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Reassessing Project 100,000: Context and Lessons—A Research Note

Russell T. Warne[1]

Abstract

Between October 1, 1966 and December 31, 1971, a total of 341,127 men joined the military under lowered physical (9%) or mental test standards (91%). Called *Project 100,000*, this initiative was controversial from its first announcement and has been the subject of commentary for more than 50 years. In various discussions, Project 100,000 has been portrayed as a cynical method of meeting military needs without drafting middle-class youth, a dangerous experiment that harmed vulnerable people, and a successful employment program. This literature review explores the context and empirical research on Project 100,000. The conclusion is that Project 100,000 met some of its creators' goals and fell short of others. Though it ended over half a century ago, Project 100,000 still provides valuable historical, theoretical, scientific, and societal lessons for both civilian and military leaders. A preprint version of this article is available at https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/rtazj

Keywords

intelligence, IQ, Project 100,000, military history, Vietnam War, intelligence testing, predictive validity

[1]Independent Scholar, Columbus, GA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Russell T. Warne, Independent Scholar, Columbus, GA, USA.
Email: russwarne@gmail.com; Twitter: @Russwarne

A Critical Reassessment of Project 100,000—A Research Note

> The poor of America have not had the opportunity to earn their fair share of this nation's abundance, but they can be given an opportunity to serve in their country's defense, and they can be given an opportunity to return to civilian life with skills and aptitudes which for them and their families will reverse the downward spiral of human decay. (McNamara, 1966, p. 10)
>
> —Robert S. McNamara (1966)

> Even people who ain't too clever
> Can learn to tighten a nut forever,
> Attach one pedal,
> Or pull one lever . . .
>
> —Lynn Ahrens, "Henry Ford," *Ragtime*

In 1966, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara announced a new military program to adjust accession standards to allow more men with low aptitude test scores to serve in the military. Named "Project 100,000," this program would eventually become the largest-ever intervention related to IQ. From 1966 through 1971, 341,127 men volunteered or were drafted to serve in the U.S. military via Project 100,000 (Sticht et al., 1987).

However, Project 100,000 (named for the goal of adding 100,000 newly eligible men to the military per year) is poorly understood today. Most of the quantitative research on Project 100,000 was published in technical reports and portions of books about broader topics. Consequently, the findings of this research are largely unknown, and the program's impact on the scientific community has been limited.

Journalistic and historical accounts of Project 100,000 (e.g., Gregory, 2015; Hsiao, 1989) are more accessible, but they rarely make use of the psychological research. Scholarly authors who have assessed these accounts often found them incomplete and/or biased (Bateman, 2014; Dawson, 1995; Jensen, 2019; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991; Sticht, 2012; Sticht et al., 1987). Project 100,000 was controversial from the beginning, and it gets easily incorporated into larger narratives about the Vietnam War (Jensen, 2019).

In this article, the goal is to provide a literature review of the scientific research on Project 100,000. Context and commentary on Project 100,000 will be offered so that readers can have a nuanced perspective on the topic. Far from a "spectacular failure" (Warne, 2020, p. 330), Project 100,000 was a program with mixed outcomes that defy simple judgment.

Origins of Project 100,000

A common theme of discussions of Project 100,000 (e.g., Hsiao, 1989; MacPherson, 1984) is that it was a cynical effort to curry favor with middle-class White voters by

sending poor and minority men to fight an unpopular war instead (Bateman, 2014). The truth is more prosaic. The motivation for Project 100,000 originated in two concerns that emerged in America's leadership in the 1940s and 1950s. Military leaders were concerned about the difficulties of training that occurred when accession standards were lowered. Civilian leaders worried about deficiencies in the skillset of America's youth, a proposed cause of intergenerational poverty. These concerns became intertwined and eventually resulted in Project 100,000.

Military Concerns

When governments find that their military needs exceed the supply of manpower, leaders adjust their standards to induct more individuals into the military. Meeting manpower demands can take the form of a draft or reduced accession standards—and sometimes both (Marble, 2012a, 2012b). The American military frequently raised and lowered minimum requirements for serving in the military between 1940 and the mid-1960s (Dawson, 1995; Eitelberg et al., 1984; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991; Sticht et al., 1987; U.S. Department of the Army, 1965). In this context, Project 100,000 was not an aberration.[1] During both World War II and the Korean War, the U.S. military admitted more low-IQ men—in numbers and as a percentage of military personnel—than during Project 100,000. As the Vietnam War began, the military was already studying the feasibility of lowering its standards to expand the pool of recruits available for service (Bateman, 2014; U.S. Department of the Army, 1965). Fundamentally, minimum accession standards are arbitrary (Sticht et al., 1987), and military leaders knew that standards would have to be lowered if there was another large-scale war (Dawson, 1995).

Military leaders were also concerned about how to train low-IQ soldiers. In World War II, the Army had difficulties with the large number of illiterate soldiers. In response, the Army launched a program to teach these soldiers how to read so that they could better follow orders (Dawson, 1995). The Navy soon followed suit. After the war, the military conducted research on how to train men with below-average intelligence in case it needed to induct large numbers of them into the military (U.S. Department of the Army, 1965).

Civilian Concerns

Civilian concerns about the low skills of large numbers of young Americans also date from the 1940s. However, the galvanizing event for Project 100,000 was President Kennedy's 1963 formation of the President's Task Force on Manpower Conservation. The group produced its report to President Johnson the following January with the title *One-Third of a Nation: A Report on Young Men Found Unqualified for Military Service*. This alarmist document stated that over one-third of young men were ineligible for military service and that they disproportionately came from backgrounds of poverty and low education. The task force recommended a universal training

program for low-aptitude men to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty (President's Task Force on Manpower Conservation, 1964). The tone of *One-Third of a Nation* is consistent with the era's anti-poverty rhetoric, and the Johnson administration embraced it (Bateman, 2014; Dawson, 1995; Rutenberg, 2019).

McNamara was eager to enlist the military in the War on Poverty (Worsencroft, 2021). In 1964, McNamara asked the Army to explore ways of helping young adults who had been rejected for military service because he and other members of the Johnson administration believed that the military was a proven vehicle for preparing young men for the responsibilities of citizenship and fatherhood (Rutenberg, 2019; Worsencroft, 2021). The ensuing plan was called the Special Training Enlistment Program (STEP). In STEP, men with minor physical problems amenable to rapid correction would receive medical interventions, and those with low test scores would receive remedial education. Congress, however, denied funding for STEP (Dawson, 1995).

However, existing programs that were not reliant on new funding from Congress inspired a work-around. The military did not need Congressional approval to lower accession standards, and existing training funds could be allocated for remedial training of accepted personnel (Rutenberg, 2019; Worsencroft, 2021). Instead of using the military to train civilians, the military could use its existing budget to educate recruits who scored low on cognitive tests. McNamara planned to use existing techniques in the military, such as having men repeat failed courses, reviving literacy programs, and revising curricula to reduce reading demand. None of these initiatives required Congressional approval (Dawson, 1995).

