

Veterans are living representations of America's core values. They volunteer to uphold liberty and justice for all. This sheer patriotism in conjunction with the significant and educational stories veterans have participated in defining veteran legacies. Listening to their experiences provides rich historical insight and strengthens civilian perspectives on what America asks of its veterans. When in the presence of a veteran it is customary to say "thank you for your service" especially as November 11th rounds the corner, but the line of conversation need not be drawn here. We as civilians mustn't disregard the significance and scope of the word "service". Specificities about what the word means to each veteran bring forth perspective and are learned simply by showing interest in what a veteran has to say about their service. A veteran sharing their story benefits both groups –veterans and civilians– by aiding a veteran in processing what they have endured, creating a connection between civilians and veterans trying to reintegrate into society, providing a way for civilians to show gratitude, and educating civilians on the veteran experience. Veterans develop stories that can teach the citizens of America about the makings of history.

From these stories, we can learn that veterans volunteer themselves to spend time away from the comfort of typical American society. They experience trauma, sacrifice time with their loved ones, experience physically demanding training, and are exposed to war zones all so U.S. citizens are never forced to familiarize themselves with tyranny. After enduring these transitions, veterans are also tasked with integrating back into society. Veterans return to family, enter or reenter the workforce, and begin a new daily routine all while coping with the imprints of war and combat. In honoring veterans upon their homecoming, people help narrow civilian-veteran disconnection and ease the shock of returning.

A display of honor is momentous, albeit not always present in American history. During various periods, veterans have been treated differently. The treatment of veterans impacts their return to society, illuminating the importance of the civilian role that is honoring our veterans. Comparing the return of soldiers from World War II and Vietnam is a prime example of the

varying spectrum of support veterans have received. Upon their return from World War II, veterans were greeted by a nation anxious to show their approbation. Parades flooded the streets and celebrations lit up houses all in praise of the country's heroes who helped win the war. During the Vietnam war era, a significant change in attitude occurred. The public connotation of what it means to be a veteran shifted. There was an uprising in antiwar protest as people disagreed with America's involvement in Vietnam. Veterans were stereotyped as killers and villains who carried out unjust government actions. In their homecoming veterans were not celebrated as heroes, they were rejected by society. Veterans were greeted with forms of indifference, discomfort, and suspicion. They experienced the already hefty feat of adjusting back from war and witnessed America torn apart by a debate over the very subject they risked their lives for. WWII and Vietnam are an example of how politics can be intertwined with the respect veterans receive. A major learning point from this history is that we must collectively recognize that the military is essential and meaningful regardless of current politics. It protects our freedoms and defends the nation, symbolizing our independence as individuals and as a country.

This is especially important considering the recent decrease in military enrollment. People are showing less interest and motivation to serve. The number of people in the emerging generations who are exposed to the veteran experience is shrinking. In the short term, fewer people are defending the country which weakens America's strength. In the long term, there could be fewer people to share their stories and inspire new people to join. This inflates the civilian bubble, where people lack exposure to –and therefore struggle to comprehend– the veteran perspective. Mitigating this disconnect and lack of enthusiasm to serve, stems from raising awareness of Veteran importance. It stems from education on the veteran experience and from speaking of veterans with a grateful demeanor. The teaching of veteran history is a tool that can captivate and encourage youth! Education ensures that when the people of America are asked "Why is a Veteran Important?" they can answer with confidence and respect

about the dedication, patriotism, bravery, strength, and sacrifice that create a legacy of immense importance within each veteran.