



Civic Education Through National Service: Lessons from American History

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fostering an ethic of active citizenship is typically a key goal for national service. However, national service advocates often assume that national service will act as civic education, paying insufficient attention to what this means and how different policy designs further or undermine different conceptions or aspects of citizenship.

This paper explores the relationship between national service and civic education through a study of the Civilian Conservation Corps and VISTA, to see what lessons we might learn and apply to the nation's current program, AmeriCorps. Given that citizenship has multiple, contested meanings, I look at this from five perspectives – constitutional citizenship; critical citizenship; citizenship as patriotism; as service; and as work. While this list is neither exhaustive nor the perspectives mutually exclusive, they suggest different goals for the national service civic education agenda.

Certainly, in attempting to draw lessons from programs that operated decades ago, one must take care. The CCC and VISTA were created under unique circumstances, for particular purposes, and at fundamentally different times than at present. Nonetheless, it is possible to learn from past experience. Therefore, I will suggest three lessons that our earlier programs can offer to current policymakers.

- ≡ **Lesson One: Make Civic Education an Explicit Priority.** The fact that the CCC made inculcating citizenship an explicit, high priority clearly differentiated it from VISTA. In both programs participants performed significant national service, but the attention paid to enrollees' civic development in the CCC made it a more effective instrument of civic education. AmeriCorps has done well on this score.
- ≡ **Lesson Two: Integrate the Language of Citizenship into Existing Program Elements.** One of the keys to the success of the CCC as civic education was its ability to harness seemingly unrelated policies and program elements to its civic mission, as well as to use civic language in connection with these elements. Words matter.
- ≡ **Lesson Three: Incorporate Specific Program Elements to Support the Civic Mission – Carefully.** If words matter to civic education, so do actions, and there are actions that policymakers can take to strengthen programs' civic impact. But they also must take care that their choices don't backfire, civically or politically. Any effort to improve national service as an instrument of civic education has to, at the very least, not jeopardize the civic education it currently accomplishes, by making the program's survival and growth less likely.

When President Bush proposed expanding America's national service programs in the months following September 11th, 2001 he reinforced his earlier call for Americans to be "responsible citizens, building communities of service and a nation of character" (2001: 3). Fostering an ethic of active citizenship is typically a key goal for national service, particularly given the current widespread concern over the state of civic engagement in the U.S. However, national service advocates often assume that national service will act as civic education, paying insufficient attention to what this means and how different policy designs further or undermine different conceptions or aspects of citizenship.

This paper explores the relationship between national service and civic education through a study of two civilian national service programs – the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) (1933-42) and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) (1965-93, when it was incorporated into AmeriCorps), to see what lessons we might learn and apply to the nation's current program, AmeriCorps (1993-present). Specifically, I explore how the two early programs understood their civic mission, particularly with respect to their participants, and how successful they were seen to be at fulfilling it. Both programs engaged participants in meaningful national service work and influenced their understandings of citizenship, their civic dispositions, and their civic skills and knowledge. However, the CCC more effectively acted as an instrument of civic education because it made participants' civic development an explicit priority and integrated civic language and principles into multiple aspects of the program's design.

In some instances, both programs had explicit education components, but in all cases they had (to borrow a phrase from sociologists of education) a "hidden" curriculum of civic consequence. The programs' policy design – their stated purposes, organizational structures, service work, training and education, requirements and benefits – communicated lessons to participants and the larger public about the meaning of citizenship and the relationship between citizens, government, and the nation. To understand how

and to what extent the CCC and VISTA contributed to effective, responsible citizenship we must uncover and evaluate both their explicit and implicit civic lessons.

However, in doing this we must recognize that citizenship has multiple, contested meanings, and that different policy designs strengthen or weaken different aspects or understandings of citizenship. So I first discuss five perspectives on citizenship – constitutional citizenship; critical citizenship; citizenship as patriotism; as service; and as work. While this list is neither exhaustive nor the perspectives mutually exclusive, they are in some tension and frequently spark ideological debate. They also suggest different goals for the national service civic education agenda.

CONCEPTUALIZING CITIZENSHIP

One of the principal rationales for national service is that it is thought to promote qualities of citizenship that support and transcend the necessary limitations of America's constitutional democracy. What these qualities are and how they are justified, however, is open to debate. In fact, there is nothing inherently democratic about national service or the lessons it instills: Totalitarian governments can and have supported national service. But whether national service can support democracy and how are critical questions. The answers vary depending on the perspective one takes on citizenship – both what it means and how it is fostered.

CONSTITUTIONAL CITIZENSHIP

For a number of reasons, being a citizen is not an identity that people strongly claim in their everyday lives. "Citizen" is usually – and both importantly and problematically – reserved to describe a constitutional legal status: people born or naturalized in the United States are American citizens. Citizenship from this first perspective is located in the state and encompasses a set of legal rights – the right to vote, freedom of speech, qualification for certain benefits, and so on – and obligations – to follow the law, pay taxes, serve on juries, and the like – that undergird constitutional democracy. So central are some of these rights

and duties of “citizenship” that they are not always limited to legal citizens. Even from a constitutional perspective, and even more so from other perspectives, the definition of citizenship is not clear-cut.

Further, it is clear that not all citizens are created equal: young adults, for one, whether legal citizens or not, are at a disadvantage in terms of important civic resources such as time, money, opportunity, and experience (Schlozman et. al., 1999). As reflected in survey and other data on youth civic and political interest, knowledge, and activity (Sax and Astin, et al., 1997 and 2000; National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999; Harwood Group, 1993; Youth Vote, 2001; Center for Voting and Democracy, 2002), these disadvantages affect young adults’ ability both to understand their rights and to meet their obligations. In addition to rights and obligations, continuing opportunities are needed, of which national service might be one.

National service programs can support constitutional citizenship in a variety of ways. If required, national service could teach about the obligations of citizenship by being an obligation. Even if not required, programs could underscore the importance of reciprocity – the idea that citizens should both contribute to and benefit from the commonwealth – by tying educational or other benefits to service. Voluntary as well as mandatory programs can encourage participants to vote, provide high school completion and college-prep classes (which increase the likelihood of participants’ future civic and political participation by raising their education level [Jennings and Niemi, 1981: 230; Verba et. al., 1995: 305]), encourage discussion of current events and public issues, and train participants in civic and political skills. While schools and other programs can do these things as well, as a federally supported program, participants could learn about the structure and function of government through their participation in it – using the program itself as a “text.” In these ways and others, national service programs could increase participants’ knowledge about, interest in, and commitment to the American political system. And given the

overlapping nature of these perspectives, they may also support, or undermine, citizenship from other perspectives.

CRITICAL CITIZENSHIP: ADVOCACY AND RESISTANCE

Survey data notwithstanding, youth are clearly not uniformly politically uninvolved. Both historically and in recent times young people have engaged in often contentious political activity, fulfilling our nation’s need for critical as well as compliant citizens. In essence, young activists use their rights – free speech, assembly, and petitioning rights – to protect and fight for rights, both checking and directing the use of state power through public protest and grassroots lobbying. While most commonly associated with the political left, the libertarian aspects of this perspective are also shared by many of those on the right.

