

Introduction

The year 1839 witnessed the founding of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), the first state military school in the U.S. South. By the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, there were twelve state military academies in the South, as well as more than seventy private ones. Together, these institutions educated more than 11,000 young men – a generation, or possibly two, of the growing southern middle class.¹ The rise of southern military education occurred in the context of increasing sectional tensions preceding the Civil War, and this timing certainly contributed to the institutions' success and informed the students who passed through their gates. Yet military schools also participated in the modernization of the Old South; they were more culturally and socially significant and progressive than their current image as institutions of retrograde, militaristic extremists would suggest. Indeed, the study of southern military education provides an excellent window into the makeup and priorities of the southern middle class that emerged in the late antebellum years. This book emphasizes military education as one location for the development of the middle class as both a regional and a national group.

¹ Bruce Allardice, "West Points of the Confederacy: Southern Military Schools and the Confederate Army," *Civil War History*, 43 (December 1997), 321, counts ninety-six southern military academies and computes that 12,000 alumni entered the Confederate army. My calculations confirm only 11,000 matriculates, but Allardice's figure suggests a larger number as not all alumni served in the Confederate army. Lester Austin Webb, "The Origin of Military Schools in the United States Founded in the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1958), 207, discovers thirty military academies in Virginia, 1840–1860, which may suggest a higher total number of schools than both Allardice and I have evidence for. Given the records and transitory nature of nineteenth-century schools, a higher figure would be unsurprising. Appendix 1 lists the military schools I have confirmed by evidence.

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It explores class formation, professionalization, and social mobility in the 1840s and 1850s through military education. Military schools, which educated non-elite young men in the Old South, were used to advantage (and for their advantage) by the families who sent their sons off to be cadets. Middle-class southerners mirrored their northern counterparts in leveraging education to develop professional occupations, social stability, and what are often identified as bourgeois values; as they accomplished these things, they attempted to redefine the southern criteria for upward mobility to make those criteria attainable for men of their standing.

The complex work of defining the emerging southern middle class – were they small planters? were they yeomen? – has begun but is far from complete. Perhaps the best definition of that class, and one supported by this research, comes from Jonathan Daniel Wells, who identifies it as made up of nonagricultural professionals. Wells estimates that the middle class of nonagricultural professionals encompassed 10 percent of the urban population in the South. My analysis of military education suggests that the group includes rural professionals and thus the figure may be even higher, perhaps reaching 15 or 20 percent of the southern population.² This small but growing constituency of doctors, merchants, teachers, and other white-collar workers in southern society often remains absent from or underrepresented in historical texts.³ Defining the socioeconomic characteristics of this class sheds light on the group, as well as on the structure and processes of class in the South and across the nation. For this reason, the first chapter of this study outlines the emerging southern middle class and indicates how military school patrons fit into that rank.

All military schools modeled themselves on the United States Military Academy at West Point. In addition to offering education free of

² On the difficulties of defining the middle class, see Peter N. Stearns, “The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition,” *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, 21 (July 1979), 377–96. Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800–1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8. Wells employs the term “middling class” for before 1850 and “middle class” for post-1850. This text focuses on the formation of the southern middle class during the antebellum years; thus, the term “emerging” or “developing” is implicit herein even when not printed.

³ An exception is Alden B. Pearson Jr., “A Middle-Class, Border-State Family During the Civil War” in *The Southern Common People*, ed. Edward Magdol and Jon L. Wakelyn (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 151–74. Southern scholars have turned attention to these groups since 2000; see especially work by Jonathan Daniel Wells, Frank Byrne, Scott Marler, and Beth Barton Schweiger.

the cost of tuition, fees, or living expenses, West Point and Annapolis guaranteed employment in the armed services upon graduation. As the federal military academy, West Point possessed a special prestige. Unlike the national academies, southern military schools offered no connection to the U.S. military; cadets at state and private schools received no preferential entrance to the armed forces, and 95 percent of them chose civilian careers. The twelve southern state legislatures that established military institutes did so not to train soldiers so much as to employ cadets as guards for state arms and to procure teachers by requiring scholarship recipients to teach in the state for two years after graduation. Private military education, likewise, fell into a category of educational experimentation and expansion commonplace throughout the nation in the early nineteenth century, adopting West Point's science-based curriculum and disciplinary program without its military mission.

