

HISTORY OF AMERICAN MILITARY SERVICE

As of 2011, the United States' military is an all-volunteer force. Has it always been? Learn how the first military came to be, the changes it underwent, and how it became what it is today.

Grades 8-12

Illinois State Goals: 1A, 1B, 1C, 14A, 14C, 16A, 16B, 16D, 18B

Vocabulary: militia, patriotism, conscription, draft, subsequently, disbanded, enticement, bounties, quotas, incentives, fruition, draft lottery, commutation, preexisting, societal, Emancipation, asylum, professionalism, forcible, virtue, minimize, reverted, forbade, demobilization, militarized, reinstated, deferments, Baby Boomers, sustain, privatization, inequities, misrepresentation, demise, apathy, sentiment, draftees, bias



Fig.1: Gen Washington Parting
With His Officers

Section 1: The volunteer army and early conscription

-Important concepts to consider:

- The early volunteer militia army and its function in early America
- What factors led to changes in military service requirements, and why?

The issue of fielding an army for the American Revolution was different in each state. State militias became a crucial element for the revolution as developing American patriotism prompted strong volunteerism in the Continental Army of George Washington. Congress eventually approved a larger federal force to which volunteers committed one year and later three years of service. There was a sense that military service was more than a duty – it was a *right* to fight for one’s country. That sense prompted strong enlistment on both the state militia level and in George Washington’s federal force. Despite this, conscription drafts were utilized by several state militias and the federal government to maintain a strong force throughout the war. These were largely temporary and specific conscriptions that encouraged enlistment rather than forced it.

Another American tradition of fearing both an overly powerful federal government and large standing armies subsequently led to the forces of the American Revolution being mostly disbanded after independence was won, resorting to a state level militia system. This would be the pattern for the United States Armed Forces throughout the following century and even well into the 20th century. The idea of a small standing military would repeatedly be taxed and altered due to conflicts and changes in the world and America’s role in it. Here we will discuss this evolution of being a citizen and a soldier in American history.

Despite patriotism, enlistment was not always high during the American Revolution. Certain states were able to field stronger militias, whereas other states had great difficulties in doing so. Small populations, the need for agriculture and production to continue, and economic factors often kept men from joining in the struggle. On the next page, the Pennsylvania call to arms from 1777 highlights some of these challenges. Here we see how men were encouraged to enlist with the enticement that they would join a winning team. As we see in this message, the duty to raise forces fell upon states and local communities. This militia system evolved and state militias grew. A significant Continental Army was gathered by encouraging volunteers and offering bounties. The federal government assigned quotas to each state. This was a force that would largely be disbanded after the war. Not until the Civil War would the issue of volunteerism versus conscription arise again.

To the inhabitants of

P E N N S Y L V A N I A .

In COUNCIL of SAFETY.

Lancaster, 23d October, 1777.

Friends and Countrymen,

WE are again called upon by General *Washington*, for a reinforcement of the militia, and have complied with his requisition, on our part, by ordering out two additional classes, together with such delinquents of the former classes and volunteers, as can be prevailed with to join them.

Tho' we are sorry to find, that our former calls have not been complied with, on the part of the militia, with all that alacrity, we wished to find, owing perhaps to the discouraging appearance of publick affairs; yet, if people will now consider the true situation of matters, they will find abundant reason to rouse and animate them to more spirited exertions.

Our bretheren to the northward, from the joint operation of the continental troops and militia, have most effectually crushed the attempts of the enemy on that quarter, by subduing the army of General Burgoyne, reducing the posts in his possession, and making him, and all those under his command, prisoners of war. General Howe has received such a shock at Germantown, that he has thought it advisable to withdraw his troops, within the confines of Philadelphia; and, on the other hand, our fort and shipping, on the Delaware, have hitherto repulsed every attempt of his fleet and army, to possess themselves of the river. If then, we exert the force we are masters of, his army, cut off from their shipping, and confined to the narrow bounds of the city, must be speedily brought to the same distress, which reduced Burgoyne to the necessity of surrendering. With the overthrow of this army, we may expect to put a speedy and honourable end to this cruel war. The good people of this common-wealth are therefore most earnestly exhorted, to make this last effort with a vigour and resolution worthy of themselves;---worthy of freemen.---When the British arms, the last winter, threatened to overwhelm us, the militia of Pennsylvania nobly stemmed the torrent; now, that a brighter prospect opens, we trust they will not be wanting; that they will not omit, to share in the glory of putting the last hand to the establishment of our freedom.

