“Better Becoming a Band of Robbers:” Army, Society, and Ideology in America’s First Wartime State

by

Steven Elliott

A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School-Newark Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts In History written under the direction of Professor Gautham, Rao Newark, New Jersey May 2012
Abstract

This thesis investigates how the American state conducted the War of American Independence. Primarily, I look at how, in the absence of a strong centralized national government, American military leaders used alternative methods to support their army. I argue that the Continental Army constituted a source of national authority and sovereignty which effectively maintained the military struggle even as the Continental Congress abdicated responsibility for directing the war effort. Moreover, I demonstrate that the strains of waging a protracted war with little support from the national government had adverse effects on America’s social cohesion. Overall, this thesis serves to complicate both military historians’ conceptions of the War of American Independence as well as political and social historians’ understandings of republican political culture and American society during the revolutionary era. More broadly, I hope to show that the War of American Independence is integral to the understanding of the wider forces at work during the American Revolution.
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A Country, once overflowing with plenty, are now suffering an Army employed for the defense of everything that is dear and valuable, to perish for want of food. A people too, whose political existence depends upon this Army, and the future enjoyment of what they now possess. O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you! Legislatures are guarding against little trespasses, while they suffer the great Barriers of political security to be thrown down, and the Country overrun.¹

So wrote quartermaster Nathaniel Greene of the Continental Army’s plight as it endured a period of frightful cold, hunger, and fatigue during its encampment at Morristown, New Jersey, during the winter of 1779-1780. Greene’s lament, echoed by many others in the army who also suffered through that winter, represents more than just the complaint of an exasperated officer; instead, it highlights the deep flaws in the American system of politics and society as the fledgling colonies muddled through the War of Independence. By 1780, declining morale, military stalemate, and a collapsing financial structure combined to greatly undermine the Americans’ ability to further prosecute the war. The civilian apathy and military indiscipline Green observed were the most salient examples of the overall malaise that had engulfed the nation after five years of war.

Yet, less than six months later, the Continental Army, in close cooperation with the New Jersey militia and with broad support from the state’s civilian population, repelled a large incursion by royalist forces, culminating in the Battle of Springfield on June 23, 1780. Despite ongoing financial problems and the political and social friction caused by the army’s presence in northern New Jersey, enthusiasm and unity characterized the conduct of civilians, soldiers, and officers during the Springfield

¹ Green to Furman, January 4, 1780. Morristown National Historical Park Collection. Box 5. Folder 353. (Park Collection hereafter referred to as PC)
Campaign, in stark contrast to the discord and infighting that plagued them during the winter encampment at Morristown.

In this thesis, I look to explore the winter and spring of 1780 in New Jersey, to better understand the social and political factors that shaped how revolutionary America made war. I argue that the strains of conflict exacerbated the social fissures and political tensions within the American state’s republican structure. The paradoxical nature of republicanism’s ideological and social foundations profoundly affected the colonies’ conduct during the war. The republic’s government and people distrusted professional standing armies and the strong central governments required for their maintenance, yet the realities of eighteenth century warfare made a standing army necessary to safeguard the republic. Thus, this paper uses the Morristown encampment and Springfield campaign to trace how Americans coped with these difficulties and the ultimate legacies of this process.

Here I study three agents of change: civilians, common soldiers, and officers. In the absence of a centralized national authority to provide adequate food and equipment, common soldiers responded the poor logistics and pay by disobeying their officers and plundering supplies from the surrounding population. Civilians suffered from plunder as well as from royalist raids and sanctioned confiscations by army officers, civilians responded in a variety of ways: voicing their concerns through civilian political leaders, non-compliance with military orders, and illicit trade with the British garrison in New York. Officers sought to maintain the army’s strength despite the absence of support from the national government, while also attempting to secure New Jersey and its civilians and keeping its rank-and-files in line.
I argue that the Continental Army utilized several strategies, dependent upon exploiting conceptions of Republican society and ideology, to foster a fragile cooperation in New Jersey during 1780. Most importantly, in the absence of a strong national authority, I contend the Continental Army’s itself behaved as a sovereign body. At its Morristown headquarters, the army’s leaders received foreign ambassadors, held formal parades and social gatherings, and dispensed military discipline. Politically, this display of pageantry served to demonstrate to New Jersey civilians a facet of the national government that was strong and stable; ideologically, these acts exhibited the officers’ statuses as virtuous gentlemen, a key element of the republican order. Conversely, the common soldiers were confined to camp and severely punished for any disciplinary transgressions, particularly violations of civilian property.

Yet, it was these common soldiers New Jersey civilians relied upon to protect their communities when threatened by royalist raids, a frequent occurrence during the winter of 1779-1780. Overall, I argue that officers’ attention to civilian sensitivities transformed a politically and militarily vulnerable environment in December 1779 into one which successfully withstood the British invasion the following June. This success reveals an inherent strength within republicanism, despite the apparent hindrances and paradoxes of republican doctrine during wartime. The exploitation of the rank-and-file as part of this successful strategy did have negative consequences, though, as the increase of large-scale mutinies during the final three years of the war can attest. Thus, while republican ideology did prove pliant enough to forge a structure that could successfully prosecute the war, the overarching divisions in republican society remained an unsolved problem well after 1780.
I do not intend this paper to be a work of military history, although military conflict does compose much of its subject matter. To-date, military historians have produced voluminous works, ranging from traditional studies of battles and campaigns to more recent, innovative examinations of social and cultural topics. While this paper is certainly informed by this scholarship, I chiefly seek an audience with the broader studies of Revolutionary America. Given the pathbreaking scholarship in the social, political, and intellectual understanding of the Revolution resulting from the work Bailyn, Wood, Nash, and others, it is problematic that the War of Independence has largely escaped the attention of many historians, who instead focus on the political and social developments immediately preceding and following the war. Here, I link a non-military topic to the war itself through the core concept of republicanism, both as ideology of governance as well as a social order, and examine its function during wartime. I focus on the Continental Army. As it was a standing army, and therefore at odds with the key tenets of republican ideology, how the army functioned within the paradigm of a republican war is a problem that few historians have addressed. The Continental Army fought to defend a republican government uniquely ill-suited to maintaining it; therefore, how these opposing attitudes of militarism and republicanism were negotiated and rectified are a key component to understanding the course of the war and the colonies’ survival. Furthermore, beyond the war itself, examining the interplay between militarism and anti-militant republicanism leads to a better understanding of American ideology and society during the Revolutionary era.

Also, this paper does intersect with the “war and society” turn taken by military historians in recent decades. Here I examine the Continental Army as an institution
created by America’s revolutionary society. Like any institution, the Continental Army’s behavior was determined by its environments. Just as the mountains and forests of its ecological environment determined where the army marched and how it fought its battles, so too did the colonies’ political, legal, and social environments determine how the army received its funding, quartered its officers, and recruited its soldiers. From the military historian’s perspective, understanding these contexts is crucially important to comprehending the American war-effort, as well as placing the Continental Army in comparative context. Republicanism is the key to understanding why the colonies could never craft a central government with the fiscal power of Great Britain, why its independent-minded and politically aware population would not acquiesce to conscription as in Prussia, why and its leaders, suspicious of radicalization, could not entertain the dangers of wholesale popular mobilization in the way of revolutionary France a decade later. America, in sum, did produce the minutemen and the Continentals, but it did not yield grenadier guards or a levee en masse.

Overall, I hope this paper can help adjust historians’ attitudes towards the War of American Independence. American historians have often treated the war as of secondary importance to the political, social, and cultural transformations taking place in the colonies between 1776 and 1787, while military historians tend to minimize the conflict’s importance to understanding warfare, less illuminating to study than the preceding Seven Years War of the subsequent French Revolutionary Wars. I intend to revise both of these beliefs, helping American historians better understand the strengths and weaknesses of republicanism, while further demonstrating the very real connections between armies and societies that have recently preoccupied military historians.
STANDING ARMIES AND THE DILEMMA OF REPUBLICAN GOVERNANCE IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

Military topics have proved problematic for historians of the Revolution. For many years, scholars of the War of Independence focused on battles, campaigns, and leaders, subjects with little appeal outside of the parochial interests of military historians. Political and economic historians conversely remained aloof of the war itself, instead turning their attention to understanding the nature of America’s political transformation between 1776 and 1787. Thus, while mainstream historians crafted the “progressive” interpretation of the Revolution during the early twentieth century, then reversed course during the 1940s and 1950s, military historians remained content to produce traditional battle narratives and campaign studies. Historiographical debates did take place among military historians, centering on such concerns as determining to what extent the War of Independence was a guerrilla war, characterizing British and American strategic thought, and re-casting the conflict as a world war. Whatever value these debates had within military historical circles, they did little to foster a dialogue with the wider discussions among American historians.

Among these mainstream historians, the 1960s were a watershed moment in Revolutionary scholarship that saw such seminal works as Bernard Bailyn’s the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution and Gordon Wood’s The Creation of the

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These historians emphasized the importance of ideology in influencing the actions and decisions of America’s Revolutionary leaders. Specifically, Wood and Bailyn highlighted the concept of republicanism as a body of ideas and attitudes that profoundly shaped the American worldview and served as the ideological underpinning of the Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Federal Constitution. In this fashion, scholars of the republican school re-cast the Revolution not as a simply conservative affair in which colonial elites achieved independence while keeping the existing social structure intact, but instead as a radical event with transformative political implications affecting all levels of society.

Historians since the 1960s have produced voluminous works uncovering various facets of republicanism and the Revolution. Beyond ideas and politics, scholars have also uncovered the social nature of the Revolution, showing how structures of social distinction transformed during the revolutionary era a modern, liberated society replaced aristocratic one. Such sweeping claims have not gone without criticism, though, as many historians have sought to complicate our understanding of republican society, pointing out which groups remained marginalized and powerless even after 1787.

