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A White Man's War: Race Issues and Vietnam

William M. King

VIETNAM GENERATION

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Special Editor, William M. King

Introduction

Much of the writing about race during the Vietnam war (1964-1975) focused on the two-front war fought by black American troops. One reason for this was simply the large number of black soldiers serving in Vietnam. A second reason is more complex, and involves the existential contradictions that arise when one is a black soldier in Vietnam, fighting to impose "democracy" on a colored people (who may not want it if the costs are too high) coeval with one's inability to exercise one's civil rights back in the United States. Third, there was that whole civil rights thing, followed by Black Power, which migrated overseas with each troop deployment. Coverage of the Civil Rights movement sensitized the press to coverage of the Black Power movement. What journalists and reporters saw in disproportionate black combat death rates, Article 15s, racist promotion criteria and rumbles between black and white soldiers, was the sometimes bitter fruit of the military's attempts to integrate itself; to undo what it had done in segregating the post-Civil War militia into black and white branches.

The concentrated attention of this coverage sometimes masked the fact that there were other peoples of color fighting the American war in Vietnam, as this special issue of *Vietnam Generation* is designed to show. Too, looking at the conflict in the context of the rise and fall of colonial powers, it was clear that what America was about in Southeast Asia was a white man's war—a last ditch stand to preserve some of the myths engendered by insecure acting out in the name of control. Like the black soldiers, these other non-white warriors suffered their own peculiar brand of torment as a consequence of their involuntary or voluntary participation, and paid a great price for their citizenship. Our goal for this issue, *A White Man's War: Race Issues and Vietnam*, then, is to foster further research into some of the questions raised here; questions born out of the different experiences of blacks, Native-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans during the period of active US involvement.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, there are no "subcultures" in the United States. Each of the peoples cited here has some full-fledged scheme for making sense of their world, and a set of patterns to guide their conduct; that is what culture is. As we learn more about each of the cultures we embrace and profess, we set the stages for cross-cultural contrasts that might more effectively illuminate the

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founding concepts of our society and its construction. Vietnam was the United States' first integrated—though not racially balanced—war in quite some time. As a consequence, it raised anew the old questions about the meanings of freedom, equality, justice and liberty and forces us to consider how these meanings change as a function of one's status in the American social order. For, as Harold Cruse has observed in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, "...America, which idealizes the rights of the individual above everything else, is in reality, a nation dominated by the social power of groups, classes, in-groups and cliques—both ethnic and religious. The individual in America has few rights that are not backed up by the political, economic and social power of one group or another."[1] When any particular group, readily identified by some ascriptive criterion, falls out of favor, its members, by virtue of their relative powerlessness, get the short end of the stick.

Lyndon Johnson wanted no wider war in Southeast Asia because it would interfere with his favored domestic agenda;[2] thus, the war was done on the ethical cheap. Sons of the rich and powerful, and many of the sons of the middle and upper-middle class were afforded the easy out of college deferments. After the lifers and volunteers were used up in a bait-and-switch marketing strategy designed to attrite the enemy, the war came increasingly to be fought by the relatively powerless and dispossessed. When the skewed death rate of black combat troops began to raise a public furor back home, a simple answer was to thin them out by increasing the presence of other soldiers of color in the ranks. What before was a front-line unit that was 60% black, became a front-line unit only 40% black. Colored casualties might still be as high; but the impact of the numbers' magnitude is masked by its spread among different groups whose existential pathways in America have been very different indeed. It would be wise to keep those kinds of notions to the front in moving through this issue of the journal. Be forewarned, however; there are gaps in the record. The solicited pieces on the Puerto Rican and Asian-American experience proved less than satisfactory. Consequently they have not been included. What remains suffices to line out some avenues of investigation.

An important addition to this volume are the extensive bibliographies on American minorities in the Vietnam war. By no means complete, these citations are meant to assist the scholar or student in beginning to explore the issues of race and Vietnam. We hope that you will explore them, add to to them, and annotate them.

Finally, there is this. Mother Africa teaches that the present flows into and creates the past which functions simultaneously as context for the present. As we retreat further and further from the war

itself, we reshape it in accord with current needs. White folks took a beating but came back ticking!—This is the new message we are given as the "official" accounts are constructed to cement the growing number of cracks in the cultural wall. We present the essays in this issue in the hopes of widening those cracks and, indeed, forcing Americans to build a complete new structure which can contain us all. The old one can no longer serve.

Who controls the past influences the present. When one is not the custodian of his own experiences, the meanings made out of those experiences are subject to all manner of deletions, denials, and distortions. Who benefits when that is done? We encourage those of you who read this to write in with suggestions respecting questions, theories and methods of investigation that will help us to flesh out the record.

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May 15, 1989

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[1]   (New York: William Morrow) 1967: 7-8.
[2]   Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row) 1976.

Contemporary Afro-American Studies and the Study of the Vietnam War

Herman Beavers

The relationship between Afro-American and Vietnam era studies seems to propose two questions. First, there is the question of how Afro-American Studies responds to a discipline that is, in effect, "younger" in the span of its existence and, on first glance, more narrowly focused. The second question is why should Afro-American Studies shift its focus to consider a field that, on its face, falls outside of its scope of interest? These questions are important, given the fact that Vietnam Studies is gaining momentum both in and out of academic circles and one wonders why Afro-American Studies has not engaged the field in the same manner that it has Women's and American Studies.

Certainly within the last ten years Afro-American Studies has veered from the polemical to the constitutive; from narrow didacticism to a more synthetic form of analysis. In the mid 1970s, Afro-American Studies was still engaged in the task of constructing an Afro-American identity that distanced itself from the negative connotations of blackness that four hundred years of Western civilization had accumulated in black minds. As part of such a project, scholars within the field often shunned methodologies that originated within "mainstream" scholarship, arguing that these approaches were either inherently racist or irrelevant to the study of Afro-Americans. The later 1970s and early 1980s saw a greater willingness on the part of Afro-American scholars to confront new theories. For example, literary critic Houston Baker shifted from his position as a staunch proponent of the Black Aesthetic, and began to use French post-structuralist theory as one of the key elements of a criticism that valorized Afro-American vernacular speech.

It is not my intent to denigrate that earlier project here. Rather, I want to suggest that Afro-American Studies—or Black Studies, if you prefer—fused social activism and scholarly enterprise. The result was that the boundaries between the academy and the black communities that often surrounded it were blurred. As Robert Allen points out:

> The demand for Black Studies cannot be separated from the rise of the militant black student movement in the 1960's. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the establishment of hundreds of Black Studies curricula in colleges and universities is one of the major achievements of the black student movement.[1]

Afro-American scholars attempted to create strategies relevant to revolutionary action as well as to confront the fact that "the totality of the black experience was not to be found in the curricula of the vast majority of colleges and universities."[2]

Ironically, this movement developed almost concurrently with the Vietnam war. And, indeed, as activists made conceptual links to Africa and other states in the Third World, Vietnam was among the topics of discussion. For example, consider these remarks by Robert Browne:

> The Vietnam War is gradually replacing civil rights as the top story of the Mid-Sixties, and because the protests against the United States policy in Vietnam has been primarily made on moral grounds, as was the demand for civil rights, there has been inevitable coincidence of the two movements on various levels.[3]

These observations can be found in a 1965 issue of *Freedomways.* Clearly, Browne's reading of events is perceptive. And his remarks suggest that black activists realized that it was in their best interest to involve themselves in the protests against the war. Thus, as early as 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. was moved to take a stand against the war in Vietnam. He saw that it was wrong for Afro-American soldiers to take up arms against another people of color when the country they served would not accord American blacks full citizenship.

As Afro-American Studies moved into middle and later years of the 1970s, there was a tendency to voice solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle for independence. The United States' role in the Vietnam war was characterized as racist imperialism. But as this reading has taken hold, a kind of conceptual slippage has resulted, causing Afro-American Studies and Vietnam era studies to dovetail, even though the former displayed at least a cursory interest in the latter during the 1960s. By constructing Vietnam as a "white man's war," where black men were pawns, black scholars have transformed the war into a symbol of black exploitation. This, coupled with the fact that the war exemplified a larger imperative: the need to break ties with any- and everything "American" (a euphemism for things white), led Afro-American Studies away from the issue of Vietnam once the

war ended.

Perhaps this explains why Afro-American literature and scholarship has not taken up the subject of Vietnam. The black soldiers who fought in the war, most of whom were too poor to avoid the draft, were marginalized by this scholarly inattention. Their struggle to reintegrate themselves into American society is screened from view, even though Afro-American Studies enjoys a more institutionally secure status in the academy. Thus, one is hard pressed to find in Afro-American literature more than three novels that center on the Vietnam experience. Non-fiction books of note are equally scarce.

The irony in considering Afro-American and Vietnam era studies in joint fashion is that both scholarly projects have constituted themselves as revisionary enterprises. What is also clear is that Vietnam and blackness have undergone similar types of entry into American public space. That is, we find that the representation of the war in literature and film seems to be analogous to that experienced by blacks in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Afro-Americans were becoming a consistent part of newspaper and television coverage, suddenly commercial television shows from *Bonanza* to *Star Trek* to *The Partridge Family* all had story lines that presented images of Afro-Americans. Further, the film industry produced films where the plots centered on the many different ways an angry black man could kick white ass—and get the girl (also white). Black audiences ate it up and came back for more.[4] And of course, in the print media, one needed only to use the word "Black" in the title for a book to become a best-seller.

But there is a deeper relationship to be gleaned here. That relationship resides in the intersection of ideology and myth. And when we consider the image within this nexus, I hope it becomes clear that Afro-American and Vietnam era studies share a common agenda. An increase in cultural activity, whether it concerns Afro-Americans or American soldiers in Vietnam, has very strong implications. Indeed, when one considers the marginality of both groups, the revisionist postures of their respective scholarly enterprises has grown, in part, from the necessity of demystification, debunking the myths that surround both. Unfortunately, neither of these enterprises exists in a scholarly vacuum and, thus, they are not safe from the American cultural machine.

Even as texts began to appear that revised our sense of what happened in Vietnam, images of the war were commodified and reconstructed within the context of American ideology. Bill Nichols examines the ramifications of this and observes:

> Images surround us. There are those we fabricate ourselves, perceptually; there are those fabricated for us, artistically or commercially. Represent: to stand for or in place of something else to bring clearly before the mind.... To represent with images is to symbolize and symbolization is basic to intercommunication.[5]

As legitimate images meant to raise our consciousness proliferated, so too did images that served as mere representations. Thus, it was often assumed that all those artists who wrote or made films about Vietnam—or blacks—had somehow been transformed, enlightened.[6] And if they were, by chance, Vietnam veterans, they were not susceptible to the effects of the ideology that drives American cultural production. As Nichols informs us, however:

> Ideology arises in association with processes of communication and exchange. Ideology involves the reproduction of the existing relations of production (those activities by which a society guarantees its survival). Ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image a society gives to itself in order to perpetuate itself....[7]

Nichols argues that images, as representations, "establish fixed places...that work to guarantee coherent social actions over time."[8] Vietnam, no less than blackness in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is a part of the American image industry. As such, the proliferation of prose fiction and fiction films that deal with Vietnam suggests that artistic production on this topic is ideologically entrapped.

What does this have to do with Afro-American Studies? It should be clear that the struggle in the 1960s and early 1970s in the Black Studies Movement had everything to do with the revision of cultural representation. And what was also clear, though much later, was that the film where John Shaft "did in" the white dude didn't present positive images of women at all, and was not much better at constructing a realistic image of black manhood. The proverbial snowball effect was in motion. It took black feminist criticism to deconstruct John Shaft. And when I consider the ways Afro-Americans are represented in Vietnam narratives, it is clear that Afro-American Studies must address the subject of Vietnam.[9]

Popular culture has perpetrated a mythic Vietnam experience: that, somehow, black and white soldiers were de-racialized. No longer could one make distinctions between black and white. Rather, Vietnam produced a new racial distinction: the grunt. However, as Loren Baritz points out:

> Racial conflict was suffused throughout the war, from 1968 until the end. Every service, including the previously calm air force, had race riots of varying magnitude. As some of America's cities burned, or rather as the ghettos in some cities burned, the domestic rage found its counterpart in the military.[10]

What one finds in many Vietnam narratives, however, are white narrators who suggest that, against all odds, they understand the black grunt. For example, in Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, we find Herr's description of a black Marine named Day Tripper. To Herr, he is a "big black spade gone wrong somehow and no matter how mean he tried to look something constantly gentle showed."[11] Herr's language suggests that as a black man "gone wrong," Day Tripper has been transformed from Detroit homeboy to gentle grunt. The assumption here is that anger or hardness is the emotional state of most black men. The passage does not illuminate Day Tripper so much as it clarifies the positioning of Herr's observation. His reading of Day Tripper suggests that his biases are somehow suspended; he can decode blackness within the Vietnam context, even as he maintains the racist language used to describe blacks in the States.

In Nicholas Rinaldi's *Bridge Fall Down*, a novel that follows the story of a team sent to blow up a bridge (a reprise of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*) in a mythical Third World country modelled on Vietnam and Central America, we find Rinaldi's description of Thurl, a black lieutenant:

> Up ahead, Thurl was laboring along, tall and bulky, black, from Harlem, his powerful left hand carrying his automatic weapon as if it were a toy. A pink earphone was saddled to his right ear, feeding him tunes from a cassette. He was a lieutenant, but it was hard to tell, because he had long ago lost any enthusiasm he might have had for being a lieutenant, and now was more or less just going through the motions, waiting for his tour to be over...he didn't give a damn about war or nonwar, discipline or anything else; he just shuffled along, his own man, amiable and easy, trying to survive the jungle.[12]

Rinaldi offers us a narrator capable of reading the black presence. The protagonist of the novel, Simon Grzegorz, is carrying high explosives in his backpack and thus he is described as "ground zero." What this suggests is that the other characters in the book are deployed in fictional space around him; he is the conceptual center of the

discourse. Grzegorz is, of course, a white male. Thus, his position in the narrative reflects mainstream cultural discourse. Rinaldi's description of Thurl, the fact that he "shuffles along," alludes to the stereotypical manner of describing black motion. Further, Thurl's cassette inscribes the image of young black men with "ghetto blasters," marginal because they commit the crime of being black and male, a threat to the hegemony of the white man. Thurl, in a novel written in 1985 about Vietnam, is himself a representation of the ghetto blaster. His ferocity in a firefight is what makes him valuable; his ability to kill coupled with his enclosure in a musical world bears a strong analogy to images of black men who listen to large radios and kill with little provocation. His apathy reflects the popular image of black men in the 1980s. And Rinaldi's characterization of Thurl as someone who has little regard for his own authority as a lieutenant, likewise implies that the white narrator has no reason to respect his authority either.

Steven Philip Smith's novel, *American Boys,* presents a black character named Padgett. Though Smith can be credited with making Padgett a complex character, an artist who goes to war to confront the question of his sexuality, Smith's narrative technique attempts to render Padgett's black idiom with questionable results. Consider this passage:

> One night he fell in with some guys from school, and they were smokin' and sippin' when all of a sudden the fat cat's name come up. All the other dudes was pokin' each other and grinning like they all know who he is, and they start puttin' down this rap about him being a queen.[13]

This passage is unusual when one compares it to the paragraphs used to introduce other characters. Smith strains to represent Afro-American urban slang. Inevitably, Smith mystifies black speech because his representation of that speech is filtered through a narrator who suggests a white man who "talks black," rather than Padgett's actual thoughts being reconstructed on the page.

While there are aspects of Smith's characterization of Padgett that are admirable, I want to suggest here that the danger (and this is equally true with each of the texts I have mentioned) is that the narrative valorizes a point of view that is white and male. Consider the way Smith tells us how Padgett gets "...the blackest hole he [can] find and cut[s] that bitch till her pussy hurt[s]." The reader can only bond with Padgett, in his state of sexual uncertainty, if he is willing to participate in a scene grounded in misogyny and contempt for blackness.

Each of the writers mentioned above falls prey to mainstream

notions of black manhood. Their narratives, as cultural productions driven by ideological machinery, privilege the construction of the white narrator who is hip enough to understand, and thus decode the black presence in the war. Because there is such a dearth of Afro-American narratives to offset this state of affairs, or scholarship by Afro-American critics that deconstructs these images, inevitably, these narratives come to stand for the reality of the black experience in Vietnam. Nichols alludes to the danger of this: "Ideology appears to produce not itself; but the world. It proposes obviousness, a sense of 'the way things are' within which our sense of place and self emerges an equally self-evident proposition."[14] These narratives, because they occur within an ideological space that seeks to commodify images of Vietnam, to make that commodified image into the reality of "what happened," serve to "persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be"—white men rendering Vietnam faithfully, with egalitarian intentions.

The ineffectual nature of these renderings of the black experience in Vietnam is made clear when we consider it alongside David Berman's study of the war as it is rendered in school textbooks. Berman convincingly argues that American textbooks' treatment of Vietnam was reductive, driven by a need to fit the experience into the prevailing American cultural myth. Berman asserts that when

> we reduce warfare to a theoretical model we conceal its violence from our students, some of whom will go on to fight the next war, ignorant of its costs. Academics treat Vietnam as a limited war, for which limited coverage is appropriate. Remarkable for its "lack of passion" our educational writings on the war are consistent with the political tone of textbooks "suitable" for distribution to high school students whose minds are in the process of being shaped to inherit the ideology of the patriotic American community.[15]

Berman's remarks suggest that the revisionist history that erased Afro-Americans as a presence in American history is likewise revising their experience in Vietnam, homogenizing it until it disappears altogether. What I would like to offer in closing is a call to Afro-American scholars to consider Vietnam, not as an event that fourteen years and the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign have distanced us from, but as an event which continues to loom in the American cultural machinery. The discipline's concern with demystifying the Afro-American presence must extend its parameters to encompass what has thus far been of marginal interest to scholars in the field. The critical skills that we bring to bear on mainstream notions of American history, sociology, and literature must be applied to the multifaceted

construct that is the Vietnam war era. And the revisionary role we apply to mainstream representations of blackness must be focused on the Vietnam war.

I would call Vietnam era scholars to resist the reduction of the Vietnam war to a raceless experience where the nation somehow transcended its racial chauvinism. I hope it is clear that we must hold those who write about and create films about the Vietnam war accountable for the narratives and images they produce. In this, Afro-American Studies and Vietnam era studies share a common mission: to present the American landscape as it is, to achieve a self-recovery that allows us to embrace difference.

[1]   Robert L. Allen, "Politics of the Attack on Black Studies," *The Black Scholar*, September 1974: 2.

[2]   *Ibid.*: 3.

[3]   Robert Brown, "The Freedom Movement and the Vietnam War," *Freedomways* (5:4) 1965: 472.

[4]   Consider the proliferation of what were called "blaxploitation films" where somehow black men rebelled against the system and played out a violent fantasy. Inevitably, these films represented their own form of containment, in ways more destructive than the stereotypical servant if only because they often suggested that black men had more power than they actually possessed. Films such as *Shaft*, *Superfly*, *Three the Hard Way*, and *Trouble Man* all presented this plotline. For more on this topic, cf Donald Bogle's fine study, *Uncle Toms, Coonies, Mammies, and Bucks.*

[5]   Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 1981: 1.

[6]   Consider, for example, the *Rambo* films alongside Bill Moyers report on blacks in poverty. Both offer representations of the Vietnam veterans and the urban poor (particularly black men) that call us to challenge them as images.

[7]   Nichols: 1.

[8]   *Ibid.*

[9]   This is not to suggest that Vietnam scholars have been irresponsible, rather it is clear that Afro-American Studies must take up the project of examining Vietnam narratives in the same way that Southern literature, for example, has been addressed in Afro-American literary criticism.

[10]   Loren Baritz, *Backfire* (New York: William Morrow) 1985: 316.

[11]   Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Avon) 1977: 125.

[12]   Nicholas Rinaldi, *Bridge Fall Down* (New York: St. Martin's Press) 1985:8.

[13]   Steven Philip Smith, *American Boys* (New York: Avon) 1975: 46.

[14]   Nichols: 2.

[15]   David M. Berman, "In Cold Blood: Vietnam in Textbooks," *Vietnam Generation* (1:1) 1989 Winter: 62-63.

Project 100,000: The Great Society's Answer to Military Manpower Needs in Vietnam

Lisa Hsiao

Introduction

In 1966, during a speech in New York City, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced that he would lower the mental and physical standards for admission into the Armed Services. McNamara based his decision on government reports[1] which had studied the rejectees. He promised that the new program, "Project 100,000" (POHT), would uplift America's "subterranean poor" and cure them of the "idleness, ignorance, and apathy" which marked their lives. Proclaiming that these young men "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 skills and aptitudes,"[2] the Secretary predicted that men recruited under POHT would return to the civilian world able to earn two to three times the amount that they would have earned had they not entered the military.[3]

Although the original announcement of Project 100,000 did not specifically mention the problems of black Americans, in a speech called "Social Inequities: Urban Racial Ills," presented to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, the Secretary of Defense claimed that POHT was created to assist black men in overcoming a heritage of poverty and deprivation. McNamara claimed that the DOD had the "potential for contributing to the solution of the social problems wracking our nation."[4] He described POHT as a step towards restoring the self-respect of these men, citing high black failure rates on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, as well as Moynihan's theory of the cycle of family poverty.[5] An excerpt from the speech reads:

> What these men badly need is a sense of personal achievement—a sense of succeeding at some task—a sense of their own intrinsic potential.... They have grown up in an atmosphere of drift and discouragement. It is not simply the

sometimes squalid ghettos of their external environment that has debilitated them—but an internal and more destructive ghetto of personal disillusionment and despair: a ghetto of the human spirit.[6]

McNamara announced that Project 100,000 would enlist or induct 40,000 men by June of 1966. He neglected to mention General Hershey's declaration that escalating the war effort would require a monthly draft call of up to 40,000 men by October 1966. Perhaps he felt that the juxtaposition of those two pieces of information could lead to a line of questioning which would be uncomfortable for the Johnson Administration. In fact, his August 1966 speech gave no indication that rising manpower needs had any relationship to the decision to implement POHT. He also failed to point out that Congress had refused to fund his project, and that he planned to finance it out of the DOD's regular budget. Instead, McNamara made four promises about the program: New Standards Men (the term for men enlisted under POHT) would receive the same basic training as regular soldiers and all the special assistance they required; New Standards Men (NSM) would be trained in skills useful in military occupations and would have access to the best technological and military specialties; NSM would learn self-discipline by absorbing the military system; and, NSM would receive veterans' benefits after their service in the Armed Forces. Declaring that the Armed Forces had previously maintained unreasonably high standards for admission, McNamara predicted that POHT would enlist up to 150,000 NSM a year.

Virtually no historical research has been done on Project 100,000, and the Johnson Administration's motives have remained obscure. The historical works which do mention POHT seldom devote more than a paragraph to the program, and their authors frequently accept the administration's explanation without probing more deeply.[7] Most military, political, and social histories of the Vietnam War fail to note Project 100,000 as a policy of historical and cultural significance. By focusing on three areas—a short history of Project 100,000, an overview of discriminatory politicies in the military, and a look at the military's treatment of rejectees—I hope to establish some basis for drawing conclusions about the Administration's investment in POHT. The information contained in this essay is based on the small collection of available documents on Project 100,000, and should serve as an indication that a full scale study on the current status of POHT veterans deserves to be pursued.

Project 100,000 represented a landmark in both American domestic and foreign policy. The domestic policy of "helping" underprivileged blacks provided the troops necessary to carry out US

foreign policy in Vietnam. Moynihan's theory that military training and discipline could solve poor black men's social and educational problems gave the Johnson Administration an excuse to draft these men and send them into combat.[8] Motivated by issues of race and racial paternalism, POHT failed in every way to benefit black Americans. Few NSM received the promised remedial education, few improved their post-war employment status, and many came home wounded; many did not come home at all.

Ironically, POHT also failed to benefit the military establishment. It provided the Armed Services with incapable, often mentally disabled soldiers. The first page of Moynihan's report, *The Negro Family*, ends with a quote from Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*: "America is free to choose whether the [black American] shall remain her liability or become her opportunity." Moynihan's use of Myrdal is ironic, as Myrdal would probably not have supported the choices which Moynihan's report urged Johnson and McNamara to make. By creating Project 100,000, the American government made a choice Myrdal did not envision: it exploited black Americans, using them as cannon fodder while cloaking their betrayal in the rhetoric of advancement. America had turned liability into opportunity—but not for the black man.

A Brief History of Project 100,000

The DOD had lofty goals for New Standards recruits. Every branch of the military was told it had to accept a certain percentage of them in its quarterly quotas, with the Army required to take 25% of its quota from POHT, the Marines 18%, and the Navy and Air Force 15%.[9] Most rejectees had failed the AFQT; under POHT the military would accept them anyway, provided that they could demonstrate over time that they had higher intellectual abilities than their test scores indicated. The DOD also specified that the training, performance, and achievement data for each NSM had to be updated bi-annually.[10]

Between October 1966 and June 1969, POHT received 246,000 recruits. The population of POHT men differed considerably from regular servicemen; 50% of POHT, versus 28% of regular servicemen, were from southern states.[11] The median score of POHT men on the AFQT was 13.6,[12] If curing "ignorance, idleness, and apathy" could not be achieved on a volunteer basis, mandatory induction represented the next best alternative. 47% of all NSM were drafted.[13]

As studies of rejectees had indicated, most NSM came from economically unstable homes with non-traditional family structures. 70% came from low-income backgrounds, and 60% came from single-parent families. Over 80% were high school dropouts, 40% read below a sixth grade level, and 15% read below a fourth grade level. 50% had

IQs of less than 85.[14]

"Vietnam: Hot, Wet, and Muddy—Here's the Place to Make a Man!" enthused an advertisement placed by POHT recruiters in *Hot Rod Magazine*. The Army and the Marines stressed glamor and excitement, as well as training, as part of a soldier's job, and many men volunteered for dangerous assignments because recruiters made them sound like adventures. SS targeted low-income ghetto areas—particularly those where high concentrations of blacks lived—for their advertising campaigns.

In Oakland, California during one year, POHT recruited 120 men from lower income groups, out of a total of 125 enlisted by SS. 90% of these recruits had placed in Category 4 or 5 (Category 4 men were considered marginally qualified for service, and Category 5 men were previously disqualified) ; most of them were black or Chicano youths with police records.[15] During the five years POHT lasted, an average of 40% of NSM were black. This figure contrasted sharply with the black 8% of the Service population. DOD certainly heeded Moynihan's call to overrepresent black men in the Armed Forces.

Project 100,000 took in 149,000 men during its first year—an increase of 9,000 over McNamara's original projection. After that first year, the Secretary of Defense told the public that "our Project 100,000 is succeeding beyond even our most hopeful expectations."[16]

All NSM entered regular basic training. 17,000 men took remedial reading courses in order to achieve a fifth or sixth grade reading level[17]; 6% took transition programs of educational or vocational training.[19] After six weeks, the Armed Forces found 17% of the men still unable to read at a fifth grade level.[20] Although these men had not yet met the minimum literacy standards required by the service, they were not recycled (sent back to take the course again). Instead, they were assigned to basic combat training or special motivational platoons for extra discipline. The Marine Corps had no remedial reading program: "We are not impressed with the long term effects of a short term remedial reading program," said a Marine Corps general.[21]

In training courses other than remedial reading, POHT recruits confronted other difficulties. Continental Army Command (CONARC), which conducted technical and other high level skills courses, determined that the presence of NSM in many of these courses hindered the progress of other students. CONARC recommended that NSM be excluded from 64 of 237 entry level "advanced individual training" (AIT) courses because slow learning and comprehension abilities prohibited NSM from meeting academic course prerequisites. In 1968 the Army decided to exclude NSM from 54 additional courses because of the group's previous poor performance and attrition rate. The Army next revised course prerequisites for 37 more courses in order to exclude NSM, before banning them from another 19 courses.

John Grant was one example of a POHT recruit. With an IQ of 66, he could not do simple arithmetic. At the age of 15 he had married his pregnant wife, and the year Grant served in the military, he went AWOL fifteen times. Kenny Matts was another POHT recruit. Retarded as the result of a childhood brain injury, Matts could not take notes or spell. After failing the Armed Forces media training course, he went AWOL. Both Grant and Matts joined the services because they were drawn to its advertised programs for disadvantaged teenagers. Gus Peters came from a broken home, left school after finishing eighth grade, and was unemployed when he enlisted. Also in poor physical condition, Peters had an IQ of 62. He scored in the 10th percentile on the Armed Forces pre-enlistment aptitude test, and later failed basic training due to poor literacy skills[17]. Once in the service, Peters' mental inabilities prevented him from completing training as a tank driver. Ridiculed by fellow soldiers, he went AWOL and was released with an Undesirable Discharge after only six months in the Armed Forces. Demoralized and without confidence, Peters experienced much unpleasantness, and acquired no skills during his short stint in the military.[18]

Of all AIT courses only five were restructured to accommodate POHT recruits.[22]

Even in the five restructured courses—Marine Hull Repair, Engineer Equipment, Wheel Vehicle Mechanic, Switchboard Operator, Supplyman—the Army had problems with NSM. Instructors found that NSM required more attention than other students, and more time to absorb class material, during which more competent trainees became bored. The Armed Forces was finding Project 100,000 increasingly time consuming and expensive.[23]

By April 1968 the service found only 68% of NSM eligible for any AIT courses.[24] Most NSM could not qualify for any advanced skills or technical specialty training; many received "soft skill" or menial jobs. The DOD, however, had another use for those NSM denied training. Over 40% received combat-related assignments, and 37% went to the infantry in Vietnam.[25] The high numbers of black combat troops which POHT later brought to Vietnam added to disproportionate black casualty numbers.

A 1969 study by the Comptroller General's Office and the Department of the Army cast doubt on McNamara's initial assessment of the progress of POHT. Though the report, titled "The Management

of Project 100,000," called the program "a marked success," the study's conductors also publicized many negative results of POHT, and issued a number of criticisms.

The Department of the Army study found major problems with POHT training programs. NSM required enormous amounts of remedial reading training, but could not receive it because of the shortage of instructors and facilities. To remedy the situation, the Army would have had to spend a great deal of money and hire many additional personnel. Men who came into POHT under the medical remedial program had an extremely high discharge rate. Many costs associated with POHT, such as time costs and the cost of giving the other men less attention, could not be estimated. The continuous "recycling" (repetition of courses until NSM received a passing grade) which many NSM required made the reporting system impractical and deficient, since officers were reluctant and sometimes unable to complete the many special POHT reports.

The GAO had several suggestions for reforming POHT, including the recommendations that SS prevent the enlistment of men whose mental conditions demanded more than six weeks of training, and that local personnel be given adequate instructions for completing POHT reports. In addition, the GAO suggested that the Armed Forces establish reliable cost data for the training of NSM. The DOD accordingly formulated new policies for POHT. Stipulating that those who failed to meet minimum performance standards during or after training would be released, DOD specified that during the initial training phase, NSM would receive all the additional time they needed to complete the basic course. DOD also instructed Armed Forces officers to constantly monitor the individual and group progress of POHT recruits. The military establishment had gradually made impossible the realization of McNamara's initial promise of equal, specialized training and valuable experience for NSM.

Throughout the program's tenure, DOD supervisors reported that 90% of the men received excellent ratings of conduct and efficiency.[26] The joint GAO-Army report, however, noted that faulty and inaccurate recordkeeping cast doubt upon many of DOD's claims. Many members of the military establishment, especially those who worked directly with NSM, openly criticized and disparaged the program.[27]

Like the GAO and DOA, Armed Services officers found that POHT men needed more time—and money—than regular soldiers. Many NSM required remedial education, in addition to the basic skills taught in boot camp. In order to achieve the minimum literacy and skill levels required to advance, these men (frequently called "the moron corps" by their military peers) often had to recycle. Many NSM

never passed some of the courses, no matter how many times they recycled.

Officers complained that they had to "babysit" these men, who sometimes could not master the most basic skills, such as brushing their teeth.[28] In an *Army Times* editorial, one Army officer expressed the sentiment that the services, already preoccupied with fighting, should not take on the war against poverty. The military did not have the desire, the time, the money or the resources with which to assume responsibility for such a program, regardless of the DOD's professed altruism.

At the heart of career officers' criticism of POHT was the feeling that the military—especially during wartime—should not serve as a social welfare program. Another *Army Times* editorial claimed that past performances by rejectees showed that the Armed Forces could only expect "poor mileage" from NSM. Many military men were aware of the results of an important study conducted by Eli Ginzburg, a Columbia University professor. Ginzburg's report, *The Ineffective Soldier*, examined poor soldier performance in World War 2. His conclusions should have caused readers of the Moynihan and Marshall Commission reports to regard their conclusions as doubtful. Ginzburg's results indicated that intelligence and education were important qualities in good soldiers. In fact, his findings determined that high school dropouts were five times as likely to perform poorly in battle than college students, and three times more likely than high school graduates.[29]

In 1969, troop numbers in Vietnam began to decrease as the US de-escalated the Vietnam War. As the ceilings dropped, the number of recruits in POHT fell. Although McNamara had originally presented POHT as a social welfare program which would annually recruit up to 150,000 men, the military evidently had no desire to utilize these men in a peacetime army.

DOD cited several reasons for phasing out POHT. Revising their earlier estimations, they claimed that the program had been extremely expensive and not very successful. The Air Force, for example, spent 14% of its budget on its 14% quota of NSM, and even this was not enough, because 39% of their POHT recruits required additional funding in order to recycle basic training.[30] Military officials explained to the DOD at the 1970 House Appropriations Committee hearings that de-escalation had reduced the numerical strength of the Armed Forces and that they had cut POHT numbers accordingly. They reasoned that if they continued to enlist 100,000 Category 4 men every year, these men would eventually constitute too large a percentage of the total troops, and would downgrade overall military standards and efficiency.

In 1970, SS set the POHT quota at 75,000. In 1971 it dropped

the number to 50,000, and in 1972 the DOD officially terminated Project 100,000.[31] Even before the quota decreased, the Armed Forces had independently begun to eliminate more men during basic training, effectively restoring higher pre-Vietnam rejection rates. In 1968, the Marines released 6.8% of all Category 4 recruits because of mental inability. In 1969 they rejected 10.5%, in 1970 33.9%, and in 1971 46.1%.[32] Spurred by the career military's opposition to POHT, the Armed Services took the initiative in eliminating these men from their ranks.

The military accepted some Category 4 troops until 1977, but the DOD now asserts that the military can not serve as an appropriate environment in which to rehabilitate the disadvantaged. Recent legislation prohibits the use of mental group quotas in military recruitment. Unfortunately, the military reached these conclusions too late for many NSM.

Almost all Category 4 soldiers entered the services under POHT. Their court-martial rate was 3% (as opposed to 1.4% for the control group of other soldiers) while their rate for nonjudicial punishments was 13.4% (as opposed to 8.2% for the control group).[33] Studies showed that Category 4 soldiers were three times more likely than other soldiers to go AWOL during basic training, twice as likely to receive early discharges, and two-and-a-half times as likely to be court-martialed.[34] One third of NSM (approximately 360,000) were discharged for absence or disciplinary offenses. Of these, 80,000 of them received Dishonorable, Bad Conduct, or Undesirable Discharges, and 100,000 of them received General Discharges.[35] Some 36,000 POHT troops were killed, wounded, or dishonorably discharged before serving their first eighteen months[36].

While many NSM came home disabled, and many others died, those who returned physically intact faced the same difficulties as other Vietnam veterans in terms of employment, emotional and family instability, and post traumatic stress disorders. Because a large percentage of NSM experienced combat, stress disorders may be even more widespread in POHT veterans. The difficulty many veterans faced in finding post-war employment was exacerbated in the cases of the many POHT veterans who had received less than honorable discharges. Deprived of promised training and education, these men had little prospect of earning the doubled or tripled income which McNamara had promised them.

Because McNamara insisted that the military avoid stigmatizing these men, their records contained only cursory indications of their status. This poor recordkeeping initially resulted in many NSM failing to receive special training, and later receiving no special attention from the Veterans Administration. The VA has repeatedly denied

many benefits, even on appeal, to the numerous POHT men who received less than honorable discharges.

McNamara also demanded that NSM should never be informed of their unique status, so that they would not feel as if they were government charity cases. The long-term result of this ignorance is a group of men who cannot fight for the special treatment they deserve because they do not know who they are.

The injustices suffered by POHT veterans were intensified in the cases of black NSM. Since 40% of POHT men were black, their post-war activities are included in various studies of black veterans. In 1969, when the Armed Forces released their first group of POHT recruits, the unemployment rate for black veterans was 8.5% The rate rose to 16% by 1971. Although unemployment rates among black veterans dropped to 14% in 1972, during one month of that year it was as high as 22%. In 1972, while the overall rate for black vets had dropped to 11%, the rate among black veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 was 16.3%.[37] As 21 was the average age of NSM through POHT's tenure, by 1973 most of them would fall in the 20 to 24 age group. It seems likely, then, that POHT men contributed significantly to high unemployment rates among black Vietnam veterans. Project 100,000 certainly failed to accomplish one of its primary stated goals: the "uplifting" of black males.

