

VOLUME X, NUMBER 3, SUMMER 2010

# CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*

Steven F.  
Hayward:

**Peter Beinart's  
Hubris**

Mary  
Eberstadt:  
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at Work**

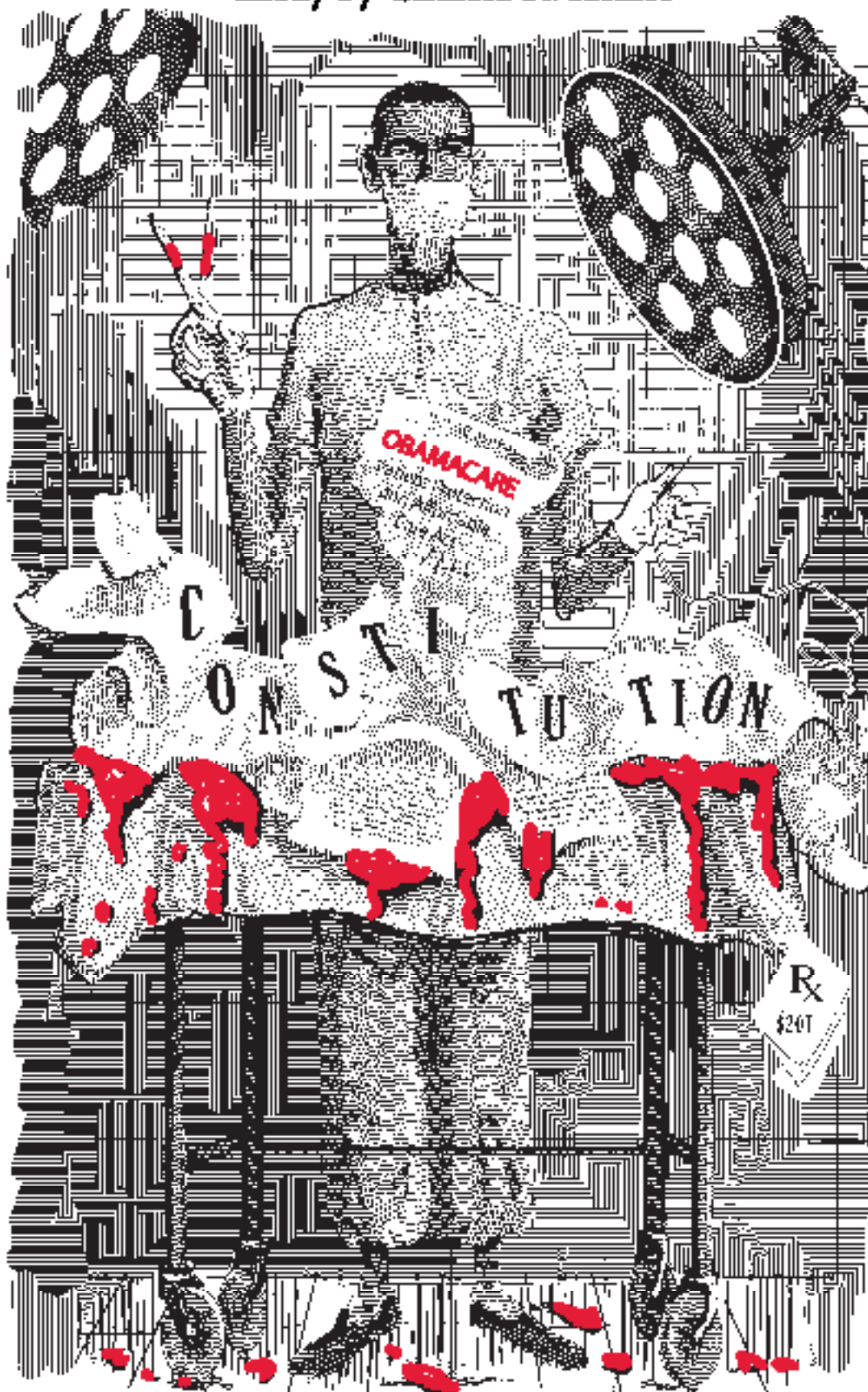
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Davidson:  
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## STUCK IN VIETNAM

*From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, by George Herring.  
Oxford University Press, 1056 pages, \$35

GEORGE HERRING'S *FROM COLONY TO Superpower* is the latest installment in that excellent series, the Oxford history of the United States. Best known for his distinguished work on U.S. policy in Vietnam, Herring sketches the history of American foreign policy over more than two centuries.

