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The Literary Afterlife
of the Korean War

You understand that all of our periods have been defined by war. All of them. War's about the acquisition of wealth and land, period. And then somehow it's not about any of that. . . . When is it going to be over? When is the end? We talk about it like it's a theater.—Toni Morrison (2013)

On February 27, 2013, Toni Morrison spoke at Google New York about her Korean War novel *Home* (2012), the cultural memory of the 1950s, and the enduring state of American warfare. Since 2005, Google has hosted Authors@Google, a series of hour-long literary conversations, at its home offices in Mountain View, California, and at its East Coast base in Manhattan's Meatpacking District. Guests have included novelists Paul Auster, Jennifer Egan, Junot Díaz, Alice Walker, and Jonathan Safran Foer, as well as many nonfiction writers and intellectuals (www.google.com/talks/). As it has with nearly everything else, Google is beginning to leave its mark on contemporary American literature. Authors@Google has come to symbolize literary celebrity in the same way that *Charlie Rose* once did. And yet there is something contradictory about Morrison's work being discussed at one of the largest, most future-driven technology companies in the world. Whereas Morrison has committed her career to excavating and rewriting the violences of American history, Google's goal is, as founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin emphasize on the company's home page, "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (www.google.com/about/company/). On the surface, Morrison's and Google's aims might appear similar, even in agreement that information must not be merely recovered but

American Literature, Volume 87, Number 1, March 2015
DOI 10.1215/00029831-2865199 © 2015 by Duke University Press

organized. Morrison crafts stories from historical knowledge. Google coordinates search results from big data. These are both, in different ways, structured narrative acts. The difference of course is that Morrison as a fiction writer has always worked to reanimate counterhistories, those traumas left out of or rationalized by official national histories, whereas Google is in the business of further foregrounding the most-read, most-viewed, and most-advertised information online, the information of hegemony. The centrality of the state to this process would become evident only months after Morrison's talk with the revelation that Google had shared its troves of user information with PRISM, the surveillance data-mining program operated by the National Security Agency (see Claire Cain Miller, "Tech Companies Concede to Surveillance Program," *New York Times*, June 7, 2013). Morrison had been a leading critic of the war on terror, a presentist undercurrent in *Home*, while her New York host was, we would later learn, altogether entangled with the homeland security state and the growing and unregulated field of cyberwarfare.

Morrison could not have known this at the time, but her talk highlighted a long prehistory to the war on terror and the military-technological complex on which it was built. Discussing why she chose to write about the 1950s, Morrison (2013) stated that she was interested in "taking the skin or the scab off of our view of the fifties in this country." The post-World War II and pre-Civil Rights era arouses a powerful sense of nostalgia among conservatives, "American dream stuff," Morrison called it. In New York, she underscored three historical knowledges left out of this fantasy: the Korean War, which "we're still fighting"; anticommunism and McCarthyism; and hazardous medical and scientific testing on soldiers, prisoners, and the lower classes. Morrison cited the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study, in which the US Public Health Service monitored but did not treat the disease in hundreds of impoverished African American sharecroppers in Macon County, Alabama, from 1932 to 1972 (see "Bad Blood" 2007). And she referred to the US military's testing of LSD, tear gas, and lethal nerve agents on American soldiers from 1952 to 1975 at secret laboratories in Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland (see Raffi Khatchadourian, "Operation Delirium," *New Yorker*, December 7, 2012; and "Secrets of Edgewood," *New Yorker*, December 26, 2012). The US warfare state has, Morrison stressed, always relied on its ability to achieve narrative control (McCarthyism) and mobilize biological and technological authority

(Tuskegee and Edgewood Arsenal) to rationalize and effect violence. The cultural logic of war is engineered at the intersection of storytelling and biopower. PRISM is a digital outgrowth of this narrative logic, which, as Morrison suggests, does not originate from September 2001 but rather informs much if not all of American history.

Referring to the Korean War as a record that had become scabbed over with time, Morrison mobilized the “forgotten war” framework by which Korea is most often understood in the United States, as a war that is lost to memory amid the more legible wars bookending it. In this account, the Korean War is forgotten in the United States and the work of the artist or cultural critic is to remember it, to recover this neglected knowledge. Morrison’s perspective on the Korean War also, however, troubles this bifurcated understanding of history in which the past is either remembered or forgotten, known or not known. Turning from her interviewer to the audience, she noted that the Korean War was not over—an armistice, not a peace treaty, was signed in 1953; and there are still forty thousand American military personnel stationed in South Korea today (J. Kim 2010, 144; Cumings 2009, 395)—nor would it be: “You understand that all of our periods have been defined by war. All of them. . . . When is it going to be over? When is the end? We talk about it like it’s a theater” (Morrison 2013). The Korean War was forgotten, and in some ways it was, as Bruce Cumings (2010, 62–63) has argued, “never known.” But the Korean War was also *narrativized away*. When the Truman administration characterized Korea as not a war but a “police action” and its aim not empire building but “defending humanity,” it had struck on the rhetorical basis for permanent war. The Korean War would surface in US media and art over the course of the 1950s and 1960s as well, but always as a discrete and remote event, forgettable if not exactly forgotten. Noting that Americans understand war as a “theater,” Morrison recognizes that narrative is among the warfare state’s most powerful technologies. The military state building conceived of in National Security Council (NSC) Reports 48 and 68 and enacted in Korea has endured the end of the Cold War and the ideological ascendancy of neoliberalism thanks to the narrative belief that war ends, that war must by definition conclude.

With the war on terror well into its second decade, Morrison is among many literary authors beginning to challenge the narrative structuring of the permanent warfare state by returning to the Korean War. It was Korea—aggravated by the “loss” of China in 1949—that

provided the rationale for building a permanent standing military and a global network of more than seven hundred military installations throughout Europe and Asia. Many of these authors trace the rhetorical and material origin of the war on terror back to 1945, when the United States established a military government in Korea, and 1950, when the war began in earnest. Those mining this history include some of the most acclaimed American novelists writing today: Ha Jin in *War Trash* (2004), Philip Roth in *Indignation* (2008), Chang-rae Lee in *The Surrendered* (2010), and Morrison in *Home*. Whereas World War II laid the economic groundwork for today's warfare state, the Korean War in many ways introduced the narrative logic of permanent war, creating the idea of preemptive, "limited" war making in the interest of defending humanity against its own perceived ideological degeneracies. In this way literature becomes a critical terrain for negotiating and contesting the narrative structuring of the American warfare state. These literary works make clear that history is not only about remembering and forgetting but is also structured by the gray areas of narrative.