Blacks and the Military

The US Commission on Civil Rights reported in 1963 that "Negro servicemen believe on balance that the Armed Forces offer them greater career opportunities than they can find in the civilian economy."[38] In a 1965 survey, 40% of the black men questioned listed self-advancement as their reason for enlistment. Some all-volunteer airborne divisions were 24% black.[39] Until 1967, black reenlistment rates for all service fields except communications and intelligence, technical specialties, and medical and dental were between 47% and 49%.[40] Observing these statistics, Moynihan viewed the military as "a socializing experience for the poor... until their environment begins turning out equal citizens."[41] But pre-1967 rates of black enlistment and re-enlistment may not have been indications of black patriotism—black men may have had few other available options.

Moynihan did not realize that for many black soldiers, the "socializing experience" of the Vietnam-era soldier would come in the jungles and deltas of Southeast Asia. In 1963—the same year in which the Commission on Civil Rights claimed that the military offered black soldiers great advancement opportunities—20% of all personnel assigned to combat were black.[42] Some black men volunteered for combat in order to earn higher wages for high risk assignments. More

frequently, however, the lower educational and technical skill level of black enlistees and draftees led to infantry duty.

The disproportionately high number of black men in combat units translated into disproportionately high casualty and death rates. While black Americans represented 11% of the population and 8% of the military between 1961 and 1966, they comprised 16% of all combat deaths in Vietnam. In 1965, 23.5% of all Army personnel killed in action were black.[43] The DOD attributed unusually high black casualty and death rates to the frequency with which black men volunteered for elite combat forces like Airborne or the Green Berets, but overlooked the fact that many of these men qualified for no positions other than infantry duty. Between 1965 and 1970, blacks comprised 9.3% of total active duty personnel in Vietnam, yet they suffered 12.6% of the deaths. Black death rates exceeded by 35.5% the rates for all servicemen, and exceeded by 30% the rates for those men in Indochina.[44]

The National Advisory Commission on Selective Service found large discrepancies between draft rates for blacks and whites. In 1966, 30.2% of blacks who joined the service were drafted, as opposed to only 18.8% of all whites. The Commission hypothesized that black men were less likely to enlist because fewer of them were admitted into the reserves and officer service programs. As a result, blacks comprised a larger percentage of the draft pool. Commission figures confirmed this lack of representation in the reserves, revealing that only 2.8% of all nonwhites had any reserve duty experience, while 15.5% of all whites had some. An even more startling figure showed that only 0.2% of all nonwhites, versus 3.3% of all whites, were admitted into officer service programs.[45] Clearly, the equality and opportunity which many ascribed to the Armed Forces was more illusion that reality.

The Commission's report moved the DOD to instruct that admission standards for the reserves be identical to those for regular service. The reserves were a point of political controversy; critics asserted that many college students and other potential deferees enlisted in order to fulfill a patriotic duty and, at the same time, avoid going to Vietnam. Anti-war protesters, who included civil rights activists, college students, and others who felt the war was morally or politically insupportable, claimed that the reserves served as a haven from combat duty. In order to demonstrate the reserves' exclusivity, the protesters cited the minute percentage of black men in the reserves, and compared that number to the high percentage of black men in combat. The DOD sent 3% of the reserves to Vietnam to serve as support troops in 1968, hoping to offset antiwar criticism, but the nature of the reserves was not substantially altered. By the end of 1968, over 100,000 men had signed up for the National Guard waiting

list, and at that time only 1% of the reserve forces were black.[46]

Further investigation of Armed Forces' policy toward black Americans revealed that discrimination began even before these men entered the service. The Armed Forces consistently rejected black men at a higher rate than they rejected white men. Over half of all blacks failed to meet military standards: black males comprised 11% of the US population of 18-21 year olds, and less than 5.5% of these men qualified for military service.

Both the AFQT, which determined mental fitness for service, and the exam for deferment contained implicit biases towards whites. In addition, if a black man passed the AFQT and wanted deferment for educational reasons, he had to pass the draft deferment test. An official from Science Research Associates (the company that lost the bid for the draft deferment test design to Educational Testing Services) claimed that "the test is culturally weighted to favor the white, middle-class and upper-class student, as are all tests of this type."[47]

Representative Adam Clayton Powell of New York recognized the test's racial bias in 1966, predicting that

> An excessively disproportionate number of those failing would be black students. The draft deferment test brings the circle of racial discrimination full cycle. First, we provide an inferior education for black students. Next we give them a series of tests which many will flunk because of an inferior education. Then we pack these academic failures off to Vietnam to be killed.[48]

Other critics of the military's testing policies questioned the tests' accuracy at determining standardized "dimensions of achievement across different groups."[49] The draft deferment test qualified candidates on the assumption that the highest scorers would be most successful in their chosen career paths, although a 1964 Columbia University study showed that academic achievers were more likely to attain lower levels of professional achievement.[50] The AFQT, critics claimed, failed to measure "idealism, stamina, persistence, and creativity."[51]

L. Mendel Rivers, chair of the House Armed Services Committee, commented on rising military manpower requirements, stating "The Army is good for a man's soul."[52] In 1965, 230,991 souls were improved by the draft, and in 1966 their numbers rose to 331,000.[53] Rivers' view of the Army as a reforming institution may have had some effect on the decisions of local draft board members, who inducted a startling percentage of qualified black men. Though 94.5% of the men who qualified for the draft were white, black men made up 8% of the military overall—and 11% of the military personnel in Vietnam. The black draft rate increased at a much faster rate than did the general

draft rate. Although black citizens comprised 11% of the American population, the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service cited studies which showed that, of qualified men, 30% of blacks (in contrast to 18% of whites) were drafted.[54]

In 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service revealed additional unbalanced induction figures for men with military experience: 27% of white men and 42% of black men with military experience were drafted.[55] Racial imbalances like these occurred because of institutionalized policies of discrimination at the local level—especially in southern states.

October 1966 figures show that only 1.3% of all local draft board members were black. Seven states had no black draft board members, including Mississippi, where 42% of the population was black. Blacks were also unrepresented on draft boards in Alabama (30% black population), Louisiana (31.9% black population), and South Carolina (34.8% black population).[56] The state Governor appointed draft board members, who frequently lived in wealthy districts far from their jurisdictions, and had little contact with community members. Racial discrimination on some local boards went further than a simple lack of representation—the New Orleans draft board had one member who had also served as the head of the Ku Klux Klan.[57]

Most black leaders were acutely aware of the military's discriminatory policies , and were incensed by Moynihan's suggestion that the Armed Forces could improve the status of black men by "socializing" them. To many, the idea that black men "deserved" larger military participation seemed a transparent excuse for sending even more black men to die in Vietnam. The white administration had seemingly developed the perfect cover for a genocidal campaign against black Americans. In his essay "Hell No, Black Men Won't Go," Gayle Addison, Jr. recalled a World War 2 newspaper editorial which he felt expressed the United States' current intentions in Vietnam. The *Waterbury Times* opined:

> It seems a pity to waste good white men in battle with such a foe. The cost of sacrifice would be nearly equalized were the job assigned to Negro troops.... An army of nearly a million could probably be recruited from the Negroes of this country without drawing from its industrial strength or commercial life....[59]

The complaints of black leaders were many and varied. The money spent on the war and defense, some argued, could be better spent to alleviate American domestic problems. Black men were fighting to help Vietnamese secure freedoms which black citizens did

not have at home in America. There was a strong sense that black Americans were being robbed of their future, that the "talented tenth" of black youth were being shipped off to die in Vietnam.[60] Eldridge Cleaver saw serious global repercussions to the black image:

> It is no accident that the U.S. Government is sending all those black troops to Vietnam. Some people think that Vietnam is to kill off the cream of black youth. But it has another important result. By turning her black troops into the butchers of the Vietnamese people, America is spreading hate against the black race throughout Asia.... Black Americans are considered to be the world's greatest fools to go to another country to fight for something they don't have for themselves.[61]

One-Third of a Nation: **Rejectees and Army Policy**

Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Labor and Chair of the President's Task Force on Manpower Conservation, opened the 1964 report *One Third of a Nation* with a letter lamenting the fact that "Fully a third of the age group does not meet the required standards of health and education. Far too many of these young men have missed out on the American miracle."[62] In the year of the report's publication, 1,400,000 men turned 18. According to report estimates, one-third of them would be disqualified, for some reason, from participation in the Armed Services. The Task Force concluded:

> Of persons who have recently failed the mental test... a major proportion of these young men are the products of poverty. They have inherited their situation from their parents, and unless the cycle is broken, they will almost surely transmit it to their children.[63]

The rejectee group of 1964 consisted of about 600,000 men, and the correct conclusion that most of these men had grown up in poverty was based on the similarity of rejectees' background characteristics. Most of these men had little education: 40% of mental rejectees had only completed elementary school, and 80% had not finished high school.[64] 50% of the rejectees came from families with annual incomes of less than $4,000, and 20% came from households with annual incomes under $2,000. 70% of rejectees came from homes with more than four children and 50% came from homes with more than six children.[65] A 1963 poll published similar statistics: of 2500 rejectees, 30% had left school before the age of 17 in order to support themselves or their families. (Half of all rejected black men cited this reason for leaving school.[66]) The 1963 poll revealed that 21%

of the rejectees came from families who had received public aid during the past five years; 14% of them presently received public aid. 31% came from families in which the parents had divorced or separated, and 9% of these men had court records.[67]

Investigations at the time of the poll determined that these men had not escaped the poverty environment in which they had matured. 31% of rejectees were unemployed (a figure four times that of the average 18 year old male), and those who did work held low-skill, low-paying jobs.[68] Rejectees earned almost one-third less than the average income of all those in their age group; they had an annual income of $1,850 while their peers earned an average of $2,656 a year.[69] Based on these figures, the Task Force concluded that those who failed to qualify for the Armed Forces had a high chance of failing in other areas of life.

Altogether, including those disqualified for mental and physical reasons, 49.8% of men tested in 1962 failed to meet Armed Forces standards. Of those men who took the AFQT in 1962, 306,073 failed the intelligence tests: "It was determined that they lacked the mental equipment to be able to absorb military training within a reasonable time. The most common deficiency was apparently that they could not read or do simple arithmetic."[70]

In addition to these depressing statistics, the report gathered some hopeful figures. Of the 2500 rejectees polled in 1963, the majority of both employed and unemployed men expressed a willingness to obtain additional training and education, even if they had to leave home to obtain it. The rate of willingness of black men greatly exceeded that of whites, with 78% of working black men, and only 56% of white men, desirous of more education. 85% of black men looking for work wanted training and remedial education, while only 74% of their white peers wanted these opportunities. Even among those not actively seeking employment, 79% of blacks and only 59% of whites were ready to leave home to receive training. A nationwide survey of rejectees found 96% of nonwhites desirous of basic education and job training.[71]

The Task Force suggested that: "The President should announce a Nationwide Manpower Conservation Program to provide persons who fail to meet the qualifications for military service with the needed education, training, health rehabilitation, and related services that will enable them to become effective and self-supporting citizens."[72] Three years later, the Marshall Commission echoed the Task Force's call for national programs to help rejectees, but it gave the job of manpower conservation to the Pentagon. While educational and training programs for these men were included in the Task Forces' initial recommendations, these programs were not the primary goal of the Marshall Commission's plan. Its goal had shifted from assisting

rejectees to achieving "the objective, insofar as it proves practicable, of accepting volunteers who do not meet induction standards but who can be brought up to a level of usefulness as a soldier, even if this requires special educational and training programs to be conducted by the Armed Services."[73]

The National Advisory Commission report offered no less bleak an image of American rejectees than its predecessor. Figures published in 1965 showed that 62% of rejectees failed for physical and mental reasons, while 38% failed because they were not judged to meet a vague and flexible "moral"[74] standard. Marshall Commission race-based statistics agreed with those of the earlier report: 49.7% of black men and 24.7% of white men in the 26 to 29 year old age bracket were judged unfit for service.[75] The National Advisory Commission report also found that low income slum areas had the largest percentages of rejectees and the least percentages of student deferments.[76]

The Marshall Commission generalized its conclusions, and predicted that a man was likely to fail the AFQT if he had less than an eighth grade education, or if he was a black high school dropout. The report cited the fact that so many American men failed the AFQT and other minimum standards tests as a "national security risk" and emphasized that unfitness was a result of "the years of their youth and development, in conditions of poverty and discrimination, inadequate education, and poor medical facilities."[77] The Commission's investigations had begun months before McNamara made public his plan for Project 100,000, but the report was released seven months after the announcement. The report strongly supported the DOD's new program, claiming that it would train men and improve their condition once they had entered the service.

The Commission tendered suggestions which directly contradicted the conclusions of Ginzburg's 1950 report, *The Ineffective Soldier*—a report taken very seriously by the post-World War 2 military, and which had originally spurred the Armed Forces to adopt the AFQT. The AFQT was designed to measure mental ability, and to screen out men unable to acquire military skills. If a man scored in the passing range on the 100 point test, and he qualified for no deferments, he was ranked 1-A. Those who failed the test, but scored between 10 and 30 received the ranking of 1-Y, and were placed in Category 4. (Categories 1, 2, and 3 automatically qualified for service. Category 4 was marginally qualified, and Category 5 was automatically disqualified.) Most Category 4 men were disqualified from service during periods of peace, since the Armed Forces could then afford to be discriminating. During periods of conflict, however, men who had received a 1-Y ranking had a good chance of being accepted by the military, since SS had to expand the pool of qualified men in order to

meet military manpower needs.

Historically, Armed Forces admission standards have fluctuated with the manpower demands of wartime and peacetime. The AFQT was designed as a measuring device; a way to classify men for military induction. For example, during World War 2 and the Korean War, when available men were scarce, the overall military rejection rates were 30% and 37% respectively. During the peaceful period in the early 1960s, before the US had committed its forces to Vietnam, rejection rates rose from 49% in 1961 to 57.9% in 1964.[78] By December 1966, the preinduction rejection rate had dropped to 34%.[79]

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the military made a great effort to prevent the enlistment of men who could potentially cause disciplinary problems, have psychiatric disorders, or might otherwise fail to meet the Armed Forces' rigorous mental and physical demands. The number of men in the Armed Services with 5 to 8 years of education dropped from 23.6% in 1953 to 10.8% in 1959, while the percentage of men with 12 years of education rose from 35.3% to 53%. Department of Defense officials explained the changes:

> This raising of intellectual standards can be regarded as an important factor in decreasing non-effectiveness, since in the past the prisoner group contained three times the proportion of individuals with an eighth grade or less education than the general troop population. Also it is a reasonable assumption that individuals with lower intellectual capability have greater difficulty in adjustment than persons of average intelligence and thus more frequently become psychiatric problems or disciplinary offenders.[80]

During this same period, the Armed Forces maintained a high rate of less than honorable discharges, as it eliminated men who had disciplinary problems and were not needed during peacetime. A study by Army psychiatrists explained the rationale for these higher rejection and discharge rates: "The smaller and cadre-type Army in peace time has less opportunities for the utilization of marginal personnel."[81]

1965 was the first year in more than a decade to see military rejection rates fall. In this same year, many began to question the validity of the AFQT. "Perhaps the military criteria for physical and mental fitness," conjectured one congressman, "is simply a more convenient way for them to eliminate the numbers subject to the draft which is in excess to their needs."[82] Other critics expressed indignation at the falling rates, insinuating that during times of low manpower needs, the Armed Forces denied rehabilitation and training to men with limited skills and physical ability, but during times of high need—

wartime—these same men were inducted, enlisted, and hastily trained for combat. When SS devised the 1-Y classification in 1962, General Hershey defined 1-Y men as "not too objectionable for war, not perfect enough for 1-A in peacetime, but acceptable in an emergency."[83]

Conclusion

McNamara's goal when he founded POHT was to admit 40,000 former rejectees in 1966, and 100,000 more each year. More than 300,000 men joined the Armed Services as New Standards admittees between 1966 and 1971.[84] Because most of these men could not attain the skill level for special technical training, over 40% of them were assigned to combat units, and in the Army and Marines, over 50% of them went to Vietnam.[85] An estimated 10% of New Standards men were killed, wounded, or dishonorably discharged in the first eighteen months of their service.[86] Although the whole premise of the Project 100,000 program was to provide education and training for these men, only 7.5% of them received any remedial education and skills training.[87] In 1971, because of high costs, waning manpower needs, and de-escalation in Vietnam, Project 100,000 ended.

Project 100,000 assumed the guise of a social program with the primary goal of helping black youth and reconstructing "the fabric of black society."[88] In reality, the Johnson administration, the DOD, and the Armed Forces used Project 100,000 to further their own agenda by sending over 100,000 NSM (about 50,000 of them black) to fight and die in Vietnam. The Administration had little time and money to devote to the war against poverty and the campaign for civil rights. But by adopting the paternalistic hypotheses of selected government reports, Johnson and McNamara constructed the pretense of Project 100,000. Not only would the program provide soldiers to produce the body counts on which the Vietnam War focused, it would also temporarily eliminate pressure on the administration to show its support for civil rights.

The past and present discrimination experienced by blacks in the military might have indicated that the Armed Forces were not the ideal environment in which to nurture a new generation of black men. The Ginzburg study had revealed that rejectees would not be soldiers of great potential and ability. And already, disproportionate numbers of black men served, fought, and died in Vietnam (along with poor men of all races). *The Ineffective Soldier* should have served as a warning to the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service that if it focused on the mentally and socially disadvantaged it would not find a reasonable and just answer to the question "Who shall serve when not all shall serve?"

After POHT's inception, the DOD should have discerned that the program would not be successful. Repeated cases of desertion, disciplinary problems, mental incompetency, and physical incapacity should have alerted the DOD to the fact that POHT was not an overwhelming success. But as long as the Vietnam conflict required troops, the Pentagon persevered in its insistence on the program's soundness.

Project 100,000 also played an important political role for the Johnson Administration. By enlarging the pool of prospective draftees, the Administration could continue the war in Vietnam without calling in the reserves or drafting college students. Since college students served as the voice for anti-war protest, POHT permitted Johnson to avoid arousing increased protest from that group. NSM were neither vocal nor politically inclined, and many of them welcomed the Armed Forces' guarantees of training, education, and excitement.

Project 100,00, although profitable to the Administration, benefitted none of those whom it professed to help. As the Marines' self-imposed release rate of POHT men and the antagonism on the part of career officers illustrates, NSM were more often a nuisance than a benefit to the military. Nor did most of the poor and uneducated minorities recruited by the program come home better educated or more self-confident. Black POHT veterans returned from Vietnam to the same poor conditions as other Vietnam veterans.

By making the black family the scapegoat for America's racial problems, Moynihan had given the administration an excuse to send unreasonably high numbers of black men to war. Moynihan's theory provided Johnson with a way to avoid implementing more practical, useful, and fair methods for alleviating black poverty. Many of the black families whom Moynihan claimed POHT would benefit had to contend, during and after the war, with the grief of losing family members, emotional traumas caused by combat, injuries, unemployment, and social instability, in addition to the trials of poverty and American racism. Project 100,000 did not help to solve the problems of poor black Americans: it compounded old problems and created new ones.

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[1]   The basic foundation upon which this decision rested was the January 1964 report, *One-Third of a Nation: A Report on Young Men Found Unqualified for Military Service*, prepared by the Presidential Task Force on Manpower Conservation, which was headed by Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Moynihan. The report stated that every year almost 600,000 young men, or about one-third of the 1.8 men eligible for service, were found "unfit" because they failed the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). The report also found

that a high proportion of these men belonged to minority groups. In 1965, DOD records reported that 56% of all black men failed the AFQT. *One Third of a Nation* concluded that Black men failed the AFQT primarily because they suffered from educational disadvantages. This argument was logically extended in the 1965 Moynihan Report on the black family. Assuming that poor education and academic performance on the part of many black men was only a symptom of a disturbance in "normal" family relations, the Moynihan Report hypothesized that service in the Armed Forces represented the best way to boost the self-esteem and confidence of black men. Under a section headed "The Armed Forces", the authors of the 1965 report stated:

> Service in the United States Armed Forces is the *only* experience open to the Negro American in which he is truly treated as an equal.... it is an utterly masculine world. Given the strains of the disorganized matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth come of age, the Armed Forces are a drastic 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 get to know what it feels like to be a man."

[The President's Task Force on Manpower Conservation. *One Third of a Nation: A Report on Young Men found Unqualified for Military Service* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office) January 1964: 2. And, Office of Policy Planning and Research, US Dept. of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office) March 1965.]

[2]   Lawrence M. Baskir & William A. Strauss. *Chance & Circumstance: The Draft, the War and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Vintage) 1978: 126.

[3]   *Ibid.*

[4]   Robert S. McNamara, "Social Inequities: Urban Racial Ils," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 34: 4 (1967): 98.

[5]   At a planning conference for a study on black Americans, sponsored by *Daedalus* and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Moynihan made known his opinions on the state of black America: "I think the problem of the Negro family is practically the property of the American government. I mean, we spend most of our money on this... in health, in welfare, and on employment, and yet we know nothing about it." [Rainwater, Lee & William L. Yancey. *The Moynihan Report & the Politics of Controversy* (Boston: MIT Press) 1967: 75.] In March 1965, Moynihan produced his controversial report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* The report concluded that, because of a history of discrimination and lack of opportunity, the black American family was deteriorating. This breakdown, said the report, resulted from the fact that American society disempowered black American men, who consequently could not support a typical patriarchal family. Moynihan, in different sections of the report, summarized the situation:

> At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society

is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time.... In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well.

The report documented the black family's "instability" by reporting high fertility rates, incidences of teenage pregnancy, welfare dependency rates, divorce, separation, and desertion rates, and unemployment rates. Black Americans, Moynihan explained, were trapped in a "tangle of pathology": high crime rates, narcotics addiction, and alienation from white society. As a result of this "unsound" familial and social structure, black children, in Moynihan's estimation, lacked proper role models and thus had no aspirations to rise in American society. Moynihan contrasted black families with the typical white family who, "despite many variants, remains a powerful agency... for transmitting... valuable contracts of the world of education and work."

When the Department of Labor unofficially released the Moynihan Report in 1965, both government officials and civil rights leaders hastened to criticize it. Citing the report as incomplete and overdrawn, Bayard Rustin of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, Whitney Young of the National Urban League, Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP, and John Lewis of SNCC criticized both the report and Moynihan. The report, they complained, focused on socioeconomic measures, and not antidiscrimination. Despite the expert status attributed to him by the white political and social establishment, Moynihan had few contacts with the black community or the civil rights movement. Furthermore, he fit the stereotype of the "white liberal", against which militant and separatist groups such as the Black Muslims rebelled. Ignoring the criticisms of many black leaders, Johnson and McNamara embraced Moynihan's conclusions.

The report suggested several solutions to the problem of the black family, including universal employment for all black men (which Moynihan proposed could be achieved by placing black men into traditionally female jobs). He also recommended housing and birth control programs. By focusing on statistics and de-emphasizing the continuing impact of economic and social discrimination, Moynihan could maintain his narrow focus on the problems of the black family. Accordingly, he also suggested limited solutions. Ultimately, his most influential and dangerous suggestion was that the position of the black male could be strengthened if he were offered greater opportunities in the Armed Forces.

Moynihan's focus on the Armed Forces as a solution to the problems of the black family was not coincidental. The year before the report on the black family was issued, Moynihan helped lead the Task Force on Manpower Conservation, which produced *One Third of a Nation.* Service in the Armed Forces, or "The American Miracle", as Task Force Chairman Willard Wirtz referred to it, seemed to Moynihan an ideal solution to the poor education,

employment prospects, and social status of black men, and to the increasing manpower needs of the Vietnam conflict. In 1964, black Americans comprised 11% of the population, but only 8% of the military. Moynihan carried his proposals further in his 1965 report, stating:

> The ultimate mark of inadequate preparation for life is the failure rate on the Armed Forces mental test. A grown man who cannot pass this test is in trouble. 56% of Negroes fail it. This is a rate almost four times that of the whites.

> Military service is disruptive in some respects. For those comparatively few who are killed or wounded in combat or otherwise, the personal sacrifice is inestimable. But on balance, service in the Armed Forces over the past quarter-century has worked greatly to the advantage of those involved. The training and experience of military duty is unique; the advantages that have generally followed... are singular, to say the least.

Despite the fact that by 1966, the number of black troops *in Vietnam* was commensurate with their proportion of the population, Moynihan believed so adamantly in the advantages of military service that he advocated even greater black participation. The 1960s' single most important psychological event in race relations, he contended in a 1966 *New Republic* article,

> was the appearance of Negro fighting men on the TV screens of America. Acquiring a reputation for military valor is one of the oldest known routes to social equality.... Moreover, as employment pure and simple, the armed forces have much to offer men with the limited current options of, say, Southern Negroes. By rights, Negroes are entitled to a larger share of employment in the armed forces and might well be demanding one. (Rainwater 33-34)
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> [Office of Policy Planning and Research, US Dept. of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office) March 1965.] For an extended discussion of black responses to Moynihan, see Rainwater and Yancey.

6   McNamara: 101.

7   Many accepted authorities on the Vietnam War, such as Stanley Karnow and Gloria Emerson, fail entirely to mention Project 100,000 in their accounts of the conflict. In addition, several authors who do include POHT in their studies accept the Administration's line without question. For example, Rainwater and Yancey's *The Moynihan Report* mentions POHT only as a by-product of the study; they fail to attach any importance to it. Jean Carper's *Bitter Greetings* considers POHT as an example of the draft's unfairness and does not question McNamara and Moynihan's belief that these men were capable of becoming good soldiers. Baskir and Strauss' *Chance and Circumstance* contained the only in-depth assessment of the motives behind POHT. Interpretations critical of the project are generally found only in books

and essays dealing with inequities experienced by blacks in the military—such as Binkin and Eitelberg's *Blacks in the Military.*

8   Project 100,000 represented the second attempt of the Johnson administration to create a program with the goal of inducting under-qualified men into the Armed Forces. In late 1964, Johnson directed Selective Service to steer pre-induction rejectees into federally sponsored non-military assistance programs. This experiment, coined Project STEP (Special Training and Enlistment Program) tried to provide remedial job training skills and job referral services, with the goal of raising rejectees to the educational skill level of normal soldiers. Ostensibly, they would receive training, get jobs, and also meet military qualification standards. 134,000 men participated in Project STEP, which proved a disappointment in three ways. First, of 134,000 letters written to prospective employers by the rejectee group, only 20% were answered. Second, the program referred less than 4% of the men for jobs; 2,200 men eventually got jobs, while only 189 participated in job training programs. Third, Congress refused to provide the $10 million which the Pentagon requested to fund Project STEP. This program, which used the DOD as a tool for implementing domestic social programs, marked the President's first attempt to use the military as a vehicle for his domestic policies. It would not be the last time such an attempt failed. [Baskir: 125]

9   Jean Carper. *Bitter Greetings: The Scandal of the Military Draft* (New York: Grossman) 1967: 158.

10   McNamara made this last requirement impossible to fulfill, however, since he adamantly insisted that NSM should not be stigmatized by their designation. NSM were never informed who they were, and a common service number, which in 1967 became an alphabet code, was the only indication that a recruit came from POHT. Nevertheless, poor physical or mental performance generally made these men easy to identify. NSM came to be known by their military peers as "the moron corps" and "McNamara's idiots".

11   Binkin, Martin & Mark Eitelberg. *Blacks in the Military* (Washington, DC: Brookings Inst.) 1982: 34.

12   *Ibid.*: 90.

13   *Ibid.*: 34.

14   Baskir: 129.

15   *Ibid.*: 128.

16   McNamara: 102.

17   Baskir: 122-123.

18   *Ibid*: 127.

19   *Ibid.*

20   The Comptroller General of the United States. *Management of the Project 100,000 Program* (Department of the Army) December 1969: 6.

21   Paul Starr. *The Discarded Army—Veterans After Vietnam: The Nader Report on Vietnam Veterans and the Veterans Administration* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Responsive Law) 1973: 195.

22   Comptroller General: 20.

23   Between 1968 and 1970 the costs for POHT more than doubled. In 1968, the GAO estimated the cost for the entire program at $5.2 million. By 1969 the

cost grew to $11.2 million, and by 1970 it was $12.8 million. [Binkin: 128]

24   Comptroller General: 28.

25   Charles R. Figley & Seymour Leventman. *Strangers at Home: Vietnam Veterans Since the War* (New York: Praeger) 1980: 348.

26   Comptroller General: 16.

27   Baskir: 126-127.

28   Figley: 349.

29   Baskir: 123.

30   Starr: 195.

31   Baskir: 130.

32   Starr: 196.

33   Starr: 195.

34   Baskir: 129.

35   Baskir: 129.

36   Figley: 348.

37   Starr: 201.

38   Report of the National Advisory Commission: 26.

39   *Ibid.*

40   *Ibid.*: 161.

41   Baskir: 125.

42   Report of the National Advisory Commission: 26.

43   Starr: 187.

44   *Ibid.*

45   Report of the National Advisory Commission: 22.

46   Figley: 348.

47   Testing bias is also indicated by the fact that many black college students failed the exam. The majority of these students attended college in the deep South, where most black colleges were located. In 1966, 32% of all students failed the draft deferment test in Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas; 47% failed in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee. These figures stand in marked contrast to the 7% failure rate for New England students, and the 10% national rate. In its testing policies, the military failed to consider that low academic performance might be a result of differences in educational opportunities, rather than low mental ability. Selective Service officials admitted that the deferment test favored math and science students over those in the liberal arts. Most black colleges at that time, emphasized neither the sciences nor the liberal arts, however: they trained students in technical and trade skills, which were not included in the deferment test at all. The Armed Forces also overlooked the racial, cultural, and economic discrimination which existed within the educational system—discriminatory practices which restricted black students from schools and programs which specialized in the academic subjects privileged by the exams. [Carper : 76]

48   *Ibid.*: 89.

49   *Ibid.*: 77.

50   Binkin: 89.

51   Carper: 47.

52   Report of the National Advisory Commission: 156.

53   *Ibid.*: 9.

54   Carper: 92.

55   Report of the National Advisory Commission: 25.

56   *Ibid.*: 75.

57   Carper: 107.

58   Clyde Taylor, ed. *Vietnam and Black America: An Anthology of Protest and Resistance* (Garden City, NY: Anchor) 1973: 49.

59   Clyde Taylor's *Vietnam and Black America* contains a collection of essays by noted civil rights leaders which detail the decisions of some movement leaders, and many movement followers to oppose Vietnam War policies. Reasons for protest range from a concern with the future of black Americans, to a concern with national and international policy.

60   *Ibid.*: 278.

61   The President's Task Force: 1.

62   *Ibid.*

63   *Ibid.*

64   *Ibid.*: 18.

65   *Ibid.*: 15.

66   *Ibid.*: 21.

67   *Ibid.*: 1.

68   *Ibid.*: appendix. One statistic shows that, although the average black rejectee had 10 years of schooling, and the average white rejectee had eight years, white rejectees earned 40% more than their black peers.

69   *bid.*: A-1.

70   *Ibid.*: 21.

71   *Ibid.*: A-1.

72   Report of the National Advisory Committee: 7.

73   The inclusion of the "moral" category in these figures demonstrates an interesting phenomenon: an overwhelming number of black men were rejected on the basis of mental or moral inadequacy. The rate of black disqualification for physical reasons was actually lower than the regular national average. [Report of the National Advisory Committee: 22]

74   *Ibid.*: 207.

75   *Ibid.*: 22.

76   *Ibid*: 58.

77   Carper: 150.

78   Baskir: 124.

79   Albert G. Glass, et al., "The Current Status of Army Psychiatry," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 117: 8 (February 1961): 682.

80   *Ibid.*: 679.

81   Carper: 150.

82   *Ibid.*: 39.

83   Figley: 348.

84   Baskir: 129.

85   Figley: 348.

86   Starr: 194.

87   Rainwater: 51.

Soldados Razos: Issues of Race in Vietnam War Drama

David J. DeRose

In *Vietnam Campesino*, Luis Valdez's 1970 agitprop play, a white militarist, satirically named General Defense, rounds up young Chicano laborers to fight in Vietnam. He is assisted by his allegorical henchman, "El Draft," a tall figure with a death's mask, shrouded in an American flag. "What's the matter with you, Draft," the General scolds, "Haven't I told you to stick to the minorities?"[1] Despite his reprimand, the General does not appear to need much help from El Draft. As he tells one wealthy white father, "Mexicans are pouring into the army." "We just give 'em a pretty little uniform, a few pesos, a blessing from mamacita, and wham-o, they're on the frontlines. Those boys are dying to show their machismo."[2] Many American racial minorities, blacks and Asians, as well as Latinos, joined the armed forces during the Vietnam war in hopes of gaining the respect of their cultural community, of escaping a life of poverty, or of proving their mettle to themselves and to "the Man". They joined the armed forces to become—like the titular hero of another Valdez play—*soldados rasos.*

Soldado raso is the Spanish equivalent of our own "buck private". But with not so much as a slip of the tongue, *raso* becomes *razo* and "buck private" becomes a "soldier of the race". Minority draftees of the Vietnam era learned quickly that they were indeed *soldados razos,* involved in a race war with the white society which sent them to Vietnam.

There is a significant body of dramatic literature on the Vietnam war which is rarely mentioned in scholarly essays. Written by blacks, a few whites, Chicanos, Asians, and Puerto Rican nationals, these plays portray a wide spectrum of minority experience, from the pre-war enthusiasm of blacks for a newly integrated military, to the race riots in Vietnam's Long Binh Jail, to the betrayal felt by minority veterans returning to find that the country for which they fought still had no place for them. They explore in microcosm the inequities experienced by America's racial minorities fighting in Vietnam.

Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play,* written in 1981, but portraying the lives of black soldiers in 1944, serves as a history lesson in

minority attitudes toward the military. In World War 2, the American armed forces were still segregated, but the military was nevertheless seen by blacks as a place where they could work their way into a position of some rank. In *A Soldier's Play*, Sgt. Vernon C. Waters, a black career soldier and hard-line integrationist, looks upon the war as an opportunity for blacks to prove themselves. "When this war's over, things are going to change," he comments. "The First War, it didn't change much for us, boy—but this one—it's gonna change a lot of things."[3] Waters is referring to the opportunity that blacks (albeit only a few) would have in World War 2 to form and fight in combat units. "We are men—soldiers," Waters declares, "and I don't intend to have our race cheated out of its place of honor and respect in this war."[4]

Attitudes like Waters'—that the military offered blacks greater career opportunities than the civilian job market—persisted through the 1950s and into the 1960s. A 1968 *New York Times* article on blacks in the military reported that many black soldiers reenlisted because civilian employers back home offered "only 'colored' jobs...where whites did the same work for higher pay."[5] In August Wilson's play *Fences* (1986), an unemployed black musician advises his younger brother to "Stick with Uncle Sam and retire early. Ain't nothing out here."[6] The unspoken irony of these lines from the final scene of Wilson's play is that the year is 1965, and the young man, a corporal in the Marine Corps, will undoubtably be called upon to serve in Vietnam.

Although President Harry Truman ordered the military services desegregated in 1948, blacks in the Korean war still fought in all-black units or in non-combat positions. Vietnam was, thus, the first war in which all areas of military service, including combat positions, were fully integrated. "For the first time in the nation's military history," *Time Magazine* proudly reported in a cover story from 1967, "its Negro fighting men are fully integrated in combat, fruitfully employed in positions of leadership, and fiercely proud of their performance."[7] Wallace Terry, Jr., then a junior correspondent for *Time*, is reported as saying, "I have observed here the most successfully integrated institution in America."[8] The war in Vietnam was seen by many blacks as a great opportunity; according to *Time*, the black soldier in Vietnam "fights for the dignity of the Negro, to shatter the stereotype of racial inferiority."[9]

Young Latinos also seemed eager to serve their country as a matter of racial and communal pride. In Ruben Sierra's play *Manolo* (1976), about an Latino Vietnam vet turned drug addict, the unfortunate protagonist recalls how he brought a halt to his anti-establishment protests and enlisted in the Army because he believed his racial

community expected it of him and would never accept him as a community leader if he refused to fight in Vietnam. In Valdez's *Soldado Razo*, Johnny, a young Chicano leaving for Vietnam, is viewed with admiration and envy by family and friends. Johnny's girlfriend dreams of marrying her man in uniform. Her parents loan Johnny their family car since "he's more responsible now that he's in the service."[10] Johnny's father is proud because his son has become "a man". He looks upon the uniform as a sign of success, and hopes Johnny's younger brother will follow in his footsteps. Johnny's brother is envious of the attention and wishes he were old enough to enlist. Johnny basks in his family's regard. His own thoughts echo his father's: "*Ahora si,* I'm a man!" He naively fantasizes about proving himself to the people of the barrio:

> Maybe they'll feel different when I come back from Nam. Simon *el War Veteran!* Maybe I'll get wounded and come back *con un chigatal de* medals. I wonder how the *vatos* around here are going to think about that?... I might even get killed. If I do, they'll bring me back here in a box, covered with the flag...military funeral like they gave Pete Gomez...everybody crying...[11].

