

# Moral Injury and Veterans

Annotated Bibliography for 2016 NEH Summer Institute on Veterans in Society

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Bica, Camillo Mac., *Beyond PTSD: The Moral Casualties of War*. Commack, NY: Gnosis Press, 2016.

Camillo “Mac” Bica, Ph.D., a former Marine Corps Officer, Vietnam Veteran, and a philosopher at the New York School of Design, wrestles with the “psychological, emotional, and moral injuries of war,” in this collection of essays. He rejects the clinical model of veteran suffering and claims that the invisible wounds of war go beyond trauma. He seeks to provide a greater understanding of the war experience and to dispel the mythology of heroism by providing an insight into the reality of war.

Boudreau, Tyler E., *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2008, and “The Morally Injured,” *Massachusetts Review*, July 2010, <http://www.massreview.org/sites/default/files/Boudreau.pdf>.

Tyler Boudreau, Ph.D., joined the Marine Corps at seventeen but didn’t deploy into a war until he was in his 30s. Before, during, and after deployment to Iraq, he had heard the oft-repeated phrase, “war is hell,” and while he does not minimize the actual experience of being in war, for Boudreau the descent into hell did not truly begin until he returned home. Boudreau recounts the high expectations and fascinations for war that many in the military have before deploying and how war permanently alters those who serve, often in ways that they and their families at first cannot comprehend. In his subsequent essay in 2010, he criticizes regarding moral injury as a treatment disorder while noting its value as different from PTSD. He discusses, as a dimension of moral injury, the importance of empathy for those harmed, including the humanity of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed—without them troops have no moral injury to speak of.

Brock, Rita Nakashima and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury After War*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2012.

Through the stories of two Vietnam veterans, Camillo “Mac” Bica and Herman Keizer Jr., and five Iraq veterans, Kevin Benderman, Tyler Boudreau, Joshua Casteel, Dweylon Fifer, and Camilo Mejia, the authors explore the devastating effects of moral injury on veterans. Through each chapter, the veterans explain their motives for enlisting, describe key experiences in deployment, reflect upon their struggles after returning, and discuss how they have come to terms with their moral injury. The book also stresses the responsibility society has in supporting the recovery of the ones that we send to war.

Capps, Walter H., *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience*. 2nd ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

Even though the Vietnam War ended on May 1, 1975 Capps argues in his 1990, revised edition of *The Unfinished War*, that the Vietnam War not only impacted the lives of those injured and family members whose loved ones were killed or went missing, but also had lasting effects on American culture. The Vietnam War shattered the myth that justice and morality were linked with American military might. The Vietnam War also impacted religious and social institutions as Americans struggled with making sense and/or moving on from the Vietnam War. He asserts that the rise of Protestant Conservatism and the heavy emphasis on individuality and the placing of confidence solely on oneself and not on collective institutions are ramifications of the controversial war. Beginning in 1978 Capps taught a course at UC Santa Barbara, “Religion and the Impact of Vietnam,” which offered Vietnam veterans a first opportunity to tell their stories. It regularly enrolled 900 students and was featured three times on CBS’s “60 Minutes”

program. He journeyed with veterans to the Soviet Union in 1988 and to Vietnam in 1991. His was the first television class to be transmitted by satellite, in 1992 and 1993. Capps, who was elected to Congress in 1996 and died in 1997 of a heart attack, was among the leaders of a nation-wide effort to establish Vietnam veterans' centers in every major city of the United States.

Goodell, Jess, and John E. Hearn, *Shade It Black: Death and after in Iraq*. Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2011.

Jessica Goodell, as part of the first Marine Corps mortuary unit in Iraq, spent eight months processing body parts, matching them, and preparing them to send to their families. Each body bag sent home had to include a diagrammed outline of the body with missing parts shaded black. Goodell describes in her memoir her personal struggles and those in her unit with coming to terms with being immersed for months in the gristly human remains of war, including the emergence of a universal experience of ghosts. The author discusses the difficulty veterans face in holding onto their humanity in the midst of so much pain and destruction as well as the unique challenges female service members face in service and back home.

Litz, Brett, et. al., *Adaptive Disclosure: A New Treatment Protocol for Military Trauma, Loss, and Moral Injury*, New York: Guilford Press, 2016.

In distinguishing moral injury and complex loss from the fear-based diagnosis of PTSD, this team of VA clinicians offers a tested eight-session protocol for "hot counseling" in the immediate aftermath of combat or a deployment. It is designed to identify and begin a process of recovery from moral injury and loss. The book includes helpful information on military culture and values for those who do not understand military service, written by Dr. William Nash, a retired Marine Corps psychiatrist and former member of the VA national PTSD Center who became director of Office of Psychological Health for the Marine Corps in June 2015.

Mejia, Camilo E., "Healing Moral Injury: A Lifelong Journey," *Fellowship of Reconciliation*, Winter, 2010, <http://web.archive.org/web/20160420012701/http://forusa.org/fellowship/2011/winter/healing-moral-injury/11606>.