Given the importance of republicanism scholarship, military historians since 1970 have increasingly used these intellectual interpretations of the Revolution to inform their own studies. Beginning with Don Higginbothom’s the War of American Independence, military historians began to situate their interpretations of the conflict within the broader

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social and political context of the Revolution. For example, Higginbothom eschewed a narrative of battles and campaigns for a focus on government policies and their influence on the conflict. Also adopting the “military-political” approach was John Shy. Shy’s *Towards Lexington* traced how Britain’s military policies during the decade before 1775 contributed to the wider colonial ferment for independence.

Following this emphasis on government policy came a shift towards “war and society” studies. Reflecting a broader turn among military historians, these works connected armies and attitudes towards warfare to the societies from which they were produced. Thus, military historians, like historians in other fields, began to look at their subjects “from the bottom up.” For historians of the Revolution, this has yielded several social histories of early America’s armed forces. From these studies has emerged a revision, albeit a strongly contested one, of our understanding of American soldiers during the War of Independence. Mark Lender’s excavation of the social origins of the New Jersey Line indicates that the Continental Army consisted primarily of poor, landless, and immigrant rank-and-file who contrasted greatly in terms of wealth and status with their gentry officers. These findings overturned the popular conception of the Revolutionary soldier as patriotic, selfless yeoman farmer. Subsequent works like

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Charles Neimeyer’s *America Goes to War* have served to reinforce the revisionist interpretation of the Continental Army.10

Nevertheless, some historians have remained unconvinced. Charles Royster’s *A Revolutionary People at War* defends the traditional portrayal of an army of patriotic yeomen. For Royster, although outright participation in the army may not have been as widespread as originally believed, this does not outweigh the overall enthusiasm for the war felt by most of the population.11 As he puts it, “the revolution had such comprehensive, demanding ideals that no one could match them, and few could pursue them unswervingly. But the many directions of wartime behavior seemed to pale beside one essential achievement—the ideals would survive.”12 Despite such a bold thesis, Royster’s argument remains problematic as it rests on the tenuous claim that Americans supported the war without actually serving.

Nevertheless, Royster’s emphasis on ideology and popular sentiments is a useful lens onto understanding the war. Mark Lender, in conjunction with Edward Martin, utilized the ideological perspective to respond to Royster in their *A Respectable Army*.13 Lender and Martin’s work best integrates republican scholarship into the military history of the revolution. In particular, in a manner reflecting Bailyn’s *Ideological Origins*, they show how British whig attitudes against standing armies and in favor of militias influenced Americans’ own approaches to warfare. Importantly, they point out how Britain’s constant involvement in European wars during the eighteenth century led it to

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11 Charles Royster. *A Revolutionary People at War: the Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783.* (Williamsburg, the UNC Press, 1979)
12 Royster, 368.
13 Lender and Martin.
eschew the militia of whig ideals in favor of a profession standing army, while in the American colonies the militia continued to suffice. This is a key point, as it highlights the opposition to standing armies prominent in republican ideology and thus integrates the scholarship of the War of Independence with the works of Bailyn and Wood.

Despite this approach, historians have not significantly studied the Continental Army within the political and ideological context of Revolutionary America. Although *A Respectable Army* does provide a useful overview of the problem, the book is too brief and too broad to fully treat the topic. Yet historians in recent years have actually drifted away from the “social-institutional” perspective on the war. Instead, military historians have opted for cultural approaches. For example, Caroline Cox’s *A Proper Sense of Honor* looks at behaviors in military discipline and military burial to uncover social differences between officers and men in the Continental Army. Works like Cox’s help reinforce the sense of social divide between officers and men highlighted by Lender’s and Neimeyer’s scholarship. These findings align with the broader critiques of American society that emphasize the inequality and class conflict during the Revolutionary era.

Yet, the success scholars have had in increasing our understanding of social aspects of the military conflict has not been matched in the realm of political culture and ideology. The only scholar to investigate how republican ideology drove the problems of wartime supply has been E. Wayne Carp. In his *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, Carp argues that republican congressmen’s suspicions of standing armies and, more specifically, corrupt staff officers, was the primary culprit in the Continental Army’s

lackluster logistics. His work is invaluable, in no small part because he has disentangled the often complicated organization structure of the American logistical system.

Furthermore, his overall thesis, that American republicanism itself was a poor formulation for wartime government and that Army leaders gave impetus to the nationalist movement of the 1780s, has not been subsequently challenged.¹⁵

Yet, given the importance of the relationship between governance and military conflict during the Revolution, it is problematic that To Starve the Army at Pleasure remains the only work to treat the topic. The renewed emphasis on institutions and “the state” among political and legal historians during the last fifteen years, as well as the rise of war and society studies among military historians during the same period, present useful new frameworks with which to treat the issues Carp addressed 30 years ago.

Carp’s broad, sweeping analysis on the national-level leaves ample opportunities to investigate specific civil-military interactions on the local level, to better understand the nuances of Carp’s argument. For instance, this thesis particularly reinforces Carp’s views on the affect the 1780 financial collapse had on supply. I also further demonstrate the importance the commonality between officers and local elites had in ensuring supplies for the army.

I differ from Carp, however, in several key aspects. First, I draw together the disparate strands of logistics, politics, and status together into a unified interpretation. Thus, while the main actors for Carp are the army’s quartermaster department and the Continental Congress, I include the experiences of common soldiers, civilians, and the

¹⁵ E. Wayne Carp. To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783. (UNC, 1984).
Continental line officers as well, to show the multitude of actors involved in the waging
of the war. Furthermore, whereas Carp argues that military problems helped to shape
civilian political culture, I focus more closely on how the interplay between war, society,
and ideology shaped the nature of the conflict itself. In doing so, I hope to better our
understanding of the War of Independence within the context of eighteenth and early
nineteenth century warfare in the western world. Thus, I look to address issues like
military bureaucracy, wartime social strains, and the nature of the American state that
were not a part of To Starve the Army at Pleasure.

Overall, the Continental Army and its relationship with American society and
government remains a historiographical problem understudied by historians. As Lender
and Martin have shown, America went to war in 1775 influenced by a body of whig ideas
that were suspicious of standing armies. More importantly, political and intellectual
historians of republicanism have shown the distaste American revolutionary leaders had
for strong centralized governments. Wartime necessity did however, lead America to
raise a professional standing army and keep it in the field for nearly eight years. That
Americans undertook this immense task constrained by an ideological outlook at odds
with the military realities of the situation negatively impacted their ability to make war.
Yet, make war the fledgling nation did.

The length of the War of Independence, its often overlooked violent and brutal
nature, and the haphazard manner in which civilian leaders managed the conflict all
contributed to excessive strains on American society during the conflict. These strains
have not been studied in any in-depth fashion by military, political, or social historians.
This omission appears particularly egregious when compared to the studies of wartime
mobilization for other conflicts, such as the Civil War and the Second World War. Like these conflicts, the War of American Independence saw manpower mobilized and separated from their families and homes for excessive periods, tax burdens and confiscations of civilian property, and increased security and violations of civil liberties. No scholarship focusing solely on the Declaration of Independence, nor the Constitutional Convention, or even the military historians’ various battle vignettes and campaign narratives can adequately capture these aspects of the Revolution.

In sum, during the last fifty years, scholars have learned much about Americans during the Revolution. We know how their society was organized, what political beliefs they held, and how these beliefs shaped their actions. Military historians have moved past battles and campaigns to uncover the social structure of the Continental Army, and have even shown how civilian political values affected the creation and use of the army. Yet, the continued supply and support of that army rested on the nation’s overall mobilization, a process not as well understood. This is not merely question of logistics of interest only to the most parochial of military historians. Instead, it is the story of the strains wartime places on society, of fissures expanded and fractures mended. Underpinning this drama throughout was republican ideology. When American radicals overturned British rule in the colonies, they could not have known the arduousness of the coming military struggle; certainly the government they crafted at the outset of the conflict was woefully equipped to fight the war. That republicanism did of course

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survive the war and flourish does not mean that it was not tested during the conflict, and it is the nature, and ultimate effect of this trial that historians have yet to truly uncover.
THE PITFALLS OF THE REPUBLICAN STATE AT WAR: SOLDIERS, CIVILIANS, AND THE MORRISTOWN ENCAMPMENT

The arrival of some 13,000 Continental soldiers in Morris County in late 1779 presented serious difficulties for officers, soldiers, and civilians. As one of the largest and most concentrated encampments of the war, the cantonment at Morristown was so severely tax both the army and governmental logistical apparatuses as well as the civilian economy. Coupled with the national fiscal crisis, deteriorating morale in the ranks, and declining popular enthusiasm for the war, the winter at Morristown was to exhibit the perils and strains of making war as much as any battle or campaign. During the army’s seven-month stay in Morris County, civilians became increasingly disenchanted with the army, rank-and-file soldiers lost confidence in their leaders, and officers were left to manage the conflicting interests of these disparate groups. Thus, even away from the battlefield, a drama unfolded that exhibited all of the fragilities and insecurities of the American wartime republic.

The Continental Army’s leaders planned the 1780 winter encampment with civilian relations in mind. During a previous stay at Morristown in early 1777, the army had had numerous negative interactions with the community, highlighted by a smallpox outbreak that the inhabitants blamed on the presence of the army. In 1777, the small Continental Army (3000 men at most) billeted in private homes, but the subsequent growth of the army as well as civilian outrage meant that by 1779 this option was no longer available. Thus, when the Continental Army once again arrived in Morris County in December 1779, its leaders chose to encamp the soldiers in a sparsely populated wood known as Jockey Hollow, five miles south of the town.17

While Jockey Hollow did offer secure ground and ample lumber, army leadership also chose this location because of its distance from the civilian population center at Morristown. In contrast to the 1777 encampment, concentrating at Jockey Hollow would

17 The only published overview of the Morristown encampments is Samuel Stelle Smith. Winter at Morristown 1779-1780: the Darkest Hour, (Freneau, 1979).
inconvenience only the half-dozen farmers who inhabited the area. The five miles between Morristown and Jockey Hollow were in a way a social quarantine, segregating the potentially unruly, rapacious soldiery from the genteel Whig community to the north. Yet, events that winter were to prove that soldiers and civilians could not be kept separate so easily.