National service might support critical citizenship from either ideological pole, and indeed from a critical centrist position as well. In most cases, national service would give participants an in-depth, close-up experience with government, through the program itself and through the contact participants would have with state and local social service agencies, schools, law enforcement, and the like, in the course of their service. Depending on how it is structured and processed, this experience could prompt participants to see shortcomings in or limitations to government action upon which they might then act. It might sensitize them to the presence of social injustice or demonstrate that social problems are rooted in individual actions. National service might also directly support advocacy, allowing or encouraging participants to press for new government policies and challenge existing policies as part of their service. But whether national service should do this is controversial. Is it simply an example of a democratic government using its resources to increase democratic participation? Or is it a case of a government program advocating ideologically-based criticism of government policy and of government itself? This debate raises important questions about the meaning and purpose of national service and of citizenship.

CITIZENSHIP AS PATRIOTISM

A third common way of understanding citizenship is in terms of patriotism, as a deep commitment to one's country and fellow citizens. As described by Stephen Nathanson, patriotism means having a special affection for one's country, a personal identification with it, a special concern for its well-being, and a willingness to make sacrifices to promote its good (1993: 38). National service, particularly military service, is often framed as a sacrifice citizens should be willing to make in order to protect, defend, or strengthen their nation. However, by bringing citizens together to accomplish these ends, national service can go further and reflect and instill identification, affection, and concern. To the degree that national service brings together people from different classes, races, regions and so forth, it may help to create a sense of shared national identity. To the extent that national service exposes participants to national needs, provides them with an opportunity to help address them, and supports them in their endeavor, it may help increase participants' concern and commitment to the country. Put another way, patriotism can be understood as loyalty – in Bill Galston's words "the developed capacity to understand, to accept, and to act on the core principles of one's society" (1991: 221) – which national service may be able to foster and reinforce in tangible ways.

While not as contested as government-sponsored political activism, whether national service should do this – whether patriotism is a good thing – is open to debate (Nathanson, 1993; Cohen, 1996). In Nathanson's framing, patriotism can be expressed in varying degrees, ranging from "moderate" to "extreme," from a proper regard for one's own homeland to a malevolent disregard for others', from a commitment to helping one's country live up to its ideals to a rationale for excusing its worst failings (also see Hilary Putnam, 1996). Even in a moderate form Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne express concern that "a focus on loyalty . . . work[s] against the kind of critical reflection and action many assume are essential to a democratic society" (2002: 12). Further, given the global, interdependent nature of the economy,

the environment, and human rights, some argue that stressing national citizenship and patriotism is counter-productive and so advocate framing citizenship in global terms (Nussbaum 1996). However, there is much less of a consensus on the meaning or appropriateness of global citizenship than on citizenship in general (Cohen 1996). These are further reasons why the idea of citizenship, and national service for citizenship, is contested.

CITIZENSHIP AS SERVICE

Fourth, citizenship can be understood in terms of service. This perspective draws upon elements of both the legal obligation and patriotic views of citizenship, and encompasses both military and civilian service. In Charles Moskos's view, "There is no more basic form of national service than military service" (1988: 14). However, with the end of the draft, very few young Americans experience service in the military: today only 6 percent of Americans under age 65 have served (Gitell 2001).

On the other hand, a growing number of young people are engaging in community service. A 2001 survey shows over 82 percent of incoming college freshmen report doing occasional or frequent community service work (Higher Education Research Institute 2001). Community service includes a range of activities, from volunteering in hospitals and homeless shelters to cleaning up riverbeds to tutoring younger children, to name just a few. Young people are serving through their schools, churches, youth clubs, and groups specifically founded to engage youth in service. This work is further supported by national organizations like the Points of Light Foundation, America's Promise, and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). To a large extent, national service in the United States has come to mean community service, although importantly, national service has the potential to connect otherwise local, disparate service efforts into shared, national work, potentially giving participants a sense that they are contributing to the nation as a whole.

From the service perspective, the responsibilities of citizenship are fulfilled through acts of care and concern for those community

members most in need and for the community as a whole (Bellah et. al. 1986). It is citizenship located principally in civil society, not in the state, and emphasizes the creation and strengthening of community. Advocates of this understanding of citizenship argue that state- and government-centered (or constitutional) citizenship leaves citizens with little fulfilling role to play (Barber 1984). Others argue that Americans are learning this lesson too well, disavowing collective political action as a necessary part of citizenship in favor of individual acts of charity (Boyte 1991; Westheimer and Kahne, 2002: 13). However, Paul Rogat Loeb finds that community service can be a “way in” to politics and other forms of civic engagement:

[Students] want to help. They don't want to deal with complicated issues and factions, or the messy contention of politics. Instead, they've revived approaches to involvement that focus on individual service, and organized volunteering in local communities. Yet these same approaches often then lead them back toward larger social change (1994: 231).

Whether service is defined as citizenship in its own terms or whether it is supposed to lead to other forms of engagement is a contested and complex issue. The extent to which national service can strengthen the civic aspects of community service, as well as make it more likely that community service will contribute to citizenship from other perspectives is an open and important question.

CITIZENSHIP AS WORK

Finally, there is the work approach to citizenship, which encompasses both individual job-holding and collective public work. Judith Shklar best explains the job-holding- or earning-citizenship connection, making the case that “to be a recognized and active citizen” a person must “be independent, which has all along meant that he must be an ‘earner,’” (1991: 64). This is citizenship grounded

principally in the market, and while it has been largely accepted throughout American history it has also been rightly contested, since millions of Americans – slaves, women, immigrants and others – have been systematically denied the opportunity to become self-supporting or had their uncompensated labor devalued. While there has been some effort to sever the connection between citizenship and earning for these (and other) reasons, most have sought to open avenues to work, and therefore to full citizenship, to those who have been excluded. By providing participants with a work experience, national service can teach specific job skills and instill general work habits. However, whether national service should perform these roles and how well it is able to has made the connection controversial, especially for those who define citizenship in contrast to work, rather than a condition or part of it.

National service can also play a role in supporting a public work understanding of citizenship, which addresses some of the concerns raised by a job-holding understanding of citizenship. The definition of public work, as offered by Harry Boyte, public work's principal theorist, and James Farr, is worth quoting at length. Public work is

the expenditure of visible efforts by ordinary citizens whose collective labors produces things or creates processes of lasting civic value . . . It solves common problems and creates common things. It may be paid or voluntary, done in communities, or as part of one's regular job. Public work takes place with an eye to general, other-regarding consequences. It is also work done ‘in’ public – places that are visible and open to inspection. And it is cooperative work of ‘a’ public: a mix of people whose interests, backgrounds, and resources may be quite different (1997: 42-43).

