man. It dominates every phase of his development."[166] West Point "plebes" (first year cadets) enter as impressionable and obedient teenagers and are purposely picked as such so that molding

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[163] Samet 2007, 42-43
[164] Samet 2007, 22
[165] *Neither Athens nor Sparta?: The American service academies in transition,* 15 Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

them into proper soldiers will be easier. Their conditioning as "beasts" hearkens all the way back to the Spartan *agoge*.

> *The thick steel door, standing twice my height, slammed shut with an eerie finality. Everything seems to have an inflated, even ominous importance when one is a plebe at West Point. Standing just outside Cullum Hall on this windy night, I relished a rare moment of solitude. At the United States Military Academy, one spends virtually every minute of every day in the company of others. Studying, sleeping, marching, showering, running, eating, training, testing, sweating -- you are never alone. A plebe's schedule, in particular, mandates group activity. No fourth classman can make it alone, because many tasks, even one as mundane as delivering upperclass laundry bundles, require the help of one's classmates.*[167]

When a person applies to the USMA they often have no idea what life will be like as a "plebe" and their parents are likewise uncertain of what their child's experience will be.[168] They are certainly not prepared for the first stage of their training, an intense conditioning, indoctrination, and survival test which takes place the July before each cadet's first academic year at West Point. This pivotal phase is referred to as "Beast Barracks" by cadets and "New Cadet Barracks" by the Academy.[169] Here, the priority and requirement is military training, not academic achievement. Like the young and untamed seven-year-olds of the *agoge,* the new cadets are considered "completely wild, untrained young men who need discipline" as one graduate said. They are put through rigorous training and are terrorized into submission by older men. The first skill each Beast is given credit for is rifle training, which brings them pride and excitement.[170] The "Barrack's" raw indoctrination is a rite of passage which rebirths civilian boys as military men. It cleanses

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[166] Ambrose 1966, 147-48

[167] Ollstein, CPT Bruce Warren. "The Impact of an Institution." Originally in *Assembly*, the magazine of the Association of Graduates of the United States Military Academy: Found at: http://www.usma.edu/bicentennial/history/history_impact.asp

[168] U'Ren, Richard C. 1974. *Ivory fortress; a psychiatrist looks at West Point,* 19. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Co.

[169] U'Ren 1974, 17

the new class of weaklings in order to ensure that the officer class born is the best of the best, an elite force suited to lead armies into battle and to protect the nation's interests.

Total immersion into the West Point way of mess life and belief system was and is only solidified when "embellished with legends of academy graduates."[171] Cadets today are still taught by graduates, surrounded by photographs, memorials, buildings, and fields dedicated to the heroes of West Point, and reminded of their purpose as members of an elite team. Many play on the Army football team where the "CAN-DO" spirit of the military leader is demonstrated by full-contact combat on the field and an ability to "go all out for teammates."[172] They are encouraged to create new families away from home, families which they see as soon as they wake up and until they close their eyes at night. In turn they often feel in secure in their homes, with their families, and about their personal freedoms in the civilian world which seem unfamiliar outside of the walls of the Academy. As some cadets put it, "At West Point they take away your rights and give them back as privileges."[173]

With the superior military training and indoctrination of American cadets at West Point comes a familiar spartan attitude toward cowardice and self-interest. As stated before, being accepted to the USMA is a prestigious honor and upholding it and its Honor Code: "a cadet does not lie, cheat, or steal," is how one proves him or herself to be worthy of the uniform, title, and reputation of an army officer. Cadets who cannot uphold these rules are destined to be silenced by their fellow cadets and superiors, "a virtual sentence to

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[170] U'Ren 1974, 26
[171] 17 and 24
[172] 256
[173] U'Ren 1974, 39

solitary confinement as long as the cadet remained at the Academy."[174] Up until 1973, "silencing" was an acceptable and expected practice in order to show disapproval and disownment of men who could not display proper self-control, respect, virtue, and comradery. Often times breaking the Code occurs for academic reasons such as cheating. Although it is not officially practiced anymore, it still goes on in the mess halls, on the field, or in the classrooms of West Point.[175] Silencing often ended up with the resignation of the "cheater." However, resignation from the Academy also marked the weak. In one particular instance a cadet too afraid to resign because of the embarrassment and shame it guaranteed decided to commit suicide instead:

> *Tell Mother, Daddy, and Joan I love them, and tell them this will keep them from having to claim a coward for a son and a brother...*[176]

West Point remains an important part of America's military heritage and its motto of duty, honor, country a model for the various branches of the military in America today. However loosely linked its curriculum is to Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* or Xenophon's *Spartan Constitution*, it is surprisingly spartan in its mission, indoctrination, and punishment. Its preparation of high ranking young men and women ready to die for their country and to lead their own platoons in battle also distinguishes West Point as an elite military society within an already small American military community, a society that few can gain membership to.

The United States Marine Corps: Duty, Honor, Commitment

The Marines motto: Semper Fidelis, always faithful, symbolizes every Marine's lifelong commitment to their fellow Marines and country. The Marines represent the

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[174] U'Ren 1974, 91
[175] U'Ren 1974, 94
[176] U'Ren 1974, 82: from suicide letter of 18 year-old West Point cadet

smallest branch of the Armed Forces and they like to keep it that way. Slogans like "The Few, the Proud," "A Few Good Men," "First to Fight," and "Once a Marine, Always a Marine" reinforce the concept that you not only have to fight to survive Marine training and have to prove yourself worthy of the title, but you need to continue to uphold Marine doctrine within your own life after war. Like every other service member, each Marine recruit has to complete boot-camp, and the Marines are well known for the intensity and discipline of recruit training. Journalist Thomas Rick's 1995 first hand account as an observer at Parris Island boot-camp in South Carolina is one of the best descriptions of this elite training and the effects it has on its 36 young recruits in Platoon 3086.[177] He describes one's ritualistic survival as "one of the few rites of passage left in America."[178] It is in this description where we find some of the most striking resemblances to Spartan military society and culture.

The foremost goal of drill instructors is indoctrinating new recruits to be Marines, not individuals. When they arrive at Parris Island they step off of the bus onto the close and rigid formation of footprints painted 4 by 18 on the asphalt and into a controlled environment.[179] All of their personal possessions are confiscated and put into a paper bag and the only identification they receive thenceforth is a black marker brand of "3086," their platoon number.[180] From now on they are only called by their platoon number or their last name and they are never to use the term "I" because it is seen as suspicious. Commands are given in the future imperative, in a curt and clipped fashion, and are loud and simple which is best illustrated by the popular use of acronyms instead of phrases. One's ability to

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[177] Ricks mentions that this particular platoon consists mainly of 18-19 year-olds, most lower class, and few with any college education.

[178] Ricks, Thomas. 1997. *Making the Corps,* 30. New York: Scribner.

