APPRENTICES TO POWER: THE CULTIVATION OF AMERICAN YOUTH
NATIONALISM, 1935-1970

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how privately-operated youth leadership programs promoted citizenship among millions of adolescents and furnished political apprenticeships for many past and current American leaders. It considers four major programs: the American Legion’s Boys’ State and Boys’ Nation; American Legion Auxiliary’s Girls State/Nation; YMCA Youth and Government; the Junior Statesmen of America; and the Society for Ethical Culture’s Encampment for Citizenship (EFC), as well as smaller, likeminded initiatives. From small pilot projects, the programs grew into quasi-official youth movements for the United States responsible for training millions of adolescents and young people in the arts of government.

Welding youth politics to the State through a diffuse network of democracy camps, these programs aimed to resolve fears that the next generation of American citizens would be too disaffected or too ignorant to assume leadership of the country and tend the wheels of government. In their hands-on, youth-centered approach to instruction, the programs incorporated tenets of Progressive education and borrowed from models of international youth work. Although the curricula promoted varieties of “civic” nationalism, the general thrust was conservative, especially since programmers generally sought to cultivate a leadership class limited in many ways by gender, race, and physical condition. Over a thirty-five year period, organizers sought to promote various ideological and political agendas, from the maintenance of youth allegiance during the Great Depression and World War II, to the construction of a post-war domestic “consensus” and American hegemony abroad. Students avidly competed to obtain valuable “social capital” to invest in their budding careers. By 1970, the programs had lost favor with many young people and the public because of their inherent conservatism and the curriculum’s perceived lack of relevance to contemporary problems of war and inequality.
Acknowledgements

This project is rooted in personal and political concerns. I have long been fascinated by how people develop their ideological orientation. Seminar work at the University of Illinois allowed me to study transnational youth cultures and political identity. The right radicalization of American society and politics in the 2000’s convinced me that I should investigate how nationalism was transmitted from one generation of Americans to the next. Searching for educational models that promoted this ideology, I turned to my experience as a high school delegate at the American Legion’s Boys State program in California in the early 1990s. My time as an aspirant for elected office was undistinguished, although the episode left a significant impression on me. Determining what this educational experience meant for other delegates and for the political culture of the United States is a central task of this dissertation. From the start, my advisor and mentor, Professor James Barrett gave expert guidance and encouragement, without which this project would never have been completed. Similar credit belongs to Professors Mark Leff and Kristin Hoganson, whose questions and suggestions greatly improved my analysis and prose. Professor Akira Iriye, the dissertation’s fourth reader, inspired me to explore the transnational implications of youth work and 20th century American nationalism and assisted me in publishing my ideas.

This dissertation has also benefitted from support given by an exceptional community of scholars from the University of Illinois. I am grateful to Professors David Roediger, Maria Todorova, Bruce Levine, and Leslie Reagan for their instruction and advice. I am also indebted to colleagues and friends among the History Department’s graduate students. Will Cooley, Mike Rosenow, Tom Mackaman, Jullily Kohler-Hausmann, Melissa Rohde, Kwame Holmes, and Brian Hoffman read my work and made incisive criticism. I am particularly grateful to Brian
Ingrassia and Janine Giordano-Drake, who agreed to be interviewed on their experiences as delegates to Boys’ State and Girls’ State. The members of the Department’s Working Class Reading Group gave me a friendly forum to present chapter drafts. Financial support from the History Department, including two fellowships and smaller grants allowed me to conduct research and present my findings at conferences. Every historian knows that nothing of value gets done at Illinois without the aid of librarians, but special thanks belongs to Mary Stuart of the History and Newspaper Library; John Hoffmann of the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections; and the helpful and efficient staff of the Inter-Library Loan office.