Historians have downplayed the extent to which unfamiliarity played in shaping relations between civilians and soldiers, as well as between soldiers themselves. In some ways, the Continental Army resembled an occupying foreign army more than a force with New Jersey's interests at heart. First and foremost, the army was composed predominantly of soldiers from other states. Nearby Pennsylvania and Connecticut each contributed two brigades, while New York contributed one. Farther off Maryland also contributed two brigades, and another two brigades of Virginians briefly occupied Jockey Hollow as well. The final two brigades present, those of Stark and Hand, were composed of troops from several New England states, as well as other regiments, including refugees of the 1775 Canadian invasion. Only one brigade, under Brigadier General William Maxwell, was composed of New Jersey men. Thus, not only were soldiers seen as ill-disciplined plunderers, they overwhelmingly originated from far-off, unfamiliar places.¹⁸

More importantly, not only were the soldiers from unfamiliar geographical origins, but socially as well. In contrast to the well-to-do farmers, craftsmen, and merchants of the Morristown area, most of the soldiers in the Continental Army by 1780 were overwhelmingly of the lowest class of laborers and recent immigrants. European professional armies were generally seen as both separate from and below the social order,

¹⁸ For the composition of Continental Army, see Charles H. Lesser. The Sinews of Independence: Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army. (Chicago, 1976); and, more generally, Robert K. Wright Jr., The Continental Army, (Michigan 1983).
and, as the Continental Army came to increasingly resemble its European counterparts, it too was ostracized.¹⁹

Morris County's economy was still highly localized, and most of the local population would have had experience little interaction with the growing population of urban laborers from which the Continental Army now drew its rank-and-file.²⁰ For example, two of the region's wealthiest families, the Fords and the Wicks, made their livelihood in the local markets for iron and apple brandy, respectively.²¹ Neither they, nor any members of the wealthy class could have been prepared to deal with the mass of underfed, underequipped, lower class soldier-laborers that descended on the Morris County countryside in December 1779.²²

As supplies began to dwindle shortly after the army's arrival, hunger became the army's primary concern. The local magazine was apparently depleted rapidly after the army's December 3 arrival, as by the middle of the month accounts already deplore the lack of provisions.²³ This deficiency reached its height in early January, when the entire army was placed on starvation-rations.²⁴ Men were told their two pound ration of meat was to last ten days, though even this meager supply was rarely available to every man.²⁵

Improving weather conditions later in the month allowed supplies to be transferred from

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¹⁹ For the perception of soldiers as a separate class during the eighteenth century, see Duffy, Duffy. The Military Experience in the Age of Reason. (Routledge, 1987). For the American variations of this theme, see Cox, Neimeyer, Lender and Martin.

²⁰ There is a large body of literature on class and the American Revolution. See. Carl Bridenbaugh’s Cities in the Wilderness on the ‘middle-class’ revolution; and Charles Beard on an elite revolution.


²³ Jeremiah Greenman, December 18, 1779, PC 2, 1, 23. Nathan Beers Diary, December 20, 1779 PC . 5, 343.

²⁴ Parkman’s Diary, January 2; PC 5, 353 Harme, January 7, 1780. LWS, 157.; Beers, January 7, 1780. PC 5, 343

other magazines, temporarily improving the food situation. It might appear then, that the near-catastrophic absence of victuals from the Morristown encampment was more of a byproduct of inadequate transportation further hindered by snowy weather conditions, rather than any failure of government, finance, or civilian political will. Indeed, Historian John Shy has attributed the Americans' supply difficulties to issues of transportation and distribution.

Yet, in the case of the Morristown encampment, supply deficiencies transcended transportation problems. Morristown itself was selected in part because it stood astride the lateral lines of communication stretching from Philadelphia northwards towards West Point, while also dominating local routes connecting Newark, Elizabeth, and Bergen County with the communities of the state's interior. Therefore, a lack of roads themselves cannot be blamed for the army's supply difficulties.

The weather may appear to have played a decisive role in hindering supply, given the amount of snow that accumulated in New Jersey that winter; however, this supposition is also problematic. By 1780 the Continental Army had the manpower to delegate parties specifically tasked with clearing snow from roads to maintain lines of communication, and on several occasions during the winter supply convoys arrived despite the poor weather. Yet, even with roads’ cleared and the overall improvement in the climate after February, near-famine periodically returned to the Morristown

26 Thatcher, January 27, 1780; LWS Box, 67, 168. General Orders, January 30, 1780 , LWS 266; Divisional Orders, Pennsylvania Line, March 19, 1780, LWS Box. 67, 266
29 General Orders, January 13, 1780. LWS Box 67, 266
encampment.\textsuperscript{30} For example, in late March, soldiers endured a four day period without bread.\textsuperscript{31} This second period of hunger lasted into the next month, with meat rations completely absent in early April.\textsuperscript{32} This distress appears to have been alleviated as April progressed, only to return the following month, when soldiers were reduced to half rations on May 22nd.\textsuperscript{33} Writing during this third period of hunger, James Thatcher summed up the army's exasperation; "we are again visited with the calamity of which we have so often complained, a great scarcity of provisions of every kind."\textsuperscript{34}

Overall, the Morristown encampment experienced three periods of "great scarcity," the first occurring during the first week of January, the second between March 20th and April 3rd, and the last during the final week in May. Furthermore, deficiency, though not outright starvation, prevailed through much of December, April, and May. Notably, the two month period from mid-January to mid-March was one of relative plenty, even though the "hard winter" was still at its height during these months. Conversely, from late-March onwards the army drifted between hunger and starvation, despite the generally fine weather. Shy's hypothesis, that transportation and distribution were the primary determinants of logistical problems, is at odds with the realities of the Morristown encampment. The Army enjoyed only two months of consistently available food, and this came at a time when snowfalls were heavy and travel difficult. Two of the three periods of "great scarcity" occurred after the worst of the winter was over and transportation should not have been a problem, particularly in such a well-situated

\textsuperscript{30} Harmar, April 6, 1780, LWS, 157.
\textsuperscript{31} Harmar, March 20, 1780, LWS, 157; Division Orders, Connecticut Line, April 14, 1780. LWS Box. 67, 266.
\textsuperscript{32} Parkman, March 31 1780; April 3, 1780, PC 5, 353.
\textsuperscript{33} Greenman, May 22, 1780, .PC 1, 23.
\textsuperscript{34} Thatcher, May 29, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168.
location as Morristown. That the Continental Army spent 70% of its time at Morristown short of food indicates a much greater logistical problem than simply inadequate transportation.

Contemporaries too, did not see transportation as a significant logistical issue, and aside from orders detailing fatigue parties to clear roads, there are few accounts from the winter encampment concerning roads. Instead, American officers were far more concerned with their inability to procure supplies locally. Washington recognized that in the absence of an advanced logistical infrastructure based on magazines and civilian purchasing agents, the army was reliant upon what the local inhabitants were willing to part with. The American commander-in-chief wrote to Congress shortly after the beginning of the encampment to express his concerns, stating "I confess I am greatly alarmed at the prospect of our supplies of provision which so much depend on that of forage." It quickly became apparent that the root cause of the army's forage problems was the depreciated currency. For instance, as the first famine period began in late December, James Thatcher wrote "the people in the country are unwilling to sell the produce of their farms for this depreciated currency." General James Clinton echoed Thatcher the following month, when he wrote "our money is so reduced that I fear it will not purchase a further supply." Indeed, the inflated currency did greatly inhibit the army's ability to purchase supplies form the local inhabitants, who often times outright refused to accept the Continental Dollar as legal tender. That the Army's financial difficulties, and therefore its logistical problems, were a product of the inability of the

35 Harmar, January 3, 1780, LWS, 157; Washington, January 6, 1780, PC 9, 695.
36 Washington to Congress, December 10, 1779, PC 9, 695.
37 Thatcher, December 20, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168.
38 James Clinton to George Clinton, January 7, 1780, PC 10, 705.
39 Huntington, January 8, 1780, PC 5, 25; Hand to Yeats, June 5, 1780, PC 5, 24
Continental Congress to craft an effective wartime national state was not lost on observers in the army. Alexander Scammel contrasted the army's perseverance in the face of hardship with Congress's perceived ineffectiveness; “if Congress can contrive a method to appreciate currency as quickly as we can build huts, our affairs would soon assume a promising aspect.” Yet Scammel's desire never came to fruition, leaving the Continental Army to search for other methods to rectify its supply deficiency.

Early in the encampment, the rank-and-file at Jockey Hollow crafted their own solution to the army's supply problem by stealing from civilians. Certainly, even the limited physical activity of the winter encampment could not be sustained on a diet of bread, or even less. Even in their isolated location at Jockey Hollow, the soldiers could not have remained ignorant of the fact that even as they starved, New Jersey civilians continued to eat well. Thatcher indeed described the encampment to be "in the midst of a country abounding in every kind of provisions." As an armed, organized body of men the army's rank-and-file were well-positioned to appropriate this abundance from the surrounding communities, despite their officers' proscriptions, leading Washington to write "the property of the inhabitants in the vicinity of camp is prey to the plundering spirit of the soldiery". This indicates by the end of the first month of the encampment, soldiers' marauding was becoming endemic.