[179] Ricks 1997, 29

"phrase questions and answers clearly, concisely, and to the point"[181] is of the utmost importance and is included in the list of criteria followed by cadets or recruits of military training programs. Characterizing this style of command as "spartan" or "laconic" seems appropriate knowing what we know about Spartan economy of speech and the discouragement of speaking out of turn. At meals and during drill they are conditioned to repeat chants such as, "Honor. Courage. Commitment. Kill, kill. Marine Corps!" to boost morale, ego, and team spirit. They are taught that "unity is the basic building block of drill-and drill is the basic element of the professional military unit."[182] If your are not with them in drill, you are weak and consequently, you do not belong. The following is an interesting parallel between Spartan and American military conduct toward cowards:

> *They were for the most part praises of men who had died for Sparta, calling them blessed and happy; censure of men who had played the coward, picturing their grievous an ill-starred life...*
>
> (Plut., *Lyc.* 21.1)

> *How glorious fall the valiant, sword in hand,*
> *In front of battle for their native land!*
> *But oh! what ills await the wretch that yields,*
> *A recreant outcast from his country's fields!*
> *The mother whom he loves shall quit her home,*
> *An aged father at his side shall roam;*
> *His little ones shall weeping with him go,*
> *And a young wife participate his woe;*
> *While scorned and scowled upon by every face,*
> *They pine for food, and beg from place to place.*
> *Stain of his breed! dishonoring manhood's form,*
> *All ills shall cleave to him: affliction's storm*
> *Shall blind him wandering in the vale of years,*
> *Till, lost to all but ignominous fears,*
> *He shall not blush to leave a recreant's name,*
> *And children, like himself, inured to shame.*[183]

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[180] Ricks 1997, 39, 40, 47
[181] Neiberg,
[182] Ricks 1997, 63
[183] Tyrtaeus translation by Thomas Campbell of 'Martial Elegy.' Reprinted from *Greek Poets in English Verse*. Ed. William Hyde Appleton (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1893).

Like Plutarch and Tyrtaeus' hoplites, Platoon 3086 mocks drop-outs Joseph Parker and Ivan Trujillio in their "Casualty Cadence:"[184]

Hope you like the site you see
Parris Island casualty.
As for you, it's still a dream
On May 19th we are Marines...

See ya later Tru-jill-i-o
It's off to Disneyland you go.
Place for fun, games, and rides-
Follow Parker, he's your guide.

If you cannot withstand the serious physical and mental tests the Marine drill instructors present to you, then it is assumed that you also cannot handle fighting as a member of their elite brotherhood. The "silencing" which stifles *tresantes* of the 5th century BC and lingers in the halls of West Point is present with the Marines and Army as well. A veteran I interviewed recently shared stories from his army experience during Vietnam. If a man was weighing the platoon down with his reluctance to conform or his lack of manly courage on an operation, the veteran and his fellow men would make up sayings or songs about him to straighten him out or to make him quit.[185]

One has to wonder how much of this demeaning behavior is a cultural product of the male dominant societies of ancient Greece and modern America and how much has to do with the nature of man himself as a being who fears being labeled as feminine and whose instinctual role is to be an assertive, rational, and virtuous authority figure. Today one can sit back and turn on Discovery's Military Channel and watch a variety of programs including "Top Sniper," "Weaponology," and the reality television program "Marine

[184] Ricks 1997, 149
[185] Interview with Philip T. Bourne III, US Army and Long Range Recon, Vietnam War. Interviewed

Corps Survival School." Viewing the latter will give you a glimpse at the male-centric mentality still being promoted in boot-camp and still aspired to by young recruits. The voluntary group is sent into the Sierra Nevada Mountains with little to no rations, few previous survival skills, and mock casualty orders. They are already Marines, but upon completion of the course, they will receive an even higher distinction and will be better equipped for survival should war present them with dire circumstances. Similar British precedents such as Gordonstoun and its successor Outward Bound, both survival schools created during the second World War, the latter for the purpose of training navy men to survive in the Scottish Highlands. Marine Corps Survival School is designed as an elite group within an already elite group, much like the Marine's Force Recon unit.

A Spartan hoplite's reason for being trained in survival was based on his fear of the surrounding Helot populations and likewise the fear of non-Spartan ideologies influencing the hoplite ranks. Thucydides describes this fear by saying that "Spartan policy with regard to the helots had almost been based entirely on the idea of security."[186] In Sparta the elite taskforce within the hoplite ranks was known as the *krypteia*, from the Greek κρυπτω to hide. According to Plutarch this secret service group selected by the magistrates consisted of the most discreet young warriors, equipped only with daggers and such supplies as were necessary.

> *In the daytime they scattered into obscure and out of the way places, where they hid themselves and lay quiet; but in the night they came down onto highways and killed every Helot whom they caught. Oftentimes, too they actually traversed the fields where Helots were working and slew the sturdiest and best of them.*[187]

By making this parallel between Marine and Spartan special forces I only aim to

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January 29, 2008.

[186] Thuc. 4.80.3

point out how each group is trained to "weed out" the "other" that threatens their secure way of life (Spartan or American). In modern terms, we can view this in many ways. The Jim Crow mentality in America that just recently "phased out" promoted not only segregation and unequal rights for African Americans, it also ensured white male dominance in the South which led to not only a fear of blacks but the proliferation of hate crimes against them. Likewise during the anti-communist movement of the twentieth century, blacklists, imprisonment, and alienation relabeled many Americans, communist or not, as the enemy. Because of this, Vietnam was fought as an ideological war. Similarly, post-9/11 American mentality feeds off of a fear of Islamic fundamentalism and the Iraq war is being fought today for the sake of the "War on Terror."

The soldiers of the Military Academy, Army, and Marines are charged with the burdensome responsibility of protecting the nation from all its enemies (physical or ideological) no matter what. For those in boot-camp today that means proving your self worthy as a man, a leader, and as a receptive pupil of American military doctrine. For those in combat it means having the courage to step up to the enemy and to put your indoctrination into action by defending the values of democracy, liberty, and equal rights that America promotes.

It only seems fitting then to examine one of the greatest and the most well-known examples of Sparta's military might and superiority, self-sacrifice and courage, and duty to uphold a way of life that is still admired and emulated centuries later in the Western world.

PART IV: Thermopylae then and now

Go tell the Spartans, passerby,
That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

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[187] Plut., *Lyc.* 28.1-3

One of the most telling examples of how Spartan tradition and military values have permeated throughout European and eventually American society is the 480 BC Battle of Thermopylae. With an examination of the event, the most prominent of its heroes, King Leonidas I, and the role its legacy has played as a catalyst of political and ideological change persistent throughout the past few centuries, we will begin to see how inevitable its role is in today's America. Furthermore, on one hand the 300's self-sacrifice at Thermopylae has become a model for duty and respect for one's country and Simonides' epigram has done nothing but eternalize the Spartan war mentality, directly or indirectly influencing the way we think about sacrifice in America today. On the other hand, it is crucial to note that the heroic 300 also represent a group of mortal men, merely human and susceptible to the psychological affects of war. What makes these men so different from men today and would modern men seek out counterparts in Spartan history like Leonidas if they did not feel akin to them on a moral or purely human level? In order to dig deeper into the psyche of nationalism and its soldiers who fight a common struggle we must look at the site and memorial of Thermopylae itself and its role in Greek heritage.