Project 100,000 Is Born

On August 23, 1966, McNamara gave a speech announcing Project 100,000, justifying the military's involvement in an anti-poverty program by framing it as critical for national security. McNamara argued that the military's aptitude tests underestimated the abilities of examinees with an impoverished background. His diagnosis was that "The 32 million Americans who are poor were not born without intellectual potential. They were not brain-poor at birth; but only privilege-poor, advantage-poor, opportunity-poor" (McNamara, 1966, p. 5), and that many were "the victims of faulty education or of inadequate health services" (p. 6). McNamara believed that the military could remedy these deficiencies to produce a mass of young adults with the skills needed to enter the middle class (Worsencroft, 2021).

Like many political speeches, McNamara's address was high in rhetoric and low in specifics. Over time, the details would become clear. Despite saying that, "I do not believe that the qualification standards for military service should now be lowered" (McNamara, 1966, p. 6), that is exactly what Project 100,000 did. Overall aptitude scores on the military's Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) were classified into five groups, numbered (from highest scoring to lowest) I through V. Categories III and IV were subdivided further into IIIA, IIIB, IVA, IVB, and IVC. Table 1 displays the

Table 1. Score Categories and Corresponding Aptitude Test Percentile and IQ Range.

AFQT category	Percentile range	IQ range
I	93–99	122+
II	65–92	106–121
IIIA	50–64	100–105
IIIB	31–49	93–99
IVA	21–30	88–92
IVB	16–20	85–87
IVC	10–15	81–84
V	1–9	≤80

categories, the range of their percentiles, and the corresponding IQ ranges.[2] Potential recruits also took the Army Qualification Battery (AQB), which measured aptitude in seven areas. AQB scores were supplemental scores designed to help assign new military personnel to a job. In 1966, each military branch had its own accession standards, though all of them accepted recruits in Categories I through III.[3]

Minimum standards for admission to the military changed overnight when Project 100,000 started on October 1, 1966. Now, more recruits in Category IV could join any branch of the military, though there were still rules that prevented some from doing so—especially for those without a high school diploma.[4] Even some Category V applicants were permitted to join the military as "Administrative Acceptees" if it was believed that the aptitude test did not reflect a recruit's true capacities, due to nervousness, language barriers, malingering, etc. (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991; Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969).[5]

Project 100,000 also lowered medical standards. Men with medical deficiencies that could be easily corrected were eligible for service. Most of these new recruits were overweight (62.4%) or underweight (20.4%), though some needed surgery or other medical interventions (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. 9). Men who joined the military under the revised medical standards were 9% of Project 100,000 personnel (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 41).

Many uniformed military leaders opposed Project 100,000 and tried to minimize the program's impact on their branches (Dawson, 1995). In response, in 1967 the Department of Defense leadership set quotas of individuals from Project 100,000 that each branch of the military must accept.[6] Despite the internal resistance, accession standards for the military were going to be lowered anyway (Dawson, 1995; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). As the Vietnam War intensified, there was a greater need for manpower, and lowering standards was a viable way of meeting this demand.

This historical background reveals several important facts. First, Project 100,000 was always an educational program; McNamara's main goal was to build the skills of people who scored low on aptitude tests—not to demonstrate their limitations (Sullivan, 1970), and he sincerely wanted to lift people out of poverty and improve

their lives (Bateman, 2014; Jensen, 2019; Katz & Goldsamt, 1971; Sticht et al., 1987). Second, the genesis of Project 100,000 predates the Vietnam War and was not a reaction to the war, nor was it a plan to expand the military's ranks without upsetting middle-class voters. Indeed, in McNamara's speech, there was no mention of a manpower shortage, and the military would not need to rely heavily on the draft for another 18 months or more (Dawson, 1995).

Profile of Project 100,000 Recruits

Who was accepted for service in Project 100,000? All were men, and they were young, with an average age of 20.0 (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 37). They were disproportionately Black: 36.7%, compared with 11.2% of all Americans (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 44; U.S. Census Bureau, 1971, p. 4). Many had unpromising backgrounds: 44.5% were unemployed when they joined the military (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 46), and only 13.3% earned $100/week[7] or more. Almost half (46.9%) held a high school diploma, compared with 55.2% among young adults at the time (de Brey et al., 2023, Table 104.10), and the recruits had completed an average of 10.7 grades. That education did them little good; the median recruit in Project 100,000 had a sixth-grade reading level (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 45). Before joining the military, 9.2% had a criminal conviction (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. 21). A group of disproportionately poor, Black, unemployed, and undereducated men was exactly what McNamara expected, and he believed that military experience could mold these men into productive citizens (Worsencroft, 2021).

The median IQ for men in Project 100,000 was 83. According to Table 2, most of the men in Project 100,000 were in Category IVC—low, but not abnormally low. The typical military recruit in Project 100,000 was not one of "McNamara's morons," as the slang of the time called them. Project 100,000 included some people with IQs as high as 92—within the range of average intelligence.[8]

The majority (54%) of men in Project 100,000 volunteered for military service. Some were "draft-motivated volunteers," who enlisted in the military to have more control over their service if they expected to be drafted (Katz & Goldsamt, 1971, pp. 29, 30; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). Nevertheless, Project 100,000 volunteers joined the military for a variety of reasons (Katz & Goldsamt, 1971), including the education and training opportunities (Federman et al., 1973).

Experience of Project 100,000 Personnel

The Army received 70.4% of the men in Project 100,000, and the other branches of the military received approximately equal proportions of the rest: 10.3% served in the Navy, 10.1% in the Marine Corps, and 9.2% in the Air Force (Sticht et al., 1987, pp. 41–42). A tour of duty for Project 100,000 men was expected to last 18 to 24

Table 2. Distribution of AFQT and IQ Scores of Men in Project 100,000.

AFQT category	Percentile range	IQ range	Percentage
I to III	≥31	≥93	0.2
IVA	21–30	88–92	2.4
IVB	16–20	85–87	31.9
IVC	10–15	81–84	61.9
V	≤9	≤80	3.6

Source. Data adapted from Sticht et al. (1987, Table 11).
Note. This table only reports data from Project 100,000 personnel admitted under the revised mental testing standards. It does not include data from recruits admitted under the revised medical standards.

months. This time included their training, after which they were expected to perform their jobs in a satisfactory manner until discharge.

Basic and Occupational Training

In all branches of the military, Project 100,000 men attended basic training first. If they passed, they received a job assignment and proceeded to either (1) advanced basic training or (2) on-the-job training. Most Project 100,000 personnel passed their basic training: 94.6%, compared with 97.5% in a comparison group. Ninety percent of those who passed basic training would pass their advanced training for their assigned job, compared with 96% of the comparison group (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. xiv). Personnel who failed their job training were reassigned to another job and trained. While most Project 100,000 members passed their training, some had difficulty doing so. Among Project 100,000 personnel, 5.9% recycled through part of their basic training, while 1.7% of other personnel did (Sticht, 2012, p. 259).

