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Citizenship and Service: From Roman Auxiliaries to U.S. MIlitary Naturalization Programs

Christian Nana Andoh

Abstract: This article compares ancient Rome and the United States to show that military service has not always been a way for everyone to become a citizen. In Rome, non-citizen auxiliary soldiers were integrated via a standardised legal agreement that conferred citizenship upon honourable discharge, formalised by the diploma militaris. This predictable system met the needs of the population and made it easier for provinces to slowly come together. The United States created a more flexible and episodic system in which military service by immigrants has sometimes sped up the process of becoming a citizen, from the Revolutionary War to the time after 9/11, often because there were not enough soldiers. The American system has been legally broken up and made harder to work with by immigration policy and the all-volunteer force, unlike Rome's institutionalised approach. The article demonstrates that military service fosters integration most effectively when it is consistently transformed into legal recognition, emphasising the integrative efficacy of standardisation in Rome and the precariousness of service-based inclusion in the United States, all within the context of broader theories of empire, citizenship, and state capacity.

Introduction

Throughout history, military service has often served as a means by which states integrated outsiders into political communities. During periods of territorial expansion, demographic limitation, or military emergency, rulers have traded legal status and political acknowledgement for military service, thereby converting non-citizens into stakeholders in the state. This article analyses the dynamic through a

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comparative historical examination of Roman auxiliary service during the Principate and military service and naturalization in the United States from the eighteenth century to the post-9/11 period. Instead of looking at political ideas or constitutional forms, the study looks at how military service worked in real life as a way to bring people together and what made this system stable or tense. This kind of comparison needs clear ideas. During the Principate, Rome kept republican institutions and language even though it had imperial power over a huge area.[1] On the other hand, the United States is a republic by law, but it has kept a military presence around the world and a system of bases abroad that many scholars have called imperial in nature.[2] Consequently, this article does not juxtapose "empire" and "republic" as mutually exclusive forms of governance. Instead, it looks at two expansionist governments that used non-citizen workers and military service as a way to formally or informally include people in politics. The emphasis is on functionality over ideology, encompassing recruitment requirements, legal status transitions, integration results, and the vulnerability of service-based agreements.

The primary research question directing this study is: In what ways and under what circumstances did military service serve as a means of civic integration in Rome and the United States, and what factors contributed to its durability in certain contexts while leading to instability in others? The auxiliary system made integration a part of Roman society. Non-citizen provincials were enlisted into permanent military units and assured Roman citizenship upon honorable discharge, formalized through the *diploma militaris*.[3] This arrangement solved the problem of not having enough workers while also spreading Roman law, legal status, and social norms to the frontier areas. Giving citizenship to auxiliary veterans and their families helped them fit in with the locals and made them more loyal to the empire. Many historians have said that Roman expansion depended on more than just force; it also depended on selective inclusion, especially through the army.[4]

The United States has used a similar but structurally different method many times. Since the Revolutionary War, immigrants and non-citizens have served in the U.S. military. During times of mass mobilization, they have often been able to get citizenship faster.[5] During the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, when the

[1] Millar 1981, 3–12; Nana Andoh 2025, 50; Mattingly 2010, 284.

[2] Lutz 2009, 5–11.

[3] CIL XVI 43; Saddington 1982, 142–48.

[4] Ando 2000, 214–19; Le Bohec 1994, 112–15.

[5] Lonn 1951, 342–46; Karsten 1983, 391–406.

United States relied on conscription, military service became a powerful way for immigrants to become part of the community, showing loyalty and speeding up the process of becoming a citizen.[6] But the American case is different in some important ways. The United States is primarily an immigration society, distinguished by complex and legally distinct statuses of belonging.[7] Military service has always been one of many ways to become a citizen, not the main way to get involved in politics.

Also, the switch to an all-volunteer force in 1973 changed the role of immigrant soldiers in the U.S. military in a big way. In the time after the Cold War and after 9/11, programs like Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) showed that the military was using targeted recruitment strategies instead of mass mobilization.[8] Legal scholars have demonstrated that military service may expedite naturalization, yet it does not serve as an unequivocal assurance of citizenship, the differentiation among residence, discretionary naturalization, and complete civic membership persists as a legally significant distinction.[9] The resulting ambiguity has rendered the American service-citizenship relationship more precarious and politically contentious than its Roman equivalent.

This study posits that military service served as an efficient means of civic integration, not due to the inherent inclusivity of states, but because service-oriented inclusion synchronized manpower requirements with political allegiance. When the terms of this exchange were clear and consistently followed, like they were in Rome before the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 CE, the system encouraged long-lasting integration.[10] In some modern U.S. situations, the service-citizenship deal was weak because the terms were unclear, unevenly applied, or depended on politics. In both instances, the durability of integration was contingent more on institutional clarity and credibility than on ideology. The paper is organized in four coherent parts. The first study looks at the Roman auxiliary system, focusing on North Africa and how citizenship grants helped bring the empire together. The second part talks about how military service and naturalization have changed in the United States. It focusses on the change from conscription to a professional force and the legal problems with military naturalization. The third one looks at the two cases side by side, focusing on how well they work, how well they fit together, and their structural limits. The

[6] Glasrud 1993, 50–64; Ford 2001, 4–7.

[7] Ngai 2014, 2–14.

[8] Bailey 2009, 201–25

[9] Cuison Villazor 2017, 148–205; U.S. Government Accountability Office 2019, 1–9.

[10] Saddington 1982, 63-67; Mattingly 2010, 288.

conclusion examines the implications of historical patterns for understanding the conditions that determine the success or failure of service-based inclusion, while avoiding a reduction of the analysis to modern policy advocacy.

