# We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident

The National Guard and the Categorical Imperative

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National Guard Educational Foundation; National Guard Memorial Museum, Library, and Archive

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## **Abstract**

This book makes the ethical case for a volunteer Citizen-Soldier military in a democratic republic using Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) Categorical Imperative as justification. An Enlightenment theory, Kant's Categorical Imperative represents a higher moral duty-free from reliance upon consequence. The Categorical Imperative directs that a moral law fit three requirements: the action must be universally applicable, deemed as fair by all parties to the action, and not use men as a means to an end. By reviewing the history of the National Guard of the United States, I draw the reader away from a traditional Utilitarian argument of cost/benefit analysis and demonstrate that the Deontological argument is equally applicable. National Guard history is relevant because the Citizen-Soldier military in the United States has evolved over 400 years. Beginning with the first legislated Muster in 1636, pre-Enlightenment village bands protected the tiny, immigrant communities, today volunteer Citizen-Soldiers stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their career counterparts in both domestic and foreign theaters. While the Utilitarian based cost/benefit analysis changes over time with circumstances, I demonstrate that the Categorical Imperative applies throughout the National Guard's long, complicated history.

The procedure used to make the argument follows the history of the United States in chronological order. In each chapter, a significant leader is looked at closely – how that person reflected the Categorical Imperative over the changes in the National Guard from the First Muster in 1636 to present day. Specifically, we look at the birth of the nation with General George Washington, the turbulent nineteenth century to World War One with Senator Charles Dick (R-OH), and the post-modern era of the 1940s through the early twenty-first century with Generals Ellard A. Walsh and Frank Grass. By evaluating world events and these remarkably influential men, we observe the Categorical Imperative in action as it shapes the National Guard and reflects the Enlightenment principles upon with the nation was founded. In conclusion, the reader will see that Kant's theory of a higher moral duty – one that results in a universal law of fairness and non-manipulation of one's fellow man as a means to an end – does, in fact, readily apply to the Citizen-Soldier concept in a democratic republic such as the United States.

## Short Statement on Development of Subject

This book is an adapted version of my dissertation for the Doctor of Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University in Washington, D. C. As the Director of the National Guard Memorial Museum, Library, and Archive, I am the lead historian for the National Guard Association of the United States. I find I spend the majority of my time hearing the Utilitarian argument for the continued service of the National Guard of the United States. During my studies at Georgetown, I was exposed to Immanuel Kant's normative arguments and realized that American voluntary military service goes much deeper than mere "bang for the buck". There is something to the idea that, born of the Enlightenment, the Founding Fathers realized Americans understood the timeless need to protect their communities. Since this argument is timeless, I set out to make the argument span the entire 400-year history of the National Guard and to show how it succeeded in some ways and failed in others.

## Acronyms

AGAUS Adjutants General Association of the United States

AGR Active Guard and Reserve

ATF Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives

CCC Civilian Conservation Corps
CNGB Chief, National Guard Bureau
DHS Department of Homeland Security

ESGR Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve FEMA Federal Emergency Management Agency

GWOT Global War on Terror

JSPS Joint Strategic Planning System NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NORAD North American Aerospace Defense Command

NORTHCOM Northern Command

ODS/S Operations Desert Shield and Storm

OEF Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF Operation Iraqi Freedom
SPP State Partnership Program
UMT Universal Military Training
WPA Works Progress Administration



## Introduction

Two seemingly unrelated but critical events occurred during the seventeenth century that form the basis of this book. First, small bands of militia in pre-Colonial America formed, based on decisions made by community legislatures, to protect the interests of the vulnerable villages. Second, the era known as the Enlightenment began in Western Europe. The man credited with coining the name of the era, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), was born in Königsburg, Germany soon after the turn of the century. The militias would go on over four hundred years to evolve into the modern National Guard of the United States. Immanuel Kant would systematize the nature of moral duty into a universal theory, arguably immune to change over time, and a fundamental tenet of human society.

The issue at hand is whether Kant's universal "Categorical Imperative" can be applied to service in the militias from 1636 to present day. This book lays the groundwork and sets examples through 400 years of history to demonstrate that Kant's imperative holds up and applies as an ideal to voluntary military service. This book is based on the author's doctoral thesis in the Humanities at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Critical to this argument is that the United States was founded upon the Enlightenment theory that authority is granted to the legislatures from the governed and not the reverse. Kant's Categorical Imperative provides a fairly complex system to determine the behavior of men employing an "ought to" formulation. Rather than looking at hypothetical imperatives in which one conditions the goal and action to attain it within an "if" statement like "if I want a cup of coffee, I make it in the coffee pot", Kant addressed a Categorical Imperative - one that is not based on consequence but upon universal duty. For example, a Kantian imperative would be: "I ought not to lie". There are no conditions or consequences attached to this admonition.

The history of this argument is an interesting one – primarily because it has been largely ignored. During the period of time that the National Guard found itself fighting for its existence in the halls of the nation's capital, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) formulated the moral doctrine of Utilitarianism. The several state legislatures of the United States found this argument seductive and used it to justify the use of their individual military forces rather than the less calculating lines of the Kantian Categorical Imperative. Much later, President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) coined the very Utilitarian phrase "more bang for the buck" that beautifully illustrates how wedded both the Federal Government and senior military leadership came

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to the Utilitarian argument. Because the Kantian argument has been widely ignored by scholars and advocates, this book is written to fill that void.

The Categorical Imperative has been in action in United States military service since the nation's inception. The book is designed, chapter-by-chapter, to show how it has applied over time in the development of the nation. In the fledgling pre-colonial United States of the seventeenth century, village legislatures began to see a need for local defense. The legislature, elected by the village men, ordered certain citizens to serve in the local militia. Through representative government, the citizens themselves directed this service. Per Kant's (as yet unformed) Categorical Imperative, this voluntary service model was based on the ideal that men "ought" to serve to protect their community and its interests. Over time, as the world changed and the United States formed into a global superpower, the universality of the Categorical Imperative still applied. By World War II, recently enfranchised African American citizens in New York, Washington, DC, and other areas on the East Coast, volunteered with state National Guard units to go overseas to fight with career Army peers in a war against the Third Reich of Germany. With growing freedom and ability to assimilate into society, African Americans left the United States to fight overseas hoping that integration in the military might influence their integration in American society at home. These two simple examples demonstrate the universality over time of the Categorical Imperative as volunteers performed a duty to protect their communities. In the first example, the villagers protected their families and their own plots of land, while in the second example, citizens volunteered to protect national interests overseas. The world changed but the Categorical Imperative remained stalwart.

This book will show that the Categorical Imperative, as it relates to the Citizen-soldier concept of military service in the United States is an ideal not always attained. However, in application, the theory applies across different historical periods and this is demonstrated through a discussion of its application to voluntary military service in various events and contexts within the United States from 1636 to the present day. The following chapters will show how, in a democratic republic, the concept of voluntary military service based on a Citizen-soldier model conforms elegantly to Kant's Categorical Imperative.

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