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# An Un-American Enterprise: The Demise of the Reverse Peace Corps

by

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*The philosophy of the Peace Corps is really the philosophy of America. And when you cut down deep with honest politicians in the Congress, they understand that. And therefore they support it because it is a genuine American enterprise.*

*--Sargent Shriver, first director of the Peace Corps*

*I don't particularly like this [Reverse Peace Corps]—I haven't from the beginning. I think our Peace Corps is a unique institution, an American institution, that can't possibly be duplicated by other nations. They don't think the way we do. They don't live the way we do.*

*--Ohio Republican Frances Bolton, Peace Corps hearings of 1966*

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# Introduction: The Peace Corps, with a Reverse Twist

## *The Celebrated History of the Peace Corps*

The Peace Corps story has been told again and again. Since its birth in 1961, the Peace Corps has captivated the American imagination, garnering widespread attention from the media—the Peace Corps has become a symbol of peace and friendship, an icon of American goodwill toward the developing world. Fifty years later, nearly every controversy, twist, and turn in Peace Corps' history has been documented. More than 20,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps, while many more reporters, scholars, Peace Corps staffers and volunteers have written (with praise and occasional scorn) about its origins, development, and future.

The same cannot be said for the ill-fated Volunteers to America program (VTA), a Peace Corps in reverse that brought foreign volunteers from the developing world to work in American schools and communities. Although the idea for a reverse Peace Corps originated in the Peace Corps, the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs administered the pilot exchange program, which ran from 1967 to 1970. Both the Peace Corps and the Johnson administration embraced the program; however, Congress vehemently opposed the reverse Peace Corps from its inception. As a result, this controversial experiment in two-way service succumbed to Congress in 1969, and has since faded into obscurity. The complex, albeit short-lived history of Volunteers to America has been eclipsed by the Peace Corps' illustrious history, retold so many times that a mythos now surrounds it.

The mythic genesis of the Peace Corps begins with a speech by then

presidential candidate John F. Kennedy. On October 14, 1960, Kennedy, so the story goes, stopped by the University of Michigan at 2:00 a.m. A crowd of 10,000 eager faces looked up to him. Having just completed the third of a series of debates with Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, Kennedy presented a string of unrehearsed rhetorical questions about self-sacrifice and service:

> How many of you are willing to spend ten years in Africa or Latin America or Asia working for the U.S. and working for freedom? 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?[1]

In this telling of the Peace Corps' early history, the Peace Corps originated with President Kennedy, who came to embody the organization's ethos of service and idealism. In actuality, however, the idea dated back to the late 1950s. Three years before Kennedy's speech, two congressmen—Democrats Henry Reuss of Wisconsin and Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota—had been testing the waters in Congress, the State Department, and on college campuses. Their idea was to send "young men to assist the peoples of the underdeveloped areas of the world to combat poverty, disease, illiteracy, and hunger."[2] The summer before Kennedy's impassioned speech, both Humphrey and Reuss introduced their bills in the House and the Senate, respectively; Reuss' for a "Point Four Youth Corps" and Humphrey's for the establishment of a "Peace Corps."

Even Reuss and Humphrey, however, conceded Kennedy's significance in the

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[1] Gerald Rice, *Twenty Years of Peace Corps* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 1.
[2] Ibid., 11.

Peace Corps' founding. As Reuss noted, "if it had been left to us, the Peace Corps idea would still be cluttering up the legislative corridors."[3] Had Kennedy's campaign stop not garnered such enthusiasm, the Peace Corps idea might never have made it through Congress and the State Department, as many older, traditional diplomats (and even many liberal congressmen) deemed it a "silly and unworkable idea."[4] Once Kennedy made the creation of a Peace Corps a campaign promise, these reservations were muted.

On the first of January 1961, President Kennedy delivered his inaugural address, in which he famously urged Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." On January 2, he asked his brother-in-law, Robert Sargent Shriver, to lead a presidential task force "to report how the Peace Corps could be organized and then to organize it."[5] On January 22, Shriver contacted Harris Wofford, then a law professor at Notre Dame who had served as Kennedy's civil rights advisor during the presidential campaign. Wofford was an obvious choice for the task force, given his proposal decades earlier for a "peace force" of overseas volunteers.[6]

Kennedy put immense pressure on the task force, which consulted with various professionals in academia and government. In a meeting on February 6, Shriver also invited Warren W. Wiggins and William Josephson, two officials in the International Cooperation Administration (ICA). Wiggins and Josephson were the co-authors of a paper they called "The Towering Task," a proposal for a Peace Corps

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[3] Ibid., 12.
[4] Ibid., 11.
[5] Ibid., 34-5.
[6] Ibid., 36.

that would profoundly shape the nascent organization's philosophy. Kennedy had requested a report by the end of February, but after just two weeks, he became impatient. As Shriver later recalled, "Kennedy wanted to know what was taking us so long…I replied weakly that no one had ever tried to put a Peace Corps together before."[7] The task force's "Report to the President on the Peace Corps," made it into Kennedy's hands on February 24.

The report recommended the immediate establishment of a Peace Corps by Executive Order, but it left many questions up in the air, readily admitting that "since the Peace Corps is a new experiment in international cooperation, many of the questions considered below will only be finally answered in action by trial and error."[8] The report advised that funding be taken from a contingency fund in the Mutual Security Act of 1954 and that the program be run under the authority of the State Department. Shriver had some qualms about this. He feared the Peace Corps would become subsumed by ICA, a government aid agency limited by the bureaucratic inflexibility of the Department of State. As Shriver put it, "This new wine should not be poured into the old ICA bottle."[9] Shriver envisioned an anti-bureaucratic agency, one that would operate outside the confines of the Department of State.

Within two months, Kennedy had signed Executive Order 10924 for the establishment and administration of a new Peace Corps agency within the State Department; within six, the Washington staff had grown from two to 362 and more

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[7] Ibid., 39.
[8] Ibid., 44.
[9] Ibid., 44.

than six hundred volunteers had already been deployed overseas.[10] Rather than create new legislation, the Peace Corps, following Shriver's recommendation, was financed by the Mutual Security Act, which aimed to "maintain the security and promote the foreign policy and provide for the general welfare of the United States by furnishing assistance to friendly nations in the interest of international peace and security."[11] By signing an Executive Order, Kennedy was able to avoid congressional red tape and fulfill his campaign promise within his first few months in the White House.

However, Kennedy could not sidestep Congress indefinitely. As P. David Searles wrote in *The Peace Corps Experience*, "it was far easier to announce the conception of the Peace Corps than it was to deliver it."[12] Furthermore, the State Department—as predicted by Shriver—was not willing to relinquish control without a fight. On May 4, 1961—two months after the Peace Corps' establishment by Executive Order—an article in the *New York Times* ran with the headline "Peace Corps Wins Fight for Autonomy." The announcement represented the end of a two-month-long turf battle between the Peace Corps and the State Department bureaucracy, which was "aghast at the thought of thousands of 'college kids' roaming about the world unsupervised, untrained in the niceties of diplomacy, and speaking out in ways sure to upset the delicate task of foreign relations."[13]

The State Department saw the Peace Corps as part of a larger trend of the

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[10] Robert G. Carey, *The Peace Corps* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 22-3.
[11] *Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. "Mutual Security Act of 1951," by Lynn K. Zusman and Neil S. Helfand, accessed March 30, 2011, http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3407400194.html.
[12] P. David Searles, *The Peace Corps Experience: Challenge and Change, 1969-1976* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 4.
[13] Ibid., 4.

executive branch meddling in State Department affairs. In the months following the Executive Order, the State Department reasserted its authority, insisting that the Peace Corps be subsumed under the newly created United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This move was a major blow for the Peace Corps' founders—USAID was new and inefficient, and any Peace Corps proposal would have to make its way through USAID, the State Department, and the White House Executive Office for approval. Much to the dismay of Shriver, Kennedy sided with the State Department, leaving the fight for independence up to Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who Kennedy had appointed chairman of the Peace Corps National Advisory Council.[14]

Johnson was the right man for the job. As Senate majority leader, he had built a reputation for himself as an adept politician, willing to use crass and intimidating tactics to bend Congress to his will. Johnson was deeply dissatisfied as vice president, where he felt useless and upstaged by Kennedy's youth and popularity. As Robert Dallek wrote in his biography of Johnson, "running for Vice President hardly seems like a punishable offense—unless you were Lyndon Johnson. His sense of defeat at having to take second place expressed itself in 'the heaviest period of boozing' in his life."[15] Johnson's assignment therefore offered him a unique opportunity to assert his power. At the insistence of Bill Moyers, one of Johnson's aides in the Senate, Johnson initiated a private meeting with Kennedy. While the meeting took place behind closed doors, it is clear from the Peace Corps Act, which passed by large

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[14] Carey, *The Peace Corps*, 14-15.
[15] Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.

majorities in both Houses on September 22, 1961, that Johnson's intervention made a difference: the Act delegated the Peace Corps Director the authority to "promulgate such rules and regulations as he may deem necessary or appropriate," while the secretary of state only had responsibility for ensuring that the Peace Corps programs "are effectively integrated both at home and abroad and [that] the foreign policy of the United States is best served thereby."[16]

As Searles points out, this legislative triumph disguised the fact that many liberals and conservatives in Congress opposed the idea of sending inexperienced volunteers abroad. Some reiterated the concerns of the State Department, while others were isolationists, opposed to foreign assistance programs entirely. Skeptics included Senator J. William Fulbright, who, despite co-founding the Fulbright program, questioned whether the Peace Corps was a responsible vehicle of international exchange. One of the Peace Corps' most powerful foes was Congressman Otto Passman, who staunchly opposed all forms of foreign aid, especially the Peace Corps, throughout his time in Congress.[17] Fulbright and Passman, however, were in the minority in the early 1960s, and Kennedy and Shriver's idealistic message won the day.

This year the Peace Corps will celebrate its 50th anniversary, commemorating half a century of service abroad and promotion of peace and friendship. In honor of the event—which will include months of panel discussions and award ceremonies—the Peace Corps created a Peace Corps 50th Anniversary time-line, chronicling major events and persons in Peace Corps history. Noticeably absent from the time-line,

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[16] Searles, *The Peace Corps Experience*, 5.
[17] Ibid., 6.

however, is the Volunteers to America program, a small-scale experiment in international volunteer service with far-reaching implications.

## *International Education Year*

The year 1970 marked the beginning of International Education Year (IEY), as proclaimed by the United Nations in 1968. In the first of 17 bulletins, the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued a message encouraging member-states to think differently about education:

> But how is education to broaden its bounds in this way if it remains compartmentalized in its international organization and isolated as a whole from life and society…In too many cases, the school, the college and the university, far from living at one with the community, constitute tiny worlds of their own.[18]

The resolution, which passed unanimously in the United Nations General Assembly, was celebrated as a historic moment of worldwide consensus. In addition to urging increased access to education for women and the people of developing nations, the General Assembly agreed that life-long, international education was a means to promote mutual understanding among peoples. Throughout the year, member states were encouraged to undertake substantively new approaches to education and

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[18] US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Office of Education, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, *International Education Year 1970 Bulletin* (Paris, 1969), 2.

training.[19]

That same year marked the end of the Volunteers to America program, a Peace Corps in reverse that ran from 1967-1970. Under the auspices of the State Department and briefly the Peace Corps, the program invited foreign nationals to the United States to volunteer alongside Americans in the fields of education and social work. The objectives of VTA were four-fold, as outlined in a 1965 proposal for an "Exchange Peace Corps of Volunteers to America":

(1) It would be a two way contribution, by helping Americans meet some of their needs, while at the same time enabling foreign volunteers to better meet their home countries' manpower needs upon their return.

(2) It would promote a better understanding of America by other peoples.

(3) It would promote a better understanding of other peoples by the American people.

(4) It would encourage and assist in the development of national voluntary service programs by other countries.[20]

Both VTA and IEY were designed as counterweights to the narrow-minded, isolationist views of education, which dominated the American education system at the time. Rather than simply promoting international education abroad, VTA took International Education Year one-step further; it challenged Americans to broaden their worldview. The timing for VTA could not have been better—or so it seemed.

The fact that International Educational Year marked the end rather than the

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[19] Ibid., 1-4.
[20] C.S. Houston to Douglass Cater, letter, 27 October 1965, "Working Paper on Exchange Peace Corps of Volunteers to America," WHCF, LBJ Library.

beginning of Volunteers to America suggests that the demise of VTA is a complex story. As the director of the VTA program, Neil Boyer, reflected at the time, "It died a very quiet death. Volunteers to America, the government's 'Reverse Peace Corps' project, succumbed in mid-October, with only a seven-line obituary deep inside the *New York Times*."[21] VTA quickly descended into obscurity, abandoned by Congress, the Peace Corps, and the Nixon administration.

VTA's goals related not only to those of International Education Year, but also to those of the Peace Corps itself. Indeed, the Peace Corps originally conceived of the idea for a Peace Corps in reverse, and shared three out of four of VTA's stated purposes:

> (1) Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
>
> (2) Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
>
> (3) Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.[22]

VTA had immense value to the Peace Corps as a means of promoting internationalism on American soil; moreover, the Peace Corps had an overwhelmingly positive image in the eyes of the American people. All this, it would seem, should have made VTA an instant success story. Yet, this fleeting government program, despite the cornucopia of books and articles on the subject of the Peace

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[21] Neil Boyer, "Death by Congressional Fiat," (Neil Boyer personal records, November 1969), 1.
[22] "Peace Corps Mission," on Peace Corps website, accessed April 6, 2011, http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=about.mission.

Corps, has been largely forgotten. While Peace Corps newsletters reported on the small-scale program and a few newspapers chimed in about the novelty of the concept, most Americans never knew of its existence. By 1970, the program was living out its final days under the passive watch of Kevin Lowther, a returned Peace Corps volunteer in the Federal Office of Voluntary Action. As Lowther recalled,

> It wasn't official, but Neil [Boyer, the director of VTA] was going off to do other things. There were three or four of us volunteers, which meant we had to stay in touch with the remaining volunteers, but they were pretty self-sufficient. I don't recall ever having to do anything. Nixon and Congress had made it clear that they were not going to fund it. It was quite clear at the point I took over.[23]

By contrast, 1970 initiated a decade of ambitious growth for the Peace Corps, as one of the most highly regarded government programs expanded its influence to more than 6,000 volunteers in 69 countries worldwide.[24] The Peace Corps had proven its staying power, despite a party shift in the Oval Office: in fact, its bipartisan nature was one of its major selling points. Although Kennedy's assassination, the war in Vietnam, and budgetary cuts during the Nixon administration damaged its pristine image, the future remained bright for the Peace Corps, which had inherited John F. Kennedy's youthful idealism along with first director Sargent Shriver's sharp political skills. Volunteers to America, by contrast, was tainted from the start.

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[23] Kevin Lowther, personal interview by author, Washington, D.C., 23 August 2010.
[24] "1970s-Peace Corps History, on the Peace Corps website, accessed April 1, 2011, http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=about.history.decades.1970.

## *The Indian Pilot Program*

The Peace Corps' third goal—to strengthen Americans' understanding of the world and its peoples—was present from its inception, but the notion of Americans learning from the Third World was highly controversial. After the first wave of volunteers returned home from abroad, the third goal of the Peace Corps began to take on new meaning. As Kennedy stated at the time, "the logic of the Peace Corps is that someday we are going to bring it home to America."[25] Although Kennedy was referring to American volunteers, whom he hoped would return with a broader perspective on the world and its people, the idea took on literal meaning in the mid-1960s, beginning with a little-known Indian pilot project.

According to Coates Redmon, author of *Come As You Are: the Peace Corps Story*, two Peace Corps volunteers—Alfred Winslow Jones and Charles Houston—came up with the idea of a Peace Corps in reverse, after serving in Peru and India. Charles Houston was the first country director for the Peace Corps in India, as well as a mountaineer, physician, professor, and author. Jones worked as a financial reporter for *Fortune* magazine in the 1940s before discovering Wall Street—Jones is widely considered the founder of the first hedge fund. Despite his contribution to money management, however, Jones was not interested in making money for its own sake; rather, he wanted to "slope away from business and pick up [his] old interest in social affairs."[26] As a sociologist with a PhD from Columbia, Jones was a champion of what he called "the humiliated poor," and started the Foundation for Volunteer Service to

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[25] " Third Goal," Peace Corps website, accessed March 30, 2011, http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=resources.returned.thirdgoal.
[26] Peter Landau, "Alfred Winslow Jones: The Long and Short of the Founding Father," (*The Institutional Investor*, August 1968), 2.

bring new perspectives to fighting the cycle of poverty.

The idea to create a two-way flow of volunteers had also occurred to Shriver and Wofford independently. While serving as director of the Peace Corps' program in Ethiopia, Wofford spoke to Ethiopian students about his idea for a "reverse peace corps" and came to the conclusion that Ethiopians would be interested in a two-way traffic of volunteers. Likewise, in a meeting with Shriver in 1961, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana offered to send Africans to the United States in return for Americans, while President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania told Peace Corps officials that he would be "especially happy to educate your Americans."[27] As we shall see in Chapter Two, however, these African socialists would have aroused suspicions in the context of the Cold War. Returned volunteers also indicated their support during a conference themed "Citizens in a Time of Change," held in 1965.

