

Brief Remarks About the ROTC and Columbia

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I cannot be with you today, because I am traveling on Columbia business. But I am delighted to help further debates about the ROTC and Columbia, and to do so as part of the Hamilton Society's Service and Society program. I address you not only as Dean of the College, but also as a moral and political philosopher, and as an administrator who oversaw the operation of the ROTC Tri-Service units and programs (Army, Navy, and Air Force) at another Ivy League Institution.

As I see it, three questions are fundamental to the debate. We must ask first "what kind of military is most conducive to the persistence of free and open democratic institutions?" This question naturally leads to a second: "How can we produce a military that best meets the needs of a free and open democracy?" Finally, "What do the needs of democracy, and what we know about how to meet those needs, actually mean to Columbia?"

The authors of the U.S. *Constitution* offered a compelling answer to the first question, when they laid down the blueprint for a military that remains fundamentally subject to civilian control. Thus Article I Sec. 8 gives Congress the right to raise and support an Army and to provide and maintain the Navy, and Article II, section 2 declares that the President is the Commander in Chief of the military. Even the oaths that are taken by enlisted personnel and commissioned officers require them to swear (or affirm) that they will support and defend the Constitution. I have watched many outstanding young women and men take these solemn oaths, as a prelude to service and sometimes profound sacrifice to their country. The content of the oaths that set them on their paths carefully echo the notion that the military is rightly subject to civilian control.

So how can we produce a military that lives up to this ideal, a military in which the service and sacrifice of its members best protects democratic institutions? Building on the wisdom of the Constitution, I suggest that military training and discipline must work to create "citizen- soldiers," and

encourage every member of the military to see himself or herself in this light. Of course, as a consequence of their training, citizen-soldiers may develop expertise and knowledge that will set them apart, in some way, from citizens who never serve as soldiers. But if their training leads them to view themselves merely as professional soldiers, and not also as citizens, then our society has failed at one of the most fundamental tasks at which any healthy democracy needs to succeed.

Of course, an all volunteer force (such as we have in contemporary America) may face special challenges as it tries to create citizen-soldiers. I don't claim to know how to meet all the challenges. But what if part of the solution is to create a pool of highly skilled military leaders who are trained in non-military institutions—institutions that teach them about the complexity of human experience, and so through the reading of great works of literature, philosophy, science, social thought, and art? That is, what if an elite liberal arts education proved especially likely to create leaders who understand what it takes to turn others into citizen soldiers? What if having an official ROTC presence at a school like Columbia might be a valuable and reliable means of ensuring the creation of citizen soldiers? A lot has been written, lately, about the fact that even the military academies are adopting a renewed focus on the liberal arts and sciences in their curricula. But is there still a special, additional role, that institutions like Columbia might play?

Yet, even before we ask that question, we should reflect on the role that Columbia has actually played in the last decade. All of you know that, since 1970, the institution has officially resisted the idea that ROTC programs could have a home here—even though we continue to welcome *students* who participate in ROTC programs elsewhere in the greater New York area. Has Columbia been unreasonable in continuing to take this stance for so long? You will answer “no” to this question, if you think that the policy of “Don't ask, don't tell” is inconsistent with the ideal of the citizen soldier. You may consider that policy to be just as antithetical to the ideal of the citizen-soldier as the racial segregation that the military finally began to reject beginning near the end of World War II. Now if you

don't think that DADT is inconsistent with democracy, as some of you certainly would not, then I would ask—in the spirit of reasoned debate—that you be willing to debate the reasons (and not just your emotions) with colleagues who take a different view.

But what if the problem posed by DADT were to be rendered moot? What if we should finally take the step, as a nation, toward a policy that might more fully realize the democratic ideal? What should this step mean for Columbia?

Here are some questions we would need to answer in order to proceed in the right way in a post “don't ask, don't tell” environment? For instance, Would it mean something special for an ROTC student to have his or her service as a citizen soldier given a new kind of recognition on Columbia's campus? Might it increase the numbers of Columbia students who sign up for ROTC, and hence increase the chances for interaction between students who choose military service and those who do not? How might the resulting changes add to the diversity of the Columbia experience—and might we all come to appreciate more about the diversity of opinions among students who choose military service? Might faculty be able to play a role in helping to shape the perceptions of democratic needs and interests of the men and women who go on to be leaders in the military?

In short, might it be good for the undergraduate experience of ROTC and non-ROTC students alike if the ROTC were to make an official “return” to Columbia?

I will not try to answer these last questions for you. Instead, I urge that the continued well-being of our democratic institutions depends upon your willingness to move past the answers that seemed “obvious” in the 1960's and 70's, and to resist views of military institutions and practices that might have seemed “inescapable” in the 1990's. In conclusion, I invite you to consider whether the right question may no longer be “How could we ever formally recognize ROTC on our campus,” but, instead, “How can we not welcome them back?” Please do not shy away from this important debate.