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**PEACE CORPS IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

In 1961 John F. Kennedy founded the Peace Corps. After 45 years of continual international service, the organization has nearly 8,000 volunteers serving in 67 countries throughout the world. Throughout the years the organization has struggled to gain presidential support and funding, as well as recruit well-rounded volunteers.

After years of falling volunteer numbers, in 2003, the Peace Corps revamped its campaign to appeal to a broader volunteer audience. The recruitment strategies differ from those in the 1960s, appealing to the pragmatic benefits of service rather than the idealistic appeals used in the early years of the organization. This work includes an analysis of the organization's recruitment strategies both textual and visual as well as an analysis of volunteer accounts of service. This study culminates in a look toward the future of the organization, in hopes of revealing the direction of the Peace Corps in the 21st century.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Peace Corps and the 21st century

How many of you who are going to be doctors, are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world? On your willingness to do that, not merely to serve one year or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country, I think will depend the answer {*sic*} whether a free society can compete. I think it can! And I think Americans are willing to contribute. But the effort must be far greater than we have ever made in the past.¹

At two o'clock in the morning on October 24, 1960, Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy revealed his idea for the Peace Corps to a crowd of anxious University of Michigan students. That night on the steps of the Student Union Building, Kennedy began to harness the enthusiasm and optimism of a nation putting World War II behind them. The youth of America—for whom the news of battles and the sacrifices of wartime were either vague memories or written and oral history—were raised on newsreels showing the slow and painful recovery of a war-torn Europe. The combination created a young generation eager to help. Kennedy's youthful exuberance, winning looks, and idealistic words made the Peace Corps seem like a logical next step in this process of healing. Simultaneously, Cold War tensions weighed heavily. The impending threat of the atomic bomb meant that Americans had the options either to stay at home and wait for the giant flashbulb in the sky or to do something to make things better.

Five months later, in his January 1961, inaugural address, President Kennedy's vision of a federally-sponsored volunteer program remained a top priority. He challenged a new generation of Americans to join "a grand and global alliance" to fight tyranny, poverty, disease, and war. "To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery," he said, "we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves."² And on March 1, 1961, President Kennedy signed Executive Order 10924 establishing the Peace Corps.

According to Gerard T. Rice, "Kennedy felt that there was a great fund of idealism in America waiting to be harnessed and discharged for a noble cause. The Peace Corps was his way of demonstrating the reality of this idealism to the world."³ In his book, *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*, Rice termed this the Kennedian spirit; Rice argues that the Peace Corps captured the 1960s spirit of voluntarism and grassroots organizing. The rhetorical framework in which Kennedy couched his vision of the organization in 1961 took as its major tenant idealism. Addressing those assembled for the signing of the Executive Order, the President said, "But if the life will not be easy, it will be rich and satisfying. For every young American who participates in the Peace Corps--who works in a foreign land--will know that he or she is sharing in the great common task of bringing to man that decent way of life which is the foundation of freedom and a condition of peace."⁴ Kennedy's speeches focused on the difficult challenge that would lead to peace for all of humanity. The Peace Corps would be the connection between cultures and nations.

Reflecting on Peace Corps' past will provide a platform from which we can delve into the present. The Peace Corps' tradition of idealism and a spirit of service are met

today with a pragmatic view of service. This study will analyze the rhetoric of the organization today to present the tension between the organization's idealistic past and its current effort to respond a more pragmatic population. By this I mean to suggest that today's volunteers approach their service with a sophisticated sensibility that upholds service as a practical convention necessary for self-satisfaction and personal advancement while at the same time holding on to the idealism of spreading peace to developing nations. In this introductory chapter, I will provide a historical background of the organization – a review of pertinent Peace Corps studies and a characterization of the state of civic engagement in the 21st century – and after a justification of my study, briefly define the contents of the five chapters of this study.

Peace Corps' Past

In 1961, the Peace Corps hit the ground running. By August of that same year, the first volunteers, selected from a pool of 5,000 applicants, were sent to Ghana, Tanzania, Columbia, the Philippines, Chile, and St. Lucia. In September of 1961, Congress approved formal legislation, making Kennedy's executive order an established law. By the end of 1963, 7,000 volunteers were "in country" in 44 different nations, and by June of 1964, over 15,000 volunteers were in service, which to date remains the highest number of volunteers in service at one time.⁵ One volunteer recalls the excitement of that time: "We were the Peace Corps, the shiny new creation that President Kennedy had proposed in the last days of his 1960 campaign, his experiment in international development. Everyone, it seemed, was impressed. That summer, all across the country, our names were read on local newspapers We were on the

evening news with Walter Cronkite, and Huntley and Brinkley.”⁶ The Peace Corps was at the height of its popularity in the 1960s. During this time, many volunteers joined because of their affinity for Kennedy and the Kennedean spirit of idealism.

In the 1960s, the Peace Corps budget included substantial monetary support for advertising, leading to partnership with the Ad Council in 1961. The Ad Council created a public image through the Public Service Campaign, “The Toughest Job You’ll Ever Love.” This campaign included print ads with clip and mail-in coupons to request application information. By 1965, more than a thousand people a week were sending them in.⁷ The Peace Corps of the 1960s was a brand new project, and a bold media campaign attracted a great deal of interest in the organization. But the 1960s’ fountain of idealism began to run out after Kennedy’s death. The 1970s saw a dramatic decline in volunteer numbers.

Between 1969 and 1971, the United States’ involvement in Vietnam began to affect the Peace Corps. The governments of “Somalia, Turkey, and Bolivia expelled the Peace Corps as a convenient means of appeasing anti-American sentiment,” and Tanzania ended its ties with the organization because of its “disdain for United States involvement in Vietnam.”⁸ Requests from host countries began to include a strong call for volunteers with actual skill sets. The newly-graduated generalist volunteers of the 1960s were no longer requested in many countries. Volunteers with useable skills were needed; however, the administration believed in the value of the youthful volunteer with a general educational background. According to Karen Schwartz, Peace Corps scholar, “It was widely known in the agency that the few technically skilled volunteers whom the Peace Corps had provided in the past were older, and could not learn the languages or adapt to

the rigors of the life in the third worlds as easily as the recent college grad.”⁹ Peace Corps advisors began to make strong arguments for a shift in recruitment, which was further justified by the fact that the volunteers of the early 1970s “lacked the dedication of the earlier groups.” The attitude of volunteers had changed; they were different than the idealistic volunteers of the 1960s. These 1970s volunteers publicly protested the Vietnam War both in Washington and abroad and offended local customs and norms by their wearing long hair, short skirts, and beards.¹⁰

The loss of idealism after Kennedy’s death affected recruitment numbers in the 1970s. President Kennedy’s youthful fountain of idealism became cynicism about American intentions abroad. The damage done by the War was irreversible; “Mid-1970s [youth] had learned from the Vietnam War that their government’s intentions overseas were not always honorable.”¹¹ In 1976 applications hit a low because of this sentiment. The mistrust in overseas policy was not the only reason for volunteer drop-off. A diminished budget meant there was less money for advertising and recruitment.

The Nixon Administration had little interest in volunteer service and the expansion of philanthropy throughout the globe, and Nixon nearly put an end to the organization. In 1970 after Nixon’s aide, Pat Buchanan, detailed what he conceived as Peace Corps’ negative publicity for America, Nixon decided to gradually reduce the budget. Nixon blamed the budget decrease on the Vietnam War.¹² However, his most crippling effect on the Peace Corps was the decision in July 1971 to join all overseas organizations into ACTION, a federal volunteer agency. Grouping all federal volunteer agencies gave the Peace Corps the same goals and mission as every other Foreign Service organization, compromising the organization’s independence.¹³ Independence is

important as it guarantees the organization freedom from the whims of politics.

After a battle to keep the organization alive during the Nixon administration, Jimmy Carter's election brought new hope for the Peace Corps. It was widely known that Carter's mother was a former volunteer, and he made a concerted effort to appoint former Peace Corps volunteers as aides, staffers, and cabinet members. Fritz Fischer notes that "Hundreds of AID staffers were returned volunteers, and the director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service had served in the Philippines as a volunteer."¹⁴ This administration was known for its push for human rights. President Carter understood that foreign relationships, especially in Latin America, needed to be developed. He viewed the "third world" as "sophisticated and complex."¹⁵ Fritz Fischer characterizes President Carter as being "just like a volunteer" because "he attempted to articulate a fresh approach toward the third world but could not choose between contradictory goals of respecting the cultures of others and pushing others to change."¹⁶ The Carter administration was viewed by the next administration as indecisive, but Carter framed developing countries as allied nations in need of "partnership," rather than "help" from United States.

To reestablish its independent status, President Carter signed Executive Order 12137 in 1979, disconnecting the Peace Corps from ACTION and granting full autonomy.¹⁷ Carter justified his Executive Order by insisting that "The spirit of the Peace Corps springs from the deepest wells in our culture, from the reasoned and strongly-felt impulses of our people to share with their neighbors their caring and their labor."¹⁸ With this legislation, Carter temporarily ensured that Peace Corps would not have to fear confusion with other organizations or feel legislative pressure. Carter

understood that in order for the organization to be successful, it needed to be free from politics.

As mentioned above, in the late 1960s, the Peace Corps experienced a tension between volunteers with specific skills and volunteers with general educational backgrounds. By the late 1970s, the host countries had assessed the Peace Corps' presence and realized their own needs. This caused them to request volunteers with more experience. Sargent Shriver, the first Peace Corps director and mastermind of policy from its inception, believed in the power of a volunteer force with generalist backgrounds. Shriver felt that B.A., liberal arts undergraduates "were more likely to be unsure of their career path and more likely to be attracted to the two-year sabbatical offered by the Peace Corps."¹⁹ According to Fritz Fischer, the B.A. generalists "suited Shriver's image of the lonely frontiersman, forced to rely on nothing but his own guile to survive."²⁰ By the 1970s foreign nations began to understand the role of the Peace Corps in their countries and the needs of their own countries, which led them to request specialists to work on specific problems in their countries.

Requests for volunteers with specific qualifications led to new media campaigns, which repositioned the Peace Corps' recruitment strategies in the 1970s to "attract skilled people, not just 22- year-old college grads."²¹ The Administration responded to this problem by placing articles in professional publications to reach out to nurses and MBAs, and they advertised in agricultural trade publications for farming experts.²² Bill Novelli, an advertising strategist, used social marketing to recruit these new volunteers. In the 1970s, social marketing or advertising with a philanthropic purpose became a common recruitment strategy. The Peace Corps was one of the first organizations to give

volunteer service an appealing look, which was a way to remind Americans of the organization's work.

One result of recruiting more skilled volunteers was that the average age of Peace Corps volunteers rose from 22 to 27, and five percent of volunteers were over the age of 50. At the end of the 1970s two Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), Paul Tsongas and Christopher Dodd, were elected to the United States Senate. Dodd and Tsongas were the first of many political figures who served as volunteers, giving Peace Corps service a distinguished list of alumni.²³ Tsongas and Dodd also worked on President Carter's commission on human rights and developing nations, which contributed to Carter's legacy as a president concerned with foreign diplomacy in developing countries. At that time, volunteers served in 69 countries, and more host country nationals (HCNs) worked for the organization than ever before.

In 1981 President Carter's 1979 Executive Order passed as Congressional legislation, making the Peace Corps an independent federal agency. Congress recognized that Carter's order was important and worthy of approval, as it completely freed the organization from the possibility of being confused or associated with other governmental branches.

The Peace Corps was showing signs of revival. The Carter administration had helped to reshape and renew the vitality of the organization, adding funding to the budget for recruitment and advertising. However, the Reagan administration firmly rejected Jimmy Carter's stance on foreign policy, which deeply affected the organization's development. Within his first days in office, President Reagan signed his first fiscal year budget requesting a 25 percent reduction of funds.²⁴ Reagan did not support overseas

programs, and he positioned the “third world” as “a battleground in the struggle with the ‘evil empire,’ and American leaders never saw the third world as anything more than primitives. . . .”²⁵ The Reagan administration managed to oversimplify the state of the non-Western world by creating an image of the world’s poorest countries as weak and childlike. This stance on foreign relationships and politics directly affected the Peace Corps. The organization never viewed the “third world” as weak or childlike; rather it maintained the ideal that these countries needed American aid in order to meet their potential as world partners.

Though the Reagan Administration did not financially support the mission of the Peace Corps, Reagan did appoint Loret Miller Ruppe who is to date the longest serving Peace Corps director. She established new initiatives in the Caribbean, Central America, and Africa by adding business-oriented projects to the agenda. Even as the 1980s celebrated the 20th anniversary and new overseas initiatives, the number of volunteers fell to 5,380, the lowest number in the history of the organization.

In 1985, Congress increased Peace Corps funding and set a goal to have 10,000 volunteers by 1992. Such revived government support helped to fund two major programs that still exist. In January of 1985, the Peace Corps established its Fellows Program at Teacher’s College at Columbia University to recruit, prepare, and place returned volunteers as teachers in the New York City public schools. The Fellows program eventually expanded to include teachers in many different programs and in different cities. In September of 1989, Director Paul D. Coverdell announced the establishment of “World Wise Schools.” This program pairs volunteers with teachers in the United States to promote international awareness and cross-cultural understanding by

teaching school children about other countries and voluntarism. Both of these programs began to establish links with schools, helping to promote the organization's work within the United States and across cultures.²⁶

President George H. W. Bush continued along the ideological path Reagan had created. The Bush administration was not particularly interested in the Peace Corps or expanding its budget. However, during Bush's term in office, the Berlin Wall fell, which led the Peace Corps into the former Soviet Union to work with a new type of developing country.²⁷ The devolution of the Soviet Union temporarily revived the organization's popularity. The former Soviet bloc began requesting teachers and business advisers from the Peace Corps.

The 1990s was a decade of firsts. In June 1990, the first volunteers served in Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism. In July 1992, the first group was sent to the former Soviet Union. Returned Peace Corps volunteer Carol Bellamy became the first volunteer ever appointed director in 1993.²⁸ In October 1993, the first volunteers taught English in China. And in 1995, the first volunteers lived in the apartheid-torn country of South Africa. In that same year, Mark Gearan, the newly-appointed director and former volunteer, formed the Crisis Corps. Crisis Corps is a volunteer group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) who are sent back to their countries of original service when those countries are affected by natural disaster.²⁹

President Clinton strongly supported the Peace Corps, announcing in his very first Presidential radio address that he wished to see its expansion. By March 1998, six RPCV, now Senators, with the support of President Clinton, proposed a bill to expand to 10,000 volunteers by the year 2000 and to increase funding from \$241 million to \$365

million by 2003. The Peace Corps, Clinton noted, “is a remarkable tradition that emphasizes that our country is about more than power and wealth. It is also about the power of our values and the power of a helping hand, the ethic of service, and the understanding that we have an obligation not only to our own people, to people around the world to help them make the most of their own lives.”³⁰

At the end of the 20th century, the Peace Corps moved into its own building in Washington, D.C. This move was a visible sign of its importance as a fully-supported, fully-functioning governmental organization. During his two terms as president, Clinton appointed three Peace Corps directors, two of whom were RPCVs, fulfilling one of Sargent Shriver’s dreams. Shriver hoped that “in the not too distant future, every office in the Peace Corps will be occupied by a returned Volunteer.”³¹

The 45 years of Peace Corps have seen many changes. According to the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 2006, the Peace Corps received only \$322 million, which is “well below the requested \$345 million requested by President Bush.”³² Clinton’s idea of a \$365 million budget has yet to be met. Today’s recruitment of 7,700 volunteers fails to meet the 10,000 volunteer mark. President George W. Bush pledged, in his 2002 State of the Union address in the wake of September 11th that he wanted to increase the volunteer numbers to 14,000.³³ Even with the continued rhetorical support of many presidents since Kennedy, the Peace Corps has not been given the monetary support needed to reach its expansion goals. In the post-September 11th moment, the organization remained under-supported and under-recognized by the American government, people, and media. Today the organization stands in the shadow of the 1960s Peace Corps. Not only has it suffered from political

turnover and shrinking budgets, the organization also struggles to recruit volunteers willing to sacrifice two years of their lives in developing nations of our world.

Sacrifice and Service

1960s idealism, brilliantly encouraged by President Kennedy, led to a significant interest in the newly-formed Peace Corps. Leroy G. Dorsey, involving the “new frontier” image, argues that Kennedy’s campaign rhetoric persuaded idealistic supporters to throw their political support toward him and eventually toward the Peace Corps, propelling it “into the forefront of public consciousness.”³⁴ Dorsey argues that through Kennedy’s rhetorical vision, volunteers “embodied that pioneer spirit of rugged individualism when they left the safety of their homes to travel to distant and little-known places to devote years of service to secure a realizable peace; yet, in challenging the age-old evils of the new universe, they acted as symbols around which the American people could experience a greater sense of responsibility and community spirit.”³⁵ Kennedy constructed a rhetoric powerful enough to frame volunteers as pioneering individuals and purveyors of civic responsibility and community spirit.

Kennedy’s rhetoric pictured the Peace Corps volunteers as no strangers to hardship. They had physical stamina and would be able to live in the most primitive of conditions, with no salary, among the peoples of foreign lands. Kennedy envisioned these volunteers of the New Frontier as pioneering heroes as they “serve where no American has ever lived or even traveled.”³⁶ He rhetorically situated the volunteer against intangible enemies such as poverty, starvation, and lack of education. These enemies would be combated with “genuine peace,” a goal that was far more complex

than simply providing money or food. Volunteers of the 1960s were embarking on unknown territory, fighting grand enemies, and spreading peace in new and exciting ways. The volunteer turned hero possessed two key elements: sacrifice and service.

According to Dorsey, Kennedy stated that “Peace Corps volunteers met the criteria to be frontier war heroes by heeding the call to arms and exhibiting the physical stamina and the willingness to sacrifice their lives in service to their country.”³⁷ The 1960s recruitment slogan, “the toughest job you’ll ever love,” is a complement to the “new frontier” motif. This recruitment slogan appealed to the rugged individual in the spirit of sacrifice and service. First, the volunteer was being recruited to undertake a specific service. Second, the volunteer’s job would be difficult and self-sacrificing. Finally, it would be rewarding and heroic. Kennedy’s rhetoric and the Peace Corps’ recruitment slogan defined the 1960s volunteer.

In the first two years, recruitment strategies strayed from the rugged individual created in Kennedy’s New Frontier Myth. Gerard T. Rice notes that original recruitment strategies framed volunteer service as a vacation. Rice notes one early advertisement depicted Nepal as “the Land of the Yeti and Everest” and told volunteers headed to warm climates to “bring your bathing suit, the swimming is great.”³⁸ These strategies quickly proved unsuccessful. Volunteer numbers during the first two years did not meet the expectations of those involved in the formation of the organization. In fact, Bill Moyers, one of the Peace Corps original masterminds, fought hard to maintain Kennedy’s image of the volunteer as a rugged individual. Moyers argued that if gimmicks were used to recruit volunteers, then the organization’s mission would seem too superficial. He stated, “If we set up appeals beyond the basic desire of an individual to involve himself in his

program simply because he feels it is worth doing, we will fail.”³⁹ This view was further confirmed when Robert Landrum, one of the first volunteers, advised Sargent Shriver that “the literature that is being distributed does not create the proper image of the Peace Corps to the people that we should want as Volunteers. Some of my friends have said that after reading various Peace Corps brochures, they felt that the Peace Corps was too superficial an organization.”⁴⁰ These responses led to a more realistic recruitment campaign in 1963 that focused on sixteen hour days, monotony, mosquitoes, and the reality of life in the developing world.⁴¹ This campaign strategy worked brilliantly as 112,000 Americans applied for service between 1961 and 1964. And 1964 saw 15,000 volunteers, the largest number ever to be in service. Kennedy’s rhetoric of hardship established an appeal to the idealistic volunteer spirit in the 1960s. Appeals to a travelogue style of volunteer service were not aligned with Kennedy’s rhetorical appeal to the rugged individual and, as a result, were not successful. However, these appeals would have a place in the future.

Appeals to adventure and excitement would not work in the 1960s because these appeals made the newly forming Peace Corps seem like a Madison Avenue billboard rather than a socially conscious peace-making organization. The 1960s harnessed the idealism of Americans eager to serve in rugged places, sacrificing their time and efforts to make a difference. Rhetoric devoted to the spirit of the New Frontier effectively captured the sensibilities of volunteering in the 1960s. However, by the late 1970s, the “toughest job” campaign slogan was no longer effective. Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman notes, “[t]he Vietnam War ended the blithe expansion of American overseas commitments. An internationally embarrassed United States withdrew in virtual defeat.

Nixon curtailed U.S. responsibilities as world policeman, and subsequent presidents adjusted their ambitions to the constraints of the ‘Vietnam syndrome.’” The Peace Corps itself entered a decline that bottomed out in 1987. “Suspicious of power, many Americans seemed suspicious of idealism as well.”⁴² By the 1980s, “American idealism” was no longer a compelling marketing strategy. Today, recruitment rhetoric responds to the changing face of the American volunteer. Recruitment rhetoric focuses on the personal and professional benefits of service as well as the potential for adventure and excitement.

Characterizing the 21st century

Today’s Peace Corps negotiates the tension between the idealism of the past and the pragmatic concerns of Americans today. The central argument of this study maintains that American society is no longer the idealistic Kennedian society of the 1960s. The organization cannot continue to use the same appeals for service or support. In a May 5, 2005, article in the *Chicago-Sun Times*, Gery Chico writes, “Remember the Peace Corps? If you’re old enough, you probably recall the commotion when President Kennedy launched his great initiative, sending eager young Americans to Third World countries. If you’re not old enough, maybe you heard about it in a history class. Somehow, during the events of the next few decades, we sort of lost track of the Peace Corps.”⁴³ The Peace Corps has fallen out of the American consciousness. Recruitment reached its height in the mid-1960s with 15,000 volunteers, but today that number has been reduced by half.⁴⁴ Leadership faults new public service announcement laws and a limited budget.⁴⁵ The Peace Corps of today recruits differently than it has in the past,

appealing to a new type of volunteer.

For nearly ten years, from the mid-1980s until 1994, the Peace Corps did not rely on Public Service Announcements for recruitment. During this time the organization relied on its reputation and word of mouth for volunteer recruitment. Realizing the need for a public face to revive the organization, in 1994 the Peace Corps hired Goodwill Communications to distribute a new Public Service Campaign. Responding to the changing attitudes and priorities of American culture, Goodwill Communications advised the organization to shift its advertising focus from an “international Peace Corps mission” to the domestic benefits of service.⁴⁶ The Peace Corps was advised to change its media focus because the generally held perception was that media outlets were “more concerned about local issues and the domestic impact of the campaigns they air.”⁴⁷ Goodwill Communications recommended that “Peace Corps slightly shift its creative strategy from an international focus to the domestic benefits that are derived here at home from Peace Corps Volunteers’ work.”⁴⁸ This shift in advertising translated into a significant increase in the number of PSAs picked up by media outlets. This meant that the organizations’ recruitment focus would gradually shift from the “toughest job you’ll ever love” to the 2003 motto, “Life is calling: how far will you go?” The shifted PSA campaign aimed beyond Kennedy’s rugged individual toward the adventures of service and personal benefits. Rhetoric of today relies less on the idealistic image of bringing peace to foreign nations, and more heavily on convincing the volunteer that service will satisfy personal concerns such as the adventure of two years spent abroad and future career advancements.