That same year, Alfred Jones returned to the United States with a specific proposal to initiate a partnership with India through a small-scale, privately funded pilot program. The project would bring five Indian volunteers, selected by the Indian government, to volunteer in the United States. Jones was not only the architect of the program, he was also its primary sponsor, and used his Foundation to help fund the project.[28] USAID paid for travel costs and the Indian government covered local travel costs, but Jones's private contribution paid for the volunteers' summer teaching stint, as well as their volunteer stipends. Jones believed that foreigners would have more of an impact on America's poor:

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[27] Gerard T. Rice, *The Bold Experiment*: *JFK's Peace Corps* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 291.
[28] Coates Redmon, *Come As You Are: The Peace Corps Story* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 334-35.

> It is fascinating to watch the quick rapport between an Indian girl in a sari and the ghetto poor—or a black African and a young slum Negro…Now these foreigners—and there ought to be more of them—learn that even the richest country in the world has problems, and is trying to come to grips with them.[29]

David Schimmel, who worked with Wofford as associate director of the Peace Corps program in Ethiopia was chosen as the Indian exchange program's director. By August 1965, five Indian volunteers had been sent to Saint John's College in Annapolis, where they spent the summer teaching Hindi and Indian studies to a group of Peace Corps' volunteers headed for India.[30] That fall, the Indian volunteers were incorporated into the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, a U.S. anti-poverty program, often called a "Domestic Peace Corps." According to Schimmel, the Indian volunteers made an "obvious and relevant" contribution to Johnson's War on Poverty:

> The interesting thing was in having Indians work on Indian reservations. I think I remember them being appalled that people on reservations could have a television and not a refrigerator. It seemed to me it was useful, and also there was a sense of pride and satisfaction that nations could have in contributing to us and seeing our relationship as reciprocal. It made every sort of sense and furthermore it was quite successful.[31]

Both the Indian volunteers and American Indians benefited from this exchange, but at a cost: by sending foreigners to urban slums and Indian reservations, the United

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[29] Landau, "Alfred Winslow Jones," 4.
[30] Martin McLaughlin, memo, "Exchange Peace Corps," 12 August 1965, WHCF, LBJ Library.
[31] David Schimmel, phone interview by author, 20 September 2010.

States was forced to acknowledge its own economic and moral failings, a dangerous admission at the height of the Cold War.

## *The Uncelebrated History of Volunteers to America*

The immediate success of the pilot-project convinced Shriver that Nkrumah had been right. On December 7, 1965, Shriver delivered the address to the Experiment in International Living—a high school cultural immersion program, in which Shriver himself participated as a student—on the importance of an "Exchange Peace Corps to America": "So I repeat the invitation: If [Nkrumah] doesn't believe we understand Ghana, let him send us some volunteers who will enable us to understand first hand…it is time to try this Reverse Peace Corps on a larger scale."[32] Wofford, too, became enamored by the idea, and organized preliminary meetings in his office with Jones and Schimmel, among others, to discuss the complex issues of funding and legislative authority. Wofford—recalling Johnson's heroic intervention on behalf of the Peace Corps' autonomy in 1961 and desperate for help from the White House—brought his working paper for the establishment of an "Exchange Peace Corps of Volunteers to America" to the White House. Wofford's instincts were right: in his message to Congress on February 2, 1966, Johnson enthusiastically endorsed an "Exchange Peace Corps," proposing an initial goal of 5,000 volunteers:

> Our nation has no better ambassadors than the young volunteers who serve in 46 countries in the Peace Corps. I propose that we welcome similar ambassadors to our shores. We need their special skills and understanding,

[32] Sargent Shriver, "Address to the Experiment in International Living" (Dinner of the Experiment in International Living, New York, December 7, 1965), 5-6.

just as they need ours.[33]

Like Kennedy before him, Johnson organized a presidential task force to prepare a proposal for the establishment of a Reverse Peace Corps. Charles Frankel, Assistant Secretary of State for the Educational and Cultural Affairs (CU) division of the State Department, was chairman of the task force, which submitted its report to the president on June 15, 1966. The proposal recommended that the Peace Corps, in collaboration with the Office of Education and other relevant government agencies, be given sole responsibility for the selection and placement of foreign volunteers. The first group would include 40 volunteers in 1967, a number which would increase by 20 each year for a total of 120 volunteers by 1971.[34] The Peace Corps agency would fund the program, using one-tenth of a percent of its budget to do so. The goals of the Exchange Peace Corps, as mentioned earlier, were identical to those of the Peace Corps,' but with a reverse twist: while helping Americans, foreign volunteers would gain skills and insights to help meet their home countries' needs. Like Shriver's initial proposal for the Peace Corps, the report provoked heated debates in the State Department and Congress concerning funding, control, and the merits of sending foreign volunteers to American shores.

Shriver's successor, Jack Vaughn, and the chairman of the presidential task force, Charles Frankel, presented the proposal for an Exchange Peace Corps to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, chaired by Pennsylvania Democrat Thomas E. Morgan. The proposal had the strong backing of both the President and the Peace

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[33] Lyndon Baines Johnson, message to Congress, 2 February 1966, Box 74, WHCF, LBJ Library.
[34] Task Force Proposal, Report on "Exchange Education Corps: Volunteers to America," 15 June 1966, Box 8, WHCF, LBJ Library.

Corps, and was included in the Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966. Despite this initial victory, however, powerful figures in both houses of Congress were incredulous about the exchange program, especially Democrat Wayne Hays of Ohio, who was ferociously opposed to the proposal. As co-author of the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961 (officially known as the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act)—which "enable [d] the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange"—Hays viewed the Peace Corps' proposal as not only redundant, but also dangerously radical.[35] The House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by William J. Fulbright, recommended instead that:

> Under existing authority contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (Fulbright-Hays Act) as amended, a pilot project could be started…the [House Foreign Affairs] Committee therefore suggests the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State and the soon-to-be established Center or Educational Cooperation of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to work, in cooperation with the Peace Corps, toward achievement of these objectives.[36]

Although neither Fulbright nor Hays had envisioned sending foreign volunteers to the United States, Congress found legislative authority in Section 102 (b) of the Fulbright-Hays Act, which authorized the President to "promote and

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[35] Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961. Pub. L. No. 87-256, 75 Stat. 527 (1961).
[36] General Data on Volunteers to America, RG 490, Subject files. NACP.

support medical, scientific, cultural, and educational research and development."[37] The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (CU) of the Department of State provided the small cost of the pilot program.

On January 1, 1967 David Schimmel left his post as director of the privately-sponsored Indian exchange program and handed the new pilot exchange program—known as "Volunteers to America"—to Neil Boyer, who had served as a Peace Corps volunteer under Schimmel and Wofford in Ethiopia. Beginning in July, the volunteers to America were sent to one of three places for training: the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and the Experiment in International Living in Brattleboro, Vermont for teachers, and the Commonwealth Service Corps in Boston for those assigned to work in community development and social work programs alongside other American VISTA volunteers. Trainees spent the summer honing their English and teaching skills and preparing for the "American way of life."[38] That fall, 64 volunteers (30 women and 34 men) from 12 foreign countries (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Iran, Israel, Korea, Nepal, the Philippines, and Venezuela) were placed in 13 states and 30 communities. Two-thirds were assigned positions as language or cultural aides in public schools, while the remaining volunteers joined one of Johnson's anti-poverty initiatives.[39] The fact that most volunteers were assigned teaching positions suggests that the United States was wary of involving foreign nationals (many of whom came from socialist countries) in the politics of needy communities.

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Volunteers to America Training Program, pamphlet, University of Southern California, 1967. Barbara Hodgdon personal files.
[39] Benjamin H. Pearse, "Volunteers to America," (*American Education* 1968), 1-2.

One year later, at the request of a letter from the Bureau of the Budget (BOB), the Center for International Education of the University of Southern California submitted a comprehensive evaluation of the Volunteers to America program to the CU Division. The report, based the University's study, interviews with related government agencies (such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, and the Office of Education), participating communities, and volunteers, concluded that the first year of the program had been a tremendous success, both from the point of view of the communities and contractors who received the volunteers and the volunteers themselves. As one volunteer from Argentina wrote of her experience, "I have learned very much of why I am a Volunteer to America. Every single thing has had a meaningful value during this time."[40] The report advised that the Bureau of the Budget—budget permitting—not only continue the pilot program, but also expand its reach to 5,000 volunteers in the next five years.[41] The last recommendation, however, was the most consequential: "Administration of the program should be transferred to the Peace Corps as soon as possible to take advantage of its emphasis on voluntary service and its commitment to innovation and experimentation."[42]

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs soon approved the transfer and forwarded the evaluation to the Bureau of the Budget. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Budget, Ralph Roberts, further recommended that the program be transferred to the Peace Corps, "since somewhat similar operational problems are involved, whether in the U.S. or abroad, common direction of both should help to

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[40] Darma Valentini, letter to Bureau of the Budget, Neil Boyer personal files.
[41] US Department of State, *Evaluation of Volunteers to America* (Neil Boyer personal files, September 1968), 4.
[42] Ibid., 5.

assure consistency and efficiency."[43] On March 6, 1969 Vaughn discussed the transfer with Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson. After consulting with the general legal council of the Peace Corps and the State Department, neither of whom found any legal obstacle to the transfer in the Fulbright-Hays Act, Vaughn wrote to Johnson's secretary of state, Dean Rusk, for approval. On April 7, 1969, Richardson, as acting secretary of state, obtained approval from the director of the Bureau of the Budget, Robert Mayo. On July 3, 1969 Richardson signed a "Delegation of Authority," thereby transferring authority from the secretary of state to the director of the Peace Corps.[44]

By the time of the transfer, Richard Nixon had become president and replaced Vaughn with his own appointee, Joseph Blatchford. Blatchford took over in May 1969, inheriting the Volunteers to America pilot program, as well as a state budgetary crisis. In the months leading up to the transfer, Blatchford met with members of Congress, such as Hays of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Brooklyn Democrat John J. Rooney of the House Appropriations Committee, and conservative Louisiana Democrat Otto Passman, who indicated their opposition to the program in hearings in the House Appropriations Committee on May 26. Because of negative reactions in Congress and financial difficulties, the State Department acquiesced to the transfer of authority, but cancelled the third group of 40 foreign volunteers, scheduled to arrive in the United States that July.[45]

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[43] Jack Vaughn, memo to the Secretary of State, 7 March 1969, RG 490, NACP.
[44] US Department of State, *State Department Delegation of Authority NO. 105-A: Delegation of Functions Under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961,* 7 March 1969, RG 490, NACP.
[45] Memo, "Volunteers to America," 10 October 1969, RG 490, Subject files. NACP.

In hearings on July 21 in the House Appropriations Committee, Rooney's Appropriations Subcommittee confirmed that no funds would be included in the State Department's budget to continue the Volunteers to America program. Blatchford, however, would not give up on VTA without a fight: three days later, he introduced an amendment to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which would circumvent Rooney's restrictions by spending the Peace Corps' own money on the exchange program. His proposal would have taken $100,000 from the Peace Corps regular budget.[46]

On September 8, 1969 Hays presented an amendment of his own—this to the Peace Corps Act of 1969. The Hays amendment put an end both to the transfer of authority and to the program itself. The bill, which passed nearly unanimously in the House, stipulated that:

> None of the funds authorized to carry out the purposes of this Act shall be used to carry out the Volunteers to America Program conducted under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 or any similar program involving the service or training of foreign nationals in the United States.[47]

In the Senate, meanwhile, the Foreign Relations Committee authorized Blatchford to use Peace Corps funds for the Volunteers to America program on September 17, but later withdrew the amendment. Hays' amendment to the Peace Corps Act signaled the end of Volunteers to America. On January 20, Boyer informed the volunteers remaining in the United States of the situation in Congress and

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1969, H.R. 11039, 91st Cong., 1st sess., (1969).

officially announced his resignation. On January 26, Boyer accepted a position in the Cultural Affairs division of the State Department, analyzing the Fulbright program among other state-run international exchange programs. With Boyer and VTA funding gone, the program was transferred to Lowther in the Office of Voluntary Action. By the end of August 1970, Volunteers to America had been terminated altogether.

## *Who Killed VTA?*

The Peace Corps and Volunteers to America were intimately connected. The two organizations shared many of the same people, agencies, and ideals; both exhibited the youthful idealism of Kennedy's New Frontier in the early 1960s, and both were aimed at realizing Johnson's dream of eradicating poverty in the United States through the creation of a Great Society. Likewise, both organizations faced intense opposition from Congress and traditional diplomats in the Department of State. The story of Volunteers to America diverged from that of the Peace Corps in one fundamental way: it failed. The Peace Corps has stood the test of time, as the widely anticipated 50th anniversary celebration illustrates, while Volunteers to America has drifted into oblivion, unknown and therefore unmissed.

This thesis will examine the short-lived, albeit complex history of the Volunteers to America program. The story of Volunteers to America is multilayered; hence, this thesis is divided into three chapters and an epilogue, each of which digs deeper for answers to the question: why did this promising pilot program die? Chapter One analyzes the structural and institutional reasons why Congress cancelled

VTA, from bureaucratic infighting to monetary concerns. Chapter Two considers the political climate of the late 1960s and the impact of the Cold War and the Vietnam War, which predisposed Congress to oppose the VTA concept from the start. Chapter Three theorizes that VTA created a "crisis of inversion" in the United States by implying that Americans could benefit from the help of others. This reverse twist was counterintuitive for most Americans, who inherited the paternalistic, cultural arrogance of their forebears.

Unlike the Peace Corps, which has been documented, analyzed, celebrated, and critiqued, there has been almost nothing written about Volunteers to America; while the Peace Corps has dozens of books chronicling its complicated bureaucratic, legislative, and ideological history, Volunteers to America only appears in a few sentences scattered across the entire canon of Peace Corps literature. Because of the novel nature of this undertaking, research for this project is based heavily on primary sources, which were gathered from a variety of locations: the Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) Library in Austin, Texas, the National Archives at College Park, Maryland (NACP), the Library of Congress (LOC) in Washington, D.C., and Wesleyan University's Government Document depository. The LBJ Library contributed many White House memos, Department of State newsletters, drafts of speeches and working papers relating to the Volunteers to America program. The National Archives at College Park provided access to confidential Peace Corps, State Department, and White House files, which included memos, letters, congressional speeches, sending country profiles, evaluation reports, as well as well-guarded articles on the subject of Volunteers to America. The Library of Congress and

Wesleyan University's collection of government documents supplied congressional records and hearings, which became crucial to understanding the debate and controversy surrounding Volunteers to America. In addition, Peace Corps co-founder, Senator Harris Wofford, VTA Director Neil Boyer, and USC's VTA Training Coordinator Barbara Hodgdon generously released their personal files to advance this project.

Finally, various personal interviews were conducted with Wofford, Boyer, White House Fellow Tom Cronin, Kevin Lowther of the Office of Voluntary Action, David Schimmel of the Indian Pilot Program, VTA volunteer Dharma Rodriguez, and Scott Beale of Atlas Service Corps, a recent incarnation of the Reverse Peace Corps project. Each person generously donated many hours of their time, whether in person, over the phone, or via email, to tell the important—and as of now untold—story of the collapse of the Volunteers to America program. Without these oral histories, this thesis would not have been possible.

# Chapter 1: Surface Tensions

## *A Lack of Understanding*

In many ways, the quiet disappearance of Volunteers to America (VTA) from Americans' consciousness was the result of American bureaucracy. The sheer number of names used to describe the program during its short lifespan—from Partnership Exchange Program in its very early stages, to Reverse Peace Corps, Exchange Peace Corps, and finally, Volunteers to America—reveals the convoluting nature of the project. As the name for the new experiment changed throughout the planning stages, the meaning attached to the concept changed with it. Exchange Peace Corps, after all, has a very different connotation than Volunteers to America.

In part, this confusion stemmed from the radical and unprecedented character of the Peace Corps' (and later President Lyndon Johnson's) proposal to send foreign volunteers to the United States for the betterment of American society. Such ambiguities and surface tensions over the exact purpose of a Peace Corps in reverse would prove detrimental to the pilot program's success. In a memo sent to the Volunteers to America, Director Neil Boyer urged the volunteers to make their purpose known, noting that many Americans were still uninformed about the program's objectives. As Boyer wrote to the volunteers in December 1968, "Making themselves and the program understood remains as one of the biggest problems of the volunteers."[48]

Signs of bureaucratic infighting and technical confusion about the proposal to

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[48] Neil Boyer, memo to Volunteers to America, 10 December 1968, Neil Boyer personal files.

invite foreigner volunteers to work in the United States can be seen as early as 1965 in meetings between Harris Wofford and representatives of the Office of Education (OE). A State Department Memorandum from Martin McLaughlin, a member of the State Department's Agency of International Development (USAID), sent with the subject line "Exchange Peace Corps," recounts a recent meeting in Wofford's office between members of the OE and the Peace Corps. McLaughlin writes that the meeting was called based on his own suggestion that the Peace Corps consult the relevant government agencies before seeking out private funds. McLaughlin's retelling of the meeting's highlights shows how complicated the program's procedures were, even at this early stage.

In his description of the privately funded pilot project, which brought five Indians to the United States to work with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) volunteers, McLaughlin concedes that the funding and inner-workings of this small-scale experiment in volunteer exchange were "rather complicated," to say the least:

> International travel was paid by AID; local travel in India for 30 volunteers, from whom the five were selected, was paid by the Indian Government; their VISTA Volunteer stipends will be made up by a combination of the Peace Corps support to their summer teaching activity and the private contribution of a New York philanthropist named Alfred Winslow Jones.[49]

Given the size of the program, it should come as no surprise that most Congressmen at the time were unaware of its existence: when the director of the Peace Corps, Jack Vaughn, references the work of the Indian volunteers in an attempt to help House

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[49] Martin McLaughlin, memo, 12 August 1965, RG 353, Box 8, NACP.

members understand the value of expanding this project, he provokes a string of questions, the most telling one being "what are we talking about?"[50]

While the Indian pilot program managed to circumvent Congress successfully—by putting the financial burden on the Indian government and the private contribution of Jones—the Peace Corps always had a bigger vision in mind. By setting a precedent for foreigners (from outside of Western Europe) to render this kind of volunteer service alongside Americans, the Peace Corps had hoped Congress would be more open to an Exchange Peace Corps on a larger scale. However, when the Peace Corps proposed to expand this reverse Peace Corps idea to the tens of thousands, Congress balked at the idea.

