



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
WACHMAN CENTER

**CLASSROOM LESSONS:
THE MILITARY IN U.S. DOMESTIC HISTORY**

The Military Role in Nation Building in U.S. History and the World Today

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GRADE LEVEL: 11-12

Class Time: 1 Session of 70 min. lecture & discussion; homework assignment
Student Reflection/Critical Thinking

Sunshine State Social Studies Standards:

1. SSUSH4: Students will identify aspects of development in the early American period.
2. SSUSH12: Students will analyze the impact of the military's role in the growth of America.
3. SSUSH13: Students will identify major efforts to reform American society.

OBJECTIVE:

Students will understand the role of nation-building in our military's history and be able to explain the expanding role of nation-building as part of the war fighting prowess normally recognized as the exclusive domain of our military forces. Key focus: Describe the contributions that our military forces have made to U.S. history.

Teacher Readings:

1. Presentations from FPRI's April 2010 conference on The Military in America's Domestic History: Michael Tate, "Frontier Army and the Age of

American Discovery." Todd Shallet, "Building Infrastructure, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers." Christopher S. Parker, "Fighting for Equality."

2. The Accidental Guerilla, Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One, by David Kilcullen, Oxford University Press, 2009.
3. The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World, by Gen. Rupert Smith, New York, Knopf, 2007.

Lesson Outline:

1. **Introduction:** Brainstorming Session: What kinds of things do you think our military does?

a. Possible responses: Defend the country; train for future war; pay for college, travel the world; serve the country.

b. Discussion items:

-- The public expects our military to train to fight on land, sea, and air; commonly understood primary focus on defeating the enemy forces and/or their will to fight; general expectations are of exclusively combat functions of fighting, supply, and logistics. These notions come from experiences of "war stories," movies, popular books, and most history lessons.

-- Factual history is much more involved and complex, involving more than combat. See below.

2. **Main Body:**

I. The Military in Early American History

a. Revolutionary era leaders had a long-standing fear and suspicion of standing armies. George Washington was convinced of the need for a strong army, but Thomas Jefferson was reluctant. Jefferson feared a standing army would be a threat to freedom.

-- Jefferson later agreed to establishment of West Point (1802), but lobbied for its emphasis to be an engineering academy.

-- First 50 years of West Point's history produced an elite corps of army engineers with scientific, mathematics, and cartographic skills. Army officers were among the best educated and trained men in the country at that time. West Point was a dominant institution for educating engineers in this country until the 1870s when its focus started to shift to war fighting and other colleges and universities grew and undertook science and engineering studies.

-- In the post Revolutionary period, they played a larger role in building our nation than they did fighting wars.

b. Our history tends to focus more on the frontier/Indian fighting roles of the army and ignore the less glamorous tasks such as exploring, trail marking, mapping, etc. Who do you think built most of the roads and bridges in early America? Who dug the canals and harbors or built water works projects? Army engineers led the way.

c. As the west expanded, most cities and towns grew out of early army outposts. (Detroit, Chicago, and Ft. Wayne are prominent examples).

d. The army's role in developing our nation took precedence over war fighting until the Civil War. At that point it switched to combat.

e. War fighting and winning wars became the obvious reason for supporting a military force. It is important, however, to realize the significance of our military's contribution to the growth of our nation itself...and its continuing contribution in that regard in the world today.

f. As the West expanded, many of our cities and towns grew out of early army outposts. (Detroit, Chicago, and Ft. Wayne are examples). The U.S. Army's role from after the Revolution until the Civil War was actually more focused on nation-building our new country than on war fighting. After the Civil War, war fighting gained in importance.