In 2006 there were 7,749 volunteers serving 73 countries, working within a

\$318.8 million budget. Today's volunteer number is half of what it was in 1964, and the volunteers are recruited differently.⁴⁹ The idealistic model of the 1960s is challenged by 21st century realities and a fundamentally different understanding of service; so to engage citizens in voluntarism, America needed a new approach to recruitment. In his research, Michael X. Delli Carpini has defined civic engagement as individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern, not only a set of actions and efforts, but a feeling of belonging, an experience of investment and ownership in the local, regional, national, and/or international civic and/or political communities to which citizens belong. Possible effects of civic engagement are higher voter numbers, willingness and desire to join social and civic organizations as well as a general attitude of interest and investment in a community or society at large.⁵⁰

The State of Civic Engagement

Robert Putnam, Harvard professor of political science, argues that the United States is facing a crisis of declining civic engagement.⁵¹ In his book *Bowling Alone*, published in 2000, Putnam extends his hypothesis by arguing that Americans have become an independent-minded nation. To demonstrate this point, Putnam uses the American pastime of bowling as an example, arguing that bowling leagues have decreased dramatically in recent decades, while numbers of individual bowlers steadily increased.⁵² Putnam's research concludes that people at the turn of the 21st century do not participate in civic organizations such as the Elks club, church groups, and philanthropic or service-based clubs with the same frequency as generations past. Putnam states, "The closing decades of the twentieth century found Americans growing

ever less connected with one another and with collective life. We voted less, joined less, gave less, trusted less, invested less time in public affairs, and engaged less with our friends, our neighbors, and even our families. Our ‘we’ steadily shriveled.”⁵³ However, our individual acts of service and kindness remain steady, which is a major point often overlooked by Putnam.

Additionally, Putnam found that fewer Americans are investing in “social capital,” which he defines as “social networks and norms of reciprocity between citizens.”⁵⁴ Putnam argues that social capital is fundamental to a functional democratic society because social networks are a powerful asset in relationships among individuals and communities.⁵⁵ Putnam argues that as our belief in social networks declines, we lose our sense of democratic responsibility. We, in turn, do not turn out to vote or join.

Putnam is interested in what constitutes civic engagement based on quantifiable acts of service; however, many scholars opposed this claim, arguing instead that some acts of service are not considered within his definitional framework. Determining *how* to count acts of service is in question. Often, individual acts of service are not considered a part of civic engagement because they are not seen as contributing to a community at large. However, this is limiting because, as we will see, individual acts of service often do contribute to the greater society. The question over how and what constitutes service is to be the dividing line in this complex debate about whether or not our civic society is in decline.

Robert Asen argues that one of the major problems with Putnam’s theory of declining citizenship is that it defines civic engagement in terms of specific acts.⁵⁶ Putnam has based his research on asking people if they belong to a certain club or

organization. Asen, however, wants to understand *how* people enact citizenship rather than asking *what* counts as citizenship. For Asen citizenship is a process, and he seeks to look at democratic citizenship holistically. Thus, his discourse theory of citizenship understands “citizenship as a *mode of public engagement*.” And citizenship conceived of in this light “recognizes the fluid, multimodal, and quotidian enactments of citizenship in a multiple public sphere.”⁵⁷ Civic engagement may happen in non-traditional ways.

Zukin, et al., agree with most scholars that citizen engagement in U.S. public life is changing. They concur with Putnam and Asen that changes in “the nature and scope of participation affect the quality of our democracy.”⁵⁸ Unlike Putnam, Zukin et al. do not blame America’s youth for disengaging the American citizenry from public life. Rather, they argue “citizens are participating in a different *mix* of activities from in the past. . . . The volume of civic engagement has not declined so much as it has spread to a wider variety of channels.”⁵⁹ The kinds of participation have shifted from our traditional categories. A significant part of the American public ignores voting and campaigning and focuses its efforts on civic activities. The division between political engagement and civic engagement is central to the debate over citizenship. Younger generations are disenfranchised by the political system; however, they remain interested in civic issues which often affect public policy. A decline in political engagement does not mean that society is civically disengaged. For the purposes of this study, engagement includes new and different acts of voluntarism; civic engagement is not in decline. It is merely in need of reframing to include all aspects of service.

Political Disengagement

One of the major principles upon which Putnam argues for a declining civic society is that younger generations do not participate in voting at the same rate as older generations. Putnam suggests that “electoral abstention is even more important as a sign of deeper trouble in the body politic than as a malady itself.”⁶⁰ The suggestion here is that political engagement is an indicator of larger, more systemic social problems. However, voting and political knowledge are rather individualistic forms of participation that do not necessarily indicate whether a person votes or participates in civic engagement.

Younger generations are not involved in politics for three reasons: they do not believe their vote or opinion makes a difference, their participation does not make them feel satisfied, and they generally do not trust the political process or their government. Zukin, et al., note that today’s citizens are often not engaged in traditional politics because they do not believe “that citizenship entails traditional obligations such as voting, paying attention to government decisions or contacting a public official.”⁶¹ Part of the reason for this sentiment is shown in a 1998 study published by the National Association of Secretaries of State: “Sixty-one percent of 18- to 24-year-olds believe that today’s political leaders have failed them. Only one in four young Americans ages 15 to 24 think government or elected officials have a major impact on their day-to-day life. Young adults are significantly less likely than older adults to think their participation in politics would make a difference.”⁶² This general belief that engagement in the political process will have no effect leads directly to the disengagement from politics.

The second reason that citizens are not participating in political activity has to do

with a lack of satisfaction when they do. Delli Carpini argues, “Americans do not lack for problems that concern them and express a strong if sometimes ambivalent desire to be more engaged in public life. What is missing is the belief that becoming involved in public life in any way that involves politics, government, or organized collective action . . . is likely to be effective or satisfying.”⁶³ People participate in service because there is a reciprocal effect; service should help others and make the volunteer or participant feel good about his or her service.

Along with making a difference or feeling a sense of satisfaction, another contributing factor to civic participation is the relationship between trust in an organization and participation in that organization. Trust functions as a catalyst that strengthens the connection between social associations and civic participation. Zukin, et al. claim that public trust has declined over the last 40 years because of government scandal and unpopular wars.⁶⁴ People often do not trust in their government or the political process and refuse to participate in that process. The theory of social trust contends that people involved in non-political settings “should be even more likely to become civic participants when they hold trusting attitudes.”⁶⁵ Young Americans are not participating because they feel alienated from the process either by dissatisfaction with their experiences or a loss of trust in politics; this suggests that today Americans see the future of democratic citizenship as more *civic* than political.⁶⁶

Interest in civic participation has not only shifted away from the political; it has also shifted away from the public sector in general. Delli Carpini has followed this detachment and states:

This lack in the efficacy of civic involvement results from the systematic

devaluing of the public sector over the past 30 years. Beginning in the early 1970s with the Watergate scandal and the resignation of Richard Nixon and continuing through the sex and financial scandals leading to the impeachment of President Clinton, government and politics have come to be viewed as irrelevant and ineffective at best and corrupt and the source of many of our problems at worst. Adding to this perception is a growing faith in the private sector and the market as the best way to address the nation's and the world's public concerns. This devaluing of the public sector was initially limited to the formal institutions and processes of government, but has spread over time to include most forms of collective public problem solving (e.g., interest groups and civic associations).⁶⁷

Today's citizens, particularly young people, are disengaged from institutions and the processes of civic life, and they lack the motivation to change. Their decision has little to do with a lack of care or apathy; the younger generation of adults in America participates in different ways than older generations. Youth are participating in charitable activities and volunteerism with more frequency than older generations. Although young people are less interested in political activity than their elders, they still participate civically.

Redefining Civic Engagement

Moving away from the political, we can see that today, people volunteer based on individual concerns and needs, rather than for the health of some governmental organization or policy. It appears as if collective civic engagement has "changed rather than declined, with sources that are organizational rather than interpersonal in nature."⁶⁸ Citizen participation several decades ago meant programs were funded by the

government to provide opportunities for citizens to have input into the public policy process.⁶⁹ Today, there is more individual initiative, in the sense that many volunteer activities occur in the private sector and place more attention on private deliberation and collaboration.

Typically non-routine forms of engagement occur, which are harder to track because they are not initiated by the state or some professional organization. A recent study by the Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) revealed that “While their parents were activists in social protests and worked to make society more open and accepting, this generation’s call to action is social issues and human rights. They are especially impressive because, unlike their parents, they are not protesters and marchers, but participators and doers. They want to be involved one-to-one, and they want to make a difference. Their volunteerism is up close and personal.”⁷⁰ The nature of participation in the 21st century has changed. There may be fewer people gathering to march in Washington, D.C., but there are certainly more people using the internet and creating a global conversation about civic issues.

Today American citizens use web logs to talk about their feelings and argue about social and even political events. As our definitions of civic action shift, we have to recognize what the positive effects of this new form of engagement entails. For example, the above-mentioned study conducted by CIRCLE found also that the service youth participate in often encourages them to become more active in a particular movement or political issue. Individual acts of engagement and service have the potential to lead a person toward the larger social issue or campaign. The CIRCLE study revealed, “Although their [18 to 30 year olds] preferred mode of service is one-to-one, their service

has broad residual effects. Almost three-quarters . . . say their service increased their interest in following news about a public issue or area of the community in which they had not previously been interested. Just as large a share of young adults . . . say their service has enhanced their understanding of public issues, politics, government, or civics.”⁷¹ It is possible that participation in the civic world is an intentional effort to affect politics and policy through other avenues, “a rejection of the *means* of politics and policy but not the *ends*.”⁷²

Zukin et al., present two kinds of civic engagement that have not previously been included in research. First, *public voice* is the way citizens express their opinions on public issues. For example, they may sign a petition, send an email, contribute to a blog, or write letters to news editors. The second form of engagement is *cognitive engagement*, which is defined as citizens paying attention to public affairs. This includes following the news, talking about politics with friends and family, or simply being interested in public affairs.⁷³ These two forms of participation are not recognized in studies of citizenship behaviors, but when included, greatly broaden our ideas about what constitutes active citizenship. These things also confirm that civic engagement is beginning to occur in individualistic ways, which is what Putnam most fears. As membership in organizations decreases, Putnam believes our concept of a democratic citizenship shrivels. However, when we expand our definition of civic involvement to include less grandiose forms of civic behavior, we begin to see that joining an organization does not make for a better or more engaged citizen.

Evidence suggests that some faith exists for future generations. Putnam even writes, “A wide range of evidence . . . suggests that young Americans in the 1990s

displayed a commitment to volunteerism without parallel among their immediate predecessors.”⁷⁴ In their recent book *A New Engagement?* Cliff Zukin and others reject Putman for blaming America’s youth for the decline in social capital. Rather, Zukin, et al., argue “. . . young adults look as or more involved than older Americans.”⁷⁵ And given that participation tends to increase with age, America’s youth are poised to be great contributors to the future. Given this positive spin on the status of civic involvement, it is no surprise that a December 2006 study revealed volunteering to have reached a 30-year high. The Corporation for National and Community Service found that since 1989, voluntarism has risen from just over 20% to 27%.⁷⁶ This study is consistent with a trend the administration has seen in recent years. A November 2003 report announced that the Peace Corps volunteer numbers reached a high of 7,500 volunteers.⁷⁷ This was the highest volunteer number since 1974. And by September 2006, volunteer numbers reached 7,750.⁷⁸ The steady growth of the organization may be due, in part, to the overall rise in voluntarism found by the CNCS study. Another factor affecting growth may be a shift in Peace Corps recruitment rhetoric since 2003.

In 2003, the Peace Corps welcomed the new century with a new recruitment slogan and a new website face—a new overall look and outlook. While remembering its roots in idealism and community service, the Peace Corps seeks to attract the career-oriented and not-entirely-selfless volunteers of today. To the sense of obligation to a global community has been added a seemingly contradictory understanding of the volunteer’s desire for résumé enhancement and for a collection of photos from an adventure.

Review of Literature

A review of pertinent scholarly literature reveals a preoccupation with the Peace Corps of the 1960s. The idealism and newness of the organization in its formative years offers scholars an excellent opportunity to understand the Peace Corps' historical, political, and rhetorical challenges and successes. In particular, Sargent Shriver's book, *The Point of the Lance*, recounts the organization's formative days including the struggles with budget, naming, administration, and volunteer health and safety. His account of these years points out the idealism of the early administration. For example, Shriver writes about the choice of Peace Corps as the organization's name, "What we did want was a name which the public at large could grasp emotionally as well as intellectually. . . . Peace is the fundamental goal of our times. We believed the Peace Corps could contribute to its attainment."⁷⁹ Along with Kennedy, Shriver was one of the main proponents of idealism; as the first director, Shriver was responsible for advancing that idealism at every step.

Fritz Fischer's *Making Them Like Us* is an examination of volunteers in the 1960s. The premise of Fischer's book is that by looking at the Peace Corps experience, "We can gain valuable insights into American culture and its interactions with the world in the late twentieth century."⁸⁰ Fischer's work gets at the heart of the organization's liberal idealism in the 1960s and explores the relationship between American culture, volunteers abroad, and the host countries they served. Understanding the way the Peace Corps and its volunteers are a reflection of a larger cultural context is a concern of this project. In response to a changing American public, today's Peace Corps looks different and recruits differently than that of the 1960s. The organization faces challenges to

recruitment that may never have existed in the past precisely because of the changes in American culture.

Gerard T. Rice and Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman each have published books on the early years of Peace Corps. Both argue, though in different ways, that Kennedy's introduction of the Peace Corps was an idealistic response to the contemporary struggles facing the United States in the 1960s. For Hoffman, the Peace Corps is an example of the "spirit" of the 1960s.⁸¹ She argues that the organization's immediate popularity was due to "its generational belief in the absolute necessity of universal values respecting the dignity of all peoples."⁸² Hoffman contends in her prologue that the volunteers' values and beliefs were congruent with overall American values of the time. She argues that the "men and women of the Peace Corps spearheaded a generation that believed deeply in its potency. Their feelings paralleled those of the nation itself, which had attained overwhelming economic, military, and political power."⁸³ The motivations of volunteers and reasons for joining a volunteer corps are a reflection of a larger cultural phenomenon.

Gerard T. Rice writes of the Peace Corps in its formative first three years. He traces the challenges of taking Kennedy's rhetoric and turning it into an organization. Rice documents the Peace Corps' growing pains, such as fights with Congress over establishing the organization, funding such a dream, and actually sending the first volunteers into the field. Rice argues that the early Peace Corps was successful and by 1975 quietly doing its work. He states, "[l]ooking back almost twenty-five years later, the United States dwelled on Vietnam, reflecting on the fifty-eight thousand Americans who had died there and on the many other wounds that the war had opened. Few people noted that over the same twenty-five year period, more than 100,000 Americans had

served overseas with the Peace Corps.”⁸⁴ Rice is convinced that the Peace Corps is Kennedy’s most enduring legacy; he reveals his belief in the power of the volunteer by stating, “[t]he one constant throughout the Peace Corps’ history has been the work of the Volunteers. Once overseas, they are virtually immune to political vagaries and leadership changes in Washington.”⁸⁵ However, as Rice goes on to argue throughout his book, it is the politics that occur in Washington that most greatly affect the organization and its ability to place volunteers in the field. The health of the organization and recruitment strategies have had a major impact on placing the volunteers in service.

Contrary to these accounts of Peace Corps’ early success, Karen Schwarz, argues that the organization was not based on idealism but rather that “idealism” was the Peace Corps’ public face, its mythical image. Her analysis of the organization consists of a strong critique of the accepted perception of the Peace Corps as an organization free from political bias and governmental tampering. She states, “[e]arly on, I discovered how far my original idealized perception of the organization was from reality. The Peace Corps, I ultimately realized, is a kind of modern-day myth that projects an idealized portrait of the American character.”⁸⁶ Schwarz’s book, however, fails to note, as Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman has, that “ideals and self-interest are not mutually exclusive categories in foreign service.”⁸⁷ She argues that the United States has been its most idealistic during its most expansionistic times. The Peace Corps is a way for the nation to convince itself that its enormous power is beneficial to others. Though Schwarz suggests that this was simply a mythical story of an idealistic mission, she fails to realize that nations can do both simultaneously with good intentions. My work, as a secondary contribution, helps to advance the groundwork laid by Hoffman by arguing that the idealistic beginnings of

the Peace Corps remain today and are working in concert with a much more pragmatic American society.

Peace Corps' history is well documented by scholars and writers. These books are informative and important, but none of these authors have published since 1998.⁸⁸ And those books speak only to the politics and history of the Peace Corps of the past. This absence of scholarly attention reflects a lack of public interest, a public interest that has waned significantly since the 1960s. Today the organization struggles to fulfill its goals and fights with Congress to increase spending.

This introduction frames the central focus of this study: the Peace Corps in the 21st century. This paper focuses on both what has not been previously documented and the intricate relationship between the face of today's American culture and the face of the Peace Corps in the early 21st century.

Justification for this study

It would be quite easy to say that a study of the contemporary Peace Corps should be done because it would be the first of its kind. This justification might simply mean that no one else is interested in the topic, and therefore, no one has taken the time to answer the larger question. Why? Why is the Peace Corps silently continuing its overseas campaign to give aid to developing nations without scholarly attention? Why are people still joining the organization? How does the organization go about recruiting people to an organization that so quietly exists? One way to answer these questions may be to turn toward Peace Corps' history. The Peace Corps has a long-standing tradition in American history. As the longest running foreign aid organization, the Peace Corps

holds a space in the hearts of Americans as a fond memory of President Kennedy's lasting legacy.

There seem to me three major justifications for a study of this type: first, the Peace Corps is a historical organization that has helped to change our nation's perception of foreign cultures; second, recruitment strategies have significantly changed to reflect the changing American culture and the world abroad; and finally, the result of those recruitment strategies is a new face of volunteers, which in turn, presents an ideal of what Americans are like.

It is important to recognize the significance of the Peace Corps for foreign relations as well as for the development of Americans' perceptions of other peoples and other cultures. The Peace Corps of the 21st century, just as the Peace Corps since its inception, provides Americans an opportunity to experience a world outside of their own. The United States, now more than ever, needs a positive international face. The volunteer symbolizes cultural exchange, development, fundamental interest in others, forging peaceful relationships in countries where Americans are often times seen otherwise. The act of writing about the Peace Corps is, for me, an act of reminding us of the work done by volunteers to enhance foreign relationships.

This study is imperative because recruitment strategies have significantly changed over the past 45 years. Conducting a rhetorical analysis of these strategies will allow us to see that the Peace Corps of today is quite different than in the past. It will also reveal an image of the "other" that is reflected back upon Americans. These images help us to determine what we believe about non-Americans. The recruitment strategies are one way for us to truly understand the Peace Corps' stance on the foreign world and how

volunteers can interpret and work within that world. Along these lines, the work of volunteers has a considerable impact on the way we view the peoples of other nations as well.

Today's Peace Corps volunteer is no longer the Pioneering Frontiersman of Kennedy's era. The changing recruitment strategies reflect a change in American cultural values and situations abroad. The volunteer of today does not endure rigorous physical examinations and boot camp trainings as have volunteers of the past. The volunteers live relatively comfortable and safe lives. Today's volunteers are less likely to work in the dirt alongside a farmer (although some still do) and more likely to teach in a classroom, work with a local government, or create an information technology system. Volunteers of today send emails and talk on cell phones alongside their host country national partners. Today's volunteer is the face of Americans to the outside world.

Arrangement of this study

In this chapter, I have detailed the history of the Peace Corps. And I have demonstrated how the history of service in America has led to new conceptualizations of volunteering. Both a historical glance at the Peace Corps and characterization of the 21st century provide a foundation upon which to analyze the contemporary Peace Corps, its recruitment strategies, current volunteer perspective, and the future of the organization. I move toward Chapter Two by asking how our shifting values changed the Peace Corps' recruitment strategies.

In an effort to understand the Peace Corps organization in the 21st century, Chapter Two will analyze the new Peace Corps' slogan and fundamental recruitment

policy changes. I turn to Public Service Announcements and the Peace Corps' website, demonstrating that the changed American values revealed in Chapter One have impacted the way Peace Corps recruits volunteers and the American public.

Chapter Three turns from the organization's overall recruitment strategies to a specific focus on the visual rhetoric used for recruitment. I ask how recruitment images, such as the photographic images on the Peace Corps' web site and public service announcements, affect the image of the organization. An analysis of these photographs will uncover whether the image that volunteers send back to the U.S. is congruent with the way Americans visualize the Peace Corps and its volunteers. Ultimately, the goal of Chapter Three is to paint a picture of the visual elements of recruitment.

In Chapter Four I analyze volunteer accounts of their service experiences in an effort to further demonstrate the pragmatic sensibilities of volunteers in the 21st century. Web logs (blogs) have become a standard means of communication for volunteers today. These blogs, along with newspaper and magazine articles, are an opportunity to discover motivations for joining Peace Corps service. Chapter Four is intended to bring together the work in the previous three chapters to show a comprehensive view of the Peace Corps in the new millennium.

Finally in Chapter Five, I seek to demonstrate how this changing face of the Peace Corps has led to a rethinking of the three official Peace Corps goals. The proposed introduction of a fourth goal to Peace Corps doctrine reflects the Peace Corps of the 21st century. In Chapter Five, I will conclude by thinking about the future of the organization, the new director, and how the events of the past decade have shaped the Peace Corps we see today.

Overall, this study reveals that the Peace Corps in the 21st century is a different organization than it was in the 1960s. Scholarship has, for the most part, applauded the spirit of the 1960s and held the Peace Corps up as a model because of that 1960s spirit. This study argues that the spirit of service in America today is best reflected in the Peace Corps today.

Chapter 2

Recruiting the 21st Century Volunteer: PSA and Web Site Rhetoric

Peace Corps members will often serve under conditions of physical hardship, living under primitive conditions. . . . For every Peace Corps member service will mean a great financial sacrifice. They will receive no salary. . . . It is essential that Peace Corpsmen and women live simply and unostentatiously among the people they have come to assist.⁸⁹

The 1960s Peace Corps volunteers were pioneering frontiersmen and women. Recruitment success in the early years depended on the idea that the rugged individual went off into the frontier to become a “hero.”⁹⁰ Leroy Dorsey argues that Kennedy’s “new frontier” rhetoric invoked the key elements of sacrifice and service; he states that “Peace Corps’ volunteers met the criteria to be frontier war heroes by heeding the call to arms and exhibiting the physical stamina and the willingness to sacrifice their lives in service to their country.”⁹¹ The 1960s recruitment slogan: “the toughest job you’ll ever love,” complements the “new frontier” motif. This recruitment slogan appealed to the rugged individual in the spirit of sacrifice and service. First, the volunteer was being recruited to do a job, a specific service. Second, the volunteer’s job would be difficult and self-sacrificing. Finally, it would be rewarding and heroic. Kennedy’s rhetoric and the recruitment slogan defined of the 1960s volunteer.

Over forty-five years later, the Peace Corps’ recruitment slogan responds to a different rhetorical audience and situation. Today’s slogan is, “Life is calling. How far will you go?” The new recruitment slogan reveals an appeal to adventure and the personal benefits of service. It reveals a new type voluntarism, which is a result of the

changing civic values in the new millennium discussed in Chapter One. The 1960s campaigns' focus on sacrifice and service no longer appeals to volunteers as it once did.

