

THE SETTING

IN 1968 General Lewis Hershey, director of the Selective Service System, asserted that “the System is representative of the American people, as clear an example as exists today of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. . . . The system as constituted invades all economic levels, all educational institutions, all geographic areas and all ethnic groups.”¹ Hershey was responding to critics who found an inequitable distribution of the “burden of defense” among the nation’s youth. However, Pentagon statistics were showing that black Americans were more likely to be drafted, to be sent to Vietnam, to serve in high-risk combat units, and consequently to be killed or wounded.² Also, an array of deferments and disqualifications—for getting married, having a child, enrolling in college, teaching in public school, joining the Peace Corps, or failing the induction physical examination—left numerous ways for young men to avoid the draft, and those who did, it appeared, were mainly the white, better-educated children of comfortable families.

By 1969 the end of conscription seemed inevitable. The rising tide of public opinion favored President Nixon’s 1968 campaign promise to “prepare for the day when the draft can be phased out of American life.”³ At the same time, prevailing views of the relationship between

1. Lewis B. Hershey, “The Operation of the Selective Service System,” *Current History*, vol. 55 (July 1968), p. 50.

2. “How Negro Americans Perform in Vietnam,” *U.S. News & World Report*, August 15, 1966, pp. 60–64. However, see Gilbert Badillo and G. David Curry, “The Social Incidence of Vietnam Casualties: Social Class or Race,” *Armed Forces and Society*, vol. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 397–406.

3. Cited in Melvin R. Laird, *Report to the President: Progress in Ending the Draft and Achieving the All-Volunteer Force* (Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, July 20, 1972), p. 1. See also Richard M. Nixon, “The All-Volunteer Armed Force,” address given over the CBS radio network, October 17, 1968, in Gerald Leinwand, ed., *The Draft* (Pocket Books, 1979), pp. 96–108.

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the military and society were undergoing significant changes. First, the war in Vietnam (along with increased draft calls) gave the armed forces a new and higher level of visibility. The seemingly endless war, the daily body counts and reports of missing persons, selective service reform, and the movement to end conscription were important public concerns, and concurrently, "quota consciousness" was becoming a major social and political issue. The civil rights movement, women's liberation, the welfare rights movement, Supreme Court decisions, the War on Poverty, and federal legislation to create a "balanced society" contributed to a heightened awareness of group participation and "statistical parity" in all sectors of society.

In 1970 the stage was set for serious debate concerning the practicality of an all-volunteer force—not only whether it was feasible, but whether a volunteer system could amend the social injustices of a less than equitable draft. The equity issue became a primary argument of critics of voluntary recruitment, who claimed that abolition of the draft would further insulate the better-educated sons of middle- and upper-class families from military service and the horrors of war.⁴

The first negative reactions to the introduction of the plan for "zero-draft" calls, however, generally had to do with national security and the means of maintaining a mass armed force—the major reasons given for instituting conscription. There were some references to the issues of proportional "representation" in early discussions, but it was the final report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force (often referred to as the Gates Commission after its chairman, former Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates, Jr.) and its treatment of objections to the all-volunteer force that provided the first official recognition of possible representation problems.

The Gates Commission report identified and then dismissed several contemporary issues that were directly related to questions of complete citizen participation: (1) an all-volunteer force will "undermine patriotism by weakening the traditional belief that each citizen has a moral

4. This particular comment is attributed to Senator Edward M. Kennedy. See, for example, statement by Kennedy before the Senate Armed Services Committee cited in *The Power of the Pentagon* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1972), p. 50. See also James W. Davis, Jr., and Kenneth M. Dolbeare, *Little Groups of Neighbors: The Selective Service System* (Markham, 1968); Harry A. Marmion, *The Case Against a Volunteer Army* (Quadrangle Books, 1971); Blair Clark, "The Question Is What Kind of Army?" *Harper's*, September 1969, pp. 80–83; and "The Question of an All-Volunteer U.S. Armed Force: Pro & Con," *Congressional Digest*, vol. 50 (May 1971).

responsibility to serve his country'';⁵ (2) the presence of self-selected, "undesirable psychological types, men inclined to use force and violence to solve problems," will isolate the military from society and threaten "civilian authority, our freedom, and our democratic institutions";⁶ (3) the volunteer force will be all black or dominated by servicemen from low-income backgrounds, "motivated primarily by monetary rewards rather than patriotism";⁷ (4) the volunteer force will lead to a decline in patriotism, a decline in popular concern about foreign policy, and an increase in the likelihood of military adventurism;⁸ and (5) there will be a general erosion of military effectiveness "because not enough highly qualified youths will be likely to enlist and pursue military careers," further causing an erosion "of public support of armed services" and a decline in "the prestige and dignity of the services."⁹

