Tocqueville on the American Soldier:

Honor, Patriotism, Pity, and the Suffering of the Soul

“Under the Ancien Régime,” writes historian Marc Bloch, “the nobility of the ancient lineage, in contrast with the aristocracy of office, continued to call itself the nobility ‘of the sword.’”[[1]](#footnote-1) Implied in this distinction is the feudal honor which adhered to the martial class, an honor which, in the encroachment of modernity, was under threat of *embourgeoisement*.[[2]](#footnote-2) Tocqueville, positioned as he was “between two worlds,” came to see this perspicaciously.[[3]](#footnote-3) What the end result would look like he encountered in America.

Tocqueville challenges many assumptions about the American soldier.[[4]](#footnote-4) He did write about the American soldier—indeed, *Democracy in America* (*DIA*) contains five chapters on the American military and war—although scholarly work on Tocqueville’s arguments is near nonexistent.[[5]](#footnote-5) This is unfortunate. Tocqueville reveals, first of all, that the American soldier has a definite place in American political life. There is an abiding disposition toward the soldier in America, one that has endured across time.[[6]](#footnote-6) This disposition—and this is Tocqueville’s second revelation—is not at all what most Americans believe it to be. Tocqueville argues that the American soldier is not honored. The military spirit is extinguished in democracies. Unlike the aristocracies of the past, which were, fundamentally, societies that emerged from the human activity of war, democracies are animated by a spirit of commerce. Democratic citizens strive for well-being (*bien-être*). The spirit of commerce and the spirit of war are opposed. For Tocqueville, the United States is, at its core, an anti-military society. The American disposition toward the soldier is not one of honor, but rather one of sympathy and pity. This argument finds support in contemporary scholarship.[[7]](#footnote-7) Tocqueville would explain the appearance of honor—for there does certainly seem to be an appearance—as an outflowing of American patriotism. For Tocqueville this is not the same thing as honor. Tocqueville does, importantly, allow for a shift toward honoring the martial in periods of great war, i.e., when commercial activity or political survival has come under threat. But these are exceptional cases. Americans, generally, do not esteem the soldier’s task. However, motivated as they are by a spirit of improvement (*esprit d’amélioration*) and by a desire for well-being, Americans have a strong regard for the suffering of the soldier, and they seek to reduce this suffering. They do so even though this suffering is traditionally regarded as necessary. Tocqueville cautions, however, against the American tendency to view the human things as infinitely workable. He suggests that attempts at improvement, beyond what might be natural limits, are not only delusional, but often, probably harmful. For Tocqueville democracies face what is ultimately a dilemma in regard to the soldier. For the features of democracy that cause Americans to care so much for the suffering of the soldier also impart upon the soldier a new kind of harm. As Tocqueville puts it, the democratic soldier suffers in his soul (*son âme souffre*). This is a consequence of not being honored. The extension of sympathy and pity does not alleviate this suffering, but, in fact, points back to its source. The soldier is not esteemed in America.

The first part of this paper presents Tocqueville’s understanding of honor, and examines his argument that the American soldier is not honored. The second part seeks to explain the appearance of honor. Here, I discuss Tocqueville’s view of American patriotism, and his thoughts on the possibility of a great war which might turn society temporarily toward the martial. In the third part of the paper I argue that, if the American soldier is not honored, his political existence will be defined, following Tocqueville, by being an object of sympathy and pity. In the paper’s fourth part I explain why, for Tocqueville, democracies face a dilemma in regard to the soldier. I examine his argument that democratic soldiers suffer spiritual harm.

1. The American soldier: the soldier who is not honored

“I can advise no young man to enter the Army,” wrote West Point superintendent Robert E. Lee in 1858. “The same application, the same self-denial, the same endurance, in any other profession, will advance him faster and faster.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Lee’s words, sent to a friend, reflect a sentiment that was common in nineteenth century America, and that would remain common to the present day.[[9]](#footnote-9) Why—the thinking goes—would one voluntarily enlist in the military, if one could make more money, and retain more freedom, doing something else?

Tocqueville expected this question. He thought that few, aside from eccentrics seeking adventure, would willingly join the American military.[[10]](#footnote-10) This was not because Americans feared death more than other peoples.[[11]](#footnote-11) Nor was it because the conditions of American military life were particularly arduous.[[12]](#footnote-12) Americans, Tocqueville thought, would eschew military service because Americans were a commercial people who, above all else, desired monetary gain, and its concomitant comforts.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Tocqueville’s argument that the American soldier is not honored must be understood in this way. It is based on the character of the American social state, not in changing historical particulars.[[14]](#footnote-14) It is not about the popularity of, say, the War of 1812. It is about—entirely—democracy, equality, and commercialism as abiding and defining features of American life.

Another notable commentator has advanced this type of argument. A century after Tocqueville, Samuel Huntington published (1957) *The Soldier and the State*. In this book, Huntington argued that (1) “Liberalism has always been the dominant ideology in the United States” and (2) “Liberalism does not understand and is hostile to military institutions and the military function.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Huntington’s point was that American liberalism interfered dangerously with the American military by preventing it from functioning professionally and objectively, i.e., in service of security rather than ideology. The book’s title, however, was somewhat misleading, since Huntington’s focus was not the soldier *per se*, but rather civil-military relations at the highest levels of government.[[16]](#footnote-16) Nonetheless, Huntington did note that, in the United States, “The military man *qua* military man…has never been popular.”[[17]](#footnote-17) He also observed: “In America…the regular has been rejected in both peace and war.”[[18]](#footnote-18) In the fashion of Tocqueville, Huntington explained these developments by reference to a deep and abiding American political character.

Tocqueville does not speak of liberalism, but democracy.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is because the American soldier is a democratic soldier that he is not honored. Democratic honor breaks sharply, Tocqueville tells us, from the martially oriented honor of aristocracy. But before examining these points, we must ask what Tocqueville means by the term, “honor.”

