

COLONIAL REBELLIONS AND NEW NATION INSURGENCIES:  
VIOLENCE, UPRISINGS, AND THE GENESIS OF ANGLO-AMERICAN  
MARTIAL IDEOLOGY, 1600-1800

by

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## Introduction

In the waning years of the eighteenth century, civil disobedience in eastern Pennsylvania framed as “Fries’s Rebellion” and looming conflict with France coalesced into a national emergency that provided Hamiltonian Federalists justification for creating the United States’ first standing army.<sup>1</sup> Although Americans had beheld before a professional military force operate within its borders, never had they fully accepted one during peacetime.<sup>2</sup> When the creation of the Provisional Army is viewed within the limited context of the interval between the end of the Revolution and the end of the century, little seems out of place. During this period Americans fought the British, fought themselves through three insurgencies, and rightfully worried about a second war with a European power.<sup>3</sup> Yet the creation of America’s first standing army served as a turning point in the young nation’s development.<sup>4</sup>

For nearly two centuries of colonial and Early National history, Americans held steadfastly to their inherited English martial ideology. That period witnessed conflicts, wars, and insurrections that slaughtered populations, stunted colonial development, and

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<sup>1</sup> The *House Tax Act of 1798* levied nearly \$2 million on the American people to create America’s Provisional Army and Department of the Navy. The Provisional Army, under the auspices of General Alexander Hamilton ultimately marched on eastern Pennsylvania to subdue and apprehend “rebels” such as John Fries who participated in the unlawful rescue of Bucks and Northampton County citizens that had failed to submit to the *House Tax*.

<sup>2</sup> Americans generally accepted the creation of the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Conversely, English soldiers and British Regulars stationed within colonial cities and quartered in private homes caused much consternation among American colonists during both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

<sup>3</sup> This specifically refers to conflicts including the American Revolution, Shays’s Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, Fries’s Rebellion, and the French Quasi-War

<sup>4</sup> The creation of a standing army reversed nearly 200 years of American martial policy and provided the United States government unprecedented centralized power to utilize soldiers against foreign and domestic threats.

sometimes toppled local governments. Still, such effects rarely swayed Anglo-Americans to adopt security measures more significant than their local citizen-soldiers.<sup>5</sup> While Anglos championed the militia system, they simultaneously vilified, scorned, and rejected professional military forces. Significant to this study is the development and institutionalization of these collective outlooks referred to as anti-standing army ideology in England and its colonies.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, the Oxford English dictionary defines a standing army as “an army of professional soldiers kept permanently on foot, as distinguished from one raised on a special occasion and again disbanded, as were the English armies before the 17<sup>th</sup> century.” Historian Bernard Bailyn asserts that American colonists “had a vivid sense of what such armies were: gangs of restless mercenaries, responsible only to the whims of the rulers who paid them, capable of destroying all right, law, and liberty that stood in their way.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in reference to British Regulars deployed to the colonies prior to the Revolution, Gordon S. Wood affirms that “The sending of new troops to America was merely the introduction of despotism’s traditional instrument—the standing army.”<sup>8</sup> While Anglo anti-standing army ideology serves as an unambiguous theme throughout this study, it is essential to highlight that the power of inherited English martial sentiment proved equally

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<sup>5</sup> Long before New World colonization and in lieu of professional soldiers, the English developed a militia-first mentality that spearheaded both Anglo and Anglo-American martial tradition. This development is further explored in Chapter One.

<sup>6</sup> This study will examine the development of the martial dogma in England as well as the transmission, proliferation, and expression of anti-standing army ideology in the American colonies.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967), 62. See Chapter 3 for Bailyn’s discussion on Power and Liberty and the role of the standing army.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 42.

as strong or stronger than the swords, muskets, and armor with which Anglo-Americans used to wage war against their foreign and domestic enemies. Anti-standing army ideology inarguably possessed power that shaped the lives and experiences of countless English men and women. Its authority persisted beyond the colonial period until the threat of invasion and actuality of rebellion provided the means to a new-ordered end and martial revolution in the nascent United States. Through this lens, the Provisional Army existed as an anomaly.<sup>9</sup>