Civilian property of various kinds was threatened in this atmosphere of increasing desperation and deteriorating discipline. The constant transit of undisciplined soldiers through the countryside could also harm civilian property even when nothing was being

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40 Alexander Scammel, December 13, 1779. PC, 5, 452.
41 James Fairlie to Van Courtlandt, January 12, 1780, PC, 5, 18.
42 Thatcher, December, 1780, LWS Box 67, 168
43 General Orders, December 29, 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.
stolen, as complaints about trampled wheat fields indicate.\textsuperscript{44} Certainly, food was the soldiers' primary concern, and poultry, sheep, pigs, and cattle were among the most commonly stolen items.\textsuperscript{45} Alcohol, a necessity in the eyes of many soldiers, was another commonly stolen good.\textsuperscript{46} Other items were also prey to soldiers, especially rail fences, which were often stripped by rank-and-file for firewood.\textsuperscript{47}

The claims of damages made by Morris County civilians provide the best details of the nature of the plunder taking place in the Jockey Hollow area. Resident Josiah Guerin, for example, filed claims for “one calf, some sheep, two bushels of rye, six bushels of potatoes, two narrow axes, one greatcoat, blanketing, a new linen petticoat, and two half-worn shifts.”\textsuperscript{48} Other civilian claims list a similar litany of items.\textsuperscript{49} While livestock and foodstuffs were the most prevalent items stolen, the frequent mentions of clothing, tools, and utensils indicate that plunder was about more than supplementing meager rations, but a breakdown in discipline.

Crimes were not limited to the sparsely populated Jockey Hollow area. Detachments of soldiers in Morristown itself also had negative interactions with the local population, just as in 1777.\textsuperscript{50} While soldiers' depredations were generally limited to theft, on occasion more confrontational transgressions also took place. In one instance, a soldier had a violent altercation with a Morristown woman which ended with a threat by

\textsuperscript{44} Regimental Orders, Jackson's Regiment, Starks Brigade, April 10 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.
\textsuperscript{45} Thatcher, January 20, 1780, LWS Box 67, 168; General Orders, December 29, 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.
\textsuperscript{46} General Orders, January 26, 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.
\textsuperscript{47} Angels Regiment, January 29, 1780; Connecticut Line 1st Brigade, Brigade Orders, April 17, 1780; Brigade Orders, New Jersey Brigade, February 17, 1780; Brigade Orders, Starks Brigade, December 31, 1779: LWS Box 67, 266.
\textsuperscript{48} Guerin, Claims of Damages, PC, 5, 348.
\textsuperscript{49} Dickenson, Claims, PC, 5, 348.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
him to burn down her house. Moreover, the threat of marauding becoming a habit among soldiers was a very real fear to Army commanders. For example, for a group of recently discharged Connecticut soldiers returning home from New Jersey, their divisional commander ordered "the officers are to pay particular attention to the conduct of the men on their march that no destruction of private property or any other disorders are committed by them on their march." With the contagion of disorder already extending from Jockey Hollow to the surrounding area, officers faced the specter of its continued spread wherever bodies of armed and increasingly unruly men traveled. Certainly, the army's inability to control its soldiery would drive the country's civilians to reconsider their support for the regime. Overall, the predatory nature of the rank-and-file’s activities points to a disruption of faith in the republican cause. The civilians refusal to sell their food and the army leadership’s inability to devise a suitable system of supply represented a betrayal of the common soldier upon whom military success relied, thus plunder of civilians and defiance of orders was a form of retaliation.

For soldiers, being disciplined for plunder even as officers confiscated civilian supplies and enjoyed relatively comfortable quarters equated to an exploitation of their inferior social status; while officers and civilians shared a republican commonality, soldiers were excluded from this social order. For them, to suffer such harsh disciplinary measures further isolated them from their officers, local civilians, and the state and

51 Brigade Orders, Stark's Brigade, May 26, 1780 LWS Box 67, 277
52 Brigade Orders, 4th New York Brigade, December 28, 1779, LWS Box 67, 277
53 Divisional Orders, Connecticut Line, January 6, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277
national government they were charged to defend. The soldiers perceived their plight as a violation of their moral economy, a betrayal of the terms both legal and societal, by which they had enlisted. Ultimately, the ongoing sufferings of the soldiers led them to change their methods of protest. Whereas early in the encampment plunder and other forms of indiscipline were individual actions, by spring 1780, soldiers for the first time began to act collectively. During May, the soldiers of the Connecticut Line disobeyed orders wholesale. As with the earlier acts of indiscipline at the Morristown encampment, the search for food acted as a vehicle for the mutineers, who organized their two regiments into a mass foraging expedition as a means of disobeying their officers.\textsuperscript{54}

Less dramatic than outright mutiny were the desertions and the soldiers who chose not to re-enlist. Numerically, the Continental Army declined from a strength of 13,000 men in December 1779, to 7,000 by June 1780.\textsuperscript{55} After 1780, the Continental Army suffered from numerical inferiority throughout the remainder of the war. Beyond numbers, the financial and logistical problems further hindered the American war effort, and in the main theatre of war the Continental Army could achieve little more than to loosely contain the British garrison in New York.

Disciplinary problems also continued after 1780 in increasingly organized fashions. Early 1781 saw the mutiny of the Pennsylvania Line at Morristown, followed by the New Jersey brigade’s mutiny at Pompton later that same year. In the latter case, New England soldiers were used to violently suppress the insurrection. Significantly, the writings of Continental officers appear less concerned with the degrading military

\textsuperscript{54} Joseph Plum Martin. \textit{A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier: Some Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of Joseph Plumb Martin}. (Signet, 2010).
\textsuperscript{55} Neimeyer, 15-35.
capabilities resulting from the mutinies as they are with the potential spread of political radicalization. In the wake of the Connecticut mutiny Nathaniel Greene wrote of fears of “mutiny spreading through the line like wildfire,” and a year later termed mutiny “a contagion.”

Overall, the decline in discipline seen in the Continental Army beginning in 1780 reflects the paradoxical nature of American ideology. Americans’ republican mindset led suspicion of standing armies and a preference for decentralized authority; however, the realities of war with Britain showed that a professional army was needed to protect the emergent republic. Yet, as E. Wayne Carp has shown, Americans never crafted a national system of government necessary to support a professional army during wartime. Thus, the Continental Army made war without the necessary financial and logistical infrastructure. Such a strategy was not without consequences, and the strains of war making made these consequences apparent beginning in 1780. Soldiers, dissatisfied with their lack of pay and food and increasingly at odds with their officers and the civilian community, turned to plunder, mutiny, and desertion. Civilians, suffering through an inflated currency, ineffectual national government, and playing host to a rapacious soldiery and imposing officers, reacted by withholding supplies, avoiding militia service, and trading openly with the enemy.

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56 Neimeyer, 130-159.
57 See Carp.
THE REPUBLIC IN DANGER: THE CONTINENTAL ARMY AND PARTISAN WARFARE IN NEW JERSEY

The above narrative has thus far highlighted the problems the American republic had in waging its war for independence away from the front lines. Certainly, logistics, soldiers’ morale, and civilian enthusiasm and loyalty all threatened the gains of the Revolution. Yet, these difficulties represent only one half of the equation. For, even as wartime strains threatened the civilian home-front and the Continental Army’s internal cohesion, they remained inseparable from the war’s “sharp-end,” and indeed the winter of 1780 was to see also an intensified military campaign that further strained the American war effort. The following chapter details this campaign and shows how, at least in New Jersey during early 1780, the home front and the front lines were often indistinguishable.

Early on October 25, 1779, a party of American loyalists crossed the Arthur Kill from Staten Island to land at Perth Amboy in Whig-held New Jersey. These men, from Colonel John Simcoe’s Queen’s Rangers, a Tory regiment specializing in partisan operations, were acting on intelligence received from loyalist spies in New Jersey informing them of the presence of 50 American flatboats stored at Hilsboro. Such boats, useful for moving supplies and men along the numerous small waterways in the American colonies, presented a valuable yet vulnerable target. Upon reaching their destination, though, the Rangers found only 18 boats remained at the Hilsboro location. The Tory partisans thus altered their objectives, opting to press-on to Somerset Court House where they freed 52 loyalists prisoners. The following day, the Rangers defeated a counterattack by the local militia and withdrew back to New York.58

This brief vignette illustrates a miniscule portion of a much broader aspect of the War of Independence. Raids like Simcoe’s October foray into Somerset County occurred

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frequently throughout the war in virtually every theatre. The chronicling of this *Petit Guerre*, as it was known in the eighteenth century, has been conducted unevenly by historians. Popular conceptions of the war enshrine the image of the American rifleman, fighting in open-order, besting the tightly-packed lines and columns of the British Army. Historians have countered this inaccurate depiction by emphasizing the military conservatism of American officers, who did, for the most part, adopt the linear formations and preference for battles and maneuvers common to eighteenth century European military thought.

While this interpretation has succeeded in countering popularly held misbeliefs, it has come at the expense of creating new inaccuracies, as the War of Independence has taken on the character of a “gentleman’s war,” keeping within the confined representations of eighteenth century European military formalism. Under this paradigm, fighting is seen as confined to formal battles and sieges between standing armies, with little involvement on the part of civilians. Indeed, not just conflict but armies themselves are interpreted as largely separate and segregated entities from society. In contrast to the violent depredations of the seventeenth century, eighteenth century warfare is seen as restrained, detached, and having few consequences for civilian society. 59

Interpretations of warfare in the War of Independence in the context of eighteenth century warfare has thus far been characterized by an peculiar geographic delineation. Historians have long recognized the presence of “guerrilla”-style conflict, with all of its implied violence and civilian involvement, but only in the western and southern theatres. These “frontier” regions, whether because of geography, population, or a general

59 See Duffy.
perceived absence of “civilization” have been enshrined by earlier historians as spaces where partisans, both Whig and Tory, as well as Native Americans, waged a war well outside the confines of eighteenth century military formalism. Even when regular armies were present, historians have sought to recast their maneuvers as “guerrilla.” In contrast, the war in the northeast has not been similarly interpreted. The narrative in this theatre is dominated by battles and maneuvers, Long Island, Trenton, Brandywine, etc. Thus, the character of warfare in the north has been made to conform to broader perceptions of this space as more “civilized” than the west or south.

