

History of the Draft

The draft, or conscription for military service, in the United States began in colonial America. Over the course of time, changes were made in the way men were chosen and in the ages of those eligible for service. In the beginning of the 1970s, there was growing opposition to both the draft and the war in Vietnam. More and more frequently, protesters would gather and burn their draft cards in open defiance of the government. Organized violence against a draft system had occurred in 1863, but it did not compare to the actions taken by men in the seventies.

Throughout American history, a number of draft laws were passed to meet specific needs. Both the North and the South had their own conscription acts during the Civil War. In the North, men could avoid service by finding a substitute or paying the government \$300. Between the Civil War and World War I, there was no conscription; but after World War I erupted, Congress passed the Selective Service Act. This law provided for eligible men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to be chosen by a lottery system. Exemptions were allowed, but bounties were eliminated.

The period between World War I and World War II saw a return to the peacetime custom of maintaining a regular army along with National Guard units. When war broke out in 1939, the U.S. began a peacetime draft which was allowed to expire in 1947. Over the next twenty years, a number of draft laws were enacted. All of them required men to register with their local draft boards when they reached eighteen years of age.

In January 1970, Congress instituted a lottery system with men between the ages of nineteen and twenty eligible to be called for a period of one year. Previously, men were eligible for a period of seven years. The following year the draft was extended for two years, but after July 1, 1973, the draft was again left to expire. All young men continued to register with the Selective Service System until March 1975, when the lottery system was discontinued.

Since 1980, men aged nineteen and twenty must register with the Selective Service, but they are not classified or inducted. The purpose of this registration is to compile names for a possible future military draft which would have to be approved by Congress.

In the box below is a sampling of draft classifications that were used during the years of active military conscription. Research and add two more classifications to the list.

- 1-A:** Available for military service
 - 1-A-O:** Conscientious Objector; available for noncombat military service only
 - 2-M:** Deferred because of study preparing for a medical specialty
 - 3-A:** Deferred because of dependency of others
 - 4-A:** Has completed military service
 - 4-F:** Not qualified for military service
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