From the public work perspective, citizens are understood as “co-creators of the public world”

(Boyte, 2000: 65). As such, public work locates citizenship in all three sectors: the state, the market, and civil society. What matters isn't where the work is done, but what work is done, how, and with what consequence, in terms of individual and collective civic skill development and the creation of public goods. Further, through public work citizens can gain a particular sense of patriotism – a sense of being part of, as opposed to outside of, politics and public life that engenders a commitment and attachment to the nation. This is bolstered by public work's attention to diversity, bringing together people of varying backgrounds and beliefs in shared work that can help create a common civic identity. To the extent that national service does this, that it engages a mix of people in public problem-solving and "co-creation," it can strengthen citizenship from this final perspective, while at the same time raising many of the same questions as the other perspectives about the meaning and appropriateness of inculcating citizenship through national service.

THE "CIVICS" OF U.S. NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAMS

The question now is, how did civic education operate in the Civilian Conservation Corps and VISTA? How high a priority was it for these programs? What approaches to citizenship did they most support, and how? And based on the available evidence,¹ what did their participants learn? The answers to these questions will help clarify the complex relationship between civic education and national service.

THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

The Civilian Conservation Corps was America's first, and largest, civilian national service program, enrolling over three million participants between 1933 and its termination in 1942. Through the CCC, unemployed and needy young men and veterans worked on forestry, soil erosion prevention, flood control, and other environmental projects for an average of nine months in exchange for room and board in forest camps, other necessities, and \$30 per month – of which approximately \$25 was sent home to help support their families.

As communicated through its purpose and program, the CCC predominantly emphasized a work-based approach to citizenship, an emphasis that has since been weakened. But its understanding of citizenship wasn't monolithic: the CCC also incorporated patriotic, constitutional, and service approaches. This conceptual diversity reflects the multi-faceted, contested nature of American citizenship and the prevailing opinions of the time. However, what is most striking is the sheer pervasiveness of the language and idea of citizenship, however defined. The CCC had an explicit, formative civic mission: to create citizens. As CCC director Robert Fechner explained, "Every effort is made to derive from the life and activities of the [CCC] those training values which go to strengthen and improve the individual as a citizen in a democracy" (1939). In no other national service program, past or present, has citizenship been such a driving, central concern.

Citizenship as Work

The CCC principally supported a work-based understanding of citizenship, in both its job-holding and public work forms. In fact, these two forms were mutually reinforcing and intimately tied to the very purposes of the program.

The CCC was created foremost to address massive youth unemployment brought on by the Great Depression. The civic rationale was clear: citizens (at least male citizens) held jobs, and in their absence millions might lose – or never gain – their standing as wage-earning citizens. The CCC's contribution to earning citizenship was two-fold: It gave young men temporary jobs and trained them for future private employment. By working in the CCC, enrollees earned their keep and provided needed support for their families – two hallmarks of responsible, adult citizenship. Further, the program prepared enrollees for work after the CCC. As one CCC administrator explained: "When Johnny Q. Enrollee is discharged from CCC camp . . . he is faced with the task of getting a job and earning his living. He cannot be a very good citizen unless he has the opportunity to get a job and the ability to hold it" (Williams, 1937: 334). As a result, much of the CCC work and education program was geared

toward job training.

Second, the CCC was created to accomplish critical environmental conservation and development work: the Great Depression was marked by the Dust Bowl as well as the unemployment line. This focus allowed enrollees to contribute their labor to valuable natural resource projects – to do public work. As one observer wrote: “The CCC enrollees feel a part-ownership as citizens in the forest that they have seen improve through the labor of their hands. These youths are interested because the woods, streams, and lakes are theirs in a new way. They have toiled in them, protected them, improved them, replenished them,” (Blanchard, 1937: 354).

But enrollees’ public work extended beyond the creation of environmental benefits: The program generated “moral and spiritual value” to a nation dispirited by crisis and contributed to the “up-building of a national culture,” by bringing together a mix of young men, diverse by the standards of the time (FDR 1933, 1938 2: 271; Fechner qtd. in Oliver and Dudley, 1937: 28). As one former CCC enrollee explained, “I hadn’t gotten out much and [the CCC] gave me a chance to meet and work with people different than me from all over the country – farm boys, city boys, mountain boys, all worked together” (Al Hammer qtd. in Boyte and Kari, 1996: 29). In many instances, the CCC introduced enrollees to the public world; in every instance, it gave them the opportunity to contribute to it.

Testimony from administrators, enrollees, and observers shows how prominent and closely intertwined were the earning and public work approaches to citizenship. For example, on the CCC’s fourth anniversary Robert Fechner stated, “Let me emphasize that the jobs needed the men as badly as the men needed the jobs. We did not engage in any “made work” but we do feel that in thousands of instances we made men” (Radio Address 1937). Critical to their understanding of “manhood” was citizenship: by “making men” the CCC was also making citizens; the terms were used largely interchangeably. One such citizen-enrollee was Allen Cook, who explained that the CCC “was not only a chance to help support my family, but

to do something bigger – to help on to success this part of the President’s daring new plan to down Old Man Depression” (qtd. in Butler, 1935: 33).

While work was both the most prominent and central approach to citizenship in the CCC, the program supported constitutional, service, and patriotic understandings as well.

Constitutional Citizenship

The CCC supported constitutional citizenship both implicitly, through its structure, policies, and general education program, and explicitly, through formal civic education. The latter was weak and not always constructive, but the former largely succeeded, especially by giving enrollees a real, concrete experience with government.

The CCC’s implicit constitutional civic curriculum can be seen, in the first instance, in the enrollment process. To be eligible for the CCC, young men had to be citizens, providing a real-life lesson in the benefits of holding this official status. Further, for many young men, applying at the local relief office gave them their first exposure to government, and one that was typically positive: The broad impact of the depression reduced the stigma of need and consequently local officials were helpful (Holland and Hill, 1942: 71). It can also be seen in the federated structure of the CCC program as a whole. As CCC director Fechner explained, enrollees had

become aware of the blessings of responsibility, individual and civic. They have seen reciprocal relationship [sic] built up between the governmental bureaus, state agencies, and their fellowmen, as they worked on conservation projects in national, state and metropolitan parks . . . (“What the C.C.C. Means” 1937: 18)

CCC policy further encouraged enrollees to fulfill their civic responsibility as voters: enrollees of age were given election day off to vote.

