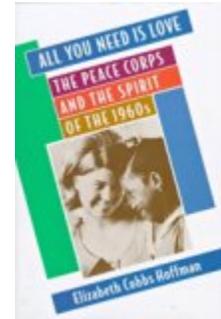


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998. viii + 306 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-01635-4.

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Established at the height of the Cold War in 1961, the Peace Corps attempted to restore America's moral authority in the world. As a part of John F. Kennedy's new directions in foreign policy the Peace Corps' objectives were threefold: to assist the process of modernization in developing nations, to better educate the rest of the world about America, and to improve America's understanding of the non-western people. It was designed to be a cross-cultural experience. From inception the Peace Corps lived up to its reputation, and has arguably remained as Kennedy's most enduring achievement in foreign policy. Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman's *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*, is a well-written and thoroughly researched study of the Peace Corps from the agency's creation to the present. Some of the significant topics addressed in the book include the establishment of the Peace Corps, role of the agency in the Cold War, important Peace Corps personalities, peace corps look alike organizations from other western nations, and volunteer performance in Ghana.

The Dwight E. Stanford Professor of American Foreign Relations at San Diego State University, Hoffman argues that the Peace Corps was created by "popular demand (p. 10)," and not solely by Kennedy's initiative. America was ripe for such an organization, she states. The 1960s was a time of reform, and the Peace Corps symbolized that age. The creation of the agency restored America's altruistic values, and showed that the attainment of "universal values and progress (p. 26)," transcended the East-West ideological struggle. It was, therefore, no surprise that the Peace corps received bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, and the agency recruited volunteers from across class and racial boundaries. It rejuvenated the American spirit. Hoffman is persuasive in

contending that: "the American conscience had always struggled to reconcile the practice of realpolitik with the principle of humanitarian internationalism, usually with little success. The Peace Corps lent its weight to the weaker half of the equation (p. 72)."

A significant contribution of this study is the author's ability to place the Peace Corps within the broader context of volunteer organizations from other nations. Along with the Peace Corps volunteers, western countries including Canada, Britain, Australia, and Holland also sent volunteers to developing nations. Kennedy's support of the Peace Corps encouraged these western nations to endorse volunteer organizations from their respective countries. These governments, Hoffman argues, were able to "conceive of a marriage of altruism and realpolitik (p. 88)" as the volunteers served "both national interests and higher interests (p. 88)." Those Peace Corps like organizations forced previous colonial governments to take the moral high ground in the post colonial world in order to help rebuild the economy of developing nations. By following America's lead to establish those types of organizations, western governments inevitably endorsed the "prestige of the United States in the western alliance during the early 1960s (p. 109)."

The book contains an important section on the problems the Peace Corps faced in the period after 1966 until the early 1980s. As it was with several other programs in the 1960s, the Peace Corps ideals collided with America's Vietnam policy. While volunteers saw themselves as "change agents (p. 120)," and crusaders for humanity, they perceived the Vietnam war as destructive to the very ideals America stood for. As the war escalated, so did the problems for the Peace Corps agency. Inceas-

ingly, volunteers questioned the merits of the war, condemned the race riots in America, and the violence which very quickly marred a decade that began with so much excitement. From the late 1960s Peace Corps applications dropped, and during the Nixon era the agency's budget was slashed drastically.

With the rise of Richard Nixon and his arrogant policies, several volunteers expressed doubts about the objectives of the Peace Corps. In 1969, the Committee of Returned Volunteers lashed out at the Peace Corps as "nothing more than a graduate school for imperialism (p. 218)." Such criticisms only provided more ammunition for the agency's critics, as the Nixon White House became more determined to shut off the Peace Corps. In 1971, the Peace Corps agency became a subsidiary of ACTION, where it remained until 1981 when Loret Miller Ruppe, Peace Corps director at the time, secured the agency's independence. The author's analyses of these events and Nixon's conspiracy to end the Peace Corps is very convincing. *All You Need is Love* is detailed in its treatment of the issues addressed. The section on volunteer activities in Ghana strengthens the book. "The Peace Corps," Hoffman concludes, "sought to build upon the best traditions of the

United States, including the belief in the right of all peoples of self-determination... such was the spirit of the sixties (p. 259)." Sadly enough that spirit of idealism is currently absent in America's relations with developing nations.

A more thorough analysis of the impact of Peace Corps services on the returned volunteers would have been helpful. What impact did services in Peace Corps have on the lives of the volunteers? To what extent have returned volunteers educated the rest of America about the people of developing nations, which was an important Peace Corps objective. Kennedy had stated that following Peace Corps services returned volunteers would help America to create better policies for the developing nations. In the light of the present policies towards many of these nations, can one conclude that the volunteers succeeded or failed in that respect? These questions should not take away from the important contribution of this book.

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