

# H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

## Roundtable Review 14-15

William D. Adler. *Engineering Expansion: The U.S. Army and Economic Development*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. ISBN: 9780812253481 (cloth, \$75.00).

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 Introduction by Bartholomew H. Sparrow, The University of Texas at Austin
 

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Research on the physical expansion of the United States has a crucial subtext: the importance of geopolitics. The conquest of the North American continent and, later, the expansion into the Pacific and Caribbean facilitated the large growth of the United States, the great accumulation of wealth, and the addition of dozens of more states into the federation. With this expansion the United States took a larger role in international relations and became a great power and, not long thereafter, a superpower. This, the fundamental significance of the United States existing in a world of states and the implications that follow, is the premise of Ira Katznelson's and Martin Shefter's *Shaped by War and Trade*<sup>1</sup> and other scholarship by political scientists and historians who study the US Army, Indian removal, American foreign policy, and US grand strategy in the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

William Adler's new book, *Engineering Expansion: the U.S. Army and Economic Development*, is a valuable addition to this line of scholarship. In answer to Stephen Skowronek's argument about the early United States being typified as a state of "courts and parties,"<sup>3</sup> Adler, a political scientist, spotlights the dual role played by the US Army. One is coercion, as he observes in his first chapter on the US government's use of force dating from Shays' Rebellion, through the War of 1812 and Mexican War, to the forts established on sites along the Oregon and Santa Fe trails, and, before that, in the Northwest Territory and elsewhere in trans-Appalachian and trans-Mississippi wests. At the center of the US Army's use of force was the suppression and removal of Native Americans. The other way the Army promoted statebuilding, which was complementary to its coercive role, was through Michael Mann's "infrastructural power."<sup>4</sup> Army officers such as Meriwether Lewis, Zebulon Pike, Stephen Long, and John C. Frémont explored, inventoried, and mapped the Midwest, Southwest, and Far West, and the US Topographical Corps surveyed boundaries, selected transcontinental railroad routes, and engaged in other activities before its merger with the Army Corps of Engineers in 1863. Adler documents and maps the forts and Army installations that enabled European-American settlement; made western migration safer; allowed for the distribution and delivery of mail (and, therefore, newspapers); permitted mining and resource extraction; and aided the construction of roads, canals, and railroads. This was no weak American state.

The four reviewers admire *Engineering Expansion* for its synthesis of the Army's multiple functions on the American periphery. Gautham Rao praises *Engineering Expansion* for its convincing account of the US Army as being at "the heart of the American state" (141). Rao notes that Adler's account of the Army's construction of a nationwide infrastructure, supply of expertise to the private sector, and encouragement of settler colonialism importantly builds upon work by others on the eighteenth and nineteenth century federal state. He does wonder about the variation of local contexts, such how Native Americans and European Americans interacted in any one area. Rao concludes by noting that Adler and other scholars who examine the early American state have yet to convince many historians and most Americans of the indispensable presence of a pre-twentieth century American state with the Army at its core. This, Rao agrees, was a state that conducted surveys, planned railway routes, relegated surviving Native Americans to reservations, cooperated with

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<sup>1</sup> Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, David Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); Katharine Bjork, *Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Richard W. Maass, *The Picky Eagle: How Democracy and Xenophobia Limited U.S. Territorial Expansion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *European Journal of Sociology* Vol. 25, No. 2 (1984): 185-213.

commercial enterprises, collaborated with state and territorial governments, and gave rise to the United States as a continental power.

Lindsay Schakenbach Regele welcomes Adler's "balanced" contribution to the many different disciplinary studies of how international factors and foreign conflicts shaped American statebuilding. She observes that *Engineering Expansion* rightly identifies the role of the national security state, here the US Army, in promoting economic development through its "socioeconomic" activities that provided for public goods and that created an ever larger United States. Schakenbach Regele appreciates Adler's focus on the surveying and mapmaking achievements of the "topogs"—the Army Topographical Corps—where Adler nests William Goetzmann's important earlier research into a larger study of the US Army's socioeconomic activities.<sup>5</sup> She further values the distinction Adler makes between the (weaker) strength of constitutional actors in the "center" (Congress, the president) and the autonomous authority of non-constitutional actors on the periphery (Army officers, engineers, and agency bureaucrats), who were able to leverage their long tenures, their experience and perceived expertise, and their distance from Washington into political entrepreneurship and operational discretion. In contrast to the control of US presidents over the military in demarcated wars, Schakenbach Regele draws attention to Adler's emphasis on the delegation of power and ad hoc decisionmaking of Army officers in Indian warfare. She appreciates Adler's grasp of the large body of scholarship in history and related fields, particularly given the chronological scope of the book, even as this same sweeping ambition results in some events receiving "cursory attention" and in some historical gaps in his account. She also wonders how the Navy helped create an "expanding commercial empire," a question she leaves to other scholars to take up.

Stephen Rockwell appreciates *Engineering Expansion's* attention to the manifold roles the US Army played in the geographic expansion of the United States. He notes Adler's inclusion of the Army's less-known actions, such as its intervention in Rhode Island's Dorr Rebellion, the exchange between Army engineers and foreign experts, and the autonomy and entrepreneurship exercised by US secretaries of war. And on the periphery, Army officers were able to affect the governments' allocation of funds and policy decisions. Rockwell does wonder if Adler might have said more about civil-military relations, where civilians (such as early settlers) were themselves using force in advance of or in concert with the military. We may even wonder if businesses and other vested interests were sometimes driving US Army policies and priorities on the periphery. Rockwell also questions the degree to which there was actually "attenuated civilian control" of Army officers on the periphery, such as with the US-Canadian border issues of the late 1830s. Rockwell nonetheless regards Adler's book as making an effective argument for the "significant, visible, intrusive, and complicated" activity of the nineteenth century American state.

Samuel Watson welcomes the comprehensiveness of Adler's focus on the Army. Watson notes that whereas other historical syntheses of nineteenth-century America have omitted the indispensable role of the Army in the United States' evolving borderlands and in the wars against Native Americans and Mexico, Adler joins other scholars (including Robert Wooster and Watson himself) in recognizing the Army's contribution to economic development. Watson appreciates Adler's adaptation of the center-periphery framework and the introduction of military history to a larger, interdisciplinary audience of political scientists, historians, and others. But he disagrees with Adler's statement that there was "a significant lack of civilian control" (74) over Army officers and bureaucrats on the periphery, remarking that officials serve *under* the Constitution and that the discretion afforded mezzo-level officials is fully consistent with the leeway afforded the "men on the spot" of the British empire. And, sometimes, Army officers dragged their heels and were reluctant to take the fight to the enemy. So, too, in the periphery: it fell to the agents of the executive and to the secretary of war to interpret rules and legislation and to then put them into action. Watson likewise points out that *Engineering Expansion* neglects to study the congruence of politicians' and civilians' interests on territorial expansion, on

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<sup>5</sup> William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); also see William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

the one hand, and those of the US Army on the other. He questions, too, if the book overlooks the role of Army commanders as “military diplomats” who effectively conducted US foreign policy in the borderlands. The book also does not include his and Robert Wooster’s findings in their research of the considerable interaction and fluidity among civilians and the Army, on the one hand, and among Native American peoples and the Army, on the other hand. All the same, Watson welcomes Adler’s “valuable synthesis” and his important insight that the military, as the chief “coercive actor” of nineteenth-century America, lies at the “heart of the American state” (141).

In his reply to the reviewers, William Adler explains the purpose of *Engineering Expansion*: to challenge the “courts and parties” thesis of the nineteenth-century American state. Despite the forty years that have elapsed since Skowronek’s analysis, Adler recognizes the sticky legacy of this narrative. Accordingly, he seeks to convince political scientists in *American Political Development* of the central role played by the Army in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In response to the reviewers’ reservations, Adler recognizes that there were distinct local contexts for the Army’s conquest and variation in the socioeconomic benefits provided by the military, but he points out that this was not his focus. He recommends that more research should be directed to how Native tribes experienced the US Army and how they related to the authority of the state. Adler explains his brief treatment of Russian imperial expansion and subjugation of indigenous peoples at the end of the book—a point raised by Schakenbach Regele and Rockwell in their reviews—by noting the potential gains of comparative studies of the roles that militaries play in statebuilding and geographic expansion. Addressing just how central the Army was in the periphery, particularly with respect to Rockwell’s “blended civil-military relations” vis-à-vis Native Americans, and in answer to Rockwell’s question about why *Engineering Expansion* did not focus more on the Army’s role in upholding and expanding slavery, Adler replies that Rockwell has already written about the US government and tribal relations in his own book<sup>6</sup> and that David Ericson has previously analyzed the Army’s relation with slaveholders.<sup>7</sup> Adler points out, too, that he discusses the Army in the context of fears of slave revolts and addresses the role of slavery with respect to its impact on the routing of the Transcontinental Railroad. As for Rockwell’s and Watson’s questions of actual independence and implied insubordination of military officers in the field, Adler explains that by “highly attenuated” civilian control (22) he means that US Army officers and military officials played the part of “street-level bureaucrats”<sup>8</sup> who sought to retain their discretion and resisted efforts to rein in their autonomy. At times the actions of officers “far exceeded what their superiors would have ideally preferred.”

The above constitutes only a partial summary of the many points raised by Gautham Rao, Stephen Rockwell, Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, and Samuel Watson and by Adler in reply. I am grateful to Andrew Szarejko for organizing this roundtable and for focusing discussion on *Engineering Expansion* and, more broadly, on the contours of the early American state. I thank the four reviewers for their serious and extensive comments, and I thank William Adler for his valuable contribution to the literature on American statebuilding and the study of the US Army.