Should we, at this time, rest supinely, and thus suffer our enemy to escape, or revive, we have the melancholly prospect of a long continued war before us, and of seeing, from year to year, scenes of desolation and cruelty; our friends slaughtered; our fields laid waste; and our families left a prey to a barbarous and insulting foe.

Let not any flatter themselves, that, by tamely folding their arms, if the enemy should at last prevail, their lives and property will be secured. We know how little faith can be put in the specious promises, contained in the proclamations of the enemy; and even that little protection, which was promised, upon their taking possession of Philadelphia, has been withdrawn, by a new proclamation, from all those who had not already complied with the terms of the former ones. Thus they deny to us the power of living, even in slavery, unless they can also pillage us of our goods and lands.

But, with the blessing of Heaven, we have strength sufficient, if we will only exert it. The militia of the neighbouring states are exerting themselves to assist us, and all parts of the continent will contribute to our aid, if we will but join in helping ourselves: Let us then rise, like men, in earnest; let us not fall behind the other parts of the continent; but let the force of Pennsylvania be once more felt and acknowledged, as it often has been, by the enemy; let us strike this last blow with such effect, that we shall not need to strike again. Then shall we forever bless the day, when we nobly rose, and drove the enemy from our country:---and our children's children shall bless us.

Hoping and believing, that you will thus act, we commend you to the protection of the Almighty, and look forward to the speedy prospect of returning victory and peace, when every man shall sit under his own vine and fig-tree, and none shall make him afraid.

By order of the Council of Safety,

THOMAS WHARTON, jun. PRESIDENT.

LANCASTER, Printed by FRANCIS BAILEY.

Fig.2: In Council of Safety. Lancaster, 23, October, 1777...

Library of Congress

When the Civil War began, the responsibility for raising troops was handed down to the states through a quota system. In the past, states recruited using bounties and other incentives. As it became clear, however, after the initial defeat of Union forces at Manassas, that it would be a prolonged and very bloody war, recruitment became increasingly difficult for many states. Hence, in 1862, the Militia Act began transferring more authority over conscription to the federal government. For the first time, the federal government had official authority to raise an army without state assistance, subsequently calling for a draft if a state failed to meet its enlistment quota. The Enrollment Act of 1863 brought this new power to its full fruition as the federal government first enrolled all eligible males in each state, and later (if the state failed to meet its quota) entered enrollees into a draft lottery to fill in the gaps. Draftees could either produce a substitute or pay a \$300 commutation fee to avoid service. This was the first large-scale and federally controlled draft in United States' history, though only 8% of the fighting force were draftees. The overwhelming majority, 92%, was a volunteer force.



Fig.3: The First Minnesota: Battle of Gettysburg, July 2, 1863

Despite the fact that relatively few Americans were actually drafted into the Civil War, the idea of forced conscription in the military was no less controversial than it is now. When it was announced that draft lotteries would be taking place, riots broke out in various states; preexisting societal tensions exploded with the added pressures of a draft. In New York, for instance, tensions over race, class, and labor boiled over amongst the city's working-class Irish, who feared black competition for their jobs and therefore feared the outcome of the war and Emancipation. On July 11, 1863, a draft lottery was held in the city. With the \$300 commutation fee a nearly impossible amount for the working class to come up with, the Irish felt attacked as both a class and as a race. Riots spread the following Monday as people began targeting first federal draft offices and officers, then all figures of authority and wealth, and finally the city's black communities. The image below depicts a scene in which anti-draft rioters attacked the Colored Orphan Asylum on Forty-Third Street and Fifth Avenue, burning it down to the ground. While it is uncertain how many died or were injured, the estimates range between the hundreds and thousands. Union troops were called to settle the rioters. A military draft in this situation highlighted deeper tensions in the community, a situation that would repeat itself.

