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Using This Guide



This discussion guide is a tool to support community groups and Indie Lens Pop-Up partners in hosting screening events for the *Independent Lens* film ***National Bird***. Developed primarily for facilitators, this guide offers background information and engagement strategies designed to raise awareness and foster dialogue about the U.S. military drone program. We also include valuable resources about whistleblower protections and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as recommendations for finding local organizations that support veterans.

The U.S. military drone program is both highly secretive and fast growing. Government officials laud the precision and accuracy of drones, but filmmaker and investigative journalist Sonia Kennebeck provides an alternative perspective for audiences to consider. ***National Bird*** takes a critical look at military drone technology by exposing its limitations and the associated

human costs. Screenings of ***National Bird*** bring communities into the conversation by engaging viewers in a discussion about the future of the U.S. military and modern warfare. Engagement goals for film events include:

- Raising awareness about the growing use of military drones and the human impact of drone warfare on the pilots and analysts who operate the drones and on the civilians in foreign countries who live beneath them.
- Building empathy for diverse veteran experiences and providing connections to local resources that support veterans and their families in community building and/or mental health services.
- Educating citizens about whistleblower laws and protections and underscoring the importance of whistleblowing as a civic responsibility.



Indie Lens Pop-Up is a neighborhood series that brings people together for film screenings and community-driven conversations. Featuring documentaries seen on PBS's *Independent Lens*, Indie Lens Pop-Up draws local residents, leaders, and organizations together to discuss what matters most, from newsworthy topics to family and relationships.

Director's Statement



Sonia Kennebeck

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

It was Ramadan and we were still six hours away from sunset when we could have our first sip of water. That day, it was over one hundred degrees and no one except a little boy in front of me had anything to drink. But in this very moment, thirst didn't cross my mind. My thoughts and my vision had honed in on the two people in front of me: a father and his son, both dressed in light blue traditional Afghan garb. With a calm voice the man quietly recounted the most disturbing experience of his life. His son, not a year over ten, was cuddled up close, tenderly holding his father's hand.

Over the three days we filmed the family, the boy was never more than a few steps away from his beloved father. The Taliban had attacked the Afghan parliament with a car bomb, only blocks away from us. Maybe he was still feeling the impact from the loud blast that shook all of us up the previous day. But something tugged at me, suggesting otherwise.

We were sitting in a shady waiting room with turquoise walls at a hospital in Kabul, where this man shared with me that he was studying to become a doctor when a bomb from a U.S. airstrike tore off his leg and shattered his dreams. I didn't understand his soft-spoken Dari, but two years into my research on drones, his story was all too familiar.

Military leaders have long aspired to wage war through unmanned weapons systems that kill enemies without putting their own troops in harm's way. Over a decade ago, this vision turned into reality, but much of it was skillfully hidden from the public. As an investigative journalist, I am drawn to secrets. So when I started this project in 2013, I was curious to understand more about the U.S. drone program that had grown so exponentially under the Obama administration and by many accounts had become the President's weapon of choice in the

global war on terror. As a firm believer in the First Amendment and government transparency, I struggled with the secrecy and lack of public discourse around such an extensive killing program.

National Bird is an investigative political documentary that explores the complex issue of drone warfare from a human perspective. Through this film, I hope to enliven the public debate not just by enriching the existing discourse with a balanced portrait of the U.S. drone program, but more importantly by illuminating the impact this program has on the people—veterans and survivors—the human side of this war. Like previous advancements in military technology, combat drones have transformed warfare, outpacing the ability of legal and moral frameworks to adapt and address these developments. A broad, immersive, and thoroughly public discourse is critical to understanding the social cost of drone warfare.

From the day I met my first source in rural Pennsylvania to that moment in Kabul where I sat on a wooden bench opposite a maimed man and his son, this project has grown far beyond my expectations. The protagonists have given me intimate access to their stories and lives to educate the public about a weapons program with global implications. I greatly respect their courage and thoughtfulness, but most of all their humanity.

— Sonia Kennebeck

Director, *National Bird*

Filmmaker Q&A

This interview is based on previous interviews published in Filmmaker Magazine and Indiewire.com.

1. *National Bird* is your feature documentary debut. Why is this a story you felt needed to be told? Did your background as an investigative journalist factor into this in any way?

The use of armed drones has substantially altered the way we wage war. These high-tech devices can track and kill human targets anywhere in the world, even outside of conflict areas and warzones. The operators are often based halfway across the world, in physical safety and with little knowledge of the people and places they attack. This raises a plethora of legal and ethical questions. Nonetheless, the U.S. has been using armed drones for over a decade in complete secrecy, with little oversight or accountability.

I wanted to bring transparency to the U.S. drone war through the voices of people directly impacted by it—the operators and analysts working in the drone program, and the victims and survivors in the target countries.

Considering the secrecy surrounding this war, finding subjects who could give first person accounts was a major challenge and required a lot of time and research. My background as an investigative journalist was very useful to find the right resources and information that laid the groundwork for *National Bird*. I also had experience with sensitive military and national security stories, which helped me gain access to the right legal counsel. That legal support turned out to be vital during the production of the film when the government tried to silence the whistleblowers.

2. How did you discover the subjects of the film – Heather, Daniel and Lisa – and gain their trust to be on camera? How did you meet Jesselyn?

I started my research three years ago by speaking to people I knew in the veteran and activist communities, and I studied the drone program by reading declassified military reports and investigations of drone strikes.

On an activist website I came across a photograph of a young woman who covered most of her face with a sheet of paper—only her eyes were visible—and on the paper it said something like, “Not everything you hear about the drone program is true. I know what I am talking about.” I was

wondering if the woman who was holding the paper was the same person who knew about the drone program. Through a mix of detective work and a bit of luck, I eventually tracked her down. That woman was Heather, my first protagonist, and she had just left the drone program when I first met her.

Later, I approached Daniel at an anti-drone protest, and Lisa at a veterans convention. We built up trust through time and preparation.

During development, I asked a friend from the intelligence community to introduce me to whistleblower attorney Jesselyn Radack, who also represents Edward Snowden. She has defended many national security whistleblowers, including former senior NSA executive Thomas Drake, and she now represents all three veterans in *National Bird*.

3. The aerial footage featured throughout the film is remarkable. Was this captured with a drone and what are your thoughts on drones in filmmaking?

Some of the aerial footage we shot with our own small video drone. In more populated areas I worked with licensed drone pilots, and in other places we used a helicopter with a special 90-degree mount and a RED camera to capture the footage. Our method of aerial cinematography really depended on local rules and regulations, and our own sense of safety.

My director of photography, Torsten Lapp, was very cautious when he used our video drone and never flew it out of sight. When we started production of this film three years ago, the use of video drones was not really regulated. That has changed. In my mind, it is good to have some restrictions in place for safety reasons and also because video drones can infringe on people's privacy.

Video drones are an affordable and effective filmmaking tool, but I hope they will not be overused. In *National Bird*, the aerial cinematography serves a clear purpose: we are turning the camera around to make our audience understand what it feels like to live under constant surveillance.

Filmmaker Q&A

4. The film is centered around a drone strike that occurred in 2010. Why did you single out that one event and how did you prepare to interview the survivors of the strike?

Before we traveled to Afghanistan, we had researched multiple airstrikes that have impacted civilians, and we spoke to many survivors, men and women, who wanted to tell their stories.

