

The Costs of War: Retrospectives from our Lived Experience

Format: Classes will be based on readings, films, or guest speakers. Class members will be expected to provide one presentation that helps to trigger and organize discussion.

Resources/Expenses: *The Violent American Century: War and Terror Since World War II* (2017), is available on Amazon in paperback for \$4.00 and up.

The films, *The Best Years of Our Lives* and *Hearts and Minds*, are available either from the local library or can be streamed on-line. Both were Oscar winners:

- *The Best Years of Our Lives:*
 - [:The Best Years of Our Lives : The Samuel Goldwyn Company : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming](#) (This is a high quality stream which plays very well on a computer, but may be cast to a tablet or smart tv with airplay or chromecast
 - [\(36\) The Best Years of Our Lives by William Wyler \(1946\) - YouTube](#) (a lower quality version that you may cast to a smart TV.
 - Ocean State Library System has 14 DVD copies, and 3 Blu-Ray editions
- *Hearts and Minds*
 - [\(36\) Hearts and Minds \(1974\) HD – Best Vietnam War Documentary - YouTube](#) Janus Films.(again an uploaded version that wants for image quality but the whole film is there for you to see)
 - Ocean State Library System has 2 DVD copies.

Course Description: The celebration of war is built into the American landscape. Public memory places prominently feature a WWII Museum, multitudes of war memorials, and preserved warplanes, ships, and battlefields. These tend to place martial glory at the front of public awareness. Is there space for public discussion of the costs of war?

This course searches for entry points to such conversation. In text, in film, and through local commentators we'll explore the legacies of WWII and the Vietnam War (our generation's seminal war experiences) focusing on what ultimately shapes our view of American defense and global security missions and their costs. The "costs of war" meme comes from a project housed at Brown University focused on the so-called Global War on Terror.

This course and the Brown project gesture ultimately to the 2020 US Defense and Security budget of \$750,000,000,000. As we talk about this, we might also ask: what can we do about it?

Course Session Description

March 18

Week 1.

A Starting Conversation: Our Personal Histories and The Role of Remembrance.

Relating to War, and its costs.

In preparation

Please prepare to share a personal statement. (5 to 10 minutes) Here are some prompts. Around when were you born? And where? What was your first memory of war? Did you, or a member of your family ever serve in the armed services? Did you demonstrate for or against a war? How do you celebrate Memorial Day, Veterans Day?

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Class Discussion:

- Dower, Chapters 1. Measuring Violence & 2. Legacies of World War II
- Reactions to "[Hymn to the Fallen](#)" by John Williams and the comments about this YouTube video
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP6cm6YKLAo&authuser=0>

March 25

Week 2.

"Collateral Costs" Personal losses and Remembering:

In preparation

- Please watch *The Best Years of Our Lives*,
- Read [Coming Home to The Best Years of Our Lives - Los Angeles Review of Books \(lareviewofbooks.org\)](#)
- Review [film essay for "The Best Years of Our Lives" \(loc.gov\)](#)

Susan McCalmont leads discussion

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A Conversation: Heather Oberg, RI Veterans Administration

- For background Browse Dower index US Department of Veterans Affairs

April 1

Week 3

Public Memorial and Public Feeling

John unpacks his experiences with Victory Day in RI

- [WWII Army Casualties: Rhode Island | National Archives](#)
- Victory Day in Rhode Island

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Class Discussion of Chapter 4 "Gratitude" in Erika Doss, Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America.

April 8

Week 4

WWII Legacies

In preparation for class discussion please review

- Dower, Chapter 2
- [The Cost of U.S. Wars Then and Now](#)
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-worldwide-deaths-world-war>
- [Eisenhower's "Military-Industrial Complex" Speech Origins and Significance](#) Origins of Eisenhower's MIC speech

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Mapping RI and SE New England Military Industrial Complex.

Presentations from Ken Reed, Kevin Culley

April 15

Week 5

“Documentary” History: Hearts and Minds.