Tocqueville devotes a chapter of the second half of *DIA* to the concept of honor. It is clear from his notes that the chapter occupied an unusual involvement of his thought.[[20]](#footnote-20) He openly struggles to come to terms with the operation of honor in democratic societies. This is because it seems at first glance, and perhaps, at the final glance, that honor is unnatural to democracies.[[21]](#footnote-21) It is clear that, when thinking of honor, military honor is of special importance for Tocqueville. This can be inferred not only from the honor chapter itself, but also from Tocqueville’s notes, which suggest that, originally, Tocqueville’s extended treatment of honor accompanied the five chapters on the military.[[22]](#footnote-22) Honor remains an important part of those chapters, but Tocqueville seems to have judged the topic of too great an importance to confine to that discussion.[[23]](#footnote-23)

For Tocqueville, honor can be understood in two ways.[[24]](#footnote-24) First, honor can be taken as the *esteem* that attaches to an individual in virtue of certain actions performed. Second, honor might refer to *the system of rules* that determines which actions are to be esteemed in the first place. Tocqueville is concerned with honor in the second sense, i.e., with honor as a code that bestows praise and blame.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Tocqueville begins from the observation that honor appears differently in different times and places.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, he strongly rejects the notion that this is a matter of mere happenstance. To the contrary, the form honor assumes will be determined by the principles and needsof a political community.[[27]](#footnote-27)

This specificity distinguishes honor from virtue. For Tocqueville, virtuous actions are *not* virtuous because they advance the principles and needs of a particular society. Virtuous actions aim at meeting those needs that are *general* to the well-being of political communities across time and space.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Honor works by manipulating virtue and vice in the eyes of public opinion. Certain vices might be raised, or certain virtues might be lowered, so that the public distribution of esteem works to fulfillthe *unique principles and needs* of a political community. “The general and permanent interest of humanity is that men do not kill each other; but it can happen that the particular and temporary interest of a people or of a class is, in certain cases, to excuse and even to honor the homicide.”[[29]](#footnote-29) The prescriptions of honor derive from the “singularity of the social state.”[[30]](#footnote-30) “Each one of these associations forms like a particular species within the human race; and although it does not differ essentially from the mass of men, it holds itself a little apart and feels needs that are its own.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Honor manipulates praise and blame so that the principles and needs of a political community are met and fulfilled.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Tocqueville hurries into an example.[[33]](#footnote-33) This example is aristocratic honor. It is important to consider, in order to fully appreciate Tocqueville’s position that the American soldier is not honored.

Modern aristocracy, Tocqueville tells us, is born within feudalism.[[34]](#footnote-34) Feudal organization is organization for war.[[35]](#footnote-35) It is the reality of war—as an ever present possibility—that determines the character of feudal politics and the nature of feudal honor.[[36]](#footnote-36) Correspondingly, feudal honor prizes above all else military courage.[[37]](#footnote-37) It esteems the drive to greatness, and the willingness to take risks. Essential to its inner workings is that the concept of glory is operative.[[38]](#footnote-38) The noble seeks renown, so much so that it is better to be infamous than unknown. Great crimes are preferable to small gains.[[39]](#footnote-39) There is a disdain for work, for small pleasures, for softness of spirit, and for preoccupation with material things.[[40]](#footnote-40) Modern aristocracy emerges in a fundamental way from the phenomenon of war, and consequently aristocratic honor reflects the principles and needs of a martial society.[[41]](#footnote-41)

This is not the case in America. “In the United States, warrior valor is little prized.”[[42]](#footnote-42) American honor is commercial honor.[[43]](#footnote-43) This arises from the singularity of the American social state, which is thoroughly commercial.[[44]](#footnote-44) Consequently, “The American calls a noble and estimable ambition what our fathers of the Middle Ages named servile cupidity; in the same way the American gives the name of blind and barbaric fury to the conquering fervor and warrior spirit that threw our fathers into new battles every day.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Americans elevate those virtues that assist in the creation of wealth. They value regularity and steadiness in habits; a willingness to take risks; and, of course, work.[[46]](#footnote-46) Americans esteem courage, but of a commercial variety.[[47]](#footnote-47) War threatens to destabilize the peace within which commerce thrives, and to harm well-being (*bien-être*), toward which Americans labor.[[48]](#footnote-48) For these reasons Americans eschew *l’humeur guerrière*. Instead, “Americans put a kind of heroism in their way of doing commerce.”[[49]](#footnote-49) They are, as Tocqueville put it in a particularly disenchanted passage, “the coldest, most calculating, least military and, if I can put it this way, the most prosaic of all the peoples of the world.”[[50]](#footnote-50)

American honor, as commercial honor, is not predisposed to honoring the soldier. American commercialism, Tocqueville tells us, plays a leading role in extinguishing (*éteindre*) the military spirit.[[51]](#footnote-51) And with the death of the military spirit, the American soldier is no longer honored.

When the military spirit deserts a people, the military career immediately ceases to be honored, and men of war fall to the lowest rank of public officials. They are little esteemed and no longer understood. Then the opposite of what is seen in aristocratic centuries happens. It is no longer the principal citizens who enter the army, but the least. Men give themselves to military ambition only when no other is allowed.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The argument that the soldier is not honored in democracies is put forward three times by Tocqueville in the five chapters on war.[[53]](#footnote-53) It is stated less explicitly a fourth time.[[54]](#footnote-54) And the notion that the military spirit is, at the very least, weakened in democracies is advanced on four occasions.[[55]](#footnote-55) (In Tocqueville’s papers we learn that the initial title for the first war chapter was “The Military Spirit.” The manuscripts for all of the chapters were found in a jacket entitled “The Influence of Equality on Warrior Passions.”[[56]](#footnote-56)) It is Tocqueville’s position that the democratic social state is at odds with the soldier.

Tocqueville clearly believed that the standard practice in centuries of democracy would be to avoid the task of the soldier as anything but a last resort.[[57]](#footnote-57) At the time he wrote the first half of *DIA*, Tocqueville believed that conscription was so contrary to the spirit of democracy in America that he ventured it could probably never be instituted.[[58]](#footnote-58) In the second of the war chapters, though, Tocqueville takes it for granted that democracies will have to resort to some form of compulsory enlistment.[[59]](#footnote-59) Importantly, the fundamental problem did not change for Tocqueville, only his interpretation of its consequences: i.e., the reason democracies have to conscript is the same reason that conscription is bound to be unpopular, namely, soldiering is not honored in the democratic social state.

Tocqueville thought that the not-honoring of the American soldier would come to be self-reinforcing. Leading citizens, he expected, would shun the military career, given its low social status, and pursue instead—indeed, unstoppably—the activities of commerce.[[60]](#footnote-60) This would create a “vicious circle.”[[61]](#footnote-61) “The elite of the nation avoids the military career, because this career is not honored; and it is not honored, because the elite of the nation no longer enters it.”[[62]](#footnote-62) The consequence of this process, according to Tocqueville, is that the military will come to be “inferior to the country itself.”[[63]](#footnote-63) The army, Tocqueville says, will be less intelligent than the people, their habits cruder.[[64]](#footnote-64) They will form “a small nation apart,” more specifically, a “small uncivilized nation.”[[65]](#footnote-65) This, needless to say, will not be an army that elites wish to join.

