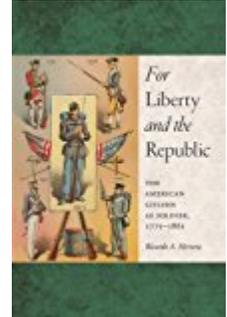


**Ricardo A. Herrera.** *For Liberty and the Republic: The American Citizen as Soldier, 1775-1861.* New York: New York University Press, 2015. 272 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4798-1994-2.



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**Commissioned by** Robert P. Murray (Mercy College)

A Navy ROTC student at Texas A&M University, enrolled in this reviewer's American Military History survey course, requested to meet after completing a paper comparing the experience and ideology of soldiers in the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War II, and Vietnam. The course emphasized how a society's culture shapes the practice of war and the assumptions that guide its warriors. The student, a veteran of a tour in Iraq, told me that reading scholarship about the connection between soldiers and their culture in the past made him realize how disconnected he was from contemporary American society. He said that he and his comrades were alienated because the values and beliefs that prompted them to join the military had become exclusive to the military. Ricardo A. Herrera, in *For Liberty and the Republic: The American Citizen as Soldier, 1775-1861*, makes the same point in his introduction when he writes that today's professional, all-volunteer army is disengaged from the rest of society. This stands in sharp contrast to the period covered in his book, when American soldiers

were deeply engaged with a broader culture of republicanism that emphasized the relationship between citizenship and bearing arms.

Herrera convincingly argues that soldiers from the American Revolution to the Civil War embraced a "military ethos of republicanism" derived from the republican culture in which they lived. Whether they were northerners, southerners, westerners, volunteers in the militia, or enlisted men in the regular army, soldiers understood their service according to five broad tenets, which serve as the organizing themes for the book's five chapters. One was virtue, or the conviction that the character of its people determined the success of a republic. A soldier through his service fulfilled the highest obligation of citizenship and proved both his own manhood and the worth of his society. Legitimacy, the second component of the ethos, had two aspects. In its conservative form, soldiers desired to defend traditional rights, the republic, or the Constitution. They revered the American past and sought to preserve its legacy. In its forward-looking aspect, ethnic

and racial minorities used soldiering to legitimize their membership, citizenship, and participation in the republic. Self-governance, the subject of the third chapter, was the principle that a soldier maintained the right to rule himself and his society even within the context of military service. Soldiers drafted militia constitutions, negotiated enlistment terms, and regularly petitioned superior officers. Herrera claims that volunteer militia companies were among the most democratic institutions in American society. Soldiers fourthly understood their service through a belief that God had chosen the American republic as his earthly agent to spread liberty. Finally, glory, honor, and fame guided a soldier's conduct and provided the ultimate goals of his service.

Herrera anticipates an important objection that readers might raise when confronted with an argument that claims such sweeping temporal and regional continuity. He first acknowledges that the ideology of republicanism contained ambiguities and contradictions. The military ethos incorporated disparate views because the ideals underpinning it were broad and elastic. Although Herrera discusses in each chapter conflicting perspectives within the military ethos--such as the militia soldier's belief that the regular was a base hireling and the regular soldier's belief that the volunteer was undisciplined--he does not always explore the varied and contested definitions of the terms he uses to define the ethos. His description of honor is built upon the work of one historian who writes about the revolutionary period and does not explicitly engage with the corpus of scholarship produced on honor in the antebellum and Civil War eras, which suggests that honor changed over time and meant something different and looked different to frontier backwoodsmen, elite southern slaveholders in South Carolina, and merchants in New England. That soldiers shared a sense of honor is clear; that soldiers agreed on what honor meant and how it applied to their behavior in the service is less clear.

*For Liberty and the Republic* combines extensive archival and primary source research with a synthesis of recent scholarship. Herrera draws on the conclusions and analysis of historians who write about the early republic. This is a great strength of the book. Within its pages readers will see the connection between the scholarly literature on early American politics and society and the literature on soldiers and military institutions. Herrera succeeds in placing the motivations and beliefs of American soldiers within their broader context. He reveals a powerful ideology that lasted through political and social change and that framed military service for decades. His work captures the essence of what it meant to be a citizen and a soldier and reminds us that at one time most Americans thought the two were inseparable.

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