This study focuses on southern private and state institutes, not the U.S. service academies. I do not analyze education at northern military institutions, though southern boys certainly enrolled in Alden Partridge's American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy, the first private military school, before southern schools took root.⁴ Only 12 percent of military schools were located in the North. These schools exhibited the same curriculum and disciplinary structure as southern schools, and they probably attracted northerners for similar reasons as the southern schools attracted southerners. Northern military education did not aid non-elites in the same way as it did in the Old South, however, because northerners had more options for practical, low-cost, and public education available to them. Perhaps for this reason, there is little evidence that many northern military academies remained open beyond the 1840s.

This study of military schools helps to redress gaps in the neglected history of education in the antebellum South and its connection to the emerging middle class. The northern experience has become the historiographic model for the history of education, with the South relegated to an exception. Canonical texts in the field, such as Lawrence Cremin's *American Education* and Carl Kaestle's *Pillars of the Republic*, correctly highlight developments in northern education and society but make only

⁴ See, for example, John Ball in Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

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passing references to the schooling of southern children. Despite calls to redress this imbalance by historians in every generation from Charles William Dabney in 1936 to Wayne Urban in 1981 and John Hardin Best in 1996, educational history's focus on New England, its so-called Massachusetts Myopia, has persisted.⁵ Although classic works in educational history describe the enlargement of educational opportunity throughout the antebellum North, especially with public systems educating non-elite youths, those works and, equally as surprising, those by southern historians have yet to investigate the applicability of their descriptions to the southern context.

What scholarship there is on antebellum southern education has usually focused on public (common) schools, which achieved only limited success, or on higher education, which appears to have benefited

⁵ It is historiographically clear why: (1) the Progressive school did it because they connected education to industrialization (thus omitting the Old South); (2) the next wave described public education (absent in the Old South); (3) revisionists focused particularly on Massachusetts and public education as social control in the industrializing era (not the Old South); and (4) the newest trend is the inclusion of previously excluded groups (not southern white men). As a new generation reworks TheodoreSizer's *The Age of Academies*, Edgar Knight's 1919 and Dale Robinson's 1977 works on the Academy Movement in the South are passed over. Similarly, only in 2004 did Robert F. Pace revise E. Merton Coulter's work on southern colleges, whereas northern texts from the early twentieth century, such as Donald Tewksburg's *Founding of American Colleges*, have been much revised. Pace's *Halls of Honor* brought attention to southern college students in a broad synthesis; my data contraindicate Pace's categorization of VMI as a college. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Coulter, *College Life in the Old South* (1928; reprint, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951); Natalie A. Naylor, "The Antebellum College Movement: A Reappraisal of Tewksbury's *Founding of American Colleges and Universities*," *History of Education Quarterly*, 13 (Fall 1973), 261–74; Carl L. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980); Colin B. Burke, *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Traditional View* (New York: New York University Press, 1982), 94, 114, 125, analyzes the South but notes the lack of sources for the region, which limits many of his conclusions; Charles William Dabney, *Universal Education in the South* (1936; reprint: New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 1:60–1; John Hardin Best, "Education in the Forming of the American South," *History of Education Quarterly*, 36 (Spring 1996), esp. 44, 48; Wayne J. Urban, "History of Education: A Southern Exposure," *History of Education Quarterly*, 21 (Summer 1981), 133–36; "Symposium: Reappraisals of the Academy Movement," *History of Education Quarterly*, 41 (Summer 2001), 216–70. Only four articles on antebellum southern education appeared in 2003, and the number was down to two in 2006; "Southern History in Periodicals, 2003: A Selected Bibliography," *Journal of Southern History*, 70 (May 2004), 351–402; "Southern History in Periodicals, 2006: A Selected Bibliography," *Journal of Southern History*, 73 (May 2007), 363–412.