### Participants:

**William D. Adler** is associate professor of Political Science at Northeastern Illinois University, where he teaches courses on American Government, the Presidency, Congress, and Public Policy. His research on the

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791-186*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

Presidency, the Army, and the early American state has been published in *The Journal of Policy History*, *Studies in American Political Development*, *Political Science Quarterly*, and *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

**Bartholomew H. Sparrow** is the author of *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (PublicAffairs, 2015), *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (University Press of Kansas, 2006), and *From the Outside In: World War II and the American State* (Princeton University Press, 1996). He is a professor of Government at The University of Texas at Austin and a nonresident senior fellow of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security.

**Gautham Rao** is associate professor of History at American University, and Editor-in-Chief of *Law and History Review*, a leading journal of legal history published by Cambridge University Press for the American Society for Legal History. He is working on a history of runaway and fugitive slave laws and their influence on American law and politics.

**Stephen J. Rockwell** is professor of Political Science at St. Joseph's College, New York. He is the author of *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and the brief essay *How Big Government Won the West* (BookBaby, 2013), designed specifically for college undergraduates. He has authored numerous articles and reviews, including "Henry Knox and the Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy," in *Federal History* (2018).

**Lindsay Schakenbach Regele** is associate professor of History at Miami University. She is author of *Manufacturing Advantage: War, the State, and the Origins of American Industry, 1776-1848* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019) and is currently working on a book about Joel Roberts Poinsett and early national political and military development.

**Samuel Watson** is professor of American and military history at the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he teaches electives on nineteenth-century warfare and Cold War America. He is the editor of the *Oxford Handbook of American Military History* (forthcoming) and the North American chapters through 1900 in the digital *West Point History of Warfare* (Rowan Publishing, 2013), and is working on a book on the U.S. Army in the borderlands between 1784 and 1813, to follow those he has published on the period 1810-1846 (*Jackson's Sword*, University Press of Kansas, 2012), and *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, University Press of Kansas, 2013, which won the Society for Military History Distinguished Book Award).

## Review by Gautham Rao, American University

William D. Adler's impressive new book, *Engineering Expansion: The U.S. Army and Economic Development, 1787-1860* is a vitally important contribution to the history of nineteenth-century American political economy and the early American state. Adler convincingly argues that the United States' military was a driving force in the development of the national state, in the expansion of national boundaries, and in the dramatic growth of the national marketplace. Adler's point about the constitutive role of federal governmental institutions in national economic development is also noteworthy because Adler argues that the military's significance transcended its "purchasing power" or subsequent indirect influence on market growth (140). Rather, Adler tracks the role of Army officers and others as they contributed to railroad and Ordinance Department mixed enterprises. The geographical expansion point is the most straightforward: the military's use of coercive violence and non-coercive economic activity fueled the westward creep of national boundaries. Adler's argument about the military "as being at the heart of the American state" is also compelling (141). It makes perfect sense that, for instance, the Army Corps of Engineers was an unrivaled infrastructural statist force in the early republic. But the concept of military violence as a public good in the service of white settler colonists and their expansionist project is both more provocative and more difficult to pin down.

Crucial to Adler's argument is the "distinction drawn here between coercive and socioeconomic activities," which he patterns on social theorist Michael Mann's "twin concepts of 'despotic power' and 'infrastructural power'" (11).<sup>1</sup> As Adler explains, despotic or coercive power bears on the state's ability to extend itself directly into the everyday. By contrast, "infrastructural power is spatial in its application," occurring over broad expanses, through different networks, and in varying scales and scopes. Coercive and infrastructural power can also work in tandem, such as the example of the Army's coercion to ensure tax compliance, and the federal government's infrastructural appropriation of revenues—and the promise of future revenues—to fund continued territorial expansion. Adler's nuanced approach to theorizing this early American state in which the Army was so important thus evokes historian William J. Novak's call for a new history of government "embracing both force and law, sovereignty and freedom, contract and compulsion."<sup>2</sup>

Adler is also to be commended for his willingness to curry dialogues with scholars involved in fractious historiographical debates about the nature and function of the American state. Although he is trained as a political scientist, Adler seeks to make an intervention in the historiography of nineteenth-century political economy and governance. He does so through his focus on the Army as a central governmental institution that existed and functioned within different contexts. To be sure, previous scholars such as William C. Bergmann in *American National State and the Early National West* have argued that the military significantly shaped early national economic development.<sup>3</sup> Adler, however, specifies that the Army "made three contributions" on this front: "it helped build a national infrastructure, it supplied scarce engineering expertise to the private sector, and it encouraged standardization and organizational innovations in the private sector" (19). In more practical terms, the Army's movements and network of forts projected power that allowed settler colonialism to thrive and other federal operations like mail delivery and the rule of law to take root. If the recent scholarship is any measure, historians of the early American state will welcome these claims. They will also likely admire Adler's determination to write a history of federal statecraft that connects the federal government's "center" in the nation's capital, and its officers out in the field, or in Adler's parlance, the "periphery." For instance, West Point and the Army Ordinance Department provided labor and expertise that allowed centralized infrastructural planning by presidential administrations (57). Likewise, "the Army in the periphery supplied goods that were not being provided by the private sector or by state governments"

<sup>1</sup> Mann summarizes his development of these terms in Michael Mann, "The Despotic and Infrastructural Powers of Democratic, Autocratic, and Authoritarian Regimes," in *States and Nations: Power and Civility*, ed. Francesco G. Duina (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 172-96.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Novak, "The Myth of the Weak American State," *American Historical Review* 113:3 (June, 2008): 761.

<sup>3</sup> See, William C. Bergmann, *American National State and the Early National West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

(65). This chapter—“Building the Nation, Building the Economy”—also offers the example of a middle layer that connected center and periphery in the institution of the Quartermaster General.

And although he has written a history of the Army in the early United States, Adler seeks to make an intervention in the American Political Development literature in political science by demonstrating that there was indeed a strong “central state apparatus in this period which in many ways resembled modern bureaucratic forms—the U.S. Army and the War Department” (16). Another such noteworthy argument scholars is the idea that foreign affairs spurred further expansion of the federal government and the American state. That claim isn’t exactly new, and Adler acknowledges the foundational status of the volume edited by Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Development* (16, 17, 142).<sup>4</sup> Yet Adler’s work goes deeper and in further detail than any of the studies in Katznelson’s and Shefter’s volume and offers a far more complicated explanation of why and how diplomacy, foreign affairs, and war spurred the Army into action; how the Army’s actions would work in practice; and how and to whom the benefits of those military actions would redound. Conflicts with foreign nations may have necessitated military operations that scored points for presidents and politicians in Congress, but once in the field the Army found itself subject to local contingencies that required officers’ discretionary—and cautious—intervention (22).

Adler’s method of seeking to explore the messy connections between core and periphery positions his work alongside an all-star roster of historians who have also demonstrated, in different ways, that the early federal state was both strong and important. Thus we can add Adler’s work on complex and multifaceted Army operations to that of Max Edling on revolutionary constitutionalism, Laura Jensen on early national welfare state, Michelle Landis Dauber on federal disaster relief state, Stefan Heumann on imperial and colonial state, David Ericson on the connection between slavery and statecraft, Matthew Karp on the imperial ambitions of enslavers, Stephen Rockwell on Indian Affairs agents, Jerry Mashaw on early administrative law, Paul Frymer (and Malcolm Rohrbough) on land officers, and Lindsay Regele on the federal facilitation of technological growth, among others.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of the book’s historical arguments, while recognizing the lengths to which Adler has already gone to try and contextualize Army coercive and infrastructural activities within the political history of the early republic, one wonders about the extent to which local contexts shaped the story of the Army’s activities in these years. Had Adler pushed beyond his primary source base of governmental reports to encompass the views of those who found themselves appropriating or facing down federal coercion or infrastructural programs, he would have been able to offer an even more detailed explanation of the meaning of “conquest,” of governmental “expansion”—of “the state” writ large. One example is Adler’s fascinating insight and supporting quantitative data about the military’s expanding network of forts and garrisons in antebellum

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<sup>4</sup> See, Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, ed. *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Max Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and Making of the American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Laura S. Jensen, *Patriots, Settlers, and the Origins of American Social Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Stefan Heumann, “The Tutelary Empire: State- and Nation-Building in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century United States,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2009; David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791-1861* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011); Stephen Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Jerry Mashaw, *Creating the Administrative Constitution: The Lost One Hundred Years of American Administrative Law* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, *Manufacturing Advantage: War, the State, and the Origins of American Industry, 1776-1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

America. For Adler this is unmistakable evidence about the coercive power of the federal government expanding and protecting national borders, as well as of the surprisingly spindly chain of command that connected field officers with their commands (104-108). But what was the meaning of these forts for the communities in which they were built? How did they alter or disrupt existing power relations between Natives and settler colonists? How did these stories differ based on locality, and region? Between different groups of settler colonists and different tribes? Admittedly, these are not the kinds of questions Adler sought to ask or answer, but future scholars are now well positioned to build on his insights to further refine our understanding of just how federal power designed and deployed by politicians functioned in practice.

As for the book's dialogue with political scientists, despite Adler's diligent research and brilliant argumentation, this may be a potentially impossible task. Adler begins his book by noting that he seeks to solve a "central puzzle of American political development: if the United States had a weak central state in its earliest years, then how did national consolidation and rapid economic development occur" (1)? Adler's book readily solves this "puzzle." His argument is decisive and his evidence is overwhelming. But it is not clear whether the book—along with others, such as published works cited on pages 168-72—usher in a new paradigm of recognizing that the early American state was more than "a state of courts and parties" (3) among political scientists? After all, this "puzzle" still exists, even with the veritable deluge of scholarship on the vitality and importance of the federal government in the early republic. Time will tell. Some years ago, the renowned scholar of American Political Development Adam Sheingate asked, "Why can't Americans see the state?" If, after Adler's book, the "central puzzle of American political development" yet persists, it might be time to ask the same question of the political scientists that Adler seeks to address.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Adam Sheingate, "Why Can't Americans See the State?" *Revue Francaise de Science Politique* 64:2 (2014): 15-26.



