THEORIZING PRAXIS IN CITIZENSHIP LEARNING:
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF INEQUALITY
IN AMERICORPS

by

Sara Catherine Carpenter

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Sara Catherine Carpenter 2011
Theorizing Praxis in Citizenship Learning: Civic Engagement and the Democratic Management of Inequality in AmeriCorps

Sara Carpenter

Doctor of Philosophy, 2011

Department of Adult Education & Counselling Psychology

University of Toronto

Abstract

Over the last twenty years, the academic work on citizenship education and democracy promotion has grown exponentially. This research investigates the United States federal government’s cultivation of a ‘politics of citizenship’ through the Corporation for National and Community Service and the AmeriCorps program. Drawing on Marxist-feminist theory and institutional ethnography, this research examines the ways in which democratic learning is organized within the AmeriCorps program through the category of ‘civic engagement’ and under the auspices of federal regulations that coordinate the practice of AmeriCorps programs trans-locally.

The findings from this research demonstrate that the federal regulations of the AmeriCorps program mandate a practice and create an environment in which ‘politics,’ understood broadly as having both partisan and non-partisan dimensions, are actively avoided in formalized learning activities within the program. The effect of these regulations is to create an ideological environment in which learning is separated from experience and social problems are disconnected from the political and material relations in which they are constituted. Further, the AmeriCorps program cultivates an institutional discourse in which good citizenship is equated
with participation at the local scale, which pivots on a notion of community service that is actively disengaged from the State.

Through its reliance on these forms of democratic consciousness, the AmeriCorps program engages in reproductive praxis, ultimately reproducing already existing inequalities within U.S. society. The primary elements of this reproductive praxis have been identified as ‘a local fetish’ and the ‘democratic management of inequality.’ The local fetish refers to the solidification of the local as the preferential terrain of democratic engagement and is characterized by an emphasis on face-to-face moral relationships, local community building, and small-scale politics. The democratic management of inequality refers to the development of discursive practices and the organization of volunteer labor in the service of poverty amelioration, which is in turn labeled ‘good citizenship.’ This research directs our attention to a more complicated notion of praxis and its relationship to the reproduction of social relations. Also, this research brings into focus the problem of the conceptualization of civil society and its relationship to democracy and capitalism.
Acknowledgements

This thesis research would not have been accomplished without the support and care of a wide community of people. I extend my gratitude to the faculty and students of the Adult Education and Community Development program at OISE/University of Toronto, many of who helped me along in my thinking and provided sounding boards for reflection and clarification. I also wish to sincerely thank the staff members of the Department of Adult Education and Counseling Psychology, in particular Jennifer O’Reilly, Todd Will, and Susan Hall, each of who has held my hand and organized my movement through the doctoral program.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Roxana Ng, Alan Sears, and Daniel Schugurensky, the members of my committee, for their mentorship and assistance in this process and their important and critical feedback. Many thanks as well to John Holst and Nancy Jackson for their contribution to this process.

To my research participants who welcomed me into their experience in the AmeriCorps program, providing me with much optimism during the research. They affirm in their actions everyday that people sincerely want to be good to one another.

I owe the deepest gratitude to a number of friends who have fed, housed, transported, and listened to me during the course of this research. Without their care and friendship I would not have completed my field work or perhaps even the entire dissertation process: Jeri Lu Mattson, Don Esperson, Nan & John Kari, David Holliday, Meg Erke, Martha Malinski, Scott Shoemaker, Sarah Humphage, Lindsay Schwab, Rob Zelada, Shana Mengelkoch, Bill Reichard, Oded Burger, Bill Lindeke, Michael Eaton, Paul Van Cura, Phil Sandro, Joel & Faith Krogstad, Lynn Englund, John Wallace, and Jane Plihal.

I am also indebted to many intellectual comrades whom I have worked with other the last five years and whose ideas and reflections are present in this work: Amir Hassanpour, the reading group in Paris, Helen Colley, the critical reading group, the institutional ethnography reading group, Lance McCready, Shama Dossa, Bethany Osborne, Soheila Pashang, Bahar Biazar, Sheila Wilmot, Sheila Gruner, Nadya Weber, Tara Silver, and Anthony Cushing. Special thanks to Antony Chum, for being the sounding board, and to Eddie Farrell for his transcription work and graphics design.

I offer my most profound thanks to Shahrazad Mojab for her supervision of this dissertation as well as her friendship and mentorship. I am, and remain, the very lucky student of an excellent teacher.

And finally, to my family, for their love and encouragement.

Ellen Haag and Helen Mills, two women who never had the opportunities I have enjoyed and whose support has made it possible for me to do this work.

My brother Matt Carpenter and sister-in-law Jody Halsall who have pushed me forward and sheltered me (literally) from the various downpours encountered along the way, and my nephew Duncan who has provided enough silly faces and happy sounds to distract me from the difficulties.

My parents, Graham and Sue Carpenter, who have put all of themselves into me and for whom there are not enough words of thanks.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. iv  
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................................... viii  
List of Appendices .................................................................................................................................... ix  
A Ritual To Read To Each Other ........................................................................................................... x  

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION: A SHOULDER TO THE WHEEL ................................. 1  
  The Path of Most Resistance ............................................................................................................. 6  
  The Research Problematic .................................................................................................................... 14  
  The Citizen ‘Frenzy’ in Education Theory and Beyond ........................................................................ 15  
  Overview of Research ........................................................................................................................... 25  

## CHAPTER TWO: A MARXIST-FEMINIST APPROACH TO STUDYING  
CITIZENSHIP AND LEARNING ........................................................................................................ 29  
  Dialectical Conceptualization in Citizenship Education Research ...................................................... 30  
    Case in Point: The Dialectical Conceptualization of Civil Society .................................................... 37  
  Ideology, Learning, and Citizenship ...................................................................................................... 42  
    Case in Point: Citizenship and Learning in Adult Education ............................................................. 48  
  Summary and Transition ...................................................................................................................... 52  

## CHAPTER THREE: THE HISTORICAL EMERGENCE AND CONTEMPORARY  
ORGANIZATION OF CIVILIAN NATIONAL SERVICE IN THE UNITED STATES:  
THE CASE OF AMERICORPS .......................................................................................................... 53  
  The Moral Equivalent of War .............................................................................................................. 54  
  The Civilian Conservation Corps ....................................................................................................... 58  
  The Civilian Public Service ................................................................................................................. 60  
  The Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America ..................................................................... 63  
  Re-Organizing and Re-Visioning: 1000 Points of Light ..................................................................... 67  
  The Beginning of AmeriCorps ............................................................................................................ 69  
  National Service Post-9/11 ................................................................................................................ 72  
  Institutionalization and Bureaucratization of National Service .......................................................... 75  
  The Corporation for National and Community Service .................................................................... 76  
  The Organization of the AmeriCorps State Program ...................................................................... 85  
    The Grant Making Process ............................................................................................................. 87  
    Operating an AmeriCorps Program Site ......................................................................................... 90  

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH ......................... 92  
  Ontology and Epistemology of Institutional Ethnography .................................................................. 93  
  Not the Wizard of Oz: The Relations of Ruling and Institutional Discourse .................................... 95  
  Trans-local Organization of the Relations of Ruling ......................................................................... 99
Citizenship and Inequality: ‘Standpoint’ and ‘Problematic’ ..................................................103
The Research Process ........................................................................................................105
Research Participants: Voices within the Research ......................................................112
Presentation of Findings ...................................................................................................115

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF EXPERIENCE AND
LEARNING IN AMERICORPS ............................................................................................116
Framing Experience and Learning in AmeriCorps ..........................................................118
Crafting Sites of Learning in AmeriCorps .....................................................................122
  First ‘Narrowing:’ The Problem of ‘Politics’ in Sites of Learning ..................................123
  Second ‘Narrowing:’ ‘Sustainable’ Sites of Learning ...................................................128
The Coordination of Work in AmeriCorps ......................................................................139
  Third ‘Narrowing:’ Permissibility and Prohibition in Service Activities .........................140
  Fourth ‘Narrowing:’ The ‘Logical’ Organization of Service Work ................................151
The Narrowed Field ..........................................................................................................163

CHAPTER SIX: A SCHOOL FOR DEMOCRACY: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND
DEMOCRATIC LEARNING IN AMERICORPS .................................................................166
Historical Development of ‘Civic Engagement’ in AmeriCorps ......................................167
Straining Towards Definition: The Civic Engagement Performance Measure ..............175
Tools for Teaching: Civic Engagement Curricular Activities ........................................179
  Civic Engagement Trainings .........................................................................................179
  Civic Engagement Action Plans ..................................................................................186
  Structured Service Projects ........................................................................................191
The Vacuity of Civic Engagement ..................................................................................194
Pedagogy or Ideology .......................................................................................................214

CHAPTER SEVEN: LEARNING DEMOCRACY AS IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE ..............216
Ideological Frame of Democracy and Citizenship within AmeriCorps .........................218
Forms and Appearances of Objectified Consciousness ..............................................221
  Service, Citizenship, and the State .............................................................................221
  Local People with Private Politics Faced with Public Problems ..................................228
Citizenship as Relations of Ruling ..................................................................................237

CHAPTER EIGHT: ELEMENTS OF REPRODUCTIVE PRAXIS IN THE
THEORIZATION OF DEMOCRACY AND LEARNING .....................................................242
The Local Fetish ...............................................................................................................244
The Management of Inequality .......................................................................................253
Final Comments ..............................................................................................................270

CHAPTER NINE: DEMOCRACY, LEARNING, AND REVOLUTIONARY PRAXIS .......273
Summary of Findings .......................................................................................................275
  Ideological Organization of Institutional Processes within AmeriCorps ......................275
  The Vacuity of Civic Engagement ..............................................................................279
  Objectified Consciousness and Reproductive Praxis ..................................................282
Implications of Findings .................................................................................................284
Areas for Further Research.................................................................290
  Democracy, Citizenship, and the Pathology of Poverty.........................290
  Labor, Wages, and Working Conditions............................................292
  The Problem of Pragmatism............................................................294
Final Comments.....................................................................................296

BIBLIOGRAPHY...................................................................................299

APPENDICES.......................................................................................339
List of Figures

FIGURE 1: Levels of Government and Organization.................................................................78
FIGURE 2: CNCS Fiscal Budget.................................................................................................80
FIGURE 3: Focus Group Discussion Outline.............................................................................110
FIGURE 4: Basic Selection Criteria.........................................................................................151
FIGURE 5: Program Planning in AmeriCorps.........................................................................157
FIGURE 6: Performance Measure Worksheet (Needs & Activities).......................................158
FIGURE 7: The Narrowing Effect of Regulations within AmeriCorps...................................164
FIGURE 8: Civic Engagement Action Plan Goals.................................................................187
List of Appendices

APPENDIX A: Glossary of Terms ................................................................. 339
APPENDIX B: Corporation for National and Community Service Organizational Chart .... 340
APPENDIX C: List of Texts Analyzed .......................................................... 341
APPENDIX D: Letters of Information and Consent ......................................... 342
APPENDIX E: Outreach and Recruitment Materials ......................................... 353
APPENDIX F: AmeriCorps Program Director Interview Guide ......................... 355
APPENDIX G: AmeriCorps Member Contract ................................................ 356
APPENDIX H: Performance Measurement Worksheet ...................................... 366
APPENDIX I: Citizenship Goals for AmeriCorps Members (2003 Guidelines) ........ 367
APPENDIX J: Civic Engagement Logic Model & Performance Measure .............. 369
APPENDIX K: AmeriCorps Member Civic Engagement Survey ......................... 376
APPENDIX L: Civic Engagement Action Plan ................................................ 379
A Ritual To Read to Each Other

If you don’t know what kind of person I am
and I don’t know what kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

…

And as elephant’s parade holding each elephant’s tail
but if one wanders the circus won’t find the park.
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider —
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake.
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give — yes, no, or maybe —
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

Chapter One

Introduction: A Shoulder to the Wheel

Over the course of the last five years I have pursued doctoral research on the question of democracy and citizenship. During this time, I have been unable to disconnect myself from world events that provide continuous, compelling engagements with these constructs and which crop up everyday in accidental and serendipitous ways. At several key moments over the last few years, seemingly disparate events grabbed my attention and began to weave together in my thinking. Together, I believe they set the stage for my choice to pursue this research.

The first incident came from a reading in my 2009 study group on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In his 2006 field study of the occupation of Palestine, journalist Eric Hazan (2007) devoted a large portion of his discussion of the city of Nablus to its former mayor, Bassam Shakaa. The city of Nablus is located on the northern edge of the West Bank and is surrounded by both Palestinian refugee camps and Israeli settlements. In Hazan’s account, Shakaa describes his political life as a member of the Palestinian resistance, his affiliation with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the assassination attempt carried out against him by members of a militant Israeli settler group, during which he lost both of his legs. Hazan concludes their long discussion of ‘terrorism,’ occupation, and resistance with a simple exchange. Hazan asks, ‘if you had to define yourself politically, what word would you choose?’ Shakaa answers simply, ‘citizen’ (p. 21).

Two years after Hazan’s fieldwork in Palestine, the global financial system entered its most profound crisis in over fifty years. In the United States, the crisis resulted in an exponential growth in unemployment, home foreclosures, bank failings, public service reduction, and increased family poverty, all of which disproportionately impacted the material well being of
communities of color (Berndt & James, 2009). In response to the crisis, the Obama administration enacted two major pieces of legislation within the first six months of the new term. The first, the American Investment and Recovery Act, the ‘stimulus,’ provided substantial public financial support to imploding financial and insurance corporations as well as an injection of federally held capital into public infrastructure development. The second piece of legislation, the Edward Kennedy Serve America Act, made substantial funds available for the promotion of community service and volunteerism programs, specifically through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). These pieces of legislation, and the relationship between them, aptly characterize the response to the crisis by the United States government: fiscal bailouts for private financial institutions and increased public service rhetoric for private citizens. As Obama (2009) argued in his promotion of the 2009 summer volunteerism campaign ‘United We Serve,’ it was time for United States citizens to muster up their ethic of civic duty and get to work fixing the problems in their communities. He argued that if everyone was to put their ‘shoulder to the wheel’ and volunteer their labor in community settings, we could work our way of the crisis and its fallouts. The ‘wheel’ of recovery and progress would turn only with the collective might of the citizenry behind it. It was time, Obama argued, for us to be good citizens.

Finally, in the years since the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, many important questions have been raised about good democracy and good citizens. Jean Bricmont (2006) has asked us to consider how it is that, since the end of the cold war, human rights have become the perfect justifications to wage war and violate, even desecrate, human rights themselves. Similarly, Ellen Meiksins Wood (2006) has asked how the United States government has been able to convince its citizenry that feminism and liberalism are good reasons to go to war. These interrogations into the invisible corners of a universal good such as ‘democracy’ have taken
place against what Slovaj Zizek (2002) called ‘fidelity to the democratic consensus.’ This fidelity,

means acceptance of the present liberal-parliamentary consensus, which precludes any serious questioning of the way this liberal democratic order is complicit in the phenomena it officially condemns, and, of course any serious attempt to imagine a different sociopolitical order. In short, it means: say and write whatever you like-on condition that you do not actually question or disturb the prevailing political consensus. Everything is allowed, solicited even, as a critical topic: the prospect of a global ecological catastrophe; violations of human rights; sexism, homophobia, anti-feminism; growing violence not only in faraway countries, but also in our own megalopolises; the gap between the First and the Third World, between rich and poor; the shattering impact of the digitalization of our daily lives…the problem is that all this occurs against the background of a fundamental Denkverbot: a prohibition on thinking (p. 167).

Here Zizek establishes one of several central paradoxes in democratic life; we are free to criticize, but not to imagine. If we picture ourselves standing inside of a square box, Zizek argues that we push out each side until we have formed a rectangle; the more we push, the more we turn our rectangle back into a box. The bigger our box gets, however, the more we think we are changing. Never do we consider how to transform our box into a circle, into an utterly different relation. Moreover, we ridicule, persecute, assassinate, and execute those who suggest we consider creating a circle at all.

If we look at these seemingly disparate social and geographic events, the occupation of Palestine, community service campaigns in the United States, and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a clear problematic emerges. How can democracy and citizenship mean so many different things to so many different people? It is within this problematic that this research began with the assumption that it is exceedingly important that we understand how youth and adults come to understand the relationship between the category ‘citizen’ and the problems and possibilities of democracy. This research began as an inquiry into what young people learn about citizenship and democracy through their participation in the federal civic engagement and national service
program AmeriCorps. It was inspired by my own participation in various movements for ‘civic engagement’ and ‘citizen participation’ in the United States as a student, educator, community organizer, and activist. These movements are pervasive; they exist in numerous arenas of everyday social life, including the state, educational institutions, civil society, the labor market, and the private sector. They formed in response to massive transformations in global political economy and state formation that have thrown the relationships between citizen, state, and market into increasingly deeper forms of crisis and contradiction. Within the interstices of these historical moments, a particular form of citizenship has arisen, one which is based on notions of participation and community and which forges new roles for citizens in the everyday social relations of capitalism.

In the text that follows, I will explore some of the dynamics of citizenship learning that emerge within the AmeriCorps State national service program. Working from the theoretical and methodological approach of institutional ethnography, the focus of this research is the institutional organization of civic engagement and democratic learning by the state through the project of civilian national service. I pursue questions that explore the nature of the kind of citizenship promoted within the AmeriCorps program and how the learning activities that support this ‘politics of citizenship’ are organized. The conceptual apparatus for this research is Marxist-Feminism; I draw from historical materialism, feminist theory, and anti-racist perspectives to think critically about the dynamics of citizenship and democracy within the program as well as the implications of the politics of civic engagement promoted through program.

I begin by detailing the Marxist-Feminist theoretical framework that sits at the center of this research. I then situate the contemporary organization of the AmeriCorps program within a
historical trajectory in which the state has increasingly incorporated forms of unpaid and low-wage labor into its efforts to address the effects of social inequality in civil society. Drawing on this historical analysis, the AmeriCorps program can be understood as not just ‘an idea’ for mobilizing citizen activity, but as part of a larger process of state organization. This process is characterized by the tides of neo-liberal social policy, in which the state engages in ‘entrepreneurial’ activities and seeks to ‘download’ or ‘off load’ the provision of social welfare services to non-profit, charitable, and religious organizations as well as regional and local levels of government. The historical context for the development of this institution then informs its founding legislation and internal institutional processes, which are revealed to have a strong effect in the organization of learning activities within AmeriCorps program sites. Civic engagement learning activities emerge within this institutional context and are characterized by a narrowing process in which sites of learning and service activities are constructed as non-political in nature. I then explore in depth the forms in which democratic learning can arise in this environment, detailing the institutional processes that fragment learning within the program, separating experience from reflection and abstracting the political domain of citizenship and democracy from the material terrain of social inequality. I argue that the challenges of ‘civic engagement’ within the program appear as pedagogical in nature, but in reality are the outgrowth of an ideological project of citizenship that is reliant on ‘volunteerism’ and reform as the cornerstones of democratic participation. I then examine the ideology of citizenship and democracy within the program as forms of objectified consciousness. I conclude by detailing how these particular forms of consciousness and ideologies of citizenship and democracy can have important effects in the theorization and practice of critical forms of adult education.
This research takes on a complicated case study, the AmeriCorps program, and further complicates its narration by delving deeply into its institutional processes and constantly holding its surface appearance in tension with its organizational and deeply rooted essence. As such it oscillates between a very standard form for the presentation of thesis research and a slightly altered form. The reader will find the standard chapters here; theory, method, case study. I want to note, however, that I diverged from the standard format of analyzing data and reporting findings. I have attempted to create a conversation between the AmeriCorps program and larger, broader, more universal social relations impacting citizens, communities, and, importantly, those living and struggling with poverty. This includes larger-scale changes in the non-profit sector and the provision of public social services. In this way the AmeriCorps program is a case that may feel familiar to the reader. As such, it requires that after detailed reporting on the findings of the research, I return to the terrain of the theory to demonstrate the implications of this research for a broader audience and a wider set of social problems.

*The Path of Most Resistance*

As a young child, I made semi-regular trips with my family to St. Luke’s Community House, a community center and social service agency affiliated with the Episcopal Diocese of Nashville, Tennessee in the southern United States. During the day, St. Luke’s was a place to receive services, go to an after-school program, or attend a meeting. For many West Nashville residents with nowhere else to go, at night St. Luke’s became a place to eat and sleep. St. Luke’s was located in a section of West Nashville bound by the Cumberland River on one side and Interstate 40 on the other. Cut off from the rest of the city, it was a community center originally founded to aid families visiting relatives at the state penitentiary, which was located only a few
miles down the road. St. Luke’s is approximately four miles from the house I grew up in, but it felt much farther. On the nights my family volunteered at the center, it was always winter and we came and went in the dark. My mother, brother, and I would spend the evening in the center’s kitchen, mixing large trays of pasta or arranging bread in baskets. My father would work in the dining room and when everything had been cleaned up and put away, my mother would take my brother and I home while my father stayed behind as an overnight volunteer. In the morning we would pick him up and he would always look very tired. The days after one of these volunteer stints were the only times I really remember my father taking a nap in the middle of the day.

My family did not spend a lot of time discussing these trips or the ones to donate clothes or household goods. My parents came and went from neighborhood association and parent-teacher association meetings with little conversation; usually my brother and I were left in the company of a graduate student and some macaroni and cheese. The summer before the third grade, I injured myself at my brother’s little league picnic and was unable to attend the day camps my parents had lined up to provide a summer’s worth of childcare. Left in the lurch, my mother consulted with some neighbors until it was determined that I could spend the summer ‘helping out’ at Harris Hillman School. Harris Hillman is located just two blocks from my parent’s house and is a school designed to meet the needs of children with severe and/or multiple physical and/or cognitive disabilities. I spent the summer with children my own age and older whom had real ‘needs;’ I began to recognize that their needs far surpassed and were qualitatively different than my own.

Inspired by that summer, volunteering became a more regular activity for me. I served as a ‘special needs helper’ for the special needs class at my school, accompanying children with disabilities to music, physical education, lunch, and other school activities were they could be
‘mainstreamed.’ I spent the next few summers helping at my former preschool; I wiped noses, picked up toys, made snacks, and monitored the playground. By the time I was in high school my volunteerism was frequent. I volunteered at Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital in the parent resource center. I taught Spanish to preschoolers at First Baptist Church. I went on service trips with a church group in both Appalachia and the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. My mother and I happily participated in the Angel Tree Christmas gift program. I organized a recycling program in my high school. I was fully committed to ‘helping out’ and was most likely an addict of the so-called ‘helper’s high’ (Luks & Payne, 2001). More importantly, I felt like volunteering was something I ‘should’ be doing. I was well rewarded for my efforts. Somewhere, buried in a box of childhood things, is a passel of volunteer appreciation certificates, a school award for community service, and, the shining jewel, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Good Citizen medal.

It is curious to reflect on the derivation of this notion that I ‘should’ be volunteering. As I said, my family did not discuss it. My brother did relatively little volunteering and there was no discussion of that either. My family was more likely to watch the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) News Hour and argue about it over dinner. Once I went off to college, the volunteering came to sputtering halt. It was actually quite dramatic and it coincided with a great epiphany in my 19-year old self. My mother had advised me not to ‘get into volunteering’ my first year of college so that I would take my classes seriously. As a sophomore I signed up to volunteer as a women’s advocate at a domestic violence shelter. My initial stint was technically an internship, and it was that combination of volunteer experience and academic work that changed everything. If my reader walks away with nothing else from this research, please take note that, ironically, we can blame service-learning for everything that has happened since.
In that internship, I realized very suddenly, and even violently, that my ‘help’ meant very little and when it did ‘mean’ something it was largely to myself and of my own creation. There were plenty of people in and out of the shelter who wanted to ‘do good.’ They answered phones and gave women rides to court. They built a playground and sorted clothes donations. There was, however, a shortage of people in the house who could actually help the women and children living there. My role in the shelter was to answer the crisis telephone lines and help women find housing. Our shelter was very popular in part because it was small and most of the staff members were bilingual. One night, we had a vacancy for one woman and one child. I answered the phone and told the woman on the other line to gather her child, her ID cards, and any prescription medications. I called her a taxi and 35 minutes later she was sitting next to my desk, her two year old asleep on a blanket on the floor. I began to fill out her intake file and when she told me that she had been beaten very recently, I asked her to take off her clothes so that I could take pictures for the police report. I was thoroughly and completely unprepared for the experience.

I continued volunteering at the shelter for another few months, but ultimately left feeling very conflicted about what I was doing. My intellectual life at school had raged and transformed the ‘helper’ from Nashville into a ‘hell raising’ campus activist. I was involved in anti-racism and feminist organizing on campus; indigenous rights, immigrant solidarity, and anti-poverty programs constituted my daily discussions. I did not know it at the time, but the domestic violence shelter turned out to be my last volunteer activity ever. In my third year of college, I studied abroad in Central America. In the first week of class, I met another student who had come to Guatemala because he wanted ‘to help.’ He asked me, what are we here for if not to make a difference? I asked him, do you know what kind of difference to make? We found
ourselves in an environment that was completely and utterly foreign. We saw problems everywhere and, unlike living in our own communities, we were clueless as to the roots of such wide spread and severe inequality. I am thankful now that we were scared enough to not take action and, when pressed, to explain ourselves to Guatemalans with the mantra ‘I’m not here to help,’ just to learn.’ Studying in Guatemala was an in-depth, experiential course in relations of power. By the time I came home, I had made my 180-degree turn on volunteering.

Upon my return, I immediately began ‘working,’ not volunteering’ or ‘serving,’ at a community education collaboration on the West Side of St. Paul, Minnesota called The Jane Addams School for Democracy (JAS). JAS was organized through the collaboration of a community center/social service agency, a large public university, and a small private college. JAS has become a national model for the burgeoning community-university partnership movement, primarily because it has, from its inception, rejected the ethical and pedagogical framework known as ‘service-learning.’ Rather, JAS embodies the theorization of the public work tradition of democracy in which citizens work together to solve public problems (Boyte & Kari, 1996). This framework allowed me to connect, for the first time, my ongoing work in the larger community with the theorization of democracy. It should be noted, this was the first time I had really considered what such inequality had to do with democracy; none of my ‘volunteering’ had spurned this investigation. In the public work tradition, coming to a local community center twice a week to help immigrants study for the naturalization test or learn English, such as what happens at JAS, can not be understood under the benevolence of volunteerism. It is simply the work that citizens do in a democracy. Further, the relationships between citizens cannot be understood as one-sided; while immigrants may naturalize or learn English, their native-born counterparts will deepen their understanding of the depth and importance of social diversity in
U.S. life. At JAS, I became a huge proponent of ‘working’ in community, of collaboration and reciprocity amongst citizens. Understanding the relation between learning, work, citizenship, and democracy became not just an activity, but also an intellectual passion.

After a few years, however, I began to realize that collaboration and participation can take on an appearance of efficacy in a context in which they are not really happening. The leadership at JAS had become focused on service delivery and meeting community needs, just like many other program providers in an already non-profit heavy neighborhood. Further, some dynamic was at play that allowed a room full of people to have weekly discussions about ‘democracy’ and yet never discuss poverty or racism in the immigrant experience. Rather, we treated citizenship as some idyllic club of mutual collaboration. It was not the ‘rights and responsibilities’ mantra of traditional liberal political theory, but nevertheless the embedded liberalism of the public work tradition emerged, with similarly narrow conceptions of the terrain of politics in which ‘the political’ was separate from ‘the material.’

This contradiction drove my master’s thesis research. I wanted to better understand how an adult education program in civil society can reproduce the very social relations it claims to transform. I had come to JAS seeking a more critical perspective on community participation and social change. Ultimately, I had to move through and beyond JAS’ model in order to understand more completely the challenge posed by my next foray into understanding the relationships between learning, community, participation, and social change.

After completing my master’s degree and still in need of a deeper theoretical approach to the question of citizenship and democracy, I accepted an invitation to work as a visiting research fellow at the UNESCO Centre at the University of Ulster in Coleraine, Northern Ireland. My task was to develop a curriculum in human rights education that would support the teacher education
program at the university and the centre’s work on conflict transformation. During this experience I had the opportunity to visit with numerous community organizations working in what was locally called ‘the community relations sector.’ This sector was charged with transforming the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland through community development programming, often focused on identity change. The UNESCO Centre’s position was that citizenship education was the primary task of conflict transformation; the claim was that if the residents of Northern Ireland learned to be ‘better citizens’ in a ‘stable democracy’ then they could move past their painful history. This ‘better citizenship’ involved respect for juridical processes and a rejection of paramilitary organization as well as integrated social programming and community development. This claim was not unique or exclusive to the UNESCO Centre; it seemed a pervasive rhetoric amongst community practitioners. As an outsider to the conflict, I very clearly saw parallels to other colonial conflicts I had studied and, even further, to the devastating long-term effects of poverty and political alienation. It seemed to me that the residents of Northern Ireland were in need of something else besides instruction on how to be ‘better citizens.’

I began to question how it was that every social problem I encountered on my journey was singularly being reduced to a question of citizenship. How do we get rid of endemic poverty and racial brutality in immigrant communities? Good citizenship. How do we transform the lasting effects of colonial violence and exploitation? Good citizenship. How do we both get women and children out of the tyranny of the welfare system and meet the material, social, and spiritual needs of life? Good citizenship. In these scenarios the ‘good citizens’ came from two directions. Obviously, folks like myself, who were theorized as being ‘outside’ the social problem at hand, needed to be good citizens and allies. However, those who were victimized by,
or trapped in, these social problems also had to be empowered, sometimes by folks like me and sometimes by themselves, to be agents of their own transformation and to struggle to change systems and cultures that were dysfunctional.

I arrived in Toronto to begin a PhD program thinking that I wanted to do something completely different than what I had worked on as a master’s student and community educator/activist. The experience of Northern Ireland had left me tired, disinterested, and in need of new inspiration. I bumbled about with different theses topic ideas for about six months before returning to precisely the question I had taken off the table: what does citizenship have to do with material life? Only now, I wanted a more complex understanding than the one I had previously undertaken. In my master’s thesis I had chipped away at the limitations of liberal citizenship from the perspective of nationalism and anti-racism. However, my solutions to the problems of white supremacy and classism in United States citizenship had only re-inscribed the very liberalism I set out to critique. I was focused only on one component of social life, racialization and immigration; my understanding of those phenomena was not thoroughly steeped in a critique of capitalist social relations. For these reasons, and perhaps many more, I was unable to think outside of the pervasive logic of liberalism. The solution to poverty and material inequality under these conditions was the ‘economic’ or ‘social’ citizenship of T.H. Marshall, the re-inscribed politics of the social democratic welfare state. I also proposed ‘cultural’ citizenship as a way of changing the manifestations of citizenship in our daily life, as if history itself could be changed. I had forgotten, however, that foundations last for a very long time; we can still trace the Roman Empire more than 1500 years after its collapse because of its foundations, which have eroded, but still remain. Perhaps more than anything, I had not theorized adequately the relation between citizens, the state, and the arena of ‘civil society.’ My
experiences in Northern Ireland taught me that the organization of that relation would be core to my understanding social change.

The Research Problematic

I emerged from this long story a scholar, activist, and teacher. Somehow I engaged in a process of learning that resulted in the transformation from ‘helper’ to ‘hell raiser.’ As a learner, educator and activist, I have been caught up in the intersection of two powerful discursive entanglements between education and democracy. The first of these discourses is what Teresa Ebert (1996) called the ‘modernist contradiction,’ or the discursive promise of equality colliding with the visible, visceral reality of inequality. The second discourse posits a way of addressing the challenges posed by this contradiction. This entanglement goes by many names, but at its core is an assertion that there is a deeply transformative relationship between community service, or sometimes a general notion of participation, and the learning necessary to create an enlivened democracy. In elementary, secondary, and higher education, the influence of this discourse appears as service learning. In higher education, it also goes by phrases such as civic engagement or community-university partnership or public scholarship. In adult education, we focus on the cultivation of civil society and democratic participation. The common trait across these various articulations is a theory of change, a rhetorical argument, that if we (citizens, young people, university students) participate in community (or volunteer, serve, work) then we will be better citizens with values of civility, tolerance, and participation, skills of deliberation and advocacy, and knowledge of government structures and paths to social change. For most educators, the site of this learning is ‘community’ or, more specifically, civil society, which has been termed by a leading adult education theorist as the “privileged domain of non-instrumental learning,” that is
learning for human freedom and understanding (Welton, 1998 p. 369). It is a powerful progressive vision, richly full of ‘if…then’ causal claims.

I want to pursue a slightly different ‘if…then’ question. While much research on the civil society-learning-democracy relation is evaluative in nature, my position is that the civil society argument is also a deeply abstracted formulation in need of serious interrogation. It begs a series of important questions. What kind of citizenship is ‘good citizenship’? What kind of democracy results from this formulation? What about the state? If we adopt this orientation towards citizenship and learning, how will we organize and address social relations of inequality? What are the ‘politics’ of this kind of citizenship? These are the sorts of questions that this research takes up and explores through the case of the AmeriCorps program. The AmeriCorps program, whose history and organization is detailed in chapter three, is a federal program charged with “cultivating a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in America” (Goldsmith & Eisner, 2006 p. 3) through the project of civilian national service. AmeriCorps, and its parent organization CNCS,¹ provide an ideal case study for pursing these sorts of questions and for interrogating the realities of community service as a state-sponsored agenda for the promotion of democracy and civic engagement. In the United States today, the CNCS and AmeriCorps constitute a widespread and far-reaching program for the promotion of community service, civic engagement, and civil society.

The ‘Citizen’ Frenzy in Education Theory and Beyond

The consolidation of the AmeriCorps program has taken place within a historical moment in which ‘the citizen’ is the subject of a renewed debate in popular and academic circles. Often the emergence of this renewed interest in citizenship in the United States is traced to the advent

¹ In Appendix A I have provided a short glossary for common terms and acronyms associated with this research.
of the communitarian movement’s rejection of liberal individualism in such now-seminal works as *Habits of the Heart* (1985) and *Strong Democracy* (1984). However, the debate does not simply concern the conflict between the individual and social dimensions of democracy. It is also tied to a larger question concerning the so-called ‘democratic deficit.’ Not long after the Watergate crisis, when public opinion polls concerning citizen trust of the government bottomed out, the Trilateral Commission produced a report on “the crisis of democracy” (Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975). The report argued that citizens had become alienated from the institutions of democracy and that democracy in the United States had become “anomic.” The authors claimed that this unrest was due to an ‘excess’ of democracy that made advanced democracies difficult to govern (Kellner, 1990); the solution to this problem was less, not more, democracy. Given these sorts of paradoxical arguments, it is important to trace the emergence of the renewed focus on citizenship a bit farther back that initial communitarian interventions in order to understand the citizen’s relationship to larger changes in global political economy associated with early forms of neo-liberalism in social policy.

In this context, the debate around citizenship and democracy, and the proliferation of literature on the subject, takes on several characteristics. Much of the literature is associated with the dysfunction of democratic institutions, the failure or lack of trust that citizens have in those institutions, the decline in electoral turnout, and the general disengagement of citizens from participation in the state. A far greater segment of the literature, which is influential in the field of education, has to do with the decline in individual citizens activity both in relation to the state and civil society. In this regard, diagnostic treatises on the ‘democratic deficit’ from the perspective of dysfunctional citizens, such as the debates on declining social capital and civic responsibility, have gained popularity within policy and non-academic circles. These authors
argue that the individual citizen has new challenges ahead of them in relation to the reform of the state, the regulation of the market, the health of the planet, and the well being of their communities.

Part of the reason for the exponential proliferation of literature on citizenship is that ‘the citizen’ belongs to the political continuum; as the ideal category of democratic subjectivity, the citizen is claimed by both the political left and the right and is constantly re-articulated against a back drop of policy movements, state re-organization, and ongoing social and historical change. Kmylicka and Norman (1994) argued, in an important capture of the theoretical debate at the time, that the ‘citizenship debate’ was crossing over three major terrains of political thought: liberalism, communitarianism, and civic republicanism. Liberal theorizations follow in the tradition of the Marshall (1950) post-war orthodoxy. They focus on the articulation of citizenship as an accumulation of different kinds of rights (civic, political, and social), which emerge out of historical struggle for recognition within the terrain of the state, with the argument that social rights can only be secured within a social democratic model of the state (Esping-Anderson, 1989). During the Reagan administration, social entitlements were substantially eroded, as was the Fordist labor compromise that provided the framework for the Keynesian welfare state: high employment, high wages, high taxes, public benefits. This erosion culminated in the elimination of welfare entitlements, with the exception of social security and disability insurance, in the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, formally titled The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. It was in this context of the 1980s that the calls for new citizens began in earnest. It began with the conservative critique of social citizenship. These theorists argued that citizenship, understood as an entitlement from the state, was destroying democracy by creating lazy, dependent citizens who had a consumption oriented relationship to the state (Murray, 1984;
Mead, 1986). These citizens, they argued, expected the state to provide for them. The political right had long resisted social rights, but they seized the economic flux of a transformation in the mode of capital accumulation and the subsequent strain of the welfare state to assert their position in the language of economic inefficiency and self-reliance. They also took hold of and capitalized on the racist and sexist discourses circulating about dependency (Fraser & Gordon, 1994a; 1994b; King & Waldron, 1988). The 1980s was an era in which family values, posited as the white hetero-patriarchal family, were openly heralded against its opposite, the hetero-matriarchal black family. To be a good citizen was to be a good worker and self-reliant, as opposed to the ‘welfare queen’ who leached off the state without providing her ‘fair share.’

During the 1980s a backlash evolved against the traditional notions of liberalism, namely that individuals should pursue their own best interests in both the political and material arenas of life. Communitarianism, a political philosophy that seeks to balance individual rights with collective well-being, gained significant ground in the 1980s and 90s (Bell, 1993). Communitarians argued that individuals are ‘socially embedded’ and thus, have responsibilities to the community that surrounds them. Theorists began to explore these connections, such as Putnam's (1995; 2001a; 2001b) social capital thesis, but many became advocates of a new direction for citizenship. Being a good citizen would now encompass one's participation in the community, both in forms of voluntary association and volunteerism, and the overall encouragement of civil society as the appropriate sector to address social problems and relations. Communitarianism has both its conservative (Etzioni, 1994; Tam, 1998) and liberal (Barber, 1984; Bellah, et al, 1985) contributors. Communitarianism, which Kymlicka and Norman (1994) refer to as the ‘civil society theorists,’ has been soundly critiqued. Boyte & Kari (1996) have gone beyond the concept of community participation to argue that a citizen who merely concerns
him/herself with voting is no longer good enough, nor is a citizen who sees participation in community as service. Rather, citizens must see democratic participation as work; public work, the work of citizens, is what builds and maintains democracies. This argument follows in what Boyte and Kari refer to as the commonwealth tradition of democracy and strongly resonates with the civic republican tradition, which sees democracy as the constant struggle of citizens to vigilantly maintain, through their own labor, the democratic nature of their society. Civic republicanism is often attributed to any citizenship theory that emphasizes the necessity of civic virtue (Kymlicka, 2002). Within this frame, the movement for an emphasis on participation, often traced to Pateman’s (1970) early work, is articulated as part of the virtue of citizens.

The notion of participation as a civic virtue has held primacy of place within citizenship education literature, which often distinguishes between ‘passive’ and ‘active’ citizenship (Crick, 1999; Davies, 2000; Saha, 2007). In this framework, ‘passive’ citizenship tends to correspond with the liberal critique of a consumption orientation towards rights and entitlements, but it also extends to those citizens who participate at perfunctory levels, possibly only participating in elections. A more sociological approach examines the extent to which a ‘citizen’ is understood as a ‘subject’ or ‘agent’ within democratic life (Turner, 1990). The ‘virtue’ of participation also spans a continuum of notions of ‘participation,’ from traditional kinds of participation (formal political participation) to following rules to working to change social relations of power in society (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In response to these academic and popular debates, citizenship education emerged as a substantive and contentious area of research and writing across the field of education, particularly in a post-Cold War context. In addition to academic discussions, a new energy emerged in policy circles for formalized citizenship education in schools. Today civic education has been re-mandated in schools, almost uniformly, across the
United States (103rd Congress of the United States of America, 1994; Kedrowski, 2003; Milbank, 2002; Pederson & Cogan, 2000) and increasingly across Western Europe and other parts of the globe (Ross, 2008; UNESCO, 1995). Educational scholars have responded to the call to understand youth civic development with a plethora of research, exploring every imaginable facet of the lives of young people (Sloam & Kisby, 2009; Torney-Purta, et al, 1999; Youniss & Levine, 2009). Citizenship education has also emerged under the blanket of conservative oriented efforts for moral and character education (Althoff & Berkowitz, 2006; Halsted & Pike, 2006; Paris, 1991; Youniss & Yates, 1999) and also within critical pedagogy and more social justice oriented forms of education (Banks, 2004, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Jarvis, 2006).

Citizenship and adult education have been connected for a very long time and have long hinged on notions of ‘participation’ as both the point of departure and arrival for democratic learning. Adult education movements throughout the 19th and 20th century in the United States utilized explicit or implicit discourses of citizenship, either for the purpose of mobilizing participants or to legitimate their aims and methods. The most obvious examples of this in the United States are the Americanization movement (Addams, 1961; Carlson, 1975; King, 2000, 2001) and the Civil Rights movements (Adams, 1975; Clark, 1999; Horton, 1990; Payne, 1995; Tjerandsen, 1980), although adult education movements for citizenship have proliferated in Canada, Denmark, Scotland, England, Brazil, Cuba, Australia and most likely in many more regions beyond the scope of the Western academy. It is important not to create too concrete a separation between movements such as these, which were explicitly concerned with the legal status, activity, and participation of citizens, and the more general histories of social movements and community organizing, which necessarily contain elements of adult learning and political consciousness. This relationship is in part the driving force behind the emphasis on the field on
the informal learning of political activism. If the academic debates surrounding new social movements have focused on the causal dimensions of political structures and group identities, then adult education has largely thrown itself in with the agency contingent of this debate, focusing its efforts on understanding how and why individuals become ‘activated,’ ‘radicalized,’ ‘politicized,’ or ‘transformative’ in their learning and activity. There are of course exceptions to this special attention on individuals, often found in the work surrounding new forms of participatory democracy and structures of governance (Fung & Wright, 2003; Gaventa, 1999; Schugurensky, 2002).

As educational theorists, from many sub-specialties of the field, traverse this terrain of the relationship between citizenship, education, and learning, they are actually theorizing the democratic subject and the political field. They are taking up the central questions of political philosophy as pedagogical problems: how could we live democratically as well as sustain and reproduce this democracy? In pursuing these questions, we engage with academics, politicians, contrarians, ‘think-tank’ intellectuals, policy makers, and so on and so on. Oprah Winfrey has even waded into this conversation (Tisch, 2010). I have argued elsewhere that several important characteristics can be observed in the literature on citizenship education (Carpenter, 2008). The literature is highly dependent on ideal, abstract articulations of ‘good citizenship’ that are based not in everyday experience, but in political theory. A vast amount of this literature is devoted to delineating the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the good citizen and translating them into educative practice, which are in turn linked back to these ideal articulations of citizenship. This articulation of the ‘good citizen’ is dialectically related to an articulation of the ‘bad citizen,’ which assumes many forms in the literature, the most popular of which are the apathetic and disengaged youth, immigrants with the ‘wrong culture,’ and the dependent female, particularly
welfare recipient, who I referred to earlier. The overwhelming thrust of all of this academic production is the continued assertion that something is wrong with democracy in the United States, and more globally, and that part of the solution to this crisis is the reformation of the citizen. A new citizen must emerge; one who is more ‘engaged’ and ‘active’ and who ‘participates’ in new and innovative ways. This is the diagnosis of democracy that subsumes the AmeriCorps program; this logic sets AmeriCorps’ precedents, rationalizes its existence, legitimates the expenditure, and directs its focus on the cultivation of a new citizen through civic engagement and community service in local communities across the United States.

In this regard, AmeriCorps is situated between two of the most prominent sub-streams of the citizenship education literature: volunteer service, or service-learning, and civic engagement. Service-learning, which began in post-secondary education and has now spread across all areas of education, is an approach to experiential education that emphasis community service as a means of accessing socially differentiated communities, ‘testing’ theoretical assertions from the academy, and promoting or stimulating civic virtues of responsibility and agency by participating in activities that address social problems (Eyler & Giles, Jr, 1999; Stanton, et al, 1999).

Much of the literature on service-learning is occupied with best practices. In reviewing this literature, it becomes apparent that one of the reasons for its popularity is its malleability within the norms and structures of a traditional curriculum. It does not require teachers to completely reorganize schools, content delivery, or the relations of knowledge in order to integrate service activities, reflection, and assessment into their teaching. I do not want to diminish the extent to which debate rages amongst service-learning practitioners in regards to the political nature of the project and its relationship to social relations of power, particularly as
many of the ‘recipients’ of service come from historically marginalized communities. The most basic premises of the approach form the basis of the pedagogical claims made within the AmeriCorps program; through participation in community, in the form of service, people learn to be better citizens.

Service-learning is intimately linked, historically, to the call for civic engagement within higher education. Funded by foundations such as Carnegie, Kettering, Spencer, Lily, and Ford, civil and political engagement are the fashionable trends in higher education. University officials have declared their intention to craft universities into institutions that serve the interests of democracy through the core activities of teaching and research (Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Campus Compact, 2000). Pedagogies and programs aimed at getting university students out into communities in order to generate civic capacities and values have flourished (Colby, et al, 2003; Ehrlich, 1999; Kiesa et al., 2007; Long, 2002; Raill & Hollander, 2006), while academics have re-committed themselves to the ‘public’ and ‘democratic’ purposes of knowledge production (Checkoway, 2001; Ehrlich, 2000; Gibson, 2005). The civic engagement trend in higher education can be seen as part of a much larger body of work that focuses on the political and civic engagement of young people. This body of literature has been expanding exponentially in recent years (Colby, et al, 2003; Duval, 2010; Fahmy, 2006; Khazei, 2010; Levine, 2007; Print & Milner, 2009; Rimmerman, 2011; Saha, et al, 2008; Youniss & Levine, 2009; Zukin, et al, 2006).

If we could characterize the ‘citizen frenzy’ of the 1990s by the title of E.J. Dionne’s (1991) popular work Why Americans Hate Politics or by the image of Robert Putnam’s lonely bowler, we could characterize the current moment using Harry Boyte’s (2008) latest book, The Citizen Solution: How You Can Make a Difference, or the new book by Jonathan Tisch, Oprah blog-poster and Loews Hotel CEO, and Karl Weber (2010), Citizen You: Doing Your Part to
Change the World. The frenzy has evolved from the disorganization and debate of why democracy is not working to a sure-footed argument that individual citizens have an important role to play in revitalizing, reforming, and sustaining democratic life and meeting ongoing social needs. This is the central claim of AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Despite this claim, there is surprisingly little research interrogating the presuppositions of citizenship within the AmeriCorps program. There is plenty of discussion of the civic impact of the program, particularly assessment of the extent to which individuals ‘keep serving’ as a result of their participation or remain ‘civically engaged’ (Abt Assoc, 2004, 2008; Simon & Wang, 1999, 2000, 2002) as well as the occasional discussion of how AmeriCorps could be more effective at meeting its civic mandate (Bass, 2004; Hajdo, 1999; Standerfer, 2003). Much of the other work on AmeriCorps focuses on the effectiveness of the service methods employed, the vocational and interpersonal skills developed by participants, program models, and effect on organizational program planning (Bolton, 2001; England, 2000; Epstein, 2009; Frumkin, et al, 2009; Griffiths, 1998; Hawk, 2009; Hicks, 1997; Kazan, 1999; Larson, 1995; Thomas, 2009; Peterson, 1998). There are several studies that tread into the terrain of the political life of AmeriCorps, however many of these come from a more traditional political theory perspective and examine AmeriCorps as example of the devolution of federal responsibilities (Driebe, 2000), the relationship between national service and the bureaucratic state (Travis, 1998), philosophical debates concerning egalitarianism (Fitzgerald, 1995), and a largely positive descriptive assessment of the role AmeriCorps plays as a ‘rite of passage’ into United States civic culture (Trombley, 2001). Still others have explored the extent to which participation in AmeriCorps cultivates a commitment to social justice in participants (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Ferrier, 1998),
a position which is marginal within the literature perhaps because of the politically volatile claim that AmeriCorps harbors ‘liberal’ sympathies (Dee & Henkin, 1997) and which itself has spurned research demonstrating the ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ of AmeriCorps (Simon, 2002). Some of the less flattering literature on AmeriCorps has emerged in the context of the effectiveness of the program at the grassroots level and its impact on the provision of public services (Cassidy, et al, 1998; Checkoway, 1997; Naples, 1998; Sweet, 1997; Thompson & Perry, 1998; Worthington, et al, 2003); many of these studies were conducted soon after the establishment of the program and do not focus on its organization at the federal level. While these studies move towards questions of the larger social purpose of the program and possibly even its effects on the organization of labor in the non-profit sector, none approach the question of how AmeriCorps is part of the larger shifts in the articulation of citizenship I described above or the relationship of that shift to the political economy of public life and democratic social relations.

**Overview of Research**

It is in this context that citizenship education and civic engagement came to the forefront of education policy discussions. In looking over the recent literature, we see that academics and educators are positing citizenship education as a pedagogical response to a wide range of issues including conflict and war, migration, racism, ecocide, poverty, terrorism, corporate malfeasance, and the ‘democratic deficit. It is important to recognize that calls for re-theorization of ‘the citizen’ and participation stem from sincere concern about severe changes in the global landscape. Today we live in a world in which global income inequality is increasing dramatically (Cornia, 2004) and where over one billion children in the global south suffer from the severe
deprivation of human need (Gordon, at al 2003), while 13 million children in the United States live in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2005) amidst extreme wealth and privilege. We also find ourselves in a state of ‘permanent war’ in which capitalist nations continue to battle over the expansion of free markets and neo-liberal state formation (Amin, 2004; Harvey, 2003a). Adult education, much like the rest of the world, is caught up in the problem of trying to understand our global conditions through the banners of ‘old imperialism’ (political colonization by nation-state empires), ‘new imperialism’ (financial colonization by nation-state empires), and imperialism in the Marxist sense of monopoly capitalism.

My experience as a ‘citizenship educator’ leads me to believe that our approaches to, and understanding of, citizenship education do not address these contradictions nor do they give us the intellectual or political tools to critically engage the world we live in. One the one hand, we are stuck at an impasse between the professed vocation of citizenship, community, and our deepening disregard for the welfare of others, both within our borders and without. On the other hand, we are unable to interrogate the kind of democracy that leads to these kinds of contradictions in the first place, and thus, what kind of citizens find these conditions legitimate or even tolerable.

I believe that it is time to re-read citizenship education through a Marxist-Feminist perspective on capitalism, democracy, education, and consciousness. Only in this way can citizenship education be explored not as practice, pedagogy, experiment, movement, or as an idea, but as a social relation bound up in the racialized and gendered relations of capitalism. This research investigates citizenship education as a project of the state; a project situated within a particular arrangement of political economy, whose purpose is to create the conditions necessary for continued reproduction and re-consolidation of the social relations of capitalism. While adult
citizenship education almost exclusively takes place within the relations of civil society, adult citizenship educators have largely neglected the extent to which the state is an active participant in the cultivation of a politics of citizenship (Jenson & Phillips, 1996, 2001). Adult educators have largely left this project to those critiquing human capital theory. In an attempt to rectify this imbalance, this research, pursued through a case study of the United States federal government civic revitalization program AmeriCorps, will examine the following questions:

- What is the politics of citizenship developed in AmeriCorps and promoted by the federal government through the volunteer programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)?
- How are the activities of citizenship learning organized in AmeriCorps through the regulatory mechanisms of the volunteer program?
- How does the program influence its participants in regard to their understanding of citizenship and democracy?

In order to explore these research questions and theorize my findings, I have organized this thesis in a manner that focuses on the clarity and transparency of my interpretation of the findings. The second chapter lays out the theoretical premises and assumptions of the research, with a focus on a Marxist-Feminist reading of the citizenship learning. In chapter two I fully situate the reader in the framework of feminist anti-racist dialectical historical materialism and its implications for the theorization of ideology, social relations, learning, and civil society. The third chapter discusses the history of civilian national service in the United States, with the aim of illuminating the emergence of the case examined in this study, the AmeriCorps program, and the current institutional organization of the AmeriCorps program. Given the discussion of the organization and development of the institution of AmeriCorps, the fourth chapter outlines the method of research in this study, institutional ethnography. This discussion includes a rationale for a unique reading and implementation of this method, which draws from the base premises of
a Marxist-Feminist reading of the framework of institutional ethnography. I also discuss here the particulars of data collection and forms of institutional analysis. The fifth chapter begins the reporting and analysis of the findings. I have organized the findings in three interrelated discussions. In the fifth chapter I discuss how citizenship learning is organized in the AmeriCorps program through the regulatory mechanisms of the program. In chapter six, I explore the particular pedagogical forms of ‘civic engagement’ that emerge in the program. In chapter seven, I discuss the particular forms of consciousness concerning citizenship, democracy, and social inequality that emerge within the regulatory structures of AmeriCorps. In chapter eight I discuss the implications of these findings for the theorization of democratic learning in radical adult education. In chapter nine, I offer conclusions to the research as well as recommendations for future study of citizenship, democracy, and learning in adult education.
Chapter Two

A Marxist-Feminist Approach To Studying Citizenship And Learning

I began the previous chapter by detailing three separate incidences in recent years that demonstrate the complexity of social questions surrounding citizenship and democracy. Each asks how ‘democracy’ can be an oppressive and emancipatory relation at the same time. Such a contradiction requires critical and sophisticated analytical tools. I believe that these tools need, above all, to have the capacity to see a category such as ‘democracy’ or ‘citizenship’ as theoretical categories. What I mean is that much of the literature I have encountered during the course of this study takes the organization of these concepts for granted. It may acknowledge that liberals and communitarians differ in their assertions about what the content or form of democracy should be, but ‘democracy’ becomes trans-historical in nature. It loses its specificity to time and space as well as any sense of a dialectical relation to other social relations. It becomes a ‘thing’ or a ‘system,’ rather than an active way of living. Based on my experience of researching citizenship and learning in my master’s work, I determined that in order to not repeat this same reification I needed a set of theoretical tools that allowed me to understand constantly moving historical relationships and forms of consciousness. For that reason, I turned to Marxist-Feminism.

Studying democracy and citizenship requires that we take seriously the relation between idealism, understood as our ideas and forms of consciousness, and materialism, or the objective social organization of life, as it is in this relation that ideology is formed (Marx and Engels, 1932/1991). This relationship is the core of the theoretical framework I explore in this chapter. It is important that researchers of citizenship and democracy employ a theoretical framework that
allows them first, to see this relation at all, and second, to investigate how we live and how think about how we live inform one another. The theoretical framework for this research draws from a body of knowledge I will refer to as Marxist-Feminism. This body of knowledge encapsulates a wide range of influences, including the dialectical historical materialist tradition of Marxism, feminist-materialist scholarship, and the radical/critical theorization of adult education. I use this framework with an explicit purpose, namely as an attempt not to reproduce contemporary forms of research into citizenship learning that rely on ideological methods of knowledge production. My hope is that this framework, and its various components I will discuss in this chapter, will help the reader to understand why I have chosen to conduct inquiry in the way that I have and to analyze data in a particular way. This Marxist-Feminist framework has several important components, including dialectical conceptualization, a thorough orientation towards the epistemology of ideology, a firm grounding in historical materialist research, and an ontological orientation centered on gendered, racialized, and sexualized forms of social organization. I have organized this discussion in two parts. First, I review the nature of dialectical conceptualization in the ontology of historical materialism and provide an example of this kind of theoretical work through a discussion of the category of ‘civil society.’ Second, I explore the Marxist understanding of ideology and its relation to the theorization of learning. I conclude with a brief discussion of how this theoretical framework influences research into citizenship learning and democracy promotion.

*Dialectical Conceptualization in Citizenship Education Research*

The struggle to understand dialectics has occupied this research. This struggle has served as both the point of departure for inquiry and its arrival. The question of dialectics in historical materialism has been deeply debated throughout the hundred plus years of Marx's influence in
the social sciences. My purpose here is not to review these debates, but to explain the heart of this conception and my uses of it in this research. The classic conception of the Hegelian dialectic of historical change is the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model in which two concepts or phenomena have an antagonistic relationship with one another. They interact to produce a synthesis, which in turn interacts with another antithesis and so on and so on. Ideas and concepts are posited in relation to one another, but these relationships are external. The thesis and the antithesis are conceived as two autonomous bodies that exist apart from one another. Marx and Engels’ famously argued in *The German Ideology* (1932/1991) for an inversion of Hegel, but not the simple one posited by Feuerbach as a mere inversion of idealism and materialism. Further, Marx is famous for his cryptic comments concerning the rational kernel and mystical shell of the dialectic (Althusser, 1969). This inversion is not simply a matter of materialism and idealism, but also an inversion of the kind of relationship between materiality and consciousness that Hegel and his young followers had postulated.

Paula Allman (1999, 2001, 2007) and Bertell Ollman (1976, 1978, 1993, 2003) have both published extensively on the relational concept of dialectics in Marx's work and, while they disagree on some points, both have articulated the inversion of relationships that is at the core of dialectics. According to Allman (1999),

> Dialectical conceptualizing involves apprehending a real phenomenon as either part of or the result of a relation, a unity of two opposites that could not have historically developed nor exist as they presently do outside the way in which they are related (p. 63).

This kind of relation, which postulates an *inner* connection between phenomena, is very different than the kind of relationship articulated by Hegel, in which phenomena are *externally* related.

---

2 While numerous authors have published on the problematic of dialectics, Paula Allman and Bertell Ollman are useful to the specific needs of educators. Allman has written extensively on dialectics in learning and education, while Ollman has focused his inquiry on dialectics as a method of thinking central to the formation of oppositional bodies of knowledge.
interact with one another, and the focus of inquiry is on the outcome of that interaction (Allman, 1999, 2001). In a Marxist dialectic, a phenomenon, such as capitalism, is seen to be composed of relations that are inextricable to its composition. For example, as Ollman (2003) pointed out, the word ‘capital’ itself is meaningless without its relationship to ‘labor.’ One is a function of the other. Ollman goes on to point out that the emphasis for Marx is not the relationship between labor and capital, but the relation itself. The focus is not on the interaction, but on the relation, particularly the movement and development of the relation. Allman (1999) argued that “instead of just recognizing that entities interact, thinking in terms of internal relations involves focusing on the relation and observing or studying the way in which it regulates the development, the shaping and reshaping, of the attributes of the related entities” (p. 64). The focus on movement and development is because social phenomena are seen, within historical materialism, to be organic and thus, constantly changing their appearance while the necessary relation, their essence, remains.

Dialectics itself is an organic way to conceive social reality, since it avoids the objectification and reification (turning relations and processes into things) of social phenomena. Ollman (1993) argued, very matter-of-factly, that

Dialectics is not a rock-ribbed triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis that serves as an all-purpose explanation; nor does it provide a formula that enables us to prove or predict anything; nor is it the motor force of history. The dialectic, as such, explains nothing, proves nothing, predicts nothing, and causes nothing to happen. Rather dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world (p.10).

Once we have conceived of social phenomena as relations and processes rather than things, our way of thinking is directed towards the nature and form of these relationships. Ollman has argued that dialectical relationships are best examined in terms of four relations: identity/difference, interpenetration of opposites, quantity/quality, and contradictions. These
relations bring into sharper relief the notion that a dialectical way of thinking allows us to see the organic, changing nature of social relations and phenomenon. Furthermore, examining these relations cast even more light on the idea of the historical development of material conditions and social relations, bringing these phenomenon into their full relationship with their own historical development. For example, we can see the place of dialectics in historical materialism when we look closely at Marx and Engels’ (1932/1991) argument, regarding historical materialism, that they endeavor to explore the real material relations of production as well as forms of consciousness and social relations and “the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another” (p. 58). This conception of dialectics plays out quite intricately when we look at the confusing discussion concerning material relations, social relations, and productive forces that follows their proclamation. They refer to the mode of production as a social relation and social relations as a productive force. They refer to both production and civil society as the driving force of history. They would seem to contradict themselves again and again if we did not understand that they conceive of these phenomena as relations.

The use of the term ‘social relations’ is deliberate on my part and alludes to two interrelated components of my theoretical framework. On the one hand, it is a term that helps me to maintain the dialectical orientation I described above. On the other hand, it is a term that orients the reader to a substantially different ontological orientation than is typically found in citizenship education research, even within research that situates itself as socially constructed. This emphasis on relations is born out of an emphasis on historical materialism, which differentiates itself from other forms of social theory by its emphasis on ontology as an active project of human labor. In the first Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx castigates his contemporaries for conceiving of social life as an “the object of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity,
practice, not subjectively” (Marx, 1888/1991 p. 121 emphasis in original). By this Marx is referring to the tendency of social theorists to work from the assumption that social reality is external to human beings and, in an extreme idealist form, as something that is only brought into existence through human consciousness.

Marx and Engels (1932/1991) argued vociferously throughout The German Ideology that the opposite is the case: material reality exists, but it exists as active human mediation of the natural environment and historically specific modes of human social organization. In this way, materiality is understood by Marx and Engels to be both an objectively existing reality and a human creation. For this reason, they employed the term ‘mode of production’ to reference this grand scale of human cooperation. The ‘mode,’ however, is not to be understood as simply as economic relation or the ‘productive base.’ Rather, as they argued

This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are (p. 42, authors’ original emphasis).