primarily the elite.⁶ Southern military schools, as postprimary but not collegiate institutions, fall into a third category, which has been recently labeled “higher schooling.” That terminology, offered by Nancy Beadie and Kim Tolley, usefully distinguishes from colleges and universities the numerous academies that offered education beyond common schools but did not confer bachelor’s degrees. As scholars of the nineteenth century are well aware, antebellum academies and colleges did not display the more distinct definitional clarity that they began to assume in the latter half of the century.⁷ What are now different types of institutions – academies, institutes, seminaries, and schools – might in the Old South have had the same curriculum, structure, type of students, and meaning in the students’ lives as a culminating school experience. Some military institutions became preparatory academies; others added military programs to existing colleges and occasionally granted bachelor’s degrees. The larger military institutions compared themselves to colleges (even without granting B.A.s), but they also competed with nonmilitary academies for students. Any young man attending VMI, for example, chose it over Washington College, which was located mere yards

⁶ On southern education, see: Bruce W. Eelman, “‘An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved’: The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 44 (Summer 2004), 250–70; Kathryn A. Pippin, “The Common School Movement in the South, 1840–1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1977); J. Mills Thornton III, “Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 378–84; Christie Ann Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); L. Ray Drinkwater, “Honor and Student Misconduct in Southern Antebellum Colleges,” *Southern Humanities Review*, 27 (Fall 1993), 323–44; Robert F. Pace and Christopher A. Bjornsen, “Adolescent Honor and College Student Behavior in the Old South,” *Southern Cultures*, 6 (Fall 2000), 9–28; Jan Price Greenough, “Forgive Us Our Transgressions: Rule and Misrule in Antebellum Southern Schools,” *Southern Historian*, 21 (2000), 5–24; Pace, *Halls of Honor*.

⁷ Nancy Beadie and Kim Tolley, eds., *Chartered Schools: Two-Hundred Years of Independent Academies in the United States, 1727–1925* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 3, 21. Using “higher schooling” generally connects more closely to the historiography of academies but, in the South, military higher schools had roles similar that of colleges; thus, scholarship on “higher schooling” needs to bridge the separate histories of academies and colleges that do not always reflect the realities of the antebellum period. Linguistic difficulties are noted in Roger Geiger, “The Rise and Fall of Useful Knowledge: Higher Education for Science, Agriculture and the Mechanics Arts, 1850–1875,” *History of Higher Education Annual*, 18 (1998), 52. Because of this difficulty using nineteenth-century terminology with twenty-first century meaning, the words school, academy, institution, and institute are used interchangeably throughout this work.

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away. Indeed, many cadets thought of themselves as college students and equated the two types of institutions, as one father did in 1841 when he described military schooling as providing “a collegiate education.” The majority of military institutions, however, were higher schools, not colleges.⁸

Institutions of higher schooling proliferated in the Old South, and this study of military schools provides support for Beadie and Tolley’s argument that higher schools were significant institutions in their communities, educating the majority of southern men who received secondary schooling. If they had been enumerated as colleges in the 1850 census, military higher schools would have represented 9.2 percent of the colleges in the same states. For example, the 1850 census enumerated twelve colleges with 1,343 students in Virginia, and VMI served 12 percent of that number.⁹ The study of military education also confirms post-1970s revisionist conclusions that non-elites pursued collegiate educations: Just as it did in the North, the reform of curricula away from the classics and toward scientific pursuits in some southern schools encouraged middle-rank southerners, and others below the planter class, to enroll.¹⁰ Across

⁸Recommendation letter, [1841] (quotation), Carlton Munford student file, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute Archives. For clarity, the term “college” as used in this work denotes bachelor’s degree-granting colleges and universities. Rather than B.A.s, most military academies gave certificates granting a “Degree” of graduate. Throughout the antebellum years, state legislatures began permitting military institutes, especially colleges with military programs added, such as the University of Alabama, or programs offering Latin, such as the Kentucky Military Institute, to bestow bachelor’s degrees. The North Carolina Legislature began conferring the “degree of bachelor of science” in its state military institute in 1859 – the B.S. had been first granted eight years earlier at Harvard – and three years later stipulated that the Hillsboro Military Academy could offer the same degree as “other institutions of learning.” Generally, the degrees from military academies and colleges differed, but they fulfilled similar functions as statements of a completed education within a nonstandardized education system. “Report on the Governor’s Message,” Committee on the Military and Petitions, 6 December 1849, South Carolina Division of Archives and History; Chapter 284, 1859, Chapter 54, 20 February 1862, North Carolina Legislature; William Couper, “The V.M.I. Diploma,” *The VMI Alumni News*, 6(3) (June 1930), 4.