This study explores the evolution of Anglo-American martial traditions and the often violent results of those developments from the period of earliest English permanent North American settlement until the end of the eighteenth century. It examines the causes and consequences of Anglo-Americans' martial policies born from English martial ideology based on anti-standing army sentiment and doctrinaire reliance on the militia system to construct a tripartite argument. First this work demonstrates that despite the existence of violence as an inescapable part of life for many Anglo-Americans, the martial policies adopted and adhered to amplified the dangers and viciousness of reality. Secondly, it establishes that traditional reliance on the militia created environments with few organized and prepared constabulary forces. Given these conditions, outbreaks of violence and rebellion erupted, threatened local security, and sometimes toppled sanctioned authority. Yet despite persistent warfare and the threat of insurgency, Anglo-Americans strongly adhered to their traditional martial policies. Finally, this work illustrates that in the years leading up to the

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<sup>9</sup> Note that the Provisional Army existed during a time in which the United States had not officially declared war. Many Americans alive at the time of the Provisional Army's creation had experienced the War of Independence and the Continental Army, but that force existed as a wartime army.

American Revolution, violence and rebellion had become mainstays in American society and served as practical outlets of Anglo-American frustration and hostility, first against the British government and then their own administrations during the Early National Period.<sup>10</sup> Alongside the multilateral argument, a secondary goal of this work is to demonstrate that that the long-championed Anglo-American defensive forces—the militia— perpetuated or prolonged violence as frequently as they prevented it.<sup>11</sup>

This study is divided into three chronological chapters that span from roughly 1600 to 1800 and is necessarily trans-Atlantic in scope. Undoubtedly, actions and ideas in England—and later Britain—reverberated across the ocean and directly affected the lives of their English cousins living in the New World.<sup>12</sup> Mirroring the origins of the American colonies, this history necessarily begins in the Old World. The opening pages of Chapter One, “English Military Tradition, Trans-Atlantic Transmission, and Application in Early American Settlement” establish the formation of English military ideology and policies beginning as early as the medieval reign of Henry II through the early seventeenth century by examining events and actions in the British Isles and continental Europe. Next, the

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<sup>10</sup> These three arguments are respectively expounded upon in the three subsequent chapters.

<sup>11</sup> The American militia has continued to hold a prestigious position in twentieth and twenty-first century popular culture, a reflection of modern collective thought and values. Movies such as *The Patriot* (2000) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) rank in the International Movie Database’s “100 Best War Films” and other militia-centric films include *All for Liberty* (2009), *April Morning* (1988), and *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939). The modern U.S. National Guard—today’s “militia”—traces its lineage to and celebrates its founding date as December 13, 1636, and features an unequivocal citizen-soldier on its seal. The contemporary militiaman and woman has been celebrated in music as well. In 2007, the band 3 Doors Down released the single “Citizen Soldier” that cracked the US Billboard Hot 100. The lead singer’s refrain affirms: “Citizen soldiers/ Holding the light for the ones that we guide from the dark of despair/ Standing on guard for the ones that we’ve sheltered/ We’ll always be ready because we will always be there.” This work will demonstrate that the citizen-soldier was neither always ready nor there.

<sup>12</sup> While an array of political, social, and cultural ideas followed Britons to the American colonies, this study will focus on martial concepts.

subsequent transfer, adaptation, and reinforcement of English martial procedures are explored through the earliest English settlements in Virginia and New England. During this period, Anglo colonists essentially established beachheads and frequently came into conflict with local indigenous people as their settlements expanded. This section explores the violence associated with the Anglo-Powhatan Wars and the Pequot War as well as the role of English expressions of explicit militarism and the leadership of experienced professional soldiers to aid the survival of fledgling English settlements.<sup>13</sup>

Chapter One continues to examine challenges to Anglo military traditions during the English Civil War and Protectorate period. To win the conflict against Charles I and his Royalists, Parliament turned to its first true standing force: the New Model Army. Though victorious, Members of Parliament (and the English people) realized the power of a standing army to reduce the state to tyranny as Oliver Cromwell used his soldiers to assert his own authority. While anti-standing army fervor solidified in England, issues arose concerning the militia system's ability to maintain peace in the American colonies. Disruptions in England propelled aftershocks across the Atlantic, and Anglo-American colonists—existing without adequate security forces—experienced insurgencies as early as the 1640s. Violence between colonists and Native Americans persisted as well. This section concludes with an examination of the bloody King Philip's War in New England and the state of martial flux in

