

Project 100,000

Great Society program designed to extend the social and economic benefits of military service to disadvantaged or underqualified Americans. Johnson administration officials hoped that by easing military admission standards, underprivileged young men could gain valuable skills, discipline, and useful benefits that would enhance employment opportunities and help stabilize families.

Announced in August 1966, Project 100,000's goal was to bring 100,000 previously ineligible men into the Army and Marines each year by relaxing entrance requirements. Between 1966 and 1972, the U.S. military accepted 350,000 men under Project 100,000. A high percentage came from broken homes or low-income families; most were high school dropouts; many had low IQs or read at a grade-school level; 41 percent were black; and the majority, black and white, were from the South.

Project 100,000 had practical as well as political implications for the U.S. effort in Vietnam by adding badly needed bodies to the manpower pool. More than half of the Project 100,000 men went to Vietnam, and most received combat-related assignments. One report indicates that Project 100,000 men died at almost twice the rate of nonproject combat troops, although this is disputed. The expanded manpower pool helped Johnson to avoid calling up the Reserves as the demand for troops intensified. Critics cited increased disciplinary problems and poor military performance among relaxed-standards inductees, but many special-standards inductees performed well, and some combat commanders preferred them to more educated troops in the field.

As a social engineering program, Project 100,000 largely failed. Few of the men received training or developed skills that would benefit them in civilian life. Many, especially those with less-than-honorable discharges, came away from the experience worse off than before. With decreased force demands after 1969, Project 100,000 quotas dropped accordingly. The project was terminated in 1972 with the advent of an all-volunteer military.

—Paul R. Camacho and David Coffey

References: Baskir, Lawrence M., and William A. Strauss. *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, The War, and The Vietnam Generation* (1978); Dougan, Clark, Samuel Lipsman, et al. *A Nation Divided* (1984); Hsiao, Lisa, "Project 100,000: The Great Society's Answer to Military Manpower Needs in Vietnam" (1989); Moynihan, Daniel P. *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (1970); Rainwater, Lee, and W. L. Yancey. *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (1967); Starr, Paul. *The Discarded Army: Veterans after Vietnam* (1973).

See also: African American Personnel in U.S. Forces in Vietnam; Conscientious Objectors (COs); Draft; Johnson, Lyndon Baines; King, Martin Luther, Jr.; McNamara, Robert S.