JOURNAL OF VETERANS STUDIES

Introduction to the Special Issue: 9/11, Post-9/11, and the Future of Veterans Studies

COLLECTION:
9/11, POST-9/11, AND THE FUTURE OF VETERANS STUDIES

ARTICLE

CORRINE E. HINTON

TRAVIS L. MARTIN

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

VIRGINIA TECH PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT

This special issue, 9/11, Post-9/11, and the Future of Veterans Studies, brings together four papers from researchers, practitioners, and educators and from veterans and civilians alike. Each contribution is unique, valuable, and blends the personal with the scholarly. Given the individual impacts September 11th has had on so many of us, we found it critical to invite our authors' various lived experiences into the conversation. These articles explore, at their essence, facets of reintegration (re-entry, re-acculturation) broadly and, more specifically, post-9/11 veterans' transitional experiences into higher education (as students and as professionals) as well as civilian life generally. In so doing, our contributors describe various opportunities for conflict, for resolution, and for progress.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Corrine E. Hinton

Texas A&M University-Texarkana, US

chinton@tamut.edu

KEYWORDS:

veterans; post-9/11; understanding; transition; special issue

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Hinton, C. E., & Martin, T. L. (2022). Introduction to the Special Issue: 9/11, Post-9/11, and the Future of Veterans Studies. *Journal of Veterans Studies,* 8(2), pp. 1–7. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v8i2.370

CORRINE'S 9/11 AND POST-9/11

On September 11, 2001, I was on my way to Dr. Adell Patton Jr.'s *African Diaspora* class at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Then a junior and recent transfer student, I often listened to the radio through my earbuds on my way from the car to the classroom. That day was no different, and although Dr. Patton was signaling his readiness to begin from the front of the room, I didn't stop listening. Chaos and confusion streamed from the news reports into my ears, and I interrupted Dr. Patton to tell him that a plane had struck the World Trade Center in New York. He stopped, asking me to relay details as they were coming from the local affiliate. When it became clear something more serious was happening, even when we didn't quite yet understand what it was, Dr. Patton dismissed class. On my way back through the student center, I caught a television screen out of the corner of my eye and stopped. I watched what I had, to that point, only heard. By then the second plane had struck, the Pentagon had been hit, and confusion only turned into panic. I thought immediately of my father, a retired Air Force veteran then working on the 15th story of a brokerage building in downtown St. Louis, just miles from me. I called him, and he assured me he was fine, but that all of the executives and their assistants were watching carefully.

I didn't know it then, but the meaning and impact of September 11th would change for me, personally and professionally, over the next few years. Five years later, as a graduate student, I met and married my husband, a combat infantry Marine set for his first deployment as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom (his second combat deployment to the Middle East). I went from civilian bystander to Marine wife: waiting for alerts, watching news reports more carefully, participating in the rituals of sending off, and welcoming home, my husband and the Marines in the battalions with whom he would serve during what would be three combat deployments in the post-9/11 portion of his service in support of the Global War on Terror. During his active-duty service, September 11th became the catalyst propelling him from training and preparing to implementing everything for which he had trained; this also meant leading, encouraging, and protecting the Marines in his platoon. Comparatively, the War on Terror propelled me into a support role: I was a lifeline back to the world beyond the one he was living, the sender of care packages, the single stepmom to my 10-year-old stepson. I have held the phone in fear after explosions dropped our calls. I have endured the sleepless nights and breathed the sighs of relief when injuries, at the time, were minimal in comparison to the alternative.

And then I experienced another evolution as my husband's combat experiences impacted his life at home, even after he retired and the Marines were no longer a part of his day-to-day life. Although he had initially gone through a vocational program and tried to maintain gainful employment after his retirement, his understanding about how the world should work and how people should treat each other, coupled with the manifestations of his invisible injuries, ran in conflict with his civilian experiences. Posttraumatic stress disorder, a previously undiagnosed (and largely ignored) traumatic brain injury, bureaucracy and delays at the VA waiting for medical and mental health care: our post-service lives looked nothing like either of us had imagined. I went from military wife to military caregiver as my husband was declared 100% permanently and totally disabled and housebound.

