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Shaping Service Initiatives through Neoliberal Economics and Governance: An Analysis of Policy Makers' Rhetoric

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Abstract

National service legislation in the early 1990s allowed for the institutionalization of civic engagement programs in U.S. higher education. While these programs are often celebrated for promoting civic and democratic engagement among college students, the broader political, social, and economic context for why the legislation progressed is often ignored. Utilizing historical discourse analysis with national service proposals and associated congressional documents from 1989 to 1993, we examine policy makers' rhetoric to 1) highlight their rationales for national service and 2) illustrate who and what they posit that national service is for. Through this investigation, we argue that political leaders used service and the amelioration of social problems as a way of instituting neoliberal logics, both in terms of economics (e.g., defunding social programs, thereby shifting civic and social responsibility to individuals and communities) and governance (e.g., through social control). We further contend that the mechanism of civic engagement has been one way that higher education has motivated youth to perform ideas and behaviors that align with the state, thereby further enabling neoliberalism's advancement.

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National service legislation in the early 1990s allowed for the institutionalization of civic engagement programs in U.S. higher education. These programs are celebrated for promoting the civic and democratic engagement of college students, but the broader political, social, and economic context for the legislation's enactment is often ignored. Utilizing historical discourse analysis with national service proposals and associated congressional documents from 1989 to 1993, we examine policy makers' rhetoric to 1) highlight their rationales for national service, and 2) illustrate who and what they posit that national service is for. Through this investigation, we argue that political leaders have used service and the amelioration of social problems as a way of instituting neoliberal logic, both in terms of economics (e.g., defunding social programs, thereby shifting civic and social responsibility to individuals and communities) and governmentality (e.g., through social formation and control). We further contend that the mechanism of civic engagement has been one way that higher education has motivated youth to perform ideas and behaviors that align with national interests, thereby further enabling neoliberalism's advancement.

Keywords: Higher education, civic engagement, neoliberalism, governmentality, historical discourse analysis

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, numerous colleges and universities, as well as other organizations, put out statements condemning racial injustice and police brutality, acknowledging centuries-old racial trauma, anger, and devastation, and calling people into a space of deeper understanding, compassion, and civility. In the excerpt below, Jane Turk, Director of Member Engagement at Iowa and Minnesota Campus Compact, who formerly taught at Hamline University, offered the following:

> I saw a picture a few days ago of protesters on the Hiawatha Bridge in Minneapolis meeting National Guard members called in after several nights of blazing pain in the Twin Cities. I can imagine my former students on either side of the image: a dedicated activist serving their community by marching to help bend the long arc of history toward justice and a dedicated National Guard member serving their state by holding the line after two nights of mounting devastation. I felt a mixture of heartbreak and concern. I know what brought them to this place. I wonder what they might have said to each other during a table conversation in a class they took together or as they crossed paths with each other walking on campus. I wonder if any of it made a difference, and I wonder how anything else could. (Everett et al., 2020, para 19)

This excerpt hints at part of the work that higher education institutions do; they train students to serve, to be civically engaged. This is not new. Contemporary rhetoric links civic engagement to universities' founding missions in the 1800s (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010). More recently, however, federal proposals for national service legislation, which gained momentum in the 1980s and passed with the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (Warner, 1995), ushered in a new era focusing on education for citizenship. The legislation called for all citizens, especially young people, to "renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States" (National & Community Service Act of 1990, §12501). Three years later, Congress passed the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, the federal legislation that funded many service-learning[1] initiatives in higher education as well as offered education stipends to those who completed national service programs (Battistoni, 2013).

What is particularly interesting about service in the context of the opening quote is that the two groups on the Hiawatha Bridge, both described as "serving," have vastly different values and objectives for service; one side bolsters the state's control of the population, while the other side calls attention to the injustices that arise from the state's governance. Further, the second group resists state control by demanding a stop to the mechanisms that have enabled the state to impact People of Color disproportionately and harmfully, as well as those considered marginal or deviant in body, mind, values, or behaviors. As Turk implied, people from both groups may have been on campuses with service-learning programs, but the discourse policy makers used to frame national service legislation and in turn, education-based service initiatives, did not include the second group's type of activism as "service." These conflicting notions of "service" and civic engagement, which are intricately linked to practices in higher education, mirror competing purposes of education: Is education meant to fulfill economic, civic, and patriotic functions for the nation, or is it to provide opportunities for all people to learn, question, and participate (or not) in society however they choose (Zion & Blanchett, 2017)?

In this study, we investigate how the economic and civic goals of the nation are intertwined with higher education. Examining the political discourse that shaped national service legislation, we highlight leaders' rationales for supporting the legislation and interrogate the rhetoric that specifies who and what national service is for. Through this inquiry, we argue that political leaders have used service and the amelioration of social problems as a way of instituting neoliberal logics, both in terms of economics (e.g., defunding social programs, thereby shifting civic and social responsibility to individuals and communities) and governmentality (e.g., through social formation and control). We further contend that the mechanism of civic engagement has been one way that higher education has motivated youth to perform ideas and behaviors that align with neoliberalism's—and the nation's—advancement.

The Economy, Higher Education, and National (Community) Service

The economy offers an important context for how service-learning gained traction. Responding to the "stagflation" (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 9) of the 1970s (slow economic growth and rising prices), President Reagan believed that economic problems were a result of "big government" and a lack of market competition (p. 21). As such, Reagan forwarded policies that

[1] Various terms are used within the field of higher education to depict engagement efforts by postsecondary institutions, including civic engagement, community service, and service-learning (Saltmarsh et al., 2009; Welch, 2016). While scholars have distinguished these terms from one another in regards to what community efforts each entail and how connected they are to academic content, in this paper, we use the terms interchangeably.

1) deregulated businesses, 2) liberalized trade and industry, and 3) privatized public goods (Steger & Roy). Subsequent administrations continued with this economic logic, also known as neoliberalism. As a result of these practices and the idea that government spending on social programs should be curtailed, economic inequality grew during the 1970s and 1980s, with people in poverty and People of Color experiencing the brunt of disparities (Danziger, 1988; Danziger & Haveman, 1981).