Roman Auxiliaries and Citizenship

The Origins of the Auxiliary System

The Roman auxiliary system grew slowly during the Republic, but it became an official part of the government under Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE). During the Republic, Rome depended on Italian *socii* (allies) and troops from the provinces for military campaigns, especially during the Punic Wars. Polybius says that Italian allies often had the same number of troops as Roman citizen legions, and they also had cavalry and other specialized troops.[11] After the Social War (91–88 BCE), Italian allies were given Roman citizenship. The command structure of the auxiliary units stayed Roman, even though they were made up of non-citizen provincials. From the time of Augustus onwards, Roman citizens, mostly from the equestrian order, led the *auxilia* instead of senators or local elites. This setup made sure that the empire stayed in charge and gave equestrians a chance to have a professional military career. It wasn't until provincial elites got Roman citizenship and joined the equestrian order that provincials themselves began to take charge of the auxiliary officer corps. However, they always did so as Roman officials, not as representatives of their home communities. The system combined ethnic recruitment with centralized command, bringing together provincial manpower without giving up Roman power.[12] Rome used these auxiliary units on purpose because they had unique ways of fighting in their own regions, such as Batavian cavalry, Numidian light horsemen, Cretan archers, Thracian infantry, and Syrian slingers. But ethnic specialization was not fixed. When auxiliary units or their veterans were given Roman citizenship, the way they were recruited, trained, and used in battle changed. Over time, many units became more Roman in terms of their equipment, discipline, and deployment, even though they still went by their original ethnic names. Citizenship did not maintain rigid martial identities; rather, it promoted the gradual professionalization and incorporation of auxiliary forces into a standardized imperial military framework.[13] During Hadrian's reign (117–138 CE), the auxiliary force may have been as big as or even bigger than the legionaries. Estimates

[11] Polyb. *Hist.* 6.21.

[12] Tac. *Ann.* 4.5.

[13] Goldsworthy 2003, 105–9.

say there were between 150,000 and 200,000 auxiliaries and about 150,000 legionaries.[14]

Citizenship as Reward: The *Diploma Militaris*

The benefits of auxiliary service were real and useful. Recruits got regular pay (*stipendium*), food, gear, and the social status that came with serving in the military under Roman command. These benefits were especially appealing in rural and border areas.[15] Over time, these short-term rewards were backed up by a bigger, more important long-term reward: the promise of Roman citizenship after twenty-five years of honorable service. When they were discharged, veterans were given the diploma *militaris,* a bronze tablet that officially gave them Roman citizenship and *conubium,* which is the legal right to marry a Roman. Daily incentives like pay and security explain why men signed up, but citizenship explains why auxiliary service was such a strong tool for integration, spreading Roman legal status and social norms to soldiers' families and communities all over the empire.[16] These diplomas, of which thousands still exist, show how Rome connected military service to becoming a citizen. For instance, a diploma from 90 CE shows that an auxiliary cavalryman from Pannonia was granted citizenship after 25 years of service, which also gave rights to his wife and children.[17] Another diploma from 122 CE under Hadrian confirms that soldiers were let go from the fleet at Ravenna, and they were given citizenship as well.[18] These inscriptions make it clear that citizenship was not just a vague promise, but a real, legal reward. The *conubium* was very important of this diploma. Before they became citizens, many auxiliaries had married women from their home provinces. The diploma made these marriages legal under Roman law, which gave the children legal status.[19] So, auxiliary service not only rewarded the soldier, but it also brought whole families into the Roman civic body, speeding up the process of Romanization at the local level.

[14] Le Bohec 1994, 45–50.

[15] Le Bohec 1994, 92–97; Keppie 1998, 184–87; Goldsworthy 2003, 105–09; Tac. *Hist.* 4.46; Saddington 1982, 142–48; CIL XVI 43; Ando 2000, 214–19; Maxfield 1981, 87–93.

[16] Maxfield 1981, 87–93.

[17] CIL XVI 43 (Diploma for auxiliary cavalryman, 90 CE).

[18] CIL XVI 66 (Diploma for sailors of the Ravenna fleet, 122 CE).

[19] Ando 2000, 214–16.

The Roman government used citizenship as a tool, giving it to whole communities as well as individual veterans. In 24 BCE, Augustus gave the whole Gaulish community of the Santones citizenship as a reward for their loyalty during the civil wars. The *diploma militaris* became the gold standard for people. Examples that have survived show exact legal formulas: "The Emperors Caesar, Trajan, Hadrian and Augustus gave Roman citizenship and the right to marry to soldiers who served in the alae and cohorts of (province) for twenty-five years or sometimes more. Diplomas also list the names and places of birth of soldiers, which helps us find out how they were recruited. For instance, a diploma from 103 CE shows that Thracian recruits were let go in Moesia. Another record from 146 CE shows that Syrian archers were in Dacia. These papers show that service turned "barbarians" into Roman citizens, who often lived far from home.[20]

Auxiliary Troops in Action

Auxiliaries were not mere auxiliaries in name, they played decisive roles in Rome's wars. During the invasion of Britain in 43 CE under Emperor Claudius, auxiliaries formed the backbone of the expeditionary force. When Emperor Claudius sent troops to invade Britain, they needed help from other countries. Cassius Dio says that Batavian troops, who came from the Rhine frontier, famously swam across the Medway River in full armor to catch the Britons off guard. It was not a coincidence that they were good at amphibious assault, it was part of a long martial tradition that the Batavians had learnt from their parents along the Rhine. Archaeological evidence corroborates this narrative, gravestones of Batavian cavalrymen have been unearthed at York (Eboracum) and Chester (Deva), indicating their enduring presence in Britain post-conquest. Tacitus later said that Roman commanders often trusted Batavians with important jobs, like guarding bridges or storming fortifications. Their contributions in Britain show that auxiliaries were not just there to fill in gaps in the legion, but were also very important for getting new provinces.[21] By the late first century, Tacitus could describe the Roman army in Britain as composed largely of auxiliaries, with the legions providing the core but provincials supplying mobility and numbers.[22]

[20] CIL XVI 43 (diploma for auxiliary soldiers discharged in Moesia, 103 CE); CIL XVI 66 (diploma for Syrian archers discharged in Dacia, 146 CE); Saddington 1982, 145–48; Ando 2000, 214–19; Le Bohec 1994, 112–15.

