



# **Reject, Recruit, Reject: A Well-Worn Pattern of American Military History Resources for Military-Veteran Transition**

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**BACKGROUND: EXCLUSION OF PEOPLE OF COLOR**



# A History of Service Without Full Belonging

From the nation's founding, the United States military has relied on the labor, loyalty, and sacrifice of people of color—often while simultaneously denying them full inclusion, dignity, or recognition. Military service has long been framed as a pathway to citizenship, honor, and belonging. Yet for Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, Filipino, and later Muslim Americans, that promise was frequently conditional, delayed, or outright denied.

For much of U.S. history, policies explicitly barred people of color from enlistment, confined them to segregated units, excluded them from leadership roles, or limited the benefits afforded to their service.

Black Americans fought in every major U.S. conflict, even as they were segregated, relegated to labor roles, and deemed unfit for combat or command.

Native Americans were drafted and deployed before they were recognized as U.S. citizens.

Asian and Asian American service members were excluded or treated as “enemy aliens,” even as their families were incarcerated at home.



# A History of Service Without Full Belonging

Filipino soldiers who fought under U.S. command in World War II were later stripped of promised benefits.

Latino service members faced discrimination both within the ranks and upon returning home.

After 9/11, Muslim Americans who volunteered to serve encountered suspicion, surveillance, and accusations of disloyalty simply because of their faith.

These exclusions were not only structural—they were deeply personal. They shaped how service members understood their worth, their identity, and their relationship to the country they pledged to defend. Being asked to risk one's life while being told, implicitly or explicitly, that you do not fully belong inflicts a particular kind of harm: moral injury rooted in contradiction.

Understanding this history matters not to diminish military service, but to tell the truth about it. The modern U.S. military is more diverse than ever, yet the legacy of exclusion still shapes trust, opportunity, and experience for many veterans and service members today. Recognizing this past is essential to building workplaces, institutions, and communities where service is honored with equity—not just in words, but in practice.



**BACKGROUND: WOMEN'S MILITARY SERVICE AND EXCLUSION**



# A History of Service Without Full Authority

Women have always served in the U.S. military, long before they were formally allowed to join it.

From the nation's earliest conflicts, women worked as nurses, cooks, messengers, and logisticians, often in dangerous conditions and without rank, pay equity, or official recognition.

Their labor was essential yet consistently framed as auxiliary rather than authoritative.

When women were formally admitted into military service in the 20th century, their participation came with strict limits. They were confined to specific roles, excluded from combat and command, capped in number, and routinely forced out due to marriage, pregnancy, or shifting political priorities.

Even as women proved their competence and leadership in wartime, their service was frequently treated as temporary—welcome in moments of crisis, expendable in moments of peace.



# A History of Service Without Full Authority

These exclusions were not only structural; they were deeply personal.

Women service members learned early that excellence did not guarantee opportunity, that leadership was conditional, and that their commitment to service was often met with skepticism rather than trust.

For women of color, these barriers were compounded by racism, segregation, and erasure, creating a double bind that shaped both military and post-military experiences.

Understanding the history of women's exclusion is essential to understanding today's veteran workforce.

Many women veterans arrive in civilian workplaces with advanced leadership skills, operational experience, and resilience—alongside lived experience navigating bias, invisibility, and unequal standards.

Honoring women's service requires more than recognition; it requires systems that translate service into equitable opportunity, safety, and advancement.

# A TimeLine of Service, Exclusion and Employer Responsibility



**1775–1865**

**Colonial Era & Early Republic**

Black and Indigenous people served in America’s earliest wars while being denied citizenship, freedom, or sovereignty.

**What this means for employers:**

Some veterans enter the workplace carrying generational distrust of institutions that demanded loyalty without offering protection or opportunity



**1861–1877**

**Civil War & Reconstruction**

Black soldiers fought to end slavery in segregated units, earning less pay and fewer protections. Native Americans were drawn into conflicts that further destabilized their communities.

**What this means for employers:**

Advancement systems have not historically worked the same for everyone—fair promotion and pay practices cannot be assumed; they must be examined.



**1917–1918**

**World War I**

People of color were drafted in large numbers but often assigned to labor roles. Native Americans served before being recognized as U.S. citizens. Asian immigrants were largely excluded.

**What this means for employers:**

Skills and leadership potential may be overlooked when bias determines who is seen as “fit” for responsibility.