In considering the literary afterlife of the Korean War, I begin with an analysis of the biopolitical logic of defense that arose after World War II during a time of American global ascendancy and heightened anticommunism. Second, I discuss the understanding of the Korean War as "forgotten," an idea first introduced in 1951 but more recently taken up by memory studies scholars, before advancing an alternative narrative theory of the Korean War. And finally, I consider the twenty-first-century literary return of the Korean War through readings of Jin's *War Trash* and Morrison's *Home*. These novels advance counter-narratives of the Korean War. Refusing the bracketed, three-year history of the war, they instead reveal the basis of an enduring warfare state in Korea and locate the war on terror in this legacy.

The Biopolitical Logic of American Global Ascendancy

While governing the southern Korean Peninsula in the late 1940s, the US military underwent an organizational and rhetorical transformation. Twenty-two months after the end of World War II, the National Security Act of 1947 restructured the armed forces, bringing the Army and Navy together under a single banner and creating the Department of the Air Force (NARA 1947). The centralized National Military Establishment (NME) was the result. Often characterized as a watershed in American

military history and the founding of the Cold War national security state, the NME in truth had limited power. Its first secretary, James Forrestal, commanded only a skeleton staff and had almost no authority over the secretaries of the services (Smith and Miller 2011, 96–98). This would change with the National Security Act Amendments of 1949. The amendments were intended to reorganize the “fiscal management” of the NME by hiring a comptroller who from then on would allocate budgets to the Army, Navy, Air Force, and intelligence agencies that fell under the direction of the secretary (NARA 1949). In a statement announcing the amendments, Harry Truman (1949) referred to this as a “performance-type” budget that would give the NME greater “flexibility in the control and use of funds.” In effect, the amendments insured that the two-year-old centralized military office would be able to work secretly and with far less fiscal oversight, no longer having to share specific budgetary decisions with Congress.

The “short Korean War” would provide the rationale for flooding this restructured office with funding—the military budget would climb from \$13 to \$56 billion over the first five months of combat (Cumings 2009, 390)—moving the national security state into full swing. But the National Security Act Amendments of 1949 are significant in signaling a rhetorical shift in American military affairs. It was with these amendments that the National Military Establishment, the former Department of War, would become the Department of Defense (DoD). The United States would no longer make war, nor would it define itself on the world stage in terms of “nation” or “military.” Rather, in forming the DoD, the United States was beginning to articulate itself as the defender of a normatively defined global humanity, securing civilized society from the ideological degeneracies of communism, fascism, totalitarianism, and terrorism. According to this logic, World War II was the last “true” war, and the wars that came after could only be “conflicts,” “hostilities,” or “operations.” This would be reinforced in NSC-68. Often characterized as the master document of Cold War containment policy, NSC-68 was not intended to reevaluate foreign policy so much as break down the state’s refusal to raise the military budget with rhetorical bluster (Johnston 2005, 84). When he received the report in April 1950, however, Truman was unwilling to authorize the recommendations made. It would take the beginning of the Korean War that summer for the document to receive his endorsement. In Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s words, Korea

“prove[d] our thesis” and “created the stimulus which made action” (84). NSC-68 begins with two subsections titled “Fundamental Purpose of the United States” and “Fundamental Design of the Kremlin,” respectively. The former states:

The fundamental purpose of the United States is laid down in the Preamble to the Constitution: “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” In essence, the fundamental purpose is to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual. (NSC 1950, 5)

By citing the preamble to the Constitution, the authors of NSC-68 cast the interventionism being advocated as continuous with the nation’s founding. Cleverly, the summary offered (“in essence”) reframes this “purpose” in global rather than national terms; the North American “Union” becomes “free society” and “the individual” broadly defined. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, does not have a purpose but a global “design” and is defined not as a nation but a government (“the Kremlin”). The purpose of the United States is no longer to “provide for the common defence” of the nation but the world as well, thereby necessitating an American-led “police action” on the far-flung Korean Peninsula.¹

This was the biopolitical logic of American global ascendancy. In reversing military theorist Carl von Clausewitz’s famous claim, Michel Foucault (2003, 16) argued that politics is, and has always been, the “continuation of war by other means.” And yet in the twentieth century this warfare is articulated as anything but, as organized state violence shifts from a system of “race war”—violence carried out by one race on another—to one of state racism. In the latter system, there is assumed to be a single human race, and it is the state’s objective to defend this humanity from its own deformities and degeneracies. The primary locus of state power moves from the body (man-as-living-being) to the population (man-as-species), from disciplinary power to biopower. And while contemporary theories of biopolitics tend to focus on the nation-as-population under siege from the globalizing world, biopolitics, as it was first conceived by Foucault, is a world politics and a “relationship of war” (255). The contaminated segments of the human race must be

eradicated in order to preserve the health of the species's normative core—as in war, this is rationalized as taking life in order to live. This is why the national security state so entirely conflated “national objectives” with the “survival of the free world.” In the wake of World War II, the state set out to secure not merely the nation but what it defined as “free society,” a world ecology under threat from degenerate communism. This biopolitical logic necessitates that the state act predictively and preemptively according to risk estimates and forecasts, thereby constructing a spectral enemy and setting a course for permanent war. In Korea, the specter of continuous warfare necessitated a new narrative framework for military violence, in which war was never exactly war and the enemy never entirely sovereign.

