

heightened interest in the problems of great power competition and hegemonic power transitions, Raymond suggests that we should apply a rule-based approach to these phenomena. He implies that maintaining great power peace is possible despite the increasing diversity of the international system. Further research can explore those factors that enable or inhibit the emergence of basic agreements about secondary rules.

**Curating and Re-Curating the American Wars in Vietnam and Iraq.** By Christine Sylvester. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 240p. \$34.95 cloth.  
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Christine Sylvester has produced a book that retheorizes how war is represented. She does so through a series of unconventional framings and stories that push the boundaries of what has traditionally been conceived of as war studies. It is a masterful example of the way narrative work can generate knowledge, with key insights on the individual experience of war inside and outside the traditional war theater. As a result, the visual and narrative both become ways to engage the everydayness of war, war representation, and war memory by repositioning as authoritative individual voices that are typically excluded from the traditional authorities managing war and its representation.

The main question explored in the book is, “Who is an authority on a war, able to truly experience it, represent it, and influence public discourse about it?” (p. 3) The book establishes its arguments by examining what kinds of knowledge of wars comes through textual and object displays (p. 10), focusing on US wars, particularly the two failed wars in Vietnam and Iraq. The key argument is that no one representation can provide the “authentic truth of a war” (p. 174), and the book makes a specific call for multiple war stories. Sylvester also offers provocative methodological insights on the way we study war, encouraging readers to think beyond traditional definitions and approaches.

Sylvester is well known for her previous feminist work, and the threads of that can be seen here in her focus on the role of the individual and in her idea of “the personal politics of war and death” (p. 47). Here she suggests we should look for knowledge of the wars in Vietnam and Iraq in “places that can seem secondary or tangential to the usual locations and kinds of actors accorded authority on war” (p. 5). It is this focus on the everyday dimensions of war and the populations rendered invisible in representations of it that forms the most significant contribution of her book, in the face of the standard state-centric approach to studying war.

The book begins with militarism as the backdrop for the representation of war in America, particularly its evolution as a “civic religion” (p. 9). Sylvester’s contention is that gendered understandings of war along with the centrality of militarism shape the curation of war memory: in short, the process of collecting and organizing material objects to convey meaning is political, although it may claim neutrality in its appeal to historical memory. She sees militarism as a dominant narrative that encourages one particular type of curation, albeit through a contested process of remembering and forgetting and including and excluding (p. 18), rather than allowing for the movement among modalities of war experience to collect multiple war stories.

Part Two is an effort to examine these modalities via an examination of sites of memory. In chapter 3, she focuses on the Smithsonian, particularly on the Air and Space Museum and the exhibit at the National Museum of American History titled *The Price of Freedom: Americans At War*. In chapter 4 she focuses on object display at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and in Section 60 of Arlington National Cemetery. The argument about new modalities of war experience manifests most clearly in chapter 5, where she argues for the inclusion of memoirs and novels, including those by the “other side,” to understand war experience, rather than being limited to traditional memorial sites. She notes that “these works foreground the injurious nature of war that cannot be shown in public museum exhibitions and must be subordinated at government gravesites” (p. 168).

In terms of her theoretical approach, Sylvester attempts to straddle the line between anthropocentric and new materialist approaches to agency with a middle road focused on the curation of objects (p. 15), although at times she is clearly critical of the idea of object agency. For example, in chapter 3 she elaborates a critique of the object focus of the display of a Huey helicopter in the Vietnam exhibit in *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War*: she states that “whatever agency the objects have is insufficient to convey war as experience” and overtly notes the limitations of new materialist approaches to object agency (p. 100). Yet an object perhaps need not be sufficient at explaining a phenomenon in order to have agency, because even a story cannot be sufficient in explaining war as experience. At the same time, she invokes the new materialist idea of assemblages as a way of understanding the multiplicity of war experience, yet it is not always clear how the collections of objects and stories act as assemblages. Given the focus on the question of agency, I would have liked to see the idea of curation more thoroughly theorized: Where are the voices of curators? How do they see themselves and their roles? At times, the book focuses on agency in the curation process, whereas elsewhere curators appear as a homogeneous group that

advances national narratives of militarism. Additionally, we are told curators decide what is seen, but there is less discussion about the audience for these works: Who is seeing/who sees? At one point in discussing the Air and Space Museum she asks, “Who does the exhibit think I am as a viewer?” (p. 86)—though she does not fully return to this question or to the subject position of the viewer beyond the militarism framing.