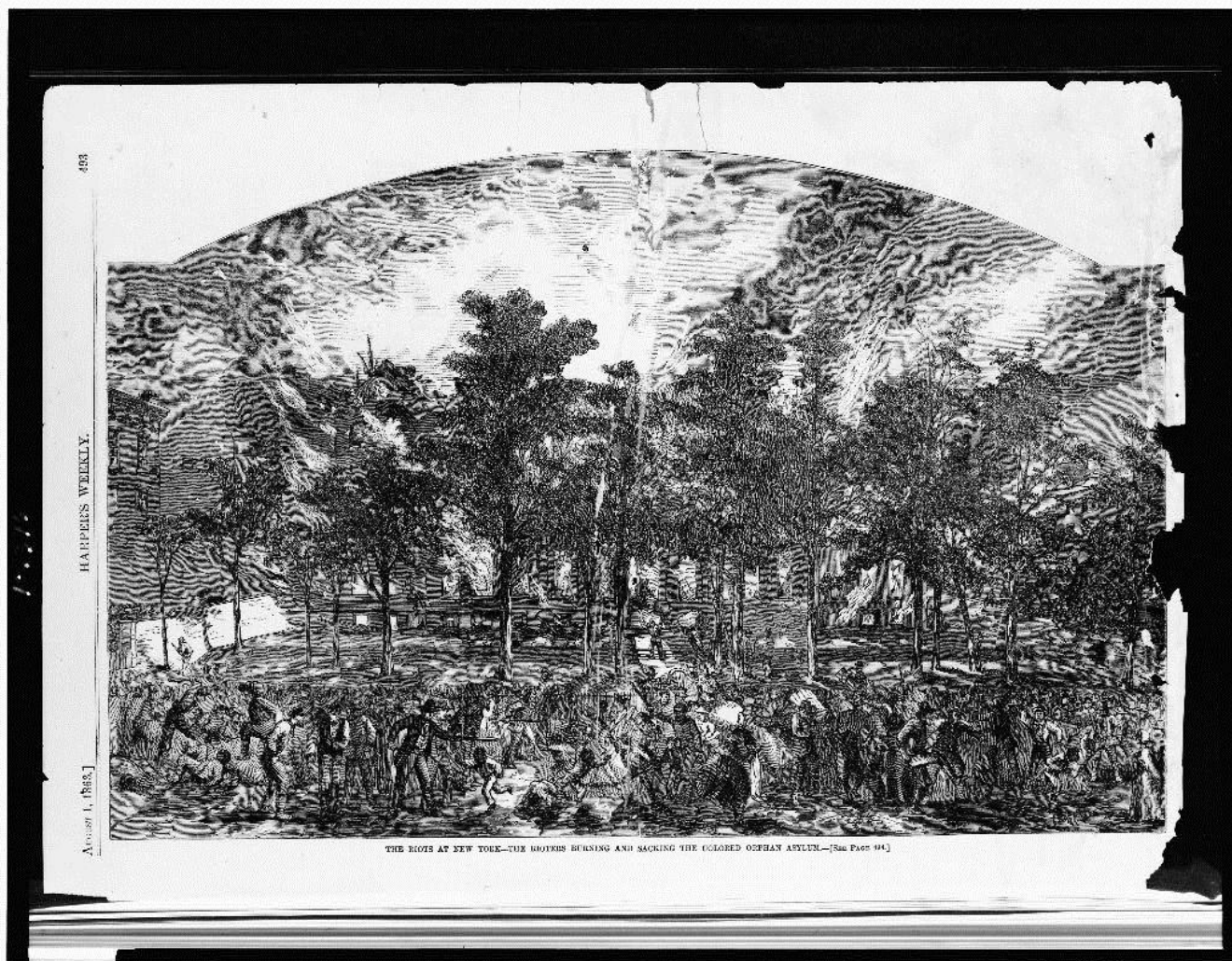


Fig.3: The Riots at New York--the rioters burning and sacking the colored orphan asylum
Library of Congress

