
Overview: Sebastian Junger, a New York Times bestselling author of The Perfect Storm and A Death at Belmont, recently was embedded with a U.S. military unit in Afghanistan. Over a fifteen-month period, between 2007 and 2008, Junger followed a U.S. platoon stationed in Korengal Valley, Afghanistan. Junger described the location as, “the Afghanistan of Afghanistan: too remote to conquer, too poor to intimidate, too autonomous to buy off” (16). After his experience in the Middle East, Junger wrote a book about “what war actually feels like”. War is an in depth account of the day-to-day lives of American soldiers combating the Taliban in one of the most dangerous outposts of Afghanistan.

War falls within the American Studies genre because it takes an in-depth look at the lives and experiences of young men and women defending our country abroad. War provides the reader with the harsh realities of combat. “There’s nothing like it, nothing in the world,” writes Junger, “when its negative twenty degrees outside, you’re sweating. If it’s a hundred and twenty, you’re cold as shit. Ice cold. It’s an adrenaline rush like you can’t imagine”(33). The themes of fear, honor, brotherhood and a distinct type of trust resurface many times throughout the text. Junger’s deeply intimate narrative gives the reader a sense of the intense psychological and physical hardships endured by soldiers. Soldiers of the U.S. Battle Company are constantly faced with re-occurring nightmares, the loss of a sense of self and the terrifying realities of adjusting to life after war. Junger recalls how intense participating in a firefight can be for a solider. Many of the soldiers in Battle Company begin to look forward to the adrenaline rush brought about by a
firefight and often slip into boredom when a lull in fighting takes place. Junger recognizes that dependency on violence might not make psychological sense to a “normal” person. However, after participating in war these soldiers are no longer normal.

*War* is an extraordinary work of investigative and descriptive journalism. It not only gives the reader a sense of what the soldiers were doing on a day-to-day basis but dives deep into the psychological effects of war. Junger’s ability to describe and depict the behaviors of the soldiers is exceptional and gives the reader a realistic portrayal of what these men endured.

*How this work can be applied to American Studies:* The study of war is vital to American culture and the history of our nation. This book would provide a different perspective on war because it is not rooted in politics but focused more on raw individual experience. Learning about the physiological effect that war can have on American soldiers would benefit any American Studies course. Ideally, reading books like Junger’s *War* will hopefully encourage Americans to think more critically, and perhaps more frequently, about the government’s actions in becoming involved in armed conflicts.