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


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


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


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


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).


WEEK 6  WORLD WAR II: WHY WE FIGHT

Class #8


Class #9


WEEK 7 WORLD WAR II: THE GOOD WAR?

Class #10


WEEK 8 WORLD WAR II: THE WAR AT HOME

Class #11


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

Class #12


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

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

Class #13


Class #14

WRITING:  THIRD WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

WEEK 10  VIETNAM

Class #15


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

Class #16


WEEK 11  VIETNAM

Class #17

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


WEEK 12  AMERICA IN A POST-COLD WAR WORLD

Class #18

WRITING:  FOURTH WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

Class #19


WEEK 13  WAR, MEDIA, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Class #20


WEEK 14  WAR IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Class #21


Class #22


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.