As the daughter of two retired enlisted Air Force veterans who attended college nontraditionally, I had generated an interest in the post-service experiences and perceptions of veterans, particularly those choosing to pursue their postsecondary degrees, before meeting my husband. As a college writing teacher, I had several student veterans in class and interacted with several more as a writing center consultant, and I wanted to better understand how to provide them with the support they might need while also understanding how their learning and writing experiences during the military might be advantageous and disadvantageous to learning and writing in college. As a researcher I began investigating these experiences formally, learning from the lived experiences of the student veterans who agreed to share their stories with me. I still conduct this work, and I still learn from the veterans who speak with me about particular aspects of their experiences. For me, one particular pattern that emerged, and continues to reemerge with new work of my own and of other veterans studies scholars, is the importance of contextualizing veterans' experiences in consideration of the cultural impact and implications of military service.

In my 2012 dissertation, at the start of the resurgence of veterans studies work, I contextualized my participants' experiences through social psychologist Nan M. Sussman's (2000) model of re-acculturation, often referred to as *reverse culture shock*. This framework was new to work in the transitional experiences of student veterans, as previous literature in that period tended to lean heavily on Nancy K. Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory (some work on veteran reintegration still does). But I was struck by the ways in which the cultural values and systems, including the teaching-learning dynamic, of the military broadly, and of branches specifically, shaped how some student veterans characterized their post-service experiences (including

those on their college campuses). Even now I am reminded of this, as Travis, my co-editor of this special issue, ponders in his recent book, *War & Homecoming: Veteran Identity and the Post-9/11 Generation*:

> Did taking an oath of enlistment somehow transform me into a member of a new culture, one less defined by skin color or socioeconomic background than by the habituations common to those who've endured military service? Were we all, in fact, *green*? And if I *was* green, what am I *now*? (Martin, 2022, p. 46)

So, when I consider what veterans studies, as a field, has gained and lost from its work cast by the still-growing shadows of the September 11th terrorist attacks, I come back to what I see as a thread running through the work of our special issue scholars: ***understanding***.

Civilian veterans studies scholars must put *understanding* at the center of our interactions and research with, as well as interpretations and support of, veterans and military families. However, *understanding*, conceptually speaking, is fraught with complications and contradictions, especially when it comes to apprehending the lived experiences of others when (a) those experiences are not the same as our own and (b) those experiences are sometimes marked by such distinctions as to not be traditionally accessible as a part of the broader human experience. With less than 10% of the US population having served in the military, military service as a lived experience is still uncommon, war-time service even less common, combat engagement during an active conflict even less common than that. *Understanding* is derivative: from recognizing a phenomenon's existence, from one's intellectual knowledge about a phenomenon, and/or from sympathetic temperament toward a phenomenon. For some, *judgment* plays a critical part in understanding as an essential evaluative byproduct. I have learned *x*, so now we should do *y*. I have learned *a*, and so that means *b*. But judgment can also be problematic, limiting, and misrepresentative of the very phenomenon or lived experience we are attempting to understand. Even more challenging, judgment often aligns itself to explicit and implicit values possessed by the judge rather than the judged. To advance veterans studies research and the field itself, we must continue to move our perspectives and approaches from observations *of* to interactions *with* military affiliated individuals, from studies *of* to conversations *with* them. Our work, evinced by our field's challenges and by the work of our special issue scholars, pulls us away from object-oriented pursuits that can, however unintentionally, *other* veterans and military affiliated individuals, and calls us toward building partnerships with the community members we want to understand and from whom we want to learn.

TRAVIS'S 9/11 AND POST-9/11

I was a senior at a high school in a small town in southeastern Kentucky on September 11, 2001. A mediocre student, my educational records contained a long list of disciplinary referrals and counselor's notes. Other students walked down the hall thinking about the next test or essay. I was more focused on the next party, or what prank I could pull to get a laugh from my friends. My guidance counselor told me, "Kids like you don't make it in the real world." He forced me to meet with an Army recruiter because he honestly thought the military would straighten me out.

On that Tuesday morning, honors students and pranksters alike were huddled around the entryway to Ms. McEnroe's English class. Peering over gawking heads, I saw the smoke rising and the panicking voices of newscasters—the gasps of some students, each hammering home the fact that what we were witnessing was not, in fact, a scene from an action movie, but rather the deaths of 2,977 individuals. The only memory to which I could compare what was unfolding would have been the Oklahoma City Bombing on April 19, 1995. Though young, I remember people huddled around the television that day, too.

Television newscasts emerged thematically in my life as windows into a larger world filled with insanity and violence. In November 2002, when I enlisted, I would not have been able to locate Iraq or Afghanistan on a map. I would not have been able to explain the concept of religious extremism, the geopolitics of America's involvement in the Middle East, or even the nature of the mission in Afghanistan. My ignorance was a form of privilege. Then, during my last week of Advanced Individual Training, I got an extended look at the Iraqi landscape as American tanks rolled toward Baghdad on the television screen in our day room. "Take a look, that's where you all are going," said one of the drill sergeants. Never mind that I'd locked in Germany on my enlistment contract.

