



THREE TOURS

The James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism, 2017

Directed by Betty Yu

Produced by Betty Yu

2016, 48:57 min, United States, English, HD Video

Screening Formats Available: mov, mp4, Virtual Cinema, and Educational Streaming

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THREE TOURS

LOGLINE

Iraq War Veterans on Healing and Activism

SYNOPSIS

Three Tours" is an award-winning documentary film that captures the lives of three U.S. military veterans, Nicole Goodwin, Ramon Mejia & Ryan Holleran, as they work to heal their wounds and battle with PTSD resulting from their deployments in Iraq. The film follows their transformation from U.S. military trained soldiers to agents of change advocating for proper mental health treatment of veterans and an end to unjust wars.

Long Synopsis

Nicole Goodwin, Ryan Holleran and Ramon Mejia are three U.S. military service members who deployed to Iraq after 9-11 to fight in the "Global War on Terrorism." Nicole and Ramon served in Iraq during "Operation Iraqi Freedom," the initial invasion in 2003, while Ryan deployed during "Operation New Dawn" at the end of the war in 2011. Three Tours is a documentary film that captures the lives of these three veterans as they work to heal the wounds and battle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) resulting from their direct experience with the traumas of war. Told through their own voices, Three Tours documents their profound transformation from U.S. military trained killers to agents of change advocating for proper mental health treatment of veterans and an end to unjust wars.

The film captures the personal journey of each of these veterans, as they work to heal their wounds - through activism, writing, teaching and religion. Ramon, a Marine veteran, converted to Islam which became his vehicle to finding inner peace. Ryan, an Army veteran, became an activist with Iraq Veterans Against the War and Under the Hood Café, two anti-war veterans organizations. Nicole, an Army veteran, found healing through writing and sharing her poetry about her experiences in Iraq. All three veterans come together through their shared experiences, desire to tell their own stories and activism. Each of these veterans embarks on their personal journey seeking inner peace, restoration of their humanity and forgiveness for taking part in an unjust war.

The film takes places at a time when military suicide is at an all time high, surpassing combat deaths in 2012. An estimated 50% of returning veterans suffer from PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injury, and 60% of women have experienced sexual assault. Because only .5% of the U.S. population is fighting these wars, it's far removed from the American people's daily consciousness. It's against this sobering backdrop that these stories take place. At its core, Three Tours is about three veterans who are struggling with deep pain and regret for what they've done, and are working to find a way to heal those wounds.

"Three Tours" film starts with a definition of "Tour". "Tour (noun): an activity in which you go through a place in order to see and learn about the different parts of it." The film interweaves three intimate portraits. Its narrative arc is chronological and is roughly divided into four "acts:" Act 1) joining the military, Act 2) experiences in Iraq, Act 3) coming home and coping with PTSD and Act 4) the transformation and path to healing their wounds.

SCREENINGS, FESTIVALS & AWARDS

The James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism, 2017

Guild Cinema, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2017

ArtsQuest Festival, Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA, 2017

Veteran's Day: Reframed, Hunter College, NYC, 2017

Veterans for Peace National Convention in Chicago, IL, 2017

BIOGRAPHY OF DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER

Betty Yu is a multimedia artist, filmmaker, photographer and activist born and raised in NYC to Chinese immigrant parents. Ms. Yu integrates documentary film, new media platforms, and community-infused approaches into her practice, and she is a co-founder of Chinatown Art Brigade, a cultural collective using art to advance anti-gentrification organizing. Ms. Yu has been awarded artist residencies and fellowships from the Laundromat Project, A Blade of Grass, International Studio & Curatorial Program, Intercultural Leadership Institute, Asian American Arts Alliance, En Foco, and Santa Fe Art Institute. Her work has been presented at the Brooklyn Museum, Queens Museum, Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival, Tribeca Film Festival's Interactive Showcase, the 2019 BRIC Biennial; Old Stone House, Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center and in 2018 she had a solo exhibition at Open Source Gallery in New York. In 2017 Ms. Yu won the Aronson Journalism for Social Justice Award for her film "Three Tours" about U.S. veterans returning home from war in Iraq, and their journey to overcome PTSD. She holds a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, a MFA in Integrated Media Arts from Hunter College and an International Center Photography New Media Narratives One Year Certificate. Ms. Yu teaches video, social practice, art and activism at Pratt Institute, Hunter College, and The New School, in addition she has over 20 years of community, media justice, and labor organizing work. In the Fall 2020, Betty had her curatorial debut as she presented *Imagining De-Gentrified Futures*, an exhibition that featured artists of color, activists and others along with her own work at Apex Art in Tribeca, NYC. Betty sits on the boards of Third World Newsreel and Working Films; and on the advisory board of More Art.