I decided to cover the February 2010 airstrike specifically because General McChrystal had ordered a military investigation, which was later released through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The investigation file is about 2,000 pages long and includes not only medical records of the victims and interviews with military personnel involved in the strike, but also a transcript of the radio traffic of a Predator drone crew—so we are fairly certain about what actually happened.

Through research and with the help of trusted local guides, we tracked down the families of the victims of this specific incident. We took our time with the Afghan protagonists to get to know them before we set up the main interviews. We wanted to be sensitive and also give them the same attention that we gave our U.S. protagonists, as much as it was possible in a warzone.

The filming circumstances were difficult but my director of photography was incredibly respectful and his cinematography reflects that. When we spoke to the Afghan survivors it became immediately clear that they had waited to tell their stories for a long time and wanted their voices to be heard by the world community.

5. What do you want people to think about as they are leaving the theater after seeing your film?

First of all, I want people to feel some sort of emotion when they leave the theater—be it sadness, hope or anger. Then they should think about the consequences of the drone war and hopefully discuss the issue with their friends and families. Like previous advancements in military technology, combat drones have outpaced legal and moral frameworks.

I think our society has to catch up and the public must decide how we use these weapons—if we want to use them at all. To make this decision, it is necessary to have information. That's what I am providing with this film.

About the Film



National Bird follows the dramatic journey of whistleblowers who are determined to break the silence around one of the most controversial issues of our time: the secret U.S. drone war. The film gives rare insight into the American drone program through the eyes of veterans and survivors. Plagued by guilt over the killing of faceless people in foreign countries and suffering from PTSD, the veterans decide to speak out publicly, despite the possible consequences.

Universities seeking a copy of the film for their library or a screening should contact: rocoeducational.com/national_bird.

Relevant Topics and Issues

- Military use of drones, also called “unmanned aerial vehicles” and “unmanned aircraft systems”
- Desensitization of war
- Ethics of modern warfare
- Rise of drone technology, including domestic applications
- Veteran PTSD
- Whistleblower rights
- Investigative journalism

Potential Audiences

- Veterans and their families, veterans groups, and service professionals
- Mental health professionals/advocates, especially those specializing in PTSD
- Consumers of news, including newspaper subscribers and news radio listeners
- Science and technology professionals and hobbyists
- Anti-war advocates
- Members of humanitarian and civil rights groups
- High school and college students
- Interfaith and faith-based groups

About the Film Protagonists



Heather: Former Drone Imagery Analyst

Heather grew up in Pennsylvania and was attending a local community college when she was recruited by the Air Force at age 18. She went through a specialized training program to become an imagery analyst for the U.S. Air Force drone program. Heather was stationed in the United States and was primarily working with Predator and Reaper drones that flew over Afghanistan and Iraq. She participated in her first mission when she was 20 years old. Heather had a top-secret clearance level. Read her article in *The Guardian* ([theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/29/drones-us-military](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/29/drones-us-military)).

Afghan Families*: Survivors of a U.S. airstrike on February 21, 2010

On February 21, 2010, multiple families traveled through the mountainous region of Uruzgan, Afghanistan. They were unarmed civilians, among them students, women, and children, who wanted to visit family, go to school, or find jobs. A Predator drone crew tracked them for hours, mistaking them for insurgents, which eventually led to an airstrike on the families that killed 23 civilians. A military investigation concluded that the drone crew was primarily responsible for the attack because of "inaccurate and unprofessional reporting." A declassified radio transcript documents their failures.

**The names of the families are withheld to protect their identities.*



Daniel: Private Contractor and Former Signals Intelligence Analyst

Daniel is from rural Tennessee. After finishing high school, he started college, but struggled to pay for tuition and living expenses making only minimum wage. He was homeless when he enlisted in the Air Force. After his training, he was stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland, and worked with the National Security Agency (NSA). Later, he deployed to Afghanistan, where he was assigned to the Joint Special Operations Command, the elite organization that was responsible for killing Osama bin Laden. In Afghanistan, Daniel worked in the drone program as a signals intelligence analyst and tracked down high-value targets for drone attacks. Daniel also had a top-secret clearance level.

Jesselyn Radack: Whistleblower Attorney

The most prominent whistleblower attorney in the United States, Jesselyn Radack represents a number of high-profile national security and intelligence community whistleblowers, including Edward Snowden. She heads the Whistleblower and Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at Expose Facts, where her work focuses on the issues of secrecy, surveillance, torture, and drones. She has testified before the U.S. Congress, the European Parliament, and Germany's Bundestag. Previously, Radack worked at the Justice Department as a trial attorney and legal ethics advisor, and she blew the whistle on the government's misconduct in the case of John Walker Lindh, the "American Taliban." Radack represents all three whistleblowers featured in *National Bird*.



Lisa: Former Technical Sergeant on Drone Surveillance System

Lisa grew up in California and initially joined the military as an army medic and nurse. When it became apparent that she was adept with computers, she transferred to a combat communications squadron, which later became an intelligence squadron. Her final deployment as a Technical Sergeant was to Beale Air Force Base, California, where she worked on the Distributed Ground System (DGS), a weapons system that makes use of drones to collect vast amounts of data and find and kill targets. Like Heather and Daniel, Lisa had a top-secret clearance level.

Film Advisory

National Bird is a film about the impact of war. It includes scenes that could be upsetting for some of your audience members, especially those who have experienced trauma, including veterans and refugees. We strongly recommend that in your opening remarks before the film begins you include an advisory in order to prepare your audience for the images of war they are about to view. For example:

"Midway through the film, we meet survivors of a 2010 airstrike in Afghanistan. For the first time on camera, they share their experiences of being targeted by a U.S. drone. The film includes a graphic reenactment of the drone footage of the attack and a blurry video filmed by the survivors that shows the bodies being returned after the attack. We want to make you aware of these images in advance because they may be triggers for anyone who has experienced war or trauma."

Consider designating a "safe space," such as a quiet area in the venue's lobby, for anyone that may need a moment away from the film or conversation, and include in your advisory the instructions for finding it. You might also invite a mental health service provider to help connect audience members to local PTSD resources or to be on hand to provide support for anyone triggered by the film or the conversation. Look to the referral resources at the National Center for PTSD for additional guidance (ptsd.va.gov/public/where-to-get-help.asp).

Facilitating and Planning Your Discussion

Preparing Yourself

Reflect on the film. Watch the film before your event and take time to process any thoughts or emotions that arise for you. This will enable you to be more present for those who experience strong reactions to the film or the discussion.

Be knowledgeable. It is not necessary for you to become an expert on drones. However, it is recommended that you familiarize yourself with the background information included in this guide so that you can ask relevant questions of speakers and audience members at your event.

Define your role. As a facilitator, it is important that you establish a climate of respect in which people feel welcome to speak openly. Set a clear intention to facilitate dialogue across diverse perspectives without imposing your viewpoint.

Know your audience. Although you may not know exactly who will attend your event, you can anticipate your audience based on your partners, your promotional strategies, and the surrounding community. Consider how people from groups may respond to the issues and remember that not all people in a group share the same opinions. Keep in mind that people will respond to issues differently based on their life experiences and consider how elements such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, and relationship to the military might impact your audience's participation.

Preparing the Group

Set the tone. Before your discussion, be clear about your goal to create a welcoming and respectful civic dialogue. Invite everyone to participate, but ask that they be concise in their comments and questions to allow time for others. You can also establish basic guidelines. For example, ask people to use only respectful language (no slurs) and to speak from the first person ("I think ...") rather than generalizing for others ("Everyone knows that ..."). If people forget the guidelines, gently interrupt and ask them to rephrase.