Johnny, of course, receives what he has foolishly wished for. He is killed in Vietnam, as are all the Chicano soldiers in Valdez's three antiwar plays.

Muerte, the figure of Death who serves as a narrator in *Soldado Razo*, confirms that Johnny got the funeral he wanted: "Military coffin, *muchas flores*, American flag, *mujeres llorando*, and a trumpet playing taps with a rifle salute at the end."[12] Muerte knows that he can depend on the Chicano community to continue sending its brave and foolish young men to fight and die for a false dream of glory and the self-perpetuating stereotype of the Latino male as noble warrior. In Valdez's *The Dark Root of a Scream* (1967), a Chicano mother collects her third posthumous Medal of Honor, having lost sons in World War 2, Korea, and Vietnam. The barrio priest assures her that her son has sacrificed himself for the sacred Christian cause of democracy. The local barrio youths, envious of the admiration inspired by the dead soldier, wonder if they, too, should enlist.

Only Johnny, in *Soldado Razo*, sees the waste of his race's brave young men. He writes to his mother from Vietnam, asking her to tell his friends what the war is really about. But the letter is never finished. Muerte, who must continue to exploit the naive and heroic attitudes of the barrio youths, guns Johnny down with a knowing smile.

By 1968, returning veterans were rapidly dispelling any

romantic attitudes that minorities might have had about the glory of proving their worth in the American military. Instead of being viewed as a great opportunity, the military came to be seen as a last resort for unemployed and untrained minority youths in a country which offered them few means of advancement. "It's an awful indictment of America," a soldier in the *New York Times* was reported to say, "that many young Negroes must go into the military for fulfillment, for status—and that they prefer service overseas to their homeland."[13] To a new generation of black soldiers, equal opportunity for status became far too great an opportunity for death. This change in attitude is dramatically embodied in white dramatist Jonathan Greenberg's *Casualties* (1987). A black career officer argues that "We forced them to integrate the service! We were at the *forefront* of the civil rights movement!" But his arguments are countered by the ghost of a black grunt, killed in combat, who sneers at him, "you're proud...cuz they integrated the fuckin *cemetery*. Yeah, that's your 'victory'. We all get wasted now."[14]

When statistics on the racial make-up of combat troops and casualties began to appear, it became clear that minorities—especially blacks—were taking on more than their fair share of the war. In 1965, for instance, 23.5% of all Army enlisted men killed in action were black.[15] By 1968, blacks accounted for 9.8% of the military forces in Vietnam, but in combat units, that figure rose to 20%, and even 25% in such elite units as the paratroopers.[16] In 1970, black combat deaths were "running about one-third above the proportion of blacks stationed in Southeast Asia."[17] Casualty rates for Spanish surnamed soldiers were also disproportionately high.[18]

At first the disproportionate number of blacks in combat units and subsequent combat deaths were viewed as the result of blacks volunteering for elite units as a means of gaining status. In 1967, National Urban League president, Whitney Young Jr., reported that:

> The reason for the high rate of negro combat deaths lies in the simple fact that a higher proportion of negroes volunteer for hazardous duty. They do so not for the money—which doesn't begin to justify the risk—but more from a desire to prove to themselves and to their white colleagues that they are men capable of as much skill, courage, and sacrifice as any man alive.[19]

While Young's statement might have been true of blacks who served in Vietnam before 1967, by the time these sentiments were quoted in *Harper's*, a military program had been implemented which would send more and more impoverished and unwilling minority draftees into combat positions in Vietnam.

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's Project 100,000 was intended, according to its creators, to make more men eligible for military service by reducing the mental and physical aptitude standards of the armed forces. McNamara claimed that the program would give America's poor an opportunity to serve their country and "an opportunity to return to civilian life with skills and aptitudes which for them and their families [would] reverse the downward spiral of decay."[20] In fact, while Project 100,000 lowered admission standards, it did not lower similar prerequisites for special training in technical positions within the military. The end result was that approximately 40 percent of the one hundred thousand "New Standards Men" being accepted for military duty each year were used as combat troops.[21] Few gained the skills and aptitudes promised by McNamara. And since Project 100,000 reduced standards for draftees as well as enlistees, the draft was able to dig deeper into ghetto communities and rural areas of the deep South to fill combat units with the poor and underprivileged while continuing to give educational deferments to college students. Later figures confirmed that 41% of all Project 100,000 men were black.[22]

In a 1970 article for *The Black Scholar*, Wallace Terry Jr. describes a dramatic reversal in black attitudes toward the military and the Vietnam war. Unlike his 1967 *Time* report, which proclaimed the successful integration of the military, his *Black Scholar* essay confirmed that blacks had begun to view the military as a deadly extension of civilian discrimination. "Among all black enlisted men surveyed," Terry notes, "nearly half believe that blacks were assigned more dangerous duty than whites. Even some whites agree." One white sergeant told Terry that "you honestly have to say that the black man in our brigade...has almost no chance of getting a support job."[23] Terry also contradicts the 1967 claim made by Whitney Young Jr. that blacks in Vietnam were the "cream of the crop of the Negro community."[24] Terry declared that some of the so-called "volunteers" he spoke with had either enlisted to avoid the draft, or were escaping jail terms— often for arrests made during ghetto uprisings.[25]

One such ghetto dweller is portrayed in white veteran David Rabe's *Streamers* (1976). Carlyle is a black draftee; uneducated and unskilled, he knows he has been written off as cannon fodder by the military. "You got it made," he tells three other draftees, all with clerical skills and special assignments. "I don't got it made."

> You got jobs they probably ain't ever gonna ship you out, you got so important jobs. I got no job. They don't even wanna give me a job. I know it. They are gonna kill me. They are gonna send me over there to get me killed, goddammit....

> I don't wanna be no DEAD man. I don't wanna be the one they
> all thinkin' is so stupid he's the only one'll go, they tell him;
> they don't even give him a job. I got thoughts, man, in my
> head; alla time burnin', burnin' thoughts a understandin'.[26]

Carlyle's fatal sentiments are an accurate reflection of the feelings of blacks interviewed by Terry in Vietnam. Terry quotes one black paratrooper as he prepared to jump into the Ashau Valley: "I was a dead man when they told me I was going to Vietnam.... I have nothing to lose here or back home. The white man has told me to die."[27] The promise of a military organization where "the only color is olive drab" had proven hollow.

The outrage of blacks in Vietnam reached crescendo pitch in 1968. The Tet Offensive in January of that year meant an escalation in fighting and thus in drafting new combat troops—a disproportionate number of whom were black. The assassination of Martin Luther King in April 1968 brought out the ugliest side of white racism in Vietnam, and sent blacks into paroxysms of violence. In the wake of King's murder, whites burned crosses at Cam Ranh Bay and flew Confederate flags over bases at Da Nang.[28] Rumors spread among both black and white soldiers that an all-out race war was underway back in the States.

Blacks in large numbers were questioning their participation in the Vietnam war. Many draftees of this period had spoken with returning veterans about conditions in Vietnam. Others were witnesses to, and often participants in, the racial violence of stateside civil rights battles and ghetto riots. These men had very little desire to fight or die for a country which had declared war on them. In a *New York Times* article from July 1968, black veterans expressed a growing opposition to the war. "We shouldn't fight for this country until it's worth fighting for," declared one black vet. "The rights we fought for [for] somebody else just don't exist for us," says another.[29] These sentiments are echoed by the character Carlyle in *Streamers*, who declares that "It ain't our war nohow because it ain't our country."[30]

Vietnam became the first war in American history in which black national leaders did not urge black youths "to take up arms in support of American policy to improve the lot of the black man in the United States."[31] Before his death, Martin Luther King Jr. was one of several black leaders to condemn the presence of blacks in Vietnam. His speech in New York City's Riverside Church in April of 1967 proclaimed:

> We are taking the young black men who have been crippled
> by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to

> guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not
> found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have
> been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro
> and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for
> a nation that has been unable to seat them together at the
> same school.[32]

Blacks stationed in Vietnam were at first confused and frustrated when leaders as ideologically dissimilar as Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King Jr. labeled Vietnam a race war and encouraged blacks not to fight. But many black soldiers soon saw the sense in the arguments of American black leaders, and adopted an antiwar stance. At the time of King's murder in 1968, he was held in high esteem by black GIs, as were other antiwar black activists such as Carmichael, Cassius Clay, and Julian Bond.[33] Black GIs began to view the war as an example of the oppression of a nonwhite people by the white American establishment. Stated one black veteran: "We're not fighting for the freedom of the Vietnamese, but rather to oppress them. The Vietnamese are fighting for self-determination the same as black people here." Another veteran concluded that "We [are doing] to the yellow people what whites do to us."[34]

Other racial communities whose young men were fighting in the American military expressed similar emotions. In Jaime Carrero's play *"Flag Inside"* (1966), a Puerto Rican family laments the loss of their son in a war waged by imperialist America against a small nonwhite nation much like their own. In *Honey Bucket* (1976), Filipino veteran and playwright Melvyn Escueta examines what it meant to be "a gook killing gooks."[35] His young Filipino hero, Andy, is haunted by images of Vietnamese peasants who, noting his Asian features, tell him "same-same, Viet-Me." At first Andy rejects his connection to these people, but eventually he finds that "We were cousins under the skin." When a white lieutenant is disgusted by the "crap" in an old woman's mouth, Andy impatiently explains that she is chewing betel nuts and that his grandparents "chew that 'crap'." On another occasion, he shares a bowl of rice and *nuoc mom* (fish sauce) with a Vietnamese girl, trying to explain to her that it is much like the Filipino dish *bagoong*. The smell, he says, "reminds me of home." When two white soldiers enter the scene, they complain about the stench, commenting that the fermented fish smells like "something crawled up somebody's ass and died." Andy's anger about such slurs against Asians is so great that five years after his return from Vietnam, he still cannot help but feel that in America "anyone not white is a gook."

Luis Valdez expresses much the same sentiment on behalf of the Chicano community with *Vietnam Campesino* (1970) in which

Chicano *campesinos* (farmworkers) are shown the similarities between their plight and that of farmers in Vietnam. Valdez depicts both the migrant *campesinos*, and the Vietnamese peasants as simple agrarians who wish to escape a capitalist society in which their lives are controlled by wealthy landowners.   Several parallels are drawn between the two groups and their relationship to the American capitalist establishment.   The *campesinos* wish to unionize; the Vietnamese wish to socialize. In both instances, white Americans in power encourage the farmers to ignore their own leaders (Ho Chi Minh and Ceasar Chavez) and support puppet leaders backed by the American government and wealthy capitalists. Valdez compares the actions of agrobusiness executives who order pesticide spraying while farmworkers are still in the fields to the actions of US government officials who order soldiers to bomb Vietnamese villagers. (Ironically, Valdez was unaware of the fact that both Chicanos and Vietnamese were being drenched with Agent Orange at that time.)

The Vietnamese Communist Party was quick to capitalize on the racial ambiguity of the US government's foreign and domestic policy stance.   According to Whitney Young, "one of the favorite propaganda exercises of the Vietcong is to drop leaflets explaining the race issue to the American Negro. These thoughtfully remind the Negro troops of their own period of slavery and ask for what purposes they are in Vietnam helping the whites oppress a colored people."[36] As one veteran tells, blacks quickly got the feeling that they had been "seduced and abandoned by the man."[37]

Three plays by black veterans, set in-country during the peak of racial tensions in 1968, dramatize the anger and the frustration of black soldiers who consider themselves patriotic Americans, but who find themselves at odds with the society for which they are fighting. Fred Gamel's *Wasted* (1984) involves a fragging plot on the night that troops in Vietnam learn of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Charles Michael Moore's *The Hooch* (1978) takes place several weeks after King's death, as inter-racial tension between bunkmates builds toward violence.   Jamal's *LBJ* (1986) recreates one of the most infamous prison riots in Army history in which 200 black inmates gained control of Long Binh Jail and injured scores of white prisoners.

In all three plays, black moderates are torn between a moral vision of racial tolerance and an emotional bond with their militant brothers. In *Wasted*, a black sergeant named Bassett must decide whether or not he will conceal a plot by one of his men to frag a white "nigger-hating" sergeant in symbolic retaliation for the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. In a climactic scene, Bassett vents the frustration of a moral man and a loyal citizen fighting in a war he knows is no longer

his own:

> What's supposed to be eating me...a leader of my people gets wasted in the land of the PX, nobody even sends word of it to us at the firebase...we get a deadhead nigger-hater for a platoon sergeant.... I'm fighting a war for a country where I'm a second-class citizen...and I'm supposed to sail on like nothing's ever been wrong in my life.[38]

Although Bassett remains reluctant to halt the fragging of a white racist, he must eventually shoot a black soldier to end the escalating tension on the base camp.

Charles Michael Moore's *The Hooch* is also set within a basecamp tense over racial issues, where black grunts guard a military radar unit controlled by white technicians. The symbolic significance of this hierarchy is unveiled late in the play when a black soldier discovers that the equipment on the hill, which the whites have carefully hidden and which the blacks are expected to give their lives to protect, is a worthless invention which has never worked and which the white technicians do not know how to repair. The radar unit on the hill, like America's involvement in Vietnam, is unveiled as a white man's cause, and a worthless one at that, for which blacks are expected to die.

The black soldier who discovers this folly is a radar specialist— the first black to hold such a position on this base. His name is Corporal Promus (i.e., Promise), and he is a redemptive figure of high moral fortitude, racial tolerance, and intelligence. In revealing the false god on the hill, he manages to disarm the aggression building between blacks and whites in camp. His philosophy is a simple one: "What goes around, comes around." He convinces a fellow black soldier not to sink to the level of the white racists by shooting a white corporal who they believe has killed one of the black grunts.

In Jamal's *LBJ*, an unlikely inter-racial trio of prisoners band together in the face of certain death by rampaging black inmates. Wade is a level-headed but independent-minded black who has made an enemy of Big Man, the dangerous leader of the rioters. Wade is forced to share a hiding place with Chacon, a Chicano who is generally friendly with neither whites nor blacks, and Christopherson, a white pacifist. These three are trapped together inside Long Binh Jail during the race riots of 1968. By calling an end to their petty differences and combining forces, they defeat Big Man and his murderous cohort, Weasel. The message, as in *The Hooch* and *Wasted*, is one of inter-racial solidarity and tolerance as an alternative to white or black extremism.

Juxtaposed against the moderate protagonists in all three of these plays are black militants who find themselves driven to acts of violence against whites by a system which refuses to recognize their rights. "They make you prove it to them, Bro," Chacon laments in *LBJ*. "They hate to give you your respect."[39] In *Wasted*, the hot-headed Spider Evans, who joined the military in lieu of a prison sentence for assault, plots against the white sergeant who has made his distaste for blacks well known. In *The Hooch*, short-timer Horus Brown plans to kill a white soldier who he believes has murdered one of his men. Brown looks upon relationships with whites in terms of war. He tells Promus he wants blacks to "infiltrate" all areas of white military duty because, in his words, "this is war."[40] His white counterpart, Seebold, believes that the army is training blacks to kill whites. "These people are at war with us," he tells another white technician.

These images of races at war accurately reflect the conditions in Vietnam as described by numerous veterans in interviews between 1968 and 1973.[41] Some veterans expressed the concern that blacks in Vietnam saw the real war as one they would fight, with their new and deadly skills, on the streets of America. "The big question," one black GI told the *New York Times*, "is whether the black cat can walk like a dragon here in South Vietnam and like a fairy back in the land of the big PX."[42] In *LBJ*, Big Man claims that the war "has been giving the real brothers the experience they'll need when they get back home."

> Vietnam is giving me an education: a chance to learn about life. Ain't my fault the man turned loose the beast over here. You, me, Weasel and 500,000 more. He thought he would ride the back of this beast making it do his killing, blindly, obediently. And he's been riding it into the ground. But... then he forgot something...one day he had to get off that beast's back and when he does...[laughs] The beast would still be hungry and the man would be devoured.

Wallace Terry, Jr. notes, as does Thomas Johnson in the *New York Times*, that black militant groups were not uncommon in Vietnam. The Black Panthers, the JuJus, the MauMaus, and the Zulu 1200s were all represented. "I dig the militant brothers," one black soldier told Terry. "Non-violence didn't do anything but get Martin Luther King killed."[43]

Many black veterans returned from Vietnam to communities where the rate of unemployment for blacks was "at least three times the national average" and where the unemployment rate for blacks between 20 and 25 (the age of most veterans) "was likely to be eight or nine times the national average."[44] In the words of playwright Tom

Cole's Medal of Honor winner, DJ, the average black veteran became "just another invisible Nigger, waiting on line and getting shit on just for being there."[45] Many black vets, like Spec 4 Anthony Brazil in Stephen Mack Jones' *Back in the World* (1984), found that Vietnam had trained them for one job only:

> So here I am, right? At home. Back in Indianapolis. Back in the world. If you can call Indianapolis "the world." And all I'm trained to do is kill. Twenty years old now and that's all I know how to do. Not exactly the kind of thing you put on a resume....
>
> Two months later, I re-up. Four months, I'm back in the 'Nam. Don't need no resume. No references.[46]

Combat veterans could expect to be pressured about reenlistment while still in Vietnam, or approached back in the States by National Guard or State Police forces who hoped to use them as riot control troops. Although many veterans accepted service with these organizations, the outcome was often further racial confrontation. Wallace Terry, Jr. cites at least one instance in which 43 black soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas, refused an assignment at the Democratic National Convention for fear of being ordered to battle the black youth of Chicago.[47]

Black vets were also solicited by militant groups eager to capitalize on their battle training and their escalating resentment of white America. In 1968, Bobby Seale said veterans had been steadily joining the ranks of the Oakland Black Panthers; that same year, Clarence Guthrie of the Zulu 1200s estimated that about one-third of his members were vets. The majority of black vets interviewed by the *New York Times* said they were opposed to the war. Many said they would never fight for the United States again. One black vet expressed the intensity of the rage felt by many of his brothers: "I find myself hating this [white] man so much that [Uncle] Sam couldn't kill me, melt me, or pour me back into the Army or back into the Nam."[48] Despite such sentiments, there were only scattered incidences of "insane veterans' militancy" in the wake of the war, and most of the violence came, not from black veterans, but from right-wing white mercenaries and KKK veterans.[49]

Two plays, both by non-veterans, directly address the helplessness, rage and resentment experienced by black veterans upon their return to civilian life. Black playwright Adrienne Kennedy's *An Evening with Dead Essex* (1973) and Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag* (1975) are both based on true stories of black veterans who met with violent ends after their return to the United States.

Kennedy's play recounts the death of 23-year-old Mark Essex

in January 1973. Firing his high-powered rifle from the roof of a New Orleans Howard Johnson, Essex carried on a 32 hour shooting spree in which seven people were killed and 21 others wounded. He was eventually overcome by 40 police sharpshooters and a military helicopter; over 100 bullets were found in his body.

In what amounts to more of a memorial service or documentary than a conventional drama, *An Evening with Dead Essex* attempts to reach a sympathetic understanding of the events which led a young black man of highly spiritual upbringing to randomly gun down passers-by from the roof of a hotel. A company of black actors use quotations from Essex's family and friends, stories of his youth and his military service, pictures from his life and from the day of his death, and fabricated testimony to summon the spirit of dead Essex.

Essex is revealed as an innocent Kansas youth, deeply religious, who believed in the benevolence of his white neighbors and in the goodness of God and country. While serving in the Navy, Essex's profound faith was shattered by the cruel bigotry of the white military hierarchy. Kennedy's play relates how Essex comes to believe that white men are his enemy, that America is the white man's country, and that Christianity is a "white man's religion." According to Kennedy, it is the subversion of Essex's faith which makes him pursue, with religious zeal, the destruction of the society which has brutally betrayed him.

Although Essex served in San Diego, not Vietnam, his death is presented by Kennedy (as it was viewed by the American press in 1973) as an emblem of the brutality which the Vietnam war had brought to America's streets. Kennedy illustrates the militarization of civilian culture with two news clippings, recited in sequence by an actor:

> 1972—B-52 bombers made their biggest raid on the Vietnam war demilitarized zone to date dropping nearly 200 tons of bombs. 1973—at 9:25PM the helicopters lumbered past again.
> [Pause]
> When the sharpshooters opened fire, a slight figure, rifle in hand, bolted into the open. Trapped in a withering crossfire between the helicopter overhead and marksmen in two adjacent buildings, Jimmy Essex was literally ripped apart by at least a hundred bullets. The police kept firing even after he went down, his body twitching with the impact of each slug and his rifle shattered beside him.[50]

Because the actor finishes the first quotation and begins reading the second before pausing, the distinction between the two events—the

bombing in Vietnam and the violent death in New Orleans—is blurred. As one of the actors comments, the two events "very much continue into each other"[51] and the war in Vietnam becomes indistinguishable from the violence on America's streets.

Elsewhere in the play, one of the actors speaks with shocking directness on the significance of Mark Essex's death to the black community. He speaks for a generation of black veterans, many of whom feel betrayed by their country, and who see Essex as a spokesman and a martyr:

> About a year ago five of us ex-G.I.s were arrested.... They said we had a plot to kill all white people. We didn't. But we did meet in the cellar almost every day and talk, just talk. We wished we had a plot to kill white people—we had a lot to say to each other—about our confusion about the deep racial significance of the war between the U.S. and Viet Nam, white against non-white—about our joblessness—we did *want* to *kill* but we had no plot—we had a lot to say and we still have a lot to say—about Mark Essex—to us he is a hero—we believe he was carrying a banner—we believe he saw himself as a soldier of mercy—we have a lot to say about dead Essex.[52]

While few would readily recognize a sniper, randomly firing at pedestrians, as either victim or martyr, Adrienne Kennedy's play draws attention to the tragic stature of the "slight figure" on the roof. She successfully creates a documentary image of an innocent young man from Kansas who enters the Navy in order to serve his God and his country, and who is transformed into a genocidal killer by the bigotry and racial hatred he finds there.

Mark Essex's acts of violence and racial hatred may have made him an unlikely subject for sympathetic dramatic portrayal. By contrast, Dwight Johnson, fictionally characterized as DJ in Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag*, immediately captured the sympathy of the American public in 1971 when he was shot to death while robbing a grocery store in his home town of Detroit. Unlike Essex, who chose violence to express his personal sense of rage, Johnson ran from the rage he had found within himself in Vietnam.

Johnson returns from Vietnam to find he is unemployable. Trained to kill, he feels roughly discarded after his service to his country. As recounted in the play, DJ's tour of duty in Vietnam ends suddenly and dramatically with a firefight in which he single-handedly wipes out an entire North Vietnamese unit after witnessing the deaths of his closest friends. In a mortal frenzy, DJ is dragged from the scene

of the battle and tranquilized. Within 48 hours, he is on a plane headed for Detroit with a medical discharge. Several months later, two MPs suddenly appear at DJ's door and question his mother about his activities. He is asked to take another sudden plane ride, this time from the Detroit ghetto he calls home to the White House, where he is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. DJ expresses the bitter irony of his country's treatment of him: "Yesterday afternoon for all they knew I was a junkie on the streets, today the President of the United States can't wait to see me...."[53] The country that exploits his services as a trained killer, then throws him back into the ghetto, now needs him again. DJ becomes the token black hero at an awards ceremony conceived of by the Johnson administration to counteract the war's bad press.

Despite the obvious status and social mobility which the medal offers DJ, he cannot help but see it as a reward for acts of violence which he considers heinous. "I got that medal," he tells his psychiatrist, "because I went totally out of my fucking skull and killed everything in sight."[54] He fears that he may again lose control of himself and repeat his violence in his home town. "Man, if I lose my cool again—just, freak out," DJ asks, "what's to stop me from going up and down the streets of Detroit killing everything I see?"[55] Though DJ feels that the medal brands him as a crazed killer, he cannot reject it without disgracing his family, his community, and the black race. The prestige which accompanies the medal reflects not only on DJ, but on the community at large:

> I am an authentic hero, a showpiece. One look at me, enlistments go up two hundred percent.... I am a credit to my race. Did you know that? I am an honor to the city of Detroit, to say nothing of the state of Michigan, of which I am the only living Medal of Honor winner! I am a feather in the cap of the army, a flower in the lapel of the military.[56]

In need of someone to pass judgement on him, DJ enters a grocery store in a white section of Detroit. He has a pistol, but never fires it as the white cashier pulls his gun from behind the counter and shoots him repeatedly. In the words of the real Dwight Johnson's mother, he "tired of this life and needed someone else to pull the trigger."[57]

Medal of Honor Rag and *An Evening with Dead Essex* were written at a time when the Vietnam war was still a gaping wound in the lives of most veterans. In the early 1970s, the vast majority of vets did not dare to speak of their war experiences, let alone express their confusion and hatred on the stage. Among veterans of this period, only David Rabe chose the stage as a means of openly venting his anger. His

vitriolic anti-American plays, *Sticks and Bones* and *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, raised great controversy and resentment when they were produced in 1971, alienating far more people than they converted. But Rabe was the exception, and several years passed before other veterans took to the stage.

Of the veteran plays discussed in this essay, Sierra's *Manolo* and Escueta's *Honey Bucket* (both produced regionally in 1976) were the first to appear. These works portray Vietnam veterans who survive the war only to self-destruct after returning to their homes. *Manolo* is a crime-world melodrama in which a Latino soldier returns unscratched from Vietnam only to find that his mother has died in his absence and that his little brother has been stabbed to death by a neighborhood pusher. Manolo dies taking his revenge on the pusher who would never have come to power in his neighborhood if Manolo had not been sent to Vietnam. Andy, the veteran protagonist in Escueta's *Honey Bucket*, finds his recurrent flashbacks of Vietnam far more vivid than his real life. He is haunted throughout the play by the ghosts of his friends who died in battle. At the end of *Honey Bucket*, Andy, alienated from his wife and family, speeds out of control on his motorcycle while his dead companions encourage his suicide with screams of "Come on home," and "You're better off with your buddies." Both Escueta and Sierra make it clear that death could seem the only way out for troubled minority veterans of this period.

Plays by black veterans from the late 1970s and into the 1980s still express the anger and despair of the immediate postwar years. But the sense of hopelessness and of hatred, directed both at whites and inward at the self, has evolved in these plays into a positive, sometimes therapeutic energy. *The Hooch, Wasted,* and *LBJ* advance the portrait of a protagonist who transcends the racial hatred of his companions, black and white, and offers hope of tolerance and racial harmony. The placement of this type of character at the heart of these plays suggest that veteran playwrights are attempting to instill their Vietnam experience with a sense of redemption in order to leave behind their lingering rage.

The evolution of Escueta's *Honey Bucket* offers an excellent example of the conversion of anger and hopelessness into therapeutic regeneration. After the first production in 1976, Escueta frequently revised the play until in 1982, having determined that isolation and death were not the only way out for his veteran protagonist, Escueta rewrote the final scene so that Andy lives. Instead of urging Andy toward suicide, the ghosts of his dead comrades cease to haunt him, granting him permission to start living again. The play in its revised form still contains a strong message about a Filipino veteran's anger at America's treatment of minorities, but *Honey Bucket* is now

therapeutic rather than destructive. Instead of promoting the image of an inevitable dead-end, the play speaks of a veteran making the long mental journey back to the World.

That same therapeutic journey and re-emergence can be found in Jones's *Back in the World* (1988). In a series of monologues, much like a veterans' rap session, five black vets tell their stories in turn while the others listen and occasionally comment. Some part of each of these characters is still trapped in Vietnam. Among them are the man who refuses to believe the war is over, insisting it could still be won if ignorant liberals would not interfere; the soldier who searches photographs of Saigon for the Vietnamese wife and child he was forced to leave behind; and, the exile who lives in Belgium with his white wife and his children. In each of these characters, one can sense a powerful desire to "come home". Sharing their stories, they help each other approach that end. A letter from a stateside friend (a disabled veteran), read by the exile, expresses this common desire: "I wish to God you'd save me some postage and come home. For better or worse, America is home, James. And if you can't stand proud at home, it's hard to do it anywhere else in the world."

While the individual monologues all conclude on a similar note of longed-for homecoming and healing, the play is open-ended. The final lines are spoken by the one character who will never be able to return to the World. He is a homeless veteran, known only as The Man, who is first seen curled up with his radio in an alley. He lives on the edge, struggling each day with the flashbacks that send him screaming for cover. He tells us that he works occasionally with "black kids off the street" at a local community center: "Trying to help 'um, you know, make somethin' outta theyselves." He wants the present generation of young ghetto dwellers—a generation facing an all-time high unemployment rate for black youths[58]—to see what has happened to him, and to be sure that they never allow themselves to be swept without question into war by a government promising to reverse "the downward spiral of decay" for minorities.

The Man's message to the present generation of draft-age minorities recalls young Johnny's words to his Vietnam era friends: "Please," Johnny writes to his mother, "tell Sapo and all the *vatos* how it's like over here. Don't let them..."[59] But his warning is cut short by a bullet to the head, fired by the gleeful figure of Muerte as he sings the ballad of "*El Soldado Razo.*"

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[1]   Luis Valdez, *Vietnam Campesino,* in *Actos* (Fresno, CA: Cucaracha Press) 1971: 117. Hereafter, Valdez, *Vietnam.*
[2]   *Ibid.*: 108.

3   Charles Fuller, *A Soldier's Play* (New York: Hill & Wang) 1981: 28, 72. Hereafter, Fuller.

4   *Ibid.*: 90.

5   Thomas A. Johnson, "The US Negro in Vietnam," The *New York Times* , April 29, 1968: 16. Hereafter, *NYT*, 4/29/68.

6   August Wilson, *Fences* (New York: New American Library) 1986: 94.

7   "Democracy in the Foxhole," *Time*, May 26, 1967: 15.

8   *Ibid.*: 1

9   *Ibid.*: 15.

10   Luis Valdez, *Soldado Razo*, in *West Coast Plays 19/20* (Los Angeles: California Theatre Council) 1986: 62. Hereafter, Valdez, *Soldado*.

11   *Ibid.*: 56.

12   *Ibid.*

13   *NYT*, 4/29/68: 16.

14   All quotations from Jonathan Greenberg, *Casualties* (unpublished script) 1987. First produced February, 1987 at TheatreWorks, Palo Alto, CA.

15   Myra MacPherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday) 1984: 559. Hereafter, MacPherson.

16   *NYT*, 4/29/68: 16.

17   Wallace Terry, Jr., "Bringing the War Home," *The Black Scholar* (2:3), November 1970: 12. Hereafter, Terry.

18   MacPherson: 560.

19   Whitney M. Young, "When the Negroes in Vietnam Come Home," *Harper's*, June 1967: 66. Hereafter, Young.

20   Paul Starr, *The Discarded Army: Veterans After Vietnam* (New York: Charterhouse) 1973: 190. Hereafter, Starr.

21   MacPherson: 559.

22   MacPherson, citing a 1970 Defense Department Study: 559.

23   Terry: 12.

24   Young: 66.

25   Terry: 7.

26   David Rabe, *Streamers*, in *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War*, James Reston, ed. (New York: Theatre Communications Group) 1985: 32. Hereafter, Rabe.

27   Terry: 15.

28   *Ibid*: 11.

29   Terry: 14.

30   Rabe: 16.

31   Thomas A. Johnson, "Negro in Vietnam Uneasy about US," *New York Times*, May 1, 1968: 14. Hereafter, *NYT*, 5/1/68.

32   Quoted in Starr: 193.

33   Terry: 7.

34   Thomas A. Johnson, "Negro Veteran is Confused and Bitter," *New York Times*, July 29, 1968: 14. Hereafter, *NYT*, 7/29/68.

35   All quotations are from Melvyn Escueta, *Honey Bucket* (unpublished script in two drafts, 1976 & 1988). First produced October 1976 at the Asian American Theatre, San Francisco, CA.

36   Young: 64.

[37] *NYT*, 7/19/68: 14.

[3] Fred Gamel, *Wasted*, in *The Best Plays of 1983-1984*, Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead) 1984: 55.

[39] All quotations from Jamal, *LBJ* (unpublished script) 1968. First produced January 1986 by SEW/Lorraine Hansberry Theater at the San Francisco Repertory Theater.

[40] All quotations from Charles Michael Moore, *The Hooch* (unpublished script) 1978. First produced May 1984 at the New Federal Theater, New York City.

[41] As well as the examples cited from the *New York Times* (1968) and from Terry (1970), these attitudes are expressed in interviews with veterans in David F. Addlestone and Susan Sherer, "Battleground: Race in Viet Nam," *Civil Rights*, February 1973.

[42] *NYT*, 5/1/68: 1.

[43] Terry: 14.

[44] *NYT*, 7/29/68: 14.

[45] Tom Cole, *Medal of Honor Rag*, in *Coming to Terms: American Plays and the Vietnam War*, James Reston, ed. (New York: Theatre Communications Group) 1985: 146. Hereafter, Cole.

[46] All quotations from Stephen Mack Jones, *Back in the World* (unpublished manuscript) 1988. First produced April 1987 at the Attic Theater, Detroit. Produced in its current form October 1988 by the Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theatre Company, New York City.

[47] Terry: 10.

[48] *NYT*, 7/29/68: 14.

[49] MacPherson: 568.

[50] Adrienne Kennedy, *An Evening with Dead Essex, Theater* (9:2), Spring 1978: 71.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Ibid.*: 67-68.

[53] Cole: 142.

[54] *Ibid.*: 143.

[55] *Ibid.*: 141.

[56] *Ibid.*: 126.

[5] John Nordheimer, "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero," *New York Times*, May 26 1971: 16.

[58] MacPherson: 554.

[59] Valdez, *Soldado*: 65.

Forgotten Warriors: American Indian Servicemen in Vietnam

Tom Holm

During the Second World War, whites in the United States were presented with a new image of American Indians to contemplate and finally to accept as truth. When the United States entered the war, Native Americans seemingly flocked to the enlistment stations and draft boards, volunteering for the armed forces in numbers far out of proportion to their actual population. The poverty-stricken reservations not only provided human resources but donated money and land to the crusade against the Axis powers.[1]

From the outset of the war, the media paid a great deal of attention to the American Indian contribution. Popular magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, New Republic* and *Reader's Digest* reported with a great deal of satisfaction that American Indians were not only giving all they had to the war effort but were uniquely valuable to the military. Typical of the images conjured up of Indians was Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes' description of American Indian "inherited talents" for *Collier's* in 1944. According to Ickes, the Native American fighting man had:

> endurance, rhythm, a feeling for timing, coordination, sense perception, and an uncanny ability to get over any sort of terrain at night, and, better than all else, an enthusiasm for fighting. He takes a rough job and makes a game of it. Rigors of combat hold no terrors for him; severe discipline and hard duties do not deter him.[2]

Even the motion picture industry, perhaps the most powerful medium for creating stereotypes, began subtly to change its image of American Indians. Hollywood "horse operas" tended to glorify the American expansionist past. Indians, a non-Indian idea in the first place, were depicted as barriers to American progress. On the screen, Indians raped and pillaged without conscience. But contemporary Westerns began to portray, more and more, the "Indian companion" character who, just as he had in the war, aided whites in a crusade against injustice. War movies exploited this new image of Indians even further. Soon the steely-eyed, stoic Indian member of the All-American platoon, who was willing to die for his non-Indian comrades,

became an American cinematic cliché.[3]

The new stereotypes could only have gratified both the state elites and the larger American public. The image of Indians as loyal, brave, trustworthy fighters, dedicated to the American cause, boosted morale and validated the American sense of mission. To most Americans the war was a duel to the death between righteous democracy and facist injustice. It was a war to free the people of the world from the clutches of totalitarianism. American Indians, in throwing themselves so unflinchingly and wholeheartedly into the war effort, appeared to be seeking to share in the victory, legitimizing themselves as American citizens. Indians had been treated miserably but they were committed to the American crusade.

According to one young Columbia River tribal member who was quoted in a national magazine, even though his people had been treated badly by the United States, Hitler would be much worse: "We know that under Nazism we should have no rights at all; we should be used as slaves."[4] If an oppressed people such as the Indians sided with the United States then logically the American crusade was a just cause. Moreover, the media gave the impression that Indians were fighting in order to become assimilated into the body politic. Indians had been transformed, unlike blacks, Latinos, and Asians, into a "safe" (meaning politically reliable) minority.