# A TimeLine of Service, Exclusion and Employer Responsibility



## 1941–1945 World War II

Muslim Americans volunteered to serve yet often faced suspicion, surveillance, and accusations of disloyalty.

**What this means for employers:** Bias can follow employees into the workplace—religious and cultural inclusion must be actively protected.



## 1948–1970s Desegregation & Post-War Era

The military was formally desegregated, but inequities in leadership, benefits, and recognition persisted.

**What this means for employers:** Policy change alone is insufficient; inclusion requires accountability, follow-through, and measurement.



## 1955–1975 Vietnam Era

Black and Latino men were drafted at disproportionate rates and returned to a divided nation with limited support.

**What this means for employers:** Veterans may carry unacknowledged trauma and disengagement rooted in being used, then forgotten—support systems matter.

# A Timeline of Service, Exclusion and Employer Responsibility



## 2001–Present

### Post-9/11 Era

Muslim Americans volunteered to serve yet often faced suspicion, surveillance, and accusations of disloyalty.

**What this means for employers:** Bias can follow employees into the workplace—religious and cultural inclusion must be actively protected.



## Today

### The Employer Moment

Veterans and military-connected employees arrive with deep leadership, resilience, and skill—alongside histories shaped by exclusion.

**Employer responsibility:** Create workplaces where service is met with equity, trust, opportunity, and belonging—not just gratitude.



**IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY'S EMPLOYERS**

# Implications for Today's Employers

The history of exclusion in the U.S. military is not a distant or abstract reality—it directly shapes how veterans and military-connected employees experience today's workplaces. Many arrive with extraordinary leadership, discipline, adaptability, and mission focus, alongside lived experience navigating systems that demanded service without consistently offering equity, safety, or belonging. **For employers, this history carries real implications.**

## Trust Cannot Be Assumed



For generations, service members from marginalized communities were asked to demonstrate loyalty in environments that did not fully protect or value them. As a result, some veterans may enter civilian workplaces with a cautious relationship to institutions, authority, or promises of advancement.

### Implication for employers:

Trust is built through consistent action, transparent decision-making, follow-through on commitments, and leaders who demonstrate credibility over time.

## Leadership May Not Look the Way Employers Expect



Many veterans of color and women veterans held leadership roles that were informal, situational, or constrained by policy, bias, or exclusion. Their experience may not align neatly with traditional corporate leadership archetypes or titles.

### Implication for employers:

Assess capability, not just credentials. Rigid definitions of “leadership potential” risk replicating the same exclusion veterans experienced in uniform.

## Trauma and Moral Injury May Be Invisible—but Impactful



Beyond combat-related trauma, many veterans carry **moral injury**—the psychological toll of serving systems that conflicted with their values or treated them as expendable, suspect, or unequal. This can show up as disengagement, hypervigilance, reluctance to self-advocate, or hesitation to trust management.

### Implication for employers:

Support systems matter. Manager training, psychological safety, flexibility, and access to culturally competent resources are essential, not optional.

# Implications for Today's Employers: Moving Forward

Honoring veteran service is not only about recognition or gratitude. It is about ensuring that service translates into **equitable opportunity, psychological safety, and belonging** in civilian life. The section that follows outlines concrete resources and actions employers can take to move from awareness to impact.

## Bias Can Follow Veterans Into Civilian Workplaces



Racial, gender, religious, and cultural biases that shaped military experiences do not automatically disappear after service. Veterans from marginalized groups may continue to face assumptions about competence, loyalty, temperament, or “fit.”

### **Implication for employers:**

Inclusive hiring, onboarding, and performance systems must be intentional. Neutral policies alone do not prevent inequitable outcomes.

## One-Size-Fits-All Veteran Programs Fall Short



Veterans are not a monolith. Women veterans, veterans of color, LGBTQ+ veterans, Guard and Reserve members, and disabled veterans often have distinct experiences and needs that generic programs fail to address.

### **Implication for employers:**

Effective veteran inclusion requires differentiated support—by role, identity, life stage, and transition experience.

## Employers Are Part of the Continuum of Service



For many veterans, the civilian workplace is the next institution they must learn to trust. How employers show up—through policies, culture, and leadership—can either interrupt or extend a long history of conditional inclusion.

### **Implication for employers:**

Workplaces can become sites of repair, or repetition. The difference lies in intentional design, accountability, and leadership commitment.



**RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS**

# Resources for Employers

Honoring veteran service is not only about recognition or gratitude. It is about ensuring that service translates into **equitable opportunity, psychological safety, and belonging** in civilian life. The section that follows outlines concrete resources and actions employers can take to move from awareness to impact.

## U.S. Federal and Public-Sector Veteran Employment Resources

**Best for:** compliance, foundational education, transition support, and benefits navigation.

### U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

*What it offers:* Benefits education, Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E), Veteran Readiness, healthcare and accommodations guidance

*Why employers use it:* Understanding benefits, disability accommodations, and veteran support structures

### U.S. Department of Labor – Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS)

*What it offers:* Employer toolkits, Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) guidance

*Why employers use it:* Legal compliance, reemployment rights, supervisor training

### Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

*What it offers:* Career readiness, resume translation, civilian job preparation

*Why employers use it:* Aligning hiring pipelines with military transition timelines

## Veteran Hiring, Recruiting and Pipeline Program

**Best for:** talent acquisition, workforce planning, skills translation.

### Hiring Our Heroes

*What it offers:* Corporate fellowships, hiring events, military spouse programs

*Why employers use it:* Proven pipelines from military to corporate roles

### American Corporate Partners (ACP)

*What it offers:* 1-on-1 mentoring for veterans and spouses

*Why employers use it:* Retention, professional development, leadership readiness

### Veterati

*What it offers:* On-demand mentoring with senior executives

*Why employers use it:* Accelerating veteran advancement, sponsorship models

### SkillBridge

*What it offers:* DoD-approved internships during last 180 days of service

*Why employers use it:* "Try-before-you-hire" model with minimal risk

## Disability, Mental Health and Well-Being Resources

**Best for:** inclusive workplaces, accommodations, psychological safety.

### Wounded Warrior Project

*What it offers:* Mental health programs, caregiver support, employer education

*Why employers use it:* Trauma-informed approaches and reintegration support

### PsychArmor

*What it offers:* Free courses on military culture, PTSD, TBI, moral injury

*Why employers use it:* Manager training and DEI education

### Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

*What it offers:* Accommodation guidance for disabilities (including invisible injuries)

*Why employers use it:* Practical, legally sound accommodation solutions

# Resources for Employers



**Best for:** dual-career retention, mobility-aware policies, equity.

## **Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)**

*What it offers:* Employer network, spouse hiring initiatives

*Why employers use it:* Reducing turnover caused by relocation

## **Blue Star Families**

*What it offers:* Research, spouse career support, employer insights

*Why employers use it:* Understanding family impacts on workforce stability



**Best for:** strategy, benchmarking, leadership signaling.

## **Veteran Jobs Mission**

*What it offers:* Best practices, data, peer learning

*Why employers use it:* Scaling veteran hiring across large organizations

## **Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)**

*What it offers:* Veteran-inclusive HR policies, toolkits, research

*Why employers use it:* Integrating veteran inclusion into HR systems



**Best for:** inclusion, belonging, leadership education.

## **Center for Veterans and Military Families (Syracuse University)**

*What it offers:* Research on veteran transitions, employer toolkits

*Why employers use it:* Evidence-based inclusion strategies

## **Institute for Veterans and Military Families**

*What it offers:* Employer research, data, program design

*Why employers use it:* Designing sustainable veteran initiatives

# Resources Mapped to the Employee Life Cycle



**Goal:** Signal commitment, reduce self-selection out, build trust.

## Employer Use Cases

Military-friendly employer branding  
Community credibility  
Outreach to transitioning service members/spouses

## Key Resources

**Veteran Jobs Mission** – Public commitment, employer signaling, peer benchmarks

<https://www.veteranjobsmission.com>

**Hiring Our Heroes** – Military-focused career fairs and employer visibility

<https://www.hiringourheroes.org>

**Blue Star Families** – Insights into what veterans and families value in employers

<https://bluestarfam.org>

**Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)**

– Veteran-inclusive employer branding guidance  
family impacts on workforce stability

<https://www.shrm.org>



**Goal:** Translate military experience fairly and expand qualified talent pools.

## Employer Use Cases

Skills translation  
Bias reduction in screening  
Veteran-friendly hiring pipelines