In addition to these implicit lessons, the CCC tried to teach enrollees about American government and citizens’ roles in it explicitly,

through its civic education program. In the occasional evening civics class, enrollees were introduced to American history, the structure and function of government, and current events. In camp assemblies, enrollees heard camp commanders lecture on their responsibilities as voters and taxpayers (and also on the importance of work, service, and patriotism). In both cases, officials sometimes used the camp setting as a model, equating the camp with a small town, to explain citizens' roles, rights and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, the civic education program was limited by childish presentation and Army control. Ned Dearborn's lessons in *Once in a Lifetime: A Guide to the CCC Camp* (1935) appear all too typical. Dearborn presented a strongly populist but overly simplistic view of government and citizenship: "Don't kid yourself into thinking you are not important. Everyone is important in a democracy" (40); "You[,] who have been given such a break by the Government, which is sincerely interested in your well-being, ought especially to feel civic-minded" (162). Discussion of what these and other lessons meant, not to mention to the extent to which they were true, was constrained by the camps' military-trained leaders. One researcher "observed a tendency . . . [for] camp commanders to discourage frank discussion in the camps. They ha[d] an almost panicky fear of 'agitators'" (Hill, 1935: 56). This fact showed the limits of the camp-town analogy: camp commanders were not mayors elected by and accountable to the enrollees; they were Army appointed officers. Writing at the time, two scholars argued that "the most important fact about these classes was that they were attempting to teach the principles of democracy within an authoritarian atmosphere" (Holland and Hill, 1942: 224).

Given these factors, the education program's major civic contribution likely came in its most general form. In the words of one educational advisor,

Training for citizenship includes a great variety of work: the elimination of illiteracy, instruction in the fundamental school subjects, and the continuance of high-school and

college work for enrollees whose training was interrupted . . . , [as well as] forums, dramatics and other activities" (Rogers, 1937: 355).

The CCC's academic program improved the educational skills of many enrollees, especially those who had less than the CCC average of eight years of schooling ("That Poignant 41.09 Per Cent," 1937). By 1939, approximately 75,000 illiterate enrollees had learned to read and write and another 700,000 enrollees had added to their education by taking elementary or high school-level classes (Fechner 1939). Given the strong connection between education and civic engagement (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) – and especially the critical importance of basic literacy – the civic benefits of the CCC's academic program were far from insignificant. Along with CCC policy and general participation, these elements accomplished far more as civic education than any specific CCC "civics class" ever did.

Citizenship as Service

In addition to teaching that citizens worked, voted, and understood their government, the CCC also taught that citizens served both their country and community. Enrollees' conservation work was primary, recognized by Labor secretary Frances Perkins and others as "a real service to the nation" (qtd. by Fechner in House Permanency Hearings, 1937: 20). Further, although uncompromisingly civilian, CCC participation was seen as solid preparation for future military service, particularly when that service became more likely with the coming of World War II (McEntee, 8th Anniversary Story; Holland and Hill, 1942: 183). Certainly, the camps' military commanders communicated to enrollees that citizens defended the country when called to duty.

The CCC also promoted community involvement and service, through camp life and activities. While misrepresented as democratically run small towns, CCC camps were functioning communities. All camps had enrollee leaders and assistant leaders, many had "safety sentinels,"

recreation committees, and discussion groups, and some had camp governance advisory councils (Oxley, 1937: 316; Holland and Hill, 1942: 200-1; Hoyt, 1935: 81). In addition, camp officials organized and encouraged a wide variety of camp clubs and teams – what a CCC administrator identified as the “constructive recreational activities” portion of the CCC’s “program of citizenship improvement” (Oxley, 1937: 316). Enrollees often had little prior experienced with organized groups like the Boy Scouts or 4-H (Holland and Hill, 1942: 68, 89, 205)²; without the CCC they might have entirely missed out on the kinds of participatory youth activities that scholars have found to significantly contribute to later community involvement and civic engagement (Putnam 2000; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Instead, enrollees became “joiners” (Hoyt, 1935: 86), and ultimately members of what Robert Putnam has labeled America’s “civic generation” because of its propensity for organized civic activity (2000).

Patriotic Citizenship

Finally, the CCC promoted patriotic citizenship, both love of country and belief in its government. As with its public work focus, patriotism was directly connected to the very purposes of the CCC – unemployment relief and conservation. And even more so than in its civics program, an emphasis on patriotism was integrated into daily CCC life, for example through twice-daily flag salutes.

Conceived at time of crisis, the CCC (and other New Deal programs) had an explicit goal of engendering faith in the system: As CCC director Fechner told Americans, “the President believes that one of his major responsibilities is to . . . instill in [citizens] a greater faith in our government and in its sincere efforts to end the depression . . .” (Radio Address 1933). There is evidence that this message resonated with enrollees. In his interviews with former enrollees, Donald Jackson found that “as a group they were obedient, patriotic (nearly all had served in WWII), resilient, [and] grateful for the chance” (1994: 69). Enrollees also expressed such sentiments at the time. One notable, although unlikely exactly representative example came from

enrollee James Kidwell, who wrote in 1935:

As a citizen I am transformed.
Government is a hateful thing to a bum. In his misshapen vision it is a hateful monster that denies his inherent rights. But, behold, the Government has remembered me. It has given me a job, a world of comforts and many luxuries. It has removed from my door the spectre of want. What more natural than that my old radical tendencies are being replaced by the stirrings of some of the finer attributes of good citizenship (qtd. in Butler, 1935: 72).

In an early book on the CCC, Ray Hoyt further connected the CCC’s patriotic mission to its conservation program. In his words,

It is a patriotism that involves trees and hillsides and streams, and is fused with one’s interest in one’s family and one’s own future, and, too, one’s feeling of gratitude toward a government that has given rather than taken away. . . . A patriotism that grows from an understanding of the powers of nature and the interest of the government in one’s own future is a potent force. It is in such patriotism that the Spirit of the C.C.C. is rooted (1935: 3-4).

The principal failing of the CCC as an instrument of civic education was that administrators, and particularly Army commanders, believed that allowing any space for critical citizenship would undermine patriotism, by definition. For many, “eradicating isms” (Major General Moseley qtd. in Oliver and Dudley, 1937: 33) – socialism, communism, fascism – and any “radical tendencies” in those directions was synonymous with instilling patriotism. The extent to which a government program like the CCC should encourage advocacy or resistance is open to debate; that the CCC went so far in precluding it that it raised questions of violating enrollees’

constitutional rights – by frequently limiting discussion and occasionally banning books from the camp libraries, for example – is not. Its principal success, on the other hand, was in giving enrollees the sense that they were valued and valuable citizens.

* * *

Certainly, in attempting to draw lessons from a program that operated seven decades ago, one must take care. The CCC was created under unique circumstances, at a fundamentally different time and for a different purpose than current efforts. However, policymakers then and now share a concern that youth are not learning what they need to know to be contributing citizens. At its most effective, the CCC addressed this concern by explicitly connecting its civic goals to the purposes of the program; by aligning many, if not most, of its policies and practices to support these goals; and by prominently employing civic language, particularly “citizen” and “citizenship,” while at the same time not attempting to impose a uniform understanding of what these terms meant. These tasks were facilitated by the political culture of the time, but the ideas are nonetheless transferable over time, at least in part.