In marked contrast to the World War 2 media attention given to their fathers, American Indians who fought in Vietnam have received little or no notice. American Indians, for example, have not been included in a single general study of Vietnam veterans. Regarded as an "insignificant population," Indian veterans of Vietnam were only accepted as a group worthy of mention after the passage of Senate Bill 2011, requiring the Veterans Administration: "to carry out a scientifically-valid study of PTSD....among Asian-American, American-Indian, Native-Hawaiian, other Native-American Pacific-Islander (including American Samoan Native) and Alaska Native Vietnam veterans."[5]

Despite the differences in media coverage of Indian servicemen between the two wars, there is every reason to suspect that Native American enlistment rates and numbers of draftees were relatively as high—compared to the total United States population—as those during World War 2. It has been estimated that over 42,000 American Indians served in Vietnam between 1966 and 1973.[6] This number is more than likely a tribal estimate arrived at by adding together the numbers of veterans from each of the different reservations. That being the case, the estimate might not include some American Indians from urban or non-reservation rural areas, members of tribes that are not recognized by the federal government and those people of less than one-fourth Indian blood.

There is, simply put, no way of obtaining a completely accurate count of American Indians who served in Vietnam. Enlistment and draft contracts of the period contained no "American Indian" racial category, and recruiters habitually assigned racial categories to individuals rather than asking them to what group they belonged. Consequently, Indian veterans report that they were listed as being anything from Caucasian to Mongolian to "Other". It is also very likely that a number of the people listed as Hispanic are tribal Native Americans. Many Apaches and Navajos and practically all of the Pueblos and Tohono O'odam have Spanish surnames.

Even if the number of American Indians in Vietnam is accepted to be 42,000 it is exceptionally high. During the Vietnam war the total Indian population of the United States was less than one million. American Indians thus made up at least 1.4% of all the troops sent to Vietnam, while Indians in general never constituted more than 0.6% of the total population of the US in the same time period. Approximately one out of four eligible Native Americans served, compared to one out of 12 in the general American population. In other words, Indians, like other minority groups, bore a disproportionate share of the war.[7]

The explanation for the relatively high numbers of American Indian servicemen in Southeast Asia during the war is complex. A study of 170 American Indian veterans conducted by Robin LaDue, Harold Barse, Frank Montour and myself between 1985 and 1988 reveals that not only were Indians recruited heavily, but they were often very willing to serve. The study group, although fairly small in number, was extremely responsive. It was culturally diverse, representing 77 tribes or combinations of tribes: Kiowas and Comanches from the southern plains; Cherokees, Creeks and Seminoles from the southern woodlands; Sioux and Blackfeet from the northern

TAbLE 1:
AMERICAN INdIAN VIETNAM VETERANS. REASONS fOR ENTERINC SERVICE OR ACCEPTINC CONSCRIPTION

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Too Important	Not Important At All
Financial Security	20.6%	29.4%	27.6%	22.4%
To Gain Respect from Indian People	35.3%	27.1%	17.6%	20.0%
To gain Acceptance by Non-Indians	15.3%	23.5%	25.3%	35.9%
Family Tradition	51.2%	24.1%	11.8%	12.9%
Tribal Tradition	43.5%	31.8%	12.9%	11.8%

plains; Chippewas, Sac and Fox, and Menominees from the Great Lakes; Navajos, Apaches, Tohono O'odam and Hopis from the Southwest; Colville, Shoshone from the northwest plateau; Tlinget and Haida from the northwest coast; Iroquois from New York, and Inuit from Alaska. Most were born between 1944 and 1952, and all entered the military between the ages of 17 and 21. Nearly half of them now live in urban areas, but only about one-fourth of them actually grew up in large population centers. In other words, they were representative of the demographic trends among all Indians of their age group. On the whole, their educational levels were high for American Indians, but most said that these levels were attained only after their military service.

Even though the media focused little attention on Indians during the 1960s, Native Americans were heavily recruited by the military. To the general public and to military elites, Indians were still a "safe" as well as a "martial" race. According to several participants in the study, military recruiters constantly emphasized that Indian people were natural fighters and military men. Also, American Indians were a youthful population, averaging between ages 18 and 22. Theoretically, a large portion of the Native American population were prime candidates for military service in the first place, and would have been recruited and drafted in disproportionate numbers compared to other, older groups.

Besides being recruited and conscripted in relatively large numbers, Indian males in the 1960s had their own reasons for entering the service and specifically for seeing combat in Vietnam. In general, American Indians in the United States live on reservations, in rural non-reservation areas, or in low-income sections of large metropolitan centers. The lack of employment, even during the prosperous 1960s, was marked in all three locales. During the period, a number of Indian communities in several states were involved in confrontations with whites over hunting and fishing rights and land and water disputes. Opportunity was nil, education was limited, and poverty was rampant. Military service, according to most of the Vietnam veterans who took part in the study, offered at least some degree of financial reward.

There were, in addition, some cultural and social reasons for young Indian males to make the decision to leave their home communities. Many traditional Indian communities simply have very little room for young males. Older males in these communities traditionally control the economic and religious aspects of life, while females are often the arbiters of a community's social arrangement. American Indian males between the ages of 18 and 25 are almost expected to leave the community for a period of time in order to mature and gain outside experience. Some Indian elders believe that this

situation is a holdover from the times when young men prepared for and went off to war. When young Indian males leave their home communities there is very little opportunity outside of joining the military service.[8]

Within the last seventy years, a number of tribes have built a tradition around service in the United States armed forces. This development is ironic to be sure and somewhat complex, but basically rooted in individual tribal cultures. Several members of the study group stated that they had taken part in tribal ceremonies related to warfare. Historically, some tribes had lived under the constant threat of attack by enemies and felt that unless the military dimension of life was placed in a ritual context, it might well permanently dominate all other considerations. Other tribes viewed warfare as a disruption in the natural scheme of things—a disruption great enough to cause disharmony, sickness and social disintegration. In either case, the tribes developed ceremonies to cross over the line from peace to war and back again. Warriors were ritually prepared for war and offered protective medicine to assure their safe return to the community. In addition to the rituals for war, many tribes devised purification ceremonies to restore individual warriors, as well as the community, to a harmonious state. Unless the returning warriors were purged of the trauma of battle, it was felt they might bring back memories of conflict to the tribe and seek to perpetuate patterns of behavior unacceptable to the community in its ordinary functioning. All these ceremonies were thought necessary to maintain a tribe's continued harmonious existence with its environment.[9]

Despite bureaucratic complaints and government prohibitions, many tribes maintained a variety of war-related ceremonies. In 1919, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells expressed his irritation at the fact that dances and ceremonies were being conducted among a number of tribes for the Indian soldiers who had just returned from the trenches in France.[10] Ceremonies to honor and purify Indian veterans also followed World War 2 and the Korean War, despite the widespread (and erroneous) idea that Indian soldiers would refuse to take part in "yesterday's culture."[11] The Sioux held victory ceremonies; Kiowas took part in soldier dances; Cherokees were ritually cleansed of the taint of battle by medicine men; and Navajos went through elaborate "Enemy Way" ceremonies to restore returning veterans to a harmonious place in the community.[12]

All of these ceremonies help keep intact a tribe's identity. Along with language, a sacred history and the knowledge of a specific homeland or holy land, particular ceremonies maintain group cohesion and distinction. In short, they keep alive a group's sense of peoplehood. Since most tribal societies in the United States are based on kinship, the continuity of family tradition is extremely important. An

overwhelming majority of veterans who took part in the study said that they entered the military to retain the respect of their own people and to carry on family or tribal traditions. Rather than joining the military in an attempt to become part of the American mainstream, Native Americans seemed primarily interested in remaining a distinctive people. Military service, simply put, is one thing that Indian males do.

Several tribes in the United States—the Kiowas and Comanches, the Cheyennes, and to a certain extent the Winnebagos, the Sioux and the Chippewas—have syncretized service in the American armed forces with their own tribal customs. For these tribes there are certain functions that can only be performed by veterans. At pow-wows, for example, if a dancer drops an eagle feather, it can only be retrieved by a veteran. At some tribal gatherings, veterans are still asked to "count coup", or tell a war story, before any ceremonies can begin.

There is also a certain amount of status to be gained in several Indian communities by fighting in a war. Traditionally, most tribes in the United States were gerontocracies. That is to say, elderly people took leadership roles because of their experience. Age and experience were equated, in most cases, with wisdom. Warfare was considered a life experience and, in fact, most tribal civil chiefs had good war records. War was not necessarily a positive experience but it was one that gave the participant a firsthand look at human suffering and death. As a Winnebago elder remarked before the performance of a veteran's honor song during a pow-wow in Wisconsin, "We honor our veterans for their bravery and because by seeing death on the battlefield they truly know the greatness of life."

Once in the military during the Vietnam conflict, American Indians typically were assigned to combat military occupational specialties (MOS)—infantry, airborne, tanks, artillery, gunships, Rangers, combat engineers. It has been demonstrated that recruits and inductees from the lower socioeconomic strata were more likely to be assigned to the infantry and to actually see combat. Studies made since the close of the Vietnam war indicate, in fact, that these men were twice as likely to find themselves in combat in Southeast Asia as soldiers from either the middle or upper classes.[13]   Historically, Indians were crushed by United States military might, forced to abandon many of their religious ceremonies, stripped of numerous tribal institutions, and left as one of the poorest economic groups in the nation. Low economic and educational levels (some reservations have reported unemployment rates as high as 80% and education averaging out at the eighth grade level) virtually assured that most Indians would be assigned to non-technical combat duties. Indians also seemed to have volunteered for combat assignments in relatively large numbers. Combat duty appears to have been a mark of distinction within several American Indian communities. As one

Cheyenne veteran remarked: "I'm proud of our warrior status."

The lack of media attention given to American Indian servicemen in Vietnam did not curb or in any way put an end to the old stereotypes that had followed World War 2 Indian veterans. The old stereotypes, in fact, followed American Indian fighting men into the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam. It became all too clear that many small unit commanders were still infected with the "Indian Scout Syndrome", which lasted for the duration of the war. In general, there was an idea that Indians were more attuned to nature than their fellow soldiers and were thus able to pick up signs of the enemy quickly and easily. The stereotype also included a notion that Indians were more stealthy and could utilize their senses of sight, smell, touch, and hearing better than non-Indians. These notions would seem laughable had they not forced Indian troops into some perilous duties. It was typical for Indians in Vietnam to be assigned to walk point on patrols and in large-scale troop movements.

Troops in Vietnam considered walking point extremely dangerous because the point man walked ahead of the main body of soldiers. In some units, the assignment was given to a new man who was considered expendable. In other units, point became the duty of a veteran who not only knew the enemy but the lay of the land. Generally, the danger of the position had to do with the topography or the flora in an area of operations. If a unit was moving through tall elephant grass, for example, the point man could literally walk into a concealed enemy position. He would also be in the position most vulnerable to booby traps and mines.

A number of the veterans who took part in the survey stated that they walked point more than any other member of their respective units. A Menominee from Wisconsin related that his platoon commander thought that since Indians "grew up in the woods" they should know how to track and generally "feel" when something in the immediate area of operations was disturbed or out of place. "Old Snoop and Poop" was the name given to a Cherokee marine who seemed to draw the point position more often than not. The phrase was used in the Marine Corps to designate a man who was a careful and enemy-wise scout. Another veteran, a Navajo from Arizona, concurred with the judgement that Indians had been falsely labelled, and stated that it had made the war somewhat more dangerous for him personally. He said that he was "stereotyped by the cowboys and Indian movies. Nicknamed "Chief" right away. Non-Indians claimed Indians could see through trees and hear the unhearable. Bullshit, they believed Indians could walk on water."

Along with walking point, other assignments became fairly routine for American Indians in Vietnam. The veterans involved in the study were regularly assigned to daytime outposts (OPs) and nighttime

listening posts (LPs) to take advantage of their supposed natural talents. But perhaps the most disturbing and dangerous assignment some of the men talked about was being selected as members of "killer teams." A killer team was a small patrol sent into an enemy-controlled area to conduct hit and run raids. Sometimes dressed in conical hats and Vietnamese clothing, killer teams were utilized tactically to harass enemy sympathizers and to disrupt enemy troop movements. The teams were exposed to several dangers, not the least of which was being sighted and attacked by an American or a South Vietnamese unit.

The composition of killer teams was frequently based on race. In order to penetrate enemy territory, the killer team was supposed to "look" Vietnamese. The selection of individuals for the teams narrowed, according to several veterans, to Indians, dark-skinned Latinos, Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders and lighter-skinned blacks. (Ironically, enemy-controlled areas, where the killer teams worked, were more often than not referred to as Indian Country, in obvious mimicry of the old Cavalry versus Indian films.)

American Indians performed other duties while in Vietnam. Some were truck drivers, clerks, and supply personnel. But their numbers appear to be comparatively very small considering the fact

TAblE 2:
INdiAN ViETNAM VETERANS. THE UNiTS THEy SERVEd IN

Unit	Percentage of Indians in Survey who Served in Unit
Infantry	41.8
Airborne	8.2
Artillery	82.
Air-Helicopter	7.7
Air-Fixed Wing	5.1
Tanks	4
Communications	3
Engineer/Combat	3
Medical Unit	3
Ship	3
Classified	2
Combined Action Group-Infantry	2
Gunboat	2
Intelligence	2
Military Police	1
Special Forces	1
Ranger	1
POW-Infantry	1
Seabee	1

that in all modern armies logistics and support personnel always outnumber combat troops. The following table shows the units that Indian veterans who took part in the survey had served in while in Southeast Asia.

Because of their duties and apparently high rate of infantry service, American Indians garnered a number of combat decorations and also suffered considerable casualties. The 170 members of the study group, for example, were awarded 38 decorations for personal valor. The physical cost was high, for over 30% of them were wounded in action. For the same reasons that hamper the efforts to gain an accurate count of American Indian servicemen in Vietnam, the number of Indians killed in action in Southeast Asia may never be known with certainty.

The emotional trauma of combat in Vietnam was as great as the physical cost. Stressful combat experiences were compounded by a general dissatisfaction with United States Indian policies. Native American soldiers found themselves in the ambiguous position of fighting a white man's war while the whites themselves suffered little, and at the same time white men carried out policies designed to disrupt tribal cultures and remove rights that the tribes had historically possessed. Said one veteran: "The white dudes stayed in school, you know, and we fought the war. They don't know nothing about anything except what they get out of a book. But they get the jobs..." A number of the veterans surveyed joined Indian political organizations such as the American Indian Movement and the National Indian Youth Council after their periods of service and took part in protests against federal policies and local racism directed at Indian people.

Table 3:
American Indian Vietnam Veterans. Types of Combat Experience*

Heavy	36.5%
Moderate	27.6%
Light	18.8%
None	17.1%

*Criteria used: Wounded in action, number of days in combat, close contact with enemy, seeing battle deaths, actually returning fire, etc.

Even while they were in Vietnam several of the veterans realized that the federal government's wartime policies conflicted with their own cultural training and notions of justice. One man was made painfully aware of the differences between his own tribal culture and military tactics:

We went into a ville one day after an air strike. The first body I saw in Nam was a little kid. He was burnt up—napalm—and his arms were kind of curled up. He was on his back but his arms were curled but sticking up in the air, stiff. Made me sick. It turned me around. See, in our way we're not supposed to kill women and children in battle. The old people say it's bad medicine and killing women and children doesn't prove that you're brave. It's just the opposite.

Another veteran saw striking similarities in the condition of the Vietnamese peasants and his own people "back in the World" [the US]:

We went into their country and killed them and took land that wasn't ours. Just like what the whites did to us. I helped load up ville after ville and pack it off to the resettlement area. Just like when they moved us to the rez [reservation]. We shouldn't have done that. Browns against browns. That screwed me up, you know.

Still another veteran was forced to take a hard look at the racial aspects of the war. During a search and destroy mission, this particular man was approached by one of the Vietnamese whose home had just been burned to the ground. The old farmer looked at the Indian soldier, compared their skin and hair color and said, as if confused, "You...me, same-same."

For a significant number of Indian veterans the return to the United States was not what they had expected. If they sought acceptance by the whites they were disappointed. If they had thought that service in the military would bring them opportunity,they discovered that it had only lowered their status within the American mainstream. It seemed as if American society, of which they were only a peripheral member, had sent them to war and then rejected them for actually serving. One man described his arrival back in the World with a great deal of bitterness: "We fought a white man's war, you know, and the first thing that happens when I get back is that some white kid, a girl, at the LA airport spits on me."

Given their combat experiences and their lack of acceptance by the general public, it is understandable that fully 80% of the veterans in the study admitted that after returning home they suffered from one or more of the symptoms associated with post traumatic stress and post traumatic stress disorder. Generally, the symptoms include frequent inexplicable headaches, flashbacks, depression, severe alienation, sleep intrusions, extreme nervousness, and a heightened startle response. The disorder is often manifested in antisocial behavior, chemical abuse, chronic unemployment, or the inability to maintain close personal relationships with friends or family members.[14]

TAblE 4:
AMERICAN INDIAN VIETNAM VETERANS. PTSD SYMPTOMS by %.

	Severe	Mild	None
Depression	36.5%	43.5%	20.0%
Sleep Intrusions	33.5%	42.9%	23.5%
Flashbacks	20.0%	43.5%	26.5%
Rage	38.8%	32.4%	28.8%

Despite their problems, few American Indians seem to seek help from the government. The Veterans Administration Advisory Committee on Native American Veterans (formed in 1987) found that Indian veterans underutilize VA benefits and health care services and cite several reasons:

> Underutilization is related to several geographic factors such as distance and topography; unavailability of resources including transportation; cultural values; eligibility for Indian Health Service Programs; and the lack of coordination among federal agencies, especially between the Veterans Administration and the Indian Health Service.[15]

On the other hand, a number of the veterans have sought and found relief in their own tribal ceremonies. According to a Navajo veteran: "When I got back I had a lot of trouble. My mother even called in one of our medicine men. It cost them but my folks had an "Enemy Way" done for me. It's a pretty big thing.... It snapped me out of it." In the same vein, a Kiowa veteran related:

> My people honored me as a warrior. We had a feast and my parents and grandparents thanked everyone who prayed for my safe return. We had a "special" and I remembered as we circled the drum I got a feeling of pride. I felt good inside because that's the way the Kiowa people tell you that you've done well.

Increasingly, Indians who fought in Vietnam have begun to seek support and healing among their own people.

Since the end of the Vietnam war, some attention has been focused on the representation of minority or ethnic personnel in national military services. One of the most insightful studies of minority-to-military relationships can be found in Cynthia H. Enloe's *Ethnic Soldiers* (1980). As part of a larger hypothesis, she suggests that militaries not only provide security for the horizontal *nation* against foreign enemies but are the protectors of hierarchical *state* institutions. Enloe demonstrates that state elites—those in control of the autonomous structure of public authority—normally have a clear

idea of "what pattern of interethnic relations best insures the state's survival." [16] These elites do not ignore ethnic patterns, nor do they work to ensure that the military service reflects the nation's ethnic mix. Rather, these elites judge the political reliability and military competence of different groups and assign minority troops to military occupations according to these criteria, thus assuring that politically unreliable groups are strictly controlled or unarmed.

State elites would prefer to arm minorities who have a propensity for soldiering and are politically safe. But recruiting even safe minorities for military service is a double-edged sword. Though it saves the elite from having to expend its own sons in a war, there is always the risk that the safe minority will figure out that it is being taken advantage of, and begin to turn the guns around (as did a number of black soldiers in Vietnam).[17] Additionally, such employment of ethnic forces puts the elite under a moral obligation to the minority group that suffered on the battlefield. In some cases the state recognizes the obligation, in others, it does not.

During the Vietnam era, American Indians were considered politically safe. For well over forty years they have been stereotyped as tenacious, well-disciplined, stealthy, courageous, and knowledgeable fighters. The Indian population has been relatively small and remained politically quiet until the late 1960s. In fact, between the early years of this century and the adoption of more militant political tactics—the fish-ins in Washington state (1965-1967), the occupation of Alcatraz (1969), the takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, DC (1972), and the occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota (1973)— Indians typically worked within the structure of the state (bringing court cases, lobbying, etc.) to redress their grievances. In addition, Indians had not yet adopted a supratribal political organization willing to rattle the *Status Quo* until the formation of groups like the National Indian Youth Council and the American Indian Movement. The federal government, in turn, simply focused attention on tribal governments and worked to create and image of the supratribal groups as being non-tribal and, therefore, non-Indian. By the time Indian activism reached its zenith, the war was already winding down. The late start of Indian activism and the rather easy way the federal government successfully applied divide-and-rule tactics to suppress supratribal militancy made sure that Indians continued to be a relatively safe political group.

The American state apparatus has recognized an obligation to Indian veterans, but only to a degree. Indian veterans are eligible for benefits, but as the recently formed Indian Advisory Committee to the Veterans Administration has pointed out, these benefits and services have not been utilized to any great extent. In a larger sense as well, the state obligation to Indians in general has yet to be fulfilled. The

American Indians who fought and died in Southeast Asia have been neglected and all but forgotten by the state they served.

[1]   Tom Holm, "Fighting a White Man's War: The Extent and Legacy of American Indian Participation in World War 2," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, (9) 1981: 69-81.

[2]   Harold Ickes, "Indians Have a Name for Hitler," *Collier's*, (113) 1944: 58.

[3]   Ralph & Natasha Friar, *The Only Good Indian: The Hollywood Gospel* (Drama Book Specialists) 1972: 194, 196-197.

[4]   Richard L. Neuberger, "On the Warpath," *Saturday Evening Post*, (215) 24 October 1942

[5]   US Senate, *Senate Report 100-439 to Accompany S. 2011* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office) 1988: 128.

[6]   *Talking Leaf* (2) 1973: 3.

[7]   Lawrence Baskir & William Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, The War, and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Vintage) 1978: 9. Estimate of eligible American Indian males from Robert K. Thomas, interview with author, May 2, 1989. See also, Sam Stanley & Robert K. Thomas, "Current Demographic and Social Trends Among North American Indians," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (436) 1878: 111-120; 1970 and 1980 *Census of the Population;* also see Francis Paul Prucha's *Demographic Map of American Indians in the United States* , 1985.

[8]   See especially Albert L. Wahrhaftig, "More than Mere Work: The Subsistence System of Oklahoma's Cherokee Indians" (paper presented at the Southwestern Anthropological Association Conference, San Francisco, 1973).

[9]   Tom Holm, "Culture, Ceremonialism and Stress: American Indian Veterans and the Vietnam War," *Armed Forces and Society* (12) 1986: 243.

[10]   Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office) 1919: 317.

[11]   Oswald G. Villard, "Wardship and the Indian," *Christian Century* (61) 1944: 397.

[12]   See especially James H. Howard, "The Dakota Indian Victory Dance, World War 2," *North Dakota History* (18) 1951: 31-40; and Broderick H. Johnson, ed., *Navajos and World War 2* (Tsaile, AZ) 1977.

[13]   Baskir & Strauss: 8-9.

[14]   See especially Marc Pilisuk, "The Legacy of the Vietnam Veteran," *Journal of Social Issues* (31) 1975: 3-12; Arthur Egendorf, et al., *Legacies of Vietnam: Comparative Adjustment of Veterans and their Peers* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office) 1981; and WE Penk, et al., "Adjustment Differences among Male Substance Abusers Varying in Degree of Combat Experience in Vietnam," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* (49) 1981: 426-437.

[15]   Veterans Administration Advisory Committee on Native American Veteran, *Final Report* (Washington, DC: Veterans Administration) 1988: v.

[16]   Cynthia Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in a Divided Society* (New York) 1980: 15.

Perceptions of Race and Class Among Chicano Vietnam Veterans

Lea Ybarra

"*La Batalla Esta Aqui*" was a rallying cry in the 1960s and 1970s for those within the Chicano community who opposed the Vietnam War. They held that the real battle was in the United States, not in Vietnam, and that the billions of dollars that were being spent on the war abroad were needed for the war against poverty at home. They felt that money which was going to support the war could be better used improving medical care, housing and educational opportunities for Americans:

> With that money we could have built eight million new homes, worth $25,000 each—wiping out our slums. Every time we blow up a village in Vietnam we are spending enough money to build a new hospital or library here. While our bombers tear apart Vietnam, this war also tears apart our own nation—because there is not enough money to wage war and also deal with drugs, slums, medical care, and housing. The poor and unemployed, the Chicanos, Blacks and Puerto Ricans—these have paid the price of this war.[1]

Others within the Chicano community, however, felt that this was a price worth paying. Thousands of young Chicanos volunteered for military service during this period. Many felt it was an honor and a duty to serve their country. The ideology within the Chicano community reflected that of the larger society, between those who opposed and those who supported US involvement in Vietnam.

This paper presents Chicano veterans, perceptions of the Vietnam war and the race and class issues it engendered—particularly as they relate to ethnic identification, national loyalty, cultural and political socialization, and discriminatory attitudes and practices. The testimony of the veterans themselves, regarding their experience during and after the Vietnam war, provides the basis for discussion of these issues.

The issues of race and class have been discussed previously in research literature on the topic of Chicanos and the war. Robin F.

Scott (1971) stated that discriminatory practices were built into the Selective Service Act of 1940. Mexican Americans in the United States were drafted while the United States government imported workers from Mexico to replace them.[2] Scott concluded that despite the large numbers of Mexican Americans who fought in World War 2: "The American of Mexican ancestry returned to the United States to find the same old prejudices on the home front: certain restaurants still would not serve him, swimming facilities were barred to him, and his children or brothers and sisters were still being segregated in the schools."[3]

In 1971, Dr. Ralph Guzman brought the issue of race and war to the forefront and confirmed what many people in the Chicano movement had suspected. In his short but powerful article, "Mexican American Casualties in Vietnam," Dr. Guzman cited statistics which verified that Mexican American military personnel had higher death rates in Vietnam than all other servicemen. His analysis of casualty reports from January 1961 to February 1967, and December 1967 to March 1969, showed that a high percentage of young men with Spanish surnames were killed in Vietnam, and that a substantial number of Latinos were involved in high risk branches of the service, such as the US Marine Corps. Chicanos accounted for approximately 20% of US casualties in Vietnam, while they made up only 10% of this country's population.[4]

According to Dr. Guzman, Chicanos were under pressure to enlist because they have too often been considered foreigners in the land of their birth, and feel they must prove their loyalty to the United States. Organizations like the GI Forum have long proclaimed the sizeable contribution of the Chicano soldier and point to impressive records of heroism in times of war. Dr. Guzman emphasized that there was "a concomitant number of casualties attending this Mexican American patriotic investment."[5] There was also the desire for status that military life seemed to offer, and a strong economic incentive, since many Chicanos help their families by sending them money from their service allotments. Relatively few Chicanos avoided the draft by obtaining the college deferments available to students in the Vietnam era. Dr. Guzman concluded:

> Other factors motivate Mexican Americans to join the Armed Forces. Some may be rooted in the inherited culture of these people, while others may be imbedded in poverty and social disillusion. Whatever the real explanation we do know that Mexican Americans are overrepresented in the casualty reports from Vietnam and underrepresented in the graduating classes of our institutions of higher learning.[6]

The Guzman article served as a manifesto for the growing antiwar movement in the Chicano community. This movement demonstrated its opposition to the war by holding moratoriums, marches and demonstrations which took place throughout the Southwest, and in which thousands of Chicanos participated. This protest movement was most forcefully illustrated by a statement called "*Chale Con El Draft*" (No to the Draft), written by Rosalio Muñoz in Los Angeles:

> Today, the sixteenth of September, the day of independence for all Mexican peoples, I declare my independence of the Selective Service System. I accuse the government of the United States of America of genocide against the Mexican people. Specifically, I accuse the draft, the entire social, political, and economic system of the United States of America, of creating a funnel which shoots Mexican youth into Viet Nam to be killed and to kill innocent men, women, and children...and of drafting their laws so that many more Chicanos are sent to Vietnam, in proportion to the total population, than they send of their own white youth....[7]

The ideas of unquestioning loyalty to the United States and of doing one's duty as a patriotic citizen were also challenged in an increasing number of publications, including *Chicanos and the War* (1972):

> Historically, Chicanos have played major heroic roles, particularly during World War II and the Korean War, where there were a great number of Chicano war veterans who were heroes. But for every Chicano hero that made it home alive, there were a great many more Chicanos who died in battle. Today, with the Viet Nam war, Chicanos are still fighting and dying to become war heroes, many because of the influence and pressures put upon them by their own families to continue the tradition that their fathers and uncles initiated 20 and 30 years ago. It is time that Chicanos begin to realize that our sons and brothers, husbands and boyfriends, cousins and nephews are the ones being used to fight a war from which *La Raza* gains nothing. We only lose....[8]

Charles Ornelas and Michael Gonzalez (1971) conducted an opinion survey among the Chicano community in Santa Barbara. Their results suggested that Chicanos were more troubled by the war than Anglo Americans, and that their worries matched those of other non-white communities. Chicano antiwar protests seemed to be more reflective of community sentiment than was generally accepted by critics. Chicanos expressed strong feelings against US involvement in

Southeast Asia, as well as against the war policies of President Nixon. There was also dissatisfaction with the draft.[9] At the time the poll was taken, almost half of the respondents considered the Vietnam conflict as the single most important problem facing the nation. Sixty percent agreed with the statement that the US should "withdraw from Vietnam as fast as we can pull out the troops."[10] Only 11% of the males, and 4% of the females polled stated that we should "send more troops and step up the fighting till we win."[11] The majority of the Chicanos polled also voiced disapproval of the way President Nixon was handling the Vietnam situation, with only 20% of the adult males and 12% of the adult females approving of his policies in Vietnam. Ornelas and Gonzales found that the level of support for Nixon was lower than that offered by the combined non-white populations in an August 1970 Gallup poll, and was substantially less than the support given Nixon by the general public. The study also found that a majority of adults and two-thirds of youth would not encourage their sons to join the service. Although the majority of the respondents disapproved of violence and rioting, 60% did approve of some forms of protest against the war, including protest marches.[12] Ornelas and Gonzales concluded:

> It ought not to be surprising if Chicanos speak out against the Asian conflict and relate it to problems at home. The impact of the war is not limited to the disproportionate higher casualty rate suffered by the Spanish-surname in comparison with the national average. Conditions in the barrios are aggravated by the inflationary war economy that strikes hardest at the many families with incomes below the poverty level. Funds for poverty programs and educational opportunities have been sacrificed for military spending and other priorities.... The nation's preoccupation with the conflict abroad has slowed down progress in the area of civil rights. It was the continuing bigotry experienced by him and other Chicanos that moved WW II hero Guy Gabaldon to return his Navy Cross to President Nixon.... It is because barrio conditions were here before Vietnam and because they will not disappear with the end to the fighting, that the Chicano Moratorium efforts have been increasingly linked to grievances attributed to internal colonialism and cutbacks in domestic programs. The war in Vietnam may fade away, but the struggle in the barrios will go on.[13]

Since these early studies, relatively little work has focused on Chicanos and the military, or more specifically on the subject of Chicano involvement in the Vietnam war and antiwar movement. There have been some personal accounts, such as Benavidez's *The Three Wars of Roy Benavidez*[14]. There is also some recent data

available on Hispanic* veterans, of all war eras. The *Chart Book on Black and Hispanic Veterans* (1985), comprised of data from the 1980 census, provides a general portrait of Hispanic veterans in the US. As of March 1980, there were 888,100 Hispanic veterans in the US. Of these, five percent were women. Hispanic veterans possessed certain group characteristics: they were generally younger than their non-Hispanic counterparts (56% were under 45 years of age as compared to 39% among non-Hispanics); they had less formal education; there was slightly higher representation of Hispanic veterans among the unemployed; and, income levels were consistently lower than their non-Hispanic peers throughout virtually the entire age spectrum.[15]

The states in the Southwest and the West had the highest percentage of Hispanic veterans. New Mexico had the highest proportion of all—one out of every four veterans there is Hispanic. Five other states had populations of Hispanic veterans which comprised at least 5% of the whole: Texas (10.8%), Arizona (9.4%), California (8.8%), Colorado (7.7%), and Hawaii (5%). New York, Nevada, and Utah were the only other states with concentrations of Hispanic veterans in excess of 3.1%, the overall national average.[16] More Hispanic veterans (38%) served during the Vietnam era than during any other single period.[17]

Becerra and Greenblat (1983) conducted a study of veterans of all war eras to find out the utilization rate of Veterans Administration (VA) health services and the major factors influencing these utilization patterns. They stated that the Hispanic veteran was of particular interest to the VA because they were a population heavily represented during the Vietnam war, and yet they seemed to use VA medical services less often than persons belonging to other minority groups.[18]

Of the Hispanic veterans they interviewed, the majority were Army veterans. However, during the Vietnam war, there was a higher percentage of Hispanics who served in the Marine Corp. Several factors were though to account for that choice, including a greater prominence of the Marine Corp during the Vietnam conflict and the desire of young men to belong to a "real man's" outfit.[19] 60% of the Hispanic veterans interviewed had been promoted to the rank of sergeant before being discharged.[20]

In addition to constructing a profile, Becerra and Greenblat provided an excellent analysis of issues affecting Latino veterans, such as family background, cultural identification, health care

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*Since the *Chart Book* uses the term Hispanic, the author of this piece has decided to use it also, to preserve consistency. The editorial policy of *Vietnam Generation* is to use the term Latino.

satisfaction and attitudes toward discrimination. Regarding the issue of discrimination, Becerra and Greenblat found that

> Vietnam veterans had a significantly stronger sense of being discriminated against than their older peers.... The Vietnam veteran was certainly much more vocal in his indignation about discriminatory practices probably because his consciousness had been raised as the result of the Chicano Movement of which he was and is a part. The older veteran was more likely to accept discriminatory treatment because by doing so he had learned to survive as a minority person in a majority culture. He was more likely to say things were fine at the VA because the organization treated him similarly to how he had been treated by other institutions in the past. The Vietnam veteran tended to feel that he deserved better.[21]

Becerra and Greenblat noted that regardless of the type of adaptation to their environment which veterans chose, "ethnic and economic discrimination was a fact of life, whether they lived inside or outside of the barrio."[22] The veterans they interviewed had joined the military expecting to be treated with respect as soldiers but they had experienced difficulties. They found that "ethnic tensions and racist feelings were as evident in the military as in the civilian world."[23] One of the veterans that Becerra and Greenblat interviewed expressed this sentiment: "We were proud Mexicans. We fought in the war to prove that. But we were still Mexicans in the service, looked down upon. They always treated you as if you weren't smart enough."[24]

One of the conclusions that Becerra and Greenblat reached is that when Hispanic veterans are faced with barriers to care at the VA, "they perceive these hindrances as a continuation of discrimination that has existed over a life-time of encounters with established institutions. Such barriers are understood as yet another example of society's devaluation of Hispanics as human beings."[25] They state that Hispanics are insulted because they feel they are not begging for charity, but have earned the right to free medical treatment because of their service to this country.[26]

Methodology

The information presented in this paper is based on a continuing study of Chicano Vietnam veterans. To date, twenty-five veterans from California, Colorado, Texas, and Arizona have been interviewed. Before the project is completed, veterans from several other states will be included. The interview instrument consists of sixty questions and the average length of the interview is three and one-half hours. The

research questions encompass a variety of areas including family background, cultural identity, political socialization and various other social and psychological issues. Some veterans have been hesitant to delve into subjects which are still emotionally charged. However, the great majority have been very cooperative, honest, and forthright. The unanimous comment by the veterans interviewed is that they are glad someone finally cares enough to ask Chicanos their opinions and feelings about Vietnam.

The average veteran interviewed was nineteen when he went to Vietnam, although three were as young as seventeen. The majority (77%) had enlisted and 23% were drafted. Less than 25% of those interviewed attended college before they entered the military. Veterans were divided equally between those who had served in the Army and those who had served in the Marine Corps. Of those that had been in the Army, the majority were infantry ("grunts"); one was a paratrooper, one a medical corpsman, and one a microwave radio equipment operator. Of those that had been in the Marine Corps, the majority were helicopter gunners or crewman. About 66% of the veterans were promoted to the rank of sergeant, and one was a first lieutenant.

Their service dates in Vietnam ranged from January 1965 to July 1971. This range of service provides an overview of the Vietnam War during its various stages, and broadens our perspective on the war. Hopefully, this study will begin to fill a gap in the general literature on Vietnam. The participation, contributions, and sacrifices of Chicanos and other Latinos have too often been ignored.

Findings

Few of the Chicano veterans interviewed had been aware of the history or politics of the Vietnam war when they entered the military. The majority considered themselves apolitical; only four of the veterans stated that they were very aware of the causes and progress of the Vietnam conflict, and believed they were also well-informed about other social and political issues. Three of these veterans had participated in antiwar demonstrations before they were drafted. The other veterans stated that they had been recent high school graduates, or workers in blue-collar jobs, with little knowledge of issues which lay outside the scope of their daily activities.

