COURSE DESCRIPTION

Distinguished military historian Victor Davis Hanson wrote: “Military history can do a great service for history at large, for its currency is honesty, a truthfulness engendered by the ultimate sacrifice of human life that transcends all pretension and rhetoric.” This course tackles some of the toughest dilemmas faced by Americans, past and present: how and when to kill, and to defend and protect, while maintaining our humanity as soldiers and citizens.

We cannot understand the American military without knowing how it developed over time, from colonial insecurity to global power. We will survey American wars and the evolution of the U.S. military, both professional and semi-professional. Readings address a range of issues: strategy and tactics, the social history of the military, the importance of technology, and civil-military relations. One of the central questions is this: Are Americans exceptional? Is there an “American way of war?” Do Americans fight differently than other nations? If so, how has our military adapted to the values of American society?