Sure enough, Iraq is where I found myself a few months later. I was awfully young. I celebrated both my 19th and 21st birthdays on combat deployments. More than anything, I wish I had had the benefit of an education when I deployed. I would have asked so many questions. And they would have been good questions, the type of inquiry put on display by the scholars featured in this journal. I would have written poems during the long waits. I might have jotted down notes for a memoir, things I have long since

forgotten. Instead, I experienced war and homecoming mostly as a passenger, observing the world around me, the people in it, and how they treated me. Things changed after I became "a veteran."

My veteran status felt like a form of separation between me and my immediate family. It wasn't that I was treated with malice. Rather, there was this imagined version of my service that my loved ones wanted to extol, a kind of respect that prevents grandmas from pinching cheeks out of fear of emasculating the "the tough soldier boy." Sure, I think of clueless practitioners and offensive questions when I hear people talk about "the disconnect between military and civilian cultures." But most often, and even more than the hardships I faced in uniform, I think about how the world and the people I loved grew ever so slightly colder toward me in order to show their appreciation. After all, I loved it when grandma pinched my cheeks as a kid!

I have been out of the military for nearly 15 years. It feels like I have told this story a million times. And there are always slight variations. But that is part of the reason I tell it. Those variations are a form of working through, of piecing together of memories and feelings and geopolitics to make sense of it all. It is a form of identity making that I discovered in myself, both in my decision to use my undergraduate and graduate studies to better understand my service, and in my decision to help other writers tell their stories in college courses for student veterans, therapeutic arts workshops, and the veteran expressive arts community. I view veteran homecoming as a process rather than experience. For me, this process has involved weaving together my professional self as an academic and educator with my experiences as a soldier.

The phrase "veterans studies" did not exist prior to 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism. There have always been scholars studying war and veteran's issues. However, the interdisciplinary coalition of scholars who have banded together in our burgeoning field share a desire to shape meaning and discourse around veteran identity in such a way that a framework is emerging, one that distinguishes between generational norms, active-duty soldiers and veterans, veterans of differing nationalities, ethnicities, races, genders, and other social identities. It is a conversation inclusive of non-veteran and veteran thinkers, military family members, and individuals inside and outside of mainstream academia. Veterans studies, as a discipline, was born in an interconnected community of activists, artists, scholars, and members of military/veteran communities trying to make sense of it all. We have so many questions.

Fifteen years after taking off the uniform I find myself an educator helping young people articulate their own questions. There are two key approaches to ***understanding*** in my Introduction to Veterans Studies course: *listening* and *empathy*. These aren't the forms of knowledge one normally associates with a college education. Yet, the ability to communicate with veterans in an authentic manner leads to empathy that becomes an intrinsic motivator inspiring the students to explore beyond the *mystique* of veteran identity so that they might understand veterans as *individuals*, as *human beings*. Empathy is a shortcut often derived from testimony. Stevan Weine (2015), a psychiatrist and scholar of identity, defined testimony by its "ability to 'fuse' … private and public worlds" with "unique therapeutic and cultural power" (p. 143). Can research be a form of testimony?

Our conceit in this special issue of the *Journal of Veterans Studies* is that our authors were asked to combine the personal with the scholarly. Through autobiographical criticism and autoethnography, the authors share how they and their understandings of the world changed as a result of 9/11. Of course, they must work through the contradictions Corrine warns about. They must display great empathy to understand experiences that are not their own. And, I will add, this need is just as true of veterans studies scholars who are veterans themselves. There are far too many variations of veteran identity to presume one's own experiences speak for the whole. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges facing our community is the human tendency to generalize and stereotype that which we do not fully understand. Veterans exist as people and symbols simultaneously. The veterans studies scholar's most useful skill, I believe, is the ability to distinguish between veterans as individuals and veterans as symbols so that *understanding* is possible.

Each student in my veterans studies class must locate a veteran, conduct a recorded interview, and index the interview for archival in our school's oral history center. For many, there is something terribly intimidating about the prospect of approaching a veteran and moving beyond the phrase, "thank you for your service." It is a common refrain to learn that the interview project is the first time many of them discuss service with their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, or other loved ones. In fact, I had a student veteran tell me once that it was their first opportunity to discuss service in a meaningful way with a platoon sergeant—a mentor and friend he'd served alongside for years. For veterans and non-veterans alike, there is a hierarchy of machismo and honor around which one treads lightly. Even societies must grapple with their own guilt and sense of loss when acknowledging wars fought in their name. Again, and to draw upon my colleague's insights from earlier, the mystique or symbolic nature of veteran identity

can be problematic, limiting, and misrepresentative of the very phenomenon or lived experience we are attempting to understand.