Outside of the University, I am grateful for the assistance of individuals connected to the youth citizenship programs studied here, as well as to various others. Ron Engel of the American Legion and Joseph Hovish of the Legion’s Library in Indianapolis made available the records of Boys’ State and Nation. Mr. Engel put me in contact with Helen Kennedy Ryan, daughter of Boys’ State co-founder Hayes Kennedy and custodian of his memory. Officials from the National Legion Auxiliary and from the Auxiliary of Illinois provided similar service in researching Girls’ State. For the history of the YMCA’s Youth and Government program, I am grateful for support given by the Kautz Family YMCA Archives at the University of Minnesota, which took the form of a Clark Chambers travel grant and assistance from archivists Dagmar Getz and Ryan Bean. The Illinois Historical Society awarded me a King V. Hostick grant to conduct research at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Thanks also go to Tara Craig of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University; Martha Imparato at the Special Collection section of the Mabee Library at Washburn University; the staff of the Daley Library at the University of Illinois, Chicago; and the Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections. Likewise, I thank De Gruyter press for permission a reprint my article, “In America,
the Young Men and Women Would be Told HOW, not WHAT, to Think”: Transnational Exchanges that Shaped U.S. Youth Politics, 1932-43,” which appeared in the March 2011 edition of the online journal *New Global Studies*.

The dozens of program alumni and counselors I spoke with during the course of this study give a human face to youth citizenship education. The information and anecdotes that they shared with me, whether cited in interviews or provided through background conversations, enriched this study immensely. To this day, I am still amazed that these men and women were willing to talk candidly with a grad student about events that occurred years or even decades in the past. Some of my contacts agreed to be interviewed multiple times and patiently fielded my questions, even the long-winded queries that made little sense. Moreover, they graciously supplied references to their friends and colleagues from the programs. I have strived to present their life stories fairly and accurately.

To my wife Suzana and daughter Mia, I pledge my abiding love and commitment.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>American Legion</td>
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<tr>
<td>AL-BS</td>
<td>American Legion Boys’ State</td>
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<td>ALA-BS</td>
<td>American Legion Auxiliary Girls’ State</td>
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<td>ASU</td>
<td>American Student Union</td>
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<td>AYC</td>
<td>American Youth Congress</td>
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<td>CMTC</td>
<td>Civilian Military Training Corps</td>
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<tr>
<td>CP-USA</td>
<td>Communist Party, United States</td>
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<td>DAR</td>
<td>Daughters of the American Revolution</td>
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<td>EFC</td>
<td>Encampment for Citizenship</td>
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<td>GAR</td>
<td>Grand Army of the Republic</td>
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<td>Hi-Y</td>
<td>YMCA High School Youth Clubs</td>
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<td>HFS</td>
<td>Highlander Folk School</td>
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<td>HJ</td>
<td><em>Hitlerjugend</em></td>
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<td>IWW</td>
<td>Industrial Workers of the World</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Junior Statesmen of America</td>
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<td>JSF</td>
<td>Junior Statesmen Foundation</td>
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<td>MUN</td>
<td>Model United Nations</td>
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<td>NBS</td>
<td>American Legion Negro Boys’ State</td>
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<td>NSL</td>
<td>National Student League</td>
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<td>NYA</td>
<td>National Youth Administration</td>
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<td>NY-SEC</td>
<td>New York Society for Ethical Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCZ</td>
<td>Panama Canal Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROTC</td>
<td>Reserve Officers Training Corps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tri-Hi-Y</td>
<td>YMCA High School Girls Youth Clubs</td>
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<td>WCA</td>
<td>Work Camps for America</td>
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<td>WCD</td>
<td>Work Camps for Democracy</td>
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<td>YMCA</td>
<td>Young Men’s Christian Association</td>
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<td>YWCA</td>
<td>Young Women’s Christian Association</td>
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<td>Y+G</td>
<td>YMCA Youth and Government</td>
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Introduction

This dissertation examines the social reproduction of nationalism in the United States from 1935-70, focusing on the inter-generational transmission of political values and on the selection of new leaders through youth citizenship education. It considers four major programs: American Legion’s Boys’ State and Boys’ Nation, as well as the Legion’s women’s Auxiliary Girls State/Nation; the YMCA’s Youth and Government (Y+G), forerunner of high school level Model United Nations assemblies; the Junior Statesmen of America; and the Society for Ethical Culture’s Encampment for Citizenship (EFC), as well as smaller, likeminded projects. From pilot projects started in 1935-45, these programs grew into nationwide franchises, responsible for educating several million young men and women in the arts of American citizenship.