In any book covering such a lengthy period, the author may take one of two approaches: offer some bold reinterpretation of well-known events, or narrate with such an authoritative, grounded, and truly balanced tone as to establish the work as the standard account. Herring aimed for the latter, and has succeeded in writing a lucid, comprehensive, but all-to-conventional history.

A central theme of the volume is American exceptionalism—that the United States has a special destiny in the world. Herring views this belief as bound up with attitudes of cultural and racial superiority, smug parochialism, and unilateralism. He traces these attitudes through the history of U.S. diplomacy, and urges Americans to disenthral themselves of them. The ride engages and sometimes informs, but to describe this conclusion as either novel or unconventional would be seriously misleading. Indeed, it is already received wisdom among academics.

Herring's interpretation of America's Cold War policies, which fills almost half the book, captures his argument. At the beginning and end of each chapter, he strikes a note that is even-handed, and his style is hardly polemical, but the moral is clear: the United States consistently exaggerated the Soviet threat, engaged in unnecessary and immoral interventions overseas, propped up brutal right-wing dictators, and paid a serious price at home in terms of civil liberties, debt, an imperial presidency, and an overly militarized foreign policy. This has been the dominant interpretation among U.S. diplomatic historians for many years now.

But can this view still be sustained, with the continuing archival revelations from existing and former Communist countries? For example, Herring says the Truman Administration exaggerated the threat posed by the USSR under Stalin, but makes no clear argument as to Stalin's actual intentions. No doubt, Stalin wished for tactical, limited cooperation between the major power victors after 1945, but he also saw long-term conflict between the USSR and the West as inevitable, and looked to expand Soviet influence whenever possible. To imply that his foreign policy was not influenced by Marxist-

It is almost as if Herring thinks the United States had no right to compete with the USSR for international influence. Certainly Soviet leaders felt no such compunction.

Leninist ideology is simply inaccurate. Similarly, Herring suggests that the U.S. missed some sort of opportunity for diplomatic settlement with Moscow in the 1950s. But what alternative, acceptable to the USSR and preferable to the one that actually developed, does Herring think existed at the time? He scolds Truman and Eisenhower for their lack of diplomatic effort with Moscow, but never spells out the real world consequences of such hypothetical efforts. For some reason it is usually the United States that errs, by failing to accommodate, while the Soviets' willingness to compromise is taken for granted.

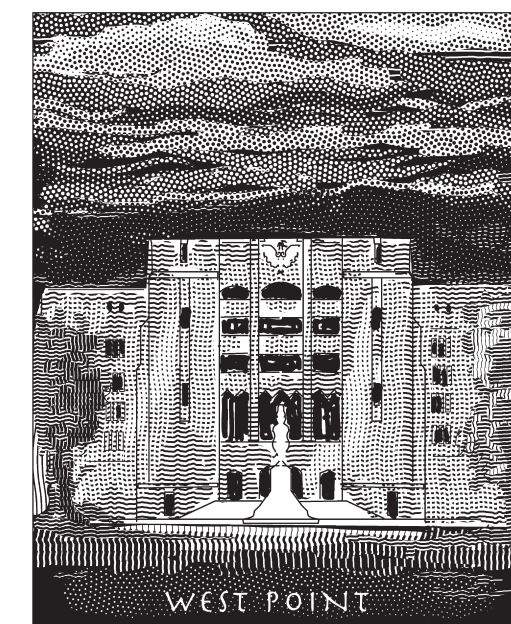
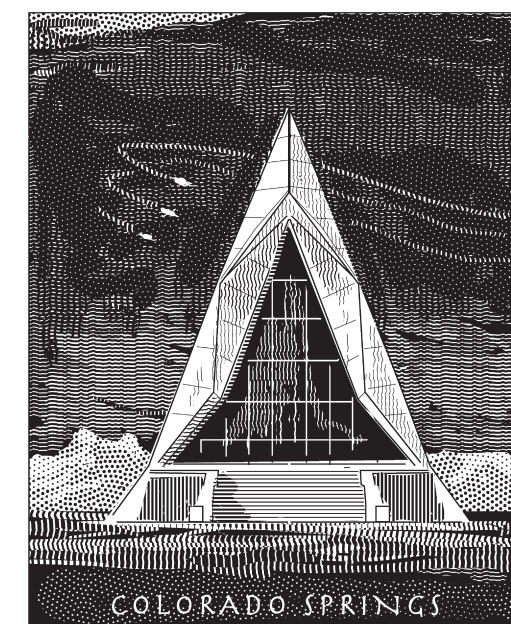
THE MISTAKES MADE BY AMERICAN LEADERS, in Herring's account, are invariably on the side of using too much force and too little diplomacy. He does not see that force and diplomacy must be coordinated in world politics to have any practical effect. For example, Herring chides the Reagan Administration for using covert action in Central America and elsewhere, and for ratcheting up Cold War tensions in the early 1980s. He later praises Reagan for reaching an arms control agreement with the USSR in his second term. Yet it never seems to occur to Herring that perhaps the two were related.