To Tocqueville’s point, Edward Coffman, perhaps the leading social historian of the American regular army, writes the following, characterizing the period between 1815-1860.

Enlisted men had an unenviable place in American society between wars. The best a soldier could hope for was that his fellow Americans would ignore him, and most did. When he attracted comment he became an object of contempt and fear. It could be argued that commentators held similar views of immigrants and laborers, the classes from which most men in the ranks came. But the man who enlisted incurred added opprobrium because he not only opted out of the competitive economic system, but worse still, he also voluntarily gave up rights which civilians enjoyed. If these were not enough to condemn the soldier as a man, membership in an institution which so much of the public despised and feared would arouse suspicion as to his competence.[[66]](#footnote-66)

This attitude toward the regular solider, on Coffman’s view, endured, during peacetime, and with gradual improvement, from the American Revolution to the Second World War.[[67]](#footnote-67) Scholars have suggested that—in peacetime—the American soldier remained a figure forgotten by society until the 1980s.[[68]](#footnote-68) Only then, with the efforts of Ronald Reagan, and with the assistance of professional consultants, would the army be successfully rebranded as an opportunity to “be all you can be.”[[69]](#footnote-69) This is not to say that the American soldier had become a subject of honor, but, to the contrary, that the up-and-coming volunteer force had replaced “the logic of citizenship with the logic of the market.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

Tocqueville, maybe, would not be surprised. At one point in his notes he wrote that, “The natural tendency of a democratic people is to have an army of mercenaries.”[[71]](#footnote-71) This conclusion, to his thinking at the time, apparently seemed a way to reconcile American commercialism with the need for military enlistment. The military might be made into a pure labor market. For the most part the military was already such a market, except for occasional compulsory service, and acts of volunteerism, certainly almost always during wartime, that had little to do with financial incentive. But a purely commercial military could, probably, never have been imagined by Tocqueville, at least not in any American future he would have recognized. For even in America, notions of the old honor lingered, though problematically. “You still find scattered, among the opinions of the Americans, a few detached notions of the ancient aristocratic honor of Europe. These traditional opinions are in very small number; they have weak roots and little power. It is a religion of which you allow a few temples to continue to exist, but in which you no longer believe.”[[72]](#footnote-72) The question, then, is whether, and to what extent, old beliefs might be resurrected in times of crisis.

1. Explaining the appearance of honor: American patriotism and great war

In the first months of the Civil War, writes Bell Irvin Wiley, patriotism was ablaze.[[73]](#footnote-73) The soldier, lamented by Robert E. Lee three years before, had become a figure of note. In the North recruitment took the form of mass meetings. So frenzied were enlistments that the problem facing authorities was “not to obtain men but to hold volunteers to manageable numbers.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Southerners were eager to be off to war.[[75]](#footnote-75) Those who hesitated to enlist were subject to public pressure, sometimes harassment.[[76]](#footnote-76) Across the country, romantic affections turned toward the soldier.[[77]](#footnote-77) The motives of most who would fight were not mainly financial.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Tocqueville thought that in periods of great war democratic societies might turn toward honoring the martial. This might happen if a war were of such an intensity that it tore citizens away from commercial activity. Then, war itself might become “the great and sole industry.”[[79]](#footnote-79) Tocqueville, however, did not think a shift toward the martial could be total in a democratic society. Instead, there was, in a more nuanced way, “a hidden connection between military mores and democratic mores that war exposes.”[[80]](#footnote-80) It would be, Tocqueville thought, the same desires and passions that attached democratic peoples to peace that would drive them forward on the field of battle.[[81]](#footnote-81) War, like commerce, offered opportunity for advancement.[[82]](#footnote-82) Yet it was not a pure transposition of peacetime ethics. In war, Tocqueville writes, the desires of soldiers are “expanded and inflamed.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Attachment to well-being must be left behind.[[84]](#footnote-84) Elite citizens will be drawn to the war, and many will compete for “military honors” and “military greatness.”[[85]](#footnote-85) For Tocqueville, honor arises from the principles and needs of a political community. For this reason, in periods of great war, citizens of democracy might honor the soldier’s task.

What of the appearance of martial honor outside of these periods? The image of the American soldier in the American mind is accompanied by the image of the American flag.[[86]](#footnote-86) Tocqueville did not doubt American patriotism. He thought it conspicuous and avid.[[87]](#footnote-87) Where patriotic sentiments touch the soldier, they might be mistaken for honor.

Tocqueville understood two types of patriotism: *patriotisme instinctif* and *patriotisme rèflèchi*.[[88]](#footnote-88) Both work upon the soldier. For Tocqueville, instinctive patriotism is an immediate and natural feeling toward the place of one’s birth.[[89]](#footnote-89) It is a feeling of affection. “This instinctive love is mingled with the taste for ancient customs, with respect for ancestors, and the memory of the past; those who experience it cherish their country as one loves the paternal home.”[[90]](#footnote-90) Of relevance is the fact that instinctive patriotism allows for personification. “Some peoples have been found who have, in some way, personified the country and have caught sight of it in the prince. So they have transferred to him a part of the sentiments that compose patriotism; they have boasted about his triumphs and have been proud of his power.”[[91]](#footnote-91) This has been the fate of the American soldier—not for all, indeed hardly for any of his history, but it does, importantly, help to explain realities of the present. Andrew Bacevich notes: “More than America’s matchless material abundance or even the effusions of its pop culture, the nation’s arsenal of high-tech weaponry and the soldiers who employ that arsenal have come to signify who we are and what we stand for.”[[92]](#footnote-92) That this personification is not in concert with the actual distribution of honor in America is of no relevance to the instinctive patriotism which animates it. For instinctive patriotism is not mediated by rational thought. “It is itself a kind of religion; it does not reason, it believes; it feels; it acts.”[[93]](#footnote-93)

Reflective patriotism emerges in America through democratic practices. Through participation in political life citizens come to see that their individual interests are bound up with those of the state.[[94]](#footnote-94) They also come to view the works of the state as the products of their own hands, for they are made democratically.[[95]](#footnote-95) In these ways democracy leads to a patriotic elision of self and state that is mediated by rational thought and is therefore reflective. For Tocqueville, two idiosyncrasies of America’s *patriotisme rèflèchi* stand out: it is protective, and it is boastful.

