

tence of the American forces.

"Vietnam: The War is Worth Winning," stated an editorial headline in the February 25, 1965 issue of *Life* magazine. The editorial went on to note that "there is a reasonably good chance the present phase of the war can be successfully wound up in 1967 or even in late 1966....The war in Vietnam is...about the future of Asia. It is very possibly as important as any of the previous American wars of this century."

At the time of the editorial, there were about 200,000 Americans in Vietnam. Some 125,000 had been there less than six months and about 50,000 were engaged in combat. About 1,400 had been killed and 6,000 wounded. Casualties were small enough and volunteerism high enough to give credibility to the administration's reassurances that a successful war effort could be managed without great public sacrifice. In a 1966 survey of high school sophomores, only 7 percent said the draft or Vietnam were problems that concerned them.

The Troop Buildup and the Draft

By the end of 1966, there were 400,000 American troops in Vietnam. The casualty toll had reached over 5,000 Americans killed in action and 16,000 wounded. Many of the enlisted men already had served their one-year tour of duty and were now rotating back to the States to be reassigned to other units. Their slots increasingly were being filled by soldiers recruited through the Selective Service System. As more soldiers were needed, more reliance was placed upon the draft.

By December 1966, the draft call was up to 40,000 men each month. Many of these soldiers were assigned to combat units upon their arrival, knowing only those people they had met in-flight. They lacked the security of serving alongside guys from basic training. Many of these draftees simply did not want to be there and a lot of them were being sent straight into combat. Morale problems began to surface. By 1970, draftees comprised 39 percent of the troops but almost 55 percent of the combat deaths.

Almost everyone of the Vietnam generation, whether or not they served in the military, was emotion-



President Nixon's draft lottery in action

ally affected by the war. As one author noted, "Vietnam was the most divisive time of battle in our country since the Civil War." It's easy to imagine yourself a hero when there is no immediate threat, but young Americans were being killed in Vietnam. Moreover, the only way to survive such a situation was to be willing to kill, an act that does not come easily to most. Many young Americans simply were not moved to such great sacrifice by the cause of Vietnam. The issue for almost all male youth, then, was whether to enlist or how to avoid the draft. For millions, this meant a confrontation with their local Selective Service ("draft") board.

Established in 1917 for World War I, local draft boards were authorized to grant deferments and exemptions to individuals who were conscripted in their area. By the 1960s, the Selective Service System included about 4,000 local draft boards. These boards were staffed by unpaid civilian volunteers, usually older

white, middle-class men who were veterans of World Wars I and II.

As the war ground on, these local boards found themselves less and less able to meet their quotas of soldiers for Vietnam. A major reason was that there were numerous deferments and exemptions from military service built into the peacetime Selective Service law enacted in 1948. In addition to deferments for reasons of family, health, and religious principles, the law also provided deferments for occupations considered to be "in the national interest," especially those in the fields of health, education, religion, and agriculture. The following is a list of Selective Service classifications that could be assigned:

- I-A Available for military service
- I-A-O Conscientious objector available for noncombatant military service only
- I-C Member of the armed forces of the United States, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, or the Public Health Service
- I-D Member of reserve component or student taking military training
- I-O Conscientious objector available for civilian work contributing to the maintenance of the national health, safety, or interest
- I-S Student deferred by statute (High School)
- I-Y Registrant available for military service, but qualified for military service only in the event of war or national emergency
- I-W Conscientious objector performing civilian work contributing to the maintenance of the national health, safety, or interest
- II-A Registrant deferred because of civilian occupation (except agriculture or activity in study)
- II-C Registrant deferred because of agricultural occupation
- II-S Registrant deferred because of activity in study
- III-A Registrant with a child or children; registrant deferred by reason of extreme hardship to dependents

- IV-A Registrant who has completed service; sole surviving son
- IV-B Official deferred by law
- IV-C Alien
- IV-D Minister of religion or divinity student
- IV-F Registrant not qualified for any military service
- V-A Registrant over the age of liability for military service

