

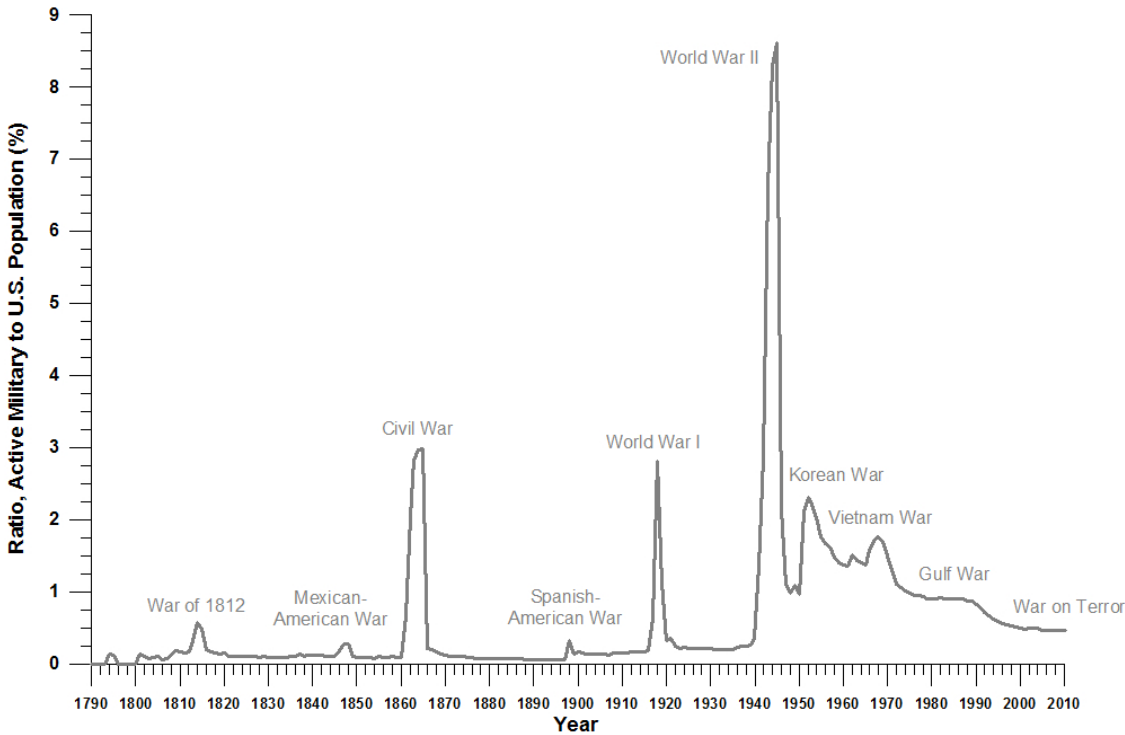


Straight from the Muse

Reflections of a Worldly Philosopher

The Thin Gray Line

When Called Upon to Serve
Ratio of Active Military Personnel to Total U.S. Population
Annual -- 1790 to 2010



Notes:

Active duty U.S. military personnel data for the years 1790 to 2003 obtained from the Department of Defense (DoD), Washington Headquarters Service. Data for 2004 to 2010 obtained from the Census Bureau or the DoD.

Populations statistics for the period from 1790 to 1900 obtained from the 1949 Census Bureau publication, Historical Statistics of the United States 1989 to 1945. Population counts post 1900 obtained from other Census Bureau reports.

Please note the military manpower count for the Civil War period excludes soldiers in the Confederate forces. Population counts of the time continued to include the southern states in rebellion. If adjusted, the effect would be to increase the ratio shown for the period from 1861 to 1865.

(Sources: Department of Defense; Census Bureau; Worldly Philosopher estimates.)

