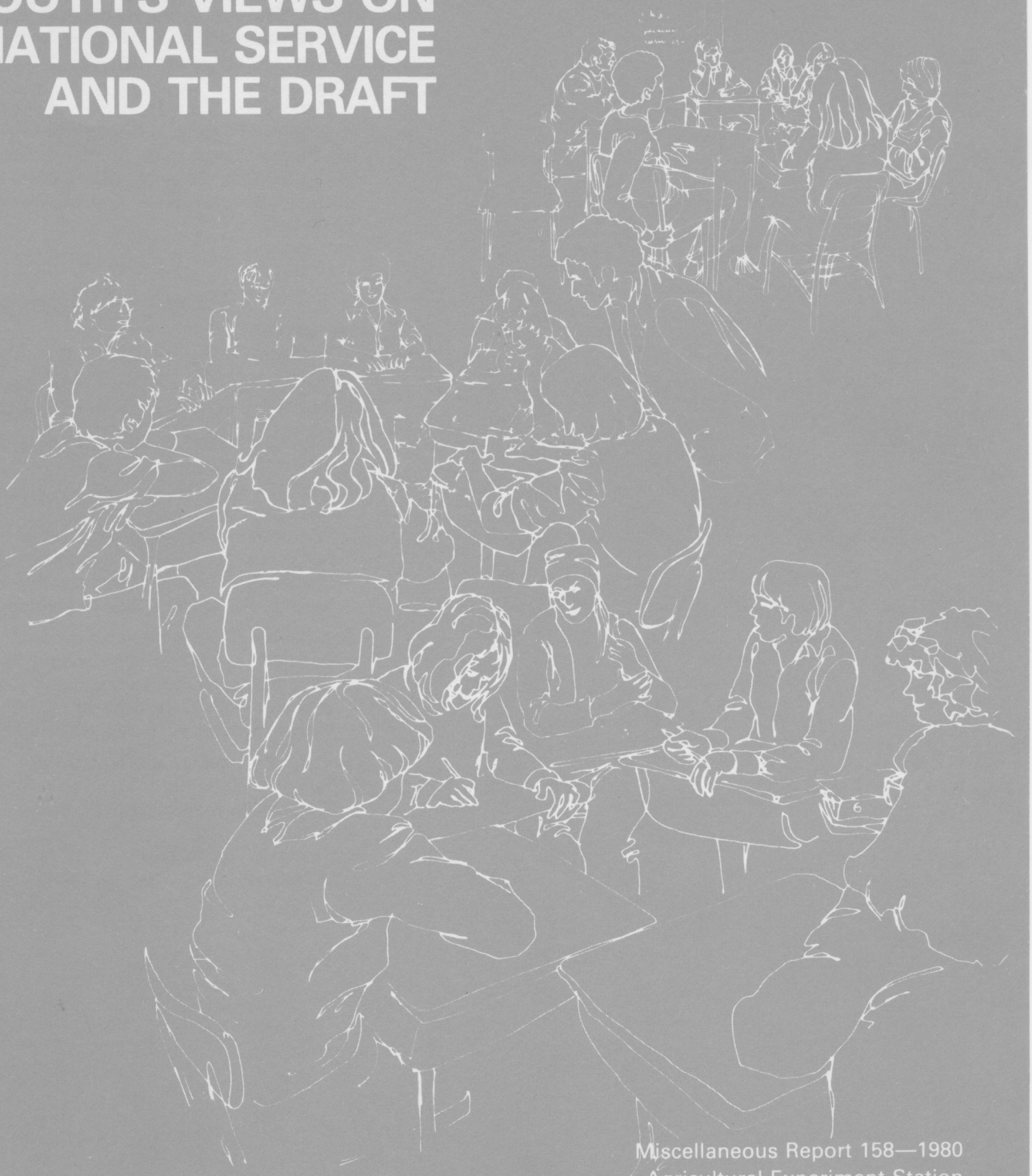
MINNESOTA YOUTH POLL:

YOUTH'S VIEWS ON NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE DRAFT



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by
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Center for Youth Development and Research

HELL NO!
NOBODY
SHOULD GO

Introduction

The Minnesota Youth Poll is an on-going study of the opinions of high school students which provides a continuing communication channel between the youth of Minnesota and those adults who make decisions affecting their lives. The current poll explores a topic of great significance to the nation's youth—the proposed national service program and the reestablishment of the military draft. Both of these issues are currently being debated and discussed throughout the country. Several bills are pending in the House of Representatives and the Senate regarding both military and non-military service for persons over 17 years of age. The Report of the Committee for the Study of National Service (1979), entitled *Youth and the Needs of the Nation*, by the Potomac Institute has recently been published and a national conference held.

Yet we know very little about how the people most affected by these proposals—the youth of the nation—view military and non-military service. While two recent (1979) Gallup Polls surveyed 13- to 18- and 18- to 24-year-olds on their reaction to a program of national service, there is little in-depth information on how teenagers view various kinds of service to their country. This study was conducted to help fill this information gap.

The Poll on "Youth's Views on National Service and the Military Draft" is really two polls in one. The two issues—national service and military draft—were separated, with the first part of the poll on national service and the second part on the draft and military service. (Appendix A contains a list of the questions used.) This was done so that the respondents' views on the military would not influence their ideas about non-military community service and vice versa. The data will be presented in this same order: the first section explores teenagers' general perceptions of service to their community and country; the second section focuses more specifically on their reactions to a program of national service, and the final section looks at their reactions to the possible re-emergence of the military draft.

Method

Approximately 400 Minnesota high school students (15- to 18-year-olds), in 73 discussion groups from inner city, urban, suburban, and rural schools participated in this Poll. In all the Polls, youth's opinions and ideas are obtained in the following way: In each location, the questionnaire is administered in a required subject matter course—English or social studies. This allows us to tap the opinions of students representing a wide range of abilities and interests in each school. The students are asked to sit in small self-selected groups of between five and seven people. One member of the group acts as both the discussion leader and recorder. The recorder reads the questions, which are designed to elicit discussion, explanation and elaboration. The recorder writes down as much of the discussion as possible.[1]

The group questionnaires are then analyzed using qualitative methods. This involves separating the questionnaires by area of residence or type of respondent (i.e. youth from urban, rural and suburban communities), and by question. The answers to each question were then scrutinized for recurring themes and ideas. The Youth Poll, in contrast to more standard opinion polls, focuses on the meanings and assumptions young people use to understand their world. Therefore, readers will not find tables of numbers or percentages of yes and no responses as they would in polls using standard survey research techniques. Rather, the information is treated as themes or pictures in an attempt to retain both the "music and lyrics" or what the young people said.

[1]The following 14 schools participated in this Youth Poll: six urban schools—Southwest, West and Blake High Schools in Minneapolis, Harding in St. Paul, Duluth Cathedral in Duluth, and John Marshall in Rochester; 3 suburban schools—Eisenhower and Lindberg in Hopkins and Osseo High School; three rural schools—Lincoln in Thief River Falls, Westview in Braham, and Worthington High Schools; and three CETA-funded programs for potential or actual school drop-outs—the Students Serving Students Program in St. Paul, and 70,0001 Program in Blaine, and the Peer Counseling Program, Work Opportunity Center in Minneapolis.

