This course is a survey of anthropological approaches to war. It does not cover theories from political science, the history of Europe or the great powers, or other “standard” war topics. If you are looking for those discussions, look elsewhere. This course looks at the nature of war as a human institution, where it comes from, and how it affects society. It asks how can we better understand war by using the vast range of cultures and behaviors that anthropologists study, and how those insights may relate to wars raging in the world today. Perhaps the best way to frame the scope of this course is to raise the question that Albert Einstein posed to Sigmund Freud: “Why war?”

We will begin be examining the actual practice of war in “tribal” societies, then move to theoretical overviews about interrelationships between war and society. Next come two units examining evidence and debates about “human nature” and war in humanity’s distant past. Four units sequentially present detailed discussions about war in relation to ecology, economy, and kinship, gender relations, values and belief systems, and finally, politics. The latter part of the semester shifts to the contemporary world. Two units examine first theories, then cases, of “ethnic” and other violence. The next unit deals with topics and cases related to the current global confrontation over terrorism, and the next with contemporary issues about anthropological engagement with military and security organizations. We conclude with a focus on peace.

Course Requirements. This course is oriented to weekly readings and class discussions. Readings are all included in two photocopied books prepared by myself. Each reader contains selections chosen and edited to illustrate particular theoretical topics, and a wide variety of cultures. With the enormous scope of peoples we will read about, this course can also be considered an introduction to world ethnography. Be forewarned that there will be about 80 to 90 standard pages of reading per week, but the thick mix of cultural areas and diverse theoretical arguments may make this the heaviest single inundation of new ideas you ever experience. It is a lot to take in, and I expect you to demonstrate you have done so in class discussions.

Class participation is important. It does not have a set percentage assigned to it, but regular contributions can significantly raise your grade. Your basic grade, however, is based on five writing assignments, of two types. Type One is a total of three short essays (about 5 pages each), discussing and evaluating 4 Units each from your readings (Units 1-4, 5-8, 9-12—for due dates see the course outline). There is much, much more in each of these groups than you could possibly discuss in five pages, so I want you to be critical, selective, and insightful in describing major themes and critical theories. Your job in these essays is to accomplish two things: a) demonstrate that you have been doing the reading, b) show me that you are thinking about this material and figuring out what is most meaningful for you. The three short essays will be graded separately, and together count for about one third of your grade.

Writing assignment Type Two consists of two medium length papers (8 pages or about
2,400 words, no more than 13), on different situations and times frames in one part of the world. Each will count for about one-third of your semester grade. The first paper would deal with a “traditional” system of violence (though you will learn those scare quotes are really justified), and the second with the same people, but today. In the first weeks of the semester, your job will be to look around, and talk to me, to find some particular area of the world that has a reseachable history of local violence, and is today (or within the past few years) caught up in some new form of violent group conflict. (But see the alternatives, below). This should not be state-vs.-state violence, not classic war, but sub-national groupings mobilized to fight and kill.

There are many areas of the world for which this could be researched, including most of Africa and the Middle East, much of Central Asia, and take-your-pick where else. The first of the two papers should describe earlier (and time frames will vary by case) forms of collective struggle, using the ideas and theories described in the first two Parts of this course. The second paper will be based on this historical-anthropological understanding, but take your analysis into recent trends and events, drawing on theoretical approaches developed in the third Part of the semester. (The last two weeks of class will turn to other topics, so you should have time to integrate that theory into this final paper).

This all can be researched simultaneously. (It might be impossible to separate the two phases). But the papers should be discrete. The first would resemble a standard anthropological essay on “tribal” (or whatever) war, the second would be focused on actions playing out in today’s global context. Different situations will pose different challenges for research and analysis, and there is no single framework for proceeding. I am open to your ideas, so talk to me about them.

There is an alternative approach, with two variations. That is, to take a situation with a very clear past history of intensive violence, but which has not been characterized by bloody struggle in recent years, and to focus on how past legacies have been dealt with in relatively peaceful ways. Or, to take a situation where peoples of differing identities are currently locked in struggle, when they demonstrated a history of peaceful coexistence in the past, showing how earlier cooperative relations were broken down.

I expect you are familiar with university standards on academic integrity and plagiarism. All factual claims must have source citations, all quotations put in quotes. For citations and bibliography format, go to http://www.aaanet.org/publications/guidelines.cfm for the American Anthropologist style. Be sure to double space, paginate, and staple. At the end of all assignments, you are to include the following university honor pledge, followed by your signature. “I pledge, on my honor, that I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this assignment”

Readers. The Anthropology of War, R. Brian Ferguson editor, Book I and Book II. Available from Affordable Copies Center, 55 Halsey Street, phone 973 802-1007. Call in advance to be sure a copy is available.
Office: 619 Hill Hall, Office Hours: Tuesday 3:45-4:45, Thursday 1:15-2:00
Office Phone: 973 353-5837, E-mail: bfergusn@rutgers.edu
Weekly Course Outline

Part One

Introduction. Film: Dead Birds, January 22

Unit #1 Practicing War, January 29
Unit #2 Overviews, February 5

Unit #3 War as a Species Characteristic, February 12

Unit #4 Western Contact and the Antiquity and Intensity of War, February 19

First short writing assignment due February 26
Selection of cultural area for longer writing assignments should be done before this

Part Two

Unit #5 War and Society: Ecology, Economy, and Kinship, February 26

Unit #6 Gender, March 5

Unit #7 Cultural Logics of Violence, March 12

Unit #8 Politics: Leaders, Factions, States, March 26

Second short writing assignment due April 2
First longer term paper due in the week beginning April 2

Part Three

Unit #9 Macro-Perspectives on Wars of the 1990s, April 2

Unit #10 Identerest Violence, Down to Cases, April 9
Unit #11 The Post 9/11 World, April 16

Unit #12 Ethics of Anthropological Engagement with U.S. Security Agencies, April 23

Third short writing assignment due April 30

Unit #13, Peace, April 30

Second longer term paper due, not later than May 2
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If you experience psychological or other difficulties as a result of this course, or because of other issues that may interfere with your performance in the course, please contact the university’s psychological and counseling service center located in Blumenthal Hall, room, 101, phone 973-353-5805.  http://www.rutgersnewarkcounselingcenter.com/CC/
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