

THE DRAFT

A play

by

Peter Snoad

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CHARACTERS

(Minimum of 9M, 3F actors)

All the actors must appear to be of Vietnam War era draft age (19-26)

The Soldiers:

GEORGE WILLIAMS, African-American

AL MILLER

JOHN BISBEE, white

Those Who Beat The Draft:

ROGER WALLACE, African-American

FRANK MAROTTA

The Refuser:

RANDY KEHLER

The Conscientious Objector:

TOM GARDNER

The Exile:

JAY HOLTZMAN

Those Who Provided Treatment, Care and Support:

PENNY ROCK

DIANE CLANCY

TRINH NGUYEN, female, Vietnamese-American college student

Other Characters

College Students (5)

Medical Orderly

Bus Driver

Young Black Men (2)

CORE office volunteers

Parents of John Bisbee

Max Sandin, a pacifist

Army Recruits

Drill Sergeant

Friends of Color (2)

White Student Protesters (2)

Army Doctor

Family Doctor

Young Black Girl

Adjutant General

Veteran Army Nurse

Non-Cooperators

Judge

Federal Marshal

Jay Holtzman's Parents

Departing GIs (2)

Trauma Unit Nurse

Other Characters (cont.)

FBI Agents (2)  
 Friends of Randy Kehler (3)  
 Randy Kehler's Father  
 Anti-Castro Cubans  
 Appalachian State Students (2)  
 Gruff White Woman  
 Ray, Kevin and Dennis, friends of Frank Marotta  
 Paxton Resident  
 Retired Serviceman  
 GI Mother  
 Police Officer  
 Daniel, a GI  
 Army Sergeant  
 North Vietnamese Officer  
 Papa San  
 David and Terry, draft resisters  
 Yu Thi Hao, a schoolteacher  
 U.S. Navy Officer  
 Captain Gardner  
 Vietnamese Bar Girls  
 Partying GIs (2)  
 Publisher  
 Okie  
 Pimp  
 Bus Driver  
 U.S. Air Force General  
 John Bisbee's Wife  
 Veteran With the Hat  
 Max, a Vietnam Vet

TIME

The action shifts in time between the period 1963-75 and the present.

PLACE

The U.S. and Vietnam

SET

None; a bare stage

“The Draft” is based primarily on real-life stories that appear in “Called to Serve: Stories of Men and Women Confronted by the Vietnam War Draft” by Tom Weiner; supplemented by additional personal interviews conducted by the playwright. Mr. Weiner has been a close collaborator on this project.

ACT ONE

The sidewalk outside a public university. Present day. LIGHTS up on a cluster of COLLEGE STUDENTS in contemporary dress. Beside them are backpacks, video camera cases etc. They're about to embark on a study tour trip to Vietnam, and they're waiting for the bus to take them to the airport. SOUND: contemporary rap MUSIC under dialogue.

FIRST STUDENT

(Calling off)  
Trinh! TRINH!

SECOND STUDENT

I think she went to the bathroom.

FIRST STUDENT

(Pulling out her/his cell phone and dialing)  
She's going to miss the bus.

THIRD STUDENT

(Panicked, rummaging in her/his backpack)  
Oh no. No!

FOURTH STUDENT

What?

THIRD STUDENT

My passport. Shit. I don't believe this...

FIRST STUDENT

(Muttering aloud, frustrated that TRINH isn't picking up)  
Where are you?

FOURTH STUDENT

Maybe you left it—

THIRD STUDENT

(Locating her/his passport)  
Got it! God.

## FIFTH STUDENT

(Absently, while listening to music on headphones)  
Will we get like Asian food on the plane?

TRINH NGUYEN enters. She addresses the audience.