As you approach Thermopylae today, you cannot help but witness the affects of twenty-five centuries of natural erosion, decades of industrialization, and recent efforts in memorialization of both modern and ancient wars. The narrow mountain pass which 300 Spartans attempted to secure in a last stand against the Persians in 480 BC now exists as a brief tourist stop off of the main National Road, an extremely busy highway which cuts between the mountains and the now coastal plateau to the North. The coastline which has receded far north was once a vital source of water for those men who guarded the Hot Gates for three days twenty-five centuries ago.

On the north side of the road lies a monument to 298 of the 300 Spartans who gave their lives for Greece under the leadership of their great king and general, Leonidas I. Here one can see the same "Leonidas" sculpture found in downtown Sparta recreated from the fragmentary piece found on the Spartan Acropolis, inlaid eyes and all. Below the warrior reads the inscription, "Molon labe," Leonidas' heated response to King Xerxes' request that the 300 give up their armor to the Persians, as was recorded by the contemporary ancient historian Herodotus. "Come and get them," as it is translated, became more than just a sentiment in ancient history, indeed it was more of a rallying cry of nationalism in the 1940's and 50's. When the Greeks were terrorized by the Nazis during the second World War, their small country's unwavering resistance to the Axis powers was envisioned as a modern day Thermopylae to many. The monument was erected shortly after the Greek Civil War in the late 1940's and with the financial aid, and almost positively the ideological interest of the United States.[188] On the south side of the road lies what has been identified as the site of the "last stand" against the Persians. At the top of the relatively small mound of earth, at least in comparison to the great mountains to the south, rests the second monument, a green Laconian marble with the famous inscription mentioned above written by the contemporary poet Simonides. The mood is surprisingly serene up there as one contemplates the rather emotional plaque resting beneath an olive tree and a Greek flag and the surrounding magnificent landscape conquered in millennia past. The image of "Leonidas" and his men struggling on that very spot comes immediately to mind and even more, the great pride that the Greeks must have felt as a nation for their heroic and legendary past as defenders of freedom.

The Battle of Thermopylae as it is retold by the foremost ancient and contemporary

[188] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2003, x

historian Herodotus, symbolizes the power a few united men can have against an army of conscripted "millions."[189] The infamous 300 which we read about in popular fiction and see in full battle array on a movie screen today, represented the best of the best. Contrary to what some might think, they did not represent all of Greece united against the Persians, but a few city-states under the command of Athens and Sparta called the Hellenic League which took an oath in 481 BC to resist the Persians. Not among this list of allies was Thessaly, the region south of Macedonia that allowed the Persians access to Thermopylae.[190]

Leonidas I lead the 300 Spartans into battle as any king in Sparta would. His case is interesting because he was not in line to be king, but took over when Cleomenes I died and left no heir. This of course meant that Leonidas had not been exempt from taking part in the *agoge* as a boy (as all kings were) but climbed its ranks, making him one of the only Spartan generals who endured the same training as his fellow men.[191] The mandatory service of Spartan kings is foreign to modern Americans living during the presidency of both William Jefferson Clinton and George W. Bush, neither of whom were active in the military at any time. Likewise the fact that Greece was divided at the time of Thermopylae (some city-states resisting the war and others willing to fight for it no matter what its outcome) seems all too real in terms of the Iraq War that a divided America fights today; a war that only one percent of the country is fighting abroad and only two branches of the military, the Marines and the Army.[192]

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[189] There is recent debate over the validity of Herodotus' numbers when it comes to the number of Persians fighting in that particular battle. It is definitely possible that the numbers were exaggerated to put the Spartans in a better light.

[190] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2003, 7

[191] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2003, 128

[192] Lewis 2007, 402

Pantites and Aristodamus: Casualties at Thermopylae

and the psychological costs of war in America

The one requirement of the 300 men who fought at the Hot Gates was that they have a living son to pass on not only their name and legend, but their favorable and superior genetic qualities.[193] The incessant purging of the population to weed out the weak or self-conscious was not even absent on the battle front in 480 BC. Pantites and Aristodamus were the only two of the 300 who did not take part in the last stand against the Persians, but for different reasons. According to Herodotus Pantites was sent away on a diplomatic mission in Thessaly and therefore missed the end of the fight and consequently when the Spartans proved themselves by dying for their people. His self-inflicted dishonor brought about by his unintended absence when his men needed him the most lead Pantites to kill himself for Sparta.[194] He did not suffer public disgracing as *tresantes* did, but the burden of his absence surely caused him mental anguish and probably brought about some alienation between himself and his fellow hoplites. A passage from the *Iliad* when Achilles finds out that Patroklos has died paints this emotional circumstance eloquently:

> *May it come quickly. As things were,*
> *I could not help my friend in his extremity.*
> *Far from his home he died; he needed me*
> *to shield him or to parry the death stroke.*
> *For me there's no return to my own country.*
> *Not the slightest gleam of hope did I*
> *afford Patroklos...*
> (Hom., *Il.* 18:108ff, emphasis added)

Today when veterans return from war having left their fellow men, alive and dead behind, they often suffer from what is called "survivors guilt." Unable to cope with the real and irreversible shame they feel they have brought upon their platoon, friends, and family,

[193] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2003, 129

they resort to suicide as a means of coping or being with their fallen men. They feel as though they will receive some closure by dying for them. As was discussed above, at Thermopylae those who survived would get together in groups to clear the battlefield of fellow soldiers. This rite was not only essential for respecting proper burial tradition and their men but also as a means of strengthening group solidarity. Spartan hoplites fought, fell, and recovered together. Soldiers fighting in Vietnam tried to carry out similar traditions, whether it be a funeral ceremony for a comrade or at least a pause in combat to "bury" him. This was the solidarity and closure *they* yearned for. However, in Vietnam in particular, few truces during combat were held, and none for funerary purposes, giving soldiers few chances to grieve or cope over the loss of friends. Instead men, like Pantites, were encouraged to internalize their feelings of regret, pain, and guilt.[195]

Jonathan Shay's study on the effects of combat trauma on Vietnam veterans and the ancient Greek warriors of the *Iliad* illustrates the similarities of psychological suffering that ancient Greek and modern American men returning from war experience. On the topic of soldier suicide he illuminates a passage from Homer's Iliad which describes Achilles' reaction to Patroklos' death and how Antilochos mourned with him worried that he, "might cut his throat with the iron."[196] According to Shay, "I died in Vietnam" is a common utterance of veterans whose close friends died in combat. Interestingly, Shay also points out how Homer's word to describe Patroklos' fallen body in battle, *keimai*, is the same as the word he uses to describe Achilles' falling down (dead) beside his body in grief, just as

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[194] Hdt. 7.232

[195] Shay, Jonathan. 1994. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character,* 57. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[196] Hom., *Il.* 18.34 as cited in Shay 1994, 50

modern veterans seem to feel.[197] The Spartans must have shared a similar bond to the warriors of the *Iliad* and the soldiers of today. They slept, ate, trained, and marched together, and were willing to die for one another in the most helpless of circumstances. Pantites was no exception, though the nature of male dominant Spartan society and ideology probably made it even harder for a man like Pantites to demonstrate signs of emotional pain.