Attrition in job training was low because the military usually assigned Project 100,000 personnel to low-skill jobs (Cory, 1971a; Eitelberg et al., 1984; Katz & Goldsamt, 1971; Mayo, 1969). The most common job family for Project 100,000 Army soldiers was combat-related positions; 34.4% were assigned to these areas (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 50). This was an increase from the pre-Vietnam era and reflects the need for additional combat personnel as the war intensified. In addition, assignment standards in many combat jobs—especially infantry—were lower than for many other jobs. Consequently, men from Project 100,000 were more likely to qualify for these positions (Dawson, 1995; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). Low-skill jobs[9] did not have a shortage of candidates to fill them, but by assigning Project 100,000 personnel to these positions, the military could free up higher-IQ men for more complex work (Cory et al., 1980).

Siloing Project 100,000 men into low-skill jobs was intentional, but not prejudicial. Prior military research (e.g., Helme & Anderson, 1964; Mayo, 1969; U.S.

Department of the Army, 1965) showed that the range of occupations that low-IQ personnel could be trained to do was limited. Nevertheless, the military made efforts to expand the number of occupations available to men in Category IV before and during Project 100,000 (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). But attrition rates in high-skill jobs were often high (Fox et al., 1969), and failure was common, even when military trainers made major efforts to help the men succeed (Cory et al., 1980). An illuminating example of this occurred in the Navy, where 30 men in Project 100,000 (with IQs between 85 and 90) were assigned to a sequence of three courses to be trained to repair airframes. This training was believed to be suited to high-functioning men in Category IV because the final course had "a considerable amount of nonabstract material with immediate and obvious practical applications" (Harding et al., 1968, p. 3). Navy personnel believed that extra support for trainees in Category IV would help them master the abstract curriculum in the earlier courses, which would allow the men to take the hands-on training, where they were expected to perform better.

Of the 30 men from Project 100,000, one third needed to repeat the most basic course, and more than 85% needed to repeat each of the final two courses. Even with the extra help and instruction time, six failed the final course. In comparison, the typical failure rate of the training sequence was 1.2% (Harding et al., 1968, p. 6). Throughout training, the Project 100,000 men performed more poorly than traditional trainees (average IQ = 109.8). On some of the job knowledge variables, men in Project 100,000 had an average score that was over two standard deviations lower than the comparison group, though on ratings of practical task performance (e.g., metalworking), differences were smaller and not statistically significant (Harding et al., 1968, p. 5).

After 7 months of working aircraft maintenance jobs, the men from Project 100,000 had lower job performance ratings from their supervisors ($d = .802$, $p = .052$; Mayo, 1969, p. 11). This study is a telling example of the limits that IQ can place on people's lives. The Navy made every accommodation possible to help these men from Project 100,000 to learn a skilled trade. Yet, most still struggled greatly and did not perform the job as well.

In other research, learning speed was invariably found to be slower for lower-IQ individuals (Cory, 1976; Fox et al., 1969; Grimsley, 1969; Hooprich & Matlock, 1970; McFann, 1969; Ratliff & Earles, 1976; Vineberg et al., 1971)—no matter how basic the information was (e.g., Steinemann & Van Matre, 1968). In addition, personnel in Categories I through III *always* demonstrated a higher mastery of the training material (Fox et al., 1969), even in simple tasks (Fox, 1969; van Matre & Harrigan, 1970). In general, Project 100,000 personnel "are more successful in courses which stress practical work and do not require significant reading and mathematical abilities" (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. xvi, emphasis removed). Others recommended "assignment of Category IVs to jobs with high practical performance content and low reading requirements which permitted extensive supervision" (Ratliff & Earles, 1976, p.

14). What the military knew in the 1960s and 1970s from practical experience, social scientists would figure out later: General intelligence is a major determining factor in a person's ability to carry out job duties effectively and that people with below-average intelligence will struggle more as job complexity increases (Gottfredson, 1986; National Research Council, 1991).

Remedial Training

Literacy programs in the military varied in scope and duration, but not their results. In the different branches of service, between 15% and 36% of men in Project 100,000 were enrolled in remedial literacy courses, except in the Marine Corps, which had no literacy training[10] (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. xxii). Military literacy programs produced few long-term benefits in job performance or military outcomes for their students (Fisher, 1971; Ratliff & Earles, 1976; Sticht et al., 1987; U.S. Department of the Army, 1965). Most of these programs were a few weeks or months long and only aimed to bring students' literacy to a fifth- or sixth-grade level. The programs were successful in this goal, with more than 80% of students in the programs achieving this level of literacy (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 34; Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, pp. 48–49). Mathematics skills and civics knowledge were also a target of remedial education, though this research is sparse and lacks follow-ups (Greenberg, 1969; Main, 1969; U.S. Department of the Army, 1965).

Job Performance

Job performance was the most common topic of Project 100,000 research. The best data come from an Army study of four occupations (armor crewman, repairman, supply specialist, and cook) in which researchers examined the relationship among AFQT scores, job experience, and three measures of job performance: supervisor ratings, a test of job knowledge, and an objectively scored measure of job task performance (Taylor & Vineberg, 1971, 1973; Vineberg et al., 1971; Vineberg & Taylor, 1972a, 1972b). For all four jobs, personnel in Categories I to III performed better on the objective job tasks than the men in Category IV immediately after training. For the armor crewmen and cooks, lower-IQ individuals could close the job performance gap with enough job experience. But this took 5 years or more to occur (and never occurred for the other two jobs). Differences among IQ groups in job knowledge never did close. However, most military personnel—from all IQ groups—received satisfactory ratings from their supervisors. While the study was cross-sectional, the differences were unlikely to be due to attrition (Taylor & Vineberg, 1973).

Other investigations consistently found that most lower-IQ men met the standards of job performance for their low-skill occupations, but their higher-IQ coworkers performed the same jobs better (Cory, 1976; Grunzke et al., 1969; Laurence &

Ramsberger, 1991; Mayo, 1969; Plag et al., 1967; Sticht et al., 1987). Men from Project 100,000 could, with enough practice (and sometimes additional training and close supervision), master routine job tasks (Bateman, 2014), though the poorer performance on job knowledge tests would be a handicap when atypical tasks or situations arose (Taylor & Vineberg, 1971, 1973). The men of Project 100,000 may not have been the best performers, but most were satisfactory, and they fulfilled a staffing need. Similar results were found in studies on Category IV men before Project 100,000 (e.g., Helme & Anderson, 1964; U.S. Department of the Army, 1965).

Long-Term Military Outcomes

Long-term, most Project 100,000 men had favorable outcomes, though negative outcomes were more common than in comparison groups. Across all the services, the average failure rate for basic training was 5.4% between October 1966 and June 1969 and 12.4% between July 1969 and June 1970, with higher rates in the Marine Corps and lower failure rates in the Army. The corresponding numbers for men in a comparison group were 2.5% and 4.4%, respectively. After basic training, 7% to 13% of Project 100,000 personnel failed their job training, which was two to three times higher than other military personnel who started their service at approximately the same time (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 46). The training failure rate varied across the services, though in all of them most Project 100,000 personnel passed their training, and the failure rates were higher for Project 100,000 than for other personnel (e.g., Dawson, 1995).

