Course Number: TC 357  
Title: Myths of War and Violence

Instructor: Thomas Palaima, Raymond Dickson Centennial Professor #2, PHD, Department of Classics, College of Liberal Arts

Description:  
How would you talk about, explain, remember or forget violence or killing that you had witnessed, experienced, or done? How did ancient Greek culture and late-nineteenth/twentieth century British and American culture deal with the concepts and realities of violence and warfare? How is violence used, controlled, encouraged, punished, experienced, remembered and explained by different societies and by individuals within those societies? What effects, short-term and long-term, does the experience of violence have on people and how do they use myths to deal with those effects?

We shall consider these questions while reading, viewing and discussing a range of mythic forms for the 19th-20th and now 21st century. This course will include the usual mixture of ancient and modern readings and genres and also incorporate new things. The course will be focused on soldiers’ voices in Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey and in Jonathan Shay’s Achilles in Vietnam and Odysseus in America as it is related to PTS and other veterans’ issues from Vietnam, Gulf War I and now Afghanistan and Iraqi Freedom. We shall look at contemporary film documentaries, too: Operation Homecoming (an NEA national initiative); The Ground Truth; Tattooed Under Fire; Body of War; My Country, My Country. And soldier writing including Jesse Odom’s Through Our Own Eyes and the book version of Operation Homecoming and Maxine Hong Kingston’s edited volume Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace. We’ll also look at selected poetry.

Texts/Readings:  
Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey  
Jonathan Shay’s Achilles in Vietnam and Odysseus in America  
Jesse Odom’s Through Our Own Eyes  
Maxine Hong Kingston’s edited volume Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace  
Additional text to be determined.

Assignments:  
Two 12-page papers (20%/30%)  
Four 2-page film responses (5% each = 20%)  
One or two notes of class meetings (10%)  
Discussion leading and active participation expected in class discussion (20%)  
[Two students will be chosen to lead discussion for each class meeting and one to write up a summary of discussion for circulation in the class.]

Biography:  
Professor Palaima has lectured, written and taught extensively on the subjects of ancient writing systems, the reconstruction of ancient culture, decipherment theory, Greek language, and war and violence studies. He loves music (esp. Bob Dylan and traditional folk and blues) and film. He is a regular contributor of editorials to the Austin American-Statesman and reviewer for the Times Higher Education Supplement. He teaches this course so that all involved, including himself, can see things in life more clearly. He has been awarded the P2 Chad Oliver Teaching Award 2005 and the Texas Exes Jean Holloway Teaching Award 2004.