Plan a strategy. Tour your venue ahead of time and decide how to best run your post-screening discussion in the space. You may decide you need an audience microphone so that everyone can hear participant comments. Or perhaps you make notecards available for audience members to write down their questions and then pass them to a facilitator to read. Whatever your strategy, give clear instructions on how people should participate in the discussion so there is no confusion.

Encourage active listening. A civic dialogue is as much about listening as it is about speaking. Advise your audience not to interrupt when someone else has the floor and to set aside distractions, such as cell phones. Model the active listening strategy of repeating a participant's statement back to them in order to make sure you understood correctly.

Promote empathy. Everyone views the world—and films—through the lens of their own experiences. Inviting speakers to identify the evidence on which they base their opinion can help people understand others' perspectives. Remind people that the goal is to expand our thinking about an issue, not to debate or determine who is right or wrong.

Take care of yourself and others. Stories from war zones are often highly emotional. If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You can also diffuse tension by acknowledging the complexity of the issue and thanking everyone for showing up to be a part of the conversation even though it is not easy. Be sure to think carefully about what you ask people to share publicly so that you are not putting them in a position to reveal things that could place them in legal or physical danger.

Background Information

U.S. Military Drone Program

At the time of writing, the U.S. Air Force has 150 Predator, 93 Reaper, and 33 Global Hawk drones (U.S. Air Force, 2014a, 2014b, 2015). Each of these aircraft can carry weapons, notably Hellfire missiles that can be launched by a pilot on the other side of the world. The Reaper can also carry 500-pound laser-guided bombs.

These weaponized drones can stay aloft for more than 24 hours, which is at least twice as long as a piloted fighter jet. The Predator has a range of about 750 miles, and the Global Hawk can fly almost 14,000 miles without refueling.

Although military drones typically receive news coverage when they are used to kill people, in reality this is only one small portion of what soldiers use them for every day. Drones watch over troops in the field, guard cargo convoys, and loiter in the sky for days on end to film and snoop on suspects in remote areas that soldiers can't easily access. The data that they gather is uploaded in real time to the Pentagon's computer-driven intelligence network so that analysts and commanders can watch from anywhere in the world.

"Everyone focuses on this little piece of fiberglass flying around called an unmanned aerial vehicle," Lieutenant General David Deptula told *Air Force Magazine* (Kitfield, 2015). "But it's just a host for sensors that provide data to this vast analytic enterprise we call the Distributed Common Ground System, which turns the data into information and hopefully knowledge."

Predators and Reapers—the most common drones used in the war on terror—are organized into "combat air patrols" that consist of three to four aircraft. A full drone crew can be as many as 180 individuals (Deptula). First, each drone has a pilot and a camera operator who typically work out of a specially designed trailer called a "ground control station" that can be packed up and moved easily. Then there are radio technicians, safety observers, video analysts, and still imagery analysts, as well as strike coordinators and commanders. In addition, there are crews who launch, recover, maintain, and refuel the physical drones at airfields close to the action (Clausen, 2016).

The three protagonists in *National Bird* each worked on different aspects of the drone war. Heather was an imagery analyst, whose job was to screen and analyze the live video feed coming from the drones. Daniel was a signals intelligence analyst, which means that his job was to use the drones to track communications signals to find human targets. Lisa provided technical support, maintenance, and security for the Distributed Ground System, the surveillance network that operates the drones and that is categorized as a weapon system.

The United States currently fields about 60 such patrols around the world at any given time (Air Force Public Affairs, 2015). There has been pressure from the White House to increase this number to 90, but a severe shortage of trained operators has made expansion pretty much impossible. Roughly 180 drone pilots graduate from training each year, and some 240 of the 1,260 pilots currently working are not expected to continue once their six-year contracts expire (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). Soon after the Government Accountability Office discovered that only about a third of drone pilots in a sample had completed their full training before being pressed into service, the Pentagon reluctantly cut back on combat air patrols until it could find more pilots.

"We were omniscient in people's lives."

– Heather, former drone imagery analyst, in *National Bird*

"Sometimes I am so sad that my heart wants to explode."

– Afghan civilian survivor of 2010 drone strike, in *National Bird*

"It's like borders don't matter anymore."

– Lisa, former technical sergeant on drone surveillance system, in *National Bird*

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Civilian Casualties

One of the challenges with surveillance data gathered by military drone video cameras is that the quality of the images is not good enough for analysts to identify specific individuals, or even tell men from women and children, as we see in the drone strike in *National Bird*. Additional examples of drone strikes gone wrong further illustrate this issue.

In April 2011, a Predator was asked to support U.S. Marines involved in a ground battle with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The commanders made a judgment call based on muzzle flashes and called in a Hellfire strike at 8:51am that day, only to discover that they had targeted and killed Jeremy Smith and Benjamin Rast, two U.S. soldiers who were dressed in full battle uniform (Zucchini and Cloud, 2011). Later, Jerry Smith, the father of one of the two soldiers, told the *Los Angeles Times* that he was shown video of the strike in which he confirmed that it was not possible to tell his son from the Afghans. All he could see was "three blobs in really dark shadows. You couldn't even tell they were human beings—just blobs," and he noted that it was impossible to identify their uniforms or weapons (Zucchini and Cloud, 2011).

A similar comment was made by Predator operators on the U.S.-Mexico border who say that they accurately identify people only via direct radio contact. "We can see Border Patrol, but not their uniforms, and so we can communicate with them and say, 'Wave your arms,' and that way we can distinguish between our guys and the bad guys," Lothar Eckardt, director of the Department of Homeland Security's National Air Security Operations Center in Corpus Christi, Texas, told the *Washington Post* (Booth, 2011).

The protagonists in *National Bird* have been deeply critical of the surveillance and targeting system that takes place from afar, based on their own personal experiences. Perhaps the most trenchant criticism of the killing based on remote surveillance in *National Bird* came from Lisa, when she said, "There's a bomb. They drop it. It explodes. Then what? Does somebody go down and ask for somebody's driver's license? Excuse me, sir, can I have your driver's license, see who you are? Does that happen? I mean, how do we know? How is it possible to know who ends up living or dying?"

"Hearing politicians speak about drones being precision weapons, being able to make surgical strikes – to me it's completely ridiculous, it's completely ludicrous to make these statements. They are as flawed as they can be with people operating them from across the world."

– Heather, former drone imagery analyst, in *National Bird*

"They just embolden commanders, they embolden decision makers. Because there is no threat (to U.S. soldiers), there is no immediate consequence."

– Daniel, former signals intelligence analyst, in *National Bird*

In the film, we also see Heather, the imagery analyst, grow angry with the Distributed Common Ground System operators for not believing the junior analysts when they spot civilians before a strike. And Daniel says that killing by remote control has become much too easy.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2017), considered to be one of the leading authorities on drone casualties, estimates that as many as 1,140 innocent civilians have been among the 5,800 victims of 732 drone strikes.

A detailed analysis of U.S. drone attempts to kill 41 specific men in Pakistan and Yemen conducted by Reprieve, a U.K.-based human rights organization, estimated that as many as 1,147 people may have been killed as a result (Gibson, 2014). All told 874 people, including 142 children, were allegedly killed in missed strikes targeting 24 of those men in Pakistan alone. "These 'high value targets' appear to be doing the impossible—dying not once, not twice, but as many as six times," says Jennifer Gibson, staff attorney at Reprieve. "There's only one conclusion that can be drawn—there's nothing targeted about the U.S. drone program" (Reprieve, 2014).

