



## Guys Like Me: Five Wars, Five Veterans for Peace

**Michael A. Messner**

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Michael A. Messner's *Guys Like Me* profiles a veteran from each of the five most recent American wars, documenting the experiences that led them to activism and advocacy for peace.

Messner, the Vietnam-protesting grandson of a World War I veteran, provides excellent, analytical passages on the wars that give context to the veterans' stories. He and his subjects—some a part of, and some independent from, Veterans for Peace—discuss harmful attitudes about masculinity and rote patriotism that lead Americans to ignore the damages of war. The United States doesn't prioritize veterans' voices and experiences in a way that impacts military policy, they say, and that's a damn shame.

Five veterans' profiles are at the center of the book, with the stories of other veterans mentioned in brief. They share enlightening themes: distress around war and after returning home, racism and other abuses during deployment, struggles to fit back into civilian life. They work to come to terms with their wartime experiences. There's also a thread of substance abuse—variously in their childhood homes, during their military years, and upon their return.

Ultimately, all five men found purpose and community in different types of service and activism to promote peace. Ernie "Indio" Sanchez, a Hispanic American World War II vet, became a one-man peace campaign, wearing a button that strikes up conversations. Activist and poet Gregory Ross, who was in the Navy during Vietnam, describes struggles in activist group dynamics and makes an important distinction that he's not just antiwar: "Veterans For Peace, it's *for* something. It's not just against something. It's for peace." All five are unique and engaging storytellers who pack the book with human interest.

Messner documents these men's efforts to amplify their ideas. The testimonies of these varied, thoughtful, and racially diverse veterans are at stark odds with the cinematic ads we see of government-approved pro-war imagery, and it's important they be heard.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (November/December 2018)

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