

Barnard College, Columbia University

“Rehabilitating the Subterranean Poor”: The Long and Forgotten Tale of the Men  
in Project 100,000 and their Lives After Vietnam

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Had I not decided to research the institutionalized racism within the history of the draft and how it affected African-Americans, I would have never even heard of this project. Though he frustrated me to no end at times, I could not have been luckier to have someone else just as interested in my thesis.

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## Introduction:

At the outset of the war in Southeast Asia, Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, gave a speech in which he spoke with candor about the deleterious effects that poverty has on our young American youth. The speech was inspired by recent findings that almost one-third of the draft-eligible population would be disqualified from service because of mental ineptitude or medical reasons. The report that studied the profile of these men to understand the reasons they were disqualified lead to one conclusion: poverty. “They have potential,” he began. “But the slow and silent poison of the poverty virus has paralyzed it in many of them.”<sup>1</sup> McNamara wholeheartedly believed in the potential of these men, but due to the destructive and disastrous effects of poverty, these men were unable to fulfill that potential. Poverty often forced these men to live in drudges of society where opportunities for upward mobility were scarce. Their conditions forced them to leave school early and join the workforce to provide financial support for their families. Their lack of education channeled them into low-paying unskilled or semiskilled occupations. The conditions that these men faced were the same as the previous generations of their families—essentially they participating in what would later be deemed as the “cycle of poverty.” When these men are reported to take their preinduction exams, the Armed Forces Qualification Tests (AFQTs), they often received extremely low scores because this fgyaptitude-based test is built on core values and concepts taught in American compulsory schools. McNamara pledged to utilize his resources to rescue these men from the cycle of poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert McNamara, “Remarks by Secretary McNamara to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters” (Denver, Colorado, November 7, 1967).

In the same speech, McNamara introduced his brainchild—Project 100,000. In 1966, he announced that the Defense Department would recruit these previous draft rejectees into the military and rehabilitate them. Each year, the military would take in 100,000 of these men to take full advantage of this program. The initiative would teach them new skills that would be transferable in the civilian job market. These new skills would result in doubling or tripling these men's future incomes. The hopes behind the program were that it would reduce domestic unemployment and enable these men to receive veteran's benefits. The increased numbers of men in the military also increased the much-needed supply of manpower for the Vietnam War. Project 100,000 also sought to rectify the systemic issues that African-Americans faced in terms of poverty. The military initiative was regarded as the military version of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" domestic reform program.<sup>2</sup>

Although the military may not regard itself as an institution of social welfare, the United States military has served as a major institution of both war and welfare. According to military manpower analyst and Naval Postgraduate School Professor Mark J. Eitelberg, the list of actions conducted by the military as an institution of welfare and war include: the nineteenth-century military's use of Native Americans as scouts, guides, and soldiers; the Civil War era's provision of basic education to African-American soldiers; and the assimilation of immigrants through service to their adopted country.<sup>3</sup> From 1933 to 1942, the Army was put in charge of running Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, which housed unemployed young men (ages 18-25) whose families were receiving public assistance. For poor Americans, the military was one of the

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<sup>2</sup> James Westheider. *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War*. New York, New York: New York University Press, 1997. 35

<sup>3</sup> Janice H. Laurence, and Peter F. Ramsberger. *Low Aptitude Men in the Military: Who Profits, Who Pays?*. Praeger, 1991. 4.

best career choices. The armed forces offered opportunities to advance one's skills through the GI Bill. The GI Bill had been an excellent source for better opportunities since it previously provided a free education to former veterans. Since WWII, veterans have utilized the GI Bill to access opportunities for higher education. In 1944, the GI Bill paid full tuition for veterans and gave them \$50/month for expenses.<sup>4</sup> The GI Bill applied to traditional college, vocational, and training schools. After three years in one of the services, the GI Bill promised money for education and loans to buy a home or start a business. No other employer offered such benefits, and the military provided a special appeal to young African-American men as they aspired toward economic citizenship in a nation that limited this status by race. During World War II (WWII), the Army had become the nation's largest minority employer. Over 2.65 million African-American males who registered for the draft through December 31, 1945, more than one million were inducted into the armed forces.<sup>5</sup>

To many African-Americans, the military was the only way of escaping the ills of poverty and one of the few sources of socioeconomic mobility. As the largest institution to employ minorities, the military was one of the first public institutions to internally fight racial discriminations. After WWII, President Harry Truman listened to the frustrated voices of the National Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and civil rights leaders such as A. Philip Randolph, who tirelessly expressed their sentiments about segregation in the armed forces. On July 26, 1948, President Truman executed Executive Order 9981 calling for "equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Boulton. "How the G.I. Bill Failed African-American Vietnam War Veterans." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 58, 57-60.

<sup>5</sup> Kimberley L. Philips. *War! What Is It Good For? Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 190

Armed Services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”<sup>6</sup> The executive order abolished segregation in the armed forces and ordered full integration of all branches of the military. The order also established an advisory committee to examine the rules, practices, and procedures of the armed services and recommended methods to make desegregation a reality. By the end of the Korean War, almost all of the military had been integrated. In 1963, the President’s Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces conducted a report called “Equality of Treatment and Opportunity for Negro Military Personnel Stationed Within the United States”. The report investigated problems of equal opportunity affecting African-Americans on and off base within the United States. The report actively explored what measures needed to be taken to improve the effectiveness of the current policies and procedures in the armed forces with regard to equality of treatment and opportunity and what measures should be taken to improve equality of opportunity for members of the Armed Forces.<sup>7</sup>

Looking at the extensive history of military and its social welfare policies, Project 100,000 would not be the first time of using the military to ameliorate the ills of society. What characterizes it differently from other social welfare programs conducted by the armed forces was the size of it. As one of the largest programs to combat the ills of poverty and offer opportunities for disadvantaged youth, the story is almost unknown within the narrative of military history. This controversial six-year program is not even remembered amongst those who work within the Pentagon currently—or even those who were drafted during the Vietnam era. As I conducted interviews with servicemen during the Vietnam, I asked had they ever heard of the

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<sup>6</sup> Paul T. Murray, “Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism,” *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 1 (September 1971): 68.

<sup>7</sup> President’s Committee On Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, “The President’s Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces: The Equality of Treatment and Opportunity for Negro Military Personnel Stationed Within the United States,” accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.justice.gov/crt/foia/readingroom/bostonjfk/text/Commmittees%20and%20reports.php>. 6

program or anything similar to it. My father, who was drafted in 1969, told me: “No I didn’t know anything about it. I didn’t know anything about it till you told me about it. And even in things where I was reading about Black people in Vietnam, it’s not there. So it’s not reported...and even then it’s still not well now.” Other men that I interviewed provided similar answers. How could it be that the legacy of one of the largest Defense Department programs almost does not exist? Why is this story almost nearly forgotten?

Myra MacPherson, author of *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation*, is one of the few historians to continue writing about Project 100,000 more than thirty years after its inception. In her chapter that discusses Project 100,000, MacPherson reviews data from Defense Department studies, casualty reports, and first-hand accounts to analyze the ramifications of Project 100,000. MacPherson harshly states that Project 100,000, billed as a Great Society program, was a vehicle for channeling the poor, mostly Southern and African-American youths to the Vietnam front lines.<sup>8</sup> She slowly starts to decipher the foundation of this inherently racist and classist military initiative. She bases her argument on the notion that the military deliberately used low-aptitude recruits to increase manpower for the war. MacPherson states that even though the rhetoric of Project 100,000 expressed that the initiative was supposed to help the “subterranean poor”, African-Americans were disproportionately affected because they constituted a large percentage of the lower-class (even though they only constituted 13% of the population at the time). She heavily criticizes the program and its inability to live up to the promises it made. She concludes her section on Project 100,000 stating that these men returned as members of the “subterranean poor.” However, her chapter does not include details on the readjustment of these men.

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<sup>8</sup> Myra MacPherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1984). 559



Paul Starr, author of *The Discarded Army: Veterans After Vietnam, The Nader Report on Vietnam Veterans and the Veterans Administration*, wrote about the servicemen who returned from military service and the integral factors that made their readjustment so incredibly difficult. His chapter is an in-depth analysis on the subject of Project 100,000. The purpose of this chapter is to expose some of the structures and policies of the program, which resulted in its disastrous ending. The chapter discusses the possible inspirations for the initiative and the program's predecessor: the Special Training and Enlistment Program (STEP). In an extremely detailed manner, Starr informs the reader about the creation and execution of the program. Accompanying his analysis are testimonies from former commanding military leaders, texts from newspaper articles, and speeches from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan. His analysis of the historical period is highly critical—almost borderline cynical. Looking back at the topic retrospectively, he criticizes the decisions of McNamara and Moynihan for not only creating the program but for believing that it could even possibly succeed. He concludes his chapter by insinuating the hypocrisy of the program and the war itself: “The poor are drafted not to fight and perhaps to die, but only to be uplifted. The passage from autocratic rule to democratic government was no doubt a great victory for mankind, but the price has apparently been a good deal more hypocrisy.”<sup>9</sup> Similar to MacPherson, he discusses the failures of the program but fails to provide any data or testimonials on the readjustment of these men.

Janice H. Laurence and Peter F. Ramsberger, authors of *Low Aptitude Men in the Military: Who Profits, Who Pays?*, are the biggest contributors to the story of Project 100,000. Their book discusses the two more recent periods (Project 100,000 and ASVAB Misnorming) in military

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Starr, *The Discarded Army: Veterans After Vietnam, The Nader Report on Vietnam Veterans and the Veterans Administration* (New York, New York: Chaterhouse, 1974). 187

history in which low-aptitude recruits were brought into the ranks in large numbers. The authors examine the historical factors that culminated to create both periods and what effect military service had on the lives of those brought into the ranks. The authors, who are also the leading researchers on the readjustment of Project 100,000 and ASVAB Misnorming men, examine the programs via empirical data. This data provides a social profile of the men who were involved in each program (from education levels, hometown regions, racial makeup, etc.), the percentage of men involved in each branch of the military, and the readjustment of the men involved in each program. The readjustment study focuses on the effects of military service on low-aptitude recruits when compared to their nonveteran counterparts of the same aptitude. For those studying this subject, this is the best text to understand the in and outs of the initiative. This text took the most objective approach to discussing the subject out of all the books available on Project 100,000.