During this time, public funding was significantly reduced in higher education compared to previous decades (Bok, 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Thelin, 2011). In response, colleges and universities raised tuition costs, which subsequently led to a decline in student enrollment (Thelin, 2011). Concurrently, public opinion polls signified a lack of confidence in liberal arts programs as questions arose about how they prepared students for the workforce (Perkin, 1991; Thelin, 2011). With public uncertainty in higher education's economic return, colleges and universities began to replace traditional liberal arts programs with preprofessional programs in an effort to position higher education "as an engine for national economic growth and individual gain" (Orphan & O'Meara, 2016, p. 217).

Even though raised tuition costs and focus on preprofessional degrees alleviated some of the shortfalls from decreased governmental funding, postsecondary administrators looked for additional cash streams. Congress passed the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, for example, which formally recognized corporate-university partnerships as a tool for revenue and made it easier for universities to patent research findings generated by federal funds (Bok, 2003). Orphan and O'Meara (2016) asserted that higher education's support of the Bayh-Dole Act positioned higher education to assume a capitalist role with the sole purpose of improving the economy.

Higher education, however, did not operate solely on an economic rationale. Institutions were able to maintain pieces of their civic purpose as well. One response to young people being socialized into "materialist and career-minded college students" (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016, p. 35) was to "renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States" (National & Community Service Act of 1990, §12501) by educating for citizenship and democracy. Some faculty had already been using service-learning, a pedagogy of engaging in communities that developed in the 1960s and early 1970s to foster university-community partnerships that addressed war, racial tension, voting, and civil rights (Ramsay, 2017; Sigmon, 2017; Stanton et al., 1999). To fulfill higher education's dual aims of civic obligation and workforce preparation, faculty and administrators simply needed to re-position service as a way to advance learning outcomes and workforce goals (Hollander & Saltmarsh, 2000; Inman, 2004; Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999). The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 offered funding for higher education to institutionalize this dual vision. Through the creation of the Corporation for National and Community Service, over $100 million in federal funds was awarded to approximately 100 colleges and universities between 1995 and 1997 (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016). Campuses subsequently "pumped resources into their service-learning infrastructure" (Battistoni, 2013, p. xiv) to establish community service offices that offered faculty development and created partnerships with community organizations (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016). Additional funding from private foundations bolstered these efforts (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). The trifecta of campus, federal, and private funds laid the groundwork for the institutionalization of postsecondary civic engagement (Battistoni, 2013). The economic context that fomented civic engagement practices is now understood by scholars as neoliberalism (Orphan & O'Meara, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Neoliberalism can be seen as a confluence of economic practices and modes of governance, both of which shape subjectivity. On the economic side, as institutions, including postsecondary education, have become increasingly privatized and commercialized, people have been hailed into being consumers who engage in activities (e.g., attending college) for individual benefit and financial gain (Giroux, 2014; Orphan & O'Meara, 2016; Raddon & Harrison, 2015). Additionally, as government actors have bemoaned the cost of social programs, people have been encouraged to help the state save money by taking responsibility for themselves and their loved ones (Duggan, 2003). Despite masking inequalities about who has adequate resources for this increased responsibility, the state has drastically cut social programs.

Connected to the economic rationale within neoliberalism is a governance ideology. Neoliberal governance is a form of social control rooted in Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality: an ensemble of institutions, calculations, and tactics used to manage populations via consented social control (e.g., schools, hospitals). Rather than instituting social control through repression or violence, the state and its close affiliates (e.g., elite players within corporations, universities, and foundations) determine and institute the everyday processes through which bodies, habits, attitudes, values, and behaviors are formed (Brown, 2003; Mirowski, 2013). Even though neoliberalism is far from monolithic, Deflem (2008) notes that the techniques of social control—especially "continuous supervision, examination, and normalization of behavior"—are "[o]riented at the production of docile bodies" and are intended to be "useful economically, politically, and socially" (p. 3). Simply put, neoliberal governmentality works to shape and control bodies, attitudes, and behaviors into ones that are useful for the nation.

Feher (2009) provides more specificity to neoliberal subjectivity by explaining how the development of human capital is central to this formation. He points out that under liberalism, people thought of themselves as divided; the labor power they sold to a boss as a commodity was separate from the dignity, freedom, and worth they held as individuals. Within neoliberalism, however, the split has dissolved, turning the otherwise inalienable realms of human characteristics into commodities. In other words, human capital, initially seen as a person's skill set acquired through education and training, has been expanded to include physical characteristics, personal dispositions and practices, family, and neighborhood context. The idea is that individuals invest in their human capital as a way to appreciate their own value. Human capital now is comprised of the investments people make in their self-development, including choices that enhance their self-esteem (Feher, 2009). Thus, within neoliberal governmentality, civil society is diminished to a sphere wherein people are hailed into being producers or entrepreneurs of themselves, while the state (and its affiliates) positions itself as an enterprise with products consisting of rational individuals, a growing economy, national security, and international dominance (Brown, 2003; Feher, 2009).

Thinking about neoliberal governmentality within the context of civic engagement, the state, and in turn, higher education, interweaves economic and governance purposes of neoliberalism together by hailing students into a subjectivity of "citizen-volunteer" (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p. 145). Students are encouraged to volunteer (or in the case of AmeriCorps, work for sub-minimum wages) in assisting those the state has neglected. While national service programs have mobilized citizens, Radest (1993) notes that critics have viewed these programs as "providing cheap labor to meet social needs" (p. 32). These citizen-volunteers not only consent to take

responsibility for public goods and services that the state has shifted to the private sphere but are also focused on building their human capital. For instance, through exposure to various people and cultures, they learn empathy (Wilson, 2011), expand their appreciation for multiculturalism (Astin et al., 2000; Steinkopf Rice & Horn, 2014), and enhance their moral development (Chien et al., 2016). These qualities not only produce "civic-minded" citizens (Steinberg et al., 2011) but also taxpayers (Feher, 2009). What is particularly interesting about this mode of subjectivity is that as people concentrate inward, dedicating time to enhancing themselves, they turn their attention away from the ensemble of institutions and practices that have shaped the conditions that have created the need for service in the first place (Duggan, 2003; Hyatt, 2001; Mojab & Carpenter, 2011; Raddon & Harrison, 2015).