The Peace Corps abandoned these high hopes, but Wofford remained characteristically optimistic, in part because of the Exchange Peace Corps' pertinence to Johnson's War on Poverty—a congruence we will return to in the next chapter. Even before Johnson officially endorsed the proposal in his message to Congress in 1966, Wofford knew the White House would jump at the opportunity; while other Peace Corpsmen pushed for a non-governmental task force to discuss the pilot program's expansion, Wofford insisted that this was a program made for President Johnson.[51] Soon, Volunteers to America came to be perceived as the brainchild of Johnson, rather than of the Peace Corps organization that conceived of the idea in the first place.

Even among Peace Corps officials, there were early signs of confusion and

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[50] Peace Corps Act of 1966: Hearings on H.R. 15371, Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 89th Cong., 2nd sess. 116 (1966).
[51] Martin M. McLaughlin, notes on meeting, 1 April 1965, RG 353, Box 8, NACP.

dissension. The meeting in Wofford's office in 1965 discussed the practical and ideological reasons for the program. According to the McLaughlin memo, Wofford and others attempted to draw on existing programs to prove Volunteers to America's feasibility. As McLaughlin reveals in a White House memo, "It became clear in the 'buzz groups' that there was no shared agreement on the meaning of the 'Reverse Peace Corps,'" such as whether foreign students would be recruited for voluntary service before or after completing their education.[52] Other meeting attendees were confused as to whether the program would operate under existing programs for selection or would require a separate institution called a "Reverse Peace Corps." Still others were unsure whether the program would be geared towards professionals, with experience in teaching or social work or recent college graduates with little to no work experience, but a youthful energy for volunteerism (like the Peace Corps).[53]

Thus, the basic issues discussed in Wofford's office are indicative of the technical problems that would plague the Volunteers to America program from its inception. What became immediately apparent to early supporters was that sending foreign volunteers to the United States, let alone from the developing world, was fundamentally different than sending American volunteers to Third World countries—and that this tension had never crossed the State Department's mind. This lack of experience would lead to one of the most basic, yet controversial questions the program would face: whether the Exchange Peace Corps should evolve out of existing programs established within the State Department or form a completely new,

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[52] Martin McLaughlin, memo, 15 March 1965, RG 353, Box 8, NACP.
[53] Ibid.

independent agency.[54] With no precedent on which to base Wofford's idea, the OE representatives who took part in Wofford's meeting turned to Title I of the Education Act of 1965, which assisted in the distribution of funding to underprivileged schools. The OE compared VTA to the Teacher Exchange Program, authorized by the Fulbright-Hays Act, which sent experienced foreign teachers from Europe to the United States through the OE, as well as the Cleveland International Program (CIP), which brought foreign leaders in the field of social work for training in the United States through the Council of International Programs for Youth Leaders and Social Workers.[55] Wofford, meanwhile, pointed out that Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) bill did not limit volunteers to American citizens, though foreign volunteers were clearly never considered.[56]

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for the Exchange Peace Corps was a lack of understanding, both within the Peace Corps and Congress, regarding just how the program would operate. In a working paper drafted by Peace Corps insiders, Wofford among others described the program as complementary to the Peace Corps Act of 1961, but with a "reverse twist": the program would be a "two-way contribution" by helping America meet some of its needs and fostering experiences for foreign volunteers, which would help them meet their home countries' needs when they returned. It was the stated hope that the development of a two-way flow of Peace Corps volunteers, especially among countries wary of inviting Americans into their countries, would counter the prevailing American arrogance that "we are bringing

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[54] McLaughlin, notes on meeting, 2.
[55] US Department of State, *Appendix III of Evaluation of Volunteers to America*, (Neil Boyer personal files, September 1968).
[56] McLaughlin, notes on meeting, 2.

light to darkness."[57] The working paper echoed the Peace Corps' mission to provide trained manpower to interested countries, while promoting a better understanding of Americans and the people they are serving, but added a fourth goal—to encourage the development of national voluntary service programs—to the original three.

While the goals of the Exchange Peace Corps were stated clearly from the beginning, the terms of service, selection, and sponsorship were not. The working paper left ambiguous whether these foreign volunteers would be selected by the sending countries' governments or from foreign students already studying in the United States. It also left training, selection, and length of service up in the air—sending governments were essentially given free reign over selection systems, a decision that would prove politically damaging by the time the proposal reached Congress in 1966. Even more consequential was the weak intimation that the Peace Corps was the best governmental body to administer the program: "The Exchange Peace Corps for Volunteers to America might be established as part of the United States Peace Corps in full and formal collaboration with the other appropriate government and private agencies."[58] Scribbled in the left-hand margins of the working paper, next to the paragraph, entitled "Administration by the U.S. Peace Corps" is the word "changed." This debate over whether the Peace Corps was the most effective or most trusted agency to run the new exchange program would become a key rationale for congressional dismantlement of VTA in 1969.

Issues of clarity for how the Reverse Peace Corps would function in practice

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[57] Working Paper on an Exchange Peace Corps of Volunteers to America, 1965, RG 353, Box 8, NACP.
[58] Ibid, 4.

were brought up in the summer of 1966, when Jack Vaughn, the newly appointed director of the Peace Corps under Johnson, brought what had become the president's proposal before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. According to Vaughn's statement, the Peace Corps had every intention of administering the Partnership Exchange Program (PEP), an umbrella piece of legislation that would include the Exchange Peace Corps, among other proposals, such as the popular school-to-school partnership program, in which American schools sponsored a school in the developing world. The selection process would be a joint procedure between the sending country and the United States. Vaughn also made clear that the program would recruit primarily from Third World countries, with an emphasis on young volunteers at the beginning of their careers.

Unlike the Cleveland International Program and Fulbright teaching fellowships operated under the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the program would work with local community development agencies, and encourage volunteers to immerse themselves in all aspects of their assigned schools and communities. Although Vaughn expressed his enthusiasm and faith that the program, if authorized by Congress, would succeed, he also stressed the Peace Corps' intention to proceed slowly and with caution, as well as its willingness to change, according to the whims of the committee members. As he stated in his opening and concluding remarks, "I want in particular to invite your questions about the Reverse Peace Corps and obtain your guidance on the course that it should take."[59]

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[59] *Peace Corps Act of 1966:* Hearings on H.R. 15371, Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, 89th Cong., 2nd sess., 1-5 (1966).

## *A Lack of Resources*

While the purpose of Vaughn's testimony was to convince Congress that his proposal for an Exchange Peace Corps was a worthy one, it appears to have accomplished just the opposite. Congressmen from both political parties were eager to counsel Vaughn and the Peace Corps, despite knowing very little about the proposal. The House Foreign Affairs Committee questioned the practicality of the program, which proposed that the sending country would undertake all of the recruiting, training, and selecting, as well as the transportation costs of volunteers to the United States. In his statement before the committee, Vaughn claimed that 17 countries from Latin America, Asia, and Africa had already expressed interest in sending volunteers to the United States; however, he glossed over how countries lacking in money and manpower themselves would gather the necessary funding to send volunteers to America.

One committee member, Republican E.Y. Berry of South Dakota, brought up the issue of salary—that is, who would pay, and whether it would be comparable to that of other Americans teaching in the school. Vaughn explained that volunteers would receive a living allowance, covered by the school. The main expenditure would come from the six to eight-week training and orientation program, which would cost $250 per trainee per week, not including health insurance and conferences, among other additional costs. While approving the program would have cost Congress less than one-tenth of one percent of the Peace Corps overall budget for fiscal year 1967, Congress used funding as a common argument against Volunteers to America.[60]

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[60] Ibid.

Even if funding was not Congress' only reason for opposing the Exchange Peace Corps, it made for a legitimate argument in many respects. In the late 1960s, many countries in the developing world did not have the means to cover volunteers' travel expenses. According to country files designed to gauge international interest in an Exchange Peace Corps, most countries were enthusiastic on ideological grounds, but tentative or dismissive for financial reasons. For example, one confidential document from the American Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, is typical of the Third World's reaction to the Exchange program as presented to them by Boyer. The report concluded that,

> The Government of Lebanon would not find it possible to participate in a program of this nature at the present time. The country has only recently suffered from a serious private banking failure, which is coupled with current banking deficiencies. Added to all this is the chronic insufficiency of teachers here.[61]

Other countries responded in a similar vein. In a letter to Deputy Assistant Secretary for Cultural and Educational Affairs, Katie Louchheim, the Ambassador to Malaysia sent her this sympathetic answer:

> There is no doubt in my mind that it would contribute to the already good relationship which exists between Malaysia and the United States and would be in our national interest…my problems are of a more practical nature. Although one of the most prosperous underdeveloped countries, Malaysia is

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[61] US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, *Education and Cultural Exchange: Volunteers to America from Lebanon*, 28 March 1967, RG 490, Country Files, NACP.

> still short competent personnel and money…the Minister of Finance will balk at approving funds necessary for the kind of project outlined in your letter.[62]

Mexico, Nepal, Panama, and Paraguay, among others, conveyed the same enthusiasm for the concept with the same complication: lack of money.

Despite these funding issues, letters from interested countries willing to provide the necessary funding rolled into Boyer's office throughout his term as director, most of which he had to turn down due to financial uncertainty. As one distraught Korean woman wrote to Boyer,

> Our government, Educational Ministry, chose me to dispatch to your country as a Korean Peace Corps during this summer vacation. I have prepared things to show your country. I want to see how your people live, how American teachers teach their students and how your students accept them. I was very glad to show my country to Americans and others, and to learn from your people. But, now I think it's in vain. I want to understand why you refused to accept us.[63]

Pleas like this were not isolated occurrences; even as the program was on its way to being phased out entirely, foreign governments, American school districts, non-profit organizations, and even a Sioux Indian Tribe continued to request involvement in Volunteers to America, unaware that the program's supporters were on the losing side of the battle with Congress.

Democratic Representative John J. Rooney of Brooklyn, presiding over the

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[62] James Dunbar Bell to Katie Louchheim, letter, 14 November 1966, RG 490, Country Files, NACP.
[63] Operations memo, "Educational and Cultural Exchange: Volunteers to America," 1968, RG 490, Country Files, NACP.

House Subcommittee on Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations, echoed the voices of the majority of congressmen who opposed government spending on VTA. A private letter exchanged in 1967 between Charles Frankel (assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs) and Boyer with the title "Mr. Rooney and Money" says it all. The letter highlighted the economical nature of the program, and strategies to override Mr. Rooney's budgetary concerns:

> Because of Mr. Rooney's preoccupation with spending, I think another major point to be made with him…If someone can get to him is…This is not simply an experimental program to try out some wild new idea, but a genuine attempt to see if there is not a better and more economical way to carry out educational and cultural exchange programs, which are his business, and ours.[64]

As Boyer told the Volunteers to America in a letter postmarked for January 20, 1970, "Many people feel the reason that Congress opposed the program was that they were unconvinced of the value of the VTA program in a time of inflation and severe criticisms of government spending."[65] These arguments—that the United States and the sending countries lacked the money and human manpower to administer Volunteers to America effectively—helped contribute to VTA's death in 1969.

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[64] Charles Frankel to Neil Boyer, letter, 17 May 1967, RG 490, Subject files, NACP.
[65] Neil Boyer to Volunteers to America, memo, 20 January 1970, Neil Boyer personal files.

## *A Lack of Preparation*

There was also a perceivable disconnect between the White House and Peace Corps Director Jack Vaughn, who inherited the idea for a reverse Peace Corps from Wofford, among others. Vaughn, a lifelong Republican appointed by Johnson in 1966, symbolized the non-partisan basis of the Peace Corps. Unfortunately for Vaughn, Congress was also bipartisan in its opposition to VTA. Just four months into his term as director, in hearings before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Vaughn appeared unprepared for the sudden downpour of questions from Congress about the Peace Corps' "Exchange Peace Corps" proposal. In response to a question posed by Republican Peter Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, regarding the meaning of "exchange volunteer," Vaughn appeared dumbfounded:

> Mr. Frelinghuysen: Why are they called exchange volunteers? Isn't that a misnomer? There is no exchange involved.
>
> Mr. Vaughn: That is correct. We couldn't think of a better title.
>
> Mr. Frelinghuysen: Are you short-handed, or do you just lack ideas?
>
> Mr. Vaughn: The latter.[66]

Vaughn bore the brunt of the criticism for the program, perhaps unfairly, though he was to blame for some of the confusion. Vaughn's newness to the Peace Corps, coupled by widespread ignorance about the program's origins and meaning virtually doomed any chance of Congress approving the $2.1 million "exchange" program.

Tom Cronin, a White House management intern sent to various Latin American countries to gauge government interest in sending volunteers to America,

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[66] *Peace Corps Act of 1966,* 116.

spelled out why Congress did not buy Vaughn's testimony:

> Director Jack Vaughn and his Congressional liaison man were new to their assignment—coming aboard long after this proposal had found its way onto their legislative agenda. They worked hard for it—but it was not their baby—and they had not anticipated the trouble Congress would raise with it.[67]

Although Vaughn and his congressional liaison were working hard on behalf of President Johnson and the Peace Corps to bring VTA to fruition, "it was not their baby" in the same way it had been for Wofford and his colleagues.[68] Cronin's letter, which was sent just a few short months after the Exchange Peace Corps proposal met considerable opposition from the House, advised that only a "gigantic push" from Washington could save Volunteers to America from Congress.

## *The Turf Battle in Congress*

Congressional opposition did not divide along partisan lines. Wofford and others, seeking to understand their opponents, observed other divisions, including what many saw as a generation gap. This particular theory leaked to the press, in an article in the *National Observer* that ran with the headline, "What the U.S. Hopes to Achieve In A 'Reverse Peace Corps' Project." In the article, Wofford theorized that "The younger members were for it; the older tended to think, 'what can foreigners do for us?'"[69] Boyer, reflecting on his strained relationship with Congress, made a

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[67] Tom Cronin to Bill Moyers and Douglass Cater, memo, 7 November 1966, WHCF, LBJ Library.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Carole A. Shifrin, "What U.S. Hopes to Achieve in a Reverse Peace Corps Project," (*The National Observer*, 23 January 1967).

similar observation, noting a reluctance among senior members in Washington, who had grown accustomed to the "old way" or one-way flow of foreign aid.[70] In fact, some of VTA's most relentless opponents, Congressmen Wayne Hays, Otto Passman, and John Rooney, were Democrats.

Hays led the opposition in the House Foreign Affairs Committee. His argument shifted from meeting to meeting, but one of his most lasting claimed VTA duplicated existing programs created under the Fulbright-Hays Act. The Act, Hays argued, was worded broadly enough to include an Exchange Peace Corps, and thus, Volunteers to America did not require new legislation. When Hays compared his Act's statement of purpose to that of the Exchange Peace Corps being proposed by Johnson and the Peace Corps, the two programs did appear to be duplicates of one another: both the Peace Corps proposal and the Fulbright-Hays Act aimed to foster mutual understanding among people through educational and cultural exchange programs. As Hays stated during the 1966 Peace Corps hearings, the Fulbright-Hays Act authorized the president to promote such exchanges by sending "students, trainees, teachers, instructors, and professors" to the United States to share their expertise and culture individually or in groups. [71]

He therefore argued that the Exchange Peace Corps, if there was any value in it, should be included under the umbrella of educational and cultural exchange programs in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, for to create a separate agency to administer this program would just "set up an empire in a field that is

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[70] Neil Boyer, interview by author, Washington D.C., 23 August 2010.
[71] Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Pub. L. 87-256, 75 Stat. 527 (1961).

already crowded."[72] While both the Peace Corps and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs were under the same authority at this time, the Peace Corps operated as a semi-autonomous agency within the State Department. Hays' derision of the Peace Corps proposal therefore suggests lingering resentment in Congress, which can be traced back to the Peace Corps' founding: the Peace Corps' assertion of independence from State Department interests angered many congressmen and State Department officials, who saw the new agency as a political liability. Consequently, Vaughn's proposal for the Peace Corps to oversee an additional program provoked a backlash in Congress.

On July 21, 1966, the day after Congress rebuffed Vaughn's proposal, Charles Frankel spoke on VTA's behalf. Unlike Vaughn, who had inherited the idea from others, Frankel was familiar with the program through his work as chairman of the special task force on international education. As chairman, Frankel oversaw the development of the idea for an Exchange Peace Corps, as well as its incorporation into the president's message to Congress in February of 1966. His statement succinctly addressed Hays duplication argument, by insisting that the Peace Corps' transnational ideal of voluntary service, compounded by its reputation at home and abroad, made it the most effective agency to administer the program. He explained that VTA's emphasis on volunteers from developing countries differed from the Fulbright-Hays Act's intention to send mature, professional teachers (mostly from Western Europe) to gain working experience in the United States.[73]

Despite Frankel's efforts, Congressman Hays' argument carried the day in the

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[72] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 19.
[73] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 43-47.