After evaluating all the available sources on Project 100,000, this thesis will take a different, more open approach to discussing the legacy of the program. To differentiate from other historians and scholars, this thesis will discuss that the military, specifically McNamara, attempted to ameliorate the consequences and burdens created by those who suffered from poverty. In my analysis of the subject, I heavily focus on the implications of race and the military's attempts at battling the systemic problems of poverty when intersected with race. Instead of taking a critical lens to discussing the subject, I examine the phrasings and rhetoric used during this time period about this subject. I want to argue that because the military has a history of taking some liberal actions towards social welfare, and that this program was another step in that direction. Inspired by the liberal attitude of the Great Society era and the general rhetoric within the reports that examined the men who were disqualified from service,

McNamara created a program that was intended to salvage these men from dredges of society and break the cycle of poverty. After analyzing the only comprehensive study on the readjustment of Project 100,000 men, I saw through the raw, empirical data that the veterans did not receive the benefits from military service that they were promised. However, the survey reveals that the Project 100,000 men felt that the program was beneficial to them and improved their lives. Though other historians and scholars deem Project 100,000 “unsuccessful” and fail to address the readjustment of these men, I argue that history is not as “black and white” as they conclude. Though the empirical data does strengthen their arguments that the program did indeed “failed”, the voices of the men who participated in the program, stated that Project 100,000 worked for them. The history of this program is more complicated than previous historians have discussed and that in order to describe the narrative of Project 100,000, we have to include voices of the soldiers when retelling the story. The program can still be deemed successful based on the opinions of the Project 100,000 men.

In Chapter One, I examine two key primary sources that I believe are the precursors of the program. The first is a report conducted by the President’s Task Force on Manpower Conservation that detailed why almost one-third of the nation’s men were disqualified from service. The other source is Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s controversial report, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action”. In his report, he utilized African-American family welfare as the central point in evaluating the effectiveness of programs to deal with disadvantaged groups. Moynihan stated that he believed it would advantageous for African-Americans to expand the military’s role. Both reports concluded that poverty was at the root of the issues they sought to confront and comprehend. The Task Force ascertained that a lack of education resulted in their inability to pass the military’s aptitude tests and hindered their ability to develop the skills

necessary for high-paying, skilled jobs. The Task Force proposed the creation of a rehabilitation program for the disqualified men; this program would improve their educational and vocational skills. Moynihan determined that the military would be the best avenue to solve the socioeconomic problems that plagued the African-American community. The military could provide a source of stable employment with a series of exceptional benefits that could ameliorate these issues. In this chapter, I argue that these two incredibly important primary sources serve as the precursors to Project 100,000. I believe that in the wake of Vietnam, the culmination of these recommendations combined with the growing liberal, dogmatic rhetoric of the Great Society era created the foundations of Project 100,000.

In Chapter Two, I argue that McNamara, inspired by the findings and recommendations of the Task Force report and the influences of Moynihan's suggestions, he attempted to ameliorate the corrosive effects of poverty through Project 100,000. He sought to upheave these draftees from the evils of poverty and offer a path to socioeconomic mobility. While other historians who have studied this period condemn McNamara for knowingly enlisting these unqualified men to increase the numbers needed for the escalation of the war, I argue that McNamara was inspired by the ubiquitous liberal attitude of the Great Society era to save these helpless victims of poverty. In his speech to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1967, McNamara echoed the same sentiments of salvaging the previously rejected men from the ills of poverty. He envisioned Project 100,000 as a plan of action that would attack domestic and foreign issues facing the United States. First, the program would alleviate the systemic unemployment that plagued the United States by providing careers through the United States military; second, as the nation continued to fight for Democracy in Southeast Asia, the need for manpower exponentially increased. The Defense Department also devised other programs alongside Project 100,000 to

train and prepare the New Standards Men (the other name for Project 100,000 men) to transition into the civilian job market after they ended active duty. In theory, these ideas appear perfect—using one of the largest public institutions in the nation to increase manpower and ameliorate poverty simultaneously. The problem, which other historians have highlighted, is that when these policies were implemented. When these policies are applied in the civilian world, these policies do not work.

In Chapter Three, I plan to investigate the readjustment of Project 100,000 men. This chapter will analyze the findings of the only study that focuses on the post-service lives of the New Standards Men ten years after Vietnam. The study compared the lives of post-service New Standards Men compared to their nonveteran counterparts of the same aptitude to see if military service had any impact on their lives. Though the findings do prove that Project 100,000—from an empirical standpoint—“failed”, I will emphasize the portion of the study where these men attest that their lives did improve because of their time in active duty. If the men who participated in this study believe that the program did in fact succeed—can we still deem the program a failure? Along with the study, I will also look into the historical context of the time and the only other previous study on the matter. Though my thesis heavily focuses on race for Project 100,000 men, this study does not account for the differences between White and African-American low-aptitude veterans. The beginning of the study constructs the general profile between the two races in terms of employment and income; however, the bulk of this survey analyzes the lives of both African-American and White veterans.

### **“Rehabilitation of Youths”: the Precursors of the Project 100,000**

“A generation ago President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke of seeing ‘one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.’ Since that time the wealth of the United States has doubled, then doubled again. Yet poverty persists.” – *W. Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Labor, in his letter to President John F. Kennedy in the Task Force Report (1964)*

Project 100,000 was publicized as a military version of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society” domestic reform program.<sup>10</sup> The military initiative was a vehicle for channeling poor, mostly Southern and African-American youths into the armed forces. To accommodate these men in the Armed Forces, military standards were lowered to recruit and “rehabilitate” 100,000 underprivileged youths annually who previously had been rejected for failing to meet the armed services mental or physical requirements. The concept was to teach them new skills and self-confidence. Service would also enable them to receive veteran’s benefits. The project was presented as antipoverty program that would teach these men the necessary skills to operate into the civilian job sector.

To understand the creation of Project 100,000, it becomes necessary to focus on two individual and intertwining occurrences in the early 1960s. Billed as a “Great Society” program that tackled poverty from a different front, the roots of Project 100,000 begin earlier than its revealing in 1966. The culmination of these events, intertwined with the liberal attitude of “upheaving” the lower strata of the United States, birthed Project 100,000.

Through the course of my research, I have found two key primary sources that set the scene of this program. The first is a report conducted by the President’s Task Force on Manpower Conservation that detailed why almost one-third of the nation’s men were disqualified for service. The Task Force discovered in its 1964 report that each year the military rejected 600,000

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<sup>10</sup> Westheider, 35

disadvantaged young men as unfit for service. Eighty percent of them were high-school dropouts, about 25 percent had not completed grade school. Almost half of the sample size came from families that made less than \$4,000 per year. In their report, the Task Force proposed a sweeping program of rehabilitation, a program that would form much of the basis for Johnson's War on Poverty and Project 100,000. The second is Daniel Patrick Moynihan's controversial "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." In his report, he utilized African-American family welfare as the central point in evaluating the effectiveness of programs to deal with disadvantaged groups. Moynihan stated that he believed it would advantageous for African-Americans to expand the military's role.

Both reports sought to understand the detrimental effects of the cycle of poverty. Both reports concluded that poverty was at the root of the issues they sought to confront and comprehend. The Task Force ascertained that a lack of education resulted in their inability to pass the military's aptitude tests and hindered their ability to develop the skills necessary for highly skilled labor jobs that resulted in high wages. The Task Force proposed a rehabilitation program for the men that would have been disqualified from service; this program would improve their educational and vocational skills. Moynihan determined that the military would be the best avenue to solve the socioeconomic problems that specifically afflicted the African-American community. The military could provide a source of stable employment with a series of exceptional benefits. In this chapter, I argue that these two primary sources serve as the precursors to Project 100,000. I believe that in the wake of Vietnam, the culmination of these recommendations combined with the growing liberal, dogmatic rhetoric of the Great Society era created the foundations of Project 100,000.

On September 30, 1963, President John F. Kennedy established the Task Force on Manpower Conservation, which was directed to prepare a program for the guidance, testing, training, and rehabilitation of young men available to serve in the armed forces. He created the task force in response to two separate issues: low qualification rates and youth employment.

The first issue pertained to a report that indicated that half of the draft registrants called by Selective Service to take AFQTs during 1962 had disqualified for military service.<sup>11</sup> Of a total of 306,000 young men who reported these examinations, 152,500 or 49.8 percent had been found disqualified.<sup>12</sup> The disqualification of these men was due to failing the adequate standard for physical or mental (in the context, “mental” is a variation of intelligence-aptitude to determine success in the Armed Forces). The disqualification of these men was due to failing the adequate standard for physical or mental (in this context, “mental” was a variation of intelligence-aptitude to determine success in the Armed Services) equipment essential for military training. The report argued that many of these disqualified individuals lacked the necessary skills or capacity to find occupation in the civilian job sector.

The second issue was the continued rise in youth unemployment. By the early 1960s, the number of unemployed young men continued to rise. For example, in June 1963, the number of male teenagers unemployed climbed to 1,033,000 and their unemployment rate to 21.0 percent, the highest to date in the post-World War II period.<sup>13</sup> In the President’s statement announcing the establishment of the Task Force, he stated his conviction “that a large-scale manpower conservation operation is both feasible and urgent, and could mean large savings in lives and

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<sup>11</sup> The AFQTs would divide the candidates into five categories with the lowest, Category V, automatically disqualified from service and the upper three deemed acceptable. These men were within Category IV, the marginal group, scoring between the tenth and thirtieth percentile on the AFQT. In 1958, additional tests were developed to limit the number of Category IV men to improve the quality of men entering service. In the context of this thesis, Category IV men were previously disqualified from service before the outset of the Vietnam War.

<sup>12</sup> ““One-third of a Nation: A Report on Young Men Found Unqualified for Military Service”” *President's Task on Manpower Conservation*, 5. United States, 1964.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 5



dollars.” The Task Force was created to prepare a program for testing, training, and rehabilitation of disqualified youths, and to submit recommendations to solve these two interrelated problems. While Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Anthony J. Celebrezze, and Director of Selective Service System Lt. General Lewis B. Hershey signed off the report’s, sociologist Daniel P. Moynihan supervised the bulk of the research.

