



THE MARTIAL CITIZEN

By Amy Rutenberg and Jacqueline Whitt March 27, 2020
<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/martial-citizen/>

Welcome to **WAR ROOM** the official podcast of the U.S. Army War College Online Journal. Graciously supported by the Army War College Foundation, please join the conversation at warroom.armywarcollege.edu. We hope you enjoy the program.

The views expressed in this presentation are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Army War College, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

Jacqueline Whitt: Hello, and welcome to A Better Peace the War Room podcast. Thanks for joining us today. I'm **Jacqueline Whitt** Professor of Strategy at the U.S. Army War College and the Editor for A Better Peace. One of the most fundamental questions a society and a military must ask is who's going to serve in the military and on what terms? Is military service a right? A choice? An obligation? What are the requirements to serve? What's the relationship between those who serve and the state? Does military service confer special privileges or status? And since the end of the Vietnam War, does the military service confer special privileges or status? Since the end of the Vietnam War, the United States has employed an all-volunteer force while retaining the requirement for Selective Service registration for American men. But during the Vietnam War when a draft was employed, the relationship between individuals and military service was constantly being negotiated. To talk about how the military and the broader society approached this fundamental question about the nature and requirements of military service during the Vietnam Era is **Dr. Amy Rutenberg**. Amy is an Assistant Professor of History at Iowa State University whose research focuses on the relationships among war, gender, militarization and American society in the second half of the twentieth century. And her first book which is called *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam Era Draft Resistance* will be out in the Fall of 2019. Amy, thanks for joining us here on War Room.

Amy Rutenberg: Thanks so much for having me.

JW: So, I want to start with a question sort of about the all-volunteer force and I think we've become accustomed, in the years since Vietnam, to the idea that people choose to enter the military and we understand that the draft and resistance to the draft during the Vietnam War was a major factor in sort of shifting the United States away from conscription. Could you start by telling us little bit more about the history of conscription in the U.S. and how manpower requirements—I guess now you'd say person-power requirements—in the U.S. military were met during the Vietnam War?

AR: Sure. And I will be using the term “men” because only men were liable to the draft so that makes sense within the context. So, the U.S. has a long history of using a draft even before there was the United States. There were drafts during wartime—the Revolutionary War on up, Confederates, the Union, on and on. But the goal was to keep the force and being small between moments of an emergency when the draft was needed up until the end of World War II essentially. Once the draft was put in place in 1940, as the needs of the United States, both for occupation governments and then combined with the nascent Cold War, it turned out that the U.S. was not real comfortable giving up the draft. So, with one brief exception for about 18 months between 1947 and 1948, the draft has remained in place from 1940 until 1973. So, it was not used extensively during times of peace through those decades between World War II and Vietnam with the exception of Korea. Primarily it was used to spur enlistment. The idea was that men who are under the threat of conscription would choose to enlist because they would be better able to control the terms of their enlistment.

JW: So, they could choose maybe which service, a little bit more control over where they went and how. We would call these draft-induced volunteers.

AR: Exactly. And they would oftentimes get a little bit more choice in terms of MOS as well—what they did, where they went, which branch of service.

JW: And that tradition continues all the way through Vietnam. There's plenty of people who volunteer for service under the threat of conscription. One of the concepts that you talk about is “martial citizenship”. I want to explore what this phrase means that might be new to some of our listeners. Specifically, during Vietnam but sort of before and after if that makes sense, what does this phrase mean and how do we understand what “martial citizenship” is?

AR: Sure. So, it's kind of a slippery term. I think that for most people it doesn't have much meaning at all. Scholars use it though to talk about something that I think most Americans would be familiar with, which is the concept that since soldiers serve the state, the state therefore owes something back. So martial citizenship becomes the rights and privileges that people who have served in the military therefore are considered to deserve as a result of their sacrifice for the state. The GI bill is probably the most obvious example in that returning veterans from World War II gained a whole host of benefits as a result of their service from low-interest loans to paying for education, on and on. But martial citizenship can also be expanded beyond that in that it can also include the added weight or authority that comes to veterans by virtue of their military service. But it doesn't always mean the same thing and by the time of the Vietnam War, manpower policies have sort of shifted in such a way that the way that policymakers themselves were using the concept, if not the term, they were applying it to particular groups of people.

JW: Okay, so let's talk about how particular groups of people sort of experience this idea differently because we know that the draft is sort of unevenly applied because, even with greater manpower requirements, not everyone has to serve in the military and so they're going to be people who are sort of on the inside and outside. Can you walk us through some of these different groups and how the concept of martial citizenship is differently applied or differently thought about?