House of Representatives. Hays, along with fellow Democrats Edna Kelly of New York, William Murphy of Illinois, and Republican Frances Bolton of Ohio, criticized Frankel and Vaughn's argument that the Peace Corps was better suited than the State Department to administer the program. Congress insisted that the wording of the Fulbright-Hays bill was broad enough to encompass a Reverse Peace Corps. Hays, accusing the White House and the Peace Corps of "empire-building, " interrupted Frankel and Vaughn periodically to emphasize this point:

> Mr. HAYS: The concept was to give you a law that was so completely flexible that you could do anything that was good for the country that you had the imagination enough to do. You say the emphasis of the Fulbright-Hays program is on mature, experienced teachers. Does it say anything in the act about that?
>
> Mr. FRANKEL: No, sir.
>
> Mr. HAYS: So you can change that concept, can't you?
>
> Mr. FRANKEL: Yes, sir.
>
> Mr. HAYS: But you want to come in here and set up a whole new program under another organization to duplicate what you ought to be doing yourself.[74]

It is no coincidence that Hays, the co-author of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, insisted that Frankel's proposal be assigned to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA); the Act stipulated that the Bureau would be responsible for "managing, coordinating, and overseeing" exchange programs, but only "those operating under the authority of this chapter and consistent with its

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[74] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 56.

purposes."[75] Thus, the Act mollified the fears of Hays and other skeptics in Congress, by placing the Volunteers to America program under the trusted supervision of the State Department. The program would remain in the Bureau under the authority of the Fulbright-Hays Act until 1969—when the Peace Corps took matters into their own hands.

## *A New Home*

For most of its short existence, the Volunteers to America program was run under Section 102 (b) (5) of the Fulbright-Hays Act, which authorized the President to provide for "promoting and supporting medical, scientific, cultural, and educational research and development." Both the House and the Senate compromised that a pilot project could be started within Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State, and the president yielded: "[W]e intend to carry out Congress's suggestion to test the idea under existing authority."[76] The president and the Peace Corps made other concessions to Congress as well: in 1967, Johnson's recommendation for a starting goal of 5,000 volunteers was cut to 64, for a total of only 107 volunteers. In 1968, however, the Peace Corps, emboldened by a glowing evaluation of VTA released by the University of Southern California (as described in the Introduction), reclaimed its authority.

In a letter to the volunteers announcing the transfer of the program to the Peace Corps, Boyer made the new letterhead (which read "Peace Corps" rather than "State Department") speak for itself: "As you can see by the top of this paper, the

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[75] Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, 22 U.S.C. § 2460 (2010).
[76] General Data on Volunteers to America, RG 490, Subject files, NACP.

Volunteers have a new home," Boyer wrote on July 14, 1969. "The conclusion [of the evaluation] was that the methods of operation and underlying philosophy of Volunteers to America are more closely allied with the Peace Corps than with any other Federal Government program."[77] Meanwhile, the nation and the Peace Corps had also undergone a transfer of power, from Johnson to Richard Nixon, and from Jack Vaughn to another Republican, Joseph H. Blatchford. (Nixon fired Vaughn, before realizing he was a Republican). Under Nixon, all volunteer agencies (including the Peace Corps, VISTA, and Volunteers to America) were consolidated under the umbrella of ACTION. These structural changes left VTA desperate for funding and independence, and left Boyer no choice but to postpone the third group of volunteers indefinitely.

The controversy surrounding the transfer pivoted on a technicality: the Peace Corps, at the behest of the 1968 evaluation, delegated authority to itself without formal Congressional approval. Hays and others who seized upon this were technically right, but they were also using this as pretext for cutting the program. Acting Secretary of State Elliot Richardson authorized the transfer, and he, the Peace Corps, and other members of State held informal talks with appropriate members of Congress, as recounted in a series of letters between the State Department and the Peace Corps in preparation for the transfer. The Peace Corps and the State conferred with lawyers to be certain that the Peace Corps could legally run the program under the Fulbright-Hays Act, and they concluded that the Peace Corps was a sub-agency of the State Department, and thus, no formal congressional authorization was

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[77] Neil A. Boyer to VTA, memo, 14 July 1969, Neil Boyer personal files.

necessary.[78]

The transfer, however, did not address the issue of funding. Although the Peace Corps' legal council concluded that the delegation of authority was simply in-house restructuring, the State Department funds to carry out the Volunteers to America program did not automatically transfer along with it.[79] This loophole prevented Boyer from making any changes to the program, and left him no choice but to cancel his contracts with the University of Southern California and the Experiment in International Living, as well as the third group of 40 volunteers. While Hays initially said he would support the transfer if the program were limited to teachers, he changed his mind in the House on September 8, 1969: "I believe we ought to keep the program where it is. I am against this divided authority. I am against it further more because Mr. Elliot Richardson transferred it without in any way, shape or form consulting Congress."[80]

A speech on the House floor given by Democrat Roman C. Pucinski of Illinois shows the extent to which Hays' argument hit a nerve with Congress:

> Some of our friends in these agencies should be reminded that this Government is a government made up of three co-equal branches, and that this legislative branch has its responsibility…I think this amendment deserves our support if for no other reason than to make clear to the Executive branch of the government that if they want the changes in this program, there is a

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[78] Neil Boyer, "Death by Congressional Fiat," 13-17.
[79] Michael Sharlot to Thomas Houser, memo, "Peace Corps Authority to Operate VTA program under Delegation of Authority," 9 July 1969, RG 490, Subject files, NACP.
[80] 115 Cong. Rec., 24661 (1969).

> prescribed and orderly method of getting those changes…the question is whether the House of Representatives is to write legislation or whether we are going to surrender and yield our responsibility to an Executive Order when they cannot do it another way. That is the issue.[81]

These words are crucial to understanding how a program regarded as a "great success" in the evaluation perished in Congress one year later. Hays' argument brought up deep-seated fears in Congress about the expansion of executive power during the 1960s—both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were guilty of issuing Executive Orders to fast track their policy agendas. These fears were compounded by Richardson's "delegation of authority," which transferred VTA from the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to the Peace Corps, then a semi-autonomous agency within the State Department. While the Fulbright-Hays Act required the president to submit all new proposals to the Speaker of the House and the House Committee on Foreign Relations, the Peace Corps Act delegated free reign over Peace Corps operations to the director and deputy-director. Thus, by transferring the Volunteers to America program to the Peace Corps agency, Richardson had rendered Congress essentially powerless.

Unfortunately for VTA, however, Hays succeeded in manipulating the facts: while Kennedy created the Peace Corps by Executive Order, Richardson signed a "delegation of authority" for a program already in existence. Thus, Pucinski's assertion that the transfer was an abuse of executive privilege is factually unsound. Nevertheless, this falsehood helped convince all but three or four of the 310 members

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[81] Ibid., 24662.

of the House to vote for Hays' amendment to the Peace Corps Act of 1969, which prohibited the Peace Corps from spending any money on Volunteers to America.

After three years of "knocking heads" with Congress, Boyer announced his resignation: "I think that VTA was a great idea, and still is… I just hope that private organizations, and perhaps even some governmental ones, will find ways to carry forward this vital and necessary concept."[82] These technical pretenses given for the death of Volunteers to America, however, present only one layer of the story. The following chapter will reveal the impact of Cold War politics, which had been festering below the surface all along.

[82] Neil Boyer to John Carpenter, letter, 20 January 1970, Neil Boyer personal files.

# Chapter 2: Cold War Politics

## *Political Independence*

In many ways, the Peace Corps' continuing strength and popularity lies in its political neutrality. In May of 1961, the Peace Corps established its independence from the Department of State, a move that solidified the Peace Corps' image as "a "ruthless and unruly place."[83] Kennedy presented the Peace Corps as a different sort of agency from day one. As Wofford said at the time, "Nobody outside the White House was going to lay a hand on the Peace Corps or Shriver because of his own power and Kennedy's behind him."[84] The semi-autonomy of the Peace Corps ushered in a period of bitter infighting within the State Department, which saw the Peace Corps' independence as a liability for American diplomatic missions abroad. While these turf battles were potentially damaging to the new agency's staying power, the Peace Corps simultaneously benefited from the attacks and cynicism emanating from the State Department, as they were a testament to the Peace Corps' position above the sway of politics.

As the entrenched foreign policy establishment made repeated attempts to reassert its authority over Peace Corps' training and operations at home and overseas—pressuring Shriver to send Peace Corps troops to Cold War hot spots, including Algeria in 1962 and 1963 and Vietnam during the Johnson administration—the Peace Corps maintained its apolitical message. The Peace Corps, Shriver insisted throughout his term as director, was fundamentally different than

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[83] Rice, *The Bold Experiment*, 128.
[84] Ibid.

other government agencies, and thus, would not succumb to American foreign policy interests:

> It is not merely non-political; it goes beyond politics and national rivalries to reach the deepest hopes of man. It is a working model, a microcosm, a small society representing the kind of world we want our children to live in.[85]

Some members of the State Department, such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk, along with undersecretaries Chester Bowles and George Ball, agreed that the Peace Corps should remain politically neutral. Rusk advised Shriver that the Peace Corps should run with as much independence as possible, and Shriver vigorously upheld this standard.

Occasionally, however, some lower-level members of the White House and the national security apparatus exerted pressure on the Peace Corps to commit American volunteers to newly independent, unaligned nations in Africa and Latin America. Shriver's insistence on neutrality angered many of these Cold War hawks, such as Kennedy's national security advisers George Bundy and Harold Saunders, who pressed Shriver to "quash this nonsense that the Peace Corps is independent of U.S. policy interest."[86] Shriver, however, stood by the Peace Corps' principle to only send volunteers to countries that specifically requested them. Kennedy generally followed Shriver's lead, but Johnson later became frustrated by Shriver's unwillingness to send volunteers to Vietnam.[87] While the Peace Corps' independence from State Department interests signaled a radical shift in American diplomacy, Cold

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[85] Sargent Shriver, *Point of Lance*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 49.
[86] Rice, *The Bold Experiment*, 267.
[87] Ibid., 266.

War ideology nonetheless permeated the Peace Corps, as well as the Volunteers to America program.

## *A Peaceful Arm of the Cold War*

The Peace Corps may have been different, but it was never entirely outside the realm of politics. While Rusk—and the Peace Corps generally—argued that the Peace Corps would function "outside of the shadows and struggles of the Cold War…outside of the constant sense of national advantage which pervades diplomacy," winning the Cold War was still pressing on everyone's minds.[88] While the Peace Corps distanced itself from politics, emphasizing service and goodwill, many remained skeptical—and rightly so. As Rusk revealed, "The Peace Corps is not an instrument *of* foreign policy because to make it so would rob it of its contribution *to* foreign policy.[89] Even the idealist, Harris Wofford, admitted that the Peace Corps was embedded in Cold War politics from its inception:

> We stressed no connection to strategic interests in American foreign policy; it was not designed to win votes in the UN or to win the Cold War, but rather to promote a better understanding of people. But the Peace Corps will contribute to American foreign policy to the extent that it is not seen as an instrument of foreign policy.[90]

Thus, the Peace Corps walked a fine line between its benevolent and political purposes. With a Cold Warrior in the White House, Americans were unabashedly

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[88] Ibid., 266.
[89] Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *All You Need is Love: the Peace Corps and the spirit of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 99.
[90] Harris Wofford, personal interview by author, 27 November 2009.

convinced of their role as the promulgators of freedom and democracy abroad. Peace Corps volunteers represented a new tactic; rather than fight wars overseas, the Peace Corps relied upon American political and cultural ideas to promote American policy and ensure that developing nations did not fall to communism. The Peace Corps' political goal—to outshine the Soviets by demonstrating the political and moral superiority of Americans—was highly popular among believers in the domino effect. They saw the Peace Corps as a more nuanced Cold War strategy in the wake of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and growing skepticism about U.S. presence in Vietnam. This shift in foreign policy away from financial and military action reflected a growing awareness that the Soviets were winning converts in newly independent countries in Latin America and Africa. As a result, Shriver and the Peace Corps found themselves in the tenuous position of having to harness the Peace Corps' political potential while preserving its pure and idealistic image in the eyes of both Americans and those they were sent to serve.

## *The Other America*

The first wave of Peace Corps volunteers finished their two years of service having met Kennedy's goal of building a more educated and worldly American populace. Many left expecting they would be treated as liberators, only to experience the harsh realities of living abroad. Some continued to lend credence to the stereotype of American diplomats described in *The Ugly American*—a book written shortly before the creation of the Peace Corps that criticized America's arrogant and paternalistic approach to development work. Peace Corps volunteers were forced to

assimilate to the language, culture, and people they were serving. They learned as much—if not more—than they taught, thereby shedding preconceived notions of the developing world. As Boyer described his experience while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia, "It is baptism by fire…a collision of different values and different expectations, of values that are never wholly transferable, of expectations that are never fully realized…until one has had the experience, one cannot realize how important two years can be in a lifetime."[91] On occasion, volunteers returned home early, but most finished their term of service with a better understanding of America and of themselves.

Many Peace Corps volunteers were humbled by their term of service. Having witnessed the political, economic, and social effects of poverty and prejudice abroad, volunteers realized that their own country was not immune to these problems. While the Peace Corps' founders had intended for volunteers to return with a more accurate image of the rest of the world, they were taken aback by the way in which the Peace Corps dramatically changed their outlooks on their own society. Returned volunteers joined the civil rights movement and protested America's intervention in Vietnam. In 1964, the Committee of Returned Volunteers (CRV) formed to protest the war effort. Others joined the foreign policy establishment to enact change from within; fifteen percent of returned volunteers became involved in the Foreign Service and other federally appointed positions at home and abroad. Another 30 percent went into the teaching profession, in the hopes of imparting their experience in foreign policy, Third World development, and cultural diversity to the next generation of

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[91] Rice, *The Bold Experiment*, 204; 294.

Americans.[92]

In 1962, Michael Harrington's book *The Other America* was sweeping the nation. The book dispelled the notion of America as the "affluent society," focusing on the tens of millions of Americans living in poverty—the "other America." Harrington's language was blunt:

> The other America, the America of poverty, is hidden today in a way it never was before. Its millions are socially invisible to us… [I]t is important to understand that the very development of American society is creating a new kind of blindness about poverty. The poor are increasingly slipping out of the very experience and consciousness of the nation.[93]

Harrington's study combined with the return of Peace Corps volunteers raised public concerns about poverty and racial inequality at home. It is no coincidence that Kennedy launched VISTA just one year after Harrington's study hit bookstores nationwide. Initiated by Eunice Shriver and Robert Kennedy, the "Domestic Peace Corps" drew upon the perceived success of the Peace Corps. Kennedy rightly predicted that Americans would be willing to take their spirit of volunteerism to America's impoverished cities and towns, and VISTA later became the galvanizing force behind Johnson's War on Poverty. As Johnson committed more Americans to fight for democracy and freedom in Vietnam, he also promised to build a "Great Society" at home. Likening the Great Society to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal and Kennedy's New Frontier, Johnson called on Americans to "join in the battle

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[92] Ibid, 293.
[93] Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 4.

to give every citizen an escape from the crushing weight of poverty."[94]

## *Johnson's Wars*

Without denying Johnson's compassion for the poor and civil rights, the influence of Cold War politics cannot be overlooked. According to Johnson biographer Robert Dallek, Johnson "unquestionably had a passion for liberating the poor from the shackles of poverty," yet was forced to convince the American people that foreign affairs were his primary concern: "It was an area in which [Johnson] had only limited control…And for Johnson, who could not stand to be dominated by anyone or anything, foreign policy was a constant irritant he could neither ignore nor relieve."[95] To advocate both guns and butter, Johnson therefore needed to link American political, social, and financial failures to the war against communism. Johnson's State of the Union speech, delivered on January 12, 1966, attempted to reconcile his priorities: "This Nation is mighty enough, its society is healthy enough, its people are strong enough, to pursue our goals in the rest of the world while still building a Great Society at home."[96]

While Vietnam took up half the speech, Johnson implored Congress to fund both initiatives. The Great Society, Johnson reasoned, should not be limited to the United States; rather, he believed he could push freedom and democracy in Vietnam, in part, by eliminating poverty at home. In his Declaration of Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific, he outlined the cornerstones of the "Johnson Doctrine"—

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[94] Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 82.
[95] Ibid., 98.
[96] Ibid., 299.

"opposition to aggression; war against poverty, illiteracy, and disease; economic, social and cultural cooperation; searching for reconciliation and peace." As Johnson wrote in his memoirs, "These were goals I wanted to help achieve in every region, and on every continent," including his own.[97] By linking these two wars, Johnson's War on Poverty and War on Communism became practically inseparable.

As many returning Peace Corps volunteers were quick to point out, racism and prejudice, coupled with American arrogance and narrow-mindedness abroad, undermined U.S. credibility. Not coincidentally, the State Department was one of the first institutions to effectively address segregation in the Jim Crow South, and under the Johnson administration, made a conscious effort to recruit African Americans and women to the Department of State and the Foreign Service.[98] The Department of State also poured millions of federal dollars into American schools during the 1960s to encourage the teaching of foreign languages; this served the dual purpose of educating citizens and preparing them to gain the upper hand over the communists. Thus, outsmarting the Soviets became an ulterior motive for monumental civil rights legislation—from the desegregation of public schools and transportation to the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of the 1960s.[99]

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[97] Ibid., 249.
[98] Department of State: Office of the Historian, "Superpowers Collide," Department of State: Office of the Historian, accessed March 30, 2011, http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/superpowers.
[99] The Soviets exploited racial and economic inequality in the United States through propaganda campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s. See Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," (*Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 41, No. 61, 1988-1989).