At the conclusion of the study, the task force compiled a report titled “One-Third of a Nation, Young Men Found Unqualified for Military Service”. Under Moynihan’s instructions, the report studied the current military service examination process and the statistics on rejections. With this methodology, the report “would develop information on the characteristics of these rejectees and on their need for further assistances”.<sup>14</sup> The Task Force studied a careful study of records of all the categories of examinations for military service between August 1958 and June 1960, including examinations of enlistment applicants and draftees by the Armed Forces Examining Stations, results of local board preliminary screening, and examinations of men who enrolled in reserve or National Guard units.<sup>15</sup> The report analyzed and researched a critical issue: that a significant portion of men were found qualified for military service.

During WWI and II, the average rate of rejection was approximately 30 percent. During the Korean War it rose to just over 37 percent. By 1961, the draft rejection rate was 39 percent and rising. In December 1962, the draft rejection rate was 49 percent and rising. In December 1962, the draft rejection rate reached an all-time high of 58 percent. Most of these men were physically over-or underweight and characterized as functionally illiterate. Initially, Selective Service officials believed that the alarming rate of rejection was due to the steady rise in draft standards.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 11

But after further review, they realized that draft requirements had remained fixed since 1951. America's youth were failing miserably and the military had few explanations.<sup>16</sup> Under Moynihan's direction, one-third of the male population failed to qualify for the Selective Service. The task force found, not surprisingly, that the 600,000 annual rejectees were in large degree the products of impoverished backgrounds and substandard schools.<sup>17</sup> Approximately one-half would be rejected based on their inability to meet the qualifications of the mental test.

Perplexed as to how 300,000 men each year would be rejected, the Task Force created a nationwide survey to a sample size of 2500 rejectees. The survey created a socioeconomic profile of the mental rejectees. The results of the nationwide survey clearly demonstrated that a major proportion of these young men were the unfortunate children born in the world of poverty. Further research noted that these men were the results of generational poverty—if their parents were poor, the chances were likely they would continue to exist in poverty as well. “They have inherited their situation from their parents, and unless the cycle is broken,” the Task Force cautiously wrote in their report. “They will almost surely transmit it to their children.”<sup>18</sup> Only sixty-nine percent of the sample group were employed. Their rate of unemployment was twenty-eight percent—four times greater than for all young men nationwide between the ages of 20-24. Accounting for race, the unemployment rate for Nonwhites was somewhat higher than for Whites—twenty-nine percent compared to twenty-six percent.<sup>19</sup> The Task Force noted that a significant portion of these men lacked a stable form of employment. More than a fourth worked for half a year or less.<sup>20</sup> Accounting for the lack of permanent employment and considerably high

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<sup>16</sup> Marcus S. Cox, *Segregated Soldiers: Military Training at the Historically Black Colleges* (Louisiana State University Press, 2013). 114-115

<sup>17</sup> Starr, 188

<sup>18</sup> *Task Force*, 1

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 15

unemployment rate, the researchers understood that the combination of these factors made it considerably harder for these men to uplift themselves out of poverty.

When studying the type of employment these men had, the Task Force stated that the majority of the young men who were disqualified were employed in unskilled, semiskilled and service jobs in 1962. For example, about 350 were employed as unskilled laborers in construction work or in manufacturing; roughly 112 held jobs as porters, 59 were janitors, 57 were dishwashers, and 55 were bus-boys. Almost three times as many rejectees were employed in unskilled jobs as all young men in the same age group. Approximately the same proportion of Whites (thirty-one percent) and Nonwhites (thirty percent) was employed in unskilled jobs. These jobs offered little to no advancement opportunities. The Task Force noticed a correlation between the types of jobs that these men worked and their levels of education. These jobs were required to be filled by persons with minimal skills and education.<sup>21</sup> Their lack of advancement was due to their lack of education. These men did not have the training and skills one receives from completing compulsory school.

When analyzing the survey results, the educational levels of these men stunned the Task Force. Four out of five were school dropouts. About half of the sample size left school before the age of 17. Only about 75 percent of the rejectees had finished grade school, compared with 95 percent of all men in the 20-24 age group. Only about 20 percent had graduated from high school, compared with an estimated two-thirds of all men 20 to 24. The median years of schooling for rejectees was about a quarter less than the years for the general population in the same age category.<sup>22</sup> About three in ten reasoned that their departure from school was due to the financial strains on their families. They would subsequently have to dropout of school to find jobs to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 16

support their families. Financial hardship was greater among Nonwhites—one out of every two said he left school to support himself or his family.<sup>23</sup> The profile displayed a group of men who lost the opportunity to complete their education. The cycle of poverty forced them to enter the job market early and sacrifice their education. Their substandard education levels highlighted the unfortunate, harsh fact that these men would face a lifetime of recurrent unemployment without proper education. Poverty forced them to withdraw from school and barred them from attaining skilled labor that would increase their income enough to escape poverty.

The Task Force believed that there was a definite need for a massive intervention. The public employment service counselors and job placement specialists who interviewed the 2,500 rejectees indicated that about 8 percent of the unemployed young men needed counseling, literacy training, or job training.<sup>24</sup> In their professional opinion, they felt about 35 percent of the unemployed rejectees were most in need of job training and approximately one in four required training to increase their reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. When asked about the opportunity of receiving basic education, four out of every five rejectees said they would accept the offer. This proportion prevailed regardless of whether or the rejectee was working, looking for work, or not working nor looking for work.<sup>25</sup> When accounting for race, Nonwhites were willing to accept an offer to correct educational deficiencies at a slightly higher rate than their White counterparts. More than four out of every five rejectees were willing to accept job training. More than four out of every five rejectees recognized a need for both basic education and job training. Comparing between Blacks and Whites, about nine out of ten Nonwhites, as compared with eight out of ten Whites, would participate in a combined program of basic

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 22

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 22

education and training.<sup>26</sup> Looking at the numbers, the Task Force surmised that there was a desperate need to create a massive program that could combine training for basic education and job-related skills.

The Task Force concluded their report with a series of long-term and short-term recommendations. After analyzing the data, there left no doubt in mind that the nation need to intervene to save these young men from the cycle of poverty. In the long run, the committee suggested that young men should receive their preinduction examinations at the earliest possible time (18 years of age) so that those with deficits or correctable medical problems could be identified and immediately receive help. This form of intervention was an important step because until then, such men were simply told they were ineligible and sent away. Mental rejectees in particular would be provided counseling about their educational and vocational needs. The Task Force thought that these efforts, in conjunction with already existing Federal programs entitled by the Youth Employment Act, the Manpower Development and Training Act, and so forth would do much to ameliorate the situation.<sup>27</sup> These methods would enable the rejectees to become more effective and self-sufficient citizens with a better skill set to survive in the civilian job market. Although at the time there was no suggestion that the Defense Department would play a role in manpower conservation, the study ultimately suggested that the military lower its entrance requirements and provide special training to those individuals with medical and social handicaps.

The idea of utilizing the armed forces as an institution of social upheaval came from Moynihan. Influenced by the dogma of the War on Poverty and his experience as a researcher for the Task Force, he wrote about the pathology of the urban modern African American family and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 22

<sup>27</sup> Laurence and Ramsberger, 16

the question of the African-American family welfare. His work on the Task Force had provided him a model as he began to work on his Negro family report. He had also been a member of the four-man team that developed the War on Poverty legislative proposals.<sup>28</sup> Moynihan wanted to strengthen the employment aspects of the antipoverty program. Though Moynihan's experience in Washington acquainted him with the problems of creating legislation that would not effectively alleviate the problems with unemployment, underemployment, poverty, and other issues that are interrelated, he believed in the potential of the government. He believed that the federal government could formulate policies or programs to deal with problems related with poverty.

Moynihan believed that the military served as America's greatest social welfare institution. Given its ability to assemble diverse groups of people and transform their lives socially and economically, Moynihan contended that African Americans in particular would benefit from the organizational attributes of structure, order, discipline, and male authority that appeared to be lacking in the lives a growing number of African-American youths.<sup>29</sup> "Military service," Moynihan wrote in his 1965 report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" (often referred to as the "Moynihan Report"), "is disruptive in some respects. For those comparatively few who are killed or wounded in combat, or otherwise, the personal sacrifice is estimable. But, on the balance, service in the armed forces over the past quarter century has worked greatly to military duty is unique; the advantages that have generally followed in the form of GI Bill mortgage guarantees, federal life insurance, Civil Service preference, veterans' hospitals and veterans' pensions are singular, to say the least."<sup>30</sup> The armed forces had traditionally offered

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<sup>28</sup> Lee Rainwater, and William L. Yancey. *The Moynihan Report and The Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Cox, 115

<sup>30</sup> Rainwater and Yancey, 42

African-Americans more upward mobility than almost any other public or private institution. Nearly 40 percent of young African-Americans questioned in a 1965 survey gave self-advancement as the reason for enlisting—close to twice the proportion of Whites, who were mostly motivated by the draft. Moynihan saw popular benefits for African-Americans in expanding the military's role.<sup>31</sup>

Moynihan believed that the military would be extremely beneficial for African-American men. In his report, he was disheartened by the “disorganized and matrifocal family life” in African-American communities. He saw how the military could get the men it needed and how African-American men could become “real men” for the first time:

“There is another special quality about military service for Negro men: It is an utterly masculine world. Given the strains of the disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth come of age, the Armed Forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change; a world away from women, a world run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable, and where rewards, if limited, are granted on the basis of performance. The theme of a current Army recruiting message states it as clearly as can be. ‘In the U.S. Army you can get to know what it means to feel like a man.’”<sup>32</sup>

Given the strains of the disorganized and matrifocal family life that so many African-American youth experience, the armed forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change: a world away from women—which he viewed as a fundamental weakness of the African-American community—, a world run by strong men that was accompanied with beneficial rewards. From a logical perspective, Moynihan concluded that the government, in its effort to eradicate poverty, should find methods to increase the number of African-American soldiers. African-Americans,

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<sup>31</sup> Lawrence M. Baskir and William A. Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation*, 1st ed. (Random House, Inc, 1978), 125-126