Of the 26.8 million Vietnam era draft-age men, some 15.4 million, over 57 percent, were deferred, exempted, or disqualified from military service. Another 570,000, or 2 percent, committed draft violations. Over 200,000 were reported to federal prosecutors. Of these, 8,750 were convicted, 3,250 of whom went to prison. Another 3,000 went into hiding. Up to 100,000 fled the country. All of these young men also might be considered casualties of the war. For purposes of the war effort, however, the relevant figure is that almost 60 percent of the eligible population escaped military service entirely during the Vietnam era.

How to Avoid Vietnam

One course to avoid military service was to do so on principle by claiming conscientious objection. This course usually required extensive documentation by religious authorities. Moreover, almost all of the 172,000 young Americans who did qualify for such classification had to work for two years in low-paying community-service jobs outside of commuting distance from their homes. About a thousand individuals were convicted for refusing to do alternative service, a federal crime (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of this issue).

A more popular way to stay out of Vietnam was to go to college. Virtually every student who maintained satisfactory progress toward his degree was classified II-S, whereby the "registrant [was] deferred because of activity in study." If the student flunked out or was graduated, he again became eligible for the draft. Of course, the student could go to graduate or professional school and continue his deferment for another several

years. Enrollment in colleges and universities increased by 6-7 percent during the war. Much of this increase was due to increased federal aid to an expanding system of higher education, patronized by a growing middle class, eager to provide advantages for their children. Nevertheless the effect was to reduce the pool of draft-eligible males by several hundred thousand.

In the early years most students were in favor of the war. For example, in 1965 only 6 percent of those polled favored immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. Pro-war students picketed university teach-ins, sometimes shouted obscenities, even physically attacked participants. Conservative students petitioned for support of U.S. policy in Vietnam at campuses all over the country. Blood drives for U.S. soldiers were organized at Ohio State, Stanford and other campuses. However, none of this implied a willingness to enlist. A 1967 Gallup Poll showed that most students acknowledged that the draft discriminated against the poor, but two-thirds disagreed with a proposal that the proportions of college and non-college youths drafted should be the same.

Like the general public, student opinion turned decisively against the war after the Tet Offensive early in 1968. Between 1967 and 1969, the proportion of students calling themselves "hawks" on the war shrank from one in two to one in five. By 1969, a majority of all students thought the war was a mistake and favored immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.

Still, there was a sizeable minority who continued to support the war. Moreover, even on campuses with a strong peace movement, most students were unwilling to give up draft deferment programs and off-campus employment opportunities with the military. For example, in 1969, a majority of students at Brown, Northeastern, and Tufts (all New England schools) still supported the continuation of ROTC on campus, although in the last case without academic credit. A May 1970 Harris Poll showed that a larger plurality (37%) of all college students favored permitting ROTC with academic credit on campus than favored its complete removal (25%). Even more dramatic were the findings from the same poll that 72 percent believed that companies doing defense business should be allowed to recruit on campus and that 70 percent agreed that "school authorities are right to call in police when students occupy a building or threaten violence." College

As we counsel young men concerning military service, we must clarify for them our nation's role in Vietnam and challenge them with the alternative of conscientious objection. I am pleased to say that this is the path now being chosen by more than seventy students at my own alma mater, Morehouse College, and I recommend it to all who find the American course in Vietnam a dishonorable and unjust one. Moreover, I would encourage all ministers of draft age to give up their ministerial exemptions and seek status as conscientious objectors. These are the times for real choices and not false ones. We are at the moment when our lives must be placed on the line if our nation is to survive its own folly. Every man of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions, but we must all protest.

—Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

campuses certainly were major centers for the storm of protest against the war. However, they also were safe sanctuaries for all students: hawks, doves, and those concerned just with their own careers.

