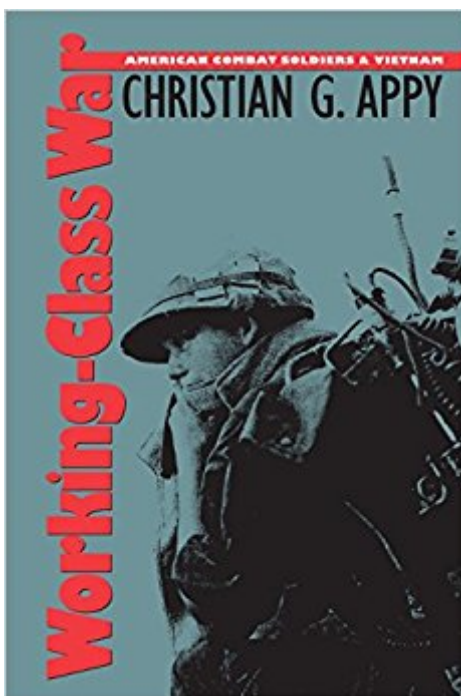


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# Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers And Vietnam



## Synopsis

No one can understand the complete tragedy of the American experience in Vietnam without reading this book. Nothing so underscores the ambivalence and confusion of the American commitment as does the composition of our fighting forces. The rich and the powerful may have supported the war initially, but they contributed little of themselves. That responsibility fell to the poor and the working class of America.--Senator George McGovern "Reminds us of the disturbing truth that some 80 percent of the 2.5 million enlisted men who served in Vietnam--out of 27 million men who reached draft age during the war--came from working-class and impoverished backgrounds. . . . Deals especially well with the apparent paradox that the working-class soldiers' families back home mainly opposed the antiwar movement, and for that matter so with few exceptions did the soldiers themselves.--New York Times Book Review "[Appy's] treatment of the subject makes it clear to his readers--almost as clear as it became for the soldiers in Vietnam--that class remains the tragic dividing wall between Americans.--Boston Globe

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In his introduction, Appy (history, MIT) states, "Vietnam is not... merely a memory; it is a fundamental part of our history and, therefore, a fundamental part of what we are." What follows is an in-depth look at the "part of what we are" that is literally the living legacy of the war--the Vietnam veteran. The author has compellingly combined his experiences from interviews, participation in weekly veterans' "rap" groups, and examination of existing Vietnam-era literature to present two narratives. First, he examines the circumstances that created a fighting force in Vietnam made up

predominantly of working-class young men. He then vividly presents readers with what participants of the war endured by synthesizing accounts of veterans with illustrative excerpts from novels, nonfiction works, and films concerning the war. Appy's achievement is conveying to readers insight into the war experience of Vietnam veterans. Highly recommended for all libraries.- Robert Favini, Bentley Coll. Lib., Waltham, Mass. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Digital edition.

Definitive and engrossing. "Commonweal" No one can understand the complete tragedy of the American experience in Vietnam without reading this book. Senator George McGovern ""Working-Class War" is gripping, thorough, and compelling. Walter H. Capps, author of "The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience" ""There really is no other study that accomplishes what Appy has done. Lloyd C. Gardner, author of "Approaching Vietnam: From World War II Through Dienbienphu, 1941-1954" ""Working-Class War" is gripping, thorough, and compelling. Walter H. Capps, author of "The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience" There really is no other study that accomplishes what Appy has done. Lloyd C. Gardner, author of "Approaching Vietnam: From World War II Through Dienbienphu, 1941-1954"

The book is a great primer on the Vietnam War and I believe this goes excellent with Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class by Jefferson Cowie as an examination of the American working class on the other side of the Vietnam War. This book alongside Cowie's book attempts to remove the myth of working class America being ultra right fascists. Indeed, it shows them trying to survive an experience that is horrifying and how they try to cope with it. This is seen in how the Vietnam veterans feel like that the only legitimate and allowed criticism of the war is by one of their own kind due to how they were there and know what happened. This goes with Cowie's accounts of why the hard hats went in and beat up the student protestors in New York because their sons were being killed in Vietnam, and they felt powerless to stop it.

Item arrived on time and as described...thank you!

Author extends interesting information with regard the extent the careerist will go to basically kiss the asses the wealthy pot-licking pukers in the US. And, how simply it would have been for me to avoid the draft and the arrogance of those who would have allowed it. (I failed Class Consciousness

101)And, the volunteer military increases the arrogance.

Appy is an excellent writer and historian with a particular interest in the Vietnam War. This is an important book that explores the class issue of the war. I grew up in a factory town and was 18 in 1961. Many of my friends went to Vietnam and 3 of my closest friends died because of the war, one in combat, one training Marine pilots in Pensacola because the maintenance mechanics were using drugs, and one by suicide after the war. I refused to cooperate with the selective service people and would have gone to Canada but they apparently lost my file. Most of my college friends did not go into the military or go to Vietnam. Some got married to get deferments. The lottery saved many people from the draft. The war still separates Americans, I have lost friends because of arguments over the war. 3.6 million people were killed in the war, 58,000 Americans were 1.6% of those. Wounded estimated at ten times killed. Midwest Independent Research, educational websites. Vietnam, [mwir-vietnam.blogspot](http://mwir-vietnam.blogspot). There is a book list here.

good condition--as stated. timing was decent--within the time stated. i havent read the book in class yet.