AR: Sure. So, I would argue that the concept... in many people's minds, if they're not using the term, definitely the concept to serve crystallized within the years after the debate over the GI bill that people who serve in the military deserve certain rights and privileges particularly at this moment—material privileges, preferential hiring treatment, the loans, the education and so on. But within the context of the Cold War, there were men who really didn't necessarily need these benefits as well as the fact that the whole deferment system that starts to get put in place from the Korean War forward, the deferments for students, for men in STEM fields, for actually fathers who are breadwinners, the men are deferred because they are acting in the national interests as opposed to just trying to keep the economy vibrant or arsenals stocked as during World War II. During the Cold War which is a lot more technological, it's an economic, it's an ideological war, men as civilians who are in these particularly middle-class roles are serving the state. They're defined that way actually by the Selective Service, and by 1955-56, the Director of Selective Service is calling this manpower channeling—that men who can serve the state as civilians are being channeled into these roles by getting deferments. They're essentially being bribed to go ahead and go into these roles.

JW: So that military service isn't the only way to demonstrate service to the state.

AR: Correct. And the reason that I start there to talk about the Vietnam War and the way martial citizenship functioned by the time of the Vietnam War is because the flip side of that coin is that by 1963, the military rejection rate, those men who are being conscripted but who can't qualify—they don't end up being inducted but they receive their draft notices and can't pass their exams—that's being identified as a major problem in American society. And a whole host of actors and plans—the actors particularly, Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, Director of Selective Service Lewis B. Hershey, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara—they begin to identify this rejection rate as a serious problem and look for ways and programs to use military service as a way to quote “rehabilitate these men.” And through military service, these men are supposed to gain job skills, literacy skills, health remediation, all these things that we would call martial citizenship that they are to gain through their service, that they can go and take out back to the civilian world. The goal was to strengthen the United States as a whole society on the civilian side by using military service to offer martial citizenship to these men specifically.

JW: So, it becomes a way to sort of Americanize and have these men sort of enter the full scope of American citizenship and what that essentially requires for the state. So, these are different from draft deferments.

AR: Correct.

JW: These are determinations about qualifications.

AR: Well, it's partially about qualifications because it's at this moment that some of the standards for letting men into the military begin to drop. There are also rehabilitation programs that are piloted through induction centers where when men fail their pre-induction exams, they are at that moment, referred out for job training and other things, which would theoretically, particularly for those men who are rejected for health reasons or literacy reasons, if they could overcome that problem, then they would actually be then eligible for the draft.

JW: Eligible for service.

AR: Right. It culminates with the creation of Project 100,000 in 1966.

JW: Let's talk a little bit more about Project 100,000 and before we dive into that, can you talk a little more about who these men who aren't meeting qualifications whether those are helped or sort of literacy requirements... I imagine there have to be sort of racial and class-based lines that are evident in these qualifications too.

AR: Yes. So, the Task Force on Manpower Conservation begins its work in I think in '64 and basically what it finds is that the men who are rejected for military service are overwhelmingly, disproportionately men of color, some white working-class men in the South. So, there are vast regional differences, racial differences and class differences. And the hope is to identify what Secretary of Labor Wirtz called the 25% or so of men who, as he put it, unquestionably caused 75% or more of the nation's social problems.

JW: So then, Project 100,000 is instituted and what's the impetus for it and what is it trying to do? So, there's a lot of discussion around where it came from and why, and I would argue that it did legitimately grow out of this desire through the War on Poverty to strengthen American manhood by creating better breadwinners, by creating man who could earn a living for themselves and their families and then thus lift themselves up out of poverty. However, it happened to overlap with escalation in the Vietnam War. So, it ends up being kept I think for as long as it was, and it operated from '66 to '71. 354,000 men were brought in under its auspices to all branches of military service, both voluntarily and through the draft, and the purpose was to bring in these men who were otherwise unqualified for service, usually because they couldn't

pass the aptitude exams, and theoretically provide them training within the military to take back home after discharge. However, they did overwhelmingly end up in infantry positions because they didn't necessarily qualify for other MOS positions and they were heavily, disproportionately men of color. This is a period of time, where though the numbers fluctuate a bit, the overall military is somewhere around 9 or 10% African-American. New standards men who were the men brought in under Project 100,000 are 40% African American, and I did find one document saying that they wished it had been up to 60%.

JW: So, this is a really complicated story then. You have lots of crisscrossing and intersecting...

AR: Yes [laughter].

JW: Well, I think this is really interesting because I think it demonstrates the complexity of manpower policies. When you think about what are the broader social and cultural and political and economic implications of military service? Who has access to those? To the rights and benefits of veterans? If you are unqualified to serve, you can never access those things and at the same time, if you're conscripted to serve in infantry positions in the Vietnam War, that clearly puts your life and well-being at stake. So, you've got really significant competing imperatives.

AR: Yeah and one of the interesting things at this moment in time was that you have essentially, what amounts to mostly white middle-class men who are being targeted for deferment explicitly and men of color and white working-class men who are being targeted for military service.