This understanding of the mode of life, the way of living and organizing life, is crucial to a dialectical conceptualization of citizenship as it requires me to direct my attention to the ‘mode of life’ of which citizenship is a part, rather than to citizenship as a theoretical category. Because Marx and Engels were working to understand material life in a dialectical way, the materialism they proposed is not the crude inversion of idealism, which I referenced above. Rather, this ‘mode of life’ is understood to include not just human activity, but human meaning making. These forms of consciousness are dialectically related to human practice, meaning that as we live we condition our thinking and as we think we condition our lives. Thinking and living are inseparable in conscious human beings, although they are rarely ‘in tune’ with one another. Our
consciousness may out pace the world in which we live or our consciousness may be formed with the epistemological process Marx term ‘ideology.’

When I use the term ‘social relations’ I am referring to an idea of the social world as socially organized, cooperative human interrelations. These social relations are organized through the complexity of a given historical mode; thus today, the inner logic of the capital-labor relation organizes these relations. However, this is not the only logic at work today. A mode of production does not simply mean how a product is made or how it is exchanged. It refers to the entire complex of social relations through which people produce their material well-being and reproduce their material/social/cultural world. It does refer to our economic relationships, such as worker, slave, serf, etc. However, it also refers to how those relationships are organized and reproduced. This material base is not, and cannot, be reproduced without the total social forces and relationships that compose our everyday world (Sayer, 1987). One of these social forces, one of the logics we use to organize our lives, is the logic of social difference or, more colloquially, the social relations of race, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, and so on.

We know from Federici’s (2004) work that a particular way of producing and reproducing material life cannot exist without a complete integration between all social relations. This means that “differences” are not transhistorical. What I mean is social relations are differentiated in a specific way to a mode of production. What gender and race not only mean, but how they are used to organize social life is particular to the dialectical relationships within the mode of production. For example, this does not mean that women did not exist as socially different from men prior to the advent of capitalism. Rather, it means that gender is organized and practiced in a manner specific within a particular arrangement of material relations. In this way, the way we understand the social and the material are intricately linked to how we understand difference.
Thus, social differences, such as race or gender, are social relations/formations. They are ongoing social relations that are enacted everyday. Bannerji (2005) articulates this idea of social difference, in the form of race, in this way:

‘Race,’ therefore, is no more or less than active social organization, a constellation of practices motivated consciously, or unconsciously, by political or power imperatives with implied cultural forms- images, symbols, metaphors, and norms that range from the quotidian to the institutional (p. 149).

When we articulate social difference through Marxist ontology we see constellations of social relations that cannot be disarticulated from one another and which organize the functioning of their social whole. Race and gender organize labor; labor grounds gender and race. In this dialectical relationship, the cultural form/meaning of social difference comes from the purposeful ground of capitalist social relations, relations of private property and labor at the same time that capitalist social relations are only made possible through the logic of social differentiation embodied in our understandings of race and gender. This does not mean that forms of social differences do not have their own particular ways of functioning, including their own representations, operations, and formations. Rather, it means that they work in concert with one another.

The elephant in the room, so to speak, of Marxist-Feminist analysis is the tendency to fall heavily on the ‘Marx’ part. This is a challenge to those who write from a Marxist-Feminist perspective and also those who read the work of Marxist-Feminist authors. Marxist-Feminist authors, writing from a dialectical perspective, deeply object to the notion of intersecting or interlocking forms of oppression. The purpose of dialectical thought is to bring social relations of race, gender, and class into unity with one another. This does not mean collapsing their specificity or resolving all social relations in a blob-like entity called ‘class.’ Rather, it is a careful attempt to see how the process of class is also a process of gendering and racializing.
individuals and social groups. From a Marxist-Feminist perspective, capitalism does not exist as an abstract social system that impacts different groups in different ways. It is a historical mode of life that comes into existence by organizing social difference in a particular way and constantly re-invents itself through those forms of difference. This is why racism may look so different in its workings today than one hundred years ago but is no less salient or central a social relation in the organization of social life. In this thesis, the subject of reflection for research participants and myself is often ‘poverty’ or ‘social inequality.’ Often these become code names research participants use to talk about racialized groups or feminized poverty without having to say ugly things like ‘black moms who do not do homework at home with their kids.’ Even though race and gender do not rise to the surface of discussion, they are constantly at work in the process of class and the reality of poverty. By utilizing this theoretical approach to the relation between race and class, it is my hope that I will be able to see more clearly how learning about democracy and social inequality involves learning about social difference.

Case in Point: The Dialectical Conceptualization of Civil Society

In order to ground this discussion a bit, let me provide an example of how using dialectical conceptualization changes the theoretical orientation of scholarship. One category that is central to this research is the notion of ‘civil society.’ Civil society is an old and loaded term in social theory. Today we typically use it to refer to a non-governmental, extra-economic arena in which citizens conduct their affairs, usually in some sort of collectivized manner, away from the influence of the state and the market. This notion of civil society, however, is very particular to the most recent development of imperialist capitalist relations and the neo-liberal political state. The term itself dates back to pre-Christian philosophy, but according to Ehrenberg (1999) three major historical periods have marked its development, including a period coincident with
feudalism, the Enlightenment, and modern capitalism. Sayer (1985), however, has argued that the term cannot be used in a trans-historical way. As a category we use to express our conceptualization of social life, it is necessarily specific in a historical mode of social relations.

In the contemporary use of the term, civil society is used to refer to an arena of public life that is associational, common, and often called ‘the public sphere’ (Edwards, 2009). This use of the term references a space in which individuals are free to interact with one another away from the conditioning influences of the market and the state. This ‘free’ individual of civil society, who today is necessarily a ‘citizen’ although a citizen free from ‘the state,’ emerges from the Enlightenment understanding of the term. Callinicos (1999) argued that Hegel took his understanding of civil society from the British and Scottish political economists. In this tradition, characterized in Ehrenbeg’s (1999) second historical tradition, civil society is understood as the arena of man’s productive, competitive, private interests. Women and reproductive labor were excluded from these conceptions. For Hegel, civil society referred to men [sic] in their personal and economic relations rather than political or public relations (Arthur, 1991). For Sayer (1985), the use of ‘civil society’ by the early political economists and philosophers such as Rousseau and Hegel is highly ideological and coincident with their own explorations of “moral basis of the emerging capitalist social order” (p. 236). These theorists deployed the term ‘civil society’ in contrast to the social, political, economic, and cultural orders of feudalism, which were rapidly degrading. The new ‘civil society’ was composed of isolated individuals in their ‘natural’ state: egoist, competitive, autonomous. These individuals existed socially only by virtue of their

---

3 I acknowledge that Hegel, Marx, and their contemporaries use language that excludes women from spheres of production, democracy, and ‘the public,’ generally, as well as their theorization of these arenas. The acknowledgement here serves as a recognition throughout the thesis of the many instances of this historical exclusion.
universal consent to a social contract based on self-interest with their relations mediated through legal frameworks.

Marx also used the term ‘civil society,’ but he moved through Hegel’s articulation of the term into a nearly complete dialectical conceptualization of the category. For Marx, individuals in their productive lives only appear as isolated individuals within the social relations of capitalism. The division of labor that characterized the development of capitalism not only isolated individuals in their labors, but transformed previous forms of community through changing social bonds, the mobility of labor, etc. The division of labor eradicates one manner of social relations and replaces them with another. In this way, ‘civil society’ is a historical category specific to capitalist social relations. Given Marx and Engels’ understanding of social life as human labor, a category such as civil society that attempts to divorce individuals from social relations is highly problematic. This sum of human labor, organization, and ideas, is what Marx calls ‘civil society,’ “which embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite social stage of the development of productive forces” (Marx & Engels, 1932/1991 p. 57). For Marx, the term, as the Enlightenment theorists have employed it, cannot be used trans-historically; this individualization of people only becomes possible when the development of productive forces detaches productive relations from previous communal forms and thrusts competitive atomized individualism into the center of human relations. Thus, in Marx’s conception of the term, ‘civil society’ is the category we use to refer to our actual productive and reproductive lives under capitalism and all the various social practices and relations related to those labors. In other words, civil society is the arena of class struggle.

However, given that civil society is composed of all of these forms of ‘human intercourse,’ and not the idealist conceptions of man that express capitalist social relations, we
can also understand civil society as the material base of society, which I understand to be necessarily gendered and racialized relations. Himani Bannerji (2005) argued that in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels provide us with an understanding of civil society, of the mode of production, as a complex, evolving social-historical space filled up with various forms of social organization, practices, meanings, and consciousness. Marx and Engels provide a very slight and casual opening for an analysis of gender in civil society when they discuss productive forces and productive relations as both productive and reproductive. From this we can take the notion that the social organization of labor in a given mode of production does not just include labor that makes new ‘things,’ per se, but labor that remakes life itself, that reproduces the conditions of life everyday. Similarly, several important feminist works have challenged the notion that the ‘appropriation of nature’ only includes transformation of the physical environment and not the appropriation of women’s bodies in the service of reproduction (Federici, 2004; Fortunati, 1995; Mies, 1986). In this way we can draw in sexuality and gender as two forms of the social organization of civil society and, even further, that gender constitutes a special form of exploitation within capitalism (Federici, 2004). Further, we can move forward with the historical evidence, particularly in the context of colonialism and slavery as crucial components of capitalist development, that ‘race’ is an equally important organizer of labor. For example, we can use Ng’s (1998, 2002) work on the re-organization of garment manufacturing in Canada as evidence of the ongoing processes of the racialization of labor, through which immigrant women work under dramatically different working conditions, characterized by piece rate work in non-unionized settings, constituting a kind of ‘re-colonization’ of immigrant bodies. Ng’s research is one of many examples of how race, class, and gender are inseparable social relations, that also constitute not just the organization of labor, but also other social practices.
and, very importantly, forms of social consciousness. In this way, Bannerji argues that civil society, the mode of production, is concretized through the social practices that organize it, specifically social practices predicated on notions of race and gender. Race and gender arise as irresolvable social realities that give shape and form to the everyday practices of capitalist accumulation. They make up the “frenzied movement” of the cultural and material elements of life (Marx, 1843/1978a p. 45).

In this trajectory, civil society is understood not in an idealized fashion, but as a way of describing social life that both emerges from the dialectical conceptualization of productive forces and relations of production and also references these dialectical relations. This is the conceptualization of the term that I bring to this research. In this notion of civil society, individual lives and forms of social cooperation are seen as mutually determining relations; the individual is a social being, social life is individual life. What this means is that human agency cannot be located in its spatial relation to institutions such as the state or the market, but as part of the complex conflagration of relations of production and reproduction of a mode of life. In this way, an individual can never exist as autonomous or abstracted from these relations, as the contemporary formation of civil society predetermines. Rather, with a dialectical conceptualization of the term I am able to fully immerse research into a notion such as ‘citizenship’ as part of these relations. It also allows me to see that ‘civil society,’ as such, can only be understood as an autonomous terrain of citizen activity through ideological mechanisms of knowledge production, which negate a dialectical conceptualization of the term. The problem of ideology constitutes the second major component of this theoretical framework, which I describe in the next section of this chapter.
Ideology, Learning, and Citizenship

If dialectics allows us to see more fully the changes, interactions, and formations of social phenomenon, as Bertell Ollman (1993) has argued, then we must have a way of understanding forms of knowledge that perform the opposite function. As we can see in the above discussion of civil society, there are ways of building knowledge that close avenues of inquiry, that render relationships irrelevant or impossible, and which ultimately obscure and abstract the full nature of social relations. Marx and Engels' critique of these forms of knowledge production emerged from the philosophical debates of the 1840s. Marx and Engels disrupted this debate in 1846 when they produced *The German Ideology*, their clearest and most direct critique of ideology as a bourgeois method of knowledge production. Into this debate they introduced their notion of ‘historical materialism,’ which profoundly upset the parameters of the debate (Arthur, 1991). The debate concerned two sides, both of whom Marx and Engels referred to as “the young Hegelians.” On one side were philosophers following the tradition of Hegel, such as Bruno Bauer, who were struggling to replace “Hegel's absolute idealism with a version of subjective idealism, according to which history was a succession of forms of consciousness” (Callinicos, 1999 p. 80). On the other side was a new brand of materialists, such as Ludwig Feuerbach, who sought to replace any form of idealism, absolute or subjective, with a naturalistic materialism that saw human beings, not ideas, as the subject of history. Marx and Engels discerned, however, that the kind of materialism advocated by Feuerbach was not in fact an inversion of Hegel. This kind of materialism, which Marx and Engels (1932/1991) referred to as “contemplative,” does not hold human practice at its center.

Marx and Engels referred to previous forms of materialism and idealism as “the German ideology” and to their proponents as “ideologists.” It is in their discussion of idealism that they
assert the concept of negative ideology. Negative ideology refers to ideology not as a system of ideas, but as a way of knowing. The two, however, are intricately linked and it is in their discussion of why the ruling ideas of an epoch support the ruling class of an epoch that they are able to explain the process of ideological reasoning. Marx and Engels argue that idealist thinkers abstract consciousness from the material and social relations through which ideas arise through a methodical process. First, ideas are separated from the material conditions under which they are produced, including the individuals themselves who produce them. Second, ideas alone, not actual human conditions are arranged to make sense. This arrangement is “mystical” in Marx and Engels’ language. Finally, the mystical connection amongst ideas is obliterated by giving the power of agency to the idea so that it appears as though concepts and theory not only determine the course of history, but determine how we read and interpret our social world. As Marx and Engels argued, “thus, the whole body of materialistic elements has been removed from history and now full reign can be given to the speculative steed” (1991, p. 67).

This conception of ideology, as a method of reasoning or way of knowing the world, deeply disturbs how we come to understand our social and material conditions as well as our historical possibilities for transformation. Dorothy Smith (1990), in her extensive writings on *The German Ideology*, argued “ideology as a method of reasoning about and interpreting society and history obstructs inquiry by giving primacy to concepts and their speculative manipulation. It fails to explore actualities and discover how to express them conceptually” (p. 35). In reality, idealism “confines us to the conceptual level, suppressing the presence and working of the underlying relations they express” (p. 37). Thus, the underlying conditions of human existence are taken as natural, given, inevitable. Materialism, as conceived by Feuerbach and his contemporaries, does not undo this mysticism. One version of this materialism, which Marx and
Engels referred to as “pure,” simply inverts the idealist relationship between consciousness and the subject, creating the illusion that material conditions dictate consciousness, which is then conceived of as “matter or merely 'materialist' interests” (Smith, 2004, p. 448).

Ideology as a method of reasoning and knowledge production is fundamentally based on the abstraction of individuals from their material and social relations and the transfer of these abstracted notions into objectified subject categories (Smith, 1990). This process, according to Bannerji (2005), “ruptures the integrity of the socially concrete at a conceptual level and posits this as a property of the social” (p. 153). Ideology performs a dual function. It not only interrupts and disrupts our conceptual understanding of our own experience, but it also provides us with a ruptured way to understand the social world in general, even the idea of it. According to Bannerji, this process makes social relations appear as the outcome of ideas and not formative with material relations. This rupturing is, of course, how ideology becomes an exercise of power relations (Allman, 1999). We can see clearly then that ideology produces the ruling notions of race and gender discourses. However, ideology, as an everyday practice, is equally bound to formations of social difference and social relations (Ng & Shan, 2010). When we think about the social whole, we can see that ideology, as the epistemology of domination, is as much reliant on racialized and gendered discourses to maintain its legitimacy as it produces such discourses. This only further supports the notion that we need methods of inquiry that do not reproduce ideological epistemologies and which uncover the social relations in which we live and their relationships to our consciousness.

It is easy to see that this understanding of ideology has deep implications for the theorization of learning, even beyond the ideological content of knowledge transmitted through hegemonic institutions. The ‘learning’ investigated in this research is a particular type of
‘learning.’ I put the term ‘learning’ in quotations marks in order to indicate that I do not intend to use the term in a typical frame. To begin, I want to differentiate between ‘learning theory’ and ‘pedagogical theory.’ There is certainly a dialectical relation between the two bodies of thought; pedagogies are often dependent on assumptions concerning the nature of learning and my focus here is active theorizations of learning as a human phenomenon. I understand pedagogy to focus on particular relations between learning and teaching. ‘Learning’ as a human phenomenon, at first assumed to be an exclusively human activity, although we know this is no longer true, has been widely theorized. Some of the early assumptions of this theorization include the idea that learning is a singular phenomenon, i.e. a universal, human, cognitive phenomenon. In this way, ‘learning’ can be assessed by a change in cognition, largely manifested by a change in behavior. The influence of behaviorist psychology on the development of learning theory cannot be underemphasized and still forms a substantial bias in the field (Jarvis, 1987). The notion that a change in cognition, or consciousness, would necessarily produce a change in behavior is an erroneous assumption made across the field of adult education, even by radical educators such as Freire. The problem of the relation between change in consciousness and change in action remains unresolved in the field.

The particular type of learning investigated in this research, which is termed political learning, transformative learning, or social movement learning in educational research, requires a theory of learning in which learning is investigated as a dual phenomenon, both individual and social. Political learning, broadly speaking, aims to understand how individuals come to understand the world they live in, how that world is organized and mediated by power, and how to create change. It would be impossible to explain how we learn about the society and our own interventions in the social world without an articulation of the relation between the individual
and the social. The earlier cognitive and behaviorist orientations in learning theory presumed the
importance of only the individual, casting ‘the social’ into a pile of unnecessary theorization.
More recently, scholars in the field have attempted to widen our understanding of learning by
promoting the importance of the social in adult learning theory. The importance of social
contexts in learning process, particularly informal learning process akin to socialization, has been
substantively discussed for many years (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hansman, 2001; Jarvis,
1987). On the whole, these authors have argued that learning is both an individual and social
process. They have demonstrated how learning is necessarily cooperative, how it is deeply
influenced by the social context in which it takes place and by the cultural constructions that
dictate its parameters. Some feminist and anti-racist scholars have regarded this work as pseudo-
social, arguing that it ultimately relies on a highly individualized conception of the “autonomous
adult learner” (Gorman, 2007). The developments of transformative learning theory have
directed attention to learning as a process of social construction, or meaning making. However,
these articulations, which vary significantly from theorists such as Mezirow (1991; 2000) to
Cunningham (1992; 1996; 1998) to O’Sullivan (1999), have relied on an implicitly discursive or
cultural understanding of the social. These various analyses have taken great pains to elaborate
the importance of the social and in doing so have often neglected to say exactly what they think
constitutes “the social.”

From a perspective of Marxist-Feminism, one imperative in the theorization of learning
is to establish a dialectical relation between the individual and the social, as it is in this relation
that ‘learning’ will take place and which will constitute one side of the larger relation of
‘learning.’ This imperative is driven by Marx’s argument that

What is to be avoided above all else is the re-establishing of the ‘Society’ as an
abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the social being. His life,
even if it may not appear in the direct form of a communal life carried out together with others is therefore an expression and confirmation of social life. Man’s individual and species life are not different (1844/1978, pp. 86).

As I have already discussed, Marx and Engels’ (1932/1991) understood individual life to be the experience of social life. At the same time, social life is understood as forms of co-operation and relations amongst individuals under historically specific conditions. Further, taking in account the first Theses on Feuerbach (1881/1991), in which the Young Hegelian Feuerbach is critiqued for understanding the social as objective rather than sensuous human practice, we can see emerging in Marx’s theory an ontological formation of a dialectical relation between the individual and the social. In this relation, the individual and the social, the subject and the object, mutually form and determine one another. This active human practice creates objective social reality. As Bannerji (2005) argues, the social world is made concrete through the actual conscious practice of individuals. In this way, the social does not come into begin through categories of thought; it actually exists. The individual and the social cannot be separated and posited to ‘interact’ as they do in more traditional learning theories. In this way, I understand ‘learning’ as a mediation of this relation.

Ontology, however, is only one side of this relation. Ontology and epistemology are locked in a determining relation. How one posits the existence, or non-existence, of social reality will hold great sway over how this social reality can come to be ‘known’ or ‘learned.’ Following Marx and Engels’ critique of idealism and materialism, I assume that ‘learning’ can be a phenomenon completely locked in an ideological relation. By this I mean that ideology constitute the bourgeois method of knowledge production in capitalist social relations and posits a particular relation between consciousness and matter (Allman, 1999). ‘Learning’ can be entirely confined to this particular relation. In this way, what we understand and take great pains to assess as ‘learning,’ pure and abstract, can be intricately embedded in this ideological relation. In order
to undo this relation, non-ideological methods of knowledge production must be followed and ‘learning’ cannot be assumed as a universal, abstract process. Conceived dialectically, learning is happening in the mediation between consciousness and matter. In this way, I understand learning as this complex mediation between the individual and the social, the subject and object, consciousness and matter, daily experience and making meaning. Given that dialectical relations are constantly moving and changing, ‘learning’ as a mediation of consciousness and matter necessarily changes and moves as well. It is for this reason that many Marxist theorists find it more useful to use the term ‘praxis’ to describe the learning relation. Because the focus of this research is the development of objectified forms of social consciousness, I will often use the terms consciousness and praxis to discuss ‘learning’ in the AmeriCorps program and when I do use the term ‘learning,’ I use it in this very specific dialectical way. This is quite different from the notion of ‘consciousness’ derived from Lenin and continued in the theorizations of Vygotsky and Freire, which largely use the term to refer to already developed forms of critical analysis (Au, 2007a, 2007b).

Case in Point: Citizenship and Learning in Adult Education

The relationship between ideology and learning is easily visible when we examine the development of citizenship education research. In previous work (Carpenter, 2008) I have argued that much of the research in the field of citizenship education begins with theoretical articulations of “the good citizen.” These articulations follow, in various combinations, the tenants of liberal, communitarian, and republican political theory. These are theories of political arrangements that describe how the world ought to function; they do not describe the reality of political contestation. For the most part they are philosophical articulations of the citizen as an abstract category. Inquiry that begins with these philosophical arguments cannot be anything but
ideological. It is ideological because it abstracts individuals from their actual political lives. Further, adult educators have focused citizenship education research along the lines of predetermined typologies of ‘good citizenship,’ which focus on the rights, responsibilities, values, and behaviors of good citizens (Coare & Johnston, 2003; Schugurensky, 2006). Inquiry that explores the extent to which individuals “match up” to already predetermined categories of citizenship turn the subject-citizen into the object-citizen.

These visions of citizenship are idealist in two ways. On the one hand, they offer ideal visions of political participation. They tell us what we ought to be and should aspire towards. On the other hand, they work from the philosophy of citizenship to the reality of our political lives. I would propose, following Marx, that this way of understanding politics is inverted. Theoretical descriptions of the citizen are ultimately abstracted from the real material circumstances in which we live our lives. The result of this abstraction is an obfuscation of the roots of the so-called democratic crisis. Further, the continued focus on immigrants and the multicultural “other” by policy makers is particularly symptomatic of this issue. The focus on educating particular social groups demonstrates a significant assumption within the field of citizenship education, namely that the problems of democracy are in reality problems of culture. The assumption driving this body of work is that immigrants arrive in advanced capitalist democracies from the Global South and are unfamiliar with the formalities or cultures of “democratic” societies. This “culturalization” at the expense of political economy is a pervasive component of citizenship education. An overwhelming emphasis on individual behavioral and attitudinal change is the only possible politics when change is confined to the arena of culture.

Understanding citizenship as identity, status, rights/entitlements, virtues, or agency is a hegemonic approach to the concept. It is also an ideological approach, based in idealist
articulations of what democracy and citizenship should be. It naturalizes the material conditions of liberal democratic societies and capitalist social relations. In the seminal text “On the Jewish Question (1848/1978),” Marx forcefully analyzed the ways in which the concept understood as ‘citizenship’ in a democracy, also understood as political equality, is a social relation presupposed by the existence of material and social inequality. The argument is simple. Because capitalist production necessitates inequality amongst human beings, a political arrangement such as democracy cannot maintain efficacy without the appearance of equality amongst people. Capitalism and democracy appear to be in concert with one another through a concept such as ‘citizenship,’ which mediates the contradiction between the two. For Marx, however, the concept of ‘citizenship’ moves beyond simply mediating this contradiction; it embodies the contradiction. Working from the Marxist ontology outlined in the introduction to this text, Marxist-Feminists understand the social world as cooperative human activity; necessary interdependence. One of the ideological effects of capitalism and liberal democracy is to make it appear as if people are independent and individualistic; as if they can survive and thrive only through competition instead of cooperation. Through capitalism we fragment human community; through the mechanisms of liberal democracy, citizenship, we reconstruct that community in such a way as to ignore the ways in which we are truly interdependent. For Marxists, political education that relies on the notion of “citizen” separated from the material and social base of the concept is an ideological practice of political learning. The outcomes of political struggle will remain within the social relations of capitalist production. This is precisely the point made by Freire when he discusses the limits of emancipation (1971) and Marx discusses the differences between political emancipation and human emancipation (1848/1978a).
The final function of ideology is to obscure the dialectical relationships between the social and the individual, between the cultural and the material, in order to support a particular arrangement of social relations. The liberal citizen as both the subject and ideal outcome of citizenship education performs just this function. In a similar way, the emphasis on civil society performs the same function. These categories, while ideological in their construction, nevertheless hold some resonance with the daily experience of life, thus explaining their ability to render their ideological derivation invisible. Smith (1990) describes categories in this way:

Concepts, ideology, and ideological practices are integral parts of sociohistorical processes. Through them people grasp in abstraction the real relations of their own lives. Yet while they express and reflect actual social relations, ideological practices render invisible the actualities of people’s activities in which those relations arise and by which they are ordered (p. 36-37).

The problem with these categories is that they leave undisturbed the ground upon which they are built. The social relations that give rise to certain experiences are not the focus of inquiry; inquiry is then confined to the manipulation of concepts and speculation. The result is the entrenchment of the interpretive domain in social inquiry and the liberal dimensions of political theory in research into political learning. When theoretical categories alone, rather than praxis, are used to make sense of the world, our sense of the social world as a historical project with real social relations is lost. Furthermore, knowledge built through ideology is incapable of exposing the material and social relations that organize our everyday experience. Thus, ideology obscures the source of our experiences of exploitation, oppression, and violence. For this reason Marx and Engels referred to their understanding of ideology as negative; it engages in a negation of the material. In this way, ideology produces a body of ideas that support the interests of the ruling class. Ideology as a system of ideas/thought content is contingent on ideology as an
epistemology. As scholars we reiterate this processes when we separate an understanding of ideology as method from an understanding of ideology as ideas (Allman, 1999).

The Importance of Historical Analysis

Hopefully this discussion has provided something of a road map to this research. The primary ontological tools employed in the research will be dialectical conceptualization and a feminist, anti-racist historical materialist orientation towards ‘social relations.’ From the epistemological standpoint, I will focus on the development of consciousness and praxis, ‘learning,’ in the context of the development and practice of ideology. To begin this process, in the next chapter I explore the historical roots of the formation of the AmeriCorps program, including the movement for civilian national service in the United States, and elaborate the current institutional organization of the AmeriCorps program. The historical development of the AmeriCorps program provides some important insight into provocative inconsistencies between the rhetoric of the program and its social organization within the apparatus of the U.S. federal government. These inconsistencies, in turn, set the stage for the exploration of learning by young people through national service. They raise the very question I have discussed in my examination of citizenship learning and adult education: how will we deal with the relationship between the ideal and the material? The history of civilian national service, as well as the history of how this story is told, bring to the surface the problem of the ideal and the material in the theorization of citizenship and democracy.
Chapter Three

Historical Development and Institutional Organization of Civilian National Service in the United States: The Case of AmeriCorps

The first step in grounding an inquiry into citizenship learning as a historical materialist project, and not only an ideal conception, is to begin with an understanding of the historical evolution of the AmeriCorps program. Within Marxist-Feminist analysis, we begin with this sort of historical work in order to make a deep connection between the ways in which people, at the time and through the lens of ‘history,’ made and continue to make meaning of particular activities or events and the broader historical and material relations that shaped those events. For example, in recitations on the history of civilian national service, a common phrase describes the 1993 establishment of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS): national service was an idea “whose time had come.” The emergence of an agency such as the CNCS and a program such as AmeriCorps should cause us to ask questions about how and why the state institutionalized an active and explicit project of promoting ‘good citizenship’ at a particular historical moment and in a particular form of organization. This is a different approach to the history of civilian national service than that which is presented by the CNCS (2009a) itself or by national service advocates (Bass, 2003; Eberly & Sheraden, 1990; Janowitz, 1983; Moskos, 1988; Perry & Thompson, 2004). These approaches tend to provide a road map of this historical development; they choose to emphasize particular historical instances for their importance in the acceptance of the program of civilian national service. Such an approach to understanding history detaches the idea of national service from the everyday life of people at a given moment.
and social relations in which state action is an important component. It does not help us to understand the conditions that generate such ideas or how they become politically expedient.

In the first half of this chapter, I will provide a different exploration of this history as well as raise some important questions about how this history has been interpreted and used to promote a vision of citizenship driven by civilian national service. My explicit purpose in recounting this history is to provide my reader with the appropriate context to consider the current organization and operation of the Corporation for National and Community Service and the AmeriCorps program. Thus, I will focus my discussion on the widely acknowledged major ‘milestones’ of national service, but with some special attention to the attenuating circumstances of this history and its ‘re-envisioning’ by advocates of national service. I follow this discussion with an explanation of the institutional structure of the CNCS and the AmeriCorps program. This description of ‘the case’ at the core of this research establishes the core institutional apparatus under investigation via institutional ethnography in this thesis.

The Moral Equivalent of War

In 1906, philosopher and psychologist Williams James gave a speech at Stanford University that became the famous essay “The Moral Equivalent of War” (James, 1910/1995). This essay is generally regarded as the first proposal for non-militarized national service and its content is particularly enlightening in regards to the proposed purposes of a national project of civilian service. James proposed that young Americans (by which he meant only men) should be conscripted to terms of national service again, saying

numerous other goods to the commonwealth would follow…no one would remain blind as the luxurious classes now are blind, to man’s relations to the globe he lives on, and to the permanently sour and hard foundations of his higher life...They would have paid their blood-tax, done their own part in the immemorial human warfare against nature; they would tread the earth more proudly, the women would value them more highly, they would be better fathers
and teachers of the following generation (p. 25).

Here we find the first solid articulation of a form of service to the nation that is not centered on military combat, although still foundational in its patriarchal, and given its historicity we can assume racist, articulation of citizen and national identity. At its center, James’ proposal appears as an attempt to consolidate the civic virtue of the nation and the relations of duty and reciprocity that exist between citizen and state, evident through the use of terms such as ‘blood-tax.’ James also demonstrates some of the tendencies of the progressive movement, a social movement of policy reform that took place in the early 20th century and of which James was an important theorist. Service, he argued, not only consolidates the relation between state and citizen, but it awakens the awareness of the privileged to ‘man’s relations to the globe’ or rather, conditions of inequality.

Within various histories of civilian national service, there are varying levels of engagement with James’ seminal essay. For some, the title is often taken at face value; they interpret James argument as advocating national civic service as morally equivalent to national military service. For these advocates, non-combatative civilian service is as important to the nation as serving in the military and thus, should be supported by the government and possibly made compulsory. However, James is not looking for a moral equivalent to military service, but rather to war itself. For others, James is arguing that rather than channel the energy of youth into war, the nation should promote the peaceful pursuit of civilian service. This would create an alternative military service that was ‘moral.’ James, however, is postulating a much more complicated relationship between war and peace than he is given credit by this argument. He did argue, albeit sarcastically, that “every up-to-date dictionary should say that ‘peace’ and ‘war’ mean the same thing” (1995, p. 19). The problem with most uses of James’ argument is that authors typically focus on a single passage concerning the actual proposal for civilian
conscription, which I cited earlier. In this way, they abstract the proposal from its argument. I would exempt Moskos (1988) and Janowitz (1983) from this as they work with a fuller version of James thesis. However, even these scholars repeat the major misinterpretation of the piece: they all think they know what James means by ‘moral equivalent.’ From the interpretations I outlined above, I understand these authors to interpret James’ use of the term ‘moral’ to mean ethical, right, just, etc. Thus, they are led towards the path of civilian national service being equally ‘right’ as war or, paradoxically, ethically superior to war. Neither of these is the case.

James (1995) began his 1910 essay with the argument that war forms national consciousness, it “trains societies into cohesiveness” (p. 18). Despite this function, he also argued that the smash-and-grab method of imperialist war between civilized nations, such as the recent war between the United States and Spain over colonial acquisitions, was beginning to wear thin on the thinking members of the United States electorate (meaning educated and/or wealthy men). He went on to critique the pacifist response to war for not engaging with the heart of the militarist argument. They argue, says James, not that war is good or fair or right, but that it has purpose in the national landscape, specifically preserving national ideals such as ‘hardihood.’

War disciplines the nation and

so long as anti-militarists propose no substitute for war’s disciplinary function, no *moral equivalent* of war, analogous, as one might say, to the mechanical equivalent of heat, so long they fail to realize the full inwardness of the situation (p. 22, emphasis in original).

The phrase ‘mechanical equivalent of heat’ demonstrates James’ argument that war and its moral counterpart must perform the same social function in order to be equivalent. According to James, the anti-war faction does not proffer a method of securing the same sort of national discipline, particularly in youth, as war. This discipline is the moral purpose of war; its method is the matter of ‘moral equivalency,’ not war itself. This is the fixation of belief, the fixation of a habit of
action, emphasized by the pragmatist school of philosophy, of which James was a founding member (Menand, 2001). Within pragmatist thought, by fixing belief in the community, something becomes true because the community believes it to be (Wells, 1954). In other words, “what the whole community comes to believe in grasps the individual as in a vise” (James, 1995, p. 24). He goes on to argue, “so far, war has been the only force that can discipline a whole community” (p. 25). The ‘discipline’ that James speaks of is in fact the cultivation of national consciousness, of belief in certain ideas, practices, and conditions.

James proposed that a “system of morals of civic honor” (1995, p. 24) could replace the virtues of conquest, dominance, and bloodlust. This appears as an admirable argument; but the question to ask is what, however, is the content of civic honor? This is an important question because the fixation of belief, as outlined by Charles Sanders Pierce (1877/1955), is not general but specific. It is the fixation of a *particular* belief. James gives some clue to his perspective. Civic virtue can be developed in a world in which the ‘planetary order’ is responsible for lives of hardship and toil, although the unfair allocation of hardship can be ameliorated through civic virtue. Civic virtue is ‘manly,’ ‘hard,’ and ‘tough’ and makes no mention of women. Without civic virtue men become ‘degenerate’ when they have no work. He is most explicit in arguing that “it would be simply preposterous if the only force that could work ideals of honor and standards of efficiency into English or American natures should be the fear of being killed by the Germans or the Japanese” (James, 1995 p. 26). Here James imbeds a second argument into his logic; the ‘nation’ must have its own internal mechanisms for fixing such belief; it should not rely solely on the racial logics of war. What is progressive, historically speaking, about James’ argument is his insistence that war itself is an unsustainable means for producing ‘good citizens.’
Significantly, James provided no substantiation of how the civic virtue of civilian service is different from, or perhaps superior to, the civic virtue of war.

The Civilian Conservation Corps

One of the most significant moments in the historical development of civilian national service was the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC). Today, its legacy is invoked in the AmeriCorps National Community Conservation Corps (NCCC) program. The conditions, however, between the establishment of the CCC and the AmeriCorps NCCC are strikingly and significantly different. The CCC was founded in 1932 as a relief program focused on building, and in some cases re-building, national infrastructure. Its organization was a direct response, by the federal government, to the economic crisis of the Great Depression and the material deprivation experienced by millions of people. The conservation component of the program, which created the system of National Parks, is perhaps the most famous, but CCC workers built roads, dams, and buildings, establishing the basic national infrastructure for modern capitalist accumulation. They brought electricity and plumbing to rural parts of the country, advancing the modernization of the United States. CCC members were organized in work camps and deployed to various sites around the country. They were paid a wage of $25 a month, most of which was remitted back home to families (Eberly & Sherraden, 1990). The conditions in the camps could be trying and injury and accident rates were high. The program also reflected the dominant social relations of the time; the camps and work crews were segregated and women were excluded entirely. A similar, although less acknowledged program, was the National Youth Administration, which operated in a similar fashion and with similar goals and requirements, although in urban centers.
There is a kind of nostalgia associated with the CCC amongst national service advocates and, to a broader extent, theorists of United States democracy. What is of particular interest to this discussion is how it is that a program that was essentially focused on job creation became such an emblematic example of civic duty. After all, these men were not volunteers; they came to the CCC out of desperation. In fact the only requirement to participate in the CCC was that you be unemployed and/or on public relief. They were not, in a strict sense, balancing the rights they enjoyed as citizens with a corresponding notion of service and responsibility, as many advocates of national service have depicted. On the contrary, they were participating in one of the first examples of the social entitlements of citizenship associated with the advent of the welfare state in the US through legislation such as the New Deal. At the time, Roosevelt argued:

> Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources (Roosevelt, 1933).

This is the same quote that is typically referenced as Roosevelt’s first major allusion to the soon-to-be-created CCC. It has also been interpreted as a reiteration of James’ thesis of civilian service as ‘morally equivalent’ to war, although Eberly and Sherraden (1990) admit there is no credible evidence that Roosevelt was familiar with James’ thesis. I would argue, however, that this interpretation is a misreading of Roosevelt. Clearly there is no reference to national service and further it is not national service that is to be treated as the emergency of war, but the task of overcoming the vast amount of unemployment and a crisis in capital accumulation.

Further, the kind of work conducted by the CCC had entirely different purposes in public policy than the kind of national services projects conducted today. They may be united today by the rhetoric of civic purpose, but the explicit mandate of the CCC was not to provide the services
of care to those in need or to cultivate the democratic spirit. Rather, its purpose was to transform
the material deprivation of the masses. Yes, one of these purposes was for the national
enjoyment and it was work of national importance, but the importance was identified as
economic crisis, not civic virtue. Further, the purpose of the work was also for the creation of
wealth, both public and private.

During the early 1920s and in the 1930s the Capitol Forest area [Washington
state]…was completely devastated by intensive private logging practices. The
land was abandoned as being of no further value to its owners and was taken over
by the state. During 1934-1939, 90,000 acres of this land was reforested by the
CCC at an approximate cost of $270,000. In 1960 commercial thinning began and
the first returns on this investment began to be realized. Today [1981] the acreage
is being harvested with the timber value placed conservatively as $7,000 per acre
or $630,000,000” (Human Environment Center, 1981 as cited by Eberly &

The use of low-wage, publicly subsidized labor to create the conditions for the private
accumulation of wealth is generally glossed over in national service renditions of the history of
the Civilian Conservation Corps. In this regard, the CCC does bare a striking resemblance to the
outcomes of the privatized social welfare system currently supported by AmeriCorps members
(Fraser, 1997). The similarities, however, do not end there. Significantly, both the CCC and the
current AmeriCorps program have, at their foundation, the mission to mitigate the effects of
poverty on citizens.

*The Civilian Public Service*

The CCC came to an end when the United States entered the Second World War. In the
various histories of national service, one example is rarely examined, including by CNCS,
although Moskos (1988) is an exception. It is unclear if this omission is due to the historical
blinder of a ‘peacetime’ versus ‘wartime’ notion of service or because this wartime example is a
less than happy example of an otherwise positive advancement of the project of civilian national
service. In 1940, Congress passed the Selective Service and Training Act, which established the provision and regulation for the national draft. After a long period of lobbying by the historical peace churches (Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren), the legislation also included provisions for the drafting of conscientious objectors. Previously, conscientious objectors had been either imprisoned or, in the early years of the republic, summarily executed by the military (Dyck, 1997). The provision made by the legislation was that those who objected to all forms of military participation on religious grounds, as opposed to those who were willing to serve in noncombatant positions, were to be assigned to a task of “national importance under civilian direction” (Waite, 1944 p. 22). There was no further direction given by the legislation save that this work of national importance would take place under the discretion of the President (Eller, 1991). This provision led to the establishment of the Civilian Public Service (CPS), a series of work camps similar to the CCC in which conscientious objectors labored during the course of World War II. The camps were organized through a tenuous partnership between the Selective Service Administration and the National Service Board of Religious Objectors (NSBRO). The CPS began with around 12,000 members serving in areas such as natural resource management, soil conversation, and in areas of production depleted by wartime mobilization, such as agriculture.

The CPS camps were highly controversial. While in some instances there are definite examples of conscientious objectors turning lemons into lemonade by organizing learning communities within the camps (Kovac, 2009), the overwhelming sense from narrative histories of the camps is that the conditions were hostile and inhumane. Whereas the federal government is often described as going to great length to provide for the members of the CCC, members of the CPS had to provide for their own welfare in the camps. The conditions in the camp were
deprived and the families of the conscientious objectors suffered the loss of income. When activist Bayard Rustin visited the camps on behalf of peace movement organizations, he found starving men wearing ragged clothing and sleeping in elemental conditions (D’Emilio, 2003). They complained that the work they were assigned to do was meaningless and of little or no importance to the communities they served. They were derided by local residents and treated with open hostility and violence by the military members that supervised them. The churches had been promised that objectors would be put to work, doing meaningful development in primarily poor communities; in reality, they did work more akin to prison labor. Condition were so bad and the work so meaningless that many participants in the CPS began to protest and strike. Rustin himself chose incarceration over the CPS. There are documented cases of work stoppages and slow downs in the CPS programs as well as ridicule and religious discrimination. The conditions were so hostile that the CPS has been described as an attempt to suppress a dissident minority (Eller, 1991).

The establishment of the CPS expands on another set of questions, raised in the previous section, regarding the significance of the surplus value created by the labor power of national service volunteers. One of the primary issues in the negotiations between the federal government and the peace churches was whether or not the service of conscientious objectors would be ‘unpaid.’ The peace churches maintained that those COs wanting to demonstrate their commitment to humanity would voluntarily refuse wages and certainly, in the end, some COs did. However, the administrators at the Selective Service Administration took the opportunity to make the case for the reduction of costs associated with the camps. In addition to providing for their own welfare, the COs would only be provided with minimal levels of support with no provisions for worker’s compensation for injury, medical insurance, or pay for dependents. In the
end, the federal government paid approximately $3.5 million for 8 million days of work (around 64 million hours) from COs over the duration of the war (Eller, 1991). Their estimated cost savings in sustaining the workers was around $14 million. In addition to these savings, the federal government seized $1.2 million in wages from COs who were contracted out to private industry. This so-called ‘frozen fund’ never materialized in compensation to volunteers.

What is of significance in the history of CPS in the development of national service is its exclusion from the sanctioned history of the federal government’s support of national service. The CNCS it from its historical timeline of the development of national service (CNCS, 2009b) at the same time that it articulates the CCC in the language of service and separates out the Work Project Administration for its merely economic purposes. This is curious given that the CPS was actually understood to be ‘service’ to the nation in the traditional sense as an alternative to military service. Its participants, however, were regarded as dilettantes to the establishment who were violating their secular civic virtues in the name of weak-willed religious values. The appeal for provisions for conscientious objectors, besides incarceration, appears to be regarded not as support for ‘the nation,’ but on grounds of religion, humanism, and pacifism (Goosen, 1997). Thus these ‘volunteers’ were, in James’ notion, pacifists, but not sufficiently ‘disciplined’ in civic or martial virtues. In this context, the actual content of the work appears to matter less than the reason for doing it, thus placing the actual service in contradiction with its discursive premise.

**The Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)**

Following the Second World War, the US embarked on a program of international development. Its most significant program was the Marshall Plan for Europe, but they also ventured out into the ‘developing world’ through Truman’s Point Four Program for
modernization. The ‘modernization’ programs were subjected to international criticism and local resistance, primarily due to the arrogance of development workers (Lederer & Burdick, 1999). Soon, it became obvious to members of the Democratic Party that restoring the United States’ image abroad was of the utmost importance. John F. Kennedy proposed the Peace Corps as an opportunity to advance United States’ interests, do good works, and promote a benevolent image of development objectives. The Peace Corps became the first official federal civilian service program, although initially it was not thought of as national service and was never equated with military service. International service was increasingly popular amongst privileged Americans and Europeans during the 1950s and 60s. The United Nations went so far as to assist in the formation of the International Secretariat for Volunteer Service. Donald Eberly, an influential policy advocate on the development of civil society and future White House staffer during George W. Bush’s administration, founded a similar organization, the National Service Secretariat, in the United States in 1959. Its mission was to promote an agenda of civilian national service and Eberly soon got his chance for a first attempt.

Beginning early in his administration, Kennedy turned his attention to the stark material divides in United States society. This ‘war on poverty,’ which was continued after his death, was primarily formulated in the work of the War on Poverty Task Force and resulted in the Economic Opportunities Act of 1964. The legislation provided for massive infusions of federal dollars into poor communities and the establishment of a wide network of social service programs including Heart Start, Job Corps, the Legal Service Program, and the Office of Economic Opportunity. The 1964 legislation authorized the organization of Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA).

Around the same time as Kennedy established the War on Poverty Task Force, he also commissioned the President’s Task Force on a National Service Program, the first executive
level inquiry into the philosophy and feasibility of civilian national service. Interestingly, the energy behind the task force, and as a result many of its members, came from the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime in the Department of Justice, under the leadership of Robert F. Kennedy (Clark, 2002). The task force did not initially associate national service with the anti-poverty agenda of Kennedy or with anti-poverty work per se. The discussions included the value of national service in the care of the ‘mentally retarded’ and ‘mentally unfit’ residing in public mental hospitals (Gillette, 1996). The program was initially proposed at the same time as a youth employment bill and Kennedy was concerned that the two would be confused. He warned Congress that the youth employment bill was for youth in need of help while the service corps was for those who could be of help (Bass, 2003). The legislation failed and, for reasons of politically expediency, the proposal for civilian national service was added to Title VI: Administration and Coordination of the Economic Opportunity Act. Here the legacy of national service became institutionally fused to government efforts to address the proliferation of poverty. Further, this precursor to VISTA is significant for its initial indication that the government made a qualitative differentiation between the recipient and the provider of service, those who ‘served’ and ‘were served’.

The model of the Peace Corps provided the initial schematics for VISTA. However, the nature of its inclusion in ‘the war on poverty’ soon changed the character of the volunteer organization. The volunteer pool was largely young, although later on they recruited already trained doctors and lawyers, but participants were assigned to various community development programs for a period of one year and received a stipend of $50 a month. Volunteers were still recruited largely from university campuses, so much so that 95% of VISTA volunteers were white, middle class, college educated youth by the late 1960s (Clark, 2002). However, the nature
of their service necessitated that their training periods be condensed and decentralized to local communities. Thus, many non-profits agencies and community organizations, such as the YMCA and Hull House in Chicago, took over the training and supervision of the volunteers. They were also placed in other EOA offices, such as community action agencies and Job Corps. In Gillette’s (1996) oral history of the program, informants reported that it was a struggle in the early years to maintain the VISTA program as civilian national service apart from the war on poverty and to keep its association separate from ‘the poverty syndrome.’ VISTA was mandated to ‘help people help themselves’ and its members were sent out to the poorest rural, urban, and reservation communities to work with the elderly, the unemployed, youth, migrant workers, and the disabled. There was local opposition to the program, with both participants and administrators admitting that ‘poor communities,’ euphemistic for communities of color, took issue with primarily white volunteers coming into the communities to ‘help’ (Crook & Thomas, 1969).

VISTAs close association with the war on poverty lasted from its inception until Richard Nixon removed it from the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1971 and consolidated it with the Peace Corps, Foster Grandparents, and Senior Volunteers programs in the newly established ACTION agency. During these eight years of operation, VISTA maintained a controversial stance vis-à-vis the professed political neutrality of the ACTION Agency. In their work ‘helping people help themselves,’ many VISTAs ran into the reality of structural and institutionalized inequality in the United States. Solving the problems of poverty inevitably converged with the need for sustained political struggle for institutional transformation. VISTAs came under attack as agitators, advocates for leftist social policy, and agents of the Democratic Party. This conflict eventually came to a head in allegations of partisan activity with public funds, resulting in the political energy for Nixon’s consolidation efforts under the banner of ‘new federalism.’
Re-Organization and Re-Visioning

The 1970s and 80s were hard years for advocates of civilian national service. While the creation of the ACTION agency appeared as support for civilian national service, in fact Nixon was trying several political machinations to eliminate federal support for volunteerism, specifically the VISTA program. In consolidating the programs, administrators were able to re-allocate funding from one program to another (Strickler, 1994 as cited by Bass, 2003), with an emphasis on bolstering direct service projects and down playing any emphasis on community organizing. Only a VISTA alumni organization and a few key allies were able to thwart Nixon’s many attempts to defund the program. Jimmy Carter attempted to expand civilian national service by creating a new Youth Adult Conservation Corp. However, the program did not make it passed Reagan’s early years in office. Reagan’s administration further re-directed service programs to direct service projects, narrowly focused on some of the most outward manifestations and conservative targets of ongoing poverty, including literacy, job skills, unemployed youth, and ‘welfare moms.’

Reagan, however, was not completely obstructive to supporting government efforts to increase volunteerism; he just had a completely different vision of the government’s involvement. Reagan set about applying his domestic fiscal policy to volunteerism. Reagan is famous for his ‘trickle down’ economic theory; if tax cuts are provided to the rich, the benefits will trickle down to those at the bottom. Reagan also believed that if he cut federal funding to social programs it would stimulate volunteerism and innovation in the non-profit sector.

The idea was that voluntarism would expand because people would make more donations, current donors would become more generous, more people would begin to volunteer, and current volunteers would devote more time to unpaid work (Chambre, 1989 p. 256).
Chambre argued that Reagan could not have been more wrong. Volunteerism did not increase; the few volunteers there were simply worked harder and burned out. Reagen’s successor, George H.W. Bush, took a completely different direction.

The social conditions of the 1980s made it increasingly difficult for policy makers to turn a blind eye to the increasing levels of inequality in United States society. The deindustrialization of the economic infrastructure of the country resulted in huge waves of working class and low-income unemployment (Bluestone & Harrison, 1984). In this context, several important academic texts began to emerge that linked the human toil of social deprivation to a new kind of citizen engagement. Part of the larger academic movement on communitarianism, authors such as Bellah (1985), Barber (1984), and, later, Putnam (1995) gained massive popular support for their argument that the rampant individualism of Reagan has resulted in destabilized communities, whose social problems could only be addressed through the reinvestment of citizen activity. Communitarian theory, the notion of civic obligation, and the pragmatism of William James were brought together in Janowitz’s (1983) substantial argument for civilian national service. Janowitz argued that civic consciousness, a sense of shared responsibility for shared institutions, was at the heart of democracy and patriotism. He concluded that this kind of consciousness could not be promoted without a system of national service. The energy behind communitarian visions of citizenship was also exciting to policy makers. President George H.W. Bush because the first Republican president to support the agenda of national service by forming the Commission for National and Community Service, with a mission to promote volunteerism and explore national service possibilities. Bush also founded the Points of Light Foundation, which today remains one of the most important bodies in the promotion of volunteerism. Janowitz’s argument, coupled with case made by Moskos (1988), was effective in getting the
attention of policy makers. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were at least seven different proposals for civilian national service from members of Congress (Eberly & Sherraden, 1990).

The Beginning of AmeriCorps

In 1993 the CNCS was established through the National and Community Service Trust Act and charged with “the responsibility of mobilizing Americans into service” (CNCS, 2009b). When the establishment of the CNCS is depicted as the advent of a new age of state legitimacy for the moral project of civilian national service, it leaves the particular context for the organization of the agency in the shadows. It also obscures the nature of some of the debates surrounding the establishment of the program and its large federal endowment.

Almost immediately upon taking office, Bill Clinton and Al Gore began an assessment of the scope and efficiency of government, which was highly influenced by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler’s (1992) text Reinventing Government. Osborne and Gaebler argued that government had to change, and to some extent already had, in response to the encroaching global economy, citizen dissatisfaction, and new information technologies. It is significant that the full title of Osborne and Gaebler’s book is Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the public Sector. ‘The Gore Report (1993),’ as the assessment is commonly referred to, advocates the implementation of an entrepreneurial management paradigm for government and is based, according to Moe (1994), on four non-negotiable premises. First, the public sector will respond to similar incentive and management processes as the private sector. Second, federal agencies should be treated as entrepreneurial bodies that function in a competitive market place. Third, the size of government is the number of its employees; to reduce government is to eliminate jobs. And fourth, budget priorities should determine management. These premises resulted in the Gore report’s four principles for government:
results before rules, customer satisfaction, decentralize authority, and work better, cost less. These were the principles given to federal agencies in 1993 when Clinton declared that the new Corporation for National and Community Service would be the model of his plan to ‘reinvent’ government (Waldeman, 1995).

Bill Clinton did not need to be convinced of the value of community service, although he was convinced of the value of nationalizing it by Charles Moskos. Clinton had his own personal history of service and religious faith that proved to him the personal benefits to those who served (Waldeman, 1995). The history of national service, as presented by Moskos, convinced him of the value of civilian national service to those who were served as well. Unlike Kennedy, who only committed to the Peace Corps days before the election, Clinton and the New Democrats had not only national service, but higher education funding at the center of their policy outreach to young voters. Clinton’s idea was to link community service to a new kind of pay-as-you-go federal loan system that would, in theory, increase access to higher education. He proposed to merge the ACTION agency with the Commission on National and Community Service and create the Corporation for National and Community Service, which would administer all existing domestic volunteer programs and the new AmeriCorps program.

The proposal caused great consternation amongst multiple political voices both before and after the final passage of the legislation. In the end Clinton had to give up his revamped education loan program, but he won the expanded institutionalization of civilian national service with, for the first time, an education grant for completion of service. The objections to the program came from all sides. The initial proposal for a pay-as-you-go loan program was far too progressive for Republican members of congress who felt that it unfairly transferred the burden of education costs to those who could afford their education. More contestable was the notion of
national service. For really the first time, Congress engaged in a substantive debate about non-
military forms of national service. There were concerns that linking service to education funding
would force lower income students to serve, while wealthier students would not have to. There
were concerns that the federal government was moving towards making service compulsory,
strongly objectionable to libertarian members. Some objected to the notion that the federal
government should support what was essentially an individual act of moral choice. Nixon and
Reagan had made the same argument; if the government compels you to volunteer, thus
removing altruism, then it is not really volunteerism. Further, others thought that the offering of
subsistence stipends also defeated the purpose of ‘service’ and ‘volunteering.’ There were
centers that a flood of untrained labor and federal paperwork would undermine the
effectiveness of non-profit programs. The specter of VISTA reared its head and drove arguments
about national service disguised as liberal activism. The Democratic Leadership Conference
anticipated many of these arguments and was prepared to back them down, having gone so far as
to contribute to a book encapsulating these debates and paying lip service to the opposition
(Evers, 1990). Some of these arguments proved strong enough to dismantle some aspects of the
program; there would be no loans, no mandatory service (which was never a proposal in the first
place), and absolutely no partisan political activity.

The new AmeriCorps members went forth into a country that was desperate for help. On
the surface, things looked pretty good in the 1990s. The economy appeared to be growing, but at
the bottom poverty was getting more brutal. Wages were shrinking for the lowest paid members
of society, social programs were eroded, safety nets gone, particularly with the passage of the
Welfare Reform Act of 1996, formally titled The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity
Reconciliation Act, which essentially eliminated any notion of social entitlement through the
elimination of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the establishment of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (Sklar, 1995). Homelessness began to increase, but this time, according to service workers, it was families on the streets, crashing on couches, and living in hotels (Burt, 1999). The economic policies begun by the Republicans and pursued by Clinton, particularly North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), forced more and more people to free trade zones in the Americas and then north into the United States to look for work. There was plenty of need for the humanitarian assistance and social services provided by AmeriCorps workers. The reinvented United States government was now focused on customer service and, in accordance with Al Gore’s reinvented government, in working harder and costing less.

National Service Post-9/11

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, then-President George W. Bush issued a historic call for citizens to respond to the tragedy in three ways: first, join the military; second, go shopping; and third, do volunteer work. Bush’s response to the attack with an endorsement of civilian national service is considered historic by national service advocates, in the sense that for the first time in US history a civilian national service program was not only supported, but expanded, by a president that was not responsible for its creation (Bass, 2003). Bush asked Congress to expand the AmeriCorps program by 50% and he created two corresponding civilian national service initiatives within the executive branch: the USA Freedom Corps and the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation. The President’s council offers recognition to volunteers through a series of service awards. The Freedom Corps was a collection of various initiatives that the Bush administration wished to see supported, developed,
or expanded. The goal was to “foster a culture of service, citizenship, and responsibility in 
America” (White House Archives, 2009).

The Freedom Corps served as a coordinating body of many public and private sector 
agencies that promote civilian national service. The Freedom Corps was located within the White 
House and operated a number of programs including the active recruitment of members to 
national service programs, the volunteer network toll-free number to help volunteers find 
placements, the volunteer service awards, the greeter program, the re-organized Take Pride in 
America program, and the USA Freedom Corps Kids website. In addition to these programs, the 
Freedom Corps also coordinated significant programs such as the American History, Civics, and 
Service program, which supported teachers to teach ‘traditional’ American history and the legacy 
of service and democracy in the United States, and the Volunteers for Prosperity program, which 
recruited highly skilled Americans to volunteer oversees in support of US global health and 
prosperity projects (White House Archives, 2009). The USA Freedom Corps worked to engage 
the non-profit and voluntary sector in key areas of need, including youth, baby boomers, 
hurricane response and recovery, mentoring, supporting military families, tsunami relief and 
recovery, and international volunteering. In the first decade of the 21st century, during which the 
United States engaged in two unpopular wars of occupation and suffered through substantial 
natural and human-made disasters, volunteerism increased exponentially.

In the opinion of many election night commentators, Obama’s election was made 
possible through a massive grassroots mobilization of the electorate on the margins, particularly 
youth and people of color. The inauguration festivities were strongly directed at youth, including 
a popular music concert and the Martin Luther King Day kick-off of Obama’s campaign to 
emphasize community service, which he had previously named as a “cause of my presidency”
(Obama, 2007). Obama has proved committed to promoting community service across the country, through both individual acts, mobilization in the non-profit sector, and federally supported programs. Obama included appropriations for AmeriCorps and VISTA in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, better known as the ‘Stimulus Plan.’ The stimulus plan included an additional 13,000 AmeriCorps jobs. Obama has so strongly emphasized community service in the first year of his presidency that his efforts at mobilizing Americans to “be the change” seems to have turned into “be a volunteer,” and appears to have weakened the political ethos of his base (Zeleny, 2009).

Obama’s election also coincided with the failing health of Senator Edward Kennedy. The Senator’s fragility and legacy was the emotional linchpin needed for the Obama administration to pass an extensive re-authorization and expansion of the Corporation for National and Community Service and, for the first time, for Congress to approve the president’s proposed national service appropriation in full ($1.149 billion). In Obama’s own words, the legislation was successful by “putting partnership over partisanship” (Obama, 2009). In the first half of 2009, the notion of civilian national service began to build as a full-fledge movement, at first organized around the passing of the legislation by national lobbying organizations such as Service Nation, and then continuing with Obama’s campaign for a summer of community service, titled United We Serve, and ending on September 11th, which Obama termed a national day of service and remembrance. The Edward Kennedy Serve American Act not only expands the AmeriCorps program, but also provides new streams of support to the non-profit sector in general, particularly for the recruitment and management of volunteers. The newest endeavor is the Social Innovation Fund, which Obama visualizes as a massive public and private investment in the innovation of the non-profit sector. The resources accumulated through the Social Innovation
Fund will target and proliferate “ideas that work” (Obama, 2007). For Obama, the driving force of service is its role in the “the spirit of progress” (Obama, 2007).

Institutionalization and Bureaucratization of National Service

It would be generous to characterize ‘official’ depictions of civilian national service as ‘selective.’ It would be more accurate to characterize them as ideological and polemical. Clearly, historical episodes such as James’ essay, the CCC, and the CPS are re-interpreted to fit the contemporary argument for investment in federal volunteer service programs. However, the discursive depiction of the history of civilian national service is relevant to this research in so far as it brings to the surface a set of contradictions that the idea of national service has been unable to escape. For example, what happens to the value of labor done in the service of the nation in the context of capitalist accumulation? What does the ‘good citizenship’ of national service have to do with periods of crisis such as war and economic depression? What is the nature of the relation between civic virtue, national service, and capitalist social relations, whether that labor is done with the purpose of ‘taming nature’ or ‘alleviating poverty’? This history also provides for us a clearer sense of the conditions under which the CNCS emerged as an institution empowered to mobilize Americans, particularly young Americans, in the service of specific policy goals.

In the 17 years since AmeriCorps was incorporated, the program has grown tremendously. It has increased from around 30,000 participants in its first year to 75,000 in 2009 and, with the reauthorization of the program through the 2009 Edward Kennedy Serve America Act, is projected to grow to an estimated 225,000 members annually within a decade. Such a large undertaking requires a vast organizational infrastructure at both the federal and state level. Thus, the AmeriCorps program is embedded in a complicated institutional arrangement of
agencies, legislation, funding streams, and federal regulations. In the next section of this chapter I will describe and explain the current institutional organization of the AmeriCorps program and the CNCS, also known as ‘the corporation,’ in order to prepare the reader to understand how these institutional mechanisms play out in the daily practice of AmeriCorps programs and why the proposed method for this research, institutional ethnography, is warranted.

The Corporation for National and Community Service

The CNCS is often described as an independent federal agency situated between the legislative and executive branches of the federal government. The agency is authorized and its appropriations made through acts of Congress, however the President appoints its chief executive officer and board of directors and the Senate confirms these individuals. In this way it is differentiated from other departments within the executive branch, such as the Department of Justice or State, in that its operations are largely internal and independent of the executive branch of the government. It is not a ‘ministry’ and does not hold any sort of advisory capacity to the president within a constitutional area of governance. The CNCS itself is a large organization with more than 600 employees, whose primary mission is to “to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering” (CNCS, 2009c). Appendix B demonstrates the organizational hierarchy of the CNCS (CNCS, 2010a). On the left side of the figure, we can see that the corporation is responsible for its own management and regulation, including staff that lobby Congress for its appropriations, provide organizational oversight, and maintain compliance with federal regulations regarding not just the distribution of resources through the CNCS, but the internal practices of the organization as well, notably the administration of the National Service Trust. The National Service Trust is the endowment of
funds held in reserve to pay deferred loan interest and education awards for AmeriCorps members.