## *VTA's Cold War Potential*

With VISTA underway, the White House began to advocate for an Exchange Peace Corps—what would become the Volunteers to America program. In many ways, the timing could not have been better. Volunteers to America offered the United States an opportunity to fight poverty at home, while promoting peace and friendship abroad. As an added bonus, the reversal would offer foreigners from the developing world a firsthand glimpse at what made America (and implicitly capitalism) superior to communism. The White House and the Peace Corps outwardly embraced the political significance of a reverse Peace Corps; as Frankel told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1966: "[I]n a cooperative spirit, and with the expressed desire that the American people learn as well as teach, and receive as well as give…the Exchange Peace Corps dramatizes this intention to cooperate with other nations on the basis of equality."[100]

An Exchange Peace Corps would not only serve as a symbolic gesture to countries receiving Peace Corps volunteers. On a practical level, the proposal would contribute to the Peace Corps and the State Department's efforts to cultivate a more internationally minded populace. As Frankel stated in Congress:

> The people of this nation, and particularly our young people, need an education that will acquaint them with the international environment in which this nation lives, and that will bring home for them the reality of other peoples' existence and the peril and promise of the great movements of

[100] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 43-47.

change taking place in this world.[101]

By bringing foreign languages and cultures to American shores, Frankel argued that Volunteers to America would provide Americans with a "source of fresh insights and special information," critical to outshining the Soviets on every front.

Another byproduct of bringing foreign volunteers to the United States was the mutual exchange of ideas. Not only would Americans learn from foreign teachers and social workers, but the volunteers would also learn from us. On a symbolic level, an Exchange Peace Corps would dispel negative stereotypes on both sides. As Boyer put it in an article in the *National Observer*, "Just as most Peace Corps volunteers went to Africa and found that most Africans thought all Americans to be cowboys, so too most Americans still think of Africans in terms of Tarzan and apes swinging from trees."[102] Boyer and others believed VTA would have the same effect on foreign volunteers that the Peace Corps had on Americans: they would return to their home countries with a more accurate picture of American society. The experience would not only impart valuable skills to foreign volunteers, but it would also ingrain in them a feeling of belonging in the United States, and thus, a subconscious allegiance to the American way of life.

Creating a two-way traffic of volunteers also offered the Peace Corps greater legitimacy from critics on the Left, who were suspicious of the Peace Corps' relationship with the State Department. The Peace Corps' working paper on an Exchange Peace Corps, revealed this motivation:

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Carole A. Shifrin, "What the U.S. Hopes to Achieve In A Reverse Peace Corps Project."

> [Volunteers to America] would improve the image of the Peace Corps at home and abroad. It would make it more appealing to other peoples—and to many Americans. As part of an international exchange, American Volunteers everywhere would breathe easier and feel better about their role.[103]

It is certainly ironic that a program built on the premise of reciprocity was marketed as a way for the United States to "breathe easier" about its aggressive foreign policy. However, for a White House burdened with an unpopular war in Vietnam, it was worth a try. As Johnson contended in his message to Congress on International Health and Education, delivered on February 2, 1966,

> We would be shortsighted to confine our vision to this nation's shorelines. The same rewards we count at home will flow from sharing in a worldwide effort to rid mankind of the slavery of ignorance and the scourge of disease. We bear a special role in this liberating mission. Our resources will be wasted in defending freedom's frontiers if we neglect the spirit that makes men want to be free.[104]

Embedded in this speech was his proposal for the establishment of an Exchange Peace Corps of 5,000 foreign volunteers. By advocating for this radical pilot program, the Johnson administration was able to appease critics of American interventionism, while preserving America's "special role" as liberators.

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[103] Working Paper on the Exchange Peace Corps of Volunteers to America, 1965, NACP.
[104] Lyndon Baines Johnson, Message to Congress on International Health And Education, 2 February 1966, WHCF, LBJ Library.

## *Anti-Johnson Fervor*

As senate majority leader in the 1950s, Lyndon Baines Johnson was accustomed to getting his way. Whether he did so by means of bribes, under-the-table exchanges, or his characteristically crude behavior, Johnson was adept at manipulating his colleagues to support his legislation. Johnson himself described his means for getting bills passed: "Don't assume anything; make sure every possible weapon is brought to bear…keep everybody involved; don't let them slacken."[105] Johnson brought three decades of experience dealing with Congress into the White House as Kennedy's vice president. He made a concerted effort to bring his overbearing personality under control, and for the most part, Kennedy stole the spotlight.[106] Johnson was, however, temperamentally incapable of following Kennedy's passive approach with Congress. As Dallek wrote, "[T]he day of Kennedy's funeral Johnson set to work mastering Congress."[107] His assertion of control over Congress ushered in a period of sweeping economic and social reforms, such as the Great Society Program, although Johnson's confrontational style, not to mention his escalation of the war in Vietnam, often undermined his administration's good intentions.

When Wofford gave his Exchange Peace Corps proposal to the Johnson White House, he gave up some of the purity associated with the Peace Corps. During the Kennedy administration, the Peace Corps in many respects, could do no wrong. Although Johnson gave a media boost to an otherwise obscure proposal—by

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[105] Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 65.
[106] Ibid., 60-68.
[107] Ibid., 70.

organizing a task force in 1966—he also tainted the Peace Corps' bipartisan approach to Congress. What became known as "Johnson's proposal" ran into intense opposition from congressmen with personal ties to the former senator, such as Democratic Senator William J. Fulbright, who was a staunch critic of the war in Vietnam. As the Vietnam War began to overshadow Johnson's domestic agenda, the relationship between Johnson and his old friend Fulbright became increasingly strained. Fulbright, a powerful and assertive senator in his own right, was a proponent of restoring congressional power in foreign policy-making. His view of the executive branch conflicted sharply with Johnson's handling of Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, granting the president the authority to engage U.S. forces without additional congressional approval, solidified Fulbright and other critics' fears of executive overreach, and public opinion polls of the president plummeted. By 1966, a credibility gap had emerged between Johnson's rhetoric and actions, leaving Congress suspicious of any foreign policy proposal put forward by the White House.[108]

According to David Schimmel, director of the Indian exchange pilot program, Congress interpreted the president's interest in the Exchange Peace Corps cynically: "People were really angry with the President and understandably so—it's a reflex political response. They did not want to give Johnson credit for anything."[109] Partisanship and anti-war fervor played out on the House Floor. An overview of congressional hearings of 1966 characterized the mood as "mean and anti-Johnson," and warned that the odds of Congress approving the Exchange Peace Corps, given its

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[108] Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 339.
[109] David Schimmel, phone interview by author, 20 September 2010.

association with Johnson, were slim to none.[110] Although Vaughn was a Republican, the fact that he was appointed by the president and advocating on behalf of Johnson's social and political agenda cast him as a Johnson ally, irrespective of party affiliation. Thus, although the president's Message to Congress on International Health and Education in 1966—in which he recommended the creation of an Exchange Peace Corps—helped raise public awareness, Johnson was also a political liability.

## *Soviet-Third World Exchanges*

As Americans fought on behalf of capitalistic values through educational and cultural exchange, the Soviets were striving to spread their socialist message to the developing world as well. Like the United States, the Soviet Union understood the importance of projecting a positive image abroad as a means of promoting the virtues of socialism. The Soviet Union administered a wide range of government-sponsored programs in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle-East beginning in the late 1950s, and broadened its efforts substantially throughout the 1960s. These programs provided everything from economic and military assistance to educational and technical training: by 1966, the Soviet Union had set up relations with 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa[111], and by 1968, a Soviet report indicated that over 500 Soviet teachers were employed in the region.[112] These harrowing statistics, at least from the United States' perspective, gave credence to Kennedy's belief that "the great danger

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[110] Congressional Meetings, 26 July 1966, RG 490, Subject files, NACP.
[111] Roger E. Kanet, "African Youth: The Target of Soviet Policy," (*Russian Review*, 27, no. 2, April 1968), 161.
[112] Seymour Rosen, "The USSR and International Education: A Brief Overview," (*Phi Beta Kappan*, 1970), 248.

is the Communist system itself and its relentless determination to destroy us…we and the communists are locked in a deadly embrace all around the world."[113]

Even more disturbing to Cold Warriors in the United States, however, was the USSR's similar emphasis on international exchange through peace and friendship. In addition to sending Soviet teachers and technicians to promulgate socialist values, the Ministry of Education hosted African youth through short and long-term academic and cultural stays in the USSR. The number of African students studying on Soviet shores increased six times between 1961 and 1966, thanks in large part to Moscow's Lumumba Friendship University.

The University, which recruited and sponsored Third World students, was one of the most glaring examples of the ideological "battle for the minds of men" taking place between the Soviet Union and the United States. In contrast to other Soviet universities, Lumumba had lower admissions standards to account for economic constraints in home countries, and many students were political dissidents, sponsored by the USSR without permission from their governments.[114] The Soviet leadership, including Nikita Khrushchev, admitted at the time that the University, and other cultural exchanges, were driven, in part, by political self-interests. By offering educational and training opportunities to foreign students in the USSR, the Soviet Union hoped to mitigate fears of imperialism abroad, while inculcating Soviet values in Cold War hot spots. Thus, both the United States and the Soviet Union were reliant upon a gesture of reciprocity to foster political sympathies. Lumumba University's

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[113] Rice, *The Bold Experiment*, 26.
[114] Harold Weaver, "Soviet Training and Research Programs for Africa," (PhD diss., UMass Amherst, 1985), 120.

stated goal, "to give Soviet and African peoples an idea of each other's culture and life," masked Moscow's chief interest in winning the Cold War.[115]

## *Cold War Hawks in Congress*

On the one hand, Congress should have embraced Johnson's proposal for an Exchange Peace Corps with open arms. For one-tenth of a percent of the Peace Corps budget, the program promised to strengthen the United States on the domestic front by bringing new skills and perspectives to teaching and community development work, thereby supplementing Johnson's War on Poverty. By broadening school curriculums to include foreign language and culture instruction, Americans would be better prepared as diplomats and ambassadors. An Exchange Peace Corps had symbolic benefits for the United States in the Third World, and providing young foreigners with a firsthand glimpse of American society would make it less likely they would fall to communism upon their return home. The program also legitimized the Peace Corps' mission in developing countries, by demonstrating the United States' commitment to a two-way exchange of people and ideas. When it came time to request funding from House Appropriations Committee in 1966, Frankel emphasized the Cold War rationale:

> Everybody in the world has a tendency to blame Uncle Sam because we are the most powerful. I would say if we had not sent out Americans and demonstrated our freedom and liberalism we would be in much worst shape. My own feeling is that if we get in any competition with the Communists and

[115] Ibid., 125.

> let people see the reality, we will win, and this exchange program is the most direct way of showing people what life in the United States is.[116]

A handful of Congressmen embraced VTA's Cold War potential, such as Democrat Clement J. Zablocki of Wisconsin. Zablocki recognized that there was "real psychological value if [foreigners] see our willingness to learn from them," as they will be "more willing to learn something from us."[117] Republican James G. Fulton of Pennsylvania took his support a step further; he admitted that the United States had something to learn from foreigners, noting that he "certainly would be a person who would welcome them as a tremendous gain to our country and progress for the people of the world as a whole."[118] Three years later—moments before the Hays amendment permanently slashed all funding for an Exchange Peace Corps—Republican E. Ross Adair of Indiana offered a token of support, and the chairman of the House of Foreign Affairs Committee, Democrat Thomas Morgan, stated his indifference: "I want to say that as Chairman of the Committee, I have no strong feelings about the amendment offered by the gentleman from Ohio [Hays]…I think the house has spent about a half an hour in wasted time discussing a matter of limited importance."[119]

While questions of procedure, spending, and authoritative issues dominated debates in Congress throughout VTA's short existence, Congress made distinct references to the Cold War at every turn. Unfortunately for Vaughn and his congressional liaisons, Congress was dubious about the notion that by sending foreign

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[116] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 238.
[117] Ibid.
[118] 115 Cong. Rec. 24663 (1969).
[119] Boyer, "Death by Congressional Fiat," 18.

volunteers to the United States, VTA would function as a peaceful instrument of the Cold War. On the contrary, Congress generally opposed the idea, believing it would threaten national security and U.S. gains in the Third World by inviting radicals, communists, and their sympathizers to see America's weaknesses firsthand and report back on their findings to the Soviet Union. Moreover, the fact that foreign countries, rather than the United States, would have sole authority over who was sent to American shores—with only the Peace Corps, a functionally autonomous agency, overseeing it—put Congress in an uproar. Congressional aversion to Volunteers to America reflected lingering fears of communist infiltration into American government and society.

Although Vaughn emphasized that the United States would collaborate with foreign governments regarding selection criteria, Ohio Congressman Wayne Hays, was adamantly opposed: "You can keep saying it, Mr. Vaughn, until you are blue in the face, but…Congress isn't going to give you any law…to bring in people who are selected by somebody else and over which we have no responsibility.[120] It was not a coincidence that Hays, the ringleader behind the amendment that killed VTA, was a staunch anti-communist. VTA's peaceful approach to the Cold War was antithetical to his belief that "the one thing the Communists respect is force. We must take a strong position and not retreat."[121] From his vantage point, VTA was political suicide: "We have too many people from other countries involved in too many things they oughtn't to be involved in this country right now...I think you may very well, if you

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[120] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 57.
[121] "Foreign Relations: Position of Strength," (*Time Magazine,* December 8, 1958), http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,864492,00.html.

get this, tarnish the image of one of the better international organizations we ever set up."[122]

Hays' aggressive stance on communism colored his judgments: by his logic, allowing foreigners from developing countries to penetrate poor communities might compromise the Peace Corps' evangelical purpose abroad and foster radical, pro-communist tendencies within American communities. To demonstrate the stakes and win support for his death clause in the Peace Corps Act of 1969, Hays referred to political unrest at a California college:

> Some of the ringleaders of the [Berkeley] agitation there were African nationals…they were the only people among the radical group one could not talk to, because there was no way to relate to them, no way to talk to them about America…they were just radicals, period.[123]

Another commonly voiced criticism centered on the dangers of exposing America's deficiencies to the world. Many congressmen pointed out that showing developing nations poverty in the United States would undermine efforts to convert them to capitalistic economies. Regardless of whether the United States might benefit from the help of foreigners, the risks of admitting to democratic weaknesses in the distribution of wealth and power were too high. Democrat Julia Butler Hansen of Washington predicted that "there is going to be no greater disaster than to let underprivileged nations see some of our financing failures here," and the majority of the House Appropriations Subcommittee agreed.[124] After the proposal met with

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[122] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 19.
[123] 115 Cong. Rec. 24660 (1969) (Statement of Rep. Wayne Hays).
[124] *Peace Corps*: Hearings on H.R. 91-100, Before the House Subcommittee on

considerable opposition in the House of Foreign Affairs Committee in late July 1966, Special Assistant to the President, Tom Cronin, outlined the reasons why Congress was overwhelmingly opposed to the reverse Peace Corps idea:

> Congressmen are apparently not too enthusiastic (for obvious reasons) about welcoming foreign volunteers into our slums, mental hospitals, and onto Indian reservations. Some of those who did not understand the proposal are not yet resigned to having American volunteers enter their districts or states. Visions of the Job Corps camps and Indian Reservations or Watts don't rest comfortably with most of them as is.[125]

Because fears of racial riots and communist subversion were so pervasive during the late 1960s, neither Congress nor the White House felt it was necessary to spell out the "obvious reasons," but the Cold War clearly played a large part. In hearings in 1966 and 1969, Hays was particularly opposed to the social work component of Volunteers to America: "We have got enough anarchists in that field [social work] now, without bringing in any foreign ones."[126] During subsequent hearings in the House of Foreign Affairs Committee in 1969, he indicated he would support the program if foreign volunteers were limited to the teaching profession. By September of 1969, however, Hays opposed the program altogether, despite the Peace Corps' willingness to compromise on this issue: "…I find it frequently advantageous to change my mind not because I am basically objecting to bringing in teachers…but

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Appropriations, Foreign Operations and Related Agencies, 91st Cong., 1st sess. (1969) (statement of Rep. Julia Butler Hansen).

[125] Tom Cronin to Douglass Cater, memo, "The Reverse Peace Corps Exchange", 7 November 1966, WHCF, LBJ Library.

[126] Neil Boyer, "Death by Congressional Fiat," 19.

I find that their plan is to use teachers to expand this program without legislation and without permission to bring in anybody."[127]

## *New Directions*

Hays firmly believed that even an institution as beloved as the Peace Corps could not be trusted on matters of international exchange. In his view, only foreign candidates (mostly hailing from Western Europe) who underwent a thorough screening process run by the Department of State and authorized by the Fulbright-Hays Act should be permitted to live and work in the United States. This reflected the ongoing turf battle between the State Department and the Peace Corps, as discussed in the previous chapter; however, there was an underlying mistrust of the Peace Corps' foreign policy know-how that went beyond bureaucratic infighting. While Congress' dislike of VTA stemmed from its proposed set-up, which would allow sending governments to administer the selection process without congressional oversight, Congress also read VTA as a testament to the Peace Corps' misreading of the international system of Realpolitik. As Vaughn and his constituents fielded questions from Congress, from security procedures to screen out spies or communists to restrictions on joining pro-communist groups in this country, Congress remained unconvinced that the Peace Corps could be trusted to deal effectively with potential communists.