Outstanding work. It highlights the myths and misconceptions about the war

Starting with the boys from Train street Dorchester - they never had a chance - Appy weaves his own brand of emotion with the facts to put us back in time- to see the unfairness of the "conflict" - the futility. Historians, former military and just plain folk will find this an entirely readable book of about 320 pages. It brings a unique focus beyond the nightly news version we remember. At the surface level it tells a story of the working class at war, like a history book, well documented with many facts. I was more facinated with the underbelly - the moral issues raised - the judgements exercised by leaders - the way the draft realy worked and how in the 60's the world became so small. I was touched, because; although my cousin is not mentioned, he came from Train Street Dorchester and he came back in a box. He didn't have to, now I know he never had a chance. Maybe we will learn from this historians story. Thanks Chris.

The main premise of this book by Christian Appy, AssociateProfessor of History at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is thatthe burden of fighting and dying during the Vietnam War fell disproportionately on young working-class and poor men. According to Appy, "2.5 million young

American enlisted men" served in Vietnam, and "[r]oughly 80 percent came from working-class and poor backgrounds." It is Appy's view that "[c]lass, not geography, was the crucial factor in determining which Americans fought in Vietnam." Appy goes on to state: "Vietnam, more than any other American war in the twentieth century, perhaps in our history, was a working-class war." That is a provocative thesis. In the introduction, which is centered on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the 58,191 names inscribed on the wall, Appy asks: "What sorts of people were they? How did they come to fight in Vietnam?" According to Appy: "[T]hose who fought and died in Vietnam were overwhelmingly drawn from the bottom half of the American social structure." Appy explains that "[p]oor and working-class soldiers, whether black or white, were more likely to be trained for combat than were soldiers economically and educationally more advantaged." In particular, Appy examines a white, working-class section of Boston, about which he writes that "boys who grew up in Dorchester were four times more likely to die in Vietnam than those raised in the fancy suburbs." Appy also identifies East Los Angeles and the South Side of Chicago as "major urban centers...[which] sent thousands of men to Vietnam," as did Saginaw, Michigan; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Stockton, California; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Youngstown, Ohio; Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; and Utica, New York. These facts are compelling. So is the poignance of the bitterness which resulted. For instance, Appy quotes a firefighter who lost a son in Vietnam: "I'm bitter. You bet your goddamn dollar I'm bitter. It's people like us who gave up our sons for the country." If Appy had proceeded to develop these points and to analyze their social consequences more fully, this would have been a marvelous book. However, only Chapter 1, entitled "Working-Class War," and Chapter 2, "Life Before the Nam," are devoted to information and insights about the role of the working class and poor in this conflict. According to Appy, most Vietnam-era draftees and volunteers "had no real or attractive alternative" to military service because "[p]oor and working-class youth - those most likely to be drafted - were least able to secure stable, well-paying jobs," in the mid-1960s, and "[c]ollege was not a realistic option for most working-class men." Appy also writes: "The draft determined the social character of the armed forces by whom it exempted from service as well as by whom it actually conscripted or induced to enlist.... From 1964 to 1973, 2.2 million men were drafted, 8.7 million enlisted, and 16 million did not serve." According to Appy: "The student deferment was the most overtly class-biased feature of the Vietnam era draft system." For instance, according to Appy, "working-class men saw military service as a natural, essentially unavoidable part of life, one they believed would at least maintain their social and economic standing, whereas "men from wealthier families were likely to view the military as an agent of downward social mobility." Appy argues that "the fundamental factors moving people into the

military were economic and institutional." According to Appy, many working-class men enlisted during the Vietnam War-era because, "[w]ith the prospect of a dead-end job, little if any chance for college, and the draft looming on the horizon," most "saw enlistment as a way of 'getting over' the unavoidable." Appy proceeds to explain that "white, working-class men did not regard military service as an opportunity so much as a necessity (nothing else to do, draft pressure, duty, job security) so much as a necessity (nothing else to do, get away, leave school)." He adds: "For black volunteers, economic and social improvement often were decisive motivations." These facts and analysis are invaluable. Much of what follows, however, is familiar, and some of it is, frankly, tedious. Appy spends seven chapters answering these questions: "What was the nature of the war they waged? How did [the working-class and poor soldiers] respond?" For instance, Appy devotes several pages to the hazing and physical abuse which were typical of Vietnam-era Marine Corps basic training, but we're already familiar with this from a dozen books and movies. Similarly, virtually all readers, other than newcomers to the literature of the Vietnam War, know: "Attrition was the central American strategy; search and destroy was the principal tactic; and the enemy body count was the primary measure of progress." I do not mean to suggest that Appy's insights are inaccurate. He writes, for instance: "For soldiers, war is a directly confronted reality, not a theoretical abstraction," and "[s]oldiers in Vietnam were preoccupied with survival." But those observations lack the sharp focus on working-class and poor military men in Vietnam which I had expected. And, when Appy does focus on working-class and poor military men, much of this book is anecdotal, drawn from interviews the author conducted between 1981 and 1987 with approximately 100 Vietnam veterans. In my mind, there is a genuine issue as to whether this is a sufficiently large sample from which to draw conclusions. The introduction and first two chapters of this book are superb, but I was disappointed by much of the rest of it. There is still plenty of room for research and analysis of the role and experiences of working-class and poor men in the Vietnam War.

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