

From the introduction of *Hell, No, We Didn't Go! Firsthand Accounts of Vietnam War Protest and Resistance*

The very concept of a draft or conscription suggests involuntary or indentured service, perhaps even slavery. Consequently, avoiding conscription is also as ancient as war itself. But *how* is always the question my generation—the baby boomers—was the last to face conscription in the United States. We were the last American generation in which lives and careers were interrupted and placed on hold, redirected, overturned, damaged, or even ended by the whims of a local draft board operating semiautonomously under the distant direction of a remote Congress and a White House administration fixated on war.

While subsequent generations have certainly had their share of life-changing issues to address, no generation since the Vietnam War has had to deal with the reality of having life upended by a military draft—and for an ultimately unpopular war, no less. Yes, we have had to deal with seemingly perpetual wars in the Middle East, classified military missions and skirmishes that we'll never know about, and the tragedies they all have inflicted, but we rationalize that the terrible consequences of post-Vietnam conflicts have involved people who chose to serve, men and women who volunteered to enter the military and agreed to accept the risks of warfare.

Once the draft ended in 1973, members of succeeding generations of Americans often had little idea of how deeply the war and the draft affected the lives of previous generations. They may have heard or read about the Vietnam War draft, had friends or relatives who served or resisted, knew people who were damaged by it, and as a result had some level of understanding about it, but they didn't live it, participate in it, and weren't directly subject to it.

Young men and women today don't have to be concerned with donning a military uniform involuntarily. We did. There's no question that voluntarily enlisting and waking up under fire in Afghanistan or Iraq or anywhere else in the world does not make for an easy day and can certainly have lasting effects, but complaining about it has its limits: *you enlisted; you knew what you were getting into; you made your choice.*

For many of us who had our sights set on a nonmilitary life and career and opposed the Vietnam War, we knew that we didn't want to go into the armed forces. Once the possibility of being drafted entered our brains, it burrowed in, made itself comfortable, and disturbed our thinking and behavior. The Selective Service System that administered the draft made us crazy.