## TRINH

This is it. We're going to Vietnam. The land of my ancestors. I am so excited! But also like anxious, right, I mean, I've never been there – none of us have – and for me, it's like...I mean, my parents were born in Vietnam. They were refugees. They came here as kids with their families at the end of the war. The Vietnam War, that is. Or the American War as the Vietnamese call it. Anyway, this study tour, when I first heard about it, I was like, yeah, that would be so cool! And my parents were supportive. But not my grandmother, she was like no way, "You are not going there while the communists are still in charge." But then she met Professor Gardner who's leading the trip, and he was charming, and when he promised to arrange for me to visit my family village, that kind of sealed the deal. I just wish I felt more prepared, you know? Mind you, compared these other kids, I'm a walking encyclopedia. I mean, when we started this course, none of them could even find Vietnam on a map.

## FIRST STUDENT

I could.

FIRST STUDENT points.

## OTHER STUDENTS

That's Korea!

## TRINH

At least you got the right continent. Okay, so we studied the history of the country and the culture and all of that, but then we did this class project together?

## SECOND STUDENT

We had to interview people who faced the military draft during the Vietnam War.

## TRINH

Find out what they did, what their experience was. Because that was the thing, right, these guys had to make this incredible decision. They had to make a choice.

## THIRD STUDENT

Do I go fight and kill people?

## FOURTH STUDENT

And maybe get killed.

FIFTH STUDENT

Do I refuse and go to prison?

SIXTH STUDENT

Or just disappear, go underground?

SECOND STUDENT

Or get the hell out of Dodge and go to Canada.

FIRST STUDENT

Knowing I could end up in jail if I ever came back.

TRINH

And suddenly it was like, wow—

ALL STUDENTS

This is us.

TRINH

They were our age. They didn't know anything about Vietnam, they probably couldn't find it on a map either.

FIRST STUDENT

Some people didn't want to talk to us.

SECOND STUDENT

It was like too painful or whatever.

TRINH

But those who did agree to be interviewed? I mean, the stories...wow.

The STUDENTS gather to watch TV. SOUND: The theme music of a TV news program.

CBS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The Draft Lottery. A live report of the picking of the birthdates for the draft. Here at Selective Service headquarters in Washington is CBS News correspondent Roger Mudd.

The SOUND of the CBS ANNOUNCER's voice fades. One of the STUDENTS in the watching group stands up. He is now ROGER WALLACE. SHIFT. Note: "SHIFT" indicates a transition to a new focus or scene.

ROGER

December first, nineteen sixty-nine.

ALL STUDENTS

Roger Wallace from Springfield, Massachusetts.

ROGER

I'm in my dorm room at Clark. Clark University. We're listening to it on the radio.

Another STUDENT rises and becomes DIANE CLANCY.

DIANE

The college cafeteria is packed. We're all watching this one black and white TV.

ALL STUDENTS

Diane Clancy from Westwood, Massachusetts.

ROGER

There's about fifteen of us, black and white, mostly basketball players. I was on the team. And there's Dave who's legally blind and isn't going anywhere, but he's included, we wanted him with us, and he says:

DAVE

Guys, we're adults now. That means two things. Number one, I don't want you to go. And number two, you may have to go."

ALL OTHER STUDENTS

We all just get quiet.

SOUND: Snippets of TV correspondent ROGER MUDD's live commentary are heard underneath the following dialogue, as indicated. Another STUDENT gets to his feet. He is now GEORGE WILLIAMS.

GEORGE

It's like any lottery. Luck of the draw.

ALL STUDENTS

George Williams from Brooklyn, New York.

GEORGE

There's a guy picking capsules out of a big glass bowl. Each capsule has a piece of paper inside with a birth date on it.

DIANE

The first one out is number one, the second number two and so on.

MUDD (V.O.)

And the famous first pick tonight is September fourteenth...

GEORGE

You just pray you don't get a low number. Anything below one twenty, you'll get the call for sure.

ROGER

(Having just heard his own number)

Sixty-nine. Man.

GEORGE

One twenty to two forty is a toss-up, can go either way.

MUDD (V.O.)

.....beginning in January, local draft boards, will induct those men born on...