The author insists that the U.S. constantly mistook Third World nationalists for Communists, and therefore engaged in wrongful, unnecessary interventions overseas. But Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz, Chile's Salvador Allende, and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega were convinced Marxists as well as anti-American nationalists who received arms and inspiration from Communist countries. It is almost as if Herring thinks the United States had no right to compete with the USSR and its allies for international influence. Certainly Soviet leaders felt no such compunction.

Herring seems to view most American Cold War policies through the lens of his heartfelt opposition to the Vietnam War. But whatever one thinks of it, Vietnam was only one episode in the Cold War struggle, and fixating on it seems generational. As those passions fade, America's overall Cold War policy of anti-Communist containment may come to be seen for what it was: an astonishing success.

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## THE CASE FOR THE ACADEMIES



LAST YEAR THE *WASHINGTON POST* devoted much of its April 19 Sunday Outlook section to a feature called "Spring Cleaning." The editors asked ten writers to identify, in 300 words or less, an "institution, person, place, event or object...the world should toss out this spring." In came the answers, including the Nobel Prize in Literature, the NAACP, tenure—even proms. Provocative as these were, none sparked nearly as much controversy as the suggestion offered by the renowned author and military correspondent Thomas Ricks: "Get Rid of West Point."

Ricks made clear in his first sentence that he wasn't just picking on the Military Academy. He also wanted to "shut down" the Naval Academy in Annapolis and the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs—for three reasons. First, the academies take students who are "crackerjack smart and dedicated to national service" and give them "community-college educations" from faculties that are short on doctorates. Second, it costs too much for the academies to produce an officer—about \$300,000 compared with about \$130,000 for a Reserve Officer Training Corps-trained officer attending a civilian university on an ROTC scholarship. Third, we aren't getting what we pay for. According to Ricks, not only do "graduates of the service academies not stand out compared to other officers,...some commanders prefer officers who come out of ROTC programs because they tend to be better educated and less cynical about the military."

The article provoked a storm of online reactions, both at the *Post* and at Ricks's blog at

ForeignPolicy.com. Distressingly few offered extended defenses of the academies, and these varied widely in quality. Cadet Tianyi Xin made some solid arguments in an op-ed posted on the conservative New Ledger website (one of her best points was that West Point produces "60 percent of the officers with hard science degrees—degrees the Army desperately needs"). West Point's public affairs officer, on the other hand, answered Ricks by reprinting admiring quotations from *Rolling Stone* reporter David Lipsky's *Absolutely American: Four Years at West Point* (2003). It's a fine book, but Lipsky has little to say about the academy's academic life and nothing to say about how West Point compares to ROTC as a training ground for officers.

What was lacking in the debate sparked by Ricks was a thorough appraisal of the service academies and, even more, an evidence-based case for their continued existence. More's the pity, because the past decade has seen a flowering of serious books about West Point and Annapolis (although not, until this year, a single one about the much younger Air Force Academy). These books come in a variety of genres. Some are scholarly monographs like H. Michael Gelfand's *Sea Change at Annapolis: The United States Naval Academy, 1949–2000* (2006), Lewis Sorley's *Honor Bright: History and Origins of the West Point Honor Code and System* (2008), and Lance Janda's *Stronger than Custom: West Point and the Admission of Women* (2002). Others are memoirs, such as Craig M. Mullaney's *The Unforgiving Minute: A Soldier's*

*Education* (2009), or insider accounts by embedded writers, including Lipsky's *Absolutely American*, Ed Ruggero's *Duty First: A Year in the Life of West Point and the Making of American Leaders* (2002), and Diane Jean Schemo's *Skies to Conquer: A Year Inside the Air Force Academy* (2010). There's even a nicely (if inadvertently) matched pair of book-length reflections on teaching English to budding officers by civilian professors: Elizabeth Samet's *Soldier's Heart: Reading Literature Through Peace and War at West Point* (2007) and Bruce Fleming's *Annapolis Autumn: Life, Death, and Literature at the U.S. Naval Academy* (2005). Together, these books and two others—Fleming's *Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide: What Each Side Needs to Know about the Other—and about Itself* (2010) and David Cloud and Greg Jaffe's *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (2009), which traces the influence of West Point's highly regarded Department of Social Sciences on David Petraeus and other innovative generals—provide most of the raw material needed to decide whether Ricks is right.