JW: Which is saying your value to the state is different, and so it appears that men of color are valuable to the state because of their bodies and white middle-class men are valuable to the state in sort of other ways.

AR: I would say that that's how it looked from the out looking in, but the goal in all of the documentation that I have found, is essentially though, to use military service, that value for their bodies, to help them gain sort of added value for after military service.

JW: For the post-military service, to fulfill the rights and obligations of citizens.

AR: Exactly.

JW: Yeah. I think it's a too-simple story to say that the race and class lines are the easiest ones to draw. You talked a little bit about draft deferments, but draft resistance is another part of this story. How does our understanding of draft resistance interact with the story that you've already been telling?

AR: So, one of the things that I have noticed is that the policy makers and particularly, and I've got some particularly great quotes from Secretary of Labor Wirtz who I mentioned before, but he's talking about military service as an opportunity, that when you talk about equalizing opportunity, he's not talking about, let's end the deferments for college students so that everyone has the same opportunity to serve, let's increase the number of people who are otherwise unqualified because they're the ones who are lacking opportunity, that martial citizenship needs to come from that direction. Draft resisters, draft counselors, civil rights activists who are working in the anti-draft movement, they actually come at it from a different way but almost end up with an ironically similar message which is that you shouldn't be decreasing the opportunity for white men to gain their deferments, you need to be increasing opportunities for black men and other disadvantaged men to gain deferments. So that the notion of martial citizenship to draft counselors and other people active in war resistance, it's a lie, that these supposed benefits that military service confers, they're not benefits because people aren't receiving them. They're ending up in the battlefields of Vietnam. And so, the traditional narrative story of disadvantaged people using the military as a way to gain full citizenship is a lie. So instead, we need to increase their ability to stay out of the draft, to avoid it.

JW: Again, it's such an interesting twist on some of the stories that we tell about Vietnam Era draft and as we think then about the implications of the move toward the all-volunteer force and what that means as recruiting practices change, as an enlistment rates change, as who serves and under what terms, and what does military service confer on veterans. If we jump maybe forward, and this is the part where historians start to hate me as the podcast host, is to think about what this historical story might have to say to us in the present moment where we have a pretty good understanding of now person-power requirements, of the human power necessary to sustain the 21st-century American military. Whether that's gender and class, race, all of these things are still up for discussion not to mention region, socioeconomic status, all of this stuff is still a complicated story. So, if you were talking to contemporary military professional strategist policymakers, what are some of the questions or themes that you might encourage them to think about?

AR: You know I am a historian and I have struggled with how I want to answer this question. I think that there is a lesson to be learned about unintended consequences. This entire pyramid of deferments that was put in place through the 1950s and early 1960s was done to meet the needs of the moment in which the deferment was passed, to meet Cold War needs in particular, but also as ways to actually thin down the manpower pool because there were too many men as the baby boomers began to come of age, particularly before the United States actually escalated its intervention in Vietnam.

JW: Because they actually needed a relatively small number.

AR: Right.

JW: Compared to the total pool.

AR: And as long as men were enlisting, even under the pressure of the draft, very few men actually needed to be drafted, but then what does that say if you have this massive available pool and you only take a few men. So, there are unintended consequences that grow out of that, but I think that those unintended consequences, they're related to elements that we don't necessarily think about immediately when thinking about manpower issues, larger social forces, how we privilege certain statuses, how we look at race, how we look at class, how we look at gender, and that matters. It really does matter in all kinds of unintended ways. I also think that thinking about what is actually important and what we feel as a society that we owe our service members, it's not obvious, and it never was at any given time, that even in a post GI Bill world, that military members deserve certain things or have earned certain rights. If that's something that's important to us as a society in general, then we need to think about how we deploy and protect those rights or those rewards because they can be chipped away at. It's not an obvious thing.

JW: And they're negotiated overtime and things change the relationship between the military and the society that it protects is always one that's being negotiated and renegotiated throughout time. One of the statistics I think that gets thrown around a lot these days is that only about 20 to 25% of Americans are even eligible for military service. It turns out we don't really know where that number came from. It's probably a really squishy number, but we use it a lot.

AR: And that terror has always been there. Going back to World War I, who's eligible, who's not, we are not a fit enough nation. It's all connected. It's 100 years old.

JW: No new questions. So, the Civil War too, the sort of accession standards and what is required for service and that changes depending on the nature of the conflict. I imagine that if the United States went to war with China tomorrow, we would suddenly find that many more than 25% of the American population is eligible for conscription and eligible for service. So, I think asking these types of questions, thinking about the cross-cutting relationships of race, class, gender, ethnicity, nation, citizenship, all of these things matter and we're still dealing with the questions of martial citizenship today. Amy, I'd like to thank you for joining us on War Room. It's been a pleasure talking with you today.

AR: Thanks so much for having me.