GEORGE

(Overlapping)

But two forty to three sixty-six?

MUDD (V.O.)

.....September fourteenth, barring deferment....

GEORGE

Bingo, you're safe!

DIANE

I feel like a fraud.

TRINH

Why?

DIANE

Because my neck isn't on the line.

ROGER

So I'm sixty-nine in sixty-nine. And I'm saying to myself, this is good, this is a good thing. My Mom is the first to call, and she's real, you know, and I say: "Mom, back up, okay, I'm just eighteen, they can't send me until I'm nineteen, and if I go..." She stops me, and she says:

ROGER'S MOTHER (V.O.)

"When are you coming home?"

DIANE

I'm sitting there, and one by one, the men I care about are divided into these different groups – enormous risk, mid-risk, low-risk – and I end up feeling very isolated, very alone. It's like before we were all in this together and now we're just individuals.

SHIFT. SOUND: the chorus of Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant", which continues softly underneath the following dialogue. GEORGE WILLIAMS holds a letter from Selective Service.

GEORGE

They tell me to report to the induction center in Whitehall Street. In Manhattan. There's even a subway token taped to the top of the letter.

SHIFT. MALE INDUCTEES stand in a row and drop their pants. A MEDICAL ORDERLY moves brusquely from one to the other. When he says "Next!", that inductee pulls up his pants.

FRANK

Guys are doing all kinds of shit to fail their physical. You fake an illness, starve yourself.

ALL STUDENTS

Frank Marotta from Medford, Massachusetts.

MEDICAL ORDERLY

NEXT!

FRANK

Take drugs to flunk the urine test.

MEDICAL ORDERLY

NEXT!

GEORGE

A couple of guys are bouncing off the walls. Probably popped LSD or something.

MEDICAL ORDERLY

NEXT!

FRANK

Pretend you're crazy.

MEDICAL ORDERLY

NEXT!

FRANK

Pretend you're gay.

SOUND: A whispered chorus of "PUSSY!" is heard offstage.

GEORGE

For me, it's more like a reunion. Guys from my old high school. We're all going in together.

GEORGE and FRANK prepare to board a bus.  
FRANK'S GIRLFRIEND appears.

FRANK'S GIRLFRIEND

(To FRANK)

Resist. Don't do what they want.

They kiss. He boards the bus as they wave goodbye to each other. GEORGE also boards the bus.

FRANK

I mean, I know what I want to do. I want to stand up and say, "Hey, look around you! Two old ladies and some fat guy driving the bus are controlling us, and we can't take matters into our own hands? Do you want to go fight in some war? Do you want to be herded like cows to the slaughter?"

BUS DRIVER

NEXT!

FRANK

"We can not only disable this bus, we can totally destroy the draft center! And there'll be no records, nothing, they won't even know our names!"

GEORGE

It's just the way it was. You went along.

FRANK

But I can't, I can't do it, I just....I can't.

GEORGE

Sure, you have options. You can get a phony ID and go underground, or go to Canada, or refuse and go to jail, but that isn't...I mean...My family, we have a history. My father served in World War Two, my older brother was in the Air Force, now it's me, it's my turn.

SHIFT. SOUND: Excerpt of a speech by President Lyndon Johnson on September 29, 1967.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Tf2xGb5Nsg> 1:41 to 1:59. STUDENTS are in a classroom with TOM GARDNER and JOHN BISBEE who address them.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON

Vietnam is also the scene of a powerful aggression that is spurred by an appetite for conquest. It is the arena where Communist expansionism is most aggressively at work in the world today.

JOHN

This is our line in the sand.

ALL

John Bisbee from Chesterfield, Massachusetts.

JOHN

Stop 'em in Vietnam before we have to fight 'em in California.

TOM

It's the standard Cold War line. The Communists want to take over the world. America is defending freedom and democracy.

ALL

Tom Gardner, from Bardwell, Kentucky.

