

**HIS/SOC 555 War and the Military.**  
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**Spring 2005**

You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you. War is a major social process with tremendous repercussions for social change. We live in a time and place in world history when few of us are likely to be directly involved in war. Yet wars happen all the time. In the last few years there have been major American military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. There are on-going bloody wars in the Sudan, Congo/Zaire, Colombia and elsewhere. In the twentieth century tens of millions of people died in the two world wars. Since the end of the Second World War tens of millions more have died. War is a powerful transforming experience, both for individuals and societies: it is a major factor in social change. Studying war can enable sociologists to examine a wide range of human behaviors under extreme conditions.

This course is cross-listed in both Sociology and History, and is designed to examine a range of experiences in different times and places. While the modern Western experience occupies a considerable section of the course, pre-modern and non-Western experiences of war are also considered in some detail.

In reaction to the traditional military history which was a catalogue of campaigns and great generals divorced from its social context, social scientists sought to place war in its broader context. Historical sociologists argued that war was a major factor in the growth of the state, in the causation of revolutions, in the achievement of democracy, women's rights, etc. In "war and society" approaches to the topic, there was increased interest in the home front: how women and minorities were caught up in the war process (Rosie the riveter), the impact war had on communities (especially through patriotic pageantry and the rituals of collective mourning), the image of war in popular consciousness (movies, comics, etc.), and the relationship between war and economic growth. This course is influenced by these "war and society" concerns; but the "war and society" approach has tended to drive "war" out of "war and society." The reaction against traditional military history has led to approaches to the topic which almost entirely ignore the actual business of fighting. We need to seek a better balance.

Greatly influenced by the "war and society" perspective, there has now emerged a "new" military history which attempts to add a "bottom-up" approach to the traditional top down view. It looks at the experience of ordinary soldiers as well as the plans of the great generals. In many ways, the "new" military history seeks a synthesis of traditional military history and the "war and society" perspective. It has generated two interesting and ongoing debates which are of great interest to sociologists.

The first of these debates is whether types of military organization and technique (styles of warfare) develop in a steady, linear fashion, or whether we can identify a series of "military revolutions" in which the style of warfare changes abruptly. If we can identify

these military revolutions, what causal factors produce them? Traditionally, military history tended to be heavily imbued with a form of technological determinism, in which the motor of military development was fueled by advances in weaponry. Nowadays, military historians are much more likely to see changes in warfare as driven by changes in the larger society: the rise of the state, the monetization of the economy, the rise of nationalism and mass participation in politics, etc.

The second debate concerns the role of culture in explaining different styles of warfare. Sociologists have long maintained that different types of society wage war in different ways. More recently, some military historians have argued that war can only be understood as a culturally-determined activity. Victor Davis Hanson has recently argued that the democratic societies of the West have developed an unusually aggressive style of war focused on decisive battle. This has met with its critics, and in the process there has been an exploration of the complex ways in which culture determines military activity.

The course is organized around these debates. We will look at the notion of military revolutions, at the role of culture in warfare, at combat motivation, and at the role of organization, innovation and tactics in determining styles of warfare. The aim is to develop a sociology of combat by placing military operations squarely within their social context. Throughout the course, we will focus on the question of war as a cultural activity. I am interested in the intellectual, cognitive, imaginative, cultural, emotional, and honorific dimensions of war, as well as the economic, strategic and societal dimensions.

After looking at a brilliant short book by James McPherson on why men fought in the American Civil War, we will turn to a polemical work by Victor Davis Hanson, Carnage and Culture, which argues that there is a specifically “Western” way of war. He makes his case by considering a series of historical cases: Greek and Roman warfare, medieval warfare, the linear formations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and colonial encounters between Europeans and indigenous peoples. John Lynn, Battle: A History of Combat and Culture, has recently attempted to provide a rebuttal to many of Hanson’s propositions while retaining a culture-based approach to the understanding of warfare. Like Hanson, Lynn uses a series of cases drawn from a wide range of societies, and we will use this as a dialectical counterpoint to Hanson. These two books will occupy us for the first few weeks. They will give us an introduction to a broad range of styles of warfare, and we will be able to examine the debates on military revolutions and culture. The second part of the course then addresses the same concerns with an in-depth study of two cases: the First World War and the English Civil War of the seventeenth century. The First World War was arguably the first “total” war of the industrial age. The English civil war was in some interesting ways a very “modern” war, and will enable us to explore the interconnections of war, religion, technological and social change, and nation-building.