The CNCS operates three major programs: AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America. AmeriCorps is further divided into three sub-programs: AmeriCorps State & National, AmeriCorps NCCC, and AmeriCorps VISTA. The programmatic wing of the CNCS also oversees offices of technical assistance to the grants programs, regulatory bodies, and special programs offices such as the faith-based initiative and special programs for tribal and reservation communities. In addition to the program offices located within the CNCS in Washington, DC, the CNCS also oversees 47 field offices that represent the corporation through all states and territories of the United States. The primary purpose of these field offices is to provide public outreach to support the mission of the corporation and to oversees the administration and programmatic aspects of both the VISTA and Senior Corps programs in their designated states and territories. These state field offices are not to be confused with the state commissions, whose primary work is overseeing AmeriCorps State grants. Figure 1 below maps these institutional relations at federal, state, and local levels.
What exactly does it mean to be an independent federal agency? The CNCS is an increasingly common, although still unusual, entity within the federal government known as a FGC or a Federal Government Corporation. Although there are quite a few FGCs, they are not well known by the general public and infrequently discussed. However, several have become prominent during the current fiscal crisis, such as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae). Although FGCs began after the Second World War, the last great push came in 1993 from then Vice-President Al Gore, who is his *Reinventing Government* program proposed proliferating FGCs as a way to manage the size and efficiency of government (Gore, 1993). A FGC is essentially an entity that is both publically and privately held. In reality there are mixes of FGCs, from some that are wholly state owned and operated to those that are nearly completely privately held. They are neither privatized nor completely public and are supposed to combine the ethic and practice of private business with the public purpose of government (Froomkiin, 1995). While for politicians such as
the New Democrats, the federal government corporation is an entity to increase efficiency in
government, to legal scholars such as Froomkilin they are largely a maneuver to circumvent
constitutional limits, particularly by placing large sums of federal dollars beyond the reach of
public accountability.

On a continuum of the ratio of public-to-private control of FGCS, the CNCS appears to be
located on the public side of the scale. The extent to which its status as a corporation affects its
operations is also unclear. The most significant factor seems to be its ability to raise private
funds to supplement its programs and services. The CNCS maintains “corporate collaborations”
with the Best Buy Children’s Foundation, the Home Depot Foundation, the UPS Foundation, and
General Electric Fund (CNCS, 2009d). Further, Northrup Grumman (a global security firm) and
the Target Corporation contribute members to the CNCS board of directors. The rest of the board
of directors is composes of a mix of former public servants, high profile members of the non-
profit and philanthropic community, and government affairs specialists from both private law
firms and media.

Most of the corporate collaborations of the CNCS focus on strategic initiatives, research,
or special projects. The CNCS’ overall operations budget is publically funded. The growth of the
CNCS budget from its first year in 1994 to its current appropriation for fiscal year 2010 is
described below, with the caveat that the sizeable increase between 2009 and 2010 is inflated by
the extra $200 million added to the CNCS budget through the 2009 American Recovery and
Reinvestment Act.
The chart above indicates that, with a few exceptions, support for the CNCS and national service programs has steadily increased since its inception, despite Congressional battles to eliminate the program. This is an important observation for those who reduce the debate over national service to a simple matter of which political party controls the executive or legislative branches of the government. While many republicans have objected to the federal government funding, we can see in an examination of the budget that both Democrat and Republican presidents have supported the program not only in rhetoric, but also through the steady increase of the endowment of the program. In fact the largest budgetary increase in the history of the CNCS (2003-2004), prior to its unprecedented expansion in 2009, occurred during the administration of an aggressively conservative president. From this funding trend, we can infer several possibilities. First, that national service has achieved the political cache and popular support to
transcend political boundaries between the Democratic and Republican parties. Second, the Democratic and Republican parties have different, though equally strong, reasons to support national service. Third, national service represents an agenda that both parties can support. It is for this reason that it is helpful to consider bipartisan support of national service within the context of changing notions of citizenship and the political economy of social programs.

The CNCS functions under the federal mandate described in the National and Community Service Act of 1990. The mandate established in the 1990 legislation is to organize national service opportunities as a means of: 1) meeting unmet public problems, 2) providing access to higher education, 3) establishing experiences of commonality that transcend social divisions with the United States public, 4) renewing the civic engagement of United States citizens, and 5) eliminating duplication and waste in the provision of social programs. In order to meet this mandate, the board of directors of CNCS devised a series of guiding principles that dictate the work of the organization. These guiding principles are (Goldsmith & Eisner, 2006 p. 7):

- Put the needs of local communities first.
- Strengthen the public-private partnerships that underpin all of our programs.
- Use our programs to build stronger, more efficient, and more sustainable community networks capable of mobilizing volunteers to address local needs, including disaster preparedness and response.
- Measure and continually improve our programs' benefits to service beneficiaries, participants, community organizations, and our national culture of service.
- Build collaborations wherever possible across our programs and with other Federal programs.
- Help rural and economically distressed communities obtain access to public and private resources.
- Support diverse organizations, including faith-based and other community organizations, minority colleges, and disability organizations.
- Use service-learning principles to put volunteer and service activities into an appropriate context that stimulates life-long civic engagement.
- Support continued civic engagement, leadership, and public service careers for our programs' participants and community volunteers.
- Exhibit excellence in management and customer service.
From these principles we can see that the CNCS leadership envision the organization to have a specific place within a larger movement of volunteerism and citizenship. First, the CNCS does not imagine itself to be a service provider. On the contrary, the organization has a strong character of advancing initiatives already in play in local communities. In this way it presents itself not as a leader or director, but as an organization of technical assistance and support. Second, the organization advances an inferred notion of justice, one in which diversity is embraced, local communities are delegated responsibility and ‘control,’ and marginalized communities and populations are provided with opportunities to advance. Third, the organization enacts a particular arrangement of state, citizen, and market in order to advance this vision of justice. They see volunteer service, private-public partnerships, and local networks of community support as the ideal mechanisms to achieve their desired goals. Finally, all of these ideals can be realized within an environment in which performance accountability, and thus fiscal accountability, is strongly adhered to and in which its relationship to the United States public is characterized as ‘customer service.’ This last point is one of the explicit organizing factors of the corporation, which was established as an FGC in part to symbolize Clinton and Gore’s plans for the reinvention of government. Early administrators of the corporation took the mandate to reorganize how federal programs work very seriously and the corporation continues to organize itself around the principles of efficiency proposed in the Gore Reports: catalytic rather than bureaucratic, competitive, decentralized, and results-oriented (Lenkowsky & Perry, 2000).

The CNCS seeks to achieve these goals through the provision of three national service programs. The Senior Corps program offers volunteer opportunities to individuals over the age of 55 through three primary programs: Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP. The first two of these programs are self-explanatory. RSVP provides a volunteer experience with no
long-term commitment and flexible schedules. Learn and Serve America is less of a direct volunteer program and more of a network of resources that provides support, technical assistance, resources, and recognition to schools, universities, and community organizations that promote service-learning and engage in best practices. The focus of this study is AmeriCorps, which is the largest of CNCS programs, and encompasses three substantial sub-programs. In addition to the standard programs of AmeriCorps, in 2009 the CNCS was operating two area specific AmeriCorps projects focused on disaster relief in the Gulf Coast region and Iowa flood plains⁴.

The oldest national service model, based on natural conservation, is still active today through AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps, referred to as AmeriCorps N Triple C. The NCCC functions on a similar model to the historical Civilian Conservation Corp by organizing young adults, age 18-24, into team-based units. Members both live and work with their unit in one of five service campuses in California, Colorado, Maryland, Mississippi, or Iowa. From these residential camps they are sent out to do regional projects, typically in eight-week increments, ranging from conservation work to disaster relief to construction. As opposed to the other two AmeriCorps programs, NCCC members receive a smaller stipend, but their room, board, and travel coasts are included in the programs. Local non-profit organizations apply to the federal government to receive an NCCC team for short-term intensive work projects. One research participant described the NCCC as having the most ‘atmospheric’ presence in the AmeriCorps program, meaning that NCCC members tend to function in very tight, cohesive units. Another research participant who had participated in NCCC previous to her AmeriCorps state year of service described NCCC as “living in a bubble.” NCCC does market themselves to

---

⁴ At the time of this research (January 2009-July 2010), it was unclear what the long-term implications of the 2009 Edward Kennedy Serve American Act would be in terms of the reorganization of the AmeriCorps State program.
potential participants with the argument that “AmeriCorps NCCC is built on the belief that civic responsibility is an inherent duty of all citizens” (AmeriCorps, 2009a). Direct parallels are drawn to both the historic tradition of the CCC and military service. Those within the AmeriCorps community often describe NCCC as a highly organized and disciplined experience for young adults in need of structure.

VISTA, the oldest national volunteer service program, also remains active in AmeriCorps today. Members of VISTA are assigned to work at a non-profit organization and often function very independent of the AmeriCorps community. They often work without another AmeriCorps member at the same site and are only brought together through events organized by the state commission or an umbrella organization sponsoring their site placement. The VISTA program organizes its work around four core principles: 1) an anti-poverty focus, 2) community empowerment, 3) capacity building, and 4) sustainable solutions. (AmeriCorps, 2009b). The most important factor that differentiates the work of VISTAs from other AmeriCorps members is that VISTA members are supposed to work exclusively on capacity building projects for community organizations. This means they participate in no-direct service activities and focus most of their energy on work such as volunteer mobilization, fundraising, program development, and outreach. VISTA is also a ‘full-time’ program, meaning that members do not chart their work hours in the same way. This raises some complications in terms of the regulation of the program, particularly in the notion of being ‘on the clock’ and thus, the application of the Hatch Act. This will be examined further in a discussion of the AmeriCorps regulations.

The final set of programs under the AmeriCorps rubric are the State and National programs. AmeriCorps State and National, who are most often referred to as AmeriCorps (as opposed to VISTAs or NCCCs), both work in non-profit and public sector organizations doing
direct service. Until recently, the mandate of AmeriCorps State and National was to exclusively conduct direct-service provision, however since 2005 the AmeriCorps regulations have been augmented to allow these members to do limited capacity building for their host organization, explicitly in the form of volunteer mobilization. AmeriCorps State and National essentially operate in similar fashions with the caveat that the National program is composed of national organizations, tribal communities, and interstate consortia programs. The State program is overwhelmingly the largest portion of AmeriCorps participants, and the CNCS budget as a whole, and is also the focus of this research project. In what follows I will provide a detailed explanation of the organization and regulation of the AmeriCorps State program.

The Organization of the AmeriCorps State Program

Underneath all of this bureaucracy, the daily practice of the corporation is to function very much as a grant-making organization. It is possible that those at the top of the corporation see their role as quite different, however to the local AmeriCorps participants in this study, the corporation was engaged solely as the organization that pulls the strings of the AmeriCorps program. Much of the organization of the AmeriCorps program is arranged to facilitate the grant-making process, including not only applying for and distributing funds, but particularly, maintaining accountability measures and measuring program outcomes. The best way to explain this organization is to imagine a hypothetical community’s decision to enter into the AmeriCorps program.

Let us pretend that a neighborhood in a major United States city has a particular problem with home-bound seniors citizens. Members of the community are increasingly concerned that these individuals are isolated and marginalized from public life; health care providers see
evidence of this isolation in the emotional and physical health of senior citizens living in the community. Local non-profit leaders decide that what is required is senior companionship; a program that can provide both basic assistance to senior citizens in their homes, deliver meals, provide transportation, and organize public activities for seniors. Several local community centers have physical space to organize such a program and other in-kind resources such as vehicles. However, neither the city nor the non-profit organizations in the area have the resources to staff such a program; the human resources of social service delivery being the most expensive element of the equation. The staff at the mayor’s office suggests to the non-profit community that they consider participating in the AmeriCorps program. Their first step would be to contact their state commission office. This office may be an independent 501c3 organization or it may be located within a state-level office, most often in the governor’s office.

Local non-profit administrators meet with officers from the state commission and learn that they must apply to the federal government for an AmeriCorps grant and have two options for how they will organize their program. The first option is to operate an AmeriCorps program entirely within one organization. That organization will then be responsible for all fiscal and programmatic aspects of the grant, including the job assignments and supervision of the AmeriCorps members. The second option is to operate in a coalition. One organization will serve as the fiscal agent and administrative home of the program. The AmeriCorps members will be assigned to various organizations and those individual organizations will be responsible for the work assignments and supervision of the individual members. However, the coalition as a whole will be responsible for supporting the member services, including trainings and reporting of outcomes.

5 501c3 designates a particular type of tax-exempt, or ‘non-profit,’ organization in the United States. 501c3 organizations will be discussed in detail in Chapter five.
In this first meeting the non-profit administrators in our hypothetical city have learned a few key facts about the organization of AmeriCorps. Although AmeriCorps is a federal program, each state operates a state commission, who is itself a sub-grantee of the CNCS, and whose mandate is to assist local organizations with obtaining federal support for an AmeriCorps program and to ensure that these funds are responsibly used. This means that each organization is essentially entering into a contractual relationship with the federal government, however that relationship is mediated and regulated through a regional organization. Each organization is responsible for the management and distribution of their grant funds and has to meet all the program requirements both in the delivery of the program objectives and the accountability requirements for their funding. The state commission will monitor the accountability of the organization to these requirements and provide technical assistance. Each state commission will have a national program officer assigned to them to assist with technical questions, budgetary issues, or problems in regulation. In this way, AmeriCorps does not function as a singular, hierarchical organization similar to the military or to previous forms of national service such as the Civilian Conservation Corp. It is highly decentralized with several important protocols and practices that organize the AmeriCorps program trans-locally. The first of these protocols appear during the grant-making stage of program development.

The grant-making process

The first of these practices is the grant-making process. The non-profit leaders, who have decided to work as a coalition they call Senior Care, return to their organizations and begin the process of building an AmeriCorps program for their neighborhood. This AmeriCorps program at the community level will be called a ‘corp,’ specifically they will refer to their program as the
Senior Care Corp. Other AmeriCorps programs in the city, working on other community problems, are also referred to as ‘corps,’ but will be differentiated from one another by their corps names. For example, one member of the Senior Care coalition is aware that the homeless shelters in the city center also operate an AmeriCorps program, which they call the Food First Corp. The first step in the grant-making process is that, because Senior Care is a coalition, each non-profit organization that chooses to participate in the Senior Care Corp must designate a staff member who will be responsible for that organizations’ participation in the AmeriCorps program. That staff person will supervise the AmeriCorps members at their organization, which is now referred to as a ‘site,’ and will work in collaboration with the other coalition staff to provide trainings for the corps as a whole. One organization will be designated as the fiscal home of the Senior Care Corp. This organization will devote staff time to the organization and management of the AmeriCorps program. In our hypothetical case, the Community House neighborhood center steps forward as the host organization. From this point on, Community House will be responsible for submitting the grant, organizing the program, recruiting volunteers, managing the logistics of the program, ensuring that federal regulations are met, and state-identified program outcomes are measured.

All of these responsibilities are detailed in the grant-making process. In the early fall, the CNCS issues a Notice of Funds Available, otherwise known as a NOFA. The NOFA will be the first substantial text a local site will engage with as part of the larger federal CNCS complex. The NOFA document will contain the most basic outlines of the grant requirements. The most important of these will be the CNCS’ designation of its funding priorities for the coming year. The Senior Care Coalition, most likely with Community House in the lead, will develop the grant proposal, beginning with a logic model that: first, defines the community need; second,
lays out what kind of service the AmeriCorps members will perform; third, anticipates the expected outcomes of the service and thus, the rationale for the program; and fourth, details assessment and reporting mechanisms for evaluating outcomes. In order to craft these models, the Senior Care Coalition will have to look into some of the regulatory documents of AmeriCorps, including the Code of Federal Regulations and a document titled ‘the AmeriCorps Rule,’ known as ‘the rule,’ which will provide guidance as to what the substance of an AmeriCorps program can contain. The rule will also given them some sense of the distribution of time between direct service, volunteer management/recruitment, and training that the CNCS considers optimal.

Many state commissions will require that local organizations applying for competitive grants at the federal level submit their application at the state level prior to the federal deadline. This will give the commission time to provide feedback to the grant authors and also to identify grants that are too conceptually weak to compete at the federal level. These grants, which are often new programs in new areas of community need, can be redirected to the state commissions’ formula grants program, which are one-year grants awarded by the state commissions with the purpose of developing the capacity of the site to host an AmeriCorps program. In this way, programs that are not sophisticated enough to compete at the federal level may have some chance at obtaining the resources to develop their work further. Once a state commission forwards a grant to the federal competition level, it will enter a process of peer evaluation. The majority of the ‘peers’ evaluating these grants will be AmeriCorps program directors with experience running a local program.
Operating an AmeriCorps program site

The Senior Care Coalition, our hypothetical AmeriCorps program, is awarded a federal grant, which provides them with funding to operate their program for three years. Depending on the budget they have submitted, they will have to devote a certain proportion of in-kind contribution to the finances of the program and will likely make this contribution in the form of staff. This staff person will oversee the administration of the program and will be referred to as the AmeriCorps program director. However, this staff person’s salary will come primarily from the grant itself. Often their position will be contingent on continued funding at the federal level. This person will have a lot of work ahead of them. They will have to work with the coalition members to organize the sites of service for AmeriCorps members. They will have to develop job descriptions for these sites and advertise these positions. They will have to interview, hire, and train the members to work at their sites. Once the members begin working, the program director will have to organize a yearlong training program called ‘member development.’ This training program will consist of regular meetings (typically at least once a month) and which are often referred to as ‘corp days.’ This term will designate the days set aside from regular service schedules for the entire corps to come together for training and other activities. The content of ‘member development’ will be intricately linked to the performance measures outlined in the program grant.

The program director will have to gather data and ensure the corps progress towards meeting these performance measures and will periodically file accountability reports documenting this progress. They will also liaison with the state commission regarding site visits, accountability measures to ensure compliance with program regulations, work to meet state aligned performance measures, and participate in inter-corps activities such as state-wide
program director meetings and a state-wide conference during National AmeriCorps Week. They will also have to coordinate with other staff at the organization concerning fundraising for the program; they may have to take these duties on themselves. They will also have to serve as counselor, teacher, mentor, and boss to the diverse group of people serving in the corps. They will have to stay in constant communication with any external service sites and liaison with other staff members supervising their members. They will have to keep track of the completion of service hours and make sure that their members are on track to complete the 1700-hour commitment within one year. They will have to recruit, interview, and hire new members every year. The process of maintaining an AmeriCorps site is an unrelenting job, further complicated by the always-pressing demands of social problems and community needs.

Given this extensive institutional context, the research questions I have chosen to pursue are best investigated from an approach to research that allows for a dynamic and dialectical conceptualization of the relationship between individual experience and consciousness and larger institutionalized processes that shape and give meaning to everyday practice. Institutional ethnography is a feminist-materialist approach to research that accounts for such relationships and further pushes researchers to examine how particular ways of thinking that evolve in particular contexts constitute a larger apparatus of social relations and work to organize social forms of consciousnesses across local domains. In the following chapter I will explore the approach of institutional ethnography and detail its application in this research.
Chapter Four

Methodological Framework for Research

The research is a feminist historical materialist examination of the United States federal government’s attempt to organize a politics of citizenship through the civilian national service program AmeriCorps. As I discussed in chapter two, a Marxist-Feminist exploration of citizenship and learning requires an approach to research that pays special attention to ideology as both the circulation of particular ideas and the deployment or practice of those ideas in organizational settings. Methods exert tremendous, and sometimes hidden, force on the direction and scope of inquiry. Since I wish to examine not only the ways in which the state engages in a politics of citizenship, but also how the relations of learning citizenship are organized, I have chosen an approach that helps me to understand not just what the discourse of the state is, but how it actually exerts influence on everyday practice. Furthermore, because I have identified ideology, in both its epistemological and content orientations, as a deep seeded problem within citizenship education, I chose a method of inquiry that rejects idealist conceptions of social reality and steers me towards the actual lived realities of material and social relations.

For these reasons, I have chosen to use institutional ethnography, from here on referred to as IE. Developed by feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith, the primary goal of IE is to reorganize “the social relations of knowledge of the social” (Smith, 2005, p. 29), meaning that IE posits itself as a method that undoes the objectification of the subject in traditional forms of sociological inquiry. It is an explicitly critical form of research, based in Marxist theory, which works from a feminist and anti-racist base in its assumptions that power relations are embedded in the production of knowledge. In what follows I will provide a detailed explanation of the
method of IE, including its ontology, epistemology, and practices as well as its application in this research project. I have elected to focus on the deep, theoretical components of IE because in this study I have used the method to examine the question of consciousness. While I argue that IE is a method well suited to studying the question of praxis, it has largely been used to study institutional discourses that create particular ideological frames and work practices. It is an approach to research, however, that provides an empirical grounding to Marx’s theorization of consciousness as praxis, specifically because of its attention to the organization of activity in social life.

Ontology and Epistemology of Institutional Ethnography

Smith (1990; 2005) argued that social inquiry should begin with the ontology explicated by Marx and Engels in The German Ideology (1932/1991) and by Marx in the Theses on Feuerbach (1988/1991). I discussed this ontological orientation in chapter two, but for brief review, this ontology begins with an alternative materialist grounding for social reality. Marx and Engels proposed that social inquiry should begin in the real, material processes of life, meaning that inquiry should be directed at actual individuals and their actual experiences and practices. This proposal asserts that social reality is constituted through the cooperative social activity of individuals. Thus ‘the social’ is known not as ‘society,’ but through categories that explain how people actually work and relate and how consciousness is formed through this social activity. Therefore, ideas, theories, categories, academic explanations arise not through abstraction, but through human social relations and the relations between humans and the material world (Allman, 1999). In this conception the individual and the social cannot be easily separated, as they are in traditional forms of inquiry. Rather, the individual and the social are dialectically related, meaning that individual action and consciousness have an inner connection
with the social totality within which the individual exists. This dialectic of individual-social-material relations is particularly evident in Marx’s theory of consciousness, which postulates that “we actively and sensuously experience these relations; therefore our consciousness is actively produced within our experience of our social, material, and natural existence” (Allman, 1999 p. 37).

This ontology, the materialist dialectic of social-individual-material relations and consciousness, is the ontology taken up through the project of IE. The aim of IE is both to understand the organization of social relations, but also to understand how consciousness is shaped in this process. The problem faced by Smith is the question of how one actually ‘actualizes’ inquiry into this conception of the social. Given our entrenchment in the abstractions and mystifications of traditional forms of inquiry, how do we go about revealing the ideological distortions in our thought and understanding the social relations in which we are bound up? Smith’s (2007) answer is to begin by making ‘the ontological shift.’ This shift requires the researcher to work from an explicit theorization of the social, which Smith has defined as individuals plus their doings plus coordination. Working from this definition, and Marx’s ontology, inquiry must always begin with individuals and their actual experiences and practice. In making this shift, the researcher moves away from understanding the social world as a collection of concepts divorced from people’s everyday experience. Smith (2005; 2007) refers to these categories as ‘blob ontologies.’ They are used to describe sociological categories that have no real base in the actual world. By making this shift it is possible to invert the interpretive paradigm, to avoid reification of individual and society as separate ‘objects’ of inquiry, and to conceptualize the dialectical formation of social-material relations and human consciousness.
It is important to remember that the caveat of Marxist ontology is the understanding that social relations and social reality are not necessarily of one’s own making (Marx, 1852/1978). Individuals work within historical processes, inheriting material and social relations from the past. Thus, individuals must constantly contend with history and with the understanding that their relations take place within a larger mode of social relations. Smith (2007) argues that given this definition of ‘the social,’ there is some social mechanism through which human relations are coordinated and organized. This mechanism, however, is not an ‘out there’ entity such as structure (a blob-ontology), but is itself a process and a relation. Here Smith moves away from Marx and identifies this ‘something’ as ruling relations and discourses (1999; 2005). Ruling relations and discourses are core concepts to both the approach and method of IE.

**Not the Wizard of Oz: The Relations of Ruling and Institutional Discourse**

The ‘ruling relations’ are the subject of much confusion among students of IE. Given the emphasis on institutions and texts within IE, the ruling relations are sometimes mistaken for bureaucracy, certain individuals, or even the texts themselves. Ruling relations is not a thing, system, or people nor is it an equivalent concept to domination or hegemony. The concept of ruling relations runs contrary to a structural ontology that sees power outside of social relations. Given Smith’s emphasis on Marxist ontology, the ruling relations are a “complex of objectified social relations that organize and regulate our lives in contemporary society” (Smith, 1999 p. 73). Smith (2007) has also been known to refer to “the ruling relation” as “the relations that rule” or “relations of ruling” in order to dispel an interpretation of ruling relations as a top-down hegemonic exercising of power. Ruling relations are “forms of consciousness and organization
that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people or places” (Smith, 2005 p. 13).

Smith’s articulation of objectified social relations and forms of consciousness is complex. It draws together many facets of Marx’s ontology and critique of idealism, particularly components of ideology and consciousness. In Marx’s originally conception, human consciousness is developed through the dialectical relationship between practice and thinking (praxis). Following Paula Allman’s (2007) interpretation of Marx’s theory of consciousness, consciousness can be distorted when we rely on ideological forms of reason and draw on abstracted, idealist categories to organize our thinking. Consciousness can also be critical when we follow a historical-materialist-dialectical form of reasoning that exposes the inner relations and contradictions within social relations and modes of production. Smith expands on this notion of consciousness to conceptualize ruling relations as objectified forms of social consciousness. Smith (1999) argues that Marx conceived of consciousness as primarily an individualized phenomenon as his particular focus was how to transform individual consciousness through the mobilization of the proletariat. Smith sees the ruling relations as a historical development over the last hundred years of modern, imperialist capitalist development; a process through which consciousness has transformed from solely an individual phenomenon to a social one in which consciousness is objectified outside of individuals and organizes and coordinates their activities. This assertion thus makes the argument that the ruling relations are primarily ideological in the sense that they rely on ideological methods of reason to create objectified consciousness and explanations abstracted from individual experience. Ruling relations, however, do not just frame how we interpret or understand the social world; they also coordinate how we act within these relations. This process happens through the dialectical relationships between consciousness and
action (praxis). As we think about the world, we act accordingly; as we experience, we condition our thinking. The exploration of the ruling relations in IE is an exploration of the dialectic of consciousness, action, and social relations as much as anything else.

Within IE, the concept of the ruling relations is very closely tied to the notion of discourse. The term ‘discourse’ is a loaded word in the social sciences and I will say from the beginning that Smith’s conception of discourse is quite different from its other usages. Discourse, for Smith (2007), stems from looking at the way social relations, individual actions, and consciousness are organized in a particular way. More popular notions of discourse, typically following Foucault, conceptualize discourse as forms of power embedded in language, in particular acts of speaking, statement, and text (Palmer, 1990). This form of discourse, however, still locates knowledge outside the individual and her/his experience and it acts to impose particular subjectivities on individuals (Smith, 2005). Smith (1999) discusses this form of discourse as important to the study of ruling relations. From her perspective, Foucauldian discourse analysis explicates a particular dimension of the ruling relations and it can be seen as a complementary process to textual analysis in institutional ethnography (Smith & Schryer, 2007) as it “captures the displacement of locally situated subjects” (Smith, 1999 p. 80). However, this form of discourse leaves unanalyzed the socially organized practices and relations that objectify, even those visible in discourse itself. Its constitutional rules confine subjects to a standpoint in discourse and hence in the ruling relations. They eliminate the matrix of local practices of actual people that brings objectification of discourse into existence” (p. 80).

For institutional ethnographers, discourse refers not just to language, but to the totality of social relations mediated in text (Smith 2007). A discourse is not an entity of knowledge existing outside individuals; rather a discourse is a particular arrangement of social relations in which people are active participants.
This difference is best explained in Smith’s (2005) discussion of institutional discourses. These are discourses embodied in particular ‘institutions’ or complexes of social relations. An example might be the discourse of teacher-student relationships. This discourse coordinates activity within the institutional setting of the school, but it also organizes relations between individuals and knowledge. It is embedded with relations of power and domination, but it is a discourse that teachers, students, parents, administrators, politicians, and the general community participate in everyday. They enact this discourse and bring it to life. Discourse can be understood as the particular arrangement of social relations coordinated and organized through ruling relations. When institutional ethnographers begin their inquiry with a problematic, they develop this problematic in concert with critical reflection on their own location within a discourse, also known as standpoint.

Given this methodological orientation, one of the primary tasks of this research is to further understand the ‘discourses’ of citizenships within the contemporary ruling relations of democracy within the United States at this historical moment in the imperialist development of capitalism. This kind of inquiry will hopefully lead me in the opposite direction of the typically discursive research into citizenship. This type of research in the field of education, such as Abowitz and Harnish (2006), has proved extremely useful in demonstrating how deeply political ideology embeds itself within curriculum and the consciousness of educators. However, it provides no ground for the emergence of those ideologies; that type of explanation is impossible without a historical, materialist orientation to the production of knowledge. Thus in this research I will pursue the ‘good citizen’ not only as an ideal discursive construction, but as an active, social relation that young people struggle to recognize, internalize, negotiate, resist, and activate.
Trans-local Organization of the Relations of Ruling

It is Smith’s contention (1999; 2005; 2007) that discourse and the ruling relations are observable through the ways in which they are embedded in talk, texts, and institutions. IE maintains a special and dynamic focus on texts as the central mediating body of ruling relations. Ruling relations are conceived of as embedded within texts, whereas the historical development of a text-mediated society brought the ruling relations into existence. Smith (2005) sees texts as an essential component of the contemporary world. It is Smith’s contention that contemporary society has developed into a social reality dependent on text for communication, organization, and regulation. Historical developments of technology, particularly print and now computer technologies, allow for the mass replication of texts across time and space, thus instilling in texts a regulatory function across multiple local sites of activity. Texts produced across multiple sites function in a variety of ways. Some texts create textual communities through which individuals are organized based on a common interpretation and significance attached to text (Smith & Schryer, 2007). Religious bodies associated with core texts (the Bible, the Koran, the Tora) would be examples of these textual communities. Texts are also embedded within institutions and operate through institutions to coordinate social relations. Texts embedded in institutions and the institutional discourses they create are the primary focus of IE. Texts embedded in institutions almost take on a life of their own. According to Smith (1999), “the materiality of the text and its replicability create a peculiar ground in which it can seem that language, thought, culture, formal organization, have their own being, outside lived time and the actualities of people’s living” (p. 79). This understanding of text makes clear the relationship between the way texts function in society and the objectified consciousness of the ruling relations.
Smith uses the term ‘text’ in a broad manner. Text does not just refer to written language, but to other forms of representation, including images, that are replicated and produced across multiple sites. Smith also rejects post-structuralist theorizing on texts that places them solely within the interpretive realm. Texts are actual things that exist in an actual space. They are taken up by readers in different times and activated in different ways. Texts exert a regulatory capacity, but they are much more than sets of rules or directives that readers blindly follow. Smith and Schryer (2007) argue that

Coordinating people's doings through the multiplication of identical texts takes for granted that a given text will be interpreted in different local contexts. Texts penetrate and organize the very texture of daily life as well as the always-developing foundations of the social relations and organization of science, industry, commerce, and the public sphere (p. 116).

In this way, texts function in a similar manner to the ways in which Marx and Engels (1932/1991) described how abstract conceptualizations help to order consciousness. But they go beyond this function in that they also organize behavior and coordinate action. Ellen Pence’s (2001 as cited by Smith, 2005) institutional ethnography on domestic violence demonstrates this dual process. Through her research Pence shows how texts utilized by police in the course of domestic violence intervention not only shape the consciousness of police on gender-based violence, but also coordinate their actual practice of policing these offenses, ultimately leaving social relations of patriarchy unchallenged. Texts function as the carriers of institutional discourses, making explicit the ways in which individuals are ‘hooked in’ to larger social relations through these institutional processes.

The processes by which texts mediate and coordinate individuals within ruling relations are quite complex. I will do my best to provide an explanation of this process without detailing every minutiae, which Smith (2005) does elsewhere. Smith begins by asserting that texts are
inseparable from people’s activities, either within institutions or in everyday life. My everyday activities of taking the subway, buying a cup of coffee, checking my email, and interacting with friends and colleagues are all mediated through text. My institutional life as a graduate student is completely immersed in texts, both the texts that I study and the institutional texts that direct the pursuit of advanced degrees. Smith argues that taking an ethnographic approach to these texts, and not just behavior or meaning, is what allows institutional ethnography to move beyond the local and particular and to understand how the local is the actualization of larger social relations. These texts must be seen as inseparable from an individual’s action and as an in-motion themselves. Texts are constantly produced, reproduced, and read or, in the language of IE, ‘activated.’ The process of activating the text is a central component of IE, known as the text-reader conversation. The activation of the text is very important in IE partly because as researchers we want avoid reverting to the texts as the subjects of inquiry rather than the ways in which readers actions are bound up with text (Smith, 2005). Activating the text brings the text into local relations and in the individual reader. Smith (2007) also points out that institutional texts in particular are designed to accomplish exactly these tasks. They are designed to be inserted into a particular local setting to accomplish the same effect as any other local setting. The coordinating process is at one level explicit and at another level invisible.

Texts, institutional texts in particular, work as organizers and coordinators of social relations. This is the very process described by the concept of ruling relations. Based on Smith’s (2005, 2007; Smith & Schryer, 2007) understanding of texts it is easy to see that texts are an integral part in the formation of institutional discourses. Institutional discourses are embodied and enacted through texts. However, Smith (2005) cautions us not to interpret this relation as one in which discourses and texts dictate activities. Rather, we should see discourses and texts as
“providing the terms under which what people do becomes institutionally accountable” (p. 113). They frame activities, agents, subjects, behaviors, relations only in institutional terms, using institutional categories. This ideological process again obscures and evacuates individual experience and the ‘hooking in’ of social relations. In this way, institutional texts and discourses produce regulating discourses. Explication of the regulating discourse and the mapping of its associated social relations is the ultimate goal of institutional ethnography.

I want to address an important debate in institutional ethnography. Dorothy Smith (2005) is very clear that institutional ethnography is not a methodology and she goes so far as to assert that it also is not a theory. To be clear on our terms, Smith is using methodology to refer to a way of conducting research that brings with it an already predetermined framework for analyzing and interpreting data. Furthermore, I believe she uses theory here in its ideological sense, as in theory generated through the abstraction and generalization of experience from social and material relations. This confusion arises because we are 1) grappling with the positivist legacy that leads us to believe that our research methods are ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ and 2) we have not fleshed out the entrenchment of ideological modes of reasoning within our approaches to research.

If we understand that institutional ethnography is built on a foundation of Marxist-Feminist ontology and epistemology and, as such, is a method of inquiry that rejects ideological reasoning, returns to materialism, and undoes the objectification, masculinazation, and racialization of the subject, then we will see that institutional ethnography is a process, a method, that makes social organization visible, but does not explain why those social relations exist. In this way it is very similar to Ollman’s (1993) discussion of dialectics, to which I referred in chapter two. IE gives us the tools to see, to actualize, an understanding of the social that otherwise remains hidden under layers of ideology and mystification. In this way it is not an
Explanatory theory; it is not a framework for interpreting the social. It is a framework for conceptualizing the social. Because of this, we need theory, but we have to be very careful; we do not need theory based on ideology. We need theory generated through the rigorous empirical work of dialectical historical materialism. This is one reason why I propose to work from an explicit and vigilant Marxist-Feminist reading of institutional ethnography.

Citizenship and Inequality: ‘Standpoint’ and ‘Problematic’

In order to accomplish the aims of IE, researchers must begin with the everyday; they must begin with a question as a point of entry and it must be something that the researcher cares about. This point of entry is referred to in IE as the ‘problematic.’ This problematic must be created from a ‘standpoint.’ The standpoint “creates a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society or political economy” (Smith 2005, p. 10). ‘Standpoint’ serves as a tool to keep the researcher oriented to the subjective position of experience and the real material and social conditions through which subjects experience and make sense of the world. It is only from this embodied subject position that the relations of ruling become visible (Smith, 1997). Standpoint, however, is not a phenomenological condition. Other theoretical inscriptions of the embodied subject can lead the researcher away from the actual experiences of the individual in their social world and towards a priori theoretical frameworks. Rather, Smith argued, standpoint commits us to beginning in the local historical actualities of one’s experience. From this site we can see theories, concepts, and so on, as themselves in and of people’s activities, indeed as themselves practices that people bring into play in the ongoing organization of subjectivities that is integral to coordinating activities (p. 129).
From this perspective experience is understood as disjunctive social relations (Smith, 1988) and as “the crucible in which the self and the social world enter into a concrete union called ‘social’ subjectivity” (Bannerji, 1995 p. 86). The feminist orientation of standpoint theory, when utilized in an explicitly Marxist framework, allows adult educators to see that human agency and consciousness are integral components of the social organization of social relations (Gorman & Mojab, 2008).

I have already alluded to the emergence of the problematic and standpoint of this research in the introduction to this thesis. My experience as an adult educator working with undocumented immigrants, refugees, and families struggling with poverty has led me to critique the social relations of community service and the dynamics of power and privilege implied in the server-client paradigm. While this paradigm has been critiqued at length, for example Illich’s (1990) powerful indictment of volunteer service, the extent to which this paradigm is currently embedded in the larger social relations of citizenship is in need of further exploration. These relations constitute the problematic of this research, with the assumption that how young people learn relations of power, privilege, and inequality in relation to citizenship is an exceedingly important dynamic of larger relations of democracy.

After much internal debate, I have concluded that the standpoint of this research is dynamic and changing. On the one hand, the standpoint is in reality those ‘served’ by the AmeriCorps volunteers, although they were in no way involved in the research. What I mean by this is that in assuming the standpoint of those is need of the ‘services’ of AmeriCorps members, I assume a commitment to examine the relations of citizenship from the ‘bottom up’ or rather from the relations of dependency out through the institutional mechanisms of the state that determine the nature, scope, and political implications of that dependency. This is a commitment
to understand the relations of citizenship from the perspective of those deemed ‘unworthy’ of the title, either as legal status, national identity, or civic virtue. On the other hand, because I want to understand how the young people serving in AmeriCorps learn these relations of citizenship, I assume their standpoint in the pedagogical relations of the program. I immerse myself in the program as a learner in an attempt to understand how the program affects the consciousness of participants and how participants contest the discourses they see emerge. This dual standpoint speaks to the larger shifting relations of the research. In standing outside the program and looking in, I must see it as its least powerful stakeholder - the service recipient. In attempting to stand inside the program and see out, I must look from the perspective of its least powerful agent - the volunteer.

The Research Process

The data collection for this research involved two ongoing components. Beginning in the summer of 2008, I conducted an initial round of text analysis in order to familiarize myself with the various texts that regulate the program and to begin to unpack some of the most explicit ideological components of the texts. Then I began an in-depth examination of the legislative and regulatory texts of the CNCS. Because of the challenges posed by reading the highly technical language of federal legislation, I developed a method to ‘test’ my interpretation of these documents. I read the documents, produced summary notes, and then met with a family friend who serves as a legislative attorney and is tasked with writing official legislative documents. Based on those meetings, I developed a deeper understanding of how legislation is constructed and which pieces of legislation would be most relevant to my research. This phase also involved close examination of several other regulatory documents including the mission statement and strategic plan of the CNCS. A list of these documents is provided in Appendix C. My approach
to textual analysis was largely influenced by the approach of institutional ethnography, which focuses on analyzing texts ‘in motion’ as people utilize them to organize their work practices. Nevertheless, research participants did not directly use several important documents, such as federal legislation. In these instances, these documents were used to trace the emergence of regulations that appeared in texts, such as the AmeriCorps Rule or Notice of Funding Opportunities. Often these regulations could be directly traced back to legislative or congressional documents. My analysis of these documents took on an almost ‘forensic’ nature as I tried to understand which documents became important for the daily operation of the program and which provided a more substantial framing for the kinds of decisions made and which programmatic initiatives were important. This required reading ‘across’ texts, such as looking at the vision of national service and civil society embodied in a text such as the CNCS strategic plan and the original rhetorical argument for the programs found in legislation. While my work on textual analysis began in earnest in the Autumn of 2008, it continued throughout data collection as I often had to refer back to these texts to construct the interviews with program directors and other AmeriCorps staff.

The second component of data collection focused on fieldwork. This fieldwork took several forms and was largely completed between January and June of 2009. One of the ethical protocols of the research was to maintain confidentiality of not only the individual participants, but the geographic location of their organizations. Because the AmeriCorps community in each state can be rather small, it is necessary not to identify the municipality in which the research took place. The geographic particularities of the research site are relevant in so far as this particular state has a well developed non-profit sector with a large umbrella organization for non-profits and a high level of social capital amongst residents, meaning that volunteerism and
community participation are popular in the metropolitan area where the research took place. Letters of consent, including confidentiality mechanisms, are included in Appendix D. Research participants were recruited through a third party whom I identified as a ‘community liaison.’ This person, who is a former colleague and a member of the academic staff of a local university, circulated an announcement concerning the research to local AmeriCorps program directors in the community (Appendix E). These program directors were then able to discuss their desire to participate with the community liaison and only contact me directly once they had decided to participate.

In September of 2008 I traveled to the research site to meet with potential research participants. I met with the staff of each organization, including the AmeriCorps program director, for approximately one hour and described the commitment that would be required. Of the five AmeriCorps program sites that indicated interest in the research, three programs decided to participate in the full research protocol. I traveled again to the research site in January 2009 to conduct six months of fieldwork and data collection. In the first week of fieldwork, one of the sites withdrew from the research due to a health condition of the supervising program director. These two remaining sites had 42 and 21 AmeriCorps members respectively. One group worked as tutors in public schools with the mandate to ‘bridge’ the achievement gap. The other group was involved in affordable housing development. Of the two remaining sites, two program directors and two supporting staff members agreed to be interviewed concerning the organization and practice of the program. Each of these staff was interviewed three times in two-hour increments. These interviews centered on discussing how the program directors organize their program within the regulations of the program. We discussed how they put together their grant applications, organize their trainings, recruit consultants, and plan workshops and special field
activities. These interviews involved standard practices in institutional ethnography that involve uncovering how the program directors interpreted and used the regulatory texts in their everyday work. The kinds of questions discussed in these interviews are detailed in Appendix F. Based on the discussions had with program directors, certain aspects of the institutional organization of the AmeriCorps program were pursued further with staff members of the state commission office as well as consultants and trainers of the program.

Early in January 2009 I began observation of trainings and activities conducted at the AmeriCorps program site. I participated in trainings sessions, workshops, field trips, field visits, conferences, and community service activities. I did not observe AmeriCorps volunteers in their day-to-day activities at their work sites. During the course of proposing the research I determined that the day-to-day activities of the volunteers was less relevant than their interpretation of the events, which was addressed in another manner. Further, I did not feel it was necessary to subject the recipients of volunteer service, mostly poor women and children, to the gaze of the academy through my physical presence in the community service interaction, which can be a trying and degrading circumstance. During the course of all participant observation activities I took copious notes on the activities and discussions AmeriCorps members engaged in. Following each event, I kept my own reflective journal documenting my observations and interpretations of the event. I often referred to these events in my interviews with program directors and staff in an attempt to better understand why particular activities or trainings had been organized in the way they were and what the relationship was between those activities and the regulatory documents of the programs.

The bulk of the data collection took place through focus groups with AmeriCorps volunteers. In early January 2009 I visited a training day at each site to recruit participants. I
explained the goals of the research and the incentives for participation. Each volunteer was asked to participate in one focus group per month for four months; three hours a month for a total of twelve hours over the course of the spring. To compensate for the participation, a meal was provided at the focus group, significant for young people living at the poverty line, and the participants were allowed to count their participation in the focus groups as part of their required total of 1700 hours of work. In other words, each participant received 12 hours of work-time in exchange for his or her participation. Initial interest in the research was overwhelming. The first round of focus groups had 49 participants. This number eventual shrunk to 36 participants who completed the entire set of focus group, although the attrition was not immediate. Approximately seven of the thirteen who did not complete the entire four-meeting process did complete three of the sessions, with a few others completing two of the four sessions. I initially attributed this high level of interest to the opportunity to earn work hours towards the 1700-hour commitment.

However, as the research progressed I realized that participants continued, and even went out of their way to arrange their schedules so that they could participate, because of the reflective space provided by the focus group format. The participants were organized into six groups of six to ten participants each. The groups were organized to fit the unique schedules of the volunteers depending on their volunteer commitments. For example, the AmeriCorps volunteers working at public schools had their focus groups in the evening. Each focus group involved roughly 30 minutes of socializing and 120 to 150 minutes of discussion. The focus groups began the first week of February.

I organized the content of the focus groups based on my initial observations of trainings conducted in the month of January and what I learned from the program directors about how the program was organized. Rather than operate each group as a series of questions mean to survey
participants responses, I chose to conduct the focus groups as reflection sessions, which were designed to allow for maximum participation from the participants. Each session was organized around a series of questions that I structured as reflection activities; these topics are detailed below.

**Figure 3: Focus Group Discussion Outline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Discussion Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| February 2009 | • Introduction/Ice Breakers  
• Why did you join AmeriCorps?  
• Familiarity with volunteer service, community service, or ‘civic engagement’  
• Reflection Activity: Lifelong/Life wide citizenship learning |
| March 2009  | • Debrief of LLL/LLW activity  
• What does it mean to be a good citizen?  
• What does it mean to have a good democracy?  
• What is the purpose of your service work? |
| April 2009  | • Reflections on civic engagement activities  
• What do you think civic engagement means? |
| May 2009    | • Reflection Activity: what is a good learning experience?  
• What have been ‘good’ learning experiences in AmeriCorps?  
• How/when did you learn these things? |

In each session I would give the participants ten minutes or so to reflect on a set of questions, allowing them to write or draw in order to organize their thinking. We then proceeded to discuss the questions, often in a learning circle format, in order to allow them the chance to articulate their own perspective and discuss the question at hand with their peers. The learning circle
format was chosen because it allowed each participant to voice their initial reflection and then opened the discussion for them to respond to what others had raised. This semi-structured method of facilitation allowed for the group to respond to an initial prompt with ‘waves’ of reflection, moving easily between areas of interest and their own diverse opinions and perspectives. The first round of focus groups focused on why the participants had chosen to participate in AmeriCorps, what their expectations were, and what was involved in their daily work. At the conclusion of the first focus group, I gave each group a reflection assignment to complete at home that asked them to think back over the course of their life and identify when they learned significant lessons or ideas about citizenship and democracy and how those ideas were learned. The second round of focus groups began with a discussion of these experiences before moving into a discussion of what it means to be a good citizen and what constitutes a good democracy. In the second session, the participants also discussed further the nature of the volunteer service they perform and what the ‘purpose’ of that work was within a democracy. In the third round of focus groups the discussion turned to explicit examination of the civic engagement components of the AmeriCorps program and the definition of civic engagement. In the final round of focus groups, the participants reflected on what they had learned in the program overall, how they had learned it, and what they would take away from the program in regards to their own identity as a ‘citizen.’

These three ongoing forms of data collection (interviews, focus groups, and observation) involved a constant process of mediating between experience, reflection, and organization of the experience through the regulatory texts of the program. While I only explicitly asked program directors, administrators, and trainers to discuss their use of the texts in their everyday practice, I did ask the members to reflect on why some of the components of the program were organized as
they were. This surfaced the observation that interpretation of the texts by the program director did filter down through the practice of the program to the level of the AmeriCorps member. Thus, the members were aware that their everyday experience was regulated by requirements at both the state and federal level. In this way, the texts organize the practice of AmeriCorps not only trans-locally across geographic sites, but within the various hierarchical structures of the program. The relationship between the institutional discourses embodied within the texts is only illuminated by the ways in which is appears in the work practices of AmeriCorps participants at the various levels of organization: state administration, community organization site, and individual volunteer work experiences.

*Research Participants: Voices within the Research*

Assuming the standpoint of the volunteer within this research, that is trying to understand what it is like to participate in the AmeriCorps program and the civic engagement training process, required a deep level of engagement with my research participants. The voices you as a reader will see reflected in this research come from four primary positions. First, AmeriCorps program directors and program staffs provide a good deal of reflection in the text. The two program directors that participated in this research have been quoted extensively and assigned the pseudonyms of David and Amanda. Both David and Amanda are long-term AmeriCorps program directors and former AmeriCorps members themselves. Further, two of Amanda’s program staff members are represented in the text as well and I have assigned them the pseudonyms of Stacey and Mary. Second, employees of the state commission have also been quoted extensively as their interviews reveal much about the organizational logic of the program. I interviewed three state commission employees. Two were mid-level managers who I have
named Laura and Robert. Their responsibilities included recruiting new AmeriCorps sites, helping organizations write grants, vetting these grants at the state level, advancing some programs to the federal competition, conducting site visits, and ensuring compliance with federal regulations. The third employee, who I refer to as Rebecca, was a member of the executive leadership and had worked with the AmeriCorps program for more than ten years. Third, I interviewed two women who worked as consultants and trainers for AmeriCorps programs. These women, who I refer to as Michelle and Susan, were both former AmeriCorps program directors and long-time non-profit employees in the area. All of the individuals in these first three groups of participants were white Americans, between the ages of 25 and 45, and college educated. All lived in a major metropolitan area and worked in the urban core.

The fourth group of participants was the AmeriCorps members themselves. I will refer to them through the text as ‘AmeriCorps members,’ in part because this is how the AmeriCorps program requires them to be identified. They are not ‘employees’ or ‘volunteers,’ but ‘members.’ The focus group transcripts for these sessions are extremely complex. There are between six and ten voices in each discussion and I allowed the members the choice to identify themselves in their written reflections with either their real name or a pseudonym. Only a handful chose pseudonyms. Given the number of voices present in this text, I will not identify AmeriCorps members by a pseudonym. Rather I will introduce them by providing the reader with their gender, age, and service activity, either ‘tutor’ or ‘housing.’

The group of AmeriCorps members that participated in the research were diverse in terms of their life experiences and perspectives, although not in terms of standard group identities. The group was almost entirely white, with only two visible people of color, one of whom was an international adoptee. They were all between the ages of 20 and 25. Five of them were high
school graduates and the rest had completed an undergraduate degree within three years of their enrollment in AmeriCorps. The vast majority of these young people had graduated from university the previous spring and were 22 or 23 years old. Roughly 50% of them had attended a public university and the other 50% had attended one of the regional private liberal arts institutions. There were largely representative of the larger AmeriCorps programs in which they participated, which were majority white young adults. There were several older adults in school-based program, but they worked part time and elected not to participate in the research. The fact that one of the AmeriCorps sites was a tutoring program affected the composition of the group in terms of their educational backgrounds. In compliance with No Child Left Behind standards, all AmeriCorps members working in schools must have at least four semesters of undergraduate education.

The groups were diverse, however, in terms of their upbringing. Most had grown up in suburban or near-rural (exurb) communities, with a few having been raised in an urban center or in a very rural community. Despite this geographical sameness, they were quite diverse in terms of class. Several had grown up in single parent households with lower incomes, while others had been raised in more affluent circumstances. In the focus groups they detailed a diverse range of political and religious beliefs as well as several members identifying as queer or LGBTQ identified. Many of them had studied social sciences or pre-professional programs in education or law. About a third of them had previously devoted a large amount of time to volunteerism or community service and most of them envisioned themselves pursuing a career in either the public or non-profit sector.
Presentation of Findings

To demonstrate the ways in which civic engagement is organized through institutional regulations within the AmeriCorps program requires a complex overlapping of explanation and theorization. I have organized this discussion in three sections. In chapter five, I discuss the institutional organization of the terrains of engagement and learning in AmeriCorps, examining specifically how the space for democratic learning is crafted within the program. In chapter six, I examine ‘civic engagement’ as the form of democratic and citizenship learning that emerges within the space of AmeriCorps programs. In chapter seven, I return to the articulation of the relationship between relations of ruling and learning citizenship through AmeriCorps. In chapter five I introduce the notion of ‘narrowing’ to describe how the local program space for AmeriCorps is organized through regulations at the federal level. One way to think about the presentation of findings in the subsequent three chapters is to imagine moving from the trans-local to the local and then back out again. I will move from the federal organization, to the inner workings in a local site, and then back out to trans-local relations and forms of objectified consciousness.
Chapter Five

The Social Organization of Experience and Learning in AmeriCorps

Mike is a twenty three year old white American man. He has a university degree and is a member of an AmeriCorps program, working in public schools to ‘bridge’ the achievement gap. Every Monday through Friday, Mike gets up at 6am. School starts at 7:45, but he needs to be there by 7:15 is order to get the children off the school buses and into their classrooms. Mike doesn’t make enough money to afford a car; gas prices are too high and as a 22-year old male, the insurance costs are astronomical. He usually rides his bike to school, but if the weather is bad he will have to take the bus and get up at 5:30am instead of 6am. By 7:15 he is dropping his coat and lunch off in the volunteers’ office at the school and looking through the calendar to see what his day holds. By 7:30 he is on the sidewalk, waiting for the buses, ushering hundreds of children into school. The children speak 34 different languages, but the sounds of Spanish rise above the crowd, and Mike scans their faces to see if he can spot who amongst the group has not had breakfast that morning. By 7:45 he is in his first classroom and his day proceeds in a blur: 30 minutes of reading with this kid, 25 minutes of math with that one, lunch duty, lesson planning, prep work for a teacher. In the afternoon he struggles with his math group, three young boys who have no interest in fractions. He wonders if public education is really just a complicated exercise in behavior management. By 2:45 he is back on the sidewalk, wrangling kids onto buses, watching some wander off into the neighborhood, others peering their heads around the corner waiting for a sight of their parent’s car. At 3pm he is back in the school, organizing children in afterschool activities, promising that after they do their homework for 60 minutes they can play basketball and soccer. At 4:30, he checks the sidewalks to see who is still waiting for their
parents and calls them inside before the ‘entrepreneurs’ of the neighborhood arrive at the playground for their afternoon business transactions. By 6pm, after a 12 hour day, he is pacing in the hallway outside his office, starving and exhausted, waiting for a graduate student to bring him dinner and ask him what he has learned working in AmeriCorps.

For Mike, his exhaustion is in part due to his perception that every day at school is a repetition of the same stressors, anxieties, frustrations, and struggles as the day before. For Mike, everyday in AmeriCorps appears as the experience of ‘working in schools’ as if the way in which he does his work is the only way one could ‘work in schools.’ Mike goes to school each day with his job description in his head, a set of duties he is obliged to perform both out of a commitment to the children he works with and the AmeriCorps program that employs him. Mike arrives at school each day with only a vague awareness that his daily experience in AmeriCorps comes from ‘somewhere else’ and that what seems like the natural monotony of everyday work is in reality a highly specific form of intervention in school life, theorized and organized to produce particular outcomes. For Mike, this organization disappears as he is presented with the very real struggle of convincing a student to stay in his seat during science class.

The purpose of this research, as previously stated, is to explore both what AmeriCorps members learn about democracy and citizenship during their service but also under what conditions this learning takes place. The question of ‘how’ could be answered using the traditional theoretical tools of educational research. AmeriCorps members engage in informal learning through their everyday work experience, most of which could be classified as ‘incidental’ in that they neither expect nor pursue the new ideas or interpretations at which they arrive through their service. They also engage in non-formal learning through trainings and workshops. Educational researchers have developed sophisticated tools for analyzing the
experiential and reflective relationships involved in these forms of learning. The tools, however, say nothing about the context of learning in the first place. They arrive at the ‘experience’ as a found object on the terrain of social life and investigate only its interpretive domain, how a learner ‘makes meaning’ of this experience. While this is an important area of investigation, it is not the kind of ‘how’ that helps me to understand why AmeriCorps, as an apparatus of the state, operates in the way that it does and what the effect of that operation is on learning in the program. This ‘how’ must interrogate how the space and practice of learning democracy, or ‘civic engagement,’ is established in AmeriCorps. How do young people arrive at the experiential base of this democratic learning? How does this experience emerge out of the institutional processes of AmeriCorps? This is the purpose of institutional ethnography and why it directs my attention towards experience and learning in a particular way, with specific emphasis on the social organization of experience and learning. This is the purpose of this chapter; to explore in detail how the work life of AmeriCorps members is organized in the program.

Framing Experience and Learning in AmeriCorps

My exploration of how learning is organized in the AmeriCorps program is informed by the theorization of experience and learning in the fields of education, feminist theory, and Marxist theorizations of the relation between consciousness and matter. This relationship has been deeply explored by a wide range of educational theorists, beginning with Dewey and continuing on to Kolb, Jarvis, and Mezirow. It has also been a central theorization in feminist research, particularly in relation to the development of feminist consciousness, mobilization, and activism (Carpenter, in press). Experience and learning, through the language of matter, consciousness, and praxis, has also been a central subject of Marxist theorizations of education
and learning (Carpenter & Mojab, in press). My own thinking on the experience-learning relation is informed not only by these theorists, but also by my work as a community-based educator in higher education and adult education. By ‘community-based educator’ I mean that in my work as a teacher I have always approached learning from the perspective that knowledge is generated from experience and possesses the potential to transform human agency and social life. This presupposition has developed in my teaching through the ample opportunities I have had to observe learning processes that emerge in the context of work experience. I have supervised university students in internships and as volunteers in community organizations, taught practicum and field seminar courses, and used field work and discovery-based assignments in my classes. I have also maintained a practice as an adult community educator that uses learners’ everyday experiences as the point of departure for reflection and learning. In these roles I have generated my own understanding of the relation between experience and learning; this understanding has become an assumption of this research.

By this assumption, I mean that the day-to-day experiential components of the AmeriCorps program constitute a major source of learning for AmeriCorps members. This means that learning does not take place solely within designated trainings, workshops, or ‘corp days,’ but that learning processes are ongoing and fluid. I do not wish to use the traditional paradigm of adult education that segments the experience of learning into formal, non-formal, and informal modes. The non/in/formal framework, while extremely popular in the field of adult education, has the dangerous potential to fragment our exploration of learning by placing too much emphasis on the appearance of institutionalized contexts in one spatial locality, for example schools or workplaces, while rendering these same institutional processes invisible in other spaces, for example in the theorization of ‘civil society’ as outside ‘the state’ and ‘the
market.’ This is a central problematic of the research undertaken here and as such, Colley et al. ’s (2003) argument that all learning, understood as a social activity, must be understood to contain relational arrangements of formality and informality is key. Further, this is exactly the kind of social coordination that institutional ethnography seeks to uncover.

Nevertheless, the cumulative knowledge on experience and learning in the field of adult education, while subject to ongoing debate, contains important insights into the nature of the experience-learning relation. Dewey is of course famous for his declaration that learning can be ‘miseducative’ unless it contains the principles of continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938/1997). These principles, which reference the importance of history and agency and the interplay between subjective and objective relations, formed the core assumptions of experiential learning theory. Experience is something that happens in definite, historical conditions to a subject who has likewise been formed in these conditions. However, according to Dewey, an experience can only be judged as ‘educative’ if the interplay of these principles results in an ever-expanding arena of experience, growth, and meaning making. This, however, does not mean that ‘learning’ is not taking place.

From a Marxist perspective, learning is better understood as the movement of consciousness through praxis, meaning that as we move through everyday life we come to understand our world in a variety of ways. Thus, ‘learning’ does not necessarily imply positive growth, as Dewey argued. As an undergraduate I worked at a research assistant for a sociologist who performed mitigation research for death row appeals. I remember very clearly the recitation by one client of the now well-known adage that the place he really learned to be a criminal was in prison.
This tension between ‘growth’ and ‘regression’ in experiential learning theory should indicate to us that the contexts of learning are vitally important to understanding the nature of learning itself. To remove learning from such a context is the kind of violent abstraction that results in an emphasis on experiential learning as an individual process rather than a social one. The implications of de-socializing learning are far-reaching and treacherous (Colley et al., 2003; Foley, 1999; Gorman, 2007). This de-socializing is exactly the kind of academic tendency that institutional ethnography works to undermine and is the reason why ‘experience’ or ‘work,’ understood broadly, constitute the central data of this approach to research. Further, while certain pedagogical aspects of AmeriCorps programs, such as the content of trainings and workshop, will vary from program to program, the ways in which the sites of learning are formed through institutional regulations are not particular. They are universally applied to all AmeriCorps program sites and give us some indication of how learning in the AmeriCorps program is coordinated translocally.

In this chapter I will explore how learning is organized in the AmeriCorps program through four separate process or acts of regulation. One way to think about this organization is to think of the ‘openness’ of learning being increasingly ‘narrowed’ through the institutional processes of AmeriCorps. I use ‘narrowed’ in the sense that what we originally conceive of as the open terrain of learning in ‘civil society,’ in either the Marxian or liberal sense, is made increasingly smaller in the AmeriCorps program through the focus, position, and practices of the program. The space deemed appropriate or permissible for learning is made smaller through these regulatory acts. In the first section of this chapter I explore the organization of the sites of learning in AmeriCorps, which constitutes the first and second ‘narrowing’ processes within the program. The first and largest ‘narrowing’ in AmeriCorps involves the kinds of non-profit
organizations eligible to serve as AmeriCorps sites. This is done through an examination of the restriction of grants to 501c3 organizations. The coordination of sites is further explored through the second ‘narrowing,’ an increased emphasis on ‘sustainability’ in the selection of AmeriCorps sites. In the second section of this chapter I explore how the day-to-day work activities of AmeriCorps members are organized in the program, which constitutes the third and fourth ‘narrowing’ processes. These ‘narrowing’ processes take place through a series of regulations that eliminate, either explicitly or implicitly, the kinds of activities in which AmeriCorps members can engage. The third narrowing involves the regulation of permitted and prohibited activities, while the fourth involves organizational capacity measures, the funding priorities, and finally, the logic models used in the grants themselves. This analysis requires extensive engagement with several key documents, including Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), the AmeriCorps provisions (‘the provisions’), the AmeriCorps Federal Rule (the ‘rule’), the Notice of Funds Available (NOFAs) and the 1990, 1993, and 2009 legislative acts.6

Crafting Sites of Learning in AmeriCorps

The sites of learning in AmeriCorps are predetermined upon the arrival of AmeriCorps members. By ‘sites of learning’ I am referring to the organizational contexts in which AmeriCorps members work and which are in turn related to the kind of service work they perform. The sites of AmeriCorps work are chosen through a nationally competitive grants process and they are selected, in theory, because they represent some of the most innovative local-level responses to important social challenges facing Americans today. In order to understand how learning is organized within the program, it is important to examine the

processes at both the federal and state level that contribute to the shaping and selection of these sites of learning.