A Narrative Theory of the Forgotten War

By most accounts, the Korean War did not inaugurate a narrative shift in American warfare but instead lacks narrative form altogether. Korea has never attracted the memory culture that other twentieth-century wars do. Whereas World War II and Vietnam are the focus of countless documentary and Hollywood films, memorials and museums, and commemorative celebrations, the Korean War is almost always characterized as a side note—either an aftershock of World War II, a precursor to Vietnam, or a brief stage in the Cold War. Korea is remembered only for not being remembered, as the “forgotten war.” This moniker was first coined in a 1951 article in *US News and World Report*, nearly two years before the armistice agreement was signed in Panmunjom (October 5, 21). Titled “Korea: The ‘Forgotten’ War,” the article contradicts itself by discussing what the war means to Americans while suggesting that it is being disregarded just the same: “Korea, half forgotten, is receding in the minds of many to the status of an experimental war, one being fought back and forth for the purpose of testing men, weapons, materials and methods, on a continuing basis.” The Korean War is being disremembered precisely because it is ongoing, carried out on a “continuing basis” and “with no end in sight.” For Americans at this time, according to *US News*, permanent war is forgettable in a way “traditional” warfare is not. In contrast to the European theater, which came to epitomize what war is and should be, Korea is merely an “experimental” war laboratory. But why would the idea of a permanent, technoscientific war in East Asia provoke less and not more public

awareness and unease? Why does the “status of an experimental war” fought without end make the Korean War recede from Americans’ minds? What is so forgettable about the forgotten war?

The most thorough engagement with these issues in the last decade has come from cultural memory studies, a field that is notable for its work on American wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Memory studies scholars interrogate the organized and strategic forgetting that informs official history making, and they look to unofficial memory discourses to unearth counterhistories of organized state violence. The Korean War, known by a memory lack in the United States, is a natural subject for these scholars. This growing body of work includes studies by Grace Cho (2008), Suhi Choi (2014), Daniel Kim (2009), Eleana Kim (2010), Jodi Kim (2010), Christina Klein (2003), and Marilyn Young (2013). Literary critic Jodi Kim (2010, 5, 145–46) has, for example, argued that Asian American cultural production advances an “unsettling hermeneutic” in which fragmentary knowledge of the Korean diaspora is brought to bear on the dominant American understanding of the war: as a minor and forgotten military defense action, a proxy war between good and evil, the United States and the Soviet Union. The work of the artist and critic is to “capture what is repressed in U.S. national memory . . . to account for and connect what is left out of hegemonic European and American perspectives and texts in U.S. Cold War historiography” (10). Yet, while the necessity of this work is undeniable, the very rubric of remembering/forgetting or repression/dissemination has the effect of limiting the strategies by which scholars might interrogate this Cold War historiography. When knowledge is understood in terms of cultural remembering and state-sanctioned forgetting, cultural criticism becomes an entirely additive undertaking, remembering in the absence of memory. If, however, we consider how “hegemonic European and American perspectives and texts” do in fact remember and narrativize organized state violence in specific and expedient ways, we might begin to see the Korean War not as forgotten but as strategically remembered in American culture.

This strategic remembering is evident in the *US News* article, wherein the Korean War is forgotten as a result of the way it is remembered (“experimental” and “continuing”) and, even stranger, remembered as forgotten. The fact that this article was referring to Korea as “forgotten” long before the armistice agreement—the end date to the short Korean War—gives credence to Cumings’s claim that the war

was not so much forgotten as “never known” within the United States. Cumings, the best-known American historian of the Korean War, has long argued that Korea should not be understood as forgotten because forgetting entails an initial and reversed period of remembering. The Korean War was, rather, never known by Americans. But these two understandings of the war, as forgotten and never known, are not exactly conflicting. The Korean War was never well understood within the United States, and what was known was disremembered as the Vietnam War escalated and the DMZ became familiarized, a permanent rather than temporary solution to the war. But Cumings’s account nevertheless replicates the bifurcated logic of remembering/forgetting, characterizing war as either known or not known, one or the other. By shifting the analytic focus to a narrative theory of the Korean War, I am suggesting that Korea was not merely forgotten or never known but also narratively constructed as a not-exactly war with a nonsovereign enemy for which an ending was imagined and imposed. This narrative structuring produces forgetting and a lack of historical knowledge, but it also provokes an anxiety that crystallizes around narratives of permanent war. The *US News* article, for instance, brackets off the Korean War as already forgotten while still evoking the presence of a permanent (“continuing basis”), biopolitical (“experimental”) warfare state. Korea is not lost to memory but rather a site of contradictory narrative negotiations, and this was as true then as it is today.

The Literary Afterlife of the Korean War

Jin’s and Morrison’s Korean War novels contribute to a discursive conflict over where to locate the war on terror in American history. While defenders of counterterrorism have often crafted analogies to World War II, Jin’s novel *War Trash* interrogates the war on terror through the historical lens of the Korean War. Troubling the reductive account of Korea cultivated in the *US News* article, the novel restores the war’s complexity and biological dynamic with a nod to today’s homeland security state. And while it garnered a PEN/Faulkner Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the novel has received little attention from literary scholars. *War Trash* is narrated as the memoir of a Chinese veteran and former prisoner of war (POW) during Korea. In the novel’s twenty-first-century present, Yu Yuan is visiting his son and grandchildren in Atlanta, where he sits down to record what he witnessed in the war. This framing device then falls away until the end of

the novel. In the late 1940s, Yuan is a cadet at the Nationalist Huangpu Military Academy. The Communist Revolution leads to a change in name and curriculum, and after graduating Yuan is assigned to the 180th Division of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Not long after entering combat, he is injured and captured by the Americans. He is sent first to a prison camp on Kojima Island and then to one on Cheju Island. Devoted to neither the Communist nor the Nationalist cause, Yuan nevertheless finds himself at the center of the action throughout the war due to his abilities as an English translator. *War Trash* conveys an alternative narrative arc of the Korean War, one that invites complexity and neither begins nor ends in the early 1950s. Framed by the present-day homeland security state, Jin foregrounds the biopolitical logic of postwar warfare in which all are, though differentially, constituted in relation to a normative and politicized global population, the "war trash" of a permanent war that began long before September 11, 2001.