We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us. The provenance of the quote has been lost to eternity. Some attribute it to Eric Blair (popularly known by his pen name, George Orwell); others ascribe it to Winston Churchill, the eminent British Prime Minister who led his country to victory during the Second World War. Still

others claim The Washington Times columnist Richard Grenier deserves the credit. All three men were, in their own unique ways, champions of liberty and sworn enemies of tyranny, in whatever form or guise it assumed. All three can thus lay claim to the sentiment expressed.

Whoever was the original author, I can

“What is bureaucracy? An arrangement of individual incompetences for the purpose of general responsibility.”

Anton Kuh (1890 to 1941), Austrian Journalist and Commentator

“By continuing a process of inflation, government can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens.”

John Maynard Keynes (1883 to 1943), British Economist and Political Commentator

“Corporation, n. An ingenious device for obtaining individual profit without individual responsibility.”

From the *Devil's Dictionary*

Ambrose Bierce (1842 to 1913?), American Journalist and Writer

Yeah, I am on Twitter too. Follow my sporadic tweets at [my-museclio](#).



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"A good politician is quite as unthinkable as an honest burglar."

H.L. Mencken (1880 to 1956),
American Man of Letters

"I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts."

Abraham Lincoln (1809 to 1865),
16th President of the United States

think of no better tribute to the men and women of the United States military, living and fallen, who throughout our nation's history have safeguarded our liberty and preserved our independence through perilous times. Monday, we observed Memorial Day. It is one of two days (the other is Veterans' Day in November) set aside each year when we acknowledge those who have died in the defense of our country or who have served in our armed forces.

Both holidays arose in the aftermath of bloody, hard fought wars. Veterans Day was originally known as Armistice Day. It commemorated the cessation of hostiles on the Western Front in the conflict which would be remembered as World War One. Memorial Day — in years past, Decoration Day — arose in the years following the Civil War. For the generations who lived before the Second World War was fought, the Civil War and the Great War were the defining wars of our nation's history. They were the first conflicts to involve mass conscription and the mobilization of the entire might and muscle of the U.S. economy to total victory.

They were also unique in being the first citizen-soldier wars. Prior conflicts — with the exception of the War of Independence, waged and won by the yeoman of the colonies — were largely short wars, fought by professional soldiers. During the course of the Civil War and World One, a significant share of the able bodied men of the nation were under arms. In 1865, almost three percent of the U.S. populace was serving in the Union cause. The records of the War Department of the time did not tally the numbers serving under the Confederate flag. Estimates are 750,000 men served in the Army of Northern Virginia and other southern armies during the war. At any one time, Confederate forces in the field num-

bered perhaps 350,000. This puts the total forces, both blue and gray, at four percent of the U.S. population in 1864. It would be another fifty years before, in 1918, a similar proportion of U.S. citizens would find themselves in Uncle Sam's service.

Few communities and families did not have neighbors or loved ones called to service in the two conflicts. Many as well shared or knew the grief of a friend or family member lost to war. So although citizens of the time lacked radio, television or the internet to provide immediacy to either conflict, they had a stronger, more emotive tie to the wars' progress. It is perhaps for this reason, for the Civil War in particular, few towns or cities from Iowa in the west to Maine in the northeast are without a commemorative statue of a solitary Union soldier, wearing kepi, great coat and cape, leaning on his musket, looking wistfully to the distance of time, bivouacked forever on some village green, town square, city park or by a cemetery gate.

Today we are at war against terrorism. Unlike the Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korea or Vietnam, a smaller, all volunteer, professional military shoulders the burden. Images and news may stream onto our televisions and computers in almost real time, but most Americans are removed from the war. While no one is perhaps more than the proverbial six degrees of separation from a member of our armed forces, fewer of us have soldiers or sailors in our immediate circles. For this reason I urge you to spare a moment this holiday weekend to pay tribute to the rough men and women of the thin gray line who stand at the ready to ensure our America remains safe and our independence inviolable.



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"Nature abhors a moron."

H.L. Mencken (1880 to 1956),
American Man of Letters

"An unlimited power to tax involves, necessarily, a power to destroy."

Daniel Webster (1782 to 1852),
American Senator, Statesman and
Jurist