TRINH

(Walking through the classroom, holding a book of Vietnamese poetry)  
Our professor. We interviewed him, too.

JOHN

It's like dominoes. If Vietnam falls, all them other countries will go communist, too. Boom, boom, boom, like a row of dominoes.

TOM

It's simplistic and it's wrong. Most Vietnamese are nationalists above everything else. They want independence, and we're just another foreign occupier. It's their history over hundreds of years. First it was the Chinese, then the French, then the Japanese, then the French again, and now it's us, the Americans.

As TOM speaks, TRINH reads sotto voce from "Return to Thai Nguyen", a poem by the Vietnamese poet Y Nhi.

TRINH

Toi thuc noi voi trinh trong dem  
ta da tro ve, da tro ve  
oi con duong nho ven doi lau xam

SHIFT. Her voice fades into the SOUND of chattering helicopters, which morphs into the SOUND of Malcolm X speaking in Detroit in 1964: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oVW3HfzXkg> 37:58. A CROWD that includes RANDY KEHLER listens.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

This is why I say it's the ballot or the bullet. It's liberty or it's death. It's freedom for everybody or freedom for nobody.

SOUND: the Malcolm X speech continues under RANDY's dialogue.

RANDY

So here I am, walking down 125<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, on my way to an outdoor jazz concert.

ALL

Randy Kehler from Scarsdale, New York.

RANDY

Suddenly there's a big crowd in front of me, a street rally, hundreds of people, and they're all listening to this African-American guy who's clearly a very skilled orator, powerful. And I recognize his voice. It's Malcolm X. I've heard some recordings of his speeches, and I'm fascinated by him, and kind of scared, too, to be honest.

JOHN

Doubt? Are you kidding me?

RANDY

And what happens after that totally changes my life.

JOHN

Oh sure, we joke around in high school about being rice-paddy bait, and we are. But I always wanted to go.

TOM

For me, it's more a process of discovery – learning about things I don't know, things I haven't been told.

JOHN

Every Memorial Day, when I was a kid, we'd all go up there to the church, and there'd be ceremonies and we'd sing songs, patriotic songs, all the grades. And my family, my uncles, my Dad, they'd all march in and sit down, and I'd think, "Someday I want to do that."

AL MILLER appears. TRINH is interviewing him. He tries to speak but he can't. He's in distress. He's having a flashback about Vietnam.

TRINH

Mister Miller?

(Beat.)

Mister Miller? Are you okay?

TOM

Okay, so I'm in this civil rights group at the University of Virginia – a student group – and we're arguing about Vietnam, and I'm saying, "Look, we can't be against the war because it might hurt the fight for civil rights here. And anyway we have to stop the communist threat." But I'm losing the argument, and that bothers me because I was a pretty successful debater in high school.

RANDY

I'm standing at the edge of the crowd, listening to his speech—

TOM

So I go to the library and I read every book I can find on Vietnam.

Two YOUNG BLACK MEN appear and grasp RANDY's shoulders from behind.

RANDY

And suddenly I feel these hands on my shoulders.

FIRST YOUNG BLACK MAN

Listen, man, you really don't want to be here.

SECOND YOUNG BLACK MAN

This is a dangerous place for a white man.

They lead RANDY away.

TOM

And that's when I find out. U.S. policy is wrong. We're on the wrong side. We saw to it that national elections in Vietnam were cancelled and we installed our own dictators in South Vietnam.

SHIFT. RANDY is escorted by the two YOUNG BLACK MEN into the Harlem office of CORE. OTHER PEOPLE are there folding flyers and stuffing them in envelopes.

RANDY

They take me up these stairs to an office. It's the Harlem office of CORE. The Congress of Racial Equality, one of the major civil rights organizations. They're putting out a big mailing about the upcoming March on Washington, which I've never heard of.

FIRST YOUNG BLACK MAN

You wanna help?

RANDY

Sure.

SHIFT. JOHN BISBEE confronts his MOTHER and FATHER. He's brandishing a letter from Selective Service.