### ROTC's Virtues

LET'S BEGIN WITH THE WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED fact that ROTC does an awfully good job of producing fine officers at a much lower price than the academies. Ricks is even more right about that than he realizes: a 2004 study by the Navy's own Tench Francis School of Business found that academy-trained



Books mentioned in this essay:

*Absolutely American: Four Years at West Point*, by David Lipsky. Houghton Mifflin, 336 pages, \$25 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper)

*Sea Change at Annapolis: The United States Naval Academy, 1949–2000*, by H. Michael Gelfand. University of North Carolina Press, 416 pages, \$34.95

*Honor Bright: History and Origins of the West Point Honor Code and System*, by Lewis Sorley. Learning Solutions, 180 pages, \$37

*Stronger than Custom: West Point and the Admission of Women*, by Lance Janda. Praeger, 228 pages, \$106.95

*The Unforgiving Minute: A Soldier's Education*, by Craig M. Mullaney. Penguin Press, 400 pages, \$28.95 (cloth), \$16 (paper)

*Duty First: A Year in the Life of West Point and the Making of American Leaders*, by Ed Ruggero. HarperCollins, 341 pages, \$14.95

*Skies to Conquer: A Year Inside the Air Force Academy*, by Diane Jean Schemo. Wiley, 320 pages, \$25.95

*Soldier's Heart: Reading Literature Through Peace and War at West Point*, by Elizabeth Samet. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 272 pages, \$23

*Annapolis Autumn: Life, Death, and Literature at the U.S. Naval Academy*, by Bruce Fleming. New Press, 288 pages, \$99.98

*Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide: What Each Side Must Know about the Other—and about Itself*, by Bruce Fleming. Potomac Books, Inc., 288 pages, \$27.50

*The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army*, by David Cloud and Greg Jaffe. Crown, 336 pages, \$28

*History of the U.S. Army Cadet Command: Second Ten Years, 1996–2006*, by Arthur T. Coumbe. New Forums Press, 412 pages, \$10

*Making Citizen Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service*, by Michael S. Neiberg. Harvard University Press, 288 pages, \$27

*Army 101: Inside ROTC in a Time of War*, by David Axe. University of South Carolina Press, 111 pages, \$24.95

officers cost, not twice, but four times as much to train as ROTC scholarship officers. Defenders of the academies like to say that the cost differential washes out when you consider how much longer academy graduates serve after their five-year active duty service obligation is over. (Scholarship-funded ROTC officers commit to four years.) The evidence on this point is inconclusive. In the past, most generals and admirals were academy grads, but that hasn't been true for quite a while. The same Tench Francis study showed that ROTC began producing more flag and general officers (that is, admirals in the Navy and generals in the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps) than the service academies by the mid-1980s and have continued to do so ever since. At times during the past two decades only one member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has been an academy alum. And in the Army as a whole, Arthur T. Coumbe shows in *History of the U.S. Army Cadet Command: Second Ten Years, 1996–2006* (2008), some recent classes of West Point-trained officers resigned their commissions sooner than ROTC scholarship recipients. At the nine-year mark, for example, only 33% of West Point's Class of 1994 graduates were still in uniform, compared with 38% of ROTC officers from that year. Officer Candidate School, the main route for enlisted personnel to become officers, has been taking up some of the slack,

but relying heavily on OCS strips much-needed sergeants and petty officers from the ranks of noncommissioned officers.

What makes ROTC so good? Two recent books supply much of the answer: Michael S. Neiberg's *Making Citizen Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service* (2002), which recounts ROTC's origins and development through 1980, and David Axe's *Army 101: Inside ROTC in a Time of War* (2007), which chronicles how a unit works today at a typical school (that is, a large, Southern, conservative, public university) that sponsors ROTC, in this case the University of South Carolina.