Attempts to revise this narrative by recognizing the presence of partisan operations in the northern theatre have come from two sources. One has been works of local history, which have highlighted the extent to which the whig/tory divide violently disrupted many communities in the middle colonies. These conflicts, often waged by irregular forces, were further complicated when regular armies were present in a region as well. Thus far, the most thorough treatment of the regular army’s involvement in partisan fighting has been Mark Kwasny’s *George Washington’s Partisan War*. Kwasny’s work has shown that, aside from the well-known battles and campaigns, a nearly constant partisan struggle was waged in the middle colonies, much like the more accepted narratives of war in the South and on the frontier.\(^\text{61}\)

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In the context of this thesis, recognizing partisan fighting is important for several reasons. Frist and foremost, it further highlights the strain placed upon civilians and soldiers alike in New Jersey during 1780. Not only were civilians struggling with a faltering economy and burdensome demands of the army, they also lived in fear for life and property from an aggressive and nearby enemy. For officers and soldiers, safeguarding New Jersey communities was an additional burden to collecting supplies, maintaining discipline, and preparing for active campaigning in the spring. Thus, while previous historians may have dismissed partisan fighting as perhaps violent but ultimately unimportant, here I argue that the violence perpetrated on civilian communities in New Jersey in 1780 constituted a military danger just as serious as formal battles and sieges. More broadly, the heightened awareness by both American and British leaders of the political sensitivities of the civilian population, most vividly ingrained in military force through partisan fighting, indicates a merging of war and politics that complicates our understanding of warfare during the War of Independence. In the context of republican governance during the war, the partisan fighting highlights the ambiguities and paradoxes of republican ideology and once again exhibits the central role of the Continental Army as a civil-military body. More broadly, I argue that, a decade before the *Levee en Masse* and two decades before Clausewitz, the War of Independence saw a merging of military and mass civilian interest that looks forward towards a distinctly modern conception of war.

Most indicative of the increasing intersection of politics, armed force, and civilian violence is the change in British military approach that occurred during the 1779-1780 period. Certainly, historians have recognized several aspects of this transition in British
policy during the latter half of the War of Independence. In response to military failures against the colonists during 1777 and the entry of France into the war the following year, Britain’s overall strategy changed. On the broadest, grand-strategic level this meant a shift in forces away from North America to reinforce possessions in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and Europe, threatened by the new French menace. In America, this had a direct effect in 1778 as the now undermanned British army abandoned Philadelphia and withdrew to New York.

Moving forward, the war in North America saw a shift in British strategic emphasis away from the northern theatre in favor of a new focus on the southern colonies. Several issues drove the British to adopt this southern strategy. First, the broad plains and numerous rivers of the southern colonies compared favorably to the mountainous terrain near New York for British operations. Secondly, the economically lucrative plantation colonies of the South made for tempting targets, more so because of the relative weakness of the colonists’ southern army. Most importantly, British leaders perceived a much greater potential for loyalist support in the southern colonies.62

This final point highlights the increasing appreciation in the British camp that the war could not be one through traditional eighteenth century conceptions of military victory. The 1777 campaign had demonstrated that the battlefield defeat of the Continental Army and the occupation of the capital city could not bring the war to an end. Given the concurrent transformation in American politics and society, the war could only be won by degrading American morale and undermining the broadly popular
republican movement. This meant a shift in emphasis to target the social and economic foundations of the emergent republic.

As stated above, the ongoing fighting in the northern theatre after 1778 is generally forgotten in this narrative. Yet, 1779 saw a change in British military approach in this theatre comparable to the more well-known transformation in the South, and was largely the result of the direction of lesser-known British commanders. Henry Clinton’s departure for the Charleston campaign left the New York garrison under General William Smith and Baron Wilhem von Knyphausen. Smith’s writings point to his dissatisfaction with Clinton’s leadership. During October, 1779, he wrote “Sir Henry must feel now the ill effects of his inactivity this summer… Why has he not harassed and cut up the Jersey and Connecticut Militia. Is it possible he can think of returning soon to England? He has done nothing.”

Clinton had largely failed to accomplish anything militarily during the summer of 1779, which had seen a series of ineffectual maneuvers as he attempted to bring Washington to battle.

Smith’s advocacy for a campaign of small raids intended to devastate the regional militias contrasts with Clinton’s traditional approach, and aligns with the broader transition to a social-economic strategy more evident in the southern campaign. Indeed Smith’s writings are characterized by an abundant appreciation for the social and economic benefits of a partisan campaign. He summed up his own vision for operations as envisioning “frequent descents to harass and beat down the militia, and by creating expense exhaust the funds and depreciate the cash of the continent.”

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64 Smith, 178.
close ally in William Tryon, leader of New York’s loyalists, who advocated for a similar emphasis on supply stores and the militia. With Clinton’s departure, Smith and Tryon took on a more active role in planning and directing operations in the northern theatre.

Smith’s outlook on the form that future operations should take greatly helps to interpret and understand the fighting that did take place during the winter of 1779-1780. Overall, New Jersey suffered from 7 major British raids from October 1779 to April 1780.Raids generally consisted of columns of roughly 1000 infantry, and were tasked with destroying public buildings, taking local leaders prisoner, plundering private property as well as public stores, and degrading the local militia. An area from Bergen County in the north to Middlesex County in the south was threatened up to thirty miles inland from British held New York. The heaviest fighting occurred in Essex County, especially in Newark and Elizabethtown which were the most exposed to British outposts on Staten Island.

A close examination of the winter fighting in New Jersey indicates the blurred lines between soldier and civilian, the increased appreciation for the local political and ideological environment, and the pervasiveness of small-scale partisan tactics used by regular forcers. Raids were not simply foraging expeditions, like those that had taken place throughout the war. For instance, British plans for a January 6 operations called for attacks on Paramus, Hackensack, Orange, Cranford, Elizabethtown, Rahway, and Woodbridge and utilized the bulk of the New York garrison.

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65 Ibid.
The Continental Army was not ignorant of British attacks and throughout the winter worked to craft an effective solution to the threat posed by British raids. Shortly after its arrival in New Jersey, Washington came to appreciate the strength of the British garrison as opposed to the weakness of his own force. In response to attacks like Simcoë’s October raid and the planned January 6 operation, the Continental Army responded with an offensive of its own. On January 15, 2,500 Continentals led by Major-General William Alexander left the Morristown encampment to attack Staten Island. Alexander’s force succeeded in crossing the frozen Arthur Kill, destroying some of the stores present on the island, and withdrawing unmolested. While the Staten Island raid had little tangible military benefit, it can be best understood when considering civilian morale and popular political sentiments. By 1780, New Jerseyans had long suffered from loyalist attacks, more recently joined by British regulars as well. As a center for New Jersey loyalist exiles, Staten Island must have had a symbolic value to many New Jerseyans as the source of loyalist depredations. That Washington assented to the militia accompanying the Staten Island raid, despite his negative opinion of the militia’s military value, indicates his appreciation for the attitudes and emotions of the state’s population. Indeed, his orders give tacit approval to militia reprisals, stating that State Island civilians “found in arms must be expected to be treated as enemies, and their effects given up as plunder.” The raid therefore did not constitute a traditional military operation at all, but a means to maintaining civilian morale and support for the republican cause.

67 Washington, 12.20.79, 12.29.79, PC 9, 695.
68 Ibid.
69 Washington, 1.15.80, PC 9, 695
That New Jerseyans themselves relished the opportunity to exact restitution on the loyalists is indicated by the militia’s conduct during the raid. For example, A Staten Island ferryboat dock and home was identified as a billet for a unit of New Jersey loyalists; “the house, as a garrison place, and eight or nine vessels were burned…a considerable quantity of blankets and other stores were found,” and removed.\(^70\) A British participant noted the “stripping of women of their body clothes.”\(^71\) A Continental participant reported, “our troops returned off the island with 500 sleigh loads.”\(^72\) A militia colonel admitted “the inhabitants of the island are sorely plundered.”\(^73\) Alexander’s report on the operation noted “a number of persons from this side took advantage of the occasion to pass upon the island, and plundered the people there in the most shameful and merciless manner.”\(^74\)

The brief Staten Island expedition, miniscule relative to the wider events of the military conflict, nevertheless illustrates the growing intersection of political, military, and economic factors during this period of the War of Independence. Civilian militiamen, oftentimes aloof to military service, eagerly joined the expedition to for an opportunity to strike at the loyalist base. Washington, generally suspicious of using militiamen on combat operations, approved of their presence because of the immense political-psychological importance of the target. Militiamen surpassed their mandate to plunder armed loyalist’s property only, as they apparently stole from civilian homes throughout the island. The forces at work in the Staten Island raid were to be present throughout the winter’s fighting.

\(^{70}\) Washington 1.16.80, PC 9, 695  
\(^{71}\) Washington, 1.25.80, PC 9, 695  
\(^{72}\) Ibid.  
\(^{73}\) Sylvanus Seely, Journal, 1.16.80, PC 6, 399.  
\(^{74}\) Washington, 1.25.80, PC 9, 695
Late January brought British reprisals for the American raid. A detachment of 300 regulars surprised the Newark garrison, killing 8 and capturing 34. A simultaneous strike on Elizabethtown with a mixed force of infantry and cavalry captured some 50 militia, including 2 majors. Meanwhile, a force of mounted Tories “made incursions into Jersey, advancing by way of Bergen to Rahway and also to the post on Oyster Bank, in Newark Bay.” This expedition captured a further eight militia.

British attacks in late January highlight reflect the same military-political dynamic as the Staten Island raid. Loyalist regulars served as guide for British columns; their local knowledge of the landscape was instrumental in helping the raiders avoid known militia and Continental posts. The commander of the column raiding Elizabethtown noted, “guides led me without discovery to the rear of the town, which I entered without any alarm…the surprise was complete.” Also, highlighting the increasing appreciation for civilian sentiments in military operations, the loyalist guides were recruited from Staten Island residents angered by Alexander’s attack.