A shining moment in the book that is brief but incisive is her examination of the affective dimensions of war exhibits. Sylvester describes a middle school student and Vietnam veteran who visit *The Price of Freedom* exhibit together (pp. 95–100). The student says the objects smell like war. The veteran says he closes his eyes so as not to see what “they are constructing as the Vietnam War” in the exhibit, and he does not smell what he did in Vietnam, so it does not take him back to that time. This moment, analyzed by Sylvester, is a microcosm for the most interesting contributions of the book: there are variations in the embodied interaction at the museum site, implying the multiple ways in which the same exhibit can be experienced. The response to the exhibit is affective, embodied, and academic. The exhibit exceeds the design of its curators precisely in the language used by the veteran that they are constructing something *as if it is the war itself*.

The book is suffused with an ethical stance to acknowledge heretofore unacknowledged sites of memory and experience and to take account of ordinary people as a means of achieving a more just memory. One of the most well-theorized parts of the book discusses two unconventional memorial sites that pay tribute to both American soldiers and dead Iraqi civilians: Eyes Wide Open and Arlington West. Sylvester theorizes how these memorials are set up in “deliberately ‘wrong’ places” (p. 58), spaces of banality rather than sacred spaces. The language and logic of witnessing underpin the book: although her main focus is on who can authoritatively speak on and represent war, she forces the reader to confront what it may mean to account for war’s impact by witnessing it in the face of the totalizing narrative of militarism, as an ethical stance.

This has important impacts for scholars doing work on affect and embodiment, because Sylvester’s conclusions in the book put readers in a position to look for what can occur between spaces of militarism that can provide access to affective and embodied notions of war. Although she focuses on this access via the mechanism of the museum, memorial, and memoir, readers can envision taking up this approach in the context of other unconventional sites of war representation. In short, not only is this an excellent piece of work in itself but it also lays a framework for future research on unconventional sites and representations of war and provokes additional

questions about the politics of representation and memorialization.

**The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: Why Strategic Superiority Matters.** By Matthew Kroenig. New York: Oxford

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In *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy*, Matthew Kroenig observes a puzzling disjuncture between scholarship and practice in the realm of nuclear strategy. For much of the nuclear age, the United States has sought to achieve “superiority” over its adversaries, maintaining a large, elaborate, and technologically sophisticated nuclear stockpile. Yet a coterie of academic luminaries—including Thomas Schelling, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Jervis, and Charles Glaser— have long criticized this doctrine as both frivolous and dangerous, arguing that deterrence requires only a small and secure nuclear arsenal. Why has US nuclear strategy not followed this prescription?

Although it begins with an intriguing puzzle, the book does not attempt to answer it. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy* does not, in fact, explain the logic driving US nuclear strategy. It does not investigate why the United States has opted for an arsenal of thousands of nuclear weapons deployed on a multitude of advanced delivery platforms. Nor does it explain why the United States has prioritized superiority during some periods but not others. Instead, its purpose is to devise a rationale, rather than an explanation, to justify America’s quest for nuclear supremacy.

The book’s central claim is that nuclear superiority—which it defines as simply having more nuclear weapons than one’s adversary (p. 68)—gives leaders bargaining advantages in nuclear confrontations. It draws heavily from the scholarship of Schelling, who articulated in *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960) how leaders can translate nuclear weapons into political leverage. In high-stakes confrontations, Schelling argued, a sane leader cannot credibly threaten to intentionally start a catastrophic, suicidal nuclear war. But leaders can and do take risky actions that increase the chance of a nuclear war occurring by accident or mistake. Who prevails in a nuclear crisis depends on which side has more nerve in this escalating game of brinkmanship; in other words, who has more resolve in the face of unpredictable danger.

Kroenig makes a minor but important modification to Schelling’s argument: he asserts that resolve is directly tied to the balance of nuclear forces. A state possessing a nuclear advantage is willing to run higher risks of nuclear conflict than its opponent, Kroenig argues, because it would suffer comparatively less damage in a nuclear war. Consequently,