Section I:

SERVICE TO SOCIETY— THE TEENAGE PERSPECTIVE

"What has this country ever done for us? They take our money and just use it for stupid things."

HOW YOUTH VIEW THEIR CIVIC AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

To learn how young people perceive their civic and social responsibilities, we asked the following question: "What do teenagers believe they owe their community and country?" Four major themes emerged: 1) teenagers owe their country "nothing"; 2) being a good citizen means having appropriate attitudes about patriotism and loyalty; 3) young people should actively contribute to a better society, and 4) civic obligations are defined strictly in terms of fighting for this country.

No Sense of Obligation

Students in urban schools and those enrolled in alternative programs for alienated or disadvantaged youth were most likely to think they had no obligations to their country or community, though this idea also appeared among suburban and rural respondents. They seldom elaborated beyond saying they owed their country "not much," "not a damn thing," or "nothing."

Some argued that since they had not received many services nor been allowed to be involved in decision-making, they felt justified in offering little in return:

> "What has this country ever done for us? They take our money and just use it for stupid things."
>
> "I don't owe anything to the country when it's so bad. I think I owe something to my mom and dad, but that's all.
>
> "We pay enough taxes and think the country owes us."
>
> "The government does not listen to us and they do as they please."
>
> "Nothing, we'd make it right if we had the power."

Some thought that because they were still young, they were and should be exempt from any form of civic responsibility:

> "Teens don't think they owe anyone anything. At this point in our lives, we care about what is for *us*. Maybe later, the outlook may change and as adults we may feel that we should give support so that the community can remain strong."
>
> "The community owes teenagers. There's not enough things provided for them to do. There's too much partying because of it."

"We don't owe as much as our parents do."

"We don't owe this country anything. If anything, they owe us!! They're screwing up the world for us, who will have to live in it."

"We believe we don't really owe our country much; we're more on our own."

Citizenship as Appropriate Attitudes

Another major theme was that young people should have a certain set of attitudes about their country; i.e., a good citizen was characterized as being loyal, patriotic, respectful, faithful, supportive, involved, and concerned:

"Loyalty to parents, respect for natural resources, learn to further betterment of the community."

"Be good citizens, responsibility to government and to stay informed."

"Faithfulness to the community or country. Keep everything alive so that the next generation can have the same things that we have had and enjoyed."

"Our loyalty but no service except in war."

"Respect the laws, owe our citizenship and our patriotism."

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

These qualities of the "good citizen" stated above sounded faintly reminiscent of a paragraph from a civics or American history textbook. The statements lack the complexity and depth found in student discussions about more familiar and salient topics. In fact, some of the students commented that this was a very difficult question to answer because they had never thought about it before. This view of citizenship as allegiance to an abstract set of principles about being a "good" American may reflect the fact that most teenagers have few opportunities to take a more active role in civic and community affairs. Having no real and active experience in civic participation leads them to rely on cliches and slogans about citizenship.

Active Contribution

The third major theme was that youth should actively help to create a better society. What distinguishes this theme from the one above is the emphasis on tangible contribution, that is, what good citizens do in contrast to what they think or believe:

"Teenagers should help the community in times of hardships such as sandbagging during a flood."

"Contribute new ideas and opinions which help shape the country."

"To be of some use by helping people."

"They owe the country their votes, their taxes, and their willingness to work."

"Keep improving it—taking care of the environment, lending a hand to community services, get involved in parades, vote, go to meetings like the city council, church groups should get together and pick up garbage."

Fighting for the Country

The final theme focused on whether young people should fight or die for their country. It appeared that war, military service, and the draft are very much on the minds of these young people. A substantial number of students used this general question on civic responsibilities as an opportunity to voice their opinions about these issues. In general, they were strongly opposed to a peacetime draft and were not willing to die for their country:

"In times of national danger we owe service, but a peacetime draft is opposed by all."

"I know I owe it something, but not my life."

"Some feel they owe their country something, but not serving in the army."

"Things have changed. A long time ago, guys thought they had to go into the army. I don't think they care so much anymore about their country."

"I know I owe it something, but not my life."

WHAT YOUTH CAN DO FOR THEIR COUNTRY

To find out what kinds of community and social problems teenagers would like to, and feel they could effectively work on, we asked the following two questions: "What kinds of problems in your community, your country or in the world do you think teenagers could do something about?" and "What kinds of things can teenagers do better than adults to solve community problems?" Two important ideas emerged. First, teenagers were able to generate a very long list of community problems, and second, they thought they were best able to work on problems close to them and others their age, such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, school problems, delinquency, etc.

The fact that teenagers could identify many serious community and social problems is important from two perspectives. First, it provides options and ideas for persons planning community service and work programs which involve teenagers. Second, it suggests that teenagers themselves should be involved in the process of designing work experience and community service programs since they appear to be competent in analyzing their communities' needs. Moreover, involvement in determining which problems need attention might reduce the sense of powerlessness and apathy voiced earlier (e.g., "The government does not listen to us and they do as they please.") What follows is a list of possible projects that students identified:

- drug and alcohol abuse
- violence
- delinquency
- give something to do for ages 13 through 19 because too much boredom
- crime
- juvenile prostitution
- big brother or big sister to young kids
- teenage runaways
- school vandalism
- ecology
- learning problems in school
- abortion
- V.D.
- poverty
- safer driving
- bicycle safety
- pollution
- inflation
- corruption in government
- school policies and practices
- racial conflict
- conserving wild life
- teaching young kids—set good example

starvation—"farm space where teenagers would work to grow food for starving people," or "stop consuming so much and give excess to poor countries"
volunteer in state hospitals
watch racist cops
problems of the elderly
help the handicapped
change school board
shoplifting
environment
clean up lakes
paint homes of the poor
clean up community, pick up litter
change youth-related laws like smoking in school
fight the bill to reinstate the draft
pregnancy, overpopulation
vote
fight nuclear energy
energy conservation; "quit cruising to conserve gas"
police brutality against teenagers
recycling trash
international understanding
fix up abandoned buildings
arms control
stop wars
find a cure for acne
pornography
child abuse
develop better pollution control devices

Besides working on these specific problems, some of the students expansively asserted that young people could solve *any* problem:

"We understand teenagers' problems and can influence our peers to do things."

"Basically, teenagers can do a lot about quite a few things—really, we could do something about almost any problem."

"We can do anything we put our minds to. But adults don't always allow us to do it. Teenagers have to be organized. Teenagers could do more; they don't do enough."

"WE CAN DO AS MUCH AS ANYONE ELSE!!"

"If there's a problem, we'll solve it. We are restricted as teenagers but we are also lazy."

Working With Peers

Though some seem to have an almost unbridled optimism about being able to solve the major problems facing the country and the world, most of the students had more modest goals. The most common target of their youthful energy was problems and issues faced by teenagers and children. Students thought they would have more knowledge about and influence with people their own age:

"We understand teenagers' problems and can influence our peers to do things."

"What we are doing, peer counseling! I don't want to sound mean and cruel, but I think we should take care of our own (teenagers') problems first."

