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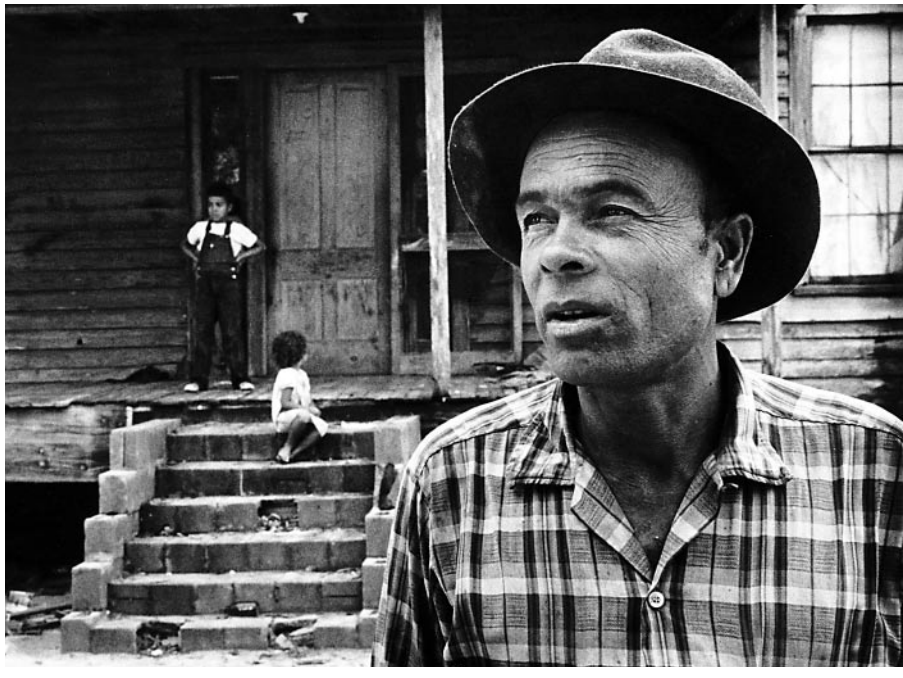

In the mid-1960s in North Carolina, there remained "tens of thousands whose family income [was] so low that daily subsistence [was] always in doubt." Left to right, top: Children playing in a public housing development in northwest Charlotte; a child in New Bern; middle: Haliwa (N.C. Indian) children in Halifax County; people protesting conditions at the McDougald Terrace housing development in east Durham; a child near downtown Durham; three children peering out of a house in Hamlet; bottom: a Lumbee (N.C. Indian) tenant farmer in Robeson County.

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Leadership and Politics in the War on Poverty: *The Case of the North Carolina Fund*

James L. Leloudis

In the summer of 1963, America stood at a crossroads. A decade of civil rights activism had challenged the nation to fulfill its promise of equality and opportunity. Not since the Civil War and Reconstruction had citizens so fundamentally questioned the political and social foundations of the republic. How the nation would answer was by no means clear. Alabama Governor George C. Wallace spoke for one possibility. In his inaugural address, he pledged, "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" Those words would eventually make him the point man for a resurgent politics of fear and resentment.

In North Carolina, Governor Terry Sanford laid out a dramatic alternative. On July 18, he announced the establishment of the North Carolina Fund, a unique nongovernmental organization designed to lift the burdens of racism and poverty:

> *In North Carolina there remain tens of thousands whose family income is so low that daily subsistence is always in doubt. There are tens of thousands who go to bed hungry . . . There are tens of thousands whose dreams will die . . . These are the children of poverty who tomorrow will become the parents of poverty. We hope to break this cycle of poverty. That is what the North Carolina Fund is all about.*

Those words were one of the first salvos in what would become a national war on poverty.[1]

Just as television images of attacks on civil rights demonstrators captured the public imagination during the 1960s, so did accounts of dilapidated

housing, malnourished children, and the hopelessness of the rural and urban poor. While campaigning for the Democratic nomination to the White House, John F. Kennedy witnessed firsthand the hardships of life in the coal towns and mountain hollows of West Virginia. Edward R. Murrow's landmark documentary, *Harvest of Shame*, brought national attention to the plight of migrant workers. John Kenneth Galbraith's *Affluent Society*, together with Michael Harrington's *Other America* and Dwight MacDonald's review of both books in *The New Yorker*, stirred the concerns of liberal policy makers and the general public. Meanwhile, dissident voices within the civil rights movement were beginning to drive home the point that, for more than a century, race had been a key component in the economic stagnation of the South.

Sanford and his advisers were among the first public servants to confront that connection between race and poverty and to realize its implications for the future of both the region and the nation. When Sanford took office in 1961, North Carolina's factory workers earned some of the lowest industrial wages in the nation; 37 percent of the state's residents had incomes below the federal poverty line; half of all students dropped out of school before obtaining a high school diploma; and of adults twenty-five years of age and older, a fourth had less than a sixth-grade education and were, for all practical purposes, illiterate.[2] Those conditions had long been a part of everyday life in the state. Public policies such as segregation, disfranchisement, antiunionism, and miserly expenditures on public education effectively maintained a racially divided and low-wage labor force. By the early 1960s, however, poverty was moving from the shadow of neglect to the forefront of public policy agendas. The civil rights movement, now at high tide, was challenging the nation to fulfill its promise of equality and opportunity. At the same time, technological innovation was revolutionizing the agricultural and manufacturing sectors of North Carolina's economy. Automation in the textile and tobacco industries and the mechanization of agriculture meant that employers' profits no longer depended so heavily on access to a large pool of unskilled labor. Displaced by these processes, thousands of men and women lacked steady employment, and many were migrating out of the state. North Carolina had a net outmigration of more than 250,000 people between 1940 and 1950. In the next decade, the number fell to 30,000, but that seemingly good news veiled a continuing loss by North Carolina and the rest of the South of 6–10 percent of young adults between the ages of twenty and thirty-five.[3]

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In this context of upheaval and dislocation, Sanford sought to "awaken" the state to the human and social costs of poverty and racial inequality.[4] The governor devoted his administration to diversifying the economy, improving public education, and reducing North Carolina's dependence on low-wage manufacturing. He and his supporters also signaled a willingness—indeed, an eagerness—to surrender segregation, as long as they could simultaneously control the pace and direction of change. For North Carolina progressives, poverty and racial discrimination became pressing concerns both because of the suffering they inflicted and because they threatened to block the path of the state's economic growth. Writing for a national audience in *Look* magazine, Sanford explained:

> *The President's Council of Economic Advisers estimates that racial bias deprives the U.S. of between $13 and $17 billion a year in increases in gross national product. In North Carolina, we know that we are 42nd on the list of states in per capita income because Negroes don't have adequate economic opportunities. If their income equaled that of white citizens, North Carolina would jump to 32nd, at least.*
>
> *The South badly needs new industry. But what manufacturers would expect to find a worthwhile market in an area where a large percentage of the population is on relief and likely to remain so? What space industry, which must compete mightily for physicists and engineers, would locate in a community ridden with hate and prejudice? The answer to these questions is already being given. In the last several years, new industry has with few exceptions gone most heavily into those Southern states making the most progress in civil rights.*

Poverty, Sanford was quick to add, also exacted a terrible human price. "We can measure the costs of lost productivity, of lost purchasing power, and of the relief rolls," he contended. "But how do we measure the cost of a crushed spirit or a dead dream or a long-forgotten hope? What is the incalculable cost to us as a people when the children of poverty become the parents of poverty and begin the cycle anew?" The challenge posed by these observations was obvious but daunting. "How," asked the governor and his aides, "can we in North Carolina reverse trends, motivate people, reorient attitudes, supply the education and public services and the jobs that will give all our people the chance to become productive, more self-reliant, and able to compete in the complex but dynamic, exciting but perilous world of today and tomorrow?"[5]

Changing times required innovative strategies for uplifting the state's economically disabled citizens. To that end, Sanford and a well-connected coalition of business and educational leaders chartered the North Carolina Fund as a private, nonprofit corporation. Its purpose was to "enable the poor to become productive, self-reliant citizens, and to foster institutional, political, economic, and social change designed to bring about a functioning, democratic society."

Sanford chaired the fund and recruited an interracial board of directors representing all geographic sectors of the state. Day-to-day operations were overseen by Executive Director George Esser, a law and government professor at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a member of the Institute of Government faculty. Assisting him was a small staff of social workers, ministers, journalists, and academics. For its time that staff was remarkably diverse. At its peak it included roughly seventy-five employees, at least half of whom were either women or blacks.[6]

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From 1963 to 1968, the fund drew the bulk of its financial support from the Ford Foundation ($7,000,000), which was actively investing in similar projects of social reform elsewhere in urban America and throughout the postcolonial Third World; two local philanthropies, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation ($1,625,000) and the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation ($875,000), both of which were tied to influential banking and tobacco interests and had records of generous contributions to health and welfare reform; and agencies of the federal government, including the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Departments of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Health, Education, and Welfare ($7,042,753). That five-year budget of $16.5 million roughly equaled the state of North Carolina's average annual expenditure for public welfare during the mid-1960s.[7]

As the only statewide antipoverty agency of its kind, the North Carolina Fund played a notable role in shaping the Great Society initiatives that became the hallmark of Lyndon Johnson's administration. Both Sanford and Esser helped draft the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which launched a national assault on poverty, and a number of North Carolina Fund initiatives served as models for the national effort. Beginning in 1965, for instance, the fund helped to launch the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program by training participants from all across the country. Since the fund's statewide assault on poverty began six to nine months before the national campaign, there was considerable interaction between Fund staff and White House aides, and over the next few years, they regularly passed programmatic ideas back and forth between fund headquarters in Durham and the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington.[8]

George Esser, right, director of the North Carolina Fund, and Governor Terry Sanford, fund originator, announce the nonprofit organization's first grants, in spring 1964. Both Esser and Sanford were once Institute of Government faculty members.

Sanford, however, helped pioneer the Great Society from a position of relative weakness. By 1963 he already had begun to run afoul of opponents who objected to his economic plans and moderate stance on civil rights. They would repudiate the governor in 1964 by delivering his hand-picked successor a bruising defeat in the Democratic primary. Sensitive to that impending backlash, Sanford conceived of the North Carolina Fund as a means of keeping his reform agenda alive. As a private corporation, the fund did its work with foundation and federal government grants rather than state appropriations, and for that reason it had a unique capacity to bypass hostile lawmakers.[9] Its purpose, explained Esser, was "to *create* the possible" by cultivating like-minded reformers on the local level and nurturing experimentation in antipoverty work.[10] In that way the fund foreshadowed the proliferation of nonprofit social service

providers, both in the United States and around the world, that today stand along with government and business as a vital third sector in the development of social and economic policy.[11]

The North Carolina Fund's first, and in some ways definitive, undertaking was its Volunteers program, which, during the summers of 1964 and 1965, brought a select group of college students face to face with the realities of poverty. The students—black and white, men and women—represented every college and university in the state. They gave a variety of reasons for signing on with the fund. Some spoke of a sense of Christian duty to help those who were less fortunate. Others—particularly the black students—described their own firsthand knowledge of poverty and discrimination. But the one theme that resounded in nearly all the students' writings was a conception of citizenship defined by the militarized culture of the Cold War and President Kennedy's call for patriotic self-sacrifice. "Because I am a concerned American," wrote Hugh Jones, a black student from the northeastern part of the state, "I think to be able to help others is more than an opportunity; it is a duty that is part of the democratic form of government which we have." For Jones and others, battling poverty became a way of advancing the cause of social progress, achieving justice at home, and strengthening the nation for the global confrontation with communism. Guided by those principles, the volunteers dubbed themselves "Citizen Soldier[s]" in a national "War on Poverty."[12]

The students traveled to their assigned communities filled with idealism and convinced of their capacity to work a transformation in the lives of the poor. Almost immediately, though, they encountered scenes so abject as to challenge comprehension. One young woman was stunned by the squalor and deprivation she witnessed in a "shack" not far from the campus of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "Only five of the children were home," she reported in her daily log. "We read to them and played with them. Those children do not know how to even look at a book . . . The place has a sickening smell—The children have sores and whelps from beatings all over them—They also have protruding stomachs."[13]