After training, most Project 100,000 men did not have any disciplinary problems, though the rates were higher than in comparison groups or the military at large. Table 3 shows the rates of discipline through 1969. Punishment rates were highest in the Marine Corps and lowest in the Air Force, and, throughout the military, Project 100,000 men committed offenses at a higher rate than a comparison group of personnel who had served for the same length of time (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. 43). Nevertheless, 76% to 96% did not experience disciplinary action (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 53).

The personnel subjected to a court-martial were part of a larger pattern of attrition in Project 100,000. Through June 1969, between 3.7% and 11.1% of Project 100,000 personnel were discharged before their expected term of service expired, compared with 2.0% to 4.4% of a comparison group of men. In the following 12 months, discharge rates were higher: 5.5% (in the Army) to 37.8% (in the Marine Corps), likely due to the military's lessening manpower needs as it reduced its commitment to the Vietnam War (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 44; see also Sticht, 2012, p. 258). Again, unfavorable outcomes were more common among individuals in Project 100,000, but most men in the program succeeded in the military.

Data on promotions are similar (see Table 4). Project 100,000 men received promotions, but at a slower rate than the typical enlisted man at the time. Rates of

Table 3. Rates of Sanctions Against Misbehavior for Men in Project 100,000 and a Comparison Group of Military Personnel (in 22–24 Months of Service).

	Nonjudicial punishment		Court martial	
Branch of military	Project 100,000	Comparison group	Project 100,000	Comparison group
Army	15.0%	9.1%	3.7%	1.5%
Navy	9.7%	3.5%	0.5%	0.3%
Marine Corps	23.8%	18.2%	5.3%	4.7%
Air Force	4.2%	1.5%	0.6%	<0.05%
All Services Combined	13.4%	8.2%	3.0%	1.4%

Source. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) (1969, p. 43).
Note. Typical infractions for nonjudicial punishment were minor, such as tardiness, traffic violations, violating curfew, and missing bed check. Offenses warranting a court-martial included going AWOL, desertion, assaulting a superior, and robbery.

Table 4. Ranks of Men From Project 100,000 and a Comparison Group at 19 to 24 Months of Service.

		Rank			
Branch of service	Group	E-1 and E-2	E-3	E-4	E-5
Army	Project 100,000	4.7%	9.6%	65.4%	20.3%
	Comparison	1.6%	4.3%	51.2%	42.9%
Navy	Project 100,000	31.0%	56.0%	13.0%	—
	Comparison	2.3%	27.6%	60.2%	9.9%
Marine Corps	Project 100,000	8.8%	16.1%	68.8%	6.3%
	Comparison	3.4%	9.2%	70.3%	17.1%
Air Force	Project 100,000	7.3%	76.2%	16.5%	—
	Comparison	1.8%	68.1%	30.0%	0.1%
All Services Combined	Project 100,000	9.1%	24.2%	53.1%	13.6%
	Comparison	1.9%	16.5%	52.3%	29.3%

Source. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower), 1971, Table F-1, as reported in Sticht et al. (1987, Table 19).
Note. Achieving a rank of E-2 or E-3 is almost automatic for personnel who do not get into trouble during their first tour of duty (Oppler et al., 2001); attaining a rank of E-4 or E-5 in the first tour of duty is evidence of accomplishment in a budding military career (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991).

promotion differed across the services, but Project 100,000 personnel received fewer promotions than other men.

The rank that Project 100,000 men attained by the end of their first tour of duty was usually their final rank. After their initial service commitment, most personnel in

Project 100,000 could not reenlist because they did not meet the standards for continuing service. During Project 100,000, the military branches were allowed to retain their own standards for reenlisting, which often included minimum aptitude test scores and/or education requirements that were not lowered for Project 100,000.[11] These standards would bar many men in Project 100,000 from continuing service—no matter how much they would like to. In the Army, only 32% of Project 100,000 soldiers were eligible to reenlist; of these, only one-quarter chose to reenlist (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. 56). These comparatively high standards for reenlistment were criticized at the time (Sullivan, 1970, p. 46); aligning them with accession standards could have reduced the need to draft new recruits. The exception was the Marine Corps: 77.72% of a sample of Project 100,000 Marines were recommended for reenlistment after their 2-year tour of duty, though this is lower than the percentage of non-Project 100,000 Marines recommended for reenlistment (Plag et al., 1970, p. 26).

In a 1983 follow-up study (12–17 years after enlistment), 8,262 men from Project 100,000 were still in the military, which was 2.7% of Project 100,000 (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 58). Many of the careerists had earned a high school diploma, and some had transferred to a job assignment that required higher skills (Sticht et al., 1987, pp. 57–60). Almost one-fifth of them had attained a rank of E-7 or E-8, which requires supervision of dozens or hundreds of personnel, and 27.7% had raised their AFQT scores above the 30th percentile.[12]

Combat experiences varied among Project 100,000 individuals. In the Marines, 80% of Project 100,000 men were assigned to combat arms, and every Marine who completed combat training during the Vietnam War served in combat. But neither the Air Force nor the Navy ever exceeded 7% of their manpower in Vietnam; for the Army, this number was 20% (Dawson, 1995, p. 98). Given these percentages, it is almost a mathematical certainty that most men in Project 100,000 did not serve in Vietnam, let alone in combat. Project 100,000 was not started to provide "cannon fodder" (e.g., Hsiao, 1989) for the war.

Little is known about the experiences of those men in Project 100,000 who saw combat. Anecdotes of poor performance of Project 100,000 personnel in combat (Bateman, 2014; Gregory, 2015; Hsiao, 1989) are probably not representative. The stories indicate that some men in Project 100,000 were given the least skilled combat duties (see also Dawson, 1995), though this was not a formal policy. One problem with these stories is that McNamara gave orders that commanding officers and other supervisors were never told which soldiers were members of Project 100,000 (Grunzke et al., 1969). Yet, Project 100,000 as a whole was very visible, and it was widely known that some of the enlisted men were admitted under the lowered aptitude standards. As a result, a badly performing enlisted man admitted under the standard criteria may have been mistakenly seen as belonging to Project 100,000 by their peers or superiors, but well-functioning men in Project 100,000 may have escaped notice (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). In Dawson's (1995) interviews with

commanding officers in the Marine Corps who served in combat in Vietnam, he found that none could state with certainty that any particular soldier was admitted under Project 100,000. The uncertainty about who was part of Project 100,000 is an inherently limiting factor of journalistic accounts based on anecdotes about low-performing soldiers during the era (Bateman, 2014).