First Narrowing: The Problem of ‘Politics’ in Sites of Learning

It is popularly understood that AmeriCorps grants are restricted to 501c(3) organizations. The truth of this claim is hard to determine. On the one hand, the CFR does not explicitly limited eligibility to 501c3 organizations (Section 2521.10: Who may apply to receive an AmeriCorps Subtitle C grant?). This section of the code specifies that “states (including territories), subdivisions of states, Indian tribes, public or private non-profit organizations (including religious organizations and labor organizations), and institutions of higher education are eligible to apply for AmeriCorps subtitle C grants” (Code of Federal Regulations, 2008, p. 645).

However, the section of the code that lists the prohibited activities of AmeriCorps members includes a prohibition on “providing a direct benefit to (i) a business organized for profit; (ii) a labor union; (iii) a partisan political organization; (iv) a non-profit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code” (p. 644). Further, the code does not define ‘non-profit organization’ in Section 2510.20: Overall Purposes and Definitions. On the other hand, the legislative acts of 1990, 1993, and 2009, prohibit affiliation with organizations that do not comply with the requirements of the 501c tax code. 501c, however, refers to the general category of non-profit organizations, and not any specific type. Further, a survey of the NOFAs for the past several years reveals inconsistent directions (CNCS, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009f, 2010b, 2011b). In 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009, applicants for AmeriCorps grants were required to declare that they were not a registered 501c4 organization in accordance with the Lobby Disclosure Act of 1995. The NOFAs state:

Any organization described in Section 501 (c) (4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(4), that engages in lobbying activities is not eligible to
apply, serve as a host site for member placements, or act in any type of supervisory role in AmeriCorps programs (CNCS, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009f).

However in 2010 and 2011, no mention was made, at the national level, of confinement to 501c3. A final confounding element is that the 2009 Serve America Act does define a ‘non-profit organization’ as

(3) NON-PROFIT.—The term ‘non-profit’, used with respect to an entity or organization, means—(A) an entity or organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of such Code; and (B) an entity or organization described in paragraph (1) or (2) of section 170(c) of such Code (Serve America, Subtitle H, Part V, Section 198S).7

This definition, however, is only provided with reference to the Non-profit Capacity Building Program. The Serve America Act also states that the term non-profit can be used interchangeably with the term ‘community-based entity’ (111th Congress of the United States, 2009).

These regulations paint a confusing picture. Who is eligible for an AmeriCorps grant? While one might be able to make the technical argument that any 501c organization is eligible to apply for a grant, the regulations are very clear as to what kind of organization is allowed to benefit from the service of AmeriCorps members. Thus, while organizations other than 501c3s are not explicitly excluded from eligibility criteria for grant making, they are explicitly prohibited from participation in the program. In this way, non-501c3 organizations are ‘prohibited’ as sites of AmeriCorps engagement and 501c3 organizations are positioned as the only kind of organizations suitable for AmeriCorps placement. This regulation raises an important question: what is the significance of restricting AmeriCorps programming to 501c3 organizations?

7 Section 170 of the tax code refers to the conditions for both individual and corporate tax-deductible/charitable donations.
501c is a code used by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to recognize entities within the United States that are exempt from federal income taxes. ‘501c’ literally refers to the listing of these organizations in the tax code, which specifies 28 different kinds of organizations that can be exempt from taxes (Title 26, Subtitle A, Chapter 1, Subchapter F, Part 1, Section 501). These organizations are colloquially known as ‘non-profit’ organizations, but in following the intent of the tax code, it is more accurate to refer to them as ‘tax exempt.’ Out of the 28 varieties of tax-exempt organizations in the United States, the 501c3 is both the largest and least specific category. According to Title 26, an organization can be designated as a 501c3 if it falls under the following characterization:

Corporations, and any community chest, fund, or foundation, organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, or educational purposes, or to foster national or international amateur sports competition (but only if no part of its activities involve the provision of athletic facilities or equipment), or for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals, no part of the net earnings of which inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual, no substantial part of the activities of which is carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation (except as otherwise provided in subsection (h)), and which does not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office (99th Congress of the United States, 1986)

This definition is widely interpreted as ‘charitable’ organizations, including religious, labor, human service or educational organizations. The intent of the code is to reference organizations that work in pursuit of the ‘social welfare’ in such a way that no individual gains profit or revenue from the organization’s activities.

While organizations listed under designates 501c1,2, and 5-28 are extremely specific, most organizations in the ‘non-profit’ sector are incorporated as either 501c3 or 501c4. In reality, overlap exists between the c3 and c4 statuses in terms of the intent of the exemption from tax liabilities. Both codes designate organizations that serve the social or public welfare. Their chief
difference is the extent to which they engage in political activities as part of their core operations. Categories such as ‘political activities’ and ‘legislative activities’ thus become the chief characteristics differentiating 501c3 organizations from 501c4 organizations.

What appears to be important to administrators of AmeriCorps is the designation made at the federal level between a 501c3 and a 501c4 organization, specifically in relation to their participation in ‘political’ and ‘legislative’ activities. According to the IRS, a 501c3 organization is

Absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office. Contributions to political campaign funds or public statements of position (verbal or written) made on behalf of the organization in favor of or in opposition to any candidate for public office clearly violate the prohibition against political campaign activity. Violating this prohibition may result in denial or revocation of tax-exempt status and the imposition of certain excise taxes (IRS, 2010a)

501c3 organizations, however, are not prohibited from engaging in voter registration, education, or get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns as long as these activities are conducted in a ‘non-partisan’ manner. ‘Partisan’ is not explicitly defined by the IRS, but is acknowledged as “activities with evidence of bias that (a) would favor one candidate over another; (b) oppose a candidate in some manner; or (c) have the effect of favoring a candidate or group of candidates, will constitute prohibited participation or intervention” (The restriction of political campaign intervention, 2010). Further, 501c3 organizations are prohibited from ‘lobbying’ and ‘advocacy:’

In general, no organization may qualify for section 501(c)(3) status if a substantial part of its activities is attempting to influence legislation (commonly known as lobbying)…An organization will be regarded as attempting to influence legislation if it contacts, or urges the public to contact, members or employees of a legislative body for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation, or if the organization advocates the adoption or rejection of legislation (IRS, 2010b)

However, there are small allowances for this sort of activity:
Organizations may, however, involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered as lobbying. For example, organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status (IRS, 2010b).

501c4 organizations, however, are also understood to be entities that are organized “exclusively for the promotion of social welfare” (Reilly et al, 2003 p. I-2). A 501c4 is differentiated from a 501c3 by allowance for political and legislative activity:

Seeking legislation germane to the organization's programs is a permissible means of attaining social welfare purposes. Thus, a section 501(c)(4) social welfare organization may further its exempt purposes through lobbying as its primary activity without jeopardizing its exempt status… In addition, a section 501(c)(4) organization that engages in lobbying may be required to either provide notice to its members regarding the percentage of dues paid that are applicable to lobbying activities or pay a proxy tax… The promotion of social welfare does not include direct or indirect participation or intervention in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. However, a section 501(c)(4) social welfare organization may engage in some political activities, so long as that is not its primary activity (IRS, 2010c).

These regulations result in the 501c3 being contrasted to the 501c4 organization as a ‘non-political’ entity that engages in direct human service activity.

In accordance with these regulations, the first ‘narrowing’ of learning in the AmeriCorps program takes places by confining the experiential terrain of learning to particular kinds of organizations charged with doing explicitly de-politicized work. This, of course, does not mean that there is no political discourse within 501c3 organizations. However, it does mean that this politics will exist on an informal basis and will not be integrated into the mission, mandates, or officially sanctioned and funded activities of the organization. The intentional engagement with politics is removed from daily experience at first through the ways in which the organization directs human labor towards the amelioration of human need. In a 501c3, AmeriCorps members will find themselves working side by side with other individuals doing the same kinds of direct
human service activity and perhaps, the small amount of political activities allowed under 501c3 code. The AmeriCorps member, however, can be disengaged from this work, if it is present at all, by further restrictions on their labor imposed by the AmeriCorps regulations.

**Second ‘Narrowing’: ‘Sustainable’ Sites of Learning**

If we accept the generous evidence that AmeriCorps work and learning is confined to a particular segment of the non-profit sector, regulations of the program reveal that AmeriCorps sites are further narrowed by a set of program requirements that address the fiscal viability of AmeriCorps programs. In 2005, the AmeriCorps program issued a new set of regulations entitled the ‘AmeriCorps Rule’ (Federal Register, 2005). The ‘rule’ is revamped periodically and reflects amendments to the provisions and regulations of the AmeriCorps program. The 2005 rule, which went into effect on September 6, 2005, governed the AmeriCorps sites that participated in this research and their most recent grant applications. The revision of AmeriCorps provisions was undertaken in 2004 in response to Executive Order 13331, issued by President George W. Bush, which “aimed at making national and community service programs better able to engage Americans in volunteering, more responsive to State and local needs, more accountable and effective, and more accessible to community organizations, including faith-based organizations” (p. 39562). Further the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2004, which set the budget for the CNCS,

directed the Corporation to reduce the Federal cost per participants and to increase the level of matching funds and in-kind contributions provided by the private sector…and directed the Corporation to engage in notice and comment rulemaking about the issue of ‘sustainability’ (p.39562)

Again the following year, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2005 directed the Corporation to “increase significantly the level of matching funds and in-kind contribution provided by the private sector” and “reduce the total Federal costs per participant in all programs” (p. 39564).
The language of ‘sustainability’ refers explicitly to the ability of an organization to fiscally sustain its program while reducing its reliance on federal support. In response the CNCS issued the ‘final rule,’ which implemented changes in AmeriCorps practice around four areas of policy: sustainability of programs, grant selection criteria, tutor qualifications, and performance measures and evaluation. Of these four, the emphasis on sustainability and grant selection criteria increased the pressure on organizations to demonstrate their financial efficacy as part of their selection as AmeriCorps sites. Sustainability efforts within AmeriCorps, however, appear in two different places as seemingly disconnected phenomenon. On the one hand, the CNCS has enacted measures, under the auspices of the funding match, to make AmeriCorps program less dependent on federal dollars. On the other hand, the CNCS grant selection criteria and new emphasis on capacity building activities in AmeriCorps programming are also focused on the sustainability and expansion of the non-profit sector and its funding through private dollars.

In a 2005 internal communication to AmeriCorps program directors announcing the publication of the ‘AmeriCorps Rule,’ Corporation CEO David Eisner and AmeriCorps director Rosie Mauk informed grant recipients that

Grantees will assume an increasing share of program costs over time. Currently grantees are required to match 15 percent of member support costs and 33 percent of operational costs. The new rule requires, in addition to the current minimum requirements, an overall match percentage that increases gradually to 50 percent over a period of 10 years. The rule also specifies that programs that demonstrate they are unable to meet this requirement and operate predominantly in rural or economic depressed areas can apply for a waiver at a lower alternative match schedule (Eisner & Mauk, 2005 p. 2).

The ‘funding match,’ as it was referred to by research participants, requires that organizations hosting an AmeriCorps program must engage in fundraising activities to support their participation program in addition to their grant writing to the federal government. This requirement poses a significant problem for some AmeriCorps sites.
The problem of funding matches first emerged in my interviews with AmeriCorps program directors. In the first round of interviews I asked the program directors to describe their responsibilities as AmeriCorps directors and what their job duties encompassed. At the top of each list was the problem of fundraising. Amanda, a pseudonym, is a research participant who worked as the program director for one of the two AmeriCorps sites that participated in this research. In the spring of 2009, she had worked as an AmeriCorps program director for 10 years, and was herself an AmeriCorps member in the early 1990s. In her interviews she revealed that fundraising was a major challenge for her program. Under the new rule, her program was currently at the 34% level and would soon be increasing to 38%. Amanda, however, had her eye on what would happen in the long term when the program was required to raise 50% of its funding. Reaching 38% would mean, according to Amanda,

That I have to raise my site fees by two thousand and I’m still thirty thousand short. So if we’re going to get a 50-50 match, we’re probably going to be charging five to six thousand per member. Right now they pay eight thousand for a team of members. So that is going to increase dramatically and it is going to be really prohibitive to some of our sites (program director, January 14, 2009).

Amanda’s problem was clear to both of us. In order to maintain her program, she would have to make it more difficult for the community to access the services of AmeriCorps. In order to reduce federal spending on per member costs, she would have to pass the expense to the local schools where her members worked as tutors.

So we have to really think strategically about how we’re going to move forward and where else we can augment our budget so that we can minimize the burden to the schools themselves. Cause you know their budget cuts are part of the reason we’re here to begin with and able to do the work we do. Because they are short staffed and overwhelmed. If it goes up much further they’re not going to be able to participate (program director, January 14, 2009).

Her fear was that some schools, or other organizations in the case of other similar programs in her city, would be ‘priced out’ of having an AmeriCorps member at their organization.
I got a call today from a site, from another AmeriCorps site for another program. They were trying to get an extra member. And they were just calling around to other programs to see ‘what are the shots’ and you can’t blame them, but you’re like your mission doesn’t align with us at all. But she had looked somewhere they were charging nine or ten or twelve thousand dollars per member and she’s saying ‘we just can’t afford that’ (program director, January 14, 2009).

The logical next question to ask Amanda was if increasing site fees was her only option to raise the funding necessary to meet her match requirement. Amanda, clearly frustrated with the situation, described the options available to her: foundation grants, fundraising drives, employee contributions from the school district, private donations. She explained that each activity was time consuming and that “right now I just need to do stuff and I’m not supposed to do any fundraising on the clock. As an AmeriCorps program director fundraising is a prohibited activity for me. I can’t even write the grant on the clock.” I asked her to explain further; how is it that although she is prohibited from writing the AmeriCorps grant or doing any other fundraising ‘on the clock,’ she nevertheless found herself in the situation of being responsible for all the fundraising activities of her program? She offered that the CNCS probably assumed ‘the person above me’ was the one responsible for grant writing. In her environment, the only option was an unnamed person higher up in the district hierarchy, who has no real relation to the program, or she would complete the fundraising activities on ‘volunteer time.’ This problem, she argued, was “one of the reasons it [fundraising] doesn’t happen.” Despite this problem, Amanda had secured several foundation grants for her program, had collected private donations, and held a yearly fundraising event. Each activity was accomplished beyond the boundaries of her own very full 40-hour workweek.

The other AmeriCorps site participating in the research did not have the same struggles as Amanda. David, also a pseudonym, is the AmeriCorps program director at a local affiliate of an internationally well-known non-profit organization, which is the second AmeriCorps program
that served as a research site. This local affiliate is also a long-term AmeriCorps site and David has worked as the program director for the last seven years. David’s organization is very different from Amanda’s. While Amanda works within a school district and has access to virtually no institutional resources beyond her AmeriCorps grant, David’s organization operated on a budget of approximately $16.5 million in 2009. The organization is able to leverage large amounts of resources through charitable contributions due to its reputation and the focus of its work. While David is quick to point out that the organization is completely dependent on the labor of AmeriCorp members to accomplish its mission, it does not struggle to meet the fiscal requirements of the AmeriCorps grant program. David described their approach to the match by saying,

I think it is 38% we have to do or maybe its 42% this year. But yeah we’re at 46%; we’ll get to 50% within the next couple of years. I think we see it as a strategy that we do more than we’re asked to as a way to sort of say well look at us, we’re already doing more than we’re asked. And we’re not having a hard time meeting those numbers either (program director, January 20, 2009).

All of David’s AmeriCorps members worked internally to the organization, meaning that the members are not ‘farmed out’ to local sites; David’s program does not function on the coalition model described in chapter three. Thus, David also does not recoup any site fees as revenue to contribute to his funding match requirements. David divulged later in the interview that all the money required to make their match is taken from the general operating fund of the organization. While Amanda argued that, “I think there are very few sites that do not charge site fees,” there are clearly organizations that do not struggle to meet the fiscal match of the AmeriCorps program. Further, David responded to my questions concerning fundraising by saying that while at one point he did write the grant, the AmeriCorps grant was now written by the organization’s on-staff grant writer.
This imbalance between well funded, prosperous, and large organizations and small, underfunded, struggling organizations, raises an important question for the organizations that become the sites of learning for AmeriCorps members. One could argue that the AmeriCorps program accounts for this imbalance by providing seed funding, through state commissions, for smaller organizations who are not ready to compete at the national level for an AmeriCorps grant. The purpose of these smaller grants is to expand the capacity of smaller non-profits to fully access larger levels of funding. It does not correct the inequality that exists between those organizations that can maintain ‘sustainability’ within the federal fund matching guidelines and those organizations that barely keep themselves above water. Further, one could point out that underfunded organizations can apply for a waiver from the funding match requirements. When I asked Amanda why she did not take this option her response was that she had served, and was currently serving, as a peer reviewer for the grant selection process. Applying for the waiver, she argued, made the proposal ‘less competitive.’ The politics of how resources are unequally distributed across organizations in civil society, as well as public agencies, are beyond the scope of this research. However, the realities of an exponentially increasing number of non-profits competing for a limited amount of funding, funding which has been drastically reduced in the current economic crisis, leave questions as to how the ability to be ‘sustainable’ impacts the organization of the AmeriCorps program.

Regulations around sustainability are also built into the grant selection criteria of AmeriCorps Subtitle C programs. In their announcement of the 2005 ‘rule,’ Eisener and Mauk also stated that

The new rule incorporates elements of sustainability into the grantee selection criteria, and readjusts the ‘weighting’ of criteria the Corporation uses to assess applications. Specifically, the new selection criteria are: 50% program design, down from the current 60%; 25% organizational capability, consistent with
current practice; and 25% cost effectiveness and budget adequacy, up from the current 15% total for that category. We believe these criteria will more effectively predict program success and ensure a stronger AmeriCorps portfolio (Eisner & Mauk, 2005 p. 2).

These grant criteria are infused with sustainability measures in such a way as to suggest that they are in fact presuming, if not encouraging, competition between non-profit organizations for private funding. Regardless of intent, which is impossible to discern, the criteria require organizations to engage in relationships with the private sector in order to sustain programs. Beyond the funding match, this requirement appears in three different places in the grant criteria, most explicitly in the categories of organizational capacity and budget effectiveness, but also in the designation of program effectiveness, framed as ‘community outputs.’

The last category, cost effectiveness and budget adequacy, is a complicated category in which all the program costs are evaluated against Corporation frameworks for per member program costs and are evaluated as appropriate to the expected outcomes of the program. Most of the criteria have to do with whether or not the grant follows the budget development ‘rules’ designated in the regulations. As might be expected, budget making is perhaps the second most heavily regulated aspect of the program after recruitment and employment of members. Sustainability enters into this equation when a program submits a re-compete grant, or any grant after a previous period of funding. At this point, the program must begin to meet the match criteria and must, in its budget narrative, demonstrate how it has rallied the resources of the private sector to meet its match requirement. In this section, the AmeriCorps program must provide evidence that it is a ‘public-private partnership.’ This particular regulation was interpreted by AmeriCorps program directors as seemingly innocuous and as logical within the confines of budget making activities.
However, the extension of funding match requirements into the category of organizational capacity was interpreted as a somewhat harsher introduction. Amanda felt that her difficulty in meeting the match requirements would contribute to the reviewer’s judgments of the capacity of program and thus, technically count against her twice in the grants process. Criteria for organizational capacity includes, among other factors, the ability for prior grantees to

Have secured the matching resources as reflected in your prior grant awards, (3) the extent to which you are securing community support that recurs, expands in scope, or increases in amount, and is more diverse, as evidenced by- (i) collaborations that increase the quality and reach of service and include well-defined roles for faith-based and other community organizations, (ii) local financial and in-kind contribution (2522.430).

The private sector funding requirement is thus iterated in at least two components of the grant review. The push for private support for AmeriCorps programs is most substantially felt at the level of the state commissions. While the state commissions serve in a regulatory capacity, they were described by one employee as “our job is really to bring as much of the funding as we can.” To this end, Rebecca, a state commission executive, described aligning their program areas and implementing accountability measures to secure private funding.

I’d say a couple years ago, but more and more this year and as it became more of a priority for the corporation we really pushed our programs because of us raising money we can really see the value of it. If we can say these are the results we’re getting when we tutor these kids to a potential funder, we have a much better chance of securing additional funds from the private sector (executive staff, state commission, May 15, 2009).

State commission employees described developing program areas and state-wide corps on issue areas that appealed to the private sector, such as education and job training. Further, they described their attempts to integrate support for unpopular programs, such as Head Start, with more corporate friendly programs, such as reading achievement.

AmeriCorps program sites that will survive in this funding environment will not necessarily be those that run the most effective programs or those whose members go on to serve
the nation, but rather those non-profits that are able to cultivate their ‘entrepreneurial’ skills despite the fact that there is evidence to suggest that ‘entrepreneurial’ non-profits are actually less effective in meeting their missions (Foster & Bradach, 2005). Programs that are effective at raising dollars from the private sector will be able to sustain their work by having the public and private sectors equally bare the cost of meeting humanitarian needs. This goal is further evidenced in the grant selection criteria found in the program design component that assess program effectiveness. According to the criteria, a successful program,

1) is successful in meeting targeted, compelling community needs; (2) has an impact in the community that is sustainable beyond the presence of Federal support; (3) Generates and supports volunteers to expand the reach of your program in the community; and (4) enhances capacity-building of other organizations and institutions important to the community. (2522.425)

Much of this focus on sustainability has to do with promoting sustainability in the non-profit sector through the expansion of volunteer mobilization. But it is also presents a picture of an AmeriCorps program that not only meets a compelling local need in a sufficient manner, but performs this service in such a way as to create a program that spins out of the federal government and into the realm of civil society. It appears as though the grant making processes encourage organizations to think like ‘civic entrepreneurs,’ the new catch-phrase of national service advocates such as Alan Khazei (2010) and Shirley Sagawa (2010) and the brainchild of former CNCS chairman Stephen Goldsmith (2010), which Khazei (2010) defines as “taking the entrepreneurial spirit and innovative approaches often found in the private sector to address social problems” (p. 3).

An interesting afterward to this conversation is that currently, as I write, Amanda’s prediction that the funding match requirements of AmeriCorps would ultimately force her to fundamentally reorganize the focus of her group has come true. When I interviewed Amanda in 2009, she was writing (off the clock) the federal re-compete grant for her Corp. Her application
was denied in part, she suspects, because of a lack of institutional commitment, in the form of dollars, from her school district. On the eve of the program being shut down, a manager from the school district stepped forward with a financial commitment to the program, thus convincing the state commission to extend a one-year operational grant to Amanda’s corp. She no longer has to worry about meeting her match through site fees because, rather than have individual schools find the money to support the AmeriCorps program, the district has decided to do it at a higher level. On the surface this appears as a positive development. However, the state commission has deemed her program too repetitive with other programs running in different parts of the state, although not in her school district, and requires the district to shift the focus of the Corp, changing their mission from ‘bridging the achievement gap’ to English language learning. This new development raises questions as to the nature of ‘sustainability’ as defined by the federal government. Sustainable for whom? 50% of the cost of this AmeriCorps program has been taken over by an already resource-strapped school district.

Another important element of the puzzle of AmeriCorps emerges in the conversation of financing AmeriCorps programming. In her own exasperation at increasing her site fees, Amanda makes an interesting admission that could lead one down the rabbit hole, so to speak. Referencing her attempts to reorganize her budget as to not ‘pass the buck’ to public schools, Amanda argued, “cause you know their budget cuts are part of the reason we’re here to begin with and able to do the work we do. Because they are short-staffed and overwhelmed.” Here Amanda, most likely unintentionally, highlights a central contradiction of AmeriCorps. Amanda spends her days working with a group of young adults who will, in theory and rhetoric, benefit immensely from the opportunity to work for a year in the public schools. Her intentions, as a program director, are that these young people will learn about the challenges of public schools,
form important relationships with their students and peers, benefit from vocational skill
development, and develop a life long commitment to volunteer service, community participation,
and youth development. They are provided this fantastic opportunity by the ongoing
underfunding and clawing back of resources from public education. Because public schools in
the United States are short staffed and overwhelmed, AmeriCorps volunteers are “able to do the
work” that they do, while children continue to learn in unsafe buildings with out-dated texts in
too-large classrooms.

What is evident is that the sites of AmeriCorps learning are crafted in the contemporary
context of the defunding of public and human services; this inherently political context forms the
backdrop of the program and provides additional depth to the notions of ‘sustainability’
advanced in the program. Although the advocates of national service have taken steps to ensure
that the sites of AmeriCorps programs are written and organized as ‘non-political’ spheres, they
are unable to contain the external pressures of shifts in the larger political economy of public
policy that craft these sites as inherently political and subject to ongoing struggle and
contestation. This tension becomes even more pronounced in the program when we move from
analyzing the sites of learning to the coordination of work activities. This coordination comprises
the next two levels of ‘narrowing’ in the program and further complicates the relationship of
experience and learning in the program.

The Coordination of Work in AmeriCorps

In April of 2009 I attended a statewide AmeriCorps conference as part of the annual
AmeriCorps Week celebrations. This conference was held at a local college and was attended by
an estimated 600 AmeriCorps members. The agenda for the daylong conference was orchestrated
in an unusual manner; the attendees set it in the opening session on the morning of the
conference. The facilitator of the conference, who was a professor at another local university, took suggestions from the floor for sessions that should be held throughout the day. The sessions would focus on whatever conversations AmeriCorps members wanted to have with one another. There were no ‘experts’ or ‘professionals,’ only peers. Each session was structured as an informal conversation; one attendee would volunteer to facilitate while another typed notes directly into an online forum. During the opening session to set the agenda, an interesting pattern emerged in how AmeriCorps members introduced themselves. Each was asked to state their name, designate which Corp they were a member of, and where they performed their service. In their introductions, the members began to mirror each other in their language as one after another introduced themselves by saying “my name is X and I work, I mean, I serve at Y organization.” I was struck by this impulsive self-correction, or perhaps self-censoring, and urge to replace the verb “work” with “serve.” When I informally polled some attendees as lunch, the answer I received was quite simple: AmeriCorps members do not ‘work’ anywhere, nor are they employees. They ‘serve’ the community.

My research indicates that AmeriCorps members do work; they work very hard. It is obviously an ideological ‘trick’ to rename ‘work’ as ‘service’ and I will explore this trick in the next chapter in a discussion of service, citizenship, and democracy. What I want to focus on here is the ‘work’ that AmeriCorps members do, or rather, the activities that comprise their everyday service in the program. These activities organize the core experiential components of their learning and, as this research has uncovered, shape the nature of their interaction with the communities that they ‘serve.’ Within the approach of institutional ethnography, the ‘work’ done by AmeriCorps members and their supervisors constitutes the primary source of data in this research. Work is understood quite broadly within institutional ethnography; it is not necessarily
bounded by relations of employment, labor, or the production of surplus value that constitute our normative understanding of ‘work’ within capitalist social relations. ‘Work’ in the IE sense is more akin to the notions of labor power and social cooperation explored by Marx. In this way, ‘work’ can be unpaid, unacknowledged, unseen, or even unknown by others. Work simply means “anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about” (Smith, 2005 p. 152). It is the individual’s knowledge of this work that is important to institutional ethnography; how they understand their own activity, its purposes, its outcomes, and its formation. This notion of ‘work knowledge’ has a dual character, which Smith describes as “one is a person’s experience of and in their own work, what they do, how they do it, including what they think and feel; a second is the implicit or explicit coordination of his or her work with the work of others” (p. 151). This second dynamic, the coordination of the work of AmeriCorps’ members, is the focus of this section.

Third ‘Narrowing’: Permissibility and Prohibition in Service Activities

In the daily experience of AmeriCorps members, their supervisors, and their program directors, the most significant regulations are those which govern permissible and prohibited activities. These regulations are first encountered by the program site in the grant writing process and then are past on to members through both the contract that they sign and the orientation processes in which they participate. The regulations are also a source of tension in the program because they raise questions about the intent of their content as well as their purpose. Interpretations of the regulations differ across sites, within sites, and between state commissions. The state commissions are ultimately responsible for ensuring that prohibited activities are not
taking place and in interviews with state commission staff, it was reported that the majority of questions they receive from sites have to do with the permissibility of particular activities. In this section I want to introduce these regulations in the context of how they coordinate the daily work of AmeriCorps members. The direct exclusionary effects of prohibited or ‘unsanctioned’ activities are the most apparent and visible aspects of the regulations in the program. However, this research has revealed that the regulation of activities has a much more profound effect on the program and so I will return to these regulations in both my discussion of organized training activities as well as the civic engagement components of the program.

Each of the NOFAs released by the CNCS over the last five years have advised applicants to closely examine the CFR restrictions on permissible program activities for AmeriCorps Subtitle C grants. These restrictions begin by confining the work of AmeriCorps members to two broad categories: direct human service and organizational capacity building. These two kinds of work must be undertaken pursuant to the larger goal of expanding the capacity or ability of the organization to provide public services or respond to unmet needs (Code of Federal Regulations, p. 642). This regulation forms the basis of what will become the program model, or program design in the language of Corporation grant making, and which is essentially a logic model, a frequently used tool in non-profit program planning. I will return to the importance of logic models in the next section, but want to acknowledge here that AmeriCorps logic models can only emerge out of the context of the regulations around permissible activity. The restriction of service activities to direct service and capacity building are further described in detail in the CFR. At this point it is important to pursue a definition of what is meant by ‘direct service,’ the original mandate of the AmeriCorps program. Permissible direct service activities are described more fully by their outcomes than by their content. For
example, direct service activities will ‘advance the goals of the program,’ ‘result in specific identifiable service or improvement,’ ‘address local environmental, educational, public safety, or other human needs,’ and ‘provide a direct, measurable benefit’ (Code of Federal Regulations, p. 642). The activities of AmeriCorps members are equally regulated by what they can and cannot do as ‘service.’ In many ways this relation between ‘permissible’ and ‘prohibited’ defines the nature of ‘service activities.’

The prohibited activities can be understood as having a relationship with not only the exclusion of certain activities from the daily experience of AmeriCorps members, but also as having a role in defining what is deemed permissible. As the CFR states, AmeriCorps members are expressively forbidden from

(1) Attempting to influence legislation; (2) organizing or engaging in protests, boycotts, or strikes; (3) assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing; (4) impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements; (5) engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office; (6) participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials; (7) engaging in religious instructions…; (8) providing a direct benefit to- (i) a business organized for profit; (ii) a labor union; (iii) a partisan political organization; (iv) a non-profit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 except that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative; and (v) an organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph (g); (9) Conducting a voter registration drive or using Corporation funds to conduct a voter registration drive (Code of Federal Regulations, 2008, p. 644-645).

The Serve America Act amends this list by adding the provision that AmeriCorps members are also prohibited from “providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services” (H.R. 138-49), while additional rules regulate the consumption of alcohol at AmeriCorps events and the further affiliation with religious organization. The broad interpretation of this regulation is that, similar to the restriction of AmeriCorps programs to ‘non-political’ organizations labeled
501c3, the service activities of AmeriCorps members cannot take on the political dimensions described above, while AmeriCorps members are accruing service hours, wearing AmeriCorps gear, or perceived to be AmeriCorps members who are accruing hours. The extent and intent of the regulations is a source of great confusion amongst members and even as they approached the end of their year of service, many AmeriCorps members were deeply unsure of what exactly was covered in these prohibited activities and what the implications of the regulation might be. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, the implications are far reaching. The pertinent issue at this point, however, is to explore what dynamics of the prohibited activities are important to the coordination of work and learning in AmeriCorps.

The logical place to start vis-à-vis institutional ethnography is to ask how those within the AmeriCorps program interpret the regulations. This is a difficult question to answer because, as one state commission employee put it, there are as many interpretations as there are members of AmeriCorps. In attempting to dissect the interpretations, I encountered an effort by various parties to ‘pass the buck,’ for lack of a better term. By this I mean that at each level of the hierarchy of AmeriCorps, interviewees were emphatic to point out that their working interpretation of the regulations came from somewhere else. For members, they gleaned their interpretations from their program directors. Program directors deferred to the interpretations of state commission employees. State commission employees followed directions from the corporation. The ‘official’ appearance of the interpretation follows the organizational flow chart provided in Appendix B. However, this ‘official’ interpretation breaks down when it comes to how various components of the program are organized at the local level. The interpretation that program directors argue is ‘fixed’ takes on a differentiated character within local programs.
This effect can in part be explained by the existence of a culture around the interpretation of the regulations. In one instance this culture appears haphazard or piece-meal, with state commission employees admitting that much of the interpretation happens on a case-by-case basis in the analysis of actual activities. Robert, a state commission employee who conducts site visits to AmeriCorps program, commented,

Programs will ask questions like, a big one is the ‘not lobbying’ requirement. And so what is allowed, whether they can write a letter to a newspaper about a certain bill that’s happening, you know, what they can and can’t do. So we’ll provide a lot of interpreting…A lot of times I ask for the specific, you know, what are they looking to do, what does the letter say that they’re writing. And just helping them interpret and walk through (state commission employee, April 23, 2009).

If the case given appears to be a ‘grey’ area to the state commission employee, they defer to the interpretation at the federal level. Interpretations, in this case, are subjective to individual employees and are based on their reaction to the specifics of cases rather than general categories of activities. Robert attributed much of the interpretation to the program directors, arguing that

In their [program directors] level of nervousness about the regulations, I think for lack of a better term, some will do everything and anything to avoid coming anywhere near that line. Where others will say ‘you know, I’ll come right up to that line, and I know pretty much were it is and I’m happy to be there.’ So I think it comes down to program directors more than any kind of corporation guidance or us guidance (state commission employee, April 4, 2009).

In this instance, the interpretation of the regulations appears as decentralized and on a continuum. In reality, this continuum most likely exists, although program directors who come up to and possible straddle the line of the prohibited activities are said to ‘fly under the radar’ for the sake of their own program’s viability. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the interpretive process of each program director cannot be understood as a closed process in which each director works in isolation.

These interpretive processes take place within a larger framework concerning not just what the regulations mean, but rather what interpreting them in too lenient a fashion could mean
to the continuation of the AmeriCorps program. The executive director of the state commission in which this research took place was characterized by Michelle, a former AmeriCorps program director, and Susan, a community member and non-profit employee, as “a figurehead of risk averseness who impeded anybody who wasn’t brave on their own” and as having established a culture in which the interpretation of regulations should tend towards the conservative for the purposes of preserving the appearance of neutrality within the program. Michelle argued

When I was an AmeriCorps director it was very frustrating to me how most corps way of dealing with…there feels like there’s some grey area here…was just to, like, not go anywhere near it. Which then denies people the opportunity to engage with elected officials. I mean, anything that people have thought was anywhere near (AmeriCorps consultant, March 12, 2009).

Susan continued,

The ED of the state commission, I remember being very frustrated with her interpretations which were often overturned by others who actually knew better that were so risk averse that it was impeding folks’ ability to engage (AmeriCorps consultant, March 12, 2009).

What emerges here is the notion that interpretive processes of the regulation are taking place in an environment of threat. What exactly is this threat? Simply, defunding of the program. As one male AmeriCorps member explains it

I remember way back when we had our orientation, they told us there was something going on at the capitol, like a protest. And there was a guy there, who was in AmeriCorps, but he wasn’t part of the protest, but he was carrying something or wearing his AmeriCorps shirt and his picture got taken and put in the newspaper about this protest and there was an AmeriCorps there. And a bunch of people wrote in, our taxes fund AmeriCorps, why is there an AmeriCorps at protests. I just kind of remember that (male, early 20s, tutor, April 29, 2009).

This picture of the environment surrounding the prohibited activities is one of fear, threat, instability, and arbitrariness. Interpreting the programs in an open way requires program directors to be ‘brave.’ Others, who are ‘nervous’ about the consequences, will tend towards a conservative interpretation. Why would program directors be ‘nervous’ about violating regulations and threatening the stability of their programs? As most are employed by the same
AmeriCorps grants that fund members, their own livelihood is implicated in their organization of the program. Although they may feel empowered by the vagueness of the regulations to stretch their interpretations, that same vagueness can be the cause for punitive action. As Rebecca explained it,

There are lots of grey areas. This and this and this, but you can’t use your AmeriCorps status to do any lobbying or influence legislation unless it’s on your own time. There’s all this variation. What does that mean? Can you do it on your lunch break? Is that really your own time? It’s up to the interpretation of whoever would be doing your audit, inspector general or whoever (state commission executive, May 15, 2009).

In the case of the re-submission of your grant, those doing the interpreting could extend to peer reviewers, Corporation employees at the federal level, and so on. All of these possibilities taken into account, program directors clearly work in an environment where the stakes for their interpretations of the regulations have high consequences.

It is perhaps counter-intuitive to argue that coercion might exist in this environment given that there is no metaphorical iron-clad interpretation of the regulations. In an environment where ambiguity and subjectivity are the rule, it is entirely likely that the most logically and defensive position is to drift towards the center. This is exactly what program directors expressed; their purpose is to make sure that there is no room in which to subjectively judge that their members are engaging in unsanctioned activities on AmeriCorps time. However, program directors also engage in self-monitoring to different extents. Some are quite diligent and exert effort to reiterate to their members what they can and cannot do within the program.

It is revisited. And it comes up, especially in a year like this in a politically heavy year like an election year, it gets revisited in individual emails, as things come up, you know you can do this, can’t do this, this event is sanctioned, this one is not (Amanda, program director, February 23, 2009).
Others, however, find that they do not need to ‘police’ members. For these program directors, this lack of policing had everything to do with how they themselves understand the purpose of the regulations and how they convey that interpretation to their members.

How do AmeriCorps program directors and members interpret the purposes of the regulations? The members who participated in this research had not read the regulations beyond what was provided in their member contract, an example of which is provided in Appendix G. The program directors had read the regulations and explained the existence of the regulations to their members using a complex of two separate logics. The first logic presents the prohibited regulations as ‘logical’ within the context of publicly funded programs. David described his approach in this way:

The way I explain it is that the government doesn’t— how I interpret the government— want to be giving people money that would be like engaging and like disputing their decisions. I mean like on their dollar, you know like, they want their money to sort of get the biggest bang for the buck. They want like doing their direct service. They don’t want you off doing other things that are not important to the money that they’re giving to support your activities (program director, February 18, 2009).

It’s me looking at the regulations, me trying to figure out like, you know, with most regulations, what’s the spirit of the regulation and what is it they’re exactly- I’m mean I’m not going to look at the letter of the law, I’m not a lawyer. What is it they’re trying to prevent and I think it’s exactly that like you promoting your own political agenda. Having an organization be able to sort of, under the auspices of their AmeriCorps program, have people out there saying ‘x party is doing this and we need you to sort of fight back and help us’ (program director, February 18, 2009).

In this framework it is presented as common sense that the government would not fund activities aimed at contesting public policy decisions. Members echoed this framework back in focus groups by arguing that the regulations make sense within the larger framework of 501c3 organizations. When pressed to explain why the government should not support so-called ‘political’ activities, members often reverted to the second logic. This second logic returned to
the notion of threat and marshaled the notion of ‘bipartisanship’ to explain why these activities had to be excluded from the program. As one male AmeriCorps member recalls,

That was the message I got. That we have these strict rules about political activities and drinking and not even being able to register people to vote because the republicans tried to shut down AmeriCorps in the 90s and we don’t want that to happen so now we have these rules. I think national service has bipartisan support, but AmeriCorps is still seen as a leftist project by a lot of members of the right (male, early 20s, tutor, April 14, 2009).

As the history of VISTA demonstrates, this threat is not imagined. Further, during the course of this research, Representative Michelle Bachmann, a Republican from Minnesota, referred to AmeriCorps as a ‘re-education camp’ (Tevlin, 2009). Beyond the reality of the threat to the program, the fact that those involved with the program can see the regulations as common sense and logical has important implications on two levels. At one level, it tells us something about how the state is positioned within the program, which gives us clues as to how ‘democracy’ and ‘citizenship’ are understood. This point will be pursued in the lengthier discussion of civic engagement that is to come. On another level, it has important implications for the coordination of work and learning. Within the apparent logical exclusion of political activities from the program lies the dialectical formation of ‘direct service’ as something other than political.

The regulated activities are drawn along lines label ‘permissible’ and ‘prohibited.’ The category ‘prohibited’ is further labeled ‘partisan,’ ‘political,’ and as having an ‘agenda,’ including not just politics but religious proselytizing. You may recall that permissible activities are vaguely defined by their outcome; following these definitions the regulations provide examples:

(d) Examples of the types of direct service activities AmeriCorps members may perform include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) tutoring children in reading; (2) helping to run an after-school program; (3) engaging in community clean-up projects; (4) providing health information to a vulnerable population; (5) teaching as part of a professional corps; (6) providing relief services to a
community affected by a disaster; and (7) conducting a neighborhood watch program as part of a public safety effort (45 CFR 2520.25 2008, p. 642).

‘Direct service’ is defined in the AmeriCorps program by both its contribution to meeting community needs and by the fact that it is not prohibited. Rather than being prescriptive about what can be ‘direct service,’ the regulations are prescriptive about what cannot be considered service. Direct service, or service more generally, is articulated as mutually exclusive with partisan activity. In this process, direct service takes on a non-political character and postulates that ‘meeting unmet needs’ can take place in a similarly non-political fashion. The effect is that work activities are bifurcated: this activity is considered ‘political’ while another activity is not. This bifurcation is clear on easy to identify activities such as attending a protest or organizing a union. It is not easy to identify within the most vague of the prohibitions, which forbids “participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials” (Code of Federal Regulations, 2008, p. 644-645). This regulation and the articulation of ‘political’ and ‘partisan’ in regards to training sessions will prove to have tremendous effects on the organization of civic engagement within the program.

This bifurcation is mirrored in the daily lives of AmeriCorps members and how they make sense of organizational imperatives such as ‘civic engagement’ and ‘active citizenship.’ However, it is also plays out in how the daily work activities of AmeriCorps members are defined. Each member receives a service description as part of his or her work contract. These service descriptions are generated through a program planning process that begins with the separation of ‘permissible’ from ‘prohibited.’ But AmeriCorps members further feel the ambiguity of the regulations in their daily lives and this ambiguity drives them to invoke and avoid the regulations in different was. For some, the ambiguity in what is permissible drives
them to abstain from prohibited activities, despite the fact that they are allowed to conduct these activities as a private citizen. One member recalled to her focus group that they had a Corp member who left the program under unclear circumstances after he was arrested at a protest.

Another female AmeriCorps member commented on the situation saying,

That kind of puts a damper on the idea that you can do whatever the hell you want in your private time. It’s not a 100% true. If you get arrested while protesting in some way, shape, or form, you could get asked to leave (female, early 20s, tutor, April 14, 2009).

Other members expressed the difficulties that emerge from having to have a dual persona vis-à-vis the community in which they work. Michelle, who observed this bifurcation during her period as a program director, commented on the prohibitions of AmeriCorps by saying, “yeah, well, the reality is that it is difficult to really be ‘off the clock’ if you’re living and working in the same community” (AmeriCorps consultant, March 12, 2009).

These prohibitions are extremely important in the organization of learning in AmeriCorps and they serve as another ‘narrowing’ of experience and learning. Clearly, they confine the experiential terrain of learning to a particular set of activities from which anything that could be interpreted as partisan is excluded. At a deeper level, they confine work to activities that are deemed non-political. While the idea that humanitarian service work is non-political is deeply contested (Amin, 2004; Bricmont, 2006; Funicello, 1993; Incite!, 2007; Mojab, 2009; Solnit, 2010), the AmeriCorps program postulates to its members, its staff, the United States Congress, and the United States public that ‘politics’ does not happen in the provision of human services. Politics is not only something that happens elsewhere, but it is appropriate that it should happen elsewhere; the converse being that it is inappropriate for those working on the public dollar to engage in the inherently political nature of public problems such as school achievement gaps, affordable housing provision, public safety, or environmental degradation. Non-profit staffs
around the country enter into this framework when they sit down to write an AmeriCorps
Subtitle C grant. They must plan an AmeriCorps program in such a way as to justify the logical
and measurable impact of non-political direct service activities on the community need they
identify. This process, the most explicit process coordinating the everyday experience of
AmeriCorps members, is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Fourth ‘Narrowing’: The ‘Logical’ Organization of Service Work

As I previously mentioned in the section of this chapter on sustainability, the AmeriCorps
Subtitle C grant criteria are divided into three major categories and each is assigned a different
weight of the overall score of the grant. The figure below summarizes the grant criteria:

Figure 4: Basic Selection Criteria: Categories, Sub-Categories, and Respective Weights (CNCS, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sub-Categories and Weights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Design</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Rationale &amp; Approach- 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Member Outputs &amp; Outcomes- 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community Outputs &amp; Outcomes- 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Capacity</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>No sub-categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Effectiveness &amp; Budget</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Cost Effectiveness- 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Budget Adequacy- 10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Budget adequacy and organizational capacity together comprise 50% of these criteria and
program design makes up the other 50%. Program design is further divided into three categories,
which in turn are weighted as well. The *rationale and approach* of the program counts for 10%
of the overall grant score. The other two categories are labeled *member outputs and outcomes*
and *community outputs and outcomes*, each being weighted at 20%. In each of these sections,
those writing AmeriCorps grants, sometimes AmeriCorps program directors, must follow a set of
instructions and criteria that correspond to the program regulations found in the Code of Federal
Regulations. In this section, I will explore how the process of program design is organized within the grants processes, using the participating AmeriCorps sites as examples of how these program design processes play out in actual, successful federally competitive grants. This analysis requires two activities. First, I will explore the ‘logic’ embedded in AmeriCorps program design that establishes a particular relationship between service work and social problems. Second, I will explore how this articulation of ‘community needs’ affects the character of work in the program. I argue that the program design plays a substantial role in the organization of service work and constitutes the final level at which experience and learning are in narrowed in the program.

Member activities are organized in AmeriCorps grants and program planning through both the explicit and implicit use of logic models. A logic model is a “graphic display or ‘map’ of the relationship between a program’s resources, activities, and intended results” (Kaplan & Garret, 2005 p. 167). Logic models, however, serve the additional purpose of attempting to surface the assumptions and preconditions of the relationships within a program by making “the implicit theory explicit’ (Dwyer & Makin, 1997 p. 421). Logic models emerged in the late 1980s in non-profit and public sector program planning and evaluation in response to a funding environment, in both the public and private sectors, which emphasized accountability and measurable results. According to Renger (2006), in 2005 President Bush’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB) undertook a program review project aimed at eliminating programs that cannot ‘get results.’ The OMB developed the PART (Performance Assessment Rating Tool), which scores programs on purpose and design, strategic planning, program results and accountability, and program management. Logic models became a bulwark against this kind of criticism because “logic modeling provides a mechanism to ensure that the important dots
between underlying assumptions, strategies, and outcomes are meaningfully connected” (Renger, 2006 p. 453).

There are a variety of versions of logic models floating around in the world of program planning, although all include the same basic components. These components, however, often have different terms to describe similar functions. The most basic components of a logic model include activities, populations, and outcomes.

Activities are the things the program does to work toward its desired outcomes. Target groups are the individuals, groups, or communities at whom the program’s activities are directed. Outcomes are the changes the program hopes to achieve. These are differentiated between short term and long-term outcomes (Porteaous, et al, 2002 p. 116-117).

The logic model postulates a theoretical relationship of effect between the various components of the model. The theory that is established in a logic model is often called a theory of change or sometimes a program theory. A theory of change establishes a series of if…then relationships between various factors; if event X happens then event Y will occur. We can use as an example the most basic theory of change postulated by the CNCS, if that is, the CNCS was required to make a logic model for their own programmatic existence. They are not and thus, to my knowledge, no such logic model exists. The most basic assertion found in the legislation establishing the CNCS is that if young adults participate in civil society through community service then they will become more engaged citizens. The population or target group in this example is young adults, specifically AmeriCorps members. Their activities are their community service activities and trainings. The outputs define the quantifiable, measurable components of their work, for example 1700 hours of full time service in one year. Finally, the outcomes of the program will be various levels of civic engagement on a short to long-term continuum.
The problem with logic models and the way they conceptually organize information has
to do with the type of implicit theory that is made explicit. As Bickman (1987), a noted scholar
in non-profit management, argued

Every program has a theory. Unfortunately, it may be implicit, fragmented, and
not well conceptualized. These theories are composed of a number of important
assumptions that can include basic constructs such as human nature, assumptions
about the nature of the problem and of the population, and the boundary, or
limiting conditions, of the effects of the program. These assumptions are in
addition to assumptions about the causal linkages within the program (p. 14).

Logic models can establish relationships between variables that exist on a continuum of over
simplification to radical complexity. They are conceptual models that are limited by the
theoretical and analytical tools available to the individuals who design them. Renger’s (2006)
research interrogated how deeply practitioners reflect on the nature of the problems identified in
the model prior to the development of activities and expected outcomes. Renger argued that logic
modeling

begins by defining the problem of interest. Most problems are influenced by
behavioral, environmental, social, and biological conditions; these factors, or
antecedent conditions, must be indentified and understood to focus intervention
efforts (p. 455).

He claims that in this process, planners should map various answers to the question “why does
this condition occur?” And yet, popular logic models design tools do not push practitioners to
engage in this research process. The use of logic models can be further complicated by the
funder’s own agenda:

Often when funders require the development of a program logic model, the
emphasis is on laying out the activities and expected outcomes. Although
articulating the underlying rationale for a program is critical to its success, it is
frequently a second generation or post hoc activity- one that is never quite
completed (Kaplan & Garret, 2005 p. 170).

Renger’s (2006) research demonstrates that when research into antecedent conditions is not
done, a chain reaction of missteps can be set off, including incorrectly identifying the nature of
the problem, targeting aspects of the problem that may not have strong relevance to the actual problem, programs can become fractured from one another, and activities can be developed that do not target antecedent conditions.

However, the errors found by Renger are largely errors in the logical claims of the relationships established. They do not necessarily recognize that the interpretation of antecedent conditions, that is the definition of the problem at hand, is a theoretical, political, and ideological activity. Theory, within the logic model notion, refers to program theory. Although Bickman (1987) defined program theory in such a way as to include basic assumptions, within the activity of a logic model this theory becomes pragmatic in nature, meaning that its focus becomes the claim to effect. This is the theoretical relationship of interest to funders, because it results in the articulation of measurable outcomes to which program planners can be held accountable. As Kaplan and Garret (2005) have pointed out,

In its essence, use of the logic model guides program participants in applying the scientific method- the articulation of a clear hypothesis or objective to be tested- to their project development, implementation, and monitoring (p. 171).

To see underneath this process requires that the components of the logic model be interrogated for their organization of social relations. Through this process, it is possible to see the ideological construction of the notion of ‘community needs’ at the center of AmeriCorps programming.

An examination of the supporting documents for AmeriCorps Subtitle C grants provides evidence into how ‘community needs’ come to be defined through the ‘logic’ of program planning. 8 Ironically, the entirety of the program rationale and approach, which contains the ‘theory of change’ of each AmeriCorps program, is seen from the Corporation’s perspective as

---

8 In this section, I will analyze five documents to support my argument. First, I will use the 2009 NOFA as presented by the state commission that participated in this research. I will also use the 2007 and 2008 NOFAs, which correspond to competition years in which the participating AmeriCorps sites were funded. Finally, I will use the grant applications of the sites from 2007 and 2008.
the least significant part of the grant and counts as only 10% of the overall selection criteria, despite the fact that the relationships depicted in this section dictate all other ‘logics’ employed in the grant. The CNCS designates the criteria for the rationale and approach section as follows, in addition to the criteria around sustainability already mentioned:

(1) Whether your proposal describes and adequately documents a compelling need within the target community, including a description of how you identified the need; (2) whether your proposal includes well-designed activities that address the compelling need, with ambitious performance measures, and a plan or system for continuous program self-assessment and improvement; (3) Whether your proposal described well-defined roles for participants that are aligned with the identified needs and that lead to measurable outputs and outcomes (CNCS, 2009f p. 10-11).

The structure of the grant and the evaluation criteria ask grant writers to conceptualize AmeriCorps programs in a particular way. This thought process looks something like this:

Figure 5: Program Planning in AmeriCorps
This is of course an ideal arrangement for program planning, one that asks practitioners to first consider the problem at hand before developing activities and performance mechanisms. This is also a unique condition for program planning to take place under.

In interviews with AmeriCorps program directors and state commission employees, the portion of the grant that rises to the top as the most important component are the performance measures that conclude the grant and which are distributed between ‘member outcomes’ and ‘community outcomes.’ Rebecca, the state commission executive, pointed to a more recent, post-2005, emphasis on measurable outcomes as part of the overall plan to ensure effectiveness in programs, emphasizing that the insistence of sustainability and capacity building are not separate from the emphasis on measurable outcomes.

There’s a new way of thinking about AmeriCorps and how we use those resources. The focus is really on measurable results. If you can show that because you tutor these 300 kids they’re staying in school or whatever the outcomes are, there’s a lot more focus on outcomes. So we really push our programs in their performance measures to make sure you have something measurable and that you can point to the AmeriCorps members as making a difference (state commission executive, May 15, 2009).
The bulk of the ‘member outcomes’ section of the grant focuses on the program’s plans for recruiting, training, and retaining AmeriCorps members. The final criteria designates performance measures as they relate to the members themselves and it is here that the civic engagement measure comes into play, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The final section of the program design focuses on ‘community outcomes.’ As I mentioned previously in the sustainability section, 75% of the criteria in this section has to do with the ability of the program to develop itself into a sustainable program that builds capacity in the community to address the need identified.

Grant writers build performance measures through the use of a tool available in the online grant submission system (eGrants), the Performance Measure Worksheet. A full copy of this worksheet is provided in Appendix H and is partially reproduced in the figure below.

**Figure 6: Performance Measure Worksheet (Needs & Activities)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs and Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Briefly describe the need to be addressed (1-3 sentences):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (1-3 sentences):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many AmeriCorps members will be participating in this activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many days per week (on average) will this activity occur?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many hours per day (on average) will this activity occur?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When does this activity begin?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When does this activity end?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the section of the worksheet entitled ‘Needs and Activities,’ the relation established between the community need and the service activities is phrased as ‘results.’ Specifically, after briefly describing the need, the author is asked to describe how they “will achieve this result.” They substantiate this claim by detailing how many members will perform the activity, how often the activity will occur, and what the duration of the activity will be. In order to accomplish this
‘logical’ articulation, the performance measures must articulate the need through the logic of the activity rather than vice versa. For example, in Amanda’s program a performance measure on academic support for k-12 students, the need is defined as “students who are below grade level in reading and/or math will receive tutoring by an AmeriCorps member.” The need to engage in this kind of articulation emerges out of the climate of regulation, threat, and accountability already seen in other aspects of program regulation. As Rebecca argued,

I think congress and everyone is saying ‘show me the results’-- you can’t just say you’re doing good work. They want to know how many kids we’re impacting, how many have jobs, how many houses built. We can submit stories, but what we report to the corporation is hard data. They want to know how many kids across the country increase their test scores as they basically have to roll it all up to congress (state commission executive, May 15, 2009).

This emphasis on outcomes dictates the kinds of service activities that will be designed for AmeriCorps members and thus, the logic through which members will engage with the community they serve and the need they address. In many ways, the emphasis on outcomes forces AmeriCorps program planners to work backwards from the logic model described above, asking first what can be achieved and measured. Increasingly, institutional ethnographers are uncovering the pervasive logic of the imposition of performance measures and accountability practices, embodied in ‘forms’ and endless paperwork. These activities have multiple effects in organizational settings; importantly they work to impose an extra-local set of priorities within local organizational contexts, tie staff promotion and professional enhancement to compliance measures, reproduce particular social relations of ‘need’ and ‘deviance,’ and obscure the actual root and functioning of particular program policies and practices (Nichols, 2008; Nichols & Griffith, 2009; Ridzi, 2003, 2004).
The best way to unpack this process is to walk through what these grant selection criteria actually look like after they are processed and interpreted by AmeriCorps directors and articulated in their grants. Whereas logic modeling posits the relationship between activities and outcomes as linear or causal, what emerges in the grant writing process is a definition of community needs that is formed through not only its explicit rationale, but through the defining of activities and outcomes as well. Ultimately, a speculative teleology emerges in which a set of guiding, abstract assumptions about the nature of the problem direct the generation of a set of activities, which in turn become part of the definition of the problem.

The definition of need is the first step in defining the nature of the problem that faces the AmeriCorps member as they step into their service work. It also has a compelling effect on how AmeriCorps members are trained to understand and go about ‘meeting’ this need. In their recommendations on how to interpret the selection criteria, the state corporation advises grant writers to include four points: 1) a description of the need, 2) why the need was selected, 3) how the need was identified, and 4) provide documentation of the need. For the organizations participating in this research, the grant writers took two divergent, but equally successful approaches to establishing need.

Amanda’s organization provides a list of statistics with very little narrative explanation or development. The list of statistics states that in the organization’s school district, 67% of students receive free or reduced lunch, 72% are students of color, and 23% are English Language Learners. The statement of need then lists that around 50% of students read below grade level at the 5th, 7th, and 10th grade levels and that between 62-84% of students are below grade level on math scores, while graduate rates are around 60%. This need is further supplemented by the $120
million dollars cut from the district budget in the preceding five years. Amanda’s need statement takes up about 80% of one page, double-spaced.

David’s organization took a different approach, crafting a need statement that first and foremost focuses on the credibility of his organization to address the problem of affordable housing and stabilize low-income families. This need statement then goes on to argue that stable housing is the “foundation for family success” and that the “development and preservation of affordable housing is imperative as the gap grows between wages and housing costs.” David offers some statistics around low-income households and housing costs for the local area, as well as federal definitions of the categories. David’s organization goes on to support this claim by arguing that children with stable housing have greater academic success and that evidence exists linking the achievement gap to income inequality. The need statement also argues that poor families lack social capital and that this deficit must be addressed in order for poor families to maintain self-sufficiency and stability.

On a first read, Amanda’s need statement establishing the frank reality of disparities in educational outcomes. Clearly, Amanda is confident that the numbers ‘speak for themselves’ and are not in need of any further elaboration. In David’s application, however, the need for affordable housing is not treated as a self-evident ‘need.’ Rather, it is linked to other social problems such as academic achievement, self-sufficiency, and family stability. David takes the approach of in part justifying his location of need on housing, rather than say job skills, by referencing the interrelated nature of social problems. However, despite their apparent differences, when the next section of the grant, activities and outcomes, is included, it becomes clear that Amanda and David have both taken the same approach to defining need. Amanda has used her need statement to describe the need that exists (inequalities in educational outcomes)
and to document the need through statistics. David has accomplished the same thing. However, as each goes on to describe the necessary activities, they further define ‘community need’ by describing the activities that will address the need. They in effect explain where the problem comes from by delineating the activities that will ameliorate the community need’s appearance. Amanda’s grant proposes five activities for AmeriCorps members, which in turn each address one aspect of the achievement gap. The service activities for members will include tutoring to address academic support, service-learning projects to foster leadership development in students, out-of-school programming to foster the development of social skills, mentoring to improve self esteem, and volunteer recruitment to provide positive role models. David’s program proposes that affordable housing needs can be met by mobilizing volunteers to help stabilize low-income families by developing the affordable housing stock, helping low-income youth improve academic performance, and organizing social networks and a sense of community in low-income neighborhoods.

How should we interpret the fact that each of these grants focuses its explanation of a community need on individual deficits? In the case of the Amanda’s program, all the designed interventions focus on the individual dysfunctions of young people. They are behind academically, they have low self-esteem, and they need to develop their social skills. In the case of David’s program, lack of affordable housing and the instability of poverty becomes functions of a lack of social capital amongst poor people as an exacerbating factor to the shortage of affordable housing. It of course problematizes the ways in which ‘needs’ are defined. These definitions become more clear when we examine how students are trained to address these problems and to understand the relation between their service activities and the ‘community need’ they are working to solve. The impulse present in these programs, to frame social
problems as matters of individual or cultural deficit, is a long-standing ideological practice, enshrined in seminal works such as “The Negro Family” (Moynihan, 1965) or The Truly Disadvantaged (Wilson, 1996). They constitute not only a re-definition of poverty as a ‘tangle of pathologies,’ as Charles Murray (1984) was fond of saying, but also work to re-inscribe particular notions of race and its relation to social inequality. In this way, the ‘logic’ of an AmeriCorps program can serve as ideological frame (Ng, 1995) on the nature of social inequality in that we can see the activity of AmeriCorps volunteers, as they build social capital in poor communities or struggle to increase individual engagement in school, as processes that reproduce a certain way of understanding a social problem and acting in relation to that problem, i.e., by organizing social interventions at the level of individual behavioral change.

The Narrowed Field

Thus far I have argued that the daily experiential reality of AmeriCorps members is organized through four regulatory processes that establish what the sites of AmeriCorps work will be, that is where members will conduct their service, and coordinate the kind of work AmeriCorps members will do at these sites. The regulatory processes work together to confine AmeriCorps activity to a particular set of activities defined by the Corporation at ‘direct service’ and ‘capacity building.’ The terrain of these activities, and thus the terrain of experiential learning in the program, is increasingly narrowed in the program through these regulatory acts. Thus, while it may appear as though AmeriCorps members are hard at work in diverse areas of civil society, they are in reality confined to a very narrow arena of citizen activity. This narrowing process is summarized in the figure below.