[21] Cass. Dio. *Roman History.* 60.20.

[22] Tac. *Agr.* 36.

In North Africa, Rome relied on Numidian cavalry as early as the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE). Massinissa, king of Numidia, allied with Rome, and his horsemen proved decisive at the Battle of Zama (202 BCE), where Scipio Africanus defeated Hannibal.[23] Christian Nana Andoh has argued that such reliance on client kings and auxiliary contingents was part of a broader Roman strategy in Africa, blending divide-and-rule with promises of status.[24] Later, under the Empire, auxiliary units recruited from Numidia and Mauretania were stationed across the frontiers, from Britain to the Danube, spreading North African military traditions throughout the empire.

During the Jewish Revolt (66–73 CE), auxiliaries were crucial to Roman victory. Josephus records that Vespasian's forces included large numbers of auxiliaries from Syria and other eastern provinces.[25] Their knowledge of the terrain and guerrilla tactics complemented the discipline of the legions. Similarly, in Dacia (101–106 CE), Trajan deployed vast numbers of auxiliaries, commemorated on Trajan's Column in Rome. Depictions show archers, cavalry, and light infantry in non-Roman dress, visually representing the empire's reliance on foreign-born troops.[26]

Numbers and Organization

By the time Claudius ruled (41–54 CE), auxiliaries were grouped into standard units like cohorts (*cohortes*), cavalry squadrons (alae), and mixed infantry-cavalry units (*cohortes equitatae*). Each one had a standard size, but the strength of each one was different. Soldiers were usually recruited from the area where they lived, but they were often sent to faraway provinces to keep them from working with people from their home areas. For example, Batavian troops fought in Britain and Spanish troops fought in Germany[27]. This policy not only reduced rebellion but also promoted cultural integration and allegiance to Rome. By the second century, auxiliaries had become professionals, getting the same pay and training as legionaries. Many scholars contend that the distinction between legionary and auxiliary became increasingly ambiguous over time, with the conferment of citizenship upon discharge further diminishing these differences.[28]

[23] Liv. 30.32.

[24] Andoh 2025, 55–57.

[25] Joseph. *BJ*. 3.67–73.

[26] Keppie 1998, 184–87.

[27] Le Bohec 1994, 56–61.

[28] Saddington 1982, 142–48.

Citizenship and Romanization

The granting of citizenship had very important social effects. Auxiliary veterans frequently established themselves in frontier colonies, attaining Roman citizenship within emerging provincial communities. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence from throughout the empire indicates that auxiliary veterans were not socially marginalized but were often incorporated into urban civic life. In Cologne (Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium), inscriptions document discharged soldiers serving as *decuriones* and *augustales,* directly engaging in municipal governance and the imperial cult.[29] In York (*Eboracum*), funerary monuments and dedicatory inscriptions show that auxiliary and legionary veterans acted as civic patrons and benefactors, using Roman naming conventions and public religious practices.[30] In Lambaesis, a major military center of Numidia in North Africa, inscriptions show that veterans of the *Legio* III Augusta held positions like duumviri and flamines. This shows how important the army was in getting provincial elites to join Roman city governments.[31] These examples show how the Roman army worked as a way to get people to join the army and to Romanize the elites in the provinces by getting them to take part in structured civic activities.

The symbolic significance of citizenship is immense. For people from the provinces, it meant being able to use Roman law, not being punished with corporal punishment, and being able to run for public office. It made a group of loyal ex-soldiers in Rome who were grateful to the empire and wanted to stay connected to it. As Clifford Ando has noted, the Roman state grew less by giving everyone the right to vote and more by giving people small, individual grants that made them loyal.[32]

Limits and Tensions

There were some problems with the system. The requirement of twenty-five years of service meant that many auxiliaries never lived to become citizens. Roman elites mostly accepted this as a normal part of military life. This became a problem only when soldiers thought that the promised rewards were impossible to get or were being withheld for no reason, which hurt morale, recruitment, or loyalty. Tacitus writes about times when auxiliaries mutinied because they thought promises were not kept,

[29] CIL XIII 8262; Breeze / Dobson 2000, 109–14; Ando 2000, 214–16.

[30] RIB 200; RIB 658; Maxfield 1981, 87–93; Breeze 2007, 133–39.

[31] CIL VIII 2557; CIL VIII 18042; Andoh 2025, 55–60; Millar 1981, 221–24.

[32] Ando 2000, 222.

like the Batavian Revolt of 69 CE, which was led by Julius Civilis, who had been an auxiliary officer himself.[33] Civilis used complaints about Roman exploitation and broken promises to get Batavian cohorts to fight against their former masters. Also, citizenship grants were sometimes used for political purposes.[34] Emperors could make access easier or harder depending on what they wanted to do. After 69 CE, the Flavian emperors purposefully increased the number of auxiliary recruits and citizenship grants to ensure loyalty in the provinces after the civil war.[35] Lastly, Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 CE, which gave citizenship to all free people living in the empire, effectively ended the special incentive of auxiliary service.[36] Some scholars contend that this diminished the significance of citizenship, whereas others propose that it represented the culmination of a protracted process of integration spanning centuries.

U.S. Military Service and Naturalization

Revolutionary Foundations (1775–1783)

The United States was founded as an immigration society during a time when the military was very weak. About one in ten soldiers in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War were born outside the United States. This was not only because of ideological openness, but also because there was a constant lack of trained manpower and colonial militias were not always reliable.[37] Militias were still important for local defense, but their short enlistments, lack of discipline, and unwillingness to serve outside of their home areas made the Continental Congress and George Washington rely more and more on long-term enlistments and experienced soldiers, including immigrants.[38]

Officers who were born in other countries had a disproportionately large impact on the early American military. The Marquis de Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, was in charge of the battlefield and also helped France get military and

[33] Ando 2000, 217–19.