Current efforts would also do well to pay heed to where the CCC fell short. One can certainly criticize the CCC for its attempts to preclude critical citizenship; there were those who did at the time and more would today. On a practical level, it appears that the CCC was least successful in teaching civics, history, and current events in classroom settings, disconnected from enrollees’ work in and experience with the program itself. Given their ties to the national government, national service programs might do better both by strengthening their “hidden” civic curriculum – clarifying and stressing the pedagogical value of the program’s purpose, structure, policies, and values – and by connecting any formal civic curricula – manuals, readers, trainings, and the like – explicitly to these.

VOLUNTEERS IN SERVICE TO AMERICA – VISTA

VISTA was America’s second major domestic national service program, and is its longest running. It was designed under the Kennedy administration,³ passed as part of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, and continues to this day as part of AmeriCorps. (In this section I focus on VISTA’s pre-AmeriCorps history, especially its first decade, and for simplicity’s sake write in the past tense.) Through VISTA an average of 4,000 people a year, a majority of them young adults, lived and worked in impoverished communities, providing services and assistance for one to two years to “help people help themselves.” In exchange VISTA volunteers received a stipend to cover basic living expenses, health insurance, and a modest end of service award.

Unlike the CCC, which had an explicit goal of inculcating citizenship in its enrollees, VISTA’s citizenship agenda was directed primarily toward the general public and those served, not the volunteers: VISTA volunteers were to act as civic role models for others. As an early planning document stated: “It is to be hoped that the example of men and women rendering . . . full-time voluntary service would motivate many more Americans to participate on a part-time basis,” prompting the “haves” to fuller citizenship through service (Kennedy, 1963: 5). Later, the focus shifted to the “have nots.” As one official explained: “VISTA is trying, and we thinking succeeding in giving poor people back their citizenship; their belief that they can help themselves and have lives of dignity” (Brown, 1980: 7). Volunteers were to be chosen precisely because they already had a strong base of civic knowledge, skills, and commitments that they could share.

In this respect, political theorist Eric Gorham is correct when he writes that VISTA did not “make pretensions to training [volunteers] for citizenship” (1992: 50). However, it is another thing to say, as Gorham does, that as a result VISTA did “not promote citizenship or educate [volunteers] politically” (1992: 140). While not an explicit

goal, VISTA service clearly influenced volunteers – acting as “experiential education,” in the words of one VISTA sponsor – both politically and civically (qtd. in Schwartz, 1988: 154). In fact, that VISTA service influenced volunteers’ political leanings was well known. One recruiter explained, “I’d tell people that if they went into VISTA as a conservative, they’d come out a liberal. If they went in as a liberal, they’d come out as a radical. And if they went in as a radical, they’d come out and go live on a mountain top” (Joann Rose qtd. in Schwartz, 1988: 447). Mountain tops aside, an early study of VISTA volunteers, complete with control groups, supported this view (Gottleib and Gold, 1970).

Civically, VISTA was principally characterized by a dual emphasis. As originally conceived, it stressed the service dimensions of citizenship; in its early practice, it stressed critical citizenship. Much of VISTA history can be read as a series of attempts by changing administrations to adjust the balance between these two perspectives, through an ideological and programmatic tug-of-war. However, as with the CCC, other perspectives also came into play, specifically the constitutional and public work approaches.

Citizenship as Service

VISTA was created to address a double paradox: poverty in the midst of plenty and “a desire to serve but no clear path to meaningful volunteer commitment” (President’s Study Group, 1962: 1). VISTA would address both, by providing an outlet for committed volunteers to serve those in need. As an early planning report asserted, “Personal service to human problems would be the [program’s] major contribution” (President’s Study Group, 1962: 7). As an additional contribution, planners hoped that youth service in VISTA would succeed in “stimulating a long-time respect for volunteer service” (President’s Study Group, 1962: Review 2).

The importance of service was communicated to volunteers both directly and indirectly. “Service” was part of the program’s very name, as was “volunteer,” which was (and is) strongly associated with the service, and especially the community service, perspective.

Addressing the first group of VISTA volunteers, President Johnson further stressed service-oriented themes, explaining, “This is your job – to guide the young, to comfort the sick, to encourage the downtrodden, to teach the skills which may lead to a more satisfying and rewarding life” (1964/1965: 801). The proportion of volunteers providing direct services – tutoring, renovating housing, providing medical assistance, organizing youth programs, and the like – varied depending on administration – in particular increasing under the Nixon and Reagan administration. Volunteers were more likely to be involved in community organizing and advocacy under the Johnson and Carter administrations, and while this work was often contrasted with service – and associated more with a critical than service approach to citizenship – volunteers so engaged were also performing valuable service.

In addition, under all administrations volunteers lived in the neighborhoods they served, at the economic level of the residents, contributing to the sense that volunteers were serving their communities, not just doing a job. In the words of one volunteer, “The living in the neighborhood makes all the difference – you’re not just here to do an ordinary nine-to-five job” (qtd. in Crook and Thomas, 1969: 77). As a result, “volunteers soon be[came] part of the neighborhood or the community” (Crook and Thomas, 1969: 77).

Volunteers’ work and community involvement were central to the VISTA experience, but they also influenced volunteers beyond their term of service, increasing their likelihood of future civic engagement. The potential for such impact is evident in surveys of volunteers. For example, in an early (1965-1969) study, David Gottleib and Carol Hancock Gold found that three-fourths of the volunteers studied stated that “VISTA ha[d] strengthened their commitment to end this country’s social problems” and had “had a positive affect on their desire to be involved with social change or social intervention activities” (1970: 4). Further, Marvin Schwartz found evidence of future impact in his twenty-year retrospective study of VISTA in Arkansas. In his words:

An assessment of the long range results of VISTA must include the

program's impact on the Volunteers themselves. To a large degree, many Volunteers conceded they gained more than they gave during VISTA service. Yet personal gain can be repaid by a lifetime of involvement.

. . .

Former Volunteers . . . possess a distinct sense of community involvement. They can often be found in community affairs such as school boards, city planning, church activities, and youth programs (1988: 4-5).

While examination of other VISTA evaluations is necessary to assess trends over time, these two studies suggest that VISTA succeeded in strengthening volunteers' commitment to service, as early planners had hoped. They also suggest that VISTA taught other lessons in citizenship to its volunteers, more or less intended by its founders, most notably lessons in critical citizenship.

Critical Citizenship

While the early, Kennedy administration plans and testimony for its version of VISTA stressed that volunteers would provide non-controversial services to those in need while respecting (or at least tolerating) local political structures and social norms (including segregation) (Balzano, 1971: ch. 3), there were hints even at this stage of a more critical edge to the program. For example, one task force member wrote:

Added to the concept of supplementing such community services would be the goal of furthering social change . . . the goal of social change adds to the [program] the assurance that it would not be utilized for maintenance of the status quo and for the avoidance of important issues" (Sheldon Granger, HEW Youth Services Director, 1962, qtd. in Pass, 1975: 13).