Figure 7: The ‘Narrowing’ Effect of Regulations with AmeriCorps
What is represented above is a depiction of the regulatory processes that establish the site of AmeriCorps activity and the location of the AmeriCorps member within the regulatory frameworks. In the first instance, AmeriCorps activity is confined to the narrow sector of civil society designated by 501c3 tax-exempt status. The purpose of this regulation is to confine AmeriCorps activity to an arena of public life that can be deemed ‘non-political’ because of its purposeful disengagement with public policy and state power. In the second instance, AmeriCorps sites are increasingly required to conform to ‘sustainability’ protocols. While the effect of these protocols is increase the pressure on smaller organizations and collapse those programs that are less fiscally viable, the sustainability measures also require organizations to develop civic entrepreneurism and seek out private sector support for AmeriCorps program. In the third instance, AmeriCorps work is coordinated by a set of regulations that differentiates between ‘permissible’ and ‘prohibited’ activities. These regulations exclude all ‘political’ and ‘partisan’ work from the daily activities of AmeriCorps members and confine their experiences in the program to the delivery of direct service, which is defined as inherently non-political.
within the AmeriCorps program. In the fourth instance, AmeriCorps work is coordinated through a grant making processes that requires AmeriCorps programs to define social problems within a logical framework that directs service activities towards measurable and quantifiable interventions in social problems. This is the organized, experiential space into which AmeriCorps members enter and which becomes the terrain of ‘informal’ or everyday learning processes in the program.

This experiential terrain is important to an exploration of learning about democracy and citizenship in the AmeriCorps program for several reasons. First, the daily experiences of AmeriCorps members are the ground upon with praxis develops. For the AmeriCorps members who participated in this research, their most profound learning activities were found in making sense of their daily experience through informal conversation with their peers. Second, in their attempts to process their assumptions and learning around the concept of ‘civic engagement,’ their daily experience in service work served as their first point of interpretive departure. Third, this research as uncovered evidence that the bifurcation of work activities into ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ activities has some influence on the learning of AmeriCorps members in regards to democracy and civic engagement. Finally, and most importantly, the same regulatory processes that explicitly organize daily work practices in AmeriCorps also implicitly organize formalized training practices within the research sites. This effect on learning has far more serious implications for how ‘democracy’ and ‘citizenship’ are framed within the program. These processes will be explored in the following chapter, which focuses on how learning about civic engagement is intentionally organized within the program and what other aspects of training and service activities have an unintentional effect on the learning of members.
Chapter 6

A School for Democracy: Civic Engagement and Democratic Learning in AmeriCorps

In view of the great interest Americans of all ages and backgrounds have expressed since the attacks of September 11 in becoming more active citizens of our country, we believe we have a great opportunity—and responsibility—this coming year to strengthen AmeriCorps’ value as a ‘school’ for democracy (Lenkowsky, 2003 p. 4).

The phrase ‘school for democracy’ is a romantic trope in both educational research and political history. In the United States, there have been many ‘schools for democracy;’ the settlement houses, the Highlander Folk Schools, the ‘citizenship schools’ of the civil rights movement, and a myriad of social movements have assumed this title. It has also been a label for American Indian residential schools, the Americanization movement, and coerced naturalization programs. This dual history is an indication of the dualism embodied in the projects of citizenship education and democracy promotion: the making of boundaries, the establishment of ‘nation,’ the opening of markets to capital, and the implicit processes of conformity and racialization. When AmeriCorps assumes this title, it positions itself, most likely unaware, within a very complicated history.

In this chapter, I will describe the emergence and manifestation of civic engagement in two AmeriCorps programs within a particular state with a civic engagement performance measure. I explore the contours of democratic learning through an analysis of how a ‘school for democracy’ is practically organized within the bureaucratic structure of AmeriCorps described in the previous chapter. This discussion is organized in four sections. First, I explore the historical

---

9 As I mentioned in chapter four, this research was conducted in a particular region of the United States and the identity of that state is withheld for reasons of confidentiality. Throughout this chapter I use the term ‘state’ to refer to the location of the research and ‘the state’ to refer to the democratic apparatus.
development of curricular mandates on civic engagement in the AmeriCorps program. Second, I examine the organization of ‘civic engagement’ through a performance measure designed by the local state commission and compulsory for every AmeriCorps site in the state in which I conducted this research. Third, I explore the embodiment of the state-level performance measure through three pedagogic activities in AmeriCorps programs (civic engagement plans, service projects, and trainings) as well as the experience of AmeriCorps members in relation to these activities. Finally, I offer some findings from the research as to why civic engagement appears as it does in the daily experience of AmeriCorps members.

**Historical Development Of ‘Civic Engagement’ In AmeriCorps**

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 includes Congressional mandates for all national service programs, including AmeriCorps, with its provisions largely duplicated in the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Both documents state that the purpose of national service, second only to meeting unmet public needs, is to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility and the spirit of community throughout the United States” (101st Congress of the United States, 1990 p. 1). Throughout the document, national service programs are described using phrases such as ‘building an ethic of civic responsibility’ and ‘fostering civic responsibility.’ In Waldeman’s (1995) account of the legislative process to establish the CNCS, he depicts Bill Clinton, Eli Segal, and other founding advocates of national service as seeing a very explicit relationship between volunteer service and service to the nation. They inscribe in community service a larger vision of civic wellness through developing a commitment to the local and by extension, and possible fallacy, the national community. In this way, ‘civic engagement’ has been around since the beginning of AmeriCorps, but its appearance within the program has developed in different ways at different times.
There is little public documentation of early efforts to promote civic engagement amongst AmeriCorps members in the first four to five years of the program. Research participants with long institutional connections to the AmeriCorps program referred to early efforts as ‘top-down’ and ‘prescriptive,’ but could only muster vague memories of early curricula or mandates provided by the Corporation for the purposes of promoting civic engagement. It appears as though there was little organized or concerted effort to promote civic engagement in a systematic way prior to 1998.

Beginning in 1995, two years after the establishment of AmeriCorps, a flurry of academic and policy literature began to emerge around the question of civic disengagement, apathy, and decline. Notably spurred on by the publication of Robert Putnam’s (1995) article “Bowling alone? America’s declining social capital,” the question of the extent and effectiveness of citizen’s engagement in public life became an important concern of centrist policy makers, think tanks, and academics. It dovetailed with a growing concern amongst conservative thinkers about the ‘moral character’ of the national body, which, for some commentators, manifested as civic disengagement (Glendon & Blankenhorn, 1995).

In 1996 the Pew Charitable Trust and the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy at the University of Maryland partnered to found the National Commission on Civic Renewal. William J. Bennet, former Secretary of Education under George H.W. Bush, and Sam Nunn, former Democratic Senator from Georgia, co-chaired the commission, which was staffed by William A. Galston, professor at University of Maryland and a former advisor to Bill Clinton, who is also a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. The commissioners formed a bi-partisan group, although more appear to have ties to conservative political parties, think tanks, and religious organizations, and no official standing vis-à-vis the federal government. The commission was
charged with researching the state of public life in United States and with issuing recommendations for the renewal of civic life and “its moral underpinnings” (National Commission for Civic Revewal, 1998 p. 3). In 1998 the commission issued its final report, *A Nation of Spectators: How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It*. This early document crystallized some of the elements that would become the focus of government efforts for civic renewal, including a focus on the culture of families, a renewed role for faith-based institutions, strong emphasis on local and neighborhood based participation, and service-learning, civic, and character education in schools. It is clear from other Corporation documents, including civic engagement studies and curricula, that the report, in concert with emerging research, had a strong influence on the renewed emphasis the Corporation placed on civic engagement within national service programs.

Following the publication of the NCCR report, the Corporation commissioned the production of two curricula on active citizenship and civic engagement for use in national service programs, specifically AmeriCorps programs. One curriculum, entitled *By the People* (2001), was produced by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota and was edited by Harry Boyte, an international advocate for citizenship in the public work and civic republican tradition. The other curriculum, entitled *A Guide to Effective Citizenship through AmeriCorps* (2001), was produced by the Constitutional Rights Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization devoted to producing and distributing curricular materials focused on the US constitution, the Bill of Rights, and with special emphasis on the United States judicial system. The curricula were initially distributed to a sample population of AmeriCorps sites and the Corporation later hired consulting firm CHP International to produce facilitator guides for the curricula. Not long after the curricula were ‘piloted’ at various AmeriCorps sites, the
Corporation commissioned a research project, through the National Service Fellows program, which examined how national service programs responded to the problem of civic disengagement through trainings and the use of the two nationally sanctioned curricula.

The Corporation released this study, entitled *Citizens in Service: The Challenge of Delivering Civic Engagement Training To National Service Programs* (Diller, 2001), in the summer of 2001. ‘The Diller report,’ as I refer to it, demonstrated a large incongruence between the civic ideals of AmeriCorps participants and the effort and intentionality to address these questions on the part of state commission offices overseeing AmeriCorps programs. Diller argued that the young people participating in AmeriCorps were interested in civic engagement, were involved in their communities, and were demonstrating leadership skills in the public domain. However, she often found substantial evidence that state commissions were ambivalent about addressing civic engagement, often arguing that it was best accomplished at the program level, while at the same time finding program directors ill equipped to deliver civic engagement training to their corps. Based on her findings, Diller recommended that the CNCS should incorporate

high quality and challenging civic engagement programs into the member-training curriculum; develop guidance or a definition of civic engagement for commissions and programs… program staff could be encouraged to include civic engagement training as part of member development objectives (p. 1).

It is impossible to know to what extent Diller’s recommendations affected decision-making at the highest levels of the Corporation. Diller’s report was published on July 27, 2001 and was quickly followed by the events of September 11, 2011, which fundamentally altered the national conversation around volunteerism and thrust national service programs into a new rhetorical position in public life.
In his 2002 State of the Union address, President George Bush introduced a new effort to organize the federal government’s support of volunteer community service initiatives. After detailing the military’s successful occupation of Afghanistan, the long road that would become the ‘war on terror,’ the necessity of vigilance and surveillance by every level of government as well as individual citizens, Bush moved on to remind listeners that citizens of the United States had many freedoms, but many obligations as well. He outlined the agenda of the new USA Freedom Corps: to mobilize volunteers in the service of rebuilding communities, responding to domestic crisis, and “extending American compassion throughout the world” (Bush, 2002). He called on every American to commit 4,000 hours, or two years of full time work, to community service. Before continuing on to discuss why the occupation of Afghanistan was not only necessary, but desired by Afghans themselves, Bush offered the following summary comments on the importance of volunteerism:

This time of adversity offers a unique moment of opportunity -- a moment we must seize to change our culture. Through the gathering momentum of millions of acts of service and decency and kindness, I know we can overcome evil with greater good. And we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace.

Throughout the spring of 2002, Bush and his congressional allies struggled to pass the Citizen Service Act, which reauthorized the CNCS and its programs with several important changes to policy. The events of September 11, 2001 remained central to the arguments for the legislation.

The spirit of community service in our country is stronger than ever because of the tragedy our Nation has endured. Since so many Americans are looking for a sense of community and looking for ways to contribute constructively to their communities, we must take this opportunity to reform our Nation’s service laws. The principles outlined by President Bush and included in the Citizen Service Act of 2002 seek to build on this spirit and will help to sustain it in the future (Hoekstra, 2002 p. E933).

Although the Citizen Service Act ultimately failed to pass Congress, and in fact never left conference committee, the influence of Bush’s emphasis on the relationship between service and
citizenship was felt at the CNCS. For the 2003 grants cycle, the Corporation released new guidelines for AmeriCorps programs and new grant applicants. These guidelines, referred to by research participants as the 2003 Guidelines, took the furthest steps yet in mandating AmeriCorps programs to include civic engagement programming as part of their member development efforts.

The 2003 guidelines include a specific recommendation for the inclusion of civic engagement in AmeriCorps program plans. The guidelines were designed, as described by Corporation CEO Leslie Lenkowsky, to put the principles of the Citizen Service Act “into practice as much as possible within existing legislative authority” (2003, p. 3). While unable to force AmeriCorps programs to implement civic engagement training, the guidelines “clarified” the Corporation’s goals in this regard, “while leaving to the programs themselves considerable flexibility in the methods they use to attain them” (p. 4). The 2003 guidelines are infused with what could be described as ‘persuasive’ arguments concerning the inclusion of civic engagement training. For example, one section on member development says, “successful applicants will provide training and use the service experience to help members acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be active citizens of communities—local, state, and national” (p. 49, emphasis mine). The knowledge, skills, and attitudes of active citizens were further detailed in the appendix to the guidelines (Appendix I). To support the learning of these skills, the Corporation launched several efforts to support member development in active citizenship, many of which are available today. The two curricula described above, as well as several other smaller curricula, were made available online to programs. Online resource libraries were created to distribute various curricular materials and to aid in the planning of member develop training around citizenship ‘priorities.’ The Corporation announced its intention to distribute copies of
historical United States documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, to all AmeriCorps members with the argument that these documents “invite us to reflect on who we are as a nation and why service is vital to our communities and to our nation” (2003, p. 17).

There is little documentation concerning the effect of the Corporation’s attempt to implement widespread civic engagement trainings in the AmeriCorps program. While the program had a very specific effect in the state where this research was developed, such as the development of a statewide performance measure for civic engagement, the efforts appear to have elicited a negative reaction from local level AmeriCorps directors. Laura, a state commission employee, described the imposition as ‘top-down,’ saying,

I mean it’s definitely a corporation priority, that members are in engaged in civic engagement…I think they were probably going in the way of direct recommendations when they came up with the two competing curricula that they actually paid for people to develop and I think programs were just like, no that’s way too strict and they backed off on prescribing so now they let programs kind of determine what civic engagement is on their own (state commission employee, April 23, 2009).

The experience of new layers of requirements within program had mixed reaction amongst research participants who had worked for AmeriCorps during this period. Some were excited that the Corporation was putting an explicit emphasis on the citizenship components of AmeriCorps. Others were frustrated by what Michelle described as “the decentralized world of AmeriCorps where everyone can do whatever they want, except you all have to do X, Y, and Z and we’re not going to tell you how” (AmeriCorps consultant, March 12, 2009). The curricula also raised concerns about their appropriateness for differing AmeriCorps programs. Michelle, a former program director remembered:

What was really great was when they were trying to introduce those curricula to the tribal communities, who were going ‘I’m not doing this with my Indian Nation members. This is completely culturally and politically inappropriate’ (AmeriCorps consultant, March 12, 2009).
This anecdote is telling as it gives another point of reference around how the regulations and the nature of ‘partisan’ and ‘political’ are interpreted in the program. While it may be considered ‘political’ to discuss existing treaty claims by American Indian communities, it is not ‘political’ to suggest to tribal communities that they need to learn about American citizenship and incorporate themselves into the national body.

Despite the ambiguity and ambivalence among state commissions surrounding the entire project of citizenship education in AmeriCorps, and detailed in the Diller report (2001), the Corporation pushed forward in this period a list of goals for citizenship learning in AmeriCorps that remain influential within the programs. The 2003 guidelines state that,

By the end of their term of service, AmeriCorps members should: understand and be able to participate effectively in American democracy; discuss and explore their community and the people, processes, and institutions most effective in improving community conditions; help plan effective service projects that respond to real community needs and emergencies; foster within themselves and others positive attitudes regarding the value of lifelong citizenship and service for the common good; have new or increased existing life and/or employment skills; and gain a greater appreciation and understanding of what it means to be an American, including an appreciation and understanding of those of different backgrounds (p. 16)

It is clear from these goals that the Corporation’s intentions for AmeriCorps programs not only transcend ‘active citizenship’ defined solely as some vague form of democratic participation, but they also strain towards the values and virtues of citizenship. These values and virtues contain seeds of national identify, the protestant and/or capitalist work ethic, and the chorus of self-improvement identified by critical educators as the ‘entrepreneurial self’ (Peters, 2001).

*Straining towards Definition: The Civic Engagement Performance Measure*
The first instance in which an AmeriCorps program comes up against the notion of civic engagement is in the grant writing process. The Corporation requires every state commission to have common or aligned performance measures, which every local corps will have to meet. These performance measures are proposed and approved through the grant application process for state commissions themselves, which have to reapply to remain the official ‘ambassador’ of AmeriCorps in their state. In their individual grant writing process, AmeriCorps programs will have to include not only their program specific performance measures, which I discussed in the previous chapter, but their state mandated ones as well, and will have to incorporate these performance measures into any other component of the grant where they apply. In the case of civic engagement, this means introducing civic engagement into the member development sections of the grant. In the state where this research was conducted, there were two aligned performance measures, which is the minimum number required. The two performance measures were ‘civic engagement’ and ‘volunteer mobilization.’

The ‘volunteer mobilization’ measure is essentially what it appears to be; it indicated that a state priority for AmeriCorps programming was to increase the number of people across the state who were volunteering by directing AmeriCorps members to the active recruitment and cultivation of volunteers beyond the boundaries of the AmeriCorps program. This performance measure proved to be prescient given that the 2005 final rule directed all AmeriCorps programs to engage in volunteer mobilization. The ‘civic engagement’ performance measure, on the surface, gives the impression that increasing the capacity and involvement of AmeriCorps members in public life is also a high priority. However, the choice of these performance measures was not made in a political vacuum. Rebecca remembered,

Five or six years ago the corporation said that every program has to have an aligned performance measure and we decided at that time as a state we could
choose two that were really a focus of the Corporation and for us (state commission executive, May 15, 2009).

At the time of this conversation, the interviewee was remembering the state commission’s strategic effort to directly respond to the ‘guidance’ that emerged in the post-9/11 national service context. This does not discount the possibility that civic engagement was, and remains, authentically a programmatic goal for the AmeriCorps programs in this state. However, the performance measure creates the space in which civic engagement activities within the program emerge in a compulsory form.

To understand the performance measure, we must look at the tools used to develop such an instrument. Just as with the local AmeriCorps program sites, the state commission was required to produce a logic model for its aligned performance measures (Appendix J). The civic engagement logic model employs the basic components of all logic models: it attempts to establish a logical relationship between the activities of ‘civic engagement’ and the outcomes defined by the Corporation. In the logic model, the performance measure dictates that sites will organize three primary civic engagement activities: structured service projects, member training curricula, and civic engagement action plans. Program directors reported that their understanding was that each program site had to provide at least a minimum of three civic engagement trainings. They complained, however, that there was no confirmation of that number. Further, they understood that each member had to complete five civic engagement action goals, although some sites thought it was three, and that there was no specified quantity on the number of structured service projects. The outputs of these activities, according to the logic model, are that members will be trained in the designated civic engagement skill areas; their capacity in this regard would be measured through a civic engagement survey and by their completion of their civic engagement plan. Said more plainly, AmeriCorps members would be deemed ‘civically
engaged’ if they evaluated themselves as such on an end of the year survey (Appendix K) and if they completed the mandatory components of the program: action plans, trainings, and service projects. The state set a high bar for the performance measure, saying that the measure would be reached if 90% of members across the state reported that, as a result of their participation in AmeriCorps, they acquired the skills, attitudes, and knowledge for effective civic engagement.

The presence of the performance measure and the Corporation goals does not ensure that civic engagement activities are conducted uniformly across the state. Rather, these parameters set the context in which civic engagement activities can be organized. In this moment emerges the second instance in which AmeriCorps program directors can subvert or resist determination from the Corporation. Whereas in the previous instance, interpreting the program regulations, interviewees noted that program directors had to be ‘brave’ to assert a broad interpretation of the regulations, there is significantly less oversight involved in the civic engagement activities at the state level and the stakes can be perceived as somewhat lessened. However, civic engagement activities always run the same course as the program regulations; in other words, state commission employees are quick to point out that in no way can civic engagement be used as a rationale to subvert, bend, or ignore the larger regulations I discussed in the previous chapter.

The lack of oversight may allow some program directors to flex the boundaries of what is permissible and sanctioned within the program, but it poses a significant challenge to other program directors. While the program directors interviewed in this research have a long-term affiliation with AmeriCorps and each has their own sense of what is encompassed within ‘civic engagement,’ state commission employees did acknowledge that there is a steep learning curve for new program directors when it comes to civic engagement. When I asked in interviews if there was any required content for civic engagement trainings, I was told that it depended on
what individual programs wanted to do and how involved they wanted to be. I asked if there was any training, consultation, professional development, or peer support on ‘facilitating’ civic engagement activities and again the answer was no. The only support structures to implement the civic engagement performance measure are what is available in national online resource centers, the two Corporation sponsored curricula, and whatever email messages happened to emerge on the program list serves.

The performance measure thus appears to programs as an external condition that is compulsory for their participation in the project. While some program directors take on the project with gusto, state commission employees admitted that others do not. Thus the uniformity or generalizability of the civic engagement curriculum is not the issue at hand; rather, it is important to consider what kind of space within AmeriCorps programs can be filled with civic engagement activities and how that space will influence the operation of civic engagement. From the vantage point of administrators the program appears open and fluid. Laura, a state commission employee, argued:

I think it has become a little more flexible, but what we’ve learned, well the corporation had put out a couple of curricula that were very, not boring, but didn’t engage the members creative side. It was so general and ‘this is how a bill becomes a law, this is the three branches of government’ kind of thing. Versus now how we have it set up is that programs can be a little more flexible and they can determine what civic engagement means to them. So it might be attending a school board meeting or maybe they want to create a service-learning project in their community and that’s civic engagement. So it’s up to them to determine, they could read an article and write about how their community reacted to a flood or something like that. It just depends on how programs want to have their members interpret civic engagement (state commission employee, April 23, 2009).

This flexibility described by a state commission employee hinges on the notion that the category of ‘civic engagement’ is open to collective interpretation at the program level and individual
interpretation at the member level. This apparent ‘openness’ emerged strongly in the data of this research as the primary way in which members understood the concept of civic engagement.

**Tools for Teaching: Civic Engagement Curricular Activities**

In this section I will discuss the curricular elements of the civic engagement program in the AmeriCorps sites I researched. These include civic engagement trainings, civic engagement action plans, and structured service projects. My goal here is to elaborate on how these activities are organized, that is conceptualized by program directors, and then how participants directly experience them. As something of a preface, I would argue that members do not experience the civic engagement components of the program as meaningful learning opportunities. However the intent of promoting a particular vision of civic participation remains apparent to the volunteers. In this way, the civic engagement activities are largely experienced as directive, fragmented, and arbitrary. This externality between the conceptual category of ‘civic engagement’ and the members’ daily activity of service work is what I will explore in the following section.

**Civic Engagement Trainings**

In each site of this research, the civic engagement trainings were explicitly conceptualized by the program director, meaning that the program director and his/her staff sat down and thought through the year’s activities in an intentional and pedagogical way. Civic engagement work was not haphazard or spontaneous. In Amanda’s site, there were four trainings. The first took place during orientation and focused on the various types of national service. Its purpose was to give members a sense of the larger national project in which they were implicated. The second was an introductory training to civic engagement, in which the program coordinators introduced the concept, the program requirements, and the regulations
around what can and cannot be done as ‘civic engagement’ within AmeriCorps. The third workshop involved a trip to visit the state capitol building and the fourth was a panel discussion by staff members from neighborhood associations. In David’s site, the civic engagement trainings looked a bit different. The first training was a discussion on the notion of ‘service’ and was a time when members were encouraged to think about their work as service. This was based on David’s experience that because his AmeriCorps members learn and then deploy a good deal of technical skills, they tend to see their activity as ‘work’ instead of ‘service;’ they lose some of their connection to AmeriCorps over time. The second training was equivalent in purpose to Amanda’s second, it introduced the concept of civic engagement and the program requirements. After that, David’s group visited decision-making bodies at three levels of government: the city council, the county board, and the state capitol. Both David and Amanda also had structured service projects and civic engagement action plans as part of their overall civic engagement curricula.

In each case, program directors arrived at the conclusion, independent of one another but each based on long-term experience with AmeriCorps, that introducing the notion of service or national service was important. Each, however, had very different reasons for doing so. 2008-2009 was the first year Amanda had begun her AmeriCorps program in such a way, and she was largely pushed to do so by another staff member of the program who was an alumna of AmeriCorps and whose husband served in the National Guard. The national service training consisted of a series of lectures from various participants in different forms of national service, including former AmeriCorps members, CCC alumni, and a member of the National Guard. Mary, a staff member in Amanda’s program, described the purpose of the training:

One of the questions was why do you want to serve and we wanted to integrate that into the orientation process just as a reminder…you are serving. This is
not…it is about you, but it is about something bigger. I wanted to instill some pride in our members that you are coming from this long legacy and that it looks very different in very different ways (AmeriCorps program staff, February 23, 2009).

Mary’s insistence that AmeriCorps members understand their daily service as part of a larger commitment to the nation was weakly transmitted to the members themselves. In focus groups, the large majority of them expressed that yes, they knew that serving in AmeriCorps was part of a larger movement for national service, one they associated strongly with President Obama, but for many of them that had little to minor impact on their own personal decision to serve. This reticence on their part proved to be indicative of a larger undercurrent that undermined their connection the civic engagement curriculum.

In David’s case, the conversation was not focused on AmeriCorps as part of the national service tradition. Rather, David was more concerned that his AmeriCorps members left the program seeing community service as something they could continue to do throughout their life without the kind of enabling structures supplied by the AmeriCorps program. Only through coming to this understanding, argued David, will they continue to serve in their communities. Continued service, as one of several forms of participation, was what David understood as the purpose of increasing civic engagement. The conversation focused on questions such as ‘what does service mean to you’ and ‘how we value service.’ David’s training departed from Amanda’s group in a significant way besides the different focus on the question of service. Whereas Amanda’s training presents the stories of past participants in national service activities in order to convey a sense of history, David’s training is designed to provoke AmeriCorps members to conceptualize their own definition of ‘service’ and then engage their definition with the differing perspectives of other corps members. Through this process, AmeriCorps members interact with each other’s perspectives, but, as David points out, they are discouraged from engaging in debate
with one another. David characterized the role of the facilitator, sometimes himself or another staff member, as

we’re just sharing opinions. It’s not like ‘you’re right and I’m wrong, I don’t really agree with you or let me tell you why I’m right.’ You can share your opinion, but I don’t want it to become combative or you try to persuade someone else (AmeriCorps program director, February 18, 2009).

The emphasis on ‘sharing opinions’ emerges as major motif of AmeriCorps trainings and it appears in many forms. Sometimes ‘sharing opinions’ comes to mean, and serve, as reflection. Its most dominant form, however, is as the appearance of self expression and participation in learning activities, a presentation that AmeriCorps members themselves later challenged as a shallow opportunity to exercise their own voices.

The foundational trainings on civic engagement took similar forms. Each focused on engaging members with the variety of activities that could fall under the category of ‘civic engagement’ as well as exploring various levels of government. David’s training asked members to evaluate their own past levels of civic engagement and speculate on their levels of commitment in the future; the activity was extremely unpopular with AmeriCorps members, in part I believe, because of some of the qualifying rejoinders they place on the concept itself. I will return to this point in the final section of this chapter. Nevertheless, each took a similar track to explaining the concept. Amanda described the process in this way:

We just ask them to discuss it. And I tell them there are two wrong answers, both of which members have tried in the past. One is getting engaged at the capitol and the other putting your Honda into drive. Everything else is ok. We put it all up on a list and then our bottom line summary would be that in AmeriCorps, we want them to find a definition that fits for them. And they can see just by having this conversation that there are a lot of different ways to define it and different people think about it in different ways (AmeriCorps program director, March 25, 2009).

To say it another way, the process of defining the concept ‘civic engagement’ began in the program with the introduction of the words ‘civic’ ‘engagement.’ Members were then asked to
say what they think the term meant. I asked each focus group if they remembered the kinds of activities or ideas that surfaced as part of the discussion in their first civic engagement training. It would be accurate to describe their recall of these trainings as ‘hazy;’ many admitted the experience did not make a strong impact. For example, in detailed list generated by a focus group of AmeriCorps members working as tutors, all in their early 20s and both male and female, they remembered the following as elements of ‘civic engagement: buying a U2 cd, adopting a highway, go to a neighborhood council meeting, any sort of volunteering, lobbying or writing letters, international adoption, city councils, welcoming immigrants into the country, sponsoring a child in another country, and ‘self-education stuff’ (April 14, 2009). Based on the activities the members were able to generate, the trainings then proceeded in emphasizing the ability of the members to get involved in civic engagement activities, before turning to the requirements of the performance measure and the civic engagement plans.

In reflecting on their first civic engagement training, the members recalled two major concerns rising to the surface. For David’s group, the question was the degree to which one participates in community activities. The facilitator of the training made an error, according to focus group members, in inferring to the members that while they were technically ‘civically engaged’ during their year in AmeriCorps, they could be more civically engaged in the future. This created much consternation amongst the AmeriCorps members who became focused on thinking of civic engagement in terms of time. As one female AmeriCorps member argued,

They were putting values judgments on what they thought we should be thinking. Cause like when we did the future thing and I thought, if I want approval I should move towards this end of the spectrum. But Anna went backwards and they went after her and asked her why. And she said ‘I want to have kids and a family and I probably won’t be as engaged as I am now.’ She was upset, like life is sometimes more than civic engagement and sometimes just living can be civic engagement. Sometimes the best thing you have to offer the world is being a happy fulfilled participant in it (female, early 20s, housing, April 21, 2009).
For many, it was impossible to envision a future in which they were more civically engaged during AmeriCorps, since during this time they were ‘serving’ 40 hours a week. This association of civic engagement with time, however, was not exclusive to David’s group. I encountered the same concerns in Amanda’s group and in the state-wide AmeriCorps conference, where members also noted that as they age, have families, and full time jobs, they will necessarily become less civically engaged. Many research participants from Amanda’s group remember a powerful discussion regarding the private and public dimensions of civic engagement. One female AmeriCorps member recalled:

The debate was if you went around your block, by yourself, and picked up the garbage on the side of the streets, is that civic engagement. And there were people who said yes that is and there were people who said no, it is only civic engagement if you go through your neighborhood organization. Or if you and your neighbors form a litter pick up club (female, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009).

This conversation was recalled in each of the focus groups of Amanda’s corps members; clearly it had some impact on their thinking and it resurfaced at several other points in focus group discussions. The members, however, were troubled by the resolution of the conversation, which they felt was a return to the ‘sharing opinions’ position. There were, it seemed, no answers or fixed definitions, only their own definitions of the concept. Amanda argued the case to her corps in this way:

We give them a little bit of a historical piece, this is an AmeriCorps performance measure and all AmeriCorps programs have to address it in someway. And in the past they’ve had these curriculums and kind of a top down approach to telling you what you need to learn about it and in what way. And we don’t buy that. We think you have some sense of what civic engagement means and how it fits into your life and what’s important about it. So we’re going to do things this way. So that way they can find something that fits for them and they can find something that’s much more meaningful. So that’s kind of our bottom line. Pick something that works for you (AmeriCorps program director, March 25, 2009).

The openness and flexibility that state commission employees described as part of the intent of the performance measure appears in the program through a lack of conceptual clarification.
around the concept of ‘civic engagement.’ As one AmeriCorps member argued, “I think the point was that everybody had a different definition of civic engagement. And we didn’t really debate it, but we like argued our points versus other definitions and in that process everyone made up their own definition” (female, early 20s, tutor, April 14, 2009).

The combination of the trainings on ‘service’ and ‘civic engagement’ composed the conceptual apparatus, as it is, for civic engagement in the AmeriCorps program vis-à-vis the members. When pressed to discuss what impact the trainings had on their understanding of civic engagement, a variety of responses emerged. For some, the intent of the message, as understood by the program directors, ‘got through’ in that they took from the trainings a reinforcement of the value of service and participation. As one male AmeriCorps member put it,

The usefulness of the training was not so much refining my thinking of ‘civic engagement’ per se but in reminding me that yeah volunteering in the community is a good thing to do. Cause I’ve been very politically engaged and informed for a very long time but a lot of times I’ve felt like I’ve been revved up really high but my motors disengaged. I’ve been really excited about politics, but it is not going anywhere. Not really doing anything with all the information. So I think it was helpful for me to have a day and say if you really care about your community then go out and do something. Cause it doesn’t really matter if you care if you’re not doing anything at all. It makes no difference if all you’re doing is reading about it and thinking to yourself that your angry that things aren’t different. That’s why it was useful (male, early 20s, tutor, April 14, 2009).

Others were turned off by what they saw as the conceptual weakness of the notion of civic engagement. As one member argued, “I would say I hadn’t put much thought into civic engagement before, but hearing their definition, you consider civic engagement to be anything ‘good.’ It’s not useful” (female, early 20s, housing, April 6, 2009). Still others were upset by what their perceived as the imposition of a program requirement that was repetitive with the experience of serving in AmeriCorps and which expressed a value judgment on their own participation. One female AmeriCorps member summed up the feeling by saying, “I was frustrated with the message, which was like, ‘you need to civically engage’ and I was like ‘I’m in
AmeriCorps.’ Not to be selfish about it, but I am civically engaged” (female, early 20s, housing, April 6, 2009). Although there was much frustration expressed in the focus groups around the topic of civic engagement, there was also appreciation, at sometime begrudgingly, of the value of the trainings. Many expressed that they now know a ‘better appreciation’ of how to get involved in their neighborhood or city. It is significant to note that this sense of involvement extended only to the local level.

**Civic Engagement Action Plans**

The civic engagement action plan (Appendix L) is a major component of the curricula provided in the state. The plan is based on several assumptions. First, rather than offer a course in civics or government, the plan allows AmeriCorps members to engage in a personal way with the concept of civic engagement. The intention is that through the plan they are able to set their own goals and follow through on their own accord. Second, the action plans are meant to be more flexible than traditional curricular models. Instead of a required series of trainings on pre-determined models, the plan allows members to move at their own pace. Third, the plans are open-ended, meaning that they set no official lines around what will or will not count as civic engagement apart from the agreed upon definition within the program. As long as what the member writes down on the action plan corresponds to the definition of civic engagement discussed in their corps trainings, it counts as a civic engagement goal. This includes activities that would technically be ‘unsanctioned’ within the AmeriCorps program. As such, some programs do not allow members to count any civic engagement action plan activities as hours of service, while some do allow members to count hours if the activity falls within the parameters of the program. The members who participated in this research did not feel that the incentive of hours factored into their decision making around what kinds of activities to pursue. Full time
AmeriCorps members are required to complete a minimum of five civic engagement goals, set forth at the beginning of the year, and part-time members must complete at least three. Program directors expressed that they encourage their members to write down more than five items on the plan in case something happens that prohibits their completion of one of the goals. This is key because being able to say they completed the five goals is an indicator of the performance measure, which argues that if members complete the plan then they may be described as ‘civically engaged.’

In both sites of data collection, the process for setting the civic engagement action plans proceeded in a similar fashion. Each site hosted a training in which members were initially introduced to the concept of civic engagement. For many members, it was their first introduction to the concept although not to the notions such as volunteerism, community participation, or activism. Given member reflections on the content and experience of these trainings, it is not surprising that what they wrote on their action plans reflected their ambivalence to the concept of ‘civic engagement.’ Figure five summarizes the five most popular member civic engagement goals, collected across the two programs, with the middle column indicating the number of times the goal appeared on an action plan:

**Figure 8: Civic Engagement Action Plan Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic Engagement Goal</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>animal shelter; pack food; teach Sunday school; sing at nursing home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live a green lifestyle</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>buy local; shop at farmer’s market; ride bike; conserve energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vote in November 2008 election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about culture/diversity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>learn a language; go to interfaith dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to public meetings</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>school board; city council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of the remaining goals, all with incidences of less than five, include a broad range of activities. All of these activities, including those above, can be organized in four major
categories: community building (i.e. community clean ups or block parties), learning activities (i.e. learning more about a public issue), electoral activities (i.e. vote or go to a public meeting), and personal lifestyle choices (i.e consume less). The most popular activities are those associated with electoral politics or elected officials, but when we remove ‘voting’ and ‘attending a public meeting,’ an event required and facilitated by both corps, the frequency of engaging with elected officials drops to 20. Electoral activity then becomes the third most popular activity after learning activities and personal lifestyle choices. I make this point because the act of voting was indicated by most participants as something they were already going to do and would get ‘credit’ for in AmeriCorps, while attending a public meeting was something that was also ‘already happening.’ These members disclosed that their approach was to tread as easily as possible through the requirements of the civic engagement curricula. In this way, learning activities and personal lifestyle choices become significant as they lead us to conclude that they indicate what members are willing to do external to the program and on the basis of their own inertia. Members often expressed, in discussing the plans, concerns about time, multiple commitments, conflicts with their part-time jobs, and being ‘over committed.’

Member reflections on the experience of writing up their civic engagement action plans were largely negative, perhaps influenced by the increasing pressure, as the year wore on, to complete the goals. I observed that as the AmeriCorps members began to worry about their year of service running out, their anxiety about the next phase of their life began to increase, as did the pressure to complete required AmeriCorps activities. Nevertheless, their were able to describe the process of writing their action plans and emerged a few key components of the experience. The civic engagement action plans present themselves as the most visible form in which ‘civic engagement’ is experienced as an external imposition on the learner. This emerges
through the language of force, which is perceived on a scale of minimally invasive to bordering on coercion. Two female AmeriCorps members characterized the experience in slightly different ways:

I guess for me it hasn’t been a totally conscious effort of ‘I need to do this’ or ‘I’m really excited to complete these goals.’ I want to learn about this stuff, but I’m feeling a little forced to learn about this stuff so then it’s like homework. But it’s a weird balance. It’s homework you want to do, but you don’t want to report back that you did it. Does that make sense? (female, early 20s, housing, April 6, 2009).

It was so forced. It was not a training that empowered us to be civically engaged. It demanded civic engagement and made us fill out a worksheet (female, early 20s, housing, April 21, 2009).

Perceived as an extra requirement on top of the 1700-hour service commitment they had already made, some members expressed resentment at the requirement while others were ambivalent, seeing both positive and negative parts of the experience. This ambivalence may have lead many members to express a lack of enthusiasm for the assignment or unwillingness to fully commit to the intentions of the work. One male AmeriCorps member argued,

For me it was the path of least resistance, so a lot of it is a reinforcement of good behavior. I mean of course I could do more to be civically engaged, but I feel like I’m doing pretty well right now and didn’t want to resent the idea of civic engagement by taking on too much (male, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009).

For most of the members who participated in the research, the action plan was interpreted as one of many program requirements, and it did not carry special meaning particular to the goal of becoming a more civically engaged person. Finally, the experience of writing and fulfilling their civic engagement plans was an extension of their overall lack of engagement with the civic engagement requirements and for many surfaced the feelings of incoherence, indecision, and confusion associated with what was being asked of them. One female member reflected,

I got a little overwhelmed. There is so much to do and what can I do and how do I decide what is important and what I should work on…You get all these thoughts going and then I have to get them organized and put them to action and see what I
can do. But, there is already so much going on that I sometimes forget to stay on top of my goals (female, early 20s, housing, April 6, 2009).

Some of this discomfort can be dealt with pedagogically, but it also reflects the lack of coherence identified by the members. When *anything* can be civic engagement, then anything *can* be civic engagement. Perhaps the most flagrant version of the ‘anything goes’ notion of civic engagement can be found in the civic engagement goals of a previous corps, which included, among more serious endeavors, flamenco dancing.

The vision of the civic engagement action plan that emerges from the members’ perceptions is one of an external requirement that is engaged with in a perfunctory manner. Program directors admitted as much, one going so far as to say that the action plans are a larger symptom of a ‘ridiculous’ performance measure. Despite the lack of validity conferred by participants, the action plans reveal a telling component of the way in which civic engagement is actually conceptualized within the hierarchy of AmeriCorps. As a pedagogical act, civic engagement action plans ask members to learn in individual ways, in isolation from one another and the program, and in a way in which accountability to learning is organized through checking a box marked completed.

A final note on civic engagement action goals is that some programs in the state do offer the opportunity for members to work in groups on a community action project. One of the sites that participated in the research was experimenting with this model for the first time and offered their members the choice between individual and group projects. The experiment was, with complete agreement from all involved, an absolute disaster. This is because while a group project may be ultimately more rewarding than individuals working in isolation from one another, it is infinitely more difficult to manage pedagogically as a constructive learning experience. It takes a skilled facilitator to know what problems a group will encounter and how best to manage them.
The ability to execute this successfully is further complicated by the fact that every AmeriCorps
who participated in the research had some sort of second job, which made meeting in groups
extremely difficult. It caused an endless amount of frustration for the members; the material
reality of their participation in the program became a prohibitive factor in their completion of
program requirements.

**Structured Service Projects**

The structured service projects carried much greater weight in David’s program than in
Amanda’s. Amanda’s group participated in two or three service projects, no one could quite
remember, nor could any of the participants, or Amanda, remember what exactly the projects
were. Amanda did introduce her participants to multiple service projects within the community
as they became available. She would email her members with the opportunity and whether or not
it was approved for service hours. Thus, at their own discretion, her corps members were
provided with opportunities for more service projects. However, with the exception of Martin
Luther King Jr Day, during which there was a state-wide coordinated AmeriCorps service
activity, none of the focus group members mentioned additional service projects as part of their
civic engagement learning. David’s corps proceeded quite differently and their approach to these
service projects is significant for its similarity with service-learning literature and some
problematic, and unintended, outcomes.

David’s goal was to have his corps members complete one structured service project per
month. Whereas other programs would have two training days per month, David’s group had one
corps day and one service project. For the first few months of the year, David and other
AmeriCorps program staff organized the service projects. However, after three of four examples,
David coordinated the members in groups of three or four and asked them to organize a service activity for the whole group.

I kind of explain to them what the goals are, that we want members to be busy. We want them to have a project that is appropriate for 30-40 people. Our goal there is wanting to get things done, but it’s also tuned to learn about the organization and figure out what role they play in the community. So, what is the need they are trying to address, how are they addressing it (AmeriCorps program director, February 18, 2009).

David’s goal in the service projects was that members would go through the work of planning a quality service project, organizing it, and facilitating it. Through this work he hoped that his members would learn more about what agencies are working in the community, what kinds of issues non-profits address, and what are the components of a good volunteer experience. He did not provide any research materials or training on how to go about investigating a community ‘need’ or the organizations that meet such needs. His best guess was that the members worked with connections they already had in the community, although he was sure some simply go with large organizations that already have developed volunteer programs. David acknowledged that it is difficult for an organization to coordinate a volunteer activity for 30-40 people that is a good use of their time. David was not sure that the members retained the logic he used to introduce the service projects at the beginning of the year. For this reason, and because of best practices in service-learning, each member ‘reflected’ on the project at its completion.

David’s emphasis on reflection on service projects is well intentioned, but misguided. The reflection questions asked members to evaluate on the utility of the service project (to themselves as well as the community), to briefly discuss their learning, and then to recommend whether the experience should be replicated for another group. Amongst the members, these ‘reflections’ were understood as ‘evaluations;’ they understood that the purpose of the service projects was to learn what a ‘good volunteer experience’ was. This understanding was reinforced
by their service activities that involved coordinating volunteers; the members felt that their organization put strong emphasis on the quality of volunteer experience and on retention of volunteers.

From David’s perspective a large component of AmeriCorps members remaining ‘civically engaged’ after their year of service was their continued commitment to service. For this reason, he felt it was important that through civic engagement activities they developed a commitment to serving outside of the AmeriCorps program and an understanding of how to facilitate service experiences for themselves and others. This way, in the future, they would not be intimidated to start volunteering somewhere. While philosophically David argued that service is only one component of civic engagement, the other components did not materialize in his program with anywhere nearing the amount of emphasis that community service did. David is not alone in his thinking. In the past five years, the CNCS has devoted considerable resources to researching the ‘impact’ of AmeriCorps on its participants; indicators of the ‘ethic of service and civic engagement’ are confined to volunteerism (Shelton et al, 2007). Within David’s program, service projects were technically organized under the logic of civic engagement activities. A significant result of David’s effort, and the most problematic outcome of the service projects, has to do with the extent to which civic engagement and volunteer mobilization became conflated within the logic of the program. AmeriCorps members’ demonstrated this conflation in their reaction to one particular service project. This experience, and several others, provides insight into why the civic engagement activities of these AmeriCorps program are met with such a lukewarm reception by AmeriCorps members.

In our final meetings, I asked focus group participants to reflect on the value of the civic engagement activities during their year of service. The unanimous position was that civic
engagement activities were among the least useful aspect of the program requirements, falling behind daily work experience, informal conversations with other members, and work-specific training sessions. Further, in a series of focus group discussions I explored with participants their own perspectives and thinking around the questions of what is a good democracy and what is good citizenship. Their responses to these questions point towards some fissures in their thinking that indicate that the experience of serving in AmeriCorps forces them to contend with substantial challenges to their assumptions about democracy. Paradoxically, ‘civic engagement’ does not emerge as a tool that helps them to navigate this learning.

The Vacuity of Civic Engagement

I have chosen the term ‘vacuity’ for an important reason. A common definition conjures notions of emptiness, idleness, or pointlessness. To work from this definition would degrade the efforts of those involved in AmeriCorps by engaging in academic ridicule. I do not intend to imply that civic engagement within AmeriCorps is an ‘empty’ project. Rather, I chose the term ‘vacuity’ because its more technical definition refers to the absence of matter. While the term’s origin may be in physical science and refer to an artificial vacuous state, it serves as an important and grounding metaphor for the findings of this research; there is literally, and pedagogically, an absence of matter within the civic engagement curriculum of AmeriCorps. The structure, organization, and practice of civic engagement are abstracted from the daily material reality of both AmeriCorps members and those that they serve. This abstraction weaves through the various appearances of civic engagement in AmeriCorps and it surfaces as a response to the regulatory effect of the ‘narrowing’ process described in the previous chapter. I have identified in the data of this research at least three processes that contribute to this ‘vacuity:’ the larger functioning of training within the program and the epistemological relations employed therein,
lingering ambiguities concerning the regulations of the program, and challenges posed by a de-materialized notion of civic engagement.

The civic engagement trainings within the AmeriCorps programs are situated in a larger context that surrounds training and member development within the program. I will begin by describing the epistemological and pedagogical relations found in the trainings I observed and will then argue that these relations have a significant impact on the ways in which civic engagement training emerges within the program. My findings indicate that these relations are characterized by: 1) a reliance on ‘expert’ knowledge as politically neutral knowledge, 2) technocratic interpretations of social problems, 3) de-politicization of subject matter, and 4) an abstraction from an experiential base of knowledge.

The first training I went to as part of my fieldwork was with Amanda’s corp. It was a diversity training facilitated by a diversity officer from the school district. We were assembled within a large classroom at the community and adult education center and the training began with a lecture explaining what the diversity officer’s role was within the school district. The man was a lawyer and his job was to make sure the equal opportunity standards were upheld in employment practices. The major activity of the training was to watch a video containing a series of portraits of people of color. On first viewing, the members were shown the video and asked to take notes on ‘who they thought these people were.’ After watching the video, the facilitator asked us to volunteer our ideas on who we thought particular individuals were. For example, when shown an image of a middle-aged man, we were asked to describe his race, participants guessed Latino, and then asked, what kind of job do you think he has or what do you think his name is. After several rounds of this, we watched the video a second time. This version of the video revealed the names of the individuals and their occupation, many of which upset prevailing
stereotypes of various racial groups. The lesson of the activity was that ‘everyone has stereotypes’ and we use them on a daily bases. The members felt betrayed by the trainer; he solicited stereotypes from them and then scolded them for acknowledging them. He amended his claim: yes we all have stereotypes, but the problem lies in not acknowledging that we do. As long as we make this acknowledgement, we can have a productive conversation around diversity. Despite his insistence on the necessity of productive conversation, at no point were the members asked to think about their experience in AmeriCorps or for their own opinions on the subject at hand.

The training shocked me. I had never been to a ‘diversity’ training that lacked any acknowledgement of the reason why we have to go to diversity trainings in the first place, namely unequal relations of power organized through socially constructed categories of race. I had come to the program to explore democracy and citizenship and on my first day I saw the problems of inequality within democracy being actively avoided in training. I later asked Amanda and her colleagues what perspectives or frameworks they used to introduce their corps into politically charged topics such as No Child Left Behind, racism within schools, the achievement gap, special education programs, English as a second language programs, and homophobia in schools. Their frameworks, she argued, were professional experts. She invited experts in to discuss the issues in factual and descriptive terms. For example, the discussion of No Child Left Behind involved a compliance officer from the district. The woman reviewed the mandates and the current performance standards. The discussion of the achievement gap was again facilitated by someone from the school district and provided statistical information on the nature of the gap and which social groups were disproportionately represented. The presentations tended to be technical, oriented towards practical interventions, and focused on developing the
skills of AmeriCorps members. For example, trainings focused on tutoring methods or strategies for dealing with offensive language in schools.

I had multiple experiences in trainings in which problems of ideology were quickly swept away in favor of conversations that focus on technical interventions in social problems. For example, I attended a county commissioner’s meeting with David’s corps. Serendipitously, the commissioners were set to debate a proposal for county funding of affordable housing development. Despite their nearly eight months of service in affordable housing development work, the members were not prepared for the discussion at all; most of them had no idea what was being discussed. At one point several of them turned to me and asked what they were talking about. When I replied ‘affordable housing,’ they quickly whispered it to each other, settled down and tried to follow the debate. When the conversation turned to strategies for dealing with wide scale home foreclosures, a republican member of the commission stated that he thought the commission should ‘let the market handle it.’ A democratic member quickly countered that they had already had that conversation. It was a palpably tense moment in the meeting. After the meeting the members had the opportunity to meet with one of the commissioners, who kept the conversation solidly on what the responsibilities of the county commission were. When one member asked what the argument between the commissioners had been about, the commissioner said ‘just a discussion we’ve been having for a while’ and quickly returned to plans for transit expansion. The conflict came up again in a focus group conversation, at which point I was honest with the members and told them that the republican and democratic parties differ in their approach to who should pay for social service delivery and humanitarian needs, like affordable housing. The comment to ‘let the market handle it’ was a nod to this ideological division.
For Amanda, relying on ‘experts’ from the school district precluded the possibility of delivering ideological, biased, ‘political’ or ‘partisan’ trainings to AmeriCorps members. Amanda asserted that they had no frameworks; their purpose was just to give the members the information and let them decide on their own perspective. It hardly takes much attention, however, to acknowledge that the claim to neutrality is no such thing; the expert who chooses to discuss ‘diversity’ within a context in which power is not acknowledged has firmly situated herself or himself within a particular ‘framework.’ Amanda’s corps members had strong, and often polarizing, feelings about the trainings. Many felt they were useful for their emphasis on practical skills. They would often complain that the skills were not particular enough to their situation, but they appreciated the ongoing effort to train them in their service work. Many others, however, were vocally frustrated by what they felt was a truncated experience. In one focus group, members discussed their recent experience completing the civic engagement survey. They narrowed in on a question that asked them if they felt prepared to address the underlying causes of community issues. The conversation began with a male AmeriCorps member arguing, “Absolutely not. I feel like we’ve been prohibited from discussing the underlying causes of community issues” (male, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009). Another female participate replied that she agreed with him before another young woman jumped into the conversation to say,

I don’t know. I feel like sometimes the discussions we’ve had in a cultural sensitivity training are ones that certainly no one that I know is having outside of a college. But also, like why can’t we fund education, specifically political issues. We’ve talked about that race matters, class matters, I still think about our training on NCLB, not that its an underlying cause, but it is tied up (female, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009).

Another second male AmeriCorps member responded that

I feel like we’ve spoken a lot about some of those things, but I feel like I would have gotten more value talking about the underlying issues in our schools or those
neighborhoods. But yeah I don’t feel like we’ve discussed it (male, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009).

I asked them what they had discussed in their trainings, to which they responded that they had received training on No Child Left Behind. The young man who began the conversation responded by saying,

I mean talking about the achievement gap is inherently political and bridging it is our meaning. And when we were having orientation we were trying to talk about what is the achievement gap and why does it exist. And there were definitely issues that were introduced, like we had someone talk about multiculturalism and the disparity between minority and Caucasian students and sometimes it would veer into the why, but mostly it was ‘this is what it is.’ I mean there were moments where it would shift; we read one article where the woman wrote about education in the segregated south and how important those schools were in the black community even though they were dangerous as well, so that was an example of us crossing into thinking about those issues on a more substantive level, but I think mostly we stuck to this is what NCLB is, this is what the law is, this is the statistics that outline what the differences in achievement are (male, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009).

The members indicated that the ways in which the trainings dealt with social problems contained several important dynamics. First, the trainings naturalize the ‘community need’ to some extent by giving it no history or acknowledging the definition of the problem itself as an ideological act. Second, the emphasis on practical intervention demonstrates that the trainings relied on largely technocratic interpretations of the social problems, following from the first articulation of ‘need’ in the logic model. Third, the trainings emphasize a description of community issues as needs or problems and to do not endeavor to explore explanations of the problems, only their appearances.

The fact that some AmeriCorps members are aware that they are only engaging partial or fragmented understandings of the social problems at hand indicates that their consciousness is more politicized than the parameters of AmeriCorps allows. For these members, the AmeriCorps trainings were a frustrating experience, both because they were unable to explore any issue in depth and further because the members were actively discouraged from engaging their own experience through processes of reflection. One member characterized the trainings by saying...
“we listened to speakers, but didn’t engage.” The format was overwhelmingly based on lectures, with some divergence into small group activities. The members indicated that when reflection activities were included they were organized in an ineffectual way. One female member argued,

Well it wasn’t stuff that needed reflection and it was always framed as stupid activities. Or it would be in really big groups. Like, I’m sick of sitting in a huge circle and going around the circle and everyone gets 2 minutes to talk. It is really hard to pay attention when there are 45 of us. But I feel like something like civic engagement, stuff that we don’t really know a lot about, there should have been reflection. They are in charge of us, even if we whine about it, they should know that we should do it anyway. They shouldn’t be intimidated by what we say (female, early 20s, tutor, April 29, 2009).

Program directors explained their lack of emphasis on reflection by saying that if they opened the discussion to people’s ‘opinions’ and ‘personal experiences’ the conversations became too difficult to manage and chaotic. The tone of the conversation would change, become ‘too personal,’ or diverge into an unintended direction. Despite these concerns, AmeriCorps members in every focus group expressed their opinion that the trainings were ‘boring,’ in part because they were being lectured at and unable to reflect on their experience in their service activities. For some, this lack of reflection was experienced as a curtailing of their own voice within the program. One male AmeriCorps member, reacting to a question on the civic engagement survey said, “I feel like those questions were really to monitor what we were supposed to do. I don’t feel like we touched on a lot of those things. Like ‘express myself?’ Were we really given the chance to express ourselves?” (male, early 20s, tutor, April 29, 2009). Another female AmeriCorps member, in reflecting on how her best learning experiences in the program happened outside of formal activities, argued that only in the research focus groups did she feel open to really reflect on her experiences in the program because she could “let her guard down.” She went on to say, “I also feel like this [the focus group] is discussion for the sake of processing and some of them [corp days] is discussion for a purpose only. Like we’re going to make something fit into
AmeriCorps scheme. I don’t feel like I’ve been truly invited at corp day to do this kind of reflection” (female, early 20s, tutor, May 11, 2009).

What is the pedagogical effect of training organized in this way? Learners experience subject matter as external bodies of knowledge not connected to their own experience. In the context of a program such as AmeriCorps, in which experiential learning is the primary mode of engagement, learners make connections between daily experience and the theoretical context of that experience informally or implicitly. Without structured reflection, which is emphasized in the best practices of many forms of service-learning and experiential education, learning becomes incidental and can have the opposite effect as what is intended by program directors. This is the mis-educative experience described by Dewey (1938), which can inadvertently reinforce existing stereotypes or forms of knowledge rather than challenging previously held beliefs. While certain types of learning, such as changed perspectives or growth in bodies of knowledge, can certainly come from such epistemological and pedagogical relations, the experience remains alienating to learners as they experience the source of epistemic authority as external to themselves or their experience. While this can be disempowering for some learners, the more typical outcome is disengagement, frustration, and exasperation, particularly amongst individuals who are accustomed to hearing their own voices. Thus, the alienation of learners from their own experience within AmeriCorps programs is likely to have different effects on different members, based on their previous experience with classroom-based learning and their positionality with social relations of power.

The effect of this kind of learning is aptly demonstrated in an experience I had with David’s corp. I participated in several of the service projects organized by David’s corps members. All had a similar structure. We converged at the given location, listened to a 10-15
minute presentation from a staff person about the structure, mission, and programs of the organization, engaged in two to three hours of service work, gathered for final questions, filled out reflection forms, and departed. One service project had a decidedly different rhythm to it and it turned out to be an incredibly telling experience. A few corps members had made arrangements with an organization on the northeast side of the city to engage in an ‘act of neighborly kindness.’ The organization, whose name I withhold for confidentiality, was a loose association of neighbors who assisted anyone in the neighborhood with household projects they could not accomplish on their own. They did a lot of housework and property maintenance for elderly residents and those without the income to employ others to do so. As such, they described their work as doing lots of ‘odd jobs’ around the house for people. The corps members had informed the organization that they would have 30 volunteers at their disposal for 3 hours on a Friday morning and that we could be assigned to any task. The day before the scheduled activity, a staff member called to say that we would be helping a neighborhood resident move and asked us to meet them at a residential address. We assembled at 9am in the street and waited approximately 30 minutes for the woman to return to her house with a moving truck. The AmeriCorps members were frustrated by their inactivity. At that point, the staff organized us into a long line of people winding from her attic apartment down to the moving truck and we proceeded to pass objects down the stairs. Several times the procession of objects stopped for 10 to 15 minute stretches, at which point the members grumbled and complained about the disorganization of the process.

When the truck was packed, nine or ten vehicles caravanned to a storage unit center on the east side of the city. The woman led us to her storage unit, which she opened and revealed to be completely full of things. She asked several volunteers to begin pulling things out so she
could get to some objects that were in the back. Ultimately she had more things to move than room in her rented truck, so several members began packing her things into their cars. When the packing was completed, she dropped the keys off at the office, her storage unit still two-thirds full, and we drove her and her possessions to a third storage center on the south side of the city. At this point, we had reached the three-hour marker and several members began leaving to return to their afternoon service activities. Those with either no pressing engagements or a desire to complete the project remained. We unloaded all of the trucks and packed her things into a new storage unit. When the project was complete, those who remained filled out their evaluation forms and then left; the woman remained at the storage center waiting for someone to pick her up.

Throughout the entire morning, the AmeriCorps members vocally expressed their irritation at the ‘lack of organization’ of their service experience. They were upset that the woman was not organized enough to fully utilize the ‘free’ services. They were frustrated that she had arrived late, that she was not finished packing, that she did not have clear directions on how to get to either storage center, and they complained that she was frazzled and ‘ungrateful.’ Some AmeriCorps members remained quiet during the morning, however all of those who participated in the focus groups later joined the chorus of complaints.

My experience of the service project was quite different, in part because I volunteered to drive the woman from site to site. She was indeed frazzled, a bit disoriented, and appeared disorganized. On our first car trip, we made small talk and she felt the need to apologize to me for her level of disorganization. She told me she had lost her housing 48 hours before and had only had a short time to pack. She told me that the relationship with the people who owned the house had become ‘untenable’ and she alluded to both a problem with violence in the home and
an inability to pay her rent. Her son had recently been involved in a workplace accident that resulted in extensive medical costs. On our car ride between the two storage centers, I asked her why she was moving her things to a different storage center. She told me that she could no longer afford the larger unit and needed to consolidate her things into a smaller unit. I asked her when she would be moving into new housing. She told me she had been approved for a senior unit in public housing, but that it would not be open for five months. In the meantime, she would ‘crash with friends.’ When I left her, she was unsure where she would be sleeping that night.

A few weeks later I met with the AmeriCorps members in their focus groups. I had not seen them since the service project. I asked them for their thoughts on the experience and the entire reflection, in both groups, revolved around the ‘quality’ of the service experience. They rehashed their frustrations about the level of disorganization, the inefficiency of the work, the poor use of time, and even the seemingly irrational nature of their entire project. Why get things from one storage unit, they asked, to just move them to another? They discussed ways in which the ‘volunteer experience’ could have been improved, with a focus on time management. As one member reflected, “we spend our time thinking ‘how are we being effective as volunteers.’ That’s how we were coming at it. What is effective? Was I utilized?” They reflected that if they were just regular volunteers and not AmeriCorps, they might have left the project because they weren’t being ‘properly utilized.’ The important outcome of the experience was that “you feel as though you’ve contributed during the day, not just sitting around. If you’ve taken a day off of work, so you feel like you’ve done something.” One member complained that the entire experience at the first storage unit was a waste of time because all she had pulled out were ‘personal items’ like kid’s drawings and baseball trophies.
I found myself unable to remain a researcher. I was sitting with two groups of young adults who had been working in an affordable housing organization for nine months. They worked with families moving into affordable housing projects; they worked with volunteers to develop the housing. They were confronted, on that drizzly morning, with a person in crisis; someone who was not in control of her housing and who was, for all intents and purposes, homeless. They treated her with disdain. Only a few of them talked with her or inquired about her situation. She had revealed to me in the car that she felt uncomfortable talking about her ‘situation’ with a group of ‘college kids.’ They were completely unaware of the dynamics of the situation they were confronting on the ground and their AmeriCorps program directors did nothing to try and problematize their reaction to the experience. They merely evaluated the quality of the experience and moved on. They were faced with a visceral opportunity to understand the ‘community need’ they were charged with, and towards which they had committed to ‘getting things done,’ and there was no conversation. Even with no politicians present, no partisan platforms, nothing to be advocated, they were utterly ill equipped to deal with the relations of power they found before them. They could not even see them. I asked one group if only people who can afford housing should be allowed to accumulate mementos of childhood. Was she not allowed to keep her son’s baseball trophy? Was it not telling that she had abandoned all her possessions in the storage unit except ‘kid’s drawings?’ Why would she have her possessions in three different parts of the city? Did we not see what it means, in very real organizational terms, to not have control over where you live? Was this not the problem they were here to understand?