II. A Look at Non-Combat Contributions of the Military:

a. Needs of the military prompted many research and development projects from our commercial industries. Science and technology received strong stimuli from military necessity. Over 70 percent of research funding has come from responses to military requirements.

b. Concerns over the diseases affecting troops deployed in isolated places led to medical research to find cures for malaria, typhus, and yellow fever. The concept of "preventive medicine" grew from these efforts. Public Health departments, familiar today, are products of military medicine and the civilian doctors and researchers supporting the military.

c. Commerce was improved and expanded by naval patrols first along our coastlines, later in the Caribbean and around South America. The opening of trade with Japan came on the heels of historical naval visits to that country in the 19th century. (Commodore Perry, 1852).

-- Naval patrols secured trade routes used by commercial shipping.

-- Voyages promoted diplomacy in the era before embassies.

-- Navigators charted, surveyed, and explored the hemisphere.

d. Army engineers built our nation's infrastructure.

-- Roads, bridges, canals, and monuments are tributes to army efforts. (Panama Canal, Washington Monument, Boston Harbor, St. Lawrence Seaway, and the Manhattan Project (atom bomb) are examples.

-- Navigation, flood control, and environmental development/protection became missions for the Army Corps of Engineers.

e. Spurring transportation. All modes of transportation received impetus from the military. From the marking/mapping of old Indian trails to their later development, from building roads and railroads to the modern interstate highway system, and from the advent of aviation to the space program, military needs linked with commercial development to forge our nation's great commercial capacity.

f. Fighting for Equality.

-- Two reconstruction periods of American history

-- Post Civil War (1865-1876)

-- Civil Rights Era (1964-1965)

-- These two periods emphasized the American Creed. There were vast social movements in the country and widespread black participation in the armed forces.

-- Equality became based on sacrifice and culture, willingness to fight for the cause of freedom.

-- Armed forces became the locus of efforts to integrate the black and white populations.

-- Armed forces have served as a proving ground for successful integration of minority groups.

-- Pres. Truman ordered integration of Army units before the Civil Rights era.

-- Racial integration within the military took effect before it did in society at large.

III. Modern Military Developments in Nation-Building

a. Defense Department directives today highlight what is called "Stability Operations." This emphasis directs our armed forces toward peace keeping and nation-building as core military missions. New terminology is evolving:

-- Operational Environment (includes military, political, economic, & social structure).

-- METT-C (Mission, Enemy, Troops, Time available—traditional elements—now adding a 'C' for Civil considerations).

b. War today in the Middle East and Afghanistan requires integration of combat and nation-building skills to a greater extent than ever before. To attract and win a population to our side calls for us to help build capable, functioning states. We must retain military superiority on the battlefield, but equally important for today's context is to understand the limits of force alone and recognize the value of reconstructing a nation's infrastructure. Examples:

- Security for local elections
- Road and bridge construction or reconstruction
- Chlorine supplies for water treatment plants
- Training bankers for their jobs

c. According to Gen. David Petraeus, current leading thinker in the Army, counterinsurgency is not about killing the enemy and holding real estate as in past wars, but in protecting and improving the well being of the population.

d. Military victory today requires more than defeating the enemy and destroying his supplies. The modern military must improve its "soft power" as well. This requires us to:

- Promote economic development
- Initiate construction projects
- Promote the rule of law
- Foster reconciliation
- Enable good governance
- Train & equip indigenous military & police

3. Conclusion

a. The U.S. military has a long tradition of nation-building that is much overlooked and overshadowed by our focus on its war fighting history.

b. The development and expansion of the United States owes much to the efforts of military research, planning, construction, and maintenance, as well as close cooperation with our civilian industry and commercial enterprises. Mutual collaboration between civil-military leaders has proven to be a great strength.

c. Modern warfare has further brought out the importance of the nation-building role of the armed forces in our efforts to achieve victory in the current War on Terror.

Homework Assignment: Find an example from current events (newspaper, news magazine, internet, or other source) and prepare a 5-paragraph essay describing military aspects at nation-building using information from this class.

Student Note-Taking Outline
The Military Role of Nation-Building

1. Brainstorming Session

2. The Military in Early American History

3. Look at Non-Combat Contributions of the Military

4. Conclusion