Solidarity aside, each man, Spartan or American, was and is also responsible for controlling his emotions, maintaining his manliness, and keeping his dignity. There is a long-lasting stigma that exists today sometimes referred to as the "wacko-vet myth." It is the fear that recent veterans possess concerning their "weaker" yet inevitable psychological and behavioral problems post-combat. They want to avoid becoming "crazies" like those Vietnam veterans who plummeted into drug and alcohol abuse or severe mental illness, those who became disgraces to America and its military and now are often times homeless, jobless, and alone. Philip Bourne, a veteran who served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969 as a member of the Army's Long Range Recon force suffers from PTSD. In an interview he explained how he and his fellow men felt as they fought a war that many of their fellow Americans did not support, in fact he and most of his men did not support it.

The culture of war in America has changed dramatically since the draft and the Vietnam war. Lewis asserts that after 1973 and the end of the draft there was a "loss of interest" in joining the military.[198] America was more and more divided especially by the time of the Persian Gulf War. By this time the military had recovered a more desirable and devoted class of cadets because it was now an all-voluntary force, however it had polarized

[197] Shay 1994, 52
[198] Lewis 2007, xx

itself further from the common American people, representing what Lewis calls a "military cluster" within American culture.[199] This "cluster," one percent of the American population, now represents America on the battlefield even though its mentality and values are markedly different from an average American's outside the "cluster." The soldier of the all-volunteer age is a life-long soldier."[200] "In a 2003 *Military Times* Poll it was found that "two thirds of surveyed military personnel said that they think military members have higher moral standards than the nation they serve... Once in the military many said, members are wrapped in a culture that values honor and morality" and soldiers see how different they have become upon return to their old neighborhoods, they believe the training they have received has made them "better people."[201] Consider the following poem written by a Marine who served in Iraq in 2003:

We all came together
Both young and old
To fight for our freedom
To stand and be bold.

In the midst of all evil
We stand our ground,
And we protect our country
From all terror around.

Peace and not war,
Is what some people say.
But I'll give my life
So you can live the American way.

I give you the right
To talk of your peace
To stand in your groups
and protest in our streets

But still I fight on,
I don't bitch, I don't whine.
I'm just one of the people
Who is doing you time.

I'm harder than nails,
Stronger than any machine.
I'm the immortal soldier
I'm a U.S. Marine

So stand in my shoes,
And leave from your home.
Fight for the people who hate you,
With the protests they've shown.

Fight for the stranger,
Fight for the young.
So they all may have,
The greatest freedom you've won

Fight for the sick,
Fight for the poor,
Fight for the cripple
Who live next door.

But when your time comes,
Do what I've done.
For if you stand up for freedom,
You'll stand when the fight's done.[202]

[199] Lewis 2007, xix
[200] Lewis 2007, 379
[201] Lewis 2007, 380
[202] Lewis 2007, 380; Poem written by Aaron Gilbert, Corporal U.S. Marine Crops

The Spartans, a small and elite military community within Greece undoubtedly valued their culture above all others and their upholding of a strict discipline, high moral standards, and utter devotion to their country intensified their distrust of those unwilling or too weak to put the same sacrifice on the line. Aristodamus' eventual death after Thermopylae, unlike that of Pantites, was thought by Herodotus to have been brought about by his lack of obedience, rationality, self-control, and manliness. Inflicted with a blinding inflammation of the eyes which made participation in combat nearly impossible, Aristodamus was sent by Leonidas to Alpeni to recuperate with Eurytus, a man with the same affliction. When Eurytus decided to return to the battle, Aristodamus "took advantage of the excuse" and decided that he could fight another day.[203] Do to the return, proud participation, and self-sacrifice of Eurytus the individualistic carelessness of Aristodamus was publicly disgraced following the battle. Herodotus tells us that he was given no flame for his fire and was not allowed to speak to anyone, similar circumstances described my Xenophon and Plutarch. It is also in these lines in Herodotus about Aristodamus that we first see the word *tresas*, a term widely used by contemporary and later sources.[204]

In order to regain his broken honor, Aristodamus chose to fight, this time for what *he* perceived as Sparta, at Plataea in 479BC. According to Cartledge, when the wall of hoplites had lined up to advance forward Aristodamus "turned beserker" thrusting himself onto the enemy before the fight had commenced and causing his own death, or suicide.[205] However the Spartans found this act to be just as self-motivated as his previous offense at Thermopylae and offered him little to no honor.

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[203] Hdt. 7.229
[204] Hdt. 7.231

Again we find similar behavior in Homer's Achilles and America's Vietnam veterans. Shay states that fellow soldiers often feel as though the "beserker" within their company is putting the lives of their fellowmen on the line and not acting as a member of the team.[206] This kind of distrust within a tight-knit and loyalty-based unit as the 300 would have definitely caused uproar among its members. It was not just the person who acted out of turn and on their own terms, but the fact that they forsake a duty, reputation, and allegiance to the institution of *hoplomachia*.

Citizenship and transition back into "civilian life"

Due to a lack of first hand Spartan hoplite accounts we will never really know what the ancient Greek men felt upon their return from battle. We only know how their feelings and grief were suppressed by harsh indoctrination. However, Spartan citizenship was entirely dependent on one's service in the military, completion of *agoge* training, and financial responsibilities to one's mess. Therefore, if you were a man, you were not Spartan unless you were a hoplite and consequently, there was no transition back into "civilian life." Contrary to current percentages, one hundred percent of all Spartan men old enough to serve, including the king were required to do so. This idea seems foreign to modern Americans today because of the all-voluntary status of the military for the past three decades. Our definition of "citizen" and our loose meaning for it would be hard for the Spartan to comprehend, especially since not all American "citizens" were or are supportive of the Vietnam and Iraq wars. Within the military or "military cluster" itself there appears to be a dichotomy between the soldier who will live and die by the military, deployed or not and the soldier who serves but then wants to return to civilian life after war. Devotion to

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[205] Cartledge, *Thermopylae* 2006, 158
[206] Shay 1994, 90

"the cause" is essential for survival in battle, but given the factors of both physical distance from the battlefront when one returns home and psychological distance from the war brought about by changing attitudes toward the necessity and nature of the war itself, duty for some becomes temporary and nonexistent after combat.