As Neiberg shows, Congress created ROTC in 1916 to supply the nation's need for, as the name implies, reserve officers. With the coming of the Cold War, the United States began, for the first time, to maintain a large and permanent standing military, and ROTC was charged to supply a majority of newly-commissioned regular officers. But it ran into trouble when the Vietnam War went politically sour in the late 1960s. The problem wasn't university administrators, most of whom, appreciating the program's infusion of scholarship money, have always supported ROTC. Nor were the vast majority of students the problem: two days after the Kent State University shootings in 1970, a poll showed that 75% of KSU students favored

keeping ROTC on campus, barely below the national average of 80%. ROTC's main problem was with faculty members, who had long resented the presence of officers without advanced degrees bearing the title "professor" and offering credit-earning courses that in some cases seemed like little more than marching and drill. And, among students, the small minority of anti-war radicals did place ROTC in their sights. In 1970, for example, Students for a Democratic Society charged that ROTC "produces the officers essential for continuing the United States' genocidal war in South East Asia." The political controversy, Neiberg argues, gave faculty members cover to stop awarding academic credit for ROTC courses, to strip ROTC instructors of their academic titles, and, in the case of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, and several other elite private universities, to banish ROTC from campus entirely.

Only in his treatment of these Vietnam-inspired campus controversies is Neiberg's generally excellent book seriously flawed. He overestimates the extent to which professors' hostility to ROTC was sincerely grounded in academic concerns and underestimates their visceral hatred of all things military. But Neiberg is surely right to conclude that, severe as the blows ROTC suffered from the academic Left were, even bigger ones came from the Nixon Administration,

which instituted a draft lottery in 1969 and, four years later, persuaded Congress to abolish the draft entirely in favor of a new All-Volunteer Force. Nixon's actions removed what had been ROTC's best recruiting tool—namely, its appeal to draft-eligible male students who preferred to meet their service requirement as officers rather than as enlisted men.

ROTC Heads South

ROTC RESPONDED TO THESE THREATS TO its viability by getting better. Its officers were encouraged to obtain advanced degrees (no more marking a cadet wrong because he identified a constellation as Cassiopeia instead of the Army-preferred "Big M," as happened at the University of Illinois); and they began offering solid courses on subjects like military history and civil-military relations instead of old mainstays like "Military Publications... their indices, filing, and use." ROTC opened its door to women and for the first time actively recruited racial and ethnic minorities. (Interestingly, ROTC's exclusion of women and spotty record on minorities never came up in the faculty debates that led to its marginalization or outright banishment.) Most important, ROTC moved south, where it was greeted with open arms. From 1968 to 1974, the Army closed 30 units at Eastern schools and opened 33 in the South, both at predominantly white universities like Old Dominion and predominantly black universities like Norfolk State. At the start of this six-year period, there were 123 ROTC units in the East and 147 in the South. By the end, Southern units outnumbered Eastern ones 180 to 93.

Testimony to how well ROTC has adapted to the All-Volunteer Force can be found in Axe's thick description of University of South Carolina's Gamecock Battalion. A freelance war correspondent, Axe spent enough time in 2004 with the Army unit's 80 cadets to develop a strong sense of how ROTC works. During the academic year, every week includes several days of early morning physical training and coursework on military history and theory; in addition, cadets receive weekly and sometimes weekend training in how to fight in squads and platoons and they attend at least one summer advanced camp. Everything officers "needed to know was there to learn," Axe concludes: "land nav, weapons assembly, basic marksmanship, squad tactics, and the all-important operations order, the OPORD, the Army's template for briefing upcoming missions"—all this while the cadets were enrolled as full-time students. They had to develop the self-discipline needed to organize their time, stay in shape, and in many cases work a part-time job.

Yet the civilian campus environment that usually makes ROTC such a strong breeding ground of excellent officers is also the main reason why Ricks is wrong to think we can rely on ROTC instead of, rather than along with, the academies. Although ROTC might meet all the services' needs for officers in peacetime or during the popular phase of a war, one lesson of Vietnam is that campuses can quickly turn inhospitable when a war becomes unpopular with the academic Left. Not only was ROTC expelled from some universities in the late '60s and early '70s, but more recently, when post-9/11 student movements were launched at several Ivy League universities to bring ROTC back, they were thwarted by loud objections to the "don't ask, don't tell" policy toward gays and lesbians that Congress adopted in 1993. In a 2003 referendum at Columbia University, for example, students voted 973–550 to restore ROTC, but that didn't stop the University Senate from vot-

Two days after the 1970 Kent State University shootings, a poll showed that 75% of KSU students favored keeping ROTC on campus, barely below the national average of 80%.

that is concentrated in the red states, not the academies. The source of Lipsky's title is revealing on this point. In 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt told a West Point audience that the institution is "absolutely American" because "you represent, with almost mathematical exactness, all the country geographically." West Point, Annapolis, and Colorado Springs famously draw the vast majority of their cadets and midshipmen from recommendations made by members of Congress, who by definition represent every region, party, and persuasion in rough proportion. And all three academies are located in states that in 2008 were solidly blue.