In addition she has over 20 years of community, media justice, and labor organizing work. Ms. Yu's social justice organizing recognitions include being the recipient of the Union Square Award for grassroots activism and a semi-finalist of the National Brick "Do Something" Award for community leadership in NYC's Chinatown. Her work has received media coverage in outlets including New York Times, HBO VICE News Tonight, i-D Vice Media, Art Forum, ARTNews, Sinovision, Hyperallergic, La Belle Revue Art Journal & Studio International.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT ON THE MAKING OF THE FILM

I never intended to make a documentary film that glorified or demonized U.S. soldiers, nor did I want to portray them as helpless wounded veterans. In the last twelve years there have been a number of documentary films made about veterans coming home from war. Most of those films tell the narrative of the proud soldier who served their country and return with physical injuries and/or PTSD. But the story usually stops there. These other films focus on the veterans' suffering, and give them little agency. Meanwhile, *American Sniper*, a Hollywood film, depicts U.S. Navy SEAL Chris Kyle as a gung-ho killing machine hero who is celebrated for a record 255 kills from four tours in Iraq. Although the film shows

Kyle's struggle to adjust to civilian and family life, it fails to recognize the remorse that many soldiers have when they reflect on what they've done.

The film is more than about the human cost of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is true that technically the war in Iraq has been over for several years now but there is still a huge military presence and the Iraqi people will be suffering for many many generations due to the devastation that the U.S. has caused in this "War on Terror". During the more than ten years of war, the U.S. military used weapons that are harmful and will have a long-lasting effect on Iraqi communities for generations to come. The military used white phosphorus, napalm and cluster munitions leading to many civilian deaths and serious injuries. The military left behind weapons containing depleted uranium and also burned highly toxic and carcinogenic military waste. In addition the military destroyed healthcare facilities and industrial sites. This has resulted in large amounts of toxic substances being released into the environment. Iraqi civilians as well as U.S. service members were exposed to burn pits. These burn pits have caused cancer, Traumatic Brain Injury and seizures in soldiers. And a number of young soldiers have already died as a result of being exposed to these burn pits. Many Iraqi civilians, particularly children are born with unimaginable birth defects and adults experience high cancer rates that lead to death.

I sought to make a film about veterans who transformed themselves and became powerful agents of change. The veterans in this film realize that their path toward healing and forgiveness is inextricably tied to owning their own experiences and sharing it with others as their strongest argument against wars. Through my interaction and conversations with dozens of military veterans who've deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, I noticed that what all of them had in common was their disdain for war and how it dehumanizes both the soldier and the civilian. I wanted to make this film because I became intrigued with the resiliency of these military veterans. Many of them are struggling with PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or had experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Through my research I discovered that the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have resulted in alarmingly high rates of trauma and suicide. The American Journal of Public Health found that between 20 percent and 50 percent of active duty soldiers that deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have suffered PTSD. Suicide rates have risen to an all time high - as of 2012 an average of 22 veterans commit suicide everyday, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs' Suicide Data Report. Active-duty service members are twice as likely to commit suicide than civilians.