The Peace Corps' recruitment rhetoric provides information to potential volunteers, educates the American public about service, and generates greater visibility for the organization. The public service announcement (PSA), a central resource within the campaign, targets varying service groups encouraging them to join the organization. The PSAs also direct interested parties to the Peace Corps' web site, where they can learn more about the organization's goals and service. The public relations campaign helps to remind the American public that the organization still exists. The broad-based campaign includes billboards, television commercials, print advertisements, radio spots, and an award-winning web site. This campaign begun in 2003 was the first major effort to bring exposure to Peace Corps recruitment since the 1970s.

This chapter examines the scope and rhetorical nature of the Peace Corps' recruitment campaign, not only to illustrate how different segments of society were targeted with different messages, but also to identify how these messages reinforced the characteristics of service today. Toward this end, this chapter will first discuss the general characteristics of the campaign and the different audiences it targets, and then analyze certain messages emphasizing particular themes. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of the rhetorical strategies utilized by the campaign to promote recruitment.

New Recruitment Rhetoric

The AdCouncil was responsible for the Peace Corps' advertising campaign from 1961 until 1991. By the mid-1980s, however, the organization essentially stopped its Public Service campaign due to limited budgets during the Reagan years. In 1994, Goodwill Communications began managing the Peace Corps' marketing and advertising campaigns, which was the first step toward changing their recruitment strategies.

A major hurdle for agencies like the Peace Corps has been finding media outlets that will air or publish their PSAs. Spokespeople have directly blamed the changing PSA laws on the lack of Peace Corps attention in the media. Charles Brooks, the associate director of volunteer recruitment and selection for Peace Corps, claimed in a 2005 interview, "It has been increasingly difficult for the Peace Corps, an independent agency that reports directly to the president, to get the word out about itself. We do not have paid advertising. . . . We've just never been funded at the level to be able to do that."⁹² The organization has relied on donated time both for the design of their campaigns and for the implementation of those campaigns.

A problem is the reduced number of Public Service spots available to non-profit organizations. As Scot Roskelley, a spokesperson for the organization, stated, "The Peace Corps used to be the beneficiary of lots of public-service announcements (PSAs). The Peace Corps had a lot of free TV time. But public-service requirements for broadcasters have gotten more lax, and there are a lot of not-for-profit agencies competing for those PSA slots. So there are several generations that haven't grown up with the Peace Corps' classic slogan: 'The toughest job you'll ever love.'"⁹³ The American public in the past would have known the Peace Corps' famous slogan because

of heavy media exposure; today, however, the slogan has not been publicized because of limited PSA time.

For the ten years during the 1980s the Peace Corps did not use public service announcements, which contributed to a dramatic decrease in visibility. The Peace Corps was advised by the Public Research Center, which conducted an analysis of the organization's campaigns since 1961 that public service announcement campaigns do contribute greatly to increased public awareness. Based on these correlations, the Public Research Center strategized for a new approach to marketing. They suggested shifting its "creative strategy from an international focus to the domestic benefits that are derived here at home from Peace Corps Volunteers' work"⁹⁴ because media outlets are more likely to air announcements that appeal to national rather than international interests.

The Public Research Center noted that when, in 1994, Goodwill Communications became involved in volunteer recruitment through PSAs, "lead generation" significantly increased (Lead generation is an advertisement that brings people to the organization, creating an initial interest in volunteering). They found that lead generation increased "for the first four years from 102,172 in 1994 to 151,137 in 1997."⁹⁵ During these four years, Goodwill Communications distributed two PSA campaigns per year. They found that in 1998, when the Peace Corps only funded one campaign, lead generation decreased by 11 percent."⁹⁶ The 1990s advertising review by the Public Research Center revealed a much needed shift in the organization's image. Recruitment strategies from the late 1990s until the present have focused on the personal benefits of service. In 1999, the Peace Corps launched the campaign slogan, "How far do you want to go?"⁹⁷ This campaign would eventually become the 2003 slogan, "Life is calling: how far will you

go?” In 1999, the Peace Corps began to develop its new advertising strategies and learned how to appeal to a new generation of volunteers. It was not until post-September 11th that the organization took an active role in recruiting a new advertising firm to handle their public service announcements. This was also the first time in decades that the Peace Corps used money from their own budget to ensure a successful recruitment campaign.

The Peace Corps saw a great need for public service campaigns, and in 2003, after years of limited or non-existent advertising budgets and relying on donated marketing aid, put \$500,000 into a marketing campaign aimed at doubling their numbers.⁹⁸ The Peace Corps began accepting bids from advertising firms and asked 15 agencies on a list of qualified government contractors from the General Service Administration to make proposals for a campaign that would include paid and public service announcements for TV and radio.⁹⁹

Not only did the Peace Corps begin investing in their advertising and marketing strategies; they also made a decision to diversify their volunteer corps in order to increase the number of volunteers in service. An important aspect of today’s recruitment strategy is appealing to the non-white, non-college aged student. Former Peace Corps Director Gaddi Vasquez made diversifying the Peace Corps his top priority. In the “Peace Corps Charter for the 21st Century Act,” he petitioned the Senate subcommittee on the Peace Corps stating:

[t]he agency will seek to expand recruitment efforts and increase diversity of our Volunteer population. This means that recruitment efforts will grow beyond college campuses. Just as the face of America has changed over the past

40 years, so will our recruitment efforts so that we reach out to all people regardless of faith, married couples and the disabled, seniors and retirees, and the scores of men and women currently in the work force or between jobs and looking to make a meaningful contribution to the United States.¹⁰⁰

Vasquez states that volunteers in the 21st century are likely to change careers, be older than the traditional volunteer, or be from a diverse background. Current demographics reveal the average age of volunteers is 28. 15 percent of all volunteers are considered of “ethnic” background; the rest are white. 58 percent of volunteers are female and 42 percent male. Six percent of volunteers are over the age of 50, and nine percent of the volunteers are married. The average age of Peace Corps volunteers has increased over the past four decades, as have the percentages of “ethnic” volunteers. Women have always volunteered at higher rates than men, and the percentage of older and married volunteers has increased in recent years.¹⁰¹ In the past, volunteers consisted primarily of recent college graduates. Volunteers are older on average, revealing that what was the “norm” is changing.

The Peace Corps has subdivided its recruitment strategy, targeting specific groups of potential volunteers. General recruitment rhetoric remains a constant, focusing on the newly graduated college student. Aside from this general rhetoric, today’s Peace Corps targets people without Bachelor’s degrees, people in transition from one career to the next, the older volunteer, and people of color. For each of these targeted recruitment groups, the organization designed a specific rhetorical strategy to appeal to the sensibilities of the different potential volunteers. An analysis of recruitment rhetoric reveals that the Peace Corps is responding to the changing face of America and changed

American values. The key rhetorical elements of today's recruitment include adventure and the personal benefits of service. This completely changes the notion of sacrifice and service, turning the persuasive rhetoric inward, toward the potential volunteer and the benefits he or she will gain. Additionally, the Peace Corps has made it clear that they intended to target specific groups of potential volunteers who have not historically joined the organization in an effort to change the face of the Peace Corps. All of this is being done in an effort to boost volunteer numbers.

Public Service Announcements

In 2003, the Peace Corps hired BBDO, an Atlanta-based advertising agency, to produce its new campaign. The design work was done on donated time, and BBDO partnered with Los Angeles based Method Productions.¹⁰² BBDO introduced a new public service campaign which includes print, radio, and television advertising. The campaign currently features three different print ads, two television commercials, two radio spots, and two different billboard PSAs. Matthew McConaughey and Forest Whitaker, famous film actors, donated their voices to English versions of the radio and television advertisements. Ricardo Chavira, television actor, narrates one television spot. Eduardo Verastegui, actor and model, donated his voice to the Spanish versions of the same advertisements. These PSAs have been aired on radio and television stations in major markets around the country. The print ads have been published in *Time* magazine, *Rolling Stone* magazine, and *ESPN* magazine.¹⁰³ The billboard campaign is their first ever. These were placed on donated billboards and transit displays in 27 major markets as well, including Philadelphia, Washington DC, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Detroit.¹⁰⁴

Designed as a means to reach the general public and recruit potential volunteers, the Peace Corps PSA campaign encouraged citizens to make a decision to change the current direction of their lives. The PSAs attracted volunteers from all walks of life. The campaign consisted of a series of print, radio, and television ads making the following points: 1) Peace Corps service is an adventure, 2) Peace Corps service will be self-gratifying, 3) service will fulfill a calling and eliminate regret, 4) service will be beneficial in the future, and 5) service is for everyone regardless of age, race, or educational level. Hints of the new frontier and the Peace Corps of the past exist, but with far less frequency than these five appeals. In the PSAs we find more new frontier rhetoric than on the web site. In general, the Peace Corps' new recruitment rhetoric is based on a commitment to change the face of the organization in accordance with the changing face of Americans. The organization recognizes that what were formerly effective recruitment strategies are no longer as successful as a means for attracting new volunteers as they once were.

Volunteers are no longer entering unknown lands in far away places. In fact, the advent of the internet and instantaneous communication throughout the globe has changed. The new frontier no longer exists as it once had. The internet provides information and live updates on countries and what their volunteers are doing. The average volunteers have regular internet and telephone access, keeping them connected to their lives in America. The new frontier hero, the Peace Corps volunteer, was headed into the third world without a true sense of what it might be like. The volunteer would be disconnected from others and from their familiar lives. Also, service was rhetorically constructed as physically demanding and isolating. Kennedy, in his speech to Congress

upon recommending the establishment of the Peace Corps, stated “Peace Corps members will often serve under conditions of physical hardship, living under primitive conditions. . . . For every Peace Corps member service will mean a great financial sacrifice. They will receive no salary. . . . It is essential that Peace Corpsmen and women live simply and unostentatiously among the people they have come to assist.”¹⁰⁵ As evidenced by Kennedy’s rhetoric, volunteers were meant to live disconnected from the comfort of America under difficult conditions. Service was meant to be full of sacrifice and duty. Today, there are few places that can be called “new frontiers.” Today’s volunteers are entering countries, though unfamiliar, not undiscovered.

The Peace Corps’ recruitment no longer needs to appeal to the frontier spirit. The rugged individualism of the Kennedy era is no longer as central to service as it once was. The public service announcements appeal to today’s volunteer, targeting specific diverse volunteer groups and making general appeals to the spirit of service today. In 2003, the organization decided to get serious about recruitment messages in print, on the television, on the radio, and on billboards.

Magazine and Newspaper

The print campaign targets one of three different audiences; the older volunteer, the African-American volunteer, or the Hispanic volunteer.



Figure 2.1

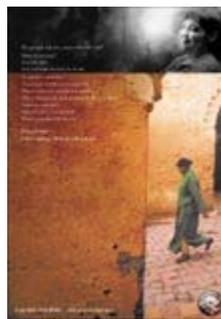


Figure 2.2

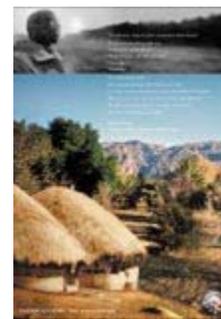


Figure 2.3

These print ads are all equal in shape and layout, although they differ in content. They are divided into two parts; the upper fourth of the page is in black and white copy and the bottom three-fourths, in color. The top portions show a volunteer or potential volunteer, either Hispanic, as in figure 2.1, an older woman, as in figure 2.2, or an African American young man, as pictured in figure 2.3. This portion of the ads is a visual marker indicating the target audience of a given advertisement. The lower portion of the ads, the colored portion, features various scenes from foreign lands. These ads depict the exotic lives the volunteer can anticipate while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer. In figure 2.1, we see a group of boys jumping and diving from a ledge into the water. In figure 2.2, an Indian woman, in traditional dress, walks down a cobblestone street past old, arched doorways of the past. And finally, in figure 2.3, we see a group of huts on a hill overlooking a beautiful valley, surrounded by mountains.

These three advertisements, regardless of what they say, use visual rhetoric to draw the readers' attention to the person being featured on each page and the beautiful surroundings. Rhetorically, these print advertisements are persuasive in the sense that they recruit a particular diversity group with each image.

While the wording of these print advertisements reemphasizes the visual image, viewers would get a similar interpretation without the words. In figure 2.1, the copy states, “Has anyone ever called you crazy? For the way you dress? The things you say?” This rhetorical turn catches the reader’s attention, identifying with anyone who feels different. The message is clear; a person who would join the Peace Corps must be crazy. He or she, in this case, the Hispanic woman, may have been called different because of her ethnicity, what she wears, or how she speaks. The Hispanic woman is not like others and the advertisement is meant to highlight these differences. Figure 2.1 goes on to read, “What if you left for two years? Moved to another country? To live with people you don’t know. Where no one speaks your language. What if you were going to improve their lives? And in the process, improve yours.” The second part of this PSA moves from identifying with the reader to telling the reader about the Peace Corps. The copy ends by asking, “Would that be crazy?” leaving the reader reminded of the beginning where s/he was considered crazy because s/he is different. At the close of the ad, being crazy would mean leaving your life behind to help others. The advertisement ends, “Peace Corps. Life is calling. How far will you go?” This campaign slogan reinforces the idea that people do not want to look back wondering if they made the right choices.

Figure 2.2 follows the same logic as figure 2.1; however, this advertisement targets older Americans. It begins, “Do you tell people you’re over the hill?” The target audience is established with this single sentence. Visually, it is clear who the target of this advertisement is, and the words merely reinforce the point. Much like figure 2.1, this image first asks a question with which the reader can identify, then moves on to establish a way to make that seemingly harsh question an empowering one. In this case, being old

means being able. The PSA continues, “What if you were? Over the hill, over a stream and over an ocean. To another continent. Thousands of miles from your own.” This part of the advertisement turns the line “Do you tell people you’re over the hill?” on its head. This implies a willingness to recognize growing old as an opportunity, rather than a death sentence. “Over the hill” is reconceptualized as positive. The next section of this advertisement touches on one of the most sensitive issues for seniors in America. The PSA reads, “Where elders are looked to as leaders.” A great fear for Americans is getting old and feeling unwanted. In many other nations, the elderly are considered wise and held in high regard. The ad invokes a feeling of value and respect for the experience that comes with age. Finally, the advertisement ends, “Where the process of improving the lives of others improves your own. What if you’re over the hill? What’s over that hill anyway?” By this point in the PSA, the idea of being seen as older and feeling older has turned into an opportunity to experience something different in this second phase of life.

Finally, figure 2.3 emphasizes the recruitment of African Americans. This PSA, aside from featuring an African-American male, focuses on a particular place. The other two advertisements are rather generic. This advertisement strategically selects Namibia, on the African continent, and school teaching as its subject, reinforcing the traditional Peace Corps image. This strategy asks the reader to imagine a country and job that are stereotypical for a Peace Corps volunteer. The copy reads, “Would you stop to give someone directions? If you were walking that way, would you guide them? What if it was out of your way? One mile. Two miles. Two thousand miles, directly inland from the Skeleton Coast, to a one-room schoolhouse in the foothills of Namibia.” The words in this first part of the PSA remind the reader that volunteers are educators. This is one of

the major emphases in recruitment material for people of color. They are recruited based on the idea that they will be role models. The advertisement continues, “What if you were the teacher in that schoolhouse? Would you travel that far to teach someone? To learn something yourself?” The PSA asks the reader how far he or she will go to be that role model or teacher. And as always, it reminds potential volunteers that they will learn more than they could ever teach.

The over-arching themes in these advertisements are the gratifying nature of Peace Corps service, the adventure associated with service, and the universality of participation, regardless of age or race. Reinforced continually in these PSAs is the experience of not only helping someone else, but also learning something in return. Self-service and gratification through service are major recruitment devices; the personal benefits of service are ever-present in Peace Corps rhetoric. The beautiful images and talk of far away lands signals exotic adventure for the potential volunteer. And, the major impact of these ads is their emphasis on diversity, targeting three different groups.

Radio

The radio advertisements focus less upon race or age and appeal to a more general audience. The visual imagery is stripped away on the radio. However, the voices are distinctly Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic. These radio spots rely on the reputation of famous actors to work as a recruitment tool. The association of famous actors with the Peace Corps might also encourage people to investigate the organization further. This is especially true for people who see these actors as role models. Matthew

McConaughey and Forrest Whitaker have very distinct voices and are often seen as spokespeople for good causes.¹⁰⁶

These radio PSAs encourage all races and ages to do something different, to take a risk by trying something new. The first radio spot is read by Matthew McConaughey.

Would it be crazy if you just stopped? Everything? Packed your bags and left?
For a week. A month. A year. What if you left for two years? Would people think
you lost your mind?

What if you were going far away to help in a village... on the edge of the Gobi
desert. A village crowded with Buddhist temples, not skyscrapers. A place where
there isn't a word for electricity, but a thousand words for 'community.'

Would it be crazy to go 5,000 miles from home to spend time with people the rest
of the world has forgotten? What if you were going to improve their lives and, in
the process, improved your own?

Would that be crazy?

Peace Corps. Life is calling. How far will you go?

As with the print advertisement in figure 2.1, this PSA emphasizes the act of doing something “crazy,” something outside of convention. This strategy demonstrates that being in the Peace Corps means stepping outside of the norms of daily life and doing something that is seemingly crazy, like leave your life for two years. This ad also reinforces the idea that Peace Corps service will not only enhance the lives of others, but also enhance the volunteer’s life.

This advertisement is meant to appeal to a broad, general audience. This is evidenced by the fact that the exact same message is directly translated into Spanish and played on Hispanic radio broadcasts. The radio spots are the only PSAs created for a Spanish-speaking audience. With this strategy the message is universal to the general

audience. Each of the two radio spots has the same motivational music. There are no words to this music; it is upbeat and motivating.

The other radio spot, read by Forest Whitaker, is a bit different. In the first radio advertisements, the music in the background is affecting, but in this advertisement, the song, "He is Alive" plays softly underneath Whitaker's reading. The music is somewhat distracting, and adds little to the advertisement. The advertisement text is lengthy and somewhat meandering. Whitaker reads his text much slower than the other two.

What would happen if you didn't follow the established path?

If you did the unexpected. Would you feel Scared? Proud? Relieved?

Could you explain that helping the people of Peru improve their own community, would also have an effect on your own?

Or assisting an entrepreneur in Ukraine to launch her small business?

Or creating a support group in Malawi for children orphaned by AIDS?

What if you established your own path?

One that others might follow?

Would you rather make your own way?

Or spend your life saying "what if?"

Life is Calling. How far will you go? Peace Corps.

First, and most noticeably, this advertisement presents the idea of doing something unexpected and questions how leaving an established norm would make a person feel.

The questions lead to a scenario, which reinforces service for the sake of personal growth, a common theme. This radio spot uses the phrase "what if?" playing on an internal desire to live life without regret. This ad relies most heavily on the new frontier rhetoric that was seen in the advertising campaigns of the 1960s and 70s. It is about making a path into a new environment and then having others follow. The new frontier

rhetoric is still in effect today, especially when framed in a larger context with multiple other messages, as we see in this radio ad.

Television

Two television PSAs were created in both Spanish and English. The text of the first ad is as follows:

How far would you go to help someone?

Would you go to the end of your driveway?

Would you cross the street?

Would you cross an ocean to a place 6,000 miles from home?

How long would you go?

Would you go for a week, a month, a year, two years?

Would you go if you could use your knowledge to teach someone?

In the process maybe learn something yourself.

Peace Corps. Life is calling. How far will you go?

This television recruitment advertisement begins in black and white, with the palm of a very dark, worn hand, so dark that the lines of the hand are well defined. Then the scene changes to a shadow which becomes a man stepping off of a curb. The man steps from the curb, Matthew McConaughey says, “How far would you go to help someone?” The scene switches to a busy overpass in an urban setting, and McConaughey reads, “Would you go to the end of your driveway?” The image becomes a map, and the ad shifts to color. A red line moves along a road, and McConaughey says, “Would you cross the street?” A jet flies across a bright blue sky to an ancient map of the coast of Africa and

the speaker asks, “Would you cross an ocean?” As the map becomes a lush green rainforest valley, the voice says “to a place 6,000 miles from home.” A Pacific island group of villagers hauls in a fishing net as the voiceover says, “How long would you go?” The message speeds up, and the images change more quickly than before, “Would you go for a week, a month, a year, would you go for two years?” At this point the images change from the fishing villager to a desert scene to two buses with two men reaching out to each other through the windows, finally to a white American man working in a field. The frames then slow back down as McConaughey says, “Would you go if you could use your knowledge to teach someone?” at which point a small African school child stands at a blackboard. Followed by the returned image of the dark hand, this time in color with the words, “in the process maybe learn something yourself?” The advertisement concludes with the Peace Corps’ logo and the motto, “Life is calling. How far will you go? Peace Corps.”

Television advertisements can use voice, color, sound, and images as persuasive elements for recruitment. First, the visual elements in this PSA place the viewer initially in the United States where life is busy, cars are moving quickly as viewed from an interstate overpass. A jet leads the viewer to new continent, then through many different worlds, the rainforest, an island, the desert, a farm, a school. These scenes are gorgeous, breath-taking and display the life of a volunteer. The final image is the hand shown at the opening, which is now the hand of a volunteer.

The second television PSA is entitled “What Will You Do?” narrated by Ricardo Chavira, of televisions’ *Desperate Housewives*. The message is slightly different:

What's it like when you hear your calling?

Will you remember where you were?

Will you ignore it? Or will you listen?

What if it calls you to go halfway around the world?

To share your skills.

To serve people you've never met?

To do things you never thought you could?

What will you do when you hear your calling?

Peace Corps. Life is calling. How far will you go?

This television advertisement calls on the viewer to listen to the voices within. The television spot opens with a 60-something couple sitting at an outdoor café reading the morning news. The woman appears to have heard something and looks to the sky. This image is followed by several other people doing the same, stopping their activities because they have heard “a calling.” The advertisement successfully targets the major recruitment groups. The first woman to hear the calling is part of a married couple in their retirement years. Next, a white woman in her 30s looks over her cubicle to find the calling, the narrator simultaneously says, “Will you remember where you were?” Then a white 30ish business man waits at a busy city crosswalk and hears the call, and the narrator says, “Will you ignore it? Or will you listen?” A white-haired, balding white man at an airport comes into focus as the narrator reads “What if it calls you to go halfway around the world?” This is followed by a young college student in her school library passing a globe. As she passes, it spins and calls to her. The narrator reads the remainder of the copy as finally, an African-American college-aged man hears something

and walks toward a kiosk with a poster recruiting volunteers. The ad closes as we watch television over the shoulder of a young man. The television screen comes into focus and viewer can read the line, “What will you do when you hear your calling?”

Simultaneously, the narrator reads what is on the screen.

This advertisement relies heavily on the notion that people have desires to make a change in their lives. And, the ad points out that people often times ignore what they truly want to do. Without asking “what if?” this PSA indirectly emphasizes the same idea by asking “What will you do when you hear your calling?”

Billboards

Unlike the newspaper and magazine ads, the two outdoor ads overtly emphasize the importance of fulfilling a desire. The billboards display a brief yet powerful message to their general audience. The messages appeal to those who might be currently considering volunteering or have considered Peace Corps service in the past.

The two billboards created for Peace Corps recruitment are displayed in figures 3.1 and 3.2. The billboards are basically the same, made for two different types of spaces. These images hone in on the idea that individuals should not live their lives with regret, which is emphasized in this 2003 recruitment campaign.