[34] Tac. *Hist.* 4.68–69; Tac. *Ann.* 13.27; see also Millar 1981, 91–97. Plin. *Ep.* 10.5–7; Sherwin-White 1973, 279–88; Erdkamp 2007, 110–12.

[35] Tac. *Hist.* 4.12–20.

[36] Mattern 1999, 175–79.

[37] Neimeyer 1996, 47–49; Karsten 1983, 391–406.

[38] Shy 1990, 142–52.

financial support through diplomacy. Tadeusz Kościuszko built important forts at Saratoga and West Point. Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben introduced professional drill and discipline through his 1779 book, Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States, which remained important until the War of 1812.[39] These contributions filled an immediate gap in the institution: the Continental Army did not have a professional military tradition and relied heavily on foreign expertise to make up for it.

Congress understood that immigrant service was both useful and important, but its response was very different from the Roman model. The Naturalization Act of 1790 made it easier for "free white persons" to become citizens by lowering the residency requirement to two years. Revolutionary War veterans often got faster consideration.[40] This relatively short path to citizenship showed how fragile the republic's population was and how quickly it needed to bring soldiers into a new political community. The American system of incorporating new citizens quickly was different from Rome's auxiliary system, which required twenty-five years of service and delayed citizenship until discharge.

So, the comparison with Rome works on the level of function, not equivalence. In both cases, military service was a socially acceptable way to fit in, but the way it worked in time was very different. Roman citizenship-through-service rewarded people who had been through a lot and slowly brought survivors into imperial society. During the Revolution, American naturalization was sped up because people needed to survive in a war for independence. This difference is especially clear in cases of desertion during wartime, like Hessian soldiers who left British service to join the Continental Army. These defections were motivated by American manpower shortages, promises of land or settlement, and comparatively favorable treatment, rather than by an inherent commitment to American identity. Their subsequent naturalization exemplifies how military exigency can expedite political integration, converting actions of pragmatic self-interest into postwar narratives of voluntary civic engagement. In this regard, Revolutionary America resembled Rome not in the duration or structure of service, but in its readiness to transform military utility into political membership when necessary.

[39] Von Steuben 1779; Delbert Cress 1982, 84–91.

[40] Naturalization Act of 1790, 1 Stat. 103; Ford 2001, 7–9 (for early precedents of military-facilitated naturalization).

Conscription and Mass Mobilization: 1861–1945

During times of conscription and large-scale war, the link between military service and citizenship was most clear. About a quarter of the Union soldiers in the Civil War were born outside the United States, mostly Irish and German immigrants.[41] The Act of July 17, 1862, made the connection between service and citizenship official. It let alien soldiers who had been honorably discharged become citizens without having to meet the usual residency requirements.[42] This law was very similar to Rome's service-based integration model in how it worked, but not in how it looked: citizenship was not given by imperial decree, but by republican law. The relationship grew even stronger during World War I. About 18% of the American Expeditionary Force was born outside the US. Congress allowed naturalization ceremonies on the battlefield that did not require residency or literacy.[43] These ceremonies, which took place in training camps and abroad, made the change from immigrant to citizen very public. They also reinforced the idea that military sacrifice could speed up the process of becoming a citizen. Scholars have underscored that these practices were not merely symbolic but produced enduring demographic effects, allowing veterans to sponsor relatives and stabilize immigrant communities within the American political framework.[44]

World War II continued this pattern, but it also showed its flaws. More than 100,000 people became U.S. citizens through military service between 1942 and 1945. More than 300,000 non-citizens served in the U.S. armed forces.[45] At the same time, racial exclusion continued. While their families were still in prison because of Executive Order 9066, Japanese American soldiers in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team fought in other countries. Their service did not automatically end discrimination, but it was very important in changing the way people talked about citizenship, loyalty, and civil rights after the war.[46] Like in Rome, service-based inclusion could go along with inequality, leading to integration over time instead of immediate equality.

[41] U.S. Statutes at Large 12 1862, 597.

[42] Glasrud 1993, 50–64.

[43] Gentile Ford 2001, 4–7.

[44] U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1945, 71.

[45] Kashima 2003, 144–49.

[46] Bailey 2009, 201–25.

The Shift to an All-Volunteer Force

After the Vietnam War, there was a clear break in the structure. The United States ended conscription in 1973 and switched to an all-volunteer force (AVF). This changed the way military service, citizenship, and social integration were related.[47] In the past, wars needed a lot of people to join the military, including new immigrants. But after 1973, the military relied on targeted recruitment, long-term career service, and economic incentives instead of universal obligation. Researchers have pointed out that the military during the draft era was as much a civic institution as it was a fighting force. During World War II and the Cold War, conscription united citizens and non-citizens across class, regional, and ethnic boundaries, transforming military service into a collective national experience and a significant means of integration.[48] The all-volunteer force, on the other hand, made it harder for people to join the military. Service became more and more focused on certain groups of people, like working-class Americans, racial minorities, and immigrants, instead of being a civic duty that everyone shared.

This change had a big impact on the services available to immigrants. Under the AVF, immigrant soldiers still played important roles, but they only did so in certain situations. Recruitment focused more and more on people with certain skills, like being able to speak multiple languages, having technical knowledge, or having medical training. The Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) program is an example of this trend. Instead of recruiting large groups of immigrants, the military hired small groups of non-citizens who were already living in the United States and had skills that were thought to be strategically useful.[49] This method was very different from how things used to be, when immigrants mostly joined the military as part of a large-scale mobilization instead of a niche recruitment.

The legal ramifications of this transformation were equally significant. Even though U.S. immigration law still allowed non-citizens who served honorably during certain periods of hostilities to become citizens more quickly, military service was no longer a way for people to become citizens more quickly.[50] Instead, service was part of an immigration system that was getting more complicated and made clear differences between lawful permanent residence, temporary status, eligibility for naturalization, and full citizenship. As a result, the symbolic connection between service and

[47] Bailey 2009.

