

Cracking the Atom of Civic Power

BY HARRIS WOFFORD

Asked why he robbed banks, Willie Sutton said, “Because that’s where the money is.” Like Sutton perhaps, higher education may be short of money, but it is not short of brain and brawn. There is no better place to look for the human resources that cities need to meet the extra educational and social needs of children and families, or to help solve other critical problems, than America’s four thousand colleges and universities. Their faculties, administrations, and trustees are more than a million strong, with connections to millions of alumni. The largest of the campus resources, right on hand to be called into action to help America’s cities, is sixteen million students.

The most critical need—and the key to mobilizing the human and monetary resources to meet the needs of our cities—is educated, engaged, and responsible citizens who will work together to solve our communities’ and our country’s serious social problems. The largest deficit we face as a nation is the shortage of such active-duty citizens. In the brain and brawn of students, the campuses of this country offer the largest potential pool for such citizens.

This participation should not be deferred until the day after graduation. If higher education is to fulfill its mission, the practice of citizenship should be an integral part of civic education. Students are often proclaimed the leaders of tomorrow. It is more important for them to be seen as (and to see themselves as) leaders today. There is no more important way for students to develop and demonstrate their leadership—to be tested and to test themselves—than in action to help American cities. We need better education for millions of children who are at great risk. Children need Head Start and even earlier childhood education, such as Jumpstart; they

need a healthy start, with health education and access to health care; they need extra tutoring in reading and mathematics; they need after-school programs with structure in a safe place; they need mentoring by caring adults; and, from the earliest age, they need age-appropriate forms of service learning.

It requires tremendous new resources for elementary and secondary teachers and nonprofit programs such as Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, MENTOR, and after-school service and tutoring programs to provide that crucial assistance. Federal, state, and local governments are not able or willing to finance the hiring of enough new staff. To fill the gap, millions of volunteers are needed, either unpaid or with a modest stipend for service requiring a large investment of time (such as college work-study jobs, living allowances and education awards for AmeriCorps members, or various off-campus internships).

Great goals can galvanize. What calls out the best from us is being asked to give of ourselves to something larger than ourselves. Asking college and university students to join in concerted, dedicated effort to turn around the lives of their younger neighbors in great trouble can be such a call to action. Ask, and they will go! In the process, they help our neighborhoods and cities solve one of their most pressing problems.

Civically engaged colleges and universities should take the lead in asking students and faculty to enlist in these efforts and together mobilize the other resources of their institution. This demands a quantum leap in engagement with cities and with the children of those cities. It requires a leap in leadership, first of all by presidents but also by trustees, faculties,

and students. In this essay, I present an overview of the history of efforts to engage higher education and students in large-scale civic-engagement and service-learning programs in the hope of finding clues that will help us crack the “atom” of American civic power and produce a quantum leap in the civic engagement of America’s campuses.

The Post–World War II Era

After the Second World War, my generation learned how American universities had secretly played a central part in producing the atomic bomb. In a metaphorical sense, our generation saw how the atom of American civic power was successfully cracked and harnessed to win a war we had to win. At the University of Chicago, where I went after coming out of the Army Air Corps, cracking the atom was more than a metaphor. The University’s Stagg Field was the place where scientists produced the first nuclear chain reaction. We heard about the all-out, multipronged search for the way to build the bomb before Hitler did. In that war, all sectors of American society came together in the common cause, and we discovered what great goals can be achieved when this happens. We wanted to see it happen again—in winning the peace and solving important problems on the home front.

Many of my generation read William James’s 1910 essay “The Moral Equivalent of War,” which proposed a year or more of national service on the part of all young men to undertake some of the hardest tasks of the nation.¹ We had just done that and were not in a mood for further service, at least not then. Yet some form of that idea (usually including women) was in the air and stuck in the minds of many future leaders, among them John F. Kennedy and George H. W. Bush. We believed the intense experience of military service prepared us for civic leadership at home. Professors proclaimed us the greatest generation of students because so many of us had come out of the war with new curiosity and an avid desire to read and argue, and to explore the larger questions of how to choose a good life.