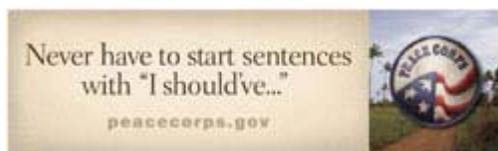


Figure 2.4

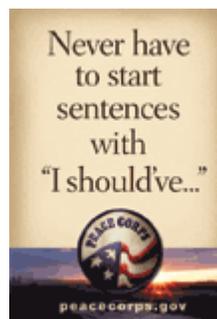


Figure 2.5

The organization realizes that a life of regrets is a tragic thought for many Americans. They are aware that no individuals want to wake up knowing that they missed an opportunity, especially a noble opportunity such as helping underdeveloped countries abroad. This billboard campaign can be read by multiple audiences with different interpretations. This campaign is particularly effective on both younger and older people. Youth do not want to regret not joining the Peace Corps when they are older. The older generations have already missed an opportunity in their youth to make a difference, and now the billboards says it is never too late.

The billboard ads also use visual elements to entice viewers. As shown in figure 2.4, the Peace Corps logo is inserted on top of a dirt road leading into a beautiful green space, and in figure 2.5, the logo is backlit with the rays of the sun setting on a pink sky over the ocean. These serene images remind the viewers that the Peace Corps will send volunteers to an exotic, inviting location. Today's PSA campaign is invested in displaying the beauty of the exotic "other."¹⁰⁷ The entire billboard ad campaign focuses on an immediate reaction. They are simple in text, color, and design and comprehended quickly as they are meant to be.

All of the PSAs, regardless of medium, focus on people who are feeling the “call” of a life outside of daily lives. The Peace Corps’ recruitment focuses on missed opportunity and regret. They are counting on the nagging voice inside of restless Americans to lure them toward the organization. The Peace Corps relies on the confusion of daily life, lack of job satisfaction, and changing American ideals to encourage voluntarism. The PSA campaign reminded the public about the Peace Corps and generates interest in the organization by providing potential volunteers with snapshots of what service means. These brief introductions to the organization show an organization devoted to service but not through the rugged images of the past. The ads focus on a new marketing angle by asking people to heed the call to do something new and adventurous. Sure to grab the attention of those concerned with changing their lives by doing something new and different, the ads encouraged those interested in learning more to visit the Peace Corps official web site. PSAs cannot do the full work of recruitment; they generally generate interest and awareness of an issue and then provide another resource (such as a web site or toll free number) for more information. These public service announcements did what they were supposed to do. They brought the Peace Corps message into people’s living rooms, stirred interest, and then directed that interest toward the web site.

The Web Site – www.peacecorps.org

The web site is the most comprehensive recruitment and resource tool the organization uses. It contains direct responses to why people should volunteer, who is eligible for volunteering, and what volunteer service entails. When the PSA campaign

was revived, the web site was redesigned. It is the primary tool with which the organization disseminates information, accepts applications, and displays images of service. The site plays an important role for the organization, and much time and energy were invested in its creation. In fact, in 2003, the Peace Corps web site received a nomination for the prestigious Webby Award. The organization was nominated for the “Best Practices” Award, which recognizes a single web site as a model of excellence.¹⁰⁸ These awards are generally not given to non-profit or government organizations because in years past, such organizations did not worry about design. But today, organizations such as the Peace Corps recognize that their sites can contain all needed information, reducing the cost of printed recruitment brochures and eliminating the need to staff toll-free numbers. The Peace Corps now conducts the majority of its business online.

The Peace Corps web site serves as a gateway into the volumes of information accessed through the main page. The web space is divided into three main parts. The main focus of the site is an image on the right hand side of the screen. This changes with each entry to the site but always contains the picture of a volunteer and an in-country image. This part of the page leads directly to the application and more information. This section of the site also contains resource links for current volunteers, returned volunteers, family and friends of volunteers, donors, and information about graduate school. The bottom part of the page is devoted to quick links, which is a series of 50 different options that essentially repeat all of the above options with the addition of new links to items such as a kids’ page, which leads to a series of games and stories about the Peace Corps.

The most intriguing part of the web site is the menu on the left hand side of the page. One of the menu options is labeled “About the Peace Corps;” it contains an

expanded menu of options, including a series of question-based links, such as, “What is the Peace Corps?” “Who volunteers?” “What do volunteers do?” This menu is meant for people interested in joining the organization. After being directed to the web site by a PSA or through general interest, the potential volunteer would find information in this series of links. It quickly directs the user to a particular part of the site; each of these links opens into a series of more specific links and recruitment information. Whereas the recruitment rhetoric in the PSAs might be indirect, the Peace Corps web site is full of specific information guiding the viewer toward a decision to join.

Since recruitment rhetoric is at the heart of this chapter, I analyzed the rhetoric used on the web site and found that the Peace Corps has segmented its recruitment pages into five areas. First, there is general recruitment information, which is intended for the white, middle-class volunteer. Secondly, the site targets its rhetoric toward potential volunteers without bachelor’s degrees. The third target group are those future volunteers in transition from one career to the next: the potential volunteer at the brink of a life change. The fourth segment addresses its recruitment rhetoric toward older Americans. Finally, the most developed recruitment strategies are those that target “people of color.”

General Recruitment

General recruitment rhetoric focuses on post-service benefits. It places little emphasis on the emotional and psychological benefits of volunteering; rather most rhetorical attention is spent on monetary and professional benefits. Today, the Peace Corps touts itself as an excellent way to better chances for graduate education or higher income jobs. Volunteers know that being able to list this service on their résumé is a

great advantage. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that the organization is selling itself not for the volunteering benefits, but for what the volunteer will have when he or she completes service. They state that the Peace Corps, “is tailoring its message to emphasize benefits like foreign-language and skills training, a payment of about \$6,000 at the end of a stint, international experience. . . . Recruiters also talk up long-term benefits like a leg up in landing a government job.”¹⁰⁹ This recruitment strategy is no longer based on civic duty or a philanthropic urge. Americans respond to the post-service benefit package, which sounds more like a sales pitch for military service than for a volunteer position.

Not only does the Peace Corps use post-service benefits for recruitment, it also sells the in-service advantages of volunteering. They offer “full medical coverage and the seven weeks of vacation that volunteers can use for travel abroad. Volunteers also receive a no-fee passport and a monthly stipend of a few hundred dollars to pay for food, housing and local transportation.”¹¹⁰

Traditionally, volunteers have a college education and little work experience. As the market for college graduates becomes more competitive, the Peace Corps appeals to the uncertainties of life after college. As noted above, many more college students are opting to “take time off” between college and the job force: still others have earned degrees that do not translate directly into a skill like farming, IT, or business. Therefore, the organization has begun to appeal to that ambiguity. The following is taken from the Peace Corps web site addressing the college graduate:

Many applicants are concerned that their specific major or field of study does not match up directly to any Peace Corps program. Don't worry! Many Peace Corps

Volunteers are college graduates with degrees in liberal arts such as history, political science, English, social studies, or psychology. Others have degrees in photography, theater, and other fine arts.¹¹¹

A college degree is the most sure-fire way to get into the Peace Corps without on-the-job experience. Since its inception, the Peace Corps has been committed to sending educated Americans abroad. However, they have begun to diversify their volunteer base by directing information toward non-degree holding applicants.

Changing Educational Requirements

To include volunteers with associates degrees or years of skilled experience, the Peace Corps has changed its educational requirements. One problem the Peace Corps faces is the common perception that they do not accept non-degree holding applicants. Therefore, many potential volunteers do not consider themselves candidates for service because they lack a Bachelor's degree. The Peace Corps recently began a recruitment campaign geared toward community college students to find people who had not thought of volunteering but who had relevant work experience. The Peace Corps has targeted community college students who are working and going to school simultaneously or are non-traditional students with skilled work experience.

The Peace Corps web site, in an appeal to community college students states, “[y]our combination of education, willingness to learn, work and/or volunteer experience . . . can set the course for a career-enhancing adventure in the Peace Corps, enabling you to put your degree and experience to work in gratifying ways and opening new worlds of opportunity in the future.”¹¹² The most interesting part of this recruitment

appeal is that the Peace Corps is an “adventure” but not just any adventure, one that will enhance a career and future. It is an adventure with benefits. The community college recruits are different than the general college-educated volunteers because they put their careers on hold in an effort to have an adventure where job skills can be useful. The community college graduate is not all that different from what the Peace Corps refers to as a “transitional” recruit.

Transitions

The “transitional” applicant refers to the majority of volunteers in service.¹¹³ With the average age of volunteers being 28, many volunteers held a full time job in between their education and their time as a volunteer. The Peace Corps’ web site has a separate page recruiting people in transition from one career to the next. The organization is recruiting the mid-life or quarter-life crisis volunteer.¹¹⁴ These recruits are different than the recent college graduates who are taking time after college and before “life begins” to do something for themselves. This transitional period happens after a first career is over. The Peace Corps web site states:

Sometimes, you reach a point in your career where you wonder what would have happened if you had taken a different path. Maybe you enjoy the life you have, but wish you'd had the chance to do something different, something adventuresome, something that matters. It's not too late. For many people in mid-career, the Peace Corps is the perfect transition point. Why not get out of the daily grind and do something meaningful? You'll learn a lot about the world and about yourself. You may decide to take a completely different direction with your

life when you get back. Or you may return to the same career, but with a renewed sense of purpose and clarity.¹¹⁵

The Peace Corps emphasizes that career changes are normal. The organization anticipates that the average American will no longer hold the same job for his or her entire life. The Peace Corps emphasizes the idea of “adventure,” providing something out of the ordinary as a break from mundane details of daily life. Adventure can either lead to a new path or a return to the old with a new perspective. To those people suffering from a banal existence, the Peace Corps targets the everyday life in America as the culprit for unhappiness. The Peace Corps, for most people, is something entirely different.

Older Americans

The Peace Corps’ campaign to recruit the over-50 community focuses on safety, health, and family. The web site states, “[a]s an older American you may have some special concerns: perhaps about your health and safety while overseas, or about staying connected to friends and family.”¹¹⁶ The aim is to create a feeling of caring. This is far different than the pages dedicated to the young, white, middle-class volunteer. The organization goes on to focus specifically on the largest concern of older volunteers, family:

Families and Volunteers are encouraged to stay in touch with each other. You'll have plenty of opportunities to keep in touch, from rediscovering the art of letter writing to the occasional phone call or email. You'll also accrue vacation time during your service, and you may use this time to travel home if you so choose.

And of course, your family is welcome to visit you during your stay overseas. If an emergency occurs in your immediate family, you will be given leave to travel to the site of the emergency, at government expense, and to remain there for two weeks.¹¹⁷

This is a significantly different message than the one sent to younger volunteers. The younger volunteers are encouraged to use their vacation time traveling abroad and discouraged from traveling home. For the older volunteer who may have children and grandchildren, the Peace Corps focuses on visiting family and having them visit the volunteer.

At the same time, the site appeals to adventure and exploration in the recruitment rhetoric geared toward the older applicants. However, the rhetorical element of adventure is slightly different for older Americans. It is the adventure of a changing lifestyle and respect for the elderly that appeal to the older American. The web site states, “[y]ou will be in an environment in which life is measured by your achievements, not your earning power. You will find that you and your work are appreciated, which renews vigor and vitality. You will have the adventure of creating a new life for yourself.”¹¹⁸ This rhetorical approach relies on the benefits of service, which may revitalize the volunteer. For older applicants, feeling useful is a selling point. This completely flips the 1960s notion of “service” on its head, emphasizing the service of self over the service of others.

People of Color

The largest, most aggressive recruitment efforts are geared toward non-white volunteers. Gaddi Vasquez stated in an interview that one of his major goals as director would be to “build a Peace Corps for the 21st century that looks like America, one that includes all colors, all faiths, all backgrounds.”¹¹⁹ Unlike the other sections on the web site, the “people of color” pages are many and detailed. They are full of information about why non-white volunteers should join. The Peace Corps states, “Families and friends respond with caution or outright opposition when they hear of their loved one's interest in the Peace Corps. It's easy to understand why.” The reasons “why” are articulated clearly, and strategies to deal with unsupportive family members are also given.

Since its inception, the Peace Corps has recruited predominantly white volunteers. Volunteering is most often performed by people from higher socio-economic backgrounds, which unfortunately tends to exclude the majority of “people of color.” People of higher educational levels and socio-economic background are more likely to be “joiners and trusters” because of the resources and inclinations that were imparted to them at home and in school.¹²⁰ As a practical matter volunteering is a practice that people from higher socio-economic backgrounds find themselves free to consider. As a cultural matter those who find themselves “better off” traditionally consider volunteering ennobling. Historically, “people of color” have not found themselves so free of the day to day processes providing for family and home to consider service outside of their own communities.

One possible reason people of color do not join the Peace Corps is that a two year commitment would take them away from beginning a career. The key recruitment element of self-service is used to combat these career concerns. The director of Peace Corps states, “Recruiters need to talk about the professional opportunities beneficial to parents that have invested a lot of money in their children.”¹²¹ Self-service is a highly effective rhetorical response to families concerned with volunteer service. Pointing out the professional benefits is way to assuage concerns about money-earning potential. People of color are often the first in their families to go to college. Families who have supported their children though college wish to see them start a career and begin earning money. The organization addresses this directly by stating, “Parents who have worked hard to get a child through college, or struggled to bring children to the United States in search of economic opportunity, may feel disappointed that their son or daughter will not dive into a high-paying job right after graduation.”¹²² This concern is not seen in other recruitment rhetoric. Peace Corps aims this message at people of color because working for little to no money following an expensive college education may seem foolish to parents who have invested in their child’s education.

The Peace Corps suggests that “people of color” might also be discouraged from serving abroad rather than in their local communities. The Peace Corps web site states, “[o]thers might think that Americans should help improve the quality of life in their own community.”¹²³ People from non-white backgrounds may feel pressure to volunteer in their own community or within their own ethnic group rather than serving a foreign country. These concerns are addressed in another recruiting tool, “volunteer profiles.”

The other major recruitment tools used are the “volunteer profiles” written about Peace Corps volunteers of color. These are short volunteer statements that address most of the concerns analyzed above. For example, the issue of making money after college is a concern for many potential volunteers and families. A quotation by Peter Arellanes, a Mexican-American volunteer sums up the issue stating, “A lot of people won't consider joining the Peace Corps because they don't want to sacrifice two years of income, but I never had to take an entry-level job when I got back. Professionally, it can do nothing but help you.”¹²⁴ Likewise, volunteer experiences, such as the one of Behzad Roohi, an Iranian-American, focus on the similarities between immigrants and people in the underdeveloped world, “I have been able to apply my life experiences as an immigrant to my work. My own family members had to go through challenges similar to people in rural areas here. I use these stories – the issues we faced and overcame – about my family and me as an example.”¹²⁵ Finally, Azikiwe Chandler, an African-American volunteering in Nicaragua states, “The high school director is thrilled to have me working here. She appreciates Peace Corps Volunteers of any kind who come and help, but she realizes how beneficial it is for black children to have black role models. I've made a difference in their lives, and I'm really proud of that.”¹²⁶ Volunteer accounts such as this one, focus on experiences that are particular to ethnicity and multiculturalism. These quotations beautifully describe the exact message that the organization wants to communicate. The strategy of using actual volunteers to make the argument for the Peace Corps further strengthens recruitment efforts.

Recruitment images

The Peace Corps web site displays images that reinforce a rhetoric of adventure and the personal benefits of service. The home page has two main images that rotate between six different scenes. As described above, this is where the user is drawn upon entering the site. The first image is always large and in color and depicts a landscape setting with the Peace Corps slogan “Life is calling” superimposed over the image. The second, smaller image is of a volunteer and has a brief phrase about the volunteer below it.

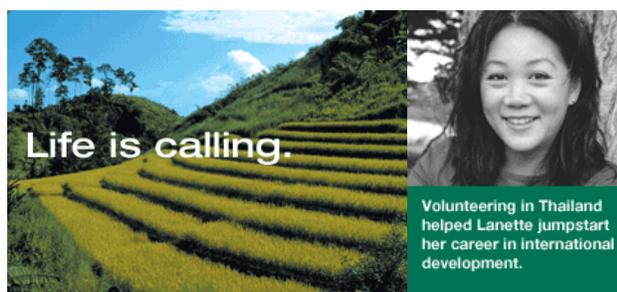


Figure 2.6

In figure 2.6, the beautiful landscape of Thailand is accompanied by the image of Lanette, whose service helped her to “jumpstart her career in international development.” The image of a hillside next to a successful volunteer reinforces both the adventure and the benefits of service. The left-hand side displays an adventure and the right-hand side, personal benefits. They intersect beautifully on the Peace Corps’ homepage. This is aligned with each of the five rotating landscapes and volunteer profiles, just as it is with the image of Dana in 2.7.



Figure 2.7

Aside from the main homepage, the Peace Corps consistently maintains images of beautiful landscapes and volunteers in action. These are a bit different because the volunteers in other photographs are in their communities. These volunteers are rarely working, but they are laughing, sitting, talking, playing games with the people of their communities. This positioning reminds the viewer that Peace Corps volunteers are up for an adventure, rather than hard work. The Peace Corps is hard work, but that is not the image the Peace Corps provides. The “toughest job” aspect has all but been removed.



Figure 5.1



Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3



Figure 5.4

In figure 5.1 we see a volunteer laughing with host country nationals. In figure 5.2, a volunteer is playing a game with a group of young girls, as is the volunteer in figure 5.3. In the final image, 5.4, the volunteer is watching an event with a group of kids. These images all indicate an easy form of volunteer service, one that allows for free time. A limited number of images actually show the volunteer at work, either teaching, planting,

or working with computers. The Peace Corps projects an image of relative comfort and ease. The host country nationals are not captured in moments of sickness or in times of need. Their impoverished lifestyles are glossed over in an effort to paint a fun and exciting Peace Corps experience.

Making Peace Corps a Household Name

The decision to join the Peace Corps, though it is ultimately an individual decision, likely includes input from family and friends. Volunteer recruitment not only includes convincing the potential volunteer but also convincing his or her support network. With a shifting interest in civic engagement, the Peace Corps must invoke public awareness of the organization and its ideals. Gaddi Vasquez targeted not only those potential volunteers, but he also recruited the mind of the American public. In order to maintain interest and continual volunteering, the American public must be aware of the organization and what it does. Vasquez stated that the first goal for the 21st century Act is

to acquaint the American people with the mission of the Peace Corps – by introducing the value of Peace Corps service to a broader audience, particularly school children, seniors and those ‘baby boomers’ who are nearing retirement, we bring the visibility of the work of the Volunteers to a new audience of potential Volunteers.¹²⁷

This goal works in concert with boosting recruitment numbers. The Peace Corps direction is clear. First public relations work, then the rest.

For many, the image of the organization ended in the 1970s. The image of the Peace Corps needs to be updated. With a new campaign, very young children will grow up knowing the Peace Corps, leading to future volunteers. One of the most effective public relations campaigns aimed at children is the Paul Cloverdale World Wise Schools Program. This program pairs a volunteer with an American school teacher. The organization pays for postage stamps to encourage communication between the school students and the volunteer. Volunteers are encouraged to send letters, and teachers are encouraged to use the volunteer's experience for classroom lessons, such as geography, language, and culture.

Peace Corps' campaigning focuses on baby boomers by reminding them that it is still around. This targets the baby boomers because they remember the Peace Corps. These baby boomers likely have friends and relatives who entered the organization as volunteers years ago. This is a highly important link between these fifty-something adults and the organization as it is today. Nostalgia is a powerful tool that has great recruitment potential. Some of the media ads analyzed in Chapter Three respond directly to this ideal.

As long as the American public's interest in service organizations is shifting, organizations like the Peace Corps will have to become more recruitment savvy. Recruitment rhetoric that includes the elements of adventure and personal growth is the most strategic way to appeal to today's American public. The Peace Corps has recognized this consciousness shift and has invested in its web site as a major recruitment tool. Along with the web site, the organization employs persuasive recruitment images and has developed a polished media campaign. In the following chapter, the visual

implements of recruitment will be analyzed, from the web site images, to photography contests, to the “Life is calling. How far will you go?” media campaign.

Chapter 3

Framing the World: Visual Recruitment Rhetoric

What Peace Corps volunteers understand – because they have lived in the places where one third of humanity tries to survive on \$2-a-day or \$1-a-day – is that laughter, late-night conversations in dimly-lit courtyards, wailing chants at weddings and funerals, and tears of loss, shared with friends who happen to be from different cultures – these humble experiences define humanity for all of us.
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In the 1960s, newspapers reported stories of the Peace Corps. Television hosts invited volunteers to appear for interviews on national nightly news. Public service announcements publicized “the toughest job you’ll ever love.” And Norman Rockwell depicted the spirit of service through his Peace Corps paintings. Rockwell’s work as pictorial historian of American culture captured the spirit of the Peace Corps of the 1960s. Leo Cecchini, a volunteer in Ethiopia in the early 1960s notes that, “[t]he Peace Corps hit the world stage with a bang and became the thing to do. . . . It even achieved instant status as a folklore icon through the paintings of the great Norman Rockwell. And who were we? Indeed, we were ‘Norman Rockwell Americans’”¹²⁹ Rockwell’s most famous Peace Corps painting depicted the first volunteer group sent to Ethiopia. This image of President Kennedy, surrounded by the new volunteers, appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine in 1966. Today, this iconic image is displayed in every Peace Corps office around the globe. Rockwell’s Peace Corps painting *JFKs Legacy*, (figure 3.1) romanticizes a forward-looking President and ready volunteers. This image captures the “new frontier” rhetoric, highlighting the elements of sacrifice and service in the 1960s.



Figure 3.1

Images have cultural, historical, and political effects.¹³⁰ Guy Debord claims that the *image* is central to contemporary society because photographs and film, rather than written texts, are now the primary educators.¹³¹ Photographs do not merely represent reality but also have the potential, as Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo argue, “to create it [reality].”¹³² Because photographs both represent and create reality, Peace Corps images have the potential to reflect our idea of service and create an idea of service; therefore, analyzing photographs reveals how Americans view the Peace Corps. It is increasingly important to look at such photographs to understand how the developing world and volunteer service are presented to the West. The images produced by the organization are not merely reflective of our perceptions about “social capital” but are actually the progenitors of the social climate of the 21st century. They reflect our public ideology about the third world and create a narrative of volunteer service.

Creating an attractive public image can make an organization successful. Doing this not only helps with recruitment, but also garners public support for the organization. Public support is important because the Peace Corps relies on its public image for continued government funding. Photographic images and public service announcements account for the majority of the Peace Corps’ face to the American public. In the previous chapter, the specific recruitment rhetoric from the Peace Corps’ web site revealed a new rhetorical strategy.

This chapter analyzes the visual rhetoric of the Peace Corps, including web site images, photography contests, and public service announcement images. The rhetorical force of these photographs is revealed by analyzing how dress affects cross-cultural perceptions, how a simple smile is indicative of larger cultural stereotypes, and how an image of nature can idealize another culture. This not only provides a public image of the organization; it serves recruitment purposes as well. The Peace Corps helps to define the countries it serves for the American public, and as we will see in this chapter, this reflection creates and reinforces stereotypes of the non-Western world and the role of the Peace Corps in that world. A rhetorical analysis of Peace Corps images will reveal the ways in which Americans view the organization today.