Its passage as part of the Economic Opportunity Act, the changing 1960s political culture, and the central role of youth in that culture and in VISTA further contributed to VISTA's role as an institutional gadfly.

Just as VISTA was not primarily responsible for instilling in volunteers their service commitment, but rather recruited those who already possessed it, VISTA was not principally responsible for turning volunteers into critical citizens. As two early VISTA administrators explained: "Essentially, VISTA Volunteers are critics of the current social scene, for they never would have joined unless they felt that something was wrong, that something needed to be corrected" (Crook and Thomas, 1969: 181). However, as with the service commitment, VISTA reinforced this perspective both directly and indirectly. For example, less than a year after President Johnson exhorted volunteers to "encourage the downtrodden," Senator Robert F. Kennedy told them that their job was "to make the people dissatisfied with landlords and politicians – dissatisfied even with this United States Senator" (qtd. in Robinson 1965). In a fair number of instances they succeeded. A 1970 review of VISTA project evaluations showed that 23% displayed evidence of conflict with local decision-makers and/or controversy within the community (Schaffer 1970). At the same time, some of these projects were recognized to be highly effective. No relationship was found between the presence of conflict and controversy and the overall quality of a project, and even the VISTA evaluator in charge of the review – which was undertaken out of concern on the part of Nixon administration officials that volunteers were "making too much noise" – argued that "there is a kind of conflict that must be expected as part of affecting positive community change" (Schaffer 1970).

Certainly many VISTA volunteers shared that view, not only with respect to their community work but also with respect to their government (Gottlieb and Gold 1970; Schwartz 1988). For instance, in 1970 a group of volunteers created the National VISTA Alliance (which grew to represent 2,000 current and 10,000 former volunteers [Lucas

1971]), its organizers arguing that “now is the time for VISTA Volunteers to take in hand the self-determination we daily preach to poor communities and hurl it at the VISTA administration, the OEO and the Federal Government” (qtd. in Pass, 1975: 135). As mentioned earlier, Gottlieb and Gold found that “the VISTA experience [did] have a radicalization impact upon many vol[unteers],” with the “VISTA experience generally embitter[ing] their attitudes toward social agencies and local and federal government agencies” (1970: 3, 4). Among the VISTA experiences that radical volunteers identified as contributing to their beliefs included:

Observed economic and political oppression of the poor; observed corruption at the local and federal level; shocked at how the system operated to enhance poverty and racism; became more politically aware of social and political injustice and the need for political action; learned that the national power structure is an obstacle to the solution of poverty; shocked by the depth and extent of poverty in this country; and became frustrated with the uselessness and inadequacy of VISTA (Gottlieb and Gold, 1970: 3).

Again, further review of subsequent evaluations is needed to assess trends over time; both changes in VISTA practices and the broader culture make it unlikely that VISTA had this impact consistently over the course of its long history. However, Crook and Thomas’s early assessment may still hold true. Not only did they hold that volunteers were inherent “critics of the current social scene,” they went on to argue that “It seems most probable that this critical sense will have been heightened and honed by the time the VISTAs return to their own neighborhoods and communities. They will be quick to spot inequities and flaws, and they will be just as quick to do something about them” (1969: 181).

Constitutional Citizenship

While VISTA stressed the service and critical aspects of citizenship most strongly, it also

incorporated constitutional aspects. One reason VISTA recruited college educated, middle class volunteers (exclusively at the start, in partnership with locally recruited, low-income volunteers later) was precisely because they “would serve as resources in planning social change; after all, they underst[ood] how the economic and political system functions” (Reeves, 1988: 16). Volunteers used their knowledge of both the substance and process of government – of welfare programs, tenants’ rights, voter registration, petitioning, and so on – to demystify government for others. As Schwartz explains, in Arkansas, “available assistance programs were no longer hidden within foreign environments of county courthouses or social service offices. The Volunteers . . . were like a walking resource to the community” (1988: 34-5). Further, “the Volunteers recognized an important part of their job was to prepare the community to impact the political process, to show them how decisions were made. In effect, teach a course in practical civics” (1988: 152). However, in the process of teaching they also learned. In Crook and Thomas’s assessment, “If the VISTA experience offers anything at all, it offers a postgraduate course in practical politics. The Volunteers, of necessity, learn all about the power structure and how to use it” (1969: 180).

Part of this structure was the VISTA program itself – its place within the federal government and its relationship to the administration, Congress, state and local governments, and the agencies for whom volunteers worked. And while during the 1960s, at least, volunteers’ experience with the program did not increase their commitment to the American constitutional system (Gottlieb and Gold 1970), it likely did increase their knowledge of its component parts. At an extreme, the VISTA volunteers who in 1974 sued VISTA administrators in U.S. District Court for imposing “arbitrary and selective cutbacks” in support services for volunteers (they charged that the cutbacks were part of a conspiracy to change VISTA into a “service-oriented, Red Cross type program” that would only ameliorate the affects of poverty, not fight its causes) received an up-close, personal experience with multiple branches of the U.S.

government ("U.S. Agency Sued," 1974).

Citizenship as Work

Lastly, VISTA incorporated elements of the work perspective. When asked in interviews what volunteers learned as a result of their experiences, former VISTA staff unanimously, and often exclusively, said that it shaped volunteers' future career directions. "Attracting more Americans into helping professions" was an explicit goal for early program planners (President's Study Group, "Facts," 1963: 1) and one that appears to have been more fully achieved than any other. In Schwartz's estimation,

The changes Volunteers went through were not solely due to the impact of the program. . . . [M]any Volunteers were already headed in that direction, [but] . . . [w]ith VISTA providing the last bit of thrust, many Volunteers either deliberately or unknowingly moved into service careers.

Almost unanimously, these former Volunteers have identified their VISTA service as the single most influential event in determining their career directions. Their exposure to a range of knowledge – the social, racial, bureaucratic, and personal curriculum of their VISTA education – has created an internal momentum this group seems compelled to continue (1988: 447).

Unlike volunteer service, choosing a career in the helping professions was not framed as a necessary, constituent part of what good citizens should do. However, by highlighting this goal, the program communicated that citizens' paid work could contribute to the public good – which is a key principle of the public work approach to citizenship.

VISTA also emphasized bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to address significant public problems, which is also central to the idea of public work. Even when VISTA primarily

recruited middle class youth, their job was to work with the residents of poor communities, to "help them help themselves." And when VISTA expanded its recruitment to include members of poor communities themselves, the importance of recognizing and drawing on diverse talents was formalized: when possible, locally recruited, generalist, and professionally trained volunteers worked together in teams.

Finally, VISTA stressed creating sustainable programs and institutional change, or in the language of public work theorists Boyte and Farr, "produc[ing] things or creat[ing] processes of lasting value" (1997: 42). One VISTA supervisor expressed the philosophy well when he wrote:

I really like the old concept of working yourself out of a job. We did a self-help housing project in one county. Except for the first few families that came in, they wouldn't know VISTA from shmista. And there's a multi-million dollar health program over here that we wrote and pulled off a few years back. If you told the people that are over there now that we were involved in the beginning, why they might think that you were a liar. That's the only way to do this job. When you get done with something, you spin it off and go on to something else (Lou Vitale qtd. in VISTA 15th Anniversary, 1980: 39).