Chicago was a center of the atomic scientists’ agitation for world nuclear control, and with the blessing of Albert Einstein our president, Robert Hutchins, formed a distinguished Committee to Frame a World Constitution. He became an eloquent and outspoken leader in the campaign for world government. He never preached civic engagement, but we were proud that he was himself engaged with vital and controversial public issues. When he spoke in Rockefeller Chapel, students packed the great hall to hear what he had to say (an

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experience most university presidents don’t enjoy today). His subject was usually the world, but certainly not the city around us.

The urban problems of Chicago were very little, if at all, on our minds. No one asked us to become volunteers serving the city or the country. Nor was “service learning” an idea we had heard about unless we were reading John Dewey. Without demeaning our service in the military, we laughed at the line in Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* warning that “service” is what gas stations do to cars and bulls do to cows.² In fact, large metropolitan areas such as Chicago were dealing with increasingly difficult social problems and did need help. There was a huge migration into northern and western cities of poor black families from the South,³ but it took another decade before the new U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, inspired by Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame, put the spotlight on the racial segregation of housing in the North. Those of us who staffed the commission’s hearings on discrimination in housing found Chicago to be the most segregated community of all those we studied in the nation. But even in those years, we heard no

call for universities and students to come to the help of cities.

The Sixties and the Peace Corps

The call did come in the 1960s. College students, like most Americans, were stirred by the words of the young new president who turned *ask* into an unforgettably strong verb. “The world is very different now,” Kennedy began his inaugural address. “For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life.” He did not deal with any domestic issue, but at the last minute he added two words—“at home”—to an address wholly focused on the world. “The trumpet summons us,” he said, “to a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself,” and committed America to support human rights “at home and around the world.”⁴

In asking Americans to lift their sights to what they could do for their country, Kennedy’s first call was to young Americans to volunteer in service overseas, in the one new program he proposed in his presidential campaign: the Peace Corps. University students played a crucial role in inspiring him to propose a Peace Corps at San Francisco’s Cow Palace in the last days of the campaign. Then, after he was elected, college and university students helped turn the idea into a reality.

It was on the steps of the University of Michigan’s Student Union in the middle of a cold night in mid-October 1960, in unplanned and extemporaneous remarks to some ten thousand long-waiting students, faculty, and townspeople, that Kennedy tossed out some leading questions: How many students were willing to spend ten years in Africa or Latin America or Asia? Or young doctors willing to serve in Ghana? To his undefined call to volunteer service abroad, the audience responded with extraordinary enthusiasm. In the next few days, 250 students and some faculty in a group they called “Americans Committed to World Responsibility”

circulated a petition saying they would volunteer if a Peace Corps were launched. When the word got to Kennedy that nearly a thousand Michigan students had signed, he decided to spell out the idea and make it a major campaign promise.

After the election, more than thirty thousand college students and other mostly young Americans wrote to the incoming president supporting the idea, more mail than on any other subject. The National Student Association took up the cause and convened a national conference to help shape the idea. These were important factors in keeping Kennedy and his staff from forgetting the promise.

Sargent Shriver, who was asked to design (and later run) the new program, wrote that the Peace Corps would probably “still be just an idea but for the affirmative response of those Michigan students and faculty. Possibly Kennedy would have tried it once more on some other occasion, but without a strong popular response he would have concluded that the idea was impractical or premature. That probably would have ended it then and there. Instead, it was almost a case of spontaneous combustion.”⁵

When by executive order President Kennedy boldly created the Peace Corps (even before Congress passed the authorizing legislation) tens of thousands of college students applied to be among the first volunteers. The report of Shriver’s task force on the Peace Corps, which the president adopted and sent to Congress, proposed that “wherever feasible” the overseas projects themselves should be administered through contracts with colleges and universities, or through other nonprofit organizations operating overseas. There were already fifty-seven universities working, in thirty-seven countries, on economic development or education projects under contract with the U.S. aid program. As a practical matter, they were a constituency the Peace Corps needed. “As a high educational venture, the Peace Corps’ proper carriers are our traditional institutions of higher education,” the report sent to Congress

stated. “It is time for American universities to become truly world universities.”⁶

Kennedy, like Shriver, had a similar vision of the educational character of the venture. Through the Indiana Association of Universities, President Hesburgh of Notre Dame arranged for his university to organize and run the large program in Chile, which it did successfully for most of a decade with long-lasting impact on Notre Dame. But no other university or college rose to the occasion and sought to do so. Nor do I think Peace Corps administrators pursued others, although the Peace Corps contracted with a number of experienced universities to train volunteers for particular countries. The plan sent to Congress called for the college and university channel, and administration by private agencies such as CARE, to be the preferred way but added that there would be some projects of a size, complexity, novelty, or urgency that could not be carried out, or carried out well, through such channels. Those familiar with the expansive appetite of government agencies will not be surprised that direct Peace Corps-run projects became the dominant, indeed almost the sole, model.