Rhetoric of Images

The photograph has been situated in the scholarly literature as both a political statement and as an image or snapshot of reality. Concurrent in most contemporary literature is the sense that photographs are not mere representations of a reality's past; in fact the image presented as a photograph has already been selected, reflected, and deflected prior to its viewing by an outsider or critic. This knowledge will help in the understanding of the Peace Corps photographs as political and contextual. A reading of these photographs is more than a mere reflection of the reality; they must be *read* as part of a larger narrative and deconstructed with the knowledge of their active space in time.

The practice of viewing a photograph is also significant to this study. Graham Clarke notes, "Rather than looking, which suggests a passive act of recognition, we need to insist that we *read* a photograph, not as an image but as a *text*."¹³³ Behind this claim is

the idea that viewers bring their own assumptions and expectations to a reading of a photograph. This is arguably not different than studying a speech act or pamphlet reading. The photograph does its own work as well. Roland Barthes suggests that photographs limit, frame, and perspectivize a moment in time.¹³⁴ Hariman and Lucaites develop this notion of framing by noting that a photograph is sectioned off by the “rectangular boundaries” and “marks the work as a special section of reality that acquires greater intensity than the flow of experience before and after it.”¹³⁵ Fundamental to analyzing photographs is the work of the critic to read the text of the photograph and simultaneously recognize the already framed image being constructed by the camera (and operator).

Visual images are political. Susan Sontag’s work on photography proves helpful in understanding the underlying power relationship present when a picture is political. She notes, “[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge . . . like power.”¹³⁶ As a tool of power, photographs serve as evidence of claims made; they can be proof to a skeptic. Sontag reminds us:

In deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects. Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are. Those occasions when the taking of photographs is relatively indiscriminating, promiscuous, or self-effacing do not lessen the didacticism of

the whole enterprise. This very passivity – and ubiquity – of the photographic record is photography’s “message,” its aggression.¹³⁷

Pictures have a subject behind them and contain power.

Hariman and Lucaites point out that “once thought to be windows to the real, photographic images become the ideal medium for naturalizing a repressive structure of signs. And there is no doubt that they can function that way, as both prized shots and millions of banal, anonymous images reproduce normative conceptions of gender, race, class, and other forms of social identity.”¹³⁸ The images used by Peace Corps illustrate the everyday life of the volunteer, of the underdeveloped world, and of its people. An investigation of visual rhetoric is crucial to understanding how Peace Corps photographs act as signs of larger cultural beliefs.¹³⁹

Stephen Browne, in a 1995 book review discussing the procedures of memorializing, claims that “[h]owever varied those procedures, they collectively stress a sense of the text as a site of symbolic action, a place of cultural performance, the meaning of which is defined by its public and persuasive functions.”¹⁴⁰ Though Browne is talking about the practice of memorializing, I would argue that visual rhetoric acts similarly. They have political agency. Agreeing with Browne’s assertion that the work of public memory has to do with social construction and political resonance, I suggest that visual images use the grammar of the political to do rhetorical work. To this end, I believe visual rhetoric is concerned with three particular functions. Images are rhetorical precisely because they are: 1) constructed under the pressure of society, 2) ideologically bound, 3) narrative producing.

First, *visual rhetorics are constructed under the pressure of society*. According to Birdsell and Groarke a visual culture may be defined as our collective “ways of seeing,” and a set of “cultural conventions of vision.”¹⁴¹ Images are framed by the creator’s investment in cultural codes; likewise, they are selected for display based on their reflection of those cultural codes. The way we view our own culture and other cultures is a result of societal pressures. Maurice Halbwachs notes that our remembrance of the past is based on conscious decisions we make to “choose the society in the midst of which we wish to find ourselves.”¹⁴² The way we choose to frame the world around us depends on what our society wants. In particular, photographs, as artful expressions of realistic situations, are not merely “evidence,” but are by their very nature rhetorical; they are constructive of the era.¹⁴³ The forces of culture burden photographs to tell the story for an entire culture.

Second, *visual rhetorics are politically charged and ideologically bound*. Visual images are not inherently rhetorical. A rhetorical image consists of symbols that stand in for larger social claims. Visuals are made rhetorical when they are bound by the pressure of human intervention. Visual rhetorics are constructed from a collective consciousness. Barbie Zelizer suggests that “collective memories help us fabricate, rearrange, or omit details from the past as we thought we knew it.”¹⁴⁴ The same occurs with photographic images. The selected ways we collectively see the world become arguments about what a culture or society privileges. The collective remembrance of an event eventuates in an argument about which ideologies should be upheld as accurate representations of identity of social norms. Hariman argues that the “image becomes capable of directing the attention across a field of gestures, interaction rituals, social types, political styles, artistic

genres, cultural norms, ideographs, and other signs as they intersect an event.”¹⁴⁵ This ideological understanding of visuals leads directly to the third principle I have noted, narrative.

Third, *visual rhetorics are simultaneously bound by narrative and construct new narratives*. Cara Finnegan argues that because images purport to offer a “real” and “natural” view of the world, they can only do so “through framing and construction of those views.”¹⁴⁶ Texts are always already framed; they are selected, reflected, and deflected in a way that mirrors cultural narratives. This process of screening emerges from an internal or collective narrative. The narrative created within the boundaries of a photograph frames a specific moment in time.¹⁴⁷ Robert Hariman states that photography “marks the work as a special section of reality that acquires greater intensity than the flow of experience before and after it.”¹⁴⁸ This particular moment created within the image is part of a story and reveals a larger cultural idea formed under the pressure of society. Images, whether photographs, paintings, or quilts are polysemous, always read through narratives.

The three functions of rhetorical images help us to read the Peace Corps photographs as part of a larger cultural rhetoric. These images tell us who we are as Americans and who we are not. They reveal what it means to be a volunteer in the 21st century and what the third world looks like today.

Much is at stake in understanding the Peace Corps’ images. American political and cultural history is filled with anxiety about the “other.” Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, in their intriguing analysis of *National Geographic* magazine, argue that “[t]he cold war, decolonization, Vietnam, and the rise of the officially sanctioned anxieties

about foreign terrorists have clear implications for how the third world is portrayed.”¹⁴⁹ Organizations such as *National Geographic Society* and, in different ways, the Peace Corps, promote distinct images of the less developed world. Representations of the “other” tell us who we are, who the other is, and who a volunteer is. Images also help to ease the Western anxiety of helping others by framing the experience of today’s volunteer as an incredible adventure.

The Peace Corps’ photographs are generally filled with happy and healthy indigenous people. Service is pictured as exotic, adventure-filled, and beautiful. Janis L. Edwards and Carol K. Winkler say that images “used strategically in the public sphere reflect not only beliefs, attitudes, and values of their creators, but those of the society at large.”¹⁵⁰ The images show the volunteer what to expect and provide the American public with a visual *topos* or reference that helps to formulate an idea about what those countries must be like.¹⁵¹ The photographs reinforce an ideal of peace and tranquility by ignoring issues of poverty, homelessness, and war, even though these issues exist for the majority of countries served. The Peace Corps idealizes the developing world in several ways: by exoticizing the non-Western world, by continuously displaying happy people and volunteers, through indigenous or indexical dress of natives, through the use of children at play, animals, adults at rest, and finally by depicting nature as the raw material of culture.

Idealizing the Third World

Raymond Williams argues that culture is “the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced,

experienced, and explored.”¹⁵² Because culture is the means by which we understand the world around us, the visual images need to be analyzed in order to understand contemporary America’s view of developing countries.

Lutz and Collins argue that in the field of humanities a common question arises about how people represent the various kinds of human differences, such as racial, ethnic, gender and class distinctions. This question is a means to understand how these representations help to create and reproduce social hierarchy. They write:

At the least, those hierarchies have created small humiliations and rejections, and have lessened opportunities. At the worst, they have abetted wars of extermination, lynchings, and rape. Representations may be deployed for or against such horrors or indifferently in relation to them, but they are never irrelevant, never unconnected to the world of actual social relations. Images of the non-Western world draw on and articulate ideas and thus, like all conceptual work, become cultural and historical, mutable and political in intent and/or effect.¹⁵³

Photographic images, like those used by *National Geographic* or the Peace Corps, have significant potential for altering our unrealistic views of indigenous peoples.

The organization has a tendency to idealize the people of developing nations, with an accompanying tendency to ignore poverty and violence. The photographs show these people as cut off from the flow of world events, living peacefully in traditional ways. Our need to idealize the “other” goes hand in hand with our shifted image of public service. Public service consisted of sacrifice and hardship in the past, but today service looks more like a vacation. The “other” in popular media is quite often “portrayed as

exotic; they are *idealized*; they are *naturalized*; and taken out of all but a single historical narrative; and they are *sexualized*.”¹⁵⁴ The people of the third world in Peace Corps photographs reinscribe this sort of narrative.

Anxiety about threats of chaos or decay does not exist in the photographs; rather we view an ideal world, free of suffering. This again, reinforces the narrative that volunteers are not entering service to solve problems because none exist. In these photographs, hard work and responsibility are downplayed, while the world’s peoples become aesthetic objects to appreciate.¹⁵⁵ The “other” is beautifully dressed, quietly enjoying life, and smiling at the camera. These snapshots of reality capture an idealized life which may or may not exist.

Finally, we can recognize images as a means of public identity. We know who we are in contrast to those who we are not. Hariman and Lucaites articulate this point by stating that “the public sphere depends on visual rhetorics to maintain not only its play of deliberative ‘voices,’ but also its more fundamental constitution of public identity.”¹⁵⁶ They argue that the public is a body of strangers grouped discursively through images and are addressed through the public image. Forces like the Peace Corps provide people with a collective representation of a culture. The organization is responsible for offering the public an idealized face of the non-Western world. In photographs of the 1960s we saw images of volunteers working along-side host country nationals. For example, in Aaron J. Erickson’s pictorial history of the Peace Corps in the 1960s, images of manual labor abounded. Nearly all of the images showed volunteers hard at work, participating in hands-on training or talking with native peoples. In the over 200 pages of photographs, we never see volunteers sitting around, host country nationals at rest, or

very many children at all. These images are entirely different than the images we find now. Today, no such images of volunteering or of native peoples exist. Volunteers are rarely shown working, host country nationals are shown relaxing, often surrounded by children, who are most often resting, smiling, dressed in clothing of another world, and sitting in front of beautiful landscapes. I ask, for the purposes of this chapter, in what ways do these photographs change or reinforce ideas about others held by their viewers? And how might these photographs influence how the viewers view volunteer service?

Images of the Developing World

The Smile

The smile idealizes the happiness of people in the developing world and reflects a stereotype of general contentment. Americans are given the idea that indigenous people are blissfully happy in the countries where volunteers serve. This is a common misconception threaded through American discourse on the developing world. As mentioned in Chapter One, President Carter understood the “third world” to be sophisticated and complex. But, upon Reagan’s election to the Presidency, he framed the “third world” as nothing “more than primitives.”¹⁵⁷ The Reagan administration saw this world as simple people living simple lives. This mentality runs through the American consciousness. We know the “other” is impoverished and lacking necessary resources for subsistence; however, we see them smiling, blissfully ignorant of their living conditions. The smile in photographs reinforces the people of these poorer countries as simple, content with their primitive lives.



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3



Figure 3.4

Aside from implicating the “other” in a world of smiling innocence, the smile is also consistent with an idealism that sees the third world smiling because they are growing and developing. Lutz and Collins contend that, “[t]he smile, like the portrait, follows cultural conventions in defining and depicting the person. The smiling, happy person evokes the goal of the pursuit of happiness, written into the Declaration of Independence. . . . The smile is a key way of achieving idealization of the other, permitting the projection of the ideal of the happy life.”¹⁵⁸ By using many images of smiling people, the Peace Corps is responsible for reinforcing this idealistic view. Concerns of poverty are swept away, and the Western viewer can believe that volunteers work in relaxed, agreeable conditions. Images 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 all relay this message. They are close shots of smiling people, where the subjects are not engaged in work or play; they are merely smiling for the camera.

As with the smile, the portrait is a common part of the organization’s visual rhetoric. Portraits capture the subject at his or her best. They also are the most humanizing because they give the viewer the idea that the subjects are “real” people. Portraits, such as those above, have no context or setting to complicate them. Looking again at the above figures, we see close portraits of native people. This kind of up-close shot creates a connection between the viewer and the subject because there is nothing to frame the image. The same is true of volunteer images. More than half of all pictures found in recruitment materials are volunteer portraits. These images display the

volunteer as a “real” person, which is ideal for recruitment. Portraits humanize the experience of volunteering.



Figure 3.5



Figure 3.6



Figure 3.7

The portrait, whether of a host country national or an American volunteer, identifies service for the viewer. At the same time, Peter Galassi believes that portraits “enable us to trace the sameness of man.”¹⁵⁹ They do this by stripping away culture and leaving a universal person. The American public receives a version of the less Westernized world as a place where people are just like them, human. Outside of this context, these volunteer portraits could be pictures of people from any part of the world. Portraits do not reveal any “ethnic” or traditional clothing; they display the face only, reminding us that context is significant when reading photographs. Clothing is always a key component in these photographs and a way to read the organizations’ visual rhetoric.

Dress

Indigenous dress is one of the most common features of these photographs. Images of ritual costumes or tribal dress are often equated with a pre-modern mentality. Most recruitment images show native peoples in their native dress. Rarely do we see Western dress, even though it is prevalent in most societies today. We enjoy seeing traditional clothing because it reminds us of the exotic. The exotic, to Westerners, shows cultural differences and/ or frames the “other” as spectacle. The photographer is

consistently drawn to people in brightly colored, “different” dress, and often engaged in strange-seeming rituals or inexplicable behavior.

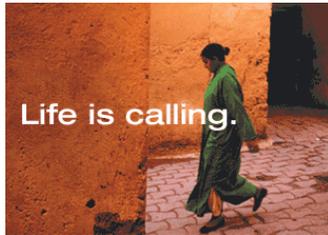


Figure 3.8



Figure 3.9



Figure 3.10

Lutz and Collins state that “indigenous dress, ritual costumes, and tribal fashion are common because they suggest something about the social stability and timelessness of the people depicted.”¹⁶⁰ In figure 3.8, the woman is simply walking about town. She is not participating in a ritual or festival of any kind; whereas, the boy in figure 3.9, demonstrates a different kind of depiction, one that includes ritual as a social force. Images of ritual have the ability to show an embedded tradition or some kind of sacred world; this ritual is of another world and can impact the viewer by reinforcing the mysteriousness of the other. This reinforces the difference between “us” and “them.” No figure does this more profoundly than 3.10, in which the tribal costumes include face painting of a warrior tradition. The exotic dress and ritual stray are totally unfamiliar to Western culture. Unlike the portrait, these images allow for a clear distinction to be made between us and them.



Figure 3.11

There exists a moment when the forces of the primitive and modern worlds collide in some of the photographs, such as in figure 3.11, where a woman is wearing a traditional skirt of brilliant fabrics and a simple, non-descript t-shirt. This contrast between the traditional wrap and the Western t-shirts throws the two worlds together. This ultimately reinforces how the West influences non-Westerners. Local costumes suggest something about social stability.¹⁶¹ A person in Western dress can be seen as progressive and desiring social change. This can be comforting to the viewer because it means that the native is becoming more modern. This contrast presumes that people wearing traditional or exotic dress have a pre-modern mentality.

Figure 3.12

Clothing is not the only way that this meshing of the modern and pre-modern occurs. In figure 3.12, a young woman in traditional clothing is wearing a baseball mitt, playing a game of catch. The West confronts the tradition of the “other” perfectly in this figure. Not only is baseball, a traditionally Western sport, becoming popularized abroad, women are also participating in sports. In fact, women are beginning to play sports in many countries, but they are still required to or prefer to wear their traditional clothing.¹⁶² Volunteers, presumably, are partly responsible for this shift. The photographs ask us to consider the Westernizing of the entire world.

Volunteers are almost never shown wearing traditional clothing. The volunteer is depicted as maintaining his or her Western values and mindset. In the singular instance found of a volunteer dressing in indigenous dress, she is smiling and showing off her henna-dyed hands. She is participating in an exotic ritual, which seems like fun. The

volunteer of the 21st century finds her adventure in this photograph, a brush with something entirely new.



Figure 3.13

This particular image, 3.13, because it is the only one of its kind, serves to reinforce the distinction between the volunteer's life and the life of the host country people. The volunteer is clearly playing "dress-up" in this image, reminding the viewer that the role is a fun and interesting experience with exotic customs. Aside from this photograph, volunteers are always seen in their t-shirts, jeans, and tennis shoes.

At Rest or At Play

Children are the focus of many Peace Corps photographs. Children communicate the future of a nation. They are not capable of being blamed; they display an innocence of the developing world. As long as children are the central figures in Peace Corps' visual rhetoric, the native peoples will continue to be romanticized and idealized. The world always appears safe and welcoming when children are involved. This rhetoric maintains a focus on youth because children are automatically equated with the future and potential change. Education is the major job for volunteers, and education is understood to be a way toward development. Therefore, by frequently picturing children, they are further emphasizing the potential for development.

Another important rhetorical factor is the inclusion of volunteers in photographs with children. Outside of portraits, volunteers are nearly always pictured with a child or

group of children, such as in figure 3.15. This creates the perception that volunteers spend most of their time with children. Importantly, when children are captured in a photograph, it is assumed that they are not working nor are they resting. Lutz and Collins argue that “the child alone or in groups of other children is consonant with the sociological reality in which children are not integrated into the adult world of work or leisure and with the cultural belief that the child is a special kind of person rather than a miniature or even protoadult.”¹⁶³ Childhood is romanticized; therefore, people surrounded by children are removed from the real work that occurs during service.



Figure 3.13



Figure 3.14



Figure 3.15

In the occasions that adults are captured in a snapshot of reality, they are frequently at rest, rarely at work. This is a typical representation of a more simplistic life.



Figure 3.16



Figure 3.17

As shown in figures 3.16 and 3.17, indigenous people are often smiling, hanging out, or posing for the photograph. The photographs rarely picture the native at work.

Aaron J. Erickson’s pictorial history of the 1960s Peace Corps always shows the native

and Westerners at work together. The photographic history of the 1960s frames the Peace Corps as hard work done by volunteers along-side host country nationals. The two are always seen working together to accomplish a common community task. The 1960s volunteer was never seen at rest. Men and women of the developing worlds were always depicted as hard working, but today that image has changed to show a passive or non-working native. This is consistent with a colonialist discourse that imagines people of the underdeveloped worlds as not working, or lazy.¹⁶⁴ This is also in line with the 21st century view of volunteering as involving little work at all. That we rarely see images of volunteers at work reinforces the idea that today's volunteer is able to "hang out" with people of other cultures; it is a cultural exchange more than a work program.

The Elderly

Another focus of the Peace Corps' photography is elderly women. The elderly women captured are always seated, never smiling, and always looking directly into the camera. If youth are the most frequently pictured demographic in Peace Corps photographs, the elderly included the least in recruitment photography. This is suggestive of a larger narrative that emphasizes children as innocent and the future of a country and the elderly as unchanging. Photographs 3.18 and 3.19 are the only two images of older people on the web site. They were included as part of a photography contest and are not found in the recruitment pages of the web site.



Figure 3.18



Figure 3.19

The pictures of the elderly women are both tight shots of the women, showing little of the background world around them. There is no mistaking their age or their traditional dress. These elderly women reinforce the pre-modern mentality which includes exotic or traditional dress. The vibrant colors in image 3.18, including the woman's dress and jewelry, are cultural implements that represent a bit of the cultural style of another world.

The elderly women in these photos bring to the fore an association between culture and age. In many cultures around the globe, wisdom is assumed to be embodied in its elders, and the elderly hold an authoritative position in some cultures. The elderly have a cultural memory that is to be held sacred. However, in the case of the images on the web site, the elderly represent a tight grip on the past and on pre-modern society. The elderly are rarely used for recruitment because they represent another time.

Animals

Multiple images of animals show up in Peace Corps' visual rhetoric. Animals, much like the images of children, display an innocence in the culture. For example, in Figure 3.21, a pig hides behind a piece of lace, revealing only an eye and a seeming smile

on its face. The pig is framed as a kind, tame animal, which places focus again on adventure as well as the exotic life of the third world.



Figure 3.20



Figure 3.21



Figure 3.22

Animals in the home or within a close-up camera shot are very common in many parts of the world. The elephant in image 3.22, is used as transportation, reinforcing the exotic lives of host country nationals. Having monkeys (figure 3.20) or elephants walking around as part of daily life, is completely foreign to Americans; therefore, this kind of image is used to reinforce the difference between the West and the non-West, again through the exotic.

Nature

One of the most remarkable features of Peace Corps' photography is the sharp focus on the incredible scenery of the natural environment. Forest, mountain, beach and desert scenery are displayed with amazingly vibrant colors. The print advertisements used by the organization for recruitment contain mountains, gorgeous village huts, and children at play in the ocean (see figure 3.26 for one example). The call to adventure is readily visible through many and varied representations of nature, and makes service in a foreign country look like a wonderful vacation. We do not see the buildings or populated cityscapes in any of the pictures. The photos are limited to the beauty of the land in rural areas. Also, many countries have enormous problems with waste disposal and littering; however, this reality is never presented. The natural world is always pristine, at its best,

cleanest and most attractive to the viewers. Figure 3.25 perfectly captures the organization's slogan and the call to nature. The "life is calling" catch phrase is displayed over the perfect fields of rice and a gorgeous sky. Life is indeed calling from far away, in a place where natural beauty has a new meaning.



Figure 3.23



Figure 3.24

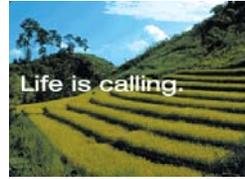


Figure 3.25

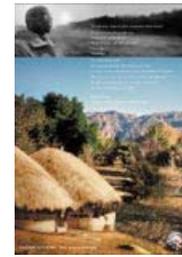


Figure 3.26

Illustrations of nature frame other countries as perfect, creating the image of a world far away where natural, untouched beauty conjures images of pre-modern peoples living in pre-modern conditions. Mark Meister talks about the importance of natural beauty in landscapes "because they act as a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored. The visual images of nature (landscapes, geographies) are essential to understanding culture."¹⁶⁵ In the case of the Peace Corps, nature functions as a way of calling Americans toward adventure.

The Peace Corps' Image

As noted above, rhetorical images have three particular functions; they are: 1) constructed under the pressure of society, 2) ideologically bound, 3) narrative producing. The Peace Corps' recruitment images are rhetorical in nature; they are produced out of our own perception of the "other" and our perceptions of ourselves. These recruitment images are also politically charged. The photographs stand in for larger social claims,

solidifying what we understand to be the “other” and what we understand to be the role of the Peace Corps volunteer. Finally, the photographs reveal an on-going narrative of volunteer service and of how that service affects other nations.

Visual Rhetorics are Constructed Under the Pressure of Society

The photographs reveal to us a set of cultural assumptions that we make about ourselves and about the people of developing nations. There are two major justifications to this claim. First, because these photographs are taken by volunteers and other American staff members, they were created with a particular set of cultural codes in mind. Secondly, the way we see ourselves and others is a result of the way we choose to frame the world around us.