I asked David the same set of questions. He regretted deeply the way the morning had developed and realized that an opportunity had been missed. But his initial reaction was in
keeping with what his original learning goal for the service project had been: how to organize a
good volunteer experience. Both David and his members worked within their own logic of the
experience; their purpose was to learn about ‘doing community service’ and ‘being civically
engaged.’ Their purpose collided, violently, with the reality of why their ‘service’ was needed in
the first place, and they were at a loss see what was before them.

This experience demonstrates the extents to which civic engagement trainings and
activities both reproduce the relations found in other member development trainings and are
substantially impacted by what happens, and does not happen, in those trainings. The most
negative consequence of all, to both AmeriCorps members and those they serve, is the
reproduction of power relations within the volunteerism dynamic, which appeared in this
instance in multiple locations and were expressed by the woman’s unwillingness to share her
struggles with poverty with ‘college kids.’ Civic engagement trainings, however, are further
complicated by an additional relationship to the prohibited activity regulations. Regular training
activities must avoid politics in so far as they discuss the underlying or root causes of the
‘community need’ they address. However, on the terrain of civic engagement they must not only
avoid the political nature of the problem, but the political nature of possible solutions as well.

Both of the AmeriCorps programs scheduled visits to the state capitol building in the
spring of 2009 as part of their civic engagement activities. Both groups had similarly structured
visits. Each began with a training session from a local non-profit coalition group. The agency is
charged with advocating for the interests of the non-profit sector within government. The
training focused on the structures of government, the differences between the various legislative
bodies at the state level and the difference between lobbying and advocacy work. The training
concluded with a tour of the capitol building and session chambers, which in the case of
Amanda’s group, were empty as it was a Friday and most lawmakers had returned to their constituencies. By my observations, the AmeriCorps members were distracted and disinterested throughout the training. Many had stressful mornings trying to find parking at the capitol building and then locate the correct room, getting lost in the vast complex of state buildings. They were uncomfortable in their ‘official’ AmeriCorps gear, which was not weather appropriate and they were constantly adjusting their layers of clothing to accommodate the different temperatures in the building.

The general atmosphere of disengagement and tedium was broken by a few significant events throughout each of the two visits. Amanda’s group had a fairly uneventful training and then proceeded to meet with a group of elected officials from the metropolitan area. Prior to meeting with the lawmakers, Stacey, a staff member of the program, reviewed with the group the kinds of questions they were prohibited from discussing with lawmakers. Reminding them that they could not tread towards anything that was ‘political’ or ‘partisan,’ Stacey emphasized that their questions should remain vocational in nature. She told the group they could ask the senators and representatives why they ran for the legislature, what they liked/disliked about the work, or how they interacted with their constituencies. Their purpose was to understand what working in state government is like and how citizens get involved in the process. What followed was an extremely awkward conversation. From my perspective, the lawmakers acted exactly how they always act when placed in front of a group of voters. They asked the AmeriCorps members, ‘what issues do you care about?’ To which the AmeriCorps members responded, ‘we can’t talk about that with you.’

In their discussions reflecting on the experience, every focus group responded by commenting on several characteristics of the experience. First, it was awkward; they were unsure
of what they could discuss with the representatives or if they could respond to questions or prompts. The conversation was thus, very stilted and they acknowledged that the session was not participatory in part because they were ‘unsure’ of how to participate. This is related to the second characteristic, which is that they felt monitored by the AmeriCorps program staff present. Third, they remained deeply confused about how they are allowed to discuss their service work or their ‘community need’ in public contexts. Fourth, they identified that the ‘elephant’ in the room was not only the avoidance of legislation or mandates, but ‘controversial’ topics more broadly. In one focus group, I asked what they thought it meant for something to ‘be controversial.’ The response from one AmeriCorps member was that it if is politically partisan then they cannot talk about it. Another responded that issues are only partisan because the parties disagree. I asked if they could think of an issue in a democracy where there is not partisan disagreement. One AmeriCorps member, rather facetiously, said ‘babies and flags.’ These characteristics resulted in a frustrated group of AmeriCorps members who felt the exercise was a waste of time because all they could discuss with the elected officials was the vocational aspects of public service and the civic processes of government. One frustrated male AmeriCorps member described the situation in this way:

It was very, very general. Like about their job and how they got into it. Nothing about what they are working on, just about the process. Personally I didn’t really like that day. I don’t think I’ve ever been to the capitol so it was nice to see it, but if I want to know what a legislator does, I can google that and see the job description. The whole point of getting to meet those people is the issues. It didn’t have to be in an attacking way. Like why did you vote that way? But just to talk, what issues are you working on, where do you stand and why. That would have been way more interesting than what or how do you do what you do. Or how did you get into it. They all had the same stories. I had passion for one issue and I decided to run (male, early 20s, tutor, April 2, 2009).
Despite many negative reactions to the day, several focus group participants reported that they left feeling as though they could more easily interact with state government, such as writing their elected officials or visiting them at the capitol. We see a few things happening here. First, they are confused about the regulations, even nine months into their service. Second, the experience is ‘hollow’ in that they can only talk about ‘the process’ or ‘the vocation,’ but not about the substance of democracy, which is social power. Third, the conversations are not ‘conversations’ because they are necessarily one-sided, AmeriCorps members are restricted from accessing their own knowledge or experience or participating in the conversation as an exchange of positions.

David’s group also experienced their own ‘regulation-bounded’ moments at the capitol. In their morning training with the non-profit advocate they were joined by the government relations staff person from their organization. Remembering that David’s organization is large and well-funded, compared to Amanda’s, they had recently employed a lobbyist to promote their interests at the capitol; her role was to both support a progressive agenda around affordable housing and, indirectly, to secure funding for non-profit affordably housing development. When she began detailing this agenda, AmeriCorps members in the room became visibly uncomfortable. At one point she was interrupted by a member who said ‘I’m not from this state. Why does everyone in the non-profit sector hate the governor?’ Both of the women facilitating the session did, in my opinion, a decent job of providing as objective an answer to this question as possible; they explained why some felt the governor made harsh cuts to non-profit funding while others felt the cuts were justified and necessary. They then swiftly diverted the conversation back to the agenda for the day and left to take the group on their tour of the capitol. As we were walking, David asked me if I thought the conversation had crossed the line. I
responded that I thought it had not, that it had remained focused on why the organization where the AmeriCorps members serve felt the need to have a presence at the capitol. David agreed, but felt that if the conversation had not crossed the line, it had at least come ‘right up to it.’ In a focus group following the incident, AmeriCorps members expressed that they felt it has been one of the only times ‘real’ issues had been discussed. One female member reflected,

    They did try and explain why some people feel that way, so on the one hand it was a governor bash fest. I was glad she asked the question because sometimes people are being partisan when they feel like they aren’t. It was a good question, I sensed this but I can’t explain it. I thought it was highly entertaining, cause we talked about a lot of hard stuff (female, early 20s, housing, April 21, 2009).

In other focus groups, participants described the situation as ‘dicey’ and that it made them ‘uncomfortable.’ The paradox arises here; on the one hand, AmeriCorps members express frustration at not being able to ‘talk about issues,’ but then they engage in the policing of the environment by retreating from such ‘dicey’ conversations and activities.

    How should we explain these kinds of experiences? If we accept the prohibited activities and regulations as ‘common sense,’ then we are unable to explain why AmeriCorps members experience the dissonance they describe; why the situation both makes sense and does not make sense at the same time. Michele, a former program director, directly correlated this experience, and my previous description of the ‘diversity’ training, to program director anxiety concerning the regulations and there lack of preparation for the role:

    So civic engagement to me, that and diversity, two areas where people aren’t comfortable or people don’t have, the people who are supposed to be doing it, don’t even know. And I just think that that’s a disservice ultimately to the members. And in both areas people are scared of either emotions or going over a legal line or whatever it might be so they do as little as they can to meet the requirements and not get in trouble. And it’s perfectly understandable why that’s where they end up (AmeriCorps consultant, March 12, 2009).

We should take a more critical approach to exploring why civic engagement and diversity issues might rise to the top as topics that are approached in such a static and abstracted fashion within
the program. In this context an interesting problem arises. While I am arguing that the regulations exert a strong influence on not just the service work of AmeriCorps members, but the pedagogical activities within the program as well, we do have to be careful not to reify the regulations. By this I mean that we can interpret the regulations as some kind of independent agent, acting within the program and driven by their own inertia. The regulations are an expression of a larger ideological process at work; they are not the ideology of citizenship within the program as much as they are the ‘fixing’ of that ideology in a particular institutional frame. If we give the regulations too much power, we turn them into an active entity exerting force on the programs. One particularly astute AmeriCorps member, male, approached this problem in his analysis of the experience at the capitol:

But then you could say I’m in favor of vouchers or merit pay or whatever as long as you don’t say I’m in favor of House File 3, which is in favor of vouchers, for example. That would still be advocacy, not lobbying. I mean our working definition of advocacy is being as vague as possible. Advocacy is saying, I think schools are good. And lobbying is saying you should hire more AmeriCorps members to work in schools. But that’s not really what it is. I think we are just being told that you’re not supposed to say you support a specific plan of action because of prohibited activities (male, early 20s, tutor, April 14, 2009).

Is the root of ‘vagueness’ of civic engagement activities found in the regulations or, said another way, should we go further into the ideological organization of the program to find the root of such ‘vagueness.’

This ‘vagueness’ emerged in the focus group discussions when members were given the opportunity to discuss the validity of the civic engagement project within AmeriCorps. A particularly insightful conversation is excerpted below:\(^{10}\):

Lisa: I feel like it is hard to teach someone civic engagement without being political. It’s like saying, ‘recycling does help the environment if you choose to do it’ instead of ‘this is what happens to the environment if you

---

\(^{10}\) To preserve the integrity of this conversation, which is an excellent example of the kind of exploration research participants engaged in focus groups, I have assigned the AmeriCorps members pseudonyms.
don’t recycle.’ ‘You should probably vote,’ but don’t tell them how to vote. That doesn’t help us know about the politicians. You could tell us equally what each one thinks, but we can’t be political. So I think civic engagement trainings themselves fall short, but I think it’s because of our inability to have political trainings.

Paul: I don’t know if I quite agree. I don’t know if you have to involve politics in civic engagement.

Beth: I think you can separate politics, I mean I do. You can, you said, say ‘its good to vote.’ I can’t tell you who to vote for, but you can educate them.

Lisa: I feel like its generalities.

Paul: But it gives people the tools to learn themselves. Its not putting a bias in their heads.

Beth: Like I’m not choosing to recycle because I fall under a certain political party.

Paul: For me, when I was sitting through those trainings I felt like it was a lot of generalities or vague statements. And if it something I’m going to act on, I’m going to need more…You’re telling me anything but ‘voting is important.’ I already know that. You’re not actually talking about anything but voting. At that point the civic engagement trainings are wasteful. Yes I vote, yes I recycle. We aren’t talking about any issues right now. Are you trying to get me to go out mobilize other voters? I can’t do that either. I felt like I didn’t get a lot out of it.

Dana: I think it was more the idea of civic engagement for me. I had never heard that term before. I guess coming to do something like this I already think service is important, and it re-emphasized that. Showing how all these different things I do are important.

Erin: I would agree, the trainings were good, but I got more out of the service projects. More information, more satisfaction, more all around. I kind of felt like civic engagement was repetitive. It was good to have, but I got more out of the service projects.

(all participants early 20s, housing, May 4, 2009)

The Diller Report (2001) made a substantial claim about the potentiality for civic learning in AmeriCorps when she argued that political socialization can be, and should be, separated from politicization. What she means by this, following in a long tradition borrowed from political science, is that people can be socialized into democratic habits without talking about power.
Clearly, AmeriCorps members disputed this claim when faced with the reality of what this means; in theory they understand the point, but in practice, such as at the capitol, the assertion begins to lose its cohesion and it feels ‘weird.’

An important addition to this discussion is that in the final focus group meetings, I asked the members to reflect on a significant learning experience. My intention was to get them to think about times when they had ‘noticed’ themselves learning, had changed their mind, or had felt a shift in their thinking. I asked them to elaborate on what made these experiences so ‘significant,’ and they described the experiences as emotional and reflective. In these experiences they learned to see patterns over time, engaged with cognitive dissonance and contradiction, discovered they were wrong about something, connected an idea to their personal experience, and came to understand that the ‘thing’ was more complicated than it seemed. They described processes of abstraction, generalization, and conceptualization. These are the kinds of processes that are implicit in critical reflection and which are absent in the AmeriCorps program. The opportunities for this kind of learning are endless in the AmeriCorps program. One female AmeriCorps member described a particularly powerful experience she had when she encountered first hand the fear and anxiety children experience when they live without legal immigration status.

I mean I’ve never had to think twice about going home and my parents not being there. And here’s a kid that I know who is terrified to go home because his parents might not be there. So, I knew about that last year about what went on in Iowa, so I knew about it, but never knew people who, you know…it made me think a little bit more about policies that exist about immigration (female, early 20s, tutor, May 20, 2009).

This member was quick to point out that this kind of experience would not be discussed during corps day training. She felt that only in the focus group discussion was she allowed to broach the subject. Ultimately, she felt cut off from the opportunity to understand where the problem
actually comes from and what is the political will to fix it. As a researcher, I found it difficult to listen to these young people recount their experiences and then watch them grasp helplessly for meaning, offered little opportunity beyond informal conversation to process or make meaning. One member said, “it feels like there are a million answers swimming beneath the surface and I can’t grab at one.” The daily experience of AmeriCorps members is a rich and contradictory milieu of power and privilege, ongoing confrontations with racism, classism, and sexism, and ultimately, a powerful opportunity to examine the scope and interrelations of social problems. These opportunities are purposefully, and forcefully, suppressed within the program.

**Pedagogy or Ideology?**

The claim to the dichotomizing of political learning and politics needs to be further examined in its implications. It raises the question as to what the relationship between pedagogy and ideology is within the AmeriCorps program. In reviewing the challenges I have raised to the efficacy of civic engagement work within AmeriCorps, it would be easy to claim that the solution to these problems could be found in new pedagogies, better adherence to the best practices of service-learning, or even a firmer hand in oversight and implementation. I do not doubt that pedagogical innovation within the program would result in an improved experience for AmeriCorps members and a more meaningful engagement with democratic learning. I do believe there is space within the AmeriCorps program for a more progressive and critical engagement with democracy and community problems then what I observed in my case studies. However, in the next chapter, I want to make the case that what is happening in the AmeriCorps program is not the result of a lack of expertise or pedagogical know-how on the part of program directors. Rather, the ideological frame of democracy and citizenship within the AmeriCorps program expresses the limits of the forms that democratic learning can take. If this ideological
frame is taken to its logical extensions, it has important implications for the kind of democracy AmeriCorps members will be prepared to engage with as well as the ways in which adult educators understand the terrains of democracy learning within civil society.
Chapter Seven

Learning Democracy as Ideological Practice

In the end, when it comes to the challenges we face, the need for action always exceeds the limits of government. While there's plenty that government can do and must do to keep our families safe, and our planet clean, and our markets free and fair, there's a lot that government can't — and shouldn't — do. And that's where active, engaged citizens come in. That's the purpose of service in this nation. –President Barak Obama (Malcolm, 2009)

Analyzing democratic learning in AmeriCorps through the lens of institutional ethnography and from the standpoint of the AmeriCorps members poses a few interpretive challenges. On the one hand, in chapter six I introduced an important finding of this research: there is an appearance within the program of openness, flexibility, and hermeneutic freedom associated with the category of ‘civic engagement.’ There is no ‘official’ definition and at each point in the hierarchy of the organization, the duty to name and claim such a conceptual apparatus is passed down to those below in an attempt to maintain a democratic nature within the concept itself. According to the Corporation, states must set the mandate for explicit attention to democratic learning. According to the state commission, each of the programs must decide for themselves how they will activate the concept. According to program directors, the members will decide what the category means to them and each permutation on the notion is considered equally valid. One female AmeriCorps member eloquently summed up her civic engagement training by reflecting, “the definition was that there wasn’t one. My group compared it to porn; you’ll know it when you see it. That’s what they said: civic engagement is whatever you think it is” (female, early 20s, tutor, April 2, 2009).
On the other hand, from the standpoint of members, this research found evidence that the project of civic engagement is transparent to AmeriCorps volunteers as an explicit ‘agenda’ of the Corporation. Phrased in different ways by different groups, a thread wove through the focus groups discussions that left participants grappling with the extent to which ‘civic engagement’ is imposed within the program. Members are not in agreement; many support the project of civic engagement while others resent its imposition as a ‘requirement’ within the program and still others are more critical of the apparent de-politicization of the trainings.

In this analysis I want to avoid the pull towards a ‘correspondence’ position where AmeriCorps members are depicted as uncritically consuming state ideology. My purpose is not to demonstrate the extent to which the consciousness of AmeriCorps members ‘matches up’ to a particular institutional discourse in order to prove that a specific ideological form of democracy and citizenship exists within AmeriCorps. Thus far I have used the approach of institutional ethnography to demonstrate how democratic learning is organized within the confines of the program and through the conceptual apparatus of ‘civic engagement.’ I have argued that civic engagement emerges within a particular, ‘narrowed’ context within the programs, which is characterized by a de-politicization of direct service work within particular kinds of organizations and with a heavy dose of rational-technical social planning processes. I have also demonstrated that the civic engagement curriculum within the program takes on the particular characteristic of vacuity, that is learning is violently abstracted from its experiential base formed in both the daily activities of AmeriCorps members and their already existing forms of knowledge.

At this stage, I want to summarize the final components of this research. To do this, I will articulate the ideological components of the institutional discourse of civic engagement in
AmeriCorps and demonstrate how this frame circulates throughout the program and organizes learning. To this end, I will explore the forms of objectified consciousness around ‘civic engagement’ that appear in the AmeriCorps program and with which the members contend and interact. The purpose here is to articulate the findings of this research in such a way as to demonstrate how civic engagement functions as an ideological practice within the program, that is how ‘civic engagement’ coordinates and organizes the work of learning democracy within the AmeriCorps program (Ng & Shan, 2010).

**Ideological Frame of Democracy and Citizenship within AmeriCorps**

AmeriCorps members enter into a variety of institutional relationships when they enroll in the program. Seen from their daily experience most of these relationships exist at the local level, for example with the people they ‘serve,’ their corps members, their supervisors, and their co-workers. Much like Mike, in chapter five, the relationships in their immediate view are confined to their daily experience. They are also, however, implicated in a set of institutional relationships that are organized outside of their local experience; this organization is driven by an agenda set at the federal level. These relationships are coordinated translocally as part of a national initiative to organize young people’s participation in civil society in a particular way and for particular purposes. These purposes, plainly stated by the CNCS, are to ‘get things done’ in communities and support “the American culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility” (CNCS, 2009c).

A central purpose of institutional ethnography is to explore this extra-local organization of experience in its trans-local practice. What I mean by this is that through institutional ethnography we attempt to illuminate the ways in which human activity becomes coordinated
across multiple sites through institutional process that do not arise out of the daily experience of those being ‘coordinated.’ Further, we assume that this organization of human activity is dialectically related to the forms of consciousness that make meaning of this activity. The way that individuals think and work cannot be artificially fractured; because of this emphasis, social organization comes into focus through an analysis of ideology. Ideology, in institutional ethnography, refers to the very specific processes associated with the production and deployment of knowledge. It is characterized by George Smith as “the imposition of objective, textually-mediated, conceptual practices on a local setting in the interest of ruling it” (1990 p. 633). Clearly, the processes of imposition within AmeriCorps have taken a central focus in this research. However, I now contend with the question of what exactly is being imposed.

To do this, I return to Dorothy Smith’s notion of ‘ideological frame,’ which differs from other popular approaches to analyzing ideology in educational research in that its focus is not only thought content, but epistemological function. Smith explains her notion of ideology as a process:

An interpretive schema is used to assemble and provide coherence for an array of particulars, thus selected and assembled, will intend, and will be interpretable by, the schema used to assemble them. The effect is peculiarly circular, for although questions of truth and falsity, accuracy and inaccuracy about the particulars may certainly be raised, the schema in itself is not called into question as a method of providing for the coherence of the collection of particulars as a whole (Smith, 1993 p. 139).

This is a fitting characterization of what I have observed in my research sites. Although there may be some griping about ‘civic engagement’ in terms of logistics or content or outcomes, there is not contention around ‘civic engagement’ itself. This articulation also raises the conundrum I alluded to in the introduction to this chapter. If there is no ‘official’ content for ‘civic engagement,’ how can we make the claim that ‘civic engagement’ constitutes an ideological frame within the program? I argue that ‘civic engagement’ is not the ideological frame itself, but
rather operates as the conceptual orchestration of a collection of ideas about democracy and participation, which in turn drive the operation of ‘civic engagement’ within AmeriCorps. Said differently, the category ‘civic engagement’ comes to stand for an ensemble of ideas about democracy and participation. In this way, the variety and form of participation can change, but the driving logic of the frame remains constant. For this reason, I find it more productive to relate this notion of ‘ideological frame’ back to Smith’s articulation of the relations of ruling as objectified forms of consciousness.

Based on data gathered from interviews, focus groups, and textual analysis as well as the findings I have thus far presented, I argue that the institutional discourse of AmeriCorps can be seen through particular ways in which consciousness around democracy, citizenship, and participation are organized. Said differently, within the institutional apparatus of the program, its regulatory structure, and its methods of promoting ‘civic engagement,’ certain ways of thinking about democracy emerge. These forms of consciousness are engaged and activated by those participating at all levels of the AmeriCorps program, including the members themselves. These forms of consciousness penetrate one another, creating for AmeriCorps members tensions and contradictions in thought and experience which, given the regulatory structures of the program, were left formally unengaged outside of focus groups. They do not always fit easily together, creating a blissfully uncomplicated ideological form; they sometimes contradict one another and crack under the pressure of experience. Nevertheless, they persist. In what follows, I will explore the emergence of these forms of consciousness in the program before moving on to a discussion of their implications.
Forms and Appearances of Objectified Consciousness

It is not difficult to discern that one of the primary purposes for the existence of the Corporation for National and Community Service and its programs, including AmeriCorps, is to promote volunteer service; that is clearly stated on the organization’s website. With only a little bit of cursory research, it is equally as easy to establish that the federal government imagines this volunteer service to be an important component of meeting human needs at the local level within the United States. To argue that ‘promoting service’ is thus the institutional agenda of AmeriCorps is an oversimplification of the ideological project at hand. It is a complicated task to unravel a narrative of what this notion of service actually means and how it operates within a vision of democracy. I argue that service and democracy emerge in particular forms within the program and take on objective characteristics, which appear in program activities and confront the consciousness of AmeriCorps members as objective realities.

Service, Citizenship, and the State

In the discussions of AmeriCorps members, service emerged as a central component of their consciousness around democracy and citizenship. In our second meeting, I asked the members to reflect on and discuss the difference between ‘citizenship’ and ‘good citizenship.’ Their general organization of these categories does not differentiate substantially from the kind of public rhetoric we are all familiar with, although it was interesting to note that many had a hard time drawing a line between the two categories. For many, ‘citizenship’ meant simply ‘being a good citizen’ in that both have the same defining characteristics, such as obeying laws and cultural norms, voting, and participating in the community. Others recognized that ‘citizenship’ is a legal category that affords a citizen rights and protections based on their
membership in a nation-state. As such, citizenship can exist in that very legalistic way. You could, theoretically, never engage with the community or the government and yet you would remain a ‘citizen.’

To be a ‘good citizen,’ however, had several key dimensions of which ‘participation’ is the singular defining characteristic and ‘service’ is the most salient example. This notion of ‘participation’ is then reconnected to the idea of civic responsibility and being ‘active.’ Good citizens are not passive or consumptive in their orientation towards public life; they are engaged, not necessarily with the state, but with ‘the community’ writ large. Emerging in their explanations was a general orientation towards the communitarian critiques staged against the liberal emphasis on rights consumption; ‘good citizenship’ has an active component to it and transcends simply abiding laws and paying taxes (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). What I saw in the focus group discussions largely corresponds with various studies on citizenship, such as Westheimer and Kahne (2004), which demonstrate that learning democracy and citizenship, at least in schools, exists along an ideological continuum that moves between the classic liberal, personally responsible citizen through a care-oriented communitarian vision to a more socially democratic, activist orientation. AmeriCorps members, in all their diversity, embody and enact this continuum in their beliefs and forms of engagement, although I argue that these philosophical paradigms alone do not explain how such notions come to the forefront of consciousness. Rather, these categories demonstrate how forms of consciousness function; they describe the appearance of a particular democratic consciousness rather than explain its derivation. Nevertheless, their participation in AmeriCorps has an important impact on the redistribution of value onto the practice of volunteer service. Their participation in AmeriCorps either confirmed their perspective that community service is an important aspect of citizen
participation or it ‘re-introduced’ the notion. I say re-introduced because many described that they had always known that they ‘should’ be volunteering because that is ‘just what people should do.’ Their paths, however, had lead them away from service and AmeriCorps reinscribed the notion of its importance within their idea of not just good community, but good citizenship as well.

In the Spring of 2009, and during the course of data collection, Representative Michelle Bachman, a Republican from Minnesota, made a series of comments on a talk radio show about the AmeriCorps program. She referred to AmeriCorps as either a socialist or a communist ‘re-education camp,’ according to various media outlets. She argued that the AmeriCorps program was a front for the Democratic Party and for the spreading of Obama-style socialist values. Her comments caused much concern amongst focus group participants. Not long after this incident, I asked members in focus groups to reflect on the Corporation’s commitment to volunteer service. As a reflective prompt, I used the Corporation’s claim that their purpose was ‘to activate a culture of citizenship through service.’ What exactly did this mean? My intention in provoking the conversation was to flesh out more about how AmeriCorps members understand the concept of ‘service.’ It was an attempt to continue the conversation that had woven through our previous sessions. Instead, the members brought into light the larger project of promoting ‘service’ through AmeriCorps. One male AmeriCorps member took this position:

I thought of what Michelle Bachman was saying about AmeriCorps and how it could be viewed as a communist re-education camp…there are broader cultural values as stake here and I think that’s fine. I think that is what this is about. They [the CNCS] have this idea of what a healthy society looks like, what a good public is, and however they have arrived at that they are going to pursue it by making AmeriCorps members and other people under the corporation this critical mass who have learned to experience the values of service, the value of engaging in community and then caring that with you and going into the communities that you become a part of. Not indoctrinating, but sharing those values with the people
around you. So, I don’t know, maybe she is on to something although it is far less sinister (male, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009).

Michelle Bachman’s comments had an interesting effect on the group. On the one hand, they moved into a defensive position vis-à-vis the value of volunteer service. On the other hand, they were forced to confront the notion that ‘service’ might be a political platform. A tremendous tension arose; could ‘service’ be both political and apolitical at the same time? There was general agreement amongst AmeriCorps members that yes, the Corporation does have an ‘agenda.’ But what is this agenda and is it ok for the CNCS to have an ‘agenda?’ This was less clear, in part because stepping back from the assumption that their service was politically neutral brought up tensions with other previously held assumptions.

The notion that service is a universal good clashes with the position of the state within AmeriCorps. As I argued in chapter five, the state is discussed in a vague and technical manner within the program. The regulations are legitimated through a logic that claims the state as ‘neutral;’ the state would never pay for something that was ‘partisan’ or ‘political,’ which is why AmeriCorps members are prohibited from those arenas of work and learning. What emerged in these conversations was fascinating. Members appeared ‘stuck’ between the claim that the CNCS, the ‘they’ of these conversations, was an ‘agenda-less’ or ‘neutral’ entity and the opposing perspective that citizenship based on service is only one possible vision of citizenship. One male AmeriCorps member argued,

They’re trying to foster a particular kind of citizenship that is service-based. And what if this was ‘activate a culture of citizenship that celebrates individual achievement.’ That would be a different statement; or a culture of citizenship through service to god. I like how Nathan put it, there are broader cultural values tied up here with the AmeriCorps mission. Like the projects they identify as being worth putting money towards and the problems they think are worth solving (male, early 20s, tutor, April 20, 2009).
This members’ position was echoed in another group where one female AmeriCorps member asked, “what if it was citizenship based on human rights.” Clearly, there is some level of consciousness that service is not the only component of citizenship.

However, there was little evidence that the implication of this argument, or why the state would select service as the kind of citizenship it promotes, was an easy analytical step for the groups. The position of service as a universal good was evidenced by the fact that they remained ‘stuck’ in the service conversation. From their perspective they could see that the state was promoting service, but because service was assumed to be normatively good, it ceased to be an agenda vis-à-vis the state. The following text is excerpted from a focus group conversation on this problematic.

Ann: One thing about AmeriCorps that I think in some ways doesn’t facilitate learning…or perhaps a different kind of learning…is that they aren’t really supposed to have an agenda for what we’re supposed to learn… And I think a lot of the things that people talked about were opinionated videos or essays or classes influenced my moments of learning that I talked about at the beginning of this discussion and the fact that AmeriCorps is not supposed to take a particular opinion about something or have an agenda about what were supposed to learn or come out with, in any sense that anyone could define, that doesn’t facilitate learning but also does leave open to not have to come to the conclusions that are held by the program director, which I guess is better for the whole grant federal money thing.

Mark: But it’s a socialist re-education camp!

Ann: Yeah there are all sorts of reasons for why AmeriCorps doesn’t have an agenda for what you’re supposed to learn.

Do you think AmeriCorps doesn’t have an agenda for what you’re supposed to learn?

Jack: Yeah they are teaching national service.

Mark: But there’s not a perspective that exists besides national service is good. The only official AmeriCorps perspective is that service is valuable.

Jack: But that’s an agenda.
Ann: I just think the perspectives are so vague, for good reason to be careful about political things, but I think it cuts us off from a certain kind of learning that could potentially happen in a national service program if we were a socialist re-education camp.

Mark: I don’t mean that’s not a philosophy. It’s just so close to a platitude that it doesn’t really count.

What doesn’t count?

Jack: That national service is good. Yes they are teaching it, but that’s a platitude.

Ann: It’s not really offensive to anyone. And that’s part of the point.

Mark: Exactly, it’s something that everyone agrees on even if they have different conceptions of what it means.

Jack: On the corporation’s website they had this thing, to create a generation of civically engaged people. If you’re creating a generation of somebody, that’s kind of an agenda.

Mark: Just the idea of civically engaged doesn’t mean anything other than civically engaged. Because there is no definition of what civic engagement is, officially, everybody agrees with it. That’s all.

Jack: I just think our country had an era of apathy, so its positive.

Lola: They might be apathetic, but that doesn’t mean there opposed to being civically engaged.

Mark: That’s because we are at a point where everybody accepts it. Everyone is all about this national service. That’s why I don’t think you see that there is an agenda to the point where the whole country likes it right now, not to where it’s a good or bad thing, I don’t know.

(all participants early 20s, tutors, May 18, 2009)

In having this conversation, the AmeriCorps members struggled with a few contradictions happening at the same time. First, AmeriCorps members arrived on the topic of a ‘service agenda’ from the question of what makes a meaningful learning experience. In discussing AmeriCorps as an example of learning that did not share the ‘meaningful’ characteristics the
group had discussed, they acknowledged that the ‘good’ learning experiences they had discussed involved some sort of ‘agenda’ on the part of the teacher or the curriculum. They then had to grapple with the idea that having an ‘agenda’ might not be completely negative. The group then identified that the CNCS has a dual character: it positions itself as non-political and as not having an agenda at the same time that it clearly states that it does have an agenda. How is this contradiction resolved? For the members, it was not. I argue that the contradiction between having and not having an ‘agenda’ was left unresolved because the ‘agenda’ itself is not the source of the contradiction; rather, the notion of service is what is important. If the member above is correct, if ‘service’ is a platitude, then the CNCS can assume its dual character without such apparent contradiction; they can ‘have an agenda’ that is ‘agenda-less.’

The stability of this arrangement depends on how the notion of ‘service’ is defined by the Corporation and how it is, or is not, positioned in relation to politics. As articulated by the CNCS, it is the kind of category that, as AmeriCorps members pointed out, does not need to be defined. It can be held in the position of ‘common sense;’ everyone knows what it means to ‘serve’ and, as Obama and Bush have argued for the last decade, everyone can and should do it. However, there are some contours to this definition that emerge when we pay close attention to the rhetoric used by the CNCS, by presidents, and by AmeriCorps members. Remembering the analysis in chapter five in which I argued that ‘service’ takes on a distinctly apolitical character in the program, a further distinction is drawn within the confines of the idea of ‘national service.’ According to its proponents, we can talk about two kinds of national service: military and civilian. Those advocating civilian national service make the case that it is equal to, or morally equivalent to, military service. So one dimension of this ‘service’ is that we are not talking about going to war, at least not against a militarized enemy. We might go to ‘war’ against poverty,
homelessness, hurricanes, drugs, or illiteracy, but ‘service’ to the community does not involve
the domain of violence. The target of such service is not an army, but the relations of inequality
that exist within and between communities and appear as ‘social problems’ and ‘community
needs.’ Another distinction is that service can be paid or unpaid. This is made by the constant
evocation of great public ‘servants’ to the nation, such as Edward Kennedy or George HW Bush,
and the constant emphasis on the aspiration of public service as vocation. Edward Kennedy and
George HW Bush, however, were monetarily rewarded for their ‘service’ and while young
people can aspire to these positions, the majority of us will not nor should we have to. As Obama
argued in his address at the 20th Anniversary of the Points of Light Foundation,

You don't have to devote your entire career to service — though I hope that many
of the students here will. But I'm asking you to have a public service mindset.
I'm asking that no matter where you live, or what job you do, or what obstacles
you face, you're always looking for ways to make service part of your life
(Malcolm, 2009).

Thus, service can be done on a part-time basis without fiscal compensation. More importantly,
service *should* be done in this way. As the CNCS draft strategic plan for 2011-2015 argues,
“service is a cost effective investment in community solutions” (CNCS 2011a, p. 5). The kind of
‘service’ we are talking about within AmeriCorps and within the CNCS is now emerging. It will
take place within community settings, it will be aimed at social needs, it will take place on a part-
time basis, and it will not be remunerated. As President Obama argued earlier, where the
government can – or should- not provide for the public welfare, citizens will through service.

**Local people with private politics faced with public problems**

In some ways, service emerges within the program as such a powerful expression of
participation not only because it is the ‘agenda-less’ agenda of the Corporation, but because its
privileged position within the program is reinforced by other dynamics of the civic engagement
program. The clearest of these is the emphasis within the program on the local domain of action. Within the AmeriCorps program, this imagined citizen is ‘active’ and ‘engaged’ on the local terrain. While notions of ‘community’ can be defined from diverse standpoints, ‘the local’ is reinforced by the Corporation in numerous ways. Throughout organizational literature, including strategic plans, guiding principles, the CFR, NOFAs, and even legislation, the refrains of ‘local needs,’ ‘local communities,’ and ‘local organizations’ are constantly sounded. If ‘service’ takes the place as one of the central features of how AmeriCorps members understand their participation in community, the ‘local’ emerged as a core component of how AmeriCorps members understand their relation to democratic processes.

In the early sessions of the focus groups, I structured our discussions in such a way as to gather the perspectives of the members as to what constituted ‘good democracy’ and ‘good citizenship.’ My purpose in pursuing this line of questions was to discern their own understanding of democracy and the role of a program such as AmeriCorps. Their descriptions of democracy vacillate in such a way that it is clear they are working through a central organizing feature: the relationship between the individual and the social in democracy. For some, democracy is strictly a macro-level ensemble of institutions and structures that organize a society. For others, democracy is understood through the aggregate of individual democratic behaviors, such as voting, making decisions, exercising their rights. For the majority, democracy lies in some mediation of these two positions, acknowledging that within a democracy the most present tension is between what is good for individual citizens and what is good for society as a whole. These conversations very quickly morphed into discussions of the present challenges to democracy in the United States. Again, their evaluations followed the same individual-social logic. Many argued that the root of democratic dysfunction was individual pathology; people are
lazy, selfish, apathetic, ignorant, or just plain ‘bad’ citizens. Equal numbers agreed that the
problems of democracy were systemic in nature; people are excluded for centers of power,
government in bureaucratic and inefficient, the size of scale is prohibitive to ‘true’ democracy.

Nearly every member of the focus group expressed the opinion that in the United States
democracy is not ‘working,’ at the federal and state levels, because the size and scope are
unmanageable. Something about size and scope creates inefficient institutions, including ‘rules’
that are seen to slow the process down. The plurality of ‘public’ interests, issues of access, and
concentrations of power were seen as further barriers to the creation of effective democracy.
Government was seen as impossible to access, or even in some cases, understand. Two
AmeriCorps members, one male one female, engaged in this exchange when discussing their
perspectives on government:

A lot of people might be apathetic or don’t care or they just don’t know or they
hear a sound bite and think its awesome, but they don’t realize the intricacies of
the issue. I feel like a lot of us, like how many of us read the stimulus bill? It is
hard to be that active, involved, informed citizen. Where there is so much out
there you can’t have an informed opinion (male, early 20s, housing, March 24,
2009).

Like when we went to the county commissioner’s office, I was so confused. So
many things I did not understand and I was so overwhelmed and not able to
follow because they don’t put it in laymen’s terms for those of us that aren’t
involved in the government. I’m all about personal accountability, I think people
are ultimately responsible for their own outcomes, but it is difficult to learn about
tax levies and bond revenue. I don’t know what bond revenue is! (female, early
20s, housing, March 24, 2009).

While many AmeriCorps members reported that their trips to the public bodies made the
processes of government appear more accessible, many of their reasons for this accessibility
were because of the dearth of participation by everyday citizens. Issues of inaccessibility and
inefficiency in government strongly influenced members on their opinion that the local level of
engagement was the optimum location for the efforts. Components of the civic engagement
curricula that were designed to influence members engagement with government often had the opposite effect; members felt as though in these activities the ‘game’ of politics was revealed for the distasteful and corrupt process that it truly was. As one male AmeriCorps member argued,

I mean anytime we go to a training that is supposed to get us more involved, like going to the capitol, is that supposed to inspire me? Hell no. More shadiness. The process of getting a bill passed, it is just a game, not helping anyone. Is it about anyone but themselves? (male, early 20s, tutor, May 7, 2009).

Others felt as though the program directed their gaze towards the arenas in which engagement with government can be effective, the assumption being that engagement as anything beyond the ‘local’ was ineffective. One female AmeriCorps member described her learning in this way:

I feel like I learned about which politics are important. It seems like your local folks, city council, local reps are way more important than the president even though people put all their emphasis on the president. Cause your city council people affect your life directly, fix the pothole on my street, or keep Trader Joe’s from moving in across the street (female, early 20s, tutor, May 7, 2009).

An effect of this kind of consciousness around the state is to both position ‘the local’ as accessible and the ‘extra-local’ as inaccessible. In this form, the state becomes an effective entity only at ‘small’ levels of government and with extremely limited scope. Susan, an AmeriCorps consultant, described the emphasis on the ‘local’ within AmeriCorps as the limitation of impact. She argued that it is very difficult to talk with AmeriCorps members about the impact of their action beyond the local level in part because this requires moving into the terrain of policy, which many regard as off limits within the regulatory structure of the program. The ‘local’ and ‘service’ emerge as reinforcing one another at this point; the local is the preferred terrain of participation and service is necessarily confined to local impact. The platitude expands.

The AmeriCorps members’ commitment to the local is further emphasized in their understanding of civic engagement as something that requires a particular arrangement of local factors. I asked the members if they saw ‘civic engagement’ as something they would continue to
do after they completed their year of service. Almost uniformly they reported that they imagined that they would continue to volunteer, but beyond community service they could not speculate. The conditions of their life held too strong a sway over their ability to participate. For many the issue was time; from their perspective civic engagement required a huge commitment of time and the importance of jobs or families might supersede community involvement. For others the issue was their connection to place. From this view, civic engagement was something that required local ‘rootedness.’ Many saw themselves as transient, as renters, as students; to be engaged beyond volunteerism would require being fixed in time and space. Their discussions indicate that geographical communities rise to the forefront of their perception of ‘community,’ but further suggest that the extra-local terrain, which is not in conflict with transient or unstable lifestyles, was beyond their conception of being ‘civically engaged.’ One caveat that may explain why AmeriCorps members have such focus on the local terrain is that many involved with AmeriCorps suggest that the young people attracted to the program are less likely to have participated in social movements. Susan, the AmeriCorps consultant, described AmeriCorps members as ‘square.’ Thus, their consciousness of the trans-local terrain of political participation may not be as sophisticated as other young adults engaged in activist politics. In my group of research participants, there were only two or three AmeriCorps members who identified themselves as politically active beyond the local scale.

The emphasis on time and lifestyle choices indicates something further beyond a commitment to the local scale; they bring up the question of the relation between the public and the private within AmeriCorps. This tension emerged many times throughout the focus group discussions; AmeriCorps members, for example, were aware that a notion of the ‘public’ or ‘common’ good was difficult to establish. The AmeriCorps members’ demonstrate a
commitment to the idea that the social problems they engage in the AmeriCorps program are
government problems, in that they are vast, complex, pervasive, and systemic. Affordable housing,
poverty, racism, achievement gaps, failing public schools are all engaged as problems of
democracy. However, a significant contradiction emerges when AmeriCorps members attempted
to reconcile these public problems with their service work. After lengthy discussions on ‘good
citizenship,’ I asked them to reflect on the relationship between their service work and
democracy. My question was, what did working on the achievement gap or trying to increase
access to affordable housing have to do with democracy? To answer this question, AmeriCorps
members were unable to move out of the individual-behavior dimensions of service work. They
argued that through their service work they are helping others to ‘help themselves’ and to
become individuals who are able to surmount the inequality of United States society in order to
succeed. They acknowledged that inequality is a threat to democracy and that in order for
communities to remain stable, or achieve stability, inequality had to be transformed. This
transformation, however, was an individual act of self and hard work.

I have argued, in chapter five, that one of the effects of the logic models used to plan
AmeriCorps programming is an institutional push towards rational technical ways of
understanding social problems. The ‘achievement gap’ can be understood within a program as a
massive complication of institutionalized racism, the historical legacies of segregation, poverty,
political inattention, and many other macro-level social factors, but within the program its
solution can only be articulated in terms of helping kids do better in schools. Policy level
solutions are largely off the table, as are questions about why there is so little political will to
address the root causes of the achievement gap, despite the fact that AmeriCorps members have
much to say on this matter. This perspective is echoed in the new Corporation strategic plan for
2011-2015, in which the educational and behavioral outcomes of school-age children are a major strategic objective (CNCS, 2011a). This introduced a different dimension to the emphasis on ‘capacity’ within the universe of AmeriCorps; we are not only talking about the capacity of organizations, but the capacity of individuals to subsist and thrive as well.

Combined with an emphasis on ‘private politics’ in the program, the relations between social inequality and democracy began to wear on the AmeriCorps members and they struggled, profoundly, to reconcile a vision of citizenship based on substantive participation and resources with the reality of persistent, structural inequality. The tension between these positions was obvious to me throughout the course of their conversations, but in each focus group the tension finally broke as they explored what it means to be a good citizen. In one focus group a male AmeriCorps member was the first to raise the issue saying,

I was thinking about some of the students I work with and their family situations. For them being a citizen, because of the family situation and just being in poverty, their outlook on how to be a citizen is maybe a lot different than someone who has a college education and all this other knowledge, just because of their circumstances and where they are at and what role, what part they can do, physically and emotionally and mindfully do. Cause if someone is thinking about what they can feed their kids for dinner it is a little more difficult to think about what I can do to be involved in my communities (male, early 20s, tutor, March 9, 2009).

A second male AmeriCorps member responded to him by saying,

I want to add on to that. I think that for someone who is like that, who doesn’t have time to think about anything else but putting food on the table for their family, like that’s good citizenship for them. Cause they always have the choice not to put food on the table, or neglect their kids. So that is what…um…not to like excuse the fact of poverty in our nation, but that is an acceptable form of citizenship in that one realm that people have power over and can actively do (male, early 20s, tutor, March 9, 2009).

In a different focus group, a female AmeriCorps member raised the issue in a slightly different, more individualized way:

I had trouble with the good citizen/good person distinction too. It was iffy for me. I wrote informed, vote, care what goes on, concerned, involved, and responsible. But then I added ‘to an appropriate extent,’ cause I can’t really begrudge someone
who is working three jobs and can’t find time to read the stimulus bill. I guess they can find time to vote once every four years. And it is very subjective as to what’s an appropriate level of involvement (female, early 20s, housing, March 24, 2009).

These AmeriCorps members raised an extremely important issue; not everyone can participate in equal ways. Many in the US struggle to eat every day; going to PTA meetings or reading the stimulus bill cannot take priority. The Corporation’s response to this sort of tension would likely be that even the most disadvantaged can be empowered through service, which it seems is not only a universal good, but an emancipator as well. This has been a consistent component of the rhetoric of AmeriCorps since its inception and is implicated in the debates concerning ‘maximum feasible participation’ of the poor in their own development (Cleaver, 1999; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Long, 2001).

However, the AmeriCorps members are moving in a much more complicated direction. The tension they raise has many dimensions: surviving vs. thriving, acting vs. being acted upon, independence vs. dependence. What the AmeriCorps members evoked in these conversations was the tension between the idea that part of being a ‘good citizen’ is being a ‘good worker.’ Some of their earliest memories of lessons of ‘good citizenship’ involve working hard, providing for their families, paying taxes, and being self-sufficient. In the United States, being ‘dependent,’ either on the state or a male partner, is a historical component of the construction of ‘good citizenship,’ with the position that those who are ‘dependent’ do not have the capacity to participate in an effective manner and are more of a burden than an empowered member of a democratic community. This historical and social relation has led to strong feminist critique about the patriarchal dimensions of citizenship and the discursive equation of productive labor with participation and value (Brenner, 2000; Fraser, 1987, 1997). The AmeriCorps members were ultimately unable to reconcile that ‘good citizenship’ may not look the same for those who
are unable to ‘serve’ in the way described by the CNCS. In this way, choosing not to neglect one’s family, to be a good worker and provider, becomes an expression of good citizenship. It is worth noting that nowhere in these conversations do the survival mechanisms or forms of social capital within poor communities become apparent as modes of ‘service’ (Hyatt, 2001).

Some AmeriCorps members struggled extensively with the relationships between power and privilege within the program and race was often present as a subtext in conversation, although often masked through abstract characterizations of ‘poor people.’ They saw service as an example of ‘leveraging privilege’ and ‘providing access’ to communities socially different from their own in a ‘legitimate way.’ Others came into the program with a much more politicized understanding of the social problem at hand than what they encountered within the mechanisms of the program. These AmeriCorps members, paradoxically, struggled deeply with what working with individuals in crisis on a daily basis means. While I observed that more conservative AmeriCorps members had insights into the reality of structural inequalities, and the organization of those inequalities along the lines of race and gender, those for whom that reality was already evident, either theoretically or in practice, struggled to make sense of the dialectical relation between structure and agency. One male AmeriCorps member, in an extremely exasperated moment, argued:

I feel white guilt, but my parents weren’t wealthy and they got divorced and my dad’s not the greatest guy. But my mom pulled it together and she had two jobs. And I find myself getting angry at the parents of my students. And I know it is systemic, but on a more like gut level I’m like how can you over sleep four days a week and not get your kid to school on time! Why can’t you get your shit together? And these are actual emotions that I have and I can always talk myself down, but they’ve definitely popped into my head (male, early 20s, tutor, March 18, 2009).

This young man, who I came to know as an extremely conscientious and ethical individual, summarized the position of many AmeriCorps members who were struggling in their experience
of AmeriCorps to hold these multiple threads of experience in tension with one another. Their debates moved quickly, with single individuals occupying several positions within the length of 30-minute conversation. Yes, good citizens should participate, serve, get their kids to school on time, and hold down jobs. Yes, poverty throws up barriers to this kind of participation, but wait, people make choices although some people have different sets of choices to choose between. It was apparent that the appearance of social inequality within AmeriCorps, that social problems can be solved through individual behavioral modifications, was a source of great discomfort and unresolved questions for many.

**Citizenship as Relations of Ruling**

In chapter five, I demonstrated the ways in which the organization of the AmeriCorps program create a particular context in which democratic learning emerges as the form ‘civic engagement.’ I argued that within the AmeriCorps program, the spaces of democratic learning are narrowed by institutional regulations and protocols, in both *de jure* and *de facto* forms, that create a space for learning that is characterized by the de-politicization of service work, social problems, non-profit agencies, the state, and the regulatory apparatus of AmeriCorps itself. In chapter six, I further argued that in this context, the learning organized within the program as ‘civic engagement’ takes on a particular form, which is predicated on the abstraction of consciousness from matter. This appears as the consistent separation of experience from reflection and the emphasis on rational-technical explication of social problems.

I temper this argument by further proposing that these forms of abstraction and disengagement within the program are not merely pedagogical problems. They emerge within the program because of the forms of consciousness that circulate through AmeriCorps on the
subjects of democracy, citizenship, and social inequality. These forms of consciousness, which are put forward as foundational logics of the program, become interpretive frames within the program, asking AmeriCorps members to contend with their explanations and complications. The learning environment of AmeriCorps, however, ensures that these frames are not encountered as possible explanations, but rather as objective truths. These ‘truths’ can go by several names depending on how we understand their origins (discourses, ideologies, etc), but I argue that they accomplish pedagogically the task Dorothy Smith (1993) describes as ideological practice:

Ideological practices are an important form of inscription. They begin within the transcendent schemata of discourse or formal organization. An interpretive schema is used to assemble and order a set of particulars—descriptions or instances of actualities. These aim at and can be interpreted by the schema used to assemble them. The particulars become indices of an underlying pattern, corresponding to the schema, in terms of which they make sense. The ordering of events, objects, etc., is thus pre-informed by the schema of discourse or formal organization. This is the ideological process at the boundaries of discourse or formal organization. It is of considerable significance in the exercise of power by the ruling apparatus (p. 217).

It is extremely important to understand what it is going on in the AmeriCorps program as not just the ‘delivering’ of a particular interpretive frame or set of ideas. It is not the uncritical, mechanical imposition of ideological norms. The ideology of a particular form of democracy, based in abstraction from material reality, is woven into the very operative practices of the program.

The ultimate reality of AmeriCorps program is a relation of bifurcation. Two competing processes of learning are set against each other; although they are not necessarily in conflict, they are brought into such a relation within the organization of the program. The state, through the auspices of CNCS working within federal legislation, hands down a set of regulations, rules, and requirements that define the sites and practices of the AmeriCorps program. It also passes
down the mandate for civic engagement curricula and AmeriCorps member training. It does not pass down an explicit definition of civic engagement. The state commission responds to the mandate for civic engagement by making it a ‘deliverable outcome’ of the program, meaning that they will use it as an indicator to assess the program. The state commission also does not hand down an explicit definition of civic engagement, but does disseminate and monitor the evaluation criteria and accountability mechanisms. The programs receive the mandate to provide civic engagement, constantly working within an ensemble of institutional mandates and protocols. Program directors also have their own vis-à-vis service, learning, and civic engagement. They combine these goals with the mandates from the state commission and the restrictions of the federal regulations in order to produce a civic engagement curriculum. This civic engagement curriculum becomes the interpretive frame of democracy and citizenship within the program.

This vacuous notion of democracy and citizenship brought forth through the conceptual apparatus of civic engagement exist in constant tension with individual AmeriCorps members daily work experiences and practices. In one physical and mental location, their service site, they struggle daily to understand the violent realities of poverty, inequality, nihilism, alienation, hopelessness, and indifference. They struggle to understand their service as part of the larger social and political landscape of the United States, to see the relationship between helping individuals and transforming social conditions, and to unearth the root causes of the social problems they face. They conduct this struggle on a largely individual basis and through informal organization with other AmeriCorps members. These are the kinds of questions that are unsanctioned within AmeriCorps; they can only emerge through ‘brave’ program directors who are willing to violate institutional regulations and risk the livelihood of their programs, their own
material well being, and the ongoing human needs their AmeriCorps members address in the community.

This bifurcation is resolved within the program through the implicit assertion that such violent experiences of social inequality can be characterized as ‘community needs’ and that the responsibility for meeting such needs should fall to citizens. A large part of this ‘should’ is the notion that the only other option is to place such a responsibility in the hands of the state, which would surely create even greater inequality, inhumanity, and callousness. The question of the ‘state,’ as such, is never a possibility for investigation. Juxtaposed to ‘the state,’ ‘the citizen’ must emerge as a particular form of democratic agent whose purpose is not confined merely to arrangements for collective self-governance. The purely ‘democratic’ role of the citizen is augmented in AmeriCorps; the citizen has new tasks and responsibilities before them and through which the notions of citizen and civic responsibility transform. As President Obama (Malcolm, 2009) argued in his remarks on the 20th anniversary of the Points of Light Foundation,

Once you've formed those connections, you'll find that it's a little harder to numb yourself to other people's suffering. It's a little harder to convince yourself that their struggles aren't your problem. It's a little harder to just stand by as a bystander. Once you've tutored young people in a struggling neighborhood, it's hard not to care about that ballot measure to fund their school. Once you've volunteered at a food bank, it's hard not to care about poverty and unemployment. Over time, the needs of the people you serve become your stake in the challenges of our time. In the end, service binds us to each other — and to our communities and our country — in a way that nothing else can. That's how we become more fully American. That's what it means to be American. It's always been the case in this country -- that notion that we invest ourselves, our time, our energy, our vision, our purpose into the very fabric of this nation. That's the essence of our liberty -- that we give back, freely.

These relations of citizenship and democracy, with their implicit relations of power and inequality, have emerged, pedagogically, in a tidal form in not only AmeriCorps, but in universities, schools, the private sector, the non-profit sector, and the public domain. The
implications of such relations in terms of how we learn what it means to live in a democracy are vast and disturbing, but can be significantly and strategically interrupted.
Chapter Eight

Elements of Reproductive Praxis in the Theorization of Democracy and Learning

This research first took shape during an early spring walk in March of 2007. As a new doctoral student, I was struggling to identify the questions I wanted to engage during my studies and pursue through my research. In typical student fashion, this struggle took the form of a fixation on ‘the case’ that I would analyze. As I walked with my supervisor, I rambled and ranted about all the frustrating experiences in adult citizenship education that had led me to quit my job as a community educator and move to Canada to pursue a doctorate. The conversation turned towards the problems that lay behind the challenges I was describing. Ultimately, the question came in a short blast: why do people think that economic life is like the weather? That is, why do we think that the conditions of our labor, poverty, homelessness, hunger, and violence are all events beyond our control? After a long process of reflection, comprising the first two years of doctoral study, I came to articulate this question differently. What is the relationship between our material lives and our political consciousness? How do these phenomena become disconnected from one another, both in daily experience and forms of consciousness? How is this relationship reproduced through our daily praxis? How do we participate in the reproduction of these forms of consciousness? These questions mirror the concept Allman (1999) refers to as ‘reproductive praxis.’

While questions such as these are common within adult education, I decided to pursue through this research the question of how ‘the state’ reproduces these relations and how we participate in this reproduction through our own activity. I felt this focus was important as more and more literature emerged within the field that moved away from the state as an object of
analysis and elevated the terrain of civil society as an ideal arena of participation. I came to this decision, in part, because I was concerned about the ways in which I had observed the state ‘wading’ into the growing debates around the nature and scope of citizenship. This lead to the obvious case of the Corporation for National and Community Service and AmeriCorps as an explicit project of the state to cultivate a particular notion of ‘citizenship’ amongst Americans, but with a special focus on young adults.

As I come to the concluding moments of this research, I feel I have only begun to explore the complexity of the questions I posed for myself. I am troubled, specifically, by two particular themes in the thinking of AmeriCorps members, which were ‘in line’ so to speak with the larger project of civic engagement within the program. Despite the fact that many members did not see the civic engagement curriculum as having much efficacy, they nevertheless repeated these two notions and cited the AmeriCorps program as having a significant impact on solidifying their commitment to these perspectives. In this way, I have come closer to unearthing two particular components of the current democratic consciousness that occupy special positions within today’s reproductive praxis, which Allman (2001) argues happens when we “partake in the relations and conditions we find already existing in the world and assume these are natural and inevitable” (p. 167). I have categorized these two phenomena, which are foundational to the AmeriCorps program, as a local fetish and the democratic management of inequality. Both of these redirect the citizens’ gaze and activity and they obscure two dialectical relationships that are important to the understanding of reproductive praxis in democratic education: the local/global and the political/material. Exploring these phenomena require that I move back to the terrain of theorization because they are not unique to the AmeriCorps program. Rather, what I observed in my focus groups is part of a larger occurrence in the ways in which we are coming to think about
questions of citizenship and democracy. I mentioned in Chapter Four that my work at analyzing this program would take the form of ‘going in’ and then ‘coming back out.’ After diving down to the bottom of the civic engagement program within AmeriCorps, this chapter serves as a ‘surfacing’ in which I will name and explain the broader dynamics and implications for the politics of citizenship proposed in AmeriCorps.

The Local Fetish

Within AmeriCorps, ‘the local’ emerges as the preferred terrain of citizen engagement within a context in which extra-local relations are purposefully obscured. AmeriCorps is not the only organization emphasizing a focus on ‘local’ needs and interests. The ‘local’ has emerged in recent years as a panacea to a number of seemingly irresolvable theoretical problems in the social sciences. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the arrival of the so-called ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama, 1992), policy discussions have taken for granted the rejection of any form of ‘big’ government and central or social planning by the state (although not the market). In this context, the ‘local’ emerges as a preferential, necessarily less autocratic, scale for governance, participation, and development. In a similar fashion, postmodern trends within social theory have turned towards the local as the only ‘knowable’ terrain accessible to social theorists through interpretive and textual analysis of meaning. The emphasis on ‘the local’ has been particularly popular amongst some transnational feminist theorists who have associated ‘the global’ with a masculine hegemonic project that renders ‘the local’ feminized, weak, and dominated and thus, in need of re-theorization as a site of feminist praxis (Gibson-Graham, 2002). Simultaneously, the ongoing processes of de-colonization and national struggle have led to the devolution of state authority to local entities, both those based on national identities or
within societies emerging out of militarized conflict. The presumption of the ‘local’ terrain has also emerged within the post-socialist shards of the organized left, with increasingly entrenched positions of identitarian social movements and emphasis on the ‘local’ as the only scale possible for launching opposition against the onslaught of the negative tides of globalization. In the ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA) to capitalism context, the local has become the defensive position of those who still resist the constant, expanding logic of capital (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

How do we explain this emphasis on the ‘local’? The ‘local’ is a serious problem for many factions trying to establish an international base, both legally and philosophically, for diverse political projects such as human rights, restricting the movement of capital, promoting the movement of capital, or developing working class solidarity. Because of this theoretical tension, I find that many who would reject an allegiance to the local, such as the current trend in cosmopolitan or global citizenship, simply ignore the problem or argue against it, without attempting to explain why there is so much interest in ‘the local.’ In a certain strain of the literature on neo-liberal globalization, the ‘local’ has emerged as the only social scale with the power to confront the global reach of capital, particularly as the erosion of the local becomes a rallying cry. This discussion then makes its way into the theorization of democracy and citizenship via debates such as ‘the right to the city’ (Harvey, 2003b; McCann, 2002; Mitchell, D. 2003; Lefebvre, 2002) and social democratic alternatives to neo-liberal policy formation (Fung & Wright, 2003; Wright, 2010).

The emphasis on the ‘local’ has been thoroughly engaged by geographers. Mark Purcell has argued, in a series of articles, that ‘the local’ has assumed an uncritical position within social theory, which is historically linked to the TINA environment in which the global terrain of capitalism is seen as an uncontestable space (Brown & Purcell, 2005; Purcell, 2006). He refers to
this process as ‘the local trap.’ The local trap is “the tendency of researchers and activists to assume something inherent about the local scale. The local trap equates the local with ‘the good’; it is preferred presumptively over non-local scales” (2006, p. 1924). Purcell argues that in these discussions a few dynamics are observable. To begin with democratization and localization are conflated. Following this logic, ‘local people’ becomes equated with popular sovereignty. Further, community becomes confined to its local manifestations, despite the fact that ‘community’ can be defined and organized in a plurality of fashions. These assumptions often crescendo into an uncritical conflation of ‘local’ with ‘participation.’ Finally, Purcell observes that ‘local’ comes to signify particular populations who are in need of local participatory democratic sovereignty. In Purcell’s field of development studies, he argues that ‘local’ becomes a kinder, gentler way of saying ‘the poor,’ the ‘indigenous,’ the subaltern and thus raises the question if the notion of ‘the local’ becomes a way around engaging directly with the relations that constitute these groups, despite the fact that it is on the local terrain that such social relations can be viewed in their substantial expression (Ng & Mirchandani, 2008). Purcell traces the root of this emphasis on the ‘local’ to the participatory tradition within democratic theory. The foundational assumption being that the local scale produces a more participatory, more face-to-face, and thus more democratic kind of association. This argument is certainly a trend amongst adult educators, many of whom are influenced by the notions of participation put forward by Arnstein (1969), Pateman (1970), Putnam (2001a), and Barber (1984).

There have also been attempts to explain the kind of preference for the local that appears in AmeriCorps through the literature on governmentality and the shift from welfare state formations to neo-liberal forms of organization. This literature sees the local as an expression of the diffusion of the state in late capitalism (Dean, 1999; Jordan, et al, 2005; Larner, 2000).
Working from the Foucauldian concept of ‘governmentality,’ these theorists explain the emphasis on the local as part of the overall neo-liberal reorganization of political life (Jessop, 2007). This position sees the political emphasis on the local as paradoxically related to the economic strategy of the local, which is embodied in policies that promote “new entrepreneurial approaches to local economic development as well as diverse programs of institutional restructuring intended to enhance labor market flexibility, territorial competitiveness, and place-specific locational assets” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002 p. 341). The political domains associated with this shift from Fordist-Keynesian state arrangements are debated as a fundamental reorganization of the state or simply a different expression of state power (Newman, 2010). Further, theorists continue to conflict as to whether this diffusion of state power leaves opportunities for resistance or not. Evidence suggests that the emphasis on local democracy may be primarily discursive (Abelson, et al, 2003; Blakely, 2010; Blaug, 2002) and raises the further problem of the relation between democratic processes and ensuring democratic outcomes (Pratchett, 2004).