When faced with such suffering, most of the volunteers turned—at least initially—to explanations that were both familiar and comforting. Never quite blaming the poor for their plight, the volunteers did locate the causes of poverty within a cluster of social and psychological inadequacies. The poor, it seemed, "believed in nothing and [had] no faith in their own capacities." Such views provided both emotional distance from hardship and assurance that the volunteers could "fix" the people they encountered. "All we had to do was clean up this one generation," a former volunteer recalled many years later, "educate these people and lift them up, and it would be over with. We really believed that."[14]

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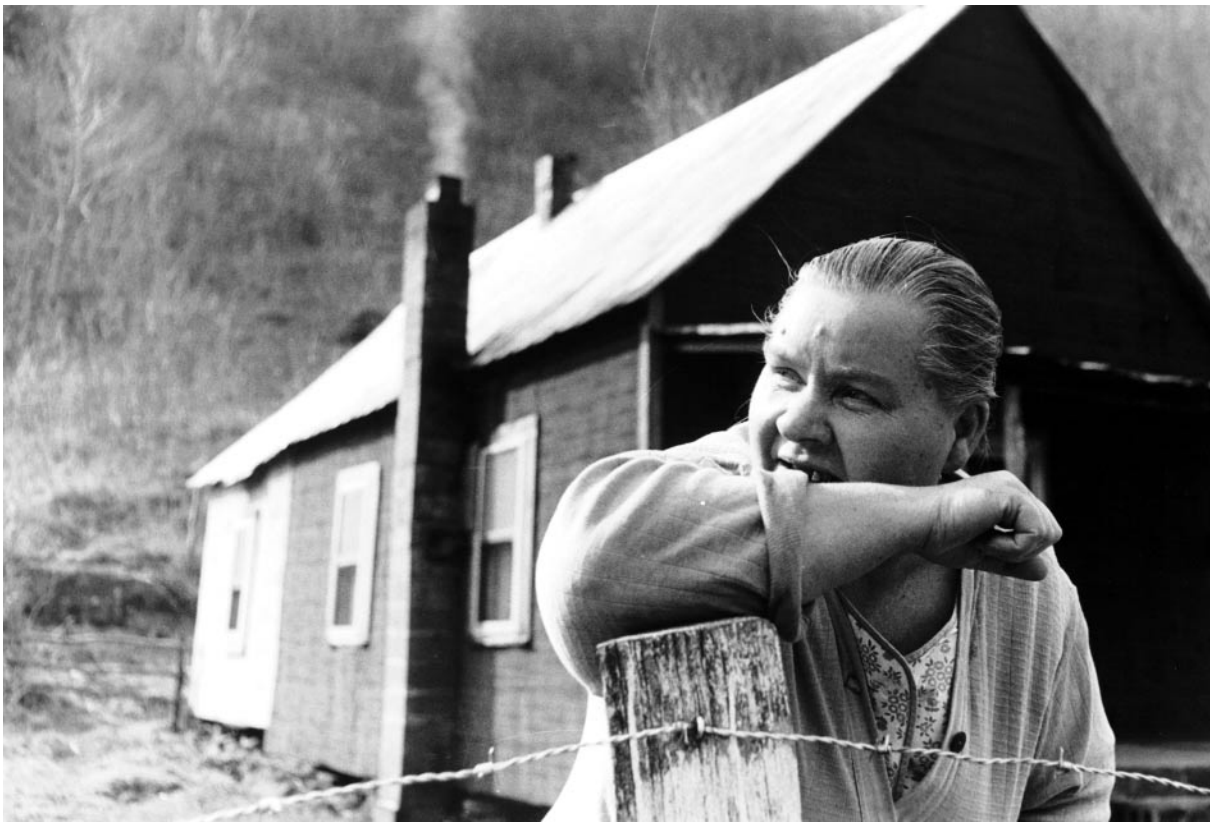
—Volunteer, North Carolina Fund

A significant minority of the volunteers never escaped this way of thinking. For most, however, face-to-face encounters made it increasingly difficult to typecast the people they had come to serve. In the course of ten weeks in the field, students wrestled with the tension between "previously-held opinions and recently-gained impressions." Through personal encounters the volunteers moved—often haltingly—toward thinking about themselves and the poor in ways that were both new and emancipating.[15]

The Volunteers program was especially effective in exposing the limitations of white students' self-satisfied racial liberalism. Most of the white volunteers emphasized in their application essays both their capacity to "work with any ethnic group" and their commitment to interracialism, but putting those principles into practice was often harder than many students had ever imagined. Their summer experiences forced them to confront the oppressive power of racism—both their own and that which permeated the society at large. For many volunteers the test came in the intimate act of sharing a meal with black teammates or with members of a black community. Such associations violated one of the South's most deep-seated taboos. A sophomore from a small church-run college strained against the grip of "'old southern customs'" on her first day in the field. "Tonight we ate supper in a Negro school," she wrote in her daily log. "I felt a little nauseated, mainly because I had never before eaten in a Negro school, and I was becoming sick." That reaction so disturbed this student that she resolved to make the examination of her racial phobias one of her chief projects. "By the end of the summer," she promised, "I should feel completely different."[16]

Since the volunteers lived and worked in integrated teams, race matters posed a constant challenge. White students found few escapes from the contradictions of their racial views. One young man was infuriated when he and his teammates were "served poorly, ordered around, talked about, [and] called names" in a segregated restaurant. "Personally, I think that someone ought to bomb the place," he confided in his daily log. A few weeks later, however, the same volunteer reacted with only slightly less anger when a white female co-worker became too friendly with young black men in the neighborhood to which they were assigned.[17]

Such inconsistencies frustrated black volunteers. In weekly group meetings,



Poverty reached high into the mountains of Watauga County in 1967.