An American soldier's transition back into civilian life can be startling. Many find it difficult to find and hold a job (unless they continue to work for the military as a civilian) and few of the skills they gained in the military and war-zone are of practical use to them at home. Many also feel estranged to their family and friends and have trouble coping with everyday situations where they are forced to make a decision instead of being ordered to complete a task. They are rigorously trained to 1) be a part of a new family and in turn lose their identities as civilians 2) kill and follow orders regardless of their own judgment, and 3) are rewarded for and given promotions for killing as a means of defending their country. This traditional indoctrination of young men and women reinforces negative behavior and sometimes leads to aggressive behavior upon their return home. A recent *New York Times* study has found 121 cases in which veterans of the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq have committed a killing, whether it be suicidal or homicidal. Two-quarters of these veterans were still in the military at the time and one-third of the victims were relatives, spouses, girlfriends, or children.[207] According to the study, few of the veterans received adequate mental health screening at the end of their deployments and many of them found out they had PTSD only after they were arrested for homicide. Likewise a study of the Veterans Affairs Department in 2007 has found that at least 283 combat veterans who left the military between the start of the war in Afghanistan in October of 2001 and the end of 2005

[207] Sontag, Deborah and Lizette Alvarez. January 13, 2008. "Across America, Deadly Echoes of Foreign Battles," *New York Times on the Web*.

took their own lives and 147 troops have killed themselves while in combat.[208] It is hard to treat someone who does not want psychological treatment. Chris Ayres, the manager of the combat stress recovery program at the Wounded Warrior Project says that nobody ever just "walks in" because "it's the hardest thing for a male, a Marine, a type-A personality figure to just go in there and say, 'Hey, I need some help.'"[209]

Today, many Vietnam and Iraq veterans feel that seeking psychological treatment after combat and being diagnosed with PTSD labels them as "weaklings" and many would prefer to skip this embarrassment in order to save their reputations.[210] After a review of the intense military training soldiers go through in boot camp alone, this should be no surprise. While in combat, it is typical for a soldier's superior and his fellow men to make demeaning remarks such as "get your mind straight" or "suck it up" or to issue curt warnings to soldiers to not "lose it." [211] This attitude lingers after war and outside the controlled environment of the military.

Permanence of Thermopylae throughout history

Already the psychological costs of war in ancient and modern times have shed light on the common human bonds men at war hold and the common obstacles they face as devoted and courageous men in uniform. The ideal and romanticized image of such men willing to die for a common cause only strengthens as a model during the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. These centuries are host to the neoclassical revival, Grand Tour, and the adoption of classical civic and moral obligations

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[208] Hefling, Kimberly. November 1, 2007. "Iraq, Afghan vets at risk of suicide," *ABC News online*.
[209] Hefling 2007
[210] Sontag 2008; Interview with Philip T. Bourne III, 2008
[211] Shay 1994, 63

to one's nation in Europe and America. Soon the popular ancient biographer Plutarch and his retelling of Lycurgan Sparta gains an eager audience among British, French, and American intellectuals. Leonidas lives to tell the tale of the 300 at Thermopylae.

After the famous battle there was a grand state funeral held for Leonidas and as stated above, a large scale inscribed monument was erected in Sparta dedicated to the 298 men who fought at Thermopylae. According to Cartledge, Plutarch also wrote a *Life of Leonidas*, which is no longer extant, but given the nature of Plutarch's biographies of "great men," the fact that Leonidas was included in this list is quite significant and reflects later traditions in honoring the king.[212] A religious cult called the Leonidaea was established to worship the king after the age of Alexander the Great (c. 330-323 BC). All Spartan kings were heroicized after death and according to Cartledge, substantial physical remains of a religious building, referred to as the Leonidaion, can be found at a site not far from the Spartan acropolis.[213] During the beginning of the Roman imperial period the Spartans sided with Augustus, forging a bond that would last over the centuries and one that granted many Spartans Roman citizenship. During Trajan's rule the emperor reestablished the *Leonidaea* at Sparta probably in an effort of honoring his allies and also in polarizing the war between the western Romans and the eastern Parthian being waged at the time.[214]

The image and idealization of Leonidas, his 300, and the Battle of Thermopylae continues to surface throughout history. During the Renaissance the travel writer Cyriac of Ancona, a modern Pausanias, lamented the absence of Leonidas in his famous travelogue of 1447 when visiting Sparta. The Renaissance is known to embody a dominant Roman

[212] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 172
[213] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 163

influence in art, architecture, and intellectualism, however, even great painters like Perugino, Raphael's master, were known for their inclusion of prominent Greek virtues and heroes, including Leonidas.[215] In 1579 in Scotland a debate arose from humanist and historian George Buchanan concerning the monarchy and how Leonidas and Agesilaus II represented true kings not wont of luxury like those contemporary men and the ancient Persians. This sentiment was adopted in France a century later when the well-known writer Fenelon adapted a fictional dialogue between Xerxes and Leonidas from Herodotus. In his *Dialogues des Morts* Fenelon praised Leonidas a an anti-despotic king and as an example to be followed in France during the Enlightenment.[216]

Two famous examples of Sparta's hold on France during the late 18th and early 19th centuries come to us in the form of grand history paintings. Louis-Jean-Francois Lagrenee the Elder's *A Spartan Mother and Son* of 1771 represents a mother and son's loyalty to the state and is reminiscent of the well-known Spartan mothers in Plutarch *Sayings of Spartan Women*. Jacque-Louis David's famous *Leonidas at Thermopylae* (finished in 1814) painted for Napoleon and during David's active participation in the French Revolution stands out as an example of the longevity of the hero and his self-sacrifice for his country. David was one of the most acclaimed history painters of the Neoclassical period and while his earlier scenes of *Brutus*, the *Horatii*, and the *Sabine Women* recall a Roman virtuous tradition, his later paintings are reminiscent almost strictly of ancient Greek subjects and ideologies. This painting's scene must be viewed as a political and cultural product of a turbulent struggle in France. During the next century and a half, France and America would fight their revolutions, each selecting from antiquity

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[214] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 170
[215] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 176

those moral traditions and victories that best suited their pursuits for freedom from tyranny.

> *Leonidas must fall*
> *Alas! Far heavier misery impends*
> *O'er thee and these, if soften'd by thy tears*
> *I shamefully refuse to yield that breath*
> *Which justice, glory, liberty, and heav'n*
> *Claim for my country, for my sons, and thee...*
> *... Why thy husband dies*
> *For Lacedaemon's safety, thou wilt share,*
> *Though and thy children, the diffusive good.*[217]
> (excerpt from *Leonidas*, by Richard Glover, 1737)

Modern Lakonizers following in the tradition of Plutarch and Xenophon produced fictional, romantic, and Thermopylae-inspired literary works aimed both at uplifting nationalism and prolonging the idealized virtue and beautiful sacrifice of the 300. One of the most popular was Richard Glover, a late 18th century British writer with a political motivation who was favored by the prince of Wales and was a patriot in the opposition Whig party campaigning against Sir Robert Walpole.[218] His epic poem *Leonidas* not only granted him the nickname Leonidas but came to represent all that was honorable about conservative Spartan tradition. He, like Rousseau, knew that failing one's country meant failing one's family and that to die for one's country and therefore for one's family was the same thing, the single-most important truth the Spartans founded their city on.[219] Likewise, the Irishman Thomas Davis penned the poem "A Nation Once Again" in the early 19th century as a rallying cry for Irish nationalists to rise up against the British:

> *When boyhood's fire was in my blood,*
> *I read of ancient freemen*
> *For Greece and Rome who bravely stood,*
> *Three hundred men and three men.*

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[216] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 178
[217] MacGregor Morris, Ian. 2004. "The paradigm of democracy: Sparta in Enlightenment thought." In *Spartan Society*, Thomas Figueira, ed., 350. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales.
[218] Rawson 1969, 345
[219] MacGregor 2004, 350