During the transition from draft to volunteer force, the major concern for most policymakers was "quantity and quality." Issues of representation were secondary since, to be effective, the armed forces would first have to attract adequate *numbers* of qualified volunteers. However, in 1972 Defense Secretary Melvin Laird did point out that "long range . . . we do not foresee any significant difference between the racial composition of the All-Volunteer Force and the racial composition of the Nation"; and charges that it will be dominated by mercenaries or be all black or be dominated by low-income youth are "false and unfounded claims."¹⁰ Indeed, Laird reported, "we are determined that the All-Volunteer Force shall have broad appeal to young men and women in all racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds."¹¹

When it became apparent that quantitative requirements could be achieved under volunteer conditions, attention shifted to qualitative considerations and the finer points of military representation. By the end of 1974 it was obvious that certain social groups were not enlisting at predicted levels; the "broad appeal" of military service did not extend quite as far as many defense analysts and devotees of voluntarism had envisioned. The most conspicuous statistic was the rapid surge in the

5. *The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (Macmillan, 1970), p. 13.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 14.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 136.

10. Laird, *Report to the President*, pp. 26, 8.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

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proportion of black Army recruits to an unprecedented high of 27 percent—a substantial increase from the 15 percent level experienced during the last year of the draft, and more than double the percentage of black recruits of just a few years before, when the Gates Commission recommended the formation of an all-volunteer military and dismissed the likelihood of a racially unbalanced force. In all services combined the proportion of black rank and file stood at about 16 percent in 1974, but total black enlistments had risen from 13 percent in 1970 to 21 percent only four years later—and a combination of factors suggested even higher proportions in the years ahead.¹²

“We are watching these figures,” wrote Assistant Secretary of Defense William Brehm, “but are not now concerned about them for one important reason: the Department of Defense sets high entrance standards for enlistment—standards designed to assure that an applicant can perform a military mission as a member of a team.”¹³ But the individual services did not completely share that view. In March 1975 Army Secretary Howard H. Callaway described the Army’s manpower recruitment goals, taking the issue of “representation” to its idealistic extreme:

What we seek, and need, are quality soldiers—men and women—who are representative of the overall population. Ideally, we would like to have at least one person from every block in every city, one from every rural delivery route, and one from every street in every small town. Our obligation to the American people is to strive to field an Army which is both representative of them and acceptable to them.¹⁴

The nation needs, Callaway explained, “an army broadly representative of all Americans which, to the extent possible, would contain roughly the same representative percentages of people of all ethnic groups, and the same percentages at various income levels and educational levels.”¹⁵ The Army’s top personnel officer said, “We believe

12. Kenneth J. Coffey and others, “The Impact of Socio-Economic Composition in the All Volunteer Force,” in *Defense Manpower Commission Staff Studies and Supporting Papers*, vol. 3: *Military Recruitment and Accessions and the Future of the All Volunteer Force* (Government Printing Office, 1976), p. E-12.

13. William K. Brehm, “A Special Status Report: All-Volunteer Force,” *Commanders Digest*, February 28, 1974. The Department of Defense took care *not* to establish a position on racial balance on the ground that the social composition of the armed forces was considered the public’s business, not the Pentagon’s.

14. In *Department of Defense Appropriations, Fiscal Year 1976*, Hearings before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, 94 Cong. 1 sess. (GPO, 1975), pt. 2, p. 13.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

that these quality personnel should be representative of all regional, economic, and racial segments of society";¹⁶ an Army that is "generally representative of the American people . . . in the racial, geographic, and socio-economic sense," echoed Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Donald G. Brotzman.¹⁷ Toward that end, in 1975 "the Army redistributed its recruiting force with a stated objective of achieving better geographical representation among recruits."¹⁸ This move, called the "Callaway shift" by insiders, transferred some recruiters out of heavily black areas, "although it would have been more efficient and cost effective to concentrate recruiters in certain 'pro-Army' areas of the country."¹⁹