JOHN

What the hell is this?

JOHN'S MOTHER

It's for the best.

JOHN

You went to the draft board behind my back?

JOHN'S FATHER

Forestry school, John, you've gotten into forestry school, you're entitled—

JOHN

It's none of your goddam business!

JOHN'S MOTHER

John—

JOHN

Mom, I don't want a deferment, I want to go to Vietnam, I want to defend my country. Jesus! Who do you think I am?

JOHN'S FATHER

Don't do it, boy. Go to school.

JOHN

Oh yeah? Who signed up two weeks after Pearl Harbor?

RANDY

Over the next month, I help raise money to pay for buses to take people from Harlem for Washington for the march. And I go on one of those buses myself. That's when I meet my first pacifist.

SHIFT. RANDY sits beside the pacifist, MAX SANDIN, on a bus.

His name is Max Sandin.

MAX

(With a thick Russian accent)

The czar has big army, and all young men in Russia must fight. Not me. My mother say killing is wrong.

RANDY

So you left and came to America?

MAX

America want me to fight, too. World War One. Crazy. I refuse. They put me in prison. When I get out, I say: I will not pay your new income tax.

RANDY

You refused to pay taxes?

MAX

It pays for war.

RANDY

What happened?

MAX

They take everything, money, furniture, everything. World War Two, same thing, because I refuse to register.

RANDY

But weren't you too old to fight by then?

MAX

To fight against war? Never.

RANDY

This is going to sound really, er...I mean, what would you do if someone was about to stab your mother with a knife and you had a gun? Wouldn't you just ...shoot him?

MAX

Young man, I cannot tell you what I would do. All I can tell you is what I have done.

SHIFT. SOUND – very loud – of a reveille horn. AL, GEORGE and JOHN and OTHER RECRUITS appear and march around chanting the following song. They are scrutinized by a uniformed DRILL SERGEANT. They complete the song and snap to attention.

ALL RECRUITS

(Chanting loudly)

I wanna go to Vietnam  
I wanna be a ranger  
I wanna go to Vietnam  
I wanna be an airborne ranger  
I wanna kill Charlie  
With a knife or with a gun  
Either way will be great fun!

DRILL SERGEANT

Oh, I am scared. I'm so scared I think I'll run away into the jungle and hide. Now listen up, ladies. If you ladies leave here, if you survive recruit training, you will be a weapon, you will be a minister of death, praying for war. And proud. Until that day you are pus, you are pond scum, you are the lowest form of life on this planet. You are nothing but little pieces of amphibian shit.

(Beat.)

Any of you ass-wipes been to college, step forward.

AL does so.

## ALL RECRUITS

Al Miller from southern Missouri.

The DRILL SERGEANT gets in AL's face.

## DRILL SERGEANT

So, faggot, how many years did you waste?

## AL

Sir, the private spent three years in college.

## DRILL SERGEANT

Spent?

## AL

Sir, the private wasted three years in college.

## DRILL SERGEANT

I don't fucking believe it! How could anyone with balls waste three years in college? You pathetic ignorant little candy-ass. Your education has just begun.

SHIFT. SOUND: MUSIC: a female opera singer performing Vissi D'Arte, Vissi D'Amore from Tosca by Puccini. PENNY ROCK appears with TRINH who is interviewing her. The music continues softly under the following dialogue.

## ALL RECRUITS

Penny Rock from Minneapolis, Minnesota.

## PENNY

Puccini. Tosca. Vissi D'Arte, Vissi D'Amore.

## TRINH

I live for art, I live for love.

## PENNY

Yes. I've always loved music. I decided by the ripe old age of thirteen that I was going to be an opera singer. But none of that starving artist stuff for me, oh no, I was going to have a career to support myself while I followed my dream. And nursing was perfect. Well paid, portable, I could work anywhere in the world.

SHIFT. THE DRILL SERGEANT grabs a paperback book concealed in AL's jacket.