As students have been molded by the logic of neoliberal governmentality, Hyatt (2001) argues that they have become "incorporated into this larger social agenda of vilifying 'big government' and valorizing citizen-volunteers" (p. 12). This logic fosters a variety of projects. Hyatt describes neoliberal citizens as increasing their participation in volunteering and nonprofit work. Going further, Dennis (2009) warns that neoliberal citizens are positioned to provide social control of particular populations for the state. Amidst these projects, it is important to note that historically, academically based civic engagement efforts have been predominantly implemented by White faculty, who send White, middle-class students into low-income Communities of Color (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Butin, 2006; Green, 2001, 2003). This has mirrored the all-too-common narrative of White bodies surveilling and controlling Black and Brown bodies, a foundational dynamic in the construction of U.S. social relations (Mills, 2014). As higher education demographics have changed, there also has been a growth in the number of Faculty and Students of Color involved in service-learning (Harper, 2009; Hutson & Williford, 2018; Wheatle & BrckaLorenz, 2015). However, when we consider the subjective mechanism of human capital that Feher (2009) describes, what remains consequential is that despite the varied racial and ethnic identities of students and faculty, the assimilative logic of forming neoliberal citizens endures. The framework of neoliberal governmentality does not care solely about skin color; rather, the primary goal is to ensure that the behaviors, attitudes, and values associated with good citizenship are visible. In short, neoliberal citizenship is comprised of people who are situated to improve the economy while also investing in their own appreciation as they develop the values and habits of self-discipline and desires of social mobility, higher education, and home ownership. Notably, these values and goals are very similar to those of whiteness (Fraser-Burgess & Davis, 2017; Sue, 2016), which Leonardo (2004) describes as historical processes that have enabled White domination and oppression of People of Color. As neoliberal citizens discipline themselves in ethics of civic responsibility and hard work, these mores also are modeled to recipients of service. Dennis (2009) asserts that even though service-learning appears to foster civic engagement, it also represents the government's "intensive restatification at a distance" via management and surveillance of specific populations (p. 158). Of course, despite the subjective apparatus of human capital calling people to conform to dominant modes of discipline, some students resist this subjectivity and join with activists like those on the Hiawatha Bridge demanding a stop to harsher forms of state control.

Scholars have begun to explore the challenges civic engagement and higher education face in the context of neoliberalism. Even though most of these critiques have utilized an economic argument, a few scholars, as noted above, have applied the framework of neoliberal governmentality to civic engagement. We draw heavily upon this work within the current study. By interrogating the rhetoric of decision-makers as they proposed and debated national service

legislation—the policy that allowed for civic engagement to be institutionalized within higher education—we offer empirical evidence that illuminates how the legislation incorporates educational institutions, university-community partnerships, and nonprofits as sites for extending state formation and social control.

Methods

We employed historical discourse analysis to examine legislation and congressional documents associated with national service proposals from 1989 to 1993. Historical discourse analysis aims to analyze discourse with an understanding that language is always laden with power (Park, 2008). As a methodology, historical discourse analysis tasks researchers with revealing power dynamics as well as the ideas and truths that histories produce. More than mere language, discourse is often defined as a "way of saying, doing, and being" within a context (Gee, 2014, p. 47). Discourse both reflects and shapes how power weaves throughout the social world (Rogers, 2011). Thus, researchers must examine discourse within its larger contexts, including its social, political, and economic contexts, to better understand how discourse is constructed and how it operates (Park, 2008).

Another aspect of conducting historical discourse analysis is considering how discourse is legitimized, or comes to be seen as worthy of consideration. Van Leeuwen (2007) explains that legitimation happens through many discursive methods; two are key to this study: authorization and rationalization. Authorization refers to the "authority of tradition, custom and law" as well as the people who are granted "institutional authority" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92). Here, the law-making process (via Congressional Records and Committee Hearings) is granted authority through the U.S. Constitution, and legislators are assigned authority via elections. The same words said by different people in different contexts would not render the same attention or legitimacy. Relatedly, rationalization refers to "the goals and uses of institutionalized social action" and the societal knowledge that gives them "cognitive validity" (Van Leeuwen, p. 92). In this study, the funding and implementation of national service policies at recognized postsecondary institutions provide another mode of legitimation.

Data Sources

After reading the two primary pieces of national service legislation (1990 and 1993), using Hein Online Database and HathiTrust Digital Library, we searched for Congressional Records and Committee Hearings associated with the legislation. The Congressional Records are transcripts of what is said on the floor of the House of Representatives and Senate. There are separate Congressional Records for each day the House and Senate are in session, with many agenda items each day. The Committee Hearings focus solely on a specific piece of legislation, and often span multiple days. Thus, the Committee Hearings had more in-depth discussions and more testimonies presented. Because several of the Congressional Records and Committee Hearings referenced 1989 proposals (which gained significant traction but did not become law), we included transcripts from a House and Senate Committee Hearing from 1989.

We used these data sources to ask the following research question: What were the rationales decision-makers used in advocating for national service proposals?

Table 1

Data Sources of U.S. Legislation, Congressional Records and Hearings on National Service

101st Congress
Senate 101-140. Hearings before the Committee on Labor and Human Resources on S. 408, (March & April 1989)
House 101-30. Hearings on the Issue of National Service. Joint Hearings before the Subcommittees on Elementary, Secondary & Vocational Education; Postsecondary Education; Human Resources; Select Education; and Employment Opportunities of the Committee on Education and Labor, (March, April & June 1989)
136 Cong Rec. Senate 2502, (February 26, 1990)
136 Cong. Rec. Senate 2719, (February 27, 1990)
136 Cong. Rec. House 24203 (September 13, 1990)
House 101-121. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, (April 27, 1990)
House 101-100. Hearing before the Committee on Education and Labor on H.R. 4330, (May 1990)
National and Community Service Act of 1990 (November 1990)
103rd Congress
Senate 103-210. Hearings before the Committee on Labor and Human Resources and the Committee on Children, Family, Drugs and Alcoholism on S. 919, (May & June 1993)
139 Cong. Rec. House 15412, (July 13, 1993)
National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (September 1993)

Data Analysis

In the Congressional Records, we initially conducted a word search for "national service" to find the relevant agenda item. Once the discussion was located, we read the entire discussion, taking particular note of the rationales policy makers used to advocate for national service. Two themes included the need for renewed civic responsibility among young people and the economic cost of social problems.