⁹Beadie and Tolley, *Chartered Schools*, 3–6. Census data available online at <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/php/state.php>, accessed 8 February 2005; public schools excluded. The 1850 census categorized schools either as “colleges” or “academies and other schools,” whereas the 1860 census did not.

¹⁰David F. Allmendinger’s pioneering study of northern colleges finds that poor young men attended them in *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975); Burke, *American Collegiate*

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nineteenth-century America, education played a significant role in the formation of the middle class, the development of professionalization, and the definition of social mobility. Filling the void of research on southern education helps illuminate the middle social position in the South during the early and mid-nineteenth century and makes apparent that the formation of the middle class proceeded in similar – though not identical – ways in the North and South.

The absence of research into military schooling in the South is not the result of an absence of source material. The biographies and correspondence of 1,057 cadets, consisting of approximately 10 percent of the total military school matriculates and including all VMI matriculates from 1839 through 1859, provide the source base for this study. I attempted to locate demographic information on all antebellum military school matriculates and have compiled information on nearly 1,100 young men. All extant personal and institutional records relating to these individuals, available at twenty-two archives and in publication, enable the creation of a detailed picture of military education and its primarily middle-class constituency.

The amount of information available per cadet varies greatly by person, and more records and data exist on men who succeeded in (or after) the Civil War than on their peers. Overall, however, the amount of primary source material available for the study of military education exceeds what is often available for analysis of southern youths and middling groups. For example, occupational data exist on 855 cadets (including 704 from archival research and 151 published in the 1860 South Carolina Military Academy catalogue), 368 of their fathers, and 174 of their kin. This data set compares favorably to smaller ones, such as Beth Barton Schweiger's set of 123 antebellum ministers and Peter

Populations; more recently, Beadie and Tolley's *Chartered Schools* expands "higher schooling" research into women's and African Americans' schooling; it details how private academies allowed women to pay to attend in situations in which they otherwise would have been excluded; the same analysis needs to be applied to southern men in a class-based study. Frederick Rudolph asserts that southern universities clung to classical curriculum (which inherently privileged the elite) longer than northern schools. Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), ch. 3, esp. 71–75; likewise, Pace, *Hall of Honor*.

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Carmichael's set of 110 young Virginians.¹¹ In addition to demographic data, middle-class southerners' expectations, goals, concerns, and views also come to life in correspondence, speeches, legislation, newspaper and magazine accounts, and institutional records.

Military schools had three distinctive characteristics – funding, discipline, and curriculum – that attracted and benefited the southern middle class. Four chapters of this study analyze these characteristics and their relationship to middle-class formation. Chapter 2 describes the advantages that funding offered southerners with sufficient resources. Legislatures funded military higher schools in Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and most southern states, which provided an education at reduced cost for at least one young man per senatorial district. The South Carolina Military Academy (SCMA) opened in 1842 with two locations: the Arsenal Academy in Columbia (for first-year cadets) and Citadel Academy in Charleston. Each year at SCMA, half the cadets could receive scholarships, as compared to only one student per year at South Carolina College. Thus, state military schools offered expanded educational opportunity. This opportunity was not available to just anyone, however: Some schools charged cadets fees of up to \$200 per year, which meant that no destitute student would have been able to attend. By providing many students with tuition remission, military schools offered men with limited but sufficient resources places to educate their sons.

In addition to funding, military discipline defined the schools. Military regulation may now be the most recognizable trait of a military education, but it probably was less significant for many antebellum patrons than was the availability of funding or the content of the curriculum. To consider antebellum military schools, we need to put aside common twentieth- (or twenty-first-) century perceptions of them. Court battles of the 1990s about sexual discrimination and images of Citadel men cheering the departure of the school's first female candidate brought with them a spate of critiques that military schools promoted oppressive

¹¹ Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War and Reunion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); *Official Register of the South Carolina Military Academy* (Charleston: R. W. Gibbes, 1860), 21–24. Burke, *American Collegiate Populations*, has an extraordinary sample size over 10,000, although also privileging northern sources.

