

**MPhil in American History Option:
“War and Society in Modern American History”**

Prof. Andrew Preston, amp33

**Tuesdays 2-4pm
Room 9, History Faculty**

Course Description and Requirements

What is military history today? Is it traditional “drum-and-bugle” or “operational” history, which examines how wars are fought and won on the battlefield? Or is it what’s called the “new military history” (though it’s not so new anymore), often also known as the study of “war and society,” the more appropriate focus? Despite its title, this course doesn’t take a side in this debate, but is instead premised on the notion that both approaches are equally valid but not always equally relevant; and upon the notion that students of American history don’t always give proper attention to the important influence of military affairs on other aspects of U.S. history (women’s suffrage? civil rights? immigration? suburbanization? Yes to all of the above). In studying the broader course of the history of the modern United States, and how it has been significantly shaped by the military and warfare, this MPhil option aims to give students a better awareness of the capaciousness of military history and, with it, a better understanding of some of the most exciting trends in American historiography.

Students should bear two things in mind about this MPhil option:

First, this is not your grandpa’s military history (or even your dad’s). For the most part, we won’t be studying battles, weapons, tactics, or diplomatic negotiations, though of course those subjects will often be relevant. We’ll instead focus on how the military (as an institution) and war (as an event and as a process), as well as ideas and cultures about them both, have helped shape American society, be it on political, racial, cultural, economic, and/or gendered terms. We’ll also consider Americans’ relationship with the phenomenon of war in the twentieth century and the extent to which American life itself has become militarized. But in the balance between “war” and “society,” this class tilts decidedly towards the latter.

Second, for these reasons and more, but most notably the locus of recent historiographical innovation, we’ll be focusing more on the Vietnam War era and its aftershocks than on the two world wars, and we won’t be focusing much at all on the recent “forever wars” in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, etc. So if the Vietnam War era doesn’t interest you all that much, this probably isn’t the course for you.

Students are expected to attend all eight classes, do the Required readings for them, and participate in class discussion (including by way of a short presentation). After the end of term, each student is required to submit an essay of 3,000-4,000 words (not including notes or bibliography). I will distribute the essay questions midway through term and discuss approaches, technical aspects, etc. Any readings listed below as Recommended are for the purposes of writing your essay (they are, however, just a start to get you going, and are not meant to be exhaustive). At the end of this syllabus is a brief list of some major overviews and syntheses, a starting point for essay reading or if you want to follow anything up from readings or class discussion.

Weekly Classes and Readings

All books are available in various Cambridge libraries and/or as ebooks via iDiscover. Journal articles can be found online on JStor, ProjectMuse, etc, either directly or via iDiscover.

Week 1, October 12: What is military history?

This class will introduce us to some attempts to define the boundaries of military history and differentiate between “operational” history and the study of “war & society.” Can we separate the two? Should they be distinct? What advantages do they each have, and are these advantages complementary?

Required (preferably in this order):

Max Hastings, “American Universities Declare War on Military History,” *Bloomberg*, January 31, 2021:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-01-31/max-hastings-u-s-universities-declare-war-on-military-history>

William Hitchcock and Meghan Herwig, “There Is More War in the Classroom Than You Think,” *War on the Rocks*, September 7, 2021:

<https://warontherocks.com/2021/09/there-is-more-war-in-the-classroom-than-you-think/>

Mary L. Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (OUP, 2012)

Mary L. Dudziak, “You didn’t see him lying...beside the gravel road in France”: Death, Distance, and American War Politics,” *Diplomatic History* 42 (January 2018), 1-16

Robert M. Citino, “Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction,” *American Historical Review* 112 (October 2007), 1070-90.

Wayne E. Lee, “Mind and Matter—Cultural Analysis in American Military History: A Look at the State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 93 (March 2007), 1116-42 (the commentary that follows on 1143-62 is recommended).

Marilyn B. Young, “‘I was thinking, as I often do these days, of war’: The United States in the Twenty-First Century,” *Diplomatic History* 36 (January 2012), 1-15.

Recommended case studies:

Ruth Lawlor, “Contested Crimes: Race, Gender, and Nation in Histories of GI Sexual Violence, World War II,” *Journal of Military History* 84 (April 2020), 541-69

Christopher McKnight Nichols and Andrew Preston, “Introduction,” and Beverly Gage, “The Blob and the Mob: Grand Strategy and Social Change,” in *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (OUP, 2021), 1-28, 49-62

Michael S. Sherry, “War as a Way of Life,” *Modern American History* 1 (March 2018), 93-96

Ellen D. Wu, “It’s Time to Center War in U.S. Immigration History,” *Modern American History* 2 (July 2019), 215-35

Week 2, October 19: Race

With apologies to 1898, the year 1917 marked *the* pivotal threshold in overseas American military history. This was certainly true for race relations, as African Americans grappled with many of the same issues confronting other Americans but had to deal with the additional burden of racial discrimination as well. The war affected Black thinking on a wide range of issues, which we’ll explore in this week’s class.

Required:

Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Harvard, 2009)

Recommended:

Beth Bailey, "The U.S. Army and 'the Problem of Race': Afros, Race Consciousness, and Institutional Logic," *Journal of American History* 106 (December 2019), 639-661

Sylvia Shin Huey Chong, *The Oriental Obscene: Violence and Racial Fantasies in the Vietnam Era* (Duke, 2012)

Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, eds., *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (OUP, 2012)

Simeon Man, *Soldiering through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific* (California, 2018)

Week 3, October 26: Citizens and the State

When and how can the state compel citizens into military service? What happens when citizens resist? And how do these issues affect broader trends in society, such as political development or culture? How does the authority of the military change norms and cultures throughout the rest of society?