As we read through the Congressional Records and pulled quotes relating to civic responsibility and the economy, additional, recurring themes caught our attention, including global competition, the comparison of civilian service to military service, college debt, environmental concerns, and the high rate of poverty, drugs, illiteracy, school dropouts, and unemployment. We then read the Committee Hearing transcripts with each of these themes in mind, coding for the noted themes along the way.

Through weekly conversations, we discussed the themes and worked to make sense of the social, economic, and political context of the legislation. We put the context in conversation with our academic knowledge about higher education, civic engagement, and neoliberal governmentality. Our findings illustrate how policy makers' rhetoric utilized social problems to advance neoliberal logic; namely to continue defunding social programs (economic) and to extend social control by inculcating acceptable forms of civic responsibility (governmentality).

We provide a counter-narrative to the already established history of national service legislation and higher education's civic engagement efforts—that they were primarily designed to promote civic and democratic engagement among young people (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010; Hartley, 2011; Rocheleau, 2004; Zieren & Stoddard, 2004). Park (2008) refers to this as "a social critique aimed at dislodging the usual story" (p. 394). While we recognize today's complex understanding of neoliberalism was not necessarily at the disposal of decision-makers in the early 1990s and thus they likely did not think about their discourse in the ways we critique it, our efforts in analyzing the national service legislation and their accompanying materials is not a "definitive representation of a historical event," but instead, a discrete sample of data aimed at providing this counter-narrative (Park, 2008, p. 393).

Focusing on the discourse of legislators and testifiers through historical discourse analysis allowed us to look at a rich dataset to better understand how the field of civic engagement emerged through national service legislation in the 1990s and subsequently has been institutionalized across higher education. This is useful in offering a social critique of the history associated with higher education's civic engagement movement. Though we argue that this movement has been informed by the discourse in the materials analyzed, future research could utilize case studies to depict and analyze how individual campuses that have been funded by national service legislation have taken up these pedagogies and practices.

Findings

Examining national service legislation and their associated Congressional documents, we highlight how decision makers' rhetoric 1) shapes economic, moral, and political rationales for national service; and 2) determines who and what national service is for. We link these themes to how civic engagement, and correspondingly higher education, has advanced not only the economic position of neoliberalism but also governmentality through the formation of subjectivities, and thus social control.

Rationales for National Service

There was no shortage of people volunteering in the 1980s and 1990s when proposals for national service legislation gained momentum. Many nonprofits operated in communities across the nation, opportunities to become involved in community service programs already existed on college campuses, and urban, suburban, and rural neighbors shared resources and helped one another when needed. Discourse from the era provides evidence of an impressive amount of volunteering. For instance, when President Bush announced to business leaders at a White House luncheon that he wanted to pursue a national service plan, he admitted, "I don't want the Federal Government getting in the way, incidentally, of the tens of thousands of volunteer programs that work effectively. I simply want to encourage more volunteerism" (Bush, 1989). Several legislators also noted the growth in volunteerism, especially in schools and universities (see Senate 101-140, 1989; House 101-30, 1989). Countering the image of youth as "self-centered and materialistic," two students from Stanford testified that over 60% of Stanford undergraduates were involved in service (House 101-30, 1989, p. 275). As described in Committee Hearings, campus-based civic engagement programs typically consisted of colleges sending students to grade schools or nonprofit organizations to tutor students, teach English to adult refugees, help in

homeless shelters, assist in health clinics, or aid disabled people with daily life tasks (see Senate 101-140, 1989; House 101-121, 1990; Senate 103-210, 1993).

Despite sustained programs like Peace Corps and VISTA, the growth of volunteerism in higher education, and a budget deficit, policy makers were interested in implementing and funding national service legislation. Because they needed a sound rationale for this legislation, supporters drafted the legislation to serve multiple interests. As Senator Nunn (D-GA) stated:

> …this isn't just a volunteerism program. It's a higher education bill, a housing bill, a job training bill, a literacy training bill, a community development bill, a conservation bill, a home health care bill…it's a fundamental investment in our country's capacity to address its social problems, and a fundamental change in the way people in this country view their relationship to the broader community. (Senate 101-140, 1989, p. 245)

In addition to the aspects Senator Nunn mentioned, legislators iterated that the legislation could inculcate civic responsibility and position the U.S. as a global competitor. For instance, from the opposite chamber, Representative Martínez (D-CA) commented:

> [W]ith America undergoing major changes in family, economic, social and moral values, the time is ripe to harvest the energy and talent of our youth and to provide them with alternatives to gangs, drugs, and crime. This is particularly important, when, as a nation, we struggle to reattain economic and moral leadership of the free world (House 101-100, 1990, p. 4).

Nunn's and Martínez's rhetoric began to illustrate how legislators used a hook that everyone could understand (e.g., social problems) in order to justify the proposed legislation economically, morally, and politically.

Economic Rationale

From poverty and homelessness to illiteracy and pollution, the U.S. had been experiencing increasing inequalities since the 1970s. Senator Nunn (D-GA) referred to these issues as "the social deficit" (Senate 101-140, 1989, p. 246), and correspondingly, policy makers debated who should pay this deficit. Advocating for the National and Community Service Act of 1990, Senator Rockefeller (D-WV) provided an answer.