[48] Delbert Cress 1982.

[49] Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. Pub. L. No. 82-414, 66 Stat. 163.

[50] Mittelstadt 2015.

belonging got weaker, even though the military still relied too much on immigrant workers in some job areas.

Researchers of the all-volunteer force have demonstrated that the military, after 1973, mitigated the lack of conscription by prioritizing economic incentives, such as competitive salaries, educational benefits like the GI Bill, healthcare, and avenues for social mobility.[51] These incentives effectively maintained recruitment; however, they also redefined military service as a career option rather than an obligatory civic duty. In this context, immigrant service was valued mainly for how it helped the military do its job better, not for how it could bring people together in the government. When you put all of these changes together, they changed the civic meaning of military service in a big way. With the all-volunteer force, service was no longer a way for large groups of people to join, like Roman auxiliary recruitment or the armies of the American conscription era. Instead, it turned into a specialized path with narrower, legally dependent, and unevenly spread integrative effects. This change helps us understand why military service in the late 20th and early 21st centuries still had symbolic meaning but did not have as much power to change how people thought about citizenship and belonging in society.

Post-9/11 Service, Legal Uncertainty, and MAVNI

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq brought attention back to immigrant service, but this time it was within a much stricter legal framework. Executive Order 13269 allowed non-citizens who served honorably during the "War on Terror" to become citizens more quickly after the attacks of September 11, 2001.[52] This power allowed tens of thousands of service members to become U.S. citizens, often in ceremonies held overseas that were similar to those held on the battlefield.
At the same time, programs like Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) showed that the military was moving away from hiring everyone and towards hiring only certain people. MAVNI, which started in 2009, allowed some non-citizens who were already living in the U.S., especially those with important medical or language skills, to join.[53] MAVNI did not guarantee citizenship; instead, it allowed for expedited naturalization based on honorable service and discretionary approval. Legal experts have pointed out that the confusion about status, residence, and

[51] Shy 1990.

[52] Executive Order 13269 2002; Stock 2006, 3–5.

[53] U.S. Army Accessions Command 2016; Bailey 2009, 219–22.

citizenship in these programs is a sign of bigger problems with U.S. immigration law, not just a broken promise.[54] These unclear situations have had real effects. The Government Accountability Office and advocacy groups have found cases where non-citizen veterans, even combat veterans, were deported after being convicted of a crime, even though they had served in the military before.[55] Even though these cases do not officially take away promised citizenship, they show how fragile service-based inclusion is in a legal system that makes a clear distinction between residence, eligibility for naturalization, and full civic membership.

Integration and Its Limits

The American experience illustrates that military service has served as a conditional and historically specific avenue for civic integration, rather than a consistent or universal means of inclusion. During conscription and total war, military service sped up the process of becoming a citizen and changed the way immigrants were accepted into society on a large scale. The Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the World Wars all saw a lot of people join the military. This made it easier for people from other countries to become citizens and made military service a public and symbolic way to show national pride.[56] In these situations, service worked as a strong unifying force, putting aside differences in language, class, and origin for the sake of survival. In the time of the all-volunteer force, on the other hand, immigrant service has been more limited, legally complicated, and politically contentious. Joining the military is no longer a shared civic experience; instead, it is a specialized job choice that is mostly made by people from certain socioeconomic and demographic groups. As researchers of the military since 1973 have shown, recruitment has relied more and more on economic incentives, benefits, and professional advancement than on bringing people together as citizens.[57] Consequently, the integrative effects of service have become inconsistent and less apparent at the societal level, despite the continued significant service of immigrant soldiers. In contrast to Rome's auxiliary system, which had few citizens, clear definitions, and institutional standardization, the American model has combined inclusion with legal stratification. Roman auxiliary soldiers worked within a fairly straightforward and predictable system: they served as non-citizens and then became citizens when they were honorably discharged.[58] In the United States, military service intersects with various legal categories lawful permanent residence, temporary

[54] Cuison Villazor 2017, 148–205; Chacón 2009, 135–39.

[55] U.S. Government Accountability Office 2019, 1–9; Acer / Byrne 2019, 12–18.

[56] Delbert Cress 1982, 219–32; Shy 1990, 231–45.

[57] Gentile Ford 2001, 4–9.

authorization, eligibility for expedited naturalization, and discretionary citizenship each regulated by distinct statutes and administrative practices.[59] This complex legal structure has led to different results, even for soldiers who did similar types of service.

This variability does not diminish the integrative potential of military service, rather, it emphasizes its reliance on institutional clarity, legal credibility, and political context. In both Rome and the United States, service-based inclusion worked best when it was clear, publicly acknowledged, and consistently upheld how military work and civic rewards were linked. When that relationship became unclear whether because of a delayed discharge, selective enforcement, or changing political priorities the symbolic power of service faded. Soldiers could still show loyalty, but the state was not sure if it would recognize that loyalty. The comparison underscores a common structural logic prevalent in both ancient and contemporary contexts. Military service alone does not ensure integration; instead, integration occurs when service is incorporated into an institutional framework that consistently converts sacrifice into status. Rome did this by making it easy to become a citizen, while the United States did it only when there was a major conflict. The service-citizenship relationship has been weak outside of those times. In both instances, the limitations of integration demonstrate not the inadequacies of soldiers, but the restrictions dictated by legal frameworks and political decisions.[60]

Comparative Analysis

Military Service as a Mechanism of Conditional Belonging

When compared, Rome and the United States exemplify a recurring yet historically specific mechanism through which military service served as a conduit for civic inclusion. In neither instance was inclusion fundamentally based on universalist ideology or abstract concepts of equality. Instead, service-based citizenship arose as a conditional exchange, connecting military labor to political recognition in situations where the state's survival, expansion, or strategic capacity relied on manpower exceeding the current citizen core. This exchange was influenced more by considerations of loyalty, discipline, and state security than by moral obligations. This

[58] Bailey 2009, 201–25; Mittelstadt 2015, 287–312.