Alkarama (which means "dignity" in Arabic), a Geneva, Switzerland-based human rights organization that specializes in the Arab world, published "Traumatizing Skies" in 2015, a special report on the impact of drones in Yemen. One hundred participants from the villages of Qawl and al-Sirin were interviewed between July and September 2014 and evaluated using the American Psychiatric Association standards for PTSD used by the military. "An overwhelming majority of adult respondents are seen to be suffering from numerous drone-inflicted symptoms of PTSD, which are even more prevalent amongst children," writes Radidja Nemar, Alkarama's regional legal officer for the Gulf countries. "The situation has transcended the question about whether or not an individual has lost a family member to a drone attack, simply because trauma has become pervasive in a society living constantly under the fear of drones."

President Barack Obama's previous claims about civilian casualties from drones are much lower than the figures published by multiple independent groups (such as those noted earlier in this guide). On July 1, 2016, his administration published an estimate that U.S. "counter-terrorism" air strikes in countries where the United States is not officially at war, such as Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, had killed 2,581 individuals, of whom only 64 to 116 were innocent civilians (Director of National Intelligence, 2016).

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"I just want people to know that not everybody is a freaking terrorist, and we need to just get out of that mindset. And we just need to see these people as people – families, communities, brothers, mothers, and sisters – because that's who they are. Imagine if this was happening to us. Imagine if our children were walking outside of their door and it was a sunny day and they were afraid because they didn't know if today was the day that something was going to fall out of the sky and kill someone close to them. How would we feel?"

– Lisa, former technical sergeant on drone surveillance system, in *National Bird*

International Law and Drones

Legal experts differ on whether drone killing is allowed under international law. Mary Ellen O'Connell, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, was perhaps one of the first legal experts to speak out unequivocally against their use. "The so-called 'global war on terror' is not an armed conflict. In addition, members of the CIA are not lawful combatants and their participation in killing—even in an armed conflict—is a crime," she wrote in a 2009 paper. "Members of the United States armed forces could be lawful combatants in Pakistan if Pakistan expressly requested United States assistance in an armed conflict against insurgent forces. No express request of this nature has been made. Even if it were made, drone attacks may well be unlawful under the international law governing the conduct of conflict."

The United Nations has backed O'Connell. "This strongly asserted, but ill-defined license to kill without accountability is not an entitlement which the United States or other states can have without doing grave damage to the rules designed to protect the right to life and prevent extrajudicial executions," Philip Alston, the U.N. special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, said in a statement that accompanied a 2010 investigation into the matter. "I'm particularly concerned that the United States seems oblivious to this fact when it asserts an ever-expanding entitlement for itself to target individuals across the globe" (Alston, 2011).

Excerpt from legal opinion issued by the United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions (Alston, 2011)

A targeted killing conducted by one state in the territory of a second does not violate the latter's sovereignty if either (a) the second state consents, or (b) the first, targeting, state has a right under international law to use force in self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, because (i) the second state is responsible for an armed attack against the first state, or (ii) the second state is unwilling or unable to stop armed attacks against the first state launched from its territory.

International law permits the use of lethal force in self-defence in response to an "armed attack" as long as that force is necessary and proportionate.

The jus ad bellum requirement of proportionality, which has been recognized by the International Court of Justice, conditions the defensive actions. Proportionality requires that a state acting defensively employ no more force than reasonably required to overcome the threat. In the context of cross-border operations, this limitation means that the scale and nature of the force employed cannot exceed that which is necessary. For instance, if targeted air strikes against terrorist camps would suffice to damp down further attacks, it would be unlawful to mount large-scale ground operations. The limitation is equally geographical. It would, for example, be unlawful to deploy forces where the terrorists are not located. Finally, such operations are temporally limited in the sense that withdrawal or cessation is required once the threat has been extinguished.

The Obama administration has defended its actions. “A state that is engaged in an armed conflict or in legitimate self-defense is not required to provide targets with legal process before the state may use lethal force,” Harold Koh, who was the State Department legal adviser under Obama, said in an official statement. “Our procedures and practices for identifying lawful targets are extremely robust, and advanced technologies have helped to make our targeting even more precise” (Savage, 2010).

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Drone Policies under the Current Administration

At the time of writing, the new administration of President Donald Trump had not indicated a stance on drones. However, the new Trump administration was accused of using drone surveillance to launch a botched raid in Yemen on January 29, 2017, in which 30 people were killed (Ghobari and Stewart, 2017). “People were afraid to leave their houses because the sounds of choppers and drones were all over the sky,” Jabbar Abu Soraima, a tribal sheikh in the village, told Reprieve. “Everyone feared of being hit by the drones or shot by the soldiers on the ground” (Schmitt and Sanger, 2017).

In addition to the weaponized drones, the Pentagon owns roughly 8,000 Raven drones that weigh less than five pounds and can be launched by hand (U.S. Air Force, 2007). These smaller drones cannot carry weapons, but they do carry cameras that broadcast real-time video so troops can “see around the corner.” Two other popular drones in the U.S. military are the Puma and the Wasp (AeroVironment press release, 2012; U.S. Air Force, 2007b). About 1,000 of each of these two models are used today, together with a variety of other unmanned craft. Most of the smaller models are not connected to the Distributed Common Ground System.

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Drone Use by Other Countries

Military drones are not unique to the United States. Seven other countries have used drones during armed conflict—Iran, Iraq, Israel, Pakistan, Nigeria, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Hezbollah, a nonstate actor, has also used drones in conflict zones (New America Foundation, 2017). China, Somalia, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates also deploy weaponized drones. The New America Foundation (2017) says several other countries are currently developing armed drone programs: Taiwan, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, India, Russia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. About 40 other countries manufacture drones domestically for surveillance purposes. Recent reports suggest that militants in Mosul, Iraq, have modified consumer drones to drop bombs (Atherton, 2017).

Given that small drones have been used to smuggle contraband packages to inmates inside heavily guarded prisons, the day that a drone is used for an attack inside the United States may not be very far off (Rosenwald, 2016). Indeed, the Department of Homeland Security has already issued a warning about this possibility (Pegues, 2015).

The biggest drone exporting country is Israel, which is also believed to have the second-largest number of drone killings, after the United States. Dr. Atef Abu Saif, a Palestinian investigator, estimated that 120 civilians were killed in 100 drone sorties during the 2012 and 2014 Israel-Gaza wars (Abu Saif, 2014).

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Consumer Drones vs. Military Drones

In some ways, consumer drones are not like military drones. Most noticeably, they can be significantly smaller and also cannot fly as far as military drones. Most consumer models, such as those made by DJI, Hubsan, and Parrot, can fly only a couple of miles and cannot spend more than an hour in the air. See below for specs comparing one type of consumer drone with two types of military drones (AeroVironment, U.S. Air Force, DJI).

	Wing Span	Weight (lbs)	Endurance	Service Ceiling (ft)	Flight Speed (mph)	Range (mi)
DJI-Phantom 3 (consumer)	14 in	2.8	≤ 25 mins	≤ 394	≤ 36	3
Raven (military)	4.5 ft	4.2	≤ 1.5 hrs	≤ 500	≤ 50	6.2
Predator (military)	55 ft	1,130 (empty)	≤ 24 hrs	≤ 25,000	≤ 135	770

It is important to note that the Raven is used solely for observation and surveillance. The Predator also is used to watch over troops, but it can be weaponized to attack enemies. This helps to explain why a Predator is much bigger and can travel further than any consumer drone, whereas the Raven is not that different from most off-the-shelf models.