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Review by Stephen J. Rockwell, St. Joseph's University, New York

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William D. Adler's *Engineering Expansion* is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the scope and influence of the nineteenth-century American state. Adler effectively argues for the importance of recognizing the Army as a coercive force contributing to, and reflecting, American state development, and he is attentive to the Army's socioeconomic contributions. Adler also adds to the growing literature on public administration before the Civil War, arguing persuasively for a high level of bureaucratic autonomy within divisions of the War Department. Adler's presentation is clear and engaging, and the book, despite some overreaching, provides a short and focused contribution.

Following the introduction, in chapter 1 Adler reviews the Army's coercive activities and their relationship to economic development by examining how the Army "helped to preserve the rule of law and ensure national authority," how the Army served as "the nation's primary instrument of territorial growth," and how the system of forts across the continent "expanded the range of land open to white settlement" (24-5). The examples here are interesting, including Adler's attention to often-overlooked activities of the Army related to labor actions, US-Canada border issues, and Rhode Island's Dorr Rebellion, in addition to more familiar matters like the Whiskey Rebellion and the Mormon conflicts of the 1850s (31-42). Adler concludes that "the Army was instrumental in building new markets and maintaining attachments to the central state" (55).

Chapter 2 reviews the Army's socioeconomic contributions, focusing particularly on its role in providing engineers and expertise, the contributions of topographical engineers, and the Army's influence on private-sector innovations in technology and administration. Notably, Adler counters the long-standing narrative of American isolation by recognizing the international context of information sharing, as US engineers worked closely with experts from other nations.

In chapter 3, Adler turns his focus to *control* of the Army's coercive operations. In the context of its traditional coercive role, Adler finds that the Army was largely directed by political actors "within the framework of the Constitution," particularly in what he refers to as the "center." In the "periphery," by contrast, secretaries of war, bureau heads, uniformed officers, and field staff, Adler argues, often were more significant decision makers than presidents or members of Congress (12-3).

In its socioeconomic activities, discussed in chapter 4, Adler emphasizes that "a more varied set" of political actors directed operations and decisionmaking, especially secretaries of war and bureau officials. In the book's most pivotal chapter, Adler examines bureaucratic autonomy in the Army and writes, "I argue that a close examination of the early War Department and its bureaus demonstrates that there was ample capacity for carrying out various policies, and furthermore that the bureaus could develop a form of autonomy from elected officials. . . . The War Department became not merely a close approximation of a centralized bureaucracy but, especially in the nation's periphery, the most significant institutional actor with the greatest amount of power" (112). Adler discusses the ways in which long tenures among office holders at the War Department contributed to autonomy (113, 118); he offers a convincing discussion of policy entrepreneurship in the office of the secretary of war, highlighted by a three-page table listing secretaries of war and their socioeconomic initiatives (table 119-21; see also 118ff, 144-5); and he adds an excellent case study of efforts by the Corps of Topographical Engineers to lobby, influence funding decisions, and drive legislation (126-37).

In the context of literature on American political development, all of this amounts to a direct challenge to interpretations that see a "weak state" or a "state of courts and parties" characterizing American political development.<sup>1</sup> Adler confidently asserts that "the 'state of courts and parties' characterization cannot apply"

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The*

to the War Department before the Civil War (138), and he offers an important challenge to Brian Balogh's *A Government Out of Sight*<sup>2</sup> by pointing out that the Army's activities were not out of sight, but instead "visible and indeed central to the politics of this period" (15).

The overall argument for the Army's importance and autonomy is sound, and adds to a growing literature on a variety of state activities in this era. There are two main areas where the book overreaches.

Adler's argument for the military's primacy in the periphery could be refined by a fuller consideration of civilian and blended civilian-military efforts in those regions, especially in regard to land acquisition and territorial expansion pressed through measures short of war. Adler writes, "through wars against other nations and native tribes, the Army was the nation's primary instrument of territorial expansion, hence opening new regions to white settlement and resource extraction" (21; see also 141). The government's array of national trade and intercourse laws, regulatory and licensing systems, financial and political support for missionaries, and civilization initiatives—many of which stemmed from the War Department—are largely missing in the discussion, though, as are the design of land laws and the development of other civilian offices working in the periphery on matters of territorial expansion. The book offers little recognition of treaty negotiators' role in acquiring lands, for example, even when such actions were backed up (as was often the case) by the threat of coercion. Adler also describes the factory system of government-run trading houses as a failure, but in so doing he overlooks its realized goals in diplomacy, peacekeeping, economic regulation, and the extension of US legitimacy. The Army's complex interrelationships with civilian businesses, slaveowners, and other complicating factors, so well described by David Ericson in *Slavery in the American Republic*,<sup>3</sup> are also largely missing.

Adler is correct to argue for the military's importance, but we should be careful not to oversimplify or overstate the case in an effort to bring the Army back in. Adler may be correct when he writes of the Army's contribution to Indian removal, for example, that "No other institution—not a single state or a private actor—could have carried out such a far-ranging coercive policy" (143), yet the fact remains that the Army did not carry out those operations alone. Without the roles played for decades by local officials, civilians, private contractors, and federal officials outside the War Department, such a far-ranging coercive policy likely would have had much more difficulty being implemented. The book is strongest when Adler's language works its way back to a position of relationships: when in the book's conclusion he describes the Army as "a central force" (148) and asserts that "coercion matters" (148), we see Adler's argument most effectively and convincingly located within a complex American state.

A second concern follows from the first. Adler argues that civilian control of the military was "attenuated" (12, 22, 77, 108) and "lacking" (74, 77, 108), especially in the periphery. This argument might be stronger if it were supported by more examples, discussed more fully.

Adler defines the center as "based in Washington, D.C., and in the established population centers in the East" (2-3); he defines the periphery as "containing the frontier regions of the nation" (3). In the center, Adler writes, the Army "was certainly important but was just one among several public actors helping to promote national economic progress" (3). In the periphery, however, "no institution came close to the Army's overarching presence" (3). Adler writes that "the periphery saw a highly attenuated form of civilian control, with officers on the ground making policy decisions contrary to the wishes of their civilian masters"

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*Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

(22; see also 77); later he refers to a “significant lack of civilian control” of Army forces in the periphery (74); later still, this becomes the assertion that “it may indeed have been the case that civilian control over the Army was lacking in antebellum America” (77). Disregarding the wishes of presidents happened “often” (90, 108), civilian control was “at best, highly attenuated” (108), and, finally, we find “a military not subject to popular control” (109).

Adler’s examples, however, do not provide much support for his assertions about attenuated civilian control. Discussing Kansas in the 1850s, Adler writes that “Army officers...often flouted presidential orders that they disliked” (85)—but the discussion is too brief to support the case adequately, and the first example used seems to be of an officer liking his orders too much and going *farther* than the president wanted. In the second example, a “lack of proslavery enthusiasm” seems to be the cause for an officer’s removal—but this is hardly the same as “flouting” disliked presidential orders, especially without a full discussion of the incident to provide detail and clarity in trying to figure out what was actually going on (85-6). In discussing the combined US diplomatic and force-threatening efforts during the Mormon conflict, Adler fails to show anything other than military preparation riding in parallel with diplomatic efforts—a two-track policy strategy that dates back to the earliest US relations with Indian nations. A military field commander continuing to prepare for battle while a president pursues a simultaneous diplomatic effort hardly amounts to a “flouting” of presidential orders (86). The discussion of a Canadian border situation in which orders flowed from the president to the secretary of war to General Winfield Scott, with room for decision making on the ground (81), is hardly an example of attenuated civilian control, especially without more examples of field commanders using their delegated authority in ways that failed to serve, or purposely undercut, the direction of their orders. A few familiar examples of officers (arguably) overstepping their orders are here, particularly Andrew Jackson’s incursions into Florida, but these few examples are not enough to sustain the author’s increasingly more comprehensive and explosive conclusions about the lack of civilian control of the military.

To be clear, Adler’s more fundamental argument, which highlights the bureaucratic capacity and autonomy of the Army, is argued convincingly and on a sound basis—without the need to go as far as suggesting a lack of civilian control. When Adler writes that “officers [in the periphery] had significant leeway to interpret their orders to give them discretion to act as they wanted,” he is correct; the statement also applies to field agents in the Indian Office and other government units. Adler seems to undercut his own more aggressive claims, writing that “for the most part officers were professional and nonpartisan actors who followed their orders...antebellum officers were more likely than not to envision themselves as professional servants of the state,” contrasted with an immediately preceding passage discussing how officers and officials “sometimes...went rogue and disobeyed orders” and “occasionally” tilted their actions in favor of political goals (76). In the end, the vast majority of the examples in the book support the findings of scholars who have examined bureaucratic control of far-flung organizations like the Indian Office, the Forest Service, the Post Office, and the Corps of Topographical Engineers itself: while local decisions were made regularly with great discretion and localized judgment, those decisions almost always fit within, and furthered, the direction of federal policy and administrative guidelines established at the capital, and were usually the result of clearly delegated discretionary authority emanating from Congress or the president.<sup>4</sup>

The organization and editing of the book raise some concerns. The book’s structure invites repetition, as two chapters examine the Army’s activities and then two more chapters examine political control of the Army’s activities, creating a noticeable number of times Adler is forced to repeat material and use phrases like “as discussed earlier.” The book includes three discussions of the military’s \$200,000 in spending on state militias and those militias’ reliance on Army manuals, for example, which use virtually the same language and