While going unrecognized had a number of negative effects for VISTA as a program, the fact that its work was integrated into the fabric of community institutions and lasted after its volunteers had moved on had positive effects for the community and influenced volunteers' understanding of their work. At times volunteers struggled to make this type of impact, but they clearly aspired to achieve it (see for example, Gottleib and Gold 1970). They also aspired to create, in VISTA administrator Mary King's words, "images of the future," (1980: 20) providing what during the CCC's years Roosevelt identified as its "moral and spiritual value." Senator

Charles Percy suggested something similar when he wrote: "VISTA volunteers make an impact that goes beyond their immediate goal of giving the individuals they serve a sense of self-sufficiency. They create commitment to community, an optimism about our country's future" (qtd. in VISTA 15th Anniversary, 1980: 60). As a small program operating at a different time, VISTA wasn't able to influence the larger political culture on the scale of the CCC, but it had a similar goal of changing how people – volunteers, community members, and the public – understood poverty and what citizens and their government could do to address it.

The principal failing of VISTA as an instrument of civic education was its inability to effectively communicate the idea that "calling America to live up to its ideals does not mean that you must hate America for its failures. In fact, it means you must love her enough to want to correct them, even to take risks to correct them," as former CNCS CEO Leslie Lenkowsky explained with regard to today's AmeriCorps members (2002). In many cases VISTA volunteers took those risks, enduring threats and violence to secure the rights and improve the lives of migrant farmers, coal miners, sharecroppers, and others. But often they suffered from the same affliction as CCC leaders decades earlier, the belief that critique and patriotism are fundamentally incompatible, as opposed to, at their best, opinions and actions grounded in similar commitments – often having different emphases, but equally valuable and necessary to the nation. Certainly, VISTA volunteers weren't alone in holding the opposing view, particularly in VISTA's first decade, and the VISTA leadership wasn't solely responsible for inculcating the alternative. But given that volunteers typically came in with a strong belief in service and high levels of civic knowledge and skill, its greatest potential as an instrument of civic education might have been to remind volunteers that they were citizens, in this case citizens working for the government to improve the lives of others and the workings of government itself, and not only service providers and organizers. VISTA's main success as civic education, on the other hand, was in strengthening volunteers' life-

long commitment to service and advocacy, as volunteers, professionals, and political actors.

* * *

As with the CCC, drawing lessons from the early years of VISTA must be done with care. It was also created under unique circumstances, at a fundamentally different time. However, policymakers then and now are committed to providing opportunities for young people to contribute to the country. And intended or not, participants will learn from their experiences. At its most effective, VISTA gave volunteers the opportunity to work with diverse others on substantial service and advocacy projects of long-term value to communities, and tied this to a larger national project – the elimination of poverty in the United States. On the other hand, the difficulties of accomplishing such a goal contributed to volunteer frustration and disillusionment (Gottlieb and Gold 1970). In the absence of an explicit civic education goal for volunteers, too little attention was paid to this and other affects of the program on volunteers. One thing that the varying administrations and volunteers typically shared was the belief that VISTA "wasn't about the volunteers." This clearly limited its power as an instrument of civic education; an explicit goal of civic development through service – like the CCC had and AmeriCorps has currently – appears necessary to take full advantage of the civic education potential of national service, and to increase the likelihood that its lessons will be positive.

LESSONS FROM PAST PRACTICE

So what can current national service programs – particularly AmeriCorps – learn from the civic education practices of the CCC and VISTA? I will suggest three key lessons.

LESSON ONE:

MAKE CIVIC EDUCATION AN EXPLICIT PRIORITY

The fact that the CCC made inculcating citizenship an explicit, high priority clearly differentiated it from VISTA. In both programs participants performed significant national service, but the

attention paid to enrollees' civic development in the CCC made it a more effective instrument of civic education. AmeriCorps has done well on this score. Congress made "renewing the ethic of civic responsibility" part of the program's legislative mandate, and both the Clinton and particularly the Bush administrations have taken this seriously, both rhetorically and programmatically. On a practical level, the priority given to citizenship can be seen in the *By the People and Effective Citizenship Through AmeriCorps* curricula commissioned during the Clinton years, and by the recent requirement that organizations applying for AmeriCorps grants describe how they plan to help strengthen the civic engagement of their AmeriCorps' members.

One reason that the CCC placed greater emphasis on citizenship was that the average enrollees' educational, economic, and social backgrounds left them with significant "room to grow," civically and otherwise. Certainly, any program that recruits participants who are already civically well-endowed, like both VISTA and AmeriCorps, will have to take this into consideration. This is not to say that as a result they don't need to take citizenship seriously; it does mean that their policy lessons and curricula need to be geared toward conceptual gaps and higher level skills, and their evaluations calibrated to account for participants' higher civic starting points. Regardless of participant characteristics, the key is to identify and strengthen programs' civic "value added."

LESSON TWO: INTEGRATE THE LANGUAGE OF CITIZENSHIP INTO EXISTING PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Service is, of course, the most obvious program element in any national service program, and the AmeriCorps leadership has done well in communicating that service is an important aspect of citizenship. However, there are many other, already existing program elements that leaders could similarly connect to citizenship. The model here is the CCC: its ability to harness seemingly unrelated policy elements to its civic education

mission was a key to its success. For example, CCC policymakers didn't require enrollees to remit much of their pay to their families on civic principle, but they nonetheless made it a "teachable policy" – communicating to enrollees that an important aspect of citizenship was supporting one's family, and that by doing so, enrollees were being citizens.

Here are just a few examples of the program elements that AmeriCorps could more explicitly, and effectively, use to support citizenship, from a variety of perspectives:

Citizenship as Service. AmeriCorps has a pledge⁴ that stresses service themes, and that works to unite and build esprit de corps among the program's diverse members. And while it is rightly focused on AmeriCorps specifically as opposed to citizenship generally, it would be easy for AmeriCorps staff who preside over members as they take their oath to make the connection. "Getting things done," "bringing America together," "strengthening our communities," "seeking common ground in conflict" – these are all acts of citizenship.

Constitutional Citizenship. AmeriCorps members receive an education award in exchange for their service. President Clinton, in particular, highlighted the civic meaning of this policy, that rights and benefits are tied to responsibilities. But one can take the argument a step further and connect this to our larger constitutional system: Representation doesn't work if people don't vote; the right to a trial by jury is meaningless if no one is willing to sit for jury duty; national security will fail if too few are willing to come to the nation's defense; crisis looms when people demand more in government services than they are willing to pay for in taxes. Reciprocity isn't just a core principle of AmeriCorps, it is a core principle of constitutional citizenship.