If you are a sociologist interested in comparative-historical sociology, culture, globalization, political sociology or organizations, this course may address some of your concerns. At the macro level, we deal with big issues of social change and conflicts between different cultures; at the meso level, we deal with organizations, their

effectiveness and adaptability. At the micro level, we examine the emotions, motivations and values involved in battle. If you are a historian, war and preparation for war is one important factor in historical development and this course is designed to provide a broad introduction to the topic. It aims also to introduce some of the more recent methods of studying military history. It is a popular course: ask someone who has taken it in the past.

Course goals and learning objectives:

For historians: to understand the variety of approaches to military history; to see war in its larger social and cultural context; to understand debates about the historical development of warfare

For sociologists: to understand warfare as a social and cultural activity; to understand the linkages between the military and other spheres of society; to understand the role of war in more general theories of social change

## Requirements

Obviously, class attendance and pre-seminar preparation is mandatory and necessary. We are a community of learners, and you owe it to the rest of us to be intellectually committed. Discussions will constitute a major part of the course, and the quality of these discussions will depend on the degree of your engagement. The class needs your contributions!

Evaluation will be based on your informed and active participation in class, and on some short writing assignments:

- 1) **Each week** you are to prepare **1-3 questions** that could be used to lead class discussion. The purpose of the questions is to get you to think critically about the issues we will be considering in this course. The questions should be brief and clear, not paragraph-long rambling excursions. Please send these to the group email list by early Thursday afternoon so I can anticipate the directions you want the seminar to go when we meet. (If, for some reason, you are unable to attend, please send the questions anyway.) It would help other participants if you could email your questions to everyone in time for us all to think about them before the seminar meets. **There is no point in emailing your questions five minutes before the class meets. That is irresponsible behavior.** Please allow the rest of us time to read all the questions, bearing in mind that we all have complicated schedules and may not be able to read our email in the hour or so before class.
  
- 2) **You then have choice of either (A) or (B)**
  - A) Eight short **critical evaluations** of the reading. (You may take a complete book, a chapter from a book, an article, or some combination of articles/chapters/books.) These critical comments should not be descriptions of the works we have read. They are **not** “book reports” or “book reviews.” You may assume that I have read these books and articles, so please don’t tell

me what they say unless this is absolutely necessary to make your argument. I want you to focus on weaknesses in arguments, and/or on the ways in which authors' arguments might be further developed. Or you can use the author to explore some theme that they don't (in your judgment) discuss adequately. (I do not want reports of the "Oh, gosh, I really liked this book..." kind.) I want your critical **thinking**. I am looking for quality rather than quantity. Length: entirely up to you: no more than you need to make your point(s); probably 2-3 pages. These critical evaluations are due at the time we discuss the material. Don't hand them in late: I will not read them if you do, and I will not count them towards the total of eight short papers that you have to do.

B) A seminar paper. This can be a research paper related to the course, or an extended review of the literature or theories. If you select this option, please discuss your paper with me by March 31 and give me a written outline or prospectus of the paper by April 14. There is no fixed format or length for this paper. Please note that I do not intend to give incompletes in this course except in special circumstances. If I do not receive from you a written outline/prospectus by April 14 I will assume that you are not doing this option.

3) **Attendance**: There are 14 sessions. I expect you to attend all sessions, having done the reading and prepared to contribute to the discussion. If you consistently miss sessions, I will reduce your grade for non-attendance

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Spring 2005  
Thursdays 7-10 pm

**Week 1 Thurs Jan 27: introductory lecture**

I will give a brief lecture followed by discussion on the sociology of war and the military and on the historiography of military history.

**Week 2 Thurs Feb 3: combat motivation**

James McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War, 1997

**Week 3 Thurs Feb 10: culture and military revolution:**

For the next few weeks we will look at two recent debates in military history. The first is the notion that military history is most usefully understood as a series of periods punctuated by “military revolutions” or “revolutions in military affairs.” The idea is that there are more or less rapid, across-the-board changes in the ways wars are fought which deserve to be described as “revolutions.” This is counterposed to the idea that military innovation occurs more or less continuously in a linear manner. The notion of military revolutions also highlights the non-technical elements involved. The second debate concerns the role of culture in defining the meaning of war and how it is waged. Victor Davis Hanson proposes a thesis about a unique “Western way of war” that defines a specifically Western approach to war over the last two millennia. Lynn is a critique of Hanson, which retains the notion of the importance of culture.