Bringing together teenagers and young adults to operate mock assemblies or take part in democratic communities, these programs were civic microcosms in which students learned through direct, hands-on activities such as crafting legislation, adjudicating cases, and enforcing mock laws. Organizers hoped that this instructional format would prepare young people for the responsibilities of adult citizenship and public service better than classroom exercises. Great pains were taken to ‘miniaturize’ the structure government bodies from town councils to the U.N. General Assembly. To ensure the quality of the mock governments, instructors and counselors were chosen from the ranks of lawyers, judges, educators, and elected officials. Sponsors attempted to nominate students who demonstrated leadership in their schools and communities. Close links developed between the youth politicians and adult authorities. Model legislation proposed at youth assemblies frequently became the template for bills in the statehouse, and thousands of future political leaders received a boost to their budding careers.
from the contacts and skills acquired at these events. For countless others, the experience marked a symbolic entry into adult political life.

These programs would merit attention because their practical influence on American citizenship education. On balance, they reflect a Deweyesque concern with making civics education relevant to young people. But a more important question is what influence they had upon young people’s conception of who counted as an American and what behaviors were expected of good citizens. More than simulacra of American politics, the organizers envisioned the projects as civic utopias in which the next generation of leader could practice an idealized version of representative governments, free from the partisanship and petty interests. After graduation, the students were expected to apply the lessons they had learned to improve life in their communities, and for the benefit of the nation at large. While the organizers used lofty rhetoric to describe their programs as laboratories of “objective citizenship” or a “seedbed for leadership,” their intent was inherently conservative. They hoped to fix young people’s understanding of politics as activities constituted of the institutions and processes occurring within the state. The programs would train apprentices to power. Over an era spanning economic depression, world war, anticommunist purges, prosperity, and social conflict, the United States underwent a radical transformation of its economy and society, yet its political system enjoyed remarkable stability. This project seeks to uncover the pillars of this stability and explores the seedbeds from which thousands of civic leaders emerged.

David Hollinger observed that the United States occupies an unusual position in nationalist scholarship. On the one hand, the U.S. is the most successful nationalist project in all of modern history – judged by the criteria of longevity, ability to absorb a variety of peoples, and its sheer power. From 1935-70, its eighteenth century constitution survived with minimal
alteration, and the American political class was readily able to replenish itself from the ranks of young citizens.1 Recognition of success and stability of the American nationalist project need not signal that the U.S. was “exceptional” or that its conduct was uniquely virtuous. However, numerous observers have noted that scholars have been far less eager to analyze U.S. nationalism than other national groups. Michael Lind labeled American nationalism “the political doctrine that dare not speak its name.”2 Why is this so? Political theorist Michael Billig noted the general reluctance to label the political culture of long-established democracies as “nationalism.” He argued that accepted use places nationalism on the periphery, either on the margins of political discourse in liberal societies, or amid the fiery birth of nations clawing free from the clutches of empire.3 Nationalism calls forth images of blood and fire – atavistic appeals to ties of “race” or clan and appeals to sacrifice on the altar of the nation. When American political culture is portrayed as “nationalistic” it is almost always in a negative light, and is often a pejorative used for describing the nativism of the 1920s, or the intense xenophobia evoked by the attacks on Pearl Harbor and September 11, 2001.4

Much of the distaste for “nationalism” seems directed towards racial or ethno-cultural variants. Civic nationalism offers an alternate paradigm. Six decades ago, Hans Kohn argued that

