

# The Martial Imagination: Cultural Aspects of American Warfare

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Jimmy L. Bryan Jr. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013. xii, 248 pp. Cloth, \$55.00. Paper, \$29.95.)

*The Martial Imagination* opens new avenues of inquiry into American military history by examining the “cultural history of American warfare” (p. 2). Jimmy L. Bryan Jr. makes no pretentious claim that the anthology's twelve essays are the final authority in the field. The volume instead highlights specific aspects of culture and applies them to the American military experience by focusing on violence, race, gender, and memory in an inclusive effort to demonstrate how the national “martial imagination has profoundly impacted the ways in which Americans think of themselves” (p. 1).

To understand the meaning of suffering—a condition so often found in war imagery and narratives—Kathleen Kennedy reviews Francis Parkman's *The Jesuits of New France* (1867) in her chapter, “War and Trauma.” For Parkman, the Jesuits' physical strength to endure torture at the hands of their Iroquois enemies signified their manhood, an indelible component of their “Teutonic racial identity” (p. 49). From her thoughtful critique of Parkman, Kennedy believes that for “historians to fully understand discourses of war [they] must pay closer attention to how [writers] construct pain and trauma” in armed conflict, as it may “mask” those authors' intentions (p. 50). Although Kennedy focused on Parkman, her assessment is also applicable to Hollywood screenwriters found later in the anthology.

Belinda Linn Rincón relates the power of gender imagery on the eve of the Spanish-American War in the chapter “From Maiden to Mambisa.” Rincón recounts not only the daring rescue of Evangelina Cossio Cisneros from her Spanish jailers in 1897 but also how the exploitation of the story by newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst mobilized American public opinion. Rincón stresses that Americans were moved by “depictions of imperialist chivalry,” which “might seem absurd” today except for a similar stratagem used by the George W. Bush administration with Pvt. Jessica Lynch's 2003 capture in the early days of the Iraq War (p. 89). Rincón's contribution emphasizes the work of Iris Marion Young by demonstrating the way “a gendered lens enables us to understand how constructions of masculinity and femininity inform our interpretations of war” (*ibid.*).

Forgetting and memory remarkably molded America's martial sensitivities. Susan L. Eastman describes those issues in her chapter, “Randall Wallace's *We Were Soldiers*,” and reveals how Tom Brokaw's catchphrase “the Greatest Generation” was used by Hollywood during the fiftieth anniversary of World War II to reawaken civic patriotism at the expense of forgetting the Vietnam tragedy. The release of Wallace's popular Vietnam War film in 2002 came shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks and before the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Many film critics assumed that if *We Were Soldiers* was promoting war, it failed by reliving the brutal combat scenes at landing zone X-ray. However, Eastman explains that when the film premiered at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 2002, the number of cadets seeking postings to the infantry actually increased. By reframing the war and avoiding domestic opposition, Eastman avers, Wallace emphasized heroic imagery of “the war as a fight for survival ‘among brothers in arms,’ and its narrative veils its revision and forgetfulness by attesting to its historical accuracy of experience” (p. 204).

Amy S. Greenberg's chapter, “Marshaling the Imaginary, Imagining the Martial,” links all the contributors' essays together by highlighting the national amnesia regarding the Mexican War (1846–1848) in light of the public's support for the conflict with Spain in 1898. She demonstrates the vistas offered by culture and how “imagined moments can reveal considerable truth about America's martial past; why Americans went to war, why civilians continued supporting a given engagement, [and] how the meaning of war differed for different Americans” (p. 223). The contributing authors have made *The Martial Imagination* a splendid and thought-provoking volume that admirably met

Bryan's objective by demonstrating that “the search for meaning in the past is as much about deciphering imagined moments as it is about uncovering empirical evidence” (p. 2).

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