"First teens must be able to take care of themselves *then* others."

"We are more involved in the problems of young people such as drugs, alcohol, birth control. We tend to face the fact rather than just kid them."

"We could bridge the gap between adults and young kids. Talk to young kids to illustrate the dangers of drugs, smoking and drinking. When adults talk, sometimes it seems like preaching to the kids, whereas older kids are sometimes looked up to."

Idealism, Energy, and a Fresh Perspective

Besides being able to relate better to children and youth than could adults, the respondents also thought that they surpassed adults in solving community problems on several dimensions: 1) teenagers had more physical strength and more energy; 2) their youthful perspective and philosophy allowed them to be more openminded, to have new, fresh ideas, and be more idealistic, and 3) they were more reasonable, logical, sympathetic and even-tempered than were adults:

"Adults complain about the problems and don't do nothing about them. Teenagers try and get out and do something instead of sitting around and leaving the problems. A lot of adults compare things to the way it used to be when they were teenagers, but now teenagers know what is going on and know more about what should be done."

"Teenagers aren't as set in their ways as adults; they are more willing to listen to other people. Teenagers realize this is the world we have to work with and we have to use it. We haven't seen as much as they have, we have more hope for the future."

"Look at it from a teenager's point of view. We may have better ideas! Talk to us, give us a chance. Please!"

Powerlessness

The last statement suggests the sense of powerlessness that pervaded some of the students' comments. There were a substantial number of comments, particularly from the students in the alternative programs for alienated and disadvantaged students, indicating an almost total lack of a sense of social or political efficacy:

"Although we could do some volunteer work to help our society, we can't voice our opinions, not until now anyway. We can't do much as we are given little or no responsibility."

"We think that adults tend to ignore the problems of a community while the younger people tend to notice the problems and can't do anything about them."

"We don't think we could change anything 'cause we have no power. We want some say in matters especially when it has to do with us."

"If we did that kind of work, we should get more money. I'm not going to give up $100 a week for just enough to live on. I can make more than enough to live on hustling in bars."

Section II:

YOUTH'S REACTIONS TO THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE PROGRAM

Youth Poll respondents were given the following description of a national youth service program and asked for their reactions:

> The government is considering starting a national youth service. It would involve 1 or 2 years of service or community work. You would be paid just enough to live on. The kind of work might be working in hospitals and schools, cleaning up slums, building nature trails, working with the poor and the elderly, helping in disasters like tornadoes and floods, helping other nations like the Peace Corps. What do you think of this program?

Qualified Approval

The initial reaction to a national youth service program was frequently positive. Many said it sounded "neat," "great," or a "good idea," but these positive reactions were often followed by qualifiers. It was thought to be a good program if the following conditions were met: a) if it were voluntary; b) if it were for a shorter period of time; c) if it paid more; and d) if recruits for the service were drawn primarily from special populations such as the poor, the delinquent and the unemployed. The low pay and the fear of the program being mandatory were of strongest concern:

> "If it were mandatory it would be too much like Communism or Socialism. It should be up to each person to decide to join."

> "It would be better if it were just for the summer; 1 or 2 years is too long, it just takes too much time out of your life."

> "If it didn't pay more, there wouldn't be enough teenagers willing to go in it. Jobs which pay more are easy to get."

"If we did that kind of work, we should get more money. I'm not going to give up $100 a week for just enough to live on. I can make more than enough to live on hustling in bars."

Similar qualifications and questions about joining the program were elicited from the following question:

If someone came up to you and told you about a national youth service program, what would you need to know to make a decision about whether to join?

The major questions students had were:

—How much money would they earn?

—Where would they serve?

—What kinds of work would they do?

—What is the length of the program?

Other questions, though raised less frequently, included: Could one choose the job or task or would it be arbitrarily assigned? Could you go with a friend? What other kinds of people would be involved? What skills would you have when you were through? What benefits would be available after service? Could you get out of it if you didn't like it? One group of students cautioned that the program might be rejected by youth if it were not properly and clearly explained:

"We don't know enough about it. We always get five minutes description and explanation, and then they expect us to make a decision based on nothing."

Disapproval

While most of the respondents expressed qualified approval of a program of national service, there were some who totally rejected the concept. The opposition centered around the following objections:

Idealogical reasons:

"It's a step into socialism—having government-funded work."

"No one likes it. Teenagers believe that they could make their lives more worthwhile if they worked themselves."

Financial reasons:

"Just enough to live on—forget it. We don't want just bare subsistence."

"If the price isn't right, people would not want to do it—like us."

"Why should we have to repair the damage the older people caused. They shouldn't make a commitment for us to follow through on."

Status reasons:

"It sucks—I'm not doing the dogwork they expect you to do."

"We're supporting welfare people. Let them do the work. If they're not able to work a regular job, they can do those crummy jobs. The dirt work should be the responsibility of people who don't work for what they get—not US."

"Let's have the kids clean up the world—it's ridiculous!"

"It would be bad for the attitudes of the workers. Rotten jobs forced on people who are used to better. They will revolt or cause conflicts."

"There would be no personal gain. We wouldn't do it."

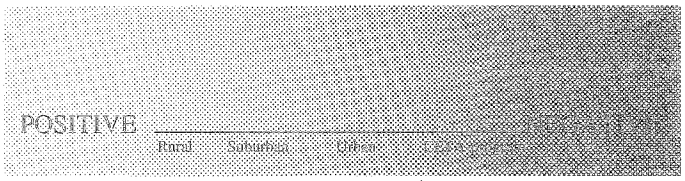
Discrimination against youth:

"Why should we have to repair the damage the older people caused. They shouldn't make a commitment for us to follow through on."

"Why youth? Why not adults? The founder of that program would be making money, sitting behind a desk watching TV!"

Who Would Join the National Service?

While many students reacted favorably to the notion of a national service as described above, not all who favored the idea would actually volunteer for such a program. Analyzing the responses by region, it was found that rural students were most likely to join, with suburban next, followed by urban students, with those enrolled in the CETA-sponsored alternative programs last. The following continuum represents the willingness of students to join the national service with the left end most positive and the right end most negative:



Reasons for Joining

Altruism, i.e., the wish to help others was a frequently cited reason for joining:

"Because if it would help this messed-up world, for sure we would."

"To make America pretty."

"We believe in helping others."

"Give something back to your country for what they are giving you."

"The satisfaction of helping improve bad situations."

While altruism and making dramatic and significant community improvements were cited as important reasons for participating, the advantages of the program were more often stated in terms of benefits to the youth themselves. Youth saw these benefits primarily in terms of social and psychological development, including taking on new responsibilities, developing career and job skills, and seeing a wider slice of life:

"It would be good because teenagers can get the experience early they need later in life."

"You would get a lot of ideas about what you can do and what interested you."

"It would give the young a chance to learn about other cultures, other's problems while helping out the world. Force you to accept more responsibility."

"It would give a teenager a good opportunity to see how the community functions before stepping into it fully."

"People would look up to us instead of down."

"It would make you aware that problems exist and that they affect you."

"It would give kids their first job experience."

"It would be for your own experience. I think it would be neat to be on the scene of a disaster. I've been sheltered; I know nothing about starving."