The novel, Jin's fourth, troubles the generic boundaries of fiction and history. Framed as a memoir endeavoring to "preserve historical accuracy" (2004, 5), it provides a commentary on history as itself a narrative act, as something structured by the devices of storytelling as well as the power relations within which it is written. In the book's back matter, Jin lists the historical works he consulted, noting that while this is a "work of fiction," most of the "events and details, however, are factual" (2004, 351). In fact, in 2005, one of the listed authors, Zhang Ze-shi, accused Jin of plagiarizing his work (Xinqiu 2012, 35–36). Whether or not Zhang's allegations are accurate, it is clear that *War Trash*, like many works of historical fiction, invites a bimodal reading as an imaginative entry into historical discourse. And this is what Jin (2008, 30) himself has characterized as the cultural work of the fiction writer, as "not just a chronicler, but also a shaper, an alchemist, of historical experiences." In his Korean War novel specifically, this is manifest in the way he renarrates the war by foregrounding the global systems of biopower that underwrote it and continue to regulate life in today's militarized global community. Jin's list of consulted works reminds us that the Korean War is not exactly forgotten but rather narrativized away as being without urgency, as having no bearing on the contemporary world. His novel, however, tells a different story. Neither dissolving Korea into the Cold War nor conflating it with Vietnam, Jin's fiction unsettles American history's account of the war and reveals a lasting biopolitical turn in global warfare.

While *War Trash* does render Korea as a mid-century event, it nevertheless locates it within an enduring state of warfare, as one origin of George W. Bush's counterterrorism. The novel begins and ends in present-day Atlanta where Yuan is concerned by an old tattoo on his stomach, which reads, "FUCK . . . U . . . S" This tattoo, we later learn, was branded on him by Nationalists (those who would immigrate to Taiwan or "free China" after the signing of the armistice) on Koje Island as "FUCK COMMUNISM" and later altered in China to an anti-American message (Jin 2004, 3). Two weeks after arriving in the United States, Yuan reflects, "Like a talisman, the tattoo has protected me in China for almost five decades. Before coming to the States, I wondered whether I should have it removed. I decided not to . . . [because] word would have spread and the authorities, suspecting I wouldn't return, might have revoked my passport." But in Georgia, he adds, the tattoo "has become a constant concern. When I was clearing customs in Atlanta two weeks ago, my heart fluttered like a trapped pigeon, afraid that the husky, cheerful-voiced officer might suspect something—that he might lead me into a room and order me to undress. The tattoo could have caused me to be refused entry to the States" (3). Yuan's tattoo is a discernable sign of the political instrumentation of his body during the war; a non-ideologue, he is branded by the Nationalists and must later have the tattoo modified in order to repatriate. This "talisman" has "protected" him for half a century until he encounters the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at the Atlanta airport. While the tattoo has receded from his consciousness in China, once he enters the US homeland security state, Yuan is again worried about the political content of his body, as a thing to be concealed, regulated, monitored, and "refused entry." From the very first scene, Jin's novel undermines the idea of discrete wartimes, instead casting the war on terror as a legacy of Korea.² Yuan's anxiety over his encounter with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) most visible agency speaks to this continuity. Entering the United States not long after Bush declared his war on terror, he recalls the unease and biological vulnerability of the Korean War that, as Morrison noted, "we're still fighting."

Throughout the novel, Yuan's status as what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life" (and Yuan calls "war trash") crystallizes around the political meaning of his involuntary tattoo. Bare life is not, as Agamben (1998, 28–29) writes, constituted through a ban from the political realm but is rather abandoned at a threshold that is neither altogether inside nor

outside the political. This biological body is prevented from partaking in political life and yet is the very locus of political power, the terrain of biopower. Yuan's tattoo is an indicator of this abandoned state. Never converted to either the Nationalist or Communist movements on the islands, Yuan is nevertheless the biological stakes of this political world, tattooed by one and then the other, before nervously entering the homeland security state with "FUCK . . . U . . . S . . ." written in ink across his stomach. He is situated within a global biological community that is constructed and monitored by a network of sovereign authorities, whether China, the United Nations, or the DHS.

Agamben (1998, 187–88) argues that bare life is today being rendered not only visible but universal, as the threshold (the zone of indifference or "state of exception") becomes normalized throughout the world. But this universality might become the basis for a counterhegemonic revolt in which the biopolitical body reenters the political realm precisely as such, as bare life. And yet Yuan's "memoir" suggests something different about biopower in the twenty-first century: bare life is never produced universally but differentially, and this differentiability is forever shifting and transforming. By the time Yuan is shuttling through customs in Atlanta, China is no longer an enemy but an economic partner with and rival to the United States. Yuan's fluttering heart is, then, informed by his memory of the Korean War at its height. But he also recognizes that the TSA agent's "cheerful-voiced" warmth toward him is conditional. His treatment as a guest in the country might come to an end if his tattoo were to be revealed. He may be "refused entry." So while the United States has become more welcoming to Chinese nationals, Yuan understands that biopolitical bodies are always produced differentially and changeably. In this regard, Jin's frame narrative makes clear the way in which biopower is founded not on a universal but a norm. The normative population of American biopower, the biological entity to be defended, is neither universal nor static. Yuan is delivered through customs as a visitor to the country and a member of global society. Thinking of his anti-American tattoo, though, he knows that this is not assured, and the TSA agent is in fact there to distinguish the societal from the antisocietal.

Yuan's encounter with the DHS conforms to a new racial logic that emerged after World War II, as theorized by Jodi Melamed (2011). Racialization is not merely a normative way of defining and organizing categories of difference, though it is certainly this. Racial knowledges

are also, and now more than ever, “materially produced discourses that both constitute and are determined by the historically specific material circumstances and geohistorical conditions for which they offer comprehension and sense making” (11–12). Racialization produces human categories of difference and yet also proceeds according to the material and political conditions that it, racialization, produced to begin with. In the post–World War II era, this facilitates race thinking without race, retaining the material and political effects of racialization while disavowing “color-line racialization” as having instigated these very circumstances. Hence, what Melamed calls the “privilege/stigma divide” no longer conforms entirely to (and so becomes grounds for disavowing) phenotypic racial knowledges. In confronting the good-natured TSA agent, Yuan recognizes that he is vulnerable to traversing this privilege/stigma divide within the United States for “geohistorical” reasons that disguise a racial legacy of the Korean War. The discovery of his tattoo, he knows, could reconstitute him as the defended against of American biopolitics. And while this would not be a race-based decision but a “matter of national security,” it would nevertheless draw on, however unconsciously, the “material circumstances and geohistorical conditions” that were produced through Korean War–era racial knowledges. Yuan may be constituted as bare life but, as the novel reveals, this is an uneven and evolving state of being. Effectively, Jin draws out the formative effects of Korea on Yuan’s life while gesturing to broader societal structures: the centrality of biopower to military violence that would endure long after the short Korean War.