In addition to the two debates, the reading in these weeks provides an overview of warfare in a wide range of times and places.

**The concepts:**

Knox and McGregor, (eds), The Dynamics of Military Revolution, chapter 1 (xerox)  
Victor Davis Hanson, Carnage and Culture, chapter 1 and epilogue

**Greeks and Romans:**

Lynn, Battle, chapter 1,  
Victor Davis Hanson, Carnage and Culture, chapters 2-3

**Week 4 Thurs Feb 17: medieval warfare**

Knox and Murray chapter 2, Clifford Rogers, "As if a New Sun Had Arisen: England's fourteenth-century RMA" (xerox)

Lynn, Battle, chapter 3

Clifford Rogers, "The Age of the Hundred Years War," in Maurice Keen (ed), Medieval Warfare, 1999 (xerox)

John Keegan, The Face of Battle, chapter on Agincourt

### **Week 5 Thurs Feb 24: linear formations of the early modern period**

Knox and Murray chapter 4, Macgregor Knox, "Mass Politics and nationalism as military revolution: the French Revolution and after" (xerox)

Victor Davis Hanson, Carnage and Culture, chapters 5, 7,

Lynn, Battle, chapters 4, 6

John Keegan, The Face of Battle, chapter on Waterloo

### **Week 6 Thurs March 3: Colonial encounters**

Lynn, Battle, chapter 5

Victor Davis Hanson, Carnage and Culture, chapters 6-8

James Belich, The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict, 1986, "introduction" and chapters 7-10 (The Waikato War) and chapter 15 "The Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict" (xerox)

### **Week 7 Thurs March 10: Colonial encounters**

James Gump, The Dust Rose Like Smoke: The Subjugation of the Zulu and the Sioux, 1994

### **Week 8 Thurs March 17: 17<sup>th</sup> century RMA**

This is the first of three sessions on the English (British?) Civil War(s) of 1642-49. The "English Civil War" consisted in a series of conflicts (hence the ambiguity about whether it was "English" or "British," and whether it was one or several wars) in the mid-seventeenth century. The dates of the war are variable, depending on how various authors define the conflict. Most of the historiography treats the war as a revolution of some sort or other, and is primarily concerned with the social origins of the conflict. This is important for understanding the meanings and motivations of the war(s). Was this a religious conflict, a constitutional struggle, a "bourgeois revolution", or an episode in a wider European conflict?

We start with a discussion of military technology and techniques, and the debate about whether or not there was a "revolution in military affairs" in this period.

Michael Roberts, "The Military Revolution, 1560-1660" in Clifford Rogers (ed) The Military Revolution Debate, 1995 (xerox)

Geoffrey Parker, “The Military Revolution, 1560-1660 – a Myth?” in Clifford Rogers (ed) The Military Revolution Debate, 1995 (xerox)

David Parroti, “Strategy and Tactics in the Thirty Years’ War; The Military Revolution,” in Clifford Rogers (ed) The Military Revolution Debate, 1995 (xerox)

### **No Class March 24 (Spring Break)**

### **Week 9 Thurs March 31: English Civil War**

Religion, politics, and economics in the origins, meanings, and motivations of the English Civil War. What was the war about? Most of the readings this week focus on the nature of the English civil war seen as a revolution of some kind.

Ian Gentles, “The Civil Wars in England” in J. Kenyon and J. Ohlmeyer (eds) The Civil Wars: a military history of England, Scotland and Ireland, 1638-1660, 1998 (xerox)

David Underdown, Revel, Riot and Rebellion, chapter 5 “Popular Politics Before the Civil War” (xerox)

G.E. Aylmer, Rebellion or Revolution?, chapter 1 “Reform,” and chapter 2 “Rebellion.” (xerox)

Christopher Hill, A Nation of Change and Novelty, chapter 2 “The place of the seventeenth century Revolution in English history” (xerox)

### **Week 10 Thurs April 7: The New Model Army: religion, discipline and radicalism**

Ian Gentles has an argument which links the religious constitution of the revolutionary armies to their battlefield tactics.

