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**Amy J. Rutenberg. "Drafting for domesticity: American deferment policy during the Cold War, 1948-1965." *Cold War History* 13:1 (May 2013): 1-21. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2012.728208. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.728208>**

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Reviewed by **Michael Sherry**, Northwestern University

Amy Rutenberg has published a very useful article. True, its broad strokes will be familiar to those Americans who lived through the era, especially men who were of draft age at the time, and the later stages of her story will be familiar to readers of Christian Appy's canonical book, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* and Beth Bailey's recent *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*.<sup>1</sup> But this is a remote history to many historians (the draft ended in 1973), rarely near the center of Cold War historiography when it was in fashion, and rarely treated outside of the travails that the draft encountered in the Vietnam years, which was the focus of Appy's and Bailey's accounts. And Rutenberg highlights themes in the history of the Selective Service System (SSS) that other scholars have noted only glancingly if at all.

Rutenberg sees Selective Service as evolving into an elaborate system of "manpower channeling" (she places that term in quotation marks but without a citation, so it is hard to tell whether this term was used at the time she covers). Congressional leaders, White Houses, and Selective Service Director Lewis Hershey saw it as a way not only to draw some men into the armed forces, but to channel all young men into pursuits that were helpful to the nation's security. At least until the Vietnam war accelerated draft calls, their system also tended to shield from conscription those young men who were best suited by class, race, or connections to protest being drafted. Those authorities found many young men to be "more valuable to the country as civilians than as soldiers" (11). Some readers may recall Hershey as a conservative militarist, but if that's what he was, he was also in "the business of social engineering," as he "started to label his agency as 'the storekeeper' of the nation's manpower,

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<sup>1</sup>Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Beth L. Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009).

touting it as the only federal agency capable of cataloguing America's human resources, a function that would be invaluable in the event of thermonuclear war" (15). That metaphor, "storekeeper," warrants probing. Borrowed from the world of small business, it rendered young men as items on a shelf to be sold, and it had a certain antique ring in a thermonuclear age, though perhaps it also evoked the decentralized, often small-town feel of a system that operated through local draft boards, known at times for taking human items off the shelf for military service in capricious fashion. As "storekeeper" channeling the nation's manpower, the Selective Service System, as it indicated internally at the end of the 1950s, "no longer is just a draft" (15). It fused the era's conservative and liberal impulses about the state and national security, to the point that the distinction lacks much meaning.

Changes ordered by presidents in the late 1950s and early 60s effectively removed married fathers, and then all married men, from the draft, as well as those with educational or job-related deferments. Those changes prompted more marriages at earlier ages, "thus privileging domestic masculinity in the name of national defence," Rutenberg claims (18). That privileging may have been implicit, but I suspect Rutenberg gives it too much weight. At the least, few young men (and their wives) probably thought of their youthful marriages in terms of a masculinity that served "national defence." In my recollections and much that Rutenberg suggests, they were quite aware that they were avoiding "national defence" rather than serving it, if also sometimes squeamish about doing so and awkwardly conscious that many of their fathers had served during World War II. That is, they understood marital "masculinity" as at best second-rate compared to the real thing. Nor was the era awash in pro-natalist talk that might have privileged their masculinity in another way -- producing babies who could fight in later wars. As an abstract way of seeing things, "privileging domestic masculinity in the name of national defence" may work, but it does so at a long distance from how most Americans probably perceived things at the time. As Rutenberg notes, "Men who received deferments had little trouble rationalising them" (20). The piling up of deferments "unwittingly attenuated the connections between military service and masculine citizenship," she argues, but her benchmark is World War II -- the exception rather than the norm in America's past, when those "connections" had often been "attenuated" (5). What was most consequential about the mounting marital, educational, and job exemptions involved age, race, and class more than gender and sexuality: they ensured that Vietnam-era draftees would be younger, less tethered, less white, and less advantaged than the conscripts for World War II and the Korean War. As Rutenberg concludes, "Channelling had worked too well" (20).

Rutenberg places her story in the context of militarization, citing my work and the scholarship of others. Doing so, she reminds us how improvised and shifting were the high state projects of this era. Militarization was not a thing -- a settled institutional arrangement -- but rather a process. Although the designers and executors of Selective Service had to think long-term, imagining personnel needs for years or decades into the future, they recurrently had to tweak and re-design it to fit changing national strategy, wartime surges in demand for personnel, rapid shifts in demography (the baby bust of the Depression years yielded a small cohort of eligible men in the late 1940s and early 1950s), and a host of political pressures. Selective Service never really stabilized-it was always a work in progress, and then finally in dissolution. As such, it exemplified the state in the high modern era; a state

now too easily imagined as something stable, purposeful, and powerful, in contrast to the less resolute, more directionless, and bitterly contested state we seem to have now. To be sure, it was indeed powerful. A system that could subject millions of young men to Selective Service, force many of them into the military, and kill off a goodly number of them in war was by definition powerful. But it was also more jerry-built, transient, and vulnerable than it seemed to be at the time and as it appears in retrospect to many observers.

At times Rutenberg states the obvious and puts it too much within a national frame. “Historically,” she writes, “Americans have had a fraught relationship with military service” (3). Well, name the substantial military power of modern times which has not had such a relationship. America’s relationship was fraught in peculiarly American ways, but a fraught relationship was also endemic to the modern militarized world. Perhaps Rutenberg’s future work may draw in the international history of conscription and military service.

Such shortcomings hardly undercut the merits of her article, which also serves another purpose. Packed with statistics, policy shifts, and quotations from key officials and documents, it is a valuable repository for so much that is otherwise scattered in primary and secondary sources. It’s a go-to article. Crib from it for your lectures or your scholarship. It will serve you well.

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