Although the essential paradox of the Peace Corps—that an apolitical group of volunteers sent to spread peace and friendship functioned as a covert instrument of

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[127] 115 Cong. Rec., 24661 (1969).

the Cold War—gave the Peace Corps its legitimacy, the State Department had serious objections to the Peace Corps from the beginning. Many believed Shriver needed "'a gentle straightening out' to bring him more in line with classic cold war thinking," a critique which manifested itself again over the Exchange Peace Corps.[128] The parallels between the State Department's battle for more control over the Peace Corps in 1961 and the battle over Volunteers to America in 1966 are striking: in both instances, Americans were wary of the Peace Corps' soft approach to the Cold War. When Peace Corps volunteers came into contact with Soviet teachers in the Third World, of whom there were many, they often were encouraged to collaborate with them and avoid matters of politics. In Ghana, for example, Peace Corps volunteers and their Russian counterparts engaged in non-professional activities, from sports teams to romantic affairs.[129] This reflected Shriver's refined approach to the Cold War, and while some were open to this shift in tactics, others were increasingly fed up with the Peace Corps' defiance of traditional diplomatic norms of behavior. The radical experiment known as Volunteers to America was the final straw.

The radical anti-paternalism that came to be associated with Volunteers to America had been a part of Peace Corps from its beginning. Shriver had argued as early as 1961 that the Peace Corps should be in the charge of the United Nations, "making our own effort only one step in a major international effort to increase the welfare of all men."[130] After meeting with Shriver, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, brought the Peace Corps proposal to use Peace Corps

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[128] Hoffman, *All You Need Is Love*, 98.
[129] Rice, 262-3.
[130] Ibid.

volunteers for UN purposes before the Economic and Social Council, where it passed in August 1961. The move reflected Secretary of State Dean Rusk's longstanding opinion that the Peace Corps' strength lay in its perceived distance from Cold War policy objectives. By encouraging the formation of volunteer agencies in other countries, Shriver believed the Peace Corps could dispel "an appearance of arrogance in assuming that young Americans automatically can teach anybody else."[131] Although Kennedy and his liberal constituents backed the idea in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, members of the State Department were appalled by the notion of relinquishing control to an international body composed of Soviet members. Following the "International Conference on Middle-level Manpower" in 1962, the State Department released a policy memo stating its strong reservations: "Soviet participation in such international machinery would be contrary to our foreign policy objectives and make it difficult for less developed countries to refuse to accept Soviet volunteers" who were being "controlled from the Kremlin."[132]

Thus, congressional fears of delegating authority to the Peace Corps to run VTA did not arise out of nowhere. They stemmed from a history of radical, left-leaning proposals aimed at overhauling the notion of foreign exchange as a one-way street. A memorandum of conversation issued by the Department of State described VTA's controversial relationship with the USSR:

> Mr. Vaughn thought that the VTA program would provide a very useful vehicle for what would amount, in effect, to exchanges of volunteers with Eastern Europe commencing with Yugoslavia and continuing with the USSR.

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[131] Ibid., 92.
[132] Ibid., 99.

> The Yugoslavs had already indicated considerable enthusiasm for the idea, and the Soviets for the first time recently had favored international volunteer service. Mr. Vaughn indicated he hoped to pursue this Soviet interest.[133]

Although the State Department did not categorically reject Vaughn's liberal approach to the Soviet Union, Under Secretary Elliot Richardson (who would later sign the controversial delegation of authority) made a point of noting that with respect to Soviet volunteers in the VTA program, "broader issues were involved."[134]

These issues included Vaughn's support for the International Secretariat for Volunteer Service (ISVS), a Western-oriented, intergovernmental organization set up in 1963 to promote the sharing of information about the establishment of technical assistance programs comparable to the Peace Corps and VISTA in other countries. Although Congress denied the Peace Corps the authority to make a contribution to ISVS, the State Department continued to send funds and personnel by executive agreement. When informed of these transactions in 1966, Hays voiced his disapproval:

> I thought like you that we killed this thing, but it looks like they did an end run and nobody was aware of it. The best thing we could do would be to put an amendment in this that nobody from the Peace Corps could have anything to do with it and the next year we take it out of the aid bill and that will be the end of it.[135]

It is worth noting that the Soviet Union had its own reservations and only lent its

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[133] Memo of conversation, 6 March 1969, RG 490, Subject files, NACP, 122.
[134] Ibid.
[135] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 32.

support to the Coordination Committee for International Volunteer Service (COCO), a non-governmental organization with Soviet and Eastern European members. Nevertheless, in a briefing memorandum, Richardson reiterated congressional opposition to the creation of an international Peace Corps, as well as the State Department's own hesitation, given the Soviets' "continued hostility to the Peace Corps."[136]

Volunteers to America was therefore not the beginning but the culmination of tensions between Congress and the State Department over the left-leaning direction of the Peace Corps. Despite Nixon's efforts to control—if not kill—the Peace Corps entirely, Vaughn's successor, Joseph Blatchford, initiated what he called "New Directions" to promote reciprocity between Peace Corps volunteers and the countries they served. From the recruitment of more volunteers with specialized skills and from minority backgrounds to his commitment to work more closely with in-country assistance and international agencies, the Peace Corps' new directions were at odds with the political direction Congress hoped it would take.

The Peace Corps had become introspective and self-critical, reflecting a growing disillusionment over the United States' militaristic approach toward Vietnam and the Cold War in general. As Blatchford stated in the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in June 1969, "[T]he concept of foreign aid with its implied or overt paternalism is badly out of date."[137] As we shall see in the next chapter,

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[136] Jacob Cantor to Samuel De Palma, memo, RG 490, Subject files, NACP.
[137] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1969*: Hearings on S 2041, Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 91st Cong,, 1st sess., (1969) (statement of Joseph Blatchford, Director of the Peace Corps).

Blatchford and the Peace Corps' refined interpretation of America's international role was well ahead of its time.

# Chapter 3: The Crisis of Inversion

By now it should be clear that the story of Volunteers to America is far more complex than the seven-line *New York Times* obituary in August of 1970 would have it. The program stirred a debate in Congress over issues such as funding, travel, and recruitment, and authority. Some of the logistical issues raised in Congress were legitimate: many developing countries, for example, could not afford to send volunteers to the United States. Moreover, with the war in Vietnam burning a hole in Americans' pockets, VTA was an obvious program to cut from the State Department's budget. Technical reasons, combined with the program's relative obscurity, made Volunteers to America an easy target for Congress to ambush.

Congressional opposition was intensified by deep-seated Cold War tensions, which had primed the country to approach international relations in Manichean terms. In the late 1960s political climate, staunch Cold Warrior politicians saw the admission of foreigners to the United States as a recipe for disaster. While Congressmen used veiled language, the political implications were clear. By 1966—the year the director of the Peace Corps brought Johnson's task force proposal to Congress—most Americans subscribed to the domino theory and viewed the war in Vietnam as essential to stymie the growth of Soviet influence.[138] American policy was focused on stopping communism, not welcoming people into the United States whose backgrounds–-and ideologies—seemed suspect.

Beyond bureaucracies and politics, there is a third, deeper layer to the story of VTA's demise. This involved the American cultural imagination, the way Americans

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[138] Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 340.

defined themselves in relation to the world. Volunteers to America, by reversing the traditional aid paradigm, challenged this worldview, giving rise to what might be called a crisis of inversion. Had it survived, VTA would have shaken the paternalistic fabric of American cultural identity. Like the Peace Corps, VTA was committed to peace and friendship with people of other nations. Unlike the beloved Peace Corps, however, VTA ran counter to America's evangelical zeal, and thus, threatened America's entrenched self-image.

## *An American Enterprise*

In contrast to Volunteers to America, the Peace Corps easily made it through the ranks of Congress. While much credit is due to the political savvy of Shriver and Wofford, both were able to emphasize how well it encapsulated the American ethos, especially during the early 1960s. As Shriver put it:

> The philosophy of the Peace Corps is really the philosophy of America. And when you cut down deep with honest politicians in the Congress, they understand that. And therefore they support it because it is a genuine American enterprise.[139]

The Peace Corps captured the missionary zeal of America, the "you-too-can-be-a-world-saver" campaign that glamorized the centrality of American volunteers as the harbingers of world peace and progress. As *Time* magazine reported in 1963, "From the front porches of the U.S., the view of the Peace Corps is beautiful. The image is that of a battalion of cheery, crew cut kids who two years ago hopped off

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[139] Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. 1980), 267-8.

their drugstore stools and hurried out around the world to wage peace."[140] The Peace Corps fit neatly into the youthful idealism of Kennedy, for whom national service was a major theme. As the agency's first director, Shriver embraced this spirit; he imagined the Peace Corps as a "genuine experiment in international partnership."[141]

Implicit in the Peace Corps' mission, however, is the paternalistic notion that Americans—most of whom are "B.A. Generalists" with little to no work experience, aside from a college degree—are more qualified than local peoples to solve the problems of the developing world. Granted, Americans are generally better off and thus better able to provide many forms of assistance. Still, the Peace Corps often incurred charges of cultural imperialism. In the 1970s, Blatchford, as head of ACTION, addressed these charges with his "New Directions." He replaced many unskilled college students with better-trained professionals, recruitment became more specialized and competitive, and training relocated from the United States to the host countries, so as to better prepare volunteers for the realities of the job.[142] Despite these efforts, however, promulgating American ideals abroad has remained one of the Peace Corps' biggest selling points.

The secret to the Peace Corps' success was that it was perceived as a distinctly American operation. The Peace Corps' evangelical purpose—to spread freedom and democracy to developing countries—was embedded in American history. Its paternalistic philosophy can be traced to the notion of American Exceptionalism—a term coined by Seymour Martin Lipset and based in part on the writings of Alexis de

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[140] Marshall Windmiller, *The Peace Corps and Pax Americana* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1970), 1.
[141] Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 257.
[142] Searles, *The Peace Corps Experience*, 19-29.

Tocqueville. In *Democracy in America* (1835), Tocqueville exalted the New World:

> The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one…Let us cease, then, to view all democratic nations under the example of the American people.[143]

Even before the Puritans landed, the belief in American Exceptionalism was already strong. As Governor John Winthrop envisioned while on board the *Arbella* in 1630, "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us."[144] These early Puritans embraced what Deborah L. Madsen calls the "mythology of the redeemer nation," a recurring religious motif throughout American history.

The mythos of American Exceptionalism has morphed into various forms of political and cultural arrogance, and the Peace Corps, for all its efforts to the contrary, is still a product of this cultural tradition. Conrad Cherry, in her book, *God's New Israel*, argues that deep-seated notions of America's evangelical purpose have bred "a muscular imperialism that cloaks American self-interest with platitudes about saving the world for democracy, a racist myth that justifies American actions abroad because of Anglo-Saxon superiority."[145] Although the Peace Corps' third goal of educating Americans was an effort to address charges of racial and cultural imperialism, helping and teaching others came first. This ordering of goals is indicative of the messianic

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[143] Alexis Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Langley, 1840), 42.
[144] John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity,"1630, Hanover College History Department, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, accessed March 31, 2011, http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html.
[145] Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 20.

tradition in the United States. Americans proselytize American ideology (whether it be capitalism, freedom, or a protestant work ethic) abroad without accepting help or guidance in return.

American Exemptionalism is a spin-off of American Exceptionalism, and the subject of Michael Ignatieff's edited volume *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*. Ignatieff explores the paradox of America's messianic mission to promote human rights and democracy abroad and the nation's unwillingness to sign multilateral treaties that force compliance to these norms. While there are many theories—realist, cultural, institutional, and political—used to explain America's resistance to foreign influence, Ignatieff contends that from America's perspective, human rights and American rights are one and the same:

> If human rights are American values writ large, then, paradoxically, Americans have nothing to learn from international human rights. America teaches the meaning of liberty to the world; it does not learn from others.[146]

This conflation is of the utmost importance if we are to understand Americans' aversion to the Volunteers to America program, an experiment that shook the country by insinuating that Americans might benefit from the help of foreigners from the developing world. The Peace Corps was met with widespread enthusiasm by the American public, in large part because of its compatibility with American imperial ideology. A Peace Corps in reverse was diametrically opposed.

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[146] Michael Ignatieff, ed., *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14.

## *An Un-American Enterprise*

As Chapter One and Two have shown, Volunteers to America encountered a sea of difficulties in Congress for technical and political reasons. Hays alone managed both to mislead Congress on a bureaucratic formality and to invoke Cold War tensions. Hays' arguments, however, generated much of their support from a general sense in Congress that Americans had nothing to gain from asking foreigners for help. In hearings before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1966, Democrat Leonard Farbstein of New York openly acknowledged his inability to believe that Americans could learn from others:

> I can understand the concept of these individuals being sent here for the purposes of learning. I find it rather difficult to envision theses technicians coming here and teaching the social workers and coming here and teaching the teachers. If you were to say that you are inviting these people to come here for the purpose of learning so they could go back and teach their own people, this, to me, would appear to be an extremely practical situation and one I could understand. However, I find it extremely difficult to understand technicians being sent here to teach us and social workers being sent here to teach us.[147]

Republican Peter Frelinghuysen was equally explicit in a question he posed to Peace Corps Director Jack Vaughn:

> I am still concerned as to what would be accomplished by bringing, for example, a Colombian into this country…I can understand how a volunteer

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[147] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 29.

> going from this country to work in a Colombian slum stands both to benefit individually and to improve the image of the United States, because this is a practical demonstration of our idealism…what contribution can a Colombian make?[148]

While practical and political concerns dominated the debates in Congress (whether overtly or covertly), much congressional opposition stemmed from deep-seated paternalism. The Peace Corps buttressed Americans' sense of superiority as it encouraged a missionary instinct to spread our superior ideals of freedom and democracy to as many un-reached peoples as possible. The Exchange Peace Corps project, on the other hand, undercut this sense. It had to be defeated before it damaged—or even questioned—American hubris.

Vaughn's response to Farbstein, Frelinghuysen, and other critics was to challenge American foreign relations, and the "disbelief of many of our people that anybody can come here and teach us anything."[149] Peace Corps advocates fought tirelessly to change the prevailing view by recalling the humiliation revealed in *The Ugly American*—a book published in 1958, criticizing American diplomatic ineptitude abroad. A Peace Corps in reverse, they argued, would strengthen the United States' influence abroad by demonstrating our willingness to learn other languages and cultures. Even this argument, however, was designed to get around rather than challenge American Exceptionalism. The emphasis was not on what foreigners could teach us but on how letting them come to the United States would improve the United States' reputation abroad. Clement J. Zablocki, a Democratic

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[148] *Peace Corps Act Amendments*, 116.
[149] Ibid., 29.

representative of Wisconsin, recognized the moral value of VTA: "It is a two-way street…if we assume we are a super race that knows it all, we immediately block communication between ourselves and other countries.[150]

One year later, as Frankel and Boyer prepared their statements for the Foreign Affairs Committee, Boyer pinpointed the crisis of inversion the program had to overcome:

> Thus far, most of the involvement of this movement by the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, has been the recipient…U.S. involvement with foreign nations is almost always in the role of supplier, seldom of recipient…by inviting young people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America to this country…we are not only demonstrating that the U.S. has much to learn from others, but we are exposing the participants to the American spirit of volunteerism and teaching them techniques and skills that will be valuable in their own countries.[151]

Boyer advised Frankel to de-emphasize that Americans would be learning from others, and instead turn the focus back to Americans helping foreigners, by sending them back to their home countries with valuable skills acquired during their stay in the United States. The tactic shows a growing awareness on the part of VTA that the third goal of the Peace Corps was likely to be derided and derailed by the American public and politicians. Boyer and Frankel were forced to acquiesce to the image of America as the helper nation, Winthrop's shining city upon a hill, while relegating all others to the role of recipient.

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[150] *Peace Corps Act Amendments of 1966,* 68.
[151] Neil Boyer to Charles Frankel, letter, 26 May 1967, RG 490, subject files, NACP.

Ohio Republican Frances Bolton was representative of how far short these tactics fell of success:

> I don't particularly like this idea—I haven't from the beginning. I think our Peace Corps is a unique institution, an American institution, that can't possibly be duplicated by other nations. They don't think the way we do. They don't live the way we do.[152]

Republican Barratt O'Hara of Illinois seconded these sentiments: "He [Vaughn] is a great statesman. He can do a great job with the Peace Corps where it is, an exclusively American product."[153] The suggestion that foreign countries could create a Peace Corps of their own—the fourth goal of VTA—was considered sacrilegious and downright un-American: if the Peace Corps was an American institution, then foreign governments should not attempt to reproduce it.

In the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1966, Hays countered one of Volunteers to America's basic premises—to give foreign governments' authority over selection of volunteers—by emphasizing that the Peace Corps originated in the United States. Frankel's intimation that the Peace Corps could become an international project horrified many members of the committee. Frankel tried to clarify that though the Peace Corps was a "wholly American" enterprise, this need not be the case, but Congress would not budge. VTA folded, in part, because American Exceptionalism was (and continues to be) ingrained in the American psyche; not only must we be the missionaries of good fortune, but nothing as momentous as the Peace Corps can be reproduced by other nations. Americans, who were raised to believe that

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[152] Peace *Corps Act Amendments of 1966*, 49.
[153] Ibid., 60.

they live in the mightiest nation on Earth, refused to let Johnson and the Peace Corps (or any foreigners) tell them otherwise.

The demise of Volunteers to America was a result of this double standard—the notion that Americans must curb foreign influence at home while enhancing American power abroad—and is the underlying reason for the Peace Corps' success and Volunteers to America's failure. President Johnson's desire for equality, as expressed in the Great Society, extended beyond America's borders. Volunteers to America, in line with International Education Year slated for 1970, expressed Johnson's and the Peace Corps' belief that Americans could learn as well as teach, receive as well as give. Despite the popularity of the Peace Corps, however, the proposal to reverse the traffic of volunteers could not overcome the strong impulse to disseminate American values abroad.