American patriotism is protective because of democratic craftsmanship. When an American regards his country, he regards “his work.”[[96]](#footnote-96) He therefore will not suffer criticism, for it is “not only his country that you then attack, it is himself.”[[97]](#footnote-97)

So America is a country of liberty, where, to hurt no one, the foreigner must not speak freely about individuals, nor the State, nor the governed, nor those who govern, nor public enterprises, nor private enterprises, about nothing in fact that you find there, except perhaps for climate and soil; even then you find some Americans ready to defend the one and the other as if they had taken part in their formation.[[98]](#footnote-98)

More than any of the above, Americans will not tolerate criticism of American soldiers. This has particularly been the case since the time of the First Gulf War. It was then that—reacting against memories of Vietnam—popular and political opinion decided that one could, indeed that one must, “support the troops,” whatever one thought about the aims or execution of an American war.[[99]](#footnote-99)

In the first letter he sent back to his family from America, Tocqueville wrote: “These people seem to me to stink of national pride.”[[100]](#footnote-100) Tocqueville thought American patriotism boastful. He called it a “talkative” patriotism and an “irritable” patriotism.[[101]](#footnote-101) Americans, Tocqueville believed, suffered from national vanity. This arose from the insecurities of a people of equality, their stations uncertain, their fortunes fleeting.[[102]](#footnote-102) Americans boast of their liberty, their morality, the beauty of their country.[[103]](#footnote-103) It is predictable that they would also boast of their military. This began in the colonial period. It was not, then, it must be emphasized, the regular army that was aggrandized, but the colonial militia.[[104]](#footnote-104) There prevailed at the time what Don Higginbotham has called “the militia myth.”[[105]](#footnote-105) “Colonial Americans boasted of human tools of war—of minds and bodies: minds that acted out of disinterested patriotism and that were attached to bodies of upstanding citizens. As fighters they were infinitely superior to the riffraff thought to be the mainstay of European professional armies.”[[106]](#footnote-106) This would not be the last time Americans would take an exaggerated view of their soldiers.[[107]](#footnote-107)

The patriotic vaunting of soldiers is not the honoring of soldiers. Nor is honor to be found in the identification of soldier with country or in the protective instincts that castigate criticism and offer impassioned support for the troops. For Tocqueville, patriotic sentiment is not genuine esteem. Honor arises from the principles and needs of a political community. The American soldier is not honored because of the character of the American social state.

Two objections stand out. First, it might be noted that, at the time Tocqueville wrote, the American military was small, and the United States did not face serious military threats on its borders. (Tocqueville, in fact, makes both of these observations several times.[[108]](#footnote-108)) Today, the American military is the most powerful in the world, and the United States is no longer isolated from military threats. Given these developments, might it not be possible that American honor has shifted toward the soldier?

The problem with this objection is that the developments in question do not touch upon the forces that Tocqueville saw as responsible for the death of the military spirit in America.

The ever-increasing number of property owners friendly to peace, the development of personal wealth, which war so rapidly devours, this leniency of morals, this softness of heart, this predisposition toward pity that equality inspires, this coldness of reason that makes men hardly sensitive to the poetic and violent emotions which arise among arms, all these causes join together to extinguish military spirit.[[109]](#footnote-109)

These forces are, first of all, commercial, and, second of all, tied to democratic *mœurs*. (I have discussed already the influence of commerce. I take up the subject of *mœurs* in the next section.) These forces have, to put it mildly, *expanded* and *deepened* in America since the time of Tocqueville’s observations. This suggests even less honor for the martial in American society.

Second, one might put forward for Tocqueville’s consideration the reverence shown to the fallen soldier in America. It is probably the case that in the United States today the most sacred of places is not a church, but a military cemetery. There is, it might be said, no greater evidence for the honoring of the soldier in America than the regard with which those who have fallen in war are treated.

Tocqueville would not deny that honor might be bestowed upon fallen soldiers. If a soldier falls in war, to him will be a share of the martial honor that war brings forth. Beyond, this, though, it must also be recognized that the treatment of fallen soldiers is deeply political.[[110]](#footnote-110) This has been the case in the United States since the Revolutionary War.[[111]](#footnote-111) Moreover, patriotic feeling is deepened in war, and this feeling will be extended to the treatment of the fallen soldier.[[112]](#footnote-112) Finally, the fallen soldier obtains that respect that is general to the dead.[[113]](#footnote-113) For these reasons, the honoring of the fallen soldier cannot be taken simply.

1. The political existence of the American soldier: sympathy and pity

The suffering of the American soldier did not begin in Vietnam.[[114]](#footnote-114) Nor did the notion of the veteran as a victim of government neglect or popular ingratitude.[[115]](#footnote-115) Vietnam did not establish a new place for the soldier in American political life so much as it revealed—in extremity—what that place has always been destined to be, given Tocqueville’s analysis of the American character. For Tocqueville, the American soldier’s political existence was fated to be defined, not by the aristocratic honor of the sword, but by the sympathy and pity of a democratic people.

 Democratic peoples, Tocqueville thought, were naturally disposed toward sympathetic sentiments. It was not, necessarily, that they felt these sentiments more deeply than other peoples, but rather that they extended them to a greater range of objects.[[116]](#footnote-116) For this equality was responsible. It is easier to sympathize, Tocqueville noted, with those like one’s self (*semblables*).[[117]](#footnote-117) Democracy produces similarity.[[118]](#footnote-118) Therefore the democratic citizen will be quick to sympathy. “So there is no misery that he cannot easily imagine and whose extent is not revealed to him by a secret instinct. Whether it concerns strangers or enemies, imagination immediately puts him in their place. It mingles something personal in his pity, and makes him suffer as the body of his fellow man is torn apart.”[[119]](#footnote-119)

The democratic *penchant* toward pity must be explained, in part, by the readiness with which democratic citizens come to depictions of suffering. Democracies prefer the real to the ideal.[[120]](#footnote-120) Their instinct is for the useful, not the beautiful.[[121]](#footnote-121) If Americans are the most prosaic of peoples it is because the aim of poetry is not to represent the true but to embellish it.[[122]](#footnote-122) Aristocracy produced “beautiful illusions” about human nature.[[123]](#footnote-123) Achilles was a creation of aristocratic poetry.[[124]](#footnote-124) Democratic poetry, however, takes as its subject “humanity itself.”[[125]](#footnote-125) No longer will poetry “live by legends,” which, it must be said, elevated, and palliated, violence in the aristocratic consciousness.[[126]](#footnote-126) Democratic poetry subsists on “human destinies.”[[127]](#footnote-127) It will depict, then, in democratic centuries, not only “unprecedented prosperity,” but also “incomprehensible miseries.”[[128]](#footnote-128)