Consumer drones do not carry any weapons, although many can carry small packages. Nor do they carry phone-tracking technology, which would be illegal (Timber, 2014). However, surveillance is a different matter. Most consumer models tend to be quadcopters that can hover and carry higher-end cameras whose images can be transmitted easily over short distances. Military drones typically have lower-resolution cameras plus radar and night vision equipment, enabling them to communicate with satellites.

Finally, it should be remembered that drones are not just a consumer fad. Drones are used by industries to conduct safety inspection in high-risk environments, like on oil platforms. They have been used to conduct humanitarian relief, and companies like Amazon are hoping to use them to deliver goods. Perhaps the single biggest user of drones outside the military is the agriculture industry, which uses drones to conduct crop inspections (Mazur, 2016).

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PTSD and Veterans

Although it is common to experience a negative emotional response, or post-traumatic stress, after a violent experience, PTSD occurs when those responses significantly disrupt daily life or endure for months or longer (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016a). Symptoms of PTSD may include:

- continually reliving the experience through flashbacks or nightmares.
- avoidance of things that trigger memories of the experience.
- negative beliefs about yourself or others.
- hyperarousal, that is, jittery, jumpy, irritable, or unable to sleep.

Medical understanding of PTSD has evolved with each war. During the Civil War, some doctors attributed the symptom of a rapid heartbeat to a physical ailment, dubbed “soldier’s heart.” During the two world wars, the terms *shell shock* and *battle fatigue* were used to describe what were probably PTSD symptoms. It was not until the 1980s that psychologists began diagnosing PTSD. Studies of Vietnam War veterans, Holocaust survivors, victims of sexual violence, and other trauma survivors showed that PTSD had more extensive and persistent implications than previously thought (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016b). A common theory is that life-threatening experiences cause PTSD. However, a growing amount of research has shown that even viewing violent imagery in the news can have negative mental health effects as severe as PTSD (Gregorie, 2015). It is likely that the understanding of PTSD will continue to evolve with the changing characteristics of modern warfare, and the trauma that Heather experienced as a result of working in the drone program will become more widely recognized.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), an estimated 11 percent to 20 percent of veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom will experience PTSD in any given year (VA, 2016c). Meanwhile, a 2013 report by the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center found that drone pilots experience PTSD at the same rate as traditional pilots (Tenold, 2016). Drone teams battle a persistent assumption that they have it “easier” than those who are engaged in direct combat. Drone operators do sit in cubicles in front of computer screens far from the front lines, but the shifts are exceedingly long, and, as Heather describes in the film, analysts become intimately familiar with their targets over the days before a strike and in the harrowing hours after a strike. And although many drone operators are based in the United States and are not in physical danger, they are still fighting a war and participating in killing people. This seems to have a strong psychological impact on drone operators and others working in the drone program, especially considering that the top-secret clearance they have prohibits them from discussing their experiences with anyone who does not have the same clearance, including mental health professionals. The stressors of the assignment have caused a high rate of outflow, or dropouts, at a time when the military is ramping up its drone usage, causing even more strain on the current pilot force to fill the growing demand (Chatterjee, 2015).

**“I lost part of my humanity
working in the drone program.”**

—Lisa, former technical sergeant
on drone surveillance system,
in *National Bird*

Heather shares in the film that she knew people in the drone program that had committed suicide. Heather herself was on a suicide watch list, but could not get reassignment from her role as analyst. Although the suicide rate specifically for drone program veterans is not yet widely available, it is well known that veteran suicide overall is a critical problem. According to a VA report (2016d), an average of 20 veterans a day took their lives in 2014, a 32 percent increase since 2001. The VA has responded with a series of initiatives to try to connect more veterans with suicide prevention services and hotlines, such as its Veterans Crisis Line (www.veteranscrisisline.net) and the Make the Connection campaign (maketheconnection.net). However, materials still predominantly speak to veteran experiences in more traditional military roles, not the unique experiences of veterans engaged in drone warfare.

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Whistleblowing As a Civic Responsibility

A whistleblower is an employee or contractor who reports illicit activity or misconduct committed by an employer. Whistleblowers serve an important civic role in reporting government waste and mismanagement. In 2013, for example, 11 whistleblowers revealed that Department of Homeland Security employees routinely billed for gratuitous overtime, costing taxpayers \$8.7 million each year (Wax-Thibodeaux, 2015). In the private sector, whistleblowers act as watchdogs for the public good by exposing corporate fraud and violations of state and federal laws. In 2016, whistleblowers reported Wells Fargo for opening as many as 1.5 million accounts in clients' names without their permission (Blake, 2016).

The Whistleblowers Protection Act of 1989 makes it illegal for employers to retaliate against an employee for whistleblowing (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). The Department of Labor is responsible for enforcing the act in the private sector, and the U.S. Office of Special Counsel, an independent federal investigative agency, was established to enforce the act in the public sector (Office of Special Counsel, 2016). States also have their own whistleblower protection laws and reporting and enforcement procedures, which vary widely. (For information by state, visit workplacefairness.org/whistleblower-claim.)

"I don't want [fear] to silence my words or curtail my speech."

—Daniel, former signals intelligence analyst, in *National Bird*

Due to the sensitive nature of the information available to them, military and intelligence whistleblowers have stricter reporting guidelines. The Military Whistleblower Protection Act of 1988 and the Intelligence Community Whistleblower Protection Act of 1998 require that disclosures be submitted to the Inspector General or a member of Congress (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). Like other government employees, military and intelligence whistleblowers are promised protection from reprisals if they follow these rules.

Some whistleblowers and their advocates contend that reporting to authorities within the system accused of wrongdoing threatens the integrity of the disclosure. They argue for reporting directly to the public via the press or sites like Wikileaks, a publishing website for restricted information about war, spying, and corruption. Government officials often distinguish these individuals as leakers, rather than as whistleblowers entitled to protection under the law. There have also been cases in which national security whistleblowers who went through the internal reporting system have experienced repercussions. One prominent example is NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake, who in 2010 was charged under the Espionage Act for allegedly leaking information about the NSA's domestic surveillance program. His lawyers complained that the charges were based on confidential testimony given to the Inspector General during an investigation into NSA leaking (Goodman, 2016). In the case of Daniel in the film, the aim of the federal investigation is unclear. But Radack, his attorney, has defended many national security whistleblowers whom the government has tried to intimidate and silence.

Whistleblowing is not without risk. Whistleblowers often put their own personal and financial well-being in jeopardy when reporting wrongdoing. Laws protect individuals from retaliation, but they cannot prevent it. Nor can they protect people from the social stigma or mental or emotional strain often associated with whistleblowing. Before becoming a whistleblower, individuals should consult the laws and a lawyer whenever possible.

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A Century of the Espionage Act

The Espionage Act is a century-old law that criminalized acts intended to harm the United States during wartime, for example, obstructing military operations or sharing classified information with foreign countries (Greenberg, 2010). It was passed just as the United States entered World War I. Much like today, sections of the proposed legislation were controversial at the time. Critics argued that the law would encroach upon First Amendment rights to free speech. Congress debated for weeks, ultimately ending on a compromise that excluded a clause about censoring the press.