Anne Henderson demanded to know why, whenever the team moved into new quarters, she was the last to get a roommate; she chastised white volunteers for describing the diet of poor families as "'typical Negro food'"; and she insisted that her teammates learn to pronounce "the word 'Negro'" and abandon the polite disrespect of "'Nigra.'"[18]

Such confrontations exposed the ugly residue of racism, but even so, habituated ways of thinking and behaving were not easily changed. A young woman who worked as a teacher's aide in an all-black elementary school, titled an entry in her log "My most embarrassing moment as a Volunteer (I forgot my children were Negro)":

> *Last week I went downtown and bought paint for puppets faces, and paint for a puppet stage, and yarn to use for puppets hair. My selections were good, I thought. This morning I went to the room and asked each child to get his puppet. Then I showed them how to put on the hair—paint the face and features. One of the children said, "Miss Smith, where is the brown paint?" You see I had purchased "flesh colored paint" and yellow hair, and black and brown hair—and the children wanted to make puppets like themselves. I almost died. I said very quickly, "Children since we are pushed for time we will not paint your puppets' skin today. We will just try to get their hair on." (I'm making a[nother] trip downtown before Monday.)*[19]

In a similar situation, a group of white volunteers who worked with a black preschool teacher were at a loss to understand the woman's coolness. "Mrs. Brown keeps herself very removed from us," one of them wrote; "she's the boss." The relationship became so strained that the volunteers mentioned the problem to the local school superintendent, who surprised them by suggesting that they had given offense in ways they never understood. "He thought the reason for our cool relationship . . . was due to the fact that we were white . . . [and] she wanted to show she was perfectly competent and didn't need our help." In such circumstances the volunteers had to confront the paternalism that too often characterized their own labors. They learned slowly—and sometimes painfully—the limitations of doing good. Effective reform could never be built from the relations of patron and client. It required instead that the volunteers engage their hosts as equals, acknowledging the fullness of their hosts' claims to citizenship and capacity for independent action.[20]

As the students began to translate that lesson into practice, they found themselves ensnared by the tangle of connections that tied racism and poverty to political power, class interests, and the privileges of whiteness. The volunteers experienced some of the stiffest resistance and indifference from where they expected it the least. Poor whites often were deeply suspicious of the fund and its activities. They had much to gain from the antipoverty program but, in their estimation, even more to lose from the prospect of racial leveling. In one white community after another, volunteers found themselves rejected as "communists," "freedom riders," and "civil rights demonstrators." Except in the mountains, where the black population was small and was therefore perceived as less threatening than elsewhere in the state, the North

Carolina Fund made no significant headway in poor white communities.[21]

That rejection of the fund was reinforced by political leaders, who often were equally loath to lower the walls of segregation or to surrender the prerogatives of class that racial discrimination helped sustain. Local officials invited the volunteers into their communities with the hope of securing additional funds for social services and for improvement of poor residents' job skills. They never meant for the program to disrupt established lines of authority, power, and privilege. Indeed, local leaders often worried about the potential of the fund's work to catalyze and give legitimacy to organizing initiatives within poor neighborhoods. A young man named Marc White belonged to a team of volunteers assigned to work with the parks and recreation department in a Piedmont town with a large black community. At first, White felt excited by the promise of the job. But the wariness of white civic leaders quickly became apparent when White and his teammates set out on their own to help parents build a playground in a poor black neighborhood where the city had refused to provide recreational services. Such independent action prompted a tongue-lashing from the mayor. "The mayor launched a politely-phrased tirade," White reported in his daily log. "To wit, we, the volunteers, must remember that we were employees of [the city], and under the city's thumb. We are here to serve as requested, not to change the requests. In short, we are here to be un-creative, and not to fight poverty, but to play the city's conservative ball game."[22]

When faced with such intransigence—and in some cases, even the threat of officially sanctioned violence—teams across the state adopted a common strategy: they hunkered down in black communities where they were welcomed and where they felt that they could make a meaningful contribution. As several volunteers explained, they took it on themselves to set "the pace for integration" and to model for others a vision of what "'could be.'" One team set up a mothers club for poor women so that "*they* [might] investigate for playgrounds." Another helped neighbors in a poor coastal community secure federal dollars for an after-school tutoring and recreational program that local officials refused to fund. In yet another community, a group of volunteers worked with poor parents to turn a summer playschool into a Head Start program. Such organizing efforts could go only so far in the course of ten weeks of summer work, but they reflected nonetheless a fundamental change in the students' understanding of citizenship—both their own and that of the poor. The volunteers had come to embrace activism no less than service as an essential element of democracy. Further, they had begun to argue that the poor had not only a responsibility to live as productive, self-reliant citizens but also a right to demand the preconditions of such citizenship: political standing, a living wage, decent housing, and quality schools.[23]

The volunteers' expanded sense of citizenship helped steer the North Carolina Fund in dramatically new directions. At the end of their summer of service, many of the students complained bitterly about the ephemeral nature of their work. What good was it to tutor a child or to provide organized recreation, they asked, if the programs would disappear as soon as the summer ended? Others went even further and openly mocked the idea that poverty might be eradicated by rehabilitating the poor rather than addressing issues of politics and economics. "Taught one 7-year-old boy to tie his shoes," a volunteer quipped in her log. "Very important for breaking the cycle of poverty: if we're to help them lift themselves by their shoe straps, it helps if their shoes stay on."[24]

Those challenges resonated with new voices rising up from within poor communities themselves. In many places where the volunteers worked, the summer program provided a public stage for indigenous leaders who had their own ideas about how best to fight poverty. For instance, the men and women who had worked with Marc White to build a playground moved next to organize a rent strike and picket city hall. They insisted that the streets in their neighborhood be paved, that garbage be collected more regularly, and that housing laws be enforced against white realtors and slumlords.[25] Such demands from below worked, in turn, to amplify incentives from above, as the Office of Economic Opportunity coupled federal dollars ever more tightly to the goal of ensuring the "maximum feasible participation" of poor people in the framing and implementation of anti-poverty initiatives.[26]

The North Carolina Fund began in late 1965 to direct its attention toward community organizing. It financed independent poor people's movements and began training former volunteers and the poor themselves as Community Action Technicians who would live and work full-time in the places they served.

By late 1965, North Carolina Fund officials were ready to shift course. They felt pinched by these pressures and frustrated by the intransigence that too often had greeted their initial efforts. When the summer program ended in August of that year, the fund disbanded its Volunteers project.