The majority of the veterans were conscious that race was an issue during the time they were stationed in Vietnam; both in terms of the camaraderie they felt with each other as Chicanos, and in terms of the relationships they developed with both Anglo and black soldiers. It was natural, they said, that Mexicanos would be drawn to each other by their cultural ties. Some especially looked to other Chicanos

because they had come from segregated schools and neighborhoods. These cultural alliances started even before they were shipped to Vietnam. As one veteran stated:

> Chicanos, during training, in the war and when I came back and I was at Fort Bragg, that was my life line. It was a strange world out there and I was a parochial kid and it felt good to be around the guys. We used to listen to *rolas Mexicanas* when we would get together. That wasn't music that any of us grew up listening to. I mean, we heard our mothers playing it on Sunday when they were cleaning house, but it wasn't music that was at our dances, the Midnighters and that kind of rock-n-roll stuff. The guys from California, too, but I think it was the guys from Texas, by and large, that had that sense of traditional culture. I remember in North Carolina, one of the guys from Brownsville was married. He hadn't been to Vietnam yet and we used to go and have bar-b-que's because his wife could make tortillas. I mean it's a sexist, chauvinistic thing, but all of a sudden, for me at least, it symbolized home and the music symbolized home even though, like I said, it wasn't something that I would go out and buy. But this cultural awareness, I think, was because we were so far from the culture. In North Carolina they used to call us long-haired niggers. That's the first time I ever heard anything like that and so racism made me take refuge in something that was familiar. I mean I understood racism. I had experienced it here at some institutional level.... But there it was just blatant, I mean, it would be on big billboards, Ku Klux Klan country and stuff like that.[27]

Cultural alliances and ethnic awareness continued as soldiers went from the US to Vietnam. Many veterans reported socializing with Chicanos in their camps and throwing parties for the ones who were going home. One veteran said:

> There were Mexicanos from all over the place. Being from *Tejas* [Texas] originally, you would always figure out who was from where just by the way they talked. You started talking about "*huercos*", hey, this guy's got to be from *Tejas*, right, and we had a way of finding each other. Like in my case, there were very few Mexicans in aviation, from what I could see. So, there were a few and we hung around together. I remember being in our base camp, Marble Mountain, and when we got there, there wasn't a whole hell of a lot out there, but we got some electricity and we all chipped in and got a little black and white TV. There wasn't hardly ever anything on TV, but I remember one time we were sitting in our hut and some

Mexican program came on that had Mexican music, I think it was Little Joe or something, and it was real exciting.[28]

Another veteran explained his cultural awareness and pride this way:

We talked to each other in our own language. There was even a time in our squad that we wanted to set up the radio men to all be Mexicanos because the NVA were monitoring our calls so they knew what we were going to do before we did it, so we figured okay they know English pretty good, right, so we'll fix them, we'll throw a snake in here so we put Mexicanos on the radios, so the Mexicanos would be talking back and forth. We had guys from Texas and we had guys from all over the United States naturally, but the *Tejano* and the guy from California talked a little bit different.... We used different slangs that we picked up to identify particular missions.... The other soldiers liked it because they knew were weren't going to get monitored. They were sort of proud that we knew how to speak Spanish.[29]

Some soldiers found that being in Vietnam strengthened their ties to their own cultural identity but, paradoxically, also provided them with their first opportunity to relate to other cultural groups. For many Chicanos, it was the first time they had ever experienced close friendships with Anglos, blacks, or other ethnic groups. Veterans speaking on this subject commonly made remarks such as: "One of my best friends wasn't really Mexicano, he was a Puerto Rican from New York and he and I were real close;"[30] and, "My best friend in Vietnam was a black and he and I were in Nam when Martin Luther King was assassinated."[31]

The importance of these new-found friendships was described by one veteran:

I think the most important thing that it did for me was my whole attitude about respecting others and also I guess my new attitude about the Anglo. Prior to that I didn't trust them, any of them, I didn't care. I mean, they were my enemy back home. Everybody who was white was my enemy and with my experience in Vietnam and meeting and knowing and getting very close to a lot of Anglos, close enough to say that I trust them with my life, I learned a lot more than I would have if I never got out of my neighborhood.[32]

Despite the fact that there were often friendships across ethnic and cultural lines, racial conflicts were common among servicemen

stationed in Vietnam. While several of the veterans stated that in their own unit there was little or no racial disharmony, the great majority testified that they witnessed many difficulties. When soldiers were out in the field, they stated there was no room for prejudice because everyone depended on each other, but racism often surfaced when the men were back in base camp:

> Where you're under fire and all, everybody was equal and there was no room for prejudice and racial attitudes. But in base camp or wherever people are socializing and really relaxing it was obvious, blacks went to blacks, Hispanics went to Hispanics and even some of the Hispanics were kind of unsure where to go because there were some Puerto Ricans that were black and they wanted to be with us and they wanted to be with the blacks. There were very strong racial lines drawn. There was racism and prejudice, yes, very much so.... Somebody would say something and then there would be blows and a couple of times it came to pointing guns at each other. The conflicts were generally between blacks and whites and usually the blacks and Chicanos were kind of together because we're usually outnumbered, but then sometimes blacks and Chicanos would fight together, but most of the time that there was conflict it was induced by alcohol.[33]

Veterans repeatedly made the point that the majority of the conflicts were between Anglos and blacks, and that very few of the incidents involved Chicanos:

> There was a lot of racism in Vietnam between the whites and blacks. There were a lot of fights. At the mess hall that we had, I personally witnessed locking and loading. Locking and loading means you've got the rifle, and it's ready, and if you just open up, *ya comenso.* I saw the confrontation as me and my buddy were having dinner. Eight or ten on each side and they just started locking and loading. These were all grunts that got together at our mess hall, blacks and whites. The Mexicanos were all on one table. So, I casually nudged my buddy and I said, you know what, I think I'm going to get the hell out of here and he said, me too, let's get out real slow because they were screaming at each other and just pointing. You know what defused the whole situation? *Un* Mexicano. Honest to God. *Un* Mexicano came out of the woodwork. I don't know where the hell he came from *y comenzo*, "What the hell's going on here? *Que chingados,* what's going on? What the hell's wrong with you? Can't you see we're in Vietnam you assholes?" And I mean this guy was yelling "what the hell's wrong with you?" and all of a sudden it defused the whole

situation. *Que digo yo,* Goddamn. Because when you see death in a man's eyes, he's going to kill you. There's no ands, ifs or buts and that's how bad it was with the *gringos* and the blacks.... In '68, when I was there, the Mexicanos were not a threat to the Anglos, the blacks were. That was when the Civil Rights Movement was going on, Martin Luther King and all that. But when you're in a war and you got a rifle in your hand, *hijola,* don't call me a nigger, don't call me a wetback because I'll kill you. But not with the Mexicanos. The Mexicanos were accepted in everybody's status because we were just there. In a group, the Mexicanos were always neutral, that I saw. That's the way it was with us. We didn't have a war with the *gringos* or the Blacks. We had a war with the Vietnamese.[34]

It was clear that in the great majority of the cases, Chicanos did see themselves as a neutral group, "sort of in the middle":

We had our share of incidences, fights between Blacks and whites. I never really saw any between blacks and Chicanos. I didn't see any between *gavachos* and Chicanos, other than a couple of arguments here and there but between blacks and whites there were a number of incidents there because of discrimination. I think we even had a couple of knifings. There was just racial bigotry.... Chicanos just kicked back and watched it. It ain't my fight. *Que se den en la madre los dos.* We ain't going to get involved. That's their *pleito* [fight]. The military tried to deal with it when it happened but I don't think they really tried to solve the problem.... It was just like well, let it go and it will stop.[35]

Several veterans stated that race relations worsened after the 1968 Tet Offensive. A veteran who was a sergeant and a squad leader commented:

When you first got there, for the first three or four months, there was a relatively high degree of people trying to live the ideal, like that we were one family, one unit, one Army and we're fighting the Viet Cong. I can remember that we actually were living it for four or five months. But after about the fifth or sixth month, and survival became the only thing, it became very individual. You always had to fight the individualism of your squad members because they wanted to do as little as possible. I just want to get the hell out of here attitude. It was about one-third Latino, one-third black and about one-third white. The whites, in general, half of them were Okies from the south and the other half were ethnics, like Italians, from the East Coast cities. After about the

seventh or eighth month that I was there, one of the biggest jobs that I had as the Sergeant was trying to ameliorate the racial things. Especially the white Southerners and the blacks, it's like constantly having them go at it, everybody claiming that they're doing more than the other, and I'm constantly separating them. What I'm saying is when you first got there, there was this really conscious attitude to create a oneness, a family, a real single unit, but it broke down under the reality of the war.[36]

Another issue of race that was discussed in the interviews was whether Chicanos identified with the Vietnamese people on any level. The majority of Chicano veterans interviewed did not relate to the Vietnamese as being people of color like themselves. The Vietnamese were considered the enemy. Only three of the veterans stated this was an issue that bothered them, and they questioned their role as Chicanos in a war with other minorities. One veteran stated:

There are several other things that really come to mind and that really made me start thinking about the whole Vietnam experience. I remember that I had a white girlfriend in high school and she had given me her picture before I left and I remember I showed it to one of the Vietnamese kids and he pointed at it and said she's Number Ten, and then he pointed to his face and then my face and said, we're brown. Same, same. So he was telling me like why are you fighting us, you and I look the same, and he called her Number Ten, which is the worst you can be. She's Number Ten, he said, because she was white and I remember that struck me real deeply. It really impacted me that he was right. Where I'd come from, Chicanos and whites were segregated and antagonistic. I really started thinking about that. In fact, I remember writing to my parents about it. To me that's one of the few intimate moments I ever allowed myself with the Vietnamese. Since after that, for example, I never availed myself of any of the prostitutes, and I just detached myself from everything because I couldn't do both, fighting and be friendly with them. I just kind of left it alone.[37]

One of the veterans interviewed, who now works at counseling other Vietnam veterans, provided an overall view of the issue:

I think that any Chicano or any black that grows up in this country, has an implicit understanding of the dynamic of racism as an oppressive instrument. Like when we used to refer to the Vietnamese, a lot of the guys called them gooks and zipperheads and like that, but I think a lot of us just

called them *chinos* because in every barrio there's a *chino* that owns the market. And I think a lot of the guys, and I try to think of it retrospectively, I think because we experience racism ourselves and even though we're saying those goddamn dinks, those slopes, it's making something inside here, there's this kind of understanding that we're taco benders, greasers and wetbacks.... Last year I went to a conference in San Juan and I remember talking to some of the vets that were from the barrios of San Juan and they were telling me that when they came home, when they looked at their population, the racism that they practiced in Vietnam by calling those names came to them when they came home.... I think in Vietnam, however, because of the things I said about having to make war against these people, I think dehumanizing them was almost a psychological must, and the more you could dehumanize them the bigger the edge you had because you wouldn't fail one split second to do what you had to do. I think that seems to be the trick. I know we dealt with racism and ethnicity in one of the groups in East LA [Los Angeles], and I noticed that terminology, like gook and zipperhead gets used less in ethnic communities than it does in dominant culture communities.[38]

The veterans were asked whether their recognition of racial discrimination, or any other factor, made them question their role in Vietnam or the value of their presence there. Several of the Chicano veterans interviewed felt, from the beginning, that US involvement in Vietnam was wrong, and had been involved in protests against the war before they were drafted. The majority of the veterans, however, questioned the value of American presence in Vietnam only after they had been in-country for a while, or, after they had returned to the US.

Only two of the veterans interviewed maintained that they have never questioned their involvement in Vietnam, and that they still feel it was a correct and necessary intervention on the part of the United States. These two veterans stated that they went to Vietnam to fight communism and that it was "better to fight it over there than in our own backyard."[39] Another veteran, who initially had the same idea, echoed an observation of Dr. Guzman's, asserting that he felt pressured to prove his loyalty: "I enlisted for two years and I figured that, after two years I'm through and it was my obligation. I've done my duty for the government. I've earned my citizenship.... that's what I accomplished by going over there."[40]

The veterans all agreed that there were some soldiers "who were conservative when they left and conservative when they came back and they supported the President all the way."[41] But they felt that almost every vet they knew, sooner or later, ended up being opposed

to the war. One of these veterans, for example, stated he didn't start questioning the value of US troops in Vietnam until he was almost at the end of his tour:

> Towards the end of my tour in Vietnam, which was I think June of '68, by then the military discipline was starting to move into our base camp. I remember when we got there, we used to run around with our shirt sleeves cut off, we didn't shave for two or three days, and nobody really gave a damn. I remember when it got to the point in our base camp where we could no longer cut off our sleeves, and if we did we had to make sure they had a neat stitch on the sleeves. We had to shave every day, *me entiendes*, if we were in base camp. I remember coming back one day from a run and I think we had left at five in the morning, and we must have got back, God, at six in the evening. We'd been out twelve, thirteen hours. We were all dirty and grimy and greasy and stinky and everything else. I remember we were walking back from our chopper and we were carrying our guns because we still had to clean them, and we got written up for being out of uniform because we were dirty. And, that's when you start saying, what the hell are we doing here? Man, what is going on? I mean here we are in a war zone, how can you go out and do this stuff and then come back and get your butt written up for being out of uniform. How can you stay clean? I was in a chopper outfit and we had 24 helicopters in our outfit. Hey! *Pa que tengas* 23 choppers out of 24 down and none of them flying, there's a lot of dissatisfied people over there. I mean we actually went through a period where we had no choppers to fly.... There was something wrong with all of them. It got to the point where nobody wanted to go anymore. Toward the end of the tour, it was hey, right on. I didn't want to go out anyway. I mean what am I going out for? Am I going to go out and take a chance of getting killed? And for what? I mean the big guys don't give a shit. Why should I?.... We weren't as gung ho towards the end as when we got there.[42]

Soldiers who began to question the efficacy or legitimacy of American presence in Vietnam in the early years of US involvement did so frequently because of their own experiences with the manner in which Americans conducted the war. Many soldiers were gradually disillusioned by the apparently purposeless orders which they were given, and resented risking their own lives, and the lives of friends, for no apparent gain. In the later years of the war, many of the newer soldiers brought with them a different attitude about Vietnam, the result of a changing political ideology. These new men were arriving with a stronger sense of ethnic and racial identity, and a new political

awareness:

> The new wave, the second and third waves really were
> bringing the Chicano Movement. Black Power was very
> evident and the Puerto Ricans were also very nationalistic.
> So, the Chicanos kind of had our own tents and the blacks
> would have their tents and the whites. The whites were
> divided between the Southerners and the others. So, they
> even had their own splits. We came from segregated
> communities. In the late 60s, Texas still was segregated, not
> by law but in practice, so we knew, that we were different than
> everybody else, we didn't belong.[43]

Another veteran said:

> Towards the end of my tour there, I started getting mail from
> my friends about the antiwar movement and Chicano
> movement and all that. I started thinking about it, but
> because I was really ignorant politically, I didn't have any way
> to verbalize it. I just kept reading about it. The music was
> starting to get to us because the new Marines that were
> coming in every day were bringing in the music with them and
> so we used to listen to it and we'd be hearing the antiwar
> slogans and we'd hear about the demonstrations at home
> and by late '66, the soldiers were wearing peace buttons and
> beads. They were bringing in the antiwar language and the
> sentiment of what was going on and really, in a sense, they
> were bringing a very different attitude than we had and I
> didn't really understand. It was making me mad that they
> were coming in sort of really questioning the whole process
> and to me, because I was so rigid and so disciplined, I was
> thinking this won't do because you won't be able to control
> these kids. So, it was that structure in me that was rejecting
> them. You know, it's funny because in a lot of ways we
> understood what they were telling us because we saw the
> changing policies. We were always having to change to the
> needs of a general or somebody, so we kind of knew that there
> was chaos and there were problems. After a year, we knew
> that we didn't really know what our mission was. I remember
> a lot of us talking about, Why are we here? Why are we doing
> this? We fight for a village for three days and then when we
> get there we give the sucker up or we take this mountain and
> we lose all these men and then after a day or two of staying
> on the mountain we leave. So, we had those questions and
> when we talked to the younger soldiers, coming in, not
> younger in age but younger in time of in-country, we'd argue
> with them. Our arguments were more at a personal level,
> that we disagreed with their attitude or we, meaning the first

young guys there, we really didn't understand all of the change that was happening.[44]

There were Chicanos, however, who not only understood the reason that the attitudes of soldiers were changing, but also took part in initiating the shift. One individual, for example, had long felt US involvement in Vietnam was morally wrong, and he was granted conscientious objector status, serving as a medical corpsman. He expressed the following sentiment:

> I didn't want to be drafted. I'm a conscientious objector and I'm opposed to carrying a weapon, but once drafted I felt it was an opportunity for me to serve my country.... But I was pretty angry when I returned. I felt like being politically aware before I went and having a lot of things confirmed for me, recognizing that people were telling me, go home GI we don't want you here, that resulted in a lot of resentment. I couldn't get out of my uniform fast enough when I got home and I went back to school immediately and I hid in school. I recognized that we didn't belong there. That we had no reason to be there and now I really appreciate the fact that I was a conscientious objector because I don't think I carry one-fourth the baggage that a lot of guys carry.[45]

The veterans who seemed to have had the most difficult time reconciling their current beliefs about the war with their past action were those who did not question their roles in Vietnam until after they returned to the US:

> While I was in basic training and when I went to Vietnam, and all the time I was there, I really thought we were doing something for our country. I really believed we were stopping communism, preventing the spread of communism to different parts of the world.... I wasn't aware until after I got out how I was used and how we all were used and what a lost cause it was.... It was really devastating to come back and find out the truth about Vietnam. My first term paper in college, when I came back, was titled "Manipulation". I don't know why I chose the term but it was how I was manipulated by the US government to thinking what I was doing in Vietnam was right. It took, I would say, four months after I was out to really understand what was happening. It was in that period of time I joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and I was in every protest that was ever had on Vietnam while I was in college. Knowing now what I know about Vietnam, I think I'd go to jail if that's what they decided for me. I wouldn't serve, because it was unjust. It was wrong. It was a civil war and

we had no business there. The more I looked into it, the more I saw how we're imperialist and that's the side of our country and our government that I'm really ashamed of and if there's anything I can do to change that, I'm going to do it. There's not a whole lot that you can do directly, but you're voting and participating against whatever is happening in Central America and South Africa, all these things that we're, if not directly, indirectly involved in where we're disrupting the government and the people of the country I'm totally against. I think if I had it to do over again, I'd go to jail and my brothers would go to jail. We wouldn't do it, no way.[46]

Despite the fact that they questioned their role in Vietnam, and that they often received poor treatment from both the government and members of the public when they returned home, Chicano veterans frequently emphasize the point that they had been good soldiers. Many still feel pride that they and other Mexicanos acted bravely in Vietnam. They say that some soldiers would do the minimum to get by; even refusing to go on patrol, but they and the other Chicanos they knew in Vietnam could always be depended on to do their job. Many of the Chicano veterans interviewed proudly reported that they volunteered for dangerous assignments. These men also frequently mentioned that they never saw a Chicano fail to carry out his duties or "run scared". Many stated that, "If you were going to get hit, you knew that the Mexicano was going to be there, even if it meant his life. He wouldn't run."[47] They felt Chicanos had a strong sense of loyalty to their comrades and were very patriotic. This patriotism was steadfast, even though they were aware that discrimination based on race and socio-economic class was prevalent in the US. Their patriotism was based not only on national loyalty, but was linked to a cultural mandate that if they were going to join in a fight, they should fight well and with honor. One of the individuals interviewed—a veterans' counselor—explained:

When I was a little kid, I remember guys were getting out of the army from Korea. I can remember this one guy.... He had his duffle bag over his back and he walked right down the middle of the barrio just as proud as he could be, just covered with medals. I must have been around seven years old, and that was where I got my first message, this is what men do. And then by the time Vietnam came, we were knocking down the induction center doors. All I wanted to be was a goddamn paratrooper.... This made me some man, you know, and there was no restriction from it. It's "Could I run five miles in the morning?" and "Could I jump out of a goddamn airplane?" and it was the first time that there was equal

opportunity to compete and for once in my life I felt like I was a man. It didn't matter what color I was. There is an implicit recognition on our part that this is as high as we can go in society. The message is from the dominant community about what our worth is and when we get a chance to compete to prove who we were, not just to society, war is a kind of way for us to measure our own worth. But if you look at the futility of that because you don't come back a hero, you don't come back anything. When you come back, you come back somebody who is broken of spirit, who is robbed of humanity, and it's a cruel hoax about the way Vietnam veterans got treated. I think there are studies that would suggest that veterans' status, especially for men of color, doesn't increase one's ability to earn in the workplace. I think it's a popular myth that says if you go into the military, you'll learn a skill and you'll come out and you'll be more marketable....

I think that in the Chicano community there is a positive value placed on being a warrior. The substantive message to us, before we went to Vietnam, is this is how men behave and we got that growing up. That is what America is about, at least from our oppressed perspective, because it was an oppressed existence and it continues to be and to say anything less than that is to lie. We were aware of the racism, we were farmworkers, we were *campesinos*, we followed the crops. You go to any small town where they're picking grapes during the harvest and you're aware of it. But we were told this is the country that we are part of, and to a great extent I think the implicit message is to prove that you are worthy to be a citizen. I've always, in my own heart, been proud of the warrior aspect of myself, maybe not so proud of Vietnam, but that's one of the contradictions between who I am and what the war was, something that I deal with on a personal level.[48]

Another veteran who exemplified the views many of the Chicanos held about their performance in Vietnam stated:

Maybe, it's my own chauvinism, I see things through my own perspective, but I feel really good about us in that situation. I don't feel bad about our performance in Vietnam, as a group or individually. I thought we did very well. We were very good soldiers. I could always count on the Chicano. They might complain to me but I always knew that I could trust them.... All the Chicanos that I had come through seemed to me to be different forms of myself. When I went there I was a very good soldier, they could count on me. There was work that every squad had to do and there was lots of drudgery, and I would

always be willing to do my share and more. I made an extra effort and it seemed to me all the Chicanos who came had this general tendency. They came from different places, but they were different forms of the same thing. There was something that was driving us. We wanted it to be a good thing and we wanted to be part of a good thing and even if it wasn't, we were going to try to make it be if we could. And I think we probably tried too hard and too long. I mean, there's reasons why more of us got killed proportionally than others, and it wasn't because we were stupid or bad soldiers or dumb or even like John Wayne types or things like that. I think we were trying harder than the whites and the blacks to try to actually be something like we were supposed to be there, even if it wasn't turning out to be that way.[49]

The strong feeling that they had performed well in Vietnam became the root of their anger about the discrimination that some of the veterans faced when they returned to the US. One veteran stated that he was treated like a "welfare recipient" when he started collecting unemployment insurance because he could not find a job. He felt veterans were considered "basically an embarrassment to the government."[50] Another veteran said:

> No way, there was no equality. When I came back I couldn't get a job. They asked do you have a high school diploma? No. What do you want to do? Hey, I know how to set ambushes, I know how to kill people. Well, there's no job like this, I'm sorry. Get yourself in school. If a Mexicano was to say I want to join the service and I want to do this and do that for my country, or if he goes to prove that he belongs, those are all the wrong reasons to join. I think if he's going to join, he really should look and try to get himself educated before he goes in. ...I never saw one college [educated soldier] in the bush...so, if that's any indication to somebody that's going to join the military, he better get some kind of education before he goes in.[51]

A veteran whose job was processing the discharge papers for Marines explained that the reaction of those getting out of the service after Vietnam was mixed. However, many of them were disillusioned with their experience in Vietnam, and disappointed at what faced them when they returned to the States:

> Some of them were very politicized. Especially the blacks and the Chicanos were very politicized and they were very angry. In fact, when I was in Camp Pendleton, 19 Marines were dishonorably discharged because they had signed a petition condemning the US war in Vietnam and these were mostly

blacks and Chicanos. I remember them asking me to sign it and I was going, God, I can't sign that. I was too freaked out and they were way ahead of me in thinking and in their commitment and politics and they all got caught and discharged. They were Vietnam vets and they were getting ready to get out but they got Dishonorable Discharges and they lost their pay, their benefits, everything. They were just very angry because of what had happened to them as individuals and then because they knew, now that they were home, nothing had changed, the poverty and the discrimination. So, they were angry that they had been used and by the time they were home, they had a total disdain for authority. I mean, they didn't salute anymore, they didn't get up in the morning if they didn't want to and they cussed at their officers. This is '67, '68 by then and it was a total breakdown, so that the Vietnam vets that were coming back were kept on a totally opposite part of the base from the new recruits. They didn't even let them anywhere close to them. In fact, all the trainers of the new recruits were lifers, guys that were non-Vietnam career officers. They didn't want Vietnam vets training the new recruits because they knew they had a bad attitude.[52]

Feelings of disillusionment and anger were not the sole property of Chicano veterans. Like most veterans, those interviewed felt they had faced some difficult physical and psychological problems. Some felt they had lost their humanity in Vietnam. One of the veterans expressed this feeling in the following way:

I remember the first time we went to pick up American casualties, being very careful about how we picked them up and how we put them in the helicopter. After awhile, you go pick them up and it's like loading up sacks of potatoes. You just take them and throw them up in the back of a helicopter to get them out of there.[53]

Another veteran stated:

I think one of the things that really sticks out in my mind is riding through the small towns and the Vietnamese people were very poor. I remember riding through at one time and at the end of one of these little towns, there was a dead VC right in the middle of the road and all of the vehicles would have to go around it. I remember seeing the body was already getting all swollen. It was like black and blue. I almost got sick and it scared me because I thought that could be me, that could be anybody. By the time I left Vietnam, a dead

> body didn't bother me at all. It was no big deal, it was just another one. It didn't have the same effect. I came home thinking that life meant absolutely nothing, that it wasn't worth anything. It was so easy to see somebody dead.[54]

The psychic numbing described by this veteran is a common effect of exposure to war, or other trauma. The veteran must deal with this problem, and overcome it, before he can enjoy a normal social pattern of love and friendship relationships. A veteran and counselor explains:

> One of the big problems was learning how to feel again because you bottle up that emotion and you get the feeling, like if you ever start crying, you don't know if you'll ever be able to stop. So as a Vietnam veteran, I recognize that that's one of their problems. I really focus in on that because they're bound and determined to repress that. They're really afraid that if they let go they won't be able to regain control again and that's not true. We have a lot of strength. We've been able to control it for ten, fifteen, twenty years, so there's a way to relearn how to feel again and when we do that, then life changes, it becomes enjoyable again.[55]

This counselor believed that most Vietnam veterans did manage to cope with their troubles, and that many of them were doing very well. He also felt, however, that Chicano veterans face specific problems which are often overlooked or misunderstood, and therefore, they are not provided with adequate services or outreach efforts. As another veteran explains, expectations about Chicano veterans are still rooted in majority perceptions of race and class:

> I think the reason you see the differential in the assessment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is because, not only do Anglos have higher expectations of life because, after all, this is their society, but I think the people who assess them also have greater expectations of those veterans and when they don't meet them it must be PTSD. But if the Chicanos didn't meet them, well, they weren't going to meet them anyway, *que no?* They don't question it. So that when the Chicanos fail to make it, so to speak, after Vietnam, there are plenty of real normative explanations for why they don't make it. They're lazy, etc.[56]

The expectation that Chicano veterans are naturally going to maintain a lower socio-economic class status than white veterans impacts on the treatment Chicano veterans receive. As evidenced by the interviews, most of these veterans have never received any type of formal

counseling or other support. Many feel that they would have benefitted from some help in dealing with the emotions which they have kept bottled up for so many years. Instead, unable to forget, they must deal with intrusive memories on their own:

> There's no choice for me about whether I'd rather remember or forget Vietnam. I'll never forget....You can't look at your future without learning from your past and I wouldn't want to forget. I'd like to forget some of the specific incidents but those are probably the ones I'll never forget. They'll always haunt me. Every now and then, when I see my kinds, I can see dead kids. I see my kid laying down, I close my eyes and I can see somebody's head almost blowing out, and it hurts. But that's part of the price of being involved. I don't think anyone can wipe it from their minds, there's no forgetting. It's accepting it happened and forgiving yourself. Every individual has to have a different way of dealing with the memory of Vietnam.

> I'm still struggling with it. I wake up at night thinking about it. When I first came, I felt somewhat guilty that I was able to come back. When I was on the plane, there were people without arms and legs and I had all mine. I felt a little guilty that I wasn't wounded or incapacitated in some kind of way. Then I got into my new life and started going to school and when I was really down, when I was not doing well in school or when I was having trouble with my relationships, I felt really guilty. I said what am I doing here? Why didn't I die in Vietnam? It was kind of a suicidal thought, that I didn't need to come back to all this. So it doesn't necessarily have to be a guilt about killing someone but a guilt, like I'm expressing right now, a guilt about me surviving and the next guy not, or me coming back with all my limbs and the next guy not. I feel really lucky when I stand next to a vet who's in a wheelchair or one that can't see anymore or one that doesn't have any arms. I feel fortunate, but yet under all that fortunate feeling, I feel guilty that it was him and not me. It's a dichotomy, fortunate and glad but guilty and sad. I'll always have that feeling when I see disabled vets or when I was at the "Moving Wall" [a travelling exhibit depicting the Washington, DC Vietnam Veterans Memorial]. I saw the mothers crying in front of the names of their sons. My mother doesn't have to cry in front of my name, you know, and I feel guilty for her, but happy. It's really a confused emotion that I've never been able to deal with. I just accept it as a confused emotion.[57]

Another veteran expressed his feeling of guilt in this way:

> My guilt was part of my joining the Civil Rights Movement and Chicano Movement and being really involved in a lot of issues and trying to do good. I worked for the Farmworkers for a long time and was always doing something for somebody else. Part of that was trying to feel you were compensating for what you had done.... That was part of not only the fear of coming back, and feeling bad for what you went through and did, but also that feeling of guilt that you had really done something horrible and you needed to pay something back.[58]

Many veterans didn't want to forget. They felt it was important to remember their wartime experience and to remember their fallen comrades:

> I'd rather remember. You know why? Because there's a wall in Washington, DC that reminds me that I have to remember. I can never forget. All those guys that I saw in the mortuary in Da Nang, all the guys that I saw at the USS Sanctuary, all those guys that I saw come in and out of my life, I owe them something and that's for me to survive as long as I can because a lot of them didn't. I've got to go on for them.... I owe them.[59]

Conclusion

There were a number of reasons why Chicanos served in the military during the Vietnam war. As Dr. Guzman pointed out, they had little opportunity to take advantage of the college deferments that were available to the predominantly white middle and upper classes. Few minority youths had the time, money, or resources to make a successful attempt at gaining Conscientious Objector status. Many Chicanos were drafted, but more enlisted because of their own beliefs and community expectations, serving because of their faith in duty and patriotism. For the majority, this patriotism remains unshaken, even though they are not blind to the problems of race and class in American foreign and domestic policy, and even though many of them came to disagree with American policy in Vietnam. They were disillusioned with the politics and the reality of the war.

This disillusionment at what happened in Vietnam and the war's aftermath only served to underscore the sense of tragedy that so many conveyed in their stories: comrades were lost, and acts of violence committed which can never be undone. It darkens their memories of having been good soldiers and brave men. In the end, they

are left questioning the value of what they did in Vietnam and what it all meant:

> Did the war accomplish anything? No. It just destroyed a lot of lives. There would probably be a lot of doctors, a lot of good things that might have been invented, just that might have been. Probably ten thousand Chicanos who are dead today might be alive, they'd have kids and families and they're not here anymore. They're just not around.[60]

The veterans who participated in this study shared their views with honesty and with courage. My sincere appreciation to all of them. Their insights will help us to better understand the complexities of the Vietnam war .

[1]   Lea Ybarra & Nina Genera, *La Batalla Esta Aqui: Chicanos & the War* (Berkeley: Associated Students, University of California) 1971: 2.

[2]   Robin Fitzgerald Scott, "Wartime Labor Problems and Mexican Americans in the War," in Manuel P. Servin, ed., *An Awakened Minority: The Mexican Americans*, second edition (Beverly Hills) 1979: 134.

[3]   *Ibid.*: 141.

[4]   Ralph Guzman,"Mexican American Casualties in Vietnam," *La Raza* (1:1) 1971: 12.

[5]   *Ibid.*

[6]   *Ibid.*

[7]   Ybarra & Genera: 3-4.

[8]   *Ibid.*: 6.

[9]   Charles Ornelas & Michael Gonzales, "The Chicano and the War: An Opinion Survey in Santa Barbara," *Aztlan* (2:1) Spring 1971.

[10]   *Ibid.*: 25.

[11]   *Ibid.*

[12]   *Ibid.*: 27-32.

[13]   *Ibid.*: 34.

[14]   Roy P. Benavidez & Oscar Griffen, *The Three Wars of Roy Benavidez* (San Antonio: Corona Publishing Company) 1986.

[15]   Veterans Administration. *Chart Book on Black and Hispanic Veterans: Data from the 1980 Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, DC: Office of Information Management and Statistics, Research Division (711)) September 1985: 28-40.

[16]   *Ibid.*: 42.

[17]   *Ibid.*: 30.

[18]   Rosina M. Becerra & Milton Greenblat, *Hispanics Seek Health Care* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America) 1983: 3-4.

[19]   *Ibid:* 66-67.

[20]   *Ibid.*

[21]   *Ibid.*: 89.

22   *Ibid.*: 104.
23   *Ibid.*: 115.
24   *Ibid.*
25   *Ibid.*: 140.
26   *Ibid.*
27   Interview: DA, US Army, Vietnam 1966-67.
28   Interview: TY, Marines, Vietnam 1967-68.
29   Interview: LA, Marines, Vietnam 1969-70.
30   *Ibid.*
31   Interview: RL, Marines, Vietnam 1968-69.
32   Interview: TG, Army, Vietnam 1967-68.
33   *Ibid.*
34   RL.
35   TY.
36   Interview: RC, Army, Vietnam 1966-68.
37   Interview: AS, Marines, Vietnam 1965-66.
38   DA.
39   Interview: JM, Marines, Vietnam (2 tours) 1965-67, 1968-69.
40   LA.
41   TG.
42   TY.
43   AS.
44   AS.
45   Interview: OF, Army, Vietnam 1970-71.
46   TG.
47   LA.
48   DA.
49   RC.
50   AS.
51   LA.
52   AS.
53   TY.
54   OF.
55   *Ibid.*
56   DA.
57   TG.
58   AS.
59   RL.
60   RC.

"Our Men in Vietnam": Black Media as a Source of the Afro-American Experience in Southeast Asia

William King

In an appendix titled "The Warrior's Knowledge: Social Stratification and the Book Corpus of Vietnam," James William Gibson, in his book, *The Perfect War*,[1] discusses the ways in which the combatants' experiences of the war expressed in their writings and in oral histories contradict "the war-managers at virtually every level." Gibson observes that "[r]ace and ethnicity also constitute important social divisions in the warrior's knowledge" as this special issue of *Vietnam Generation* is intended to demonstrate. "Blacks, Latinos, American Indians, Asian Americans and other minorities are not present in the published accounts with anywhere near the frequency with which they were present in combat units...."[2] One way of addressing this shortcoming respecting the black experience in Vietnam obtains by consulting articles and letters to the editor appearing in the Afro-American periodical literature and in black newspapers such as the Chicago *Defender*, *Amsterdam News*, Norfolk *Journal and Guide*, *Ebony*, Baltimore *Afro American*, and *Sepia*.[3]

As a case in point, what I wish to consider here is the monthly magazine *Sepia* which in August, 1966 inaugurated a regular feature called "Our Men in Vietnam," and invited black troops to send in letters, photographs, and stories detailing their "experiences ...heartaches [and] joys while fighting communism in Vietnam." The stated purpose of this request was that "*Sepia* want[ed] to salute our fighting men."

The range of material contained in these submissions varies by the branch of service (the army is most heavily represented), duty assignment (whether in the rear area or in the "bush"), rank (officer opinions differ markedly from those of enlisted men, and those of lifers or careerists differ from those of conscripts), length of service in country and the period of service (initial buildup of U.S. Forces, before Tet, January, 1968, after Tet, withdrawal of U.S. forces). Wrote one correspondent [August, 1968] "...I could tell many things that go on over here that you never hear about in the States, but all I can say is,

everyone has his own story about Viet Nam and each one is different."