The Navy was also accused in 1975 of implementing "policies which directly limit the enlistment of blacks."²⁰ For example, the Navy's quota system allowed recruiters to sign up only one "category IV" (the lowest acceptable level) volunteer for every ten whose tests indicated they could do well in technical school. Although the 10-to-1 ratio applied to whites and blacks alike, the system was actually loaded against blacks since proportionately more black applicants normally scored in the lower aptitude categories and proportionately fewer could therefore be accepted by the Navy. During the same year the Marine Corps was challenged for giving recruiters secret racial quotas, and service entrance and placement tests were denounced as racially biased.²¹

16. Testimony of Lieutenant General Harold G. Moore in *ibid.*, p. 619.

17. Quoted in Kenneth J. Coffey and Frederick J. Reeg, "Representational Policy in the U.S. Armed Forces," in *Defense Manpower Commission Staff Studies and Supporting Papers*, vol. 3, p. D-13. See also "Statements of Assistant Secretary of Defense William K. Brehm before Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel of the Senate Armed Services Committee" (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, February 6, 1976), p. 43.

18. Coffey and Reeg, "Representational Policy," p. D-16.

19. *Ibid.*, p. D-17.

20. George C. Wilson, "Bias in Recruiting Laid to 4 Services," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1976.

21. *Ibid.* Again, in 1979, the Navy was accused of practicing "blatant" and "illegal" racial discrimination in its entrance standards for volunteers. Several congressmen along with the American Civil Liberties Union based their accusations this time on the Navy's requirement that at least 75 percent of the males in any racial category who are accepted into the service must either have a high school diploma or achieve a certain score on the aptitude tests. (For example, 75 blacks would have to achieve acceptably high scores on the aptitude tests before 25 blacks with low scores could be accepted, and the same for other races.) However, for a variety of reasons blacks and other minorities generally score lower on the aptitude tests. "Blacks and other minorities are being skillfully steered away from the military," Congressman Ronald V. Dellums of California charged. This is "very

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The Army has always been the focus of discussions of military representation since it requires the greatest manpower, is generally considered the least glamorous branch of the armed forces, and is consequently the least socially “representative” service.²²

When Army Secretary Clifford L. Alexander (the first black appointed to the position) took office in 1977, he answered critics of the growing racial imbalance by contending that the number of blacks in the Army is “immaterial”: “Who is going to play God and set a quota?” Alexander has continued to maintain that the problem lies “outside the services”; you have to ask “why there is almost 40 percent unemployment among black teenagers before you ask why they enlist or why they re-up.”²³ Although Alexander believed the Army of the late 1970s was “the best ever assembled,”²⁴ he noted that “minority and female representation” in certain occupations and on “high level staffs” could be improved. “We can do better,” he wrote.²⁵ Meanwhile, the proportion of blacks in the armed forces continued to grow, nudging 20 percent of total enlisted personnel and reaching all-time highs of 33 percent and 22 percent in the Army and Marine Corps enlisted ranks, respectively, by the end of the decade.

It did not take long for Secretary of the Army John D. Marsh, Jr., to get involved in the issue. During his confirmation hearings in 1981, Marsh testified:

I happen to feel that service in the U.S. Army is not only a privilege, it is a duty of every citizen. . . . I also believe that it is not fair for that burden to be

definitely a quota system,” Congressman Don Edwards of California added, which “discriminates against minorities” and is “unconstitutional” and “illegal.” George C. Wilson, “Navy Is Accused of Bias in Entrance Standards,” *Washington Post*, June 14, 1979.

22. As of September 1981 approximately 38 percent of all active duty military personnel were in the Army. During the peak manpower period of the Vietnam War (1968), Army personnel constituted over 44 percent of the total active duty military and about 45 percent of the total active duty *enlisted* force. Department of Defense, *Selected Manpower Statistics* (Directorate for Information, Operations, and Reports, 1978), pp. 20, 26.

23. David Binder, “Army Head Favors Volunteers,” *New York Times*, February 11, 1977. See also George C. Wilson, “Blacks in Army Increase 50 Percent Since Draft,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 1978.

