

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

21H.223

War and American Society

Fall 2002

Writing in the wake of the Civil War, poet Walt Whitman insisted that “the real war will never get in the books.” Throughout American history, the experience of war has fundamentally shaped the ways that Americans think about themselves, their fellow Americans, and the meanings of national citizenship. War has also posed challenges of representation, both for those who fought as well as those who did not. This subject examines how Americans have told the stories of modern war in history, literature, and popular culture, and interprets them in terms of changing ideas about American national identity.

Requirements: The success of this class depends on the active participation of all students. Classroom participation (15%) represents a substantial portion of the grade, and will be evaluated in terms of preparation, participation, active listening, collaboration, and overall contributions to the class experience during the term. Needless to say, if you do not attend a class it is impossible for you to contribute to it. In addition, all students will choose reading assignments and lead discussion (10%) during the last two weeks of the semester.

Writing assignments are frequent, but short: the first 1-2pp. paper is ungraded, and is followed by three essays of 4-5pp. (25% each). Writing assignments should be handed in on paper in person at the beginning of the class in which they are due. Extensions will be granted only for good reasons explained well in advance; computer malfunctions are never an acceptable excuse for a late submission. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with MIT’s regulations on academic honesty and ask questions if anything is unclear.

Books: Required books for the class are available. Additional copies of all books have also been placed on reserve at the Humanities Library. A number of readings will also be made available through the library’s electronic reserve system (accessible through the class website) or by handout. Readings should be completed by the beginning of the class under which they appear, unless otherwise stated. At times, homework assignments require you to watch films. Course films are on reserve at the Film Office of the Comparative Media Studies Program; they can also easily be found at commercial video rental stores in the area.

**** COURSE OUTLINE ****

WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION

Class #1

READING: Tim O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story," in Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990), pp. 67-85. [in class]

WEEK 2 THE CIVIL WAR AND THE MAKING OF THE NATION

Class #2

READING: Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (1995). You should try to read all of it, but we will spend most of our time on the Civil War sections, from pp. 59-156.

Class #3

READING: Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (1995). Today we will discuss the remainder of the book, from pp. 157-193.

Abraham Lincoln, "House Divided Speech" (1858), Letter to Horace Greeley (1862), "Meditation on the Divine Will" (1862), "Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation" (1862), "Proclamation Suspending the Writ of Habeas Corpus" (1862), "Address at Gettysburg" (1863), and "Second Inaugural Address" (1865), in Abraham Lincoln, *Selected Speeches and Writings* (1991), pp. 131-139, 343-348, 405, and 449-450. [electronic reserve or handout]

WRITING: FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY. (Graded check/check plus/check minus.)

WEEK 3 THE CIVIL WAR AND THE MAKING OF AMERICANS

Class #4

VIEWING: *Glory* (1990).

Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (1863).

Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead," from *Life Studies* (1959), pp. 70-72. [electronic reserve]

WEEK 4 WAR AND THE DAWN OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY

Class #5

READING: Frank Freidel, "Dissent in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection," in Samuel Eliot Morison et al., *Dissent in Three American Wars* (1970), pp. 65-95. [electronic reserve]

Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (1902), pp. 1-21. [electronic reserve]

Mark Twain, "Battle Hymn of the Republic (Brought Down to Date)" (1901), "As Regards Patriotism" (1901), and "The War Prayer" (1905), in Louis J. Budd, ed., *Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, 1891-1910* (1992), pp. 474-478 and 652-655. [electronic reserve]

William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War" (1910), in William James, *Writings, 1902-1910* (1987), pp. 1281-1293. [electronic reserve]

WEEK 5 WORLD WAR I

Class #6

WRITING: SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

VIEWING: *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930).

Class #7

READING: Katherine Anne Porter, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. (1939).

Randolph S. Bourne, "The War and the Intellectuals" (1917), in Carl Resek, ed., *War and the Intellectuals: Essays by Randolph S. Bourne, 1915-1919* (1964), pp. 3-14.