[59] Saddington 1982, 142–48; Ando 2000, 214–19; Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, Pub. L. No. 82-414, 66 Stat. 163; Cuison Villazor 2017, 148–205.

[60] U.S. Government Accountability Office 2019, 1–9; Tac. *Hist.* 4.12–20; Millar 1981, 221–24.

conditionality is essential for comprehending the functioning of military service as an integrative mechanism. In Rome, auxiliary service did not instantly obliterate provincial identity; instead, it gradually redefined identity through legal incorporation. Non-citizen soldiers stayed legally different from Roman citizens while they were serving, and they only became Roman citizens when they were honorably discharged, which usually took twenty-five years.[61] Integration was thus postponed and selective, valuing perseverance and fidelity over mere participation. People didn't deny their provincial origins, but they became less important over time to Roman law and civic norms, especially when veterans moved to new towns and started living in them.

In the United States, military service also served as a legitimizing practice, albeit within a markedly distinct temporal and legal context. Service changed immigrants from outsiders to temporary insiders, which made their claims to belonging stronger but didn't guarantee full or permanent inclusion.[62] Military service sped up the process of becoming a citizen and publicly linked sacrifice to national identity, especially during times of mass mobilization. But this change was often quick and based on the situation, not on a standardized, long-term probationary system like Rome's *auxilia*.

Thus, in both systems, serving did not automatically make someone a member; it instead created a claim to membership. Military service served as a demonstration of loyalty and utility to the state; however, the conversion of that service into civic status was contingent upon institutional structure and political circumstances. Rome put this claim into a legal system that was mostly stable and delayed but standardized citizenship. The United States, on the other hand, put it into a system that was more flexible and broken up, so it could grow or shrink depending on population pressure, military needs, and political will.[63] The two cases are not the same because of their outcomes, but because of how they think. Military service did not eliminate boundaries of belonging; it regulated them. Both Rome and the United States took in some outsiders by turning military service into conditional citizenship, while still keeping the hierarchy in the polity. Integration was therefore transactional and uneven, favoring those whose service most closely matched state needs at specific historical junctures. This dynamic emphasizes the inherently utilitarian nature of citizenship-through-service as a method of state-building rather than a universal route to inclusion.

[61] Saddington 1982, 142–48; Ando 2000, 214–19.

[62] Ford 2001, 4–9; Cuison Villazor 2017, 148–205.

[63] Bailey 2009, 201–25; Mittelstadt 2015, 287–312.

Recruitment Logic and State Capacity

A significant comparative similarity exists in the correlation between military recruitment and state capacity. As Rome's empire grew, it became harder for its citizens to keep up with the growing population, especially since it controlled land far beyond Italy. The auxiliary system got around this problem by systematically recruiting non-citizens while keeping a clear legal and institutional separation between legionaries and auxiliaries. Even though auxiliaries were not citizens while they were serving, they were fully part of the imperial military structure, trained, paid, and sent into battle with citizen legions. By the second century CE, this distinction had become more functional than social. Auxiliaries made up about half of Rome's military manpower and played important tactical roles throughout the empire.[64] This way of hiring showed that Rome was a centralized imperial state with a permanent standing army. The empire could plan for long-term service commitments, keep units going for decades, and hire people from all over the provinces. So, non-citizen manpower was added to a stable institutional framework that was meant for ongoing warfare and defense of the frontier, not just for short-term mobilization.

During the Civil War and the World Wars, the United States faced similar recruitment pressures. Immigrants were important in these wars because they helped keep large armies going when native-born citizens could not do it alone.[65] Like Rome, the United States relied on immigrants to fill urgent job openings. It did not, however, create a permanent non-citizen military caste like Rome did. Instead, immigrant soldiers were put into a temporary mobilization structure that grew quickly during wartime and shrank just as quickly during peacetime. This difference shows that there are different ideas about how strong a state can be. Rome had a permanent imperial army that was meant to grow and protect the empire all the time. This meant that they needed a long-term solution to problems with population growth. The United States, on the other hand, had a tradition of citizen-soldiers that was broken up by short periods of mass mobilization, followed by demobilization and a return to a smaller peacetime force. As a result, immigrants in the U.S. were quickly and intensely integrated into the military, but this was only temporary. In Rome, however, it was a slow, institutionalized process that was built into the military system itself.

Legal Architecture and Predictability

The predictability of legal outcomes constitutes a significant point of divergence between Rome and the United States. Roman auxiliary service provided a standardized

[64] Scheidel 2007, 110–12; Saddington 1982, 142–48.

[65] Lonn 1951, 342–46; Gentile Ford 2001, 4–7.

and legally codified pathway from non-citizen to citizen status: honourable discharge after twenty-five years conferred Roman citizenship*, conubium* (the legal right to enter into a Roman marriage), and the legal incorporation of the soldier's descendants into the civic body. The diploma *militaris*, made of bronze and valid throughout the empire, showed this reliability by making the veteran's new legal status public.[66] Even though the reward was delayed, the process was clear and consistent, which made military service a good long-term investment and helped soldiers stay loyal and disciplined throughout their careers. This legal clarity was a big part of what made the Roman system work so well. Citizenship was not automatic or optional once the conditions of service were met; instead, it followed a clear institutional logic that soldiers and provincial communities could easily understand. This transition's dependability helped the auxiliary system last for many generations, even in places far from Rome.