24. Interview on “America’s Black Forum,” Station WMAL-TV, Washington, D.C., April 10, 1977.

25. *Equal Opportunity: Second Annual Assessment of Programs* (Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army, 1978) (letter accompanying report, dated April 1978).

unequally borne in our society. . . . I do think that a national military force should represent as much as it might some cross-section of our country.²⁶

But responding to a question in a postconfirmation interview concerning the point at which the growing proportion of blacks in the Army would become a factor, Marsh replied: "I don't believe in quotas. . . . It's my own view that we work really with what we have and I don't think that I should try to hypothesize problems that don't exist. . . . I don't see any problem in our ratios at the present time."²⁷

While the changing racial mix may have been ignored in formal government channels, it did not escape the attention of outside commentators. Some scholars contend that a military force that fails to represent society poses a threat not only to civilian control of the military but to its effectiveness as well. Some national leaders—both black and white—hold that a disproportionately black force puts an unfair burden on black Americans, particularly in the initial stages of military hostilities. Other observers question the reliability of an unrepresentative force, particularly when such a force might be assigned to missions (domestic or foreign) in which their representativeness would create an issue. And some have even suggested that an increasingly black force has adversely influenced the caliber of white recruits.

Whatever the validity of these viewpoints, constituencies have formed around them, attributable in part to the influence of the popular media. The *New York Times*, for example, repeatedly noted the "drift toward a heavily black Army" in its criticisms of the all-volunteer military during the late 1970s. As early as 1975, the *Times* warned:

In a population 11 percent black, the proportion of blacks in the Army as a whole has risen by almost half since 1971 to a current level of 20 percent, and even these figures understate the real problem. . . . The end result can be a ground force so largely made up of blacks as to destroy the integration goal.²⁸

In May 1978 the *Times* again singled out the representation problems of the military:

It is now an Army with substandard education, heavy racial imbalance and a drop-out rate double that of the draft era. . . . Eliminating the Selective Service System has not in fact eliminated the inequities that helped spur agitation against the draft during the Vietnam War. . . . There are more poor in the Army now,

26. *Nomination of John O. Marsh, Jr., to be Secretary of the Army*, Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 97 Cong. 1 sess. (GPO, 1981), p. 13.

27. "Marsh Wants More Help for Reserves," *Army Times*, April 6, 1981.

28. *New York Times*, February 5, 1975.

not less. The percentage of blacks among Army enlisted men in 1971 was 13 percent, about the same as in the nation; it is now double that among Army recruits. Among officers, the proportion of blacks is only 6.3 percent.²⁹

And in 1979: "The strength, quality and cost of the volunteer force are all sources of worry," but the "more worrisome" problem is the fact that the "Army is no longer even roughly a cross section of the Nation." Volunteers "are coming far more heavily from the ranks of the poor, the unemployed and the undereducated than did even the troops in Vietnam."³⁰

"The services are growing dramatically unrepresentative of the nation," *Time* magazine found. "A number of military experts argue that while it is true that peacetime service offers to minorities opportunities for educational and social advancement, these advantages fade quickly during a war." And "the high number of blacks in uniform would inevitably result . . . in a disproportionate number of black fatalities."³¹

"The disproportionate number of poor, uneducated and blacks" is a "condition that exposes the nation to the charge of turning over its defense to the most disadvantaged elements of society while relieving the middle and upper classes from participation in the dangerous and highly unpleasant business of fighting our wars," a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued in the *Washington Post*.³² The "ambitious experiment" to maintain a military force composed entirely of volunteers "has not worked well," an editorial in *Time* magazine concluded. "The racial balance does not reflect that of the nation." The draft should therefore be restored, stated the editorial, since it would provide the Army with "a more representative cross section" of American youth.³³

In early 1979 a *New York Times* reporter observed that "many critics, both liberals and conservatives alike, believe that the military has become

29. "Can We Afford a Volunteer Army?" editorial in the *New York Times*, May 18, 1978.

30. "Misgivings About the Volunteer Army," editorial in the *New York Times*, January 2, 1979.

31. "Who'll Fight for America? (The Manpower Crisis)," *Time*, June 9, 1980, p. 25.

32. General Maxwell D. Taylor, "Is the Army Fit to Fight?" *Washington Post*, May 12, 1981. See also two replies to Taylor: Clifford L. Alexander, "Now Is Not the Time to Draft," *Washington Post*, May 14, 1981; and Lawrence J. Korb, "Volunteer Army: It Deserves a Fair Chance," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1981.