As the United States entered the 20th century, growing technology and a more interconnected world highlighted a need in America for more formal military structures as opposed to the traditional “militia as needed” position. It is in this early period before World War I that a larger standing army and increased professionalism of the military were to be established as necessary measures for the nation’s safety. This included a National Guard and Army Reserve to supplement the standing army during times of need. These were small steps that had to be altered for maximum enlistment once the United States entered World War I in 1916. Having learned from the mistakes of the Civil War, Maj. Gen. E.H. Crowder constructed the Selective Service Act of 1917 which took enrollment and subsequent draft selection down to a local community level so as to minimize negative views of the military and federal government. Instead of service being seen as forcible, Americans would once again see it as a responsibility and a virtue to offer their services for the national cause. Bounties, commutation, and substitutes were also removed in an effort to minimize the discriminatory feelings that emerged during the Civil War drafts. Nearly three million men were drawn to service, thus filling about 67% of the military’s needs.



Fig.5: On which side of the window are you?

While advancements were made in developing a larger peacetime army, an Army Reserve, and a National Guard, Congress largely reverted to old ideas of a standing army. For instance, it rejected the idea of a larger peacetime force, saying that the United States was not prepared for the implications of having such a large military system during times of peace. It would take the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 (passed amid fears after Germany invaded France) for the military to build up its strength again and for the first time without yet having declared war. Debates over how substantial drafts as opposed to volunteerism should be imposed went back and forth until President Roosevelt forbade volunteer enlistment in December 1942. Nearly 15 million would serve in World War II, and, as in World War I, about two thirds of those who served entered through the Selective Service system, conducted much as it was in World War I. After World War II, with increased global pressures and America's growing role in the world, demobilization was rapid, yet a significant peacetime force was finally acknowledged as necessary. However, debates would continue over whether a permanently militarized America would be accepted. The peacetime draft was reinstated in 1948 and remained until 1972, becoming a largely accepted part of national security. Men of certain age ranges could be drafted, but this was only to fill in where volunteerism didn't produce enough men. Deferments were also possible, and for most of this period, the Selective Service system would be largely accepted as necessary. Societal and global changes in the last half of the century changed this opinion of the draft.



Fig.6: Defend your country: enlist now in the United States Army

We have looked at the development of military service in America, and we've seen it evolve quite a bit. The following questions ask you to analyze these changes and delve deeper into changes we see in history.

1. In the American Revolution and all the way until the World War periods, the popularity of having small standing federal armies, state controlled militias, and nearly all-volunteer enlistments can be connected to deeper American ideals. What are these ideals? Are they the same now as they were in the 1770s? In the 1860s? Explain.
2. As we see after the failures of Civil War drafts, the federal military system would take a drastic turn in the ways it would fill its armies during both war and peace time. In your opinion, what factors - both in American society and in the world - contributed to these changes in perspective? Why was this new concept of selective service drafts more acceptable in this new century of American history?
3. Read closely the Pennsylvania call to arms letter and compare the ways it tries to draw recruits with the recruitment posters of the world wars. What are the similarities in wording, ideals stressed, and methods? What are the differences? Can you see both changes and lasting patterns in the way government has appealed for citizens to serve? How so?



Figure 7: The Hizar [sic] Province

Section 2: From draft to the volunteer army

Important concepts to consider:

- The effects of Vietnam and the 1960's on our views of the draft
- Debate: Could the draft come back?

