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CHRIS KLEPONIS—NEWSWEEK

Young supporters of the gulf war demonstrate in a park near the White House

Psychic Shock for a Generation

They're twentysomething and grappling with war

It could have been a scene out of the '60s: hundreds of young people demonstrating in front of the White House as a line of graying veterans march past in opposition. But for this encounter, just days after the gulf war started, the generations switched sides. The young people—almost all twentysomething—were passionately in favor of the war. They carried signs that read *BE A PATRIOT, NOT A SCUD*. The veterans, many of them scarred and wounded survivors of Vietnam, stared in disbelief. "They don't know what they're talking about," said one vet in his 40s. "They're just children."

Months from now, when the guns are still once again, young Americans who came of age after the end of the Vietnam War may indeed find that their childhood officially ended on Jan. 16. Whether they are for or against the war—or still trying to figure out where they stand—the fighting in the gulf has been a profound psychic shock. They have watched brothers, sisters and longtime buddies ship out. They worry

about the possibility of a draft (box). They may soon see loved ones coming home in body bags. War is no longer merely the stuff of history books but part of their own personal histories. "I grew up in a very secure time," says 18-year-old Bonnie Mixon, a freshman at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. "But I don't know if you can ever prepare a generation for war." Her boyfriend and eight of her friends are in Saudi Arabia. "I would hope," she says, "that it's not necessary for every generation to go through a test like this."

So far, young adults' opinions about the war appear to mirror those of the country as a whole: a majority support it. (Many say, however, that heavy casualties in a ground war could change their minds.) Recruiting is up—in the last week of January, 1,044 men and women volunteered to enlist in the Army, compared to an average of 662 nationwide in the last weeks of October, November and December. At Harvard Uni-

versity, a group called SUDS (Students United for Desert Storm) signed up 700 supporters in one day after the war started. At Kent State University, where four students were shot to death by National Guardsmen during a 1970 antiwar protest, the editor of the campus paper estimates that 60 percent of the students favor the war. "I feel like my generation is turning back to the World War II idea that it's honorable to fight for your country," says Kent State sophomore Michael Homula, a pro-war activist. "I see a firmness of purpose."

ROTC chic: Some sociologists agree that young Americans do have more in common philosophically with their grandparents, the World War II generation, than their parents, who were shaped by Vietnam. Comparisons between Hitler and Saddam Hussein convince

many young adults that the war is a just one. "Support for a war comes from a populace that thinks it must act in self-defense to prevent annihilation, or a populace that perceives a need to stamp out evil," says Tom W. Smith, director of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Young adults today generally respect the armed forces. Of all age groups surveyed by Smith's center, 18- to 29-year-olds were the most likely to say they have a great deal of confidence in the military. Smith calls it "the Ronald Reagan effect." College ROTC programs, a focus of protest in the '60s, are tolerated—even admired—today. "ROTC students don't stand out as much as they did a few years ago," says Ed Walters, editor in chief of *The Hoya*, the student newspaper at Georgetown University. "In fact, if you have a class that meets at the Pentagon, it can be pretty chic to be in ROTC."

While they may be more supportive of the military than their '60s counterparts, not all young Americans are gung-ho about the war. They were raised with the fear that any war could lead to nuclear annihilation. Now they find themselves glued to their televisions, watching films of smart bombs hitting Iraqi targets. "I'm caught between feeling that war is horrible and no one else would step in to stop Saddam Hussein," says Lester Blumenthal, 23, of San Francisco. "Every headline hits me. My peers are more depressed than normal. The war is on everyone's mind."

Although a draft is highly unlikely, many still fear being forced to fight. "We've

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been inundated with calls from people asking what to do if the draft is reinstated," says Robert Dove of the American Friends Service Committee in Boston. Nearly 200 people tried to sign up for 60 slots at a draft-counseling training session late last month, Dove says. Wild rumors about the draft have been sweeping across many campuses. At Boston College, students have heard that the government will take all men up to age 30—even though men aren't required to inform the Selective Service of their whereabouts after the age of 26.

The war has already forced many young people to re-examine their political beliefs. Brendan Huffman, 20, a student at Santa Monica College in California, went back and forth between pro-war and antiwar stances several times before deciding that he is somewhere in the middle. "I guess you could say that I'm a former antiwar activist

who now believes that it's best to support the war effort and get it over quickly," he says. "I'll wait until the next election to take out my frustrations."