Moreover, men in Category V could join the military during the era of Project 100,000 as Administrative Acceptees. This subjective option allowed an examiner to overrule poor test performance, which likely resulted in some people being incorrectly admitted into the military.[13] Some of the Administrative Acceptees may be the sources of anecdotes about poorly performing men during the Vietnam War. But the reverse is true: Some people in Project 100,000 probably *were* malingering as an attempt to avoid military service (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 30). In addition, there are claims that recruiters in the Navy and Air Force were coaching bright men to perform poorly on the admissions test so that those branches of the military could meet their Category IV quotas while admitting as few "true" low-IQ men as possible (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, pp. 39, 58). No one will ever know how many people were mistakenly admitted into Project 100,000 who were, in reality, too bright or too deficient to be accepted under an error-free process.

The important possible outcome for men in Project 100,000 is death. However, data on mortality of Project 100,000 personnel is scarce. Gregory (2015, p. 115) claimed that 5,478 men died while serving, which indicates a 1.6% death rate. This number came from "a former insider" in the 1970s and cannot be verified.[14] An unpublished report stated that 0.4% of members of Project 100,000 who entered military service in 1969 had died by the end of 1970 (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 51). If this number is extrapolated to the entire Project 100,000 population, then the death toll would be about 1,365. This is likely an underestimate. Sticht et al. (1987) also reported a death rate of 0.6% for Marines in that time, but Plag et al. (1970, *p*. 26) reported a death rate of 4.82% for Project 100,000 Marines who joined for a 2-year tour of service between October 1967 and February 1968. In comparison, 4.17% in a random sample of non-Project 100,000 men who became Marines in March 1968 had died; the difference is not statistically significant ($p = .207$). The question of whether men in Project 100,000 died at the same rate as other soldiers remains unresolved. What is clear, though, is that the contemporaneous accusations that Project 100,000 was a "genocide" and "nothing more than killing off human beings who are not members of the elite" (in the words of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell; see Worsencroft, 2021, p. 386) or a method to "get rid of black people in the ghettos" (in Stokely Carmichael's opinion; see Bailey, 2023, p. 214) were not correct. The death rate was far too low to support such a hyperbole.

No data are available on the rates of combat injuries that Project 100,000 members experienced. Negative psychiatric outcomes may have been more common in Project 100,000, but the samples are either unrepresentative (Crowe & Colbach, 1971) or too small to permit firm conclusions (Plag et al., 1970).

Nonmilitary Outcomes

The military's remedial reading program raised students' scores, but some have questioned the efficacy of these programs:

> . . . it would seem idealistic to expect a permanent or drastic change in reading level after three or even eight weeks of remediation when many of these individuals had gone through 12 years of formal schooling without achieving even a 6th-grade proficiency.
>
> The second question that arises concerns just how much value a 5th- or 6th-grade reading ability has in the civilian world. Due to time and financial constraints, the Services could hardly have set their goals much higher. (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 35)

Even Project 100,000's most ardent supporters question the efficacy of these programs (e.g., Sticht et al., 1987).

In addition to literacy training, men in Project 100,000 had the opportunity to earn a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED). This was an optional after-hours pursuit, and 35.1% of men with an AFQT score between the 10th and 19th percentile attempted to do so (with 12.2% succeeding), compared with 61.2% of military members (and 43.9% succeeding) with AFQT score at the 20th percentile or higher (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 55). For these men, their GED was a lifelong credential that was a benefit of their military service.

After Military Service

There are two long-term follow-up studies of civilian life outcomes of Project 100,000 men. Beusse (1974) compared veterans in Category IVC at age 24 with similar nonveteran men. He found that both groups were equally likely to have full-time (82%) or part-time (8%) employment. The veterans had a lower unemployment rate (6% vs. 9%), but this was because the veterans were more likely to be students. Veterans were slightly more likely to be married (54% vs. 50%), and to have earned a GED as an adult (22% of veteran non-high school graduates, compared with 17% of nonveterans without a high school diploma; Beusse, 1974, pp. 21, 23). Mean income differences favored veterans by 7.5% for high school graduates and 12.8% for non-graduates. This wage premium was higher for veterans with relatively higher IQs (Beusse, 1974, pp. 33, 36). Veterans who were assigned to combat-related occupations earned less (4.2%) than veterans who had noncombat specialties—illustrating a perennial concern (Bateman, 2014) that the skills of personnel in combat occupations are difficult to transfer to civilian life.

In a later follow-up study from 1986 to 1987 (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991), 16% of Project 100,000 veterans were unemployed, compared with 3% of nonveterans, and full-time workers earned 28.2% less per hour if they had been in Project 100,000. More nonveterans had attended college (26.6% vs. 17.7%, not statistically significant after controlling for high school diploma attainment) and non-college

training (68% vs. 42%; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, pp. 112–121). Project 100,000 veterans were less likely to be married than nonveterans at ages 35 to 40 (74.7% vs. 90.7%), more likely to be divorced (17.9% vs. 9.3%), and had more children: 2.6, compared with 1.8 (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, pp. 120, 122). In summary, the objective data show that veterans who were part of Project 100,000 had less favorable outcomes at midlife than men in similar groups. While the study cannot show that these differences were *caused* by their military experience, many veterans did not have the long-term benefits that McNamara had hoped for.

The subjective opinions of the Project 100,000 veterans are more positive. When surveyed at midlife, 49.8% stated that their military experience had helped them in life, and 13.6% stated that their military service had a negative effect (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 124). The most frequent reasons the military was seen as beneficial were the maturity, the training, and discipline it provided.

Military Perspective

While Project 100,000 was announced as a program to benefit the personnel enrolled in it, the military received benefits as well. The most obvious is that it increased the supply of available men at a time when the military needed them. While McNamara claimed in 1985 that "We weren't short of people" (Sticht et al., 1987, p. 193), lowering the admission standards in the military was inevitable (Dawson, 1995).

Project 100,000 also facilitated the military's move to an all-volunteer force (Bateman, 2014; Sticht et al., 1987; Sullivan, 1970). Military leaders were opposed to an all-volunteer force, and many claimed that there would not be enough competent volunteers without a draft (Bateman, 2014; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). Project 100,000 showed that many men in Category IV were willing to volunteer and could be trained to be competent enough to perform vital jobs in the military. When the draft ended in January 1973, the military was prepared for volunteers with a wide range of cognitive ability. Project 100,000 accelerated the process of simplifying training, streamlining classes, and creating more opportunities for "hands-on" learning (e.g., Grunzke et al., 1969; Main, 1969; Ratliff & Earles, 1976). One widespread change was that manuals and reading materials for training were simplified and revised with Category IV personnel in mind (Fox et al., 1969; Sellman, 1970, 1972), which also benefited personnel in Categories I to III (Greenberg, 1969; Sellman, 1970; Vineberg et al., 1971).