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<sup>4</sup> For example, James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), esp. ch. 9; Herbert Kaufman, *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior* (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future, 1967 [1960]); Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

references each time (10, 25-6, 143). Other matters are just clunky: in the Introduction, for example, Adler writes, “The book concludes 6 [sic] with some final thoughts...” (23). This is awkward and, since there is no chapter 6, it suggests some degree of carelessness in editing. In the conclusion, there is a comparative discussion involving Russia and Siberia that is interesting but tangential to the book’s main arguments and very much out of place just before the book’s concluding passages (150-9). There are an uncomfortable number of technical and typographical issues in an otherwise nicely presented volume, most notably involving a series of maps following page 102. Adler wants to illustrate the effect of fort construction on population growth with a series of maps laid out in like orientation over several pages. This is a terrific idea, and the maps are designed to allow a reader to flip pages and see changes and developments in population counts by the census and in fort placement. But the maps lack identifying labels, the graphic shading is confusing and somewhat indistinguishable, and larger or smaller circles indicating post sizes bear only a passing resemblance in scale to the numbers they are meant to convey. So when Adler writes, for example, that “Figure 8 shows the garrison sizes and population density for 1834,” it is unclear which graphic is Figure 8, how much difference there was in population counts and garrison size across the land, and why there is a mismatch between the text’s reference to 1834 and the figure’s use of data from the 1830 census. Together with other technical issues this becomes frustrating.

These concerns about overreach and technical matters within the book are not minor, but Adler’s overall argument, stripped of its more aggressive stances, is well taken. In fact, the title of the book itself may have the unfortunate effect of obscuring the book’s scope and significance. “Engineering Expansion,” together with a cover featuring H. Charles McBarron’s painting of Army construction work near West Point and an elegant little image of a pickaxe and a shovel, could suggest a book focused on the work of the engineers in the tradition of William Goetzmann.<sup>5</sup> Many of Adler’s analyses and some of his best examples are indeed focused on the engineers, but the scope and importance of the book are far broader than that. The inclusion of the Army as a coercive unit, its roles in land acquisition and economic development, and Adler’s analysis of institutional relations and bureaucratic development involving a host of administrative units add up to a far more expansive and important discussion than might be suggested by the title. *Engineering Expansion* complements and reinforces the constellation of works that have just about put the “weak state” myth to rest.<sup>6</sup> Adler’s book helps broaden the increasingly well-marked road toward recognizing state activity in the nineteenth-century US as significant, visible, intrusive, and complicated.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959); William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> For example, William J. Novak, “The Myth of the ‘Weak’ American State”, *American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 752-772; Jerry L. Mashaw, *Creating the Administrative Constitution: The Lost One Hundred Years of American Administrative Law* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Max M. Edling, *A Revolution on Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Max M. Edling, and Peter Kastor, eds., *Washington’s Government: Charting the Origins of the Federal Administration* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2021).

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 Review by Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, Miami University
 

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“Coercion matters” (148) is just one of the important arguments William Adler makes in a book that draws from, and synthesizes, a wide range of scholarship in political science, history, economics, and sociology. *Engineering Expansion*’s main purpose is to demonstrate the role the Army has played in not only American economic development, as the title states, but political development as well. Adler joins the group of scholars who have brought the state “back in.”<sup>1</sup> Adler is a political scientist by training, specifically in the branch of American political development (APD); he is also well-versed in the historical literature and sensitive to context and contingency. His arguments focus on how international influences and conflict have shaped American development. Adler argues that threats from, and competition with, European and Native nations created a national security state that led to spending on military and commercial infrastructure, while concerns over international reputation prompted US leaders to emulate European engineering and military practices on their quest for national strength.

The introduction functions as a sophisticated literature review on the state, beginning with a challenge to Stephen Skowronek’s famous thesis that the early American state was weak.<sup>2</sup> Adler builds on, and complicates, many scholars’ conceptualizations of the state, including William Novak’s “myth of the weak state,” Max Edling’s early American fiscal-military state, and Ira Katznelson’s “military and early American state building.”<sup>3</sup> Adler makes multiple arguments that rest on the “assertion that Army facilitated economic development through the provision of public goods that neither private actors nor other state actors could produce” (18). He stresses that even when other public institutions influenced development, the Army always played a role. This was especially true in frontier regions, where many developmental policies were made by unelected officials. Although regional biases sometimes shaped policy outcomes, the Army’s agenda was not driven by a consistent set of sectional or partisan priorities.

To organize these arguments, Adler borrows “core-periphery” (163) terminology from comparative political sociology, conceptualizing the state as a bifurcated entity composed of a center and periphery, in which the Army had less and more influence, respectively. He then builds on Michael Mann’s paired concepts of “despotic power” and “infrastructural power” to distinguish between the Army’s coercive (despotic) and socioeconomic (infrastructural) activities, crediting political scientist Richard Bensele with suggesting the “socioeconomic” terminology (163).<sup>4</sup> I found the socioeconomic/infrastructural concept a little confusing for two reasons. First, Adler does not fully define “socioeconomic activities,” other than to say that they “involved the production of both collective goods and private goods that might have been supplied by sources outside the Army” (10) and that they “were infrastructural in nature” (11). Second, “infrastructure” refers to a type of power (a state’s societal authority over a territory), but this power also includes the building of actual, physical infrastructure, such as roads and canals. Regardless of the murkiness in terminology, Adler’s differentiation among types of activities and locations is enlightening. Especially welcome is his distinction between center and periphery, and among different state actors. *Engineering Expansion* is not just a story of a “strong state” or even a strong executive. Rather, Adler distinguishes among constitutional actors (Congress and the president) and non-constitutional actors (the secretary of war, bureau chiefs), and between frontier areas and eastern centers of population. He is precise about where and when power was exerted, and

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<sup>1</sup> Theda Skocpol, Peter Evans, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Skowronek. *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Max M. Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); William J. Novak, “The Myth of the Weak American State,” *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 752-72; Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results,” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie* 25, no. 2 (1984): 185–213.

who exerted it. In general, constitutional actors were strong in the center, the latter on the periphery. He also conscientiously mentions evidence that does not affirm his overarching arguments about the Army and economic growth, noting, for example, that surveys sometimes hindered development in the periphery, as when explorer Zebulon Pike produced a report of the southern plains region that labeled it unfit for new habitation, which discouraged settlement for years.

Chapter 1 focuses on the Army's coercive activities that made possible the most important factor for economic development: national authority. Adler cites Douglass North's argument about the necessity of a government's ability to control violence for economic development.<sup>5</sup> The Army's coercive activities included protecting and expanding borders and the institution of slavery, enforcing national economic policies, and suppressing rebellions. Adler analyzes the state's sustained use of force through a series of well-known enforcements of state power in the center, including Shays's Rebellion, the Embargo of 1807, the Nullification Crisis, and the Dorr Rebellion, and on the periphery, such as the Whiskey Rebellion, the Burr expedition, and Bleeding Kansas. He then discusses measures that expanded borders in two sections, "Extending American Sovereignty," which covers violence against Native peoples, and "Wars of Expansion," which covers the War of 1812 and the Mexican American War. The final section in this chapter discusses the role of military forts in protecting mining, trade, travel, and mail routes, and safeguarding the territory sought after and claimed during the aforementioned warfare.

Adler discusses these events again in chapter 3, this time with an analysis of the actors in power. Other scholars have tackled the question of who controlled the military by focusing on the president and secretary of war, congress, or army officers, but have never examined all of these figures together. Adler pushes back against arguments about civilian control of military, offering very specific details about when and where officers in the field made the majority of decisions. Adler contends that in general, for large scale wars other than the War of 1812, presidents controlled the conflict, while in the majority of the nation's military engagements, including endless warfare against Native nations, decisions were made on an ad hoc basis by military men. This means that the civilian, constitutional center had minimal oversight over violence. Adler's argument about the lack of popular control over the army has significant implications for how we understand the United States' conflicts with foreign nations. While scholars have long looked beyond Washington to understand foreign policy decisionmaking, the book sheds new light on the importance of military figures on the periphery.

Adler shifts focus from coercion in chapters 1 and 3 to the Army's socioeconomic role in chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2 analyzes the Army's socioeconomic activities; chapter 4, the politics of those activities. The Army's socioeconomic contributions included surveying, road building, map-making, and educating engineers. The majority of these activities were undertaken by the Ordnance Department and the Army Corps of Engineers. Adler pays particular attention to the Corps of Topographical Engineers, which was independent from the Army Corps in 1838 until the Civil War. The "topogs" as they were known, conducted the surveys that made possible accurate maps of the Atlantic Coast, the Great Lakes, and the nation's rivers, which resulted in improved domestic and international trade. Adler emphasizes that no single state or private institution could have provided these maps without the expertise of the topographical corps. In fact, the Army's engineers assisted many state and private projects, until an 1838 law forbade them from doing so. Even then, private sector engineers continued to rely on Army training and expertise.