Another strategy for avoiding military service was to go into an occupation that was draft-deferred, like medicine, teaching or the ministry. A 1970 survey by Kenneth and Mary Gergen of 5,000 students at 39 colleges and universities found that one in three had altered their career plans, many for the purpose of seeking a draft-exempt occupation. Between 1968 and 1971, occupational deferments rose by over 270,000 (124%).

Hardship deferments were granted to men who were the sole means of support for their dependents. Many men chose to marry and have children in order to avoid the draft. These strategies were known as "marrying out" and "babying out". Between 1968 and 1971, such "dependency" deferments rose by almost 420,000 (11%).

Perhaps the greatest prize for those who wished to avoid Vietnam was a IV-F classification, in which "the registrant [was] not qualified for military service." This usually was granted for reasons of illness or disability and could be obtained by failing the induction or pre-induction physical examination. Some peace organizations even counseled young men on ways to fake various illnesses. Attorneys provided draft counseling for fees ranging from \$200 to \$1,000 and for anyone who found a competent lawyer, avoiding the draft was virtually assured.

Draft counselors directed men to certain boards in order to obtain exemptions. Baskir and Strauss report: "By far the most popular place to go for a pre-induction physical was Seattle, Washington. In the latter years of the war, Seattle examiners separated people into two groups: those who had letters from doctors or psychiatrists, and those who did not. Everyone received an exemption, regardless of what the letter said."

Many of these physicians charged big fees for letters to draft boards. Antiwar doctors or medical students were well known to university students. According to Baskir and Strauss, "A careful exam by a knowledgeable specialist and an equally careful choice of a pre-induction physical site guaranteed an exemption for nine clients out of ten." Individuals could be exempted for orthodontic work as well. A dentist in Los Angeles put braces on anyone who could afford them for a cost

of between \$1,000 and \$2,000.

If the above options were not available, there were many ways to fail the physical examinations. Some faked homosexual tendencies, starved themselves to obtain an underweight disqualification, or even mutilated their own bodies by slicing off a part of their thumb or shooting themselves in the foot.

Finally, one could lower one's chances of seeing combat in Vietnam by choosing a branch of the service more removed from the action, like the Coast Guard, Navy, or Air Force. The best assignments were the Reserves and National Guard. There was a four-to-six month active duty obligation, yearly summer camps, and monthly meetings over a six-year period. More than one million Vietnam-era males became guardsmen or reservists, almost all of whom stayed home; only 15,000 (1.5%) were sent to Vietnam. Studies by the Pentagon and National Guard indicated that between 70 and 90 percent of all reservists and guardsmen were draft-motivated. It was a very popular choice for college-trained men.