If we had gone the other way and higher education played a major part in developing and administering the Peace Corps—and used its effective lobbying power to win the necessary appropriations from Congress—the Peace Corps might well have reached the critical mass intended. On one of the occasions when, as his special assistant, I accompanied the president to the rose garden to send off a new contingent of volunteers, he commented afterward that this will be really serious when there are a hundred thousand volunteers a year—one million in a decade. Then, he said, for the first time we’d have a substantial constituency for an intelligent foreign policy. A large proportion of the 175,000-some volunteers who have returned in the last forty-two years were active-duty citizens, in their communities or in the country at large. If higher education had embraced the Peace Corps as an integral part of its

civic mission, we might now have several million former volunteers engaged in civic affairs at home and in shaping our relations with the world.

If year by year a hundred thousand young Americans had gone for two years of service overseas, the contribution of the United States to the education and development of other nations would have been a matter of great pride on our part and appreciation by people around the world. It is mind-boggling to imagine the difference this might have made, or would now be making, in framing and implementing an intelligent American policy in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The War on Poverty

The early success of the Peace Corps soon led to formation of a domestic Peace Corps: the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Before he was killed, Kennedy set in motion plans for an all-out assault on poverty. He also said that someday we must bring the Peace Corps idea home on a large scale. The new president, Lyndon Johnson, successfully used the shock of Kennedy’s death to move the Congress and the country forward on both counts. Johnson declared “unconditional war on poverty in America” and appointed Shriver to direct it. He also called for doubling the Peace Corps, from ten thousand to twenty thousand. At the University of Kentucky in 1965, Johnson proposed that the nation “search for ways” through which “every young American will have the opportunity—and feel the obligation—to give at least a few years of his or her life to the service of others in the nation and in the world.”⁷ Shriver and Johnson saw VISTA volunteers as essential ground troops for the war on poverty. They would provide much of the people power for the other initiatives of the campaign: Head Start, Upward Bound, Job Corps, Community Legal Services, Foster Grandparents, and the community action programs in American cities. In creating those social inventions, Shriver drew heavily on the faculties of higher education. He called on college and university students to become full-time vol-

unteers in VISTA, after graduation or as a working break during college or graduate school.

Recalling the speed and scale with which Franklin Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in his first hundred days in office, Shriver intended VISTA to grow with all practical speed to hundreds of thousands. He expected the Job Corps for high school dropouts and unemployed young people to match it.⁸ The growth of the CCC in the 1930s was a precedent for such expectations.

When FDR found there were half a million young men out of school and out of work, he persuaded Congress to authorize a Civilian Conservation Corps of five hundred thousand. Selecting Col. George C. Marshall to organize the CCC camps, he asked the future leader of America's armed forces to get "those boys in the woods," and set a goal of a quarter of a million to be at work by the end of summer. By the end of July 1933, four months later, Marshall reported that there were more than three hundred thousand young men in sixteen hundred camps, working hard on long-needed conservation projects in our national parks and forests, and on other public land. By the time they graduated into military service in World War II, some three million men of the CCC had turned their lives around, while doing work that won lasting national acclaim.⁹

This was the kind of war Shriver wanted. The three forces of VISTA, Job Corps, and returned Peace Corps volunteers, he predicted, would become "a giant pincers movement converging in the great center which is smug and self-satisfied and complacent."¹⁰ In a commencement talk at New York University (NYU), Shriver issued an appeal that he later took to many colleges and universities: "The poor for whom this university was founded are out in the night, in the street, in the overcrowded schools needing extra teachers, in the hospitals needing extra help, in the settlement houses needing volunteers. They need your help. We need men and women who will work in these programs and start

new programs of their own. For this we need the manpower and the brainpower, we need the service of the colleges and universities of America."¹¹