"Who wants to waste two years? It's not in my plans for the future."

Reasons Against Joining

The most typical reasons youths cited for deciding not to join was that they could secure a better-paying job and that national service would be a detour from their future plans. Suburban students were particularly concerned about interrupting their post high school educational plans. An image emerged of young people viewing life as a race, and joining the national service would be an annoying detour from this race course:

"We have other future plans and it sounds like it would be aimed mostly at people who don't have much to do."

"Because it would take too much time out of my life and I wouldn't have time to do the things I really want to do."

"It is only a temporary job but it is a detour from doing what you really want to do."

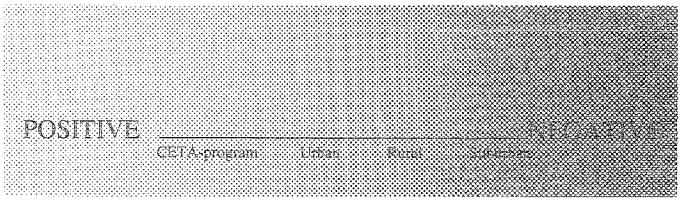
"Who wants to waste two years? It's not in my plans for the future."

National Service as an Alternative to the Senior Year of High School.

There has been much discussion in secondary school circles that the senior year of high school should be modified so that it provides a smoother transition from adolescence to adulthood (Coleman, 1974, Martin, 1975). We wondered if the respondents would view joining the national service as a viable alternative to the senior year, and asked the following question:

Some people have suggested that joining a national youth service program could be an alternative to the senior year of high school. You would receive your credits and diploma by enrolling in a national youth service program. Under these circumstances, would you join this program?

Looking at the responses once more by region, there were some interesting changes: Students in the CETA-sponsored alternative programs would be the most likely to join if it were an alternative to the senior year, urban were next, followed by rural, with suburban students being the least likely to join. The continuum below illustrates the shift when national service could be used as an alternative to the last year of high school; with the left end the most positive and the right, the most negative:



While some students seemed a little suspicious of the plan ('it sounds too good to be true" or "it seems like a bribe"), they did see some clear benefits. Joining the national service, first and foremost, would allow them to get away from school. Moreover, some thought they would learn more practical and useful information and skills, and would be paid for going to school—a very attractive offer:

"We've been in school for 13 years and we could use a break. The average high school student would do anything to get out of a year of school."

"It would be better for many people who take classes that really don't teach anything to them."

"It's a good idea—it makes it worth it to join because I don't like going to school no way. I'd say I'd be willing to try."

"Wow, you'd get out of school, and you might also learn from the experience. It would give you a chance to get ready for life. It would give you an experience in doing something important."

"You can find out what the world is really like and not looking through a closed window. You'd learn a lot more about life, not just classroom stuff you wouldn't use again. It would be a great education."

"You'd get credits and money at the same time. Work outdoors and enjoy yourself more than being kept to a schedule."

"You'd be experiencing more than just a textbook. You're really seeing it."

The main objections to giving up the senior year of high school were: a) they would be deprived of valuable academic learning; and b) they would miss the "fun"—friends, activities, and sports—of high school life:

"You need the full high school experience, too young, you leave home soon enough."

"You wouldn't be able to take courses you need for a job or college."

"Would not be a good preparation for college. Would lose a year of academic education and forget a lot of what you learned."

"The senior year is too much fun. It's the best of all. I don't want to end up in the boonies. We'd miss all the parties."

"The last year is the funnest. You can bug all the sophomores. You'd miss all your friends. Besides I want to be a pom-pom girl. You would miss the senior trip."

"Our high school already has a community program. Regular education is more important.

One group summed up the relative benefits of the senior year of high school vs. the national service by arguing that school provides a particular kind of academic information while the national service would contribute to social and psychological maturity:

"You wouldn't learn as much in the national service program as you would in school, but you might grow up faster mentally."

INCENTIVES AND BENEFITS FROM PARTICIPATION

In general, students thought the benefits from participating in national service should be similar to those for serving in the armed forces. These benefits included: educational incentives such as lower tuition and scholarships for post high school education; job preference and placement, retirement benefits, medical and health care, and a cash bonus upon completion of service. There were few regional differences, with the exception being that students in the CETA programs never once mentioned educational incentives. Clearly, these students in alternative programs have not thought about pursuing more education after high school. Another theme, though much less frequently expressed, was that there should be no material benefits at all. The intrinsic reward of helping people was sufficient. Others suggested that another form of non-material benefits, certificates of service, references and "commendations from the President" would be desirable.

Mandatory vs. Voluntary National Service

The respondents were overwhelmingly opposed to a mandatory program of national service. Their objections can be grouped in the following catagories: a) a mandatory program is not consistent with a democratic society; b) reluctant volunteers sullenly giving "service" would negate the positive aspects of the program; c) young people have different abilities and needs, and such a program would be inappropriate for some; and d) adolescents are particularly resistant to compulsory duties.

Inconsistent with democratic principles;

"I don't think a democracy like the U.S. should force people into things like that."

"I thought this was a free country; it's against our constitutional rights."

"This country is based on life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness and we are not happy with this idea. NO!"

"No way, this isn't a Communist country and we shouldn't be ordered to do work for nothing."

"It would be good because teenagers can get the experience clearly they need later on in life."

Inconsistent with the spirit of voluntarism:

"If they made you do it, it would be just like school. Kids wouldn't do it or like it."

"It's dumb, how can you force anyone to do something well?"

"People won't do a good job if they are forced to do this."

"Not everyone is going to want to do this and then it would become a drudgery instead of rewarding and fulfilling."

"It's not for all teenagers. Because some just don't want to do it and could be more of a problem than a helper."

Inconsistent with the needs of the individual:

"Shouldn't be compulsory because people have different goals set for themselves and they shouldn't be made to participate in an organization that might not benefit them for what they want to be."

"Some people may want to be a doctor or missionary and need the book work. Others need this kind of experience."

"Not all teenagers would be able to do it because some are not grown-up themselves and couldn't really help others."

"It might be helpful for what one individual might want to do and it would waste time that could be spent on further education for another person."

Inconsistent with the adolescents' need for independent decision-making:

"People at that age don't want to be told what to do. They want choices."

"We are always having to do what adults tell us—some might refuse just because they are forced into this."

National Service as a Way to Promote Integration

Students were asked whether they favored a plan to use the national service as a way to promote racial, geographic, and class integration in this country. They were asked:

> People in Washington, D.C., who are working on a program for National Service think it would be a good idea to have young people from all around the country working together in groups—urban, poor, rich, male, female, black, Indian, Chicano, white. What do you think of this idea? Please explain.

In general, students focused on the issue of racial integration. Almost no one discussed the efficacy and wisdom of having people from different areas of the country and social class working together. The majority of the students strongly favored the concept of racial integration in national service. They saw it as a way to make significant progress toward reducing prejudice and racial separation:

"It would unite the country."

"Great idea. Get everyone working together and break down the racial barriers."

"We have to learn to live with others. It would solve a lot of racial and class prejudice, and there would be a lot more peace in the whole world. To tell the truth, at first, I'd be afraid of working with some guy from Harlem and us from a tiny town with all whites. But, I think it would work."