Yuan’s awareness of his own biological vulnerability is manifest in the advice he gives his seven-year-old American grandson, Bobby, in the frame narrative. To the chagrin of his daughter-in-law, he encourages Bobby, who wishes to be an astronomer someday, to become a doctor. “If I were born again,” he thinks to himself, “I would study medical science devotedly. This thought has been rooted in my mind for five decades.” Although he is unable to convey why this is to Bobby or his son, he acknowledges, “This desire of mine has been bred by memories of the wasted lives I saw in Korea and China. Doctors and nurses follow a different set of ethics, which enables them to transcend political nonsense and man-made enmity and to act with compassion and human decency” (Jin 2004, 4–5). During the war, his memoir later recounts, an American doctor had saved his left leg, which was severely fractured by a shrapnel shell. This is the clearest basis for the respect

he shows medical scientists. But there is more to his memory of “wasted lives” and his associated desire for his grandson to be a doctor. Throughout the novel, Jin foregrounds how scientific knowledge structures the biopolitics of war. The war trash, the POWs who inhabit Koje and Cheju Islands, are rendered as biological entities to be screened, monitored, fed, cleaned, moved, and used to advance armistice negotiations. The political utility of Yuan’s body is even inscribed in his flesh through a series of tattoos as well as in his healed leg itself, which is only cared for so that he can then be incarcerated with the rest of the POWs. Medical science is necessary, as Foucault (2003, 244–47) stresses, in rationalizing this violent system that distinguishes the bodies to be rehabilitated from those to “let die.” In Yuan’s case, this distinction is even made on a single body over time, made to live and then left to die.

Revisiting his life as a POW, Yuan is conscious of the power that doctors wield, treated as the arbiters of bare life rather than bare life themselves. If not sovereigns in their own right, these military doctors, in Yuan’s eyes, at the very least conduct their work with the blessings of sovereign authority. In this regard, though medical science may be carried out under a “different set of ethics,” it is still revealed to serve and authorize the “political nonsense and man-made enmity” of the Korean War. This is what Morrison was endeavoring to convey at Google New York when she connected the military violences of Korea to the scientific violences of the Tuskegee syphilis study and Edgewood Arsenal laboratories. Once state power shifts from classical sovereignty to bio-regulatory mechanisms, the medical doctor, as Yuan recognizes and Morrison underscores, gains new authority over the political content of the biological body. Yuan may wish for Bobby to be a doctor for the ethics or stature of the work, but his memoir suggests that there is another order of power informing his hopes for his grandson.

Contra Agamben, *War Trash* dramatizes the differentiability of bare life, but this is still a very broad, if not exactly homogenous, category. The term *war trash* is used throughout the novel to refer to the POWs, who are dealt with as the biological remainder of war. And yet, by the novel’s end, this term has taken on new meaning and widened to include the millions of instrumentalized bodies, whether soldier or civilian, that are the currency of military power as well as this biological remainder. Yuan sees this category broaden through his encounters with the highest-ranking Chinese officer on Koje and Cheju

Islands, Commissar Pei. Yuan's familiarity with English brings him close to Pei. He watches as the commissar leads the POWs in suicidal rebellions against the American guards, one leaving sixty-three dead, which are more in the interest of creating a stir in Panmunjom than in aiding the prisoners themselves. But after the war, even Commissar Pei is regarded as a liability if not a traitor by the Chinese government. "What surprised me most," Yuan writes, "was that [he] didn't fare any better than the rest of us. In other words, he and we had all been chessmen on the Party's board, though Pei had created his own board and placed his men on it as if his game had been identical with the Party's. In fact, he too had been a mere pawn, not much different from us. He too was war trash" (Jin 2004, 345). While under his command, Yuan had admired Pei and assumed him to be working with directives from and the power of the Chinese state. But he is revealed to have acted without authority, no different than the "war trash" he led in the prison camps. Even Pei, a high-ranking officer, is denied sovereign status in a war fought according to the logic of biopower.

The discovery that Pei too is bare life within the matrices of global biopower sheds light on the diffuse workings of state power. One shortcoming of theories of sovereignty, as Foucault (2003, 30) once warned, is that they tend to characterize power as reinforcing a state of massive and uniform domination. Thinking instead of biopower and permanent war, we would be better advised to trace the ways in which power circulates through and is enacted by the local community and the individual.³ This does not mean that sovereignty is an ineffective analytic but that it must be considered as something less possessed than performed. Pei was not carrying out the sovereign orders of the Communist Party (CPC) but rather creating "his own board," invoking the perceived sovereignty of the CPC to authorize his commands. This is what Judith Butler (2004, 56) refers to as petty sovereignty, in which power is not unified under a single legitimate body ("the Party") but rather delegated, officially or unofficially, as a "lawless and prerogatory power, a 'rogue' power *par excellence*." So while Pei is revealed to be war trash as well, "not much different" from the other POWs, his authority over the PLA soldiers on Koje and Cheju dramatizes one way in which bare life is constituted as a heterogeneous category. He, as a petty sovereign, draws on the institutional power of the CPC to distinguish himself from the bare life beneath him. But his differential status is only legitimated by his former office, as a commissar, and his

ability to mobilize this rogue power. Over the course of Jin's novel, war trash evolves from a limited to a generalized condition but a condition that is no less hierarchical and inclined to change.

Yuan's remarks do, however, lend themselves to a consolidated understanding of power. He describes Pei as, in the end, a "pawn" on the "Party's board," on which he and everyone else are only biological units to be moved about and sacrificed based on the strategies and necessities of the sovereign state. Although he is of course writing of China and not the United States, this image of sovereignty conforms to that of the "state of exception," a theory that has pervaded American literary and cultural studies since the beginning of the war on terror. Understood as a situation in which the double structure of anomic authority and normative power merge into one, in which the law is invoked but not enacted, the state of exception is thought to be rendered visible and permanent in today's homeland security state (Agamben 2005, 31, 85–88). There is much to value in this theory, and it offers an instructive framework by which one might analyze the conduct of today's warfare state.⁴ But this framework also tends to negate, as does Jin's present-day homeland security state and mid-century China, the possibility for transformative social change—and override the resistive struggles that do in fact occur within, outside of, and amid these state infrastructures. Taken differently, the rebellions carried out by the POWs might be seen as legitimate acts of resistance and not merely futile moves on a government's chessboard.