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the United States based citizenship upon voluntary commitment to common political values. These included the sanctity of the individual, limited government, and respect for minority dissent and the rights of property. While Kohn seriously downplayed the salience of racial identity and the ties of ethnicity and religion, he was correct to point out that nearly all domestic political groups linked their activity back to ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. So powerful was the attraction of these ideals that even revolutionary groups like the Industrial Workers of the World and the American Communist Party found it expedient to frame their agendas within the compass set by these documents. Similarly, proponents of greater civil rights for racial and ethnic minorities drew inspiration from Supreme Court Justice John Harlan’s assertion that the “Constitution is color-blind.” In the early 1940s, Sociologist Gunnar Myrdal summarized these values as the “American Creed.” Decades later, American feminists and advocates for the rights of the disabled and sexual minorities would promote citizenship based upon voluntary belief and activity, rather than ascribed characteristics of the body or soul. “Civic nationalism” more aptly describes the latter mode of national allegiance than terms like “willed community,” “civic republicanism” or “Americanism,” it has


reached wider acceptance through the works of Liah Greenfeld, Michael Ignatieff, and Gary Gerstle.10

The argument that the United States represents a model of unalloyed civic nationalism is patently false. Civic and ethno-racial variants of American national identity have co-existed since the country’s founding. The framers of the U.S. Constitution may have omitted reference to race, but the federal Naturalization Act of 1790 stipulated that only “free white persons” could become naturalized citizens.11 Gary Gerstle argued that voluntary and ascribed forms of nationalism were inseparably linked in the minds of ordinary Americans as well as prominent theorists throughout the twentieth century. While a relatively strong proponent of civic nationalism like Theodore Roosevelt believed “new” immigrants from eastern, central, and southern Europe could be assimilated as loyal American citizens, he drew the line at recognizing African-Americans or immigrants from Eastern and Southern Asia as compatriots, regardless of their dedication to constitutionalism or willingness to make sacrifices on behalf of other Americans.12 Applying the binary of civic versus ethno-cultural nationalism, this project explores how both tendencies operated within the youth governments, with the impulse to include participants from all walks of American life competing with patterns of racial and


11 Rogers Smith, Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 159.

12 Gerstle, American Crucible: 28-41.
ethnical exclusion. The decades-long struggle to overcome these barriers – a mission undertaken by students, organizers, and citizens - mark one of the major themes in this work.

However, the promoters of American civic nationalism have demanded sacrifice from citizens no less frequently and loudly than their ethno-cultural counterparts. Within the curriculum of youth leadership programs, students heard exhortations on the need to pay taxes, perform jury service, vote in elections, and serve as civic leaders. Beyond these were more amorphous responsibilities reflecting particular concerns of sponsors. For example, the American Legion required Boys’ State delegates in the 1930s to swear an oath that they would venerate the American flag, and it exhorted them to identify and denounce “subversive” activity. Other programs promoted racial tolerance and urged students to combat bigotry and intolerance. The ultimate duty of citizens to kill or to be killed on behalf of the nation during wartime figured prominently in the designs of civic educators. Indeed, many of the youth leadership programs were a reaction to the student protest movement of the 1930s, in which youth radicals challenged the authority of the state to command individuals to perform military service. This insurrection was perceived to threaten the ability of the United States military to recruit junior officers from colleges and universities, and insuring that young people would make sacrifices for the American nation was a top priority of both liberal and conservative educators.

The discourse surrounding military service and citizenship also highlights how gender and racial identity influenced conceptions of American identity. Traditionally viewed as the highest form of civic loyalty, veterans have generally enjoyed a privileged civic status. Leaders of persecuted minority communities saw military service as a way to assert the civic “fitness” of their group and advance their claims for civic equality. Military service was also reckoned as a male prerogative. Indeed, citizenship develops within the matrix of gender relationships. Anne
McClintock and Julie Skurski have shown how nationalist discourse replicates structures of family authority, as when citizens pledge loyalty to the nation in the guise of a mother, father, or even an uncle.\textsuperscript{13} From the early republic to waning years of the twentieth century, the teaching of American citizenship was firmly wedded to male and female identity.\textsuperscript{14} This pattern appears markedly in the sex-segregated Boys’ State and Girls’ State. Programmers in the Legion and Legion Auxiliary attempted to reify the separation of male and female political duties, with young men being groomed to tend the wheels of government while young women received training appropriate to their role as “auxiliary” citizens. While less pronounced, similar notions of gendered citizenship operated within the programs instituted by the YMCA and other organizations.