## Key Resources

**Hiring Our Heroes** – Fellowships, military spouse hiring pathways

<https://www.hiringourheroes.org>

**SkillBridge** – Internship-to-hire model during last 180 days of service

<https://skillbridge.osd.mil>

**U.S. Department of Labor – VETS** – Veteran hiring toolkits and recruiter education

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets>

**Institute for Veterans and Military Families** – Research on military-to-civilian skills alignment

<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu>



**Goal:** Reduce culture shock and accelerate performance.

## Employer Use Cases

Military-to-corporate transition support  
Manager education  
Psychological safety

## Key Resources

**Transition Assistance Program (TAP)** – Career readiness frameworks

<https://www.dodtap.mil>

**PsychArmor** – Training on military culture, PTSD, TBI, moral injury

<https://psycharmor.org>

**American Corporate Partners (ACP)** – Early-stage mentoring during transition

<https://www.acp-usa.org>

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** – Understanding benefits, disability and adjustment needs

<https://www.va.gov>

# Resources Mapped to the Employee Life Cycle



**Goal:** Prevent veteran under-leveling and stalled careers.

## Employer Use Cases

Leadership development  
Sponsorship and mentoring  
Career pathway clarity

## Key Resources

**Veterati** – Executive-level mentoring and sponsorship

<https://www.veterati.com>

**American Corporate Partners (ACP)** – Career navigation and advancement support

<https://www.acp-usa.org>

**Center for Veterans and Military Families (Syracuse University)** – Evidence-based development insights

<https://cvms.syracuse.edu>

**Institute for Veterans and Military Families** – Veteran leadership research and employer strategy

<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu>



**Goal:** Address invisible barriers and prevent burnout or disengagement.

## Employer Use Cases

Mental health and disability inclusion  
Manager capability  
Veteran ERGs

## Key Resources

**Wounded Warrior Project** – Mental health programs and employer education

<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>

**Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** –

Disability and accommodation guidance

<https://askjan.org>

**PsychArmor** – Trauma-informed leadership training

<https://psycharmor.org>

**Blue Star Families** – Retention insights tied to family stressors

<https://bluestarfam.org>



**Goal:** Comply with the law and protect employee trust.

## Employer Use Cases

Military leave policies  
Reserve and Guard reintegration  
Legal risk mitigation

## Key Resources

**U.S. Department of Labor – USERRA (via VETS)** – Reemployment rights and compliance

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/userra>

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** – Benefit continuity and support navigation

<https://www.va.gov>

**Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)** – Policy templates and HR guidance

<https://www.shrm.org>

# Resources Mapped to the Employee Life Cycle



**Goal:** Preserve goodwill and long-term employer brand.

## Employer Use Cases

Veteran alumni engagement  
Ethical offboarding  
Reputation management

## Key Resources

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** – Benefits transition and support services

<https://www.va.gov>

**Hiring Our Heroes** – Re-entry pathways for future roles

<https://www.hiringourheroes.org>

**Veteran Jobs Mission** – Continued employer accountability

<https://www.veteranjobsmission.com>



Most employers **over-index on hiring veterans** and under-invest in:

- Onboarding
- Manager readiness
- Advancement
- Retention

This lifecycle approach shifts veteran inclusion from a **recruiting program** to a **workforce equity strategy**.



# References

## **U.S. MILITARY HISTORY (OFFICIAL)**

### **U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH)**

<https://history.army.mil>

### **Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC)**

<https://www.history.navy.mil>

### **Marine Corps History Division**

<https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division>

### **Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA)**

<https://www.afhra.af.mil>

### **U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office**

<https://www.history.uscg.mil>

### **Joint History Office (Joint Chiefs of Staff)**

<https://www.jcs.mil/About/The-Joint-Staff/Joint-Staff-History>

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND DOD INSTITUTIONS**

### **Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI)**

<https://www.deomi.mil>



# References

## EXECUTIVE ORDERS & FEDERAL POLICY

### **Federal Register – Executive Orders**

<https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders>

### **National Archives – Executive Orders**

<https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders>

### **Congress.gov (Legislation & History)**

<https://www.congress.gov>

### **GovInfo (Official Government Publications)**

<https://www.govinfo.gov>

## U.S. MILITARY SERVICE ACADEMIES (HISTORY & ARCHIVES)

### **U.S. Military Academy (West Point) – History & Archives**

<https://history.westpoint.edu>

### **U.S. Naval Academy – Nimitz Library & Archives**

<https://www.usna.edu/Library/Archives>

### **U.S. Air Force Academy – History & Heritage**

<https://www.usafa.edu/history>

### **U.S. Coast Guard Academy – History & Library**

<https://www.uscga.edu/history>