Volunteers to America was lambasted as a gross distortion of American foreign policy: as Rooney put it in a newspaper interview, "We need an international Peace Corps in our cities like we need a hole in our head."[154] In response to the transfer of VTA to the Peace Corps in early 1969, Hays reiterated that the Peace Corps should remain a one-way street: "Congress will never fund a program that would in effect set up an international Peace Corps on its own soil. Foreign Peace Corps members coming to this country would create more problems than they would solve."[155] Although technical and procedural questions dominated the debates in Congress and Cold War tensions festered underneath, Boyer acknowledged the impact of ethnocentric arrogance in the nearly unanimous decision to terminate the

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[154] Boyer, "Death By Congressional Fiat," 10.
[155] Boyer, "Death By Congressional Fiat," 11.

program in 1969. The passage of Hays' amendment, which cut all funding to the Volunteers to America program and any similar program, signified a major victory for American Exceptionalism.

## *The Legacy of VTA*

Senator J. William Fulbright, co-founder of the Fulbright Exchange program and an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam, was one of a minority of congressmen to challenge America's imperialistic culture. Noting the dangers of fusing power and virtue, Fulbright, in a piece entitled "The Arrogance of Power," warned of the fatal impact of hubris on smaller nations (i.e. Vietnam) where fear of injuring American pride took precedence over the genuine desire to free the South Vietnamese from communist aggression. The United States, Fulbright wrote, is a culture of imperialism rooted in manifest destiny. Fulbright dismisses Americans' missionary instinct as "romantic nonsense" and makes the bold claim that "we are not God's chosen savior of mankind," but are rather "endowed by our Creator with about the same capacity for good and evil, no more or less, than the rest of humanity."[156] Although Fulbright's bold critique of American Exceptionalism could not save VTA, he was not the only American to see the injurious effects of American arrogance for Americans and foreigners alike.

From the Peace Corps members who inspired Johnson to adopt the Exchange Peace Corps idea to the everyday Americans who witnessed foreign volunteers

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[156] J. William Fulbright, "The Arrogance of Power, " in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed., Conrad Cherry, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 340.

making a difference in American schools and communities, VTA transformed the lives and attitudes of those it touched. Letters from Americans touched by the Volunteers to America poured into congressional offices as part of a last-ditch effort to change Americans' hearts and minds: "It is amazing to note that we, as Americans, continue to export our ideas, programs, and personnel to underdeveloped countries but are completely blinded by our need to receive such cultural understanding and help from these countries," wrote Howard Pachman, a lawyer who met with VTA volunteers. "Meeting these two gentlemen and hearing them tell about their countries and their problems, enabled us as complacent citizens to realize that there is much to learn and understand about our fellow man."[157] Irving R. Melbo, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Southern California (one of VTA's contractors), poignantly addressed Americans' reluctance to support VTA:

> It would be a tragic national loss to discontinue or fail to expand the VTA program. Their presence in the U.S. helps us to avoid the stigma of paternalistic assistance to developing nations, since the VTA program proves we desire assistance from other nations.[158]

Despite these pleas for a genuine two-way exchange of volunteers, Congress remained unmoved. Most of the congressmen who voted against funding VTA had never come into contact with the volunteers. Indeed, most Americans had no firsthand knowledge of Volunteers to America. In one of the few Peace Corps narratives to even mention Volunteers to America, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman writes that the

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[157] Kevin Lowther, excerpts from letters in support of Volunteers to America, RG 490, subject files, NACP.
[158] Ibid.

program operated on too small a scale to make a profound impact: "[S]prinkled among 200 million citizens, [Volunteers to America] had no chance of effecting deep change in the United States."[159] One inside observer, who Boyer quotes in his unpublished article, "Death by Congressional Fiat," summed up the crisis of inversion Volunteers to America inspired:

> They obviously don't like the prospect of being on the receiving end of foreign aid. At least now they should know how other nations feel when they not only have to accept American assistance, but are also forced to accept all the complex conditions Congress insists on. I just hope they have learned something.[160]

[159] Hoffman, *All You Need is Love*, 189.
[160] Boyer, "Death by Congressional Fiat," 21.

# Epilogue

## *Partnerships, Not Paternalism*

In May 1966, Harris Wofford laid out his projections for the Peace Corps in an article entitled "The Future of the Peace Corps." The agency, Wofford wrote, had entered a "crisis of growth," and required a "quantum jump" in volunteerism, particularly among older, more skilled volunteers. He envisioned a decentralized "Exchange Peace Corps to America," which would make the Peace Corps an international venture and encourage volunteer service in other countries. As Wofford wrote, "If the 1970 Peace Corps is not at all like the model, if in the larger context it plays a smaller part, if it settles for smaller numbers and more professional performance, it will have been an 'adventure just the same.'"[161] By doubling the Peace Corps in size, recruiting more experienced volunteers, and reversing the flow of volunteers, Wofford hoped to erase the agency's (and the country's) paternalistic foundations.

Congress killed Volunteers to America in 1970, dashing Wofford's high hopes for the future of the Peace Corps, but he never gave up on his ideals. In 2010, Wofford's anti-paternalistic message re-emerged under the rubric of "ServiceWorld: Strategies for the Future of International Volunteer Service," an international service coalition of over 300 non-government organizations, colleges and universities, and multi-national corporations. ServiceWorld aims to create a "quantum leap" in international service, thereby meeting Kennedy's original vision of 100,000

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[161] Harris Wofford, "The Future of the Peace Corps," (*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, May 1966), 146.

volunteers each year. According to Wofford, the coalition grew out of the Initiative on International Volunteering and Service, led by David Caprara, director and nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution. Wofford, Caprara, and John Bridgeland, president and CEO of Civic Enterprises—a public policy development firm in Washington D.C.—co-led the Brookings Initiative, which launched in June 2006. From there, Steve Rosenthal of Cross Cultural Solutions formed a strategy group with the Building Bridges Coalition, a project of the Brookings Institution's Initiative. On October 8, 2010 ServiceWorld launched its promotional website, OurServiceWorld.org.[162]

Wofford's impact on the new coalition is evident. The first of its principles reads "Partnerships, Not Paternalism," an explicit acknowledgment "that Americans have as much to learn from others as others have to learn from us."[163] ServiceWorld, unlike the Peace Corps of the 1960s, takes an internationalist approach by promoting the growth of volunteer service programs, like the Peace Corps, at home and abroad. ServiceWorld's own admission of the paternalistic nature of the Peace Corps is a radical move, but Wofford has always felt this way. Reflecting back on his 1966 article on the future of the Peace Corps, Wofford quipped, "It's very discouraging when I read [my article] now. It makes me think I haven't had a new idea since then."[164]

Even more indicative of the continuity of Wofford's thinking is the inclusion of the long-forgotten Volunteers to America in a ServiceWorld brochure published

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[162] Harris Wofford, phone interview by author, 25 March 2011.
[163] "ServiceWorld Principles," ServiceWorld, accessed March 27, 2011, http://ourserviceworld.org/about-us/serviceworld-principles/.
[164] Wofford, personal interview by author, 27 November 2009.

last June. The brochure alludes to the Volunteers to America program in its discussion of multi-lateral service:

> We propose to find the ways and means to enable volunteers from the United States to serve side-by-side with volunteers from host countries and from other countries. Such multi-lateral service will strengthen international bonds among people of different nations. The proposals by Sargent Shriver and President Johnson to host volunteers from other countries in the United States should be reviewed and seriously considered.[165]

Taken out of context, the resurgence of Volunteers to America is surprising. Excluding Wofford, very few of the people affiliated with ServiceWorld have even heard of Volunteers to America, let alone considered its relevance to American culture. Yet the resurgence of the idea in the 21st century is enmeshed in a larger historical legacy.

The rebirth of VTA is intimately intertwined with the events leading up to its death in 1970. Thus, only by grasping the structural, political, and cultural factors that killed the program in the late 1960s will we be able to recognize the conditions necessary to resurrect the concept. To do so, we must go back to where the story left off—in the wake of Hays' amendment and Boyer's resignation from VTA.

## *Early Predictions*

On February 6, 1970 Kevin Lowther told the Chicago Daily News that VTA's future was uncertain: "If you have a crystal ball, you might do better than I in

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[165] ServiceWorld, *ServiceWorld: Strategies for the Future of International Volunteer Service*, (Harris Wofford personal files, June 2010).

predicting the future of VTA. There is some likelihood that we shall attempt to resurrect the program in some fashion. However, there is nothing solid that I can report at this point."[166] He closed by acknowledging the tragedy of VTA's premature death, noting that the program received positive feedback from volunteers, school districts and organizations, and the State Department's evaluation, and would have cost the government very little to continue.

Lowther sounded pragmatic in a belated reply to a request for Volunteers to America to work with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota: "The VTA program is concluding for one reason; Congress decided that it should not continue." He held out some hope, however, "of resurrecting the program in the future, perhaps on the strength of private funding."[167] Shortly before he moved to his new office in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Boyer, in a letter to VISTA director Pedraic Kennedy, suggested that Volunteers to America be reestablished under VISTA:

> I think the Volunteers to America idea was a great one, and still is—even after three years of knocking heads. I think it has given some valuable benefits to VISTA…I just hope that VISTA can find some way to carry forward this concept, and to continue to bring America's anti-poverty programs the talents and perspectives of skilled people from other lands.[168]

Resurrecting Volunteers to America, however, would have entailed

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[166] Kevin Lowther to Donald Zochert, letter, 6 February 1970, RG 490, subject files, NACP.
[167] Kevin Lowther to Robert McLaughlin, letter, 24 February 1970, RG 490, subject files, NACP.
[168] Neil Boyer to Padraic Kennedy, letter, 20 January 1970, RG 490, subject files, NACP.

overcoming many of the same obstacles faced in the late 1960s: funding, bureaucratic infighting and procedural red tape, lingering fears of radicalism, and a history of cultural arrogance toward the developing world. VTA would also have had to overcome an additional complication: Hays' amendment. Since Congress approved Hays' piece of legislation, the Peace Corps has been prohibited from spending any appropriated funds on VTA or any similar program. Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee Thomas Morgan warned his fellow Congressmen of the impact of Hays' amendment in 1969: "I fear that the gentleman from Ohio [Hays], who is co-author of the cultural exchange program is going to fix it so that the Volunteers to America program is without any funds in either [the Fulbright-Hays or the Peace Corps] bill."[169] Republican Ross E. Adair of Indiana made a similar observation: "If this restricting language should remain in the bill, there is a possibility that the continuation of this program might not be funded any place at all, and, thus, it would die."[170]

History has proven these congressmen prescient. Although the program's main opponents in Congress in the late 1960s—Hays, Rooney, and Passman—are no longer living, Hays' prohibitory language in the Peace Corps authorization bill has remained, and this amendment has precluded the Peace Corps from restarting VTA. It has not, however, prevented other organizations from trying their own Reverse Peace Corps. Although a comprehensive analysis of these organizations is beyond the scope of this thesis, the next section will explore representative attempts to resurrect the Reverse Peace Corps model. These programs, though not directly traceable to

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[169] *115* Cong. Rec. 24660 (1969).
[170] Ibid., 24661-2.

VTA, inherited Wofford's belief in "paternalism, not partnership."

## *A Post-Patronizing Era*

Almost a decade after VTA's collapse, Boyer received a letter from Helmut Weyers, special assignments officer for Domestic Development Services (local volunteerism) of the United Nations. Weyers had good news to report: the Volunteers to America concept was gaining ground in Europe. The idea first resurfaced in the United Kingdom as a small community development program involving Indians and Nigerians and then spread throughout Europe. It included "reversed volunteer action" projects administered through a Catholic organization in Germany and volunteer service conferences, which repeatedly discussed the possibility of "exchanging volunteers instead of simply sending them."[171] The idea, Weyers wrote, was even on the table again in the United States, this time under the authority of VISTA: "You will have guessed that at this very moment the VTA experience is becoming relevant again; history seems to move in circles."[172]

By the late 1970s, the time seemed ripe for VTA's resurgence. The Peace Corps was under siege from two sides. Though Nixon resigned in 1974, his ambivalence about the Peace Corps—during the 1960 election, he had scoffed at the idea, calling it "Kennedy's Kiddie Corps"—had spread among many on the Right. Meanwhile, those on the Left had become increasingly skeptical of the Peace Corps' political designs. As early as September 1969, the Committee of Returned Volunteers (CRV) had "come to the unavoidable conclusion that the Peace Corps should be

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[171] Helmut Weyers to Neil Boyer, letter, 15 March 1976, Neil Boyer personal files.
[172] Ibid.

abolished."[173] These Peace Corps administrators and returned volunteers preferred to see the organization dissolved rather than under the authority of the Nixon administration. Blatchford, in an interview in the *Peace Corps Volunteer* Magazine in June 1970, tried to reconcile differences between the Peace Corps and the Nixon administration through his "New Directions" campaign, which he hoped would broaden the pool of volunteers joining the Peace Corps to include an older, more diverse, and more skilled applicant pool.

"New Directions" signaled a shift away from the idealism of the 1960s toward a more practical, skills-oriented approach to development work, as suggested by Wofford in 1966. Yet, it also pointed to a cultural shift away from the paternalistic power relations that defined U.S. foreign policy. The Peace Corps and the country as a whole were coming to realize that technical assistance and not sheer good will was needed to counter growing disillusionment with American policy at home and abroad. Blatchford aimed to replace the agency's elitism with reciprocity among volunteers and local peoples. Volunteers to America was therefore highly relevant to Blatchford, who pressed Congress to allow the program to continue on a modest scale in 1970; his proposal called for $100,000 from the Peace Corps' regular budget to fund an additional 40 volunteers in fiscal year 1970. After Hays' amendment passed in Congress, however, Blatchford abandoned the idea, and instead turned his focus to remaking the Peace Corps blighted image.

Meanwhile, however, Nixon was secretly making drastic cuts to the Peace Corps, merging all volunteer agencies, including the Peace Corps and VISTA, under

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[173] Hoffman, *All You Need Is Love*, 219-220.

his new conglomerate agency, ACTION. Nor were Republicans the Peace Corps' only opponents. According to historian David Searles, its harshest critics during the 1970s were Democrats Otto Passman and William Fulbright. As Passman said in budgetary hearings, "If I had to meet my Maker in three minutes and the last decision the Good Lord would let me make…it would be to abolish the Peace Corps."[174] Fulbright, likewise, saw the Peace Corps as "an idea whose time was past."[175]

After Blatchford resigned in 1973, the Peace Corps steadily declined. In 1977, an article in the *New York Times* ran with the headline, "Peace Corps: Alive But Not So Well." Even with a Democratic supporter in the White House—Jimmy Carter's mother was a Peace Corps volunteer—the Peace Corps found itself in the midst of an identity crisis, with only 6,045 volunteers overseas (compared to 15,500 in 1966). The reporter attributed the Peace Corps' diminished size to "bureaucratic middle age." The organization had lost its glamour and idealism, as well as its sense of purpose. The United States, the article concluded, had entered a "post-patronizing era."[176] Despite ripples of success throughout Europe, however, attempts to revive VTA in the United States never amounted to anything. While the Peace Corps had matured, the country still harbored old prejudices.

## *Signs of Change*

The Peace Corps marked its 20th anniversary in 1981 with a new director—

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[174] Ibid., 231.
[175] David Searles, "Restoring a Blighted Image," *Peace Corps Worldwide*, March 10, 2011, http://peacecorpsworldwide.org/remembering-the-70s/2011/03/10/restoring-a-blighted-image/.
[176] Terence Smith, "The Peace Corps: Alive But Not So Well," (*The New York Times*, December 20, 1977).

moderate Republican Loret Miller Ruppe—a new (Republican) President, and autonomy from ACTION all but certain. Carter had signed an Executive Order restoring some of the Peace Corps' pre-Nixon autonomy, but the Peace Corps was still ultimately under the authority of ACTION. On February 22, 1982, despite the Reagan administration's objections, Congress passed legislation that restored the Peace Corps' status as an independent federal agency outside of ACTION.[177] Ruppe took over the Peace Corps at a time when it was "the least liked, least supported, least respected budget of the United States." The Peace Corps was listed as "miscellaneous" expenditures under the general category of Foreign Assistance. Yet, her position as a Republican allowed her to restore the Peace Corps' budget, independence, and, perhaps most significantly, Americans' trust in the Peace Corps' non-partisan, apolitical message.[178]

On December 27, 1986, a two-sentence brief hidden inside *The Los Angeles Times* ran with the headline "Reverse Peace Corps Proposed to Benefit U.S.: Third World Would Teach Languages, Aid Development Projects." The article added that:

> The Peace Corps…now is proposing a new twist—a "reverse Peace Corps" of Third World volunteers who would come to the United States to do good. Visiting volunteers would teach their native languages and work in various development projects under a program envisioned by Peace Corps Director Loret Miller Ruppe.