Another benefit of Project 100,000 occurred from 1976 to 1980 when an error in the norming of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) resulted in 423,590 individuals in Categories IV and V being erroneously admitted into the armed services (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 65). This was far more, in both numbers and as a percentage of all uniformed personnel, than during Project 100,000. While there were problems that developed from unknowingly accepting so many people with low intelligence (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991), the mismatch between the military's needs and the abilities of the recruits at the time could have been worse without the Project 100,000 experience.

Project 100,000 also gave the military valuable practice in conducting social science research on low-aptitude personnel. Efforts before the mid-1960s to study this population were sporadic. When the ASVAB's misnorming was discovered in 1980, the military was ready to conduct research on Category IV and V personnel accidentally admitted to service (e.g., Campbell & Knapp, 2001; National Research Council, 1991). Although unwelcomed by the brass at the time, Project 100,000 ended up as an important experience for the military.

Success or Failure?

Project 100,000 can get swallowed up in simplistic narratives about the Vietnam War. For those with an unfavorable view of the war, Project 100,000 is an example of incompetent leadership that got innocent men killed. For others, Project 100,000 is a cautionary tale of the folly of the blank slate and ignoring the value of IQ. The truth is more complex.

First, Project 100,000 did satisfy one of McNamara's fundamental goals: to provide employment for unskilled men. Unfortunately, reenlistment standards were not adjusted, and most men in Project 100,000 were discharged after their first tour of duty. Their military experience did not make them more likely to be employed after discharge (Beusse, 1974; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). Project 100,000 did not "salvage tens of thousands of these men . . . for productive roles in society" (McNamara, 1966, p. 6). In addition, McNamara hoped to reduce intergenerational poverty with Project 100,000. In the 21st century, it is known that economic inequality has a partially genetic basis (Hill et al., 2016; Hyytinen et al., 2019; Krapohl & Plomin, 2016; Rimfeld et al., 2018; Trzaskowski et al., 2014) and that intergenerational transmission of social status is strong in a variety of cultures (Clark, 2014, 2023). In hindsight, it is unrealistic to expect a 2-year stint in a low-skill job to break the "intrinsically self-perpetuating" nature of "Serious poverty" (McNamara, 1966, p. 3).

McNamara later admitted that Project 100,000 did not provide Marines with vocational skills that would be useful in civilian employment. Nevertheless, he asserted at the time that the men in Project 100,000 received "discipline, self reliance, and promptness . . . exactly the skills employers need" (quoted in Dawson, 1995, p. 182). The support for McNamara's claim that the military taught soft skills was the subjective opinions of Project 100,000 veterans in the 1980s' follow-up study (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). The objective data from the same study undermines McNamara's claim because it shows that Project 100,000 veterans experienced worse life outcomes than similar nonveterans.

One successfully completed goal of Project 100,000 was modifying training and education in the military, and millions of military personnel have benefited from the improved instructional design in military training. While this is a more modest goal than ending intergenerational poverty, it is nonetheless an important one.

It is hard to pass a general judgment on Project 100,000. Its impact on the armed services was mixed. When it did cause problems, those were not the biggest problems facing the military at the time (Rutenberg, 2019). As the war in Vietnam progressed, morale decreased throughout the military, and many soldiers engaged in rebellious activities (Cortright, 2005) for reasons that had little to do with Project 100,000. Moreover, during Project 100,000, the military was dealing with severe racial tensions among its ranks. Black servicemen had legitimate grievances against the military at the time (Vazansky, 2019). This sometimes erupted into open rebellion among Black soldiers (Cortright, 2005). The racial inequities among uniformed personnel were much more pressing than the issues that Project 100,000 created (Bailey, 2023).

An argument that Project 100,000 amplified existing problems in the military is more defensible. Many officers had a negative view of Project 100,000, blaming it for a perceived increase in disciplinary issues (Bailey, 2023). However, most individuals in Project 100,000 met their military obligations in a satisfactory manner. Likewise, Project 100,000 may have had an indirect effect on the military's racial tensions by increasing the percentage of Black servicemen and funneling them into combat positions at higher rates. The evidence regarding Project 100,000's role in amplifying these problems is circumstantial, though. At the very least, Project 100,000 was a distraction from other problems that the military had during the Vietnam War.

Where it solved problems, Project 100,000 was neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to solve them. The military could have met its manpower needs without Project 100,000 throughout the war through other methods. At the time, the government offered generous deferments for college students and fathers, which severely reduced the number of men who could be drafted into military service (Rutenberg, 2019). Military officials could have ended these deferments and drafted enough men to fill the military's needs without lowering enlistment standards. Drawing upon men in the reserves or national guard units for active duty could have also provided qualified men. Other benefits of Project 100,000 could have occurred if the program had never been implemented. For example, it seems likely that the military would have adjusted its training later in response to the large number of low-scoring individuals who joined the military when the ASVAB was misnormed.

The change in average IQ in new members of the armed services was not drastic enough to alter the overall functioning of the military. Absorbing the men from Project 100,000 did not cause the American military to lose its combat efficiency or alter its tactics, likely because the job of a new enlisted servicemember had not changed much since World War II when large numbers of illiterate and low-IQ men were successfully trained (Dawson, 1995). Figure 1 shows the average IQ scores for new members of each branch of the military from 1960 through 1970. Before the first full calendar year of Project 100,000, average IQs in the Army and the Marine Corps were already decreasing. In 1967, the Marine Corps saw the largest decrease in average IQ (1.7 points), and the Navy had the smallest decrease (0.9 IQ points). Even the

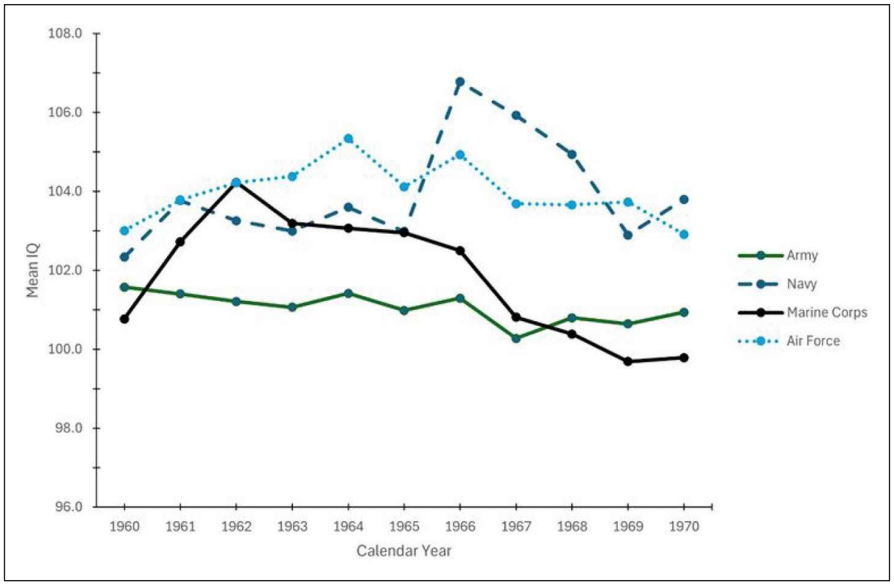

Figure 1. Average IQ of New Military Members From 1960 to 1970.
Note. Data converted from mean AFQT percentiles reported in Plag et al. (1970, p. 6).