Because the photographs are taken most often by volunteers and/or staff members, they have been taken under the influence of society, a society where the photographer has been conditioned to think of the West in certain terms and the non-West in certain terms. Then, the organization chooses from thousands of possible images, which images display the mission of the organization most clearly. This choice is actually rather limited because the options are all constructed under the pressure of Western society to begin with, leaving little variety in the final decision.

Each photograph is selected by the organization to *reflect* an image of the organization to Americans. This is a decision, however subconscious, on the part of the organization to create an attractive image of volunteer service. If we see ourselves as modern, advanced, peoples who provide educated, helpful volunteers to other countries, then we automatically presume that those “other” countries are living pre-modern,

primitive lives. As evidenced by the photographs, volunteers are modern, progressive, developers of the underprivileged host country nationals. The third world people are most often portrayed as exotic, primitive creatures, content with their lives. This image is fully constructed by our own ideas about what the third world is and what we offer to develop that world.

Visual Rhetorics are Politically Charged and Ideologically Bound

Photographic images used by the Peace Corps ignore the nuances of daily life. These images make broad, sweeping generalizations about the way the world works and the difference between cultures. Rarely in recruitment photographs is the country specified. The omission of this detail suggests that all non-Western countries are essentially the same. They all are in need of development; they are all somehow connected because volunteers serve in those countries. The assumption also exists that Peace Corps volunteer service is essentially the same regardless of location. Photographs have the power to select and frame our ideologies of other cultures. In the case of the Peace Corps, the ideologies constructed from the recruitment images suggest that third world identities are all the same. This ideological blanketing of cultures tells a story about our cultural perceptions as Westerners.

Visual Rhetorics are Bound by Narrative and Constructive of New Narratives

Two narratives develop out of the rhetorical analysis performed in this chapter: a narrative of development and a narrative of volunteer service. Each of these narratives is constructed through the photographs; this happens because photographs give us the

impression of the “real” lives of the other and the “real” lives of the volunteer. The narratives derived from pictures tell a specific story at a specific time; however, this story has no caption in Peace Corps rhetoric. The image tells a story without comment; the organization does not guide a reading of the photographs.

The narrative of development came to life through the sharp contrast between the first and third worlds. At moments, we see the collision of those two worlds, but generally, a rhetoric of development focuses on people in need of modernization. This sets the volunteer role in motion, creating a space for the American volunteers in less developed nations. This liberal developmentalism has serious political and ideological ramifications. The story of liberal developmentalism is complex, but basically goes like this: during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, American liberalism reached its height of power and influence, and specifically liberal developmentalism is the international arm of this generational idealism.¹⁶⁶ With it, liberal developmentalism carries an assumption that in order to develop a country, Americans have to understand and respect its culture and people as well as understand their own American culture. The exchange of cultures for the sake of development is a farce; as we can see in this photographic narrative, the “other” is always connected to exoticizing of people, customs, traditions, and dress. The narrative of development is clearly a story of modernizing the third world.

Finally, such photographs reinforce the written narrative explored in Chapter Two, the narrative of adventure. The photographic story of service excludes any hardship, poverty, rugged living and working conditions, or sickness that a volunteer might encounter during his or her two years of service. It is no surprise that the

recruitment rhetoric of today focuses on the beauty of other nations and their people. Service is meant to be attractive as well as rewarding. Visually, we see just that in these photographs. Life is calling the volunteer toward a great, beautiful adventure. We have lost the narrative thread of the 1960s and 70s where the volunteers' job was "tough."

Volunteer Blog Photos

Comparing the Peace Corps' photographs with volunteer photographs will show how volunteers view their own participation in service differently than the organization does. Whereas the organization's web site emphasizes scenic beauty and exotic host country nationals, volunteer web sites show volunteers working alongside their counterparts engaging in physical labor. Volunteer web logs are a means by which non-volunteers can access images of service, not seen on the official web site. In the next chapter, volunteer web logs will be more deeply explored, but for the purposes of this chapter, a brief analysis of volunteer photographs provides another perspective on how volunteers perceive service.

Volunteer web sites show them hard at work building houses and community water wells, digging latrines, farming, and teaching. One distinct difference between the volunteer photographs and the organizational photographs is that volunteer photographs generally contain captions highlighting the importance of the picture. This helps to frame and make clear the motivation for posting such an image. In the cases of figures 3.27, 3.28, and 3.29, the volunteers wrote that they were working on community projects. Amanda in figure 3.27 is working in the community garden she started; Bly in figure 3.28 is helping his community build a water station; and Joe is building a water tank in

Panama. These volunteers explain each project in detail, and they each post multiple images of themselves hard at work and their community members working alongside them.



figure 3.27



figure 3.28



figure 3.29

Another set of images often seen on volunteer web pages is of fellow volunteers together. On sites containing pictures, volunteers are shown together at parties, at work, and joining in sporting events. This consistent theme reminds the viewer that volunteers are not living without contact with other Americans. In fact, volunteers have been critiqued for the amount of time they spend with one another, and potential volunteers may be concerned that they will live in isolation for two years. In fact, according to volunteer web sites and the accompanying visuals, volunteers roam in packs, as seen in figures 3.30, 3.31, and 3.32.



figure 3.30



figure 3.31



figure 3.32

Volunteers quite often post pictures of specific members in their community and tell associated stories. Rather than simply displaying images of groups of children or unspecified people in exotic scenarios, the volunteers show their viewers what life actually looks like in their communities. In figure 3.33, a volunteer shows the disability of a young girl in her village and in the post tells her story. In figure 3.34, the community's children study by lantern in order to learn English. And in figure 3.35, the volunteer displays an image of her neighbor's funeral ceremony. This exemplifies the contrast between the organization's and the volunteer's two different depictions of service. We may see similar images on the two web sites, but on the volunteer web site, the image is made personal and is narrated according to the experience of the volunteer. The volunteer web journals create a personal connection between the reader, the volunteer, and his or her community. So, in the case of the funeral, the ceremony seems less exotic when we know it is a volunteer's close friend.



figure 3.33



figure 3.34



figure 3.35

Life in the Peace Corps, according to a majority of volunteer web journals, is challenging. Not only do volunteers work hard to develop their communities, they also work hard washing their clothes, cutting their grass, and fighting off various animals and insects. These images serve to demonstrate to the reader how different the life of the volunteer is from the organization's portrayal on its web site and in its recruitment

brochures. This juxtaposes the readers' comfortable life in America, making volunteer service both exotic and challenging.



figure 3.36



figure 3.37



figure 3.38

As evidenced by images taken from volunteer web sites, volunteer service may not be as simplistic as imagined in the organization's recruitment rhetoric. Volunteers present their lives and service as complex and challenging. The volunteers reinforce the same message as the organization in many ways, but those images on volunteer journals are accompanied by heart-warming stories and complex tales of life abroad. Through the eyes of the volunteer, service is both rewarding and frustrating. Volunteer web pages are a source of information for potential volunteers. In the past, the Peace Corps' literature was the main means of communicating what service was like. Exploring the many volunteer web sites will provide a new dimension to recruitment. The 2,500 volunteer web logs provide more detailed and graphic information about a given country than ever before. The analysis in Chapter Four will broaden our understanding of service and what it means to be a volunteer.

Chapter 4

Beyond the New Frontier: The Volunteer Perspective

If we had the power to bring our neighbors home from war.
They would have never missed a Christmas, no more ribbons on the door.
When you trust your television, what you get is what you got.
When they own the information, they can bend it all they want.
We keep on waitin', waitin', on the world to change.
It's not that we don't care, it's that we know the fight ain't fair.¹⁶⁷

The Peace Corps' three goals are: (1) to help the people of interested countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained workers (2) to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served and (3) to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. The third goal of Peace Corps was written in an effort to provide a more global perspective of volunteer service, encouraging volunteers to share their experiences with others in an effort to educate the American population about other cultures. The third goal, in the past, was fulfilled through volunteer letters written while in service, post-service presentations to local communities, and books, newspaper, and magazine articles published by returned Peace Corps volunteers. In recent years, volunteers have shared their lives with others via the internet. The introduction of email was the first means of immediate and relatively affordable communication available to volunteers while in service. Telephone calls are expensive and limited to one communicative interaction at a time. Letters mailed from most Peace Corps posts take anywhere from two weeks to several months to be delivered. Through email volunteers share their experiences with many people simultaneously and instantaneously, expanding the implementation of the third Peace Corps goal.

As briefly introduced in Chapter Four, the advent of the web log or “blog” in more recent years has allowed volunteers to maintain personalized web space where they can blog about their life as volunteers. Created in 1994, blogs are personal user web sites updated regularly by an individual or group, known as “bloggers.”¹⁶⁸ These blogs can be accessed through a web address (URL) allowing anyone to access the page, just as with a website. The advantage of blogs is that they are, at this point, for the most part free, and offer users a forum for their own ideas. Blogs:

combine musings, memories, jokes, reflections on research, photographs, rants, and essays, though we would argue that it is not the nature of the content that defines it. Blogs can be devoted to only one topic, or they can reflect what the author is interested in at any given time. They can have one author—authors of blogs are known as “bloggers”—or multiple authors. What characterizes blogs are their form and function: all posts to the blog are time-stamped with the most recent post at the top, creating a reverse chronological structure governed by spontaneity and novelty the opportunity to easily post stories, opinions, and pictures to a web address.¹⁶⁹

Peace Corps Volunteer blogs are only a small part of the blogging phenomenon that has spread across the internet. Web logs have impacted cultural and political movements, most notably the Howard Dean 2004 Presidential campaign and their coverage of Trent Lott’s 2002 comments at Strom Thurmond’s birthday party. Blogs are also a new venue for scholarly conversations, changing the place and ways that intellectual thought and capital can be expressed and shared.¹⁷⁰ According to Technorati, a blog tracking website, in May 2007 there were more than 71 million blogs.¹⁷¹ And according to We Media,

people are dissatisfied with today's media coverage and writing, and blogs are an important alternative solution. A February 2007 poll found that "72% of adults said they were dissatisfied with the quality of American journalism today. Another 55% said bloggers are important to the future of American journalism, and 74% said citizen journalism will play a vital role."¹⁷² Blogging has become a means by which opinions are expressed, politicians are critiqued, and people gather together to discuss social and economic issues. For the purposes of this study, volunteer web sites will show an alternative to the recruitment rhetoric posed by the Peace Corps. Web logs compete, however unintentionally, to tell the "true" story of volunteer life, altering the message sent by the organization.

According to the Fellow Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Community, there are 2,644 Peace Corps volunteer web logs available for public access to date.¹⁷³ These web logs are created by individual Peace Corps volunteers during their time of service to share their experiences with their family and friends. For those in country volunteers, blogs present an attractive way to journal about their lives in foreign countries. They can share much more information with many more people, including pictures, links to other blogs, and daily, instant updates. As internet capabilities span the globe, volunteers in most countries can maintain their own blogs.

This chapter will present volunteer accounts of service. There are multiple ways volunteers present their experiences while in service. In order to gather information for this chapter, I decided to select at least one web interface from each of the countries hosting volunteers. In some cases, there were one or two personal web accounts; in other cases a country may have as many as 150 volunteers with personal web sites. In those

cases, I often selected more than one volunteer journal. Some web journals are shorter than others. I tried to vary my choices, by selecting some shorter accounts; some accounts where the volunteer completed a two year commitment, and others where the volunteer ended service early. I also selected accounts in which the volunteers wrote on a daily or weekly basis and others where the volunteer wrote only a few times throughout his or her two years of service. After selecting 75 of the nearly 2,500 available volunteer web logs, I read and coded them for common themes to provide volunteer perspectives on their own volunteering. Specifically, I was interested in why volunteers joined Peace Corps, and how they characterized their experiences as volunteers, which included their introduction to a new culture and meeting new people. Themes I encountered as I read these web accounts included their motivation for volunteering, work, boredom, sustainability, integration, adjustments, stereotyping, new experiences, hosting visitors, Peace Corps critique, and reflections on service.

Volunteer blogs have become a means of recruitment. Before committing to service, potential volunteers log on to the internet to read volunteer accounts of their lives while serving in country. The volunteer blog, as a rhetorical tool, may do as much for Peace Corps recruitment as the organization does on its own. Therefore, analyzing blogs not only provides insight into the life and perspective of the volunteer, but also illuminates a new medium for recruitment.

An analysis of Peace Corps recruitment literature and photographs in Chapters Two and Three revealed that today's recruitment rhetoric does not adhere to the new frontier rhetoric of the early Peace Corps; rather it focuses on the adventure of service and the personal benefits of service for the volunteers. Analysis reveals that volunteers

perceive their service as helpful, challenging, and rugged. While volunteers see service as important, they also emphasize the difficulties of daily life. Focusing on the challenges of living in developing nations, the volunteers also write of the joy and ease of life and jobs. The volunteer blog is the most comprehensive account of service we have.

Peace Corps Volunteer Weblogs

Volunteer web logs range in type, purpose, and length. The following is an explanation of the kinds of blogs encountered in this chapter. Some volunteer accounts are written in the form of letters to friends and family with a formal greeting at the opening of each dated entry and a signature at the end. Others are written as entries in a journal or diary. And, traditional blogs make up the majority of the Peace Corps volunteers forums. The “bloggers,” or authors of the blogs, make conscious decisions to publish their words. As mentioned above, blogs offer public access to the bloggers’ sites, meaning that anyone can read about a given volunteers’ experience.

The purpose of volunteer websites varies from strict accounts of volunteer experiences to commentary on politics, religion, love, music, and films. These blogs offer insight into the thoughts and feelings of volunteers on any subject imaginable. Peace Corps bloggers often write about more than just their volunteer experiences; they comment on the world around them, many times making statements about U.S. and international politics. Bloggers also tell inside jokes which only their closest friends will understand, and they share experiences outside of their Peace Corps job description. Some web pages are set up to display volunteer photographs. These web pages contain

little in the way of journaling but rather include captions or more developed descriptions of the images, or in some cases, only the images themselves.

The length of volunteer blogs depends on how frequently the volunteer has access to a computer or the internet. It is apparent from volunteer accounts that those with their own computers at home or work typically write more. Some volunteers write on a daily basis, some weekly, and others far less frequently. The online accounts range from a few pages about their two year experience to hundreds of pages with thick description and detail of their daily lives living and working at their international post. Volunteer blogs provide additional information that is not found in the Peace Corps' official literature. These blogs provide insight into the daily life, experiences, and challenges of volunteer life, adding a "real" perspective to traditional volunteer recruitment rhetoric.¹⁷⁴

Why Blog?

The blog can both help and hurt the Peace Corps recruitment efforts. Many volunteers are clear about why they decided to create a personal web space while in service. Their justifications vary. Some volunteers say that they want an easy means of communication between themselves and family back home, especially in places where internet connections are slow and sending mass emails would take too much time. Joe, a volunteer in Panama writes, "because it will take less time to get the word out. I think uploading huge mass emails could take quite some time on a dial up modem."¹⁷⁵ For many, blogging is easier than individual emails. And, Alexis a volunteer in Nicaragua, created a blog after 13 months of Peace Corps service because she wanted to give people the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to be updated about her life; she states

“It's just that every time I tried to compose a new email, I kept asking myself if it was really interesting enough to impose on people's inboxes. Now, I don't have to impose a thing and people can check in on me as they see fit. A perfect solution.”¹⁷⁶ The web journaling format allows volunteers to write about their lives and then readers are able to decide whether or not they would like to be updated. There are other motivations for creating blogs as well.

Volunteers create blogs as a way to directly target potential volunteers. These volunteers explicitly state their desire to educate others about service. Andrea, a volunteer in Botswana, wrote that

If you are thinking about joining the Peace Corps and have stumbled across this blog, know one thing: I am writing this for you. I will make all those who read this a promise right now. I swear to be as perfectly honest as there is such a thing in my writings, and to share as much as I can about my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer and life in Africa; I hope that this will be a valuable tool for you if you are trying to decide whether or not Peace Corps is the right path for your life.¹⁷⁷

Andrea's perspective on blogging is not a new one; however, in the past, there was no easy way to allow potential volunteers into the intimate lives of current or former volunteers during their service. Blogs allow a relationship that was not available to previous volunteers, as the official web site and brochures were the available means for learning about the organization.

Because blogs are still a relatively new means of communication, many volunteers are not aware of them until they begin searching on the internet for

information about the Peace Corps or about a specific country. A Bulgaria volunteer, Stephanie, did not know of blogs before her service, and states, “I’d never even heard of a blog until a couple of days ago, when I happened to be searching the web for sites from other Peace Corps volunteers, and I discovered a couple of blogs (or simply, online journals). I found a few blogs by people who are in my Peace Corps group heading to Bulgaria in about 5 days. After seeing them, I thought ‘Wow, that is a great idea – think I’ll make my own blog.’”¹⁷⁸ The blogs of other volunteers led her to blog and, as she goes on to discuss, the blogs helped her learn about Bulgaria.

The decision to write and share that with others can be somewhat comical. Daniel, a volunteer in Georgia, sent out a call for his readers to make a commitment to reading about his life. He wrote, “I expect you to make this blog your homepage. You must check it before you check the news, or the weather, or the sports scores. It shall be your muse, your confidant, your lover. Don’t be scared. You and this blog are going to be BFF [best friend forever].”¹⁷⁹ Daniel’s perspective on blogging is light hearted; he goes on in his blog to mention that he knows no one is reading his blog, but he writes anyway. This is a running joke in his weekly posts. Begging people to read is common on blogs. Volunteers have the need to be heard and to share their experiences.

The volunteer decision to publish an online journal varies, but what is consistent is that at the surface, these volunteers want to share their experiences with others. Whether their motivation is writing for their friends and families or writing for other volunteers or potential volunteers, the motivation is to share. Blogs offer an easy medium for talking about why they decided to join the organization.

Motivation for Volunteering

Eric Silver's perspective on why people join the Peace Corps captures the feeling of an era. Silver's comments were written as he met his training group in a process called "staging." Staging is held in the United States two days before departure for service. It is meant to brief the future volunteers on Peace Corps policies and provide initial medical care. Silver wrote of various motivations for joining the Peace Corps by stating, "The youngest, those just out of college, were seeking to prove that they are different, unconventional, and daring. Those of us just out of the early business world were seeking to find similarity Those of us who are putting off their retirement with Peace Corps service seemed to be seeking reassurance that they were still vital, while we so strongly envied their experience."¹⁸⁰ The motivations for service are varied but from the volunteer perspective, idealism still exists.

Though idealism may not be as prominent as it once was, current volunteers volunteer, at least in part, because they want to "make a difference." The most idealistic response from a volunteer about why she decided to volunteer was from Melanie, a volunteer in Madagascar. Melanie wrote, "I'm fresh out of school with a degree and no purpose but to make a difference."¹⁸¹ Melanie's idealism, however, comes from a lack of direction. She is unsure of her future, so she will focus upon helping others. Jake, on the other hand, presents idealism in a negative light. For him, being idealistic is something to hide: "I like helping people. As idealistic as it sounds . . . I like it."¹⁸² The term idealistic no longer carries a positive meaning. The 1960s idealism was something to be proud of; an attitude that meant one could change things. Today, the possibilities of change seem so outlandish that idealism is viewed as something of which to be embarrassed.

In most instances, the 1960s idealism has been replaced by a 21st century “reality.” These realities include changes in the lifecycle. Today, there are more college graduates than ever before, and those college-educated students are taking time off between college and the job market. Alan Finder, in a *New York Times* article wrote, “Directors of career offices at a dozen major colleges and universities said more students are taking it [a break after college] than ever before.”¹⁸³ Leah Goodman headed off to service in the Dominican Republic to do something different, something filled with adventure before settling into a career. She notes, “The big question I have been getting since I decided to apply to the Peace Corps is ‘Why?’ And I say, why not? Im young. I want to travel. Ill learn a new language and live in a culture completely unlike my own. I am going to learn so much and grow through this unbelievable experience. Its my big adventure, and I have always wanted to have one before I settle into a typical job and routine. Its an experience of a life time! Plus its different, and I like to do things on the road less traveled.”¹⁸⁴ Leah is representative of the volunteer fresh out of college with no real desire to start a job right away. She uses the term “typical” to describe what her life would be like if she worked in the U.S.

Not only are college students delaying work, today’s American population changes careers an average of five times throughout the course of a lifetime. These are not merely job changes; they are career changes. People become disillusioned with their work and decide to make drastic changes, leading to Peace Corps service. This seems to be the most consistent reason that middle-aged people volunteer. The late 20s, to mid 30s volunteer, who make up the majority of volunteers, fall into this category. Shella joined for just these reasons; she states, “Eventually my focus, or was it my lack of, led

me to join the Peace Corps – the ultimate job for those who have become disenchanted with working. You mean to say that someone will hand me a plane ticket to some exotic local, take care of my loans while I am gone for two years, give me enough to money to buy all the rice and beans I could possibly desire and two thirds of my job description could be roughly translated as ‘hanging out?’”¹⁸⁵ Volunteers see service as a break from the realities of life in the U.S. This is consistent with the official Peace Corps rhetoric found online and reflects the slogan “life is calling.”

Still other volunteers, say they are volunteering as a call to do service for God, which is inconsistent with Peace Corps doctrine. However some volunteers join the Peace Corps for this purpose. Katherine Devine says that her service in the Dominican Republic is a calling from God. She wrote, “A lot of people have asked me why I chose to join the Peace Corps. The primary reason for my service is that this is what God has called me to do. My life serves no other purpose than to do His will- if you don't know what that means or aren't sure what it means for your life, then ask. I would love nothing more than to share Christ with you.”¹⁸⁶ Katherine is not the only volunteer with such a goal in mind. At least three of the 75 blogs contained a similar sentiment. Voluntarism carries with it many motivations. Serving in the Peace Corps is a different experience for everyone. The experiences are different, the reasons for joining are varied, but regardless of the motivation and experiences, service is challenging.

Work

Peace Corps volunteers are assigned to a particular “sector” for work. These sectors include: teaching, agriculture, community development, and health. A day in the

life of the volunteer consists of working alongside host country nationals to achieve a goal or work on development. According to their blogs, their work is generally part time. Volunteers fill their remaining hours with secondary projects of their choosing. And generally, volunteers write about their lives as quite busy and filled with projects, which is a contrast to the official web site where work is rarely mentioned. Some volunteers, especially the teachers, have strict schedules where they need to be at school a set number of hours per week. But even teachers with regular schedules, find the lack of organization found in many developing countries to be frustrating. One volunteer writes, “Not too much has been going on here in Albania. School begins here in the 18th, so the teachers have begun to go back and hang out at the school. Nothing is really happening with that yet though, we go and drink coffee, and then I usually go home.”¹⁸⁷ Because volunteer blogs tend to be written as the event is happening, the reader gets a better sense of the “reality” of daily life which includes the frustrations and joys of working in a developing nation.

