

The United States Army and the Making of America: From Confederation to Empire, 1775-1903. By Robert

Wooster (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Nebraska, 2021) 479 pp. \$39.95 cloth

This closely argued, deeply researched volume – over a third comprises references and bibliography – built on the use of extensive private papers from across the United States is readable and interesting, and its history of organized violence in early American life has contemporary resonance. It is a story of idealism to realism, and of transformation: America into a great republic and empire built by regular soldiers, and of those favorable to militias and hostile to regular forces becoming a standing army's greatest champions. Echoing Machiavelli and Cromwell, the demand for highly effective forces such as England's New Model Army replaced idealistic preference for republican militias over the perils of dictatorship of permanent forces. Regulars in the US were not only more effective, but they also often cost less than local militias. Robert Wooster's thesis is that Americans may have resisted a regular army, but benefits outweighed harm and very quickly detractors, especially once in office, grew into strong supporters of an army that secured and forged America. 'The regular army was an evil, but it was a necessary one' (p. 22) and as this chronological study shows, instead of reining in military spending, succeeding Presidents expanded, deployed, and valorized the regulars, despite comments to the contrary.

Thomas Jefferson is a case in point. When crafting a proposed Virginia state constitution in 1776, an idealistic Jefferson had boldly declared (p. 46) that 'There shall be no standing army but in time of war'. A decade later, he was still complaining about the constitutional failure to ban permanent military force. He and his fellow Republicans when out of power saw the army as a threat to liberty, but once in office in 1801 their outlook shifted. Newly elected President Jefferson was determined to transform the regulars rather than eliminate them, and in his inaugural address he (p. 40) said that militias were the 'best reliance' in peace and war. But Jefferson could not easily improve the state militias, and he needed to stake out the republic's claim to an empire for liberty during a series of international crises, so he reinforced the Army as

an institution in the early republic. Needs must. The issues were security and expansion. Jefferson set up West Point in 1802 – a Federalist idea – to become a Republican tool to transform the army. Party politics and military policy were as intertwined then as now. Meanwhile, expenditure soared: the army cost \$1.67 million in 1801 (33% of Government expenditure) to an outlay of \$3.34 in 1809 (45% of spending). When James Madison left office in 1816 the army was 25% larger and nearly half of all federal employees were soldiers, or 80% if one included sailors and War Department employees.

As Wooster argues, the history of America is the history of its army. Regulars after 1776 took on a significance that few Americans imagined at the time. The Army Act of 1796 solidified the peacetime regular army that would resist Britain, threaten Spain, attack Mexico, quell banditry, ethnically cleanse and massacre Native Americans, and so incrementally secure the liminal space for Manifest Destiny. Militias were not prepared for this national mission. With war looming with Britain the failure of state militias highlighted the differences between the (p. 61) ‘revolutionary lore’ of patriots rallying to the flag and everyday life in which Americans had other things to do. The war of 1812 amply proved the need for disciplined forces – akin to the earlier Continental army under George Washington that more resembled British Redcoats at the time than the Minutemen – and, of course, as the republic became more stable after 1783 the fear of a dictatorship of soldiers lessened. Meanwhile, Indian wars up to the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890 demanded an army, more especially as too often Indian forces won battles against irregular militiamen who refused to obey orders and fired off their weapons into the undergrowth so advertising their presence. Not even the threat of a hundred lashes could get the militia in line for Indian fighting.

When Andrew Jackson came into office in 1829, he genuflected to the militias as (pp. 95-6) the ‘bulwark of our defense’, while standing armies were ‘dangerous’, before proceeding to use regulars to remove Native Americans, preserve order and promote national development, and he deflected attempts to close down West Point. Critics proclaimed and decried that Jackson wanted a standing army of 100,000

men. Americans despite their proclaimed love of limited government and free markets welcomed the economic benefits of military presence. The Army Bill of 1838 was the largest augmentation of the regular army since the 1812 war. The army was soon the federal government's most visible agent of expansion. The army was the convergence of technology and national security, and it provided the engineers to map the West and to plan the route of the first trans-continental railroad.

Popular suspicion of regular forces (and of West Point) rumbled on into the US civil war and afterwards. Here was a people's war – of the more than two million men in the Union army about 67,000 were regulars – and afterwards (p. 197) 'acceptance of a larger regular army remained very much in question.' But trouble in Mexico, the need to consolidate federal authority over the former confederacy, and the conquest of the American West demanded standing troops. Army unit areas became havens for Unionists and freed slaves against former Confederates and white supremacists. Soldiers also fought strikers and protected infrastructure such as railroads in times of industrial unrest.

Wooster is to be congratulated for a fine, scholarly history of the US army in a formative stage of the nation's history and the argument that he develops on armies and the State is relevant in so many other national case studies, too, and to so much of American life today.

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