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G.I. Messiahs: Soldiering, War, and American Civil Religion

Jonathan H. Ebel

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Jonathan Ebel has long been interested in how religion helps individuals and communities render meaningful the traumatic experiences of violence and war. In this new work, he examines cases from the Great War to the present day and argues that our notions of what it means to be an American soldier are not just strongly religious, but strongly Christian.

Drawing on a vast array of sources, he further reveals the effects of soldier veneration on the men and women so often cast as heroes. Imagined as the embodiments of American ideals, described as redeemers of the nation, adored as the ones willing to suffer and die that we, the nation, may live—soldiers have often lived in subtle but significant tension with civil religious expectations of them. With chapters on prominent soldiers past and present, Ebel recovers and re-narrates the stories of the common American men and women that live and die at both the center and edges of public consciousness.

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