And while Yuan does set out to write his memoir for Pei and his other comrades—Pei's final wish was that someone "write our story"—he does so from the United States in English. This is, he notes, so that his grandchildren might someday "feel the weight of the tattoo on my belly" (Jin 2004, 5). He knows that, as Americans, his grandchildren will never know the Korean War as anything other than the forgotten war: a war that was never known, disremembered and narrativized away in cultural documents such as the *US News* article. In this regard, the intimacy and complexity of his memoir, as a story of a Chinese POW whose life was forever altered by the war, aggravates the narrative of the short Korean War and demands a rethinking of this ostensibly brief "police action" in US culture. And this rethinking might, under the security conditions of the war on terror, lead to a further consideration of the legacy of the Korean War in the twenty-first century—a war that was the original motive for building a network of bases stretch-

ing around the world and a war that “turned the United States into the policeman of the world” (Cumings 2010, 243). In Cumings’s words, “pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics,” and the United States, as the inflictor more so than the receiver, has managed to write Korea away for this reason exactly. Yuan’s memoir is thus not only meant to “preserve historical accuracy” but also to make this a history that demands further scrutiny within and in relation to the warfare state.

Morrison’s *Home* narrates a long history to the Korean War as well, but with a greater focus on the war’s relation to racial-scientific violence at home. Her novel directly addresses the relational understanding of Korea in the United States and reveals the way in which NSC-68’s “common defence” conformed to neither foreign nor domestic borders. Endeavoring to, as she said, take the “skin or the scab off” of our understanding of Korea, she tells the story of African American Korean War veteran Frank Money, who, traumatized, struggles to reenter a segregated society after an integrated war. Suffering from what would today be diagnosed as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Frank travels from Seattle to Atlanta to rescue his sister, Cee, from a eugenicist using her for his “research.” Whereas Jin’s novel focuses almost entirely on the war itself, Morrison returns only in brief flashbacks to Korea, dramatizing instead Frank’s harrowing reentry into civilian life. And though American veterans tend to have their war stories told first and most often and have them received by the largest audiences—so much so that Mark McGurl (2009, 61) has characterized the “*Veteran-American* writer” as a category of cultural difference and identity in the post–World War II literary market—this is not the case for African American soldiers, even while serving in the military at a disproportionately high rate (Phillips 2012, 13–14). Although *Home* never leaves the 1950s or directly refers to the war on terror, the novel does foreground the degree to which wars are never only “over there”; military violence overseas always informs and is informed by violences within US borders. Morrison reveals how the “experimental war” on the Korean Peninsula was entangled with the scientific knowledges circulating within the mid-century United States. Whereas *Home* speaks to the narrative structuring of Korea in relation to other wars, recognized only in proximity to World War II and Vietnam, it also foregrounds why it must be analyzed in its own right—as a transformative era in American militarism and biopower and a war “we’re still fighting” in Korea as well as within the United States itself.

Framed by the Korean War, Cee's medicalized vulnerability underscores the scientific grounds on which state authority is founded in the post-World War II period. While her brother is being held in a psychiatric ward in Seattle, she boards with Dr. Beau and his wife, for whom she works as a maid. Of her husband, Mrs. Scott tells Cee, "He is more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments. His inventions help people. He's no Dr. Frankenstein." And Sarah, the house cook, later adds, "He invents things. Tries to get patents for a lot of them. Like licenses to make things. From the government" (Morrison 2012, 60–61). The books on his shelves, however, include Jan Valtin's anticommunist bestseller *Out of the Night* (1941), eugenicist Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), and Leslie Clarence Dunn and Theodosius Dobzhansky's *Heredity, Race, and Society* (1946), an evolutionary biological defense of eugenics. Dr. Beau later conducts one of these "very important experiments" on Cee, almost killing her and leaving her unable to bear children. Not knowing what "eugenics" means, Cee is awed by Dr. Beau's bookcase and scholarliness, demonstrating the mystifying and self-legitimizing power of scientific knowledge. In the same way that Yuan reveres medical science for its "different set of ethics," Cee continues to believe that Dr. Beau, with his specialized knowledge, must have her best interest in mind. The fact that his "inventions" are run through and sometimes sanctioned by a state agency ("licenses" from "the government") sheds light on the state's role as a warehouse for scientific findings, however dubious, findings that can serve to authorize the government as itself conforming to a different, nonideological set of ethics. Not coincidentally, Frank is being held in medical custody too; restricted from the political realm and yet detained within it as a politicized body to be studied and surveyed. Morrison's novel is not subtle in the continuity it charts from state-authorized medical science to the conduct, whether domestically or internationally, of the DoD.

Eugenics is biopower at its most blatant. State racism, unlike race war, imagines a single endangered race rather than numerous races all striving to devastate the others. This is in some ways no more than a rhetorical shift, though. Racial knowledge is still operative but is now embedded in the idea of bio-ideological degeneracy, whether communism, fascism, totalitarianism, or terrorism. This is mobilized as an "internal racism of permanent purification" (Foucault 2003, 62). When

Mrs. Scott states that her husband is “no Dr. Frankenstein,” she nevertheless strikes on the way in which biopower, legitimized by science, constructs a nonsovereign other who is neither entirely within nor without what is perceived as normative society. Dr. Beau, as a trenchant anti-Communist and white supremacist, conceives of Communists and African Americans using the same biological logic: they are degenerate bodies threatening to subvert normative humanity that he, as a medical scientist, is charged with defending. In this regard, foregrounding an effect of biopower never theorized by Foucault or Agamben, Priscilla Wald (2008, 67) reminds us that imagining humanity as ecology also creates a sense of belonging and community, however selectively. “The use of disease to imagine as well as regulate communities powerfully enacts the most anxious dimensions of national relatedness.” Disease is imbued with political content; and community, whether global or national, becomes a matter of shared health. Under these social conditions, Dr. Beau’s work traffics in the “permanent purification” of national community, while the state imagines its citizens in the language of the medical science it authorizes.