Suffice it to say, I felt old when I realized most of my students were born after the events of 9/11. Until last year, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were a part of their daily lives—a given. The news media stopped scrolling numbers of dead soldiers across their television screens at some point during their early childhood. Yellow ribbon bumper stickers were still popular when they entered into adolescence. And American flags protruded from middle-class porches even as these young people heard stories of VA scandals, military sexual trauma, and a suicide epidemic.

So, on the one hand, their reticence to begin conversations about military service is understandable. They view such testimony as the stuff of trauma narratives, patriotic rituals, or those YouTube videos in which veterans mock Hollywood's attempts to approximate military uniforms, tactics, and mannerisms. My students worry that saying the wrong thing will be viewed as a form of disrespect or cause psychological distress. Never mind that most veterans never serve in combat. Most of those do not deal with posttraumatic stress. And those who do tend to be managing their condition with medications, therapy, or other treatments. I am among the latter. As Corrine points out, judgment can be problematic due to the values and biases possessed by the judge. As amateur oral historians, my students are required to listen to veterans. And, when they ask veterans how they can better understand military communities, they are told, repeatedly, "to listen." The veterans studies community has so many questions. Perhaps, having the wisdom to listen is that which ties us all together.

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue, *9/11, Post-9/11, and the Future of Veterans Studies*, brings together four papers from researchers, practitioners, educators, and from veterans and civilians alike. Each contribution is unique, valuable, and—as we note above—blends the personal with the scholarly. Given the individual impacts September 11th has had on so many of us, we found it critical to invite our authors' various lived experiences into the conversation. These articles explore, at their essence, facets of reintegration (re-entry, re-acculturation) broadly and, more specifically, post-9/11 veterans' transitional experiences into higher education (as students and as professionals), as well as civilian life generally. In so doing, our contributors describe various opportunities for conflict, for resolution, and for progress.

Tina Craddock reviews the development, goals, opportunities, and challenges of Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs). Her work, in part, reminds us of the interconnectedness of challenges some veterans can face, at various points and for various circumstances, when impacted by their military service or reintegration. An experienced family law paralegal, Craddock confirms, "The court does not give veterans a 'get out of jail free' card, but rather offers them an opportunity to receive intensive counseling, treatment, and to accept responsibility for their actions." Such opportunities are critical for many veterans whose opportunities have been limited or whose experiences with attempting to access support have been marred by bureaucracy, understaffed and un(der) supported organizations and institutions, or rejection. Craddock emphasizes the importance of supporting each veteran as a community member, not a criminal, and she highlights how consistency in, support for, and availability of VTCs will be critical as the veteran population continues to grow.

Margeaux Chavez, a public health practitioner with the US Department of Veterans Affairs James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, Florida, partnered with her research team co-authors to showcase the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) in community engaged research (CenR) with veterans. Using MSP voices from the Enhancing Veteran Community Reintegration Research (ENCORE) project, Chavez et al. demonstrate the value this reciprocal, collaborative approach brings to research with veterans. For Chavez and her team, the ENCORE MSP "exists to ensure that future VA research findings can support veteran community reintegration services that are designed and delivered with a deep understanding of veterans' social and cultural identities." Monica Matthieu, Army daughter, VA researcher, and co-author, explains that Veteran CEnR "is about partnering and partnering well." Ultimately, Chavez and her partners provide a crucial model for conducting ethical, transparent, impactful, community informed research for those working alongside veterans, caregivers, and military family members throughout reintegration.

Jeni Hunniecutt shares what the higher education community risks losing when we fail to attend to the lived experiences of the veterans and military affiliated learners we serve. A veteran of the Army National Guard, veterans studies scholar, and former researcher at a university veteran center, Hunniecutt reveals the way in which veterans studies research without veteran engagement and participation damages both the field and the very community those researchers are attempting to help. Through her accounting of invisibility, gender-based

microaggressions, and toxic leadership, Hunniecutt's autoethnographic account calls, in part, for the participatory, veteran-informed approach Chavez and her co-authors champion. Furthermore, Hunniecutt doubles down on how essential military cultural competence and listening are to understanding the diversity of veterans' experiences and to deploying any treatment, program, service, or support system designed to engage all members of the veteran community. She cautions, "If we [veterans] are not part of the conversation, however pure and innocent your intentions may be, the impact is exclusion, invisibility, and harm."