Besides offering a useful lens for examining the multi-dimensional architecture of civic identity, a study of American nationalism highlights parallels between the United States and other countries, particularly the common agenda of forging youth allegiance. The desire to transform illiterate peasants and provincials into loyal citizens has inspired the growth of public education since the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{15} In the United States, educational reformers like


Benjamin Rush and Horace Mann championed the common school as a mechanism to “convert men into republican machines.”\textsuperscript{16} The idea that public education would cement civic loyalty to the Republic was widely held among the intellectual elite of the early Republic. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, this argument underwrote the campaign to achieve universal primary, and later, secondary education.\textsuperscript{17} Pressed by parallel crises of war, economic depression, and political instability, nationalist educators in many countries developed institutions to secure the loyalty of young citizens, harnessing their seemingly boundless energy and idealism to the needs of the state. The Soviet Union created its \textit{Komsomol}, a model imitated by socialist governments worldwide; fascist Germany and Italy had the \textit{Hitlerjugend} and \textit{Balilla}.\textsuperscript{18} Civil society programs offered a parallel structure for socializing youth in American politics, though their ideological mission was to promote representative government, not autocracy.

One distinctive feature of U.S. nationalist development has been its amateur and voluntarist character. As Cecilia O’Leary and Francesca Morgan observed, the authority to train young people in citizenship after Reconstruction did not reside solely with the state. Indeed, from the end of Reconstruction, civic groups like the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), and the United Daughters of the Confederacy took leading roles in reconfiguring schools into veritable shrines of American nationhood.\textsuperscript{19} The


\textsuperscript{19} O’Leary, 150; Morgan, 39.
reforms they advocated led to mandatory courses in American history offering a pantheon of national “heroes” for schoolchildren to venerate, and the imposition of what I call a “patriotic regime” – exercises ranging from oaths of allegiance, to military-style drill and essay contests – all designed to weld youth loyalty to the nation. The federal government played a comparatively minor part in shaping youth citizenship, and elected officials found it more desirable to support civil society’s patriotism projects than establish state-based youth programs. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to speak of the propagation of American “nationalisms” from multiple transmission points. While scholars have examined the youth work of the Legion and YMCA, they have tended to ignore their efforts to shape youth politics, especially after World War II. I argue that during this period these organizations wielded the greatest influence over youth civic education.  

Nationalism promises to meld individuals into what Benedict Anderson called “deep, horizontal comradeships,” but that project simultaneously creates new forms of inequality. Nation-building joins citizens together by excluding the rest of humanity, who are relegated to the status of the nation’s “other.” Nationalist regimes also arrange citizens into hierarchies, and the propagation of nationalism requires citizen-leaders to transmit those concepts to their compatriots. Modern American civic nationalism evolved in reaction to ideologies perceived as “foreign” - socialism, fascism and communism. Faced with their inability to counteract

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20 For example, William Pencak’s study of the American Legion ends in 1941, before the great expansion of the veteran’s movement that occurred after World War II. The Y’s efforts to shape youth citizenship undertaken in the 1930s are explored in C. Howard Hopkins’ official history of the Association, which also ends its survey at World War II. The American YMCA also experienced a great swelling in its membership, and the late 1940s marks the flowering of the Youth and Government program into a national youth movement. While there has been a growing number of scholars who have examined the Association’s stance on gender, racial, and sexual politics, these studies have so far failed to notice one of the most significant youth work projects of the post-war era. See William Pencak, For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989). See also C. Howard Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America (New York: Association Press, 1951).

American youth’s growing disenchantment with conventional politics during the 1930s, groups like the American Legion and the Junior Statesmen Foundation (JSF) experimented with new models of citizenship education. These conservatives feared that “subversives” had instigated the protest movements on college and universities and believed that foreign agents fomented discontent to undermine young people’s willingness to shoulder civic duties such as military service. American Legion Boys’ State and the Junior Statesmen of America emerged from the soil of earlier “character building” youth programs like Scouting but also marked a pedagogical departure. These programs focused on the development of leaders who would defend the political system with their words and, if necessary, by blood.