Agriculture and rural development volunteers have more flexibility than teachers and generally focus on creating projects that fulfill a need in a given community. Erica writes,

The biggest question I've been getting is “Have you started work yet?” The answer is not so simple. During my next 2 years in Solenzo I will never have actual work in the American sense of going somewhere or doing something every single day. That's just not how Peace Corps service works. For the moment I am in a period called “Etude de milieu” which is sort of a precursor to beginning any

type of actual work. I'm supposed to take the next 3 months to set up my house (buy furniture, paint, etc.), improve my French and observe my community.¹⁸⁸

In Burkina Faso, as in most countries, volunteers are expected to spend their first three months (the three months after their three months of training) “integrating” into their communities. After such a period of time, the organization has a short conference to prepare them for real work. Casey, a Ghanaian volunteer, is an agroforestry volunteer who does not have a primary project. He works with multiple projects and writes about his latest project that “after only 20 minutes you wind up right on the lake with an amazing tiny fishing village and the beauty of the lake and mountains in the distance. It seems straight out of National Geographic! Plus the people are extremely nice, organized, motivated, and dedicated to getting this project done – a HUGE plus when it comes to Peace Corps work, as getting a community to be motivated at all can be the work itself. This has become yet another of my projects.”¹⁸⁹ Casey’s project is in a beautiful location and with a reliable group. He points out one of the frustrations that volunteers often feel: lack of excitement and energy on the part of the community. Blogs reveal that volunteers continuously face communities that are uninterested or unmotivated to help with their own development. Most people have no idea what Peace Corps life entails. And the organization rarely focuses on work in its recruitment pages. The volunteer blogs provide the reader an added perspective on what work is like in the Peace Corps.

Shella humorously writes of her week, as a 21st century volunteer, complete with her music and laptop to keep her entertained while in service, “a full and rewarding week, just the kind that they put in the brochures about Peace Corps. Bike riding, village council meeting, conflict resolution, hiking, checking out books to a crowd of eager kids,

and ending it all by pulling up in a hammock with a cool drink, an ipod full of music, and my trusty lap-top computer.”¹⁹⁰ Shella’s comment reveals a sense of satisfaction for her work and at the same time, the comforts of a privileged American lifestyle. Increasingly, volunteers bring their lap tops into service with them, especially in countries where internet is accessible and relatively inexpensive, such as central and South America, Eastern Europe, and parts of Africa. Volunteers seem to rely on their laptops and internet service as a form of entertainment. They cite boredom frequently in their posts noting that people in their own communities seem content with sitting around whereas the volunteer feels bored and anxious to serve.

Boredom

After the excitement of moving to a new country wears off, life in a foreign country can be a challenge. Many volunteers cite boredom as a major part of their daily lives. This boredom ranges from excessive to the kind that ebbs and flows. David Root says the Peace Corps, “warned us that one of the most difficult tasks that we will face is how to handle the boredom. They were so right.”¹⁹¹ The Bangladesh volunteers, like David, were preemptively warned of the potential boredom that lay ahead so they could be prepared. Volunteers often comment in their blogs on the number of books they have read in a given week or the amount of time they spend sitting alone trying to find something to do. A volunteer in the African nation of Lesotho writes, “So the pendulum has swung back to feeling useless, lonely, bored, and wondering what I’m doing here. Should’ve known the good, almost productive weeks I had would come to an end. I used a lot of energy trying to stay positive and stepping out of my comfort zone. Now, I feel

like what's the point?! This past week I read 3 books.”¹⁹² The typical volunteer story consists of loneliness and boredom, especially as volunteers try to adjust to their new lives. Boredom is generally logged in blog entries during the first three months following training when volunteers have not mastered the language and know few people. Training is exciting and new, but after training the volunteer is placed in his or her new site, alone. This means that the volunteer does not know anyone, often leading to many hours of solitary time.

In many cases, volunteer assignments do not fill a 40 hour work week. School teachers are assigned to teach only a few classes throughout the course of a week, leaving them with free time. For example, a Cameroon volunteer said of his work, “School sort of started on Monday, but there were no students. Same as Tuesday. Wednesday is my day off as well as Friday. So, I only teach 3 days a week and only 10 hours total. Its really not that bad. I'm still bored, so hopefully school will keep me a little busy.”¹⁹³ And another volunteer in St. Vincent, Aaron wrote: “I have been creating quite a few journal entries lately. That is because I am thoroughly bored. The community center where I am assigned won't be opening for about another month. I will be moving into my own place soon. Getting things organized will keep me busy for a little while.”¹⁹⁴ In Aaron's case, his place of employment was not even open, so he was waiting to begin work. According to his blog entries, he waited for nearly 3 months before he was needed for work.

Boredom for volunteers seems to be part of a cycle. The blog entries include a positive, realistic perspective on their boredom. Kari, a volunteer in Senegal advised future volunteers of the numerous hours of solitude, writing, “If you don't like to read or

write letters or whatever or can't imagine entertaining yourself, you might get a little bored and frustrated."¹⁹⁵ And one Macedonia volunteer posted, "I am bored out of my skull, I'll do anything to help."¹⁹⁶ Volunteers are often times responsible for finding their own projects. These blogs illustrate their difficulties in getting projects initiated. Rudolph Becker couches his feelings of boredom in a positive light. He says, "I get really lonely and bored and get depressed. But than other days I wake up and just look around and realize that I am being payed [*sic*] to live in Beautiful Costa Rica, while living in a small rural community helping people, and learning Spanish, with basically zero stress in my life."¹⁹⁷ The boredom is tolerable considering the many benefits of service. Becker is a good example of the tenacious spirit of volunteers. They have been told by the organization that development work is a challenge, so they make the best of it. In all of these examples, we see the positivity and willingness to help and the patience that comes with development work. In sharp contrast to the organization's recruitment rhetoric, the volunteer account of service provide a realistic picture of what it means to live abroad with the Peace Corps. On the official web site, we never hear of the possibilities of boredom or work, but this is a common theme on volunteer blogs. Sustainability is another significant topic on these sites that does not appear in the official organizational rhetoric.

Sustainability

Sustainability is the ultimate goal of Peace Corps, meaning that each volunteer project should be able to survive long after the volunteers leave. Volunteers express anxiety over being able to create sustainable projects that will continue. Anne, a

volunteer in El Salvador, in her final blog posting wrote, “I told them that I was not going to be leading a reforestation project with them [*sic*] part of me had already left and the rest of me would be gone in two weeks. I was merely dropping this information in their lap.... [*sic*] if they want things to change, they gotta do it themselves. I helped them to form a small group to lead the project. They have the resources to do it; it's just a matter of motivation and getting it done.”¹⁹⁸ Her last moments as a volunteer found her hopeful but unsure if the host country nationals would embrace the project as their own.

Similarly, Kristen, a teacher trainer in China told stories of an English Association she started at the University. She is the only native speaker in the school, and the group was her idea. Initially she had 150 members but after a few months, only 30 were showing up regularly. She began to realize that in order to have the English club continue, she would need to train the members. She wrote, “I'm trying to come up with ways to help them develop a more sustainable program through their English Association. I'm thinking some officer training, and maybe compiling a database of activities, information, topics, basic resources in order to make the weekly two hours most useful and fun for everyone.”¹⁹⁹

Volunteers are troubled by the idea that after they leave, their projects will fail.

Voluntarism has a personal element; if the idea fails, then the volunteer is a failure.

The potential for failure causes great anxiety for volunteers. One volunteer felt as if her memory as a good volunteer would be lost if her project failed. Lindsey wrote, “The other day, I discovered that 4 were eaten [moringa trees], and I got really upset, I think because I am putting my legacy in the hands (or should I say branches) of those trees. So if they fail, what sustainable thing have I done here?”²⁰⁰ During Peace Corps training, the organization reinforces the importance of creating projects with the needs of

the community in mind, with the understanding that a project done without the consent or interest of the community will not continue after the volunteer leaves. A trainee wrote during her first days in country, “But, as volunteers trying to help the process we can't just say . . . hmmm. I see this problem and this is how to fix it! We're working for sustainability. So our role is to facilitate. We also have to be culturally sensitive. So we are learning how to put aside our ideas as to what development should look like . . . to merger them with the ideas of the community so hopefully some progress may be made.”²⁰¹ We can see from Adrienne’s blog that within days of Peace Corps indoctrination, she understood this fundamental component of service. Another fundamental component of service is integration. To overcome boredom and develop sustainable projects, integration into the community is essential.

Integration

After training, volunteers move to the site where they will spend two years. Like sustainability, integration is an important part of service. In order to understand the needs of a community, the volunteer must become a part of that community. Integration includes speaking the local language, making friends at work and at home, and being familiar with the food, culture, customs, and issues of safety. Volunteers report difficulties with integration, especially within their first couple of months in their new communities. Melanie, in Madagascar, tells a sad but humorous tale of her community embracing her when she was least expecting it. She writes:

So one day I was eating a chocolate bar for lunch and crying, watching episodes of Grey's Anatomy on my dvd player and my director of the school walks in and

asks me what I am eating for lunch, I say chocolate [*sic*] he then insists on feeding me each meal there after, that was the first week...then on the third week I managed to invite myself to a few other families houses for lunch... one of which made me pizza and promised [*sic*] to make me mac and cheese this week, she is great. There is also another family, both these women speak good English and one even has a TV that gets English news...so now that I found these women I am good to go at the moment.²⁰²

Not all volunteers face such dramatic struggles with integration, and after several months in a community, volunteers begin to recognize how comfortable they feel in their new surroundings.

At some point on most blogs, the volunteer expresses excitement over the discovery that they feel a part of a community. Generally this happens when they have a visitor come or when a fellow volunteer shows up. A St. Lucia volunteer wrote, “I’m starting to feel more and more at home here in Soufriere. I have loved it here from the beginning, but I am starting to finally feel like I am ‘integrating’ as PC likes to put it. Walking through town Saturday night with Megan and our friend John was great because I ran into a ton of people that I know. Being able to walk from place to place and stop to chat with friends really makes me feel like I am making headway in getting to know the community.”²⁰³ And Shella made a similar comment, “Walking with strangers through my village is such an affirming experience, knowing all the names, inside jokes, and people treating me like their neighbor. Seeing it through the eyes of my guests was very renewing.”²⁰⁴ The experience of feeling comfortable in a new place takes time and effort. Those volunteers who push themselves to learn the language and the culture appear to be

more successful volunteers.

In some cases, volunteers live in larger cities and have “site mates.” Site mates are fellow Peace Corps volunteers living and working in the same community. They often times work at the same job, especially in areas with schools. Most volunteers see site mates as essential to their integration. Site mates generally have been living in a community for some time and can help the new volunteer to meet people and learn the language. Jeff and Jenny, a married couple, talk about having site mates and the impact of those people on their general well being. They said, “When we joined the Peace Corps we never thought we would be sharing this experience with other volunteers. We thought we would be stuck in the middle of nowhere, far far away from the closest white person. But, that is not where we ended up. . . at all! . . . but we’re happy about it! I love having sitemates.”²⁰⁵ Integration is often a long process; having fellow volunteers who are already integrated into the community can help speed up this process. Integration depends on the volunteer’s ability to adjust to a new culture and accept the culture as it is, without judgment. This proves both comical and difficult for volunteers.

Adjusting to a New Culture and Cultural Stereotypes

For volunteers, moving to a new country means learning to live within an unfamiliar cultural framework. During volunteer training, the Peace Corps emphasizes cultural exchange, cultural differences and similarities, and integration. In the case of one volunteer, the learning curve is steep and the differences are often difficult to overcome. Liz writes, “Living here is hard, and Dominicans do a lot of things that don’t make much sense a lot of the time, and sometimes the two worlds collide in a way that

makes it impossible to keep going.²⁰⁶ This particular volunteer was writing about fellow volunteers who had recently decided to leave their service. Liz explains this further in another post. She writes of her own challenges when dealing with the children of the Dominican Republic.

. . . my neighbor. He is staring over my shoulder watching me type this, and I find it kind of annoying. That is one thing that is still trying about this whole thing. The little kids just cant get enough of the Gringa. There is a little girl that comes into my house every day (Never asks to come in, by the way. Knocking hasnt reached this country yet. To be fair though, I think doors are a recent addition.) named Carina, and no matter whether I am washing my face, reading, napping, whatever, she just sits and watches me.²⁰⁷

American culture privileges privacy and personal space; whereas many other cultures have no concept of these words. Volunteers express frustration over their loss of privacy. This can manifest itself as a hard adjustment period. In some cases volunteers resort to cultural stereotypes in order to define their new experiences.

Stereotypes are rampant in these blogs. One volunteer attempted to explain this in her blog by saying that volunteers have a terrible tendency to believe that because they have had cultural sensitivity training and have lived in a place for a year or so, they are suddenly experts on their community and have the right to speak of the culture as if they are a part of it.²⁰⁸ Ryan Smith, a volunteer in Albania, writes, “but it is still nice to sit on the Adriatic and look across with yearning for Italy and the rest of civilization.”²⁰⁹ Albania, in this volunteer’s mind, is not a part of “civilized” society. Ryan fails to provide further insight into his statement. Whereas Shella begins to make a cultural

critique, tries to justify it, and then recognizes that she's gone too far. She writes, "The whole notion of romance is lost on a place where marriages are commonly arranged and people sometimes barely speak before their wedding. This is in no way a critical comment, since from what I can see families here in Blue Creek are happy and work well together. I better stop myself now before I dig myself into a hole of seeming cultural bias."²¹⁰ These cultural biases are common in volunteer accounts when they comment on their new and different experiences by pointing out the differences between their host culture and American culture.

When volunteers begin integrating into their community, they have to decide whether they will abide by local customs or maintain their own norms. Many volunteers, according to their blogs, make the decision to integrate fully into the local culture. In Muslim areas female volunteers try to maintain the practice of covering their hair, arms, and legs. One volunteer notes her attempts at cultural integration when she writes, "Shoulders and knees must be covered (more cultural than religious). My biggest challenge is riding my bike while wearing a skirt trying to keep it out of the chain AND keeping my knees covered."²¹¹ Adjusting to a new culture can present obstacles, but successful volunteers seem to be able to make decisions that help them integrate.

Ramadan, the Muslim period of fasting, presents volunteers with a decision, to eat or not to eat. Of the 75 blogs analyzed, about 15 were of volunteers from Muslim countries or Muslim villages. Each volunteer provides detailed accounts of Ramadan because it is a major cultural and religious practice in many parts of the world. According to their blogs, some volunteers fast while others simply try to limit what they eat. One volunteer claimed that she really did not want to fast, but since she ate with her

family who were fasting, she was expected to fast.²¹² And a volunteer from Jordan justified his decision to fast by writing, “During the month of Ramadan, when you fast, you experience first hand what those with little or no food or who are poor go through. It gives you time to reflect and give thanks for all you do have. do I HAVE to participate?? No. Many volunteers choose simply to refrain from eating in public. And if I didn't like the theology behind the practice, I probably wouldn't either . . . but since it seems important to me, I choose to.”²¹³ For this volunteer, the Islamic practice of fasting was appealing. For the volunteers who choose not to fast, the reasons are varied, but Gittle’s reasoning explains her decision. She writes, “I’m not fasting, mostly because I know I’d cheat and Allah would find out anyway. Lately I’ve been going without food due to illness, but I can’t give up water in this climate. I was given the job of taste-testing the food used to break fast because I’m the only one in the family allowed to eat before sundown. The other night my sister said, ‘Here, try this meat and tell me if it’s rotten.’ But I also get to taste the hibiscus juice and see if it needs more sugar added. So it averages out to be a pretty sweet job.”²¹⁴ It is apparent in their blogs that volunteers try to adjust to their cultural surroundings as best they can in an effort to integrate. Successful integration holds the key to a volunteer’s level of comfort and satisfaction with his or her experience.

New and Different Experiences

On the official web site, we find very few stories of “real” events and happenings from volunteer lives. In fact, it is often the case on the Peace Corps web site that the developing world is simply a peaceful place, frozen in time. Volunteers try to reconcile

this presumption by telling detailed stories of life abroad. Volunteers act as educators by sharing new experiences. A volunteer named Magda was asked to explain what she meant when she wrote about her “bucket baths.” She replied, “I bucket bathe. What does this consist of? Ok glad you asked? It means I fill up a bucket with water and if I am feeling special, I heat it on the stove and then wash myself and my hair. If you are thinking what you don’t have hot water- um no.”²¹⁵ Life without running water is common for many people, and Azerbaijan is no different, but the readers of Magda’s blog wanted to know more about the idea of bucket bathing. The volunteers have a tendency to translate these strange experiences into rugged lifestyles.

Aside from the bucket bathing and a few posts concerning living without electricity, most of the new experiences concern insects, animals, and strange food. Volunteer bloggers have a tendency to write about all of the scary things they encounter as a way to demonstrate how exotic their lives are. Katherine Buckel in Haiti writes, “I pulled the sheet up to my nose and layed I there for like an hour listening to them [mice] scurry around, knowing that my mosquito net wasn't tucked in very well but being too afraid to reach my arm out of the bed to do it. . . . finally i did yell at them to "go away" in kreole . . . i dont know if i consciously made that decision because they're haitian rats/mice, and i really wanted them to understand me, or if that's just what came out of my mouth.”²¹⁶

Volunteer blogs are filled with stories of close encounters with animals. It is clear that volunteers are often assigned to rural locations where animals are a large part of their daily lives. Volunteers tell stories of goats sitting next to them on busses, parrots sitting on their shoulders at the dinner table, and monkeys living on their roofs. These stories

further define the divide between the comforts of life in the average American home and life in the developing world. Anne posted the following story:

She also has a bunch of turkeys running around freely. It's a zoo. I didn't even think twice about it, though b/c this is a normal thing here.....not until the turkeys all lined up (4 of them) on the trail and wouldn't let me pass to get to the house. I thought it was kind of weird that they lined up like that and wouldn't budge, especially since the dogs usually get aggressive when visitors arrive not turkeys. So, i tried to step past the turkeys and they started fluffing up their feathers and making these low grumbling noises. . . . After I stepped past them they turned around and started following me with their feathers all huge. . . . the turkeys started to get pissed that i was continuing to trespass on to their territory, and one of them head butted me in the back of my calves. I screamed, mostly out of the shock of it and started running to find Maria behind the house. They all came chasing after me, head-butting me in the back of my legs. It totally freaked me out.²¹⁷

Anne's post is a "real life" story from her everyday life in El Salvador that provides the reader with a clear picture a story that seems stranger than fiction. These blog postings expose the reader to an entirely different culture.

Strange new foods are a common blog topic, as new cultures present volunteers with an array of new cuisine. Some of these experiences include eating turtle, monkey, goat, iguana, rats, and insects. These experiences again reinforce the excitement and exotic nature of other cultures. Exotic food rituals can throw the volunteer into shock, as was the case with Ryan who wrote, "The other day we had Mansaf for lunch. This is a

traditional Jordanian dish and is served for big events. So, the two goats that I thought were my counterparts pets (yeah wrong) were sacrificed. I asked if I wanted to watch and I politely declined. . . . the dish and, as an honor, the head of the goat is placed in the middle of the platter facing the sky, teeth, goatee, tongue and all!!!”²¹⁸ Ryan’s story reminds the reader of how far his life is from the typical American lifestyle.

In at least three of the blogs analyzed, volunteers wrote of issues concerning their vegetarianism. Developing countries often present limited food choices, and in the case of these particular blogs, the volunteers began eating meat after years of vegetarianism. This decision was made for various reasons, including limited food supply, customs or norms within a given community, or simply because the volunteer did not want to stand out. In a May 2007 blog, Jacqueline wrote about her decision to eat meat after years of vegetarianism; she stated, “First I started eating fish again because the Villa Montes area is very proud of its sabalo and surubi that comes from the Rio Pilcomayo that runs through town. Its one of the few places in this landlocked country where one can get fresh fish, so Ive had my fair share of delicious grilled fish and yuca.”²¹⁹ Jacqueline’s decision to eat meat, though it went against her vegetarianism, was a way to participate in an important aspect of her community.

Not only is the food interesting, the method for serving or eating food can often come as a shock to volunteers. In Bangladesh, utensils and toilet paper do not exist, so a volunteer wrote, “you do all of your eating with your hands...but one must be very careful...for you do all of your rump wiping with your left, so you eat with the right, but it is all good!!”²²⁰ Other than learning how to eat without utensils, volunteers report eating on the ground on banana leaves. This was reported on several different blogs, such as

Aaron's "Once everything is cooked, they put some banana leaves on the ground and pour the pot out on the leaves. Then you just take a stick as your utensil and go at it."²²¹

These stark differences from American culture are often exactly the things that volunteers expose guests to when they come for a visit.

Visitors and Vacations

An aspect of volunteer journals is hosting visitors. In nearly all of the 75 blogs analyzed, volunteers hosted at least one visitor during the time of their service. Generally these visitors were parents, boy/girlfriends, or close friends. These visits give the volunteers the opportunity to share their service with others, which is one of the organization's major goals. On the majority of these blogs, volunteers spend time convincing others to visit; they entice their readers with their stories of adventure and exotic lifestyles.

When visitors do come, the blog entries usually serve to reinforce just how "hard" or exotic the volunteer's life really is. Liz Cairns, writes of her parents' visit to the Dominican Republic, "'It's kind of like camping...'" That is what two of my most recent visitors have said about the way that I live. were champs during their whole Mom and Dad visit to El Yayal – my mom shelled beans, used the latrine, ate the soup, and didn't hear the mice at night! My dad ate everything that was given to him."²²² Volunteer amazement over the ways their parents are able to live their rugged lifestyles is common. A Haiti volunteer writes, "so my parents had a really good time in haiti, they stayed two nights in my site and didn't get sick or anything. i was so proud of them!"²²³ And a Kenyan volunteer, Libby, said of her father, "But, I was proud of my dad... he did

everything I did. He slept at a noisy hostel in Nairobi, rode in uncomfortable passenger vans all over Kenya, took bucket baths and even went to class to see me teach.”²²⁴ In these accounts, the volunteer emphasize their daily struggles, and view the visitor as doing strange and uncomfortable things.

Peace Corps volunteers are a well travelled group, both pre- and post- service. But during their service, they find ways to be quite mobile. As evidenced by the blog entries, volunteers travel throughout their country of service and into other countries regularly while in service. As with travel to the United States, volunteers seem to have financial resources outside of their meagre salary. Tales of parents meeting their volunteer children for luxurious European vacations and backpacking trips over many countries surface in these blogs. Volunteers seem to view their service as an opportunity not only to work but also to travel freely. The Peace Corps grants two vacation days per month of service and with volunteer work hours being less than full-time, they have the opportunity to travel. Lindsey left her volunteer life in Mali for a vacation, “I got back a few weeks ago from an absolutely wonderful cruise with my parents through the Mediterranean. It was so fabulous and exactly what I needed to re-energize myself to come back to Mali. I also spent a few days with my very good friend, James, in Barcelona- and that was just the icing on the already deliciously wonderful cake-of-a-vacation.”²²⁵ And Amber writes, “It was awesome to see ma, pa, and bwad, to see more of southern Africa, and to get a break from Peace Corps life. It was strange initially, to go from that life to a very nice vacation life”²²⁶ Post-vacation blogs generally include an appreciation for luxury and time away from volunteer life.

Peace Corps critique and commentary

Volunteers spend most of their time living and working in their communities; however, at times they have to interact with the administration. On the whole, volunteers seem happy and uninterested in what the administration do. However, at times, volunteers are critical. A Benin volunteer writes of his final interviews with the country director, “I told him I didn't think the Peace Corps administration was really interested in the work as much as the appearance of the work and he didn't take that too well. He said I was arrogant, and impolite. He said that it was I that brought any problems I'd had on myself and recommended I adjust my attitude.”²²⁷ And another volunteer serving in the Gambia writes, “my boss is on vacation again. I don't think it's quite fair that volunteers are yelled at if the administration feels they are making too many visits to Kombo, but they can take frequent vacations back to America. Ah well, such is life, and they aren't paid to live in a village, whereas I am. It would be helpful if they would at least tell us when they plan to leave the country.”²²⁸ Critiques of the administration tend to be minor, and volunteer blogs tend to focus on their own work, ignorant of government bureaucracy.