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and outdated southern ideals.¹² Such interpretations often rest on a misrepresentation of the history of nineteenth-century military education. Prewar military schools represented educational reform and the concerns of an emerging middle class that employed them to promote social stability and mobility. The discipline system reflected an appreciation of militarism and southern regionalism, of course, but it did far more than just affirm regional culture. Southern military schools, in other words, did not simply reflect the predominant values of the “militant South,” as John Hope Franklin proposed in 1956.¹³ Cadets, to be sure, faced a strict discipline system, drill requirements, and guard duty as they received their education. Chapter 3 describes the disciplinary program at southern military schools and shows how these schools, more than other southern institutions, encouraged young men to adopt self-regulation. The self-discipline that military education expounded dovetailed with traits advocated by the northern middle class that were increasingly accepted in the South in the late antebellum years, but the emerging southern middle class did not adopt northern middle-class traits wholesale; rather, cadets adapted self-discipline to traditional southern values, such as hierarchy and mastery.

The self-discipline that cadets learned from their military programs influenced the values these young men adopted, which borrowed but remained distinct from those of both the Old South elite and the northern middle class. Entering adulthood, young men grappled with different

¹²Susan Faludi, “The Naked Citadel,” *New Yorker* (5 September 1994), 62–81; Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999), esp. 115, 136; Catherine S. Manegold, *In Glory's Shadow: Shannon Faulkner, the Citadel, and a Changing America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 37–38. On women at VMI, see: Laura Fairchild Brodie, *Breaking Out: VMI and the Coming of Women* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Strict Scrutiny, VMI, and Women’s Lives,” *Seton Hall Law School Constitutional Law Journal*, 6 (Summer 1996), 987–90; Barbara Long, *United States v. Virginia: The Virginia Military Institute Accepts Women* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2000); Philippa Strum, *Women in the Barracks: The VMI Case and Equal Rights* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002). The negative perceptions of military schools that some of these authors exhibit arose out of the Vietnam era and more recent issues. Twentieth and twenty-first century military education lie far outside the scope of this study.

¹³John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800–1860* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), ch. 8. Marcus Cunliffe questions Franklin’s assertion of southern militancy at West Point, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1776–1865* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968). Rod Andrew Jr., *Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition, 1839–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

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models of manhood in the nation. Cadets most appreciated a restrained model that northerners, especially evangelicals, also embraced. This model – inconsistently adopted even in the North – promoted the ideal man as a self-restrained, moral, and industrious individual.¹⁴ Chapter 4 illuminates the traits military cadets connected to manhood, many of which were identical to professional, national middle-class values. Cadets also refined the southern ideal of honor and developed a vision of manhood based on the competing drives for independence and submission.

The final unique characteristic of military education, investigated in Chapter 5, was its scientific and vocational nature, which significantly attracted the emerging middle class and also reinforced the values it was developing. Military education was a successful product of national curricular reform, which reduced educational costs. Colleges and universities that required advanced knowledge of Latin and Greek texts for admission necessitated years of tutoring and remained primarily the bastion of the elite; the intensive study of classics was especially prevalent at southern state universities. Mirroring trends in national educational reform, however, some small colleges and academies, including most military schools, rejected the study of classical languages, thereby obviating the need for extensive primary education and training in these languages. Even the few military academies the curricula of which included classics maintained less stringent admission requirements in this regard than did colleges; most military institutes tested only for basic arithmetic and reading skills. In the classroom, military school curricula emphasized scientific and mathematical studies, specifically catering to young men's career expectations.

Historians most commonly describe the only goal of young men in the antebellum South to have been entry to the plantation elite.¹⁵ Yet men of the emerging middle class who entered military education forged their own institutions and beliefs and attempted to alter cultural expectations so that their institutions and values were validated. As they prepared for

¹⁴Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁵For example, Michele Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in the Slaveholding Georgia, 1789–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 33; Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).