In chapter 4, Adler employs an institutionalist approach to analyze the topogs' bureaucratic autonomy. Before he homes in on this bureau, he makes a bigger argument about the War Department as a centralized bureaucracy, contending that it was, "especially in the nation's periphery, the most significant institutional actor with the greatest amount of power" (112). He challenges Daniel Carpenter's characterization of the

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<sup>5</sup> Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry C. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

early American state as “clerical,” and builds on work by Mark Wilson and Stephen Rockwell, which located pockets of autonomy in the Quartermaster General’s Office and the Indian Office, respectively.<sup>6</sup> Adler sees this autonomy as being much more widespread, citing the ability of “political entrepreneurs” to initiate their own agendas, like Secretary of War John C. Calhoun who pushed for internal improvements and spurred Congress to pass the General Survey Act. John J. Abert, head of the topogs from 1829-1861, exemplifies Adler’s argument about bureau chiefs’ achieving autonomy because of long tenures, perceived expertise, and avoidance of congressional oversight. Abert’s story also underscores Adler’s argument about “the limits of any attempt to neatly categorize the antebellum state using a grand historical explanation” (138). Adler challenges Stephen Skowronek’s characterization of the early American state as being controlled by courts and parties, arguing that bureau chiefs usually transcended partisan and sectional politics, and yet he shows that Abert sided with southern politicians regarding a route for the transcontinental railroad and ultimately jeopardized his bureau’s autonomy.<sup>7</sup>

Adler’s acknowledgement and incorporation of this kind of complexity and counterargument is one of the many strengths of this expansive book. *Engineering Expansion* gets at many of the major themes in American history, including violence, imperialism, statebuilding, territorial expansion, state versus federal power, and public versus private interest. Although Adler is a political scientist, he speaks to many historical subfields, including histories of capitalism, politics, the military, business, and foreign relations. The chronological span of the book, from the Constitution up to the Civil War, lends itself to this thematic coverage. The scope is both a strength and a weakness. The book devotes only cursory attention to most events, and sometimes makes huge temporal leaps, such as the transition from a discussion of Aaron Burr’s expedition in 1806 to the Mexican War in 1846. Yet by starting with Shays’s Rebellion, which happened slightly before the stated start date of the book, and ending on the eve of the Civil War, the book illustrates the change in federal power from the Articles of Confederation through the first 75 years of the Constitution. Adler notes that during Shays’s Rebellion, Secretary at War Henry Knox was unable to order any military officer to use certain arms without explicit congressional approval, a sharp contrast to the Patriot War, when military officers had broad latitude over the measures taken to stabilize the Canadian border. Another major strength of the book is Adler’s grasp of a large body of scholarship, his command of archival sources, and his fresh presentation of historical military data, revealing the internal Army divisions over the issue of filibustering and producing a series of maps that demonstrate the centrality of forts to population growth before the Civil War.

My reservations about *Engineering Expansion* are few. The narrative occasionally engages in old-fashioned glorification, noting for example when a certain general should receive “credit” for a “victory” (93). He also accepts at face value the perceptions of men like Andrew Jackson and James Polk. To back up his assertion that the Mexican War changed international opinions of American power, Adler uses a quotation from Polk, even though Polk was not an accurate judge of how other nations viewed the United States. Several times, Adler notes the “conquest” of Florida, and Jackson’s role in particular, neglecting to acknowledge the major challenge the United States faced in battling the Seminoles year after year. That said, Adler does not shy away from naming the violence the early republican state sponsored and initiated. This is not a laudatory account of American nationbuilding, but a balanced account of statecraft, capitalist changes, and militarism in the early national United States.

I wish that *Engineering Expansion* had been published before I wrote my own book on the federal government and economic development.<sup>8</sup> Adler answers many of the nitty gritty questions I had about Army operations,

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Mark Wilson, “The Politics of Procurement: Military Origins of Bureaucratic Autonomy,” *Journal of Policy History*, 18 (2006), 45-75; Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Skowronek. *Building a New American State*.

<sup>8</sup> Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, *Manufacturing Advantage: War, the State, and the Origins of American Industry, 1776-1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

such as how exactly the Army Corps of Engineers worked in different locations, while also addressing the broader theoretical issues of some of his previous work about war, power, and American political development.<sup>9</sup> *Engineering Expansion* functions at once as a comprehensive reference work, a historiographical overview, and an original research monograph. This is a book with which historians of the United States should familiarize themselves. It should be read by graduate students and scholars from a range of disciplines, as well as by anyone who wants to know more about the military and economic development in the United States.

One hopes that some of these readers may be prompted by Adler's conclusion to undertake new research. First, and most obvious, scholars should be inspired to "bring the military (back?) in" (147). Adler argues that although scholars have "brought the state back in," they have done so largely in relation to social welfare and regulation, neglecting the military. His call for more attention to the military could be taken up not just by scholars of politics, but by scholars of foreign relations as well. This becomes especially clear in Adler's ten-page commentary on Russia and the United States. This discussion mostly involves a comparison of the nineteenth-century United States with Russia (interestingly, going back to 1550), along with an examination of US-Russian competition in the far Northwest. Although this section feels a little unconnected to the rest of the conclusion, it nevertheless is intriguing, and suggests new avenues for research. This includes comparative work on the influences of armies on economic development in the United States, Russia, and other nations, as well as on the impact of different political economies of the military on a nation's foreign relations. Additionally, in this section on Russia, Adler mentions the US Navy, which he previously only does several times (in relation to Matthew Karp's work on Southern expansionists and naval power). The military technically includes the navy, but in *Engineering Expansion*, Adler focuses solely on the Army. How did the Navy influence economic development? More broadly, how did the Navy shape "the expanding commercial empire that the United States was designing" (158)? Finally, scholars could extend Adler's focus past the Civil War, examining the relationship between military power and the United States' "expanding commercial empire," or between the armies' influence on economic development and economic and racial inequalities.

Future research aside, Adler's book makes a fine contribution to our understanding of American political economy, state building, and foreign relations through a detailed examination of the Army. However much the military has been missing from the literature, Adler has successfully brought it back in.

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<sup>9</sup> William D. Adler, "State Capacity and Bureaucratic Autonomy in the Early United States: The Case of the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers," *Studies in American Political Development* 26 (2012): 110; William D. Adler and Andrew J. Polsky, "Building the New American Nation: Economic Development, Public Goods, and the Early U.S. Army," *Political Science Quarterly* 125:1 (Spring 2010): 87-110. Andrew J. Polsky and William D. Adler, "The State in a Blue Uniform," *Polity* 40:3 (2008): 348-354.



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 Review by Samuel Watson, United States Military Academy
 

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*Engineering Expansion* is a synthesis of the US Army's role in early American economic development and the American political economy that also comments on civil-military relations. It is a work in the American Political Development ("APD") field of political science, which is driven by history rather than theory, but still fundamentally synthetic. Military historians who have published work on the US Army have already made many of Adler's arguments, though usually in a less synthetic form. I have done so myself, and I couldn't agree more with Adler's argument for the Army's significance.<sup>1</sup> In this review I particularly focus on the character of early American civil-military relations, which I have approached in my own books through the lens of the Army in the borderlands and frontiers during the era in question. Here one wonders whether Adler's approach is too formalist to account for the variety and nuance of American civil-military relations.

Adler argues that "although parts of this story have been presented in piecemeal fashion by historians, insufficient work in political science has paid attention to the Army's important contributions in early America" (1). This opening tells us that Adler will provide a synthesis for political scientists. Historians have written several monographs examining early civilian government agencies in depth, while political scientists have written several articles on the Army's role in infrastructural development, and Robert Wooster and I have each written a pair of substantial books on the Army's role in territorial expansion, in the borderlands and frontiers.<sup>2</sup> It is not clear whether the past political science emphasis on the nineteenth-century American political system as a "state of courts and parties" (codified in Stephen Skowronek's 1982 *Building a New American State*) is truly still the norm in political science analyses, in APD, or among American political historians, where its analogue can be found in Richard McCormick's 1988 argument for "distributive politics,"<sup>3</sup> but its implication, that nineteenth-century America was lightly governed, with a weak national state, remains a staple assertion among non-specialists, including many American historians, particularly those who do not focus on the nineteenth century. And more specifically, neither APD scholar Brian Balogh's *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America*, nor historian Gary Gerstle's *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present*, which offer the leading historical syntheses of nineteenth-century American governance and state development, say much about the military.<sup>4</sup>

Under those circumstances, Adler's argument is welcome. He argues that "any account of the early American political economy [and thus the early American state, or early American political development] in which the Army does not play a central role is radically incomplete" (2). Still more valuable for historians of American international relations or the borderlands is Adler's emphasis on the distinctions between center and periphery (the borderlands and frontiers): "in the periphery, no institution came close to the Army's

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel J. Watson, *Jackson's Sword: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1810-1821* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012) and *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821-1846* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wooster, *The American Military Frontiers: The United States Army in the West, 1783-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012). Adler cites the fairly extensive historical and political science literature on national civilian executive branch agencies in his bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Richard L. McCormick, [\*The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era\*](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2017). Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), mentions the army fairly often, but does not explore its role in much depth. A notable exception, written by a historian of the US government's forcible expulsion of Native Americans from the southeast, is Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020).

overarching presence” (3). Indeed, he notes that “it is no exaggeration to say that the Army *built* the emerging American nation through its [actions] in the periphery” (3, my emphasis). And given the limits of communications to and from the borderlands, and their civil governance by appointed (territorial) rather than elected officials, Adler argues that “in no sense...could ‘courts and parties’ have controlled the fate [the development] of the periphery” (3). Yet regions that had been borderlands in 1800 were part of the nation’s economic core within two generations at most, suggesting “that some force pushed these outlying regions into becoming more like the established eastern regions. Without the Army acting as such an important force...settlement there would have been slower, connections to the East would have been fewer, and indeed the entire frontier could have easily broken off into its own country” (3). While I would not go so far as to say that that was true of “the entire frontier,” my own books explore those processes in depth, and I would agree that “the Army played a key role in assuring that the distant West remained attached to the rest of the Union” (3), with crucial consequences for the future of North America and the world.<sup>5</sup>