I prayed that I would live to see
Our fetters rent in twain,
And Ireland, long a province, be
A nation once again.[220]

Similarly, Glover's poem inspired philhellene poets of the 19th and 20th centuries like George Gordon or Lord Byron and Constantine Cavafy to weave their own tales of Thermopylae.[221] Byron's "The Isles of Greece" and Cavafy's "Thermopylae" encouraged the native Greek liberationist Constantinos Rhigas to compose the "Patriotic Hymn of 1798" in which he summons an ancient Greek precedent in valor and stirs modern men to live up to it:

Sons of the Greeks arise!
...
Hellenes of past ages,
Oh start again to life!
Sparta, Sparta, why in slumbers
Lethargic doest thou lie?
Awake, and join in numbers
With Athens, old ally!
Leonidas recalling,
That chief of ancient song,
Who saved ye once from falling,
The terrible! The strong![222]

Dedications to Leonidas and an ancient Greek legacy of heroism come to us today primarily in the form of film entertainment and popular fiction novels. Two of the most popular 20th century films about Thermopylae, the *300 Spartans* (1962) and *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978), were in many ways products of a turbulent American ideological war. The former was released during one of the most frigid spells of the Cold War and the beginnings of the Vietnam War. It was therefore sold to an American public living "on guard" in fear of Eastern communism and in fear of their own government's power to

[220] Cited in Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 184
[221] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 183 and 186

purge America of unwanted "Reds." The latter was released during a similar era entrenched in "democratic" vs. "communist" ideology and hearkens back to the famous and timeless Simonides inscription at Thermopylae. The role of these films as popular entertainment forces us to look at how propaganda is created for the general public, without them even knowing it sometimes. It also makes us wonder how the Battle of Thermopylae, with the Spartans fighting on behalf of Greece and against the barbarian Persians, might symbolize the same conflicts America continues to fight with the East today.

The Persian Wars, like World War II, the Vietnam War, and the present-day Iraq War were fought over ideology. As stated above, the Spartans' unique discipline of self-control, physical superiority, and indoctrination as an elite class of men and women bound by conformity and obedience conditioned them to be the greatest and most honorable warriors of their time. It also guaranteed "voluntary service" to Sparta and Greece, however expected and enforced it was, which in the case of Thermopylae would hold priority over life itself. The Spartans, like many Greeks, were raised on a heroic diet of Homer, and their conduct in war and respect for ancient Greek tradition are clear illustrations of their allegiance to a heroic past as well as their own heroic present. The members of the *Gerousia* and the Ephorate, the elder keepers of Spartan ideology, were responsible for playing a vital role as overseers, sharing their experience as warriors for Sparta past and present and honored with the instructive role of drilling young Spartan *agoge* members and accompanying them on the frontlines as *homoioi*, or equals.[223] Today American students of all ages and military boot-camp or academy cadets read the inspirational biographies and histories of past American war heroes and leaders, model

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[222] Cited in Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 183-4
[223] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 69

American citizens and soldiers like George Washington and Dwight D. Eisenhower. One must wonder how different our use of these model American citizens and the Greek's use of Leonidas really is. All the examples represent a relatively modern effort to search the past for the pivotal moments in history when the country and its democracy was threatened and when courageous and selfless men stepped up to save it from the hands of a foreign master.

The Battle of Thermopylae relates to our present day conflict in the Middle East. Both armed conflicts pit the West against the East, the Free against the Enslaved, the Capitalists versus the Communists, the Democracy versus the Totalitarian regime. In either case, America and Sparta are on the Western front, fighting in essence the same war, even though during the fifth and fourth centuries BC Sparta was at war three out of every four years, unlike the US.[224]

Today in the 21st century one still encounters traces of Spartan glory and conquest in fiction novels like *Gates of Fire* by Steven Pressfield and in the thrilling graphic novel the *300* by Frank Miller and its wartime film adaptation in 2006. This film, more than any other about the Spartans seems to bring an immediacy to antiquity and not just because of its vibrant 21st century technical effects and handsome actors. The eagerly anticipated action adventure stood center stage at the box office during the grim and nearly hopeless later years of the Iraq War. Again one can argue the propagandistic nature of such a film release within such a turbulent historical context. However, after interviewing Iraq veterans Rob V. and his friend Vazquez it becomes quite clear that a soldier serving in today’s wars, just like in the past, needs a strong model of brotherhood and sacrifice in order to make it home alive, whether or not he or she believes in the war being fought. On

one hand, at home the *300* was just another gory and entertaining piece of film history, a successful depiction of the characters in the graphic novel with a few Herodotus quotes smattered here and there, but overall an idealized and relatively weak historical account of Thermopylae. On the other hand, on the battle front in Iraq, the film gave hope to relatively tiny fraction of Americans fighting a war for the "freedom" of their fellow Americans, it boosted their morale before deployment to Iraq and before fighting in Iraq, and it made them feel like part of an ancient and honorable legacy, regardless of what, if anything, they know about the Spartans. In the concluding paragraphs we will take a closer look at how these two American soldiers and a Vietnam veteran think of the Spartans.

Part V: Modern Leonidas

I assumed a lot before I began my research about the relationship between soldiers and their fellow men, their families, and how they perceived of their country, military branch, and the values both promoted. I never knew that the ancient Greeks, let alone the Spartans, had any impact on how men and women in uniform assessed the indescribable situations they faced in Vietnam or Iraq, although in the back of my mind I had always hoped to find out that antiquity was still as active a role model as it was during the founding of our country and the structuring of its moral foundation. It was not until I spoke with American war veterans that I began to understand just how much Sparta and its timeless virtuous traditions meant to servicemen today, and their words offered to me an entirely new perspective on the topic of Spartan and American military society. The perspective was that of a 25 year old named Rob, a veteran who returned home from Iraq with a severe brain injury, his fellow unit member Vazquez, who recently returned home phased about the war's purpose, and Phil, a 59 year old Vietnam veteran and my step-father, who

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[224] Cartledge *Thermopylae* 2006, 6

enlisted at the age of 17.

I first heard about Rob and his friends when I received an unexpected email from his sister Bethany, an acquaintance of mine. After she heard about my thesis topic she relayed to me how much her brother and his unit would watch the film the *300* while they were serving in Iraq and how it gave them some sense of honor and pride as soldiers. In November 2007 I met with Rob and his fellow unit member Vazquez at Rob's home and interviewed the two men about their experiences and what the movie and the Spartans meant to them. Rob and Vazquez are members of the Army Corps of Engineers, Rob participated in ROTC and attended Officer's School, and Vazquez, a police officer, was in the National Guard before entering the Corps. Both of them knew that the film was not meant to be historically accurate, however, they found an encouraging moral lesson in the characters' actions as members of a brotherhood that knew what its mission was and had its heart fully behind its leader. Rob admired, "the attitude of being willing to die for what you believe in," adding that he believes "it's the same as it is now. We are hoping not to die, but they knew they were going to and went anyway." Vazquez added: "I guess in Sparta they were actually trying to defend Sparta, where now I don't know what we're doing... it's not so clear for us now... I wish I was so convinced of something to the point of knowing I was going to die and being like, Hell Yeah!"