Dr. Beau’s alleged desire to, as his wife says, “help people” with his “inventions” comes into focus when the Scotts’ cook tells Cee about their children. Dr. Beau’s two daughters, Cee learns, “have got great big heads. Cephalitis, I think they call it. Sad for it to happen to even one, but two? Have mercy” (Morrison 2012, 63). Encephalitis is not always contagious but, considering that both sisters are suffering from it and were sent “to a home,” the novel would lead us to believe that they are carrying a transmittable strain of the disease. The sad irony is of course that Dr. Beau is conducting eugenic research on “degenerate” lower-class black women while his own daughters are being isolated from the local community over fear of an outbreak. Morrison thereby highlights how the biologically imagined community has less to do with health than it does with an enforced normality. The Scotts’ daughters may be rendered as bare life, as no more than biological bodies to be monitored, but they are still defended members of a normative society defined by a racialized “privilege/stigma divide.” Conversely, Frank and Cee are made to suffer a differential vulnerability as the perceived nonsovereigns of the domestic United States. Shortly after returning from Korea, Frank is arrested for “vagrancy” and finds himself handcuffed to a bed in a Seattle ward.⁵ In the same way as

his sister, Frank is doubly excluded: barred from the political realm and yet included as the biological locus of politics. He is cast as a patient but an untreatable one, handcuffed to his ward bed.

Home lends narrative structure to what Morrison suggested at Google New York: the Tuskegee and Edgewood Arsenal studies did not merely occur at the same time as the Korean War but were entangled in the same military-technological complex. If Korea was, as *US News* stated, “an experimental war, one being fought back and forth for the purpose of testing men, weapons, materials and methods, on a continuing basis,” these same men and methods were often being tested within the United States as well. Domestic racial violence not only “reflects” the conduct of this “experimental war” in East Asia; they are in fact effects of the very same socioeconomic arrangement and biopolitical logic (Singh 2009, 96). The transnational story of Frank and Cee troubles the chronological as well as geographical narrative of the Korean War, as a war that is neither over nor remote. Morrison’s Korean War novel testifies to this transnationality of war, which is legitimated by the “very important experiments” and scientific knowledge that the government screens, authorizes, and makes operative in Atlanta as on Cheju Island.

In constructing an alternative narrative of the Korean War, Morrison also speaks to how Korea was written off as a discrete not-exactly war to begin with. After rescuing Cee and returning to their hometown of Lotus, Georgia, Frank visits his grandfather, Salem, who he finds betting on chess with some local men:

Except for Salem, the men there were veterans. The two oldest fought in the First World War, the rest battled in the Second. They knew about Korea but not understanding what it was about didn’t give it the respect—the seriousness—Frank thought it deserved. The veterans ranked battles and wars according to loss numbers: three thousand at this place, sixty thousand in the trenches, twelve thousand at another. The more killed the braver the warriors, not the stupider the commanders. (2012, 136)

The veterans of Lotus embody a perspective that led Cumings to characterize the Korean War not as forgotten but never known. They have heard of Korea, but they do not understand it and so do not respect it as they do the world wars. And yet there is a disparity between not respecting Korea because it is not well understood and, as the following sen-

tence suggests, not venerating the war because not enough American lives were lost. There were far fewer American servicemen killed in Korea than in World War II, not even a tenth as many. But the combined civilian and military deaths run well into the millions when only considering the short Korean War, which, by all accounts, was a nasty and gruesome conflict. The connection between not understanding Korea and not being aware of the bloodshed can be traced back to the ambiguity of a war fought by the new DoD. If the US military was on the Korean Peninsula to, as NSC-68 suggests, “assure the integrity and vitality of our free society,” then Korea could only be understood as a defense action, a not-exactly war in which life is preserved, not lost. The Lotus men do not understand Korea as a war fought in the name of defense, and, as such, they cannot recognize the brutal and unending war it was. Korea is thus neither exactly forgotten nor never known. The men “knew about Korea,” but what they knew made it out to be forgettable, not worth knowing. Their view resembles that of the *US News* editors, who crafted a narrative of Korea that set it in contrast to previous wars (“an experimental war”) and as unaccountable within a world war framework, forgettable. Korea is conveyed as new, enduring, and disremembered, and Morrison draws out the contradictions in this account of the war. Not unlike Jin’s novel, *Home* undermines the too-easy understanding of the short Korean War and thereby facilitates the emergence of a different, permanent-war-conscious narrative of Korea.

In their reverence for wars with high “loss numbers,” Salem’s friends have internalized the logic of war as biopolitics and the soldier as bare life. The “respect” and “seriousness” given a war is directly related to the size of the biological ante, and the biggest takeaway is the number of casualties: “three thousand at this place, sixty thousand in the trenches, twelve thousand at another.” Echoing Yuan’s musings over “mere pawns” on the “Party’s board,” Morrison too uses chess as an allegory for the biopower of war. The veterans of the world wars see those soldiers lost during a battle as an abstracted and politicized figure, death that is removed from the political community as individuals and yet constituted as the very substance of politics when taken together. This body count is what legitimizes war, what lends it “respect” and “seriousness.” In binding American conduct in Korea to racism within US borders, however, Morrison foregrounds what Frank recognizes: there is always another body count that, occurring on non-sovereign ground, goes uncounted. Whereas the number of American

military casualties in Korea (36,516 in-country; 54,246 DoD-wide⁶) is familiar to many history buffs, the total number of casualties (more than four million, including two million civilians) is almost never cited in US media. These Chinese and Korean deaths are not accounted for because these were, according to the logic of defense, constituted as nonsovereign regions of the world. And this is what allows many wars to be evaluated as “police actions” in which the enemy is not a sovereign but an antisocial criminal. In the same way Frank is a ward of the medical state, cuffed to his bedframe, Korea is a ward of the United States, the self-authorized arbiter of global sovereignty in the post-World War II era. These other “loss numbers” are not so much lost as never counted to begin with.

And while Salem’s friends recognize the political significance of war’s casualties, they nevertheless see the soldier’s service in a depoliticized way, more about courage and virility than cause or nationalism. The veterans do not see huge losses as a sign of ineffective command but rather as a testament to the bravery of the “warriors.” This perspective on military service is a legacy of World War II, as James Sparrow (2011) has argued. During the Second World War, the figure of the combat soldier was mobilized by the state to acclimate citizens to the idea of “big government”—an era founded on warfare and not welfare, as is often assumed. “If habituation to the state was a hallmark of World War II America, then military service was the stamp that impressed it onto the social fabric” (208). The centrality of the soldier within US culture would endure after World War II but without the same political charge, anticommunism never finding the consensual backing that did antifascism. The combat soldier as a figure remains at the heart of masculine Americanism, by which citizens conceptualize their relationship to the state, but the wars themselves recede into the background, the cause ever less clear. Frank is welcomed into the circle of veterans in Lotus, though they do not understand what his war “was about.”