Antiwar sentiment appears strongest on predominantly black campuses. Like some black leaders, these students argue that African-Americans bear a disproportionate burden in the war: a quarter of the soldiers in the gulf are black, even though blacks make up only 12 percent of the population. At Howard University in Washington, D.C., 39 students who were in the Reserves have been called up, compared with just 10 at nearby Georgetown (both schools have about 12,000 students). "Students are concerned about their colleagues who have had to leave school to go to war," says Howard professor Ron Walters. "A lot of black students feel that racism in America has pushed a lot of

young people into volunteering for the military because they didn't have any other options." Howard students have held antiwar strikes, teach-ins and rallies. Even campus fraternities have been active in antiwar activities.

Whatever their opinions about this war, most young adults vow not to repeat what they see as the most tragic mistake of the '60s. "Those of us who have studied the Vietnam War are ashamed of the way students treated the vets when they came back home," says Amy Ellis, a senior at the University of Miami. "There is definitely a feeling among us that whether you are for or against the war, you should support the soldiers." In this war, the peace signs and the yellow ribbons stand side by side.

BARBARA KANTROWITZ with
JOHN MCCORMICK in Chicago,
CLARA BINGHAM in Washington and bureau reports

Americans Won't Face Another Draft

Since Operation Desert Storm began last month, speculation about reviving the draft has swept over the country faster than a squadron of F-14 Tomcats. Students protest against it in antiwar demonstrations, editors address it on op-ed pages and talk-show hosts discuss it on the radio. For all the talk, however, one point seems sorely neglected: a draft is probably not going to happen—at least not any time soon.

The reasons are both practical and political. For one, the United States may already have all the troops it needs. Out of 2 million active-duty soldiers and 1.6 million reservists and National Guardsmen, there are now about 500,000 troops in the gulf. "We have a long way to go before we'll need more forces," says Pentagon spokesman William Caldwell. Politically, conscription is about as popular as Saddam Hussein at a Fourth of July party—a point that seems not to have escaped George Bush. He told reporters last week that he has no intention of resorting to a draft.

Advocates of the current system say the all-volunteer Army ensures a willing work force, and recruitment num-



HIROJI KUBOTA—MAGNUM

Conscription ended after an era of draft-card burning

bers are up since the war began. And, even if enlistment slackens, the war might be over before a new draft could be implemented. Some legislators argue that even if conscription were instituted today, it would be of little use in solving immediate problems in the gulf. New recruits would have to spend months in training. And a draft wouldn't produce the doctors and other skilled personnel that the armed forces are desperate for. "The people who we have registered for the draft we don't need, and what we need, we don't have," says Democratic Rep. Pat Schroeder.

But some lawmakers and government officials believe a draft might become necessary in the unlikely event of a protracted war in the gulf. The United States ended conscription in 1973, after an era of protests and draft-card burning. New regulations have been in place since 1971, but reinstating a draft would take an act of Congress. Under the new law, student exemptions would be all but eliminated and hardship deferments, frequently awarded during the Vietnam War, would be scarce. Men turning 20 in each calendar year in which the draft is in effect would be the first to be called.

Proponents of such a plan argue that it is the only equitable way to build a nation's defenses. A draft treats everyone—from investment bankers to ditch diggers—equally and would help ensure that more middle- and upper-class Americans would have to serve in the military. (During the Vietnam era, however, many well-to-do Americans found ways to beat the draft.) Some say the draft may also be a way to discourage military adventurism. "If we had had the draft, I don't think there would have been this tremendous commitment of troops to the Persian Gulf in the first place," says Charles Peters, editor of *The Washington Monthly*. "George Bush's friends would have called him up and said, 'Well, George, it's August and Jason, my son, can't stand the heat of the desert.'"

Yet with the threat of a ground war looming, Americans worry about what the future holds. At the Selective Service headquarters in Washington one day recently, a woman phoned to ask if her grandson could get a deferment for having braces on his teeth. Even before a draft becomes a realistic prospect, many Americans are already exploring ways to beat it.

ANNETTA MILLER with
CLARA BINGHAM in Washington