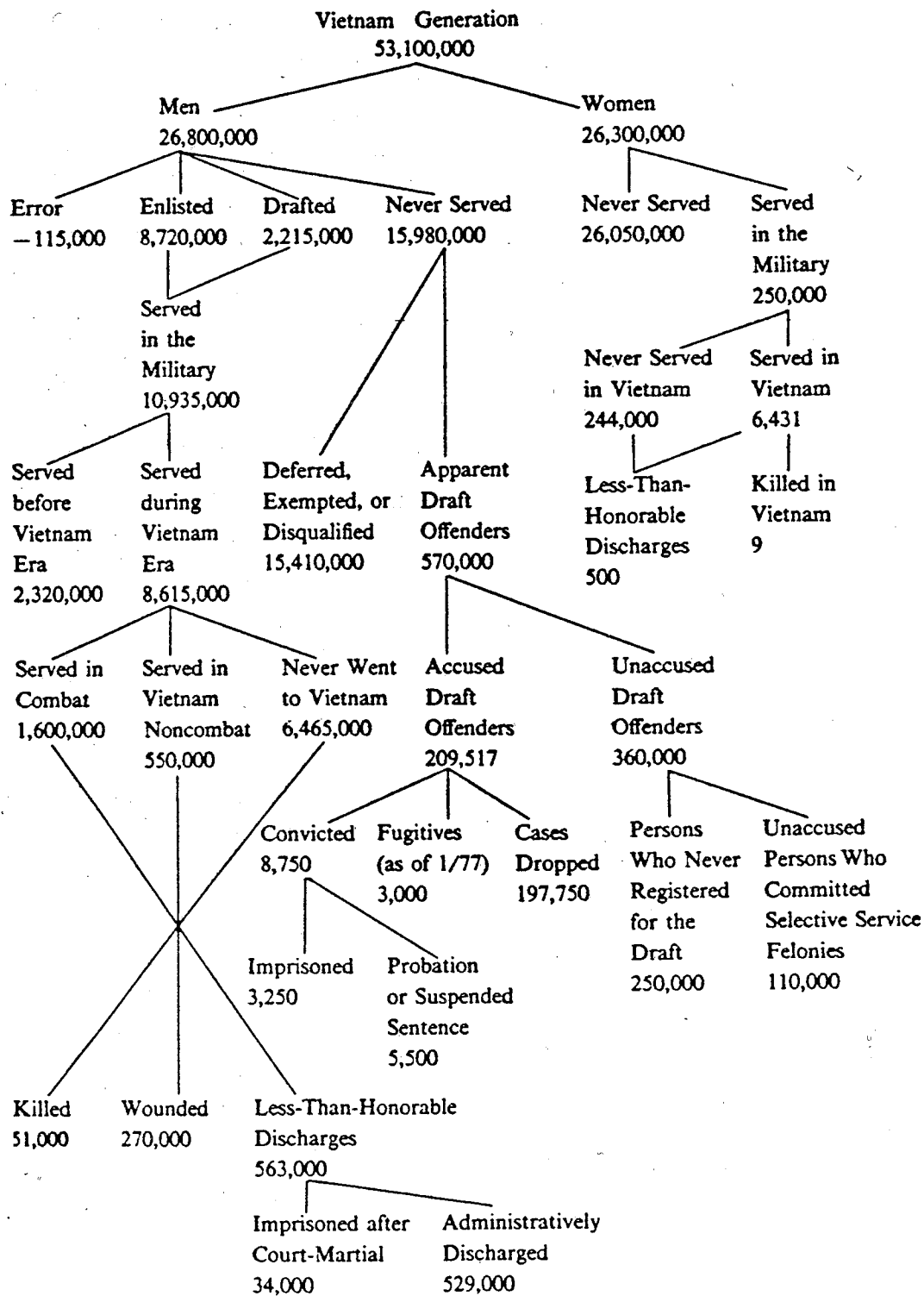
Figure 1 displays the various choices made by all members of the Vietnam generation.

In 1969, both to equalize the combat burden and to remove the threat of conscription as a motivation for protest, President Nixon established a lottery system for the draft. The lottery was based on the random selection of days of the year. The first date selected was September 14, which meant that local draft boards were required to select first all the eligible males born on that day for the January 1970 draft. Exemptions and deferments were still allowed. However, a low ranking draft number gave many young men reassurance of not being drafted and allowed everyone to plan the months ahead with more certainty.

Hardship, occupation, and student deferments were abolished by 1971. However, by that time, it made much less of a difference. The war was being turned over to the Vietnamese and draft quotas were sharply reduced. Fewer men now faced military service in Vietnam.

Throughout the war, many individuals took positive action to avoid military service. These men were much more likely to be from the higher classes of American society. They were able to escape military service by obtaining exemptions and deferments often unknown and unavailable to individuals lacking education and money.

1. The Vietnam Generation



As of 1991, 58, 135 are acknowledged as killed in Vietnam.

Who Fought For The U.S.

During 1968-69, at the height of the American involvement in the war, there were 543,000 troops in Vietnam. You were much more likely to serve in the military, be sent to Vietnam, and see combat if you were from a lower-income family and without a college education.