<sup>32</sup> Rainwater and Yancey, 42

in his report, constituted 11 percent of the total population and comprised only 8 percent of the population. If the government could create some policy to increase the number of African-American soldiers, the unemployment rates in the African-American community would plummet. “If Negroes were represented in the same proportions in the military as they are in the population,” Moynihan points out, “they would number 300,000 plus. This would be over 100,000 more than at present (using 1964 strength figures). If the more than 100,000 unemployed African-American men were to have gone into the military, the African-American male unemployment rate would have been 7% instead of 9.1%.”<sup>33</sup>

The goals of these two reports echoed the same liberal attitude of the later Great Society program, “Project 100,000”. The purpose of these reviews and studies was to pinpoint and evaluate the effects poverty on the disadvantaged. The President’s Task Force’s report investigated why the rate of disqualified men from service was on the rise; their findings created a comprehensive socioeconomic profile of these men that clearly explained their failings. Poverty and the effects of being economically disadvantaged were the root cause of their ineptitude. Because these men were the children of impoverished parents, they were forced into situations in which they would have to sacrifice their educational careers to financially provide for their families. Their lack of education was a direct link to their poor performances on the AFQTs. Their poor education levels were also direct links to their lack of skills. Their skillsets only matched unskilled and semiskilled labor jobs that either did not pay well or did not provide stable employment. The Task Force realized that these class of people needed immediate intervention to save them from the ills of poverty. This idea of “upheaving” these men from poverty echoes later sentiments of the Great Society era—hoping to provide the necessary educational and vocational training to rehabilitate these men to become effective and self-

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 42



sufficient citizens. Though the Task Force's reports mention the intersectional problems of race and poverty by stating how unemployment and employment affected the African-American community harder than Whites, their recommendations did not focus on how to specifically help African-American men. The Task Force's recommendations did not include utilizing the armed forces as a means to tackle these issues.

Moynihan's report recommended specific intervention methods that would benefit the African-American community. He sought to present a sharply focused argument leading to conclusion that the government's economic and social welfare programs, existing and prospective ones should be systematically designed to encourage the stability of the African-American family. His findings suggested that to ameliorate the plagues surrounding the African-American family (low wages, unemployment, etc.) due to the matrifocal family structure found in the African-American community, African-American men should use the military as an avenue for success. The military would serve as the greatest solution—it would provide a space for the youth to feel like “real men”, provide employment for the community, and rewards that would be advantageous for them. His recommendations built upon the suggestions of the Task Force's report. Moynihan advocated for the military's involvement to improve the conditions of the disenfranchised African-American community. The rhetoric of Moynihan's report underscored a liberal attitude towards correcting race relations and socioeconomic issues.

The combination of the Task Force's intervention recommendations and Moynihan's suggestion of using the military as an avenue of socioeconomic upheaval create the fundamental tenants of which the military initiative, “Project 100,000”, was built upon. When members of the Executive branch and the Defense Department reviewed these reports, these offices understood the importance of creating a rehabilitation program. The idea of using the armed forces to

educate, train, and invigorate the youth of America was not new; what would make this rehabilitation program different to others was the proposed large-scale nature of this initiative.

Shortly after receiving the Task Force report, President Johnson announced that he was directing the Labor Department and the Selective Service System to establish a “voluntary rehabilitation” program for draft rejects. Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz preemptively promised the success and importance of this program: “This will be the most important human salvage program in the history of the country.”<sup>34</sup> Beginning February 17<sup>th</sup>, local draft boards sent to rejectees informing them that they should visit their local employment offices for additional training programs. For those who came, which were roughly 17.5%, the Labor Department showed that only 4,900 were referred to jobs and approximately 2,200 were placed in these occupations. One quarter of the placements were for jobs expected to last no more than three days. Only 189 had been enrolled in training programs.<sup>35</sup> The reasoning for these monumentally low numbers was due to the fact that there was not enough federal money to sustain the program. The Selective Service was not equipped to run employment or rehabilitation program. The program was eventually swallowed up into larger Great Society programs. However, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara did not give up on the notion of this idea.

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<sup>34</sup> Starr, 188

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 188

### **“Disadvantaged Young Men Can Be Rehabilitated”: McNamara’s Project 100,000 Is Born**

*“Those of our youth who lack education, those who live in the ghettos, combine the ills of idleness, ignorance, and apathy. Our task is to help cure these ills with education, training, and incentives.”* – Lieutenant General Herman Nickerson, Jr., Deputy Chief of Manpower, U.S. Marine Corps

On August 2, 1964, shortly after a clandestine raid on the North Vietnamese coast by South Vietnamese gunboats, the Viet Cong (the Communist guerrilla forces the United States and South Vietnamese forces fought against in Vietnam) fired torpedoes at U.S. destroyer *Maddox*. The Viet Cong attacked the *Maddox* because the members on board the destroyer were conducting electronic espionage. Two days later, the *Maddox* and another U.S. destroyer reported that they were under attack from all sides. Although scholars have proven that these reports were misunderstood, President Lyndon B. Johnson quickly authorized retaliatory air strikes against the Viet Cong. The next day he gathered congressional leaders and strategically divulged the attack to the American people—without revealing the shady circumstances surrounding the attack: “Last night I announced to the American people that the North Vietnamese regime had conducted further deliberate attacks against U.S. naval vessels operating in international waters.”<sup>36</sup> Emphasizing the “deliberateness” of the unprovoked attack against seemingly innocent soldiers created a situation where the American people could understand and emphasize with Johnson in his decision to direct air action against gunboats and supporting facilities in the surrounding areas.

He consulted with the congressional leaders to approve of a resolution that would support the United States in supporting the freedom and peace in South Vietnam. The resolution, which would later be referred to as the “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution”, authorized Johnson to take “all

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<sup>36</sup> “The Tonkin Gulf Incident, 1964 . LBJ . WGBH American Experience | PBS,” accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lbj-tonkin/>.

necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”<sup>37</sup> This resolution solidified America’s involvement in the conflict in Southeast Asia—it would allow Johnson to wage all out war against North Vietnamese forces without securing a formal Congressional Declaration of War. With the conflict escalating, the armed forces would heavily rely on the draft, volunteer enlistment, and possibly utilize those who used college deferments to produce the numbers necessary to participate in a full-fledged war.

At the outset of the war in Southeast Asia, McNamara, inspired by the findings and recommendations of the Task Force report, attempted to ameliorate the corrosive effects of poverty through the creation of Project 100,000. He sought to upheave these draftees from the drudge of poverty and offer a path to socioeconomic mobility. While other historians who have studied this period condemn McNamara for knowingly enlisting these unqualified men to increase the numbers needed for the escalation of the war, I argue that McNamara was inspired by the ubiquitous liberal attitude of the Great Society era to rescue these helpless victims of poverty. In his speech to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1967, McNamara echoed the same sentiments of salvaging the previously rejected men from the ills of poverty. He envisioned Project 100,000 as a plan of action that would attack domestic and foreign issues facing the United States. First, the program would alleviate the systemic unemployment that plagued the United States by providing careers through the United States military; second, as the nation continued to fight for Democracy in Southeast Asia, the need for manpower exponentially increased. The Defense Department also devised other programs alongside Project 100,000 to train and prepare the New Standards Men (the other name for Project 100,000 men) for transition into the civilian job market after they end active duty. In theory, these ideas appear perfect—

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<sup>37</sup> Johnson, “*Gulf of Tonkin*”

using one of the largest public institutions in the nation to employ the nation and ameliorate poverty simultaneously. The problem, which other historians have highlighted, is when these policies were implemented. When these policies are applied in the civilian world, these policies do not work.

On August 13, 1964, nine days after the Gulf of Tonkin resolution passed, McNamara announced it would initiate an experimental military program. Similar to Project 100,000, the program would have been a rehabilitation program for volunteers who were previously disqualified from service due to mental or physical inefficiencies found by the qualification exams. The Pentagon stated its objective for the Special Training and Enlistment Program (STEP): “It is intended to reduce reliance on the draft by expanding the pool of qualified volunteers available for enlistment.” STEP would provide the army experience in training below-standard men in case of for the need of mobilization due to the war halfway across the globe. To support the additional training that the new men would need, McNamara asked Congress to appropriate \$16,375,000 for the program in his 1966 budget.<sup>38</sup>

Critics of STEP argued that vocational training and counseling programs already existed and therefore was no need. Some critics shared the opinion of South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond that STEP would drain the Army’s training resources. On the Senate floor, Thurmond asked Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, “Does not the Senator feel that these young men should be trained in the educational fundamentals by the Job Corps rather than to place this responsibility upon the Army, which has its hands full training soldiers?” Nelson responded, “We provide education in our schools, which education [sic] helps young men enter the

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<sup>38</sup> Starr, 189

Army...The Army is the biggest single educator in America...This function the Army could handle very well.”<sup>39</sup>

Congress refused McNamara’s proposal due more to fiscal prudence than the desire to keep military standards high. However, the administration enacted the program without the approval of Congress, thereby bypassing their disapproval. Though the administration lacked the fiscal power to provide special training, the Department of Defense still had the legislative power to reduce qualification standards on the AFQTs. The current rule was to accept men who scored above the thirtieth percentile, as well as men who scored above the fifteenth percentile on supplementary aptitude examinations.<sup>40</sup> There were no legal roadblocks to prevent the military from changing their standards since they were free to accept anyone with a score above the tenth percentile. When the need for men increased, the Pentagon could freely accept men who scored within the ten-to-thirty range (Mental Group IV) and assign them to jobs that were deemed fit for their low-aptitude. In November 1965, a small move was made in that direction when certain supplementary tests were waived for draftees and armed enlistees who scored above the fifteenth percentile. As a result of this seemingly trivial administrative change, the army took in an additional 30,000 men during the next eleven months.<sup>41</sup>

While contemplating how to effectively increase the necessary number of men overseas, Moynihan and other civilian policymakers, including members of the Defense Department, were beginning to favor a reduction in qualification standards for the military. However, the numerical strength of the army was stationary, it had been impossible for the civilian planners to bringing the armed services around.<sup>42</sup> For the generals in the armed forces, a reduction in standards was a

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<sup>39</sup> Congressional Record, 89th Cong. 2nd sess. (August 25, 1965), Senate 21719-20.