ROTC's strengths are gratifying, but its imperfections—especially its dependence on universities whose hospitality is erratic—render imprudent any suggestion to abolish service academies that, in addition to being geographically diverse, can be relied on in good times and bad to produce about 3,000 officers per year. ROTC sometimes falls short of its goal, as it did by more than 500 officers in 2006 and more than 700 in 2007—though, to be sure, the goal had been raised for these years from 3,900 to 4,500 recruits. In contrast, the academies nearly always have long lines of highly qualified and motivated high-school seniors doing everything they can to get in—longer lines than ever, judging by the surge of applicants for the three academies' Classes of 2013 and 2014.

Sosh

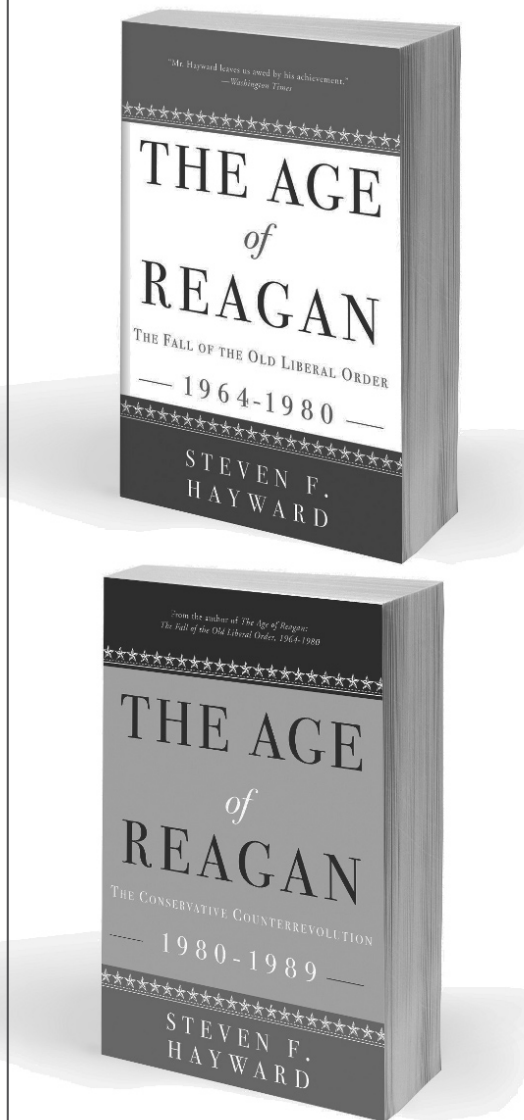
MEETING OFFICER-PRODUCTION QUOTAS in a representative way is hardly the best thing that can be said about the academies. They also do other things extremely, even indispensably well. One of these already has been mentioned: they produce a large share of officers trained in science and engineering—no minor virtue in today's technologically sophisticated military. Even English and history majors have to take many more math and science courses than ROTC cadets do. Classes in all subjects are small, and the faculty's mission is to teach cadets and midshipmen, not to bring in research dollars or train graduate students. A day in the life of an Air Force Academy instructor, Schemo records, entails eight and one-half hours in the office tutoring students, with time out mostly to teach classes and eat lunch.

Samet admires the "courage" with which cadets in her required freshman English classes at West Point "challenge accepted truths; the nuanced way they read literature and culture; and the ingenious methods they have for resisting conformity in lives largely given over to rules and regulations." Fleming's purpose at the Naval Academy is "to create thinking officers," he explains, because "officers who only know the



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answers to questions they’ve already seen won’t be good officers. Life is unpredictable; battle is very unpredictable.” Forget the academies’ top-20 rankings among national liberal arts colleges in the annual *U.S. News and World Report* surveys: West Point must be doing something right to be fourth among all institutions of higher education in Rhodes scholarships since 1923 and sixth in Marshalls since 1982.