British attacks were also notable because of their escalation of civilian violence. Loyalist irregulars burned down the Presbyterian meeting house and court house in Elizabethtown and the academy in Newark.” This, combined with the number of civilian prisoners taken, highlights the growing shift in the conflict towards the local, the civilian, and the political. In this case, loyalist irregulars did not aim to forage or skirmish with regular units, but to eliminate key pillars of republican society: physical

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75 Bauermeister 340
76 Bauermeister 340
77 Bauermeister 341
78 Clinton 1.26.80
79 Clinton 1.26.80
centers of the republican order such as religious and legal buildings, and the embodiment of the republican ideological struggle in the form of community leaders taken prisoner. In New York, Smith explicitly tied the January 25 operations to both his own partisan strategy, as well as to the earlier American attack on Staten Island, “The Jersey people are disgusted with Stirling’s expedition to Staten Island. It cost Newark its academy and Elizabethtown the courthouse and church. They fear more damage and many are moving away. Washington refuses guards and says they must look to the militia for defense.”

It is important to recognize Smith’s appreciation for civilian sentiments in New Jersey, as well as his ready acceptance of the destruction of civilian property.

The remainder of the winter saw several more British attacks, all following a similar pattern. January 31 saw a raid by Simcoe’s Rangers, followed in February by a larger expedition of 2000 men. This attack was aimed at the American encampment at Morristown, and more importantly, Washington’s headquarters. While bad weather inhibited their progress, the attackers did plunder Elizabethtown and take at least ten inhabitants prisoner. Concurrent foraging expeditions saw the capture of two more civilians and the loss of thirty head of cattle at Woodbridge and Rahway. Following this attack, generally wet weather prohibited further operations until March.

Late March saw a shift in British focus to Bergen County, with a March 23 attack on Paramus. Once again, operations increasingly trended towards destruction and plunder of civilian property. The commander of the Paramus garrison observed that, “as

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80 Smith 221
81 Simcoe, 134-139.
82 Washington 2.1.80; Washington 2.20.80, PC 9, 695
83 Washington, 2.21.81, PC 9, 695
84 Ibid.
85 Clinton, 3.24.80
soon as the enemy found their intentions were frustrated, they seemed more disposed to plunder than to pursue us, and immediately commenced their retreat down the Hackensack road, plundering indiscriminately. Among the worst of the damage done was in Hackensack, where a courthouse and two private homes were burnt. Additionally, every Patriot home in town saw its windows and doors destroyed.

The final British attack of the spring occurred during April, when 500 men were sent to seize patriot stores at Hoppertown. After a fierce firefight, the British succeeded in taking the storehouse, and captured 200 prisoners as well. Like the previous operations, the Hoppertown attack was accompanied by destruction of civilian property. According to a local resident, “the enemy…killed the major in command and wantonly burned two stone dwelling houses, one stone house and one grist mill with two run of stone…(I) was left homeless and penniless and destitute.”

In an incident indicating the animosity that had developed between the two sides, “Mrs. Basher (owner of one of homes about to be burned) was on her knees to spare the house, (the British commander) damned her and bid her begone, declaring they all deserved to be bayoneted.”

The Hoppertown raid was the final major action of the spring, as both armies took the following weeks to rest and prepare for active campaigning in the summer. In New York, British leaders interpreted the results of the winter and spring fighting through Smith’s strategic vision. Surely, reports of unhappy farmers and mutinous soldiers in New Jersey indicated the desired breakdown in morale and authority. As a direct result

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86 Washington, 3.25.80, PC 9, 695
87 Ibid
88 Ibid.
89 Clinton, 4.15.80; Simeco 140-142
90 Ibid.
91 Clinton, 4.30.80
of the winter raids and their apparent effects, Tryon, Smith, and exiled New Jersey
governor William Franklin were emboldened to attempt a conventional invasion of New
Jersey the following month.

The 1780 winter campaign increases our understanding of the wartime republic in
several ways. First, it highlights the connections between the civilian home front and
active military operations. British leaders like Smith recognized that destroying property
undermined the civilian economy and hindered the Continental Army’s logistics. This, it
was hoped, would increase civilian dissatisfaction with the war, further harming the
regular army’s image, which would in turn diminish the Continental’s operational
capabilities and thus further decrease civilian acceptance of the legitimacy of the
Revolutionary government. Smith, Tryon, and Franklin perceived reports of civilian
discontent and the Connecticut Line mutiny through their hopes of an impending
Republican collapse, thus driving the British to invade New Jersey, resulting in the
abortive Springfield campaign in June.

Americans too recognized the interplay between war and civilian sentiments.
Thus Washington attacked the Tory stronghold on Staten Island and permitted the state
militia to accompany the regulars on the expedition, and also increased the number of
Continental’s guarding the New York border when the militia proved ineffective.
Continental-militia cooperation proved instrumental in safeguarding New Jersey towns
and recovering lost property during Britain’s springtime raids.

More broadly, the most striking aspect of the winter campaign is the primacy of
civilian interests over the regular armies. Tryon and Franklin, leaders of the loyalist
refugee population in New York, were key supporters of British raids, and civilian loyalist guides as well as organized loyalist units were important to the success of many of the British attacks. New Jersey civilian sentiments also figured largely into the Staten Island raid and in pressing for a greater Continental presence along the New York border, while New Jersey militiamen played a key role throughout the winter fighting as well as during the conventional Springfield campaign. This significantly complicates our understanding of the militia, and civilians as a whole, in the fighting of the War of American Independence. Traditionally, militiamen have been regarded as ancillary to American regular forces, especially in the northern theatre, while the role of loyalist forces on the British side is usually dismissed as unimportant. While works like Kwasny’s have highlighted the military value of the militia in partisan fighting, none have fully appreciated the military-political impact of civilian sentiments. In the case of New Jersey in 1780, traditional roles were juxtaposed, as loyalist and republican civilian leaders and their militias impelled the respective regular armies to military action.
CONTINENTAL OFFICERS AND REPUBLICANISM AS A UNIFYING FORCE

Thus far, the effects of the events of winter and spring 1780 in New Jersey appear to have been largely negative for the Revolutionary cause. Inflation, starvation, mutiny, and violence plagued the Continental Army and New Jersey’s population. Conditions appeared adverse enough to prompt a British invasion of the state with hopes of its capture and even a victorious conclusion to the war. Yet, the Springfield campaign ended in failure. Starving, unpaid Continental soldiers did not desert, militiamen turned out in large numbers to fight, and the civilian population did not welcome the British with open arms. This result surprised not only the British but many Americans as well. The following chapter seeks to show how the actions of American officers during the winter and spring of 1780 helped to maintain a fragile enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause and thus preserved the republican order in New Jersey.

To mitigate civilian agitation in the face of the soldiers' depredations, Continental Army leadership resorted to several different tactics. First, by issuing general orders prohibiting plundering, officers not only sought to restrict soldiers' actions but also to make clear to the civilian community that whenever plundering did take place, it was not sanctioned by the army. The army's first response was to seek to tighten discipline through corporal punishment. Washington directed his officers to use "every method in their powers to convince depredations of so pernicious a nature will not except the most exemplary punishment."92 Thus, as injuries to civilian property continued, the Continental Army resorted to harsher disciplinary measures. For example, John de Armor, after an infraction against Morristown resident Katherine Slover, was sentenced to receive "one hundred stripes on his naked back."93 Three soldiers who broke into a

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92 General Orders, December 3, 1779, LWS 67, 277
93 Brigade Orders, Angel's regiment, Stark's brigade. May 26, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277
Morristown storehouse were similarly sentenced.\textsuperscript{94} As the winter progressed and plundering continued, the Continental Army changed tactics. Although trials and sentences were usually carried out at the Jockey Hollow encampment, during the spring proceedings were moved to Morristown itself.\textsuperscript{95} Here, at a venue more readily visible to the public, army leadership could demonstrate to the public that whatever depredations the soldiery might commit, the officers remained a disciplinary force.

To more vividly demonstrate to the public the army's commitment to punishing crimes against civilians, leadership took more extreme measures later in the encampment. During February 1780, three members of a Pennsylvania regiment were found guilty of plundering and were sentenced to hanging.\textsuperscript{96} Although accounts vary, it appears that at least one of those soldiers convicted were in fact executed while the others were pardoned.\textsuperscript{97} On another occasion the following month, four soldiers from Pennsylvania regiments were found guilty of "plundering Mr. Bogart, an inhabitant near Paramus."\textsuperscript{98} Some empathy did exist between soldiers and civilians, as these men were also sentenced to death, but their reputations as generally disciplined soldiers and the intervention of the aggrieved Mr. Bogart led to pardon, indicating that republican sentiments did, on occasion, cross status boundaries.

Yet, even as the army tried and sentenced soldiers for plundering, it also could not ignore that, with dwindling finances, sometimes outright confiscation was the only means of keeping soldiers supplied. Headquarters initially directed quartermasters to purchase

\textsuperscript{94} General Orders, January 20, 1780, LWS 67, 277
\textsuperscript{95} General Orders, March 13, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} General Orders February 18, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277; Jeremiah Greenman, February 19, 1780, PC 1, 23; Ebenezer Parkman, Feb 19, 1780, PC 5, 353.
\textsuperscript{98} General Orders, March 13, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277
supplies from the region's inhabitants, since during bad weather the army was forced to rely on local sources for logistics. New York's General James Clinton reported that with the magazines exhausted by early January, it was left to "the commissaries can have the wheat that has been collected from the farmers in consequence of our laws." 99 With the advent of the financial crisis in 1780, leadership commanded quartermasters to "borrow of them (civilians) giving them assurances to return the same quantity, when the situation of our supplies will permit, and if this shall prove ineffectual, they will take from those who will be least injured thereby, giving vouchers for the quantities they receive." 100 Josiah Harmar of the Pennsylvania Line lamented "obliged to be under the disagreeable necessity of ordering our parties to take provisions from the inhabitants and give them certificates therefore." 101 Directives such as this indicate that while the Continental Army's leadership did frequently proscribe and punish soldiers for taking civilian items, they nevertheless recognized that there was often little alternative.