A number of factors contributed to the decision. First, fund staff had grown increasingly concerned about the safety of the volunteers, the majority of whom were white women, as the civil rights movement heated up and violence directed at interracial groups intensified.[27] Second, and more important, federal

August 1965: A second-year volunteer teaches Macon County children arithmetic.

underwriting for the Volunteers program had run out by 1965, and fund leaders had not been able to locate another source of support. To continue the program would have required the fund to draw more heavily on its own resources at precisely a time when many within the organization were raising questions about the efficacy of spending money on middle-class volunteerism as opposed to developing the capacities of the poor. "It seems to me that the North Carolina Volunteers have done what they intended to do," observed staff member Betty Ward. "That is, they have demonstrated that college students, with their refreshing idealism and enthusiasm, can show us a different way of looking at the poor." Now it was time for something more. Ward and other fund leaders had come to the same conclusion as many of the student volunteers: "the real issues . . . were issues of power, and . . . not a whole lot was going to change . . . without changing internal power."[28]

For that reason the North Carolina Fund began in late 1965 to direct its attention toward community organizing. It financed independent poor people's movements and began training former volunteers and the poor themselves as Community Action Technicians who would live and work full-time in the places they served. In eastern North Carolina, for instance, the fund underwrote the People's Program on Poverty, an organization of black sharecroppers, domestic workers, and small farmers, and in Durham, the fund helped finance United Organizations for Community Improvement, which coordinated rent strikes and took charge of local civil rights protests. The goal in these and other such partnerships was not simply to deliver services but to give the poor the institutional and financial footing from which to press their demands.[29]

Through this shift in tactics, the North Carolina Fund unleashed a wave of activism in poor communities across North Carolina. As the poor began to organize, picket, and protest, the fund's opponents became increasingly outspoken in their criticisms. One newspaper in the eastern part of the state insisted that the fund had steered the War on Poverty off its intended course. The editor saw "no reason why the anti-poverty program should be controlled by the poor any more than social security should be run by the elderly . . . or the draft run by draftees." "Congress," he continued, "never intended that the 'poor' should run the anti-poverty war" but only that their views "should be taken into account." Another newspaper accused the fund of waging "guerrilla warfare," and in Congress, Representative James Gardner charged that the agency had "redirected the War on Poverty . . . into creating a political machine." For Gardner and his constituents, the North Carolina Fund promised not so much economic development as social chaos and political upheaval.[30]

By 1968 the fund's future was in peril. The agency had expended its initial foundation grants, which had been awarded for a five-year period, and the national War on Poverty was under siege. When the fund's philanthropic backers offered to extend their support, its leaders declined. In part, they held to a vision of the fund as a temporary and experimental agency. The founders had no desire to see their work routinized. To allow such a development, they insisted, would be to sacrifice innovation to the very forms of inertia that had for so long crippled

the nation's response to its most needy citizens.

Even more crucial were considerations of the changing political climate. In North Carolina, as in the country at large, the political alignments that had made the War on Poverty possible were beginning to dissolve. Liberal Democrats were in retreat by 1968, scrambling to ward off a white backlash against civil rights and to answer charges that they were somehow responsible for the violence and disorder that engulfed many communities across the state and the nation in that year. During the spring primaries, a significant minority of North Carolina's white voters rallied behind the presidential candidacy of George Wallace, and in the November elections, Richard M. Nixon became the first Republican to carry the state since Herbert Hoover in 1928. Like liberals elsewhere in the nation, the fund's architects saw few options but to settle for what seemed politically viable. They disbanded the fund and dug in to defend hard-won enhancements of federal transfer payments: Aid for Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, jobs programs, Supplemental Security Income, and Medicaid. Even though these programs did little to address the causes of poverty, they at least strengthened the safety net for the most vulnerable Americans.[31]

Fund officials did take steps to see that a number of initiatives would be continued. Esser and his staff helped create three new nonprofit organizations with specific goals: the Foundation for Community Development, which carried forward the work of grassroots organizing among the poor; the Manpower Development Corporation, which focused on job training and rural economic development; and the Low-Income Housing Development Corporation, which promoted the construction of affordable housing. Many people on the fund staff went to work for one of these organizations, and both the Ford Foundation and the Office of Economic Opportunity continued to provide some funding for them. But with the fund's demise, the antipoverty effort in North Carolina lost its place at center stage in the state's politics. Indeed, of these three spin-off organizations, only the Manpower Development Corporation survived over the long term.[32]

Social change . . . requires not only good intentions but also a willingness to confront and transform existing social and economic relations.

The North Carolina Fund, like the War on Poverty, fell victim to racial divisiveness and Americans' continued refusal to come to terms with issues of class in a purportedly "classless" society.[33] But although its programs have been long forgotten by most North Carolinians, their legacies survive in the communities they touched and in the lives of the former volunteers. Miriam Dorsey, a Raleigh native and a fund veteran, has built a career around political activism. At the end of her summer of service, she thought briefly about joining the Peace Corps but ventured instead to Washington. She secured a staff position with North Carolina Representative Richardson Preyer and, enticed by a study of wage discrimination in Congress, found her way onto the Capitol Hill Woman's Political Caucus during the early 1970s.[34] Dorsey eventually chaired the group and was thoroughly caught up in the women's movement that was taking shape around the country. Her interests brought her back to North Carolina in 1977 to join the administration of Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. She served the governor as executive director of the North Carolina Council on the Status of Women and as his senior policy development analyst and women's policy adviser. In the latter capacity, Dorsey authored landmark legislation on domestic violence in 1979 and spearheaded the unsuccessful campaign to have North Carolina's General Assembly ratify the Equal Rights Amendment during the early 1980s. Today she credits her work as a volunteer for giving her life a guiding purpose. "Everything I have done since that summer . . . has been trying to broaden civil rights for different groups of people," she explains. "Whether it's race or sex or class, civil rights is the basic thing I have been working for all these years."[35]

Emily Coble, who served with Dorsey during the summer of 1964, has led a quieter but no less committed life. After leaving the fund, she signed on for two tours with the Peace Corps and then returned to North Carolina to begin work as an elementary school teacher. Today she runs a bilingual classroom for Spanish-speaking children of migrant farm workers. Just as thirty years ago she delighted in working with the impoverished children in a fund-supported playschool, now she feels a commitment to helping new immigrants make their way in an oftentimes hostile and unwelcoming world. A self-described "stranger in a strange land," Coble relies on memories of her volunteer summer to supply her with the ability "to be tolerant, to appreciate, to respect, and to care."[36]

In 1996, Coble and other veterans of the North Carolina Fund gathered for a reunion and a conference with a new generation of community volunteers. Together with more than two hundred high school and college students, policy makers, and representatives of charitable foundations, they discussed and debated the experiences of the past, the lessons of history, and the challenges of contemporary times. Even in the 1960s, when the economy was growing and national leaders stood committed to equal opportunity, local communities as much as the federal government were key battlegrounds for change. Today, in an age of welfare reform and devolution, that

is as true as ever. The story of the North Carolina Fund and its student volunteers therefore has much to teach North Carolinians, and Americans generally.[37]

First, the story is a reminder of the importance of activist citizenship in a diverse democracy. The young people who attended the Volunteers program reunion were intensely concerned about the continuing issues of racial justice and economic equality. Nevertheless, they work in an environment that is constrained in powerful and sometimes contradictory ways by the legacies of the past. Lacking either direct experience or deep appreciation for the critical role of community organizing and political mobilization, many of today's young community volunteers see only two viable means of effecting change: as providers of direct service to poor communities or as power brokers in the public policy arena.