The early 1960's had seen the "Baby Boomer" generation coming into the age of military service eligibility. Politicians and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara began considering the elimination of the draft altogether. The idea was that the United States had enough people who were the right age to join the military and it would be able to sustain itself through voluntary conscription alone. In addition to this large pool of candidates, lower standards to join, increased incentives, and the privatization of certain jobs to outside firms were proposed so as to make the military draft completely unnecessary. This sentiment, however, faded in 1965 when President Lyndon Johnson decided to escalate American forces in Vietnam.

Instead of using the reserve forces, Johnson decided to drastically increase draft calls, a move that highlighted inequities that had evolved within the local community draft boards. Unequal treatments, ineffective processing of deferments, and widespread misrepresentation between draft boards and the communities they were meant to serve eventually led to the demise of the draft system all together. Public apathy would turn in to public outcry, and once the war proved to be extremely long and bloody, public sentiment would turn against the draft almost completely.

As the war dragged on, it became clear that draftees were often given the most dangerous positions in the battlefield. And the education deferments built in the system meant that more working and lower class draftees were chosen by draft boards, leading to strong sentiments of unequal and unfair representation in the draft. Hence, a class and racial bias was charged against the draft during a period in which such inequalities were also visible in street protest movements (such as the Civil Rights Movement). The unpopularity of the war didn't help either.

July 1, 1973, marked the first day in which the military began recruiting its all-volunteer force. From that point on, the military took on a new form. Combined with extensive peacetime recruiting, increasing professionalization and career development, and increased incentives and benefits, the movement has in large part been a successful transition. Today the ideals of military service remain respected and expected of all men and women who serve, earning the admiration and support from the American people for their sacrifice and service.

Draft Debate Activity

Globalization and America’s role in the world economy have necessitated the involvement of United States Armed Forces in various conflicts. Some politicians, military officials, and civilians have brought up the issue over the possible need for the reinstatement of the draft for armed service. Here you will discuss whether the United States should or should not reinstate the draft.

1. Students are divided into two sides of the draft issue. One for reinstating a draft, and the other against it.
2. Each side convenes and looks into the arguments for their debate on this issue.
3. Using resources in this lesson and beyond, students are able to come up with a list of arguments for their cause, along with the ability to defend these arguments using facts and historical perspectives, as well as contemporary relevance.
4. Each side then picks its five strongest arguments, and prepares a detailed and well-supported statement defending each argument.
5. Students on each side choose 5 representatives to voice the group argument, having one student representative for every point made.
6. The debate begins as opposing students voice their arguments to the class.
7. On a scale of 1 to 5, the teacher rates each argument and tallies up the scores, deciding which side argued its position the best. The rubric below will serve as a guideline for scoring the arguments.

(circle score for each criteria)	For The Draft					Against the Draft				
Validity of argument	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Use of factual evidence	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Use of historical knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Convincing logic	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Total										

The following links can help students get started on crafting their debate arguments.

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/jan-june99/service_4-8.html

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,842654,00.html>

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/jan-june03/draft_1-08.html

<http://www.cbo.gov/doc.cfm?index=8313&type=0&sequence=1>

Bibliography

Images

Figure 1: [Gen Washington Parting with his Officers], Pritzker Military Library Historic Photographs and Negatives Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 2: “In Council of Safety. Lancaster, 25th October, 1777...” Lancaster [PA], 1777. From Library of Congress, *Printed Ephemera Collection*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbpe.14403700> (accessed March 11, 2011).

Figure 3: *The First Minnesota: Battle of Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*, Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 4: *The Riots at New York--the rioters burning and sacking the colored orphan asylum*. Print. 1863. From Library of Congress, *Miscellaneous Items in High Demand*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c06376> (accessed March 11, 2011).

Figure 5: *Defend your country: enlist now in the United States Army*, Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 6: *Enlist: on which side of the window are you?* Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 7: *The Hizara [sic] Province*, Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Images from The Pritzker Military Library can be found in the Online Gallery section at www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org.

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All printed materials can be found at the Pritzker Military Library.