Ian Gentles, The New Model Army, 1992 chapter 4 “The Importance of Religion” (xerox)

### **Week 11 Thurs April 14: World War I: Origins, meaning, strategy**

In these last four weeks we will look in detail at the various sociological and historiographical approaches to the study of war, concentrating on a single case: the First World War. I would like you all to watch the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Please be sure to watch the original, made in 1930, directed by Lewis Milestone, and NOT the 1979 remake by Delbert Mann starring Ernest Borgnine. If you cannot (or do not want to) watch this on your own, I will arrange a showing at a mutually convenient time.

The readings this week cover: preparation for war, particularly planning and doctrine; anticipations of war in the popular imagination; early strategies and the problems presented by trench warfare; the First World War as a “total war;” and the meaning of the war for combatants and civilians. We will NOT spend much time on the origins/causes of the war. These are dealt with briefly in some of the readings, and it will be impossible to have a sensible discussion without touching on the causes, but I do not anticipate spending much time on this.

Start with Keegan’s chapter, “Every Man a Soldier.” Note that this is the introductory chapter to a book on the *Second* World War – one can often understand a war only in the context of the previous war. This lays out some of the big themes. Robert Graves’ autobiography provides a nice “before, during, after” narrative, and we will refer to it throughout this section of the course. (When you read this autobiography, bear in mind that “middle class” in England in 1914 has different connotations from “middle class” in Long Island in 2005.)

John Keegan, The Second World War, chapter 1, “Every Man a Soldier” (xerox)

Robert Graves, Goodbye To All That, 1929

### **Anticipations and Meanings**

Wolfgang Mommsen, “The Topos of Inevitable War in Germany in the Decade Before 1914” in Volker Berghahn and Martin Kitchen (eds), Germany in the Age of Total War, 1981(xerox)

Michael Howard, "Europe on the Eve of the First World War" in M. Howard, Lessons of History (xerox)

Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War, chapter 1, “The Myths of Militarism” (xerox)

### **Pre-war and wartime strategies:**

Holger Herwig, “Strategic Uncertainties of a Nation-State: Prussia-Germany, 1871-1918” in Williamson Murray et al (eds), The Making of Strategy (xerox)

John Gooch, “The Weary Titan: Strategy and Policy in Great Britain, 1890-1918” in Williamson Murray et al (eds), The Making of Strategy (xerox)

Michael Howard, "Men Against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914" in M. Howard, Lessons of History (xerox)

Roger Chickering, “World War I and the Theory of Total War: Reflections on the British and German Cases, 1914-1915” in Roger Chickering and Stig Forster (eds), Great War, Total War, 2000 (xerox)

## **Week 12 Thurs April 21: the local level**

This week we look at a local history: the impact of the war on the town of Bury, England

Geoffrey Moorehouse, Hell's Foundations: a Social History of the Town of Bury in the Aftermath of the Gallipoli Campaign, 1992

*Note: this is out of print, but there are numerous used copies available from Amazon and other suppliers*

## **Week 13 Thurs April 28: combat**

This week we shift gear. The principal reading (Passchendaele) is a technical military history the aim of which is to explain the shifting tactics and techniques of warfare and how they contributed to the eventual battlefield success of British armies. It is a “worm’s eye view” of military operations. Think about how you can integrate this kind of historical account into the materials we have already read.

Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, Passchendaele: the Untold Story, 1996

Robert Graves, Goodbye To All That

Knox and Murray chapter 8, Jonathan Bailey, “The First World War and the Birth of Modern Warfare” (xerox)

Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War, chapter 12 “The Death Instinct: Why Men Fought” (xerox)

John Keegan, The Face of Battle, chapter on The Somme

## **Week 14 Thurs May 5: aftermaths, mourning, meaning**

Now we return to the “meaning” of the war, with an emphasis on mourning and bereavement and on the long-term political and economic consequences of the war.

Robert Graves, Goodbye To All That

Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, 14-18, Understanding the Great War, 2002, “Mourning”, section III (xerox)

Modris Eksteins, “Memory and the Great War,” in Hew Strachan (ed), Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War, 1998 (xerox)

David Stevenson, Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy, (2004), chapter 19, “Rebuilding 1920-1929” and chapter 20, “Demolition, 1929-1945” (xerox)