The key difference here is that the confiscation of goods was part of an authorized strategy sanctioned by headquarters, as opposed to the wonton acts of plunder perpetrated by the soldiers themselves. More importantly, these orders at least maintained a pretense that the government would provide compensation at a later date. While what general orders termed "borrowing," may have been essentially the same as theft, they at least gave the promise of vouchers. As long as men acted under the authority of officers operating under the pretense of orders, the confiscation of civilian property was justifiable as a wartime necessity. Both the state government and the Continental Army's

99 James Clinton to George Clinton, Jan 7, 1780, PC 10, 705.
100 General Orders, 4th New York Brigade, January 30, 1780; and Angels regiment, May 21, 1780, LWS 67, 277
commanders could rationalize plunder as a sacrifice for the republican cause, while vouchers offered the promise of payment to assuage at least some of the civilians' anger. Official authority differentiated appropriation of property by the Army from acts of plunder perpetrated by the rank-and-file. This was of paramount importance in shaping how New Jersey civilians viewed the Continental Army's actions. Whereas European armies disciplined marauding soldiers to maintain cohesion, resorting to the whip in the American army had the added benefit of demonstrating to civilians the Army's concern for republican attitudes towards individual rights and private property.

The Continental Army's strategy rested on this differentiation between the organized acts of plunder directed from headquarters from the plundering committed by individuals. While property taken by the quartermaster's office could be written off as requisitions, individual soldiers who took from civilians were charged with theft. Publicly visible trials and punishments demonstrated to the population that indiscipline was not to be tolerated. Headquarters' own rhetoric exhibited the contrast between authorized requisition and unauthorized plunder. Washington characterized the behavior of his soldiers as "better becoming a band of robbers than disciplined troops called forth in defense of the rights of the community."102 This statement vividly illustrates the social ills both officers and civilians perceived in the common soldiers, while also incorporating the language of republican ideology. The general attitude of army leadership was similar. Actions authorized and organized by officers were sanctioned as an integral part of the revolutionary struggle, while the depredations of the rank-and-file were prohibited and punished severely.

It is apparent that, by 1780, both armies were cognizant of inextricable linkages

102 General Orders, December 29, 1779, LWS 67, 277
between finance, supply, and civilian sentiments. For the British, this meant an undermining of the civilian economy through armed attacks on private property and public stores. In the southern theatre, Royal officers looked to achieve similar ends through different means.\(^{103}\) For the Continental Army, finance and supply presented a difficult dilemma as officers were left to balance the needs of their starving soldiers with the attitudes of the civilian population. Carp has shown how a failed financial system threatened to delegitimize the national government in the eyes of American civilians.\(^{104}\) Here I argue that an ill-disciplined rank-and-file presented an equally dangerous threat to national legitimacy. The task for Continental officers then, was to keep their soldiers as best supplied as possible while causing a minimal amount of civilian consternation.

A key to this strategy was to court a positive public image. Thus, when officers took from civilians, they benefited from perceptions of them as virtuous gentlemen, a valuable source of credibility soldiers lacked.\(^{105}\) The Continental Army actively courted a positive public perception for its officers among the civilian population throughout the winter encampment with numerous public events held in Morristown. Dancing assemblies provide a particularly illustrative example. A letter to the Connecticut Line's Colonel Webb mentions an assembly of "130 subscribers (officers) and 165 ladies," from the surrounding area.\(^{106}\) Captain Samuel Shaw noted that these assemblies brought civilians from a number of communities, including Basking Ridge, Elizabeth, and Raritan, while Erkuries Beatty's social endeavors brought him in contact with residents of

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\(^{104}\) Carp, 205-215

\(^{105}\) see Joanne Freeman. Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic. 2002

\(^{106}\) Huntington to Webb, Feb 16, 1780, PC 6, 426
Beyond dances, other social gatherings brought together officers and local elites. Of particular interest is an assembly on February 23 that brought General Knox and his staff together with civilian John Jacob Faesch, a wealthy iron mine owner and prominent figure among Morris County's elites. Walter Stewart of the 2nd Pennsylvania anticipated the social possibilities of an army storehouse, "newly built in Morristown, the dancing room 70 feet long by 50 feet broad." According to Royal Flint, assemblies were "almost a daily, or rather nightly diversion." The frequency of these social gatherings, and the importance ascribed to them by officers in their writings is certainly reflective of the value colonial society placed on gentlemanly conduct. More importantly, by bringing officers and prominent civilians together in a social atmosphere, the Continental Army could foster a positive image and maintain friendly relationships. This effectively contrasted them with the heavy-handed conduct of British officers, both during the brief occupation of New Jersey in 1776, and during subsequent British incursions into the state. Conversely, that officers enjoyed a generally pleasant life of socializing could not have escaped the notice of the rank-and-files suffering in camp. Thus, even as officers and civilians came closer together, the social cleavage with the common-solider increased.

The Continental Army also used other means to maintain positive civilian relations and further its hold on claims to legitimacy and authority in New Jersey. Headquarters buildings acted as sites symbolic of republican power. American general officers actively contrasted their actions with pre-war British quartering policy, by

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107 Samuel Shaw, PC 6, 453. Feb 29, 1780; Erkuries Beatty, March 13, 1780, PC 6, 406
108 Samuel Shaw, February 19, 1780, PC 6, 453.
109 Walter Stewart, February 1, 1780, PC 6, 454.
110 Flint to Wadsworth, February 17, 1780, PC 6, 419.
deferring to state laws and requesting civilian permission before entering private homes. The homes they did choose were often those of prominent Whigs. For example, Nathaniel Greene spent the winter at the tavern of militia officer Jacob Arnold, a prominent pre-war meeting spot for Morristown's revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{111} Washington stayed at the home of deceased militia colonel Jacob Ford Jr. Ford had been prominent iron forge owner and lawyer, had been among the wealthiest men in the region prior to his death in early 1777 and his house on Morristown's eastern edge had been the town's largest.\textsuperscript{112} While little of Ford's personal papers remain, he appears to have been a well-respected figure in a fervently patriotic community and Washington's use of his home for his headquarters symbolically demonstrated the fusion of the local and national republican sentiments.\textsuperscript{113}

Washington's headquarters itself also functioned to impress the local population. Here camped Washington's Lifeguard, a unit of 300 men selected for their physical appearance and native-born ancestry. Their fine uniforms and discipline was on constant display to New Jersey residents who passed by the headquarters along the main road from Newark to Morristown. Maintaining a martial image was a particular concern throughout the army, as the preponderance of orders emphasizing proper uniform and equipment indicates. In Hazen's regiment, for example, orders directed soldiers "great care must be taken to preserve the regimental clothing which must at all times be kept neat and clean."\textsuperscript{114} Issues of clothing supply permeate general orders throughout the

\textsuperscript{111} Thayer, 205-207.  
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{114} Regimental Orders, Hazen's regiment, March 14, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277
The headquarters itself exhibited the pageantry of a sovereign capital, with an estimated 50 or more guards, servants, and staff present inside the home. The headquarters more than just gave the appearance of a sovereign; it also functioned as one by receiving foreign dignitaries and state delegations. Civilians were made intimately aware of the growing internationalization of the war with the visit of the Spanish envoy, Don Juan de Mirrales, in April 1780. Mirrales' death from illness at the encampment was followed by an apparent display of military pageantry, for Ebenezer Parkman recorded "the Spaniard {was} buried with great pomp." Parkman was similarly impressed by the pageantry accompanying a visit from the French ambassador Luzerne, writing "troops assembled to salute the French Ambassador his excellency, with the grandee and they ladies waited on him in the field...thirteen cannon were fired. A very grand appearance." A concurrent military parade directed by von Steuben served to impress both the foreign visitor and the local inhabitants. Social gatherings reminiscent of Europe's military aristocracy followed the celebrations. Thatcher records "Washington and the French minister attended a ball, provided by our principal officers, at which were present a numerous collection of ladies and gentlemen of distinguished character. Fireworks were also exhibited by officers of the artillery." Similar parades were held in Morristown the following month, with much emphasis given to an ordered, disciplined appearance; this time both a visiting delegation from congress and Lafayette

115 General Orders, December 26 1779, January 22, February 29. March 12, March 24, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277
116 Ebenezer Parkman, April 28, 1780, PC 5, 353; Nathan Beers, April 29, 1780, PC 5, 344.
117 Ebenezer Parkman, April 24, 1780, PC 5, 353.
118 Ebenezer Parkman, April 24, 1780, PC 5, 353.
119 General Orders, April 25, 26, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277
120 Thatcher, April 24, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168.
were present.\textsuperscript{121}

While Carp has recognized the connections between local elites and officers in *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, I contend that their relationship was fundamental to republican cause. Amidst a population distrustful of standing armies and exhausted from a long and expensive war, the cooperation of familiar, local leaders with the regular army must have had a powerful psychological sway over the inhabitants. Thus, the seemingly quaint wintertime social activities of the officer class, when interpreted through the lens of public perceptions of gentlemanly republic virtue, become central to the wartime narrative.

Furthermore, the pomp and pageantry of the winter encampment, and Washington’s headquarters in particular, further complicates the narrative of sovereignty and legitimacy during the War of Independence. Military parades, demonstrations, and visits from foreign dignitaries transformed the headquarters into a symbolic center of power. With the ineffectual governance of the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, the apparent authority emanating from the winter encampment provided a substitute source of national sovereignty. The *de facto* military capital thus played as important a role as the national financial system in legitimizing the republican regime. Indeed, by conducting foreign affairs, intervening the in civilian economy, enforcing law, as well as continuing its traditional defense and security role, the Continental Army acted as a source of national authority driving the republican struggle as much as the nominal national government in Philadelphia.