"The problems come when groups are too isolated from each other. In the suburbs we are too sheltered from people different than us. This would help the whole country."

In addition to the gains to the larger society, some students also see some personal benefits to themselves. They said that they would learn about another culture, make new friends, improve their social skills, learn to get along with a variety of people, and widen their horizons.

While students reacted with idealism and enthusiasm to the idea of racial integration through national service, they were less optimistic about the program's effectiveness. The problems anticipated were: a) the differences would be initially so great that people would separate into racial groups for comfort and security; and b) there might be fighting and racial violence. However, though these problems seem almost inevitable, many argued that the program should not be rejected. One group summed up this point of view:

"If they did this program, people would learn something about other humans. Just cause there are problems, we can't just abandon the idea. We have to try!"

Section III:

YOUTH'S VIEWS OF THE DRAFT

"Nothing, nothing is worth losing your life. You can replace the material things, but you can't replace your life."

Youth Poll respondents were overwhelmingly opposed to the proposed reinstatement of the draft. Strong anti-war, anti-military, and anti-government statements were pervasive:

"No one wants to fight in a war anymore. They shoot mothers, babies, everyone. Let the leaders fight each other."

"Some people don't think this country is worth fighting for. The government starts wars and we have to defend them."

"It's stupid; it's not fair to draft someone. With all the weapons we have, it is like saying, 'it's your turn to die'."

"Next election I vote; if this bill passes, you might have one vote against you."

Many argued that the draft is unnecessary in peacetime:

"We don't need it right now. If we have a war we can bring it back."

"I think it is awful. What do you need a draft for if there is no war going on!"

"Canada, here we come! We support a voluntary service except in time of war."

Others objected specifically to the compulsory nature of the draft. Similar to their reaction to a compulsory national service, they fiercely opposed any denial of their rights to freedom of choice:

"We would like to join under our own free will and not be forced to fight in a war that might be useless (Vietnam)."

"People should have the right to choose whether or not they want to fight for their country."

"I don't think people should be made to go if they don't believe in it. America is a free country.!"

Some believe that the draft is obsolete, because nuclear weapons have eliminated the need for a large army:

"With all the nuclear power, there's only a few people necessary to operate and maintain equipment."

"What good are soldiers when we have atomic bombs that can blow up the world?"

"If we're gonna have another war, we'll blow each other up anyway, so why draft—only good for the parades."

A few young people expressed the concern that increased military strength could serve as a catalyst to war:

"It would create a threat to other countries and promote war."

"If we want peace, why do we want a powerful military?"

"Stop wars—don't encourage them by drafting."

"If they start a draft, there will be war."

"Start the draft and it's another Vietnam."

"Instead of stressing all this preparation for war, why doesn't the government put as much effort into disarmament? Even if there's just a one in a million chance, it's worth it. Besides, we don't have any chance if we don't try...It's up to us to make idealistic things practical."

Only a few youth favored reinstatement of the draft, citing national defense and the inadequacy of the volunteer army as reasons for their support. This attitude was slightly stronger among urban respondents:

"It's good—it depends on who we're fighting. If it's for our country, we'll fight. For protection of our country."

"It would bring more responsible people into the service. It is better than voluntary enrollment."

"If it is the only way to get men it is the only way."

Perceptions of Government and the Military

When asked "Why do you think the government wants to do this?", the youth offered three major explanations: a) failure of the volunteer army; b) preparation for war; and c) non-military reasons such as economic considerations and control of youth. As the students examined the draft from the government's perspective, they appeared somewhat less hostile and suspicious than in response to the previous question.

Declining enlistments and the poor quality of volunteers was offered as evidence of the volunteer army's inadequacy to meet the nation's military needs:

"No one is volunteering. We show poor spirit and ambition for our country."

"Because there aren't enough people enlisting."

"Get more people in our dwindling army."

"Only dropouts and crackpots are joining so our military stinks."

"Because the volunteer army guarding the boundaries of democracy is the poorest equipped army of its kind. If the draft were reinstated the army would become more disciplined, unlike the lack of discipline we have now."

A second explanation for the re-emergence of the draft was that the government was preparing for war. Sometimes, the students thought that was justifiable, i.e., in the interests of national security and defense; and sometimes it was viewed as opportunistic and imperialistic:

"Maybe they're preparing for war."

"To keep our national defense strong."

"So we can be the biggest world power to preserve democracy."

"So we can look at Russia and say 'Ha-ha', we're better than you'; so they can counteract us, leading closer and closer to total destruction."

Finally, a wide variety of non-military reasons for reinstating the draft were cited including reducing unemployment, saving money, reducing delinquency, and manipulating youth:

"Keep the delinquents off the streets. It would reduce unemployment."

"Something for them to do. More youth in army would conserve energy—gas for driving."

"Decrease crime, cheaper than having them join."

"They feel the youth is getting too liberal, too much freedom. They're trying to breed nationalism."

"They don't want to fight themselves. They just sit in their desks declaring war and then they draft us, fresh out of high school."

Perceptions of Military Life

Youth's perceptions of military life were elicited by the following question:

What are the advantages of being in the military service?

Advantages of Military Service

Tangible "benefits" while in the service (travel and training) and after completion of service (job performance, pension, and educational subsidies) were clearly thought to be worthwhile reasons for entering military service:

"GI bill, veterans' benefits, on the job training, paid while going to school, retire early, get pension."

"Benefits after service, paid job experience, travel, education."

"Pension plan and your very own grave."

"Good training, tax-free money, month vacation a year, veterans' benefits, free food and lodging."

Non-material benefits such as character development and the satisfaction of serving one's country were also discussed, but were given far less emphasis.

"Learn respect for authority."

"It teaches you self discipline, at least more than we have now. And a chance to serve your country and fight for freedom and democracy."

"It makes you grow up faster, more responsibility."

"You'd feel like you're doing something for your country."

Some interesting differences among respondents surfaced. While benefits were the most frequently cited advantage by urban, suburban, and rural students, those students in alternative programs (disadvantaged, alienated youth) more often said that the military service had *no* advantages. This may reflect these students' general disenchantment with community institutions and organizations, since they have found their way to alternative programs usually because they failed in the traditional educational system (or the schools failed them). And similar to their statements about the "payoffs" from national service, these alienated young people did not mention the opportunity for further higher education as an incentive for joining the military.

The interest in educational benefits was strong among all other groups though it was less important to rural students than were travel opportunities. The suburban students on the other hand, put the least emphasis on travel and income. It may be that these more affluent suburban youth already have access to travel opportunities and higher paying jobs, and thus the military cannot compete with the "benefits" they can obtain on their own.

Disadvantages of Military Service

The primary—and critical—drawback of military service cited was "the danger of being killed or injured." Other important negative features were lack of freedom and the related disruption of one's life and plans:

"You're not your own person! You're (the army's) private property."