Protruding from the book is a family snapshot,  
serving as a bookmark.

DRILL SERGEANT

(To AL, holding up the book)  
What the fuck is this?

AL

It's a book. Sir.

DRILL SERGEANT

Is that right? My, my, my, who woulda guessed. You college kids are so fucking smart. I'm talking about THIS, moron!

He pulls the photo from the book, tosses the book  
away, and holds up the photo.

PENNY

Why the Army? Well, it seemed like a smart choice: they offered me a generous package and it was only a two-year commitment. And of course I asked to be assigned to Germany.

TRINH

Germany?

PENNY

The hotbed of opera, all those glorious voices!

TRINH

What about Vietnam?

PENNY

My recruiter never mentions Vietnam.

AL

It's a photograph, sir.

DRILL SERGEANT

Very good, Einstein, very good. And who's in the photograph?

AL

My family, sir.

The DRILL SERGEANT slowly tears up the photo  
into small pieces and lets the pieces flutter to the  
ground. The DRILL SERGEANT points to the

ground: Pick up the pieces. AL does so. SHIFT.  
 TRINH is reading another verse of the poem.  
 SOUND: Underneath her words we hear some  
 traditional Vietnamese MUSIC.

TRINH

Trong long tay da chai, toi con giu qua bong mau u ha nh phuc  
 mot nga y kia no se anh len ma u sac khac  
 co le.....  
 nhung gio day cho toi duoc cam on  
 vi khong co anh nhin ai ngai  
 khong co tieng cuoi on ao.

TRINH continues to recite the poem underneath the  
 following lines spoken by AL MILLER.

AL

Gooks. That's what we learn to call the Vietnamese. Gooks. We're not talking  
 about human beings. We're not talking about another country. We're not talking  
 about mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, friends – we're talking about  
 gooks.

SHIFT. ROGER WALLACE appears, flanked by  
 TWO FRIENDS OF COLOR. FRANK MAROTTA  
 appears with TWO WHITE STUDENT  
 PROTESTERS. SOUND: MUHAMMAD ALI is  
 being interviewed on TV.

MUHAMMAD ALI (V.O.)

I just don't think I should go ten thousand miles from here and shoot some black  
 people who never called me nigger, never lynched me, never put dogs on me,  
 never raped my Mama, enslaved me and deprived me of freedom, justice and  
 equality, and he's black too, I just can't shoot him.

ROGER

Muhammad Ali resisted the draft as a conscientious objector.

FRANK

Bias? In the draft? It wasn't called Selective Service for nothing!

ROGER

There's a lot of talk about the impact of the war on the African American  
 community. How many of our soldiers in Vietnam are black. Whether the war is a  
 methodology of genocide against blacks, like the Black Panthers say.

FRANK

It was all about race and class. Of course, they said the lottery would level the playing field.

ROGER

But what really matters to me is the plight of the African American in this country. I know I have a future, and I'm willing to use my student exemption because I'm doing something, I'm getting myself an education.

FRANK

But it was still mostly white middle-class college kids who beat the draft.

WHITE STUDENT PROTESTERS

HELL NO, WE WON'T GO!

FIRST WHITE STUDENT PROTESTER

Automatic deferment. As long as you're enrolled full-time and keep your grades up.

WHITE STUDENT PROTESTERS

DRAFT BEER, NOT BOYS!

FRANK

There's this culture of resistance on campus. You have information, you have friends supporting you, draft counseling, legal advice....

WHITE STUDENT PROTESTERS

ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR, WE DON'T WANT YOUR FUCKING WAR!

SECOND WHITE STUDENT PROTESTER

Of course, that's not the only way to get deferred.

THIRD WHITE STUDENT PROTESTER

You can get married and have kids.

DIANE CLANCY

Join the National Guard.

SECOND WHITE STUDENT PROTESTER

The Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is another option.

FRANK

Or you can do what I did and game the system.

SHIFT. JAY HOLTZMAN appears.