Adler explores two elements of what historical sociologist Michael Mann refers to as the sources of social power, coercive and infrastructural power.<sup>6</sup> In assessing the latter, he discusses the well-trodden ground of Army officers’ work in exploring, surveying, and directing the construction of roads, railroads, canals, and river and harbor improvements, which has been examined by historians of the US Army since at least the 1950s, but he places their sometimes descriptive studies in a valuable conceptual context: “the Army often supplied public goods necessary for economic development beyond those that the individual state could provide at a time when private actors lacked the incentive [or often the capability] to do so” (7). In other words, resources alone meant potential, not outcome, and “certain public goods could be provided only by a national state, making it indispensable to the emergence of an integrated continental economy” (9). The national standing army (which the United States has had in some form since 1796, if not 1784) meant permanence and funding, however limited it seemed to contemporary officers, or appears in comparison with the twentieth century, which enabled the development of experience and thus encouraged assertions of expertise that civilian politicians and policymakers widely accepted. As a result, and because the Army was a standing force already paid by the nation, it, rather than volunteers or militia, actually took the lead in and sustained most of the extended or difficult wars or conflicts of territorial expansion, like those against Mexico and Native Americans.<sup>7</sup>

In chapter 1, “Coercion and Economic Development,” Adler suggests that the Army helped prevent an alternative future of multiple “slow-growing republics, less attractive to immigrants, with industrial development delayed until a much later date” (55). In other words, it helped implement and secure the “peace pact” and free trade zone that David Hendrickson and others have identified in the Constitution.<sup>8</sup> Most of this chapter is a survey of cases, which are well-known to historians of the Army if not American historians in general, in which the Army provided aid to the civil power, whether in the nation’s core (deploying troops to Charleston to intimidate the Nullifiers, or sending patrols to areas where unrest had been reported among

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<sup>5</sup> Watson, *Jackson’s Sword and Peacekeepers and Conquerors*. Adler (161) also follows Mark R. Wilson, *The Business of Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861–1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) in recognizing the centrality of army logistical branches to the mobilization and sustainment of the Union war effort.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> See Samuel Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted: West Point Socialization, Military Accountability, and the Nation-State during the Jacksonian Era,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 7 (June 2006): 217-49, and “Military Learning and Adaptation Shaped by Social Context: The US Army and Its ‘Indian Wars,’ 1790-1890,” *Journal of Military History* 82 (April 2018): 371-412. William B. Skelton demonstrated that Army officers’ average careers were decades long, which was all the more true of senior commanders and staff officers; see *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1816* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992). See Timothy D. Johnson, *The Mexico City Campaign* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007) for the Regular Army’s leading role in Mexico.

<sup>8</sup> David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003). See also James E. Lewis, Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

enslaved people) or in its frontiers and borderlands (for example, against the Burr conspiracy, or along the Canadian border to enforce Jefferson's Embargo, and in the late 1830s), or fought or intimidated opponents in pursuit of territorial expansion. Chapter 2, "Building the Nation, Building the Economy," follows a similar path of case studies that are largely related to the development of transportation infrastructure, which historians of the Army have discussed for several generations.

Chapter 3, "Who Commands," raises the question of civilian control, and who specifically benefitted from the Army's actions. Here I find Adler's conclusion, that there was "a significant lack of civilian control" (74), less convincing. As he observes, "even within the [nation's] center, the president and Congress lacked the institutional capacity to exercise close oversight over routine socioeconomic functions" (12). They did not have the staffs that they do today, and few served more than say eight years, unlike many members of Congress today, so they had little of the institutional memory or experience of Army officers serving an average of twenty years. This difficulty was aggravated by distance, so that federal officials, civil and military alike, were normally expected to use their discretion to implement policy in frontier regions. As a result, policymaking "often fell outside the spare constitutional framework" (12); strict construction was hardly conducive to the governance actually necessary, whether for defense or expansion. Adler notes that "a wide range of political actors worked to control the Army's actions" (12), and he identifies a variety of scholars' interpretations about who did so (17-18), but he sees "at best an attenuated form of civilian control, with significant decisions...being left in the hands of unelected officers" (12).

I would argue that this is far too formal an approach. Adler notes that the president was the only elected official in the executive branch. This remains the case, counting the vice-president as a back-up to the president. Surely James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, or the other founders, did not intend that any policy implementation that was not undertaken by the president meant a lack of constitutional control, or that any military action that was not immediately or personally directed by the president would mean a lack of civilian control. Had Americans understood matters in that way, it seems unlikely that the Constitution would have been ratified. Rather, executive action proceeds through and within a framework of federalism and both a separation and a balance of powers: thus scholars commonly refer to civilian control "*under* the Constitution," rather than "*in* the Constitution." (At West Point I have plenty of experience reminding cadets that presidents do not pass laws or declare war). Indeed, *execution* itself—the implementation of policy—always involves discretion and interpretation on the part of the various actors. In this realm, it appears that American historians have lagged behind their British counterparts in recognizing the role of "men on the spot," those mezzo-level (to use the political science term) officials who translate objectives into actions.<sup>9</sup>

Civilian control was also a matter of shared objectives. Few American politicians (much less those who achieved election) in that era were strongly or consistently critical of territorial expansion, or actually rejected federal support for internal improvements (infrastructural development) when it was available. Decades of scholarship have demonstrated that Jacksonian Democrats enjoyed the benefits of internal improvements once the National Republicans got them into policy with the 1824 General Survey Act, and that the Democrats of the 1850s revived federal aid to internal improvements after their most anti-federal president, James Polk, reduced that support during the preceding decade. The Whigs, who failed to stop the passage of the Indian Removal Act by only a single vote in 1830, essentially ceded the issue thereafter, presenting the alleged killer of the Pan-Indian war leader Tecumseh and the victor of Tippecanoe as their presidential candidates in 1836 and 1840, before turning to Army commanders Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, victors in the war against Mexico, in 1848 and 1852. And as Robert Wooster has shown in the most comprehensive

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<sup>9</sup> See for example John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815–1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Stephen Saunders Webb, *The Governors-General: The English Army and the Definition of Empire, 1569–1681* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

exploration of the Army's role in nineteenth-century America,<sup>10</sup> Congress did inquire about military activities and expenditures, leaving a massive document trail for scholars. But on the whole Congress accepted executive branch action, particularly in the borderlands/peripheries, as the execution of law and policy.

In chapter 4 Adler uses his previous research on the Corps of Topographical Engineers, who surveyed routes for railroads and canals and engaged in physical exploration, as a case study of “bureaucratic entrepreneurs.” This is a political science concept, one that is standard in the APD field, in which unelected officials take the initiative to shape policy, whether to their own preferences or because they face a policy vacuum and feel compelled to fill it in order to implement broadly or vaguely worded objectives.<sup>11</sup> While it is a valuable term, we must consider what it implies: that executive agents might normally be expected to follow a policy so clearly and precisely delineated by legislation (or perhaps by the president, as the sole elected official in the executive branch) that it needs no interpretation. Yet even in the Army today, orders are interpreted, since only very simple orders can be so precise as to need no interpretation. Indeed, the US Army's doctrine today is one of ‘mission command’—decentralized execution, trying to execute the ‘commander's intent’ through ‘disciplined initiative.’ The existence of “bureaucratic entrepreneurs” can only be a surprise if one is starting from a premise that nineteenth-century America was governed by “courts and parties.” Courts do attempt to write precise decisions. But if a partisan actor urges an executive agent to do something, he is in fact pushing an interpretation. If the argument is that the political parties acted through legislation, this returns us to the limits of most legislation: it must be interpreted, whether by executive branch agencies or by the courts—who then rely on executive branch actors to implement *their* decisions, as President Andrew Jackson famously declined to do regarding the Cherokee.

One might further ask what “a significant lack of civilian control” actually meant. Certainly not blackmail by the military of the civilian authority, nor intimidating or overthrowing it. Sometimes, as I have explored in depth in my own books, military officers did drag their feet rather than aggressively pressure Native Americans to move westward. But, as I have argued, and as Adler shows, they did ultimately advance American territorial expansion, and the Whigs (or Free Soil Democrats) had little effect in opposing that expansion against Mexico or Native Americans. In their efforts to secure the rule of law, or to uphold laws when called upon to aid civil authorities—something Army officers almost never initiated—military officers usually sought the aid of federal civil officials to provide due process, or to at least to assert a cloak of due process. Examples include their seizure of arms and ammunition under the Neutrality Acts to prevent American citizens from invading Canada as filibusters in the late 1830s, or to force white squatters to leave public lands, or lands held by Native Americans, often burning the cabins and crops of squatters—i.e., citizens—in the process.<sup>12</sup>

These actions aroused some protest in Congress, and that protest no doubt contributed to sensitivities that limited the expulsion of squatters from Indian lands (a particularly important example of the limits to active government, even in enforcing the laws), but Congress as a whole accepted executive control over the implementation of the Indian Removal Act—which then meant Army control, in the absence of other agencies capable of logistical operations. The Indian Department, the ancestor of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, was a civilian agency of the War Department, but depended on the Army for its logistics and coercive action, much as federal customs officers and marshals depended on local posses or, much less often, the

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Wooster, *From Confederation to Empire: The Army and the Making of America, 1784-1903* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Skowronek, *Building a New American State*, and Daniel Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*. See Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (1964; rev. ed., Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988) and Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) for the variety of forms that military resistance to civilian authority can take.