<sup>40</sup> Starr, 188

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 188

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 190

hard pill to swallow due to two reasons: first, for years the armed forces had set to keep the qualifications of enlisted men high, so the reduction of standards would ultimately reduce the quality of the army; second, the circumstances surrounding the war in Vietnam, where even the most qualified men of the army were struggling to fight the Viet Cong, complicated this issue even more. Yet, the escalation of the war and the concomitant manpower crisis and the expansion of the army, that induced them to swallow it.

In 1966, at the outset of war in Southeast Asia, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced the birth of an experimental military program. The now defunct project STEP was revamped and massively overhauled into a shiny, new domestic and foreign initiative. This Defense Department program was a rehabilitation program to salvage “part of America’s subterranean poor.” The purpose of the military initiative was to rehabilitate 100,000 underprivileged youth each year that previously would have been disqualified from service due to failing to meet the army’s mental or physical standards on their qualification tests (AFQTs). The program, called Project 100,000, was envisioned as a plan of action that would attack a multitude of domestic and foreign issues facing the United States. This new initiative would involve 40,000 men the first year and 100,000 each year thereafter—hence the name Project 100,000. Whereas STEP would have lowered standards only for 11,000 volunteers, Project 100,000 would reduce standards for both volunteers and draftees. “The poor of America,” McNamara told an audience in New York City, “have not had the opportunity to earn their fair share of this nation’s abundance, but they can be given an opportunity to return to civilian life with new skills and aptitudes which for them and their families will reverse the downward spiral of decay.”<sup>43</sup> The Department of Defense was experimenting with the use of a carefully designed programmed instruction—matched with specifically against actual-on-job requirements—which

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 190

allows the student to proceed at his own individual pace, rather than merely be herded along at an arbitrarily determined group pace.<sup>44</sup>

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1967, McNamara delivered a speech to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters in which he detailed the inspiration and blueprints of Project 100,000. McNamara stated the initiative's premise as a rehabilitation program that would "salvage the poverty-scarred youth" of American society. While some historians have criticized his usage of the word "salvage"—attributing it as patronizing beneficence—I argue that the word resonated from a space of concern. When he referenced the abysmal numbers of disqualified men from the "One-Third A Nation" report, McNamara expressed a sense of alarm at how many men were failing due to educational deficiencies, especially across racial lines: "Some had medical problems, but I was particular concerned about those thousands who failed because of the educational deficiencies. In some areas, the failure rate for draftees ran as high as 60 percent; and for Negroes in some states it exceeded 80 percent."<sup>45</sup>

The source of their educational deficiencies was poverty. These draft rejectees were the helpless victims of poverty—a type of poverty that is not the absence of middle-class affluence. He described this insidious form of poverty as "a corrosive and decaying mix of social, educational, and environmental deprivation"<sup>46</sup>—a form of poverty that affected all aspects of an individual's life. The impoverished conditions that manifested from this form of poverty hindered any possibility of socioeconomic mobility. "If unchecked and unreversed," McNamara voiced to the audience. "The inner ghetto of the poverty-scarred personality of these men can fester into explosive frustrations and bitterness and violence."<sup>47</sup> This sentence underscored

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 190

<sup>45</sup> McNamara, "Remarks"

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, "Remarks"

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, "Remarks"



McNamara's opinion that there needs a form of intervention to save these men. Echoing the sentiments of the Task Force's report, McNamara sought to find a solution to rescuing these men from the cycle of poverty. Something *has* to save these men—and what better than the United States military?

The solution to utilize the resources of the United States military to salvage these men from poverty reiterated Moynihan's suggestions in the "Moynihan Report." Though Moynihan's suggestion of sending impoverished American male youth to the armed forces was meant for African-Americans, McNamara opened up the possibility for all American male youth regardless of race. He envisioned the program as a universal plan of action that would attack a multitude of domestic and foreign issues facing the United States. He concluded that the burden of military service had not been shared equally amongst the youth population; rather the racial and economic inequities spawned from poverty created an institution where these men could not participate in. The opportunity for rehabilitation would be universal. Project 100,000 would alleviate the systemic unemployment that plagued the United States by providing careers through the United States military. This would double or triple the men's future income, teach them new skills, and inculcate discipline and self-confidence—the same possibilities that Moynihan highlighted in his report.<sup>48</sup>

"[Disadvantaged young men] can be rehabilitated, both inwardly and out. They are men, we concluded, who given the benefits of the Defense Department's experience in education innovation and on-the-job training, and placed in an atmosphere of high motivation and morale, could be transformed into competent military personnel. Beyond that, after their tour of duty, they could return to civilian life—equipped with new skills and attitudes—and thus break out of the self-perpetuating poverty cycle."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Starr, 185-186

<sup>49</sup> Herman Graham III. *The Brothers' Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. 18-19

He proposed that the program would enlist these men from low-income areas and enlist them into the military. After their scheduled time fighting for their country, these men would return to their respective communities with the necessary skills to liberate them from the cycle of poverty. This would indubitably reduce domestic unemployment and enable these men to receive veteran's benefits. Shaped by the liberal rhetoric of the Great Society, the project was presented as antipoverty program that would teach these men the necessary skills to operate into the civilian job sector.

Created by the essence of the liberal, progressive attitude of President Johnson's War on Poverty, this policy was established with the best intentions. It was designed to address the systemic economic and social problems of a largely disadvantaged section of the United States population that was scarcely getting by. The idea behind the project was that by lowering the entrance standards, many underprivileged, unemployed, and poorly educated individuals would be given the opportunity to service their country, learn a skill, and return to civilian life as more productive citizens.<sup>50</sup> Project 100,000 also had important political advantages for President Johnson, whose foreign policy increasingly began to intrude on domestic concerns. By expanding the pool of potential manpower at the lower end of the scale, Johnson's administration could fight the war in Vietnam without mobilizing the reserves or ending college and other popular deferments.<sup>51</sup>

Though the program did lower the qualification standards of the military, McNamara, in his attempt to promote the project, emphasized the rehabilitation and educational aspect of Project 100,000. "I do not believe that the qualifications for military service should now be lowered," McNamara stated. "What I do believe is that through the application of advanced education and

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<sup>50</sup> William E. Alt., and Betty L. Alt. *Black Soldiers, White Wars: Black Warriors from Antiquity to the Present.*, 115-116, Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Baskir and Strauss, 123.

medical techniques we can savage tens of thousands of these men, each year, first to productive military careers and later for productive roles in society.”

Framed as a form of social uplift, the program quashed criticisms from both sides of the political spectrum. Since the beginning of Vietnam and instatement of the draft, Republicans and Democrats viciously fought over the ethics of the draft. Republicans wholeheartedly supported the draft whereas Democrats, although abhorrent of the draft because its inherent class and racial inequalities, typically viewed the military as a place for less-educated men to better themselves. Democrats also believed that the program would be beneficial for African-American men. The African-American community was split over their opinions on the program. Some, like Representative Adam Clayton Powell of New York, called the program “racist.”<sup>52</sup> He stated, “It’s nothing more than a killing off human beings who are not members of the elite.” The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) issued a statement to condemn the program arguing that it would “increase the imbalance of Black Americans in the war in Vietnam.”<sup>53</sup> Though Civil Rights leaders criticized Project 100,000 and the Vietnam War in general, still many African-American men volunteered for combat duty in Vietnam. Some of the African-American community embraced the new government program. “We join because of the pride and the \$55 extra a month,” explained paratrooper Lawrence Harkness. “It’s a challenge [and] the brother likes a challenge. We’re tough and we want everyone to know it.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Sol Stern, “When the Black G.I. Comes Back From Vietnam,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1968.

<sup>53</sup> “Rights Leaders Deplore Plan to ‘Salvage’ Military Rejects,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1966.

<sup>54</sup> John Darrell Sherwood, *Black Sailor, White Navy: Racial Unrest in the Fleet During the Vietnam War Era*, (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 17

A 1964 survey found that African-American soldiers and civilians at all levels held a more favorable opinion of military enlistment than Whites in similar circumstances.<sup>55</sup> The military was initially viewed as an excellent avenue for economic opportunity. Barred from most lucrative and financially stable jobs due to systemic institutional disadvantages, and the resultant obstacles that they have experienced have made it significantly harder for them to “uplift” themselves.

Education was deemed the solution to economic and social mobility—however this avenue was not readily accessible for the African-American community. The military provided opportunities that other avenues could not offer. They reenlisted for the same reason. David Tuck, an African-American Vietnam veteran, stated in a *New York Times* article on the return of African-American GIs, that many African-American men reenlisted because there were no other options. The lack of job opportunities for social mobility and financial security for African-Americans almost forced these men to reenlist. “Some black soldiers I know are re-enlisting,” he expressed. “But that shows how bad the society is for black people—that they should have to stay in the Army for a decent life.”<sup>56</sup> The armed forces at least offered decent pay and job security.

Ideally, Project 100,000 could have been one of the most effective tools for combatting unemployment, systemic poverty, and lack of manpower in Vietnam. The program would have done a crash course in reading and arithmetic to provide them with the necessary education required for the military. This education would subsequently offer a multitude of different professional opportunities for these men that would have been unreachable without the armed forces. In a Defense Department study conducted to study the characteristics and social profile of Project 100,000 men, the study mentioned that the armed forces offered opportunities for educational upgrading after they were assigned to their military units. They were encouraged to

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<sup>55</sup> Murray, 72

<sup>56</sup> Sol, “*When the Black G.I Comes from Vietnam*”

take advantage of all the well-developed off-duty educational programs that were available to all men at military basis. The military offered General Educational Development (GED) programs that awarded High School Equivalency Certificates, and provision were being made for the issuances of Eighth Grade Certificates.<sup>57</sup> The program would offer Project 100,000 men the opportunity to volunteer for Project Transition, which was designed to bridge the gap between military service and entrance into productive civilian employment. Project Transition offered an opportunity for returning servicemen who were not reenlisting to enhance their education or acquire civilian related skills prior to their release from active duty. The report stated that the program was highly recommended for preparing Project 100,000 men for their return to civilian life. I argue that the military saw itself as an avenue to fix the socioeconomic problems that plagued this nation. McNamara and the other members of the Defense Department envisioned the military as an avenue of rehabilitation. The military looked inward at the nation and saw a problem that needed to be confronted. Project 100,000 could have been the excellent solution to solving this issue along with other War on Poverty programs. The problem that will be later discussed is the implementation of Project 100,000. Once the military executed these policies, the illusion of the armed forces as space of salvaging the poor shattered.