That is, in part, no accident. Today's community service movement often reflects lessons learned during the 1960s about the political messiness and unpredictability of volunteerism. Much of the literature on service learning, for instance, focuses more on the moral development of volunteers than on the role of service in contesting political power. Similarly, the enabling legislation for AmeriCorps, the national service program established in 1993, draws a sharp distinction between service and activism. For instance, AmeriCorps volunteers can work to winterize the homes of the poor, but they would violate the terms of their contract by joining with "labor unions" or other "partisan political organizations" to demand the enforcement of housing codes. One way to break this impasse is to explore the work of the fund volunteers and to recover historical memories of their experiences. Social change, they remind the current generation of policy makers, requires not only good intentions but also a willingness to confront and transform existing social and economic relations.[38]

The recovery of historical memory is not just the work of scholars; it is, perhaps more importantly, the work of ordinary citizens as well. Volunteer programs—ranging from Habitat for Humanity to Teach for America and campus service-learning curricula—have proliferated over the last decade. What is striking, however, is how little these undertakings are informed by a knowledge of their predecessors. To fill that void, the country needs a concerted research effort to explore the history of volunteerism in contemporary America and its effects on individuals, communities, and the larger polity. It also needs volunteer and service-learning programs that actively promote an intergenerational dialogue. Only in these ways can America begin to prepare citizen-volunteers who are neither ignorant of the past nor bound by it.[39]

Finally, the story of the North Carolina Fund volunteers underscores the role of interracial, cross-class alliances in nurturing an inclusive, democratic society. The fund was surely right in turning its attention after 1965 to the development of indigenous leadership within poor communities, but if the agency made a mistake, it was in seeing that goal as inconsistent with a sustained and robust program of student volunteerism. With the shutdown of the Volunteers program, the fund lost much of its ability to build broad-based support for its work; student activists—both black and white—had fewer opportunities to establish relationships across the racial

Top: Under a nonprofit organization created by the North Carolina Fund (the Manpower Development Corporation), tobacco and peanut harvesters displaced by machines learned new skills, such as woodworking. Bottom: As part of an emphasis on promoting self-sufficiency, a fund volunteer teaches a Salisbury mother how to make clothes for her children on a sewing machine.

divide; and the poor found it increasingly difficult to secure the allies they required to pursue their rights and needs.[40] As William Julius Wilson and others have argued, these are precisely the kinds of coalition-building and boundary-crossing activities that are needed to combat "the rising inequality in American society." "The true task before us," Wilson maintains, is for "the American people, and especially the leaders of the poor, the working classes, the displaced and the marginalized, the downsized and the deskilled, to set aside differences and work together" on a common agenda.[41]

Today the United States faces problems similar to those confronted by Sanford and his colleagues forty years ago: rapid technological change, growing income inequality, smoldering racial hostilities, and a workforce increasingly ill equipped to meet the challenges of a global economy. In remarks to the North Carolina Fund conference in 1996, Sanford lamented his generation's inability to address these issues adequately. They had not lost the War on Poverty, he insisted; "they [had] abandoned the battlefield." He was excited to see young activists committed to the ideals of the North Carolina Fund, and he urged them to be "more persistent" in fighting poverty and racial injustice. For all its limitations, Sanford counseled this new generation of citizen soldiers, the fund still offered a model of what "could be."[42]

Notes

Portions of this essay were previously published as Robert R. Korstad & James L. Leloudis, *Citizen Soldiers: The North Carolina Volunteers and the War on Poverty*, 62 LAW AND CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS 177 (1999).

1. Terry Sanford, *Poverty's Challenge to the States*, in ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS 77, 81–82 (R. O. Everett ed., Dobbs, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1966).

2. Memo from Billy Barnes, Director of Public Information, to George Esser, Executive Director, North Carolina Fund (n.d.), Series 8.2, North Carolina Fund Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill (hereafter NCF Papers). The only overview of the North Carolina Fund and its work appears in EMILY HERRING WILSON, FOR THE PEOPLE OF NORTH CAROLINA: THE Z. SMITH REYNOLDS FOUNDATION AT HALF-CENTURY, 1936–1986, at 65 (Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press, 1986). Useful descriptions of the fund's early years are Sanford, *Poverty's Challenge*, and George H. Esser, Jr., *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation in the War on Poverty*, in ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS 77, 90 (R. O. Everett ed., Dobbs, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1966).

3. For background on the political economy of North Carolina, *see* PETE DANIEL, STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS: SOUTHERN LIFE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); GAVIN WRIGHT, OLD SOUTH, NEW SOUTH: REVOLUTIONS IN THE SOUTHERN ECONOMY SINCE THE CIVIL WAR (New York: Basic Books, 1986); PAUL LUEBKE, TAR HEEL POLITICS: MYTHS AND REALITIES (Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press, 1990); and PHILLIP WOOD, SOUTHERN CAPITALISM: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NORTH CAROLINA, 1880–1980 (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1986). On out-migration, *see* C. HORACE HAMILTON, NET MIGRATION TO AND FROM NORTH CAROLINA AND NORTH CAROLINA COUNTIES FROM 1940 TO 1950 (Raleigh: Agricultural Experiment Station, North Carolina State College, 1953); C. HORACE HAMILTON, THE NEW SOUTH: ITS CHANGING POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS 8, 75, 76 (Chapel Hill: Carolina Population Center, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill, Sept. 1970); and Esser, *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation*, at 95.

