

Wade Hasty

I have a personal vested interest in the lives that have been interwoven with my own. To add context as to what that means, it is more known these days that veterans — combat veterans reintegrating within any given community — have challenges that others are not necessarily facing. This isn't to say those having not served don't have experiences with trauma, it is to say that life experiences in the military without trauma still hold disruptive consequences to one's life. When I say that I have a personal vested interest, I have paid out-of-pocket to visit the funerary ceremonies. I have lost more of those I honor in the States, though I have no doubts, they are residual impacts of combat being carried over in the mind. Now take those types of stressors, and compound them with the intersectionality of other demographics trying to have a voice of acceptance and live their lives in peace, and you can understand a semblance of the depth as to why I care.

Within my platoon (last names will be used only as to keep a modicum of anonymity), Castillo served as my machine gunner. He is now happily married to his partner, and they have two daughters together. Carmona didn't even have his U.S. citizenship. They were fighting for a nation that recognized him as a non-citizen. Zapien was shot during a combat operation, got back to the States, and was assaulted by ICE. I was the driver of Traywick's car when he was pulled over on Post St., predicated by "driving while Black," I am clearly not Black, yet my brother Traywick is, and his vehicle had been routinely stopped on several occasions prior and knew firsthand what would happen.

I highlight these stories, because so many think the typical patriot serving abroad is a fair-skinned, blue-eyed, country male, and they don't think about others. They also don't think about our college campus population. Well, when we get out, and if we can try to transition, we're routinely using our MGIB to pay for college tuition. We have a prominent school for higher education within our town, in a neighboring town, and a couple more not far away. Veterans are an intrinsic expression of the entire American fabric, and any pressures they might be feeling are only exacerbated by extra noise inside their minds, and brought forth by external stressors in their communities. So I take very seriously the notion that everyone is deserving of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."