

George Mason University
Department of History

History 370 001, Fall 2022
War and American Society

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Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30 to 11:45
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[BlackBoard site](#)

More than most nations, America has been defined by war: the U.S. won its independence through one war, redefined its national principles in another, and rose to global prominence through its participation in the World Wars of the twentieth century before emerging as a superpower engaged in a decades-long war of a much different nature. Though many Americans are reluctant to think of their nation as warlike, military concerns have exerted an enormous influence upon the country in every phase of its development.

This course examines the American military experience from the colonial period to the twenty-first century, exploring how Americans have thought about military service, conducted war, and made peace throughout their history. At the same time, it will explore the ways that military institutions, war, and the preparation for war have affected American society, and how and why those considerations have changed over time.

Throughout the semester, our focus will not be solely on narrative—that is, re-telling the story of America's battles and wars—but on learning to *think* like historians: exploring issues of cause and effect, analyzing evidence, and studying change over time to solve the puzzles of the past. By the time you complete the course, you should have a working understanding both of the broad themes of America's military past and the basic skills of the historian: how to read sources closely, how to corroborate multiple sources into an interpretation, and how to place sources in historical context.

Reading List

Allan Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense* (Third Edition, 2012)

Primary source documents, available on BlackBoard

Assignments and Grading

Course performance will be determined by two written assignments, your participation in class, and a final exam. There are six separate opportunities to complete the written assignments, and, as the handout indicates, each assignment is different in both topic and form. You must do one of the first three assignments and one of the last three assignments. Within those guidelines, you are free to choose two assignments that fit your interests and schedule.

Each assignments is due in class on the date indicated on the syllabus.

No late assignments will be accepted. No exceptions.

Due Dates:

Essay 1: September 21
Essay 2: October 12
Essay 3: October 19
Essay 4: October 31
Essay 5: November 21
Essay 6: November 30

You are also free to do *more* than two of the assignments; in that case, only your two highest scores will count towards your final grade, and the lowest score or scores will be dropped. The system is intended to give you maximum flexibility. If you have not completed two assignments by the end of the course, you will receive a failing grade of 50 for each missing assignment.

The final grade will break down as follows:

First written assignment: 30%
Second written assignment: 30%
Final Exam: 30%
Participation: 10%

The grading scale is as follows:

A- 90-93; A 94-100
B- 80-83; B 84-86; B+ 87-89
C- 70-73; C 74-76; C+ 77-79
D 64-66; D+ 67-69
F 50

Class Schedule

Assigned readings for each lecture appear beneath the day's title. Days when assignments are due appear in **boldface**.

22 August. Introductions: Is military history really what I think it is?

24 August. Learning to think historically
Millett & Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 1-19.

29 August. The European Military Heritage: American attitudes towards the military
Common Defense, 20-43.

31 August. The War for Independence
Common Defense, 44-76.
Document: George Washington to William Woodford (1775)
Document: George Washington to John Hancock (1776)

- 7 September. Lexington: What happens in a battle?
Documents: Reports on the Battle of Lexington (1775)
- 12 September. The Fight Over the National Military Establishment
Common Defense, 77-107.
Document: Newburgh Letter (1783)
Document: The Constitution of the United States (1787)
- 14 September. The Wars Against the Whites
Common Defense, 108-141.
Document: Chief Red Horse recounts the Battle at Little Big Horn (1881)
- 19 September. Technology and War, Part I: The Mid-19th Century
Common Defense, 142-148.
- 21 September. Presidential Leadership during the Civil War
Common Defense, 149-180.
Document: Abraham Lincoln to George Meade (1863)
Document: Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address (1863)
FIRST PAPER DUE
- 26 September. The Individual Experience of Battle in the Civil War: The will to fight
Common Defense, 181-217.
Document: Wadsworth Washington to father (1862)
- 28 September. The Army and Reconstruction: The limits of military power
Common Defense, 218-251.
Document: Philip Sheridan, "Military Commissions," from *Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan* (1888)
- 3 October. Life in the Peacetime Army and the Problems of Reform
Common Defense, 252-281.
- 5 October. Technology and War, Part 2: Tactics in the First World War
Common Defense, 282-308.
Document: "Letters from a Soldier's Diary" (excerpt) from *Made in the Trenches* (1915)
- 10 October FALL BREAK—CLASS SHIFTS TO TUESDAY
- 11 October. War and Memory: Writing about War and the Lost Generation
Document: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854)
Document: Wilfred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est," (1920)
Document: Randall Jarrell, "Death of the Ball-Turret Gunner" (1945)
Document: Donald Hall, "The Man in the Dead Machine" (1966)
- 12 October. Protest and Dissent: The World War I Home Front
Common Defense, 309-338.
Documents: Great War propaganda posters (1914-1918)
SECOND PAPER DUE
- 17 October. Demobilization, Reorganization, and the Interwar Years
Common Defense, 339-366.
Document: Herbert Hoover, "Statement about the Bonus Marchers" (1932)

