

Spring 2011
English 461-01
The Senior
Seminar
"The Culture of
War"
Professor
Kenneth McNeil
Wednesday 7-9:45



A literary exploration of warfare as depicted in a range of writing and imagery.

War has been with us for a long time. Humans have made war on each other and warfare has been a fundamental aspect of human culture since the beginnings of civilization. Indeed the propensity to kill, or to sanction the killing of, others whom we have never met or do not know is arguably a basic condition of being human. Wars have come and gone throughout our history and even though warfare has generally brought with it only increased death and destruction, no human society has ever given up on it entirely.

What is the culture of war? How does war shape, and is shaped by, our most basic assumptions about ourselves as individuals or in relation to others in society? How does warfare confer status and/or identity among its participants? This course will cover a broad historical range, from wars of the ancient world to modern-day conflicts. Topics might include the nature of combat, the home front, anti-war sentiment, nations and national identity, war as historical necessity, the image of the dead, gender identities, and others.

Illustration: Francisco Goya, *The Disasters of War* "With or Without Reason"