Still, however, there were a number of repetitive themes that cropped up in the letters and articles that appeared in *Sepia* during the years that the column ran. Most prominent was racism in the military whether it was manifest in assignment policies, promotion practices or awards criteria. A second important theme was the contradiction between black men fighting for the freedom of the South Vietnamese at the same time that black people did not enjoy many of those same freedoms back in the World. Indeed, both these themes were often embraced by the larger rubric of Blacks having to fight a two-front war: one against the North Vietnamese Army and the National Liberation Front, and the other against white racism given that "the white man spreads his racist policies wherever he goes" [August, 1968].

A third theme, which appeared with regularity, was concern with domestic matters—particularly the treatment of black people, and black veterans. Black soldiers expressed unwillingness to be remanded to the second-class citizenship accorded to black troops returning home from World Wars 1 and 2. A fourth theme embraced both the anti-war protests and the rise of Black Power. Appearing less frequently than the four major themes mentioned above, but arriving on a regular basis were letters raising questions about war aims (more specifically, questions about what we were doing in Viet Nam in the first place, what it was we expected to accomplish while there and how long we would be there) and strategic policies. Letters also arrived which addressed the feelings of some black soldiers that the Vietnamese people resented their presence in Vietnam. Other writers described matters of personal impact, and complained about the inherent pettiness (and potential stupidity) of maintaining certain military practices [September, 1966].

What follows below, then, is a sampling of material drawn from these letters and expressing a wide variety of concerns. The excerpts are roughly chronological, and illustrate changes in the thinking of some black soldiers as the political environment in which they operated changed around them.

> In your July issue, I read the story on PFC Milton L. Olive III [He had thrown himself on a grenade saving four of his compatriots at the cost of his own life, 22 October 1965. For this he was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first black to receive the award since Korea and the first person to receive the decoration in Vietnam.] I thought that it was a good story about a fine hero. But as you know he was from South Side, Chicago. I would like to ask:

Do you think that Negro men should look up to this as a good thing or should they ask why this young man died? Did he die for the freedom of all or did he die for the freedom of the white man only? How does the Negro really feel about this? [September, 1966].

In January, 1967 a Marine stationed at Camp Pendleton, California, complained about having to go back to Vietnam after a six month turnaround when there were so many that hadn't been over there once. This, he felt, was unfair and so he wrote in to tell people what was really going on because there were so many others "who are reluctant to speak out for fear of the disciplinary action which would be taken against them." There was also a trooper from the 173d Airborne Brigade who, in responding to the article "Why Do More Negroes Die in Viet Nam?", said "he [had] experienced resentment from the Vietnamese People toward the Negro; and these are the people we are fighting for! Also, why must we fight over here only to go home and be treated like dogs?"

A somewhat different point of view is exhibited in this letter: "It's time to call all men to fight for their country. It is time to stop the cause of aggression before it erupts any further, and it is time to distinguish the men from the boys. It is time to cease useless talk, and start reality. Its time for all nations of the world to unite and keep democracy strong for eternity." Still, there is the soul brother who wrote in June, 1966 that although he was assigned to a non-aggressive unit, he and "another Blood (only 2) were among those picked when a platoon was picked to go up front." He had been in country for six months and in that time of the 25 Blacks in his battalion, he had only seen one promoted. In August, 1966, another soldier wrote in to confirm this when he observed "how people are moved from position to position to avoid promoting them." However, he didn't "mind fighting to make Vietnam free, because Alabama might be next."

A September, 1966 letter is interesting because it points out some of the contradictions between the first of the six codes of conduct issued to members of the U.S. military forces ("I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense."), and the American way of life—hell for this soldier because his skin "is black and the wounds of racial prejudice are still too fresh and painful for us Negroes to erase them from our memories." This can be contrasted with a letter in the same issue which observes that "If the white discriminator thinks the War in Vietnam is one of fierce fighting and bloodshed, it will seem a game compared to the action resulting from

an ex-Vietnam troop being segregated from those things he fought to save while away in Vietnam." The writer concludes his letter by calling for "first-class citizenship for Negroes—Mexicans and Puerto Ricans."

That black troops had their share of problems with the military justice system early on is demonstrated in comments about the court-martial of a Marine sentenced to life imprisonment for shooting a suspected NLF guerrilla: "It seems the war is becoming a very stupid and unwarranted thing. We train a man to kill in a country where the front-lines are non-existent and rob him of his life because he is fulfilling our President's wish to 'Bring the coonskin home.'"

In October, 1966, a few short months after Stokely Carmichael had called for Black Power from the back of a flatbed truck in Greenwood, Mississippi, one PFC wrote in to offer his opinion on Black Power and "this Vietnam mess." He observed that he loved Black Power with all his heart. And he believed it was "the only way the American black man can achieve equality in the home of the red man. How else can one deal with the white power structure? The strong never has to bend for the weak, but two strongs must and will come to a medium—power versus power." He also chose to take issue with the magazine's earlier editorial contention that Americans were in Vietnam to help the Vietnamese people. "Only a fool would think this war will stop communism. I am not a communist, but just a man who inquires, reads and loves Stokely Carmichael. The people here in Vietnam think we are fools. They don't know why the American G.I. is dying over here, so how can you know?..."

In November, 1967, one airman, second-class, penned a "Eulogy for America":

> You sit back and slip the man $100 to get your son his deferment while you chastise Cassius Clay for his beliefs. Just what do you believe? Sure, we're all behind the war. Just as long as our Johnny is scheduled for 11 credits and gets his beloved 25. This past week a friend of mine gave all he had for the glorious U.S. 'A good American,' you say? Hardly. The record will show he was Canadian. He voted for Uncle Sam, and he voted for freedom. What the record will not show is that he was more 'American' than 90% of you complacent bastards! But this is not a eulogy for my departed friend. It is a eulogy for America—unless you good people remember that there was once a Rome.

> I am said to be a fighting man.
>   Through the muddy fields and swamps I plunder,
> After endless days, I can help
>   but wonder.

> I could walk into a restaurant and be totally sincere.
> The waiter will say,'I'm sorry, but you can't eat here.'

> Now until death will I fight,
> But my gain I do not know [December, 1967].

Many of the soldiers writing to *Sepia* said how grateful they were for the magazine because it kept them informed about what was going on back in the World. Some also complained that it seemed to take longer for information about black America to reach the field than it did for many of the white publications that were placed on sale in the exchanges and distributed through the military library system. There were also a number of requests for mail including the provision of addresses so that those who wanted would know where to write. And there were criticisms of earlier letter writers in an attempt to get across the point that everyone who went to Vietnam had a different story to tell:

> Regarding a letter in your October, 1967 issue [the earlier cited letter about Black Power]. [Name] has every right to express his narrowed opinion, however, none of your readers should take his views to be that of any significant number of servicemen here. Frankly, I am as confused as most people are concerning the meaning of the phrase, "Black Power." Opinions differ as to the meaning of it, however, if it does mean social and economic equality it's a fine thing. I think many people regard this phrase simply as a war or battle cry to be used for the purpose of spurring on restless and dissatisfied people to violence.
>
> [Name] has done himself, his fellow soldier and his countrymen a grave injustice in assuming the role of soldier and patriot, when really he shares no responsibility in our effort. I feel very fortunate that I have never had to serve in battle with him. This man certainly possesses no true convictions or he would not be serving in a cause under protest when he clearly had the option to refuse.
>
> In being here, not only do we aid the Vietnamese people, but strategically, we are in defense of our country and those of other friendly non-communist countries. In addition to his weak will [Name] also appears to be a sleepwalker. One has only to see the tears of joy of an elderly man, the timid smile of a child, or the hesitant, but thankful touch of a mother, all members of a village recently liberated from V.C. control. These people are grateful and thankful for our presence here.
>
> [Name] should have long applied for separation from

the service.   Upon learning of his intense hatred of his country and his undying love for Stokely Carmichael, (an avowed enemy of the state), his application would have received great consideration, and probably aided in a discharge as an undesirable.

I pray for the sake of his unit members that [Name] is engaged in duties other than direct combat.   A man with such an attitude threatens the life of everyone in his organization.   Few of us here share [Name]'s feelings.   On the contrary, we see the necessary cause which warrants our presence.   If we risk our lives, the cause has not been unworthy.   Finally, I hope that (Name) will soon become Mr. [Name] in order that he can freely become a disciple of Stokely Carmichael.

God bless [Name], Carmichael and all other such people, as I pray that He'll bless all mentally ill persons in our society. [January, 1968]

Despite the assurance of the letter quoted above, many black soldiers still questioned what they were fighting for.   In what way might they benefit from what they had been asked to do?   One correspondent wrote in June, 1968:

...many times I have felt I was fighting in vain.   I ask myself: What will I come home to?   There will be no arms of love from the white man, who has gotten more out of the war than the Negro.   With all the riots and hate I can't help but try to find an answer to the problem we face at home....   Let's face it, the white man can't get along without the Negro and the Negro can't get along without the white man....   Love is the answer to our problem.   I can say I have no hate for anyone, yet when I get home I want what I fought for.

Another wrote one month later: "I think this conflict will end very soon, but the thing that bothers me most is how will I be treated when I get home?   Will I still be discriminated against?   Will I still be a second-class citizen?   Will my family be able to ride at the front of the bus?   These are the things I worry about."   And from a third who was an army medic: "I'm just hoping that after my tour I can just go home to a nice quiet life with my family.   Really. I wouldn't know how or what to do if I leave here after having been here and safe for so long and then get shot at home in a riot.   I'm just hoping that we can find peace at home instead of looking to the long, hot summer."   Still another wrote:

Often we pay no attention to radio, but this bulletin was the news of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It was really a shock, not only to me but to everybody who stands for peace. It made us all realize that now is the time to unite for peace. We knew that with the death of Dr. King, a great peace symbol had been discarded from life, and we knew that without his teaching of peace the nation was in great danger from the violence we knew was to follow from hippies and Negroes who just thought it would be fun to participate in the burning of a city.

It made the fighting man stop and ask himself: Am I fighting so those at home can keep on rioting and burning? My answer, at least for one, is a resounding no!

As young Americans, we have proved we will fight and die for the land we love. We have served in honor and have given our lives for a cause far greater than the senseless burning of cities. Dr. King died preaching nonviolence, and these people desecrated his memory.

In the last five years, about 175,000 troops have served in Viet Nam and returned home, and I believe the most of them feel the same as I do about the situation, and I hope through our educated minds to solve our problems.

At the same time, I feel that if we have to fight against these people we will, because it will be in the same cause we're fighting and dying for now. [August, 1968]

As the ideological orientation of black people changed throughout the 1960s, and as the percentage of volunteers and lifers went down and the numbers of conscripts went up, there began to appear more and more letters addressed to the subject of Uncle Toms—the name given to the more moderate or conservative brothers who did not always see eye to eye with the nationalists:

I know you probably will get many letters calling me an 'Uncle Tom,' but I'm going to speak my piece anyway. I think it is no more for the Negro to serve in 'the Nam' than it is for the rest of the people here, and there are people here from throughout the world. Many men who have written to you in the past seem to have a complex against their country.

I am a Negro serving here in Viet Nam and I take it as an honor. You see, I read most of the time, and I wonder why none of the Negro entertainers want to come to Viet Nam. They will take part in all kinds of demonstrations, but they don't think of their 'soul brothers' over here fighting the war.

My people will raise hell about equal opportunity, but they resent serving this country in a worthy cause. Can you please tell me why? I have gone through as many mortar attacks as any soldier serving here in Viet Nam, so please tell them to stop feeling sorry for themselves. I'm not home with

my wife and family, either.

If they didn't want to serve here, they should have taken the same course Cassius Clay did. I am going to give my country 2 years, and then I'm going back to live in it. I hope you will print this letter because maybe it will help our people to get a better outlook on life as an American Negro. I am up north at a place called Tay Ninh, and it is surrounded by Viet Cong, but they haven't gotten me yet. I've still got about six months to go. See you soon world. [August, 1968]

And then there was the officer [October, 1968] who enclosed a copy of a letter he was going to send to Robert Kennedy. He sent it to *Sepia* because he did not know what to do with it now that Kennedy was dead:

After considering the contents of the letter and the caliber of men I command, it became evident none of the shortcomings mentioned in my letter...exist among the 33 paratroopers in my platoon. Instead, they exist among the ranks of those for whom so many of our comrades have made the supreme sacrifice. Before coming to Viet Nam I felt quite sure than one American life was too high a price to pay for these very unstable people. I've since had reason to change my mind.

[The letter to Kennedy follows, in italics.]

For the last two weeks I've been wanting to write you, but have always managed to convince myself that due to the upcoming elections you probably would never receive the letter anyway. It appears you are in the race for the presidency, and to be honest I had hoped you would pass it up this time and try later, not that I doubt you could handle the job, but there are other reasons that seem to bother me.

Your brother, President John Kennedy, took a stand for minority groups such as mine, and was one of the few leaders brave enough to face the nation and speak out in our behalf, which I would say accounts for the majority of the hatred so many Americans developed for him in spite of his overall abilities as a world leader.

As an American Negro I feel as responsible for President Kennedy's death as I did for the death of Dr. Martin Luther King. As bad as I hate to think violently, I would say that our people should have gained complete freedom many years ago, even if it meant fighting for it.

Mr. Kennedy, I consider you as being one of our country's most patriotic leaders, and at present our patriotism leaves much to be desired. I see a need for our country's leaders to call on all our people to try to become better Americans.

Because of the temper of the times it is quite easy for anyone to see that unless some changes are made Americans are going to destroy America. Too many of our people are protesting every policy set by our leaders, yet if asked what they are in favor of they couldn't begin to tell you. There are many things being done that I don't agree with 100 per cent, but I feel the only decent thing we can do is support those we put in office and not allow our country to fall apart because it is composed of Negroes and whites, Democrats and Republicans. We are all Americans, and if there has to be a line, there is where it should be drawn.

I don't meet too many who feel the way I do about our country. Maybe it's because I'm the grandson of a slave and just now beginning to enjoy the freedom so many of our people seem to take for granted.

In closing I would like to say that I think you, like your brother, will be strong enough to face the world and state facts, and I also think you will consider the needs of all Americans....

One of the advantages of being away from one's mother culture is the perspective that it provides on the society that supports that culture and the contradictions between what it is and what it says it is.

It seems unbelievable that I'm sitting in Viet Nam, participating in a war which I hardly know anything about. Why? I ask myself this many times and the only conclusion I seem to arrive at is: 'I have no idea, only that Uncle Sam said that I should fight to safeguard America's freedom.' Should I regard America as being a free country, when thousands are starving, lack decent housing conditions, deprived of educational equality, and living without future perspective?

When I drain the truth out of this situation, I literally become infuriated for not being gifted with the eloquence and courage to tell the world that this is wrong.

At one time, America could hide its domestic problems, but that time has passed now. Today, these problems deface us in the eyes of the world. Even our so-called adversary, the communists, see these difficulties as a destructive means in which to obliterate us. People of America, wake up before it is too late.

The existence of our nation and the unification of its people lay in our hands. We can all walk the down staircase, but in the end, we'll all fall on our faces. [November, 1968]

Or this from a Marine PFC:

Being here in Viet Nam I find myself somewhat confused. Here I am fighting this war, while back home there is still

another war. My people are still struggling for equality.

I often ask myself what I'm doing here when I should be helping my own people back home. I know when I go home I'll still be discriminated against.

I have many questions on my mind, but the one I ask myself most is why does the white man want to keep the Negro down? Why are we treated so cruel?

And then there were the experiences of those like the trooper who wrote, in December, 1968, about the unprovoked attack upon him by a white soldier. "Going through the chain of command, I was required to get permission to see my battery commander. In confronting him about this incident, I was given a small sermon by my commander, in the presence of the battery executive office and first sergeant." His commander informed him that he did not "like Black Power [or] African haircuts," as if this was the issue at hand and not the request for remedy of the complaint. He also pointed out in his letter that a fellow soldier had problems with this same commander who paid no attention to the man's medical record (doctors had recommended he be excused from shaving because of a skin condition), and how he dumped this man's "Negro reading material" on the floor to indicate his displeasure with the same. The writer concludes by asking, "Now can you tell me who my enemy really is?"

Clearly, one enemy was the "aura of prejudice" which was "so strong and intense that many brothers [were] lashing out with vigor stronger than that in the cities of the United States. There [were] two separate wars being fought...in Viet Nam. One [was] the war against the Viet Cong and the other [was] white against Negro. This has spread to Southeast Asia. The white man [had] brought [it] along with many of his other Western traits." [January, 1969]

The black man, sooner or later finds himself stigmatized. His immediate supervisors are white, as usual, and without orientating himself, he knows they are racists. Most blacks see this as a manifestation of racism, whether his constituents are aware of the fact or not.

Not later, but right then and there, the black man becomes stubborn, his resistance becomes very strong.

The militancy and the prejudice he was not aware of before comes to light. Therefore the white man quickly realizes he is not facing the usual 'Tom,' that was once common to him...even in a war zone, the black man is still discriminated against. Therefore it's time for the black man to lay his weapon down and go home to play his role in 'black power.' [February, 1969]

A PFC felt that if a survey of rank in the army was done "the white on up through the chain would have the rank." He follows this with the observation that "Most of the soldiers in L[ong] B[inh] Jail are Negro soldiers who were forced one way or the other to do something against [their] will or belief. There are riots because white drivers have hit and run down Negro and Mexican Americans. If there must be discipline, let it be fair. Talk to some of the fellows in L.B. Jail and find out why they are there. Not all are there because of murder." He gives an example: "An incident took place where a white soldier and an Afro-American soldier had a disagreement which led to strong words and eventually blows. The white soldier didn't get any type of punishment whatsoever. The Afro-American was reduced in rank and was transferred to another unit so he wouldn't know what had happened. After trying to find out why he had been punished for defending himself, he was told by a white officer to let well enough alone." [April, 1969]

Especially valuable were the perspectives of those who served more than one tour where there was some space between the two tours. Consider the observations of an army specialist who served his first tour in 1965 and his second beginning in early 1969:

> Since I've been here, things have really changed a lot. The brothers are really sticking together now—all except the few Uncle Toms we have to put up with. A majority of us are being treated as if we are the ones who started this war. The little rank we get we have to do twice as much as the white man to get it and we have to wait twice as long. For instance, we have soul brothers who have been here in the field and jungle over six months and are still Pfcs.
>
> Many white guys come over as Privates and when they leave, they either are Sgt. (E-5) or higher. That's why, today, the brothers are coming out of the field every chance they get because the white man is misusing them.
>
> I know of many black soldiers that do their part out in the field but don't get credit for it. I know a brother who burned up two M-60 barrels on Viet Cong and saved many fellows from their deaths, and all he got was a slap on the back. But a white guy was given the Silver Star and a promotion to Sgt. The Viet Cong are treated better than the Negro soldier. We go out and fight Charlie, and when we get back to the base, we still have a private war on our hands with the white man.
>
> So you see, the Negro soldier has two wars on his hand. Most of the good jobs in the rear are held by white guys, and if a Negro comes out of the field and tries to get a rear job, he is called a coward. Many black soldiers are AWOL today

right here in Viet Nam because they are being pushed too hard.

In every stockade in Viet Nam, the majority of the people in them are Negroes. As I said before, we are really sticking together now and the white man sees it and doesn't like it, but it's nothing he can do about it, unless he puts all of us in jail.

My personal opinion is that the Army should be segregated because Negroes and whites can't live together and get along. There are a lot of people who don't know the armed services is one of the most prejudiced organizations in the world. I am speaking from experience, because I've been in the service for quite some time. I truly hope that one day someone back there will do something about what's happening over here and other places, before it's too late and before there is a war between the Negro soldier and the white soldier.

Every day, things are changing, and every day there are soul brothers coming out of the field shouting how they are being misused. Really, I don't blame any of them because all they are getting is a hard time.

I only wish there were more people back there interested in what the Negro soldier is going through over here. A lot of people might say the white guys are going through the same thing. Well, yes, they are—in the field—but the black man's fight doesn't really begin until he gets back out of the field. We fight the white man physically and mentally to have a place in this world.

Some of the submissions to the magazine took the form of poetry. Sometimes it was the only way that the soldier felt he could get his feelings across:

Take a man, then put him all alone,
        Put him 12,000 miles away from home.
Empty his heart of all but blood,
        Make him live in sweat and mud.
This is the life I have to live,
        And why my soul to the devil I give.
You 'peace boys' pant from your easy chairs,
        But you don't know what it's like over here.
You have a ball without near trying,
        While over here the boys are dying.
You burn your draft cards and march at dawn,
        Plant your flags on the White House lawn,
You all want to ban the bomb,
        You say there's no real war in Viet Nam.
Use your flags, your drugs and have your fun,

> Then refuse to use your gun.
> There is nothing else for you to do,
> And just think—I'm supposed to die for you!
> I'll hate you until the day I die,
> You made me hear my buddy cry.
> I heard them say, 'This one's dead.'
> It's a large price he had to pay.
> Not to live to see another day.
> He had the guts to fight and die,
> He paid the price, but what did he buy?
> He bought your life, by losing his,
> But who gives a damn what a soldier gives?
> His wife does, and maybe his son,
> But they're just about the only ones. [June, 1969]

Two letters that speak differently to the same subject appear in the December, 1969 and January, 1970 issues of the magazine. The first, written by a sergeant, chastises those who would mistake the actions of one committed to doing his own thing "without having to prove to anyone how black and proud he is," for Uncle Tomism. The sergeant insists: "The only way to beat a man at his game is to play it like he thinks he's playing it and then find his weak points and use him as much as possible." He continues: "At the several bases I've been assigned to, I wasn't a part of the segregated ideas and thoughts of those who greeted me with, 'What's going on, brother?' I tried to get along with everyone and I demanded respect as an individual and not as a member of a group creating social pressure as the white supremist and black power advocates continue to do over here in Vietnam." He says that the black men in his company became "unified, utilizing integrity and suppressing violence, when we knew a cool head could solve a problem instead of a hot temper." However, he cautions, "Unity is great when it's used correctly. And I'm not talking about the unity that comes from a whiskey bottle or a head that's turned on by pot. I'm talking about the type of unity that comes about because one respects the man standing next to him because he is a man and an individual, black or white." Still one should not dwell "too heavily upon the past, for it would only anger you, and hate is a blinding factor, for our destiny is tomorrow, a not too distant tomorrow, my brothers." Concludes our first writer, "The main reason why there is more racial strife on a non-combat base is due to the lack of communication between the people in charge of our bases and each individual. All the guys who've turned their backs on the white society need the help of the nearest head doctor and so does the white man who still lives on the hate taught to him by his ancestors." The letter written a month later stands in opposition to the sergeant's point of view: "I found out

one thing, my brothers, individuality gains naught but rebuke in the eyes of the white man—while unity will slow or stop his quick and hasty persecution of our black brothers and sisters the world over." The second writer adds:

> Three hundred years of constant attempts at dehumanization of the black man, repeatedly repelled by the unyielding thought that we are also men, should qualify us as judge over the white man, for it was indeed he, who said, 'all men are created equal, and therefore have a right to the pursuit of happiness.' It was an idea believed wholeheartedly by him, until he discovered the beast of burden he purchased on the slave block could actually reason, the one single factor that separates man from beast, and you can believe this brothers, 'we are going to keep on keeping on.'

Another poem, published the next month, seems to echo the sentiments of the January letter:

> Dear America, I just had to write.
>   Because this may be my last night.
> My buddies and I are pinned, there's
>   nothing we can do.
> But I would like to ask two favors
>   of you.
> You see, I fought through day, dawn
>   and night;
> Knowing all the time that this was
>   not right.
> My people, black Americans, they are;
> In America are being pushed back so
>   far.
> The young, are being deprived of a
>   real education;
> The old are being forced into a
>   low paying occupation.
> America! America! Please tell me why?
> Because for that place I'm about
>   to die.
> Give them a chance. They're human,
>   too.
> These were the favors I wanted to
>   ask of you.
> And if they're answered, my life I'm
>   ready to give;
> I would not see America again, but
>   I know my people would live.   [February, 1970]

Returning once again to the vagaries of military justice, one airman who had been in country for seven months observed that he was more than ready to leave: "This is not the black man's war, it's the white man's. The white man is always trying to impress everyone that he's the king of the world. I'll never go along with that." He continues:

> A few days ago there were two blacks here who were sentenced by a court-martial to a year in the stockade for something the court couldn't prove they did. It was a white man's court, and of course they were guilty before they were tried.
> There are brothers here in trouble who never committed any crime before they came to the Nam. The reason we get in trouble here is that we're tired of the white man bugging us. We can't take it any longer. [May, 1970]

But take it they would, for the war was not yet over, and life had to go on:

> Even the Vietnamese people are prejudiced to a certain extent. They are saying the white man is No. 1 and the black man is No. 10. I think a small minority of white GIs bring their hates with them to Vietnam. I can say that the brothers in Vietnam are together.... We are showing our black unity in so many ways, and it would make you feel good to see all the brothers getting together and doing their thing. [January, 1971]

> The white man here is the same as he is there. He thinks he's a better human being than anyone else. The white man is trying to use the Vietnamese as he uses us. He wants them to work for him for nearly nothing, and is always trying to 'use' them.... [Indeed, the] Vietnamese are faced with some of the same problems the black man has, but maybe in a different way." [February, 1971]

> This is my story. I am in LBJ [Long Binh Jail]. Why? Because the white man put me here because I didn't think like he wanted me to!....When the white man gets you in his jail, he puts leg irons and handcuffs on some of the black brothers and five or six of them jump, kick and beat you. But the black people back in the U.S. don't know this and some of them don't want to know....A lot of the older blacks are set in their ways. They are used to having a white man over them and they can't get used to having a black man over them. But I think it's about

that time. [April, 1971]

One black soldier was courts-martialed because he refused to cut his hair:

> Out in the bush they try to be friends because they know that the black man can fight because they've been fighting all their life. But in the rear they try to do us any way. They try to give us the work detail. As far as rank, they don't give it to us, not like they do the beast [white men]. They say we are fighting communism, but me I'm fighting to get home where I can fight for my black people. Communism isn't what's kept us back over 400 years. It's the beast. My enemy isn't the VC. It's the beast." [May, 1971]

In that same issue, there is a rather lengthy letter from a Spec. 4 (E-4) that covers a multitude of topics. In reading through the several parts that are excerpted here, note how the themes that he discusses are linked together, having everything to do with the differential status accorded different race designations in a supposedly desegregated (not integrated) military organization. Note also the evidently different political orientation of this young man when contrasted with some of the essays from earlier periods in the conflict. Consider also that American troops were being withdrawn from the country at an ever increasing rate. At the time of this missive, overall troop strength was down to less than a third of what it had been in the Summer of 1968.[4] Consider also that at the warrior level survival— not being the last man to die in Vietnam—becomes ever more important:

> I am a black GI serving in Vietnam and the people here are very cheap. All they think about is cheating the American GI. Whenever they see a GI in trouble, they sit back and giggle to each other and shrug their shoulders. I wonder why the government is making such a big Federal case of this My Lai stuff. The soldiers out in the field have had enough without having to worry about jurisdictional or legal torture when they get back home. These people don't give a damn whether a man lives or dies, just so long as they get all they want.
>
> Does that sound like the poor, innocent, defenseless people the white man has lied to the American public about? No, it's entirely the opposite. These people don't want us over here. They never did. But you know how it is—the whites got to have their way or else. Or else— someone's got to suffer, whether it be the American black man or the poor white man or Mexican-American.

> A lot of the white GIs around here are nothing but a bunch of George Wallaces, Lester Maddoxes and Spiro Agnews. Sometimes when I walk into a latrine for a little private business, I see on the walls...All Niggers—and literally just about every sexual insult to the black man the smut peddlers can produce. I'm not going to repeat the insults because they are so nasty somebody might throw up.
>
> Yes, no matter where he goes, the white man always has to show him bigotry and cowardly prejudice. He turns the Vietnamese people against us by lying the 'Niggers are inferior,' are No. 10, stupid, crazy or some other kind of BS like that.

Prejudice affects people in strange ways, he explains, pointing to the phenomenon of Uncle Tomism, which he describes as "a constant problem among blacks in this man's army." He details the story of a black sergeant promoted from E-5 to E-6 who "went around making war on the brothers to look good in front of the pigs," but when the sergeant takes advantage of his new rank and "starts messing up his so-called white friends...his superiors who recommended him for that particular rank want to see him busted." The man was transferred to another unit. "Just imagine," says the author, "All that Tomming, all that kissing backsides and look what it got him. A black man is still subject to certain prejudices, certain injustices, regardless of rank, certain feelings of white bigotry, certain feelings of being inferior to the white man." He continues:

> I'm going to say something else and I don't care who likes it and who doesn't like it. The thing that's holding the black people down is that too many of them are too stupid to face reality. They only see what they want. They exercise too much faith and trust in the enemy (the white man) and too little trust in real black men, like for example, Adam Clayton Powell, Elijah Muhammad, Muhammad Ali, Eldridge Cleaver. To some colored people that last man I mentioned (2nd to last also) is criminal because he is a Black Panther sticking up for the black cause and the other because he is in my opinion the heavy-weight champion of the world and refuses to be bullied or tricked into this war and treated like two cents. Also, he's showing the white man that he doesn't have to jump every time he moves his finger. If he doesn't want to come into this Army, that is his prerogative.
>
> Why die for the white man? We don't owe him anything. He expects the young black men to come over here and fight the VC but won't even grant us a decent trade when we get our discharge....

One particularly interesting letter appeared the following month [June, 1971]. It is one of the few to address the issue of the wounded warrior from the veteran's point of view:

> We speak of Hanoi and the crime wave in American streets, but the majority seems less eager to fulfill our needed goals. There is a prolongation of the war in Southeast Asia and trouble everywhere.
>
> People have called me foolish since I got hurt. Others have said worse. Nevertheless, it has happened. What are they going to do with our wounded men after they come home and after recuperation?...
>
> Ten months I lay in the hospital after the grenade explosion. Five years have elapsed. I am worse off than the day I arrived in Vietnam.
>
> I suffered multiple leg wounds that left me maimed. I'm not bitter, only curious as to what America and our government can do when we return. The prisoners there perhaps have it real bad. I was never a prisoner, but being a holder of the Purple Heart, I can say I am a lucky man....

Notable in this corpus of letters for its rare insight was one from a brother who had done a tour, gone back to the world and returned to the war of his own volition. This time, because of the isolation of his unit, he had "ample time to read and think."

> What am I, as part of a despised race in a white majority society, doing fighting for democracy in Vietnam?
>
> While at home, I am continued to be looked upon as "the white man's burden" with little or no rights that society will respect or enforce. It is indeed ironic. When will democracy in the United States mean equal treatment for all its citizens? Am I not human? Being black is not a crime. I am not an animal. I have a right to exist on this earth as all black people have a right to live and exist.
>
> I have given thought to leaving the United States for more visible signs as related to democracy elsewhere, though the United States has been my home.
>
> I fear the United States is not a mature nation nor will it be until blacks are allowed to develop freely and to their fullest potentials with the blessings of white Americans.

The black soldier in Vietnam like his counterpart back in the world, suffered through his "blacker than thou" phase, especially with the rise and spread of black militancy in the military establishment.

Cognitive dissonance had its effect. Though my own time in the service was a little earlier than the Vietnam era, I have memories of my years in the United States Navy, in and out of the South China Sea. I understood the ambivalence of the black soldier. On one extreme of the political spectrum was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (the sixth foundation of their party platform was that no black man should be required to serve in the United States military). At the other end was the lifer (which many claimed stood for Loud, Ignorant Fool, Escaping Reality) who represented blind adherence to classic American rhetoric. However, experience—which is ordinary for no one—has a way of confounding the canons of our beliefs. Most of the brothers, just like the folks back home, were somewhere in between, adrift in a sea of confusion. Given the historic treatment of black people in the United States, were black men obligated to serve "their" country in its time of need? It was a classic case of ideology shaping consciousness.[5] Resolving the question of duty was a preoccupation for some soldiers:

> A Brother [Name] stated in *Sepia* that he would rather be an Uncle Tom than give another brother the 'power sign.' He calls this action 'street clowning.' Since he has viewed and reviewed the racial situation, there are some questions I would like to ask.
>
> Who am I to fight for the freedom of another race in a distant land? Why should I place my life in jeopardy for a cause not known to myself? Should I be at home fighting and dying with my black brothers and sisters instead of placing myself at the mercy of the very ones who seek to destroy the black revolution? How can my conscience allow me to kill another being in the name of democracy when this rare and precious idea is seldom experienced in my home land?
>
> How can the rulers of our land so readily pass legislation to send me 10,000 miles away to fight and die and then so reluctantly pass laws to make or proclaim me equal? Why should I be a first class fighting man and salute proudly the red, white and blue, when back in America I'm a second class citizen and the mere color of my skin exempts me from the rights to be equal in pursuit of happiness? Doesn't the flag work for us when we salute it? Is it too much to ask to be made a first class citizen before you ask me to risk my life? [July, 1971]

But the flag did not work for them. In August, 1971 Brother Ray and 29 other others sent in a letter stating that there was a need for blacks to stick together to meliorate where possible the racist practices and attitudes to which they were subject:

In this brigade there are whites who try desperately to keep the black brothers from getting any type of rank at all. This statement was made by a white officer. He said that the black man is not capable of leadership. And another captain had a bad habit of calling us brothers boys. When we brothers try to stand up and fight these racist swine, we are put in military custody and are considered militants and troublemakers....

The whites try very hard to keep us separated from each other because they know when some black brothers get together, we stick together no matter what happens. It makes it hard for the white man to mess with us. When there are just two or three of us, they will try to make us do averting and keep us out in the field while the white guys get all the rear jobs. They get their R and R on time and get their leaves anytime they want them. When applications come down for rank, all the white guys make it. They go by time in the country but if you have more time than the white guys they still skip over you.

The blacks over here don't have a chance because of prejudiced whites. We have to fight for anything we get. The swine even try to turn the Vietnamese people against us brothers. They tell them we are Number 10, which mean troublemakers, no good....When we try to protect our interests,...they say we have broken the military law. The military law is just protection that the white man uses against the black man to lock him up for such things as standing up for his rights.

From standing up for one's rights to protesting the underlying theme of genocide that troop assignment policies in Vietnam seemed to articulate is but a short step: "...I share the feelings of my brothers here because we are the victims of this unannounced genocide the white man has so oppressively put into practice. We are the product of his greed for money, while at the same time, carrying out his ingenious plan of keeping young black strength down to a proportion which is in his favor." This writer made it clear that black veterans should not "accept business as usual with racist cops striking out against any black organization that questions the system." In that regard, they would set a new standard. There would be no more lynchings of blacks in uniform as there were during and after World War 1. They would launch themselves along new roads, building upon the gains of those black soldiers who returned from World War 2. Somehow, they would find a way to defuse and redirect a system rife "with lynchings, head beatings and all the corrupt politicians" to stop the dope flow into the black community: "[My] brothers and I plan to

change it and we are willing to perish if necessary to do so."

The popular culture image of the black soldier as a doper, a coward, or a malcontent ignores the truth that there were some brothers in the Nam who sought to make a difference. The struggle for change is evident in the letter of a Spec 4 who wrote that the "black revolution cannot be won on a white horse." One brother wrote to ask "why black publishing companies don't send black reporters over here to do stories on the black GIs and the way we are treated, so that all our black brothers and sisters can be aware of it." He wanted them to explore the reasons that the inmate populations of Da Nang stockade and the LBJ prison were almost 90 percent black. Perhaps, he suggests, if black media publicized the inequity, black soldiers might not be given the inordinate number of courts-martials they currently received—often because of insignificant breeches of the code of military conduct. He closes by saying how it hurt him to have to see unnecessary pain, especially since the war was for a white cause not a black one.

A group which rose out of black soldiers' attempts at coalition building was the American Minority Servicemen's Association. One of its members wrote to *Sepia* in November, 1971, about the uses of propaganda and lawful suppression as weapons for keeping the different, the dispossessed in their proper places: "It's used to stifle, distress and confuse us, with the obvious but latent motive of diverting ourselves against each other." He explains that those who succumb to its siren song are given "guest cards" to a closed society. They are even made token leaders. "Those who resist are quickly branded dumb niggers, militants and fools who don't know any better." However, he suggests there is another way of looking at this; especially as we "begin to realize that maybe all those dumb niggers, militants and fools have rediscovered what it is to have honor, to have pride, and to possess manhood, a right in the sea of wrongs, a path in the land of the forgotten, this country of contradiction." These will be the issues over which any future struggles will be fought "whether it's behind the levers at the polls or the triggers of guns, you and I will be responsible for its outcome."

1972 brought additional letters which addressed many of the topics already covered. As more and more men were withdrawn from Vietnam, the tone of the letters suggests that institutionalized racism increased in virulence as the war drew to a close. There was discussion about the vagaries of the military justice system, and the punishment of black soldiers because they did not share white American attitudes about American conduct in Vietnam. There was concern that some brothers might be pimping their black power or at least treating with it in a faddish manner instead of being really committed to the Cause.