Frank’s encounter with his grandfather’s veteran friends reveals the way in which Korea is always relationally understood. Whereas World War II and Vietnam attracted, for very different reasons, the undivided attention of the nation, the Korean War is only understood by a contrasting lack of interest within the United States. The veterans of World Wars I and II recognize Korea according to a negative dissimilarity to their own wars: as unclear, forgettable, not deserving of their “respect.” And while Morrison offers a critical commentary on this relationality,

she has cited David Halberstam's *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (2007), which relies on a World War II framework for understanding Korea, as a crucial historical source in crafting her fictional account of the war (see Abigail Meisel, "Words and War: Toni Morrison at West Point," *New York Times*, March 22, 2013). Halberstam's best-selling book focuses exclusively on this generation of American men whose older brothers fought in World War II—ignoring entirely the backstory and leaders of the "other side"—and holds to a reductive good guys/bad guys understanding of the conflict. Not unlike the veterans of Lotus, Georgia, he sees Korean vets as the men who just missed out on the glory of the "good war," while ignoring the enduring legacy of the Korean War itself. Troubling the memory of the war more than settling it, Morrison's *Home* does not have the same shortcomings as Halberstam's history. If anything, her use of his book speaks to the difficulty of restructuring the narrative of the Korean War when even one of the most celebrated accounts cannot see it as anything other than an unfortunate aftershock of World War II. This reductive view of the war is beginning to change, however, as the cultural narrative of Korea is renegotiated by authors today writing with an eye to the war on terror.

For Morrison, this is in fact the best way to transform the discursive field in which permanent war is continually disavowed. When asked at Google New York what Korea can tell us about today's world, Morrison (2013) demurred: "I don't understand today. . . . I don't have the fabric yet. . . . There's something very different and elusive about contemporary culture." She then described the perspective on war in the United States, suggesting that it is understood by Americans as a "movie" or "theater" or "language." Having published *Home* nine months earlier, Morrison was not arguing that artists and writers should leave war alone. Once we recognize the way in which war is always mediated through narrative and language, the war novel becomes a critical medium through which one might reframe the workings of the warfare state. And while she may not "have the fabric yet," Morrison nevertheless underscored what she took to be an emergent "resistance toward war," a structure of feeling that had been building for a long time. The renewed interest among literary authors in the Korean War is one facet of this resistance. With Barack Obama (2013) admitting to a "perpetual war footing" since 2001, these authors have looked beyond and before the war on terror to trace a longer history of permanent war

in the United States. Foregrounding a war characterized as forgotten or never known, Jin, Morrison, Lee, and Roth have added new narrative complexity to a history that instituted the untethered budget, military infrastructure, and rhetorical logic necessary to conduct war “on a continuing basis.” Morrison admits that contemporary culture can be “elusive” but is never, as her fiction has always shown, removed from history.

And though Morrison’s Korean War novel tells the overlooked story of African American servicemen, integrated as soldiers but segregated as civilians, it is never clear who Frank was fighting in Korea. The only non-American in his flashbacks is a Korean child, who voices a single word before being shot. Unlike in Jin’s Korea-centered novel, the East Asian enemy is here made “interminably spectral” (Butler 2004, 33–34). This is not out of the ordinary for American war literature, which has always focused on the combat soldier and, more so recently, the psychic rehabilitation of the veteran. Memorial culture provides evidence of the same selective history. Ever since Maya Lin’s celebrated Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated in 1982, a list of names and casualty numbers have become standard features on war memorials. These names and numbers explicitly reveal which bodies do and do not count within the memorializing culture. The nearby Korean War Veterans Memorial includes the numbers of Americans lost as well as UN losses, but not the deaths of Korean and Chinese soldiers and civilians. These absences are not exactly shocking, since the memorial was built on the Washington Mall and funded by American veterans’ organizations. But they do signal the logical circularity that underwrites the rhetorical shift from war to defense in the wake of World War II. When the US state no longer fights wars but defends society, there can be no sovereign enemy and therefore no enemy deaths—in Korea as in Afghanistan.

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Notes

I would like to thank Cathy Schlund-Vials, Clare Eby, and Chris Vials for reading early versions of this essay and for the many conversations that motivated this research.

- 1 NSC-68 emphasizes that “containing” the Soviet Union’s power would not be enough: “It is not an adequate objective merely to seek to check the

Kremlin design, for the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable. This fact imposes on us, in our interests, the responsibility of world leadership” (NSC 1950, 9). This era in foreign policy was, as Christina Klein (2003, 38–39) contends, marked by the double movement of containment and integration.

- 2 Mary Dudziak (2012, 6, 127) has argued that war today cannot be understood according to the “conceptual categories of wartime and peacetime.” Beginning with the Korean War, she writes, the state has struggled to maintain these categories, as a “newly configured, peaceless era” of “limited” war making was normalized, even if not consciously so.
- 3 Foucault (2003, 29–30) even goes so far as to suggest that the individual is in fact a power-effect: power “allows bodies, gestures, discourses, and desires to be identified and constituted as something individual.”
- 4 Agamben (2005, 21–22) has noted that the sovereign power—the ability to enact a state of emergency—of the office of the president of the United States is grounded in that office’s faculty to wage war. In the United States, declaring a state of exception has always meant declaring a state of war.
- 5 Marita Sturken (1997, 65–66) has indicated that diagnoses of PTSD have often served an ulterior motive: to depoliticize and discount veterans’ often horrific stories of US conduct abroad. And this is true, as well, of its precursors: “homesickness” (Civil War), “shell shock” (World War I), and “combat stress reaction” (World War II).
- 6 In June 2000, the Department of Defense clarified that the Korean War’s oft-cited American casualties figure (54,246) included all DoD deaths during the war, whether occurring in Korea or not. The in-country death count stands at 36,516, which includes 33,686 combat deaths (Rhem 2000).

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