> Poverty, illiteracy, hunger, racial tensions, and drug abuse are crying out for attention. Our country tolerates a shocking level of infant mortality and a growing portion of citizens who are shut out from basic health care—of dimensions that other industrialized countries find appalling. *It is not just the Government's job or the job of charity to respond to these enormous and, in some cases growing, problems. Individuals—of every age and in every community—are needed, to devote the time, suffer the inconvenience, and make sacrifices on behalf of others, on behalf of their communities, on behalf of our country's future* [emphasis added]." (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2555)

Even though Rockefeller did not specify how the U.S. incurred its social deficit, he was clear that it was the responsibility of individuals and their communities to pay it; reliance should not solely be on the government. During the same discussion, Senator Hatch (R-UT) was more direct about why individuals and communities were required to solve social ills: "Volunteers do a million other things that are indispensable in our society. If we had to pay them for what they do, our national debt would be incalculable. This bill recognizes that" (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2540). Thus, one of the main purposes of national service legislation was to create a new—and cheap—labor force. Economically, the U.S. would benefit from volunteer labor. Other

legislators agreed. Referencing a Report of the Minnesota Ad Hoc Working Group on Youth Service, Senator Durenberger (R-MN) recognized young people as underutilized human capital. He argued:

> all around us a limitless and renewable natural resource is waiting to be tapped, as this Nation seeks to meet the unmet needs and unfulfilled opportunities of its people. Youth in service is that natural resource. With passage of this legislation, we can begin to tap that resource. (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2543)

The same logic was applied three years later when legislators discussed the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Representative Kennelly (D-CT) reasoned:

> There can be no doubt that there is a real need for voluntarism. As we begin the 1990's we face a budget crisis that severely limits the Government's ability to respond to needs. National service asks all Americans, both young and old, to involve themselves in positive activities. By doing so, they help both their country and themselves…We are entering a period in the United States when we will be called upon to provide additional services. These services, as we know, are costly, time consuming, and require extensive manpower. But we need day care, we need a reformed welfare program, and we need to make health care available and affordable. We can pass progressive proposals that address these problems, but in order to finance them and provide the facilities and people to make them work, we need a pool of workers to draw from. National service gives us that pool. (139 Cong. Rec. 15412, 1993, p. 15441)

A cheap labor force was appealing and popular. As Representative Gunderson (R-WI) argued, and his colleagues agreed, national service was a "cost-effective way" to "solve local and national problems" through "subminimum wages" (139 Cong. Rec. 15412, 1993, p. 15434-15435). Gunderson elaborated that this method was "the beginning of a way in which we can better meet those local needs when we are cutting Medicare and Medicaid, when we are cutting CDBG's [Community Development Block Grant] and our other programs" (139 Cong. Rec. 15412, 1993, p. 15435). Congressional documents illustrate that legislators were candid about cutting funding to social programs despite existing, and growing, disparities.

However, union leadership strongly resisted this plan. They criticized the 1989 national service proposal as a way for politicians to grow cheap labor without worker protections. Union leaders worried that this plan would significantly displace low-skill, low-wage union employees. In testimony before the House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor, Stanley Hill, the International Vice-President of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) noted, "The apparent appeal of using a community service program to meet unmet social needs is obvious. Over the last years, Federal aid to state and local governments declined by some 45 percent in terms of 1982 dollars" (House 101-30, 1989, p. 306). He explained that the displaced workers most impacted by a national service program would be People of Color who relied on such jobs to work their way out of poverty.

Given union pushback from the 1989 proposal, legislators corrected course in the 1990 legislation to include language that employers were not to displace workers by adding national service positions. Still, a primary rationale for national service legislation was economic. This fits perfectly with neoliberalism's economic strategy. As the government decreased funds for social programs, it transferred these responsibilities to individuals who were encouraged to take civic responsibility for society's ills, with subminimum wages and very few worker protections.

Moral Rationale

In order to garner popular support for national service legislation, the economic rationale was partnered with a moral one. The National and Community Service Act of 1990 starts with "It is the purpose of this Act to renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States" and to "help meet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs, particularly those needs relating to poverty" (National & Community Service Act of 1990, §12501). Via legislation and its accompanying programs, policy makers encouraged youth to look beyond their own interests, calling them into values of helping and engaging in their communities. For example, in February 1990, Senator Kennedy (D-MA) opened the Senate discussion on national service with this:

> Across the world, nations are beginning this new decade with interest in democracy. In unprecedented numbers, Eastern Europeans and Soviet citizens are standing up for new order, calling for the participation of the people in the institutions of government. It is tragedy that while brave, young people of oppressed nations risk their lives for the right to self-government, more and more young Americans do not vote and feel disconnected from their communities. They have forgotten that democracy means not only the right to pursue one's own interest, but the responsibility to participate in the life of the Nation in return. (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2533-2534)

Echoing Kennedy's sentiment, Senator Robb (D-AZ) cited a People for the American Way survey that reported young Americans rating more importance in "enjoying yourself and having a good time" than "being a good American who cares about the good of the country" (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2541). Wanting to turn these values around, Robb advocated:

> The programs you see reflected in this bill; school-based service, conservation corps work, and extended national civilian service commitments, are designed to make a habit out of "giving back" to the community. A principal feature is the idea that we need to "get" young people early to make the "ethic" of "civic responsibility" a part of life from the earliest time possible. (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2541)

The description of young people abdicating civic duties, of not assisting the nation, was echoed in Robert Putnam's (1995) research on civic engagement in the U.S. He detailed declines in voter participation, attendance at community meetings, political gatherings, and overall interest and trust in government. Putnam argued that decreased civic involvement leads to societal division and the breakdown of important social bonds. Many policy makers, as well as civic, military, and education leaders, felt that a national service program could reverse this trend. For instance, Senator Graham (D-FL) noted: "Presently only one out of five eligible voters under age 30 exercises their right to vote. It is clear we must do all we can to change that apathy into activism. These programs are helping do just that" (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2600).