There was even one letter, in September, 1972, which stated that though there were some good white people, most of them were "swine": "The swine (racist fanatics) have created their own ugly image, for it was they who destroyed Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, John and Robert Kennedy, Medgar Evers."

In addition to the letters, *Sepia* published a series of articles that echoed and amplified several of the expressed concerns in more detail. An October, 1966 piece asked the question "Why Do More Negroes Die in Vietnam?" It raised questions about assignment and promotion policies that kept black men in the field longer than white soldiers, and placed them in more hazardous situations. In February, 1969 there was a story titled "Black Soldiers Fight Two Enemies in Vietnam." The piece stated that black soldiers were shot at by the National Liberation Front and the NVA from the front, while from the rear they were sniped at (both literally and figuratively) by racists on support bases and in the towns. The June, 1971 issue offered an essay entitled "GI Race War in Germany," and explained that during and after the Vietnam war, American military bases in Germany had some of the worst troubles between the races in the whole military establishment.[6] The August, 1971 issue gave readers "The Marines v. Prejudice," which talked about the policies and programs the Corps was instituting to lessen tensions created by the arrival of a new kind of black Marine with a different self-consciousness and agenda than some of his predecessors. And finally, in April 1973, there appeared "What Now for Black Vietnam Veterans?" This essay was published three months after the column "Our Men in Vietnam" (renamed "Voices from Vietnam" mid-war) was closed out in January, 1973.

Several secondary pieces can help to provide a sense of organization and direction for interpretation of the letters: Gerald Gill's, "Black American Soldiers in Vietnam,"[7] is particularly useful because it covers a number of topics and can be used to provide an outline of the black experience in Vietnam. Charles C. Moskos, Jr.'s "The American Dilemma in Uniform: Race in the Armed Services," [8] and William Stuart Gould's "Racial Conflict in the U.S. Army,"[9] provide important contextual materials that seek to put specific incidents into a larger pattern. Two members of the Lawyers Military Defense Committee of the ACLU, David F. Addlestone and Susan Sherer, who served in Vietnam from November, 1970 to November, 1971, have some interesting things to say in "Race In Vietnam,"[10] as does Jack White in his "The Angry Black Soldiers."[11] Myra MacPherson's fourth chapter, called "The Blacks," in her book *Long Time Passing* [12], opens with a recapitulation of one man's experience, illustrating the kinds of problems black men endured in the war.[13]

Whatever meaning is made of the black experience in Vietnam,

must be shaped by black people. Because of the character of the black experience in America and its relation to America's activities, we are forced to address the DuBoisian "Double Consciousness,"[14] Clearly, meaning would best be made within an Afrocentric orientation whose world view, normative assumptions and frames of reference flow out of the historical experiences and folk wisdom of black people.[15]

It is a fundamental truth of the Afrocentric perspective that knowledge is a social product not an objective ideal that can be possessed, owned or brought in from the outside as if it has an independent existence. That is, knowledge is information that has been organized for some specific purpose whose intent is implicit in the organizational design. It is not so much that we discover the truth as it is that we manufacture the truth in keeping with our own interests and the criteria specified by the guardians of the craft or guild who saw to our own occupational socialization. To postulate an objective ideal of knowledge is not only an illusion but also suggests that the scholar in some way is separate and distinct from the phenomena and forces being investigated. This is, of course, patent nonsense that all too often is used to evade responsibility for the consequences of our actions. Our descriptions of reality are not independent of the realities they purport to describe. Our beliefs shape our scholarship and the values we embrace give meaning to the facts we select to buttress our arguments. Because the black experience in America goes to the very core of what this society is said to be about, to its founding concepts of freedom, equality, liberty and justice for all, especially in time of war, much is to be gained by examining that experience from the perspectives of the persons who lived it. For it is when a country is at war that it is forced to come face to face with its contradictions. As I have attempted to show here, the black media is a useful source of the evidence required for that task.

[1]   (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press) 1986.
[2]   *Ibid.*: 469.
[3]   One guide to some of this material is contained in Lenwood G. Davis and George Hill, comps., *Blacks in the American Armed Forces, 1776-1983* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press,) 1985. See especially, chapters IX, "Blacks in the Vietnam War," and X, "Blacks in the Post-Vietnam Era."
[4]   Harry G. Summers, Jr., *Vietnam War Almanac* (New York: Facts on File) 1985. See especially pp 27-59, "The Vietnam War: Chronology, 1959-1975."
[5]   A trenchant and sometimes troubling account of the many dimensions and subtleties involved in this process is Maulana Karenga, "Society, Culture, and the Problem of Self-Consciousness: A Kawaida Analysis," in Leonard Harris, ed., *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy*

from 1917 (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt) 1983: 212-28.

6   For a detailed account of the military in Germany see Haynes Johnson & George C. Wilson, *Army in Anguish* (New York: Pocket) 1972.

7   *Indochina Newsletter*, January/February, 1984: 1-6.

8   *Annals* (406), March, 1973: 94-106.

9   *Race* (15: 1), July, 1973: 1-24.

10   *Civil Liberties* (298), February, 1973: 1,2.

11   *The Progressive* (34: 3), March, 1970: 22-26.

12   (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday) 1984:   632-55.

13   MacPherson believes that a disproportionate number of these problems can be attributed, to the tremendous social costs incurred by Project 100,000. Project 100,000 is the subject of an essay included in this volume, written by Lisa Hsiao.

14   "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Fawcett Books edition) 1961: 16-17.

15   There are a number of sources that one may consult for additional information on the Afrocentric perspective. Some of the more readily available include: Maulana Karenga and Jacob H. Carruthers, eds., *Kemet and the African Worldview* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press) 1986; Wade W. Nobles, *African Psychology* (Oakland, CA: Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family Life and Culture) 1986; Molefi K. Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) 1987.

I, Too, Sing America: Vietnam as Metaphor in *Coming Home*

Verner D. Mitchell

George Davis' novel *Coming Home* is both a Vietnam war novel and a significant contribution to the larger body of Afro-American literature. Davis uses the war as a metaphor for dramatizing the black man's struggle for basic human rights in America—his struggle, as Langston Hughes might say, to also sing America. This theme runs through the heart of Afro-American literature, and is reflected in the fictional journeys of characters like Richard Wright's black boy, Ralph Ellison's invisible man, Toni Morrison's Milkman Dead, and Langston Hughes' darker brother. They all journey in search of freedom and dignity.

Coming Home is also different from these traditional Afro-American odysseys. Davis' book is one of the few black American novels which focuses on the dilemma of the Afro-American fighting man. Davis, like a few other black American authors, including John Oliver Killens (*And Then We Heard the Thunder*, 1962), John A. Williams (*Captain Blackman*, 1972), and AR Flowers (*De Mojo Blues*, 1985), uses his literary talents to create a character trapped in a war on two fronts. Revolutionary soldiers in an age of slavery, Buffalo Soldiers in a society which condemned blacks and Native Americans equally, American soldiers in service of imperial conquest from the Philippines to Central America and finally to Southeast Asia, the black man in the military has always had an ambivalent relationship with the institution in which he serves. At the heart of Davis' novel, then, is the artistic dramatization of the effects of this terrible double burden.

The protagonists of Davis' novel, Air Force Lieutenants Ben Williams and James Childress, regularly fly tense combat missions in defense of such ideals as liberty, equality, and justice, only to land and be insulted by the "discriminatory practices of white peers and commanding officers."Many commanders believed that blacks were inferior beings and considered it prudent to protect white soldiers by assigning blacks to more dangerous missions—an unwritten policy which largely accounts for the disproportionately high number of

black casualties during the war. Professor Mel Watkins observes that from 1965 to 1966 it was not unusual to find blacks accounting for 30 to 60 percent of the combat troops in front-line units.[2] A Department of Defense report reluctantly admits that "blacks assumed a higher proportion of the casualties than might be expected," given that blacks constituted 16% of the forces drafted and only 11% of the US population.[3] In *Coming Home* Davis generates an example of the use of black men as cannon fodder, describing a situation in which Ben is forced to fly more sorties than his white peers.

Early in the novel the reader is treated to a vivid account of Ben's reaction to discriminatory practices institutionalized within the military.   Ben and Childress sit in a dirty, segregated bordello, thinking about the "cleaner, air-conditioned white whorehouses up the row":

> I can only hate whitey for the smaller symptoms of the disease that he is spreading around the world, like...segregating the whorehouses and the bathhouses over here...like trying to get the Thai girls to hate Negroes by telling them niggers have tails and niggers have big dicks and will hurt them.[4]

In the end Ben, like Wright's black boy and Ellison's invisible man, discovers that America's irrational obsession with race poses an insurmountable obstacle:

> As I walk I feel strangely free, and I dread the thought of going back to America. I don't know how I can ever feel right about America again.... I want to go to graduate school, but I know I'll never sit in a class and learn from a white man. And who will I work for, and where will I go?[5]

Ben eventually goes AWOL. Childress manages to complete his tour, but shortly after his return to the United States, he finds himself in trouble:

> I was walking down the street in Baltimore in the middle of the day and this young black dude was handing out leaflets on the corner. So I took one and started to read it. Then this big ugly white cop come up and told me to get moving, like that. So I told him to wait a minute until I finished reading my little leaflet. And he said, "Get your black ass moving. Now." I said, "Man, I got a Constitutional right to be here just like everybody else." And the sucker draws his pistol and tells me, "This is all the Constitution you need." So I go to get in my car, and when I started to get in, the cracker kicked me

> dead in my ass. So, I picked up a jack handle and knocked
> the gun out of his hand and knocked him down. He killed his
> own damn self when his head hit the concrete. All I was trying
> to do is teach him not to kick anybody any more.[6]

The reader is free to agree with or disagree with Ben's or Childress' behavior, but Davis insists that the audience begin to examine the complex social and cultural forces which combine to make black soldiers and veterans bitter about America.

Most other artistic works which focus on the Vietnam war deal with black characters in simplistic terms. The images of black combatants—both in movies and novels—resonate with negative stereotypes which subtly or blatantly suggest that black soldiers were cowardly in battle and criminal in inclination. These unflattering portraits appear again and again, even though it is commonly known that soldiers of color died in disproportionate numbers in Southeast Asia.

Tim O'Brien's National Book Award winner, *Going After Cacciato*, contains the following account of a black soldier who wishes he was back home in Detroit, looting and raping: "Oscar Johnson said [the weather] made him think of Detroit in the month of May. 'Lootin' weather,' he liked to say. 'The dark an' gloom, just right for rape an' lootin.'"[7] An especially unpleasant example comes from the recent Hollywood Academy Award winner, *Platoon*. Oliver Stone's Vietnam war film features a black character named Francis, lethargic and nonchalant when the enemy is out of sight, but cowardly and unprincipled when the fighting begins. When the Vietnamese communists attack, Francis jumps into a foxhole and stabs a knife into his leg, writing his own ticket out of the battle zone. As he is being carried to an evacuation helicopter, Francis—grinning like a character in a minstrel show—turns to another injured soldier and says: "Hey dig it...man we gon get outta heah. I'm gon see you in the hospital. We gon get high, high. Yes sir!"[8] In popular consciousness, black soldiers have become criminals and irresponsible cowards who are willing to do almost anything to avoid fighting.[9]

The popular culture portraits of O'Brien, Stone, and others are far removed from the reality of the Afro-American experience in Southeast Asia. Bombarding their audiences with racist stereotypes, they avoid the challenge of seriously attempting to detail the lives of black soldiers in Vietnam, and thus promote what Norman Harris labels "historical amnesia."[10] Viewed collectively, these works suggest that Afro-American cowardice, criminality, and overall ineptness are usual; that the black misfit in Vietnam is only the latest in a series of

infamous martial incompetents which extends back to at least the Revolutionary War. Such accounts are in direct contradiction to historical evidence ranging from written and oral testimony of black courage in war[11] to the significant number of black men (20) awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor—America's highest military award for bravery—during the Vietnam war.[12]

Coming Home is a welcome antidote to racist images of black men in Vietnam. Davis does not succumb to stereotyping his black characters; instead, he portrays the Afro-American combatant as neither a coward, nor a natural criminal. Rejecting oversimplified characterizations, Davis gives an empathetic rendering of black soldiers in human terms, a rendering which allows the reader to begin to understand the unique difficulties these men faced. Davis helps us imagine how Ben and Childress must have felt, flying in formation with white pilots to drop bombs and napalm canisters on a people of color, while they, as black men, were simultaneously suffering from the discriminatory racial policies of their own countrymen. Davis' primary interest is in exploring the ways in which his characters might cope with their double burden. How do Ben and Childress resolve the paradox of risking their lives to bring freedom and equality to the Vietnamese when they do not themselves enjoy that freedom or those rights? How do they deal with the fact that American freedoms and rights are apparently not available to people of color, either Afro-American or Vietnamese?

Ben and Childress are the only black pilots in an F-105 squadron based in Thailand. They are roommates, yet they still feel isolated and confused, as the war continues to reflect the hardships and inequities of the American system. Ben's confusion began while he was studying at Harvard. He realizes that his training at this prestigious Ivy League university will undoubtedly ensure his material success, but the price of this knowledge has been a "bourgeois socialization"[13] which has alienated him from his ethnic and spiritual roots. Ben is cognizant of the Western world's greatest accomplishments, but unsure of his own identity and his place in the white Western order. Childress senses Ben's ambivalence and labels him "a confused and fucked-up black motherfucker."[14] But Childress doesn't realize that he is just as confused as Ben. Consequently, when Ben says that "the white man is a threat to human life on earth," Childress responds in a self-assured and condescending manner: "What're you going to do, sit around and whine about it?"[15] Childress' solution to his situation is to isolate himself, putting up a façade of stoic imperviousness. Cut off from meaningful relationships with blacks and whites both, Childress becomes more and more committed

to his superman pose. In his mind he is immune to the effects of unfair and inequitable treatment, neither wanting nor needing anyone else's help. Davis signals us to his character's response in the scenes where Childress flies his sorties—Childress routinely ignores the authoritative air traffic control warnings: "Forward air controller, says 'Number 2, you're too low.' I go lower. Fuck him."[16]

Most telling, however, is Childress' relationship with the Thai prostitute, Damg. Even in bed Childress persists with his self-deceiving, isolationist stance: "I didn't need her love. I just wanted her to be with me.... I wanted her pussy, not her sympathy."[17] Davis signals us that Childress' pose is false, in a scene in which Childress plants communist papers in Damg's room to ensure that Ben will not "inherit" her when he leaves Vietnam. This is, Davis suggests, too elaborate a plan for a man who cares only about Damg's body. Childress is unable to realize that he needs Damg's compassion and human warmth, that he isn't an unfeeling stone. Because he cannot come to terms with his own human needs, Childress betrays both his lover, Damg, and his friend, Ben.

Norman Harris, in *Connecting Times*, describes Childress as "a metaphor for the numerous black Vietnam veterans who were unable to generalize their war experience and therefore ended in prison, addicted to drugs, or killed in civilian disputes."[18] Harris continues: "Childress' self-assured projection of himself made it difficult for him to interact with other Afro-American soldiers who were also searching for meaning.... Cut off from a community, Childress has difficulty discovering himself in the context of racial history."[19] Childress leaves the war confused and ill-prepared for surviving within the American paradigm. His murder of the white policeman seems inevitable, an act committed because he does not have the knowledge which would allow him to avoid it. Childress lacks both the historical grounding and cultural literacy necessary for appreciating the nature of blackness in America. Davis communicates the inevitability of Childress' downfall in the description of his last flying mission: "I almost wish I'd see a Mig today so I could get me one before I go home. Win another medal. Take it back to Baltimore and wave it in the Man's face. When he says: 'Boy...' I'll say, 'Boy, my ass.' and slap him across his motherfuckin' nose with one of my medals."[20]

In contrast to Childress, Ben eventually manages to situate his dilemma in a larger historical context. In a moment of extreme disillusionment, Ben "look[s] out across the water. Bangkok, Rangoon, Kuala Lumpur, Djakarta, Calcutta—dark music—and then across the Indian Ocean to Africa."[21] This is the strongest image which Davis can conjure: Ben is nurtured as he embraces his cultural and historical

roots. He begins to join those dancers to the darker tunes in their long battle against European imperialism. No longer will he be an agent of white oppression and aggression. Turning his plane around, Ben returns to his base with a "full load of bombs," and tells Stacy, "I'm not going to fly any more. I'm tired of helping white men keep their hold over the world."[22]

Harris asserts that: "Despite the war's overall negative effect...for Ben, ironically, it serves a positive function. It forces him to harmonize the two selves that Harvard created, and this allows him to appropriate an aspect of his racial past that helps him deal with the situation at hand."[23] But Harris misses the point. Undeniably, dealing with the war's racial contradictions does lead Ben to embrace his communal roots and discover who he is. But the war's overall effect on Ben is decisively negative, for Ben finally realizes that regardless of his military accomplishments and his level of education he—as a black man—still has no place in America. To find himself he must leave the country of his birth and renounce the ties of 400 years of his people's history: 300 years in slavery and 100 years still not free.

With Ben's decision to stop flying bombing missions, and to desert from the Air Force, come the achievement of an elusive dignity and inner peace. Nevertheless, the novel's tone is one of mild pessimism. George Davis is clearly suggesting that Childress and Ben have received the answer to the question, "Can I, too, sing America?" And that answer, reverberating though history, is "Not yet. Not yet."

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[1]   Norman Harris, *Connecting Times: The Sixties in Afro-American Fiction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi) 1988: 17.

[2]   Mel Watkins, "Introduction," in George Davis, *Coming Home* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press) 1971: xi. See the article by Lisa Hsiao in this issue.

[3]   *Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation* (Washington DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Equal Opportunity) 1985: 43.

[4]   George Davis, *Coming Home* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press) 1971: 17-18, 23.

[5]   *Ibid.*: 28.

[6]   *Ibid.*: 185-186.

[7]   Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* (New York: Dell) 1975: 14. On page 173 of the novel, we learn that Oscar Johnson is really from Bangor, Maine.

[8]   *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone. With Tom Berenger, William Dafoe, and Charlie Sheen (Orion) 1987.

[9]   That the image of the black soldier has grown less positive over time can be clearly seen when we compare the 1977 film *The Boys in Company C* (directed by Stephen Furie. With Stan Shaw, Michael Lembeck and James Canning [EMI/Raymond Chow]) with Stone's 1987 release. Furie's film

features a brave and capable black soldier who stands as an example to his platoon, and who refuses to join in a plot hatched by corrupt US officers and ARVN officers to smuggle heroin back into the United States.

[10] Harris: 21.

[11] For an excellent account of black contributions during wartime, see Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964*, revised edition (New York: Penguin) 1964.

[12] *Black Americans*: 67.

[13] Harris: 50.

[14] Davis.: 15.

[15] *Ibid.*: 11.

[16] *Ibid.*: 16.

[17] *Ibid.*: 15.

[18] Harris: 45.

[19] *Ibid.*: 47.

[20] Davis: 13.

[21] *Ibid.*: 28.

[22] *Ibid.*: 88.

[23] Harris: 57.

Bloods Reviewed*

John A. Williams

Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans
Wallace Terry
Random House, 1984

Oral history has always been subjected to revision by later peoples who developed or controlled writing. The Native Americans, for example, say there is nothing in their legends about coming from another land to this continent. Their legends speak of ascent from the ground to the surface of land, or descent from the sky. All Americans, however, are taught that during an ice age, when the level of oceans dropped at least 300 feet, the ancient Asian trekked eastward to become the American Indian.

There are elderly people on some of the islands of the Caribbean, to provide another example of the subversion of oral history to written history, who to this day claim their most ancient fathers sailed westward from Africa to these places where they coexisted with the Arawak Indians, and also all along what is now the Gulf of Mexico. We are taught, and most of us believe, that Africans came westward only as captives to be put into slavery. This was true for most, of course, but not all, as Pre-Columbian art eloquently testifies.

Wallace Terry, as writer, testifies for the oral historians in this fine collection. (One wishes there were more histories, but, given the situation under discussion, they'd only be repeated and repeated). Even if it had been ready, and I do not know that it wasn't in one form or another, the book would not have been published during or soon after the Vietnam war because the official line, hewed to by Government and Press, was that a new democracy was being born in the blasting pits of Southeast Asia. Oh, there was some hedging, and the Navy was the most racist of all the services, but the renditions always ended positively. Even some of the subjects in Terry's book believed that the new democracy had arrived.

But, then, we all thought sports integration would make a

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difference in the body politic, too, if integration indeed occurred with Tarzan Cooper on the Celtics, Jackie Robinson on the Dodgers and Marion Motley on the Cleveland Browns. What both sports and the military provided for the people in charge of these endeavors, however, was cheap labor disguised as brotherhood and the American Way. This is not to deny the obvious fact that in some cases brotherhood did happen; things always slip through the cracks.

Athletes accumulate press clippings and are routinely entered into the record books. The black soldier is almost without a public American history, though historian Benjamin Quarles tells us that black soldiers were there at the beginning (and will undoubtedly be there at the end, despite the pressure from some Europeans who wish him the hell out of their countries).

The military itself is the foremost proponent of the censorship that surrounds the black soldier. A primary example of this was the 1966 publication of the volume, in a series, US Army *in World War 2, Special Studies, The Employment of Negro Troops*, by Ulysses Lee. The series was produced by the Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army. The word around Washington was that the publication of Lee's volume was held up because certain generals did not want it to come out at all. The chief historian, Stetson Conn, acknowledges that most of the book was done by 1951. A revision took place, but "the work was still too long." Conn then "reduced the revised manuscript...in length and reorganized and consolidated certain of the original chapters."

In 1966, "the new democracy" was in place and Lee's book was important to its underpinnings. By the same token, Terry's book arrived on the scene when national reassessment of Vietnam was underway, which seemed to be related to events in Central America.

These considerations aside, *Bloods* takes its place in both general American history and in military history, with its twenty testaments from fifteen enlisted men and five officers who range in rank from PFC. to Lt. Commander and Colonel. Nineteen photos accompany the histories, a wise decision because the reader wants to look at the men who said this or that, to see if the visage matches the statement. Thus, when we check out Marine 1st Lieutenant Archie "Joe" Biggers' history and find him to be about as gung ho as a Marine can be, we flip to his picture. He stands before one of the two artillery guns his platoon captured at Dewey Canyon. They are, naturally, identified as Soviet Weapons. Bigger looks assured, even cocksure. He does not appear to know his history, that black Marines have been around since 1775 in the state militias of Pennsylvania and Connecticut, serving aboard the *Minerva* and the *Oliver Cromwell*. Biggers won the

Silver Star for the action. "We [black people] are a part of America,"
he says. "Even though there have been some injustices made, there
is no reason for us not to be a part of the American system."

One hundred sixty-seven years after the first black Marines,
Edgar A. Huff became one of the first group of blacks *allowed* to enlist
in the Marines in 1942. When he went on furlough after finishing boot
camp, he was promptly arrested by Marine MPs because they believed
"There ain't no damn nigger Marines." Huff went on to become the first
black Marine sergeant major, serving under nineteen generals. Three
weeks after his retirement party in 1972, after pulling duty in Vietnam,
four white Marines drove to his house and threw phosphorus grenades
into it, his car and his front yard. Although Marine authorities were
given the license plate number—by a white Marine friend of Huff—the
four were never brought up on charges; they were transferred or
discharged. Says Huff, "I've fought for thirty years for the Marine
Corps. And I feel like I am part of this ground I walk on every day."
Huff's is an open, wise face, overflowing with dignity.

Lt. Commander William S. Norman, who pulled three tours in
Vietnam, questions not only the Navy's rampant racism, but the war
itself, and the "communist insurgency" clichés that buttressed it, to
the extent that he only withdrew his resignation because the new chief
of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, asked him to stay on to
improve things. In three years they began 200 new programs. But
other brass wanted Norman out and he himself felt that he'd achieved
enough to resign once more. Under the Zumwalt-Norman operation,
the first black flag officer, Samuel L. Gravely, came topside. (The army
had a flag officer in 1942, and the Air Force at least three by the 1960s.)
"I don't think," Norman says, "you can call Vietnam a success story for
young blacks who served there. A few stayed in service and did very
well. But those who experienced racism in a war we lost wear a
scar...the black soldier paid a real price."

The sad thing is, though, that every black serviceman paid a
price in every war and they number in the millions. They stand in the
shadows of Terry's histories and must, like me, mutter: "Nothing's
changed."

Terry's May 26, 1967 *Time* cover story is slugged "Democracy
in the Foxhole," and is bracketed with photos of black servicemen,
their families and white friends. His piece followed by ten months
(August 22 1966) *Newsweek*'s "Great Society—In Uniform." Both
magazines cited the disproportionate numbers of black war dead
when compared to the civilian population—roughly 14.6 percent of the
battle dead against 11 percent of the population.

The *New York Times* military editor, Hanson Baldwin, on

November 20, 1966, claimed that "...The Negro has never had it so good in the Army." He pointed out that blacks "in many line outfits...make up between 30 to 60 percent of the personnel," and that "23.5 percent of the Army enlisted men killed during 1965 were Negro...." The price, Commander Norman, was high.

Black troopers seemed to have lost something else in Vietnam, and that is the general reputation for being far kinder to civilians than white troopers. The reputation came from the European theater during World War 2. Now and again it shines through in Terry's histories, but it is always balanced, that kindness, with the overdone machismo of the bigot. But the enemy repaid brutality with brutality, and blacks did not escape. Still, there were instances, some stated in the book, where blacks ranged untouched in areas in Vietnam where white troops were decimated. Experiences in what one might call, with tongue in cheek, "Third World Solidarity" have been noted by black servicemen since World War 2. The Pentagon, undoubtedly, has already taken notice of this.

The oral historians in *Bloods* tend to confirm the conclusions of a number of books now on the market, which criticize commanders from headquarters down to company commanders. There is widespread contempt voiced for officers in the field by Terry's historians.

Terry himself is the cool, practiced journalist here, all ears, and almost nowhere in sight except for the introduction and a photo of himself with two servicemen. Missing from the ranks of the subjects is a black flag officer—missing probably for good reason: Flag officers are not what you'd call outspoken on the issues, especially if they are black. Here and there the stitching within the selections shows, but always briefly and with the purpose of making the necessary transitions. Terry obviously eliminated gossip and litanies of complaints that did not relate to the topic at hand.

Terry has also captured the "range of the rap" from street black rap to the careful military jargon of the upper-level officers. The book echoes with frustration; these men wanted things to be better than they are. In reflection, and for most there is a careful reappraisal of what they were and what they did, they are proud that, when they had to be, they were tough and brave; they are puzzled that so many of them wound up with Bad Conduct discharges and no skills except to kill.

Perhaps Terry's first historian, Pfc. Reginald "Malik" Edwards of the Marines says it all:

> Sometimes I think we would have done a lot better by getting
> them [Viet Cong, North Vietnamese] hooked on our lifestyle

than by trying to do it with guns. Give them credit cards. Make them dependent on television and sugar. Blue jeans work better than bombs. You can take blue jeans and rock'n roll records and win over more countries than you can with soldiers.

Wallace Terry's *Bloods* may be late, but better now than never, and its contents, for some Americans, make for a welcome addition to what all Americans need to know about their military machine and the men who make it what it is.

Alamo Bay and the Gook Syndrome

Henry J. Laskowsky

At the very beginning of my course on the literature of the Vietnam War I often ask students to give me their impressions of the war as part of American history. Except for the occasional veteran or returning student, most confess to having little detailed knowledge about the origins and conduct of the war, but nevertheless agree on the perception that it was some sort of aberration—an anomaly in America's proud history of fighting on the side of virtue. One reason for enrolling in the course to begin with, they say, is the impression that the war constitutes a kind of grey area, or perhaps even a patch of darkness in the otherwise bright narrative of our military history. The many popular contemporary films, books, and television productions about Vietnam paint a picture of a morally ambiguous struggle.

My students are well prepared to deal with the war's uniqueness; what they are not prepared to do is to see what happened in Vietnam as part of an historical pattern, a chain of events which culminates in Vietnam and which reveals a developing pattern of racist behavior.. To understand the specific assumptions of those Americans who went to Vietnam or those who created policy at home, we must become aware of the historical precedents for those attitudes as applied to blacks, Latinos, and Asians within our own borders. Additionally, it is important to review the development of racist beliefs during our westward expansion as we first fought American Indians and then crossed the Pacific to fight Filipinos before sending troops into Vietnam. One of the ways I have been able to get my students to begin thinking about such complicated matters is to show them the film *Alamo Bay*. In this essay, I will show the relevance of this film to an understanding of the nature and roots of American racism in Vietnam.

When James Madison wrote in 1826 that, "next to the case of the black race within our bosom, that of the red on our borders is the problem most baffling to the policy of our country," he could not have foreseen how much more complicated America's racial problems would become by the end of the century.[1] After annexing Hawaii in July of 1898, the United States acquired Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines from Spain for approximately $20 million in December of the same year. President McKinley had been undecided about

whether or not he really wanted to buy the Philippines, and finally made his decision by going down on his knees to pray for guidance from God. What God told him was that it would be "bad business" to turn them over to France and Germany, "our commercial rivals in the Orient," but that "we could not leave them to themselves," since "they were unfit for self government." Therefore, "there was nothing left to do but take them all and educate the Filipinos, and uplift, and civilize, and Christianize them."[2] The Philippine people, however, saw things differently and by 1899, under Emilio Aguinaldo, they rose in revolt against their new American rulers, as they had risen under the Spanish occupation. After three years of war and the commitment of 70,000 American troops, the US crushed the rebellion, but by then a pattern of racist thought and action had been established which would reassert itself another half of a century later in Indochina.

Faced with a non-white, non-Western group of rebels, military and civilian officials responsible for subjugating the people of the Philippines quickly adapted the logic and the procedures used to conquer the American Indian, and turned them to use against the "savage" Philippine tribes. Like the American Indian, the Philippine people were considered by most Americans to be less than human. McKinley's advisor, Professor D.C. Worcestor, had concocted a racial classification of the Philippine people and was put in charge of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes under various American governors of the Philippines. He wrote in a 1913 issue of *National Geographic* that the "Negrito" (Filipino) race ranked "not far above the anthropoid apes," and that "they are a link which is not missing but soon will be! In my opinion, they are absolutely incapable of civilization."[3] Theodore Roosevelt, who in 1900 was McKinley's running mate, observed that, "to grant self-government to Luzon under Aguinaldo would be like granting self-government to an Apache reservation under some local chief," and went on to say "the reasoning which justifies our having made war against Sitting Bull also justifies our having checked the outbreaks of Aguinaldo and his followers."[4]

In the field, old Indian fighters such as Generals Franklin Bell and Jacob H. "Hell Roaring" Smith used the same tactics on the Philippine rebels as they had used on American Indians, including the destruction of entire towns and villages, the massacre of men, women, and children, and the burning of crops. Later court martialed for ordering the murder of eleven prisoners, General Smith, according to the trial records, gave the following orders to his troops: "I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn the better you will please me." He wished "the interior of Samar [to] be made a howling wilderness."[5] Nor was theological justification for pursuing an "Indian war" against the rebels lacking; according to James W. Thoburn, Bishop of the Methodist Church for India and

Malaysia, the Philippine people were "very much...like our American Indians...treacherous in their character."[6]

The rationalization for brutal treatment was displayed to every American in 1904, when the St. Louis World's Fair of that year presented absolute "proof" of the racial inferiority of America's native peoples and those of the Philippines by placing both Geronimo and a group of Philippine Igorots on exhibit to satisfy the curiosity of those "civilized" Americans who would pay to view them.

If the American Indian provided the clearest analogy to the Filipino for those Americans who came to conquer and civilize the natives, it is also true that American history had provided an alternative way of identifying the inhabitants of those islands. According to Howard Zinn, "between 1889 and 1903, on the average, every week, two Negroes were lynched by mobs—hanged, burned, mutilated."[7] Since the Colonial period it had been American policy to treat blacks as a sub-human race undeserving of the protections and rights guaranteed to white men by law. This disregard for the humanity and dignity of blacks was easily extended to the dark-skinned people of the Phillipines. All Filipinos were called "niggers" by white American soldiers, and were sometimes murdered for no other reason than that their skins were brown. According to a correspondent for the Philadelphia *Ledger*, writing in November, 1901:

> The present war is no bloodless, opera *bouffe* engagement; our men have been relentless, have killed to exterminate men, women, children, prisoners and captives, active insurgents and suspected people from lads of ten up, the idea prevailing that the Filipino as such was little better than a dog.... Our soldiers have pumped salt water into men to make them talk, and have taken prisoner people who held up their hands and peacefully surrendered, and an hour later, without an atom of evidence to show that they were even *insurrectos*, stood them on a bridge and shot them down one by one, to drop into the water below and float down, as examples to those who found their bullet-loaded corpses.[8]

Typically an American soldier could write home that, "Our fighting blood was up, and we all wanted to kill 'niggers'.... This shooting human beings beats rabbit hunting all to pieces."[9]

The language and attitudes of the white American soldiers created an enormous problem for the soldiers who constituted the four black regiments on duty in the Philippines. Many black soldiers resented the term "nigger" when it was used by white troops to describe the Filipinos, and there was an unusually high desertion rate for black soldiers, some of whom joined the rebels and fought against the American army.[10] Thus, Patrick Mason, a black soldier in the 24th

Infantry could write to the Cleveland *Gazette*:

> Dear Sir: I have not had any fighting to do since I have been
> here and don't care to do any. I feel sorry for these people and
> all that have come under the control of the United States. I
> don't believe they will be justly dealt by. The first thing in the
> morning is the "Nigger" and the last thing at night is the
> "Nigger"....[11]

Other black soldiers joined with the whites in calling Filipinos "goo-
goos"; the origin of the term is unclear, but it was obviously developed
to describe these people—neither Negro nor Indian—who nonetheless
did not deserve the privileges due to those with white skins. The
complexity and magnitude of American racism in the Philippines is
further signified by the fact that black soldiers sometimes took Filipino
women as lovers and wives and called them "squaws."[12]

Approximately sixty years later, when American troops crossed
the South China Sea which separates the Philippines from Vietnam,
they came to replace the French as we had replaced the Spanish in
Manila at the turn of the century. The essential features of our
Philippine occupation would be repeated as in a recurring nightmare.
Once again, villages would be burned, crops destroyed, people displaced;
men, women and children would be massacred. Because of
advancements in American war technology, Americans in Vietnam
were able to wreak terrible damage upon the peasant peoples and
cultures of Vietnam (as well as the surrounding countries of Laos and
Cambodia), killing at least two million Vietnamese (approximately
58,000 American died) and devastating the land with millions of tons
of bombs and chemical defoliants.

On the ground, American soldiers would speak of land occupied
by the Viet Cong as "Indian country," and many would try to emulate
the mythic American hero and Indian fighter as portrayed by John
Wayne. Blacks once again found themselves in the confusing position
of being required to kill people of color while their own status as victims
of racism was made clear to them by white reaction to the civil-rights
movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Vietnamese "gooks" replaced
Philippine "goo-goos" as the victims of white racist aggression, and it
was frequently stated by American soldiers that "the only good gook
is a dead gook." Once again, the history of America's racism was
shaping America's military encounter with an alien group of people;
only this time, approximately 3 million Americans would become
involved in that complex of racial attitudes which Robert Lifton has
called "the gook syndrome."
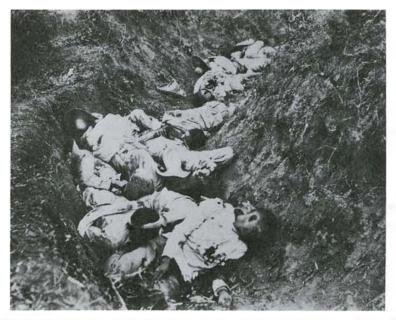shrimp wholesaler, who has employed other Vietnamese because

Burial of the dead at Wounded Knee, New Years Day, 1891. Photo by GI Trager, Nebraska State Historical Society.