While conservatives sought to rein in youth radicalism, liberals in the YMCA and the New York Society for Ethical Culture (NY-SEC) hoped that youth rebellion could be channeled against political corruption and ineffective government. Properly harnessed, they believed youth could rejuvenate the body politic. In their zeal, organizers drew inspiration from movements outside the United States. Anti-radical hardliners rejected initiatives that emerged with foreign lineage, but liberal and progressive educators studied these models and acknowledged their successes. The organizers of the American Youth Congress (AYC), YMCA Youth and Government, and the Work Camps for Democracy all sought to glean lessons that might enhance American youth’s participation in democratic life. This selective adoption of pedagogy from

22 Kerber, No Constitutional Right to be Ladies, 242-243.

abroad shows that American youth nationalism was not exceptional or unique; rather, it evolved in concert and in competition with other national ideologies.24

With the looming international crisis at the end of the 1930s, American youth remained skeptical of involvement in another war to resolve disputes outside the Western Hemisphere. Student leaders widely stated their opposition to conscription and military service in essay contests and through a potent anti-war movement. To counter this resistance, liberal and conservative educators injected pro-intervention messages into their citizenship initiatives years before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This campaign did not promote belligerence, though it emphasized defending the nation as a core obligation of young citizens. War skeptics and pacifists were portrayed as bad citizens, guilty of bigotry and ignorance. The prolonged conditions of national emergency enhanced the stature of the youth leadership programs, but the outbreak of war threatened them with the possibility of suspension and even extinction.

For two decades after the end of the Second World War, the largest programs trained upwards of 100,000 students annually across the United States and surrounding territories. Ideologically, they constituted a truly national youth movement in support of an emerging post war “consensus:” support for “free enterprise,” suppression of domestic communists, and embrace of self-anointed status of the United States as “leader of the free world.” During the last fifteen years there has been an outpouring of works illuminating the conflicts, compromises, and suppression that led to the crystallization of the politics of “consensus” and the resurgence of conservatism after 1945. Wendy Wall and Kim Phillips-Fein both argue that the campaign to politically rehabilitate the Right began amid the Great Depression, with the efforts of small

groups of what political theorist Corey Robin called “action intellectuals.” These works have illuminated the critical role that these action intellectuals played in rebuilding conservatism; however, these works generally ignore the place of young people in the process. My project shows that youth leaders were instrumental to “selling” the consensus ideology at home and were an integral part of Cold War foreign policy. Domestically, youth leaders were encouraged to “use salesmanship” to sell the virtues of “free enterprise” to their fellow citizens. However, some students used their symbolic authority to inveigh against the “welfare state” and call for drastic reductions in government interference in the economy. My project illuminates how American post-war conservative movement was able to regenerate itself thanks in measure to these young activists. By the same token, American Cold War liberalism profited greatly from the steady stream of apprentices who emerged from these programs.

Besides rebalancing the government’s role in economy and society, these youth leaders were instrumental in the projection of American hegemony across the globe after World War II. Even before the tides of battle had turned decisively towards the Allies, planners in the YMCA and American Legion devised schemes to cultivate youth leaders as political and military leaders who would support permanent U.S. involvement in the maintenance of global order. After the setbacks suffered during the Korean War, politicians and educators redoubled their efforts to train cadres of youth diplomats. Starting in the early 1950s, the YMCA added a model United Nations to the Youth and Government program. Programmers in the Youth and Government and the Encampment for Citizenship expanded their curriculum to include discussion of foreign

policy issues. After 1961, both programs fed graduates into the Peace Corps. Overall, the intent of these programs was to serve the goals of American foreign policy through formal diplomacy and person-to-person contacts.  

As producers rather than consumers of nationalist ideology, these apprentices to power were exposed to the internal conflicts within the post-war consensus. The programs generally gave students wide latitude to point out the flaws in American society and propose reforms, which frequently became templates for real legislation. The most significant conflict was abolishing racial segregation, a move supported by increasing numbers of adult counselors and students after 1945. Still, immense energy was required to fully desegregate the largest citizenship programs, and the conflicts spilled over the gates of the mock governments and embroiled the programs in controversy and scandal. In turn, the struggle of African-American “race pioneers” to win admission and equal opportunity within a mock government setting inspired other teenagers in the late 1960s to challenge bans on the disabled and to broaden the limits on political dialogue to include discussions of the Vietnam War, the draft, and urban rebellions.

