

Background

In the 1960s, military conscription (the “draft”) was administered by the Selective Service System (SSS). Under their rules, men attending college were given a student deferment known as a “2S.” In theory, they would be eligible for the draft after graduation, but due to age, marriage, and other factors, most college graduates were never drafted. Since college admission criteria and tuition costs were class-stratified, the 2S deferment favored the affluent and disadvantaged the poor and working class. Hence the common chant by Vietnam War protesters “*A rich man’s war, a poor man’s fight.*”

As the Vietnam War rapidly expanded in 1965, the SSS strained to meet the Pentagon’s ever-growing demand for more troops. To reduce the number of men granted 2S deferments, in May and June of 1966 the SSS required college men nation-wide to take an aptitude examination known as the Selective Service Qualification Test. Those who scored low on the “Vietnam Exam” lost their 2S deferments.

Since this was a general aptitude test similar to the pre-college SAT test, those attending selective, expensive, universities were far more likely to score high than those enrolled at low-cost, open-to-all community (“Junior”) colleges — thereby continuing the Selective Service Systems class bias.

In May of 1966, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organized a national protest against the Vietnam Exam. This flyer is from that protest.

CALL FOR AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Our government has decided it needs more soldiers for this "small" war in Viet-Nam; Congress has authorized the sending of an additional 400,000 men. It has decided it can no longer defer all students, and has begun to draft them off the campus.

But our very influential businessmen have personnel needs, too, just like our generals. Our businessmen need the steady stream of young administrators and managers and technicians and scientists that the multiversity has promised to keep on supplying.

So between the old men who run industry and the old

men who run the military, there's a friendly tug-of-war. We male students are the prize.

But business and the military have decided to be fair to each other about sharing us. Some of us are not so bright, or perhaps have been lazy scholars. Businessmen don't need them. **They** can go be soldiers. The bookish among us can stay home and enjoy the full-employment boom that the war has created.

To divide us up the government has decided to hold an examination on May 14, May 21, and June 3. All of us are invited to take part in this Beat-The-Draft exam.

AND THE MILLIONS OF US WHO TAKE THE EXAM WILL DO SO FOR ONE AND ONLY ONE REASON: TO STAY OUT OF THE VIET-NAM WAR.

Those who pass will have their 2-S deferment intact, at least for a while.

Those who fail can start coloring themselves khaki.

WE WANT TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS OF OUR OWN.

● What about all the guys our age who don't even get this chance? Those whose parents didn't have enough money to send them to college? Those whose background didn't even teach them they should want to go?

● Do we smell a little old-fashioned "class privilege" here? We know of a pre-law hotshot from Yale who said, "Students are the brains of the country's machine. The machine needs its brains. Let the jocks and the dumbheads be the heroes." Blunt? Even a little sickening? **But that's exactly the message of this Selective Service exam: If you're white and middle-class and a Dean's-List kind of guy, relax. If you're not, fall in.**

● For another thing—a lot of the guys who will take this test think the Viet-Nam war is a right kind of war, necessary

and just and patriotic. We in SDS think it's a wrong kind of war, not necessary, not just, and not American. But what about you who think Johnson tells the truth?

● **When your brothers are over there dying trying to do something you think needs to be done, why are you back here at home trying to pass a test in order to stay out of it?**

● And a third thing—in these tests, they're going to ask us to parade our knowledge of math, sciences, and language, our skills at reasoning and remembering. And on the basis of our answers to questions about poems and physics and geometry, we will or will not be "eligible" for the draft, will or will not be inducted, will or will not be sent to Viet-Nam, maybe to kill and maybe to die.

SO WHAT DOES GEOMETRY HAVE TO DO WITH THE VIET-NAM WAR?

The government intends to train us to be killers if we fail its test, why doesn't it ask us instead what we think this war is all about? Why doesn't it ask us what we think we'd be killing and dying for? Why doesn't it ask us what we think the other side wants, and where they came from, and why they've been fighting against the French and then the Japanese and then the British and the Chinese together and then the French again and now us Americans, for more than 35 years?

When you kill a man, you kill a man. And we think you'd better know what you're doing when you do it.

WHY DOESN'T THE GOVERNMENT LOOK FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE SOLDIERS IN THIS WAR?

And if nobody **wants** to fight it, and if they can't persuade us, then why don't they quit trying to force us to fight? After all, the thing about American democracy is supposed to be that the government belongs to the people. Or maybe things have changed? Maybe now it's the other way around?

Maybe the real battle for democracy is right here in America?

So we're going to pass out our own tests. Wherever the Selective Service System sets up its examination centers, we'll be there with our own exams. Ours will ask you questions about the war—fair and objective questions—and about how you see your relation to it, and what kind of government ours has become. And you will have to "grade" our test yourself—and decide whether you know enough about the Vietnamese to take some day the personal responsibility for their death.

THESE ARE THE REAL QUESTIONS, the ones that all of us have to think about. Because if we don't nobody will.

Passing our Viet-Nam exam won't get you a deferment from the Army. Failing it won't put you in a jungle foxhole. But maybe thinking through some of our questions will make you a little shakier, a little freer—and a little prouder of your own conscience.

STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY
1103 East 63rd Street - Chicago, Illinois 60637

(312) 667-6050