Army to enforce the laws or policies against violent opposition. Preferring to imagine itself as a European-style force intended to battle the armies of other nation-states, the US Army rarely sought to intervene in conflicts among citizens, and politicians rarely sought that it do so: note its almost complete absence from policing the persistent urban rioting of the Jacksonian era.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Adler ultimately concludes that “the fragmentation of political control over the Army” (13) actually limited its responsiveness to partisan or sectional demands—another argument I previously made, observing a change during the 1820s, in some depth in my books *Jackson’s Sword* and *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*.<sup>14</sup> Thus we find that Jackson’s dominance over the Army along the Florida border in the 1810s through his like-minded subordinates changed after Jackson left the Army in 1821, along with many of those subordinates, who were eager to profit directly from the lands they had helped coerce from the Creeks and other southeastern Indians during that decade. As Durwood Ball pointed out two decades ago, the sectional tensions of the 1850s did affect the Army—but not in a single direction, supportive of one section or party. Thus, while Adler emphasizes that the Topographical Engineers preferred a southern route for the transcontinental railroad, encouraging the Gadsden Purchase, other officers followed President Taylor’s guidance to resist Texan aggrandizement against New Mexico, which was then a federal territory largely governed by the Army. While the Regular Army did serve in the rendition of Anthony Burns under the Fugitive Slave Act, Adler observes that federal military commanders, including some who identified as Democrats, sometimes failed to act as aggressively in support of pro-slavery forces in Kansas as Democratic presidents wished. Yet this had also been true in the 1830s, when, for example, general John Wool—who identified as a Democrat—was the man on the spot trying to intimidate the Cherokee into leaving Georgia, without provoking a war while the United States was fighting the Seminole in Florida and the Creeks in Alabama.<sup>15</sup>

Jackson became angry with Wool whether Wool pushed hard or tried to conciliate—and the same pattern was repeated in Kansas and against filibusters in California during the 1850s. Of the Democratic presidents, only Martin Van Buren, who was close to Winfield Scott from the War of 1812, deployed the Army and then gave it autonomy to act against Americans filibustering into Canada. Yet, between the difficulties of communications, the absence of State Department officials, apart from some territorial governors, and the discretion necessary to implement policy on the spot, federal military commanders continued to conduct American foreign policy in the borderlands and frontiers. Indeed, I call such diplomacy ‘national military

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<sup>13</sup> The absence of attention to military power is a significant lacuna in Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administration State in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) which reads as if civilian Indian agents somehow executed federal Indian policy by themselves, despite a lack of staff or coercive power. Army officers rarely suggested that they undertake peacekeeping or civil policing: they did not seek to displace civil government or undertake its functions, which is one of Samuel Finer’s categories of military usurpation of civilian authority. Instead, they much preferred to think about war against other nation-states, with conventional armies against whom they could gain reputation and promotion.

<sup>14</sup> Watson, *Jackson’s Sword*, and *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*.

<sup>15</sup> Durwood Ball, *Army Regulars on the Western Frontier, 1848-1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001). There was a similar ebb and flow in the army’s role in attracting settlement by establishing forts, a topic to which Adler devotes substantial attention. See also Watson, *Jackson’s Sword*, ch. 6. To answer the extent to which they did so will ultimately require more detailed analyses of population flows. Ball also explores army operations against filibusters in California, where John Wool again clashed with Democratic secretaries of war. Note, however, that William Skelton does *not* identify “a disproportionate number” (Adler, 76) of Democrats in the army officer corps: Skelton observes that Democrats were a slight majority among the officers whose views he could find, as was the case among the electorate as a whole. Nor do experiences like Wool’s show that officers who identified as Democrats were able to translate the policies of Democratic presidents into practice without friction. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, ch.15, and “Officers and Politicians: The Origins of Army Politics in the United States before the Civil War.” *Armed Forces and Society* 6 (Fall 1979): 22–48. The same nuance needs to be applied to assertions that the officer corps was disproportionately southern in origin, which Skelton provides statistics to disprove.

diplomacy,' or 'frontier military diplomacy,' which often required conciliating, and not infrequently coercing, local citizens and their state and territorial officials.

In that light, I have argued that American civil-military relations during this era should be seen through a prism of military autonomy, particularly in operations in the borderlands, and insulation from partisan control, particularly in accessions and promotions, rather than alienation. Yet autonomy does not mean a lack of civilian control, but rather a congruence between the civilian consensus, among those who defined themselves legally as citizens, over broad objectives—most importantly, territorial expansion—and military efforts to secure those objectives at a limited cost to taxpayers, to the lives of citizens, and to national, personal, and institutional reputations. Contrary to what one might expect, although Army officers constantly sought more troops and funding, and could have used them given how extensive their missions were, they made do with what they received, and generally acted to restrain rather than precipitate war. This is in contrast to many British, French, and Russian commanders of that imperial era. Indeed, I think that civilian politicians and policymakers could usually predict the broad thrust of how the Army would implement policies (cf. 147).

Adler's most accurate conclusion about civil-military relations comes when he identifies "Politicians as Policymakers, Officers as Managers" (86). But managers don't just execute precise instructions: they interpret, and they are usually expected to do so. His conclusion that Army officers were "without responsibility to answer to the citizenry" is accurate at the most formal level of analysis; after that matters become much more complex, and cannot be understood without a deeper analysis of what Army officers said about their responsibilities. In my work I have emphasized the development of a sense of accountability and responsibility to the nation and its citizens, channeled through and mediated by accountability to what we now call the national command authority.<sup>16</sup> Yet that did not mean complete obedience to the commands of presidents—whose commands were often vague or internally contradictory. As Donald Connelly wrote in his biography of Army commanding general John Schofield, the question in American civil-military relations is usually not *whether* civilians are in control, or exercising influence, but *which* civilians (within the separation of powers).<sup>17</sup> Yet Adler does not offer an extended discussion of civilian control, preferring to set out what appears in *The Federalist* and the ratification debates (145-47).

Although he recognizes the limits to military partisanship or sectionalism between the 1820s and the 1850s, Adler observes that "the Army's choices ultimately served to further divide the nation" (141) during the 1850s. At one level of resolution this would be difficult to avoid, given the growing sectionalism of that era, and the Democrats' abandonment of much of their opposition to federal support for infrastructure: almost any choice would favor someone, or could be seen to do so, regardless of intentions. From a more focused perspective, I would question whether "the Army" made such choices. Here the bureaucratic entrepreneurs of the Corps of Topographical Engineers may have had an outsized effect. But on the other hand, as Adler points out, the Army's efforts in Bleeding Kansas were hardly subservient to the Slave Power (or to the Free Soilers). President Buchanan gave military commanders explicitly discretionary orders; Army officers hardly "flouted presidential orders" (85), and Adler's examples do not show that they did. What are we to make of Colonel Edwin Sumner taking "his zeal for enforcing the Pierce administration's proslavery leanings much further than Pierce" wanted? Pierce "had given him full authority to use force," and the territorial governor told Sumner to break up a meeting of the Free Soil legislature. This was not contrary to Pierce's orders: it was an implementation of them, under the direction of the president's civilian representative, the governor.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See concisely Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted."

<sup>17</sup> Donald B. Connelly, *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> See Ball, *Army Regulars on the Western Frontier*, and Tony R. Mullis, *Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), for more nuanced accounts of the army's operations in Kansas. Sumner was a strong Unionist, who escorted president-elect Abraham Lincoln to his inauguration.

As noted at the outset, I agree wholeheartedly with Adler's assessment of the Army's significance in American territorial expansion, or imperialism, and economic development. They could not have occurred so quickly, or been sustained, without the Army, and no civilian government agency had such an impact on its own. The Post Office, Land Office, and Indian Bureau all depended on military security and aggression and infrastructural development. Yet as Adler observes, "work within the APD tradition has, for the most part, not yet intersected with the rich historical literature on the American military" (148). Unfortunately, the same can be said of this book in regard to histories of the Army in the borderlands published since about 2008: Robert Wooster's synthesis *The American Military Frontiers* (2009) is absent from his bibliography, as are my *Jackson's Sword* (2012) and *Peacekeepers and Conquerors* (2013).<sup>19</sup>

*Engineering Expansion* offers a valuable synthesis of the Army's operations in support of national territorial expansion and infrastructural development. Its publication by the University of Pennsylvania Press should help it reach early American historians, and APD scholars still seem to need reminding of the role of military force in American nationbuilding, despite a generation of monographs challenging the weak-state thesis, because those works concentrate on civilian executive branch agencies. Yet the "bureaucratic entrepreneurs" of APD scholarship are the men on the spot of British imperial history, and the regional or theater commanders (the Scotts, Wools, and Sumners, and their subordinates) in studies of the US Army in the borderlands, as Robert Wooster and I have shown. Wooster's new book *From Confederation to Empire* provides a more comprehensive and detailed discussion of the Army's role in both territorial expansion and economic development, and my previous work explores in depth the Army's diplomacy in the borderlands.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps Adler's most insightful argument is that "as the primary coercive actor in political life, the military must be seen as being at the heart of the American state" (141), particularly in the nation's borderlands and peripheries. What this seemingly counterintuitive generalization means is that the United States was a developing nation, and an imperial one, albeit a republican empire or an 'empire of liberty' for those who could claim citizenship. If we pay more attention to the borderlands and frontiers, to the military and to diplomacy, coercive or otherwise, in those regions, we can better see the limits of American exceptionalism, including that in the concept of settler colonialism, in US military, diplomatic, international, political, and economic history.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Wooster, *The American Military Frontiers*; Watson, *Jackson's Sword*, and *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*. Adler does cite several of my articles, and my dissertation, and thanked me in a 2012 article. Robert P. Wettemann, Jr., *Privilege vs. Equality: Civil-Military Relations in the Jacksonian Era, 1815–1845* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009) is also absent, as is Wettemann's dissertation, "'To the Public Prosperity': The US Army and the Market Revolution, 1815–1844" (Ph. D. Diss., Texas A&M University, 2001), which focused on the army and internal improvements.

<sup>20</sup> Wooster, *From Confederation to Empire*.