The two men also repeatedly watched an Iraqi bootlegged version of the *300* to "get pumped up" for combat. The action film helped to boost their morale and give them a feeling of invincibility essential for survival. Rob, Vazquez and their unit also watched a lot of wrestling, *Rocky*, and ultimate fighting DVDs, gravitating more toward soldier movies like *Black Hawk Down* during the first months of their deployment. Eventually,

Vazquez got bored with them and Rob felt like they were too depressing. Later, their unit was involved in a roadside bombing in Iraq that ended with the death of two of their best friends and a serious injury to Rob's brain which he is recovering from today. As the interview took place, Bethany and Anna, Rob's sisters, worked on what they playfully call "Therapy," the throwing exercises Rob has to do to strengthen his right arm and coordination. Vazquez, who had only been home for three weeks at the time of the interview, was supposed to be on the same mission that Rob got injured on but was absent, feeling as though he let his men down and was a survivor at the expense of their compromised survival. Bethany interjected that when Rob was in the hospital he specifically asked his dad not to bring any "soldier movies." "It was too present for him." On the one hand the *300*, which Vazquez so readily described as "badass," offered some relief for the men, whether it be taking a break from their gruesome job to watch a movie together, or finding some inspiration from the ancient world and how its warriors rose above themselves to fight to the death for their people. On the other hand, Rob and Vazquez were soldiers facing similar insurmountable tasks in a nearly hopeless war. They cannot help but feel akin to the struggle Leonidas and his men faced, and therefore it could also be difficult for them to see it and its tragic ending play out on the screen.

Like Rob and Vazquez, Phil comes from a service family. His father, uncles, and brother were all Navy men and he wanted to follow the same honorable path. He also came from a family that could not afford college, even though Phil had an interest in studying English and literature. When Phil was unable to join the Navy due to a heart murmur, he enlisted in the Army in 1966 at the age of 17. He describes his eight weeks of basic training and eight weeks of advanced training as extremely difficult because of its demanding

physical and mental disciplining. He had to learn right away how to eat, sleep, and drill as a team member. "Don't mess with the group or we'll come down on you," was the attitude within the platoon. "If someone couldn't take the training, they do what they call 'recycling back' where they put the guy back to the week he failed and give him one last chance to make it." Being able to depend on the men around you was how you survived. "If we were going out and shooting somebody and you didn't do what you were supposed to do, one of us could die." Phil proved himself to be highly disciplined and skilled, became a member of the Army's Long Range Recon unit, a six-man rifle team, and eventually made sergeant.

Phil did not join the service because he was a "war-monger" or "baby killer," names he was called when he returned home. He says he was always a "peacenik" even during the war, he just had no other exciting options in his future and joined the service partially due to boredom with ordinary life. "It's all about ideology," he said. "You're fighting 3000 miles away from home and you're supposed to think you're fighting for America?" Despite his and Rob and Vazquez's disillusionment with war and with their supposed "leader" they still had to learn how best to survive in the situations and environments they were dropped into. First intentions for gaining glory or victory over an enemy which drive men and women to join the service quickly become transformed into a pursuit to make it home alive with all of your men, regardless of the country's ultimate political victory.

Rob and Vazquez find some hope and stimulation when watching the *300*. Phil seems to watch it more for its entertainment value being an avid reader of classical history and mythology. Rob recognizes that a Spartan hoplite's greatest possible contribution to his men, family, and city-state is to die for his country. He, Vazquez, and Phil and their

fellow men have to believe in such a thing to be able to face what they face in combat. However, instead of feeling that their commitment to the service will bring them such glory and honor, they feel as though their deaths are becoming forgotten statistics.

Phil, Rob, and Vazquez are part of a severely small fraction of Americans who serve in the military, a fraction comparable to the relatively small number of Spartans defending Greece against the Persians. However, unlike the Spartans, these three were not born into military training and separated from their families at the age of seven. Instead, as Vazquez puts it, "we were made into soldiers after we already had a sense of who we were. [We're] just normal people who have to do stuff [we] wouldn't normally do." As soldiers in an all volunteer service where academic education has taken an important role in academies or as the basis for ROTC training, Rob and Vazquez retain most of their individualism when they return to their separate civilian lives. Phil did not have the prospect of a college education but he grew up in the sixties questioning the government and did not lose this sentiment when he marched into battle. Vazquez explains that he chose not to become an active duty soldier because he "didn't want to live Army" or turn out "stupid like those guys," most of whom today have little to no education and have no prospects other than the joining the military.

When I asked the men what they thought about the Spartan concept of the citizen-soldier they immediately responded by saying that they want to keep their Army lives and their civilian lives separate. How is this really possible? When they are in training and combat they are stripped of their identities, told what to do, who to do it with, and when to do it. Upon their return home, they have a hard time "just picking out food in a restaurant." "When I came home I was out to make something of myself," Phil said. He

continued to share his difficulty with this task saying, "I couldn't deal with people and how the government and people didn't listen to us about what went on [in the war] and how *we* felt." Many of Phil's friends ended up abusing alcohol and drugs or committing suicide and Phil himself "had to move to the mountains for twelve years so that [he] could return to society." Vazquez had described Vietnam vets as "tweaked out" and later in the interview commented on the ban on alcohol in Iraq, Rob and him laughing about how their commanders had seen what had happened in Vietnam and did not want it to happen again.

Soldiers are forced to be a part of a group, act only with the best interests of the group in mind, and reinforce the solidarity of their new family every day with jokes, songs, and the promise to have each other's back. The environment they are transplanted into is foreign and completely unexpected. The only thing familiar to them is their platoon or unit, and this is what helps them to survive. Rob and Vazquez believe everyone should be obligated to serve in the military, but in regard to drafting men and women, Rob responded by saying "I want the person watching my back because they want to not because they have to." If someone in the unit or leading the unit is ever unsure or reluctant, it can spell disaster for the whole group.

"The worst thing a superior can say is 'I don't know' because people start freaking out," Vazquez said as he shook his head. Cowardice has many shades in war. When Vazquez's sergeant said those words he was letting down the men in his command, giving them reason to doubt, and allowing them to think about what they were actually doing instead of just "doing." It is hard for Rob and Vazquez to believe in the "cause" because they do not support what their Commander and Chief has done invading Iraq, Rob adding that "he's a freaking idiot," and Vazquez that he never wanted to go to Iraq but to

Afghanistan because he does not believe invading Iraq will make America safer. Instead they yearn for a leader like Leonidas, one who has endured the same training and is willing to sacrifice himself on the battle-line just as quickly as any of them. Likewise, they see cowards take the form of the female gunner of their unit who always got anxious on the way to a site or in the three conscientious objectors in their unit who left the military before deployment. To Rob and Vazquez all of these individuals broke the promise they gave to the Army and to their fellow soldiers. Unity is the building block of a successful team and Rob and Vazquez opinions of the enemy helped to reinforce this essential bond.