A year later, as World War I waged on, Congress amended the Espionage Act to add the Sedition Act, which made it illegal to use disloyal or abusive language about the U.S. government, Constitution, armed forces, or flag (Strassfeld, 2004). The Sedition Act was repealed when World War I ended, but the fervor to suppress sentiment deemed harmful to the United States persisted. Left-leaning activists and citizens with associations, real or alleged, to socialist or communist ideology were particularly targeted after World War I, known today as the Red Scare.

Although it is unclear how many people like Daniel have been investigated for espionage, only a dozen whistleblowers have been formally charged under the Espionage Act, more than half of those occurred under the Obama administration (Greenberg, J., 2014). High-profile cases include:

- Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, who in 1971 leaked classified information about the Vietnam War.
- Chelsea Manning (formerly Bradley Manning), who leaked the “Collateral Murder” video that depicts a U.S. airstrike on two Reuters journalists and sent 250,000 diplomatic cables to Wikileaks; 35-year sentence was commuted in January 2017.
- NSA contractor Edward Snowden, who exposed the agency’s secret surveillance program (Currier, 2013).
- Former CIA officer Jeffery Sterling, who was convicted for leaking plans to thwart Iran’s nuclear program to *The New York Times* (Zapotosky, 2016).

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“Espionage Act investigations occur largely in secret and have been brutal.”

—Jesselyn Radack, whistleblower attorney, in *National Bird*

Discussion Questions

Conversation Starter

The *National Bird* DVD features the following conversation starter on the menu screen before the film begins:

What have you heard about the U.S. military drone program?

Project the conversation starter before the screening as guests are taking their seats. Encourage participants to turn to a person sitting near them and, for two to three minutes, share their answers. If time permits, invite a few people to share with the entire group. Let the audience know that the film being screened, *National Bird*, offers an opportunity to learn more about the U.S. military drone program.

Post-Screening Questions

- The use of military drones steadily increased under the Bush and Obama administrations. What was the political context for the rise of drone warfare? What major events have fueled the production and deployment of military drones?
- The U.S. military drone program has been largely secretive and covert. Do you feel the public should be more informed about the ways drones are being used in military operations? Why or why not? What role should public opinion play in military decisions?
- Drones have been used as a substitute for troops on the ground in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Syria. In your opinion, what is gained and what is lost when troops are replaced by drones in foreign conflicts? Does the physical distance between drone operators in the United States and their targets influence your opinion about the drone program?
- The film is centered around a drone strike that occurred in Afghanistan in 2010. Have you heard of other drone strikes in the news that have caused civilian deaths? What effects do you think these news stories have domestically and internationally?
- As the Afghan survivors tell their stories, a military helicopter flies overhead and a silence falls over the group. One woman sighs, "May God bring peace to the country!" Later in the film, Lisa says, "I was told that they forgave me for the part I played in what happened to them." Did either of these responses surprise you? How did the survivors of the drone strike contradict common stereotypes about Afghan people and/or the way they feel about Americans?
- What was your reaction to the reenactment of the drone operators firing on the Afghan families who were interviewed in the film? What did their radio conversation reveal about the limitations of the drone program, its technology, and its operators?
- The film addresses the hazards of the murky images from Predator drones. As video technology continues to advance, do you think that clearer drone imagery will result in less damage or harm to unintended targets? Do you think technological advancements will address the limitations of the drone program?
- In several scenes, the film includes aerial footage taken by a video drone flown over U.S. communities. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to incorporate this into the film? How did it feel to observe communities from this perspective?
- Drones are used for many purposes besides military weapons. Can you provide several examples of other uses? What do you think are the main differences between these varying uses of drones? Are there new and creative ways that you would like to see drones used in your community or your world?
- At the community level, police departments are increasingly exploring the use of drones to aid in police work, such as search and rescue missions and apprehension of criminals. Have you heard news of drones being used locally by police? What community questions or concerns do you want police departments to hear regarding the use of police drones?
- A whistleblower is an employee who reports employer misconduct to authorities. Why is whistleblowing important? What should people know about whistleblower protection laws? If someone you knew was considering whistleblowing, what would you tell them?
- The Obama administration used the Espionage Act seven times—more than all previous administrations combined—to charge whistleblowers, including Jeffrey Sterling, Chelsea Manning, and Edward Snowden. Do you agree with how his administration used the law in these cases? Why or why not? Do you think these cases contributed to a climate that led to the investigation of Daniel?
- It is a common theory that life-threatening experiences cause PTSD. How does Heather's PTSD complicate this assumption? Based on her description of her job as a drone analyst, which traumatic experiences would you say are unique to those working in the drone program? Why do you think Heather is so surprised when she visits the VA and receives a sympathetic response to her application for disability benefits?
- Heather was one of the first veterans of the U.S. drone program to receive disability benefits for PTSD. As the drone program grows, what would you like to see the military or the VA do to support operators and analysts for the psychological effects of drone warfare? What policies or programs might help prevent PTSD or suicide in the drone program?
- Lisa says at the end of the film, "Imagine if this was happening to us. Imagine if our children were walking outside of their door and it was a sunny day and they were afraid because they didn't know if today was the day that something was going to fall out of the sky and kill someone close to them. How would we feel?" How would you respond to Lisa's question?

Engagement Strategies: Potential Partners, Panel Discussion, and Beyond

Potential Partners and/or Speakers

- Invite **veterans** to voice their opinions of and/or talk about their experiences with drone warfare. Even if they do not have direct experience in drone operations, they will have insights into the complexities of war that will help your audience think about the issue. They may also be able to speak about veterans services for PTSD or suicide prevention. To seek out veterans who might want to participate, re-engage partners from the Veterans Coming Home (veteranscominghome.org) and PBS Stories of Service (pbs.org/veterans/stories-of-service/home) initiatives. Also, establish new partnerships with other veterans organizations, for example:
 - Find a local chapter of Student Veterans of America: studentveterans.org/index.php/chapter/directory
 - Look for a local chapter of Disabled American Veterans: dav.org/membership/local-chapters
 - Find a local chapter of Veterans for Peace: veteransforpeace.org/vfp-chapters/find-a-chapter
 - Contact a regional chapter of Iraq Veterans Against War: vaw.org/chapters
 - See if there is a chapter of the Enlisted Association near you: trea.org/chapter-info.html
 - Review the Team Rubicon contact that serves your region to see if they are active or have contacts in your community: teamrubiconusa.org/story-of-team-rubicon/regions
 - Find a local VA facility: va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp
 - See if your local community colleges and universities offer student services and centers for veterans
 - See more partners affiliated with the Veterans Coming Home campaign: veteranscominghome.org/partners
- Contact **mental health providers, specialists, and advocates** to discuss the issues in the film as they relate to veterans' experiences and PTSD and to connect audiences with local support and resources. Area hospitals and private practices may have trauma specialists. You can also check to see if the Trauma Recovery Network (emdrhap.org/content/trauma-recovery-network) and the Trauma Survivors Network (traumasurvivorsnetwork.org/trauma_centers) have local affiliates.
- Look to your local universities to find **professors and experts** that study emerging drone technology and the political and legal debate that accompanies it. Look in the engineering, political science, justice studies, law, and journalism departments. You can try calling these departments directly; also contact the university's communications team to see if it has a referral. The schools may also have directories that you can search to find experts in specified fields.
- Local **civil liberty and human rights organizations** may be interested in speaking about their campaigns around the rise of drone technology. For example, both the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Amnesty International USA have called for more oversight of the military drone program. Look for a local affiliate of the ACLU (aclu.org/about/affiliates) and a regional group of Amnesty International (amnestyusa.org/get-involved/lead-in-your-community/local-groups/find-a-group).
- A growing number of **interfaith leaders** are speaking out about drone warfare for moral reasons. For example, the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare has openly criticized the drone program under the Obama administration. Even if your local faith leaders have not taken a stance on drones, they may be able to speak to their role in supporting and counseling veterans in your community. Reach out to your local contacts in the faith community or call the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare to ask for a referral in your area (interfaithdronenetwork.org/contact.html).
- Educate your audience about state and federal whistleblower laws by inviting a local **government official or a lawyer** who works on whistleblower protection. Most states have their own whistleblower laws, which are usually enforced by the state's department of labor/workforce development. Likewise, local law firms may have experience representing whistleblowers and can provide information about worker rights as they relate to whistleblowing protections. Search the Workplace Fairness site (workplacefairness.org/whistleblower-claim) for information on your state laws.
- Reach out to local **journalists** to discuss the role of the media in government accountability and transparency. Ask them to help educate your audience about the principles of investigative journalism as a way to promote media literacy in your community. See if there are local chapters of any of these **journalist associations**:
 - Society of Professional Journalists: spj.org/chapters.asp
 - Association for Women in Communications: womcom.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=903060&module_id=244964
 - National Association of Black Journalists: nabj.org/?page=RegionMap
 - National Association of Hispanic Journalists: nahj.org (click on the navigation tab for "Membership" and then "Find My Local Group")
 - Asian American Journalists Association: aaja.org/where-you-can-find-aaja
 - NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists (formerly, the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association): nlgja.org/chapters