This combination of prosperity and misery was nowhere better captured than in the American postwar literature of the 1920s. Most incisive for the soldier was Hemingway’s portrayal of the wounded veteran Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. American doughboys may well have thought themselves on an adventure, as David Kennedy has pointed out, but the war nonetheless constituted the last gasp of “the medieval romantic tale.”[[129]](#footnote-129) Consequently, World War II would be fought, as Fussell put it, in an “ideological vacuum.”[[130]](#footnote-130) The American G.I. viewed his task pragmatically.[[131]](#footnote-131) The quieting of idealism allowed for a sympathetic portrayal of the American soldier, most notably, perhaps, in the work of Ernie Pyle and Bill Mauldin.[[132]](#footnote-132) It is not insignificant that this was achieved during World War II, a great war by Tocqueville’s definition. During the war, the soldier was, more than anything, a figure of admiration.[[133]](#footnote-133) After the war, this admiration yielded, in part, to concern for the veteran’s well-being. “Veterans might be victims of government neglect, of insensitive civilians, of the housing shortage, of debilitating physical injuries, of haunting wartime experiences.”[[134]](#footnote-134) Yet the victory of the war, and notions of heroism, prevented a predominance of sympathetic sentiment. Future American wars would not have this same effect.

To understand the American disposition toward the soldier, it is necessary to understand the American attachment to well-being (*bien-être*). Tocqueville believed the pursuit of well-being to be *l’objet principal* of democratic government.[[135]](#footnote-135) He described love for well-being as “the distinctive character” of Americans; the “national and dominant taste;” and the “salient and indelible feature of democratic ages.”[[136]](#footnote-136) *Bien-être* becomes the *idée fixe* of democracies because of equality. Equality demands that positions be unfixed. It is possible, therefore, to improve one’s fortune.[[137]](#footnote-137) The ambition to well-being drives American commerce.[[138]](#footnote-138) The pursuit of well-being, however, is not limited to the commercial realm. It aims, more generally, at the reduction of society’s miseries.[[139]](#footnote-139) It is joined, for this reason, to the “spirit of improvement” (*l’esprit d’amélioration*) one finds in democracies.[[140]](#footnote-140) This spirit of improvement seeks to alleviate suffering, particularly the suffering of society’s poor.[[141]](#footnote-141) But this is not all. There exists in democracies a universal impulsion toward improvement and progress.[[142]](#footnote-142) Innovation is basic to the American character.[[143]](#footnote-143) The spirit of improvement arises from the opportunities of equality.[[144]](#footnote-144) It takes life, as well, from civic participation;[[145]](#footnote-145) from the zeitgeistof change (capitalistic, revolutionary, ideational);[[146]](#footnote-146) and from the optimism of Enlightenment philosophies of history.[[147]](#footnote-147) The American believes everything can be made better. “This spirit is found in fact in all his works; he introduces it into his political laws, into his religious doctrines, into his theories of social economy, into his private industry; he carries it everywhere with him, deep in the woods, as well as within the cities.”[[148]](#footnote-148) The spirit of improvement is boundless, not only in *extension*, but also in *intension*. The American believes that the human things might be improved *indefinitely*.[[149]](#footnote-149) “All have an intense faith in human perfectibility,” Tocqueville observed.[[150]](#footnote-150) The belief in *limitless* improvement distinguishes democracy from aristocracy. “It is not that aristocratic peoples absolutely deny man the ability to perfect himself,” Tocqueville wrote. Rather, “They do not judge it to be indefinite; they conceive of amelioration, not change; they imagine the condition of society becoming better, but not different; and, while admitting that humanity has made great progress and that it can still make more progress, they enclose humanity in advance within impassable limits.”[[151]](#footnote-151) The notion of natural limits is left by the wayside in ages of democracy.[[152]](#footnote-152) It is not only a matter of ephemeral extremism.[[153]](#footnote-153) The democratic belief in *infinite improvability* marks the *continuous*, and *relentless* pursuit of democracy’s *objet principal*. Well-being will reach further.

It is of little consequence to the democratic mind that the suffering of the soldier is traditionally viewed as necessary. Tocqueville thought that Americans would seek to extend well-being even into those domains where suffering has been regarded as inevitable. The clearest example of Tocqueville’s view is found in his book with Gustave de Beaumont on the prison system in the United States. Tocqueville and Beaumont encountered, in America, a movement away from the traditional severities of the prison.

Everyday punishments which wound humanity, become supplanted by milder ones; and in the most civilized states of the north, where these punishments continue in the written laws, their application has become so rare that they are to be considered as fallen into disuse. The impulse of improvement is given. Those states which have as yet done nothing, are conscious of their deficiency; they envy those which have preceded them in this career, and are impatient to imitate them…. The various states in which we have found a penitentiary system, pursue all the same end: the amelioration of the prison discipline.[[154]](#footnote-154)

For Tocqueville, the problem with prison reform in the United States was *not* that it sought to mitigate punishment. It was, rather, that the designs of the prison reformers were not based in experience. They arose instead from democratic *mœurs* and sentiments; from the democratic passion for well-being; and from the democratic belief in limitless improvement. It was a matter of democratic *impulse*, not a matter of realism.

There are in America as well as in Europe, estimable men whose minds feed upon philosophical reveries, and whose extreme sensibility feels the want of some illusion. These men, for whom philanthropy has become a matter of necessity, find in the penitentiary system a nourishment for this generous passion. Starting from abstractions which deviate more or less from reality, they consider man, however far advanced in crime, as still susceptible of being brought back to virtue. They think that the most infamous being may yet recover the sentiment of honour; and pursuing consistently this opinion, they hope for an epoch when all criminals may be radically reformed, the prisons be entirely empty, and justice find no crimes to punish.[[155]](#footnote-155)

Tocqueville and Beaumont were skeptical about the high aspirations of America’s prison reformers.[[156]](#footnote-156) In fact, they thought that the reforms might have dangerous effects.[[157]](#footnote-157) This is not surprising, for Tocqueville did not believe in human perfectibility.[[158]](#footnote-158) Americans, nonetheless, in pursuit of well-being, seek to alleviate suffering everywhere. (Their sympathetic sentiments, Tocqueville tells us, are eventually extended to the entire human race.[[159]](#footnote-159)) If Americans will have such a pressing regard for the suffering of *criminals*, it stands to reason they will have greater regard still for the suffering of soldiers.