This film couldn't be more relevant and timely. In our post 9-11 reality, domestic security and "fighting terrorism" are at the forefront of most Americans' minds. It seems that we're in a perpetual state of war. U.S. President Barack Obama ordered a withdrawal of nearly all U.S. troops from Iraq at the end of 2011. But at the end of 2014 thousands of soldiers were sent back to Iraq to help in the fight against the militant Islamic fundamentalist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The war in Afghanistan is now the longest war in U.S. history. And recently President Biden vowed to withdraw troops from Afghanistan on September 11th, 2021, on the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Despite this promise, a number of U.S. security forces will continue to occupy Afghanistan.

STILLS & CAPTIONS



Ryan and Civilians in Iraq



Nicole and Shylah Hugging



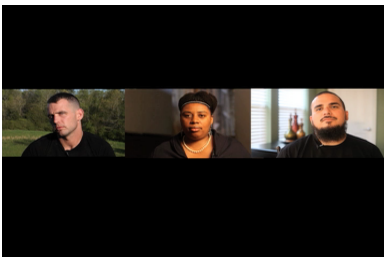
Ramon at Demonstration



Ramon at Demonstration



Ryan with dog at beach



Ryan, Nicole and Ramon

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Directed, Produced and Edited by:

Betty Yu

Camera:

Betty Yu

Additional Camera:

John Antush

Teo Altomare

Esy Casey

Carlos Pareja

Sound:

Betty Yu

John Antush

Technical Assistance:

Kaija Siirala

Translation Assistance:

Candida Rosa Minier

Other footage courtesy of:

Ryan Holleran

Bernadette Ellorin

Line Break Media

NYC Department of Records

Creative Commons & Public Domain

Music Courtesy of:

Chris Zabriskie

Podington Bear

Jon Luc Hefferman

Augustus Bro

Kitty Wells "HeartBreak USA"

Color Correction & Sound Mix by:

Christopher Nostrand

Many thanks to:

Iraq Veterans Against the War (now known as About Face) staff and members.

Also thanks to:

Warrior Writers

Under the Hood Cafe & Outreach Center
Civilian Soldier Alliance
Balch Springs Middle School

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Three Tours 2016

✓ Recommended

Distributed by [Third World Newsreel](#), 545 Eighth Avenue, Suite 550, New York, NY 10018; 212-947-9277

Produced by Betty Yu

Directed by Betty Yu

Streaming, 49 mins

College - General Adult

Depression; Iraq War; Military

Date Entered: **06/17/2022**

Reviewed by Brian Falato, University of South Florida Tampa Campus Library

The military draft ended in the U.S. nearly fifty years ago, and ever since, the armed forces have been made up of volunteers. Those who had more options in life could choose not to serve in the military. For many, though, enlisting was the best (perhaps only) option for them. *Three Tours* looks at three of these soldiers who volunteered, their experiences in the military, and their troubles adjusting to civilian life.

The three tell their own stories, supplemented by comments from family members. Ramon Mejia joined the Marines because he wanted to support his new family. Ryan Holleran was a high school dropout who was questioning his sexuality. He joined the Army and chose an infantry assignment, even though he qualified for technical jobs that would have kept him at a desk. And Nicole Goodwin joined the Army to escape a bad family situation and the crack epidemic devastating her neighborhood. All soon found themselves fighting in Iraq after the attacks of September 11.

In Iraq, Ryan said he was under fire every day. Nicole witnessed abuses of Iraqi prisoners. Ramon traveled through Iraq re-supplying combat units, and found his views on Iraqis, Islam, and the war undergoing profound change.

All three came back with post-traumatic stress disorder that affected their adjustment to civilian life. Ramon tried to deal with his anger by drinking with his buddies and ignoring his family. Ryan would not go out of his apartment for weeks at a time. Nicole's depression, coupled with homelessness, caused her to lose custody of her daughter.

Writing poetry about their experiences and participating in Iraqi Veterans Against the War have provided some solace, but each of the three knows it's still a struggle not to give in to their anger and depression. The video ends with this shocking statistic: Every day, 22 veterans commit suicide.

At only 49 minutes, *Three Tours* can't go in-depth on each of the stories, which could have warranted a separate video. But it does provide an introduction to the problems veterans face. This video is **recommended** for both academic and public libraries.

Awards:

The James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism, 2017

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