Another example: AmeriCorps is a federal government program (although not solely that) that members choose to join. Yet at the same time, many AmeriCorps members presumably are like most of their peers, not simply skeptical, but downright cynical about American government. Since AmeriCorps' planning days its leaders have highlighted, and not without reason, its

strong non-governmental aspects, particularly the large role played by non-profit, community-based organizations. But if AmeriCorps' leaders want to encourage voting and other aspects of constitutional citizenship, they would do well to also strongly identify the program with the government that created it. To the extent that enrollees see the program as valuable, it represents what the federal government can do well and encourages the respect necessary to foster participation; to the extent that they want to see changes, they need to understand that, as a federal government program, participation in the political process is the way to make them.

Citizenship as Work. AmeriCorps members are paid, enough to cover their basic living expenses while they work full-time in the program. This is controversial among those who believe that service and pay are fundamentally incompatible. However, if the goal is to encourage citizens to contribute to their communities and country, limiting citizenship to an after-work, unpaid activity – whether after putting in a full work-week or after having had a full work life – is overly restrictive. AmeriCorps demonstrates that citizens can contribute through a variety of kinds of work – full-time or part-time, paid or unpaid, by providing direct service or facilitating this work in others. Stressing this lesson could help instill in members a life-long commitment to citizenship understood not only as volunteer service, but as public work.

Critical and Patriotic Citizenship. Through their service, AmeriCorps members work to address some of the country's most challenging public problems – how to ensure that all children receive a good education, that neighborhoods everywhere are safe, that future generations inherit a livable environment – through organizations that make reaching these goals their life's work. The leaders of these organizations and of AmeriCorps can foster critical citizenship by making sure that members understand the larger public issues underlying the problems on which they are working, on the principle "that service is enriched and deepened by a process of civic reflection that ties it to fundamental issues we face as a society" (Lenkowsky 2002). They can also promote

patriotism by explaining, like former CNCS CEO Leslie Lenkowsky has, that "recognition of the ways in which the nation has failed to live up to its ideals does not necessarily mean that those ideals are false. The most passionate patriots are those who drive America to close the gap between its values and its actions" (2002). Further, they can remind members that not only is this what they are doing as AmeriCorps members, it is what citizens do, regardless of their institutional affiliation.

Put another way, this lesson can be summarized as "words matter." These words can and should be communicated in as many ways as possible, most of which will not require altering the substantive aspects of the program. But it will require a commitment to getting a wide diversity of people – AmeriCorps staff, state decision-makers, local organization administrators, enrollees, and others – to start speaking the language of citizenship. To accomplish this, AmeriCorps training will need to be strengthened – which brings us to lesson three.

LESSON THREE: ADD, STRENGTHEN, AND/OR ALTER PROGRAM ELEMENTS TO SUPPORT THE CIVIC MISSION – CAREFULLY

If words matter to civic education, so do actions, and there are actions that AmeriCorps leaders could take to strengthen the program's civic impact. But they also must take care that their choices don't backfire, civically or politically.

For example, take AmeriCorps training. There are definite reasons to add, strengthen, or change AmeriCorps training for civic purposes, and equally reasons to do so carefully. On the one hand, AmeriCorps has invested in two citizenship curricula, *A Guide to Effective Citizenship Through AmeriCorps* and *By the People*, both potentially valuable resources for teaching civic knowledge, skills, and values from multiple perspectives on citizenship.⁵ However, in her 2001 study of civic engagement in national service programs, Elisa Diller found that fewer than half of all AmeriCorps program directors had received resources about civic engagement training in their own orientation (30%), had received copies of one or both of

the citizenship curricula (40%), or had used the curricula to train AmeriCorps members (20%). Altering program director and member training to significantly increase these percentages would seem to be an altogether reasonable change, in keeping with the program's mission. On the other hand, if any new training is to help convince members that politics is relevant, the training needs to be as well. To the extent that the CCC's classroom civics training was disconnected from the program as a whole, it was largely deemed unproductive; to the extent that early VISTA volunteers found fault with their training programs, it was largely because of perceived irrelevancy. The AmeriCorps citizenship materials were written for the AmeriCorps context, and although evaluation suggests that they may need to be modified (Strang and von Glatz 2003), their implementation will need to be placed in that context as well.

Take voting and other forms of political participation as another example. Young adults' abysmal voting rates have prompted much civic concern, as has speculation that they may be using service as a substitute for electoral engagement, as opposed to a complement. One action that AmeriCorps might take to encourage voting, beyond simple exhortation, is to require that members have election day off to vote, and to serve as poll or party workers, if they so choose. This is something that they might be able to do without changing the policies prohibiting political activity as an actual part of AmeriCorps members' service work. The alternative, of course, is to change this policy and allow members to register voters, work with organizations on legislative campaigns, and other activities that fall within the domains of constitutional and critical citizenship. This approach is certainly in keeping with the principle that desired civic outcomes be integrated as much as possible into service work; if one wants members to vote, having them serve by registering others to vote, for example, makes a lot of sense. The problem with this approach is that while it has the potential to build national servers' support for politics, it also has the potential to undermine political support for national service. As a government program, national service depends

on support from the varied interests in Congress, many of whose members would be concerned about the potentially negative political impact of voter registration and policy advocacy projects on their interests and values. Given AmeriCorps' tumultuous congressional history, this is a risk the program cannot afford. Any effort to improve AmeriCorps as an instrument of civic education has to, at the very least, not jeopardize the civic education it now accomplishes, by making the program's survival and growth less likely.

CONCLUSION

Advocates of national service often assume that national service will act as civic education. And to an extent they are correct: participation in a program of service sponsored by the national government will communicate lessons to those involved about the nature of government and citizens' roles and responsibilities. But whether this education teaches the lessons advocates hope, as well as it might, is something one cannot assume.

Both the CCC and VISTA engaged participants in meaningful national service work and influenced their understandings of citizenship, their civic dispositions, and their civic skills and knowledge. However, the programs promoted different understandings of citizenship, fostered different dispositions, and imparted different skills and knowledge. Further, the programs were more than just different: the CCC more effectively acted as an instrument of civic education, because it made participants' civic development an explicit priority and integrated civic language and principles into multiple aspects of the program's design.

As a current program, AmeriCorps has the opportunity to learn from the history of these past programs – one of which continues as part of it (as AmeriCorps*VISTA), and one of which it harkens back to (in AmeriCorps*NCCC). The nation, and therefore AmeriCorps, faces different civic challenges today than the CCC and VISTA did in decades past. As a result, the balance of civic perspectives it fosters will be different, as will its means of encouraging them. Understanding how AmeriCorps accomplishes this task, and how well,

is a critical piece of research – one that will both contribute to and benefit from an understanding of what national service contributes to civic education through different programs, under different leadership, and at different times. Because one thing that has not changed over the past seventy years is the need for young adults to have opportunities for national service – and to learn the myriad civic lessons that national service can teach.

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