



Thomas Jefferson's Military Academy: Founding West Point (Jeffersonian America)

Robert M. S. McDonald

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Why did Thomas Jefferson, who claimed to abhor war and fear standing armies, in 1802 establish the United States Military Academy? For more than two centuries this question has received scant attention, despite the significant contributions of both Jefferson and West Point to American history.

Thomas Jefferson's Military Academy is the most comprehensive treatment to date of the origins, purposes, and legacies of Jefferson's school on the cliffs above the Hudson River. In a series of essays, an interdisciplinary group of military historians, legal and constitutional scholars, and experts on Jefferson's thought challenge the conventional wisdom that the third president's founding of the academy should be regarded as accidental or ironic. Although Jefferson feared the potential power of a standing army, the contributors point out he also contended that "whatever enables us to go to war, secures our peace." They take a broad view of Jeffersonian security policy, exploring the ways in which West Point bolstered America's defenses against foreign aggression and domestic threats to the ideals of the American Revolution.

Written in clear and accessible prose, *Thomas Jefferson's Military Academy* should appeal to scholars and general readers interested in military history and the founding generation.

Contributors:

- Peter S. Onuf, University of Virginia
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