Although the program promised to help all disadvantaged youth from low-income backgrounds regardless of race, African-American youth comprised a disproportionate percentage of McNamara's Project 100,000. After the instatement of Project 100,000, recruitment in low-income neighborhoods turned into an art form. To successfully fill the 100,000 slots allocated to previously disqualified men, higher recruiting quotas were established for low-income urban neighborhoods; recruiters were sent in vans to African-American

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<sup>57</sup> "ERIC - Project One Hundred Thousand; Characteristics and Performance of 'New Standards' Men. Description of Project One Hundred Thousand., 1968," accessed April 22, 2015, <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED031634>. 67

neighborhoods. They preyed outside Boys Clubs, Youth Opportunity Centers, and unemployment offices. Statistics from the San Francisco Bay Area around this time period paint a perfect example of the effective-race based recruitment. In fiscal year 1966, the Marines enlisted one resident of Piedmont (White middle and upper class), four from Berkeley (also white middle class and upper middle class, with some black middle class), and 120 from Oakland (African-American and White lower and lower-middle class). Of the Oakland volunteers nearly 90 percent scored under 31 on the AFQTs, almost all had police records, and more than 70 percent were African-American or Mexican-American. Previously, the minimum passing score on the AFQTs had been 31 out of 100.<sup>58</sup> Under Project 100,000, those who scored as low as 10 were taken if they had lived in designated “poverty areas.”<sup>59</sup> African-American recruiters were carefully assigned to African-American communities, striving to let dropouts and drifters know there would be a safe space for them in the military. The response was great—the excess from poverty areas in many cities compensated for the decline in volunteers from more affluent neighborhoods.

Often these recruiters would work strategically—going around to street corners, hamburger joints, and basketball courts to “rap with the brothers.” Sergeant Paul Conti, a White NCO in charge of the Marines’ Oakland station, explained his brand of recruitment was to adopt the slang and lexicon of the African-American youth so that they would trust and relate to them more. Staff Sergeant Pascal Thigben’s, the other White recruiter in the office, specific form of recruitment was to adhere to their masculinity and wish for racial equality: “A really big selling point is that everybody starts out even at boot camp. Then it’s up to you, as a man, to make it on

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Barnes. *Pawns: The Plight of the Citizen Soldier*. 1st ed. New York, New York: Knopf, 44.

<sup>59</sup> MacPherson, 560.

your own. Man to man.”<sup>60</sup> The recruiter sent a specific message: in the army, you are your own person who determines your own success. The playing field is even between everyone. What determined your success in the army was not your class or race but your individual skills and determination. When faced with questions from family members, recruiters answered that if their sons were drafted, nine times out of ten they would not get the job they wanted. But if their sons enlisted in the Marines, they would get “valuable training.”<sup>61</sup> These recruiters knew that these men’s substandard scores made them unlikely candidates for any technical positions or specialized skill-set positions—they would be more likely be siphoned to combat training.

Although McNamara promised to provide New Standards Men with the necessary training to qualify for lucrative jobs in the military, his promise was almost broken immediately. McNamara argued that Congress had tied his hands—funding for major rehabilitative training was not forthcoming. These men would have to join basic training with other recruits.<sup>62</sup> He boasted about the successes of the program though evidence pointed to the contrary: “...is that our Project 100,000 is succeeding even beyond our most hopeful expectations.”<sup>63</sup> He stated that 96 percent of New Standards Men succeeded in completing basic training, compared to 98 percent service wide.<sup>64</sup> The reality he presented to the press did not reflect what was occurring during basic training. Slowly, the armed forces realized that the program was not living up to its expectations. The courses that were offered for these men, which were aimed at raising soldiers to a fifth-or-sixth grade reading level, lasted six to eight weeks. Everyone graduated these courses—regardless if they passed or not. “Students who fail to achieve a fifth-grade reading level during

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<sup>60</sup> Barnes, 45

<sup>61</sup> MacPherson, 560

<sup>62</sup> McNamara rationalized this by insisting that, “these men should never be singled out or stigmatized as a special group.” If they were classified as Project 100,000 men, he argued, might make that prediction self-fulfilling. However, Commanding officers generally had little difficulty identifying Project 100,000 men although they were meant to be “anonymous.”

<sup>63</sup> Starr, 194

<sup>64</sup> *Characteristics*, vi

the six weeks,” explained an Army general, “are not recycled, but are assigned to basic combat training.” The Marines never offered the literacy programs because they believed no real assistance could be given in so brief a period. “We are not impressed with the long-term effects of a short remedial reading program,” a Marine Corps general told the House Appropriations Committee in the 1970s.<sup>65</sup> When these men suffered difficulty with the program (often for behavioral issues), they were “recycled,” held back to repeat a phase of their training, or else sent to special training companies—including “motivation” platoons, physical conditioning units, and so on—that existed prior to McNamara’s announcement. Also in response to the new program some skill training courses were reviewed and simplified.<sup>66</sup> The armed forces so desperately needed men to fill these positions in Vietnam that they were willing to overlook the glaring facts that these men were extremely ill prepared. “Lots of these guys just weren’t fit to do a job,” said an officer at Fort Polk. “They were pretty damn bad. Somebody had to help them get dressed in the morning,” said another. “You had to take more time to explain everything to them. Since they couldn’t understand what was going on, they were greater disciplinary problems.”<sup>67</sup>

From 1966 to 1968, 240,000 New Standards Men were inducted into the military, usually the Army and the Marines. 41 percent were African-American, and almost 50 percent came from the South.<sup>68</sup> This contrasted with a military-wide African-American representation of 12 percent, and a Southern share of 28 percent. Almost 60 percent of the Category IV recruits came from broken homes, three-quarters were from low-income backgrounds, over 8- percent were high-

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<sup>65</sup> Starr, 194

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 191

<sup>67</sup> Baskir and Chausse, 127-128

<sup>68</sup> *Characteristics*, 8-9



school dropouts, and half had IQs of less than 85. More than 40 percent had a reading ability at less than a sixth-grade level, and almost 15 percent read below fourth grade.<sup>69</sup>

Not many qualified for advance military specialties. McNamara uttered in the same breath that when these men would be returning to civilian life, the earning capacity of Project 100,000 men would be “two or three times what it would have been no such program.”<sup>70</sup> McNamara promised socioeconomic mobility because the armed forces would provide these underprivileged men with invaluable skills. The trajectory of this education would end with the men advancing to higher-level technical positions that could prove useful back home in the civilian job sector. However, the reduction of aptitude requirements for entering the army did not mean that the Defense Department would reduce requirements for technical positions within the services. Hence the majority of “New Standards Men” (the other name for Project 100,000 men) would be barred from the kind of training, which McNamara said would “reverse the downward spiral of decay.” The result was reported in the *Air Force Times*: “According to Defense officials, about 25 percent of the occupations in the military are suitable for the Project 100,000 men.”<sup>71</sup> Over 38 percent of Project 100,000 men were given combat-related assignments in armor, infantry, or artillery, and half the Army and Marine contingent went to Vietnam. The next common occupational assignment for New Standards Men on average was service and supply handlers (20.6%).<sup>72</sup> A majority of these men were fed into the infantry and supply and handling assignments—the two assignments that saw the most action. In the military today, 14 percent of all personnel are given combat roles; the rest draw support assignments of one sort or another.

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<sup>69</sup> *Characteristics*, 13

<sup>70</sup> Starr, 194

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 192

<sup>72</sup> *Characteristics*, 22

But among the New Standards Men the proportion going into combat proved to be 37 percent.<sup>73</sup> According to a Pentagon study, 20 percent of the men fell into that slot. While 7.5 percent of personnel in a control group were assigned to electronics equipment repairing, the proportion among New Standards Men was 1.4 percent.<sup>74</sup> When accounting for race, the percentages changed.

African-American men were heavily concentrated into combat and supply and handling assignments. During the 382,000-man draft of 1966, over 467,500 or 13.4 percent of the inductees were African-American. The following year, 37,000 African-Americans were drafted, representing over 16 percent of the total. As late as 1970, with both the draft and American involvement in Vietnam winding down, African-Americans still accounted for 16 percent of the inductions.<sup>75</sup> At the height of Vietnam, African-Americans constituted slightly over 11 percent of the draft-eligible population, but represented 14.3 percent of all draftees. In 1968, *Ebony* reported that African-Americans made up 60-70 percent of some combat units. African-Americans did, in fact, constitute more than 20 percent of the personnel assigned to Vietnam that year, down to 31 percent in 1965.<sup>76</sup> African-Americans comprised roughly 9 percent of the population, but constituted up to 20 percent of nonwhite inductees. This led to an unequal number of African-American men fighting on enemy lines.

One of the reasons why there was such a high percentage of African-Americans serving on the front lines was because of the military's AFQTs. These tests often kept out African-American soldiers from more technical fields in the Armed Forces. In 1965 and 1966, 40 percent of the

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<sup>73</sup> Starr, 192

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 193

<sup>75</sup> Westheider, 20

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 13

African-Americans taking the exams ended up in category IV.<sup>77</sup> African-Americans usually failed to achieve higher test scores because they were not provided the same education opportunities as Whites. African-Americans attended underfunded and segregated schools that did not stress advanced mathematics and science courses, which were sections of the tests that heavily influenced a draftee's result on these qualification tests. As one African-American sergeant bitterly explained, "When you come in, you take the AFQT. If you haven't had a good background and a good high school or college education, or experience in electronics, into Supply and Transportation you go. I graduated from high school in 1955. I got substandard education compared to the White NCOs my age."<sup>78</sup> These tests poorly reflected a draftee's intelligence. Rather, these tests reflected how much the draftee articulated his individual segregated school education. Because of segregation and intentional underfunding towards all-African-American schools, most African-American draftees suffered from inadequate education.