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<sup>13</sup> Specifically, this section examines the roles of Thirty Years' War veterans John Smith and Miles Standish in the integration of militarism at Jamestown and fellow veteran. Though Smith was an adventurer and Standish a hireling, both aided in establishing defensive footholds along the North American coast.



which Anglo-Americans found themselves—opposed to standing armies and reliant upon an increasingly neglected and unresponsive militia system.<sup>14</sup>

Rising tensions and emerging conditions for rebellions and prolonged violence serve as constant themes of Chapter Two, “Ripening Unrest, American Apathy, and Continental Conflict.” It begins with an examination of Virginia during the last quarter of the seventeenth-century where uprising and colonial aversion to standing forces acted in a self-perpetuating system to spur Bacon’s Rebellion. Though rebel and loyalist militias acted as the conflict’s belligerents, the restored monarch Charles II deemed it necessary to deploy English soldiers to the colony to maintain order. However, the often neglected soldiery proved more burdensome and worrisome than useful to most Virginians. Aside from the most well-known rebellion during the colonial period, the closing quarter of the seventeenth century witnessed additional violence and insurgency in North Carolina and Virginia including Culpeper’s Rebellion and the Tobacco Cutting Riots. Each of these violent episodes flourished in areas with inadequate constabulary forces to prevent or immediately extinguish them.<sup>15</sup>

Before turning to the eighteenth century, the chapter also provides insight into the role of England’s Glorious Revolution in the hardening of anti-standing army ideology in Anglo society. Not only did the event result in reaffirmation of traditional English martial

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<sup>14</sup> New England’s combined militia proved the most ready and reliable Anglo-Americans to conduct military operations during the late seventeenth century. Though ultimately defeating confederated Native Americans during King Phillips War, nearly 1 in 35 colonists perished during the conflict. Militias in the Chesapeake provided far less security. During the mid-seventeenth century, Marylanders lived virtually defenseless while Virginians witnessed increased violence while militia service became more selective.

<sup>15</sup> Culpeper’s Rebellion spanned 1677-1678 while plant-cutters destroyed hundreds of plantations’ tobacco crops in 1682.

dogma through legislation (later foundational to the United States' lawmaking), it rekindled fiery anti-army philosophical writings that influenced readers on either side of the Atlantic as well as sparked rebellion in the American plantations. In places such as Boston, New York, and Maryland, handfuls of English regulars provided little resistance to colonists—and often militiamen—determined to overthrow the established authority.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, Chapter Two demonstrates that while imperial conflicts erupted on the American continent beginning in the waning years of the seventeenth century, internal conflicts still proved onerous to Anglo-Americans in North America. Though some colonists volunteered to serve the Crown in various campaigns in Canada and the Caribbean during King William's and Queen Anne's War, others, particularly in the Southern Colonies, found themselves mired in the violence and uncertainty of insurgency and Indian wars.<sup>17</sup>

Though the British Empire proved its martial superiority during the Seven Years' War, recurring warfare with imperial opponents had calamitous effects for the victors. The final chapter of this study, "Rebellion as Revolution, A Contentious Army, and New Insurgencies," begins in the twilight of the Seven Years' War and explores the role of the standing army in Britain's imperial crisis. Though immediately more thankful than fearful of British regulars, American colonists returned to their inherited martial ideology as taxes increased and perceptions of liberty decreased. Future Founding Fathers and local pamphleteers alike voiced strong anti-standing army sentiments until the eve of the

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<sup>16</sup> In the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution in England, the Boston Bloodless Coup, Leisler's Rebellion, and the Maryland Protestant Rebellion all flared in the colonies.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to the violence Anglo-Americans experienced during the imperial wars, they also struggled through the Cary Rebellion, the Tuscarora, and Yamasee Wars.

American Revolution. Yet despite inherited attitudes, American military leaders understood that colonial militias stood little chance in defeating professional British forces.<sup>18</sup> This realization caused colonial leaders to adopt a regular, wartime army. Here a reminder should be given and a distinction made between supporting an army during peace—a standing army—and during war. Despite the necessity of the Continental Army to wage war against the British, some Americans still decried the professional force, and its rapid demobilization demonstrated that the new nation still feared a large, peacetime army.<sup>19</sup>

