

# Review: *War & Homecoming: Veteran Identity and the Post-9/11 Generation*, by Travis L. Martin. Urbana: University Press of Kentucky, 2022. ISBN-13 978-0813195643



## BOOK REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

This review examined Travis Martin's (2022) *War & Homecoming: Veteran Identity and the Post-9/11 Generation* as a foundational contribution to an emerging veteran studies discipline. Drawing on his own experience as a military veteran and interdisciplinary scholar, the reviewer underscores the significance of Martin's lived authority, interdisciplinary methodology, and critical engagement with public narratives of military service. Martin challenges simplistic cultural stereotypes, such as the hero or the broken warrior, and argues for a dynamic, evolving understanding of veteran identity. He situates his work within both literary and scholarly traditions, from *The Things They Carried* to intersectional analyses of race and reintegration, and makes a compelling case for an interdisciplinary and veteran-centered academic approach. Ultimately, *War & Homecoming* is a call to action, urging scholars, policymakers, and advocates to build an academic enterprise that does not merely study veterans but supports and empowers them.

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Travis Martin's (2022) *War & Homecoming: Veteran Identity and the Post-9/11 Generation* is a grounded, unflinching look at what happens after the shooting stops and when the war comes home with a person. He takes a hard, smart look at reintegration in the wake of post-9/11 combat deployments, and he does not waste time romanticizing anything. Martin is not interested in playing to patriotic soundbites or repackaging old-school ideas of valor that do not fit the reality he experienced. This is a book that understands what it means to come back from counterterrorism operations to a country that does not quite know what to make of combat veterans or what they have been through.

Speaking as someone who led Marines as a squad leader, served as a scout sniper team leader, chief scout, acting platoon sergeant, and who has now spent years in the trenches of higher education as an interdisciplinary scholar and professional educator, I felt Martin's work in my bones. It does not flinch from his ugly truth that the transition from warfighter to civilian is brutal and often isolating. His analysis taps into the same current that runs through Marlantes' (2011) *What It's Like to Go to War*. Like Marlantes, he does not tell us what to think; he makes you feel what it is like to carry the weight of modern war. Martin's work belongs in this company. What gives Martin's book its real force is that he has walked the walk. Two combat tours, years working directly with veterans, and a sharp grasp of cultural and social theory—these are not just credentials, that is lived authority. He uses that to build out a powerful framework for understanding veteran identity as something we are always in the process of becoming—not something we just “are.” But he also does not let the culture off the hook. He shows how our stories get boxed in by a limited set of scripts: hero, victim, PTSD time bomb, and in doing so, he created room for a more honest, human version of veteran identity to take root. For those who wrestled with what it means to “come home,” Martin's take is seeing homecoming not as a return, but more of a forced separation from something a person cannot get back to, is not only insightful, it is damn near haunting.

In Chapter 4, “The Veteran Storytellers,” Martin calls out the tired labels society keeps throwing at veterans—either we are heroes or we are broken. However, there is no room in this hegemonic narrative for a full spectrum of human experience. Martin's not buying it, and neither should we. What he is doing here is giving veterans the green light to take our stories back on our terms and not through someone else's lens. He knows what a lot of us already know deep down, that telling your story is not just cathartic, it is an act of resistance. He shows how veterans, by formal writing, painting, performing, or just putting words to paper, are actively reclaiming the right to define

who they are. Not as stereotypes, but as complex, evolving human beings who have served and are still here building a life. He is not just talking theory. No, Martin gives real examples of veterans who have found healing and purpose by speaking their truth, and by doing so, they are also helping civilians understand that service and sacrifice do not end with the DD-214. Service and sacrifice continue, but they need not define any veteran. What defines us is what we choose to do with our experience, and Martin is all about empowering veterans to choose self-expression over silence and complexity over caricature. This chapter is a reminder that your story matters, and the way you tell it can break down walls both inside and out.

One of the real strengths of *War & Homecoming* is in how Martin zeroes in on the heart of the matter in two crucial chapters that cut right to the bone. In “A Theory of Veteran Identity,” he does not just skim the surface; he digs deep into how identity gets shaped by personal experience, military training, and all the civilian noise that piles on afterward. He is not buying into some clean, cookie-cutter idea of what it means to be a veteran. Instead, he lays out a process that is messy, layered, and constantly in motion; built by the institutions we served in and their cultures, but also broken down and rebuilt through the grind of coming home. He takes direct aim at the lazy myth that military service equals automatic, uncomplicated honor. For Martin, veteran identity is never static; it is something we keep negotiating as our own histories collide with the public narratives people try to hang on us.

In his epilogue, “The Rise of Veterans Studies,” Martin shifts gears and looks at the academic landscape. He gives a tight, reflective account of how this field has started to take shape, and his role in it since 9/11 has turned a spotlight on veteran issues again. What is especially sharp and smart is how he refuses to draw a hard line between culture and policy by arguing that we need both and more. He makes the case for an interdisciplinary approach that pulls from political theory, cultural studies, and hard data alike. This closing chapter is not just a summary; it is a bold call to action. He invites scholars, veterans, and civilians alike to think bigger, dig deeper, and move beyond the usual talking points. It is a push toward a richer, more honest reckoning with what it can mean to serve and to come home.

Another thing Martin does well in *War & Homecoming* is put his work in conversation with the heavy hitters who have already shaped how we think about modern war and the veteran experience. He pulls in Tim O'Brien's (1990) *The Things They Carried* and David Finkel's (2009) *The Good Soldiers*, lining his own analysis up with a broader, ongoing conversation that stretches from Vietnam to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and beyond. But he

is not just name-dropping; he is using those connections to show how the core struggles of reintegration, identity, and meaning after service are part of a much longer arc that involves millions of us. What really stands out is how Martin brings intersectionality into the picture, especially the way veterans of color face a double burden—dealing not just with the civilian-military gap, but also with systemic racism baked into both worlds. That angle echoes the kind of critical work you see in Bowleg (2016) and in scholarship on the Vietnam generation. Martin's point is clear: none of this is new, and it sure as hell is not simple. Reintegration is not a one-size-fits-all process, and the more we account for that complexity, the better we will be at telling “real” stories that are true to our lived experiences.

At the end of the day, *War & Homecoming* is not just a solid contribution to conversations focused on veteran identities; it offers a foundation for building out the whole field of veteran studies the right way. Martin does not pull punches. He challenges the comfortable myths about military valor and forces readers to sit with the gap between public parades and private pain. His analysis is sharp, urgent, and dead-on in showing how badly we need to rethink the systems that claim to serve veterans but too often fall short. This book is not just academically aligned; it is a bold call to action. Whether you are a veteran, policymaker, scholar, or an advocate, Martin is telling us all that it is time to step up, reframe the conversation, and do better.

The bottom line is that Martin's work pushes veteran studies to do what they should do, which is put veterans first. Not as case studies or props, but as whole people who are complex, evolving, and deserving of more than

a thank-you-for-your-service or as a career-builder and status-maker for our civilian academic counterparts. His vision is about making space for veterans and more—not just to be labeled, but to become on our own terms. That is the kind of discipline the field needs, and frankly, it remains long overdue.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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