Clearly, most of the alternatives for avoiding the draft and combat in Vietnam were restricted to those with money and education. Poor boys don't go to college or train to be doctors, teachers, or ministers. Poor boys don't go to psychiatrists or orthodontists for expensive treatment. Poor boys don't worry that much about their careers, and many are likely to be raised in a home where military service is valued and enlistment encouraged.

In some areas, these inequities were especially acute. A congressman from northern Wisconsin, for example, took a survey and found that of 100 draftees from his district, every one had come from families with an annual income of less than \$5000. A study in Chicago found that men from low-income neighborhoods were three times as likely to die in Vietnam as men from high-income neighborhoods. Those from neighborhoods with low educational levels were four times more likely to die in Vietnam as those from neighborhoods with

high educational levels.

One study of enlisted men found that a high school dropout had a 70 percent chance of being sent to Vietnam; a high school graduate had a 64 percent chance, and a college graduate, a 42 percent chance. A 1965-66 survey found that college graduates made up only 2 percent of all draftees. Another study by a Harvard University graduate found that only 56 of 1,200 Harvard students had served in the military, only two of whom were sent to Vietnam. James Fallows, at the time a Harvard University student, reflects: "During the five or six years of the heaviest draft calls for Vietnam, there was the starkest class division in American military service since the days of purchased draft deferments in the Civil War." Fallows says he and his Harvard classmates avoided service through a variety of devious tactics while the working-class men from Chelsea responded to the call. He asks "why all the well-educated presumably humane young men...so willingly took advantage of this most brutal form of class discrimination—what it signifies that we let the boys from Chelsea be sent off to die."

Given the widespread class discrimination in military service, it was to be expected that the sons of U.S. political leaders would be spared the sacrifice of Vietnam. Indeed, a 1970 report showed that 234 sons of senators and congressmen were of draft age during the war years, 1965-1970. More than half, 118, received deferments. Of those remaining, only 28 were sent to Vietnam and only 19 (8%) saw combat. None were killed and one was wounded. Barry Goldwater Jr. did

Table 1. Likelihood of Vietnam-Era Service

	<u>Military Service</u> (%)	<u>Vietnam Service</u> (%)	<u>Combat Service</u> (%)
Low-Income	40	19	15
Middle-Income	30	12	7
High-Income	24	9	7
High-School Dropouts	42	18	14
High-School Graduates	45	21	17
College Graduates	23	12	9

his "alternative service" in the House of Representatives. It is tempting to speculate whether Congress' long and active support for the war might have been compromised had their children and grandchildren been exposed to the same risks as those of their less fortunate constituents.

Racial Minorities in Vietnam

During the war, as today, many blacks volunteered for military service, especially in the Marine Corps, in hopes of escaping the ghetto and bettering themselves. Many of these men were assigned to combat in Vietnam. Since the poverty rate among blacks in the U.S. is three times that among whites, black youths also were much more likely to be drafted into the military, assigned to Vietnam, and killed in combat. A final reason for this discrimination was that few blacks were assigned to decision making roles on local draft boards. In

1967, only 216 of 16,632 draft board members (1.2%) were black.

Blacks and Hispanics comprised 31 percent of all combat troops at the beginning of the war. In 1965, blacks accounted for 24 percent of all Army combat deaths. This was almost twice their share of the relevant population. As the government expanded its draft call, the black casualty rate declined proportionately to 20 percent in 1967 and 14 percent in 1968. By the end of the war, blacks accounted for 10.3 percent of all armed forces who served in Vietnam (11.9% of the Army). Although they were more likely to have been involved in heavy combat than white soldiers (37% to 25%), they constituted 13.5 percent of all combat deaths, a figure slightly greater than that of draft-eligible black males in the general population.

Hispanics also served and died in large numbers. One of two Hispanics in Vietnam served in combat and one of five were killed in action. General S.L.A. Marshall noted, "In the average rifle company, the strength was 50 percent composed of Negroes, Southwestern Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Guamanians, Nisei, and so on. But a real cross-section of American youth? Almost never." This discrimination was reinforced by

