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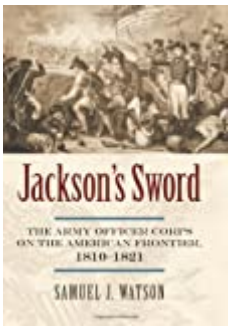


**Samuel J. Watson.** *Jackson's Sword: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1810-1821.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012. xx + 460 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1884-2.

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## Shaping the Borders: Officers on the Early Frontier

During the height of the Cold War, political scientist Samuel Huntington tried to determine the most effective methodology for retaining a protective military while ensuring this powerful organization would respond appropriately to the nation's requirements. He contended that the United States military had become a professional organization because of its isolation from society after the Civil War. Although historians have discounted this hypothesis by showing the army was not nearly as isolated as Huntington believed, scholars continue to search for the origins of the professionalism of the United States military. While addressing much more than this single topic, Watson has provided new insights on the topic in his first book of a two-volume study of U.S. military leadership before the Civil War.

In *Jackson's Sword: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier*, Watson argues that West Point's selection and socialization of future military leaders transformed U.S. officers from regionally oriented genteel elites who transitioned easily and often between military leadership and civilian occupations to professional military leaders who functioned under the authority of national civilian leaders. However, because he has divided his work into two volumes, Watson is only able to establish the character of military leaders before 1821–represented by Andrew Jackson and his subordinates–as politically active elites who responded to regional concerns as often as they did national leaders. Thus, readers must wait for his second volume to see the rest of his argument.

Watson begins his book in 1810, but spends little time on the conflict with England during the War of 1812, focusing instead on military activities around the porous and insecure borders between the United States and Spain and on conflicts between whites and Native Americans. The book ends in 1821, presumably because the military reduction in force of that year made West Pointers the core of U.S. military leadership. However, this end point coincides with the abolishment of the Division of the Army of the South, a major focus of the book, and Andrew Jackson, the Division's commander, transitioning to become the military governor of Florida. This

allows Watson to focus his next book on the post-Jackson military.

Watson commences his study with a theoretical discussion of civil-military relations and by defining his concepts and goals for the book. His arguments on civil-military relations lean more toward Morris Janowitz's constabulatory arguments about the development of the military than Huntington's concepts. He argues that studying the military relationships on the borders of the Spanish and American empires can provide as good an understanding of the state's formation and development as studying the nation's center.

As might be expected, *Jackson's Sword* focuses primarily on Jackson's Division of the Army of the South. Watson provides a fascinating account of the military responses to and, at times, active support for military excursions into Spanish territory, revealing that Jackson and his protÃ©gÃ©s often cared more about regional concerns than they did national issues. Because the military leaders were often the most significant representatives of national power in these border regions, Watson contends that studying their actions and attitudes provides a better understanding of governance during this time than would an isolated study of Washington. In fact, Watson argues that, as one of the only national power structures of the time, the military helped strengthen the nation. Military officers were often "mediators between local and national as well as international interests" and "exercised "substantial and sometimes decisive discretionary influence over the implementation and final shape of national policy" (pp. 319-20). This was especially true under the Monroe administration, when a weak president and rotating secretary of war refused or failed to reign in the politically powerful and headstrong Jackson.

In chapter 6, Watson examines the military in the Northwest. He addresses several conflicts between military commanders and local or regional leaders. Often, Watson shows, the military commanders chose to use their forces in a more conservative manner than the regional leaders would have preferred, unlike Jackson and his subordinates in the South. He concludes the book with a discussion of the early West Point education, its impact on the officer corps, and the attitudes and beliefs of the officers who led the army during the pre-Civil War era. Both topics were informative and pertinent to the book's argument , but were not given the attention devoted to the activities in the South. Because Watson is arguing that the West Point education helped professionalize the military, expanding these sections, especially the chapter dealing with the military of the Northwest, would have been helpful.

*Jackson's Sword* provides a fascinating look at Andrew Jackson's political and military influence, but, as noted above, Watson does not show that it is reflective of other U.S. military leaders. As Watson observes, Jackson "would prove exceptional in will, stature, and action." While Watson believes "the autocratic general's reluctance to subordinate himself to the legal direction and restraints of the nation-state represented by his civilian superiors was not uncommon among the cocky, hard-bitten veteran officers of the immediate postwar army," he admits that "Jackson's willfulness and political stature made him difficult if not impossible to restrain; he more than any other American military leader then or since, believed himself a tribune for the citizens he served" (p. 185). While Jackson was uniquely strong, Watson contends that James Madison and James Monroe were not, writing that "despite intermittent War Department instructions, it does not appear that Madison had a consistent policy toward Spain, Florida, or the Gulf borderlands, a policy-making vacuum the generals were happy to exploit" (p. 73). In contrast, Jacob Brown, the commanding general of the army during this time, "adeptly shifted his support to John Quincy Adams and worked closely with the new president to minimize perceptions of military involvement in politics and civil affairs" (p. 236). For these reasons, Jackson's Division of the South may have been an aberration in military professionalism. A broader look, either chronologically or by providing more detailed study on northern military officers, would have strengthened Watson's argument, but it may be more clear in his second book.

Watson shows a thorough mastery of the historiography and events of the era, citing or disputing historical arguments throughout the text. He also provides intriguing insights into relations between military leaders, regional and national politicians, and non-state or international actors and describes how these relationships influenced national and international events. He includes an amazing 93 pages of detailed notes for 285 pages of narrative. These not only document his sources, but also provide rich detail on events or explain his perspectives without cluttering up the text. The endnotes are detailed enough that he includes references to them in his expansive index. He also includes four appendices that list army officers involved in unauthorized expeditions against Spanish territory or who later accepted key federal or territorial positions, and lay out his thoughts on

levels of military action. Finally, he includes a comprehensive selected bibliography that provides students of this era with years of reading options.

Overall, *Jackson's Sword* is a worthy addition to the study of civil-military relations and the historiography of U.S. international and domestic relations in the early American Republic. For this reason, I look forward to reading his second volume.

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