In a final section, this work explores American martial attitudes during the closing decades of the eighteenth century to show that while the power of inherited Anglo ideas remained intact among American citizens, fears of rebellions and foreign invasion prompted leaders of the new nation to adopt new martial policies. The leading proponent and chief architect behind these “new” military ideas, Alexander Hamilton, campaigned for an American standing army for more than a decade—from his musings as “Publius” in the *Federalist Papers* through the presidency of John Adams. Though rebellions during the colonial era did little to alter the course of American martial development, insurgencies in the early national period threatened the solvency of the new nation and ushered in drastic revisions. In the decade that followed the end of the American Revolution and the scuttling

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<sup>18</sup> George Washington wrote to the Continental Congress, “To place any dependence on Militia, is, assuredly resting upon a broken staff. Men just dragged from the tender scenes of domestick life; unaccustomed to the din of Arms; totally unacquainted with every kind of military skill, which being followed by a want of confidence in themselves, when opposed to Troops regularly train'd, disciplined, and appointed, superior in knowledge and superior in Arms, makes them timid, and ready to fly from their own shadows.” His diatribe against the militia continues in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from The Original Manuscript Sources* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office: 1932), 6:110-113.

<sup>19</sup> For context, the enlisted forces of the United States in August, 1789 consisted of only 672 men. See Thomas H. S. Hamersly, ed., *Regular Army Register of the United States for one Hundred Years* (Washington DC: T. H. S. Hamersly, 1881), 213.

of the Continental Army, three events, Shays Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, and Fries's Rebellion resulted in the construction of new notions of national defense.<sup>20</sup>

In western Massachusetts, bands of militiamen, former Continental soldiers, and farmers banded together and rebelled against perceived civil and economic injustices and the state government reacted with an overwhelming Provincial force. Echoing the cries of patriots during the Revolution, citizens in Western Pennsylvania revolted against the federal government after it imposed an excise tax on distilled spirits in an attempt to repay war debts. In response to the Whiskey Rebellion, the federal government created a hugely expensive force as large as the Continental Army, and George Washington initially led columns of soldiers against the American non-taxpayers. Though Provincial and Federal armies violently suppressed both the Shays's and Whiskey Rebellions, Fries's Rebellion—born out of resistance to direct taxation intended to increase the size of the United States' armed forces and likely the least violent of any insurrection in this study—ironically provided the catalyst for the Federalist-controlled central government to create the first standing army in the new nation's history. The legislation that generated the Provisional Army and New Army in the waning moments of the eighteenth century fundamentally altered American martial ideologies and provided a line of demarcation in the trajectory of the nation's future armed forces.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In response to the late eighteenth century rebellions, the Federal government gained new, unprecedented martial powers. The timing of Shays's Rebellion allowed military matters to enter debate during the Constitutional Convention and likely influenced Article 1, Section 8 that allowed federal authority to nationalize state militias. The central government executed that power during the Whiskey Rebellion and soon began deliberating the Provisional and New Army Acts that diverged from America's traditional martial system.

<sup>21</sup> The legislation created America's first standing army—a force subsequently directed to march on American citizens in Pennsylvania to demonstrate federal power.

These successive rebellions in the opening decade of the new nation's history engendered fears of internal domestic collapse and, when combined with anxieties over possible invasion, led to stunning overhauls in American military policies. While these insurgencies against the nascent United States demonstrated that violence and rebellion served, as they had historically, as practical outputs of hostility in environments with few constabulary forces, they also acted as catalysts to reverse nearly two hundred years of dogmatic Anglo-American martial ideology.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> America's militia-first mentality dominated martial policy from the earliest instances of settlement in Virginia and New England through the opening years of the Early National Period. With inherited ideas from England, American colonists opposed professional forces and expressed their disdain first towards English and British troops and later, to a lesser extent, the Continental Army. The creation of a standing army in America at the turn of the nineteenth century served as a watershed moment in the young nation's military history,

## Chapter One: English Military Tradition, Trans-Atlantic Transmission, and Application in Early American Settlement

### Foundations of English Martial Tradition

Military affairs have plagued rulers desiring to maintain power and order since time immemorial. Though situated with the added protection offered by the sea, that liquid armor never completely shielded England from the need of military forces. With conflict and warfare serving as staples in English history throughout the second millennium, England utilized two conceptual systems of armed forces: the militia and the standing army, two concepts on opposite ends of the military continuum. Importantly, a standing army during peacetime existed as a foreign creature to England until the mid-seventeenth century. With much deeper roots and history of utilization, the militia system existed as a long-standing English tradition with its origins linked in documentation to the reign of Henry II (r. 1154-1189).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, William L. Shea argues that the origins of a distinct “militia” system can be traced even earlier in the historical record of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>2</sup> Operating and managed at the local level, soldiers in the militia maintained an impermanence that cast them in stark contrast to standing, professional soldiers.