As the effectiveness of the program began to dwindle, the United States military slowly pulled its support from Project 100,000. In 1970, the number of Project 100,000 men was cut to 76,500 and fewer than 50,000 in 1971. Simultaneously, the services began to eliminate an increasing proportion of the men during basic training. In 1968, the Marines dropped 6.8 percent of Mental Group IV soldiers during basic training; in 1969, 10.5 percent; in 1970, 33.9 percent; and in the first quarter of 1971, 46.1 percent.<sup>79</sup>

In all 354,000 men were taken in under the program. Project 100,000 men were never informed who they were. The decision to keep their identity confidential probably did help the men's self-esteem as McNamara intended; however, the result was that they never received the special training that was promised, and never will receive any marked attention from the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>79</sup> MacPherson, 560

Veterans Administration. Pentagon studies indicated that about 10 percent of them never finished their service because they were killed, disabled, or released with bad discharges. The proportion that received training in a skill transferable to civilian life has been small.<sup>80</sup> Of course, there are those who argue, or dread, that combat experience will turn out to be transferable back home, but somehow one doubts that is what McNamara and Moynihan had in mind. In the words of historian Myra MacPherson, the New Standards men slipped back into the world of the “subterranean poor.”

For most historians who study this moment in military history, the story of Project 100,000 ends here. In my research, I have found that most historians rarely study the readjustment of the New Standards Men. Rather the story just “ends” with condemning McNamara and the Defense Department for creating this program. The narrative does not investigate what happened to these men once they returned.

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<sup>80</sup> Starr, 196-197

**“Was Project 100,000 A Legitimate Great Society Social Program?”: The Readjustment of Project 100,000 Men**

*“....For those who survived the experience, did Project 100,000 provide a way out of the backwater of ignorance and unemployment? Impossible to tell. The Pentagon never conducted a survey of what happened after they left the military.” – Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel, columnist for the Chicago Tribune (1986)*

The tragedy of the Vietnam War continued years after the signing of the truce in 1973. Among those still suffering were numerous veterans who have felt forgotten, unappreciated, and even discriminated against. For some of them, the trauma of their battle experiences or their physical disabilities had shattered the lives. The adjustment to civilian life had not been easy. Military experience was an interruption in the life of a young American male—especially in the context of employment. Time spent overseas meant a discontinuity in one’s employment history. Veteran status could make a potential candidate more or less attractive to an employer. On one hand, a young man’s service in the armed forces has the potential of adding to his human capital in many forms.<sup>81</sup> He may acquire new specific vocational skills, increased general educational credentials, broadened geographic horizons, and “improved” work habits (ex: punctuality, teamwork, organizational skills). But military service also came at a cost: military service also implied a loss of at least two years of civilian job market exposure and experience.

The few historians who study the creation and implementation of Project 100,000 rarely reveal what happened to these lost, forgotten men of the Vietnam War. In the opinion of many military leaders, social policymakers, historians, and Vietnam critics, Project 100,000 proved to be a “failure.” In the words of Macpherson, these men just “slipped back into the subterranean poor.”

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<sup>81</sup> Charles R. Figley and Seymour Leventman, *Strangers at Home: Vietnam Veterans Since the War*, Brunner/Mazel Psychosocial Stress Series 19 (Routledge, 1990), 194

In the context of this thesis, I plan to investigate the readjustment of Project 100,000 men. The literature on the readjustment of these men is extremely limited; there are only two major studies conducted by the Department of Defense that investigated the effects of military service on low-aptitude men. This chapter will analyze the findings of the only study that focuses on the post-service lives of the New Standards Men ten years after the end of the war. The study compared the lives of post-service New Standards Men compared to their nonveteran counterparts of the same aptitude to see if military service had any impact on their lives. Though the findings prove that Project 100,000, from an empirical standpoint, “failed”, I will emphasize the portion of the study where these men attest that their lives did improve because of their time in active duty. If the men who participated in this study believe that the program did in fact succeed—can we still deem the program a failure? Though my thesis heavily focuses on race for Project 100,000 men, this study does not account for the differences between White and African-American low-aptitude veterans. The beginning of the study constructs the general profile between the two races in terms of employment and income; however, the bulk of this survey analyzes the lives of both African-American and White veterans.

In 1985, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management and Personnel), in conjunction with the Navy Personnel and Development Center (NPRDC), funded a study of low-aptitude military veterans to determine the long-term effects of military service. The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) conducted the Veterans Life Experience Study (VETLIFE), with the assistance of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago. The leading researchers behind this study, Janice H. Laurence, Peter F. Ramsberger, and Monica A. Gribben, found a sample size (311) of low-aptitude men from Project 100,000 from a database within Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). With the

sample size in mind, the research team spent countless hours interviewing and surveying the men they found.

There had been a previous study that studied the effectiveness of using low-aptitude recruits in the Air Force at the height of the Vietnam War. In a statement by Dr. William E. Beusse, the leading research psychologist on the study, veterans were more than twice as likely to have upgraded their education from non-graduated to high school graduate. 23 percent of New Standards veterans reported using the benefits of the GI Bill for education or training. Of that 23 percent, most reported using their benefits to attend private vocational, or trade schools, or other vocationally oriented programs. They were less likely to be unemployed; they were more likely to be employed in higher-paying occupations. About 10 percent of the New Standards veterans reported using the Veterans' Employment Assistance. With regards to income, veterans earned an average of 10.4 percent more than non-veterans.<sup>82</sup> Looking at the results of his study, it would appear that Dr. Beusse's results clash with the common narrative that Project 100,000 failed.

From these results alone, it would appear that Project 100,000 succeeded. However, there are certain things to consider about the results of this study. Dr. Beusse's research primarily focused on the low-aptitude of Air Force recruits (who only consisted of 10-12 percent of the entire force). In the Air Force, the most common assignments for New Standards Men were: Service and Supply handlers (34.3%), Craftsman (29.6%), and Specs. and Clerks (26.0%).<sup>83</sup> Craftsman

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<sup>82</sup> United States. House of Congress. Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. Readjustment of Project 100,000 veterans: hearing before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred First Congress, first session, February 28, 1990. Washington, D.C: GPO, 1990. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011344834> (accessed November 5, 2014), 7

<sup>83</sup> *Characteristics*, 25

and clerks are two occupations with specialty skills that are transferrable in the civilian job market. With a smaller percentage of men that obtained assignments with transferrable skills, the positive results of Beusse's study make sense.

The purpose of the HumRRO research was to study the effectiveness and potential utilization of low-ability recruits. The researchers wanted to validate McNamara's belief that the disadvantaged would benefit from military service. This study differed in a multitude of ways from the previous report on the effectiveness of military service on low-aptitude recruits. First, the study would encompass all of the Armed Forces—which would include men with or without transferrable skills. The sample size of the study would be larger and would be able to effectively observe if all branches of the military were successful in transforming the lives of the former draftees. Second, Dr. Beusse's study was limited to those who were honorably discharged from service (thus, his sample size of recruits would more likely to be successful and use the GI Bill)<sup>84</sup>. This study would see the effects of post-service life on all low-aptitude recruits with honorable and dishonorable charges. Dishonorable discharges records negatively impacted the readjustment of military veterans. Because of the stigma surrounding dishonorable discharges, most employers were apprehensive about hiring employees with these on their record. Third, his study only focused on the results of military service while other men were still fighting in Vietnam. The state of the economy during the war and post war were starkly different. Post Vietnam, the nation faced a devastating recession and the Oil Crisis of 1973. And lastly, the results of Dr. Beusse's study are the results of the fact that these men had been out of the military for a relatively short time and were more likely under the influence of the military. Whereas, in

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<sup>84</sup> A problem with the GI Bill is that those with dishonorable discharges or any punitive discharge were prohibited from using the resources under the GI Bill. A dishonorable discharge precluded a veteran from receiving any benefits. Of 23 percent that used the benefits of the GI Bill to improve their educational, vocational, and technical skills in his study could have only done so with honorable discharges. The results of his study would have changed if he included honorable and dishonorable charges.



Dr. Laurence's study, they had been out of Service for a long time, the effects of this structured environment were no longer what they had been.

To address whether Project 100,000 was successful in meeting its objectives, its participants were compared to a sample of low-aptitude nonveterans. If the program was successful, the empirical data would reflect in the experiences of veterans after they separated from service; the data would reflect higher rates of employment, earnings, and etc. for the veterans compared to their nonveteran peers.

20 years after the implementation of Project 100,000, the general social profile of the New Standards Men looked like this: 75 percent of the low-aptitude veterans were employed full-time when they were interviewed, and an additional 8 percent were working part-time. When accounting for race, 10 percent more African-Americans were unemployed as compared to their White counterparts. Race also had an effect on income, with Whites making over \$3,000 a year more on average than African-Americans. Analyzing the standard profile of these men highlighted the fact that the military service did not help the African-American men of the program. The intervention tactics that the Defense Department took for the Nonwhite veterans did not help. From these statistics alone, the program did not successfully tackle the systemic problems that manifest from the intersection of race and poverty. It would appear that Moynihan's suggestions in his report failed. Military service, according to this survey, did not improve the lives of African-American men.

When comparing employment and occupation between nonveterans and veterans, the data suggested that there was no visible difference between Project 100,000 participants and low-aptitude civilians in regard to employment status. When the samples were restricted for the same age, however, the Project 100,000 men were significantly more likely to be unemployed (by

approximately 3 percent difference). They were also more likely to be employed by the government, while nonveterans were employed by the private sector. The preference for government jobs reflected the veteran hiring preferences by the Federal government that was in effect during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>85</sup>

In terms of income, the real differences between the two groups are reflected here. Project 100,000 promised that military service would provide disadvantaged and lower-aptitude youth with the necessary training and skills that would allow them to enter the civilian job market with more marketable skills. The perceived indication of success would be based on post-service income. When comparing civilian and military income, it is critical that the difference in year of survey be taken into account. The NLS respondents reported income for the year 1980. Those who participated in the VETLIFE surveys provided income figures for either 1985 or 1986, depending on whether their responses were given in 1986 or 1987.