After deploying to Iraq, Mejia, an immigrant from Nicaragua, went AWOL rather than redeploy and spent eight months in military prison, a story he tells in his memoir, *Road From ar Ramadi: The Private Rebellion of Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia*, New York: The New Press, 2007. In this essay, he reflects on his delayed awareness of moral injury as the lingering struggle with his war service. He draws a clear distinction with his PTSD diagnosis, and in accepting ways he violated his moral conscience, he explains why he decides he would not be a moral person if he ever felt OK about killing another human being.

Nez, Chester, with Judith Schiess Avila, *Code Talker: The First and Only Memoir by One of the Original Navajo Code Talkers of WWII*, New York: Berkley Publ. Group, 2011.

Based on 80 hours of interviews with former U.S. Marine, Chester Nez, by code-talker scholar Avila, the book tells the life story of the last survivor of the 29 original Navajo code talkers who created the code (included in the book). Assigned his name in boarding school to replace his given name, Nez was raised in a traditional Navajo family in New Mexico and punished for speaking his native language in that school, a common practice of the time to strip culture and religious traditions from Native Americans. The Navajo code was used to win the Pacific theater of World War II and is the only unbroken code in modern warfare, created from a language that U.S. policy had sought to erase. In his struggle to return home after an unusually extensive time in war, Nez was haunted constantly by Japanese ghosts. He describes the extraordinary ritual measures his community conducted to keep him from killing himself because he could no longer endure the anguish he had carried home from combat. He was required to keep his time in service a secret until the code was de-classified in 1964.

Rambo, Shelly, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Rambo draws on contemporary studies in trauma to rethink a central claim of the Christian faith: that new life arises from death. Reexamining the narrative of the death on Friday and resurrection of Jesus on Sunday from the middle day--liturgically named as Holy Saturday--she seeks a theology that addresses the experience of living in the aftermath of trauma and carrying it forward as a remainder. Through a reinterpretation of "remaining" in the Johannine Gospel, she proposes a new theology of the Spirit that challenges traditional conceptions of redemption as being made new. She offers, in its place, a vision of the Spirit's witness from within the depths of human suffering as the persistence of divine love.

*After Fire*, Brittany Huckabee, Director, Odyssey Networks, Documentary Film, 2016.

Filmed in San Antonio, TX, this vérité-style documentary follows three women as they struggle with invisible wounds from their time in the military, including sexual trauma, moral injury, and traumatic brain injury. As part of a support group, each woman follows different strategies for coping: one uses intense athletic training, another focuses on her children, and a third joins the VFW and lobbies Congress. In depicting their struggles with the VA and in their families, the film presents the complexity and on-going nature of women coming to terms with military service.

Verkamp, Bernard J. *The Moral Treatment of Returning Warriors in Early Medieval and Modern times*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006.

Verkamp contrasts the nature of war and the treatment of returning Christian warriors as practiced in early medieval Europe with the treatment veterans receive today. In the early medieval period, warriors who killed even for sake of king and/or religion were considered to be sinners, and rituals were in place that not only offered the returning warriors penance and an opportunity to reestablish their place in the society, but that also served as an acknowledgement of all that they had been through. However, in the modern period, such rituals are nonexistent and warriors are left to grapple with their guilt and pain while often having their guilt dismissed by psychiatrists as disorders and neuroses or condemned as bad faith by religious leaders. Verkamp draws from a variety of sources including fourth and fifth-century bishops such as Athanasius of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo, as well as Ernest Hemingway and Albert Camus in his analysis.

Yandell, Michael, "Testimony about Moral Injury," Oct. 14, 2014, Midland, TX.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ex\\_2pS6Ekkk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ex_2pS6Ekkk), with background story about Yandell's service in Iraq by C. J. Chivers, "The Secret Casualties of Iraq's Abandoned Chemical Weapons," New York Times, Oct. 14, 2014: A1, [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/10/14/world/middleeast/us-casualties-of-iraq-chemical-weapons.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/10/14/world/middleeast/us-casualties-of-iraq-chemical-weapons.html?_r=0).

Yandell, M. Div., who enlisted at 17 and trained as an ordinance disposal specialist (EOD), reflects on his understanding of moral injury a decade after he became one of only two military service members to survive exposure to sarin gas in Iraq. Chivers' front page NYT story exposed the Pentagon secret about hundreds of American troops injured by chemical weapons left behind by Saddam Hussein. An ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Yandell is pursuing a doctorate in theology and ethics at Emory University. A short excerpt of his testimony was published January 3, 2015, in the *Christian Century*.

For an interdisciplinary, comprehensive list of resources on moral injury, visit [www.soulrepair.org](http://www.soulrepair.org) and click the box on information and resources.

**Tags:** Veterans, Iraq War; Vietnam War; Navajo code talker; Navajo Enemyway ritual; moral injury; veteran trauma; war and religion; Holy Saturday; religion and trauma; adaptive disclosure; military sexual trauma; women veterans