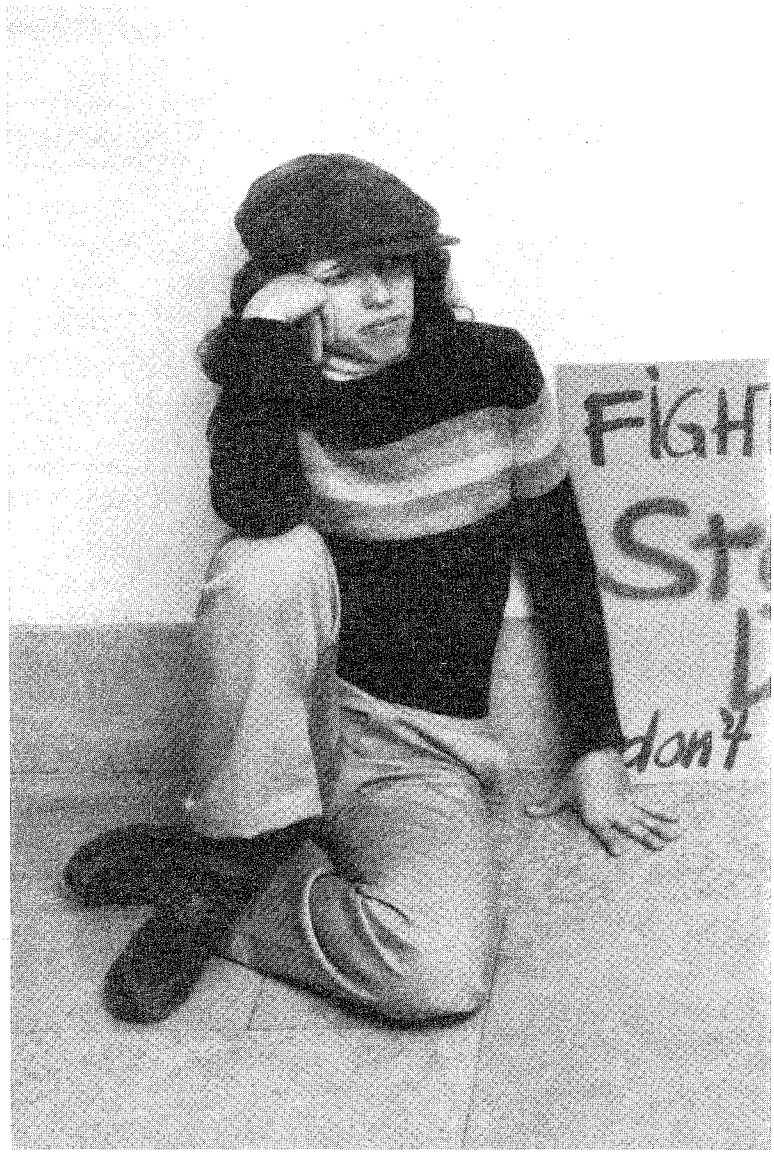
"Not much personal freedom. Can't come and go as you please. Always ordered around."

"If you don't like it, you can't quit."

"Interruption of life and future educational plans."

"Destroying individual plans for life."

Other problems of military service included being forced to leave home and loved ones and being subjected to a whole range of discomforts of daily life in the service:



"Have to leave home—Moms and Dads, grandparents, wife."

"They cut off all your hair, gotta get up at five a.m., boot camp, rotten chow, leaving home town, taking orders, bad pay."

"Haircut, slimy areas, bad working conditions, no parties, bad food."

Another negative outcome of compulsory military service was predicted by some to be widespread rebellion and civil disobedience. A return to the mood of young people during the Vietnam era was anticipated.

"People defecting U.S., people hating the government, riots."

"Rebellion, regression back to 60's young people react to government. People would begin to fear a war, the possibility of war."

"Draft evasions, AWOL, low morale, increase in radicalism and violence."

Again, differences among respondents were apparent. For all students, except suburban, the physical dangers of military life by far were the most important drawback. Suburban students, however, stressed disruption of plans equally often. They were also more likely to mention increased radicalism and conflict.

"You're not your own person! You're (the army's) private property."

Draft Resistance and Exemption

To learn how young people view non-participation in the draft, we asked the following questions: 1) What kind of people might refuse to go into military service; 2) Should people be able to get out of being drafted? For what reasons? and 3) What happens to people who refuse to be drafted?

Three major themes emerged: 1) Respondents generally favored traditional exemptions for health and family problems; 2) Many respondents viewed moral reasons as justifiable grounds for non-participation; and 3) Some students could see no legitimate moral or ethical reasons for draft resistence.

Traditional Exemptions

Students cited physical and mental handicaps and family obligations as legitimate reasons for not participating in the draft:

"People with families that depend on them for money, food, shelter, and clothes (should be exempted)."

"If they're the last child of the family. If they have a mental defect or physical problem."

"College, married, large family, wife is pregnant, mental state, physical state."

"Disabled, mentally ill, any major defect, chemically dependent."

The respondents expressed strong disapproval for those who sought such exemptions by misrepresenting themselves or by using their social status to avoid being drafted. Some students placed educational deferments for higher education in the same category with high income and fame as illegitimate ways to avoid the draft. They named several kinds of people who might try to use their influence to stay out of the military.

"Rich upper class WASP's."

"Rich and wealthy people, people who are stars or great and famous people."

"High class people—in college, soon to be graduated."

"Politicians—don't they always?"

Moral Objections to the Draft

Consistent with the widespread opposition to the draft, youth poll respondents favored a much broader interpretation of the conscientious objector status. They believe that anyone who objects to military service or war on almost any ideological or moral grounds should not have to serve:

"Pacifist. People who feel war has no point, meaning. Also people who feel war gets us nowhere."

"The kind who can't kill another person. The people whose religion forbids it. Non-violent people."

"People that don't like to be ordered around by a person with no right to do that."

"People who have respect for lives of other people."

"People who feel they don't want to risk their lives for a war they didn't have a say in."

Finally, some youth rejected the moral-ethical reasons cited above as justifiable grounds for avoiding the draft. Generally, they saw those who were opposed to killing and war as "cowards."

"Weak people—gun shy."

"Cowards, people that don't care."

"People scared of fighting or to even pick up a gun."

"Yellow bellies."

"People who couldn't handle it, were afraid to fight, afraid of blood."

Some branded those who might oppose the draft and the military on ideological grounds with a list of epithets:

"Radicals, unpatriotic people, irresponsible people, lazy people."

"Hippies, burnouts, bums, drug freaks."

"Dope dealers, women, homosexuals, and pinko pacifists."

Cynicism about the draft was evident in discussions of exemptions obtained. Rural respondents generally held the most negative views of people who avoid the draft. They were most likely to categorize these people as cowards or radicals. Suburban students were least likely to mention cowardice as a reason people avoid the draft, and they were most likely to discuss other plans, specifically college plans, as an important reason for exemption.

What Happens to Draft Resistors?

Youth Poll Respondents were very aware of the penalties for draft resistance and traditional methods of evading the draft. Asked what happens to draft resistors, youth discussed two major outcomes—imprisonment and escaping to another country:

"Northbound, go directly to jail."

"They get jailed or go to Canada. They grow long hair, sing peace songs in Central Park turn into hippies, injure themselves."

"They go to other countries or else they are thrown in jail."