Though the militia system maintained a central place in English martial practice for several hundred years, the kingship of Charles I (r. 1625-1649) marked a transition in English

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<sup>1</sup> Henry II issued the Assize of Arms in 1181. The document established military obligations and equipment requirements for subjects based on social status and income. Likewise, it indicated a timeline for acquiring the required equipment and mandated allegiance to the king when called upon. For the original document, see William Stubbs, *Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History*, ed. H.W.C. Davis, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 183-84.

<sup>2</sup> See William L. Shea, *The Virginia Militia in the Seventeenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 1. Shea describes the Anglo-Saxon “fyrd” as a “collection of every able-bodied freemen in the realm who could be summoned by the king in times of crisis to defend hearth and home against an invader.” The fyrd system was utilized against—and later adopted by—the Norman invaders in 1066.

history as well as in English views towards the military. During his tumultuous reign, war as well as conflict with Parliament were common themes. While a truly recognizable standing army ascended from the English Civil War of mid-century, troops conscripted and assembled for the Thirty Years' War shaped English attitudes and, more importantly, English legislation. Despite resistance from Parliament, the king ordered armies raised to serve in continental Europe. "English armies, under the erratic leadership of Charles I and his royal favorite the Duke of Buckingham," asserts Stephen Stearns, "carried on and lost military campaigns in the Netherlands, Spain, France and Northern Germany/Denmark. The armies that fought those campaigns were entirely conscripted."<sup>3</sup> Not always campaigning in continental Europe, troops had to be billeted and funded no matter the armies' geographical location. Housing and financing the king's men fell on the English people.

In fewer than three years, impressment resulted in nearly 50,000 new soldiers.<sup>4</sup> Though conscription raised the ire of some Englishmen, the practice was neither illegal nor unprecedented. Yet the cost and logistical needs of such large forces stood unparalleled in English memory. Without the consent of the legislature, Charles I levied new taxes on all Englishmen and attempted to extract forced loans from the higher classes.<sup>5</sup> Failure to pay the latter extralegal loans subjected citizens to arrest and imprisonment, sparking resistance to the practice. Besides the costs associated with impressment, equipping, transporting, and paying the soldiers, an added expense derived from billeting. Without adequate barracks or military

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Stearns, "Conscription and English Society in the 1620s," *Journal of British Studies* 11, no. 2 (May, 1972), 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, specifically mid-1624 to 1627.

<sup>5</sup> See Lois G. Schworer, "No Standing Armies!" *The Antiarmy ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 19-23. The taxes levied became known as "coat-and-conduct" money intended to help pay for military dress and transportation.

compounds, largely unnecessary due to England's customary localized militia system, officers and soldiers had to be housed in public buildings and private homes. Though citizens obligingly billeted conscripts as long as the government reimbursed them for their troubles, certain inconveniences and altercations seem likely between property holders and their guests, described by one English nobleman as "the mere scumme of our provinces."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the close proximity between soldiers and civilians resulted in the application of martial law on both. Despite the maneuvers of Charles I to establish new forms of income and to billet his armies, both the funds derived from and the restraint of the English people evaporated quickly. While the sheer size of the monarch's forces seemed exceptional, the public and legislative retort to the army proved extraordinary.

Though the armies of Charles I during the 1620s consisted of conscripts rather than professional men-at-arms, their loitering about England when not deployed to continental Europe and the extensive financial burden placed on the English certainly gave them the flavor of a standing army. Responding to injustices caused in large part from raising and maintaining such large forces, Parliament issued *The Petition of Right* to the monarch in June 1628. Laying out grievances one by one, many of the objections became foundational to subsequent English statutes as well as resounded in both colonial American and United States documents. Responding to taxes and forced loans collected to help fund the Thirty Years' War, the *Petition* stated that the king had no right to collect taxes without Parliament's assent and "no person shall be compelled to make any loans to the King against his will, because such loans were

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Lord Herbert, *The Expedition to the Isle of Rhe* (London: Whittingham and Wilkins, 1860), 46. The English Baron referred to the soldiers under his command in 1627.