Spartan hoplite warfare was based on the honor of hand to hand combat. When I asked Phil what similarities between Spartan and American military training he saw he immediately recalled how he learned how to fight with a pugil stick, knife, rifle with a bayonet, and in some cases whatever was laying around him. He associated these close order combat skills with ancient Greeks and these weapons with spears and short swords. Phil experienced many encounters with the enemy where he had to utilize these skills because of the secret nature of his Recon team and their encounters in the jungle. When I asked Phil if he thought hand to hand combat was more manly, he interrupted me and said, "it *is* more manly... because you have to look the person in the eye. If more people had to fight with spears and knives today there wouldn't be any war."

Rob and Vazquez expressed their regret for not being able fight in the same way, explaining that fighting the enemy in Iraq was like "fighting ghosts... and it really messes with your head too." When I asked if they found hand to hand combat more honorable, they both jumped in to say that they "wished" they could have seen the men they were shooting at, met them in a ring, or "settled the fight with a knife in a ring." They called their

opponents "weak and malnourished since birth" with no real training, men who could not show their faces, but who could go on television and call Americans cowards. "Who's the coward!?" Vazquez said after he described how he and his men had to go out into "their streets" dressed in uniforms and labeled as a soldiers only to be shot upon from a distance.

These three men voluntarily signed up for the service to be sent away from their families and relatively cushy civilian lives in order to do their jobs as soldiers. They had never been to Iraq nor did they know exactly what they were in for. Training in Florida or in California at a base was nothing like the insurgency warfare in the streets of Baghdad or the guerrilla warfare in the jungles of Southern Vietnam. After "successfully" completing their jobs as obedient employees of the United States Army they returned home, hoping to never have to do it again, but knowing in their hearts that if the need arose, that they would leave all of it again. Arriving home after multiple years of duty they were physically and mentally wounded, tired, desensitized, and unfamiliar with their homes and families. For Phil it took twelve years in the mountains of Northern California to readjust, for Rob the continued support of his family, and for Vazquez, readjustment has barely begun. They continue to honor the 300 and their commitment to their country, their discipline, and bravery in hand to hand combat. As Phil says, "it takes much more heart to kill a man face to face" than to blindly shoot into the distance.

The Spartans lived war. It was their only occupation and arguably the only thing they were outstanding at. They trained their whole lives and during the fifth and fourth centuries BC participated in battle practically on a daily basis. We have already seen how a couple hoplites coped with failing their brotherhood, and because of a lack of evidence, one can only imagine what kinds of psychological damage their lifestyle inflicted on its

people, especially its young boys. Similarly today the majority of the general population only knows what they know about war and its casualties from personal stories like those of Phil, Rob, and Vazquez, or from movies, books, and the news. As much as it would be helpful to have an ancient Spartan veteran's account of battle, one would still never really know or get to know the man, just like today. He and his men are distanced forever from the one's they love. After commenting on the malice of the Spartans in the 300 who ate apples while stabbing fallen Persians, Bethany reassured Rob by saying "you're better people because you're not Spartans... you're kind of normal." Rob replied, "kind of." As an injured veteran who also suffers from PSTD, Rob can see how war has changed him. Now they struggle to make their sacrifice and their duty count for something.

Conclusion

When I first decided to undertake this topic I had two things in mind. I wanted to better understand how 1) a model society like Sparta has had an affect on American military training and consequently its soldiers and 2) veterans like my father perceived of the wars they were fighting and the military families they created in combat. Indeed there is a long tradition in the United States in emulating ancient Greek and Roman moral and civic virtue, and our country and its military academies and branches have been founded on those same values of honor, duty, commitment, courage, and solidarity.

The most valuable lesson I learned with my research and in the interviews, no matter how obvious it might seem, is that there are almost just as many similarities as there are differences between American and Spartan society. In this paper I tried to look relatively objectively at these factors, pointing out what I believed to be the strongest

parallels and what I believed might be more coincidental and those stark differences that pose us with questions about the selective nature of the ancient tradition in our own lives and how we as Americans have chosen to adapt its canons to our society. Our country's military discipline and training has taken pointers from Sparta, no matter how directly or indirectly lifted they are from the *agoge* and the self-sacrifice of the 300 at Thermopylae. Young men and women are still born into military families expected to serve as a proud part of a paternal legacy, while many are still labeled as unfit, effeminate, or "crazy," only to be discarded on the mountaintop of society and to carry a stigma with them for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, today's America is still ruled by fear and is dependent on the false protection a War on Terror can provide. Citizens still live "on guard" for the next terrorist attack, checking the specific color of the terrorist alert, or becoming suspicious of a dark-skinned man's suitcase at the airport. We may not have a slave Helot population like we did in the 19th century, but in many ways our society still feeds on the segregations of the past. It encourages disunity in its streets and schools, especially among its lower economic tiers, but at the same time our country claims to be united by its struggles, a sentiment paralleled by Vazquez's isolationist attitude as he spoke about his struggle in Iraq: "you start to forget about the big stuff and you begin to just care about your men."

In their civilian lives all three men that I interviewed openly expressed their discontent with authority figures, their president, the weaklings in their platoons, the country's neglect of their psychological problems, or the unsupportive American public. However, at the end of the day, that soldier life that they hoped to keep disparate from their real lives, that life changed who they would be forever. Maybe they did not see it because they had just gotten back or because they had had forty years to think about it. The Spartans

began their indoctrination and physical training at the age of seven, and became hoplites (we could call them officer class or special forces today) around the age of twenty. American men and women especially during Vietnam, start at a similar age of twenty years old to hold not only positions as soldiers but as officers and leaders of their fellow men and women. When you think about it, it is not much different now. Our basic training is tested out on teenagers, most straight out of high school or high school drop-outs whose minds are fit for molding as they set out to undertake the first "career" of their lives. Instead of thirteen years of intense indoctrination and preparation, American men and women undergo eight weeks and if they are lucky, eight more weeks. It is important to note that indoctrination comes in forms other than military training. Entertainment such as films, books, and comic books can play a role, and what we see or read about in the news or study from our high school history books can influence our perspective dramatically. Where Americans live or what families they belong to can also be very telling of how devoted to the military or to a particular president's actions a person is.

I came to discover that the only thing that mattered to Phil, Rob, and Vazquez was their fellow men and how to best protect them in battle and when they returned home. Their bond to these men is eternal and in every instance, combat soldiers owe their lives to the men that "had their backs" on the front line. The only comparable bond they had before service, their model of conduct, was most likely that which they formed with their families and friends. They were raised on the American family values of respect, obligation, commitment, pride, and love, and it is no coincidence that the military system has adopted the same values. Spartan upbringing thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away,

embraced and enforced these values also, putting them into action and to the test on the battlefield, just as men and women do now. I still do not know how instinctive these feelings of love for one's country are or what chemical within us makes us decide to put our lives on the line for the millions of Americans back home. I do know that we have to feel like we belong to some special group, be it American or Spartan, 300 or Recon, and that in order to live day to day and to finish our job, we have to feel as if our actions are protecting the ones that we love and that they will not be forgotten.