Class discussion leaders, Doree Goodman and Mike Gerhardt

- **Watch *Hearts and Minds***

Readings

- [Hearts and Minds \(film\) - Wikipedia](#)
- Read [Why We're Still Talking About, And Watching, 'Hearts And Minds' | The ARTery \(wbur.org\)](#)
- The Victims of Agent Orange the U.S. Has Never Acknowledged
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/16/magazine/laos-agent-orange-vietnam-war.html?referringSource=articleShare>
- [Marshall D. Sahlins, Groundbreaking Anthropologist, Dies at 90 - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

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April 22

Week 6:

Vietnam Vets Eyewitness Warriors

Interview:

Col [ret.] Bill Babcock talks with Ruth Guyer

- [2018_11_11_ckt_veterans_stories.pdf \(ctkri.org\)](#) read the Bill Babcock story
- <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2020/11/10/veterans-day-2020-vietnam-veteran-peace-activist-peter-fossil-ri/3750831001/>
- [Nick Turse Describes the Real Vietnam War](#)

April 29

Week 7:

Vietnam war in the rearview mirror: Nondas Voll: Re-reading Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*

War & The Development of Modern Psychiatry: Jim Cowan

- [the cost of the vietnam war - Bing](#)
- [the cost of the vietnam war - Google Search](#)
- Dower 4. Cold War Wars & 5. Proxy War and Surrogate Terror

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May 6

Week 8. **Issues**

Mothers and War: Jill Brody

Ritvar Reinbergs: Environmental Aspects of the Costs of War

[\[You Don't Have to Buy War, Mrs. Smith\] | C-SPAN.org](#)

May 13

Week 9

"American Exceptionalism", *Extraordinary Rendition, Enhanced Interrogation: How we have sold our soul to the Devil*--- Frank Schaberg

- [Torture at Abu Ghraib | The New Yorker](#)

Ethics of War:

- **Susan Wolfson welcomes and introduces Benjamin Yelle, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Northeastern University, discussion leader**
- [Just War Theory | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy \(utm.edu\)](#)
 - Please compare WWII and the Iraq War using the criteria for *Jus ad bello* and *Jus in bello*.
 - Frame a question of your own consulting the attached depiction (e.g. What if there had been WMD?)
- <https://youtu.be/LcBovmGZSPU> Michael Walzer on "Just War Theory"

May 20

Week 10.

What change do we want?

Our text concludes:

- "The mystique of exceptional virtue does not accommodate serious consideration of irresponsibility, provocation, intoxication with brute force, paranoia, hubris, reckless and criminal actions, or even criminal negligence".

6 This is a harsh indictment, but many if not all of our sessions have added evidence to support Dower's view. It brings us back to the ethical dimensions that occupied Week 9. and where I want to begin Week 10.

As a **homework exercise, please locate yourself in the present state of American political polarization.**

- [Do You Think You Live in a Political Bubble? - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)
- Do you live in a bubble?
- What does it mean for the Costs of War?
- How can we work for change in our neighborhoods and in our state?

Hold those thoughts and bring them with you to class next week.

Or, if the spirit moves you, please send a broadside to all of us.

As this course heads to a conclusion, I want to share what I believe are consensus ideas in the group.

Please feel free to **add to this list, or to clarify with a few sentences of your own.**

The Readings suggest some possible ways in which change might unfold.

But perhaps you feel a need for more engagement.

On Paths to Engagement, I list here one initiative that Nondas has brought to my attention. No doubt you have **suggestions to add.**

Policy Consensus

- Universal National Service
- Environmental Action

- Enhanced Veterans Support
- Right sizing the Defense Budget

Paths to Engagement:

- Direct Action
 - Divestment (RI Legislative initiative) The bill is attached.
 - etc., etc.
- [Voices for National Service \(voicesforservice.org\)](http://voicesforservice.org)

Readings

- [Home - Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft](#)
- [25+ Transpartisan Orgs Identify \\$80 Billion in Pentagon Budget Cuts | Win Without War](#) Specific Budget reduction proposals
- [THE MOST IMPORTANT LEGACY OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT: \(A WHITEBOARD\) - War Room - U.S. Army War College](#) This report is a summary of judgements from 4 historians. It is relevant to a discussion of national service, and to understanding cultural and moral choices that the war engendered.
- [Our Military Can Help Lead The Fight In Combating Climate Change | Elizabeth Warren](#) Political policy related to the next item.
- [A military perspective on climate change could bridge the gap between believers and doubters \(yahoo.com\)](#) How the military establishment might be engaged in the fight against global warming according to Michael Klare
- *Has America Had Enough of War?* from FT (attached) A suggestion emerges from this piece that a national consensus, foreseen by the Quincy Institute, is possible about a less intrusive and aggressive foreign policy.
- [United States Withdraws From Afghanistan? Not Really - CounterPunch.org](#) A report that the presence is likely to persist.

Convenor: John Eng-Wong

John Eng-Wong is a recovering historian whose work career centered on advising international students and researchers about visas and tax regulations, as well as the topics of cultural difference and learning across cultures. In retirement he has transitioned to a research-oriented life that examines the exchanges between China and the world, specifically early trade relations, and the evolution of foodways along this axis. He is new to the themes in this course, and looks forward to being a fellow learner.

