Overview: This book is a compelling and riveting account of the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003, from the perspective of a reporter embedded with the First Reconnaissance Battalion of the United States Marine Corps. Using his personal experiences, as well as interviews with individual Marines, author Evan Wright constructs an intense experience of war for the reader. He does not shy away from horrifying images or descriptions of extreme violence, but he balances the horrors of war with the personalities of the men involved and their relationships to one another. These humanizing elements draw the reader in and make the audience empathize with these young men who were (and still are) fighting the war in Iraq. *Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War* is an indispensable account of modern warfare, both as a fascinating portrayal of chaotic violence and as a description of the comradeship and intense bonds shared military service can create. Wright’s main purpose seems to be to show his audience the new attitudes of many military men, including the expectation of government deceit and the impression that no one really knows what they are doing.

The book starts with an account of a firefight in a “nameless” Iraqi town, and the details of the ambush throw the reader into the environment of war immediately. The sights, sounds, and smells of this Iraqi village assault the reader, creating an almost tangible scene to which the reader feels instantly connected. Wright uses this talent for constructing a scene throughout the book to keep the reader engaged in what is going on.

The issue of the hierarchy of command is a major one in *Generation Kill*, because the lower-level soldiers are generally seen as more competent than their men serving above them. Wright does become a bit partial in this matter, due to the fact that he spent much of his time with the lower-level Marines, and was exposed to their opinions on a much more regular basis
than those of the higher-ups. He is also exposed to the Marine tradition of distributing nicknames, and he uses them primarily to designate incompetent leaders, who are never identified by their real names, although he also utilizes them to show the brotherhood created by shared military service and the need for team unity among the men of First Recon.

Wright also deals with the relative lack of information given to the men of First Recon, as they are rarely made aware of the larger plan for their battalion beyond the immediate information they need to accomplish their missions. Even then, they are often sent into hostile territory with little or no support from other troops, and often without the proper equipment to succeed. The fact that they succeed so often, despite these obstacles, is a testament to their abilities. Wright is often hung up on the fact that, despite the impression of the United States military as a technologically advanced, supremely powerful agent of foreign policy, the men on the ground are often left in the dark, literally and figuratively, but still expected to follow orders unquestioningly. He is also fascinated by the willingness of these men to go into battle, even when they do not know why they are fighting.

The book is well-written overall, and the use of direct quotes from the soldiers brings the reader into the conversations and attitudes of the men who make up First Recon. Furthermore, Wright explains what the various military terms and Marine slang words mean, making the reader comfortable with the language without being condescending towards the audience. Wright also maintains the use of profanity and crude language that is so prevalent in the military, and he does not sanitize the experiences of the men or their manner of speaking. For a public that has become increasingly disillusioned with war and the military, this book can bring back a sense of the humanity of the soldiers and the emotions and experiences that shape them during war.
How this work can be applied to American Studies: Generation Kill could be easily incorporated into courses like GOV 307: Politics of Refugees, as well as other courses that deal with diplomacy, war, and the military. This book would be especially useful in government classes, but it could also be easily incorporated into American studies courses and even history classes. This book would enrich the understanding of American foreign policy and the Iraq war in almost any relevant class.