In a longer version of the article in the *Houston Chronicle*, a Peace Corps

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[177] Karen De Witt, "Peace Corps Celebrates 20th Anniversary with New Autonomy in Sight," (*The New York Times*, June 20, 1981), http://peacecorpsonline.org/messages/messages/2629/2203330.html.
[178] Hoffman, *All You Need Is Love*, 250.

administrator refers to a similar program in the early 1970s that was "quashed after one year, I am told, largely because of the implications it seemed to carry about American culture."[179] Volunteers to America is never referred to by name, and the article is not only vague but also wrong about various details. Nevertheless, the resurgence of Peace Corps' interest in a reverse Peace Corps should not be understated. As Ruppe reported to the press, "The greatest thing we could have is this reverse Peace Corps . . . building these bonds, these partnerships for peace."[180]

In many ways, the timing of Ruppe's proposal could not have been better. The Peace Corps was celebrating its 25th anniversary, after having restored its budget, independence, and some of its credibility at home and abroad. Ruppe was an ideal spokesperson for the reverse Peace Corps idea, given her reputation for bipartisanship. The article intimates that the idea "probably would be greeted pretty skeptically here, even by Peace Corps supporters, who are interested in using limited funds to increase the number of volunteers sent abroad."[181] The article fails to mention the biggest legal obstacle to the reverse Peace Corps: Hays' amendment. In 1986, Congress reaffirmed Hays' prohibition on Hays-Fulbright funds being used for this purpose, thereby ending the Peace Corps' hopes of reestablishing Volunteers to America.

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[179] Paul Houston, "Peace Corps Hopes to Bring Third World Workers to U.S.," (*The Houston Chronicle*, January 4, 1987), http://www.chron.com/CDA/archives/archive.mpl/1987_432483/peace-corps-hopes-to-bring-third-world-workers-to.html.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

## *Offshoots of VTA*

With Hays' amendment reaffirmed, the onus was on other organizations to pick up the mantle of VTA. One such program was Teacher Corps, a precursor of Teach for America that embraced the idealistic fervor of the Peace Corps and VTA. When Congress terminated VTA in 1970, two privately run programs, the Cleveland International Program (CIP) and the Teacher Ambassadors program, continued to send foreign teachers and social workers to the United States. CIP and Teacher Ambassadors differed from VTA in a number of significant ways: both CIP and Teacher Ambassadors were privately sponsored, short-term professional exchanges, mostly from Western Europe. These programs outlasted VTA, in part, because they were compatible with the prevailing racial order; such exchanges were geared primarily toward white, well-educated Western Europeans, rather than young African and Hispanic volunteers.

The U.S. Department of State has also shown renewed interest in sending foreigners to the United States. The Youth Ambassadors Program, sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in collaboration with the International YMCA, suggests that bringing foreigners to the United States from outside of Western Europe, at least in the short-term, is no longer a serious point of contention in the 21st century. The program, which launched in 2010, is open to high school students, educators, and youth leaders from Colombia, Haiti, and Mexico, and is designed to "promote mutual understanding between the people of the Americas."[182] The program invokes the philosophy of Volunteers to America, yet falls short of

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[182] "Youth Ambassadors Program," *The International YMCA*, accessed March 31, 2011, http://www.internationalymca.org/new_site/node/73.

VTA's goal of reciprocity. While participants work on service projects throughout their three-week stay in the U.S., the underlying purpose of the program is to expose young Latin Americans to American culture—not the other way around. The program's overarching themes of democracy and civic engagement imply that the U.S. should promulgate its values to Latin America. Moreover, the program pigeonholes the young foreign visitors into American-bred stereotypes: the program's secondary themes include "substance abuse prevention" for the Colombia program, "violence prevention/reduction" for the Mexican participants, and "youth involvement in community (re)-building and disaster preparedness" for Haitian participants.

One of the organizations most closely related to Volunteers to America is Atlas Service Corps, a non-profit that sponsors a two-way flow of skilled professionals. The goal of Atlas Corps is to create a network of nonprofit leaders and organizations overseas. Atlas Corps' founder and CEO, Scott Beale, understands the linkage between his "Reverse Peace Corps of the 21st century" and VTA, even as he makes a point of distinguishing the Atlas Corps model from that of the Peace Corps: "The way most international service programs are designed is not sustainable because they require a wealthy donor or the government. We don't have a lot of competition…no one is doing what we're doing."[183] Beale, who left his job in the State Department's Indian Embassy to start Atlas Corps, said the organization is "embracing the globalization that corporations have already embraced":

Two things happened in a week long period: I was reading Thomas

[183] Scott Beale, phone interview by author, 18 September 2010.

> Friedman's, *The World Is Flat*, the story of globalization, and I heard about an Indian domestic service program, like Americorps. Those two things happened, and I thought it would be great if India had a Peace Corps—why don't they volunteer in the U.S. for a year?[184]

According to Beale, the typical Atlas Corps fellow has a college degree as well as three or more years of experience working in the non-profit sector. Applicants undergo a competitive selection process (less than one percent are accepted), but once they are admitted to the exchange program, the host nonprofit organization pays for 75 percent of the fellow's expenses during his or her 12-18 month stay in the United States. Beale claims his model is more sustainable than organizations, like the Peace Corps, which rely solely on government funding to stay afloat: "The Peace Corps has been around 50 years, through wars and times of peace, and I'm a huge fan of it, but when you limit yourself to one source of funding, you run the risk of that funding running dry."[185] Moreover, because host non-profit organizations incur most of the costs of the fellows, they are more invested in the fellows' experience.

Although Beale emphasizes the extent to which Atlas Corps is a product of globalization and entrepreneurship, by no means does he deny its relationship to the Peace Corps. The Atlas Corps website describes itself as a "21st century Reverse Peace Corps." In fact, Beale chose the second part of the name, "Service Corps," to emphasize its connection to the service-oriented Peace Corps—not coincidentally Harris Wofford is a member of Atlas Service Corps' advisory board. In celebration of the Peace Corps' 50th Anniversary, Beale is preparing to bring 50 Atlas Corps fellows

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[184] Ibid.
[185] Beale, phone interview by author, 30 March 2011.

to the United States, as part of his "50 in the 50th" campaign. Beale's ambitions are certainly as grandiose as those of the Peace Corps' founders: "We want to be largest leadership program for nonprofit leaders, challenging people and good ideas to go across borders."[186]

## *The Future of VTA*

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, fears of communists infiltrating America's shores have dissipated, and with the advent of new technology, U.S. isolationism has become less tenable than ever. Beale, judging from the positive feedback he has received from U.S.-based non-profits, believes the revival of the reverse Peace Corps is proof that times have changed:

> The idea makes sense to a lot of people, especially when you think about the fact that D.C. has a higher HIV rate than most countries in Africa. This is a different age, and people are generally more open to the idea. They are 20 times more likely to have an Indian doctor now, so people are used to others coming in and doing labor here.[187]

In the last few years, Atlas Corps has tripled in size to meet growing demand. Over 1,000 candidates applied for 21 positions last year, making a total of 74 fellows from 23 countries. Beale interprets the "quantum leap" in the number of Atlas Corps fellows as a promising sign of changing attitudes. As he sees it: "The idea is too powerful, and the market is too rich, for it not to grow and expand in a powerful

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[186] Beale, phone interview by author, 18 September 2010.
[187] Ibid.

way."[188] It is no coincidence that Beale is an active supporter of ServiceWorld, and has collaborated with Wofford to expand Americans' definition of international volunteer service. Rather than simply sending more Americans overseas, both Beale and Wofford have worked to incorporate multi-lateral service into ServiceWorld's global agenda.

The election of Barack Obama to the White House in 2008 also seemed to bode well for the revival of a reverse Peace Corps. Americans were willing to vote for an African-American president, perhaps a sign that they were prepared to find hope in a variety of cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the Obama campaign mobilized fresh energy and idealism in ways reminiscent of the Kennedy era. Like Kennedy, Obama has embraced the Peace Corps and volunteer service; in 2008, Obama incorporated Kennedy's call to service into his presidential campaign, making stops at college campuses, including Cornell College in Iowa and Wesleyan University in Connecticut, to generate support for his legislative agenda. Filling in for Ted Kennedy, the scheduled speaker for Wesleyan University's 2008 Commencement, the Democratic Senator from Illinois drew inspiration from John. F. Kennedy, who called on Americans to ask their country what they could do:

> At a time when our security and moral standing depend on winning the hearts and minds in the forgotten corners of this world, we need more of you to serve abroad. As President, I intend to grow the Foreign Service, double the Peace Corps over the next few years, and engage young people of other nations in similar programs, so that we work side by side to take on the common

[188] Beale, phone interview by author, 30 March 2011.

challenges that confront all of humanity.[189]

Almost as soon as Obama stepped into the Oval Office, he began to fulfill this campaign promise: in January 2009 he created the White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation and fast-tracked the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (developed in collaboration with ServiceWorld) through Congress.[190] When the Act passed by overwhelming majorities, it seemed to signal a turning point for ServiceWorld's global service initiative. The Act allowed for the expansion of Americorps to a quarter million and Volunteers for Prosperity, a network of U.S. nonprofits located in the developing world, as well as the creation of an International Social Innovation Fund to develop new ways to enhance the helping effect of Americans and local organizations.[191] At the time, Wofford was overjoyed by these developments, and optimistic that the Peace Corps new director, the first African American appointed to lead the agency, would be open to Atlas Corps' and ServiceWorld's new fellowship model for a reverse traffic of volunteers to the United States. In November 2009, Wofford said we should "stay tuned for a promising thing."[192]

More recently, however, the energy and momentum that brought Obama to the White House in 2008 and the Serve America Act through Congress has largely dissipated, and with it, Wofford's optimism about the future of Volunteers to America. The reverse Peace Corps idea has been incorporated into ServiceWorld's

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[189] Barack Obama, Commencement speech, (speech, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, May 2008), http://www.wesleyan.edu/rc/2008/video/commencement/5/.
[190] ServiceWorld, 4-5.
[191] Ibid., 13.
[192] Harris Wofford, personal interview by author, 27 November 2009.

agenda, but it is "not a high priority in any realistic sense."[193] According to Wofford, the unfavorable political climate of 2011 is the unfortunate corollary of the budget deficit crisis and the recession: "All the service programs are desperately trying to keep their money. The generosity of inviting people to this country is not at the core of existing international service programs."[194] VTA's future, as Wofford sees it, depends on three factors: the end of the recession, a resolution of the budget crisis, and the reelection of Obama in 2012.

Beale is somewhat more optimistic, at least about the idea's long-term prospects:

> I think Harris would agree that sometimes change comes at unexpected times. We are trying to change society and the government, and advance radical ideas, which seem crazy until they happen. The way Atlas Corps is punctuated is: Crazy. Crazy. Crazy. Obvious. I think the notion of two-way service is not going to come easily in this difficult economic time, and a lot of people out there say it may be crazy, but I am convinced that it will soon be seen as something of a no-brainer.[195]

Is the country finally poised for a Reverse Peace Corps? As of now, the program is "alive, but not kicking" within ServiceWorld's strategy, awaiting an economic turnaround.[196] However, regardless of what happens—in Congress, the White House, and the Peace Corps—it is clear that Volunteers to America is more relevant than ever before. If the story of Volunteers to America teaches us anything, it

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[193] Wofford, phone interview by author, 25 March 2011.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Beale, phone interview by author, 30 March 2011.
[196] Wofford, phone interview by author, 25 March 2011.

is that the spirit of Wofford's idea will never die.

# Appendix 1: Timeline

- **July 1958**: *The Ugly American* by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer challenges prevailing notions of American diplomacy, and inspires need for Peace Corps to improve America's image overseas.
- **1959**: Representative Henry Reuss and Senator Hubert Humphrey introduce bills in the House and the Senate; Reuss for a study of a "Point Four Youth Corps" and Humphrey for the creation of a Peace Corps.
- **October 14, 1960**: President John F. Kennedy delivers an impromptu speech at the University of Michigan, in which he proposes a potential developmental aid program overseas and receives an overwhelmingly positive reception from students.
- **January 2, 1961**: Kennedy chooses his brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, to lead a presidential task force to create the Peace Corps.
- **January 22, 1961**: Shriver taps Harris Wofford, special assistant to the president, to help coordinate the effort.
- **February 6, 1961:** Shriver organizes the first official task force meeting, in which he consults a wide-range of professionals, including Humphrey, Reuss, and two officials in the International Cooperation Agency (ICY), Warren W. Wiggins and William Josephson. Their paper, *The Towering Task*, greatly influences the philosophy and development of the Peace Corps.
- **February 24, 1961:** Shriver submits his "Report to the President on the Peace Corps," recommending the Peace Corps' immediate establishment.
- **March 1, 1961**: The Peace Corps is formally established by Executive Order on a temporary pilot basis under the authority of the U.S. Department of State. The Peace Corps is placed under a new Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of U.S. foreign assistance programs.
- **March 4, 1961**: Kennedy appoints Shriver as director of the newly established Peace Corps; after a two-month turf battle, Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson successfully fights for the Peace Corps to be established as an independent agency within the State Department.

- **September 21, 1961:** Congress passes the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act, under which VTA is first established. The Act creates the Fulbright program, among other cultural exchanges administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.
- **September 22, 1961**: The Peace Corps Act of 1961 passes by overwhelming majorities in the House and the Senate.
- **February 15, 1964:** The Fifth Conference on International Education is held in Washington, D.C. Topics on the agenda include expanding services to foreign students through what is referred to as a "Peace Corps in reverse."
- **March 1, 1965:** The Peace Corps celebrates its fourth anniversary as well as the start of a three-day Conference of Returned Volunteers. Volunteers indicate their interest in a Reverse Peace Corps.
- **March 15, 1965:** The State Department organizes a workshop on the topic of a Reverse Peace Corps.
- **April 1, 1965:** Harris Wofford organizes a meeting to deliberate on his "Volunteers to America" concept. Issues from garnering congressional support to recruitment, selection, and assignment procedures are discussed.
- **August 1965:** Five privately sponsored Indian volunteers help train an outgoing Peace Corps group in Hindi, before taking their assignments in social work. New York philanthropist and former Peace Corps volunteer Alfred Jones sponsors the pilot project, and David Schimmel, associate director of the Peace Corps' program in Ethiopia, serves as director.
- **August 6, 1965:** Wofford initiates a private meeting, and distributes a working paper entitled "Exchange Peace Corps of Volunteers to America."
- **December 7, 1965:** Shriver recommends the establishment of an Exchange Peace Corps in his opening address for the Experiment in International Living.
- **February 2, 1966:** President Johnson delivers his Message to Congress on International Health and Education. The speech includes his recommendation for the establishment of an Exchange Peace Corps with an initial goal of 5,000 volunteers.
- **March 1, 1966**: Jack Vaughn succeeds Shriver as director of the Peace Corps.

- **June 15, 1966:** Charles Frankel, as chairman of the presidential task force, submits his official report to Johnson. The proposal recommends that the Peace Corps administer the Exchange Peace Corps.
- **July 20, 1966**: Vaughn testifies before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and outlines his support for the president's recommendation. By now, 17 countries have indicated their interest in VTA; however, Congress balks at idea.
- **July 21, 1966:** Frankel, assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, testifies in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, fielding questions from skeptics in Congress.
- **1966:** Vaughn and his congressional liaison officer, Thomas Dine, meet with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where they encounter considerable opposition to VTA; the House Committee proposes, instead, a pilot program under the authority of the Fulbright-Hays Act, and allocates $100,000 for the first year.
- **January 1, 1967:** Schimmel resigns; Neil Boyer, a Peace Corps volunteer under Schimmel and Wofford in Ethiopia, becomes director of Volunteers to America.
- **July 1967:** The first group of 64 foreign volunteers from 12 countries begin orientation and training in the United States.
- **August 1968:** The second VTA group arrives, making a total of 107 Volunteers to America.
- **September 1968:** At the request of the Bureau of the Budget, the University of South Carolina issues a comprehensive evaluation of VTA. The glowing evaluation concludes that the program should be expanded and transferred to the Peace Corps.
- **March 6, 1969:** Vaughn and Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson begin preparations for the transfer of authority based on the evaluation's recommendation. The General Counsel to the Peace Corps indicates no legal obstacles to the transfer, but recommends informal talks with Congress.

- **April 7, 1969:** Richardson gains approval from the Director of the Bureau of the Budget (BOB), Robert Mayo, despite the BOB's preference to delay action until the Nixon administration approved the transfer of authority.
- **May 5, 1969**: President Richard Nixon fires Vaughn, and replaces him with Joseph Blatchford; Blatchford launches his "New Directions" campaign, calling for increased volunteer skills and diversity.
- **July 3, 1969:** Richardson signs a controversial "Delegation of Authority," which transfers VTA from the State Department to the Peace Corps.
- **July 21, 1969:** Democratic Representative John J. Rooney, as chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee, confirms that no funds from the State Department budget will be allocated for VTA. As a result, Boyer cancels a project calling for an additional 40 volunteers.
- **September 8, 1969:** Ohio Democrat Wayne Hays introduces his amendment, stipulating that no funds in the Peace Corps Act could be used to carry out Volunteers to America or any similar exchange programs.
- **September 17, 1969:** The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approves Blatchford's amendment for the Peace Corps to spend its own money on VTA. The Senate confirms this on October 3.
- **October 29 1969:** Hays' amendment passes in the House on a voice vote with only four members dissenting. The Senate recedes from its position in the joint conference report.
- **1970:** UN-designated International Education Year (IEY).
- **January 20, 1970:** Boyer resigns; the program is transferred to Kevin Lowther at the Office of Voluntary Action (OVA).
- **August 1970:** Volunteers to America is phased out entirely.
- **July 1, 1971:** The Peace Corps loses its independent status to ACTION. The centralized agency draws together both domestic and international volunteer agencies under the direction of Blatchford.
- **May 16, 1979:** Jimmy Carter signs an Executive Order, re-establishing the Peace Corps' pre-Nixon autonomy. The Peace Corps becomes an independent agency within ACTION.

- **February 21, 1982:** The Peace Corps is made an independent agency within the executive branch by title VI of the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1981.

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