He called on NYU "and the faculty and student body of all other great universities to practice the politics of service here at home in your own neighborhoods—not by more courses in responsibility or in American social problems, not by lectures, not by commencement talks; but by political action in this true sense of politics, in the service of your city."¹² He asked them: "What kind of blood runs in your veins? Are you ready to practice the politics of service?"¹³

With nearly fifty thousand students and faculty, he said, "This university alone overshadows the whole Peace Corps in its resources and potential power. . . . An all-university project to end the cycle of poverty in the areas where you live and have your being is within the intellectual and spiritual power of this, the largest private educational institution in the world."¹⁴

If NYU did this "with all the resources at your command, then future generations will say that the problem of poverty was cracked, and that a chain reaction of progress was started here on University Heights and on Washington Square."¹⁵

"What kind of blood runs in your veins? Are you ready to practice the politics of service?"

In his memoirs, Johnson looked back with nostalgia on the electrifying beginning of the War on Poverty: "The excitement was contagious. Hundreds of people—high school and college students, returning Peace Corps men, housewives, and even congressional wives—volunteered to work thousands of hours in every kind of capacity. . . . They went at it with a fervor and created a ferment unknown since the days of the New Deal, when lights had burned

through the night as men worked to restructure society.”¹⁶

With the Vietnam War consuming more and more federal resources, the president and Congress started to cut back the plans for rapid expansion of VISTA and other antipoverty programs. Shriver was also disappointed with the response of academic leaders; neither NYU nor any other university made the major commitment he sought. It was another missed opportunity for higher education and the country.

Some cities nevertheless forged ahead under the leadership of determined and dynamic mayors. One of them, Republican John Lindsay of New York City, created an “urban Peace Corps” of young men and women, mostly college students, funded 80 percent by the federal work-study program. He also established an office for volunteers that became a model for other cities. According to personal conversations with a key organizer of Lindsay’s Urban Corps, Stanley Litow (now president of the IBM International Foundation), the corps grew from a few hundred in 1966 to one thousand in 1969, to twenty-five hundred by 1970 when he became executive director, and by 1973 to nearly ten thousand participating college student interns mostly with work-study jobs when Lindsay left office. They worked part-time in the school year and full-time in the summer.

More than a hundred universities around New York had work-study contracts with the corps, and many cooperative education campuses such as Northeastern and Wilberforce sent students working for their co-op terms. The corps staffed health clinics with medical and dental students and the field offices for consumer affairs with law students. It sent other interns to tutoring programs and recreation centers. Except for a director and a few deputies in the mayor’s office, the corps was entirely student-run. Its fiscal and job development and placement offices were all staffed with the interns.

The success of the Urban Corps was later recognized by the Ford Foundation, which started an Urban Corps National Development Office that helped scores of urban corps programs get started in other cities. In New York City, the corps continued for some years but was diminished in size and clout as federal work-study funds were reduced and colleges and universities increasingly sought to keep work-study jobs on the campus instead of students going out to serve in the community.

The Collapse of Hope

Before the sixties ended, the War on Poverty was abandoned as American resources—and young soldiers—were drawn into the other kind of war, in Vietnam. The controversy over that war itself produced unprecedented engagement in political action by students and faculty (and an occasional college president). Teach-ins, protest demonstrations, and on occasion civil disobedience (sometimes uncivil, even violent, disobedience) engulfed many campuses.

In the wake of the war and dwindling federal dollars, the wind went out of the sails of the idea of engaging millions of students and faculty in service to children and the cities. Though all the main antipoverty programs that Shriver started continue in some form to this day, none except Head Start reached anything like the scale envisioned. VISTA, for example, fell to less than five thousand (as did the Peace Corps, from its high in 1966 of nearly sixteen thousand).¹⁷

The sixties saw another form of civic engagement when tens of thousands of college and university students joined the civil rights movement as it came to a climax in the years of Martin Luther King, and college and high school students were often in the front ranks. The lunch counter sit-ins were started by black college students in the South, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), where John Lewis emerged as a national leader, was started by students and young graduates. White and black students from around the country

answered the call to go to the dangerous frontlines of voter registration in the South. Some were beaten and jailed, and a few were killed. But the high hopes of that season of citizen action collapsed in the sad spring of 1968 as Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated.