<sup>21</sup> Adler provides a good example of the parallels between imperial continental expansion in his section comparing the United States and nineteenth century Russia (150-59). Although the concept of settler colonialism is usually thought to counter American exceptionalistic beliefs, it often has the effect of reinforcing old 'liberal' interpretations of American development: settlers apparently dictated the actions of the nation-state and its military forces (an exaggeration either way), or defeated indigenous warriors on their own, through technological superiority or demography. Undergraduate students may not see much difference from Frederick Jackson Turner or the language of Manifest Destiny, apart from shifting the moral onus onto white aggression. But settlers rarely defeated indigenous warriors on their own: white Tennesseans against the Cherokee in the 1790s are perhaps the best example. White Georgians certainly overwhelmed Cherokee and Creek societies that had been undermined by half a century of conflict and economic dependence during the 1830s, but the US Army had to intervene when the white Alabamians and Georgians were unable to handle the Creek uprising (the "Second Creek War") that their aggression provoked in 1836. And one of the principal themes of my work is that military officers often acted with significant autonomy: that they often detested white settlers, and sought to save lives, money, and personal, institutional, and national reputations by restraining the extremes of white aggression. See Watson, "Military Learning and Adaptation Shaped by Social Context," and (thus my choice of this title) *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, and John T. Ellisor, *The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

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 Response by William D. Adler, Northeastern Illinois University
 

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Let me first start by thanking Andrew Szarejko for organizing this roundtable, and to this incredible group of scholars for taking the time to read, analyze, and respond to the arguments of *Engineering Expansion*. I am truly grateful to Gautham Rao, Lindsay Schakenbach Regele, Stephen Rockwell, and Samuel Watson for all of their thoughts, and my responses to them should all be read in light of that thankfulness.

In writing *Engineering Expansion*, my primary goals were both to contribute to our historical understanding of the Army's role in the American polity and also to intervene in ongoing scholarly debates about the nature of the American state. These conversations among scholars cross disciplinary boundaries; in my field of Political Science, and specifically within the subfield of American Political Development (APD), understanding the American state is a topic of central concern. I am pleased that historians are also reading this work and taking the arguments in it seriously, and hope that this book can continue to have an impact on this historiographical literature.

My jumping-off point in beginning this research project was, as for many others working in this field, Stephen Skowronek's famous claim in *Building a New American State* that in the nineteenth century the United States could be characterized as having a "state of courts and parties."<sup>51</sup> Scholars of the early American state have, for the most part, abandoned this perspective, yet it remains a stubbornly pervasive view among those who work outside this specialized research topic (not to mention the public at large, which generally assumes there was no central government to speak of in early America<sup>52</sup>). Even those who acknowledge that the idea of a weak early American state is a "myth"<sup>53</sup> are still grappling with the legacy of the "courts and parties" narrative, which implies that the agencies of government themselves were captured by the party apparatus and the patronage system. Skowronek himself has since acknowledged that "courts and parties" was a "rudimentary first cut" into describing the state in that period, yet he still shies away from seeing a robust set of institutions acting autonomously of the parties in early America, far before the transformations associated with the Progressive Era.<sup>54</sup> This is the context within which I tried to enter the conversation. As I demonstrate in *Engineering Expansion*, the early US Army had significant strengths that cannot be explained by reference to the "courts and parties" framework. Agencies within the War Department and the Army gained autonomy in an era far earlier than seen in most studies of administration.

The responses in this roundtable largely agree with my arguments about the need to recognize these strengths of the early Army's bureaucracy, but take issue on certain points. Gautham Rao's essay questions the meaning of Army conquest in this era, asking how we understand the local circumstances under which that conquest took place. As he correctly notes, this was not a question I tried to address in the book, but I do think it is a worthwhile issue to explore. After all, if the American state (and specifically the Army) had so much power, it is natural to assume that areas of special concern to the Army, especially on the periphery, would have experienced that conquest differently than those in the nation's settled core. Native tribes, of course, were on

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<sup>51</sup> Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 24.

<sup>52</sup> This well-known myth is celebrated by many conservative organizations; see for example, "The Founding Fathers of Our Limited Government" series by the Pacific Legal Foundation, <https://pacificlegal.org/the-founding-fathers-of-our-limited-government-james-madison-and-the-fight-for-the-separation-of-powers/>.

<sup>53</sup> William J. Novak, "The Myth of the 'Weak' American State," *American Historical Review* 113 (June 2008): 752-72.

<sup>54</sup> Skowronek, "Present at the Creation: The State in Early American Political History," *Journal of the Early Republic* 38:1 (Spring 2018): 95-103, quote at 99. See also Karen Orren and Skowronek, *The Policy State: An American Predicament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).



the receiving end of the worst manifestations of that use of power, and future research should explore how native tribes experienced it and how that in turn affected central state authority.<sup>55</sup>

Thinking about the issue of conquest broadly is also the reason why I included in the conclusion a section on Russia's subjugation of its native peoples in comparison to the American version. Both Lindsay Schankenbach Regele and Stephen Rockwell questioned the inclusion of this material, and perhaps I did not sufficiently explain why it appeared in that chapter. The purpose here was to demonstrate that my analysis of the role armies play in statebuilding and territorial expansion can apply widely, beyond the single case of the United States. It comes as no surprise to scholars of comparative politics that "war made the state," as Charles Tilly memorably noted, yet the precise contours of that relationship have been hotly debated.<sup>56</sup> My book's contribution to that literature is to focus on territorial expansion and how armies are often used as instruments of that expansionist tendency. Despite many other differences in political systems and normative commitments, Russia and the United States look remarkably similar on that score.

Rockwell also had questions about my argument that places the Army as a central player in the periphery, and specifically with regard to the relationship of the central state to native tribes. It is true that I did not spend much time detailing the federal government's actions in tribal relations, licensing, or in encouraging missionaries, as Rockwell has done that work so well in his own book.<sup>57</sup> My disagreement with his arguments centers on how much weight we should put on the role of the Army: I see it as much more crucial in undergirding the actions of the Indian Bureau. Coercion was not always needed simply because the threat of it was omnipresent; and it was used, quite often, and to significant effect (as Samuel Watson notes in his review as well). Similarly, Rockwell criticizes me for leaving out material on the relationship of the Army with slaveowners, which is analyzed ably by David Ericson in his book.<sup>58</sup> I discuss some of this in Chapter 1, including the fear of slave revolts and the Army's occasional actions in stopping them or being used as a threat against them, as well as the one-sided nature of the Army's actions in Kansas during the debate over slavery there. Chapter 4 also looks at the role of slavery in influencing the debate over the Transcontinental Railroad, as southern politicians and Secretary of War Jefferson Davis pushed the topographical engineers to favor the southernmost route. These are only some of the examples I used, among many others, in demonstrating the broad and wide-ranging impact of the Army.

Civilian control of the Army is one of the main topics analyzed in Chapter 3 of the book. Both Rockwell and Watson disagree with my portrayal of civilian-military relations. My argument is that distance from Washington, D.C. and difficulty of communication in that era led military officers acting as "street-level bureaucrats"<sup>59</sup> to make decisions on their own accord, which were often at odds with what their civilian superiors might have preferred. As a result, I contend, civilian control of the Army was highly attenuated in this era. Watson critiques this depiction as "too formal" to be able to fully capture the dynamics of how

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<sup>55</sup> Worth reading in this context is Alison McQueen and Burke A. Hendrix, "Tocqueville in Jacksonian Context: American Expansionism and Discourses of American Indian Nomadism in *Democracy in America*," *Perspectives on Politics* 15:3 (September 2017): 663-677.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State Making," in Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42. See also Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1992* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1990).

<sup>57</sup> Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980). A burgeoning literature on the subject also includes Peter Hupe and Michael Hill, "Street Level Bureaucracy and Public Accountability," *Public Administration* 85:2 (June 2007): 279-299; Lars Tummers and Victor Bekkers, "Policy Implementation, Street-level Bureaucracy, and the Importance of Discretion," *Public Management Review* 16:4 (2014): 527-547; Evelyn Z. Brodtkin, "Reflections on Street-Level Bureaucracy: Past, Present, and Future," *Public Administration Review* 72:6 (November/December 2012): 940-949; and many other works.

civilians and military officers interacted, and argues that it does not necessarily indicate a lack of true civilian control.

My response focuses on the concept of the street-level bureaucrat (borrowed from the field of Public Policy), which possibly did not come through sufficiently in the book, and its central importance to my case. Michael Lipsky's point about these street-level bureaucrats, as described in his 1980 book and subsequent updated editions, is that they work to maintain their discretion and resist the efforts by those above them to limit their autonomy. In some cases, the managers will allow this discretion to persist, especially when they are far-removed from conditions at the "street level." Implementation of abstract policy goals then happens based upon what those street-level officials do, and not government policy. The "unsanctioned work"<sup>60</sup> of those street-level actors becomes what the public experiences as that agency's actual policies.

While Lipsky focused on social workers, teachers, and law enforcement, I extend his framing to the Army: officers and soldiers were acting on the "street level" in implementing decisions authorized by their far-removed superiors, but with a latitude those superiors could not always control. Like the street-level teachers or social workers in Lipsky's work, officers and soldiers sometimes were purposely granted that discretion, but other times far exceeded what their superiors would have ideally preferred. Officers tried to ensure they could maintain their distance from civilian superiors when they perceived their knowledge of the situation on the ground to be better. The public perception of what the Army did was then shaped by those on-the-ground conditions, and not necessarily what policymaking civilians desired. Perhaps this view does not account for every historical nuance of every particular circumstance, but I think the overall point stands up to scrutiny. Possibly the disciplinary differences are part of the reason we see it differently, as political scientists like to make broader generalizations that can account for a wider variety of conditions. But I thank this distinguished group of historians for pushing this dialogue forward and hope that we can continue to learn from each other.

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<sup>60</sup> Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition) (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), xi.