An important thing to remember here is the relation of state, citizen, and democracy that emerges in the ‘local.’ If citizens myopically focus on the local terrain, then they could have more power over their local domain, but they could also have less power over regional, federal, and international levels of organization. They could have more access to particular systems and centers of power, but less impact on the ways in which those systems relate to one another and to macro-level processes. They could grow more connected locally and more disconnected translocally. Local struggles could transform an understanding of the state into an emphasis on local organization, without dismantling or transforming existing state apparatuses, leaving them to do their work in their existing, hegemonic forms. Each of these risks associated with too much
emphasis on the local comes with a corollary risk associated with too much emphasis on the
global or universal. John Holst (2007) argues that critical adult educators have critiqued the
emphasis on the local within our own field by arguing that the vision of economic globalization
and neo-liberalism, which drives this emphasis, takes a liberal and ultimately defeatist TINA
perspective on the expansion of global capitalism. Critical educators have critiqued this local
focus within the field for having an underdeveloped relation with the global. At the same time
Holst argues that critical educators have not countered with a strong theorization of the
local/global dialectical relation that demonstrates why such a myopic focus is dangerous. I think
that the experience of AmeriCorps, from the perspective of institutional ethnography, is
instructive in this regard.

I suggest that one way to think about the emphasis on ‘the local’ in AmeriCorps, and in
democratic theory more broadly, is through the concept of fetish. I propose this formulation
because I think that even in its most nascent form, it leads educators down an interesting path. I
use the term ‘fetish’ in the Marxian sense. Marx (1867/1992) developed his notion of ‘fetishism’
in relation to his exploration of the curious form of the commodity in the capitalist mode of
production. Fetishism, however, is not a thing or an object; it is a way of thinking about the
world. In Capital, Marx explores the ways in which we think about the realm of the commodity
and describes these forms of thought as fetishism that ‘attaches’ to the products of human labor
as soon as they become commodities. Often this fetishism is interpreted in a paradoxically
fetishized way, meaning that we believe the commodity to be the source of this mode of
consciousness rather than the social relations that produce the commodity. Paula Allman (2007)
argues that fetishism within Marx’s conceptual universe is the ultimate form of reification, “a
form of distortion where the attributes and powers, the essence, of the person or social relation
appear as natural, intrinsic, attributes of powers of the ‘thing’” (p. 37). Purcell’s argument is that within the ‘local trap,’ the local becomes a place, represented physically, geographically, or institutionally; it becomes objectified or ‘fixed’ in our thinking rather than remaining as a social construct that shifts in time and space. This is the case for AmeriCorps members; the ‘local’ is a particular political space they are able to inhabit while the ‘extra-local’ remains too far afield. Fetishism attaches itself to many conceptual categories we use to organize modern democratic life, most notably the stylized liberal individual (Sayer, 1987). The major process contributing to this fetishism is the de-historicization of political and economic life. By suggesting that we use the notion of ‘fetish’ to understand the ‘local’ emphasis, I am proposing that the invisibility of history and social relations, the abstraction of ‘the political’ from the material, is one of the major contributing forces to this fixation on the local domain.

By fetishizing the local we erase, diminish, misinterpret, and/or confound its relation to the extra-local. The most important point in which this relation is rendered invisible occurs when we do not acknowledge that local relations are not only organized at the local level. The local is not just the local; it is also the global. It is the site where global relations become enacted in specific ways, organized through local social relations (Ng & Mirchandani, 2008). This relation, however, has to be understood as a historical materialist dialectic in order to transcend notions such ‘glocalization,’ which invents the global-local dialectic as product of late capitalism and not, as Paula Allman argues, as part of the inner relations of capitalism (Allman, 2010; Armove & Torres, 2007; Bauman, 1998). In this articulation, the local is not solely determined by the global, read as ‘the base,’ but rather is ‘fighting’ for its sovereignty within the expanding global market (Jarvis, 2006). Here the local and the global are conceptualized as separate spheres acting upon one another. Like boxers in the ring, they engage, but return to their separate corners. This
conception of the local-global/particular-universal relation obscures some very important pieces of the puzzle, which are fundamental to the radical theorization of democratic learning.

Let me provide an example of the problematic I am talking about, based on an organizing campaign in my neighborhood about eight years ago. A K-Mart store had stood empty for several years and the community I lived in was informed of Wal-Mart’s intentions to occupy and expand the site. Helped greatly by Wal-Mart Watch, the online Wal-Mart watchdog group run by United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, several groups staged a protest against the Wal-Mart. Then Wal-Mart began hiring people from the neighborhood to renovate the store and they made the very strong case they would bring both jobs to the neighborhood and products that people in the neighborhood could afford, arguing that the Target across the street was really more for the college kids in the next neighborhood. On the day the Wal-Mart opened 300 clergy, union workers, and neighborhood activists walked the aisles of Wal-Mart singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ Nevertheless, the parking lot was jammed packed and has remained so for the last seven years.

The major complaint against Wal-Mart was that it destroys local communities and as activists, this was our major concern. It puts smaller retailers out of business. It floods neighborhoods with poverty wage, non-unionized jobs. It creates traffic problems and undermines pedestrian friendly urban landscape design. Wal-Mart is such a large corporation it is beyond local control and is unresponsive to local demands. The corporation is not accountable to anyone. All of these things are true. However, according to David Harvey (2010), Wal-Mart is also something else. Wal-Mart imports commodities that are cheaply made and cheaply moved and sells them for cheap prices. They are made cheaply because they are produced in ‘local’ places where the hyper-exploitation of labor is pervasive--places like China. The size and scope
of Wal-Mart has a significant impact on commodity prices in the United States. Thus, it also has a tremendous influence on the price of the bundle of commodities that contributes to the determination of the value of labor-power as a commodity within the United States. The value of the bundle of commodities necessary to reproduce labor power is a determining factor in the driving down of wages. As wages fall, demand for cheap commodities increases. The result, wages remain depressed. Harvey argues, “this also explains the resistance, in many quarters of the capitalist class, to putting barriers to entry or tariffs on Chinese goods, because to do so would be to raise the cost of living in the US, leading to a demand from workers for higher wages” (p. 105). Thus, Wal-Mart does indeed destroy local communities in every locality where it exists and in every locality where it buys and produces its commodities; it globally destroys communities. It also gives us a peek into the political platforms necessary to maintain depressed wages in particular places.

Fetishizing the local impacts our learning in democracy by obscuring the historical and social nature of human material relations. Despite the fact that the AmeriCorps program focused the gaze of its members on the local domain and the AmeriCorps members largely felt confined to this terrain in terms of their political efficacy, elements lingered in our discussions that gave reference to their awareness that larger global relations matter. They were unable, however, much like the Wal-Mart activists, to bring those relations to bear on their local conditions. This was in part because they understood ‘globalization’ as something going on in the world outside of them and the economy as not involving the labor of everyday people. This is ultimately a fetishized and reified way of thinking about material and social relations and at its core allowed them to retreat into the local without a way to connect themselves to any larger social condition. “The local’ then becomes an ethical terrain in which ‘good citizens’ and ‘good people’ do the
best they can by those with whom they have interpersonal contact. As David Harvey (2010) pointed out,

There are those who, for various reasons, propose all manner of codes of moral conduct in interpersonal relations, but who then face the dilemma of whether or how to extend that moral code into the world of commodities exchanged in the world market. It is all very well to insist on ‘good’ face-to-face relations and to be helpful to one’s neighbor, but what is the point of that if we are totally indifferent to all those whom we do not know and can never know, but who play a vital role in providing us with our daily bread? (p. 40).

This kind of human relation, which Harvey describes as schizophrenic, is exactly the kind of struggle I saw play out in my research. Young people who honestly and authentically want to engage with the world, make it a better place, and lessen human suffering are left with only a limited scope for their understanding and participation in such struggles.

As adult educators we should be wary of ways of thinking and organizing that leave us with underdeveloped conceptual tools to understand our current historical moment. The work done in this field that emphasizes local democracy has much to tell us about how governance structures can be augmented beyond the limits of ‘representative’ modes of democracy, how participation can be reformulated and re-imagined, and how to build community. However, we must be wary of the ways we can divorce these practices from the social relations that move behind them and mutually determine their appearances. For radical educators who aim to not only change social formations, but generate critical consciousness about these formations, the mediation of the local/particular and the global/universal is a major theoretical task. In its dominant iterations, the local/global, understood as geographic scale, and the particular/universal, understood philosophically, are not held in unity and conflict, thus our understanding of how they transform one another is fragmented into only seeing their opposing characteristics (Mojab, 2007). This dialectic poses the challenge to manage the nature of this relation without dampening the horizons of political imagination. We also must push the
boundaries of how we conceive the relationship between these practices and the bourgeois forms of democracy that further entrench capitalist social relations. To do this means we must be critical of the forms of citizenship and democracy we posit and the kinds of relations within civil society that are brought forth. For this reason, this research demonstrates that another important implication for the theorization of democracy and learning can be found in the notion of the ‘empowered’ and ‘active’ citizen.

The Management of Inequality

The experience of AmeriCorps demonstrates that the United States federal government is actively working to cultivate a particular notion of citizenship that is based on notions of responsibility and participation rather than right and entitlements. This shift has been documented as a central component of the ‘neo-liberalization’ of citizenship and has been analyzed by social scientists working in multiple theoretical traditions. Those working from the governmentality perspective have approached this shift as the cultivation of new political ‘subjectivities’ (Cruikshank, 1999; Hyatt, 2001; Ong, 2006; Rose, 1996). Those who align themselves with the regulation tradition have used the language of ‘citizenship regime,’ which describes changes in the overall apparatus of the state and its political relation to capital (Crouch, et al, 2001; Jenson & Phillips, 1996, 2001; Lister, et al, 2006). This shift aligns with movements within educational literature to define the ‘active’ component of citizenship within the terrain of ‘citizenship as agency’ rather than citizenship as status or rights. In the literature on citizenship education, however, agency itself becomes a virtue. Newman (2010) argues that this focus has become the pedagogical aim of state policy:

Citizenship is defined not as status, not an identity, nor even as a responsibility, but as set of practices (‘votes,’ ‘participates,’ ‘works with’) that together
constitute the enactment or performance of effective citizenship…such practices require a set of capacities (knowledge, skills, and a sense of empowerment) that can be elicited and encouraged (p. 715).

This active citizen is knowledgeable and empowered to participate in a variety of possible arenas of public life, including, but not necessarily, local governance and, in the case of AmeriCorps, ‘meeting community needs.’ While governmentality literature has demonstrated the ways in which, particularly in Britain, an increased policy emphasis on local governance in linked to an increased push for the local and volunteer provision of social services, in the United States the crafting of the ‘volunteer’ citizen has been more heavily influenced by the thinking of conservative communitarians, such as Amitai Etzioni (1994, 1996, 1998, 2004), which links personal and civic responsibility to the kind of face-to-face moral framework David Harvey alluded to in the previous section of this chapter.

Etzioni’s work in this regard is significant for understanding the emergence of a state project such as AmeriCorps. Amitai Etzioni is a professor at George Washington University, Director of the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies, and a founder of the Communitarian Network, a non-profit organization devoted to the cultivating of the moral, social, and political foundations of society. He has proven extremely influential with policy makers, particularly President Clinton, and many of his arguments can be found strewn throughout literature on national service (Waldeman, 1995) and, importantly, public welfare reform (Ellwood, 1989). Etzioni has, since the 1980s, made the argument that citizenship in the United States has been too focused on the provision of rights rather than the fulfillment of responsibilities. While his critique of entitlements does not take the same form as Charles Murray’s (1984) or Lawrence Mead’s (1986) assault against the welfare state, Etzioni sees his political and intellectual purpose as balancing the need for community with the protection of individual autonomy. Thus, he often
argues that responsibilities to community are the anecdote to the heartless individualism of public life, much like other communitarians such as Robert Bellah (1985). This vision is well expressed in Etzioni’s (1994) understanding of social justice, which has four components. The first component is individual responsibility, because “people have the moral responsibility to help themselves as best they can” (p. 144). When individuals fall short of these responsibilities, “the second line of responsibility lies with those closest to the person, including kin, friends, neighbors, and other community members” (p. 144). As opposed to ultra-conservatives like Murray, Etzioni believes that, third, "as a rule every community ought to be expected to do the best it can to take care of its own" (p. 146). When all else fails, "societies (which are nothing but communities of communities) must help those communities whose ability to help their members is severely limited" (p. 146).

At first glance, we can see that the state, in any form, is absent from Etzioni’s vision of ‘social justice.’ Further, social justice here has a pathological quality; it neither recognizes inequality nor the conditions that create it, thus it does not even approximate notions of social justice from the left, which see social difference and material inequality as fundamentally related (Fraser, 1997). It is purely individual in its implied definitions of inequality. When inequality is defined in these terms, it is perfectly acceptable to erase the state from the formulation. If inequality has nothing to do with the mediation of social, political, culture or economic power, then the power of ‘the state’ is not necessary to address such conditions. These problems can be dealt with through networks of individuals working in communities. In order for a community to fulfill this responsibility, Etzioni (1996) argues that it must be ‘responsive,’ meaning that the community meets the “true needs” (p. 5) of its citizenry. Communities, in Etzioni’s vision, have three main characteristics: they are a “web of affect-laden relationships amongst individuals,”
and as such require a “shared culture” and are highly responsive (p. 5). Taken together, this implies a strong role for ‘communities’ in the maintaining of individual and collective well-being and places a great deal of weight on the maintenance of shared culture, which Etzioni also refers to as the ‘centripetal force,’ which pulls toward “higher levels of community service, regulation, and mobilization” (p. 6). The center of this vision is a balancing of rights and responsibilities, which differentiates the communitarian vision from neo-liberal positions and at the same time colludes with the neo-liberal project. Within this vision, citizens are responsible for the well-being of themselves and their communities; the state is absolved from both a responsibility to address inequality through policies of redistribution and it is obscured as an architect of inequality in the first place.

By ‘management of inequality’ I am referring to the social, cultural, and political processes of organizing and reproducing the inherent inequality of capitalist social relations at the same time that the sources of inequality are obscured through mechanisms such as choice, esteem, social pathology, and responsibility. I am taking the term from Paul Farmer (2005), who refers, in passing, to international development specialists as TBMIs or Transnational Bureaucrats Managing Inequality. In Farmer’s view, these actors specialize in managing poor people, moving them around, occupying them with ‘projects,’ pinpointing their cultural and technological deficiencies and then ‘developing’ them in accordance with the demands of capitalist ethics. My articulation of this term is also strongly influenced by Teresa Funicello (1993), who describes ‘the poverty industry’ as not just capitalists profiteering from the direness of poor people, but those who set out to ‘help’ the poor through the mechanisms of non-profits or charities and instead become focused on their own reproduction and subsistence.

‘Non-profits’ sprout like mung beans in spring water while, single mothers, in spite of being employed outside the home in even greater numbers, become more
frequently and more desperately poor. A rash of emergency responses has turned back the clock on cash assistance: food pantries are today’s breadlines, shelters today’s flophouses (p. 252).

Funicello’s critique is carried forward in Rodriguez’s (2007) articulation of the non-profit industrial complex, which he describes as “the industrialized incorporation of pro-state liberal and progressive campaigns and movements into a spectrum of government proctored non-profit organizations” (p. 21). These authors have directed attention to the very important problem of a vast network of organizations and practitioners whose purpose seems to be meeting the daily subsistence needs of poor people and maintaining the relations of poverty, while offering escape to only the minor few who can, or are willing to, conform to the necessary vision of the entrepreneurial self. I propose that one of the political and material impacts of AmeriCorps, one which is often unseen from the ideological positions of service, is the cultivation of a citizen identity that is implicit in this project of ‘managing inequality.’

Why does inequality need to be ‘managed,’ and more specifically, why would this be taken up within a re-conceptualization of citizenship? There are a wide variety of answers to this question, but I think three primary perspectives are helpful in the context of this research. One approach draws from the growing literature on the neo-liberalization of citizenship (Hindess, 2002; Mitchell, D. 2005; Mitchel, K. 2001, 2003, 2006). A second comes from an older tradition within political sociology characterized by the work of Piven & Cloward (1972) and feminist and anti-racist critiques of social welfare policy (Gilens, 1999; King & Waldron, 1988; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Lister, 1995; Nadasen, 2005) that examine the regulatory policies of the welfare state. A third comes from the political writing of Marx, who demonstrates that the material relations of capitalism are also political relations congealed in forms such as ‘the state’ and ‘citizenship’ and which have a necessary role in maintaining and expanding the logic of
capitalism. While I have alluded to the literature on neo-liberalism and citizenship and I find that the literature on regulation addresses an important sociological dimension of this question, in this discussion I want to focus on Marx’s writing because I believe his arguments are particularly important for adult education and the radical theorization of democratic learning, as they direct our attention towards a dialectical conceptualization of civil society and the theorization of consciousness.

In his writings, Marx often took the approach of exploring the nature, assumptions, and extensions of what he referred to as ‘bourgeois categories of thought.’ Many of these categories were those he saw emerging in the context of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and were associated with the new forms of democracy and secular state formation; these include notions of freedom, equality, and liberty, foundational categories for the theorization of democracy and citizenship. Marx saw these notions as dialectically related to one another and he sought to understand them through a process of critique; often his analysis comes in the form of a critique of policy proposals or historical interpretation. His method involved holding the common, and ideal, conception of these categories, such as the notion that all are equal before the law, with the material relations he saw functioning in civil society. In this way he was able to explore how these categories did not explain what was happening in everyday life, but actually obscured our understanding of the realities of social conditions and relations. Thus, in his work, a category such as ‘inequality’ emerges through its relation to its opposite, ‘equality,’ and through its relation to other categories such as ‘freedom.’

We can begin with civil society, in Marx’s sense, as the everyday material and social relations of capitalist life. In civil society, people face one another as producers, consumers, and owners of commodities organized for production through a social division of labor and the
exploitation of surplus value. This notion of civil society is not just a political entity, as it is in today’s discourse, but is a material entity as well based in relations of production. What is important about Marx’s conception of civil society is that it reminds us, before we even begin to unpack bourgeois categories, that a set of human relations exists that is not only unequal, but is premised on inequality. Within capitalism, the way we go about meeting our material needs and subsisting cannot be an equal process because it is organized to create inequality and to privatize that inequality. In fact, it cannot begin without inequality, in the form of private property, in the first place. We do not begin, historically an in our objective reality, from a position of equality. *Capital, Vol. 1* is, in part, the demonstration of this reality. Thus, the category of ‘equality’ has to emerge, at least in part, from its opposition to this already existing inequality. Thus, it can only exist in one form; politically, legally, formally. Because of this, Marx argues that ‘equality’ is a particular relation established within the terrain of the state and not within the relations of production.

The bourgeois notion of equality is premised on the notion of ‘freedom.’ Freedom here has multiple definitions. On the one hand, it refers to the kind of freedoms we often associate with liberal democracy and which can be described as the ‘regime of rights.’ These freedoms take the form of positive and negative rights, such as the ‘freedom to’ do certain things or the ‘freedom from’ particular oppressions. These are formal freedoms, given and ensured by the state, and made real through juridical apparatuses. Marx (1867) argues that other forms of freedom exist in civil society. One is the freedom to labor; to work free from ties and commitments to land or person. In this kind of freedom, labor is a commodity and it may move, theoretically, through the market as it sees fit. This kind of freedom is a precondition for labor within capitalism and emerges out of the historical conditions of feudalism. For labor to be free it must also be
disposed of the means of production and the ability to subsist; this second kind of freedom, which is tied to the first, is also a form of unfreedom. A tension emerges in these articulations. Through the bourgeois notion of freedom, everyone is made ‘equal’ before the law. Through the kind of freedom necessary for capitalist production, we are made ‘unequal’ in everyday life.

The ‘equality’ of political freedom cannot negate the inequality of material life. Rather, the equality of political freedom is presupposed by inequality and ensures its continuity. Marx argues in “On the Jewish Question” (1843/1978) that

The state abolishes, after its fashion, the distinctions established by birth, social rank, education, occupation, when it decrees that birth, social rank, education, occupation are non-political distinctions; when it proclaims, without regard, to these distinctions, that every member of society is an equal partner in popular sovereignty, and treats all elements which compose the real life of the nation from the standpoint of the state. But the state, none the less, allows private property, education, occupation to act after their own fashion, namely as private property, education, occupation; and to manifest their particular nature. Far from abolishing these effective differences, it only exist so far as they are presupposed (p. 33).

His argument is two-fold; the state does not create equality and it cannot create such conditions. In the processes of creating the formal equality known as ‘equal rights,’ the relation of inequality in civil society are reinscribed and cemented as ‘natural’ components of social life. This extends not only to material relations of production, but social relations as well, including processes of race and gender (Lowe, 1996). Said differently, the only kind of equality the state can create, within capitalist social relations, is in the sphere of formal abstract relations. Marx referred to this form of equality as political emancipation and while this freedom is an important reality of peoples’ lives, it should not be confused with human emancipation or the freedom from necessity. This differentiation is extremely important; when combined with Marx’s analysis of the capitalist mode of production we can see further how political emancipation is the limit of freedom under capitalism.
A good deal of Marxist literature on the state, such as Piven & Cloward (1972), would argue that part of the role of the state is to manage and obscure the difference between political and human emancipation. Bob Jessop (1982) organized the major historical Marxist perspectives on the state in four areas. One is the correspondence position, in which the state is understood as the political superstructure of the economic base; this relation of determinacy postulates that the state is the political form of mode of production. A second avenue focuses on the state as an instrument of class rule; political struggle is really class struggle and the state is merely an instrument of domination. This tradition equates what the state is with what the state does. A third perspective is that the state emerges as a factor of cohesion; its purpose is to manage the common affairs of the bourgeoisie. This involves representing class interests as general interests and thus, this position has often been advanced through the use of Gramsci’s notions of hegemony and ideology. The fourth tradition follows Althusser’s path of relative autonomy. In this vein the state is mostly approached as an institutional ensemble, with both ideological and repressive state apparatuses. To Jessop’s summary, I would add Bertell Ollman’s (1976) work on the state as an expression of illusory community formed through alienated social relations and based in a theory of value. We could also add to these framework more recent developments in new socialist state formations, such as Venezuela’s community councils or Brazil’s participatory budgeting projects, in which parties attempt to re-organize the state as an arena of consultation, not just legitimation. These debates, which Jessop (1982) argues are deeply influenced by other philosophical movements, such as positivism, functionalism, and various terrains of Marxist debates, have limited forms of engagement with the question of citizenship, the category through which the state organizes its ‘subjects.’ For this reason, I find Derek Sayer’s (1985) analysis of the state as an ‘ideal’ expression of capitalist social relations particularly useful.
According to Sayer (1985), Marx’s early political writings begin from the assumption that the democratic state emerged out of the political formations of feudalism. This is a position he affirmed late in his work when he argued in “Critique of the Gotha Programme” (1875/1978) that communist society would not emerge on its own terms, but out of the relations of capitalism. In this vein, in order to understand the novel forms of bourgeois society, in particular the appearance of separate economic and political spheres of life, Marx grounds his understanding of the state in the historical processes of the division of labor and the development of private property. The development of private property can be seen as part of the process by which direct producers are violently separated from the means of production and the concept of monopoly of ownership, access, and use of natural resources and forms of technology is concentrated in the hands of the few. This process, which Marx termed primitive accumulation and which is ongoing (Harvey, 2003a), is necessarily a process of class formation. Privatization also shatters previous feudal relations of dependence; the shattering of any notion of communal bond separates the political and economic. The appropriator and the producer now confront one another through terms of exchange. For Marx, this division forms the basis for the separation of the political and the economic (Wood, 1995). The social relations governing human interaction and cooperation are no longer based on communal ties, privileges, or deference, but on legal relations. These co-incident social processes, the creation of private property and the re-forming of social relations, create the need for the State to become a “separate entity, beside and outside civil society” (Marx & Engels, 1932/1991 p. 80).

The division of labor is a second and simultaneous development that plays an intricate role in the development of ‘the state’ as such. Understood as a process of class formation, the division of labor, which under capitalism takes the form of labor segmented into component parts, chiefly
the segregation of mental and manual labor but also a division in the value of reproductive and productive labor (Federici, 2004; Fortunati, 1995), creates a contradiction between the private interests of the individual and the general interest of the public. The division of labor fixes private interests by connecting one’s subsistence to a segregated role in society and production. In this way, we experience our lives in civil society exactly as the Enlightenment philosophers postulated we did: as egoist individuals advancing our private interests. The mistake of these theorists, according to Marx, is to suppose those lives constitute a natural condition as opposed to the real, lived outcomes of the division of labor. This natural individual, however, egoist man, is the presupposition of the state, the need for legal relations, and for the establishment of a general interest outside the private interests of individuals.

The contradiction between freedom and unfreedom, how to subsist and thrive within social relations premised on the exploitation and appropriation of your labor, is for Marx the central relation that gives rise to the state. This is essentially a class contradiction, but it is also a paradox. In civil society under capitalism, it is argued, we are governed by our private interests. From the historical materialist perspective, we experience life solely as individuals because we have become alienated from the basic forms of interdependence that constitute our social life. As Sayer (1985) points out, one of the peculiar functions of the division of labor is to make us feel and act as though we are alone at the same time that we become increasingly interdependent with others to meet our needs. For example, from the perspective of bourgeois economics, the food we eat is obtained through the simple act of exchange. In reality, our food, our subsistence, is premised on the combined and co-operative labor of many thousands of people. However, one of the outcomes of the division of labor, or capitalist social relations in general, is to make this interdependence invisible. The state then exists as an expression of the only communal relations
we understand ourselves to have; relations mediated through laws and rights. It is for this reason that Marx and Engels (1932/1991) argued that

And out of this very contradiction between the interests of the individual and that of the community, the latter takes an independent form as the *state*, divorced from the real interests of individual and community, and at the same time as an illusory communal life, always based, however, on the real ties existing in every family…and especially…on the classes, already determined by the division of labor, which in every such mass of men separate out, and of which, one dominates the others (p. 54).

The notion that the state is an ‘illusory community,’ particularly as argued by Ollman (1976), however does not go far enough in explaining the particularities of the bourgeois state. While it may explain the paradox of individualism and interdependence that exists in capitalist social life, it does not explain the specific class relation embodied in the state, which is implied through its formation in private property and the division of labor and manifested in the project of ‘managing inequality.’ For this reason, Sayer (1985) advised that it is best to understand the state itself as bourgeois relationship, or an ‘ideal’ expression of capitalist material relations.

To say that ‘the state’ is an ideological form of appearance is not to say that it is falsification or a floating entity that exist only in people’s heads. The state is a real entity with institutions and practices all of which Marx discusses in *The Civil War in France* (1871/1940).

To say that the state is ideal in this way is to say that it is, above all, an expression of the social relations of actual living working people. To this end, Marx and Engels (1932/1991) argued that

The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will (p. 47).

According to Marx the only agent of history is living working people, but history and social relations come into being not only through material practices, but through the dialectical relationship of material organization and forms of consciousness. The state, as an ideal, exists as
an objectified form of social consciousness. However, and I cannot stress this point enough, the state is not a transhistorical category that expresses all political relationships across time. ‘The State’ is most importantly a historical category, “in other words the concept is not a synonym for any and all forms of government (or ways in which ruling classes rule), but describes a definite and historically delimited social form: the social form, specifically, of bourgeois class rule” (Sayer, 1985 p. 231). In this way, the state is an ideal form of the class relations of capitalism.

For Marx, the state expresses all of the paradoxical and alienated social relations found within civil society, but it is also the form in which the bourgeoisie rule as a class. The notion that the state predicates the arrangements of capitalism through the legal relations or wields its monopoly on violence in the interests of the bourgeoisie seems obvious enough. Even the most alienated United States voter can argue that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and the government is the reason why. The question is why capitalist social relations require ‘the State’ as such to secure their position. Sayer (1987) answered the question thusly.

The clue to the necessity of bourgeois rule taking the form of an ideally independent state enforcing the rule of law lies, for Marx, in the atomized, fissiparous character- precisely the individualized nature- of the bourgeois class itself…The individuals of the bourgeoisie, Marx considers, ‘form a class only in so far as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors.’ Their common class interest can be secured only by maintaining conditions- above all the defense of individual property rights- in which they can continue to act freely as individuals, each pursuing his own private interests, in apparent isolation from one another. This entails both the safeguarding of bourgeois rights against the political and moral economies of other classes…and the maintenance of equal rights among bourgeois individuals themselves. The ‘rule of law’ is the paradigm form of such regulation (p. 107).

In other words, the state expresses the interests of the bourgeoisie class by protecting the capitalist forms through which their class position is formed in the first place, namely private property, and by creating a public sphere in which equality is only predicated on political grounds. Politically, but not materially, equal individuals remain the private, competitive, ‘free’
individuals of civil society formed through the division of labor, alienated from their labor and their community, and secured their status, both materially and politically, through the abstract notion of ‘the State.’ In this way, as an expression of a bourgeois relation, the state finds its articulation through the core categories of legal rights and citizenship.

In his critique of citizenship as an abstract notion, Marx is able to identify several sides of this relation between the political and the material. First, by premising citizenship and the relations of the state on abstract equality, the state leaves intact all of the social relations that make up civil society. According to Arthur (1991),

we see that a political, merely political, emancipation leaves intact the world of private interests, of domination and subordination, exploitation and competition, because the State establishes its universality, and the citizens their communality, only by abstracting away from the real differences and interests that separate the members of civil society and set them against one another (p. 8).

In this way the state declares that it will not recognize differences between ‘free’ competitors so that they may remain ‘free’ in their exchanges. In this way, Marx is demonstrating that class antagonisms remain despite the appearance of equality before the state. It is also what he means when he argues that the limit of political emancipation is that the state can be free while people are not. The state is literally ‘free’ from the complexities and complications of material and social life in civil society. This is perhaps the most popular lesson that scholars have taken from *On the Jewish Question* and it is well used in analyzing, in particular, the ways in which democracy and racism coexist in discursive forms (Lowe, 1996), which Teresa Ebert (1996) refers to as the ‘modernist contradiction’ and is the very experience that set me on the path of this research many years ago. However, Marx also argued a second side of this relation, which is that the establishment of the state through the political emancipation of civil society is actually a presupposition of the unequal relations in civil society in the first place. In many ways this is a reiteration of the analysis of the foundation of the state as bourgeois relation and is what he
means when Marx argued, “the consummation of the idealism of the state was at the same time the consummation of the materialism of civil society” (1843/1978 p. 40). In civil society, individuals co-produce under relations of inequality created through private property, the division of labor, and the accumulation of capital. The state is unable to abolish these inequalities through the mechanism of citizenship precisely because the state exists in the first place to secure these relations; the state arises out of the contradictions of civil society, not, as Hegel argued, the other way around (Callinicos, 1999). Thus, it can only abolish inequality theoretically or abstractly, formally. It cannot undo how inequality is built into the ways we have organized our productive and social lives. If it were to try and do so, if the state were to be “aware of itself” as such, and, as Marx argued, that it would be in a state of permanent revolution by trying to abolish the social relations that give birth to it. For this reason, a third relation arises from the contradiction of abstracted citizenship, which is that political emancipation develops as the limit of freedom within capitalist society.

A fourth relation of citizenship as the contradiction between the political and the material is best developed through Marx’s discussion of rights. In “On the Jewish Question” (1843/1978), Marx takes the time to ask what exactly these ‘rights’ are which define bourgeois citizenship. His answer is that the so-called immutable and natural ‘rights of man’ are in actuality the right to exist as an egoist individual in civil society. These rights, which we classically associate with liberalism as ‘negative’ rights, are the ‘freedom from’ rights: the rights of equality, liberty, security and property. They protect the citizen from incursions by his fellow citizen and the state. For Marx, these are legal expressions of the social relations of the capitalist mode of production such as the right to be separated from others in your community (the division of labor), the right to acquire and appropriate (private property), and the right to be self-interested. Or as Zizek
(2001) provocatively argues on the subject of the international expression of legal political relations, human rights,

As the experience of our post-political liberal-permissive society amply demonstrates, human rights are ultimately, at their core, simply rights to violate the Ten Commandments. ‘The right to privacy’- the right to adultery, in secret, where no one sees me or has the right to probe my life. ‘The right to pursue happiness and to possess private property’ – the right to steal (to exploit others). ‘Freedom of the press and the expression of opinion’ – the right to lie. ‘The right of free citizens to possess weapons’- the right to kill. And, ultimately, ‘freedom of religious belief’- the right to worship false gods” (p. 110).

At the same time that these rights appear to ameliorate the inequality of civil society, it is Marx’s argument that they actually affirm the inequality and class antagonisms of civil society. Further, they are in a completely paradoxical relation to their expression as common rights of political community, they are completely predicated on the separation of individuals within community. Marx argued that in the frame of bourgeois rights,

Man is far from being considered as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life-society- appears as a system which is external to the individual as a limitation of his original independence. The only bond between men is natural necessity, need, and private interest (1843/1978a, p. 40).

In this way, the bourgeois notions of citizenship and rights reduce human community to a notion of political community whose purpose is solely to reproduce the social relations of capitalism. But again, these notions of citizenship and rights are predicated on the actual existing relations of civil society. These ‘natural rights’ of the citizen are actually “the recognition of the frenzied movement of the cultural and material elements of which form the content of life” (p. 45). It is for this reason that Marx proposes that political emancipation is the limit of emancipation within capitalism, and that in order to transform these relations the emphasis must be on human emancipation. Human emancipation requires the negation of the state as a bourgeois relation and the combination of the artificial division between the private and the public, the material and the political, social and political power.
Thus, within the political relations of capitalism, the right to equality becomes the right to inequality (Marx, 1875/1978). The existence of such inequality, however, is fundamentally in contradiction with the moral claims of capitalism, particularly that through such relations equality, freedom, and liberty can be achieved. Inequality within capitalism, therefore, must be managed in some way, it must be organized and coordinated in such a way that the way we think about the existence of inequality does not oppose its existence. It must be naturalized, de-socialized, abstracted, and obscured. This is a vast ideological project of democratic capitalism, constructed through the category of citizenship and visible over time in projects such as ‘the undeserving poor’ (Handler & Haskenfeld, 1991; Katz, 1990) or ‘welfare queens’ (Adair, 2000; Hancock, 2004) through which women, people of color, immigrants, and ‘others’ become subject to violent social processes legitimating their social and political exclusion and the hyper-exploitation of labor. A good deal of citizenship discourse and theory has been devoted to maintaining such divisions between those who are ‘decent’ and ‘indecent’ in the eyes of the nation. For example, the National Commission on Civic Renewal (1998) put this platform forward in their final report,

Our moral and civic ills are most often discussed in the context of our troubled urban areas. There is no doubt that the civic condition of communities is affected by their economic condition. The breakdown of families, public safety, and neighborhoods is compounded by economic misery and diminished opportunities. The decline in civic and political disengagement is especially pronounced among individuals who are sliding down the economic ladder, or those who have never taken the first step up that ladder (p. 5).

Put differently, creating ‘bad citizens’ out of those who must be ‘managed’ is a major component of this social organization (Goldberg, 2007; Schneider & Ingram, 2005). For the democratic behavior of citizens to become complicit in this processes speaks to an evolution in the historical development of ideologies that pathologize the poor.
Creating citizens who ‘manage inequality,’ who feel responsible for the well-being of others and understand care as part of their democratic duty, is a pedagogical project, for both the state and capital. As such, it has become a major aim of public policy and appears in multiple forms such as projects for citizenship education, character education, and moral education; it is often visible in the trifecta I referred to in the introduction to this text: the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of ‘good citizens’. Newman (2010) aptly summarizes this project:

Welfare beyond the welfare state also depends on citizens taking greater responsibility for the health and wellbeing of themselves, their families, and neighbours and their ‘communities.’ This is turn requires skills, capacities, and orientations that need to be inculcated, whether it is on how to eat healthy, to be better parents, to make responsible lifestyle choices, to engage in the ‘co-production’ of services or to participate in democratic spaces of decision making” (p. 714).

I argue that this project appears explicitly in forms such as AmeriCorps, but it also appears in the work of those who uncritically accept and naturalize the political economy of democratic relations. It happens through the well-intentioned actions of those who simply want to ‘help’ those in need and understand themselves as having a moral obligation to address social problems. The impulse to help is not the problem, rather it is the contextualization of this ethical position within the reproduction of capitalist social relations.

**Final Comments**

Between 2003 and 2005, I worked as an assistant instructor for a course on urban poverty. One of my tasks was to organize field excursions for the class to visit different non-profit organizations working on the problem of urban poverty and dispossession. The goal was to see the breadth of ideological approaches to the question of poverty and how these assumptions manifested as programmatic and organizing initiatives. One of the organizations we visited is
called House of Charity, which, as one of several services, provides a public meal twice a day in downtown Minneapolis. The center feeds about 350 people a day. Residents of a substance abuse transitional housing program and rotating teams of volunteers staff the kitchen. It is a popular destination for large groups of volunteers, such as AmeriCorps, because it can easily incorporate many people in a short-term time commitment. In the two years that I visited House of Charity on a regular basis, groups of volunteers were invited to document their visit by signing the wall of the dining hall. Some went so far as to paint images of themselves and their contribution to the center. One image on the wall showed the skyline of downtown Minneapolis with a church positioned off to the left. In between the two images was a bus full of smiling faces, driving towards the downtown. The side of the bus was inscribed with the words ‘great white hope.’

Clearly, this image represents the worst possible social relations that can emerge from the service paradigm; a racist, classist, missionary orientation towards ‘helping’ communities that are different from our own. It also lays bare the power relations implicit within the service paradigm and within a construction of citizenship drawn from this notion. In order to maintain this orientation, several epistemological relations must be present. First, social problems must be confined to their appearance rather than their essence. For example, the achievement gap must be reduced to individual school performance and the affordable housing to the availability of low-cost housing rather than wages and deepening economic inequality. Following such appearances, interventions must be directed at the individual and behavioral level and socialized at only the minimum level. Second, the focus of analytic categories and reflective though must be directed at the effects of social relations rather than social relations themselves. This is accomplished by working within the domain of formal equality, rather than the realities of inequality. These epistemological relations are the effect of the ideological practice of citizenship learning in the
AmeriCorps program.

These relations are also important for the theorization of democracy and learning. They upend the assumption that we can engage with ‘civil society’ or ‘the public sphere’ as if they are not raced, sexed, and classed domains. Echoing Bannerji’s notion of race as a ‘connatative cluster of social relations,’ we must similarly come to understand civil society as complicated, tangled cluster of social relations deeply organized by the social relation of production within capitalism and the mechanisms and apparatuses of capitalist political community in the form of the democratic state. Working within the political logic of capitalism does not create forms of consciousness that negate its presuppositions and organization of social life. This is the problem of reproductive praxis in democratic learning; its critical undoing requires moving into the terrain of revolutionary praxis.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion: Democracy, Learning, and Revolutionary Praxis

William Stafford, the poet who authored the piece that prefaces this text, was drafted into the military in 1941. Stafford was a registered pacifist and conscientious objector and between 1942 and 1946 he served in the Civilian Public Service. He worked at a wage of $2.50 a month in forestry and soil conservation. At the completion of his service, he drafted his master’s thesis, a memoir of his experiences entitled Down in the Heart. In this text, he struggled to reconcile his “utopian poetics—manifested in an ahistorical vision of the ‘beloved community,’ where consensus decision-making, accommodation, and respect for the law and for others are paramount—and the press of history, genocidal war, and outright resistance” (Metres, 2004 p. 2).

Stafford, a lifelong pacifist and anti-militarist, struggled with the relation between ideal community and historical reality his entire life. In his journal on September 12, 1981 he wrote, “the wind you walk against but do not feel is ignorance. Your foolish face has happiness on one side, but the world pressed on the other” (Stafford, 2003 p. 45).

During the course of this research, I was not drawn to William Stafford because he was an alumnus of civilian national service. In fact, my discovery of his history was serendipitous and recent. Stafford has been a touchstone for me since I was a teenager; I first encountered his work in a creative writing workshop at the University of the South when I was fifteen and he has accompanied me on my transition from ‘helper’ to ‘hell raiser’ even though he passed before I ever read his work. He struggled, profoundly, with the notion that the world he wanted to live in could not grow, naturally and without intentional intervention, out of the world in which he lived. How then to reconcile the need for such action with a world so hinged upon violence? He
asked always, was there no other way? While I do not feel draw to the debate between violence and non-violence in the same way Stafford did, I have always admired his willingness to hold his visions and dreams in tension with one another and to not fold up such complexity and put it away for a later date. It is significant to note, however, that his ‘service to the nation’ perhaps played a crucial role in his own development not because of his commitment to the national project, but because of his commitment to something larger, beyond the nation and what ‘good citizenship’ meant at the time.

William Stafford confronted the national construct of ‘good citizenship’ during a time of war; it was a brave thing to do, based on an act of conscience and a form of consciousness. My interest during this research has been on the construction of democratic consciousness and praxis organized in particular institutional settings. I have investigated a set of questions concerning the construction of a particular institutional discourse of citizenship by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the United States federal government’s effort to mobilize citizens into community service. Because I have wanted to take a critical perspective on the ideology of citizenship that runs through the AmeriCorps program, I chose to work from a Marxist-Feminist theoretical framework that emphasizes the dialectical conceptualization of consciousness and matter and political and material experience. This framework, activated through the investigative tools of institutional ethnography, has allowed me to scrutinize the institutional organization of learning as practice within the AmeriCorps program. Institutional ethnography has directed my attention to these institutionalized work processes and the potentialities created within the coordination of the program for particular ways of organizing democratic learning.

This concluding chapter is organized in three sections. First, I provide a summary of the findings of this research, focusing on the institutional processes of AmeriCorps, the nature of
‘civic engagement’ within the program, and the forms of objectified consciousness and reproductive praxis that circulate throughout the program. Second, I discuss the implications of these findings with a special focus on its implications for the field of adult education. These include the further development of the concept of ‘ideology’ within the field, the theorization of the relation between civil society and learning, and the neo-liberal organization of democracy and citizenship. Finally, I propose future areas of research on the AmeriCorps program, drawing on questions that surfaced in the course of this inquiry and were beyond the scope of this research, although I believe they have a dialectical, constitutive relationship to my own findings concerning democratic learning within the program.

Summary of Findings

Ideological Organization of Institutional Processes within AmeriCorps

My analysis of institutional processes within the Corporation for National and Community Service and the AmeriCorps State program reveal the ideological influence of federal level regulations that organize AmeriCorps sites translocally. I argue that these processes are ideological in that the intent of the regulations is to organize civic involvement in civil society in such a way as to abstract human activity and labor from the larger social relations that determine its organization and meaning. These regulations are premised on the assumption that the state is a neutral entity in a democracy and that it cannot sponsor activities that would call for changes to public policy or the redistribution of power or resources in society. To do so would be ‘undemocratic.’ This notion of the state as neutral is largely accepted within the AmeriCorps program as common sense and is promulgated through rationales for the existence of regulatory mechanisms that restrict AmeriCorps participation to particular domains of civil society, certain
kinds of non-profit organizations, narrowly defined de-politicized activities, and specific
definitions of, and interventions in, social problems.

On the surface, AmeriCorps programs appear decentralized, fluid, and, in some instances, even disorganized. It can be difficult to see, from the grassroots level, how a diffused army of volunteers is, in reality, part of a highly bureaucratic and regulated state apparatus. AmeriCorps volunteers themselves arrive at their work everyday without an understanding of how their daily activities, the nature of their work, and the context of their interactions in local communities are coordinated at federal and state levels of government. Much of this coordination takes place through the grant funding process in which the CNCS designates what are acceptable sites and forms of service for AmeriCorps volunteers. These conditions are dictated by a complex set of federal regulations that grant applicants must navigate in the design of their program and in their formation of the service activities performed by AmeriCorps volunteers. Taken together these regulations act to narrow the field of civil society to a particular form of participation in particular settings and which allows volunteers to interact with constituents of civil society in particular and restricted ways. There are at least four levels of this ‘narrowing’ process, which I refer to as the ‘non-political’, the ‘sustainable’, the ‘permissible,’ and the ‘logical.’

The first instance of narrowing involves the kinds of organizations that can host an AmeriCorps program and where volunteers can perform their service. In the United States, groups that are neither entities of the state or private organizations are organized under twenty-seven different statutes for tax-exempt, or non-profit, status based on their commitment to promoting the common good. The vast majority of organizations fall into the status of 501c3 and 501c4. The primary characteristic differentiating these types of organizations from one another has to do with the extent to which the organization engages with the state and public policy
around an issue of public concern. Despite some ambiguity within the federal regulations, the statutes governing the AmeriCorps program expressly prohibit any organization other than a 501c3 organization from receiving any benefit from the AmeriCorps program. The primary point of differentiation is whether or not an organization can be said to be ‘political.’ AmeriCorps members are confined, through this regulation, to organizations that are recognized for not participating in politics and for approaching a social problem through the delivery of direct human and charitable services. This, of course, does not mean that there is no political discourse within 501c3 organizations. However, it does mean that this politics will exist on an informal basis and will not be integrated into the mission, mandates, or officially sanctioned and funded activities of the AmeriCorps volunteer. The intentional engagement with politics is removed from daily experience at first through the ways in which the organization directs human labor towards the amelioration of human need.

The second instance of narrowing involves the emphasis within grant selection criteria that bias the grant process towards organizations that are deemed ‘sustainable.’ In 2005, the CNCS reorganized its grant selection criteria to reduce the levels of federal cost sharing associated with programs. This demand amounted to an edict to increase private sponsorship of public programs or, in the lingua franca of neo-liberal policy, to increase the number of public-private partnerships. A series of regulations, specifically funding match requirements, were instituted and exist as a barrier to the participation of smaller, less well-funded community organizations. The funding matches require that an AmeriCorps program generate between 25% and 50% of their total program budget from external, private sources. The AmeriCorps programs that will survive in this funding environment will not necessarily be those that run the most effective programs or those whose members go on to serve the nation. Rather successful sites
will be those non-profits that are able to cultivate their ‘entrepreneurial’ skills, despite the fact that there is evidence to suggest that ‘entrepreneurial’ non-profits are actually less effective in meeting their missions (Foster & Bradach, 2005). These requirements raise questions as to the political form of organizations that are large, well funded, and able to sustain AmeriCorps programs with decreasing levels of support from the federal government. Much of this focus on sustainability has to do with promoting the expansion of volunteer mobilization in the non-profit sector. This also presents a picture of an AmeriCorps program that not only meets a compelling local need in a sufficient manner, but performs this service in such a way as to create a program that spins out of the federal government and into the realm of civil society.

The third instance of ‘narrowing’ is found in the regulations concerning ‘permissible’ and ‘prohibited’ activities in AmeriCorps. These restrictions begin by confining the work of AmeriCorps members to two broad categories: direct human service and organizational capacity building. Based on these two qualifications, AmeriCorps activities are further restricted through prohibitions of involvement in ‘political’ or ‘partisan’ activity. Findings from this research reveal that although local-level administrators are technically ‘free’ to interpret these regulations at the individual programmatic level, these processes of interpretation take place in an environment characterized by fear, threat, instability, and arbitrariness. Interpreting the programs in an open way requires program directors to be ‘brave.’ Others, who are ‘nervous’ about the consequences, will tend towards a conservative interpretation. Why would program directors be ‘nervous’ about violating regulations and threatening the stability of their programs? As most are employed by the same AmeriCorps grants that fund members, their own livelihood is implicated in their organization of the program. Although they may feel empowered by the vagueness of the regulations to stretch their interpretations, that same vagueness can be the cause for punitive
action. As such, in an environment where ambiguity and subjectivity are the rule, it is entirely likely that the most logical and defensive position is to drift towards the center. Through these regulatory mechanisms, AmeriCorps members’ actual volunteer tasks will be confined to activities that are deemed ‘apolitical’ and which constitute direct service to a local population.

The fourth instance of narrowing takes place through the processes used to develop the actual program plan for AmeriCorps community service. AmeriCorps member activities are organized in AmeriCorps grants and program planning through both the explicit and implicit use of logic models. A logic model is a graphic display of the relationship between program activities and outcomes, which surfaces the assumptions of program planning by making the assumptions behind program planning explicit. Research on logic models reveals that they are deeply political modes of organizing information in that they rely on pre-existing ideological interpretations of social problems. The use of logic models is combined with the Congressional mandate that AmeriCorps programs produce ‘measurable results.’ Thus, in the process of using logic models to develop programs, AmeriCorps grant writers are forced to conceptualize problems using the narrow logic of what kinds of apolitical, direct service activities will produce quantifiable outcomes at individual scales. The result is program planning that relies on individual behavioral interventions and technocratic approaches to social problems.

The Vacuity of Civic Engagement

Within this institutional context, a vision of civic engagement emerges that can only take on certain characteristics and is premised on the assumption that ‘political socialization,’ the learning of democratic skills and attitudes, and ‘ politicization,’ the adaption of political attitudes, can, and should, be separate learning processes. The civic engagement performance measure is oriented with the program in such a way that it remains in great tension with the larger
institutional environment. On the one hand, the sites and practices of work activity within the program are tightly controlled through the federal regulations described above. On the other hand, in this regulated environment, ‘civic engagement’ is meant to be a free and open category, based in program and individual-level interpretations. The intent behind this ‘openness,’ embodied in the thinness of the actual performance measure, is to avoid the appearance or experience of a ‘top-down’ or hierarchical imposition of civic norms with the program. This ‘openness’ is in direct contradiction with the highly regulated apparatus that governs AmeriCorps from the federal level and ultimately, the regulated environment exerts influence on how ‘open’ the civic engagement curriculum will be.

The civic engagement activities of the program are organized into trainings, individual achievement goals, and group service projects. The trainings are situated within the larger context of AmeriCorps member development, which is characterized by an avoidance of personal reflection or political discussion, particularly as it relates to the nature of the social problem or ‘community need’ the AmeriCorps members address through their service. This avoidance appears to come from overlapping directions. Program directors report that they do not want to create debates or opportunities for ‘controversial’ discussions within the program. This is explicitly attributed to their own deficiencies in facilitating such discussions, but in discussions of the program regulations, they make reference to the need to avoid the appearance of engaging in anything ‘political’ within the program. Further, AmeriCorps members feel as though these discussion are actively avoided in training sessions. As such, civic engagement can only take on a vocation character, in which young adults are largely subjected to lectures from others about the importance of civic engagement and democratic participation. Thus, civic engagement is fragmented from their everyday work experience, from the political nature of the
social problems, and from the policy domains of their work. This ‘externality’ is embodied in their perfunctory completion of, or resistance to engage in, the civic engagement action plans and their ridicule of the civic engagement survey as an effective or meaningful assessment of their experience in the program.

I have argued that the civic engagement components of AmeriCorps should be understood as ‘vacuous’ in the sense that it separated, intentionally, from a connection to the material reality of communities, social problems, or the AmeriCorps members’ experience of community service. This vacuity begins with the epistemological relations present in the program, which are characterized by: 1) a reliance on ‘expert’ knowledge as politically neutral knowledge, 2) technocratic interpretations of social problems, 3) de-politicization of subject matter, and 4) an abstraction from an experiential base of knowledge. The reliance on ‘expert knowledge,’ who provide largely descriptive characterizations of social problems, allows problems of ideological interpretation or political difference to be avoided in trainings by ‘sticking to the facts.’ The facts themselves are never taken up as ideologically determined. This descriptive approach to discussing social problems in turn relies on technocratic interpretations within the context of de-politicization. Further, the same reasons are given for avoiding personal reflection; the need to control discussion and keep it from veering into the domain of controversy.

The effect of these relations is a civic engagement curriculum that not only asks participants to engage with notions of engagement, participation, and citizenship solely in the abstract, but combined with the discussion of social inequality, produces an environment in which social relations of inequality, in racialized and gendered forms, are actively reproduced. I have argued that this cannot be solely interpreted as a pedagogical problem where staff members
are not properly trained in reflection activities or best practices are not adequately applied.

Rather, the civic engagement curriculum of the AmeriCorps program reflects the larger ideological frames of citizenship and democracy promoted through the program. In this context, pedagogical innovation will have the effect of improving the experience of participants, but cannot overcome the reproductive relations inherent within the program.

Objectified Consciousness and Reproductive Praxis

Thus, ‘civic engagement’ in AmeriCorps is characterized by not only its ideological organization, but also an epistemological practice that separates learners from experience, social problems from social relations, and political life from its material formation. This kind of divide is increasingly characterized within the burgeoning literature on ‘new’ forms of engagement as the difference between civic and political participation. For example, in a now classic text on the subject, Verba et al (1995) define political participation as “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action- either directly by affecting the making of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (p. 38). Zukin, et al (2002), in a much-heralded study, draw on this definition to form a distinction between ‘political’ and ‘civic,’ with civic engagement being understood as “organized voluntary activity focused on problem solving and helping others” (p. 7). Zukin and his collaborators demonstrate, empirically, that ‘civic’ engagement is the preferable domain on younger generations, in contrast to previous generations who gravitated towards ‘political’ engagement. Thus, he argues, we cannot understand our younger generation as disengaged; their engagement has simply taken on a different form.

I have argued that this civic engagement can be understood, within the terminology of institutional ethnography, as an ideological frame, which is made visible through the appearance
of particular forms of objectified consciousness within the program. One of these forms is the
notion of service as a universal good. This idea comes into conflict with another form of
consciousness within the program, the idea of the state as a neutral entity, when AmeriCorps
members must consider whether the state has an agenda vis-à-vis the promotion of volunteer
service. In order to resolve this contradiction, the AmeriCorps members have to come to
understand ‘service’ as a universal good, a platitude, which is a non-political entity the state can
promote and still maintain its neutrality. This notion of service becomes an understanding of
what it means to be ‘engaged’ and ‘active’ as a citizen and it further takes on particular
characteristics. The AmeriCorps members largely display a belief that government is
dysfunctional, a notion which cannot be directly attributed to their participation in AmeriCorps,
but for many their participation confirms this idea. Given this dysfunction, the local domain
emerges as the only realistic or effective scale for the active, engaged citizen to participate. This
notion of participation, which is envisioned as being in conflict with other ‘private’
engagements, is also acknowledged as being in conflict with an understanding of good
citizenship that is premised on endless ‘participation.’ This conflict forced the AmeriCorps
members to acknowledge that social inequality plays a role in how we understand ‘good
citizenship,’ but they remained unable to reconcile the two. The outcome of these clashing forms
of consciousness is a bifurcation; the political belongs to the state while civil society, service,
and civic engagement belong to a different space.

I have identified two important components of the reproductive praxis of capitalist
democracy that are circulating through the AmeriCorps program as well as other social projects
within civil society. First, I have argued that a fetishization of the local domain of participation is
evident in the AmeriCorps program. This fetishism separates the local from the global, distorting
the roots of local conditions and obscuring their constitutive relationship to universal process of
capitalist accumulation. Second, I have introduced the borrowed notion of the democratic
management of inequality. By this I mean the organization of ‘citizenship’ for the purposes of
not only self-governance, but also the maintenance of unequal social relations in civil society.
This citizen then becomes complicit in both the political and material reproduction of capitalist
social relations.

Implications of Findings

I believe that this research has three key areas of implication for the field of adult
education. First, it demonstrates a need to move towards a conceptualization of ideology as both
thought content and pedagogical practice, or rather to study not only particular meanings or
discourses, but forms of consciousness as well as their organization and deployment within
social relations. This has further implications for the theorization of consciousness and matter.
Second, the AmeriCorps program reveals civil society to be a far more complicated terrain of
citizen participation than many would like to believe. This research provides further evidence to
the growing number of voices that would challenge the hegemony of ‘civil society’ within
radical and progressive adult education. Third, this research is in concert with the growing body
of literature that examines the neo-liberalization of citizenship and the state as a pedagogical
agent. However, this research challenges the position that ‘democratic citizenship’ is necessarily
in opposition to neo-liberal policy, often conceived in the field with a focus on labor, and argues
that ‘citizenship’ is an ideological project implicit in capitalist social relations beyond the
terrains of neo-liberalism. This calls for a re-visioning of the catalytic and transformative agent.

To begin, the treatment of ideology within adult education has recently been influenced
by critical theory, notably within the body of work associated with transformative learning and
powerfully championed by Brookfield (2000, 2001, 2005). This reading of ideology closely mirror’s Mezirow’s (1991) description of the concept as “distorted, collectively held sociolinguistic meaning perspectives” (p. 47-48), which bares a close resemblance to Eagleton’s (1991) influential focus on ideology as primarily having to do with the sociological operation of ideas and beliefs. The influence of critical theory on the theorization of ideology in adult education has focused much attention on the necessity of ideology critique as both an epistemological and political strategy. In this vision, the role of critical learning is to assist the learner in identifying what is ideology and what is not and then empowering the learning to choose a path of recognition rather than illusion (Newman, 2006). This process has much to do with the project of decolonizing the lifeworld, although those influenced by Habermas have largely moved away from the project of ideology and its association with the notion of ‘false consciousness’ (Welton, 1995) in favor of Eagleton’s (1991) notion of ‘fragmented consciousness.’

This notion has largely displaced older readings of the concept drawn from the tradition of popular education (Freire, 1970) and, even farther back, classical Marxian analyses. Deeply marginalized within the critical tradition has been the dialectical reading of ideology characterized in the work of Paula Allman (1999, 2001, 2007) and in some early pieces of Frank Youngman’s (1986) work. This is not a challenge that is particular to the field of adult education; rather it follows the larger trajectory of left social theory generally. Perhaps weighed down by the patronizing and paternalistic tones of ‘false consciousness,’ adult education’s dealings with ideology have become entrenched in the process of critiquing modes of meaning and their dispersal, a process which stands on a slippery slope and risks sliding into engaging in disconnected critiques of culture without attention to relations of social power (Ebert, 2009).
It is my hope that this research has demonstrated the rich understanding of ideology that can emerge from a focus on examining practices of reproduction within institutional settings, which draws explicitly from the methodological strength of institutional ethnography. In my master’s thesis, I conducted an ideological critique in the mode of critical theory, following Brian Fay’s (1987) interpretation of Habermas and application in adult education. While it was an enriching process, it focused only on the ideas we professed in the classroom. In my attempts to study AmeriCorps, I faced a serious challenge. There was no explicit ideology to critique. There were no documents directing sites and saying ‘this is what civic engagement is and how you must teach it.’ As I have mentioned several times, there was an appearance of openness. The challenge then became how to conduct an investigation into ideology without any ‘ideological artifacts.’ I was only able to unearth this analysis by investigating ideology not just as a sociolinguistic consciousness, but as a practice and a method of deployment. By looking deeply into the institutional processes of AmeriCorps, I was able to understand how the pedagogical practice of the program creates and maintains a particular set of ideas. Further, by using institutional ethnography I was allowed insight into the ways in which the ideological forms of citizenship and democracy within the program do not have a direct ‘correspondence’ in the consciousness of participations. I am struck now at the end of this research how little the voices of adult learners mattered in my master’s research and, in contrast, how utterly dependent this doctoral research has been on their perspectives.

Thus, one major implications of this research is the need to focus on a dialectical understanding of ideology in adult education. Such a conceptualization should force us to look more closely at the institutional contexts of adult learning and on the processes that unite learner’s consciousness with their daily, material experiences. The difficulty of deconstructing
ideology lies in how closely it conforms to distorted forms of consciousness which emerge from the experiential separation of social and material life within capitalism (Allman, 1999, 2001). Any work we can do to bring these spheres closer together through our inquiry will help us to illuminate this ‘mystical’ process. Further, it is my hope that this emphasis will return us to Marx’s characterization of ideology as a form of class struggle.

One of the limitations of this thesis is that my focus on the notion of ‘civil society’ has largely been confined to problematizing the classic liberal assumption of its formation in relation to the state and the market, a notion that carries into critical theorizations in adult education that position civil society in a prominent place for critical and transformative learning. Others have taken on this task in a much more rigorous and theoretical orientation (Holst, 2002; Powell, 2007; Shefner, 2008; Swift, 1999), but my purpose has been to demonstrate that participation in ‘civil society,’ in this liberal sense, is also participation in ‘civil society’ in the Marxian sense. What I mean by this is that we cannot remove ourselves from these social relations, they move in and through all forms of social organization.

I find that my own thinking on the question of civil society has been illuminated by Mao Tse Tung’s (Knight, 1990) argument concerning praxis; that only in the realm of epistemology can we separate theory from action, in terms of ontology they are inseparable. I feel as though I could understand the drive to create a space for life that is free from the violence of capital and the tyranny of the state, that retreats from, rather than confronts, these formations. I can begin to understand why someone like Vaclav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic and advocate for ‘civil society,’ would tie himself to such a notion. William Stafford might have done the same thing. However, this attempt to quarantine social life from its constitutive elements, to draw it away from what it is in an attempt to envision something else, seems a
misleading direction. It is a kind of separation we can only make theoretically, but not in reality. This ‘violent abstraction’ of the political from the material is the ultimate fragmentation of the social. It is a kind of fracturing that does much damage and that leads us down paths where, as William Stafford put it, our mutual life gets lost in the dark. By this I mean that the conception of democracy driven by this hegemonic notion of civil society is a communal life lost in the dark; the true nature of own mutual interdependence remains hidden. Only in the realm of bourgeois epistemology can we separate the political from the material; in the realm of ontology they remain united.