Both King and Kennedy were pointing to the mountains of poverty and inequality of opportunity still to be climbed in the next stage of the struggle for full civil rights. Citing what Peace Corps volunteers were doing abroad, Kennedy called for young Americans “to take on the toughest jobs in this country, whether in a city slum, an Indian reservation or a mining town . . . to invest a year of their lives, at no salary and under Spartan conditions, to help millions of their fellow citizens who, through no fault of their own, are denied the essentials of a decent life.”¹⁸ As senator, he asked colleges and universities to join in helping transform Bedford Stuyvesant, one of the most depressed communities in New York City. To the angry cry of “Burn, baby, burn!” as riots raged in the cities, King said, “No, the right watchwords are ‘Learn, baby, learn’ and ‘Build, baby, build!’” Instead of picking up the torch and carrying on in King’s spirit, many young Americans, on and off campus, turned to a counterculture of drugs and civic disengagement. A depression set in, not of the economy but of the spirit, from which it has taken a long time for some, young and old, to recover.

A Period of Percolation

The hoped-for quantum leap in concerted action to end poverty and to enlist millions of young people in such action never materialized. Despite the lack of presidential leadership and loss of federal funds, however, many service and volunteer initiatives percolated up, from state and local communities, from colleges and universities, and from students and young people themselves.

In the late 1970s, another effort to secure federal funding for large-scale youth service got a serious

hearing from the Carter administration. Recognizing the increasing number of urban young people dropping out of school or ending up on the streets, unemployed and without hope, President Jimmy Carter asked Vice President Walter Mondale to head a major task force on youth policy. The Committee for the Study of National Service (which I was then piloting) had just issued its report “Youth and the Needs of the Nation.”¹⁹ The committee’s most respected spokesman, Father Hesburgh, and I presented our findings and recommendations to the vice president and found him responsive.

Despite the lack of presidential leadership and loss of federal funds, however, many service and volunteer initiatives percolated up, from state and local communities, from colleges and universities, and from students and young people themselves.

We were proposing a decentralized system of national service in which all young people would be challenged to serve full-time for one or more years in meeting the needs of the nation and the world community. Such service would not be required, but after proving itself we hoped the idea would grow “so that before long participation in either civilian or military National Service will be as generally accepted as going to high school.”²⁰ We foresaw extensive involvement of colleges and universities as well as student organizations.

Mondale seemed keenly interested, and Carter’s influential secretary of labor, Ray Marshall, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. David Jones, supported our proposals. President Carter’s mother had been an enthusiastic Peace Corps volunteer in India, and the president himself was already a champion of volunteer service. For a while, there were signs that the president would propose some form of voluntary national service. Instead, Mondale’s task force went the other way. With

limited money available, they decided to focus entirely on helping poor and minority youth.

Thereafter, federal money was concentrated on job training, remedial education, and summer jobs for the disadvantaged. Most of the major foundations made the same decision. Some, such as the Ford and Pew foundations, however, did fund new demonstration urban youth service corps in a number of cities. Led by California and Pennsylvania, several states formed youth conservation corps on the model of Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps. Started by Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown, the California corps grew to some two thousand corpsmembers and earned the support of all subsequent governors. The organizers of some of these youth corps wanted them to be "diverse" but with a twist: instead of the usual meaning—with substantial black and minority members—they hoped their corpsmembers would be black and white, college-bound as well as recent high school graduates and dropouts. But since almost all available funding was for efforts targeted on the disadvantaged, most of the corps soon became overwhelmingly black or Latino. That was also a twist on the old CCC, which was largely white and entirely segregated by race.

These corps often did outstanding work. Over the years, YouthBuild, a program led by a visionary War on Poverty veteran, Dorothy Stoneman, turned around the lives of thousands of young people who had dropped out of high school. They learned job skills and the value of hard work and teamwork while building homes for families in need. In 1984, these national, state, and local full-time youth programs joined to form the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC), which grew to more than a hundred corps in thirty-seven states with twenty-three thousand young corpsmembers.