Readjustment and Reflections

When volunteers leave their service, they express difficulties being satisfied with their two year service. There is a sense of helplessness expressed. Volunteers often question the benefits of their service in a place with such extensive poverty and disease. Lindsey's experience has been complex, and she has struggled to reconcile her years as a volunteer. She writes:

Am I doing more harm than good? What did I spend two years doing? Is maybe convincing 1 or 2 women to go on birth control, and 1 or 2 women to begin sleeping under a mosquito net better than nothing? Well obviously, but it still seems ridiculously hard to quantify the work I have done here. Granted, quantity isn't as important as quality, as the old saying goes- but is that the case in the big, scary problem that is Africa? I don't really know- but I am far more depressed now than when I began this journal entry.²²⁹

And volunteers continuously try to encourage their readers to volunteer. They often call on readers to donate to a worthy cause, send supplies to their community, or simply ask them to volunteer at home. Anne notes "It is amazing to come back and witness how closed-minded some Americans can be ...some people are content just living in their own little comfortable, material worlds unaware of what is happening with the rest of humanity. . . . Every person who is able ought to do something, big or small (and sustainable,) to help those born into poverty or unjust societies."²³⁰ Volunteer blogs are fulfilling the Peace Corps' third goal.

The Third Goal

In Chapter Two, we saw how the Peace Corps used volunteer pictures and quotations for recruitment. In March 2007, the official Peace Corps web site began posting a series of five volunteer journals. These journals are written by Peace Corps volunteers from different regions around the world about their experiences. They submit these entries for the Peace Corps to publish on their web page. The organization has

mimicked the blogging phenomenon happening in the volunteer community for recruitment purposes. The volunteer entries on the official web site are quite different than the independent blogs found on the internet. They are consistent, however, with the official web site in every way, emphasizing the excitement and adventure of service rather than the “reality” of life abroad, which we find in the volunteer blogs.

Volunteer bloggers have contributed a wealth of information for travelers and people curious about foreign lands. Blogs allow readers to enter the mind of the volunteer and add an alternate to the official web site. These blogs are a powerful medium for the dissemination of information, and the Peace Corps knows it. In 2007, the Peace Corps volunteers were told they would need to add a disclaimer to their blogs that made clear the information found on the blogs was in no way the stance of the organization or the United States government. This is a clear indication the organization recognizes the power of these volunteer accounts.

According to the third goal, the role of the volunteer is to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. Blogs have changed the dissemination of PCV experiences and information. Blogs are the most direct line of communication between the volunteer and Americans, providing insight into the life of the volunteer. This analysis reveals volunteers who are passionate about their service. They want to communicate the challenges they face in their daily lives as volunteers. And they are clear about how rewarding their experiences are.

The three Peace Corps goals have guided the organization since 1961. Today, the organization is contemplating the introduction of a fourth goal. This fourth goal emphasizes a global alliance for peace and peace-keeping practices. Blogs have

advanced the third goal and have the potential to help advance the fourth goal. The future of the Peace Corps is unclear. Chapter Five will look at the direction of the organization.

Chapter 5

Looking Forward: Peace Corps' Future

“For the Peace Corps family, September 11th underlined more than anything else the vital importance to our security and well-being of America’s positive engagement with the rest of the world. No aspect of America’s engagement with the world over more than 40 years has been more positive and effective than the Peace Corps.”

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The Peace Corps’ three basic goals, as mentioned previously are: (1) to help the people of interested countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained workers (2) to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served, and (3) to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

The goals have served as a guide for the volunteers working and living in foreign communities. These goals have a special place in the hearts of volunteers because, as they state, volunteers have a heavy responsibility. During Peace Corps training these three goals are reinforced and discussed repeatedly. The first goal is meant to emphasize that it is other countries who request Peace Corps presence. These countries request the help of trained volunteers for specific jobs designed by the country independently of the Peace Corps. The second goal asks volunteers to be ambassadors of American goodwill. Finally, the third goal is met when volunteers share their experiences with others.

After September 11th, Sargent Shriver, the Peace Corps’ first director, suggested the addition of a new goal. In a speech at Yale University, Shriver introduced his idea for a fourth goal, by saying:

let me give you the sense of it: to bind all human beings together in a common cause to assure peace and survival for all. . . . Let us unleash the power of young people in all nations to see the world for what it is now, and then go out to change it for the better. Let's join in common cause with all countries to eradicate poverty and militarism. Let's create a new Peace Corps we can believe in, led by exceptional people, not afraid to tackle difficult assignments, unswerving in their dedication to living and working alongside citizens of other nations who want to create a safe and stable world. . . . To America's young people, who listen with despair to the nightly drum beat of bad news, I'm saying: Peace is the Answer. Help us transform a new Peace Corps into a living embodiment of YOUR ideals, your sincere connection with people whose differences matter far less to you than your kinship with them.²³²

Following Shriver's address, Congressman Sam Farr, a returned Peace Corps volunteer, proposed a fourth goal that reads, "To help promote global acceptance of the principles of international peace and non-violent coexistence among peoples of diverse cultures and systems of government."²³³ The purpose of this goal is to counter a perception that the United States is seeking to expand its dominant position in the world at the expense of other countries. The proposed fourth goal was hotly debated by the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) community. RPCVs posted support and critique of the proposal on the official RPCV web site, www.peacecorpsonline.org. After some discussion, the proposal was dropped in favor of strengthening the second Peace Corps goal by emphasizing the importance of developing relationships abroad.

The proposed fourth goal, inspired by September 11th, was the start of a conversation about U.S. perception abroad. The Peace Corps, the RPCV community, and the Bush administration recognized the importance of international relationships. The Peace Corps has provided a positive image of Americans to other nations.

The September 11th Effect

Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, the Peace Corps was in a prime position to respond to the national call to service posed by President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union Address. Bush used the terrorist attacks of September 11th to harness the momentum of a nation recovering from the tragedy. In his address he said, “None of us would ever wish the evil that was done on September the 11th. Yet after America was attacked, it was as if our entire country looked into a mirror and saw our better selves.

We were reminded that we are citizens, with obligations to each other, to our country, and to history. . . . We have glimpsed [*sic*] what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self.”²³⁴ Bush recognizes the importance of service, and he goes on in his address to talk about the Peace Corps and its role in building relationships abroad. In his address he called for “Every American to commit at least two years -- 4,000 hours over the rest of your lifetime -- to the service of your neighbors and your nation. . . . we will renew the promise of the Peace Corps, double its volunteers over the next five years.”²³⁵ The Peace Corps was given new life. Bush’s call to service meant that the organization saw a boost in public awareness and volunteer applications.

Not only did Bush's address draw attention to the Peace Corps, it also established the Freedom Corps, an umbrella agency that combined the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps.

Freedom Corps

In the post September 11th moment, a terrorized public could be easily convinced that foreign and domestic service is the way to make America secure again. Bush proposed the Freedom Corps program in his 2002 State of the Union address as a way to harness Americans' patriotism and a renewed spirit of service after the Sept. 11 attacks. Bush states that, "[t]o sustain and extend the best that has emerged in America, I invite you to join the new USA Freedom Corps. The Freedom Corps will focus on three areas of need: responding in case of crisis at home; rebuilding our communities; and extending American compassion throughout the world."²³⁶ The Freedom Corps was modeled after President Kennedy's Peace Corps and President Clinton's AmeriCorps, and the Citizen Corps.²³⁷ The Peace Corps was promised more funding and a goal of 14,000 volunteers was set. The Bush administration organized all of these preexisting organizations under the Freedom Corps, had a website developed, and then left the website and the motivation of Americans to grow. In 2003, Congress approved only \$25 million of the requested \$200 million to begin the "Citizen Corps" program, and failed to grant the one billion requested for the Freedom Corps' support of Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps.

Amitai Etzioni,²³⁸ in an editorial published just before the 2003 State of the Union address, wrote, "I hope President Bush, in Tuesday's State of the Union address,

doesn't repeat his call on Americans to volunteer to help their country. The last thing we need is another moving, compelling call to do good – with so little follow through that it does a disservice to the whole cause of volunteerism”²³⁹ Etizioni's comments on the 2002 national call to service critique a government unwilling actually to support major ideas forwarded in national addresses. The nation was vulnerable after September 11th and was waiting to be given something to do to make America better or safer. Etizioni argues that the problem does not lie in a lack of funding; rather the problem lies in combining the Citizen Corps with the other already existent programs. The Citizen Corps was designed to respond to terrorism and is the only part of the Freedom Corps that is directed by the Department of Homeland Security. By grouping all organizations together, the administration combined the new program with programs that have nothing to do with national security. Etizioni argues, “Recruitment of volunteers, then, becomes a blanket approach as if – in the anticipation of new terrorist attacks – it makes no difference if you're asked to serve as a teacher's aide or a firefighter, patrol a classroom or patrol the town's water resources.”²⁴⁰ This is precisely the approach that ultimately harms independent organizations such as the Peace Corps. By placing three different organizations under one umbrella, each organization's distinct mission suffers from lack of visibility and independence from the other organizations. Enveloping the Peace Corps under the Freedom Corps contributed to the proposal of the National Call to Service Act of 2003.

The Independent status of the Peace Corps

The Freedom Corps was designed to promote voluntarism and increase Peace Corps numbers, but it also exposed the organization to legislation that was harmful. Since its inception nearly 45 years ago, the Peace Corps has fiercely protected its independence as a government agency. This independent status keeps the Peace Corps at arm's length from U.S. short-term foreign policy and national security objectives. This independence is generally thought to be one of the major reasons that the Peace Corps has been as successful as it has been, and it is widely acknowledged as one of the most trusted U.S. organizations overseas.²⁴¹ Presidents over the last 45 years have usually protected that status by continuing to re-sign The Peace Corps Act. And this independent status has had much to do with the organization's ability to survive for so many years.

Though the Peace Corps is a governmentally-funded organization and has a director appointed by the President of the U.S., it has managed to remain free of partisan politics and many governmental mandates. Mark Gearan, former volunteer and director of the organization during the Clinton administration, says "The idea behind the Peace Corps . . . was a simple one: Americans – serving as representatives of the American people."²⁴² This relationship is meant to keep volunteers safe and separate from government decision making and reporting back to the government on issues concerning foreign policy. Gaddi Vasquez, director from 2000-2005, reminded Congress in a 2002 address, "One of the major strengths of the Peace Corps Act is that it is a broad authorization, which has over the years, given ample opportunity for the agency to maintain its independence and its effectiveness This broad authority has enabled the Peace Corps to launch such successful initiatives."²⁴³ This independent status allows

for better working relationships between the organization, the host country, and the volunteer.

In 2001, Senators John McCain and Evan Bayh proposed the National Call to Service act (NCS). This act would require all American citizens between the ages of 18 and 26 to act in volunteer or military service for two years.²⁴⁴ By 2002, after the establishment of the Freedom Corps, the NCS was revised and included as a part of the National Defense Authorization Act. The NCS no longer included a mandate for volunteer or military service; rather it stated that a person may enlist in the military, serve for 15 months, followed by another 24 months in the military reserves, and for the remaining 24 months, may continue to serve in the reserves or active service or may opt to serve in the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps.²⁴⁵ The National Defense Authorization Act was ratified by Congress which meant that by 2007, military enlistees would be eligible for admission into the Peace Corps.

The Peace Corps and the military, while both serving the national interest, do so in fundamentally different ways. The Peace Corps is an independent sector of the American government, an identity on which the Peace Corps prides itself. This strong emphasis on independence was completely ignored through the National Call to Service act.

Not only is independence critical to the organization's mission, service as a volunteer has never been an exemption from military service. In 1961, when the Peace Corps was enacted by law, it was explicitly not an exemption from military service. President Kennedy made it clear that volunteers were not exempt from the draft even upon return from volunteer service. This very important part of the original Peace Corps

Act is a confirmation that Peace Corps service and military service are different in nature. This legal distinction did more than simply keep service from being a way to evade the draft; it also served as a way to distinguish it from military service. The two are necessarily different in nature, and service for one does not and should not replace or compensate for service in another. The National Call to Service Act compromised this distinction. As stated in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*, “[i]n order to maintain an apolitical posture so that it can achieve its mission, the Peace Corps prohibits Volunteers from becoming involved in political affairs of the host country.”²⁴⁶ Volunteers cannot be involved in relationship with military or government enforcement agents. This relationship could also compromise the safety of current volunteers, which is a grave concern in many nations.

NCS and the Military

By 2005, recruitment numbers in all branches of the military had hit an all time low. Today, the military requires an eight year commitment from enlistees. As a result, inspiring people to enlist has become increasingly more difficult. Spokespeople for the Army projected that 2006 would be the most difficult recruitment year despite the high bonuses and incentives being offered to those who enlist. Merely 10% of the 80,000 needed troops volunteered for duty in 2006. In fact, Damien Cave of the *New York Times* reported that the top Army recruiter said it would be “perhaps the toughest year for recruiting since the all-volunteer force began in 1973.”²⁴⁷ In 1973, at the end of the Vietnam War, the all-volunteer Army was created, and its numbers following an unpopular war match the military numbers of 2006.

In an effort to increase post September 11th recruitment, the Army announced a new military program on May 12, 2005. Between May 13 and May 16, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, and *The Chicago Sun-Times* ran brief articles about a U.S. Army program offering only 15 months of active duty service. In May 2005, the military began recruitment using the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps to entice people. The military touted the “shortest tours ever.”²⁴⁸ Under the new provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act, active military service of only two years is required. The rhetorical maneuvering used by the military to focus on shortened service tours responded to dwindling recruitment.

Recruiters have been accused of unethical recruitment tactics and ordered to take ethics training courses. This severe recruitment problem comes on the heels of an all time high commitment to service following September 11th when the country was brimming with military volunteers. Since 2003 and the war in Iraq, recruitment for military service has reached rock bottom. Major General Michael Rochelle said a variety of factors dissuade recruits, “. . . from the war in Iraq, to an improving economy, to family members and friends of applicants, who . . . often dissuade them from joining.”²⁴⁹ The U.S. military used the NCS clause to attract young people to service, including Peace Corps service, which is viewed as “easy” in comparison to military service.

In 2005 the U.S. Army began using the NCS act to attract new recruits. Until this point in time, the Peace Corps had no idea that the National Defense Authorization act of 2002 included legislation allowing those serving in the military an option to volunteer. The Act was passed without consulting the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps organizations, so

when the law was used for recruitment, the administration, including the director were asked to make statements in defense of this act. The Bush appointed Peace Corps director admitted his ignorance and quickly responded in defense of the bill. The Peace Corps Returned Volunteer (RPCV) community responded to the issue with full opposition, attacking the bill and the organization for allowing such a bill to go unnoticed. Because they were not asked to endorse this initiative, nor were they consulted on this idea, it was seen as an underhanded way to boost military recruitment with no apparent benefit to the Peace Corps.

Perceptions Matter

The post-September 11th push to encourage national and international service opportunities sprung out of a need to secure a positive image of Americans abroad. An emphasis was placed on the second goal, as a way to minimize the opportunity for terrorist attacks. Volunteers have long battled stereotypes and negative perceptions of Americans. Their work, according to its second goal, is to promote understanding of Americans on the part of host country nationals. For volunteers, gaining trust is a part of daily life. If the people of a host country do not trust the volunteers, development work cannot take place. The organization was founded on the ideal that volunteers were “serving as representatives of the American people, not the United States government.”²⁵⁰ When volunteers enter a country, they are viewed as volunteers, not extensions of the American government. Mark Gearan, former Director stated:

The Peace Corps conducts programs only in places where it is invited. Peace Corps volunteers are neither federal employees nor official representatives of the

United States government. They receive a modest living allowance, not a salary, and have no diplomatic privileges or immunities. They live in homes with host-country families, and they are protected, not by security forces, but by the concern of neighbors and colleagues in the communities in which they live and work. By law, they are required to become proficient in the local language and to conduct themselves in a manner that respects the local culture.²⁵¹

On March 1, 2007, Senator Christopher Dodd, an RPCV, introduced the Peace Corps Volunteer Empowerment Act. This act was written expressly by Senator Dodd because, as he said, “Bad policy choices and neglected opportunities have tarnished our nation’s reputation and weakened our alliances at a moment in history when both are critical to promoting and protecting our national interests and security.”²⁵² The Empowerment Act, more specifically, would provide funding for volunteers in service to educate host country nationals about American culture, as well as funding for RPCVs to give presentations on life abroad. The Act, in an effort to revamp some of the current organizational policies, called for volunteers to be included in both the review of senior staff members and training design and volunteer placement. And, a major part of the proposal would change a current policy, allowing volunteers in service to publish articles without the approval of their country director, granting volunteers greater freedom of speech. The Volunteer Empowerment Act, according to Senator Dodd, will allow volunteers to accomplish the three important goals.

The Empowerment Act was also designed to promote the safety and security of volunteers in service. Safety is a major issue for volunteers. Recent events demonstrate that Americans are not always welcomed into other nations. In August 2005, university

students in Bangladesh welcomed 60 new volunteers to their country by protesting their presence and chanting “down with imperialism”²⁵³ Perceptions of American government and American people can change very quickly in foreign nations. Since 2005, the Peace Corps has suspended programs and removed volunteers from nine countries. For varying reasons volunteers are pulled out of countries, but many times it is because of safety and security issues. The Peace Corps administration as well as the Bush Administration recognize the need for Americans to be welcomed abroad. And in 2005, after a strong campaign by the returned volunteer community, on the eve of its becoming law, the NCS Act of 2003 was altered to exclude the Peace Corps as an option for fulfilling military service.

New Directions

Peace Corps’ future includes a movement to strengthen U.S. relationships abroad by using volunteers as representatives of a peaceful America. The removal of the Peace Corps from the NCS and the recent Volunteer Empowerment Act are two examples of a serious commitment to this goal. To further emphasize the peaceful face of Americans, President Bush called on the Peace Corps to expand their service to Muslim nations. Bush told a North Carolina audience the day after his 2002 State of the Union Speech, “I believe that one thing we must do is to expand the Peace Corps, revitalize the mission, encourage the Peace Corps to go into the Islamic world to spread the message of economic development and really share the compassion of a great nation, and that is America.”²⁵⁴ Most presidents since John F. Kennedy have known what Bush knows; the Peace Corps is an opportunity to maintain foreign relationships and project a positive

American image to international governments. By 2006, the Peace Corps touted its service in Muslim countries. Ron Tschetter, during his confirmation hearings as Peace Corps director stated, “Over 20 percent of all Volunteers are working in predominantly Muslim countries. I believe that building understanding with the Islamic world at this time is critically important, and the Peace Corps has the special opportunity to share knowledge about Americans with the Muslim world through the personal friendships of Volunteers with their host country families, counterparts and acquaintances.”²⁵⁵ The future of the Peace Corps is headed toward foreign diplomacy by forging relationships that will encourage the safety of Americans.

The Crisis Corps is another direction the Peace Corps is headed today. The Crisis Corps, as mentioned in Chapter One, was established in 1996, allowing Returned Peace Corps Volunteer community to respond when tragedy strikes. The Crisis Corps volunteers work on short-term projects, utilizing the skills they learned as Peace Corps volunteers. For the first time since 1961, a Peace Corps project asked volunteers to work domestically in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As part of FEMA's efforts, 132 volunteers were deployed to the Gulf Coast region.²⁵⁶ The Peace Corps is encouraging the RPCV community to get involved in the Crisis Corps as well as asking them to continue to educate people about the Peace Corps and what volunteers do in other countries. The hope is that as RPCVs talk about the organization, more volunteers will join. Volunteers and former volunteers help to remind the American public that the Peace Corps still exists.

In 2004, the Peace Corps took another new direction; they sent volunteers to Mexico for the first time. Mexico resisted government efforts to send in volunteers

because “a lot of Mexican people were suspicious that they would get into other areas, like politics, that they didn’t want them getting into. They were suspicious that there was a hidden agenda.”²⁵⁷ The organization sent 13 highly skilled volunteers into Mexico to work in specialized fields like chemical and environmental engineering. The relationship with Mexico presents an opportunity for the Peace Corps to develop programs that utilize specific volunteer skills. This decision is likely to expand recruitment and make for better matches between applicants and their assignments. Since its inception, the administration has largely focused its recruitment on liberal arts majors, but the Mexico post is a sign of a shifting focus.

Recruitment efforts, as noted in Chapter Two, have concentrated on general recruitment rhetoric. Even the targeted recruitment rhetoric directed at the elderly, non-college graduates, and people of color fails to recruit for specified job skills. The Mexico volunteers may be an indication of changing times. If the Peace Corps makes a decision to focus upon recruiting doctors, nurses, engineers, and agriculture experts, they will change the face of the organization. The Brookings Institute’s Policy Brief on the Peace Corps notes, “Virtually all developing countries have established education systems that produce well-prepared university graduates. All have sent students to the United States and elsewhere who have met the high standards of professional schools and have successfully competed in the global marketplace.”²⁵⁸ Today more than ever, they need to send experts into service.

The recruitment strategies used in the 21st century appeal to volunteers interested in a break from the grind of daily life. As revealed in Chapter Two, the PSAs and web site attract volunteers who are seeking adventure and rarely focus on service and helping

others. In Chapter Three, the Peace Corps photographs ask the viewer to imagine the developing world as exotic, rugged, and frozen in time. The photographs idealize the “other” reinforcing the intrigue of life abroad.

In Chapter Four, the analysis shifted from the Peace Corps to its volunteers, highlighting their experience, emphasizing the ways in which volunteers see themselves as productive, active, members of their communities. Volunteers document, in their blogs, a compassion for their work, while at the same time note they are often underutilized, bored, and begging for work. Volunteers also recognize the value of their own integration and adjustment into their communities, while at the same time they are conscientious about their contributions and sustainability of their projects. Volunteers have a tendency to frame their experiences as strange or exotic, much like the organization does, but this seems to be done to show how challenging volunteer service is, rather than to show how exotic the “other” is.

One result of the volunteer recruitment strategy is volunteers who either have no specific skills or volunteers with skills who are not using those skill sets. In order to increase volunteer numbers, a continuously cited goal, the organization must redefine service. Service must be professionalized and focused. This could make volunteer service more appealing to skilled professionals.

Bush’s goal of doubling the volunteer numbers by 2010 is not a feasible goal, at this point. The organization can continue recruiting generalist volunteers by concentrating its efforts on adventure and the personal benefits of service, or they can focus on effort such as the Volunteer Empowerment Act to reinvigorate the organization, giving life to the organization and power to the volunteer. Empowering volunteers by

placing them in well-suited jobs and giving them a part in the decision-making process will encourage expansion driven from the bottom up rather than the top-down. Involving volunteers and returned volunteers will protect the organization from harmful changes in the organizations policies. With the help of volunteers, the Peace Corps will continue to grow and expand, fulfilling the needs of host countries, for at least another 45 years.

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Kenyan refugee camps. Their traditional hijab outfits are not conducive to the volleyball games played in the camps because they are bulky and cover the entire body. Nike has created a new hijab for volleyball that is both respectful to the culture and allows the women more movement. This article reflects on the changing roles of women in African cultures and the desire to maintain traditional dress, which directly combines the Western and non-Western ideals of sport and tradition.

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