For this reason, I find Peter David Thomas’ (2009) recent work on Gramsci’s articulation of civil society and the integral state to be important for adult educators as it takes up the question of the ‘pedagogic’ state. I have not incorporated his work more fully into my analysis as I have only had the last few months to begin a study and do not yet feel confident to argue his case. One of my findings is that AmeriCorps is an instance of the state acting, explicitly, with the purpose of cultivating a particular notion of citizenship within the body politic and with special emphasis on the mobilization of young adults. It is an incorporation of young people into a specific political project as well as a particular way of thinking about the world around them and the people who occupy it. One of Thomas’ arguments concerning Gramsci’s study of civil society is that in examining the historical significance of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, Gramsci came to the conclusion that following the assent of the bourgeoisie to political power, the state took on the role of expanding its logic and incorporating more and more people into its scope. In contrast to the monarchical and feudal state, in which political power is completely shut off and exists in a closed system, the bourgeois state made itself “an organism in continuous movement” (Gramsci, 1932 as cited by Thomas, 2009 p. 142). This continuous movement and
expansion brought on a new purpose for ‘the state’ and, according to Thomas’ reading of Gramsci, its purpose was pedagogical. In this movement, “the State has become an educator” (p. 142). In this historical moment, civil society, in its contemporary form, emerged as an ‘organic passage’ for class relations. Thomas argues,

As a field of hegemonic relations, civil society gave the non-leading social groups a real and substantial image of this distinctive ‘freedom of moderns’…such as had not occurred in previous ‘castal’ conceptions of social and political relations. In principle, (bourgeois) freedom and its consummation in the State is open to all, and it is precisely this that constitutes the immense revolution of the ‘political’ brought about by the bourgeoisie (p. 144).

Without going so far into Thomas’ argument as to produce another thesis, what is most important for educators, based on Thomas’ theoretical argument and AmeriCorps empirical existence, is the notion that civil society must be theorized in a dialectical relation to the state; not separate, not ‘free from,’ and not in exception to. We must continue to investigate the possibilities of this claim; if the State is educator, is civil society the classroom? The findings of this research seem to imply that the answer to this question may be affirmative. Something is being learned in civil society through the AmeriCorps program, but regardless, the State is clearly attempting to organize how and on whose terms this learning will happen.

A final implication of this research has to do with the ways in which adult educators engage with neo-liberalism and citizenship. Most of our discussions of neo-liberalism seem to be confined to the co-optation of adult education in pursuit of the knowledge economy and human capital. These are very important critiques. However, this research has demonstrated that they are clearly not sufficient and that we must follow other disciplines into the critical study of political subjectivity. It is not by mistake that much of the literature I have cited in this work comes from geography, sociology, political science, and cultural studies. We have focused our work on transformation, which is important, but we have taken our eye of the State in pursuit of the ideal
terrain for citizen engagement. The state, however, needs to be back on the agenda of radical adult education. As I write in the winter of 2011, the people of the Middle East are making this point for us and ahead of us.

This critique of neo-liberal citizenship must also bring us closer to the question of imperialism and its relationship to democracy and citizenship. The ability to explain what we see happening in the world with only the tool of ‘neo-liberalism’ seems increasingly insufficient. The findings of this research can be characterized by the term ‘learning by dispossession,’ initially formulated by Mojab (2008) in relation to the processes of democratic learning imposed in Iraq by the United States government. Learning by dispossession refers to exactly the kinds of ideological practice found in AmeriCorps, which forcefully separates learners from their own material experience in the name of ‘democracy.’ In this process, a democratic subjectivity is formed that colludes with the numerous forms of oppression that circulate within capitalist social relations. In this process, becoming a ‘citizen’ means, once again, to be free and unfree at the same time.

Areas for Further Research

Democracy, Citizenship, and the Pathology of the Poverty

When I began this research, I expected to focus on the civic engagement curriculum and the relationship between ‘civic’ and ‘political’ learning. I did not expect that I would find a dialectical relationship between democratic learning and social inequality within the program. As an unexpected finding, it has raised more questions than it has answered, many of which I would have liked to pursue further, but have withdrawn from in the interests of scope, space, and time.

One major area of research to pursue has to do with the participation of young people from low-income communities and communities of color. One of the claims of the CNCS, laid
out in the 1990 legislation, is that national service will be an empowering and transformational experience for disaffected, disengaged, and marginalized youth. This claim is in no small part due to the City Year project and its initial model of combining college educated youth with young people on probation or with varying other levels of ‘engagement’ with the criminal justice system (Khazei, 2010). The claim is also made by the National Commission on Civic Renewal (1998), who argues that civic participation is a first step to the kind of individual and social transformation necessary for communities struggling with poverty. In part due to the composition of my focus group participants, I was unable to explore the experience of people of color in the program or the impact of the program on their own notions of democracy, social inequality, or participation. I can say that the two women of color who participated in the research were among the most critical of the service-orientation of the program and the vacuity of the civic engagement curriculum. One went so far as to disclose to me on a bus ride that the ‘missionary’ zeal of national service could only impact those who came from ‘outside’ the communities they were trying to help. As an insider to some of these communities, she felt more allegiance to the coping and survival mechanisms operating in her community and very little fidelity to the notion that ‘national service’ was an important component of democratic participation.

A second area of research is to understand further how people learn about social inequality within the program. How does constant exposure to the daily crises of poverty affect the consciousness of AmeriCorps members? How are these problems explained within the program? How are notions of social difference shaped in this paradigm? How is social difference (race, gender, ethnicity, language, status) connected to or disconnected from relations of power within democracy? How are the roots causes of social problems explored, formally or
informally, within the limits of these programs? I have uncovered some of the dynamics of these questions, but not nearly in the scope or depth that seems necessary.

Finally, the proposal for the ‘democratic management of inequality’ raises a host of questions to pursue in connection to the larger function of AmeriCorps and volunteer labor more generally speaking. This is the question of the management of social inequality through the state and civil society. It is important to follow up on how this notion of citizenship, premised on work to alleviate social problems through civil society rather than state, actually impacts how people think about the state and its proper role in social welfare? Is this ideological project effective? How is it resisted? One terrain of this has to do with ethical decision making in the context of decreased state expenditure and increased punitive policy mandates. How do you choose which family to serve? When will you choose to disregard the punitive policies of the state in order to help people survive?

**Labor, Wages, and Working Conditions**

While this research has focused on democratic learning within AmeriCorps, it has raised a number of issues regarding the organization of labor in the non-profit sector and the implications of that organization in the delivery of social services. Labor, wages, and working conditions thus constitute a major area for future research on the AmeriCorps program. As I mentioned in the introduction, several studies have focused on vocational skill development in AmeriCorps, however I have not found any that have investigated the implications of AmeriCorps for the organization of labor. However, there is a growing body of research that takes up this question in regards to a more generally understood notion of volunteerism.

At the AmeriCorps State Conference that I attended in April 2009, one young woman proposed a question from the floor concerning the impact of the newly proposed expansion of members (from 75,000 to 225,000) on the availability of entry-level jobs in the non-profit sector. She argued that already all the entry levels jobs seemed to be AmeriCorps positions. What would happen when more positions were available? Beyond the impact of available jobs, her question provokes the need to explore the effect of low-waged AmeriCorps workers in the non-profit sector on wages more generally. To the extent that the mechanism of site fees allows organizations to essentially purchase labor outside of the regulated labor market, and at costs far below minimum wage, the mechanisms and impact of this circumvention must be further understood. A related aspect that deserves further investigation is the possibility of the replacement of skilled labor with unskilled labor. Within the AmeriCorps provisions, it is stated that an AmeriCorps job cannot replace an already existing position. Put differently, an AmeriCorps position cannot make another job redundant. However, to the extent that the CNCS plans to promote volunteerism as civic engagement and to harness and direct volunteer labor, it must content with what the impact of the availability of low-to-no cost labor will be on existing labor demands. Given the availability of low-to-no cost labor, which is probably but not necessarily unskilled, the impact of an influx of unskilled labor on service delivery in the non-profit sector also warrants investigation. Anecdotal evidence emerged in this research that not all organizations that employ AmeriCorps members are happy about hiring transient, low-skilled labor. The burdens of hiring and training new groups of people every year, plus the impact of their minimal levels of training, may have a significant impact on the operation of these
organizations. Further, it must be asked if low-skilled volunteer labor is the best mechanism for meeting human need. While it is certainly the cheapest in the short-term, it raises question concerning long-term viability and outcomes.

Finally, the AmeriCorps program raises a large set of questions about its purpose in relation to the labor market. As I indicated earlier, nearly every AmeriCorps member who participated in this research disclosed that their primary purpose for participating in AmeriCorps was unemployment. Either they had looked for and were unable to find work or they assumed that they would not find it. Nearly all were college educated and they turned to AmeriCorps in hopes that if they would be doing low-cost work, at least they could do something ‘useful.’ An important area of further research will examine the role AmeriCorps plays in stabilizing the labor market, particularly for high school and university graduates. In addition to meeting local needs, mobilizing citizens, promoting civic engagement, and providing access to higher education, AmeriCorps may also provide a space for labor that the market cannot accommodate. To put it another way, could AmeriCorps be a ‘holding tank’ for unemployed labor? If this is the case, we would further need to understand what role AmeriCorps has in maintaining the stability of capitalist relations by obscuring the effects of the changing nature of the labor market in the United States.

The Problem of Pragmatism

Finally, a question that emerged early in this research, and has persisted throughout, concerns the role of pragmatism in the social organization of volunteerism and citizenship and the pedagogical inertia behind service-learning. I mentioned early in chapter three that William James, a founding member of the United States pragmatist school, was one of the first to propose civilian national service as an alternative to military service. He argued that such voluntary
service to the nation could perform the function of ‘fixing belief’ in the general population. Similarly, John Dewey and the progressive pragmatist school of educational philosophy has experienced a resurgence of sorts over the last twenty years and has become a touch stone for those who promote particular visions of civil society, community building, and democratic engagement. Pragmatism’s influence is also felt in the realm of policy, where volunteerism is often cited as a ‘pragmatic’ solution to budget shortfalls, part-time and flexible work, labor cutbacks, and overall reductions and restructuring in the public sector and the delivery of human services.

Pragmatism, a philosophical school that directs our attention to the immediate effects of truth claims, is widely understood to assert that the utility of an idea is a test of its ‘truth’ and validity. This emphasis on utility is what transforms the philosophical tenants of pragmatism into the popular notion of ‘being pragmatic,’ or focusing on short-term, useful, efficient, and practical solutions to problems. It has also been extremely influential on the thinking of one of the most popular social theorists in adult education, Jurgen Habermas, and on the adaption of his notions of the public sphere, civil society, and the ‘lifeworld’ to the theorization of adult learning and democracy promotion. However, philosophers in the Marxist tradition have described pragmatism as an ‘imperialist’ philosophy (Wells, 1954), despite the appearance of anti-imperialist roots in the word of William James, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey. While these scholars were clearly opposed to the United States occupation of Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Phillipines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American war, this opposition raises questions about the kind of ‘imperialism’ we are referring to in these debates and the nature of the kind of democracy that is the purported outcome of these interventions.
There are clear elements of pragmatic influence in the AmeriCorps program, such as program planning that focuses on utility, efficiency, and immediate effects. Obama himself has proclaimed that he is not interested in ‘ideology’ only in ‘pragmatism’ (Bronsther, 2011), thus positioning pragmatism as the opposite of ideology. One position is based in reason and applicability, while the other is based on political agendas and self-interested motivations. The oppositions posed between the ‘logical’ and the ‘political’ begin to sound familiar, particularly in the context of AmeriCorps. I suspect, however, that the influence and importance of pragmatism at this historical moment, and in our conceptualization of democracy and capitalism, is much more important than these few anecdotes indicate. Thus, I would propose a thorough analysis of the historical and materialist implications of pragmatism, and its relation to community service and democracy, as a further field of study.

**Final Comments**

As I brainstormed elements to include in the conclusion to this thesis, a friend asked me what I hoped my research participants would get from reading this text. In that moment, I had to confront the reality that I have not necessarily written this thesis for them. I have written for myself and for those like me who are struggling with their own understanding of themselves in relation to questions of social justice and transformation; for those who have similarly grown tired of the limits of the progressive imagination and the lack of curiosity they confront in social activism. That may sound deeply cynical and dismissive, but it was precisely how I felt when I left the United States to pursue this doctoral degree. I felt as though everyone around me was utterly satisfied with the uncomplicated understandings of social life that circulated through ‘leftist’ politics and that they genuinely wanted a little bit of social change to be enough social change. If being unsatisfied with these limitations is being cynical, then that is fine with me. I
hope that students who are interested in political consciousness will take from this work that solutions might also be problems and that ‘doing good’ is harder than it seems. Also, I hope my readers glean not just the importance of critique, but the importance of critical reflection understood as a dialectical relation between going forward and looking back. Perhaps I will concede that Dewey might have been right on that point.

Because of this, I hope that my research participants will think critically about the many paradoxical elements I have attempted to hold together in this research. Perhaps some will feel that I have not accurately represented their experience because my window into this world was partially obscured by my own position. I suspect others will feel I have said things that needed to be said. If these research participants go on to do what Obama, Bush, and Clinton have envisioned that they might, that is lead long lives of public service, I hope they will understand that the conditions of their work are not natural or neutral, but political constructions. That everything around them is a contestation of power. That they, who so earnestly hope to do good, are engaged in class struggle, whether they like it or not. I hope that they understand that their year of service was not pointless or worthless; important learning can come from the experience of volunteerism. I am evidence of that fact and I saw many of my research participants grow and deepen in their intellectual and emotional engagement over the course of the six months I spent with them. I hope that they remember that their discomfort and unease about their own work and their own place in the world is an important thing to hold on to. I remember that one day, in one group, we discussed that if you hurt yourself you feel pain; your body is telling you something is wrong. If you go to serve at the homeless shelter and you feel guilty, your body is telling you that something is wrong. I hope they will take seriously what Lillian Smith (1946), another of my heroes, said about society’s struggle to transform itself: “Always the conscience hurt; always
there were doubts and scruples; always hate was tempered with a little love, and always folks were inconsistent...ideals seemed to be dead, but at least their ghosts haunted men’s [sic] souls” (p. 68).
Bibliography


Corporation for National and Community Service.


_About the corporation_. Government. Retrieved June 4, 2009, from

www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/mission.asp


www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/partners_corporate.asp


Corporation for National and Community Service.


doi:10.1177/074171369204200306


Gore, A. (1993). *From red tape to results: Creating a government that works better and costs less; a report from the National Performance Review*. Darby, PA: DIANE.


Griffiths, C. Y. (1998). The impact of service: An exploration of the characteristics of volunteer tutors in the AmeriCorps for math and literacy program and the benefits they gained from service (Doctoral Dissertation). Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.


doi:10.1177/1368431004046702


Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

**AmeriCorps State/National:** Largest component of the AmeriCorps program, operates volunteer service programs in non-profit organizations.

‘The (AmeriCorps) Rule’: Documents developed by the CNCS that summarize and interpret new policy mandates for AmeriCorps program sites.

**Code of Federal Regulations (CFR):** Document of federal codes that dictates the implementation of legislative policy.

**Corps:** An AmeriCorps program operating at a non-profit organization.

**Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS):** Federal agency charged with overseeing community service promotion in the United States. Agency that oversees AmeriCorps.

**Member:** A participant in the AmeriCorps program.

**National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC):** Third AmeriCorps program, provides infrastructure development work through the U.S.

**Notice of Funds Available (NOFA):** The federal call for grants proposal for the administration of AmeriCorps funds.

**Learn & Serve:** A third national service program of the CNCS, which promotes service-learning in primary, secondary, and higher education.

**Senior Corps:** A second national service program of the NCNS; focuses on retirees.

**Site:** Either the organization hosting an AmeriCorps program or a secondary organization where members perform service.

**Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA):** Oldest national service program, second AmeriCorps program in which volunteers work in organizational capacity development in non-profit organizations.
Appendix C: List of Texts

Legislation
Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973
Tax Reform Act of 1986
National and Community Service Act of 1990
National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993
Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Act of 1996
Edward Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009

Federal-Level Documentation
Code of Federal Regulations
Congressional Research Service
Federal Register

Internal CNCS Documentation
The AmeriCorps Rule (2005 and 2008)
Website (history, mission, principles)
Research and policy reports
Notice of Funds Available/Notice of Funding Opportunity (2006-2011)

State-Level Documentation
Grant application instructions
Performance Measures
Websites

Program Level Documentation
AmeriCorps State Grant Applications (received 2006 and 2007 respectively)
Internal curricular documents (staff notes, training agendas)
Member contracts
Member training materials (handbooks, guidebooks)
Appendix D: Letters of Information & Consent

LETTER OF ADMINISTRATIVE CONSENT & INFORMATION
FOR PARTICIPATING NON-PROFIT AGENCIES

To be printed on OISE letterhead

This letter serves as agreement of consent between the organization indicated below and Sara Carpenter, doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto. By signing this consent form, I agree, on behalf of my organization, to allow staff and volunteers to participate in Sara Carpenter’s research.

Participation Requirements

Participation for staff includes:

- 3 to 4 interviews of maximum two hours over the course of twenty weeks.
- Disseminating information to AmeriCorps participants about the research project.
- Assisting in logistical coordination of AmeriCorps member reflection sessions
- Providing access to information regarding AmeriCorps program (ie curriculum, training sessions, reports, etc).

Participation for AmeriCorps members includes:

- 3-5 focus groups for a maximum of three hours each over the course of twenty weeks.
- Additional one-on-one interviews (if deemed necessary)
- Writing reflections on AmeriCorps experience (if deemed necessary)

Confidentiality, Risks, Benefits, & Withdrawal

I understand that the anonymity of my organization and staff will be protected by confidentiality measures approved by the University of Toronto. Because the identity of my organization, staff, and volunteers will not be divulged in any publications, reports, transcripts, or public presentations of this research, I further understand that there are minimal risks associated with public knowledge of my organization’s participation in this research.

No member of my organization’s staff, including volunteers, will receive remuneration for their participation. However, they may receive indirect benefits through the opportunity to reflect on their work and participation in the AmeriCorps program.

I understand that any individual may withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequence to their relationship with the researcher or their employer.
CONSENT AGREEMENT

On behalf of ____________________________, I give consent for staff and volunteers to participate in the research study *Learning Citizenship: Studying Consciousness, Ideology, and Power through Institutional Ethnography*. If necessary, I will allow staff to participate in research on organizational time and provide space for focus groups.

Organization: ______________________________

Signature: __________________________________

Title: ______________________________________

Researcher: Sara Carpenter

Signature: __________________________________

Date: ______________________________________

I would like to receive a copy of the summary of the findings of the research

YES

NO

I would like to receive a copy of the summary of the findings of the research by

Regular Mail (please provide full mailing address)

Email (please provide email address)
Dear Participant:

My name is Sara Carpenter and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My faculty supervisor is Dr. Shahrzad Mojab, Professor of Adult Education and Community Development at OISE/UT. I am writing to provide you with information regarding my thesis research and to request your consent to participate.

I am conducting research on the AmeriCorps program. You have been selected for participation in this research based on your role as a supervisor of AmeriCorps volunteers or an administrator of an AmeriCorps program.

The purpose of this research is to better understand what volunteers in the AmeriCorps program learn about democracy and citizenship through their participation in the program. As an AmeriCorps supervisor/administrator you will be asked to do the following:

- Agree to be interviewed 3 to 4 times for a period of 2 hours each (maximum) over the course of 20 weeks. Interviews will be audio recorded.
- Agree to recruit AmeriCorps volunteers from your organization to participate in research
- Agree to allow researcher to observe/participate (if desired) in training sessions, reflections sessions, or organizational meetings with AmeriCorps volunteers.
- With consent of volunteer participants, agree to provide researcher with organizational materials such as monthly report forms, action plans, curriculums, etc.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Your participation in this research, including your identity and the identity of your host organization is completely confidential. All commentary provided by research participants will be considered private and confidential communication. The identity of research participants will not be revealed in public presentations or published materials. The identity of research participants and their host organizations will be obscured, meaning that the researcher will not disclose the geographical location of the organization, the name of the participant or the organization, or any descriptive information that confirms the identity of participating individuals or organizations. In public presentations and published materials the description of organizations will be limited to the size of the staff of the organization, the annual operating
budget, and the general area of community service (ie, housing services organization, refugee resettlement organization). Individuals will be referred to in research using pseudonyms, including in data collection, public presentation, and published materials. If desired, participants may submit written reflections using pseudonyms.

Data, including audio and video recordings, will be stored on the private server of the researcher at her house. Audio data will be retained until at least September of 2010 and will be erased, including all back ups, upon defense of the researcher’s doctoral dissertation. Only the researcher will have access to the data, although her faculty supervisor will have the privilege of reviewing transcripts of audio recordings. Transcripts will be retained for five years post-completion of the research.

Participants may indicate on this form if they wish to be informed of the results of the research. The results of this research will be disseminated via public presentations (conferences) and in scholarly publications. Participants’ identity will remain confidential in all publications and presentations.

Risks, Benefits, & Compensation

There is minimal risk for you participation in this study. You may perceive there to be a social risk if you comments or participation were to be made public knowledge. This risk is addressed through the privacy and confidentiality procedures outlined above and approved by the University of Toronto. You will be asked to describe your participation in and organization of AmeriCorps projects. You may find the opportunity to reflect on your work to be beneficial. Unfortunately, there is no compensation for participation in this research project.

Participation & Withdrawal

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits to you, your relationship with me, or to the detriment of your host organization. You may withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher.

Thank you for your interest in this research. If you consent to participate, please indicate your consent by completing the information on the following page and signing below. If you have further questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty advisor or me.

Sara Carpenter
scarpenter@oise.utoronto.ca
416-668-1158

Shahrzad Mojab, PhD
smojab@oise.utoronto.ca
416-978-0829

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.
Dear Participant:

My name is Sara Carpenter and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My faculty supervisor is Dr. Shahrzad Mojab, Professor of Adult Education and Community Development at OISE/UT. I am writing to provide you with information regarding my thesis research and to request your consent to participate.

I am conducting research on the AmeriCorps program. This research focuses on what AmeriCorps participants learn about democracy and citizenship through their participation in the program. I am interviewing AmeriCorps participants in order to better understand their experience. I am also interviewing administrators of the program to provide supplementary information on the organization of AmeriCorps. You have been selected for participation in this research based on your role as an administrator of the AmeriCorps program at the state level.

The purpose of this research is to better understand what volunteers in the AmeriCorps program learn about democracy and citizenship through their participation in the program. As a member of the CNCS staff, I would like to meet with you to learn more about how the AmeriCorps program is operated and organized at the state and federal level. Your participation will include one interview of one to two hours in duration.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Your participation in this research, including your identity and the identity of your employer is completely confidential. All commentary provided by research participants will be considered private and confidential communication. Furthermore, the geographical location of the research is also considered confidential so that no associative links can be drawn to the identity of research participants. Individuals will be referred to in research using pseudonyms, including in data collection, public presentation, and published materials.

Data, including audio and video recordings, will be stored on the private server of the researcher at her house. Audio data will be retained until at least September of 2010 and will be erased, including all back ups, upon defense of the researcher’s doctoral dissertation. Only the researcher will have access to the data, although her faculty supervisor will have the privilege of reviewing...
transcripts of audio recordings. Transcripts will be retained for five years post-completion of the
research.

Participants may indicate on this form if they wish to be informed of the results of the research. The results of this research will be disseminated via public presentations (conferences) and in scholarly publications. Participants’ identity will remain confidential in all publications and presentations.

Risks, Benefits, & Compensation

There is minimal risk for you participation in this study. You may perceive there to be a social risk if you comments or participation were to be made public knowledge. This risk is addressed through the privacy and confidentiality procedures outlined above and approved by the University of Toronto. You will be asked to describe your participation in and organization of AmeriCorps projects. You may find the opportunity to reflect on your work to be beneficial. Unfortunately, there is no compensation for participation in this research project.

Participation & Withdrawal

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits to you, your relationship with me, or to the detriment of your host organization. You may withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher.

Thank you for your interest in this research. If you consent to participate, please indicate your consent by completing the information on the following page and signing below. If you have further questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty advisor or me.

Sara Carpenter  
scarpenter@oise.utoronto.ca  
416-668-1158

Shahrzad Mojab, PhD  
smojab@oise.utoronto.ca  
416-978-0829

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.
LETTER OF INFORMATION & CONSENT
AMERICORPS VOLUNTEERS

To be printed on OISE/UT letterhead

Date:

Dear Participant:

My name is Sara Carpenter and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My faculty supervisor is Dr. Shahrzad Mojab, Professor of Adult Education and Community Development at OISE/UT. I am writing to provide you with information regarding my thesis research and to request your consent to participate.

I am conducting research on the AmeriCorps program. You have been selected for participation in this research based on your role as a participant in the AmeriCorps/AmeriCorps VISTA program. You are in no way required to participate in any component of this research because you are participating in the AmeriCorps program. Your participation is completely voluntary.

The purpose of this research is to better understand what volunteers in the AmeriCorps program learn about democracy and citizenship through their participation in the program. As an AmeriCorps participant you will be asked to:

- Agree to participate in 3 to 5 focus groups for a period of 2 hours each (maximum)

It may further enhance the research to collect more information from individual participants. Thus, if necessary, you may be asked to participate in the following activities as well. You will have the opportunity to indicate on this form if you would like to participate in these additional activities.

- Agree to a one-on-one interview if deemed necessary
- Agree to keep personal written reflections if deemed necessary

Further, I will be conducting observation of AmeriCorps training and reflection sessions. The purpose of observation is not to observe individual participants, but to see generally how the activities of AmeriCorps are organized. You will be asked to reflect on these sessions in focus group meetings. However, you may indicate on this form if you would like your participation in training or reflection sessions to be included in data collection.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Your participation in this research, including your identity and the identity of your host organization is completely confidential. All commentary provided by research participants will be considered private and confidential communication. The identity of research participants and their host organizations will be obscured, meaning that the researcher will not disclose the
geographical location of the organization, the name of the participant or the organization, or any
descriptive information that confirms the identity of participating individuals or organizations. In
public presentations and published materials the description of organizations will be limited to
the size of the staff of the organization, the annual operating budget, and the general area of
community service (ie, housing services organization, refugee resettlement organization).
Individuals will be referred to in research using pseudonyms and age, including in data
collection, public presentation, and published materials. If desired, participants may submit
written reflections using pseudonyms. While every measure will be taken to protect participant
confidentiality in research publications and presentations, confidentiality cannot be fully ensured
within a focus group setting. Each focus group will set ground rules to ensure that participants
are fully committed to respecting each others opinions, perspectives, and privacy.

Data, including audio and video recordings, will be stored on the private server of the researcher
at her house. Audio data will be retained until at least September of 2010 and will be erased,
including all back ups, upon defense of the researcher’s doctoral dissertation. Only the researcher
will have access to the data, although her faculty supervisor will have the privilege of reviewing
transcripts of audio recordings. Transcripts will be retained for five years post-completion of the
research.

Participants may indicate on this form if they wish to be informed of the results of the research.
The results of this research will be disseminated via public presentations (conferences) and in
scholarly publications. Participants’ identity will remain confidential in all publications and
presentations.

Risks, Benefits, & Compensation

There is minimal risk for you participation in this study. You may perceive there to be a social
risk if you comments or participation were to be made public knowledge. This risk is addressed
through the privacy and confidentiality procedures outlines above and approved by the
University of Toronto. You will be asked to reflect on your participation in AmeriCorps projects
and your learning and experiences surrounding citizenship and democracy. You may find the
opportunity to reflect on your work to be beneficial. Unfortunately, there is no compensation for
participation in this research project.

Participation & Withdrawal

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or
withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits to you, your relationship
with me, or to the detriment of your host organization. You may withdraw at any time by
contacting the researcher.

Thank you for your interest in this research. If you consent to participate, please indicate your
consent by completing the information on the following page and signing below. If you have
further questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty advisor or
me.
Sara Carpenter
scarpenter@oise.utoronto.ca
416-668-1158

Shahrzad Mojab, PhD
smojab@oise.utoronto.ca
416-978-0829

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

Sincerely,

Sara Carpenter
PhD Student
Department of Adult Education & Counselling Psychology
OISE/University of Toronto
Dear Participant:

My name is Sara Carpenter and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My faculty supervisor is Dr. Shahrzad Mojab, Professor of Adult Education and Community Development at OISE/UT. I am writing to provide you with information regarding my thesis research and to request your consent to participate.

I am conducting research on the AmeriCorps program. This research focuses on what AmeriCorps participants learn about democracy and citizenship through their participation in the program. I am interviewing AmeriCorps participants in order to better understand their experience. I am also interviewing administrators of the program to provide supplementary information on the organization of AmeriCorps. You have been selected for participation in this research based on your role as consultant or trainer for the AmeriCorps program.

The purpose of this research is to better understand what volunteers in the AmeriCorps program learn about democracy and citizenship through their participation in the program. As a former participant in the AmeriCorps program, I would like to meet with you to learn more about your involvement with the AmeriCorps program, specifically to better understand the training or services you provide to AmeriCorps program sites. Your participation will include one interview of one to two hours in duration.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Your participation in this research, including your identity and the identity of your employer is completely confidential. All commentary provided by research participants will be considered private and confidential communication. Furthermore, the geographical location of the research is also considered confidential so that no associative links can be drawn to the identity of research participants. Individuals will be referred to in research using pseudonyms, including in data collection, public presentation, and published materials.

Data, including audio and video recordings, will be stored on the private server of the researcher at her house. Audio data will be retained until at least September of 2010 and will be erased, including all back ups, upon defense of the researcher’s doctoral dissertation. Only the researcher will have access to the data, although her faculty supervisor will have the privilege of reviewing transcripts of audio recordings. Transcripts will be retained for five years post-completion of the research.
Participants may indicate on this form if they wish to be informed of the results of the research. The results of this research will be disseminated via public presentations (conferences) and in scholarly publications. Participants’ identity will remain confidential in all publications and presentations.

Risks, Benefits, & Compensation

There is minimal risk for you participation in this study. You may perceive there to be a social risk if you comments or participation were to be made public knowledge. This risk is addressed through the privacy and confidentiality procedures outlined above and approved by the University of Toronto. You will be asked to describe your participation in the AmeriCorps program. You may find the opportunity to reflect on your work to be beneficial. Unfortunately, there is no compensation for participation in this research project.

Participation & Withdrawal

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits to you, your relationship with me, or to the detriment of your host organization. You may withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher.

Thank you for your interest in this research. If you consent to participate, please indicate your consent by completing the information on the following page and signing below. If you have further questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty advisor or me.

Sara Carpenter
scarpenter@oise.utoronto.ca
416-668-1158

Shahrzad Mojab, PhD
smojab@oise.utoronto.ca
416-978-0829

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

Sincerely,

Sara Carpenter
PhD Student
Department of Adult Education & Counselling Psychology
OISE/University of Toronto
Appendix E: Outreach & Recruitment Materials

COMMUNITY LIAISON OUTREACH EMAIL (ORGANIZATIONAL)

To: AmeriCorps Host Organizations

From: Martha Malinski, Director, Community Work & Learning, College of St. Catherine

I am writing to invite your participation in an exciting new research study. Sara Carpenter, who you may know from her previous work with the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA) and the Jane Addams School for Democracy, will be conducting doctoral research in Minneapolis/St. Paul between January and June of 2009. Sara is currently working on her PhD in the Adult Education and Community Development program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The focus of Sara’s research is to understand what participants in the AmeriCorps program learn about democracy and citizenship. As a notable organization in the Twin Cities community that participates in the AmeriCorps/VISTA/NCCC programs, I thought this project might be of interest to you.

What does participation in this project mean? Because this project is focused on what and how AmeriCorps members learn, Sara is looking for organizations that will allow the following:

1) Three to four sessions (two hours each) to interview staff who coordinates or supervises AmeriCorps volunteers between January and June of 2009.

2) Three to five sessions (three hours each) to conduct focus groups with AmeriCorps members between January and June of 2009.

3) Permission to participate in and observe any training, organization, or reflection sessions that your AmeriCorps members participate in, either within your organization or in their corps between January and June of 2009.

I believe this research project will contribute greatly to our understanding of how adults learn to participate in democracy and practice citizenship. Community participation is an important part of this process and the AmeriCorps programs offer a unique opportunity for educators to better understand the practice of “learning democracy.” While there is no compensation for participation, organizations will receive the indirect benefit of contributing to this body of knowledge and informing new practices in this area. Directly, your staff and volunteers may find the time to reflect on their participation in the program to be valuable. I hope you will consider participating in this research. If you are interested in participating or have more questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sara directly at scarpenter@oise.utoronto.ca.
To: Individuals affiliated with AmeriCorps Program

From: Martha Malinski, Director, Community Work & Learning, College of St. Catherine

I am writing to invite your participation in an exciting new research study. Sara Carpenter, who you may know from her previous work with the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA) and the Jane Addams School for Democracy, will be conducting doctoral research in Minneapolis/St. Paul between January and June of 2009. Sara is currently working on her PhD in the Adult Education and Community Development program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The focus of Sara’s research is to understand what participants in the AmeriCorps program learn about democracy and citizenship. I thought this project may be of interest to you.

Participation in this research is minimal. Sara is interested in speaking with individuals in the community who have experience with the AmeriCorps program which is relevant to her research.

I believe this research project will contribute greatly to our understanding of how adults learn to participate in democracy and practice citizenship. Community participation is an important part of this process and the AmeriCorps programs offer a unique opportunity to educators, like Sara and myself, to better understand the practice of “learning democracy.” While there is no compensation for participation, you will receive the indirect benefit of contributing to this body of knowledge and informing new practices in this area. Directly, you may find the time to reflect on your participation in the program to be valuable.

I hope you will consider participating in this research. If you are interested in participating or have more questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sara directly at scarpenter@oise.utoronto.ca.
Appendix F: AmeriCorps Director Interview Guide

1. Why did the organization choose to participate in the AmeriCorps program?

2. What are the details of the program you proposed in your grant application? Can I see a copy of your grant application?

3. What kind of work do the AmeriCorps participants do? How does the organization decide what work these volunteers will do?

4. How does the organization approach the federal regulations? How do you organize work projects within the regulations?

5. How are AmeriCorps members supervised? What forms/protocols do you use for supervision?

6. What is the process for individuals to apply to the AmeriCorps program and be assigned to your organization?

7. What kinds of training sessions do AmeriCorps members participate in?

8. What kinds of reflections sessions?

9. How does the organization approach the civic engagement action plan requirement?

10. How do you approach the curriculum you provide for training sessions? What are the curriculum, goals, outcomes, and pedagogies?

11. How do AmeriCorps participants respond to the curriculum?

12. What other kinds of activities do they participate in throughout the year? Which ones are compulsory, etc? Who organizes these activities?
Appendix G: AmeriCorps Member Contract

AmeriCorps

Member Contract

PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this agreement to delineate the terms, conditions, and rules of membership regarding the participation of ____________________________ (hereinafter referred to as “member”) in the X AmeriCorps Program (hereinafter referred to as the “Program”).

AMERICORPS MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

The member certifies that they are a United States citizen, a United States national, or a lawful permanent resident alien and at least 17 years of age. The member certifies that they have a high school diploma or GED. Further, the member certifies that they have not already served 2 terms of AmeriCorps service.

NCLB REQUIREMENTS

In order to meet “highly qualified status” as determined by the No Child Left Behind Act, members certify that they have received a minimum of 60 semester credits of college prior to enrollment.

TERMS OF SERVICE

A. The member’s term of service begins on August 13th, 2008 and ends on July 31st, 2009. The program and the member may agree, in writing, to extend this term of service for the following reasons:

1. The member’s service has been suspended due to compelling personal circumstances.
2. The member’s service has been terminated, but a grievance procedure has resulted in reinstatement.

B. The member will complete a minimum of 1700 hours (full-time) or 900 hours (part-time) of service during this period.

C. The member understands that to successfully complete the term of service (as defined by the program and consistent with regulations of the Corporation for National & Community Service) and to be eligible for the education award, they must complete at least 1700 FT or 900 PT hours of service and satisfactorily complete pre-service training and the appropriate education/training that relates to the
member’s ability to perform service. This includes, but is not limited to the AmeriCorps program trainings and meetings. This training will include any necessary safety precautions for the member’s service (including service retreats).

D. The member understands that to be eligible to serve a second term of service, the member must receive satisfactory performance reviews for any previous term of service. The member’s eligibility for a second term of service with this program will be based on at least a mid-term and end-of-term evaluation of the member’s performance, focusing on factors such as whether the member has:

1. Completed the required number of hours;
2. Satisfactorily completed assignments, tasks, or projects; and
3. Met any other criteria that were clearly communicated both orally and in writing at the beginning of the term of service.

E. The member understands, however, that mere eligibility for an additional term of service does not guarantee selection or placement.

SERVICE DESCRIPTION

A. See attachment for your specific service description based on your service site and AmeriCorps position. This service description is a binding part of your service contract and should be reviewed carefully.

BENEFITS

A. The member will receive from the program the following benefits:

1. A maximum living allowance in the amount of $11,400 (FT) or $5,700 (PT).
   a. The living allowance is taxable, and taxes will be deducted directly from the living allowance.
   b. The living allowance will be distributed bi-weekly by check or direct deposit. You will receive your first check on August 29th, 2008 and your final check will be on July 31st, 2009.
      Returning full-time members will receive $438.46 per check before taxes
      Returning part-time members will receive $219.23 per check before taxes
      New full-time members will receive $456.00 per check before taxes
      New part-time members will receive $228.00 per check before taxes
2. Full-time members are eligible for health care benefits as described in the health care policy manual or online at: www.americorpsbenefits.com

3. Full-time members are eligible for a childcare allowance provided by the National Association of Childcare Resources and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) directly to the provider. Please consult the AmeriCorps CARE manual for more information.

4. Health care and child care benefits terminate on July 31st, 2009 or on the members last day of service if the member exits early or extends their term.

B. Upon successful completion of the member’s term of service, the member will receive an education award from the National Service Trust. For successful completion of a full-time term, the member will receive an education award in the amount of $4,725. For successful completion of a part-time term, the member will receive an education award in the amount of $2,362.50. At this time, the education award is taxed in the year that you use it.

1. If the member has not yet received a high school diploma or its equivalent (including an alternative diploma or certificate for individuals with learning disabilities), the member agrees to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent before using the education award. This requirement can be waived if a member is enrolled in an institution of higher education on an ability to benefit basis or the program has waived this requirement due to the results of the member’s education assessment.

2. The member understands that his or her failure to disclose to the program any history of having been released for cause from another AmeriCorps program will render him or her ineligible to receive the education award.

C. If the member has received forbearance on a qualified student loan during the term of service, the National Service Trust may repay a portion or all of the interest that accrued on the loan during the term of service.

RULES OF CONDUCT

A. At no time may the member:

1. Engage in any activity that is illegal under local, state or federal law.
2. Engage in activities that pose a significant safety risk to others.
3. Engage in any AmeriCorps prohibited activities that include:

   a. any activity involving attempting to influence legislation or an election or aid a partisan political organization;
   b. helping or hindering union activity;
   c. engaging in religious instruction;
   d. conducting worship services;
   e. providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship;
   f. constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship;
g. maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship;

h. engaging in any form of religious proselytization;

i. organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;

j. impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;

k. duplicate or displace a current or former employee or volunteer;

l. participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political candidates, political platforms, proposed legislation, or elected officials;

m. participate in voter registration activities;

n. providing a direct benefit to a for-profit entity, a labor union, a partisan political organization, or a non-profit that engages in lobbying;

o. raise funds for living allowances or for an organization's general (as opposed to project) operating expenses or endowment; or

p. supervising other AmeriCorps members.

B. The member is expected to, at all times while acting in an official capacity as an AmeriCorps member:

1. Demonstrate mutual respect towards others.
2. Follow program and site guidelines.
3. Be a positive representative of AmeriCorps.
4. Wear AmeriCorps identification or service gear.

C. The member understands that the following acts also constitute a violation of the program’s rules of conduct:

1. Unauthorized or excessive tardiness (from their site or program events/meetings).
2. Unauthorized or excessive absences (from site or program events/meetings).
3. Repeated use of inappropriate language (i.e. profanity).
4. Failure to wear appropriate clothing to service assignments.
5. Stealing or lying.
6. Engaging in any activity that may physically or emotionally damage other members of the program or people in the community.
7. Unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, possession or use of any controlled substance or illegal drugs during the term of service.
8. Consuming alcoholic beverages during the performance of service activities, while wearing official AmeriCorps service gear, or when under age.
9. Being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs during the performance of service activities.
10. Failing to notify the program of any criminal arrest or conviction that occurs during the term of service.

D. Under the Drug-Free Workplace Act, you must immediately notify the program Director if you are convicted under any criminal drug statute. Your participation in the program is conditioned upon compliance with this notice requirement and action will be taken for violation of this policy.

E. In general, for violating the above stated rules in this section, the program will do the following:
1. For the member’s first offense, an appropriate program official will issue a verbal warning to the member.
2. For the member’s second offense, an appropriate program official will issue a written warning and reprimand the member.
3. For the member’s third offense, the member may be suspended for one or more days without compensation and will not receive credit for the service hours missed.
4. For the fourth offense, the program may release the member for cause.
5. **For serious offenses or numbers 5 – 10 above, the member may be immediately suspended or released for cause.**

F. The member understands that they will be either suspended or released for cause in accordance with paragraphs B, C, D, or E in the previous section of this agreement and/or for committing certain acts during the term of service including but not limited to being convicted or charged with a violent felony or possession, sale, or distribution of a controlled substance.

**RELEASE FROM TERMS OF SERVICE**

A. The member understands that they may be released from their term of service for:

1. Cause, as explained in paragraph B of this section, or
2. Compelling personal circumstances as defined in paragraph C of this section.

B. The program will release the member for cause for the following reasons:

1. The member has dropped out of the program without obtaining a release for compelling personal circumstances from the appropriate program official;
2. During the term of service the member is convicted of a violent felony or the sale or distribution of a controlled substance;
3. The member has committed a fourth offense in accordance with paragraph E in the Rules of Conduct section of this of this agreement.
4. Any other serious breach that in the judgement of the program staff would undermine the effectiveness of the program.

C. The program may release the member from the term of service for compelling personal circumstances if the member demonstrates that:

1. The member has a disability or serious illness that makes completing the term impossible;
2. There is a serious injury, illness, or death of a family member which makes completing the term unreasonably difficult or impossible for the member;
3. The member has prior military service obligations;
4. The member has an opportunity to make the transition from welfare to work; or
5. Some other unforeseeable circumstance beyond the member’s control makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for the member to complete the term of service, such as natural disaster, a strike, relocation of a spouse/partner, or the nonrenewable or premature closing of a project or the program.
D. Compelling personal circumstances do not include leaving the program to:

1. To enroll in school;
2. To join the military;
3. To obtain employment, other than moving from welfare to work; or
4. Because of dissatisfaction with the program.

D. The program may suspend the member’s term of service for the following reasons:

1. During the term of service the member has been charged with a violent felony or the sale or distribution of a controlled substance. (If the member is found not guilty or the charge is dismissed, the member may resume their term of service. The member, however, will not receive back living allowances or credit for any service hours missed.)
2. During the term of service the member has been convicted of a first offense of possession of a controlled substance. (If, however, the member demonstrates that they have enrolled in an approved drug rehabilitation program, the member may resume their term of service. The member will not receive back living allowances or credit for any service hours missed.
3. The program may suspend the member’s term of service for violating the rules of conduct provisions in accordance with the rules set forth paragraph C in the Rules of Conduct section of this agreement.

E. If the member discontinues their term of service for any reason other than a release for compelling personal circumstances, the member will cease to receive the benefits described in paragraph A of the Benefits section and will receive no portion of the educational award or interest payments.

F. If the member discontinues their term of service due to compelling personal circumstances, the member may receive a pro-rated education award based on the number of service hours completed.

**GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

Pre-Complaint Process

1. Initially, disputes and problems should be addressed between parties on a one-to-one basis. If this pre-complaint process does not resolve the matter, the aggrieved party may file a written complaint, on the form provided, within 45 days of the alleged occurrence. This grievance procedure outlines the process for resolution. In the first phase, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), both parties come to mutual agreement through a mediation process facilitated by a neutral party. In the second phase, a Grievance Hearing, the aggrieved party may file a formal grievance within one year of the alleged occurrence if ADR did not resolve the matter. The third phase is
resolution through Binding Arbitration. This procedure is available for specific types of allegations as defined below.

2. If a grievance is filed regarding a proposed placement of a member in the Program or project, such a placement must not be made unless the placement is consistent with the resolution of the grievance.

Major Decisions

1) Members, labor unions, community-based organizations, and other interested parties, such as AmeriCorps applicants, have the right to grieve a major decision made by the administration of the program only after conflict resolution processes have been exhausted. Examples of this type of decision include:
   
   (a) release of a member for cause from the program
   (b) release of a member for cause from a service site
   (c) it is believed that a member is displacing an existing employee

2) This grievance procedure is to be utilized only when a decision has been made that will, or has the potential to, change the program structure or impact the program in a very serious manner. Questions of definition need to be directed to the City of Lakes Program Director. If grievance was made concerning placement of a member, placement must not be made unless consistent with resolution of grievance.

3) Allegations of discrimination need to be directed in writing to the CNCS Office of Equal Opportunity. Allegations of fraud or criminal activity must be brought to the attention of the Inspector General of the CNCS immediately.

Corporation for National and Community Service

1201 New York Avenue NW

Washington, DC, 20525

Dispute Resolution Processes

Alternative Dispute Resolution

1) Aggrieved party submits a written complaint, on the enclosed form, to the Program Director within 45 calendar days of the alleged occurrence.

2) The Program Director investigates the complaint, discusses the matter with both parties, and replies in writing to the aggrieved party within 15 working days. If all parties agree, the resolution is considered binding.
3) If the dispute is still not resolved, the aggrieved party appeals in writing to the Manager within 5 working days. They will meet with the parties and make a recommendation for resolution within 15 working days of receiving the appeal. If all parties agree, the final resolution is put in writing and is considered binding.

Grievance Hearing

1) If, after completing all of the steps in the ADR process, the dispute is not resolved and the aggrieved party wishes to pursue a formal grievance procedure, then the aggrieved party must submit a written formal grievance to the Director within one year of the alleged occurrence.

2) The Director will hold a hearing within 30 working days of receiving the formal grievance and will make a final written recommendation for resolution within 60 days of the formal grievance filing. If all parties agree, the resolution is considered binding.

Binding Arbitration

1) If the dispute is still not resolved, the aggrieved party must submit a request for binding arbitration to the program. A qualified arbitrator who is independent of the interested parties must be jointly selected. If the parties cannot agree on an arbitrator, within 15 calendar days of receiving a request from one of the parties, the CNCS will appoint an arbitrator from a list of qualified arbitrators. An arbitration proceeding must be held no later than 45 days after the request for binding arbitration. Or, if the arbitrator is appointed by the CNCS, the proceeding must occur no later than 30 calendar days after the arbitrator’s appointment. A final decision must be made by the arbitrator no later than 30 calendar days after the date the arbitration proceeding begins. In accordance with 42 U.S.C. B12636(f)(4)(D), the cost of the arbitration proceeding must be divided evenly between the parties to the arbitration unless the party requesting a grievance procedure prevails. If the aggrieved party prevails, the program must pay the total cost of the proceeding and reasonable attorney’s fees of the prevailing party incurred in connection with the ADR proceeding.
Additional Prohibited Activities

Details on these and other activities will be covered during the Public School’s Volunteer Orientation.

- At no time should you ever be alone with a student. This is for your protection as well as theirs. When tutoring a student, find a community space such as the school library, computer lab, the back of a classroom, or a table in the hallway.

- At no time should you visit the home of a student, have them visit you at your home, or arrange to meet them in the community. All interactions with students must take place at your service site. The ONLY exception is if you are accepted into the BBBS community-based program and you are meeting with your Little.

- Never provide transportation for a student.

- Do not promise a child that you will “keep a secret”. There are many examples of things that you are mandated to report.

- You cannot be employed by the Public Schools while serving in the AmeriCorps program.
Appendix H: Performance Measure Worksheet

**ATTACHMENT D: Performance Measure Worksheet**

**eGrants Performance Measures Section**

Please fill in the performance measure information for each section.

## General Info

**Performance Measurement Title:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure Category (choose one):</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs and Service Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening Communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Service Category addressed by this Performance Measure Worksheet**

(see Attachment A, Service Categories):

## Needs and Activities

Briefly describe the need to be addressed (1-3 sentences):

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (1-3 sentences):

## Results

The outputs and outcomes you intend to track for a particular activity:

**Result Type**

Outputs are counts of the amount of service members or volunteers have completed, but do not provide information on benefits to or other changes in the lives of members and/or beneficiaries.

Intermediate-outcomes specify changes that have occurred in the lives of members and/or beneficiaries, but are short of a significant benefit for them.

**Result: Output**

Result Statement:
1-2 sentences stating the expected result.

**Indicator:** A specific, measurable item of information that specifies progress toward achieving a result.

Indicator:
Other Indicator:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target Description:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># (number) or % (percent):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruments</strong>: Specific tool to collect information (e.g. behavior checklist, tally sheet, attitude questionnaire, interview protocol).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result: Intermediate Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Result Statement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 sentences stating the expected result.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Indicator**: A specific, measurable item of information that specifies progress toward achieving a result. |
| Indicator:                    |

Other Indicator:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target Description:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># (number) or % (percent):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruments</strong>: Specific tool to collect information (e.g. behavior checklist, tally sheet, attitude questionnaire, interview protocol).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: 2003 AmeriCorps Guidelines Citizenship Goals

APPENDIX A – CITIZENSHIP GOALS FOR
AMERICORPS MEMBERS

A successful applicant will provide training and use the service experience to help members acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be active citizens of communities—local, state, and national. This primarily means enhancing members’ understanding of how our democracy works and the value of their playing an active role in it.

Citizenship goals for AmeriCorps programs to consider adopting for their members are to:
• foster within themselves and among their team members positive attitudes regarding the value of lifelong citizenship and service for the common good;
• discuss and explore their community and the people, processes, and institutions that are most effective in improving community conditions;
• enhance their ability to plan effective service projects that respond to real community needs; and
• develop the social, cultural and analytical skills necessary to effectively participate in American democracy.

In achieving these goals, programs could assist AmeriCorps members in attaining the following educational outcomes:

Knowledge
Members will:
• recognize the variety of characteristics and actions of effective, participating citizens;

• identify and describe the community in which they live;

• understand and be capable of explaining the role and importance of the voluntary sector in our nation;

• understand and be capable of explaining how the principles set out in the Declaration of Independence, and the Preamble to the Constitution, are related to the voluntary sector;

• identify, define, and describe local problems and their connection to problems on the state and national levels; and

• discuss and explore the variety of ways an individual can help solve community problems.
Skills
Members will:
• process and evaluate information for objectivity, accuracy, and point of view;
• apply information to effective efforts to help solve social problems;
• assess the consequences of and appropriate context for personal action;
• further develop and use critical-thinking skills and ethical reasoning to make informed and responsible decisions; further develop and use verbal and written communication skills to convey ideas, facts and opinions in an effective and reasonable manner; work cooperatively with others and develop effective teambuilding practices; effectively advocate individual and shared interests; and assess and apply their AmeriCorps experiences for future educational or professional development.

Attitudes
Members will:
• respect what we have in common as Americans;
• recognize and respect the different backgrounds of Americans;
• develop a sense of personal efficacy;
• understand that rights and freedoms require accepting civic responsibilities;
and
• foster within themselves the value of service, the importance of continued involvement in the community, and attachment to the principles of freedom and equality on which our nation rests.
## Appendix J: Civic Engagement Logic Model Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Intermediate Outcome</th>
<th>End Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • # of members  
• # of structured service projects  
• Member training curricula  
• Civic engagement action plan | # of members will participate in # of lessons of civic engagement training provided by program staff (approximately xx hours total) | Result: Members are trained in core civic engagement skill areas. | Result: Members possess core civic engagement skills. | Result: Members are engaged in civic life. |

### Indicator:
• # of members trained

### Indicators:
• Percent of members who possess the core civic engagement skills.

### Sample core civic engagement skills:
Members are able to…
- Engage others in meaningful service.
- Publicly express an opinion on an issue, such as a letter to the editor.
- Facilitate public meeting / discussion.
- Identify elected officials.
- Explain the process of becoming a US Citizen.
- Explain the basic structure of local, state and federal governmental systems
- Vote

### Activities could include, but are not limited to:
- Planning a community service project
- Attending a public hearing
- Meeting with elected officials
- Voting
- Conducting community asset mapping
- Writing a press release or letter to the editor
- Facilitating a public meeting
- Serving on a public decision-making board, committee, etc.

### Instruments:
- Member Training Log
- Member Civic Engagement Survey
- Civic Engagement Action Plan
**Performance Measurement Worksheet**

**Applicant Name:**

**Output**— The amount of product or service delivered (students tutored, trees planted, etc).

**Intermediate-outcome**—A change that has occurred in the lives of beneficiaries and/or members, but is still short of a significant, lasting benefit.

**End-outcome**—A significant and lasting change that has occurred in the lives of beneficiaries and/or members.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Complete one worksheet for each performance measure.

1. **Select a performance measure category:**
   - Needs and Service Activities
   - Participant Development
   - Community Strengthening

2. **Select a performance measure type:**
   - Output
   - Intermediate Outcome
   - End Outcome

3. **Need.** Describe the need that this performance measure will address.

   For more than 250 years, Americans have shared a vision of a democracy in which all citizens understand, appreciate, and engage actively in civic and political life. In recent decades, however, increasing numbers of Americans have disengaged from civic and political institutions such as voluntary associations, religious congregations, community-based organizations, and political and electoral activities such as voting and being informed about public issues. Young people reflect these trends: they are less likely to vote and are less interested in political discussion and public issues than either their older counterparts or young people of past decades. As a result, many young Americans may not be prepared to participate fully in our democracy now and when they become adults. *(The Civic Mission of Schools, 2003)* [http://civicmissionofschools.org/cms/site/campaign/cms_report.html](http://civicmissionofschools.org/cms/site/campaign/cms_report.html)

4. **Anticipated Result.** Identify the expected **result**.

   Members are trained in core civic engagement skills.

5. **Activities.** Describe the **activities** planned to achieve this result.

   Members who successfully complete their term of service will participate in program-specific civic engagement training throughout the program year.

6. **Measurement.** Describe the data and instruments you use to **measure** the results.

   Member Training Log
7. Targets. Describe the **targets** you expect meet during the 3 year grant period?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>xx Members are trained in core civic engagement skills.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>xx Members are trained in core civic engagement skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>xx Members are trained in core civic engagement skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Performance Measure. Combine your anticipated results and your targets into a sentence.

| xx Members will be trained in core civic engagement skills. |

9. If you have **data for this performance measure from prior years**, report it here.

| OMB Control #: 3045-0047 |
**Performance Measurement Worksheet**

**Applicant Name:**

**Output**--The amount of product or service delivered (students tutored, trees planted, etc).

**Intermediate-outcome**--A change that has occurred in the lives of beneficiaries and/or members, but is still short of a significant, lasting benefit.

**End-outcome**--A significant and lasting change that has occurred in the lives of beneficiaries and/or members.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Complete one worksheet for each performance measure.

| 1. Select a **performance measure category**: | ☐ Needs and Service Activities. ☐ Participant Development ☐ Community Strengthening |
| 2. Select a **performance measure type**: | ☐ Output ☐ Intermediate Outcome ☐ End Outcome |
| 3. **Need.** Describe the need that this performance measure will address. | For more than 250 years, Americans have shared a vision of a democracy in which all citizens understand, appreciate, and engage actively in civic and political life. In recent decades, however, increasing numbers of Americans have disengaged from civic and political institutions such as voluntary associations, religious congregations, community-based organizations, and political and electoral activities such as voting and being informed about public issues. Young people reflect these trends: they are less likely to vote and are less interested in political discussion and public issues than either their older counterparts or young people of past decades. As a result, many young Americans may not be prepared to participate fully in our democracy now and when they become adults. ([The Civic Mission of Schools, 2003](http://civicmissionofschools.org/cms/site/campaign/cms_report.html)) |
| 4. Anticipated Result. Identify the expected **result**. | Members possess the core skills/attitudes for effective civic engagement. |
| 5. Activities. Describe the **activities** planned to achieve this result. | Members will participate in civic engagement training throughout the program year. |
| 6. Measurement. Describe the data and instruments you use to **measure** the results. | Member Civic Engagement Survey |
| 7. Targets. Describe the **targets** you expect meet during the 3 year grant period? | Year 1: 90% of Members who complete their term of service will report that they possess core skills/attitudes for effective civic engagement. |
Year 2: 90% of Members who complete their term of service will report that they possess core skills/attitudes for effective civic engagement.

Year 3: 90% of Members who complete their term of service will report that they possess core skills/attitudes for effective civic engagement.

8. Performance Measure. Combine your anticipated results and your targets into a sentence.

9. If you have data for this performance measure from prior years, report it here.

OMB Control #: 3045-0047
**Performance Measurement Worksheet**

**Applicant Name:**

**Output**-- The amount of product or service delivered (students tutored, trees planted, etc).

**Intermediate-outcome**--A change that has occurred in the lives of beneficiaries and/or members, but is still short of a significant, lasting benefit.

**End-outcome**--A significant and lasting change that has occurred in the lives of beneficiaries and/or members.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Complete one worksheet for each performance measure.

| 1. Select a **performance measure category:** | ☐ Needs and Service Activities. ☐ Participant Development ☐ Community Strengthening |
| 2. Select a **performance measure type:** | ☐ Output ☐ Intermediate Outcome ☐ End Outcome |

3. **Need.** Describe the need that this performance measure will address.  
   For more than 250 years, Americans have shared a vision of a democracy in which all citizens understand, appreciate, and engage actively in civic and political life. In recent decades, however, increasing numbers of Americans have disengaged from civic and political institutions such as voluntary associations, religious congregations, community-based organizations, and political and electoral activities such as voting and being informed about public issues. Young people reflect these trends: they are less likely to vote and are less interested in political discussion and public issues than either their older counterparts or young people of past decades. As a result, many young Americans may not be prepared to participate fully in our democracy now and when they become adults. (The Civic Mission of Schools, 2003) [http://civicmissionofschools.org/cms/site/campaign/cms_report.html](http://civicmissionofschools.org/cms/site/campaign/cms_report.html)

4. **Anticipated Result.** Identify the expected **result.**  
   Members are engaged in civic life.

5. **Activities.** Describe the **activities** planned to achieve this result.  
   As part of their training, members will identify civic engagement activities that they have never done before that they would like to try during their term of service.

6. **Measurement.** Describe the data and instruments you use to **measure** the results.  
   Civic Engagement Action Plan
7. Targets. Describe the **targets** you expect meet during the 3 year grant period?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>90% of Members who successfully complete their term of service will participate in civic engagement activities identified on their Civic Engagement Action Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>90% of Members who successfully complete their term of service will participate in civic engagement activities identified on their Civic Engagement Action Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>90% of Members who successfully complete their term of service will participate in civic engagement activities identified on their Civic Engagement Action Plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Performance Measure. Combine your anticipated results and your targets into a sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% of Members who successfully complete their term of service will be engaged in civic life as demonstrated by their participation in civic engagement activities identified on their Civic Engagement Action Plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. If you have **data for this performance measure** from prior years, report it here.

OMB Control #: 3045-0047
# Appendix K: Civic Engagement Survey

## AmeriCorps Member Civic Engagement Survey

This survey is important in helping us gauge how participating in AmeriCorps and civic engagement training has affected you. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential. Please feel free to add comments in the spaces provided at the end of the survey. **THANK YOU!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Self Assessment</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have learned how to discuss and explore other peoples’ perspectives on community issues.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have learned how to effectively express my opinions in a group setting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have a greater appreciation of the importance of being engaged as a citizen.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I value being involved and active in my community.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I can explain how government budgets affect issues I care about.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have been engaged in valuable discussions with other AmeriCorps members.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I understand the system of voting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I am confident that I can plan an effective community service project.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I know how to identify a community issue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I know how to go about working to address a community issue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I could explain the process required to become a US Citizen.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am skilled in listening respectfully to opinions that are different than mine.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I know how to contact the media to express my opinion about an important issue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### I. Self Assessment

Using the scale provided (**STRONGLY DISAGREE** - **STRONGLY AGREE**), please circle the number that best represents your level of agreement with the following statements.

As a result of my AmeriCorps experience and the civic engagement training I received,

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I know how to locate the elected officials that represent me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I can explain how citizens can affect how a bill becomes a law.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I know how to express my opinion effectively in a public forum.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I can identify multiple approaches for addressing critical issues in my community.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I can be an effective grassroots organizer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I know how to participate effectively in a public meeting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I know how to collaborate effectively a group of people so we can address important issues together.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I know how I could run to be an elected official.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I know how to advocate for an issue I am passionate about.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I know how to access multiple sources of information to identify the underlying causes of community issues.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Open Ended Questions

a. My participation in the civic engagement training provided by my AmeriCorps program will help me:
   - Fulfill my responsibilities as an AmeriCorps member. (check one)
     - [ ] Strongly Disagree  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Strongly Agree

   Please explain your choice:

b. Stay involved in my community in the future. (check one.)
   - [ ] Strongly Disagree  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Strongly Agree

   Please give an explanation why or why not:

b. What was the most important thing you learned as an AmeriCorps member about what civic engagement means?

c. Please describe how you intend to stay involved in your community in the future.
Appendix L: Civic Engagement Action Plan

2008-2009
PROGRAM NAME
AmeriCorps Member Civic Engagement Action Plan

Instructions: Please list civic engagement activities you have never done previously that you would like to engage in during your year of service in the table below. For each activity, provide the completion date and estimate the amount of time you spent on that activity.

Member
Name:______________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic Engagement Activities</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.

10.

*Other miscellaneous civic engagement activities you engaged in that were not included in your original plan (please list activity and date completed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES COMPLETED:</th>
<th>TOTAL HOURS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>