Politicians believed that national service could address the civic malaise of youth by inculcating different values and behaviors. In testimony on President Bush's proposed service initiative, Secretary of Energy James Watkins explained that the "President believes it is critical to the Nation's future and to the character of a young person to instill at an early age the notion that service to others is a necessary part of any definition of a successful life" (Senate 101-140, 1989, p. 432-433.) The point was not that service to others was fulfilled through taxes that then allowed the government to provide basic necessities. Rather, the action of providing essentials was thrust back onto individuals with the promise of personal development. Watkins continued, "At the very heart of many of the problems of youth is the lack of self-esteem… Service to others builds self-esteem, proves self-worth, and proves that fact that you can make a difference"

(Senate 101-140, 1989, p. 433). Representative Reed (D-RI) echoed this sentiment, suggesting that when youth invested in their human capital, it would make a "decisive difference":

> At the heart of this proposal are the dual goals of providing needed services and building an ethic of civic responsibility across socioeconomic lines. When people serve, they make a substantive contribution to their communities and/or underserved areas in addressing unmet needs. And in the act of serving, they often make a decisive difference in their own lives—developing their own knowledge, skills, character, and self-esteem. (139 Cong. Rec. 15412, 1993, p. 4544).

Despite not specifying what the development of knowledge, skills, character, and self-esteem would lead to, the assumption was that it would determine future (job?) opportunities. Urging people to enrich their personal development was elevated as a moral duty to the nation. In testimony, Vartan Gregorian, president of Brown University and Vice-Chair of Campus Compact asserted that Brown

> has a moral duty and obligation to be in the forefront of volunteer service and to instill in our students the concept of civic responsibility, civic obligation; namely, we must not take out from our nation as much as possible and give as little as possible back to our nation. All of us owe it to our community to build ties in our community and to try to assist the less fortunate. (House 101-121, 1990, p. 10)

Gregorian's statement emphasized giving more than one takes, especially giving to those who are "less fortunate." But the focus on giving eclipsed recognition of how people are differently situated (economically, socially, physically, etc.) to take from and give to the nation. Relatedly, he ignored how people have disparately experienced the privileges and freedoms associated with the U.S. that purportedly necessitate civic duty. Nonetheless, as Representative McCurdy (D-OK) summarized, legislators from both parties advocated for an "infusion of responsibility, of duty, of concern for others" into the "American ethos." McCurdy rallied, "It is a program that has bipartisan support because it does capture the true spirit of America, and that is, giving something back for your country, to your country, and abandoning this philosophy of having something for nothing" (139 Cong. Rec. House 15412, p. 15435).

These aims of civic responsibility were also tied to how the nation was positioned in the world. During the 1993 hearings, Representative Kennelly (D-CT) remarked that national service legislation asks young people (and seniors)

> to dedicate themselves to a higher standard of excellence. It asks them to respond to this challenge of responsibility, to give back to this great country and to fulfill the promise that is America. As a Member of Congress, as an American, I believe in civic obligation. I believe in helping the less fortunate; I believe in helping each other. And I know there are more like me who believe this as well. We believe in hard work, and equal sacrifice for the common good. These values are key to our stature in the world, our survival, and our future. (139 Cong. Rec. 15412, 1993, p. 15441)

In this comment, Representative Kennelly marked the concept of "civic obligation" as specifically American. The expressed values of "hard work, and equal sacrifice for the common good" helped define what she called the "promise that is America." And these values, she noted, were "key to our stature in the world, our survival, and our future" (p. 15441). In other words, without these values, the U.S. would not have the power that it held in international relations.

This rhetoric highlights that the foci on civic obligations were not simply about increased voting records. Rather, leaders sought to shape attitudes and behaviors, to mold bodies and minds into ones they deemed as morally legitimate. Values and behaviors needed to mirror those

upheld by dominant society: patriotism, working hard, and desires of upward mobility, home ownership, and college education. It is here that moral legitimacy intersects with what is legible for whiteness and productive for capital, both of which bolster nationalism (Hage, 2000; Mills, 2014). This leads to the third justification for national service legislation: the political rationale.

Political Rationale

By 1990, the Cold War had ended, but just recently so. Leaders were concerned with global competition, especially from Japan and Germany, and made educational comparisons across nations. The logic was that if the U.S. did not do something to strengthen education and stave off the tide of school dropouts, then the U.S. would lose global dominance. Senator Dodd (D-CT) posited, "20 percent of our young people are dropping out of high schools.…[In] Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany those numbers hover around zero. So we begin to think in the terms of competition with the 20-percent dropout rate" (136 Cong. Rec. 2719, 1990, p. 2750). Dodd believed that national service legislation could help to decrease the high school dropout rate. His perspective was supported by the president of the American Federation of Teachers who talked about the "massive national education deficit" and noted, "Our country is behind virtually all of its competitors in the most critical educational skills of its youth" which "our nation will need to compete in the 21st Century" (House 101-100, 1990, p. 301).

While decision-makers referenced global competition, they did not use common market measures, like GDP and debt. Instead, they talked about education. Why was national service legislation connected to an effort of educational competition? First, the legislation would promote (and fund) service programs in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions. One thought was that supporting service would motivate retired community members to volunteer in schools to be role models to youth in fields where the U.S. was lacking, specifically science and math (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990).

The second way that the legislation was connected with education was that those who participated in full or part-time service would receive monetary benefits to be used for further training or education. The idea, of course, was that education would make American workers stronger and more competitive. Supporting the legislation that established and funded the Corporation for National and Community Service, Representative Maloney (D-NY) advocated,

> By funding higher education, the trust fund would fortify our young people with the skills to compete and win in a global economy. In return, those young people would enrich our communities, our inner cities, our barrios, by tackling problems that we otherwise cannot afford to solve." (139 Cong. Rec. 15412, 1993, p. 15446)

Representative Menendez (D-NJ) echoed Maloney's nationalist desires: "Our future as a nation depends on our competitiveness. Our competitiveness depends on our commitment to rewarding hard work and a desire to learn. These are the qualities which define the productive American worker" (139 Cong. Rec. 15412, 1993, p. 15445).