\textsuperscript{121} General Orders, May 28, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277; von Steuben, May 29; 1780, PC 10, 508. Thatcher, May 29, 1780, PC 5, 353; Parkman, May 29, 1780, PC 5, 353.
CONCLUSION: CONTEXTUALIZING WAR AND SOCIETY IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

Overall, the Continental Army's officers succeeded in maintaining a tenuous peace between the soldiers at Jockey Hollow and New Jersey's civilian inhabitants. Soldiers were kept at a distance from large towns where their potential for agitating the community was minimal. They were severely punished in public for infractions against civilian property, thereby exhibiting the disciplinary authority of the Continental Army within its own ranks. Officers contrasted themselves with common soldiers by demonstrating their symbolic solidarity with the community. Officers stayed in the private homes of respected local figures, while army rhetoric extolled republican virtues while reprimanding soldiers' actions. When the army was forced to take what it needed, it at least provided vouchers and the promise of future payment to ease tensions. Thus, even as finances declined and morale sagged, the Continental Army managed to prevent large-scale distress among New Jersey's civilian population. Using a combination of coercion, discipline, and symbolic gestures, the Continental Army acted as a benign sovereign in New Jersey, maintaining public trust by exploiting distaste for common soldiers in favor of the officer elite.

These realities indicate a contradiction in republican ideology. On the one hand, the army harshly disciplined soldiers and enforced the subordination of the poor soldier to the privileged elite officers, in contrast to the revolution's humanist and egalitarian principals. On the other hand, army leaders took these actions to prevent depredations against civilians by a mass of ill-disciplined and armed men. In this fear of a
radicalization of the conflict, then, is the restrained, rational character of the revolution often recognized by scholars. Yet, the officer corps also seemingly violated republican principals with its unfunded taking of civilian goods; however, by terming these acts requisitions and issuing vouchers, the Continental Army attempted to cast coercive actions in a republican light. Displays of martial pomp and pageantry conveyed a sense of sovereignty and legitimacy and maintained the appearance of a functional government, while exhibiting officers’ social statuses as virtuous republican gentlemen through social interactions helped to ensure continued harmony with civilians. This contradiction between rank-and-file behavior and officer behavior indicates that republican ideology was malleable, and could be distorted and redeployed by various actors, in this case the Continental Army’s officers.

Ultimately, though, the Americans' republican values proved resilient. Despite soldiers' plundering and officers' confiscations, New Jersey’s inhabitants did not turn wholesale against the republican government, nor did they instigate a loyalist insurgency. While the Continental Army leadership did take civilian possessions without paying for them and did indeed place a substantial burden on the population, they never threatened to supplant civilian political leadership with a military government. Ultimately it was the soldiers that suffered most. Poorly supplied, when they took matters into their own hands they were severely punished by their military leaders and ostracized from the surrounding civilian community, and indeed the final years of the war did see several large mutinies, beginning with the Connecticut Line at Morristown in 1780.122 Yet, these mutinies

never spread to the whole army, and no radicalized soldiery ever threatened the country's social or political status quo. Nor did the rank-and-file completely descend into wholesale undisciplined brigandry. The primacy of republican ideals in the conduct of the officers, soldiers, and civilians in New Jersey during 1780 in preserving the revolution's social and political goals indicates that, while republican ideology may have caused the logistical problems of the later war years by precluding the creation of a strong centralized government, it also mitigated against any collapse or radicalization of the American war effort by providing some modicum of commonality through shared values between the social groups intrinsic to the waging of the war.

On its surface, there may appear to be very little new or modern in the manner in which the War of Independence was conducted. Weapons, tactics, and strategy were all nearly indistinguishable from those of other eighteenth century European wars. Nor did the army Revolutionary America raised to wage the war differ distinctly from its European counterparts, especially from 1777 onwards. The *levee en masse*, the battle of annihilation, and “total” warfare all apparently remained for the next century. Indeed, when looking at the national government’s failure to craft the structural framework necessary to support a standing army, America’s conduct of the war resembles seventeenth-century practices much more so than contemporary Europe, much less the nineteenth century.

Yet, a deeper investigation reveals a much different picture. For, even as the Continental Congress abdicated its authority over provisioning the national war machine, the Continental Army succeeded in maintaining the nation’s war-effort largely on its own. Through various strategies, from cajoling state legislatures, borrowing from local
farmers, to outright confiscations, the Continental Army survived. While E. Wayne Carp was correct to point out the failings of the national government and recognize the role of many Continental leaders in the post-war movement towards a stronger central government, he downplayed the success the Army had in maintaining itself during the war.

Here, I have shown how the Continental Army served as the de-facto national state during the latter years of the war. In terms of its regulatory power over civilian property, its obvious duty to maintain the safety and security of civilian communities, and its role in bringing together the otherwise disparate colonies, the Continental Army discharged authority in the manner of a wartime national government that the Continental Congress failed to do. It is important to recognize the uniquely American context of this realization. A military usurpation of the authority of a European centralized monarchy was obviously unthinkable. Thus, only in an arena of decentralized national authority like the revolutionary American republic could the military supersede civilian power. The overall weakness of the military and the generally benign attitudes of its leaders meant that this supersession was of the most subtle and conservative character. Furthermore, the need to respect civilian political attitudes played a far greater role in the Continental Army’s conduct than it would have in any European society prior to 1789. Put more simply, weather it was confiscating supplies or defending towns, the “hearts and minds” of the civilian population were always at the forefront of dictating the Continentals’ actions; this was not the case in contemporary European wars. Thus, much like other aspects of the Revolution, military authority during the war took on a uniquely American character.
The conduct of the war reflects the broader conceptions of the American Revolution. For the past forty years, scholars have recognized republicanism as the driving force in American revolutionary political culture. Based on the premise of a republican revolution and a republican society, I show here that the war was conducted in a republican manner as well. While E. Wayne Carp has shown the pitfalls of wartime republicanism at the highest levels, I complicate his interpretation here by showing the military benefits of republicanism as well. Thus, even as the Continental Army seized the reigns of the state in the realm of wartime supply and infrastructure, it nevertheless left civilian political and legal authority intact. While the army may have cajoled state legislatures it never disbanded them, and civilians were never tried in military courts.

Indeed, republicanism served as a unifying force, bringing together Continental officers and civilian leaders. Notions of republican virtue and gentlemanly conduct provided officers and civilians with a set of shared beliefs that ensured ongoing civilian support for the war, even when the army resorted to confiscations. Republicanism provided an ideological lens through which civilians perceived and officers cast their actions; thus, Americans appeals for supplies were clothed in a language of republican patriotism that differentiated them from similar British proclamations.

Republican sentiments did not have a universal appeal though, as the indiscipline and mutiny during the Morristown encampment highlights. Common soldiers suffered from the inability of their national government to provide for them, as well as inferior social status vis-à-vis their officers within the army. That New Jersey’s civilians could find a commonality with the officers confiscating their harvests but not the common soldiers plundering them indicates the incomplete nature of equality in revolutionary
America, one that officers were not necessarily ignorant of. Yet, overall, officers recognized that maintaining discipline over a rapacious soldiery feared, as potential radical was crucial to ensuring continued civilian support for the war. The Continental Army used its direct legal authority to discipline its soldiers to exhibit to civilians both a respect for republican sentiments and a continued modicum of functionality of the national state.

When placing this narrative in a broader context, we see an iteration of war, state, and society with modern overtones. The Continental Army, taking upon itself the authority to maintain the national war-effort, reflects the character, if not the scope, of nineteenth and twentieth century military governments and total-warfare states. The army’s acute awareness for political sensitivities, both among national and state governments as well as the population at large, indicates an awareness of the inseparability of war and politics still in its infancy in western military thought. While this conclusion may seem radical, I contend that it instead parallels our broader understanding of Revolutionary America. If, indeed Americans did create a radically new and modern conception of politics during this era, it should not surprise us that the society that produced these new political ideas approached warfare differently as well.

This interpretation aligns with the broader military historiography as well. The eighteenth century has been seen as an era of indecisiveness in warfare, when European states could achieve little but a maintenance of the status quo. Even the Napoleonic period, long seen as the antithesis of the indecisive eighteenth century, has received a revisionist treatment as well. Yet, in the context of this entire epoch of indecisive conflict, the War of Independence stands out as a singularly decisive victory. Between
1775 and 1783 a radically new, republican polity secured its revolutionary gains, purged the land of dissenters, destroyed Native Americans’ ability to resist white incursions, added vast western territories, and dramatically reduced the presence and influence of the heretofore strongest power in the region.

All of this was accomplished by a polity led by a national government largely inept at conducting war, a soldiering class often at odds with its military and civilian leaders, and an officer corps that was at times embarrassingly amateurish in its conduct. That Americans found the level of success they did during the war thus cannot be attributed simply to civilian or military leadership in the traditional sense, nor to the ineptitude of their opponents. Instead, I argue that a uniquely American appreciation of civilian political sentiments profoundly shaped every aspect of America’s prosecution of the war. Britain could never win a war by appealing to monarchical ideology that had already been subsumed even before the outbreak of fighting, by republicanism.

Moving forward, more work needs to be done on war and the early American state. For instance, the War of 1812 should provide fertile ground for further research. Certainly, by 1812 America possessed a better, but by no means good, structure for wartime national governance. How did military authority function in this environment? The presence of a stronger national government may lead one to conclude the absence of a process similar to the one outlined above, though the fact that much of the war was conducted in frontier areas far from the center of national authority indicates that military authority may have played a role. More importantly, the absence of revolutionary republicanism as a unifying ideology during the War of 1812 makes for a much more complicated narrative. Those looking to better understand Americans’ motivations for
fighting that war would do well to look at civil-military relations as a lens onto this problematic episode in American history.

Beyond the early republic, the interpretation above continues to have implications. As I have shown, the Continental Army set a precedent as a military force with an acute awareness to civilian political sensitivities and a contentious, though ultimately respectful, relationship with national authority. Throughout its history, both domestically and on foreign soil, the American army has often been confronted with navigating difficult civilian political environments. Also, for much of its history, the army has been both a servant of the state and at times acted as a state in of itself. Better understanding this interplay between military and civilian authority, with all of its connections to ideology and society, has immense implications even today, as the appeal to hearts and minds both on the home front and the battlefield remain as important in 2012 as in 1780.
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