In contrast, the U.S. legal system for military naturalization has been inconsistent, complicated, and dependent on other factors. Statutory provisions consistently expedited naturalization for non-citizen soldiers, especially during wartime, however, these provisions were contingent upon formal declarations of hostilities, administrative approval, and adherence to overarching immigration law.[67] Military service could speed up the process of becoming a citizen, but it did not replace other legal categories like lawful permanent residence, temporary authorization, or discretionary eligibility. Because of this, service was more of a way to make things happen than a sure way to get there legally. This uncertainty became clearer after the all-volunteer force was created in 1973. As military service transitioned from a universal civic duty to a professional career, service-based inclusion increasingly converged with a disjointed immigration system rather than replacing it.[68] The lack of a single, standardized transition like the Roman diploma made the service-citizenship exchange less clear in terms of meaning. Although military service retained moral and cultural significance, its legal ramifications became less predictable and more inconsistent, undermining its efficacy as a means of civic integration relative to the Roman model.

[66] Saddington 1982, 142–48; Sherwin-White 1973, 279–88; CIL XVI, passim (military diplomas).

[67] Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, Pub. L. No. 82-414, 66 Stat. 163; Gentile Ford 2001, 4–9; Cuison Villazor 2017, 148–205.

[68] Bailey 2009, 201–25; Mittelstadt 2015, 287–312; U.S. Government Accountability Office 2019, 1–9.

Temporality of Service and Integration

The two systems had different ways of keeping time. Before someone could become a citizen, they had to serve in the Roman auxiliary for a long time, often most of their adult life. Integration happened slowly and over generations, through things like settling down, getting married, and joining local civic groups after discharge.[69] Citizenship was the end of service, not the beginning, which reinforced the idea that belonging was earned through long-term endurance and loyalty. The American model shortened this timeline. During the World Wars, for example, people could become citizens while they were serving in the military or even on the battlefield. This cut down on the time between sacrifice and civic recognition by a large amount.[70] This shortening of time increased the symbolic power of military inclusion and met the needs of the war by raising morale and strengthening loyalty to the state. At the same time, it made integration less deep by putting speed ahead of long-term social integration. Roman integration focused on delayed but long-lasting inclusion, while American integration focused on quickness, visibility, and political reassurance during times of crisis. These different time periods shaped the way loyalty worked: Roman loyalty grew over decades, while American loyalty was often shown through short-term, highly publicized rituals of inclusion.

Military Culture and Perceptions of the "Foreigner"

Military culture makes the two cases even more different. In Rome, auxiliaries were explicitly valued for their ethnic distinctiveness Batavian cavalry, Numidian horsemen, Syrian archers yet were simultaneously required to adopt Roman discipline, command hierarchies, and legal subordination.[71] Rome did not deny foreignness; instead, it used it to its advantage by using regional martial traditions while still keeping control. As time went on, though, imperial norms became more important than ethnic differences. This was done through standardized training, equipment, and command. This created a military culture that was Roman in practice, even when the soldiers were from different ethnic groups.

In the United States, immigrant soldiers were officially regarded as interchangeable citizens-in-training, especially during times of mass mobilization, despite the ongoing existence of ethnic regiments and racial segregation in practice. The Irish Brigade, Japanese American units in World War II, and Latino soldiers in

[69] Saddington 1982, 142–48; Ando 2000, 214–19.

[70] Glasrud 1993, 50–64; Gentile Ford 2001 4–9.

[71] Le Bohec 1994, 56–61; Saddington 1982, 142–48.

later wars were sometimes praised as examples of loyalty and sometimes pushed aside as racial or cultural outsiders.[72] The United States went back and forth between using assimilationist language and doing things that kept people out, while Rome openly accepted differences and dealt with them through institutions. This tension made it harder for service to bring people together, especially for racialized minorities whose loyalty was always in doubt, even when they made sacrifices for their country.

Integration Beyond the Individual Soldier

In both systems, the positive effects of military service went beyond individual soldiers to their families and communities. Roman auxiliary veterans often established themselves in frontier areas adjacent to their former bases, where inscriptions and archaeological findings confirm their significant roles in civic affairs as magistrates, priests, and patrons.[73] Veterans helped spread Roman legal norms and civic practices to local people by getting married, owning land, and taking part in municipal institutions. Their descendants frequently ascended to provincial elites, integrating loyalty to Rome into local power structures and bolstering imperial stability at the municipal level. American immigrant veterans also had an impact on civic life, but in different ways because of the democratic and pluralistic political system. Veterans used their citizenship to help family members, get educational and economic benefits, and join political groups. Veterans of the Civil War had an impact on local and national elections; veterans of World War II were important in the civil rights movements that followed the war; and veterans of the Vietnam War helped Latino and Asian American communities get involved in politics.[74] In both instances, military service functioned as a demographic multiplier, perpetuating the impacts of integration across generations instead of limiting them to individual soldiers.

Breakdown, Resistance, and Disillusionment

The limitations of service-based inclusion become most apparent during instances of failure. The Batavian uprising in Rome from 69 to 70 CE shows how quickly loyalty could fall apart when auxiliary troops felt exploited or betrayed in a symbolic way. Tacitus underscores that Julius Civilis galvanized grievances stemming from both material circumstances and breached anticipations of honor, reward, and recognition.[75] The revolt was not a rejection of Roman identity itself, but rather a crisis of trust in the imperial bargain that linked service to status. In the United States, the

[72] Ural 2010, 17–21; Kashima 2003, 144–49.

[73] CIL XIII 8262; CIL VIII 2557; Ando 2000, 214–19.

[74] Ford 2001, 112–15; González 2022, 311–13.

breakdown was less violent but still had serious effects. The deportation of non-citizen veterans and the suspension or reduction of programs like MAVNI showed how weak service-based belonging can be in a legal system that values immigration status more than military service.[76] These incidents did not represent the annulment of guaranteed citizenship; however, they undermined the moral and symbolic integrity of the service-citizenship nexus. The issue, much like in Rome, was not the service itself, but the perceived lack of reliability of recognition.

