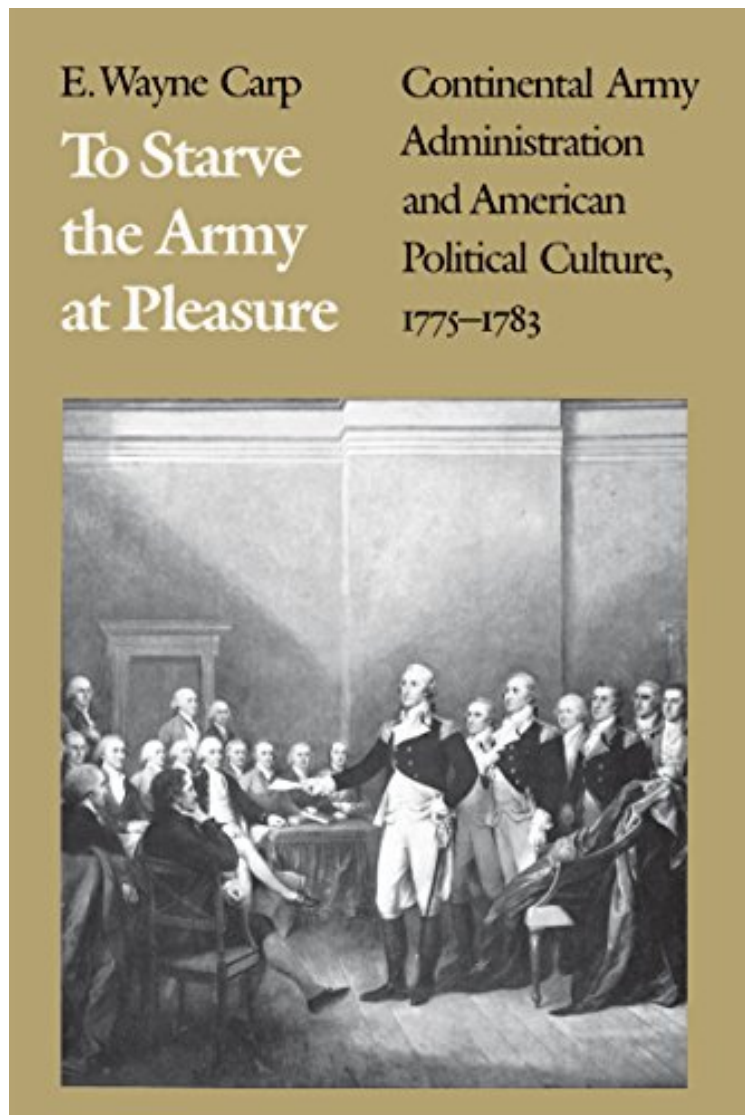


[Download pdf] To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783

## To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783

*E. Wayne Carp*

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**E. Wayne Carp : To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration

and American Political Culture, 1775-1783 By Eric Williams To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783. E. Wayne Carp. 321 pages. 1990. The thesis of this book is that the Americans won their war for independence not because of their ideology but rather in spite of their ideology. The author makes a very good case for his thesis. The book follows a chronological scheme and although it seems to be about logistics it really is about politics. The book details the Real Whig Ideology which influenced the colonies before the Revolution. The author makes a convincing point about local versus distant control and loyalty. This tension between the local governance and the distant governance was exemplified by the tension between the colonies and the distant British Crown as well as the Congress and the states and later throughout American history into our present reality between the Federal Government and the governance of the states. The book also covers the prevalent beliefs at the time, which seem relevant today, regarding a penchant for conspiracy and a belief that there is widespread corruption where and when ever there is public money being spent or public employees drawing a paycheck. These inherent tensions of distrust combined with a challenging geographic topography would haunt the Continental Army throughout the war. The crisis comes to head in 1780 with the virtual financial collapse of the economy and the failure of the states to largely see beyond their own needs. The true strength of this book lays not in its details of the mechanisms of Continental Army logistics, but rather it explains why the system was set up the way it was and why it operated the way it did. It is an excellent companion to SUPPLYING WASHINGTON'S ARMY, by Erna Risch, which covers the nitty-gritty nuts and bolts which resulted from the ideology and currents described by Carp in this book. At the end of this book you will most likely just sit there and shake your head in disbelief as to why people served as staff officers and be marveled that the Continental Army not only survived but was ultimately victorious. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Not for the Casual Reader By W. E. Wimble When deciding whether or not to read this book the reader must pay particular attention to the subtitle of the work: "Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture; 1775-1783." Mr. Carp takes the "starving" for granted; assuming the reader is aware of the bad winter encampments at Valley Forge and Morristown, for example, and instead probes the reasons why the Continental Army was always hungry. In a nutshell; the Continental Army eventually prevailed in the war in spite of the ideals of the revolutionaries, rather than because of them. The author catalogs the various shortcomings of the Confederation period, and demonstrates how these shortcomings generally derived from the impetus for independence itself. For instance, the general mistrust of remote authority (embodied in the Crown and Parliament) and resulting localism prevalent among colonists, translated into caution and sometimes outright hostility in the relationship between the states and Congress. Congress too, unable to rid itself of the fetters of ideology, chose to attribute failure in the commissary department to graft and corruption among staff officers, rather than to a flawed system in which it periodically meddled; intent upon improvement but generally resulting for the worse. Everything came to a boil in the catastrophic year of 1780, and from out of the cauldron of defeat and financial collapse arose, not surprisingly from current and former army officers who had borne the brunt of a system designed to be ineffectual, the Federalist movement. The book does what it sets out to do and is something of a tour de force. It is scholarly, well footnoted and methodical.

American political culture and military necessity were at odds during the War for American Independence, as demonstrated in this interpretation of Continental army administration. E. Wayne Carp shows that at every level of authority -- congressional, state, and county -- a localistic world-view, a deferential political order, and adherence to republican ideology impeded the task of supplying the army, even though independence demanded military strength. Placing military history within the context of colonial and revolutionary historiography, Carp finds that the colonial American belief that authority and political power should be decentralized deeply influenced Congress's approach to the task of supplying the army. Furthermore, most Congressmen had neither military experience nor any idea of how to administer an army, while local governments constantly thwarted the army's efforts to obtain supplies -- they blocked impressment and interfered with the movement of food and clothing. Carp shows that political leaders eventually adjusted their ideals to the imperatives of winning the war. He offers a revisionist analysis of the origins of the Nationalist movement of 1780-83 that was begun by army officers and state legislators fearing the imminent failure of the Revolution. Lacking unity and blinded by republican ideology, the Nationalists did not markedly improve the administration of the army. Instead, it was largely through the efforts of Superintendent of Finance Robert Morris, the cooperation of the French, and sheer luck that the British were ultimately defeated. Carp concludes that the Americans won the Revolution "in spite of, rather than because of, their political beliefs."

Carp's book takes its place in American Revolutionary scholarship alongside the handful of seminal works in that field. "American Historical " Carp's book takes its place in American Revolutionary scholarship alongside the handful of seminal works in that field . . . and establishes its author as an important historical thinker.--American Historical