4. This "awakening" is, in and of itself, fascinating. It suggests, in part, the effects of the cultural and political amnesia created by the 1950s. Southern liberals of the 1930s and 1940s often possessed incisive understandings of poverty and offered sophisticated prescriptions for change. Nevertheless, the students and the liberals of the 1960s had to "discover poverty" all over again, and they did so within a Cold War and culture-of-poverty framework that was much less useful than the class framework of earlier generations. *See* JOHN EGERTON, SPEAK NOW AGAINST THE DAY: THE GENERATION BEFORE THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH (Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press, 1994); MICHAEL B. KATZ, IN THE SHADOW OF THE POORHOUSE: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF WELFARE IN AMERICA (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

5. Terry Sanford, *The Case for the New South*, LOOK, Dec. 15, 1964, pp. 81, 83–84; Sanford, *Poverty's Challenge*, at 78; Esser, *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation*, at 96. Excellent discussions of the relationship between white business leaders and the civil rights movement can be found in ELIZABETH JACOWAY & DAVID R. COLBURN EDS., SOUTHERN BUSINESSMEN AND DESEGREGATION (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1982).

6. Three Years of Change: Narrative History of the North Carolina Fund, p. A-3, Series 1.1.1, NCF Papers; Sanford, *Poverty's Challenge*; Esser, *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation*; WILSON, FOR THE PEOPLE OF NORTH CAROLINA. For more information on the fund's board members and their backgrounds, *see* TERRY SANFORD, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE? 128 (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

7. For a detailed breakdown of contributions to the fund, *see* Emily Berry, "One Building Block in the Battle": The North Carolina Fund and the Legacy of Leadership 5 (unpublished honors thesis, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill, 1996), and Records of the North Carolina Fund Inventory 19–20, Southern Historical Collection, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill. For North Carolina expenditures on public welfare, *see* THE BUDGET, 1965–67, vol. 1, at 218 (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Co., n.d.); THE BUDGET, 1967–69, vol. 1, at 174 (n.p.: n.p., n.d.); and THE BUDGET, 1969–71, vol. 1, at 194 (n.p.: n.p., n.d.). The role of the Ford Foundation in urban antipoverty efforts is most recently discussed in Alice O'Connor, *Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight against Poverty: The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program*, 22 JOURNAL OF URBAN HISTORY 586 (July 1996).

8. Three Years of Change, at A-1; Sanford, *Poverty's Challenge*, at 82; Esser, *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation*, at 108. The relationship between the fund and the Office of Economic Opportunity is documented in the extensive correspondence files in Series 1 of the NCF Papers.

9. LUEBKE, TAR HEEL POLITICS, at 158–59. A close account of the 1964 Democratic primary can be found in JAMES R. SPENCE, THE MAKING OF A GOVERNOR: THE MOORE-PREYER-LAKE PRIMARIES OF 1964 (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 1968). The only biography of Sanford is HOWARD E. COVINGTON, JR., & MARION ELLIS, TERRY SANFORD: POLITICS, PROGRESS, AND OUTRAGEOUS AMBITIONS (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1999). On the creation of the fund and the political logic of its establishment as a private, nonprofit corporation, *see* Three Years of Change, at A-4, and SANFORD, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE?, at 125–29.

10. Esser, *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation*, at 92.

11. *See* PETER F. DRUCKER, MANAGING THE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION (New York: Harper Business, 1992).

12. Hugh Jones (pseud.), Application Essay, Series 2.1.3, NCF Papers. "Citizen Soldiers" is from Interview with Johnette Ingold Fields (Oct. 18, 1995), Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill (hereafter SOHP). The records of the North Carolina Fund are open to researchers with one important restriction. To protect the privacy of the volunteers, the Southern Historical Collection has requested that individual names not be published in reference to application essays and daily logs.

13. Daily Log (Aug. 4, 1965), Series 2.1.3, NCF Papers.

14. Application Essay, Series 2.1.3, NCF Papers; Interview with Johnette Ingold Fields.

15. Daily Log (June 14–17, 1964), Series 2.1.1., NCF Papers.

16. Application Essays, Series 2.1.3., and Daily Log (June 22, 1964), Series 2.1.1., NCF Papers.

17. Daily Log (June 25 and Aug. 6, 1964), Series 2.1.2, NCF Papers.

18. Anne Henderson (pseud.), Daily Log (July 1 and 14, 1964), Series 2.1.2, NCF Papers.

19. Daily Log (July 30, 1965), Series 2.1.3, NCF Papers.

20. Daily Log (July 24 and Aug. 26, 1964), Series 2.1.1., NCF Papers.

21. Daily Log (Aug. 16, 1965), Series 2.1.3, NCF Papers.

22. Marc White (pseud.), Daily Log (June 6 and 28, 1964), Series 2.1.2, NCF Papers.

23. Adisa Douglas, North Carolina Volunteers' Survey (unpublished survey conducted by author and on file with author, n.d.); Daily Log (June 30, 1964), Series 2.1.2, and Daily Log (July 26 and Aug. 14, 1965), Series 2.1.3, NCF Papers.

24. Daily Log (July 1, 1964), Series 2.1.1, NCF Papers. Another volunteer complained openly of superiors and local officials who "appeared to be self-satisfied with the mere fact of the Fund." *See* Daily Log (Aug. 19, 1964), Series 2.1.1, NCF Papers.

25. Chris Gioia, "How to Get Out of Hell by Raising It": Race and Politics in Durham's War on Poverty" 32–54 (unpublished honors thesis, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill, 1996); OSHA GRAY DAVIDSON, THE BEST OF ENEMIES: RACE AND REDEMPTION IN THE NEW SOUTH 153–85 (New York: Scribner, 1996).

26. The term "maximum feasible participation" was inserted into the language of the Economic Opportunity Act by White House aides who wanted to make sure that poor people themselves, not just politicians and social welfare professionals, were involved in the design and implementation of antipoverty programs. For a critical view of this effort, *see* DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN, MAXIMUM FEASIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING (New York: Free Press, 1970).

27. *See* Interview by Emily Berry with George Esser (Oct. 17, 1995), cited in Erika LeMay, Battlefield in the Backyard: A Local Study of the War on Poverty 23 (unpublished M.A. thesis, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill, 1997).

28. Betty Ward, untitled manuscript (Jan. 3, 1966), Series 2.1.4, NCF Papers; Interview by Emily Berry with Diane Sasson, former volunteer (Oct. 28, 1995), SOHP. *See also* Esser, *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation*, at 102.