Thus, the link between education, hard work, and the maintenance of global power undergirds the political rationale in the national service legislation. Representative Owens (D-NY) distinctly expressed this logic: poor, disenfranchised young people will become "productive, useful, caring citizens" rather than "embittered, unemployed and unemployable youths" (136 Cong. Rec. 24203, 1990, p. 24235). Here is his rationale laid out more fully:

> The work performed by these young men and women, most of whom have poor educations [sic] and few work skills, will have wide-ranging impact. What communities

> nationwide will receive are low-cost, quality services in the form of housing rehabilitation, day-care help, tutoring of young children, and conservation maintenance of parks and highways. Our disadvantaged and disenfranchised youth will get hands-on experience that will lead to real job skills, no wages but in some cases small stipends to help make ends meet, and opportunity to receive their GED's [sic] or college scholarships. …Instead of embittered, unemployed and unemployable youths, our cities, towns and county's [sic] get productive, useful, caring citizens. Instead of drug usage and delinquent activities, the recourse for many who feel shunted from the mainstream, we will have willing and enthusiastic participants in our businesses, schools and churches, and the foundation of a competitive, global economy to take us into the next century. (136 Cong. Rec. 24203, 1990, p. 24234-24235).

Representative Owens' (D-NY) comment illustrates that the political rationale for this legislation (global competition) is inextricably linked to the economic (cheap labor) and moral (caring citizens) rationales. Rather than considering how social forces like wage differentials, corporate deregulation, heightened policing and incarceration, and decreased funding of education and social programs are integral to the neoliberal state, all of which exponentially increase the inequities that legislators describe (Fernandes, 2018; Kotz, 2015; Parenti, 2000; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), it was easier for them to target individuals and their associated neighborhoods for blame (Ryan, 1976). If policy makers could convince people to take personal and civic responsibility for the social challenges within their communities, then the U.S. could contain any brewing frustration. In other words, if the U.S. could persuade young people to take low-wage jobs to serve their country, this would effectively decrease the number of idle bodies, thereby keeping internal affairs stable so as not to threaten the global ranking of the U.S. To keep domestic issues in line, people, especially those who were disenfranchised, needed to be socialized into the dominant civic values of the nation and trained in the skills necessary for the labor force.

The economic, moral, and political rationales for national service legislation, coupled with the reality that many people were already volunteering in their communities brings us to the question: Who and what is national service actually for?

Who and What is National Service For?

In debating national service proposals, legislators consistently mentioned being concerned about two groups of youth: middle-class students who were striving for upward mobility but were stifled by college debt, and low-income youth who legislators wanted to make sure were employed in licit jobs. In many ways, policy makers' rhetoric urged pursuit of the American dream, which can be seen in Senator Mikulski's (D-MD) comment:

> [The bill] goes to three basic values we want to foster in our society: Access to the American dream, the ability to pursue higher education or accumulate a nest egg for a down payment on first-time home ownership…and that you earn that voucher through your own sweat equity working in the community." (136 Cong. Rec. 2719, 1990, p. 2748)

Even though middle-class, White students were already conditioned toward the vision of upward mobility, higher education, and home ownership through hard work (Sleeter, 2011), civic engagement programs could ensure that they stay on this track. Encouraging low-income Youth of Color to toil for the American dream was a way to prime another source of malleable bodies

and attitudes that could be beneficial for the economy and social order. If both groups participated in national service, they could be trained in patriotic values and self-discipline. These prized characteristics, the logic went, would result in enhanced self-worth. In short, the programs could mold particular bodies, practices, and attitudes into ones that would value and perform the physical, emotional, and civic labor that legislators deemed as useful to the nation. Or, as Bruce Chapman, founder of a political think tank pointed out in testimony, "The primary purpose of National Service, in the minds of many of its advocates, has always been to engineer the character of young people" (Senate 103-210, 1993, p. 8).

In regard to the group of middle-class youth, Senator Mikulski noted that young people were struggling to reach the American dream because they were busy trying to pay for college (and college debt) and/or save for a down payment on a house. In Mikulski's view, this led to the "basic American values we hold dear, the values of hard work and rewarding hard work, of civic obligation, and of lending a helping hand to others" being "in trouble" (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2536). And, because financial responsibilities inhibited young adults from participating in service, they were foregoing the development of "habits of the heart" through "sweat equity" and "hard work" (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2536). She felt that because young adults were more focused on trying to meet their own needs rather than the common good, they were missing out on the self-development required to be upstanding Americans.

The other group of youth that legislators were worried about were low-income Youth of Color. Representative Owens (D-NY) reminded his colleagues that national service legislation was mostly "targeted to improving opportunities for service by low-income and other disadvantaged young people." (136 Cong. Rec. 24203, 1990, p. 24233). Citing statistics about Black and Hispanic men's low annual earnings and high rates of involvement with the corrections system, Owens remarked, "Despite the magnitude of this crisis, precious little is being done at the Federal, State, and local levels to arrest and reverse this horrible waste of human potential" (136 Cong. Rec. 24203, 1990, p. 24234).

Speaking in more coded racial and class language, Representative Hoyer (D-MD) remarked: "[I]t is very important for America if we are going to reinvigorate our society, if we are going to bring young people out of the drug markets and into the public service markets…then we need national service" (136 Cong. Rec. 24203, 1990, p. 24246).

The "waste of human potential" that Representative Owens (D-NY) mentioned connects to the legislation's economic and moral rationales. On one hand, the word "waste" signaled an uncultivated group (e.g., wasteland) of youth to be mined, similar to natural resources. This sentiment was shared by Senator Simon (D-IL): "We especially need to turn a national liability, our unemployed youth, into a national asset...this large untapped resource should be used to benefit this nation's parks, revitalize urban areas, and help the elderly and needy" (Senate 103-210, 1989, p. 30-31). Wasting human capital through unemployment was a risk to the economy.