What could Ricks have been thinking when he dismissed the academy experience as being equivalent to a community college education? Cadets and midshipmen are taught by a combination of civilian faculty, nearly all of them with doctorates, and military officers, mostly captains and majors with master’s degrees, company command experience, and a full awareness of what Mullaney, a West Point grad who taught at the Naval Academy, describes as “the haunting imperative that what we fail to teach our students could kill them or those they lead.” The mix is different depending on the academy: the Annapolis faculty is about 60% civilian, and the West Point and Air Force Academy faculties are about 75% military. That’s advantage Annapolis in some ways—more Ph.D.s in the classroom and more experience for the brigade of midshipmen in dealing with civilians as authority figures—but advantage West Point and Colorado Springs in others: their teaching officers tend to go to much better schools and have much brighter futures in the Air Force and, especially, the Army than their Annapolis equivalents do in the Navy. Perhaps most important, the military faculty, most of whom return to regular service after two years of graduate work and three years of teaching, annually constitute a “second graduating class” of officers who have honed their expertise both as graduate students in civilian labs and libraries and as instructors in academy classrooms.

Nowhere are the benefits of this approach more evident than in Cloud and Jaffe’s account of the social sciences department at West Point. For decades, “Sosh” (pronounced “Soash”) has recruited “some of the best minds in the officer corps” to its faculty, a combination of “free-thinkers and ambitious young officers” who together have been “a wellspring of unconventional thinking.” After Vietnam, Sosh was one of the few places in the Army that kept studying the challenges of counterinsurgency when the rest of the military “didn’t want to learn to fight guerrilla wars.” Fighting in massed formation with overwhelming power was what the post-Vietnam Army trained for, and that approach was enough to drive Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991 and topple him from power in 2003. But when postwar Iraq came apart at the seams, it was the “unorthodox ideas that Petraeus had championed years ago in Sosh [that]

now dominated high-level Pentagon strategy papers,” leading not just to the 2007 surge but also to the troops’ new mission: going into violent neighborhoods to protect people from roving death squads and suicide bombers.

An additional advantage that the academies have over ROTC is their ability to respond swiftly to changing military challenges. Soon after 9/11, Sosh created the Combating Terrorism Center and the academy increased every cadet’s mandatory foreign language training from three days per week to five. Annapolis recently initiated cyber warfare studies and ramped up its own foreign language requirement. These are changes that civilian universities with ROTC units either could not make or have made much more slowly. Samet and other English department faculty teach their classes knowing that “poetry is more important to the cultures with which U.S. troops will come in contact...than it is to our own.” She wants her students to be able to both “handle a grenade launcher and share an appreciation of Rumi with an Afghan colonel.”

The line between military and civilian challenges blurred when Congress forced the academies to incorporate racial minorities in a more than token way in the mid-’60s and, a decade later, to admit women. Absent such pressure, the academies had long dragged their feet when it came to African-Americans and actually dug in their heels against women. But when the orders came down from the civilian authorities, the chain of command moved to execute the mission. Gelfand quotes Ellen Seashore, the Naval Academy’s advisor on women’s integration: “Some male officers were not for the change. But their jobs depended on it, so any disagreement was kept to themselves.” Midshipmen were slower to adjust than their officers, and Gelfand reports that as recently as 1990 only 59% of the women at Annapolis believed that male midshipmen accepted their presence. By 1996, after a concerted effort by the academy’s leadership, that number had risen to 95%. Janda, in his supremely well-written and deeply researched book about West Point, concludes that the Military Academy’s “unofficial ‘seven-year rule’” accounts for its gradual but successful integration of women during the late ’70s and early ’80s because after seven years every cadet who had either been there when women first were admitted or had talked to a cadet who’d been there when women were first admitted was gone. Schemo worries, however, that women cadets will be stigmatized by at least some of their peers for as long as they are a minority (about 20%), are held to lower training standards, and are barred from some combat specialties.

As for race, Lipsky observes that of the 35 college campuses he visited as a reporter, “West Point strikes me as the most successfully inte-

grated, the least afflicted by racial tension.” A Naval Academy alumnus, John Bodnar, notes the irony: “the most progressive social values are implemented in an organization led by some of its most conservative individuals.” But how ironic is it? After all, the American military’s sworn duty, hammered home constantly at the academies, is to execute civilian orders in defense of our Constitution and laws.