WEEK 6 WORLD WAR II: WHY WE FIGHT

Class #8

READING: Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (1994), pp. 1-19.

Richard H. Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* (1999).

Class #9

READING: Maureen Hart Hennessey, "The Four Freedoms," in Maureen Hart Hennessey and Anne Knutson, *Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People* (1999), pp. 95-103. [electronic reserve]

Robert B. Westbrook, "Fighting for the American Family: Private Interests and Political Obligations in World War II," in Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History* (1993), pp. 195-221. [electronic reserve]

Robert B. Westbrook, "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II," *American Quarterly* 42 (December 1990): 587-614. [electronic reserve]

WEEK 7 WORLD WAR II: THE GOOD WAR?

Class #10

READING: Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (1994), pp. 21-113.

WEEK 8 WORLD WAR II: THE WAR AT HOME

Class #11

READING: Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (1994), pp. 114-159.

VIEWING: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1945).

Class #12

READING: Robert B. Westbrook, "In the Mirror of the Enemy: Japanese Political Culture and the Peculiarities of American Patriotism in World War II," in John Bodnar, ed., *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism* (1996), pp. 211-230. [electronic reserve]

Peter Irons, "Gordon Hirabayashi v. United States," in *The Courage of Their Convictions: Sixteen Americans Who Fought Their Way to the Supreme Court* (1990), pp. 37-62. [electronic reserve]

William H. Rehnquist, *All the Laws but One: Civil Liberties in Wartime* (1998), pp. 184-211. [electronic reserve]

Hirabayashi v. United States 320 U.S. 81 (1943). [electronic reserve]

Korematsu v. United States 323 U.S. 214 (1944). [electronic reserve]

WEEK 9 WORLD WAR II AND THE DAWN OF THE ATOMIC AGE

Class #13

READING: John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (1946).

Class #14

WRITING: THIRD WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

WEEK 10 VIETNAM

Class #15

READING: Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990), begin.

VIEWING: *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (1988). We will view this in class.

Class #16

READING: Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990), finish.

William Broyles, Jr., "Why Men Love War" *Esquire* 102 (November 1984): 55-65.
[electronic reserve]

Maxine Hong Kingston, "The Brother in Vietnam," in *China Men* (1980), pp. 261-304.
[electronic reserve]

WEEK 11 VIETNAM

Class #17

VIEWING: *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), or any other Vietnam film of your choosing.

READING: Lyndon B. Johnson, "Speech at Johns Hopkins University" (1965), in George Katsiaficas, ed., *Vietnam Documents: American and Vietnamese Views of the War* (1992), pp. 200-205. [electronic reserve]

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), pp. 363-391. [electronic reserve]

Michael Walzer, "The Obligation to Die for the State" and "Conscientious Objection," in *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship* (1970), pp. 77-98 and 120-145. [electronic reserve]

United States v. Seeger 380 U.S. 163 (1965). [electronic reserve]

Welsh v. United States 398 U.S. 333 (1970). [electronic reserve]

Gillette v. United States 401 U.S. 437 (1971). [electronic reserve]

Cohen v. California 403 U.S. 15 (1971). [electronic reserve]

WEEK 12 AMERICA IN A POST-COLD WAR WORLD

Class #18

WRITING: FOURTH WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

Class #19

READING: Eve Ensler, *Necessary Targets: A Story of Women and War* (2001).

Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (1998), pp. 236-252, 261-267, and 278-302. [electronic reserve]

WEEK 13 WAR, MEDIA, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Class #20

READING: Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (2001), pp. 1-42 and 125-234.

WEEK 14 WAR IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Class #21

VIEWING: *Three Kings* (1999).

READING: Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (2001), pp. 235-265.

Jean Baudrillard, "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place," in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995), pp. 61-87. [electronic reserve]

Class #22

READING: Michael Walzer, "Terrorism," in *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2d. ed. (1992), pp. 197-206. [electronic reserve]

Additional readings based on course presentations.

WEEK 15 SEPTEMBER 11TH AND AFTER

Class #23

READING: Readings based on course presentations.

Class #24

READING: Readings based on course presentations.