"People who refuse a draft sentence usually get a jail sentence."

"They get jailed or go to Canada. They grow long hair, sing peace songs in Central Park, turn into hippies, injure themselves."

A few students discussed social and psychological consequences of draft resistence:

"Guilty conscience; thought of as a coward."

"They're shunned by friends."

"Rejected by society."

"Can't get a job; goes on your record."

What Would You Go to War For?

Strong anti-draft and anti-war sentiment is prevalent throughout this Poll, and is particularly evident in response to the following question:

What if anything, would you be willing to go to war for?"

The majority of students stressed that they would fight only to defend the United States against direct attack:

"Only if we were going to be taken over."

"Self preservation, if the bomb was dropped, if the mainland was invaded."

"If the country was in great danger of being wiped out and everyone able was needed."

"If you see your own people being killed."

"If they came into my back yard."

A large number of respondents emphasized that they oppose intervention in conflicts within or between other countries. Some specified that this attitude was a reaction to the Vietnam War:

"Not just to help another country."

"Fighting for our country—not any other country. We help too many countries where we receive nothing in return."

"Never to help a foreign country."

"Don't want to get involved like Vietnam."

The second largest response was "nothing":

"Nothing, nothing is worth losing your life. You can replace the material things, but you can't replace your life."

"I can't think of anything to kill anybody for."

"We feel there is nothing serious enough to go to war for."

A wide range of additional reasons to go to war was offered, but no reasons were mentioned more than a few times. These reasons include: "Hold back communism;" "Protect our constitution;" "To defend individual freedoms;" "The honor of your country."

Women's Role in the Military

Youth Poll participants were asked for their opinion of women's role in the military. Their response indicates that the women's movement had had a clear impact, drawing both positive and negative reactions.

Three options were presented for a vote: (1) Women should *not* serve in the military at all; (2) Women should do non-combat duty only; and (3) Women should do both combat and non-combat duty. The final option was favored by a majority of these youth, particularly urban and rural students. However, over a third of the youth voted that women be required to do non-combat duty only, and this option was favored by suburban youth. Only a few respondents believed that women should not serve in the military.

The argument that women and men should be treated equally in military service took two forms—first a positive view that women were legally and morally entitled to equality and second, a more vindictive stance that argues that they must accept unpleasant duties as the price for their new rights.

Equality as a Right:

"Women are as capable as men."

"Based on ability only."

"Women want to be and are equal to men. I feel if a woman wants to serve in the military and meets the requirements, she should be allowed."

"Women and men are equal and should do the same things."

"Women should be equal with men. We will all go together."

Equality as Vindictiveness:

"If they want equal rights, they should fight—but they would probably back down."

"Women are always talking about ERA—now is their chance."

"They want equality so they can have it. Let them get shot up too."

Those who believed women should not be required to do combat duty or serve in the military at all argued that women are physically or emotionally incapable of combat:

"Women get too emotionally involved and couldn't hack the sight of killing."

"Women aren't stable enough."

"I don't think women are strong enough to fight."

"They would lose the war for us." (male group)

A number of respondents disagreed with all the options, and maintained that everyone should have the right to choose how they would serve in the military.

Military Service vs. National Service

Consistent with their negative view of the draft and the military, Youth Poll respondents overwhelmingly favored non-military national service over military service. Sometimes, this choice was viewed as the lesser of two evils, with national service chosen because it was less dangerous:

"We'd still be alive. Mosquito bites don't hurt as much as bullets."

"Because you wouldn't lose your life. And if you did, you'd know what it was for. In wars, you never really know why."

"So I could live."

More often, the national youth service program was seen as a positive alternative with respondents strongly preferring the opportunity to help others, rather than fight them.

"I'm more interested in that kind of work, one-to-one, feel as if you're doing a lot more, working for peace still."

"Instead of killing people, you're helping people."

"It's a program to progress our community, not regress."

A number of youth based their choice of national service on pacifist beliefs:

"We are firmly against war and all related aspects—would refuse to join the military."

"People can solve problems without physical and mental harm to others. Don't believe countries should fight each other. Don't believe people should kill other people."

"We are firmly against war and all related aspects—would refuse to join military."

"We couldn't kill other humans because religious and moral matters are thought of."

Of the small percentage of respondents who would choose military service over national service, the reasons given were "better benefits" and "to defend the country."

Section IV:

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

"Look at it from a teenager's point of view. We may have better ideas! Talk to us, give us a chance. Please!"

Summary of Findings

1. Minnesota teenagers were rather equally divided in viewing their social and civic responsibilities in one of the following ways: a) Some students boldly state that they owe their country "nothing;" 2) Some perceive that being a good citizen merely means having appropriate attitudes about patriotism and loyalty; 3) Another group of young people feel they have an obligation to actively contribute to a better society.

2. When the respondents were asked what they could do for their community and country, they were creative and competent in generating long lists of social problems they felt they could constructively work on. The range was enormous, from solving world hunger to finding a cure for acne! The most common targets of this youthful energy, however, were problems and concerns of their peers and younger children, e.g., drugs and alcohol abuse, delinquency, learning disabilities, vandalism, etc.

3. The typical initial reaction to the idea of national service was guarded approval. The general concept of non-military, community service was thought to be good, particularly if certain conditions were met; the most important was that the program be voluntary. Other considerations were that service be for a comparatively short period of time and it pay more than subsistence wages. Students had long lists of questions about the program and urged that it be properly and clearly explained so that young people could make rational decisions about its value.

4. The objections of those who solidly disapproved of the concept of National Service clustered into categories based on ideology (step toward Communism, denial of freedom of choice); financial concern (subsistence pay was not acceptable); status (environmental work, clean up slums, etc. was objectionable); and discrimination against youth (why should service only be required of young people and not adults?).

5. While many students reacted favorably to the concept of national service, not all who favored the idea would actually volunteer for such a program. Rural students were most likely to say they would join, followed by suburban youth and then urban students. Young people enrolled in CETA-sponsored alternative programs for alienated and disadvantaged students were the least likely to say they would volunteer.

6. The suggestion that persons could volunteer for national service as an alternative to the senior year of high school

produced dramatic shifts. As a substitution for the senior year, students in CETA-sponsored alternative programs said they would be the most likely to join, urban were next, followed by rural, with suburban students last.

7. The respondents were overwhelmingly opposed to a mandatory program of national service. They objected to a compulsory program because it was: a) inconsistent with democratic principles; b) inconsistent with the spirit of voluntarism; c) inconsistent with the needs of the individual; and d) inconsistent with the adolescents' quest for independent decision-making.

8. The majority of respondents strongly favored the concept of using the national service as a way to promote racial, geographic and class integration, both to improve the quality of the larger society as well as to secure personal benefits to themselves; i.e., learn about other cultures, gain skills in working with a variety of persons. They had no illusions about the difficulties of making integration work, but thought the idea should not be abandoned simply because it was difficult to implement.

9. Youth Poll respondents firmly opposed reinstating the draft, arguing that it is unnecessary, unfair, and by strengthening the military, might make war more likely.

10. The respondents believed that the reasons why the government intends to reinstate the draft are: because a volunteer army is inadequate to prepare for war, and for non-military reasons such as reducing unemployment and controlling youth.