### The Harder Right

THE HONOR CODE—MOST FAMOUS IN ITS pithy West Point formulation: “A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do”—is yet another distinctive attribute of the academies. Other colleges and universities have honor codes, but few would say of themselves what Sorley says in *Honor Bright*: “The honor code is West Point’s defining feature.” One reason, as Fleming points out in *Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide*, is honor’s direct application to military service:

In tight quarters with a mission that takes precedence over all else, each sailor (or soldier, or Marine) has to know where his gear is; stealing is close to the top of the list of military sins. Lying is probably at the very top: for mission effectiveness the Commanding Officer has to be dealing with correct information.

Another reason is the great tension cadets and midshipmen must learn to navigate between the code’s insistence that they enforce honorable behavior on each other and the equally powerful norm—variously expressed as “cooperate and graduate” at West Point and Colorado Springs and “don’t bilge your classmates” at Annapolis—that they must support each other in all things. Scarcely anywhere else in America are 20-year-olds forced to make such difficult judgments on ethical matters. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the only line from West Point’s Cadet Prayer that cadets actually quote is: “Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong.” Samet even hears it in a classroom discussion of *Macbeth*: “Well, ma’am, Banquo chose the harder right.”

Finally, on few other campuses are reminders of the military ethos omnipresent, as they

are at the academies. Upperclassmen hector plebes and doolies (an Air Force Academy nickname for freshman, derived from the ancient Greek *doulos*, or slave), an experience that is notorious but far from pointless. Ruggero quotes a 1983 West Point grad saying that it took the Gulf War to make him realize that the purpose of plebe year “was not harassment, ridicule, or punishment. Its goal was to train the neural network to deal with an overwhelming amount of disjointed information, quickly process that information, categorize it, and make rapid, sound judgments.” Mullaney says that as frustrating as plebes’ limited menu of acceptable answers (yes, sir; no, sir; no excuse, sir; sir, I do not understand) often was, the experience was “hammering into my head an acknowledgment of personal responsibility that eventually became second nature.” Gelfand observes that the monuments of naval and Marine Corps history that pervade the yard at Annapolis “serve as what anthropologist Pierre Nora has called a *Lieu de Memoire*, a physical manifestation of intended remembrance of the past.” Obedience and conformity are not all that the academies commemorate—Patton and MacArthur rank higher in the cadets pantheon than Washington and Eisenhower. Nor is the academy experience all about idealizing glory. Fleming describes “the thud, thud, thud of the drum” outside his classroom “as mourners follow the coffin down the road” to yet another Annapolis graduate’s funeral, a reminder that “death is never very far away.”

To say the academies are good and worth preserving is not to say they are perfect. Because the combination of academic, military, and physical demands on cadets is so massive and unrelenting, Mullaney writes, they all too often “spec and dump”—that is, learn what they need to know for the test, then forget it immediately. Because they live in an environment peopled primarily by officers and officers-to-be, cadets and midshipmen have little experience dealing with the privates, seamen, and airmen they will be called on to lead when they are commissioned. In contrast, Ruggero writes, ROTC cadets “often spend summers and time out of class working at jobs—like flipping burgers—that put them right next to the kind of young man or young woman who

comes into the army as a private.” And the enthusiasm with which the academies execute their missions can get out of hand. Fleming’s relationship with leaders of the Naval Academy has been especially stormy because he frequently calls them to account for the excess zeal with which they pursue affirmative action-based admissions (some of them Division I athletics-related) at the expense of excellence. Too often, Fleming writes, the military “overcompensates for past problems and is as absolutist in the new direction as it used to be in the old.” So disgusted did Fleming become with some of the Naval Academy’s misplaced enthusiasms that on May 20 he published an op-ed in the *New York Times* urging that the academies be “fixed or abolished.”

Are ROTC-trained officers, as Ricks argues, the equal of academy-trained officers? Yes, by most accounts; but the world of civilian universities that ROTC inhabits is a much less reliable source of officers than the academies, and ROTC’s increasing reliance on Southern campuses skews the military politically in ways that the academies’ broad geographical base does not. Is Ricks right to say that the extra money it costs to train an officer at an academy is wasted? Not if you appreciate the added value the academies bring to officer development: the combination of well-educated junior officers who, whatever their academic majors, are schooled in science and engineering; the “second graduating class” of graduate school-trained, rising senior officers with teaching and research experience; the ability to adjust quickly and appropriately to new military challenges imposed by civilian authorities; honor codes that force cadets and midshipmen to struggle with difficult but militarily essential questions of right conduct; and a concentrated martial ethos well-designed to remind officers of the best traditions, as well as the great burdens, of military service.

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