The word "gook" has two primary definitions in the *American Heritage Dictionary*: 1) "A dirty, sludgy, or slimy substance;" and, 2) "An Oriental." Like those other derogatory terms, "dink" and "slope," the word "gook" referred to *all* Vietnamese and not merely the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese Army against whom American soldiers fought. The transference of hatred from a particular enemy to all people of a given race is a necessary precurser to massacres, such as the one at My Lai, where civilians of all ages were slaughtered by American troops. A soldier at My Lai is reported to have said:

> I hate the gooks—in terms you can actually understand. I hate them a whole lot. That means I hate them worse than anybody does.... And of course the only way you could determine who hated them the most was how many times you beat them or killed them or raped them or something like that.[13]

Ingrained patterns of racism made it easy for American soldiers to transfer blame for the horrors and absurdities of the Vietnam war onto the Vietnamese, making them scapegoats for Americans who were not able to conceive of the idea—let alone acknowledge the fact—that they

Burial of the dead at Santa Ana, February 5, 1899. Photo from the National Archives (US Signal Corps No. 111-RB-1037).

were fighting an evil war. According to Lifton:

> The [gook] syndrome draws upon, but in a basic way violates, Biblical imagery of the scapegoat. The sin [the war] is there, but it is not confronted by the [American] community.... Instead the scapegoat—or gook-victim—is made to bear the unacknowledged guilt of the victimizing community; the human sacrifice is instead performed to appease appetites for killing (those of GIs, company commanders, generals, the Pentagon, the White House, and, as perceived, of possibly still higher powers),....but without convincing inner justification. The gook syndrome thus requires that one kill or otherwise brutalize the scapegoat-victim, but prevents the atonement at the very center of the original scapegoat ritual. Indeed, the compulsive killing of "gooks" can reflect an aberrant substitute for that atonement—a perverse and continuous struggle toward a 'cleansing ritual' that leads only to more blood guilt and still more compulsive killing.[14]

As in the Philippines, many Americans who were of African, American Indian, or Asian ancestry also fell victim to the gook syndrome, in part because of the melting-pot myth which required such people to leave

Massacre at My Lai, March 16, 1968. Photo by Ronald Haeberle, from Life Magazine (© 1969 Time, Inc.).

their racial and cultural origins behind in their quest to become truly American.[15]

Along with the general unwillingness of most Americans to accept this country's failure in Vietnam, there is an unsurprising reluctance to fully face the racist nature of the American struggle there. The only American film which does begin to come to terms with the racial complexities of the war—*Alamo Bay*—takes place on the gulf coast of Texas. Perhaps this is as it should be, for the tragic events which were enacted in the Philippines and which were then repeated in Vietnam were, after all, written and rehearsed here at home.

The film takes place in a small town called Port Alamo after the war is over. A number of Vietnamese immigrants have settled locally to work in the fishing industry. The opening shot is of a young Vietnamese man, Dinh, holding a small American flag while walking into town. He is given a ride by an American veteran who tells him about the "beautiful women and good drugs" he found in Vietnam. This kind of reception is ordinary, expected, and if the film dealt only with American-Vietnamese relations, animosities, and misunderstandings, it would have accomplished something significant; but the director (Louis Malle) has intentions which are much more complex. Arriving in town, Dinh seeks employment from Wally, a

"immigration has run off all my good Mexicans." Dinh does not know this, nor does he know the meaning of the letters KKK that he sees written on the side of a building; these are Malle's signals to his audience that the film will concern itself not only with America's problems with Vietnamese immigrants, but with the way these problems are created, recreated and complicated by the history of American racism. Very early in the film, when Dinh, having bought into the Alger myth of individual accomplishment, announces to one of Wally's Mexican-American employees that, like every American, he wants to get rich, the Chicano replies, "This is a gringo bay." Again, Dinh does not understand, just as he does not understand the significance of the fact that he lives in a place called Port *Alamo*. But if Dinh is as yet ignorant of American history, its consequences will nevertheless be devastating for him.

Dinh's antagonist in *Alamo Bay* is a white fisherman, Shang, who has taken out a bank loan and bought a boat he calls *American Dream Girl*. When we first see Shang, he is wearing a t-shirt with the words "Nam Vets of Texas" printed on the front, and a hat with a Confederate flag sewn on (a second reminder from Malle that we are in the South). Under extreme pressure to pay off his boat, Shang is bitter about the Vietnamese who live in a group of mobile homes near his own. (Shang's wife calls the Vietnamese settlement "slop city".) He feels, as do other white fishermen, that the Vietnamese are taking jobs away from them, and that they are "overgrazing the bay" and endangering the traditional livelihood of Port Alamo's fisherman. Like many veterans, his antagonism toward Dinh is shaped by his own war experience. For Shang, it is as though his enemy has returned to to plague him once again, and is in fact responsible for all his troubles. Because he has never successfully resolved the problems caused by his Vietnam experience, nor those engendered in him by virtue of the fact that he is a white Southerner and a Texan who "remembers the Alamo," Shang simply does not know which way to turn...but he knows who to hate.

Shang's hatred and the hatred of others in the community provides a fertile field for a KKK organizer who shows up to organize the white workers of Port Alamo to drive out the Vietnamese. Charging that their presence is part of a Communist-Catholic plot (the Vietnamese are Catholic) he is at first unsuccessful as the people of Port Alamo attempt to resolve the problem peacefully through discourse. But the town meeting results only in the repetition of clichés previously used to describe blacks and other minorities, and residual animosity over the Vietnam war intrudes as a woman in attendance remarks that, "my boy fought the VC and now they're here taking bread from our mouths." More innocent sounding statements, such as "We just want

to be American and make a living," reveal the unacknowledged depths of prejudice operating in law abiding citizens. The meeting accomplishes nothing, especially after it is interrupted by Dinh, who demands that something be done about (white) vandals who have damaged his boat.

Actions against the Vietnamese and those perceived as sympathetic to them escalate as garbage is dumped on Wally's lawn by youths, yet nothing is done about it because, as the Sheriff contends, "these kids know that the Vietnamese are driving their dads out of business." There is also a strong sexual component to the harrassment of the Vietnamese, as several white youths taunt Vietnamese schoolgirls, and threaten them with sexual violence. More complex is the relationship between Wally's daughter Glory and Dinh. Shang has become jealous because he has seen Glory (a woman who was once his lover, and with whom he still shares a strong sexual attraction) in conversation with Dinh. Glory reacts angrily to Shang's intimidation tactics, which causes Shang to explode at her: "You Communist cunt, are you going to walk down Main Street with that gook?"

As the people of Port Alamo find themselves more and more involved in their own gook syndrome, random intimidation turns into organized violence. At a meeting, the KKK organizer proclaims that "history is with the white race," and advises the fishermen to use strategy, saying (outrageously) that "we have something to learn about public relations and strategy from Martin Luther King." A veteran answers that what is needed is "a little search and destroy." The result is a flotilla of fishing boats manned by whites whose purpose is to prevent the Vietnamese from fishing the bay, to drive them out of the white man's hunting grounds. On the boats are men dressed in Klan robes; others have shirts with the words "white power" emblazoned on them; some men are dressed in their old army or marine fatigues. On one of the boats, a dummy Asian is hanged in effigy. The men shout in pidgin Vietnamese at Dinh who—irony of ironies—has taken to wearing a cowboy hat and is now armed. Completely outnumbered, Dinh and his friend comply with the orders of the whites and steer their boat out of the bay. Not satisfied with this victory, the whites proceed to burn a cross in front of the Vietnamese settlement while shouting, "White Power—Death to the Cong—Death to the gooks."

Frightened by the tactics of the white citizens of Port Alamo, the Vietnamese decide to leave. The sight of people forced to flee their homes, carrying whatever possessions they can, marching off to an uncertain destination, resonates with images of earlier evacuations: the Cherokees on the Trail of Tears, the relocation of Philippine villagers, and the movement of the Vietnamese from their homes to

"strategic hamlets."

Dinh, however, is not frightened off, and will not abandon his boat and his chance to succeed in a new country. Faced with such obstinacy, Shang and his friends resort to what has become a typical racist final solution to the problem of a recalcitrant minority population. Like those Puritans who burned a Pequot village in 1636, killing hundreds of men, women, and children and beginning a genocidal campaign against the American Indian peoples; like those soldiers in the Philippines who did the same; and like the American troops who burned Vietnamese houses and crops; Shang and others of his mentality make Molotov Cocktails in order to burn the Vietnamese out. They are, however, not completely successful, for as the fire consumes Dinh's boat, and as Shang is preparing to kill Dinh, Glory appears and shoots Shang. In Vietnam, Americans—white and black—deliberately killed other Americans ("fragging") while opponents and supporters of the war fought each other in the streets of America; after the war, Americans are still embroiled in a struggle with themselves and each other, trapped in the confusion and ambivalence of their racist heritage.

Alamo Bay demonstrates that although the Vietnam War is technically over, the gook syndrome still survives; and as long as it does there is the likelihood that American interventions will continue to produce tragedy, both here and abroad, as history repeats itself over and over again.

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[1]   Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (New York: Meridian) 1980: 99.

[2]   *Ibid.*: 279.

[3]   *Ibid.*: 294.

[4]   *Ibid.*: 299.

[5]   *Ibid.*: 314-328.

[6]   *Ibid.*: 318.

[7]   Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper) 1980: 308.

[8]   *Ibid.*

[9]   *Ibid.*: 307.

[10]   *Ibid.*: 311.

[11]   *Ibid.*: 312.

[12]   *Ibid.*: 313.

[13]   Robert J. Lifton, *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans, Neither Victims Nor Executioners* (New York: Basic Books) 1973: 201.

[14]   *Ibid.*: 201-202.

[15]   *Ibid.*: 204.

The Silent Majority Baby Boomers: Class of 1966 in a South Jersey Town

Paul Lyons

In James Fallows' influential "What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?" Harvard antiwar activists are juxtaposed with the sons of Cambridge blue-collar workers.[1] The collegians, mostly exempt from the war through anything from student deferments to psychiatric rationalizations submitted by friendly shrinks, look on as the less privileged march off to boot camp. The imagery is powerful, and, I will suggest, incomplete. In our images of the generation who lived through the Vietnam era, we tend toward a dualism of doves and vets, the soon-to-be-YUPPIE twenty-somethings and the victimized "salt of the earth" GIs of Oliver Stone's *Platoon.*[2] In brief, you either served your country, or you opposed its policies.

The responses of baby-boomers to the Vietnam war are not captured by a dove-vet polarity. There is a sizable group among the Sixties generation whose experience fits neither that of activist doves or blue-collar vets. Myra MacPherson describes, in her book *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation,* the demographic characteristics of the men of the Vietnam generation. 27 million men became eligible for the draft in the years spanning the whole of the 1960s and the early 1970s. Of those men, 9 million served in the military, and approximately 3 million actually served in Vietnam. This leaves 18 million draft age men who did not serve either in Vietnam, or in the military at all, and 26 million women.[3] Given even the largest of the estimated sizes of the antiwar movement,[4] the number of active protesters could have formed no more than 20 percent (10.6 million) of the total population of the generation. A 1973 study by John Mueller shows that "those *under* thirty consistently supported the war in larger percentages than those over thirty."[5] Though MacPherson herself succumbs to the dove-vet polarity, we may reasonably conclude from these figures that of the 53 million members of the Vietnam generation who did not serve in the military, a majority of them were neither activists nor in possession of any very strong sentiments against the war. In fact, this generational segment is best characterized by its silence, and I find some value in labeling them the Silent Majority Baby-Boomers.

This article reviews an ongoing case study of such a group, the 1966 graduating class of Mainland Regional High School, which includes the southern Jersey towns of Northfield, Linwood and Somers Point. Over the past year I have been able to complete extensive, taped oral histories of 41 graduates in a class of 248. In addition, I have talked with administrators and teachers who worked at the school during the mid-1960s.

Atlantic County has been shaped by the roller-coaster history of Atlantic City since the first roads, soon followed by rail lines, connected Philadelphia with the salt marshes of Absecon Island. Atlantic City peaked in the period between Prohibition, during which it flourished as a "wet" oasis, and World War 2, when it served as an armed forces medical and recreational facility. The seaside resort flourished until the successes of commercial flights to Florida and the Caribbean in the post-World War 2 period precipitated a decline, capped by the disastrous Democratic Convention of 1964 when the national press had a field day trashing its filth, inefficiency and tawdriness.[6]

The mainland communities had a sleepy, small town, even rural flavor during much of this history. Early Quaker settlements had been replaced by shipbuilding and port facilities by the nineteenth century, but the lack of deep water harbors limited such industry; at the turn of the century the three towns combined had about 3,000 residents, mostly in Northfield. By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, combined population had almost doubled, with most of the growth in then rural Linwood, only incorporated as a city in 1931, and the more resort-oriented Somers Point.[7]

These communities grew during the post-World War 2 boom, often providing homes for middle-class and working-class people fleeing the declining and increasingly ghettoized Atlantic City. During the period within which these 1966 graduates were growing up, population exploded; for example, Northfield, which had 2,848 residents in 1940 nearly tripled in population by 1970 to 8,046. In little more than ten years Somers Point jumped from 2,480 to 8,500 residents; Linwood, with 1,479 population in 1940 rose to 4,274 by 1965. Suburbanization was well in process, as state roads like the Garden State Parkway and sophisticated industries like the Federal Aviation Administration's National Aviation Facilities Experimental Center (NAFEC) with its 1,800 employees, emerged.[8]

The small town character of the three off-shore towns merged uncomfortably with the newer suburban tempo. First of all, during this period, the region was stagnant to declining economically, mostly due to Atlantic City's collapse. The paradox of the area is its burgeoning population and its lack of economic promise. In my

interviews, many graduates noted that those with more ambition knew that they would have to leave the area. In the ten years following their graduation, Atlantic City lost 5,200 hotel rooms; the kinds of jobs available, many of which rested on seasonal resort work, were evaporating. There were stable employment opportunities available in a few large firms, like Prudential, or utilities like Atlantic Electric, but in this strongly conservative, Republican county, run by the likes of Nucky Johnson and then Hap Farley, connections were usually essential.[9]

1966 graduates recall, with considerable nostalgia, the stability of their childhood communities, with lots of farm and vacant lands, little traffic, and innumerable opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, or exuberant play in the woods. Of the three communities, Northfield was the most settled and small-town in atmosphere; Linwood, which still had large tracts of farmland interspersed with estates, new suburban tracts, and smaller bungalows, had the reputation of being the poshest, with its Gold Coast, bayside section. The new Mainland Regional High School, built in Linwood in 1961, occupied what had been a farm operated by one of the area's socially prominent families. Somers Point, also with burgeoning suburban settlements, was more defined by its strip of resort-oriented taverns and restaurants; graduates agree that if there were kids who got in trouble—and they always add that trouble was minor delinquency, rowdiness, drunkenness, truancy—it would be Somers Point kids.[10]

All three communities were lily-white, and almost completely Christian. There were a few Jewish families, but most mainland kids associated Jews with the fancy Linwood Country Club where many young locals caddied. In fact, few paid much attention to the fact that Linwood Country Club existed because the most prestigious clubs—Seaview and Atlantic City—were restricted. Anti-Catholic prejudice seems to have been a minor factor; some 1966 grads note that their parents made anti-Catholic or anti-Italian slurs, but this doesn't seem to have been a significant pattern, especially among the baby boomers. Social patterns of friendship and dating weren't effected by Protestant-Catholic tensions, except within truly fundamentalist households.

I chose the 1966 class at Mainland Regional High School (MRHS) because it seemed to be closest in Atlantic Country to a mainstream, middle-class environment, allowing me to test my assumption that a goodly portion of the 1960s generation were neither protesters nor Vietnam-bound GIs. MRHS was one of the elite schools within the county, but was more middle- than upper-class in its essential attributes:

Table 1

Atlantic Country Median Family Income, 1969[11]

Town	Income (in 1979 dollars)	County Rank
Linwood	24,318	2d
Northfield	22,555	4th
Somers Point	17,688	13th
Atlantic City	12,342	24th (last)

The parents at the more affluent end of the spectrum were professionals, owned small businesses; the largest segment had parents who either were small tradespersons, owning the local bakeries and luncheonettes, or were blue-collar workers in the light industries and service trades of the area. They were typically churchgoers—Methodism seems to have been the most popular denomination—politically conservative, Republican and old-fashioned.

Most describe their households as stable (little divorce) and subdued. Most grads could not recall any discussions of political issues at the dinner table; public issues of the day—Kennedy, Cuba, Berlin, civil rights, Goldwater, Vietnam—were rarely mentioned. Bob Boileau described the "Methodist" nature of household discourse within which one had to infer one's parents' political views.[12] Of course, there were tirades against godless communists, Negro agitators, big government, taxes; but they were clearly outbursts breaking the hum of conversations focused on family, TV, neighbors, or, often, long silences before children could run off to play.

Most 1966 grads grew up in a highly localized environment, seemingly oblivious to larger national or global concerns. That local blacks were restricted to Missouri Avenue, Atlantic City's "Chicken Bone Beach," wasn't an item of controversy to students in an all-white environment. Those whose parents had migrated from Atlantic City and nearby Pleasantville carried stories of stereotypical black behavior which matched up with the Southern-tinged racism of more Protestant families, some of whom actually had Deep South roots. Martin Luther King, Jr. was viewed as a troublemaker, and there was some attraction to the emotional message of resistance and resentment evoked by George Wallace. Kennedy, at least in retrospect, was an attractive figure, especially to Catholics, but the mainstream among Mainland families leaned toward moderately conservative, Eastern-wing Republicans like Henry Cabot Lodge. This was not, for the most part, Goldwater country, although he won the area against LBJ in 1964. 1966 grads weren't stirred, or even aware of who Fanny Lou Hamer was when she spoke of being beaten by segregationists at Union Baptist Church during the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic

City.[13]

15,000 county residents had served in World War 2; many of the 1966 grads' fathers were among them. Many respondents suggest that pro-military feeling was reenforced by the families working at NAFEC, particularly those associated with 177th Tactical Fighter Group stationed there. For the most part, 1966 grads grew up with all of the standard Cold War shibboleths about Communism. As such, they were predisposed to accept the words of Linwood Mayor George K. Francis, spoken at the 1966 Memorial Day services: "We are demonstrating reverence for those who shed their life's blood defending our Nation's freedom." Francis posited that Vietnam was "a critical test of the so-called wars of liberation as instigated by Communism." His declaration that retreat from Vietnam would "be catastrophic to peoples throughout the world who are working to achieve their independence,"[14] was well within the ideological framework of Mainland's graduates.

1966 was the first year in which the Vietnam war was likely to impose itself on graduates of MRHS. It is striking how few answered the call to arms. At least upon reflection, 1966 graduates speak of resistance to marching off to war. Something seemed awry—this wasn't a declared war; it was off somewhere outside the students' focus of attention or knowledge. In the spring of 1966, the "Sixties" had not yet reached this part of South Jersey, though the British invasion had already hit, as the school magazine *Hoofprints* indicates in its special April 1964 issue devoted to the Beatles. The girls rallied by a margin of 80-32 in favor of the moptops; the boys, less enamored, approved in a closer 63-53 vote. But for the most part, pop music still meant the Beach Boys, Motown, and danceable rock and roll. No one was listening to Bob Dylan yet, and the yearbook gives little indication of anything beyond a clean-cut, conventional, 1950s image.[15]

Events and behaviors which were already passé in the Philadelphia area had not reached the mainland communities, a mere hour's drive, but light years away. No one was experimenting with drugs; risk-taking centered on adolescent drinking parties, including after school, weekend sprees out in the woods, mischievous pranks, e.g., mock gun battles at the shopping center. The yearbooks over the next several years do suggest changes—longer hair, more rebellious postures, hipper commentaries. But as late as 1970, the yearbook text reads that the US has pledged "her honor...to stop the spread of Communism" in Vietnam. The 1969 prom theme was "Tara," called "a symbol of life long forgotten," and the yearbook lamented that "a life once so grand, so stately, so tall—Has quietly Gone With the Wind." This prom featured "attendants dressed as Negro slaves."[16] As far as can be determined, the Civil Rights Movement had made no impact on community consciousness.

1966 graduates approached the issue of Vietnam pragmatically; they were not protesters, nor were they interested in volunteering to serve. Of twenty-two males within my sample, nine were deferred from service because of injury, school, or drawing a lucky number during the first years of the draft lottery. (There seems to be a consensus that during the time of the lottery, no one wanted to go.) Nine men served in the reserve or national guard units: six in the Naval Reserve, two in the Air National Guard, and one in the coast Guard. Only four men went into the Army: two ended up serving one year in Vietnam, but not in combat situations; one was involved in transporting supplies to Vietnam from the States on a regular basis; the fourth was stationed in Germany. One of the Naval Reservists, while on active duty, served a tour aboard the USS Ticonderoga, a carrier whose bombers struck enemy targets from the Gulf of Tonkin.

The graduating class of 1966 numbered 248, and included 129 men. I have been able to track 102 male graduates. No one from the Class of 1966 died in Vietnam, and I have found only five who served there (in addition to the two mentioned above, there was one in the Air Force stationed in Thailand, one Marine helicopter pilot, and one Army infantryman). No graduates from any class at Mainland Regional died in Vietnam. One Linwood resident, Joseph Goldberg, died in Vietnam in 1962 but he was born in 1930 and, consequently went to high school before Mainland Regional existed. Compare the price the mainland towns paid with that of more working class and minority areas:

Table 2[17]

Town	Population	Per Capita	Black%	Vietnam War Deaths
Linwood	6,159	7098	0.1	0
Northfield	8,875	6523	3.5	0
Somers Point	7,919	6442	0.5	0
Mainland Towns	22,953			0
Atlantic City	47,859	5950	43.7	16
Pleasantville	13,778	5148	33.6	7

Most Mainland grads knew next to nothing about either the country of Vietnam or the politics of the war. The high school social studies and civics program was taught, for the most part, by politically conservative men, several of whom were Korean War veterans, who articulated the basic Cold War anti-communist positions. Most graduates assumed the accuracy of such interpretations, believed themselves to be patriotic, but had little enthusiasm for serving their

country, especially in Vietnam. Graduates did know that draft calls were rising, and those not continuing on to college were aware of new risks. Within my sample, almost half (20 of 41) did not go beyond high school; an additional seven finished two year programs.

A few graduates joined the armed forces immediately, but more of the non-collegians took advantage of their free summer before facing the inevitable. Most of these young men sought out Reserve or Guard options. In a few instances, including later ones involving college graduates in 1970-71, men used whatever influence was available to avoid the draft, e.g., relatives who had connections with Guard or Reserve personnel. But equally often grads tested into their Reserve or Guard units. Several of the men in my sample had been inattentive students, mostly interested in sports and partying while in school. Yet they were quite bright, as their future careers would indicate. For example, one C student, Nick Bessor, who qualified for the Naval Reserve went on to a prestigious executive position for Atlantic Bell despite having no formal college training; John Jones, who became a chemical warfare expert in the Army, despite needing an extra year to just barely graduate from Mainland, went on to take charge of all construction for a national shopping mall combine.[18]

These white, middle-class, sometimes even working-class, kids could utilize connections to beat the draft, but essentially their middle-class environment created the possibilities, in a sense, behind their backs. Life in mainstream, middle America comes with built in privileges: such benefits acquired through the use of family and community networks are part of the informal system which gives an edge to their children. And yet those within such networks rarely notice the differentials. After all, how else could we explain the outrage over affirmative action, a formal procedure rarely able to counterbalance the informal old boys' networks integral to our culture?

In one case, admittedly rare, a grad, John Edwards, who went on to college and a profession said, "I felt that Vietnam was for the dummies, the losers."[19] But such overt elitism isn't the norm; most graduates spoke of an uneasiness about this particular war. Their fathers were often World War 2 vets; in some cases their parents had met during the war when Atlantic City had been partially converted into a hospital facility. But Vietnam was far away and undeclared. Everyday life seemed unaffected; high school seniors went to mainstream movies like *Flower Drum Song, The Sound of Music,* and saw Sandra Dee and Bobby Darin in *That Funny Feeling.* On TV they watched *The Lucy Show, Andy Williams, Hazel,* and *Ben Casey.* Even though syndicated columnist Mary McGrory was warning readers that there were "voyagers of the mind" taking a hallucinogenic called acid, the Sixties had not arrived on the mainland.[20]

No one had heard of the recreational drugs popular in New York or San Francisco. There were no long-hairs, no hippies, no beatniks, no radical student activists. Rebels were typically rowdy, highly individualistic, but essentially straight and apolitical. The boys argued over whether the Phillies' Johnny Callison was as good as Willie Mays. Iconoclastic girls either were sexually liberated or arty. Vietnam existed on the edge of their consciousness, it was confusing, even annoying. With few exceptions, no one wanted to go.

And yet, almost all male grads told me that if called they would have gone, emphasizing that they believed in national service, assuming obligations and duty toward their country. Few felt any contradiction between their generally conservative, hawkish values and their actual choices regarding Vietnam. In a few cases, reservists specifically turned down Vietnam options. But in most instances, Mainland graduates carried the invisible benefits of being mainstream Middle Americans. In fact, this invisibility of social class, racial and gender advantages, particularly in a non-elite environment, is critical to any effort to understand Middle American life and culture.

I have been struck by the marginal way in which my subjects were affected by the movements and social earthquakes of the 1960s. Within my sample, there were eight marriages of high school couples, six of which occurred almost immediately after high school. Those who didn't go off to college, particularly if they married early and began a family (sometimes the reason for the marriage) went immediately into an adulthood virtually untouched by the Sixties. But even those who went off to college had only marginal experiences for the most part. Most went to either small sectarian or in-state teachers colleges, fairly conservative campuses at best late in being affected by either student radical or countercultural influences.

Karen Carson, attending an elite Ivy League school, dabbled in campus activism but only at the margins; mostly she embraced the freedoms of the anti-authoritarian ambiance. But, like Doris Farmer, who went to a Southern elite college, even though she was a "semi-hippie," she didn't participate in the generational conflicts so characteristic of the late 1960s for many students. Farmer remained active in her sorority while occasionally going to an antiwar rally. But her dominant feeling was that the "real" hippies and radicals were "losers," not practical or purposeful in their lives and too extreme in their politics.[21]

Within my sample, there are are two examples (both male) of a fuller identification with the radical currents of the period. Bob Burns described himself as "an old Sixties radical, an unreconstructed hippie who lived by the subversive rock'n roll of the times and found liberation through the other parts of the triad: sex and drugs." Sterling Brown participated in campus demonstrations but was more

attracted to the natural and environmental aspects of the counterculture, and after graduation explored a scaled-back lifestyle through much of his twenties and early thirties.[22]

The most striking, if not characteristic, experience was that of Jane Winters, a very bright, strong woman, now a teacher, who admired the real activists for taking risks, going public, living a more authentic existence, but couldn't imagine doing such things herself. It was simply outside of her essential character to directly challenge authority, to be iconoclastic, to openly rebel. This very productive woman, a negotiator for her teachers' union local, a competitive athlete, a computer and science instructor, could only express admiration, then and now, for the activists, the radicals.[23] Although she was the most explicit about this often gender-shaped timidity, I found a sense of the alien character of protest in the words of many of the men as well.

After 41 interviews, I find myself focusing on this quality, this sense that to the 1966 MRHS graduates, activism is a totally alien concept, an activity which might as well be engaged in by Martians. There is a range of responses, from hostile to envious, with most in-between and oblivious, but to mid-1960s graduates from the off-shore communities, political activism seemed, and still seems to be foreign, odd. Whether the subject is peace, civil rights, feminism, or environmentalism, 1966 graduates find it virtually unimaginable to openly protest, demonstrate, or engage in more conventionally defined electoral political activity.

These are not, for the most part, members of what Tom Wolfe called the "Me" generation, affluent baby-boomers now searching for self-fulfillment through exotic therapies and expensive lifestyles.[24] They are people who focus on sustaining family life and careers, who are very active in local community activities ranging from Little League sports to volunteer charity drives to PTAs to zoning and school board membership. They're not by any conventional definition "selfish," nor do they fit Christopher Lasch's "narcissism" model of ego-weak individuals dependent on seducing the admiration of others, and incapable of experiencing genuine feelings of love.[25] In fact, the most selfish individual I've interviewed is the self-defined hippie.

All have been affected by the 1960s: they're less religious, more tolerant, less racist, less sexist than their parents. They're not enamored with the 1960s, having experienced it mostly in terms of friends or younger siblings who suffered from self-destructiveness, drug abuse, aimlessness, or an inability to grow up. Their perception of the Sixties has made many of them particularly sensitive to achieving stability, to maintaining family life and traditional values in the midst of the fast-lane hedonism and crude materialism they associate with the casinos, which they acknowledge as a regional

salvation, yet they fear and deplore. They are trying to be "old-fashioned" in a post-Sixties environment. It is an ongoing struggle. Despite their ideals, these 1966 graduates suffer from high rates of divorce and, in addition, there seems to be a fair amount of alcoholism, often rooted in family histories.[26]

Most pay minimal attention to Vietnam. Nick Bessor, for example, refuses to watch any of the recent films or TV shows dealing with the war, because he finds it too painful, too shocking. Many of these baby boomers, now reaching forty, have built walls of work, family, hobbies, and community activity to fend off the complexities and anxieties of the interdependent world they inhabit but, in a very real sense, resist. Most have remained Republicans; there is more independent voting than among their parents, but, significantly, less voting. A few grads have never voted. And in most instances they have a skepticism, even a cynicism about politics and politicians. Since they cannot imagine how to affect larger national and global issues, they choose to pay them little attention, focusing instead on their off-shore, face-to-face world.

We have been ignoring an essential component of the Sixties generation, those I call the Silent Majority Baby Boomers. These people don't show up as characters in Woody Allen movies; they haven't been big chilled, or, in most cases, YUPPIEfied. For the most part, they didn't protest the war and they didn't fight in it. We must keep in mind that the antiwar movement radiated out from the more elite campuses to a much broader expanse by 1969 and 1970 (to Kent State, for example), but it never became a significant part of the lives of the vast majority of students, including those at places like Columbia and Harvard. For those at southern and western colleges, at conservative sectarian institutions, the 1960s volcanos of rebellion and defiance rarely erupted. Writers like Jim Fallows and Myra MacPherson have, perhaps unintentionally, created metaphors of Harvard elitists opposing the war and Joe Lunch-Buckets fighting it. In fact, we need to examine the thoughts and behaviors of those who remained, for the most part, silent. So long as such essentially decent but parochial people remain a silent majority we will not, with any confidence, be able to speak of "the lessons of Vietnam."

[1]   *Harper's*, October 1975..
[2]   *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone. With Tom Berenger, William Dafoe, and Charlie Sheen (Orion) 1987.
[3]   Myra MacPherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (New York: Signet) 1984: 33.
[4]   *Ibid.*: 32.

5   John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley) 1973.
6   Charles E. Funnell, *By the Beautiful Sea: The Rise and High Times of that Great American Resort, Atlantic City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press) 1983.
7   *Short History of Northfield* (nd); *Short History of Somers Point* (nd)., courtesy of the Atlantic County Historical Library, Somers Point; Abrahamson, Elaine Conover, *Atlantic Country: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk: Donning) 1987.
8   Atlantic Country Division of Economic Development fact sheets, nd.
9   Funnell: 145; Abrahamson: 171. Enoch L. "Nucky" Johnson was country boss and Treasurer from 1911 to 1941, when he and forty associates were convicted of income tax evasion and imprisoned. Frank "Hap" Farley succeeded Johnson as county leader for the next thirty years.
10   Atlantic County Division of Economic Development fact-sheets, nd.
11   *Atlantic Country Census Trends* 1970-1980 (Atlantic City: Atlantic Country Department of Regional Planning and Development) May 1985: 28.
12   Author's interview with Bob Boileau, Linwood, 22 June 1988. In some cases, the author will offer a pseudonym to protect the identity of a respondent.
13   Atlantic City *Press*, 24 July 6 1964: 22.
14   Mainland *Journal*, 2 June 1966: 7b.
15   *Hoofprints*, April 1964.
16   See *Montage* 1969: 112-113 on the "Tara" prom theme, and *Montage* 1970: 11 on Vietnam.
17   Atlantic City Census Trends: 28. There were 1480 New Jerseyans among the Vietnam War dead, including 111 from its largest, ghettoized city Newark. "US Military Personnel Who Died...In the Vietnam War, 1957-1986," reprint from "Combat Area Casualties, 1957-86" (Machine Readable Record), Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Record Group 330, National Archives Building, Washington, DC.
18   Author's interviews with Nick Bessor, Linwood, 15 June 1988 and John Jones, Northfield, 19 August 1988.
19   Author's interview with John Edwards, Somers Point, 14 June 1988.
20   Atlantic City *Press*, 13 September 1965 and 1 January 1966.
21   Author's interviews with Karen Carson, New York City, 24 August 1988, and Doris Farmer, Somers Point, 14 March 1989.
22   Author's interviews with Bob Burns, Pleasantville, 11 August 1988, and with Sterling Brown, Galloway Township, 18 July 1988.
23   Author's interview with Jane Winters, Northfield, 8 August 1988.
24   Tom Wolfe, "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening," in *The Purple Decades: A Reader* (New York: Berkley) 1987.
25   Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: WW Norton) 1978, II.
26   At this preliminary stage of analyzing my interview materials, I count 26 divorces, including three of high school sweethearts, and five cases of second divorces. Many respondents agreed that their generation's rate of divorce far exceeds that of their parents. Data on alcoholism is impressionistic, but I found at least nine cases of alcoholism, including two of graduates described as drinking themselves to death.

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The fact that we did not receive a suitable article on Puerto Rican soldiers in, or veterans of, Vietnam was a great disappointment to us. We did, however, receive a letter from Mr. Angel Rivera-Estrada, a readjustment counseling therapist at the Manhattan Vietnam Veterans Outreach Center. Mr. Rivera-Estrada outlined a number of the problems faced by Puerto Rican soldiers in Vietnam, and by Puerto Rican veterans returning home. According to Rivera-Estrada, the language barrier was a terrible stumbling block for many Puerto Rican soldiers. A large number of Puerto Rican draftees, he explains, grew up on Puerto Rico in Spanish speaking communities and were inducted into an English speaking military system. Because of their lack of facility with English, most did not qualify for advanced training and were channeled into combat positions where their lack of language skills continued to cause them trouble—a soldier's life often depends upon his ability to quickly

understand commands and information. His patients, Rivera-Estrada asserts, have repeatedly expressed the belief that they were "abandoned under fire" because they did not understand the command to retreat. While in the service Spanish-speaking soldiers were discriminated against on an institutionalized basis; like black and other minority soldiers, they were promoted less frequently than their white counterparts, and reprimanded or given Article 15s or court-martials with greater frequency. The language barrier is still troubling to many Latino Vietnam veterans, who feel that VA officials and caregivers are sometimes disrespectful and unhelpful because they do not speak English well.

Rivera-Estrada also claims that Spanish-speaking veterans have the highest percentage of PTSD problems among the veteran populations: 27.9% for Latinos, as compared to 20.6% for blacks and 15.2 % for whites. He believes that the numbers of affected Latino veterans might be even higher than VA studies indicate, because so many Latino veterans avoid contact with the VA and with other medical care providers.

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Bibliography of Literature on Asian Americans and the Vietnam War

It is unfortunate that we did not receive any article on Asian American soldiers or veterans of Vietnam which was suitable for publication in this issue. The topic is important, and should not be ignored by scholars of the war, because it embodies some of the most complex intersections of race and war. As Laskowsky mentions in his article "Alamo Bay and the Gook Syndrome," the question of how America's racist heritage intersects with the tendency to "otherize" the enemy, is made more urgent when some of the people doing the killing for a racist America are themselves of the hated race.

Approximately 85,000 Americans of Asian descent served in the military during the Vietnam War era; if the percentages were evenly distributed (and there is no reason to assume that they should be), the number of Asian Americans who are veterans of the Vietnam War should be around 30,000, or about 1 percent of the total Vietnam veteran population. We have no current information on the number of Asian American women who served in Vietnam, though the presence of Asian American women in the nursing corps is attested to in some of the oral history collections listed below.

Asian American women serving in Vietnam were liable to be mistaken for Vietnamese women, and thus, for Vietnamese prostitutes. Asian American men were in danger of being mistaken for the enemy in the field, and suffered additional threats and ill-treatment from white soldiers who had internalized

internment camps constructed by the US government during World War 2.

There were, we assume, some Asian Americans active in the American antiwar movement also. During the war there was an active Asian-American student group which, we have been told by members, was involved in some antiwar protest. Literature and information on that subject, however, has been impossible for us to locate. It is impossible to imagine that no Asian Americans in the US in the 1960s saw a similarity between US racism against Asian Americans and US policy in Southeast Asia.

Today there is an active community of Asian Americans (veterans and nonveterans) working to gain benefits and acknowledgement for those Asian Americans who served in the American armed forces in Vietnam. In the fight for veterans' rights and services, the story of the unique political, moral, and emotional dilemma of Asian American soldiers is often obscured. We offer this bibliography (small as it is) in the hopes that there are Vietnam generation scholars interested in exploring the intricacies of the Asian American experience in Vietnam. We encourage you, also, to send us additional references, and submit articles on the subject.

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[1]   Ken Mochizuki, & Lily Adams, untitled, unpublished manuscript, 1989. They base their assertion on the word of Roger Hamada, of the Veteran Administration's Research and Development department in Honolulu.

[2]   According to Mochizuki & Adams, this category includes Americans of Chinese, Filipino, Guamian, Hawaiian, Korean, Pacific Islander, and Samoan descent.

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