On the front of traditional unpaid, part-time volunteering, the 1970s and 1980s also saw a steady increase in the number of volunteers and of com-

munities that started volunteer centers. After he ran for president in 1968, former Michigan Republican Gov. George Romney became "Mr. Volunteer" and spent his later years building a network of several hundred such centers. Community service by volunteers of all ages grew through recruitment and placement by these local centers, by nonprofit organizations seeking volunteers, and by the continuing federal Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

In accepting the Republican nomination in 1980, Ronald Reagan said: "Let us pledge to restore in our time the American spirit of volunteer service, of cooperation, of private and community initiative, a spirit that flows like a deep and mighty river through the history of our nation."²¹ As president, however, he did little to make the river deeper and mightier.

In 1985, supported by leading college and university presidents, the Campus Compact was established at Brown University to build civic learning into campus and academic life through student service and all-round institutional involvement in the surrounding community. Under creative leadership, the compact through the years has worked effectively to deepen and make mightier the river of engagement and citizen service, and have it run through the heart of American campuses.²² Best practices were shared, and a growing number of campuses became models of extensive student volunteering and effective faculty participation.

In the late 1980s, the idea of national service came back to life. The Democratic Leadership Council issued a landmark report, "Citizenship and National Service," recommending major investment in large-scale, full-time national service. Following the principle of reciprocity in the GI Bill of Rights, the council, with Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton's strong endorsement, called for federal student aid to be conditioned on a year or more of service to the nation. The council's chairman, Sen. Sam Nunn, and

Rep. David McCurdy introduced legislation to launch the plan. The bill was immediately attacked and sidetracked by many Democrats along with leading college and university presidents, who denounced it as unfair to poorer students since those who didn't need financial aid were under no similar pressure to serve.

Coming to the presidency with a vision of volunteer service as "a thousand points of light," George H. W. Bush appointed the first assistant to the president for national service, Gregg Petersmeyer; he proposed a new program for young people, Youth Engaged in Service (YES); and he set up the Points of Light Foundation and from the White House made daily "Points of Light awards." In 1990, he joined with Sen. Edward Kennedy and other legislators of both parties to enact the first National Service Act. Kennedy overcame opposition by turning from the stick to the carrot, providing new funds for service but with no service requirement attached to student aid.

The act created a bipartisan Commission on National and Community Service to promote voluntary service and service learning, with power to award demonstration grants to support a few full-time national service programs. One of those grants went to City Year, a program started by recent Harvard Law School graduates Alan Khazei and Michael Brown. They designed it to be a model of what national service might look like, with teams of black, white, and Latino young people, out of high school or college, working together for a year in demanding service in the city. I can report from personal observation that when Bill Clinton visited City Year's founding site in Boston during his 1992 campaign, he said, "The light went on and I knew that's what I want to do when I'm president."

The Twin Engines of Service

In 1993, when President Bush met with Clinton for their drive to Capitol Hill to the inauguration, the one thing he asked was that the incoming president

"take care of my Points of Light!" Clinton agreed. Soon afterward, when his team under Eli Segal was preparing the new president's proposal for national service, many Democrats wanted to leave out any support for the Points of Light Foundation. In the Senate negotiations, those of us who favored joining the two initiatives prevailed. It was a winning combination; if partisanship had cut Points of Light we probably would not have secured the small number of Republican senators who made up the margin of victory for the new act.

The act turned the bipartisan commission into the Corporation for National and Community Service, with new resources and a mandate to bring the streams of service together in a rising river. It continued the long-standing senior volunteer programs (RSVP, Senior Companions, and Foster Grandparents) and made a modest appropriation for a Learn and Serve America program that included support for service learning in colleges and universities. The largest appropriation went to the new AmeriCorps, which was authorized to start at twenty thousand members. Despite vehement opposition by powerful Republicans in the House of Representatives, AmeriCorps, including VISTA, was to grow to fifty thousand by the turn of the century. Clinton called it "the transcendent idea" of his administration.

About one-third of AmeriCorps members had completed college or graduate school, one-third had some college, and one-third of them were just out of high school. About 10 percent had a Ph.D. or other professional degree and about an equal percentage were high school dropouts. Most of the grants for AmeriCorps positions were made and administered by bipartisan, governor-appointed state commissions, with college and university presidents often playing a leading role on those commissions. Many grants for AmeriCorps positions went to institutions of higher education or to organizations created and led by young people just out of college. Most of the assignments of AmeriCorps members were in

urban programs of assistance to younger students and children.