Expansion, Dilution, and the Limits of Incentives

Finally, both systems show what happens when citizenship goes beyond the service-based framework. Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 CE made Roman citizenship available to everyone. This got rid of the incentive structure of the auxiliary system and made citizenship a basic legal status instead of a reward for good behavior.[77] This reform made the law more unified across the empire, but it weakened the unique role that military service played in bringing people together and changed the way that soldiering and civic privilege were related. In the U.S., the opening up of more ways for immigrants to come to the country in the 1800s and 1900s also made military naturalization less exclusive. Citizenship became easier to get through family reunification and migration for work, making military service just one of many ways to get it instead of a special way. Service kept its symbolic power, but it became less important in the big picture compared to civilian immigration channels. In both instances, the erosion of exclusivity transformed the political significance of service while preserving its cultural impact, highlighting the inadequacies of military incentives as enduring integration strategies.

Comparative Synthesis: Military Service, Integration, and State Power

In summary, the Roman and American cases show that military service only worked as a way to bring people together as citizens when it was part of a credible and understandable institutional framework that linked service to recognition. In both systems, service created claims to belonging instead of automatically including people. The strength of those claims depended on how predictable, visible, and consistent they

[75] Tac. *Hist.* 4.12–20; Millar 1981, 91–97.

[76] U.S. Government Accountability Office 2019, 1–9; Acer / Byrne 2019, 12–18.

[77] Sherwin-White 1973, 279–88; Millar 1981, 221–24.

were. Rome made this relationship official by requiring long periods of service, setting standard legal rewards, and giving military diplomas to show that someone was a citizen. This created a slow but lasting form of integration that happened over many generations. The United States, on the other hand, used short-term mass mobilization and short timelines for inclusion, which had strong but uneven effects on integration. These effects grew quickly during times of existential conflict and then shrank just as quickly in times of peace.

This difference shows that there are bigger differences in the state's ability to govern and its political structure. Rome ruled over a large empire that included a permanent standing army. Because of this, they needed a long-term solution to the problems caused by population growth. Its auxiliary system gradually brought in non-citizens while keeping clear lines between citizen and non-citizen soldiers. This way, it was able to include everyone without blurring the lines between social groups. The United States, on the other hand, followed a citizen-soldier tradition in which soldiers were called up and sent home in cycles. During wartime, military service was a strong way to bring people together, but it could not do that as well when there was not a lot of people joining up. Consequently, inclusion via service in the American context was more dependent on political exigency than on sustainable institutional framework.

In both cases, the breakdown happened not when soldiers were in danger or died, but when the legal and symbolic consistency of the service-citizenship exchange broke down. In Rome, revolts like the Batavian uprising show how perceived exploitation and delayed recognition could turn loyal helpers into political threats. In the United States, the lack of clear laws about military naturalization and the deportation of non-citizen veterans caused people to lose faith in the state's recognition of service. These moments show that service-based integration relies more on the trustworthiness of the institutions that turn service into status than on rhetoric or sacrifice alone. Lastly, both systems show how military incentives do not work as well when citizenship goes beyond the service-based framework. The *Constitutio Antoniniana* of Caracalla made Roman citizenship available to everyone and got rid of the auxiliary system's exclusivity. This weakened the unique integrative role of military service while strengthening legal unity. In the United States, the growth of civilian immigration routes made military naturalization less important, making service just one way to become a citizen. In both instances, the dilution of exclusivity transformed the political significance of service while preserving its cultural impact. Military service is not a timeless solution to integration; rather, it is a historically contingent instrument of state-building influenced by state capacity, legal framework, and political trust.

Conclusion

This paper contends that military service served as a means of civic integration in both Rome and the United States, not due to the adoption of universalist ideals of inclusion by either polity, but because service provided a conditional and instrumental route to belonging during periods when state survival, expansion, or military efficacy necessitated manpower exceeding the citizen core. In both instances, military service generated claims to membership instead of guaranteeing automatic inclusion, with the sustainability of those claims reliant on institutional design rather than moral discourse. The Roman auxiliary system is one of the most fully developed examples of citizenship through service. Rome created a slow but lasting way for people to become citizens by linking long-term military service to a standardized and legally binding grant of citizenship. This process happened over many generations. Citizenship was the end of service, not the beginning, and it made loyalty stronger by being predictable and taking a long time.

The system worked because it was credible, not because it was generous. Soldiers and provincial communities knew what they were getting into, even if the rewards were far away. The American experience took a different path. The United States, an immigration society influenced by sporadic mass mobilization, utilized military service as a catalyst for integration rather than a prolonged probationary process. During times of conscription and total war, service shortened the time it took for people to become citizens and linked sacrifice to being part of the country. But outside of those times, the switch to an all-volunteer force and the growing complexity of immigration law made service-based integration less clear and less effective. Military service still had symbolic power, but it lost a lot of its ability to change citizenship at the level of society. In both cases, things fell apart not when soldiers faced death or hardship, but when the relationship between service and citizenship lost its meaning. Revolts in Rome and legal disputes in the United States demonstrate that loyalty was contingent not on the act of sacrifice itself, but on the state's consistent acknowledgement of that sacrifice. When rewards were late, up to the person, or thought to be impossible to get, integration turned into disappointment. These instances emphasize that military service can only achieve integration when institutions consistently convert labor into status.

Finally, the comparison shows how military incentives do not work as well when citizenship goes beyond the service-based system. Caracalla's universal grant of citizenship in 212 CE ended the exclusivity of the auxiliary system. In the same way, the growth of civilian immigration pathways in the United States made military naturalization less important. In both cases, the loss of exclusivity changed the political

meaning of service, but it did not take away its cultural significance. Military service is not a timeless solution to integration; rather, it is a historically contingent instrument of state-building, effective solely under particular conditions of state capacity, legal predictability, and political trust. This study juxtaposes Rome and the United States, decontextualizing contemporary discussions on military service and citizenship within a broader historical framework of state management of inclusion under duress. The analysis indicates that the fundamental inquiry is not whether service should confer citizenship, but rather under what institutional circumstances service can authentically foster a sense of belonging.

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