33. "Needed: Money, Ships, Pilots—and the Draft," *Time*, February 23, 1981, p. 56. And a *Washington Post* columnist observed: "Defending the United States is just as much the responsibility of Nick and Adam as it is of Jose and Tyrone." Mark Shields, "Checkbook Patriotism Won't Do," *Washington Post*, March 6, 1981.

totally unrepresentative of American society. . . . As they do periodically, these criticisms have led to discussion of reviving the draft."³⁴ Another commentator put it more bluntly: "Uncle Sam does want you—if you're white, bright, and ready to fight. And that may be why he's thinking about putting the draft back to work: The U.S. Army is short on white men with managerial or technical know-how."³⁵

Advocates of the all-volunteer structure frequently find themselves on the defensive—fending off the charges of detractors and fighting to save a concept that can perhaps function effectively under the proper conditions. President Ronald Reagan thus sees "a new spirit abroad in our land" now bringing to the military "a decided rise in quality as measured by educational and testing attainment."³⁶ And the Defense Department continues to maintain that "while not without problems, the AVF [all-volunteer force] is working."³⁷ Still, the popular media brood over an armed force full of losers and social outcasts, disadvantaged minorities, and "hired guns" conscripted through economic poverty to bear arms by an employer of last resort. This perception has helped to push the all-volunteer force closer than ever before to a new form of conscription. "Some critics . . . complain that an all-volunteer military will become increasingly unrepresentative of American society," *Newsweek* notes. "If the President's plans for a massive defense

34. Bernard Weinraub, "'National Service'—An Old Idea Gets New Life," *New York Times*, February 4, 1979. Because the major shift in the racial mix happened to occur under a volunteer recruitment system, it is frequently but inappropriately cited as proof of the failure of the concept. But if the proponents of voluntary service had not been so *emphatic* in their predictions of "proportional representation," perhaps the reactions of critics and skeptics would not have been so severe. The Gates Commission had left little room for doubt; their "best projections for the future" were that blacks would constitute 14.9 percent of all enlisted males and that the proportion of black enlistees in the Army would be approximately 18.8 percent by 1980. "To be sure, these are estimates," the commission asserted, "but even extreme assumptions would not change the figures drastically." See *Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, pp. 15, 147. For the argument that "the increasing number of blacks in the enlisted accession of the 1970s would probably have taken place *even in the presence of the draft*," see Richard V. L. Cooper, *Military Manpower and the All-Volunteer Force*, R-1450-ARPA (Santa Monica: Rand Corp., 1977), p. 219; emphasis in the original.

35. Joseph Kelley, "Behind the Push to Revive the Draft," *The Progressive*, May 1980, reprinted in Jason Berger, ed., *The Military Draft* (H. W. Wilson, 1981). Quotation appears on pp. 18–19.

36. "Text of President's West Point Speech," *Army Times*, June 8, 1981, p. 53.

37. Department of Defense, "Fiscal Year 1981 Results" (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, Reserve Affairs, and Logistics, November 1981).

buildup move ahead on schedule, a return to the draft seems all but inevitable.”³⁸

New military pay raises, intensified recruiting efforts, a surge of national pride in the wake of foreign events, a depressed civilian job market (especially for teenagers), and other factors have combined to make the early 1980s something of a recruiting success for the all-volunteer force. Some faultfinders have softened their blows as “the downward spiral of quality”³⁹ appears to have gone into reverse. Yet criticisms of the quality of soldiers and racial imbalances still serve as the broadsword of those who would prefer to see a revival of the draft.

Is the concern justified? Is it appropriate for the nation’s disadvantaged minorities to bear the burden of protecting its security? Is an armed force that fails to represent society less effective, less reliable, or less legitimate? How is the racial composition of the armed forces likely to be affected by the demographics and economics of the 1980s, by changes in military pay and benefits, or by a return to some form of conscription?

Caught in a crossfire of emotions, these questions have so far escaped objective scrutiny and informed debate. This study is intended to promote a better public understanding of the issues. It does not attempt to judge whether the current racial composition of the U.S. armed forces or the initiatives already undertaken that may change it are appropriate. The study’s purposes are more modest: to identify the range of concerns, to examine the evidence on both sides of the questions, and to stimulate further research and debate.

Although many of the questions apply to some extent to all minority groups, the focus is on blacks, first, because blacks constitute by far the largest of the racial or ethnic minority groups in the armed forces (see appendix A); second, because black-white relations have long been one of the major sociopolitical issues facing the nation; and third, because data on other racial or ethnic groups are limited. Where possible, the analyses in this study are extended to other minority groups, particularly Hispanics.

38. “Why a Draft Seems Certain,” *Newsweek*, June 8, 1981, p. 39. See also Marvin Stone, “Is a Draft Inevitable?” *U.S. News & World Report*, July 13, 1981, p. 80.

39. “Today’s American Army,” *The Economist*, April 25, 1981, p. 24.