This paper examines the settler colonial genesis of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine. It is a standard presumption of U.S. military history that in the conflict between whites and indigenous groups, through which the country came into possession of the territory it now occupies, the Army waged a defensive campaign against “irregular” tribal enemies. In this paper, I show that the principal combatants against American Indians in this conflict were not soldiers in uniform, but white immigrants recruited to assume the risks of frontier conflict in the service of an aggressive government project of national expansion. During the period of the early Republic, the U.S. government oversaw a stratified immigration society that moved poor immigrants to the frontier to perform the work of Indian removal; it stoked and harnessed interpersonal interracial violence in the interest of expansion by structuring private incentives through civil law, including early U.S. immigration, property, contract and tort law. Its tiny, impoverished army functioned rather to police both white immigrants and Indian tribes, to maintain the violence that issued from its diffuse civil-military aggression at a level below the threshold of full-fledged war. In this analysis, the civil-military “counterinsurgency” tactics the U.S. developed during this conflict predate the history of its insurgencies. This history addresses the inconsistent but frequent absence of so-called “American Indian wars” in histories of “irregular” warfare, and explores how this conflict challenges many of the field’s central premises. It inverts the colonial, racially inflected binaries of “regular” Western and “irregular” other forces, to expose white immigrants in America as the “first insurgents.” It therefore subverts understandings of counterinsurgency practices as reactive and defensive, rather than aggressive and economically motivated, or as arising from the need for “regular” troops to respond to the unique security threat posed by an “irregular” enemy. Finally, it undermines the assumption that American Indian wars provide an early example of tactics that were later applied to other “irregular” enemies abroad, rather than of strategies also evident in the “regular” bodies of U.S. civil law, and demonstrative of how the U.S. history of expansion and conquest is embedded foundationally in its structures of law and governance, its racialized social fabric, and its unbroken existence in a state of armed peace, or “peace-war.”