- Asian American Journalists Association: aaja.org/where-you-can-find-aaja
- NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists (formerly, the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association): nlgja.org/chapters
- See if there is a local chapter of **Women in Film** near you: womeninfilm.org/other-wif-chapters. Be sure to let them know that *National Bird* is by a female filmmaker, Sonia Kennebeck, and features primarily female protagonists. Explore opportunities to invite the local network of women media makers to participate in the screening and conversation.
- GuideStar has a robust catalogue of contact information for **nonprofit organizations** (NGOs) across the country, searchable by keyword, city, and/or state. Find relevant local NGOs near you by searching for “veterans,” “whistleblowers,” “civil rights,” “human rights,” and other related keywords: guidestar.org/AdvancedSearch.aspx.
- Explore Meetups (meetup.com) as a strategy to expand audience outreach efforts. Try searching for local meet-ups around peace building, social justice, documentary films, and more.

Engagement Activities Beyond a Panel

- Design an interactive experience that helps participants empathize with the experiences of a military drone operator. For example, draw inspiration from the performance art piece created by David Byrne in *The Institute Presents: Neurosociety*, which shows a scene of a drone surveillance team from the film *Eye in the Sky* (youtube.com/watch?v=MBCeP_i9Bxl) and asks participants to make the moral decision of whether or not to fire on the target. Listen to the description from KQED Arts for more information: ww2.kqed.org/arts/2016/10/25/david-byrnes-theatrical-thought-experiment-in-silicon-valley. You could also have participants play the 2012 game Unmanned (gamesforchange.org/play/unmanned), which puts players in the shoes of a drone operator who has to juggle the demands of his atypical job with his ordinary family life. Or you could draw inspiration from the forthcoming game Kill Box (killbox.info), which has players assume the roles of both the military drone pilot and a civilian on the ground. Learn more about the experience of playing this game in this video, and consider showing it to your audience before or after they participate in the activity: twitter.com/ajplus/status/762840884949897217.

Please keep in mind that interactive experiences may be particularly triggering for veterans, war survivors, and others. Be sure that before they agree to play the game, participants see or hear a description of the activity and are provided with a warning of how playing the game could potentially be triggering for anyone who has experienced trauma (especially in a combat setting). Consider having a quiet space for decompressing and a volunteer on hand, ideally a counselor or mental health specialist, for participants who need support or time away from the activity.

Encourage participants to think critically about the activity they experience, for example, by answering questions such as:

- Did this activity deepen your understanding of what Lisa, Daniel, and Heather shared in *National Bird* about their experiences with the military drone program? If so, how?
- What nuances or experiences do you think a military drone operator might face in real life that cannot be captured in an interactive activity such as this?
- Some partners have suggested incorporating drone demonstrations into their events. This activity may be misleading because consumer drones vary substantially in size, design, and purpose from the Predator and Reaper drones used by the military. If you plan to have any consumer drones at your event, we strongly recommend including a comparative guide to help underscore these differences. Refer to the “Consumer Drones vs. Military Drones” section of this guide for more information and consider displaying the illustration “Drone Survival Guide,” by artist Ruben Pater, that provides a visual comparison of drones: popsci.com/article/technology/guide-spotting-and-hiding-drones.
- Help your audience understand how war has touched your community by recognizing veterans, their families, and war survivors in attendance at your event. First start by asking active service people and veterans in the audience to stand, if they are able, or raise their hand so that you can recognize them for their service. Ask them to stay standing while you invite any families of active service people and veterans to stand/raise hands to be recognized. Request that the first two groups stay standing while you invite any survivors of war and refugees to stand/raise their hands. Thank them all for attending the event, and point out to your audience that war is very much a local issue because it affects the lives of people in the community. Engage military personnel and veterans in the audience by asking them how the film has affected their views of the drone program and how the experiences of Heather, Daniel, and Lisa are the same as and different from their own military service and experiences.

- Share the lyrics for the film's title song "National Bird" (see "Appendix" at the end of this guide) in your program or in your venue's lobby for audience members to read and contemplate before and after the film. You can also consider playing the song for your audience as they enter the screening room (stream the track here: sole.bandcamp.com/track/national-bird). Take this activity further by asking students or guests to write their own lyrics or a "found poem" using a news article about drones. A found poem is created by selecting words from an existing piece of writing and reorganizing them into poetry about the subject. Consider publicizing the activity before the event and invite people to bring their poems to the event and to submit them on social media for display at your venue.
- Organize a resource fair to connect audience members with local veterans organizations. These could include service organizations that offer mental health support and community-building groups that work to bridge the military-civilian divide. You can also invite civil liberties and humanities organizations with opportunities for people to get involved. Refer to the "Potential Partners and/or Speakers" section for ideas on partners to invite to your resource fair. Be sure to also include materials on whistleblower protections, for example, an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) handout (osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/whistleblower_rights.pdf) or a Military Whistleblower Protection Act fact sheet (nlgmltf.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/MWPA_201307a.pdf).
- Are drones being used in your community? Many police and fire departments are exploring drone technology as a cost-saving way to aid in their work. Ask student journalists to investigate local applications of drone technology and produce a news piece for broadcast or social media publication. Make sure they incorporate a variety of views from the community on the local use of drones. Refer educators and students to lesson plans from the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs (studentreportinglabs.org/lesson-plans) to help guide their investigation.
- Screen the film with a Model United Nations chapter at a local high school or college and ask them to discuss the global use and regulation of drones. Encourage students to think about the issue from the perspective of both small countries and large countries. Contact a local chapter of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (unausa.org/membership/directory) to inquire about Model United Nations educators near you. For additional discussion questions and activities, refer to the high school curriculum guide created by the San Francisco Film Society: filmed.sffs.org/film-ed/lesson-library/national-bird-sffs-viewing-guide.