The stage was set for substantial further expansion when Mr. Volunteer, George Romney, proposed a summit convened by all the living presidents to turn the river of service into a truly mighty force. Instead of two competing streams of part-time voluntary service and full-time stipended national service, he had a vision of twin engines pulling together. He wanted their combined force to be the driving people power for an alliance of all the sectors of society to solve our most critical problems, at the top of which he put the plight of millions of youths.

In the summer of 1995, Romney presented to the president of the Points of Light Foundation, Robert Goodwin, and to me, as the newly nominated CEO of the Corporation for National Service, his case for what he called “a quantum leap in national service and community volunteering.” In a memorandum he was trying to get to President Clinton, Romney wrote: “If we were threatened by external forces, our resurgence would be swift and sure, centered around a full-scale mobilization of the entire nation. Our domestic problems demand no less of a response than that same kind: a full-scale mobilization of all our creative resources from the largest corporation to the smallest neighborhood group. There are roles in this for government, business, education, religion, professional, civic organizations, youth and for each and every American.”²³

The summit did come to pass, with great fanfare, in Philadelphia in April 1997, but George Romney did not live to see it. It was convened by Presidents Clinton and Bush and attended by Presidents Carter and Ford, with Nancy Reagan representing her husband; it was chaired by Gen. Colin Powell and was organized by the Points of Light Foundation, the new National Service Corporation, and the United Way of America. Two thousand delegates came from 150 communities, with thirty governors, many mayors, CEOs of corporations and nonprofit organ-

izations, religious leaders, college and university presidents, and students. The news media were there in large numbers and covered it in full force all weekend. The declaration signed at Independence Hall promised the kind of national and local all-sector mobilization Romney had dreamed of, focused on meeting the urgent needs of children and youth. Powell became chairman of the campaign called America’s Promise: the Alliance for Youth. Until he became secretary of state, he carried the message across the country.

Romney would not have been happy to know how hard the mobilization of all the sectors of society, in all the major communities, proved to be. He had assumed that the moral and political leadership of the president of the United States was an essential ingredient for success, but President Clinton was embattled and could not give it authority or priority. Opinion polls showed Powell to be the most respected of Americans. His leadership was crucial to the effort, but in 2001 he was called to another kind of national service. Government at all levels needed to give support, but it was (and remains) an excessively partisan time. Available resources for increased investment in the education of our children were severely limited by large tax cuts, increases in military spending, and, after September 11, 2001, more than \$250 billion devoted to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the war on terrorism.

Nevertheless, through thick and thin many communities have maintained the community collaborations inspired by the summit, and the national America’s Promise Alliance is moving into higher gear under CEO Marguerite Sallee. Organizations whose purpose is to provide the kind of help for children that was promised at the summit have grown. Boys and Girls Clubs have spread from two thousand to more than three thousand clubs, with new frontiers of service on Indian reservations and new clubs based in schools. Mentoring, through Big Brothers, Big Sisters, statewide initiatives of governors, and other parts of the MENTOR network, has

gone from an estimated one-quarter million organized mentors to about two and a half million, with fifteen million more needed.²⁴

Nevertheless, through thick and thin many communities have maintained the community collaborations inspired by the summit.

The budget of the Corporation for National Service is now almost a billion dollars, most of it going to support work with children and youth, helping to fulfill the Five Promises made at Philadelphia. With CEO David Eisner, AmeriCorps has grown to seventy-five thousand members. In many programs, such as Habitat for Humanity, they have leveraged the expansion of traditional unpaid volunteering through their work of recruiting and coordinating volunteers. In ten years, AmeriCorps members have totaled more than 330,000, nearly double the number of Peace Corps volunteers after forty-four years. Campus Compact, well led by Liz Hollander, has grown to more than nine hundred member colleges and universities, with offices in thirty states and 280 full-time VISTA volunteers working in state and local programs across the country. With Project Pericles, Eugene Lang has opened another front in higher education with a special focus. Drawing on his long and dedicated chairmanship of the board of Swarthmore College, he has begun a determined effort to persuade smaller liberal arts colleges to take civic education and engagement from the periphery to the center of their curriculum and campus life.

