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Highland Falls is America

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In 1957 Samuel Huntington published a highly influential book called the Soldier and the State. In the last paragraph he famously wrote “Highland Falls [represents] the American spirit at its most commonplace...today America can learn more from West Point than West Point from America.” This passage was controversial at the time and even cost Huntington tenure at Harvard. The book would go on to influence generations of civil-military relations scholars. While the sentiment may have been accurate in the 1950s, today’s Highland Falls represents everything America should be. It is true that West Point is the core of the Army’s values. It is also true that they are the guardians of freedom. Yet, the short-sighted claim by Huntington fails to highlight the critical relationship that exists between the military and society. The American people, specifically those of Highland Falls, are the reason for the existence of West Point. America’s values reside in the citizenry, those people West Point is sworn to protect. The 4th of July parade through downtown Highland Falls demonstrates that patriotism is alive and well in small-town America. Participants and spectators alike embraced the heat of the day to honor America and the values it represents. Boy scouts eagerly raced around, fire trucks drove with their lights whirring, the local marching band played with gusto, civic groups and local politicians waved from convertibles, all while the community lined sidewalks to cheer them on. If you closed your eyes, the air was filled with the smell of nearby barbeques and the laughter of children waving flags. America is still as patriotic as ever. Its values and core identity are not at risk. The people of Highland Falls are proud of their Country. They represent every small town across America. They are the keepers of America’s virtues. For as long flags fly and the marching bands play, West Point will have a reason to soldier on. If Huntington were writing today I think he would be pleased to update the last paragraph of his book to reflect what America really is.

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