
Reviewed by Dan Hart (Harvard University)

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

“The story of the United States in the twentieth century,” writes David Fitzgerald in his new book, *Militarization and the American Century: War, the United States and the World since 1941,* “and in its place in the world is, in some sense, a story about war” (p. 1). This provocation, the opening line to his work, does not need the qualifier “in some sense” as Fitzgerald seeks to show how a distinct form of American militarization has affected all aspects of American politics, society, and culture since the country’s entry into the Second World War.

Part of Bloomsbury Academic’s New Approaches to International History series, *Militarization and the American Century* is an accessible and concise 255-page monograph containing six thematic chapters exclusive of an introduction and conclusion. Suited for an undergraduate classroom, the book surveys the recent scholarship on American militarization, with particular inspiration from Michael S. Sherry and the late Marilyn Young.[1] Useful notes are footnoted on each page. Fitzgerald is a lecturer in history at the University College Cork, the author of *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine from Vietnam to Iraq* (2013), and the coeditor (with David Ryan and John M. Thompson) of *Not Even Past: How the United States Ends Wars* (2020).

To define “militarization,” Fitzgerald cites the German historian Michael Geyer, who described militarization as the “contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence.” For Fitzgerald, American militarism is distinct from historical antecedents; though overt displays of jingoistic militarization are significant, the more revealing imprints of militarization are the “anodyne and even mundane” aspects on American society (p. 3). This could be in the form of the push for greater science and math education in the 1950s and 1960s or the forgettable international agreements giving the American military jurisdiction over areas of Japan and South Korea. Here, Fitzgerald argues, the forces of militarization on American
history are most evident, an omnipresent factor in American political culture.

To best understand this phenomenon, Fitzgerald believes a holistic approach is necessary, combining the subfields of historical research—diplomatic, military, social and cultural, environmental—through an international and transnational lens. Fitzgerald's opening chapter is a contextual study of American militarization leading up to World War II. In lieu of the chronological approach, Fitzgerald then applies his approach to specific themes, showing how national security concerns influenced not only policymakers and the structures of government but also a diverse set of issues, including the environment, the welfare state, gender and race relations, and the very notion of what it means to be an American citizen. Interwoven through the text and further explored in the last chapter are the influences of militarization on the American imagination and culture. He cites Young, who argued that though war has been a constant in American history, its consequences, both foreign and domestic, have been largely erased in American culture and politics, leading to a collective inability to understand the effects of militarization.

This is a fine volume, informative and thorough, affording the reader an excellent survey of scholarship while also opening the doors to further research. Fitzgerald makes an excellent point, one that cannot be emphasized enough in such a study, of how World War II was different from previous wars, not just because of its scale but also because it was so closely followed by the Cold War. This unprecedented historical situation meant that the United States took on a permanent wartime character. There are minor errors, mostly of omission, that, if amended, would have balanced and strengthened the thesis. In 1950, President Harry S. Truman did not seek a congressional declaration of war to enter into the Korean conflict, but readers should understand that the action was done under the auspices of the recently formed United Nations. President Ronald Reagan's 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act did include tighter enforcement of the border but also provided amnesty for three million illegal immigrants. In the "early years" of the Vietnam War, black soldiers were killed at a higher rate than white ones, but, by war's end, the percentage of blacks killed in action (12.5 percent) was lower than their respective percentage of the draft eligible population (13.5 percent) (p. 165). In combat, the highest casualty rates were not among the grunts but among the educated and mostly white first and second lieutenants. John Wayne's 1968 Vietnam War film, The Green Berets, was panned by the critics, but it was not a "commercial failure," earning nearly ten million dollars domestically (equivalent to about ninety million dollars today), making it the tenth most successful film of the year (p. 200).

A final word on the book's title. Fitzgerald does a laudatory job in explaining not only militarization but also the distinct form of American militarization. However, he uses "American Century" as a mere time frame to describe the world since 1941. When publisher Henry Luce coined the term in 1941, it was to assert America as the world's preeminent power, manifesting its influence through philanthropic, economic, cultural, and political means. Luce was signifying a change not just in American history but in world history as well. Fitzgerald missed an opportunity to address this and the fact that Luce did not discuss an overt role for the military in the "American Century."

These quibbles and commentary aside, Militarization and the American Century is an instructive and comprehensive book, a fine piece of scholarship that will inform and provoke.

Note

[1]. Michael S. Sherry, In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); and Mark Bradley and Mary L. Dudziak, eds., Making the Forever

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