Required:

Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Harvard, 2009)

Recommended:

Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (OUP, 2008)

Gretchen Heefner, *The Missile Next Door: The Minuteman in the American Heartland* (Harvard, 2012)

Amy J. Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance* (Cornell, 2019)

James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (OUP, 2011)

Week 4, November 2: Gender, Part I

Warfare may be a traditionally male-dominated phenomenon, but women have been no less affected by it even when they haven't been actual combatants. Until very recently, this was certainly the case in the United States. There is a growing literature on war's effects on women and families on the homefront. But what happens to our historical perspective of the social history of warfare when we look at the women who went to the frontlines, even if not as warriors?

Required:

Kara Dixon Vuic, *The Girls Next Door: Bringing the Home Front to the Front Lines* (Harvard, 2019)

Recommended:

Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago, 2013)

Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (CUP, 2011)

Susie Woo, *Framed by War: Korean Children and Women at the Crossroads of US Empire* (NYU, 2019)

Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century* (NYU, 2010)

Week 5, November 9: Gender, Part II

This week's class takes a look at those male-dominated aspects of warfare, and the extent to which masculinity fuels militarism but is in turn reshaped by warfare itself. How did social, cultural, and political heteronormativity shape the military, and vice versa?

Required:

Gregory A. Daddis, *Pulp Vietnam: War and Gender in Cold War Men's Adventure Magazines* (CUP, 2020)

Recommended:

Frank Costigliola, "Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History*, vol. 83 (March 1997), 1309-1339

Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (Yale, 1998)

David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, 2004)

Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic, 2017)

Week 6, November 16: Repercussions, Part I

Much has been written about American wars—why they start, how they're fought, and why and how they end—but not as much attention has been paid to the longer-term effects war has had on American domestic society. This has begun to change, and this week's class examines a recent book that re-examines American policing and race relations through the prism of war.

Required:

Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (California, 2019)

Recommended:

Michael Brenes, *For Might and Right: Cold War Defense Spending and the Remaking of American Democracy* (UMass, 2020)

Joseph Darda, *Empire of Defense: Race and the Cultural Politics of Permanent War* (Chicago, 2019)

Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Wisconsin, 2009)

Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy* (Basic, 2017)

Week 7, November 23: Repercussions, Part II

This week's class continues the same theme as Week 6, this time with a complementary look at how the Vietnam War gave rise to conservative populism and the polarization of national politics.

Required:

Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Harvard, 2018)

Recommended:

Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (North Carolina, 2009)

Amanda C. Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall: Refugees and US-Vietnamese Relations, 1975–2000* (CUP, 2021)

David Kieran, *Signature Wounds: The Untold Story of the Military's Mental Health Crisis* (NYU, 2019)

Samuel Moyn, *Humane: How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Verso, 2021)

Week 8, November 30: Collective Memory

Over the past few decades, the history of collective memory (and not memory *as* history) has become one of the most important subfields of historical scholarship, and the study of how societies remember and memorialize conflict is at the center of this historiography. While he is now better known for his novels *The Sympathizer* (2015) and *The Committed* (2021), which also examine the memory and legacy of conflict, in this week's reading Viet Thanh Nguyen explores the memory of the Vietnam War in a more scholarly vein.

Required:

Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Harvard, 2016)

Recommended:

John Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory* (Johns Hopkins, 2010)

Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (NYU, 2010)

Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (California, 2014)

Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Duke, 2003)

Recommended overviews (especially for your essays):

- Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (Viking, 2004)
- Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (OUP, 2013)
- Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton, 2002)
- Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Harvard, 2001)
- Brenda M. Boyle, *American War Stories* (Rutgers, 2021)
- Mark Philip Bradley and Mary L. Dudziak, eds., *Making the Forever War: Marilyn B. Young on the Culture and Politics of American Militarism* (UMass, 2021)
- Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (OUP, 2013)
- John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq* (Norton, 2010)
- Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2000)
- Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Reconsidering the American Way of War: US Military Practice from the Revolution to Afghanistan* (Georgetown, 2014)
- Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (OUP, 2013)
- John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (Penguin, 2018)
- Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (CUP, 2001)
- William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (Free Press, 2008)
- Matthew Christopher Hulbert and Matthew E. Stanley, eds., *Martial Culture, Silver Screen: War Movies and the Construction of American Identity* (LSU, 2020)
- Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knobl, *War in Social Thought: Hobbes to the Present* (Princeton, 2013)
- Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Political Development* (Princeton, 2002)
- Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Johns Hopkins, 2001)
- David Kieran and Edwin A. Martini, eds., *At War: The Military and American Culture in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Rutgers, 2019)
- John M. Kinder, *Paying with Their Bodies: American War and the Problem of the Disabled Veteran* (Chicago, 2015)
- Paul A.C. Koistinen, *State of War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1945-2011* (Kansas, 2012)
- Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Harvard, 2007)
- Margaret MacMillan, *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* (Random House/Profile, 2020)
- Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012*, 3rd Edition (Free Press, 2012)
- Aaron B. O'Connell, *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Harvard, 2012)
- Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (Knopf, 2012)
- Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (Yale, 1995)
- Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, War, and Conflict* (Polity, 2014)
- Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Penguin, 2003)
- Stephanie Sztanyi, *Gender Trouble in the U.S. Military: Challenges to Regimes of Male Privilege* (Palgrave, 2020)
- Sidney Tarrow, *War, States, and Contention: A Comparative Historical Study* (Cornell, 2015)
- John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln's Code: The Laws of War in American History* (Free Press, 2012)
- Thomas W. Zeiler, David K. Ekbladh, and Benjamin C. Montoya, eds., *Beyond 1917: The United States and the Global Legacies of the Great War* (OUP, 2017)