On the other hand, "waste" also marked a deterioration or loss of values. Legislators' comments show that they were bothered by specific dispositions deemed unacceptable. Representative Martínez suggested that many young people had "no alternatives" outside of "gang activities" and "crime and drugs" (House 101-30, 1989, p. 289). He argued:

> An overwhelming sense of urgency has been conveyed to us that unless we in Congress and the administration do something immediately, we will lose a whole generation of youth to idleness, despair, reliance, and directionlessness...[F]ailure to do something immediately to target our youth will result in disaster for the forgotten half of our non-school youth. (House 101-30, 1989, p. 291-292)

A parallel argument was made in the opposite chamber by Senator Adams (D-WA):

> …although by no means a substitute for the family, national and community service can help correct the disenfranchised and hostile attitudes that are harbored by many Americans today. Many people have no reason to feel a part of a community, no feeling of responsibility to care for others and no sense of ownership for the future of the country. A strong program for voluntary national and community service can help reverse this trend of alienation. (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2556)

Senator Simon (D-IL) was also distressed about what the "idleness" of youth would lead to. He quoted from a speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, noting that the "material gains" from the Civilian Conservation Corps were not as important as the "moral and spiritual value of such work" which would allow the country to "eliminate, at least to some extent, the threat that enforced idleness brings to moral and spiritual stability" (Senate 101-140, 1989, p. 31). Using Roosevelt's speech to advocate for the national service legislation, Senator Simon asserted:

> Idleness and its poisons are no less a problem today than in 1933; they are a far greater problem. And we must target them with at least the same urgency and insight that FDR used 56 years ago. Those crews of spirited CCC enlistees working across this land found productive work and a paycheck in that program. But more than that, they also found hope. Millions of despairing Americans learned that a better future was possible and was within their grasp. (Senate 101-140, 1989, p. 31)

Senator Simon's speech revealed his concern about "idleness" and its accompanied "poisons," which, for Senator Adams also encompassed "hostile attitudes" and "alienation" (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2556) and for Representative Martínez (D-CA) included "despair, reliance, and directionlessness" (House 101-30, 1989, p. 291). Legislators presented low-income youth through both deficit and damaged-centered frameworks (Howard, 2013; Tuck, 2009). Senator Durenberger (R-MN) believed these challenges could be addressed through service, which could result in "an increased sense of self-esteem, especially for those who may be undernurtured" (136 Cong. Rec. 2502, 1990, p. 2542).

Worth noting is that despite the judgment of unemployed youth, there were no deliberations about the social conditions that contributed to youth dropping out of school or the lack of living-wage jobs. Nor were there acknowledgments of how youth were already civically and intellectually engaged through unpaid caretaking work and civic resistance (Herd & Harrington Meyer, 2002; Nocon, 2005; Shapiro, 2002). Instead, the perspective was that the behaviors, hearts, and minds of young people must be shaped into dominant, legible, and productive goals, habits, and values of whiteness (Fraser-Burgess & Davis, 2017; Sue, 2016). In other words, bodies must be active, doing what is profitable for the economy. Additionally, hearts must be patriotic, fulfilling, and feeling a civic obligation that is conducive for national allegiance, unity, and social control.

When we take a critical approach to the discourse that promoted national civilian service legislation, we begin to see how policy makers advanced the logic of the market and neoliberal governmentality to address social inequities. Not only was the legislation aimed at being a cost-saving mechanism that would enable further defunding of social programs, but it also worked as a strategy of formation by convincing Americans to tap into their moral sensibilities and commit to the civic work of providing basic life necessities and services for the nation. This low-cost labor force would help economically and politically bolster the nation under the rhetoric of civic values that could simultaneously enhance people's human capital via self-development.

Conclusion

Civic engagement and how it has been valued in education brings us back to the opening quote about two groups on the Hiawatha Bridge in the wake of George Floyd's murder, one representing the state's social control via the National Guard and the other resisting the state's control by protesting police brutality. While civic participation may be a worthwhile goal, it can be misguided if not critically positioned, discussed, and analyzed.

In this study, we aimed to reveal a counter-history of national service legislation and its associated service programs in higher education. By unveiling what is typically left out of the narrative, we have responded to Kliewer's (2013) call to interrogate "how neoliberal ideology shapes the civic engagement movement" (p. 77). In doing so, we have moved beyond the economic strategies of neoliberalism to expose the workings of governmentality. Thus, we have attended to how the logic of the economy and civics are bound together in the politics of education for active participation in democracy (Zion & Blanchet, 2017). By highlighting policy makers' rhetoric about national service legislation, we have illustrated that the nation's social problems were used as a catalyst to support neoliberal economic policies and intensify the state's formation of young bodies. Institutions of higher education were deeply implicated in this process as the legislation provided the funding that established civic engagement initiatives.

It is vital to recognize that civic engagement programs emerged within a specific context, one in which legislators' justifications for service legitimized acceptable forms of civic responsibility (e.g., offering social services rather than organizing against capitalist exploitation, or restoring parks instead of coordinating resistance against corporate polluters). These rationales not only influenced the focus of service programs and AmeriCorps grant proposals but also the recruitment and training of young people. As depicted in the descriptions of service activities in which youth participated, policy makers' understandings of service, civic duty, the economy, and global competition were not concentrated on upending inequalities. Rather, the civic duty to address social issues was about advancing the nation's economic and political position in the world. Targeting young people's moral sensibilities and encouraging them to discipline themselves and those they served, was a palatable way to convince youth to internalize neoliberal logic about who and what is considered valuable to the nation.

Even though a few scholars have started to address how neoliberalism has impacted national service legislation, including service-learning in higher education, we are left with the question of why a more thorough review of this narrative has been eclipsed up until this point.

The stories we tell ourselves—and the discourse we use for doing so—matter for what policies are made and what messages are internalized. These stories also shape how we understand the world and interact with one another. When policy makers tell stories about the need to renew the ethic of civic responsibility—a value that perhaps was never gone but rather expressed outside of traditional civic acts like voting—it is critically important to examine why. By interrogating legislators' discourse and placing it in the larger context of structural forces, we have aimed to understand why national civilian service, and its accompanying service-learning programs in educational institutions, gained such strong support. The questions raised leave ample room for continued transdisciplinary research on how higher education and civic engagement have been involved in bolstering the state's intentions of heightened formation and social control.

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