19 October. American Strategy in World War II
Common Defense, 367-396.
Film: Frank Capra, *Why We Fight: Prelude to War* (1942)
available at https://youtu.be/wcAsIWfk_z4

THIRD PAPER DUE

24 October. Propaganda and the World War II Home Front
Common Defense, 397-403.
Documents: World War II propaganda posters (1942-1945)

26 October. The soldiers' experience
Document: Ernie Pyle, "The Death of Captain Waskow" (1944)
Film: John Huston, PMF 5019, *Let There Be Light* (1946)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQPoYVKeQEs&t>

31 October. Terror as a Tactic: The Strategic Air War in World War II
Common Defense, 404-439.
Document: United States Army Air Forces leaflet (1945)

FOURTH PAPER DUE

2 November. War and Memory: The Smithsonian and the *Enola Gay* exhibit

7 November. Life Under the Mushroom Cloud: Thinking about nuclear war
Common Defense, 440-506.
Film: *Duck & Cover* (1951)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKqXu-5jw60>

9 November. The American Experience in Vietnam
Common Defense, 507-568.
Document: George Kennan, Long Telegram (1947)
Song: Pete Seeger, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" (1967)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXnJVkEX8O4>
Song: Barry Sadler, "Ballad of the Green Berets" (1966)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kj9qv6rmG8>
Song: Country Joe & the Fish, "Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" (1967)
available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_p1JC3z2kU

14 November. The New American Militarism
Common Defense, 569-605.
Video: U.S. Army, "Be All You Can Be" recruiting ads (1986)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ms9pxvEbILs>
Video: *Top Gun* theatrical trailer (1986)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VN8ze3S0Uj8>
Song: Toby Keith, "Courtesy the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)" music video (2002)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruNrdmjcNTc>
Video: Budweiser Super Bowl ad (2005)
available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUrf6Qg4T4E>

16 November. A Revolution in Military Affairs?
Common Defense, 606-632.

21 November. The post-9/11 World and the Forever Wars
Common Defense, 633-680.
Document: Joseph Biden, "Remarks on the end of the war in Afghanistan" (2021)

FIFTH PAPER DUE

28 November. War and Memory: Commemorating America's military past
Document: Tom Carhart, "Insulting Vietnam Vets" (1981)

30 November. Conclusions and review
SIXTH PAPER DUE

FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 10:30am—12:00pm

COURSE POLICIES:

A note on plagiarism. Each assignment completed as part of this course is bound by the University's Honor Code and its strict rules regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism entails presenting someone else's words, work, or ideas without proper acknowledgement, or borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment. Whether the source is another historical work, an internet source, a classmate, or your roommate does not matter; failure to cite the source properly constitutes plagiarism, the most serious academic violation one can commit. Students found plagiarizing in this class will fail the course. These assignments are designed so that it is easier to simply write the essay than to cheat.

Classroom Behavior. Active participation in class discussions is a vital part of mastering this set of skills and information. (Individual participation is weighted as one-fifth of the overall grade to reflect its critical importance.) In order to maximize opportunities for every student to participate constructively and to minimize distractions, a few simple guidelines will be observed:

- civil, respectful interactions among *all* class participants
- **NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN USE DURING CLASS**—this includes smart phones, laptops, and so on. If it runs on electricity and it is not a medical device, switch it off for the duration of class.