11. Concrete benefits such as income, educational subsidies, vocational training and job preference were seen as the main incentives for joining the military service. Loss of individual freedom and physical danger (death or injury) were the major disadvantages.

"You wouldn't learn as much in the national service program as you would in school but you might grow up faster mentally."

12. Consistent with their anti-war, anti-government and anti-draft sentiments, youth usually thought it was justifiable to avoid the draft. They supported a broader interpretation of the conscientious objector status to include anyone who objects to military service or war on almost any grounds.

13. Youth Poll respondents were surprisingly well-informed about the consequences of draft resistence, no doubt reflecting a lingering lesson from the Vietnam era.

14. The majority of students stressed that they would go to war only to defend the United States against a direct attack, adding that they oppose intervention in conflicts within or between other countries.

15. Youth overwhelmingly favored non-military national service over military service, either because it was viewed as the lesser of two evils or because it offered a positive and constructive alternative.

16. Most youth believed that, if the draft were reinstated, women should be treated exactly the same as men, i.e., they should be required to do both combat and non-combat duty.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Youth's views of their civic and social obligations emerged as multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Simple characterizations of this age group as "idealistic" or "cynical" or "apathetic" or "altruistic" must be abandoned altogether or recombined into a more complex understanding. We will, therefore, offer only some tentative generalizations, conclusions, and recommendations about the teenage perspective on social responsibility.

First, many youth believe that they are capable of *doing* something about community and national problems. They are idealistic in the sense that they strongly believe that the young have some special talents and competence to ameliorate social problems. At the same time, some seem almost immobilized and unable to participate in public affairs because of feelings of powerlessness or their own self-interest.

The theme of self-interest looms large. For example, youth saw the value and purpose of service to their country primarily in personal terms— tangible material benefits such as wages, skills gained, job placement and preference, travel and the like. The social value of community service in terms of improvement of the quality of life or the solution of pressing human problems, was mentioned far less often. This may be a function of their stage of development since self-interest, egocentrism, and the quest for a personal identity are all hallmarks of adolescence. Moreover, teenagers may simply be following their adult models, who in the 1970's appear to be self-absorbed and narcissistic (Lasch, 1979).

This interest in themselves is also reflected in the kinds of community problems identified. While teenagers could name an enormous range of social issues, the majority wanted to work on local issues and problems of people their own age. This concern is understandable not only from a developmental perspective, but also because of the very nature of the social structure we have created for adolescents. Teenagers *are* isolated from the rest of the society; they *are* expected to stay out of the way; they *are* forced to observe but not participate in adult life. To have knowledge about or interest in anything outside themselves and their peer group would be remarkable, given the confines of the world to which they are largely restricted.

Another characteristic of adolescence, the wish to be independent and in control of their lives, looms large in these discussions. The vehement opposition to any form of mandatory service—military or non-military—was a profoundly important theme. Both the strength of the anti-draft sentiment and the resistence to having their lives controlled and regimented by the government, should be noted by policy makers.

While a program of voluntary, community service could help to reduce the barriers between young people and the larger society and allow youth to become genuine contributors, the participation of large numbers of youth in such a program is hampered by several factors. First, it may be too late by the end of high school for youth to catch the "spirit of service." By then, many are too cynical, too discouraged, and too anxious to get on with their lives to give a year or two of service to their country. Making national service an alternative to the senior year of high school as well as encouraging youth participation through schools and youth groups during childhood and early adolescence may be necessary to insure that substantial numbers of youth are "ready" for national service.

Second, the whole issue of national service is clouded and confused by the possibility of the revival of the draft. It is very difficult for young people to consider the possibility of voluntary, community service apart from military service. This confusion was obvious during the conduct of the Youth Poll. Some students, even after a full hour of discussions, never understood the difference between military and non-military service. Moreover, the strong anti-draft and anti-war feelings seemed to promote cynicism and suspicion about the government's motives in promoting national service. For example, it was seen by some as the "back door" to reinstating conscription.

Given the findings—the confusion about what national service is, the strong desire by youth to have control over their lives, the wish to participate and "make a difference" in their communities, the suspicions about the government's motives—our major conclusion and recommendation is that youth around the country be encouraged to discuss and debate these issues. Young people should be given all available information about the options and proposals currently under discussion. Only through such a process of public debate by youth, both among themselves and with adults, can a just and democratic decision be reached about service to the country.

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Appendix A:

Questionnaire Used in "Youth's Views on National Service and the Draft"

1) What do teenagers believe they owe their community and country?
2) What kinds of problems in your community, your country or in the world do you think teenagers could do something about?
3) What kinds of things can teenagers do better than adults to solve community problems?

_____

_____

_____

The government is considering starting a National Youth Service Program. It would involve 1 or 2 years of full-time service or community work. You would be paid just enough to live on. The kind of work might be working in hospitals and schools, cleaning up slums, building nature trails, working with the poor and the elderly, helping in disasters like tornadoes and floods, helping other nations like the Peace Corps.

1) What do you think of this program?
2) If someone came up to you and told you about the National Youth Service Program, what would you need to know to make a decision about whether or not to join?

_____

_____

3) Would you seriously consider joining a program like this? Take a vote in your group. No _____ Yes _____ Please explain why you voted the way you did.

No Yes

_____

_____

_____

4) Some people have suggested that joining the National Youth Service Program could be an alternative to the senior year of high school. You would receive your credits and diploma by enrolling in the National Youth Service Program. Under these circumstances, would you join this program?

No_____ Yes_____

Please explain why you voted the way you did.

_____

_____

_____

_____

1) What do you think the benefits for participants should be after being in National Service?
2) Some people who are working on this issue think it should be compulsory which means that it would be required for all teenagers. What is your opinion about this?
3) Why would people refuse to be a part of the National Youth Service Program?
4) People in Washington, D.C. who are working on a program for National Service think it would be a good idea to have young people from all around the country working together—urban, rural, poor, rich, male, female, black, Indian, Chicano, white.
   A) What do you think of this idea? Please explain.
   B) Do you think such a plan would work? Please explain

1) There are now a couple of bills in Congress that would bring back the military draft. This would mean that there would be a lottery and that about one out of four people would be drafted for military service after high school graduation. What do you think of this plan?
2) Why do you think the government wants to do this?
3) What are the advantages of being in the military service?
4) What are the disadvantages?

1) What kind of people might refuse to go into military service?
2) What happens to people who refuse to be drafted?
3) Should people be able to get out of being drafted? For what reasons?
4) What, if anything, would you be willing to go to war for?

1) There is a lot of discussion about whether women should be required to do military service. The choices are that:

   a) Women should *not* serve in the military at all _____

   b) Women should do non-combat duty only _____

   c) Women should do both combat and non-combat duty _____

   Read the three choices again and then take a vote in your group. Then explain why you voted the way you did.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) If you had a choice between military and non-military National Service, which would you choose? Take a vote in your group.

   How many would choose military service? _____

   How many would choose national—community service? _____

   If you chose military service, what are your reasons?

_____

_____

If you chose National Youth Service Program, what are your reasons?

_____

_____