29. LeMay, Battlefield in the Backyard; Gioia, "How to Get Out of Hell by Raising It"; Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, The Daily Struggle: Poverty, Power, and Working-Class Life in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, 1929–1969 (Ph.D. dissertation in progress, Duke Univ.).

30. *PPOP Owes CADA an Apology*, HERTFORD COUNTY HERALD (N.C.), Feb. 20, 1967; *The Local Poor Have Their Say*, NORTHAMPTON NEWS (N.C.), Aug. 4, 1966; Memorandum from Representative James Gardner to George Esser (Nov. 21, 1967), Series 8.2, NCF Papers. For more on these matters, *see* LeMay, Battlefield in the Backyard; Gioia, "How to Get Out of Hell by Raising It"; and Hazirjian, The Daily Struggle. On the history of race and class in the definition of American citizenship, *see* Rogers Smith, *American Conceptions of Citizenship and National Service* 237, in NEW COMMUNITARIAN THINKING: PERSONS, VIRTUES, INSTITUTIONS, AND COMMUNITIES (Amitai Etzioni ed., Charlottesville: University of Va. Press, 1995).

31. On the guiding vision of the North Carolina Fund as a temporary, experimental agency, *see* Esser, *The Role of a State-Wide Foundation*; Memorandum from George Esser (n.d.), Series 1.2.6, NCF Papers; and Three Years of Change, at A-4. For a general account of the waning of the War on Poverty and 1960s-era reform, *see* ALLEN J. MATUSOW, THE UNRAVELING OF AMERICA: A HISTORY OF LIBERALISM IN THE 1960S (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

32. On the phase-out of the North Carolina Fund, *see* Memorandum from George Esser (n.d.), Series 1.2.6, and Transcription of Tapes of Interview of George Esser by Patricia Maloney Alt on January 2, 1970, Series 5.3, NCF Papers. For information on the continuing work of the Manpower Development Corporation, *see* its website, www.mdcinc.org.

33. *See* JILL QUADAGNO, THE COLOR OF WELFARE: HOW RACISM UNDERMINED THE WAR ON POVERTY (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994).

34. Richardson Preyer was the protégé of Terry Sanford who was defeated in the 1964 Democratic gubernatorial primary. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1968.

35. Interview by Emily Berry with Miriam Dorsey, former volunteer (Mar. 1, 1996) (on file with the author).

36. From the text of a speech by Emily Coble, Presentation on Cultural Diversity (Nov. 16, 1995), cited in Berry, "One Building Block in the Battle," at 113.

37. For coverage of the reunion and conference, *see* Ben Stocking, *Groundbreaking North Carolina Fund Provides Inspiration*, NEWS & OBSERVER (Raleigh, N.C.), Dec. 14, 1996, p. A3.

38. In reflecting on the fund's work, Sanford emphasized the importance of contesting political and economic power. "The [fund's] first impact," he wrote, "was to upset the existing power structures within communities so that changes in the status-quo could occur. In most cases, this amounted to radical changes in community relations and activities—but this we did knowingly, realizing that positive results would occur when existing structures are challenged by the new." *See* Sanford, *Poverty's Challenge*, at 82. For a general discussion of community service in the 1990s, *see* ROBERT COLES, THE CALL OF SERVICE (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993). For the prohibition on political activism in the AmeriCorps program, *see* National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, Pub. L. No. 103-82, tit. 1, § 132, (1993). For more on AmeriCorps policies and practices, *see also* COMMISSION ON NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE, WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY (Washington, D.C.: the Comm'n, 1993); CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL SERVICE, EXPANDING BOUNDARIES: SERVING AND LEARNING (New York: the Corp., 1996); Jill Zuckman, *Pared Funding Speeds Passage of National Service*, 51 CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY WEEKLY REPORT 2160 (Aug. 7, 1993); Harris Wofford & John P. Walters, *Should the Federal Government Try to Stimulate Volunteerism through Its National Service Program?* 6 CQ RESEARCHER 1097 (Dec. 13, 1996); and Jim Zook, *National-Service Program Hurt by Politicking over Its Future*, CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, June 16, 1995, p. A29.

39. There also is much to learn from other volunteer programs created in the 1960s, especially the Peace Corps, VISTA, and the Appalachian Volunteers (AV). Recent studies of all three programs emphasize the strong relationship between voluntarism and citizenship and the role of volunteers both in the United States and overseas in stretching the capacity of American society to accommodate the views of the poor. Two recent studies of the Peace Corps are FRITZ FISCHER, MAKING THEM LIKE US: PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN THE 1960S (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Inst. Press, 1998), and ELIZABETH COBBS HOFFMAN, ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE: THE PEACE CORPS AND THE SPIRIT OF THE 1960S (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998). The story of VISTA and AV volunteers in Kentucky and West Virginia is detailed in Marie Tyler McGraw, *Staying On: Poverty Warriors in West Virginia*, 8 JOURNAL OF AMERICAN CULTURE 93 (Winter 1985), and Thomas J. Kiffmeyer, *From Self-Help to Sedition: The Appalachian Volunteers in Eastern Kentucky, 1964–1970*, 64 JOURNAL OF SOUTHERN HISTORY 65 (Feb. 1998).

40. A prescient analysis of the need for middle-class volunteers in the fight against poverty is found in GUION GRIFFIS JOHNSON, VOLUNTEERS IN COMMUNITY SERVICE (Durham: North Carolina Council of Women's Organizations, 1967). The North Carolina Fund sponsored Johnson's study but seems largely to have ignored her recommendations for a continuation of volunteer programs.

41. WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON, THE BRIDGE OVER THE RACIAL DIVIDE: RISING INEQUALITY AND COALITION POLITICS 1, 128 (Berkeley: University of Cal. Press, 1999). For the value of community service in addressing the fragmentation of American life, *see also* STEVE WALDMAN, THE BILL: HOW THE ADVENTURES OF CLINTON'S NATIONAL SERVICE BILL REVEAL WHAT IS CORRUPT, COMIC, CYNICAL, AND NOBLE ABOUT WASHINGTON (New York: Viking Books, 1995).

42. Tim Caldwell, Can the Mountaineer Lead the Nation? The Origins of Community Action and the War on Poverty in North Carolina 53 (unpublished honors thesis, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill, 1995); Stocking, *Groundbreaking North Carolina Fund*.