On the annual National Youth Service Day in April, organized by Youth Service America (YSA) and sponsored by State Farm and *Parade* magazine, more than a million young people and volunteers of all ages serve. It is now linked to Global Youth Service Day in more than a hundred countries. By zip codes, YSA's Website SERVENet.org offers some forty thousand volunteer projects, each needing a number of volunteers. Competing with Youth Ser-

vice Day to be the largest day of service is Make a Difference Day, sponsored actively by USA WEEKEND. The annual National Service-Learning Conference shows the growing strength of service learning at all levels of American education. It is convened by the National Youth Leadership Council and cosponsored by State Farm and YSA, bringing together more than two thousand teachers and professionals, with one-third students themselves. The Points of Light Foundation's annual Conference on Community and National Service, cosponsored with the corporation, is a similar sign of breadth and depth of the service movement. So is the response in cities and on campuses around the country to the congressional act officially making Martin Luther King Day a day of service—a day *on*, not a day off. In 2005, an estimated forty-five thousand volunteers registered for six hundred projects on King Day in greater Philadelphia.²⁶ The growing network of Hands-On and City Cares community organizations for civic action, based in Atlanta, is particularly appealing to young professionals in more than thirty cities.

After the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush issued his own call for a quantum leap in civic engagement, asking all Americans to give four thousand hours, or two years, during their lifetime to service of their community and their country. He called for doubling the Peace Corps (with its two years of service), a twenty-five-thousand-member increase in AmeriCorps, and creation of a new Citizen Corps to enlist citizens in homeland security. To promote and coordinate these initiatives, he established the USA Freedom Corps as a cabinet-level coordinating body for all the streams of service. Launched by one of his close colleagues, John Bridgeland, it is advised by a Council on Service and Civic Participation, chaired by John Glenn and Bob Dole. Presidential awards are now under way for a hundred hours of service in a year (or fifty hours for children under fifteen). These awards for civic fitness are running parallel to the president's physical fitness awards. The president has sent a message to all schools in the United States asking them to engage their students in service

learning, with a guidebook of suggestions for how to do it well. From the White House, the president and corporate leaders have launched a Business Strengthening America initiative, to add the power of corporate America to all these efforts.

A new White House Website, USAFreedomCorps.gov, affords one-stop access to all the major databases of volunteer opportunities. It offers information on all the president's initiatives and links to those of the Points of Light volunteer center network, the United Way, the Corporation for National Service, MENTOR, Volunteer Match, SERVENet, and America's Promise. In a ceremony in the Rose Garden, President Bush signed the Philadelphia Declaration and committed his administration to support the promises to children and youth made at the Philadelphia Summit. First Lady Laura Bush, working with the chair of America's Promise, Alma Powell, has actively encouraged efforts to impart new impetus to the campaign to give all young people the fundamental resources they need to succeed.

In his 2005 state of the union address, the president proposed "a three year initiative to help organizations keep young people out of gangs and show young men an ideal of manhood that respects women and rejects violence." In announcing that the first lady will be the leader of this nationwide effort," he said: "Now we need to focus on giving young people, especially young men in our cities, better options than apathy or gangs or jail. . . . Taking on gang life will be one part of a broader outreach to at-risk youth, which involves parents and pastors, coaches and community leaders, in programs ranging from literacy to sports."²⁶

If George Romney were with us today, he would be delighted with these presidential initiatives, so much in line with his vision for the summit. He would no doubt be impressed with the infrastructure of service that has been built. He would also call on the president, former presidents, and leaders of all sectors to give this cause the priority it requires to succeed.

Romney was not one to rest content with just good incremental progress, and he would not yet find the kind of all-out mobilization for children and youth for which he yearned and worked. Gov. Mitt Romney said in his eulogy, "My father never succumbed to any of the childhood diseases—mumps, measles, chicken pox—and he never succumbed to any of the adult diseases—cynicism, apathy, and inaction."²⁷ As described by his son, George Romney would now be grabbing us and button holding us again for a renewed effort to crack the atom of civic power with his irrepressible hope of producing the quantum leap our nation needs.

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