Additional Resources

Note: Each resource's description is primarily adapted from language provided on the organization's website.

pbs.org/independentlens/films/national-bird—The companion site created by *Independent Lens* for *National Bird* includes additional content to support Indie Lens Pop-Up screenings and the PBS broadcast.

nationalbirdfilm.com—The website created by the filmmakers for the documentary *National Bird* includes additional information on how you can support those featured in the film.

Military Drones

barnesandnoble.com/w/killing-by-remote-control-bradley-jay-strawser/1124331592—*Killing by Remote Control: The Ethics of an Unmanned Military*, by Bradley Jay Strawser and Jeff McMahan, examines the ethical questions of drone warfare and how the moral dilemma of killing by remote control affects drone pilots.

thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones—The Bureau of Investigative Journalism is an independent nonprofit organization that pursues in-depth research for public benefit, including research on the drone war.

dronecenter.bard.edu/publications—The Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College researches the complex opportunities and challenges presented by unmanned technologies in both the military and the civilian spheres. Its publication “The Drone Revolution Revisited” (dronecenter.bard.edu/publications/drone-revolution-revisited) offers a contemporary guide to drone technologies.

kroc.nd.edu/news-events/peace-policy/ethical-strategic-legal-implications-drone-warfare-1507—The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame has gathered supporters and critics of the U.S. drone program to build consensus on ethical and legal standards for drone warfare. Past events include a symposium on “The Drone Papers,” which detail a U.S. airstrike against a hospital in Afghanistan (kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events/2016/02/03/1828).

pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/uncategorized/ask-the-experts-drones/14813—The Need to Know program on PBS conducted a Q&A with drone experts about the effects of the American drone strategy in Pakistan and elsewhere.

corpwatch.org/index.php—CorpWatch uses investigative journalism to act as a watchdog for multinational corporations. Enter “drone” into its search function (corpwatch.org/search.php) to find research on the production of drone technology.

bravenewfilms.org/unmanned_frontpage—*Unmanned: America's Drone Wars* is a feature documentary by director Robert Greenwald that investigates the impact of U.S. drone strikes at home and abroad through more than 70 interviews.

dronethedocumentary.com—Directed by Tonje Hessen Schei, the documentary *Drone* investigates the secret CIA drone war by interviewing people living under drones in Pakistan and drone pilots in the United States.

Human and Civil Rights

amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/security-and-human-rights/drones—Nobel Peace Prize winner and human rights organization Amnesty International provides reports and actions in opposition of the U.S. drone program.

aclu.org/issues/national-security/targeted-killing—The ACLU, a 100-year-old organization that defends individual constitutional rights, provides a legal argument against the use of drones for targeted killings.

codepink.org/ground_the_drones—Code Pink's Ground the Drones campaign is an international people's movement to oppose killer and surveillance drones.

eff.org—The Electronic Frontier Foundation is a nonprofit organization that defends civil rights in the digital age by providing research, legal counsel, and advocacy.

Veteran Mental Health

ptsd.va.gov—The VA's National Center for PTSD conducts trauma research for the public and for professionals who provide counseling and other services to U.S. veterans.

maketheconnection.net—Make the Connection is a VA initiative to reduce the isolation that contributes to suicidal ideation and other mental health concerns among veterans.

veteranscrisisline.net—Veterans Crisis Line is an emergency resource created by the VA for veterans and their friends or family to call (1-800-273-8255, press 1), text (838255), or engage in a live online chat anytime in case of emergency.

militaryonesource.mil—The Military OneSource website and call line (1-800-342-9647) offers 24/7 counseling and support for all questions related to military life.

samhsa.gov/veterans-military-families—The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is an independent organization that provides a directory of resources for military personnel and their families.

Additional Resources

Afghanistan

afghans4tomorrow.org—Afghans4Tomorrow is a registered nonprofit, nonpolitical, humanitarian organization in Afghanistan that supports families like the survivors of the February 21, 2010, attack. People can donate to these families under the project designation “Daikundi Families.”

icrc.org/en/where-we-work/asia-pacific/afghanistan—The International Committee of the Red Cross funds the Orthopaedic Center Ali Abad in Kabul. The center provides free care and prostheses to men, women and children in need. Most people on the staff are former patients.

Whistleblower Protections

whisper.exposefacts.org—WHISPeR, the Whistleblower and Source Protection Program of the nonprofit journalistic organization ExposeFacts, provides legal representation to whistleblowers and media sources in the national security and human rights arena.

whistleblower.org—The Government Accountability Project is a whistleblower protection and advocacy organization, which also writes commentary on current whistleblower cases.

whistleblowers.org—The National Whistleblower Center advocates for whistleblower protections and established the National Whistleblower Legal Defense and Education Fund to provide legal counsel to whistleblowers.

www.whistleblowers.gov—OSHA enforces whistleblower protections for more than 20 statutes, including the Clean Air Act and the Consumer Financial Protection Act.

osc.gov/Pages/DOW.aspx—The U.S. Office of Special Counsel is an independent federal agency that investigates reprisal against government whistleblowers in addition to other prohibited personnel practices.

www.dodig.mil/AI/WRI/index.html—The Office of the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Defense provides secure and lawful reporting guidelines for military whistleblowers and investigates reprisals against them.

Appendix

Lyrics for the Film's Title Song, "National Bird"

By Sole

I'm just an organism
Not in an organization of peace
Shoveling s**t in the belly of the beast
You got roped in on an economic draft
Couple years gone in the blistering sun
And the chain of command
Doesn't care if you see your mom again
What's a number to a dumb computer?
When you come from a place where making a living Is making
a killing

Shifting through feeds then it's on to the next spot
The destroyer of worlds, I became it on Xbox
I mean it's cynical son, why you think
Call of Duty donates money to the Wounded Warrior fund? The
Last Starfighter hovers over Jalalabad

Takes out a target and is home for the soccer game What have
I become?
What has war become?
There ain't no citizens in this new Rome

Only rigged decks
And a box of loaded cards to burn
By the time you learn it's rule by few you're in the green zone
Look at the trap that you've walked into

But back to the desert
The one not in Nevada You can be born in Aurora To a Muslim
scholar

Children in tribal regions pray for foggy days Cuz clear skies
bring volleys from worlds away You will never see a city the
same
Only a sociopath remains unchanged

And they wonder why we smoke the weed out!?!? 18 years to
build the coffin
30 years to bleed out

It's an army of one
Group at the top
Sending strangers to kill
For the love of god

Our daily life Predicated on death The violence beneath Sends
strangers to kill

There's a new national bird,
Its wing span is 66 feet
The old ones' habitats are disappearing
Sorry bald eagle, you're obsolete
What I am is what I am
And what I've done is what I've done
And I can't run or make right none
It takes more than bleach to clean all of the blood off More than
a protest, more than a ballot initiative

From before we born till the last dead president

If you ain't disillusioned, you ain't breathing Hard to see the
forest for the trees
When the bushes wanna kill you

This is for the nowhere folks with imperial pasts They wrote it in
gasoline, all you need is a match I mean, you'll need a whole lot
more than that But a match is a good place to start...

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ITVS

ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films and then airs them for free on PBS via our weekly series, Independent Lens, as well as other series and our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For more information, visit itvs.org.

INDEPENDENT LENS

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter @IndependentLens.