Army only saw the mean IQ of its soldiers drop from 101.3 to 100.3 (Plag et al., 1970, p. 6). It was not until ASVAB misnorming that mental ability and performance noticeably deteriorated (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991).

Lessons From Project 100,000

Societal and Political Lessons

Project 100,000 holds lessons for today. First, there is a place in the workforce for people with below-average IQs. The military found many jobs that men with IQs between 81 and 92 could perform to a satisfactory degree (though not as well as their smarter comrades). Project 100,000 shows that often "good enough" is good enough. Employers should use this information to reassess the minimum standards for jobs (Sticht et al., 1987).

Second, the context of social programs matters. The fanfare surrounding Project 100,000 made it far more controversial than other adjustments to military accession standards (Jensen, 2019; Sticht, 2012; Sticht et al., 1987). McNamara was a polarizing figure, and his and Project 100,000's reputations became intertwined (Bateman, 2014). Moreover, the Great Society programs have a mixed legacy. These circumstances make Project 100,000 an easy target for civilian and military commentators (Dawson, 1995; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991; Sticht et al., 1987). As Dawson

(1995, p. 7) stated, "if standards had been quietly lowered to meet end strength without Secretary McNamara's 'Great Society' rhetoric, in all likelihood no one would have noticed it at the time or remember it today." Project 100,000 teaches policymakers and social scientists that interventions are best developed, studied, and executed with immediate goals accomplished before making grand public pronouncements.

Theoretical and Scientific Lessons

Project 100,000 also provides theoretical and scientific lessons. Among intelligence researchers, *g* theories are the dominant framework for understanding intelligence (Warne, 2020). While these theories differ in their details, they have in common the understanding that (1) beneficial life outcomes monotonically become more likely as IQ increases and (2) general intelligence has a causal influence on these life outcomes (Gottfredson, 1997). Although not intended as such, Project 100,000 was an important test of these theoretical precepts. In support of *g* theory, Project 100,000 men performed worse than their higher-IQ colleagues in training and job performance.

Moreover, the studies of Project 100,000 men are consistent with the hypothesis that differences in outcomes are partly due to a causal influence of intelligence. For example, Project 100,000 showed that there are limits to what training can accomplish. When announcing Project 100,000, McNamara questioned the existence of "low-aptitude" learners and stated that—with the right instruction—"the so-called 'low-aptitude' student can succeed" (McNamara, 1966, p. 9). This belief is called the *training hypothesis* (Gottfredson, 1997), and Project 100,000 is the largest demonstration that it is wrong. Project 100,000 shows that most people with an IQ in the range of 81 to 92 can only be trained to perform relatively low-skill work. Even then, their job performance does not reach the level of higher-IQ individuals for years, if ever (Grunzke et al., 1969; Vineberg & Taylor, 1972a; see also National Research Council, 1991). Attempts to train men in Project 100,000 for more advanced jobs took longer and had high failure rates (Harding et al., 1968). Differences in training quality could not explain the worse outcomes because Project 100,000's servicemen received the same training as others—and sometimes *more and better training* than typical enlistees.

Likewise, the research from Project 100,000 illustrates that low intelligence imposes limits on people, which is in accordance with *g* theories (Warne, 2020). McNamara had a naïve attitude toward the causes of low test performance. In addition to the training hypothesis, he believed that

> the prime reason many men "fail" the aptitude tests given at the time of induction is simply that these tests are geared to the psychology of traditional, formal, classroom, teacher-paced instruction.
>
> Further, these tests inevitably reflect the cultural value-systems and verbal-patterns of affluent American society. That is why so many young men from poverty backgrounds do

> poorly in the test. It is not because they do not possess basic—and perhaps even brilliant—intelligence; but simply because their cultural environment is so radically different from that assumed by the test-designers . . . .
>
> Clearly the way to measure his "aptitude" is to place him in a situation that offers the encouragement he has never had before. That means a good teacher, and a good course of instruction, well supported by self-paced, audio-visual aids. It also means less formal, classroom, theoretical instruction, and more practical on-the-job training. (McNamara, 1966, pp. 9, 10)

Project 100,000 disproves this belief. While modifications to training programs did help Project 100,000 men learn more course content, a change in instruction techniques did not reveal large numbers of "brilliant" people in the program. Despite the best efforts, most people in Project 100,000 struggled to master medium- or high-skill jobs. Project 100,000 showed that low-IQ people have stubborn limitations that have real consequences—as predicted by *g* theory (e.g., Warne, 2020). This important validation of theory also has practical applications in the workplace. None of these findings imply that IQ is a perfect metric, but a person has a lower probability of mastering job training than a person with a higher IQ (Campbell & Knapp, 2001). This information shows the value of using intelligence tests (e.g., Warne, 2025) for making decisions in employment.

Limits to the Data on Project 100,000

Along with the lessons, there are limitations to research on Project 100,000. One issue is that the research from Project 100,000 consisted mostly of small and/or local projects with little coordination among scientists. This is seen in varying study populations and terminology. Researchers referred to their study populations as "Project 100,000 men," "Category IV personnel," "low-ability airmen," "New Standards men," and other terms. These are not synonymous, though some researchers used them interchangeably. It can be difficult to determine whether a study was conducted on Project 100,000 men, a subset of them, or an overlapping group.

The efforts to research Project 100,000 diminished over time. After McNamara resigned as Secretary of Defense in 1968, "there was little interest in assessing whether Project 100,000's objectives were met" (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991, p. 99), and some studies in progress were not completed and/or issued. The research on Project 100,000 is patchy, especially for long-term outcomes. The few follow-ups that do exist (Beusse, 1974; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991; Sticht et al., 1987; Taylor & Vineberg, 1973) give an incomplete picture of outcomes for men in Project 100,000.

Moreover, research was subordinate to the practical needs of a military during wartime. Policies changed between 1966 and 1971 at various times without regard for the impact on Project 100,000 or any research being conducted (Sticht, 2012). The military's manpower needs decreased by 75% from 1968 to 1972 (Laurence &

Ramsberger, 1991, p. 55), for example. This change altered the statistics on attrition and discharge among Project 100,000 men because military officers often chose to discharge Category IV personnel first when given the option (Dawson, 1995). Project 100,000 was not the controlled experiment that McNamara envisioned.

There is also a lack of random assignment in the studies, which precludes strong conclusions about the impact of experiences or educational interventions on men in Project 100,000. Similarly, there are no prospective studies comparing men randomly assigned to Project 100,000 (e.g., through the draft) with men who were not. This is a barrier to drawing any conclusions about the causal impact that Project 100,000 and military service had on the men's lives.