There have always been signs that the American soldier was to be, in his political existence, an object of sympathy and pity.[[160]](#footnote-160) Through the First World War, however, this political existence was obscured by the resurrection of martial myths. If these myths had died by the time of the Second World War, the greatness of the war, and the weight of its victory, nonetheless prevented sympathetic sentiment from achieving predominance in the public sphere, for it was eclipsed by admiration. After this, however, nothing remained to conceal or displace the political existence natural to the democratic soldier. Sympathy ascended. It is within this context that Vietnam should be understood. Already, in Korea, the soldier had been depicted as a victim. His place in political life was that of a figure who suffered.[[161]](#footnote-161) The reaction of the 1980s—Reagan’s veneration of the soldier; the marketing of the All-Volunteer Force; the coming together of a “New American Militarism”—would not succeed in putting sympathetic sentiment back in the box.[[162]](#footnote-162) Depictions of the suffering soldier have prevailed in film.[[163]](#footnote-163) As for societal attitudes toward the soldier, commentators have noted a “rise of the therapeutic.”[[164]](#footnote-164) Americans—not least of them journalists and academics—have become transfixed by the suffering of the soldier, particularly the soldier’s psychological suffering.[[165]](#footnote-165) This sympathetic bearing has not gone unnoticed by the soldiers themselves. With it, they have felt ill at ease. There is a sense that American sentiment might involve more pity than respect.[[166]](#footnote-166) This returns us to the question of honor.

1. The American soldier: a democratic dilemma

Hannah Arendt noted that pity entails distance.[[167]](#footnote-167) This distinguishes it from compassion, the visceral co-suffering of one individual with another.[[168]](#footnote-168) Compassion, Arendt thought, would, because of its goodness, regard suffering with muteness and gesture. Pity, in contrast, would speak, so much so that one might speak of its loquacity.[[169]](#footnote-169)

The expression most detested by American soldiers returned home is, “Thank you for your service.”[[170]](#footnote-170) This is because the expression implies a piteous distance. The soldier has done something that one, one’s self, did not wish to do. The task for which the soldier is thanked is one that is not esteemed. There is a recognition on the part of the soldier that he has defended the interests of a society that is not interested in him. This absence of interest if felt by the one who offers thanks. It is the source of the fear and uncertainty—what is really shame—that holds the heart upon learning that one is addressing a veteran. The common response of the soldier—that one does not need to be thanked, that one was just doing one’s job—is a reassertion of dignity. Work, if not soldiering, is something that is honored.

The American soldier is treated well because he is not treated well. The more he is thanked and supported, the more that he comes to see himself as the object of sympathy that he is. Sympathy is the political existence that obtains for the democratic soldier in the absence of honor.

Tocqueville believed that the not-honoring of the American soldier inflicted upon the soldier a kind of spiritual harm. This argument is advanced twice in the chapters on war.

Although the military man has in general a better-regulated and milder existence in democratic times than in all the others, he nonetheless experiences an unbearable uneasiness there; his body is better nourished, better clothed, but his soul suffers.[[171]](#footnote-171)

I have equally shown how among democratic nations, in times of peace, the military career was little honored and not much followed.This public disfavor is a very heavy burden that weighs on the spirit of the army. Souls are as if bent down by it.[[172]](#footnote-172)

Only the second of these passages appears in the published text. The first passage was struck-through by Tocqueville. Tocqueville replaced the struck-through passage with the following.

So you must not be astonished if democratic armies often appear restless, muttering, and poorly satisfied with their lot, even though the physical condition there is usually very much milder and discipline less rigid than in all the others. The soldier feels himself in an inferior position, and his wounded pride ends by giving him the taste for war, which makes him necessary, or the love of revolutions, during which he hopes to conquer, weapons in hand, the political influence and the individual consideration that others deny him.[[173]](#footnote-173)

These passages point to the moral significance of Tocqueville’s understanding of the American soldier.

For Tocqueville, the not-honoring of the American soldier is not a harmless affair. The American soldier suffers in his soul. This suffering—the passages make clear—*does not arise from the conditions of military life*. The problem, to the contrary, is that the soldier is out of placein the democratic social state*.* This creates for the soldier *a crisis of being*. Sympathy and pity do not alleviate this crisis, but, in fact, point back to its source. The soldier is not honored. The spiritual suffering of the soldier is *deeply political*. It existed before the trenches of the First World War, before Vietnam, and before the deadly munitions of the American Civil War. It is not a matter of historical contingency. It is a problem of democracy.

Tocqueville saw that democracies face a dilemma where the soldier is concerned. The same forces that lead democracies to care so much for the suffering of the soldier also impart upon the soldier a new kind of harm. These forces are the forces of the democratic social state.

Tocqueville believed that everything in the world has a limit.[[174]](#footnote-174) The pursuit of well-being, taken too far, might harm well-being.[[175]](#footnote-175) This is the contradiction democracies face with the soldier. Americans, however, have little regard for limits.[[176]](#footnote-176)

The spiritual suffering of the soldier involves immediate harms. The consequences reach further. Tocqueville caught sight of this. It is why he revised the first of the passages. He came to see that the American soldier might develop a troubled relationship to violence. Denied the honors of American society, the soldier might attach himself more fixedly to the pursuits of war. However, this quest for recognition, on Tocqueville’s reasoning, is almost certain to fail. The spirit of war, Tocqueville believed, will not give itself readily to the democratic soldier.[[177]](#footnote-177) He will not easily leave behind the spirit of the society from which he comes. He will experience inner turmoil. Moreover, and more importantly, military accomplishment, except in exceptional circumstances, will not win the esteem of the American public. Any quest to find fulfillment in war will remain ever-frustrated.

1. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Peter Berger, “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honour,” in *Liberalism and Its Critics*, ed. Michael J. Sandel (New York: New York University Press, 1984), pp. 149-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I have the term “soldier” throughout this article, since Tocqueville’s focus was the American army. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The sole exception that treats these chapters seriously is Eliot A. Cohen, “Tocqueville on War,” *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 3, no.1, 1985, pp. 204-222. More recently, and more distantly related, there have appeared studies of Tocqueville, Algeria, and French imperialism. See Roger Boesche, “The Dark Side of Tocqueville: On War and Emoire,” *Review of Politics*, 67, no. 4, 2005, pp. 737-752; Margaret Kohn, “Empire’s Law: Alexis de Tocqueville on Colonialism and the State of Exception,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 41, no. 2, 2008, pp. 255-278;Jennifer Pitts, “Empire and Democracy: Tocqueville and the Algeria Question,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 8, no. 3, 2000, pp. 295-318; Cheryl B. Welch, “Colonial Violence and the Rhetoric of Evasion: Tocqueville on Algeria,” *Political Theory*, 31, no. 2, 2003, pp. 235-264. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A recurring shortcoming of the literature is a tendency to trace how certain wars or war periods might have impacted the political existence of the American soldier without ever exploring whether this political existence might have an enduring character with deep foundations, tied to what Tocqueville would call the social state. See Richard H. Kohn, “TheSocial History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research,” *American Historical Review,* 86, no. 3, 1981, pp. 553-67. Kohn warns explicitly about the dangers of generalizing about the American soldier (pp. 560-563). For purposes of historical scholarship, the cautious thrust of his argument deserves to be taken seriously. Yet, for a political theorist such as Tocqueville, it might be too far to say, as Kohn does at one point, that “The truth of the matter is that the ‘American Soldier’ never existed” (p. 560). For, as Kohn also observes, “Certainly many aspects of military organization and experience are timeless” (ibid.). Tocqueville’s argument, tied to the social state, is between these extremes. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is cited throughout. For the social history of the American soldier, Kohn’s synopsis is still the best introduction. For the social history of the American military, the most recent review is Wayne E. Lee, “Mind and Matter—Cultural Analysis in American Military History: A Look at the State of the Field,” *The Journal of American History*, 93, no. 4, 2007, pp. 1116-1142. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Historical-Critical Edition of *De la démocratie en Amérique*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer, a bilingual French-English edition in four volumes (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), p. 1185. This edition contains, beneath the main text, extensive writing from Tocqueville’s notes and manuscripts. When I have cited this material I have begun my citation with the term, “notes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “Most of them adore chance and fear death much less than pain” (ibid., p. 1175). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Tocqueville thought the American army life was relatively mild, and very well equipped (ibid., p. 1158). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For a discussion of the term “service” as a descriptor for participation in the military, see David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 154. Kennedy’s point is broadly Hegelian, and certainly Tocquevillian: that “service” reconciled “the autonomy of the individual will” with “the necessity of cooperative endeavor.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For Tocqueville’s understanding of the social state, see Michael P. Zuckert, “On Social State,” in *Tocqueville’s Defense of Human Liberty*, eds. Peter A. Lawler and Joseph Alulis (New York: Garland Publishers, 1993), pp. 3-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 143, 144 respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is made clear in the book’s subtitle. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., p. 158. Here, though, the discussion is not about typical soldiers, but rather elite military commanders, and how it is they might become politically popular (e.g. Eisenhower) in a society hostile to the military. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For Tocqueville’s liberalism see Roger Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). For Tocqueville on democracy see Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, trans. John Waggoner (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Tocqueville *DIA*, notes, pp. 1093-1115. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See fn. 43 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., notes, p. 1093. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., notes, p. 1171. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Tocqueville’s footnote, ibid., p. 1093. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., p. 1094. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., pp, 1099, 1114. Compare to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: “Praiseworthy to them is whatever they consider difficult; what is indispensable and difficult is called good, and whatever stems from the highest need and still liberates, the rarest, the most difficult—that is praised as holy.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Tocqueville, *DIA*, notes, pp. 1094, 1096, 1111. In these notes, Tocqueville explicitly presents this idea of virtue, and distinguishes it from honor. (For this distinction in the published text, see p. 1110.) I would argue, furthermore, that this idea of virtue runs throughout the opening of the published chapter on honor. In the first eight paragraphs, the word *vertu* does not appear. Tocqueville speaks instead of “permanent and general needs” felt by all of humanity; of “simple notions of the just and the unjust, which are spread over the whole earth;” and of “good” and “evil” (pp. 1093-1096). The note on p. 1095, I claim, is the interpretive key to understanding Tocqueville’s use of so many terms. For Tocqueville, “true and false, just and unjust, good and evil, vice and virtue” are *not* “relative things depending on the perspective from which you see them” (notes, p. 1095). *This* description applies to honor, which is a matter of public esteem, and which *varies* according to the “singularity of the social state” (p. 1098). For Tocqueville, virtue, justice, and good and evil occupy a domain *different than honor does*, a domain that arises in accordance with meeting the needs of human communities *everywhere*. It is *these different domains* Tocqueville means to contrast. This contrast is important not only for understanding Tocqueville’s account of honor, but also for framing Tocqueville as a thinker more generally. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Tocqueville, *DIA*,pp. 1094-1096. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., p. 1098. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid., pp. 1094-1095. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., pp. 1095-1096. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. He writes here: “There is nothing more unproductive for the human mind that an abstract idea” (ibid., p. 1096). Tocqueville’s worry, here, seems to provide more evidence of an awareness on his part about the importance of the topic at hand. See also a consideration in one of his drafts on honor: “If I am understood, I am assured of not hurting anyone. But I am afraid of not being able to make myself easily understood” (notes, p. 1171). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., p. 1099. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. On these points, cf. Bloch, *Feudal Society*, pp. 151, 289-299. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Tocqueville, *DIA*, p. 1099. Cf. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Tocqueville, *DIA*, p. 1099. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., pp. 400-401, 782. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., p. 1098. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., p. 1099. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., p. 1104. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., pp. 1103-1105. It should be noted that Tocqueville hesitated on the question of whether Americans can have honor (pp. 1105-1106, notes, pp. 1170-1171). The problem ultimately for Tocqueville is one of inequality. Honor requires inequality (p. 1113) since it is based on differentiation, and yet Americans are the people of equality *par excellence*. Tocqueville resolves, however, that American honor does exist, but that it is based upon class rather than caste (pp. 1105-1106). Class, unlike caste, is fickle and changing (pp. 1013-1017), and consequently Tocqueville concludes that American honor, or democratic honor, cannot be as robust as honor in aristocracy (pp. 1106-1110). For a treatment of Tocqueville on honor, see Sharon R. Krause, *Liberalism with Honor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Tocqueville traces American commercialism to the equality at the center of the democratic social state. See ibid., pp. 316, 338, 946, 972-973. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., p. 1103. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., pp. 1103-1105. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid., pp. 1104-1105. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., pp. 952, 1139, 1154. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., p. 641. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., p. 454. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid., p. 1154. The passage is quoted in full below. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., p. 1158. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The other two places are ibid., pp. 1171, 1173. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., pp. 1165-1167. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., pp. 1153-1154, 1158, 1181, 1185. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., notes, p. 1153. The text reads: “*l’influence de l’égalité sur les passions guerrièrres*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid., pp. 1158, 1166, 1185. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid., p. 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., p. 1165. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid., pp. 975, 1171. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., p. 1158. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid., p. 1171. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid., p. 1159. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Coffman, *The Old Army*, p. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid., pp. 17, 22, 38, 61-62, 81, 137-141, 210, 329, 373, 400; Edward M. Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army, 1898-1941* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 23, 96, 192, 232, 239, 288, 299, 300, 302, 317, 323, 416. It should be noted that, in recent times, members of the American armed services perform comparatively well on a number of indicators (physical, intellectual, socio-economic) relative to the rest of the American population. See Robert L. Goldich, “American Military Culture from Colony to Empire,” in *The Modern American Military*, ed. David M. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 79-109 (see pp. 93-94). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture From the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008). The Vietnam veteran was another matter. Here, however, the publicness of the veteran was not a matter of honor, as Tocqueville would understand it, but rather a matter of the extension of sympathy and pity, a topic I take up below. See Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 105-111; Bailey, *America’s Army*, pp. 172-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Bailey, *America’s Army*, p. 4. Bailey notes that this kind of thinking emerged explicitly in the planning of the All-Volunteer Force, behind which were a number of prominent economists, including Milton Freedman and Alan Greenspan who sat on Nixon’s advisory commission (pp. 22-27). For a second account of this, see Jennifer Mittelstadt, *The Rise of the Military Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 23-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Tocqueville, *DIA*, notes, p. 1165. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., p. 1102. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1943), p. 123; Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1952), p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, p. 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, p. 15-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid., p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid., Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Tocqueville, *DIA*, p. 1174. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid., p. 1175. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid., pp. 1174-1175. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ibid. See also p. 1156. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ibid., p. 1175. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid., pp. 1174-1175. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). The men who raised the flag were Marines. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Tocqueville, *DIA*, pp. 387-388, 1085-1088. At one point, it seems that Tocqueville had the intention of devoting a chapter of *DIA* to the topic of American patriotism (p. lxxxiii, fn. 116). His comments instead are scattered throughout (pp. 160, 269-270, 384-389, 589, 597-601, 1085-1088). The closest approximation is the subsection entitled “Of Public Spirit in the United States” (pp. 384-389). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See ibid., pp. 160, 384-386, 598. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid., pp. 384-385. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid., p. 385. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid., p. 385. It should be noted that, at the time Tocqueville wrote, he did not think that instinctive patriotism had yet had enough time to take hold in America at the federal level (p. 387). He did, however, see it operating already at the level of the individual states (pp. 269-270, 589). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ibid., pp. 385-386, 598. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid., pp. 160, 387-388. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid., p. 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 11-26. The larger point of Lembcke’s book is that those who fought in Vietnam were not, in fact, regularly treated with hostility by the American public. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Tocqueville, *DIA*, notes, p. 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Ibid., pp. 388, 1086. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid., p. 1087. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., p. 1086. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. There was a general hostility toward standing armies in early America. See Lawrence Delbert Cress, *Citizens in Arms: The Army and the Militia in American Society to the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Don Higginbotham, *War and Society in Revolutionary America: The Wider Dimensions of Conflict* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the American Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* (New York: The Free Press, 1975). Even the Continental Army existed in tension with civilians. See Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: the Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Higginbotham, *War and Society in Revolutionary America*, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. See C. Edward Skeen, *Citizen-Soldiers in the War of 1812* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Tocqueville, *DIA*, pp. 209, 275, 354-355, 453. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid., p. 1154. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 163-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, trans. A.A. Brill and Alfred B. Kuttner (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1918), p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); John Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Tocqueville, *DIA*, pp. 989-990, 993. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Ibid., pp. 989-990, 991. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Ibid., pp. 731-732, 1075-1076, 1091-1092. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Ibid., p. 993. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Ibid., pp. 795, 833. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Ibid., pp. 788-789. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Ibid., pp. 454, 832. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Ibid., p. 1079. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Ibid., notes, p. 838. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Ibid., p. 838. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Ibid., pp. 840-841. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Ibid., p. 841. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. David M. Kennedy, *Over Here*, p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Lee Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1987); Kenneth D. Rose, *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, pp. 37-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Ibid, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Ibid, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Tocqueville, *DIA*, p. 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Ibid., pp. 653, 934, 751, respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Ibid., p. 779. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Ibid., pp. 397, 952. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Ibid., p. 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Ibid., p. 338. Nolla translates this as the “spirit of amelioration,” which I find unwieldy. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Ibid., pp. 395-397. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Ibid., p. 644. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Ibid., pp. 760-761. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Ibid., pp. 338, 396-397. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Ibid., pp. 760-761. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Ibid., p. 600. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Ibid., p. 644. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Ibid., p. 761. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Ibid., p. 600. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Ibid., p. 760. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Ibid., pp. 600, 643. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. For this point, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, eds. François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 208-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville, *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France*, trans. Francis Lieber (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1833), p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Ibid., p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Ibid., p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ibid., p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Tocqueville, *DIA*, pp. 600, 605. See also notes, p. 761. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Ibid., p. 993. See also pp. 837-838, 990-991. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, pp. 130-131. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism.* [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Jay Winter, “Filming War,” in *The Modern American* Military, ed. David M. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Chris Walsh, *Cowardice: A Brief History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 131-164. See also Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, pp. 18-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. See, for example, Alan Schwarz, “Research Traces Link Between Combat Blasts and PTSD,” *The New York Times* (June 9, 2016); Dave Philipps, “Scuba, Parrots, Yoga: Veterans Embrace Alternative Therapies for PTSD,” *The New York Times* (September 17, 2016); Dionne Searcey, “A General’s New Mission: Leading a Charge Against PTSD,” *The New York Times* (October 7, 2016). For the academy, the most prominent work is Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994). For a more recent statement, see Jonathan Shay, “Casualties,” in *The Modern American Military*, ed. David M. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 295-313. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. See James Wright, *Those Who Have Borne the Battle: A History of America’s Wars and Those Who Fought Them* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), pp. 275-276. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 78-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Ibid., pp. 75-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ibid., p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. See Nancy Sherman, *Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 23-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Tocqueville, *DIA*, p. 1158. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Ibid., p. 1173. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Ibid., p. 1158. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Ibid., notes, p. 761. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Ibid., pp. 963-965. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Ibid., pp. 600, 643, 760. On the topic of limits, see Christopher Coker, *Warrior Geeks: How 21st Century Technology is Changing the Way We Fight and Think About War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); P.W. Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Ibid., pp. 1163, 1166. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)