William T. Howe also explores how his experiences as an Army medic impacted his time as an undergraduate, graduate student, and assistant professor. Like Hunniecutt, Howe foregrounds the impact of the military's cultural system. Howe focuses on the values this culture imparts to many of its members, traces how these values map onto the six moral foundations, and cites these as meaningful throughout his own service-to-campus journey. He likens his experiences to reverse culture shock, and he attributes both his cultural values from the military and his unique life experiences as the forces separating him from civilian others in his campus communities. Howe explains, "When service members are forced to alter their moral foundations, whether knowingly or not, it can create difficulty when they reenter a culture that does not share these same values." Howe's claim echoes one with which many veterans studies scholars are likely familiar; yet, his excursion through multiple levels of campus engagement underscores the (mis)characterizations, stereotypes, and veteran myths that continue to perpetuate our cultural understanding of veterans and veteranness.

The articles in this special issue identify ongoing challenges, new opportunities, and significant accomplishments in various sectors of interest to *Journal of Veterans Studies* readers. Additionally, the contributors motivate us to put the voices and lived experiences of veterans and military families at the center of our work, reminding us of our ethical responsibilities as researchers, as educators, and as fellow community members. Furthermore, we are challenged to (re)focus on the dynamism, diversity, and distinctiveness of *veterans' experiences*, rather than *the veteran experience*, and (re) acknowledge the cultural influences and implications of military service on all those it touches. At the very least, we must have the wisdom to listen to those living (through) the experiences we seek to understand.

What does the future hold for our innovative and growing field? Interdisciplinary research is showcased in this special issue, but also among the many scholarly works published by the *Journal of Veterans Studies* each year. The Veterans Studies Association, building upon the work of the Veterans in Society initiative begun at Virginia Tech, will soon host another conference—this time at Arizona State University (ASU). ASU is one of several schools offering courses and/or credentials in the field. In fact, the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where one of this issue's editors was studying African identity on 9/11, developed one of the first veterans studies programs in the country. We maintain special interest groups with the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, and elsewhere. The number of communities, courses, and scholarly publications representing veterans studies grows each year. Individually we are driven by personal experiences and scholarly intrigue. Together we are driven by a desire to change the lives of veterans and their families for the better.

Chavez, Craddock, Howe, Hunniecutt, and those many scholars coalescing under the banner of veterans studies ensure that veterans issues remain in contemporary scholarly debates. They form a community in which analyses of research about issues impacting veterans, their families, and larger society can take place. As the conversation grows louder, more and more interdisciplinary perspectives gain a seat at the table. More and more ways of *understanding* emerge. It has been more than 2 decades since the events of September 11, 2001. The nature of veteran identity has changed. The experiences of military families continue to shift to meet the needs of geopolitical realities, not just in the United States, but in all societies that create symbolic categories for this amalgamation—warriors, protectors, defenders, patriots, and citizens—we call "the veteran." Veterans studies is a long time coming. And at its core, it is a field defined by the wisdom of listening to veterans and their families combined with the hope of understanding them. In this issue, we acknowledge the ways in which 9/11 shaped scholarship about veterans, lives inclusive of veterans, and how the professional and personal are forever intertwined by shared sacrifice.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Corrine E. Hinton orcid.org/0000-0003-3717-1404
Texas A&M University, Texarkana, US

Travis L. Martin
Eastern Kentucky University, US

REFERENCES

Martin, T. L. (2022). *War & homecoming: Veteran identity and the Post-9/11 Generation*. University Press of Kentucky. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2jtxrng

Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist, 9*(2), 2–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/001100008100900202

Sussman, N. M. (2000). The dynamic nature of cultural identity throughout cultural transitions: Why home is not so sweet. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*(4), 355–373. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0404_5

Weine, S. (2015). What happens—and who benefits—when trauma victims are encouraged to tell their stories? In T. Aubry & T. Travis (Eds.), *Rethinking therapeutic culture* (pp. 143–153). University of Chicago Press.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Hinton, C. E., & Martin, T. L. (2022). Introduction to the Special Issue: 9/11, Post-9/11, and the Future of Veterans Studies. *Journal of Veterans Studies,* 8(2), pp. 1–7. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v8i2.370

Submitted: 28 June 2022 **Accepted:** 04 July 2022 **Published:** 25 July 2022