Laurence and Ramsberger (1991, p. 58) suggested one possible provocative limitation of the scientific research from Project 100,000: "It almost seems that the efforts to monitor the program were undertaken not so much in the spirit of scientific inquiry, but rather to provide evidence that McNamara and Johnson were right." This may be why there were no studies on casualties or combat effectiveness. In addition, if there was high-level pressure for Project 100,000 to be a success, then it could have led supervisors to give more favorable judgments of low-performing personnel, which would inflate job performance ratings, passing rates in training, and so on. However, the reports that were issued are often not flattering to Project 100,000 or to the men in Category IV (e.g., Harding et al., 1968; Vineberg & Taylor, 1972a). The higher priority of fighting a war and inadequate coordination among scientists are also viable explanations for the state of the scientific literature on Project 100,000.

Legacy of Project 100,000

Project 100,000 lends itself to oversimplification, and often the same data are presented in different ways to make the program look favorable or harmful. Critics of the program emphasize the greater rates of failure and negative outcomes (e.g., Hsiao, 1989), while those with a favorable view emphasize the high percentages of program members who successfully completed their military service (e.g., Sticht, 2012). The same data can often be interpreted to support both perspectives (Bateman, 2014; Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991; Rutenberg, 2019).

Project 100,000 has an enduring legacy. The research it produced is relevant to modern discussions of intelligence, vocational training, and personnel selection. This article is an attempt to bring some of these primary studies to wider attention. Many of these studies are deposited in the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), and most of the findings support later research on personnel selection, adult education, leadership, the predictive validity of IQ, and other areas. Researchers in these areas should include DTIC in their literature searches.[15]

Echoes of Project 100,000 exist in the military today. Currently, the Army and Navy each has a Future Soldier/Sailor Preparatory Course (FSPC), which provides special training for recruits who fall short of the military's physical or academic standards (Jaffre, 2025; Seck, 2024). While it is doubtful that Project 100,000

inspired the FSPC, such a program fits into the experience of the U.S. military of preparing people from a variety of cognitive ability levels for successful military service. Project 100,000 is part of that experience, and the research from Project 100,000 makes it reasonable to expect that IQ will set limits on what these recruits can do in the military.

The Vietnam War ended long ago, but misunderstandings of Project 100,000 continue. Far from a total success or an abject failure, Project 100,000 was an imperfect program implemented for noble reasons in a tumultuous time by an organization that had competing priorities. While it did not provide as many benefits to military members as McNamara had hoped, the program allowed many men to honorably serve their country. Most importantly, it showed that, "the Army can apparently make good use of a considerable number of men who are in Mental Category IV" (Goffard et al., 1966, p. 18). Project 100,000 left a valuable scientific and practical legacy, and the military and scientific communities should honor the men who served in uniform under the program.

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ORCID iD


Russell T. Warne https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4763-3625

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Notes

1. During World War II, the minimum accession standard for recruits was sometimes as low as the 6th percentile (the equivalent of an IQ of 77), and, during the Korean War, the minimum mental standard was the 10th percentile (i.e., an IQ of 81; Sticht et al., 1987). At the start of that war, there was no minimum test score needed for men with high school degrees (U.S. Department of the Army, 1965).

2. Note that the ranges in Table 1 differ from those reported by Gregory (2015, p. 100), who stated that the minimum IQ for Category IV is 71, instead of 81. This is an error, and much of Gregory's analysis of Project 100,000 should be considered in light of this misunderstanding of the minimum IQ for Project 100,000 members. The men in Project 100,000 were not "morons."
3. The Marine Corps, for example, took high school graduates with scores as low as the 10th percentile (Laurence & Ramsberger, 1991). Category IVA and IVB recruits could join the Army if they had (1) a high school diploma, or (2) two AQB scores of 90 or higher. Examinees in Category IVC could only join the Army if they had an AQB General Technical score of 80 or higher and scores of 90 or higher in two additional AQB areas. Recruits in Category V were completely barred from military service in all branches.
4. For example, in the Army, any high school graduate in Category IV or higher could join, but for those without a high school diploma in Categories IVA and IVB, potential recruits only needed one AQB score of 90 or higher. Examinees in Category IVC needed two AQB scores of 90 or higher (Sticht et al., 1987).
5. The same policy had been in place during the Korean War (Dawson, 1995).
6. There was precedent for this aspect of Project 100,000. In the 1950s, a similar policy was in place where each branch of the military was mandated to minimum proportions of men from Category IV (Eitelberg et al., 1984).
7. Equivalent to approximately $48,000/year in 2025 dollars.
8. It is not clear why some men in Categories I through III are included in the data of Sticht et al. (1987) from Project 100,000. Sticht et al. identified some errors in the data, such as inconsistent reports of a servicemember's race. The 0.2% of men higher than Category IV may also be due to errors in the data.
9. Common Army jobs for Project 100,000 men were cook, supply clerk, auto mechanic, and field lineman (i.e., telephone installer, operator, and repairman in the field; Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower and Reserve Affairs], 1969, p. xvi). The Air Force identified suitable jobs as including photoprocessing, aircraft radio repair, aircraft maintenance assistance, water and wastewater processing, and clerical work (Mayo, 1969). In the Navy, almost all Category IV personnel failed to qualify for jobs that required classroom training; instead, they received training for less academic positions (Cory, 1971b).
10. In interviewing Marine Corps veterans who served during the Vietnam War, Dawson (1995) found that illiteracy was not unusual during the time period.
11. For example, in the Navy, personnel could not reenlist unless they had at least a 10th-grade education and an aptitude score of at least the 40th percentile (Cory, 1971b).
12. It is not clear what caused these score increases. They could represent real cognitive gains, an underestimation of cognitive ability from the original score, practice effects, regression toward the mean, or other phenomena.
13. Citing a 1967 memo, Laurence and Ramsberger (1991, p. 30) reported that Administrative Acceptees were 28% of personnel admitted to the armed forces during the first 3 months of Project 100,000. Citing a 1978 journalistic article, Gregory (2015, p. 103) claims that there were 30,301 Administrative Acceptees, which would be 8.9% of all Project 100,000 personnel. It is not clear whether the percentage of Project 100,000 personnel who were Administrative Acceptees decreased after 1966, or if one or both of these percentages is/are inaccurate.

14. A request for casualty numbers for Project 100,000 members and the military at large to the Defense Manpower Data Center (the organization housing casualty data for the U.S. military) was returned with a response that individual-level casualty data was unavailable for personnel serving before 1980.
15. The easiest way to search DTIC is to include the phrase "site:dtic.mil" in a Google search.

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Author Biography

Russell T. Warne is an educational psychologist who specializes in research related to IQ and human intelligence. He is the author of *In the Know: Debunking 35 Myths About Human Intelligence*, published by Cambridge University Press, a book about intelligence targeted at the nonexpert. He is also the creator of the Reasoning and Intelligence Online Test (RIOT), an online test of intelligence for adults. His research focuses on intelligence theory, measuring intelligence, and cross-cultural testing. To learn more about his work, visit https://russellwarne.com.