Once the data has been analyzed, the results clearly demonstrate that any advantage military service provided low-aptitude veterans over their civilian counterparts **did not translate into** higher incomes. Low-aptitude civilians actually earned significantly more than did their veterans counterparts. No matter which measure of income was examined—hourly wages, household income, or earned income for the year prior to being surveyed—the civilians earned significantly more than their veteran counterparts. McNamara stated in his announcement of the program that would double or triple the future income. The data would suggest that Project 100,000 participants either did not receive the “leg up” which their military service was supposed to

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<sup>85</sup> Laurence and Ramsberger, 112

provide, or that any advantages gained while in Southeast Asia did not translate into the civilian job market.<sup>86</sup>

A couple of reasons may suggest for the differences income for the veterans. Military service has been hypothesized to impede post-service economic status. Such negative effects would be due to the interruption of career, education, and gains in seniority.<sup>87</sup> While the veterans went to fight in Southeast Asia, the nonveterans did not find the trajectory of their careers hindered by a long period of absence. More lucrative jobs were available for them when the size of the work force significantly decreased. Another hypothesis is that other negative impacts from military service could have hindered veterans from entering the job market immediately: deleterious psychological and physical effects of service. While seeking treatment for these problems, veterans lost valuable time to re-enter in to the civilian job market and were siphoned into low-skilled jobs with corresponding lower-wages. And for those that lacked a high school diploma, military discharge papers could serve as a substitute credential, indicating to prospective employers that the individual has a reliable record.<sup>88</sup> But studies have shown that employers in the post-Vietnam era were wary of hiring veterans due to a multitude of stigmas surrounding their service and readjustment to civilian life. So how much would discharge papers help them in a market where a percentage of employers that refused to hire them?

The researchers hypothesized that another benefit to arise from military service was a sense of discipline, maturity and goal orientation that would work to their advantage upon return to civilian life.<sup>89</sup> One indirect measure of the success of this effort may be investigating if veterans sought education as a means of better themselves. The VETLIFE respondents were asked a

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<sup>86</sup> Effects of Military Experience on the Post-Service Lives of Low-Aptitude Recruits: Project 100,000 and the ASVAB Misnorming. Final Report 89-29, 106

<sup>87</sup> House of Congress. Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. 44

<sup>89</sup> *Effects of Military Experience*, 116

variety of questions about their education and training histories, questions, which paralleled those included in the NLS survey.<sup>90</sup>

The data in Table 40 provided a clearer picture of the educational profile of the two groups. Whereas over 26 percent of the nonveteran sample had at least some college, this was true for only about 17 percent of the veterans. The one statistically significant comparison was found between the percentage who had a high school diploma or less and the percentage who had at least some college. When those who had attended college were asked about the degree they received, the majority of both samples reported never receiving a degree.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 117

Table 40  
Highest Level of Education Completed for Project 100,000  
and NLS 1966 Samples

Sample	Highest Level of Education Completed									
	Less Than High School		High School		Some College		College+		Total	
	N <sup>a</sup>	%	N <sup>a</sup>	%	N <sup>a</sup>	%	N <sup>a</sup>	%	N <sup>a</sup>	%
<b>Veteran</b>										
PK Separated <sup>b</sup>	82	27.3	166	55.4	42	14.0	10	3.2	299	100
PK Separated and Active Duty	85	27.3	170	54.9	44	14.1	11	3.6	310	100
<b>Nonveteran</b>										
NLS 1966 in 1981	46	24.0	95	49.4	32	16.7	19	9.9	192	100
<b>Chi-Square Statistics</b>										
<b>Effective Sample</b>										
	Less Than HS		High School		Some College		College+			
PK Separated	43		87		22		5			
PK Separated and Active Duty	45		90		23		6			
NLS 1966 in 1981	34		70		24		14			
<b>PK Separated vs. NLS</b>										
Less Than HS vs. HS vs. Some College vs. College+									6.4 <sup>ns</sup>	
Less Than HS vs. HS & Some College & College+									0.4 <sup>ns</sup>	
Less Than HS & HS vs. Some College & College+									3.8 <sup>**</sup>	
<b>PK Separated and Active Duty vs. NLS</b>										
Less Than HS vs. HS vs. Some College vs. College+									5.7 <sup>ns</sup>	
Less Than HS vs. HS & Some College & College+									0.4 <sup>ns</sup>	
Less Than HS & HS vs. Some College & College+									3.5 <sup>ns</sup>	

<sup>a</sup> Weighted frequency produced by demographically equating the military and civilian samples.

<sup>b</sup> Includes those serving in the reserves.

\*\* =  $p < .05$

ns = Not Significant.

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Though looking at this data, it is not surprising that most veterans and nonveterans of low-aptitude did not attend higher education or complete their degrees if they had attended. This could be because of a lack of funds to attend college (since a significant portion of both groups were of low-to-lower middle class) or had no motivational push to pursue higher education—or even a combination of both.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 120

Project 100,000 respondents were then asked three questions regarding training programs they may have attended. Specifically, they were asked if they had ever attended a course at a business college or vocational/technical institute, attended a business or company training school.<sup>92</sup> NLS participants were asked one question regarding any training course or education programs attended. The data detailed that 68 percent of the nonveterans indicating that they had attended such a program as compared to 42 percent of veterans. The data may suggest that these individuals felt there was no additional training necessary after their military experience, and so never pursued this particular option.<sup>93</sup> In general, the educational and training backgrounds of the veteran and the nonveteran participants were quite similar. Military service, therefore, appeared to have little impact on lower aptitude individuals in regard to their propensity to seek self-improvement through education.<sup>94</sup> This result should be evaluated in light of their other research, which has shown that over 70 percent of Vietnam-era veterans returned to school at some point (Rothbart, Sloan & Joyce, 1981).<sup>95</sup>

In conclusion, when current employment and income were examined in conjunction with selected demographic and military service characteristics, African-Americans were more likely to be unemployed and earned significantly less than Whites. When looking at these results of these surveys, it is found that military service provided little, if at all any, advantage to low-aptitude veterans as compared to their civilian counterparts. In terms of their subsequent life experiences, Project 100,000 veterans appeared somewhat at a larger disadvantaged than their nonveteran counterparts. This leads to a question with potentially important policy implications:

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 120

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 121

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 124

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 125

What was it about the experiences and/or characteristics of the two groups, which resulted in the distinction in their post-service lives?<sup>96</sup>

Nearly half of the men within Project 100,000 were drafted. It could be likely that the motivational levels of the groups were somewhat different as a result. Those who enter service by choice are most likely interested in obtaining training and other benefits, which they perceive as accruing from their military service. There is a realization then that some effort must be made in order to reap those benefits. Those who are brought in against their will may simply want to survive that period in their lives and get out. There is also another possibility that there was less time for training and personalized attention during a period when the escalation for more manpower continued to increase during the war. The urgency of the Services' mission during this period may have resulted in an environment, which was less conducive to success for low-aptitude veterans. When they returned to civilian life, it is possible that Project 100,000 participants had not gained the advantaged that would allow them to compensate for time out of the workplace.<sup>97</sup> Whatever the case, the VETLIFE data suggests that simply being in the military has little long-term impact on overcoming the disadvantages of those of lower-aptitude.

At the conclusion of the VETLIFE study, the researchers polled their sample size of New Standards Men and asked them if they felt that military service was beneficial for them. An overwhelming 50 percent of the veterans interviewed felt that military service had a positive effect on their careers. They stated that the military provided them with maturity, discipline, and training.<sup>98</sup> The benefits of the training were mentioned by 38 percent of this group, and 20 percent suggested that the military provided discipline which was later beneficial to them. Finally, 10 percent of those who saw the military as a positive experience cited post-service

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 181

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 182

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 176

educational assistance as a major benefit.<sup>99</sup> When asked to identify why military service was detrimental to their future, the following was revealed: only 17.9 percent answered that it was harder to find a job post service; 25.6 percent stated that they endured physical problems post-service; 25.6 percent answered that emotional trauma hindered them from finding careers; 2.6 percent stated that family problems were the source of the problem; while 28.2 percent specified to other reasons.<sup>100</sup> Despite the negative findings, these veterans felt that their experience in the military was beneficial.

Historians and social scientists deem Project 100,000 as blight on the Department of Defense's history of initiatives. Rather than becoming the great rehabilitation program envisioned through the rhetoric of the Great Society, the initiative became a program that siphoned men into soft-skilled positions under the false promises of a "better life." The program promised that these skills would be transferable once they returned. However the empirical data found in this study proves that this was in deed not true.

Yet, it has to be noted that the men of Project 100,000 felt that **their time in the military served** them well. Though the story told by most researchers of this project state that the program was a failure, do we discredit the feelings of the men involved? Even if the data is at odds with their personal statements, does that make the project an ultimate failure if servicemen themselves feel that their time in Southeast Asia was successful?

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<sup>99</sup> Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 40

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 69



## CONCLUSION:

Stephen Lawson, in his article titled, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement”, explained that a second generation of scholars writing about the civil rights movement in the late 1970s and 1980s shifted the focus from the national leaders of the movement to focus on the transnationalism of the grassroots organizations, the intersection of the civil rights and women’s movement groups, and the interactions between national and local, and social and political dimensions within the movement. The shift in focus provided a more interactive model of the period that offers a “more complete synthesis of the civil rights movement.”<sup>101</sup> Lawson’s article argued that there are different ways to look at historical periods.

Applying Lawson’s model to the historical context of this thesis, the history of Project 100,000 has to include all portions of its expansive history. Historians and scholars have looked at this moment in Vietnam’s history and stated that the program failed. Myra MacPherson describes it as one of the darkest portions of the Vietnam War and the “shameful brainchild” of McNamara. If we view the history of Project 100,000 from the “top-down” by analyzing the leaders, the policies, major forms of implementation, and the results of the readjustment study, then the program fails. The program would historically remain as a shameful blight in American military and social history. However, if we observe this time period from the “bottom-up”, by including the perspectives of the low-aptitude men who were described the effects of military service as beneficial to their lives, then the program was successful. Using a different historical lens, the program does work and could work for future generations. Historians and who may revisit this period have to recognize that the voices of these men matter. They can no longer be

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<sup>101</sup> Stephen F. Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (April 1991): 457.

glossed over, forgotten, or buried. If they—the men who served valiantly in Southeast Asia during one of the worst moments in military history—believe that the program worked, who is anyone to deny them or justify why they are wrong in their opinion? Historians have to recognize that we observe history from all view points—social, political, economic, national, local, etc.—to have a more comprehensive understanding of any period that they study.

The narrative of Project 100,000 is vastly more complicated than previous historians have depicted. From just two lenses alone, the program either fails or it works—but there could be a possibility that the program both failed and succeeded.

With this thesis, I hope that I have shined a light on a rather unknown portion of history. These men should never be forgotten.

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