All of this begs the question of why hundreds of thousands of young people would be eager to dedicate so much time and energy to mock governments and democracy summer camps. Oral interviews with two dozen former students and administrators illuminate how these programs introduced students to adult politics and shaped their later civic behavior. They reveal that youth leaders, some as young as fifteen, entered with a significant degree of political socialization and ideological development. Some had formed strong allegiances to political

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parties or to leaders; a few had even charted out future careers leading from the school house to the White House. Nevertheless, the training could make a profound impact. For many, the programs offered an exhilarating environment in which a young politician was surrounded by hundreds of likeminded peers. Young people could try out political identities, devising or revising electoral strategies or positions. Many forged lasting bonds with other participants, based on shared values and ambitions. It could also be a deeply alienating experience. For some, the programs emphasized political forms and process over ideas or genuine debate. Others discovered that the model youth democracy offered by the sponsors was not as free or open as they had hoped, and that the counselors sometimes enforced strict limits on what the students could debate or what policies they could support.

Furthermore, the experience represented an investment opportunity for students to amass social capital to invest in their budding careers. The “credential” granted to successful candidates from the more prestigious programs could be exchanged for access to elite schools, introductions to political patrons, and public service employment. Indeed, the Boys’ State or Youth and Government credential can be found on the resumes of literally hundreds of prominent political officials in the U.S. Drawing from the works of Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu, I argue these exchanges represent forms of bonding capital, which concentrated privilege and status within existing social networks. Another type of capital was bridging – the development of interpersonal connections between individuals of different social backgrounds. The Legion’s Boys’ State and Girls’ State programs placed the delegates into the rough equality of a military barracks, though the students tended to be racially homogenous because of the admissions process. In the YMCA’s Youth and Government, the NY-SEC’s Encampment for Citizenship (EFC), and the short-lived youth citizenship programs of the Highlander Folk School, adult staff
took great pains to foster an egalitarian environment between the racially and socially diverse students. In time, they hoped that the graduates would reshape American society to align it with the idealized depiction of civic life experienced by the participants.27

The citizenship training model developed by these groups enjoyed great prestige among numerous stakeholders in American society in the decades following World War II. Government officials who volunteered their time relished the prospect of winning over prospective voters and saw the events as a tool to recruit campaign volunteers and staff members. The programs traded on the public reputation of sponsors and enjoyed access to substantial financial and logistical support. For example, the YMCA and the Legion were able to persuade state legislators and college administrators to hand over the State Capitol or campus buildings to a group of teenagers playing legislator. The advisory boards of these organizations read like a roster of the most powerful jurists, legislators, and business leaders of the day. Even a comparatively tiny program like the NY-SEC’s Encampment for Citizenship received public support from leaders like Eleanor Roosevelt and Martin Luther King, Jr. Newspaper and newsreel journalists covered meetings between youth politicians and high officials. And hundreds of thousands of parents, teachers, and community leaders eagerly nominated young people to participate. The events captured the public’s imagination because the programs seemed to embody the hope that the introduction of successive crops of impartial and dedicated youth leaders into the political system would help the country move closer to its ideals.

The terminus of this journey into the heart of American youth nationalism does not coincide with the end of the citizenship training programs. Indeed, many now celebrate their

seventh decade of operation. Throughout the intervening years, Boys’ Nation and Girls’ Nation delegates continued to be received by Presidents, and the sex-segregated programs received a specific exemption in the Title IX Education Amendments to the 1964 federal civil rights law. The programs continued to graduate thousands of adolescents and young adults annually. Yet the mid-1960s saw the beginning of a period of marked and permanent decline in popularity and public stature of this educational model. Attendance at the programs fell off from an increase in the number of youth activities available to high school students, as well as from a growing expectation that young people ought to enjoy greater autonomy over their leisure time. Another cause was the increasingly severe controversies that embroiled the youth programs. The perceived failure of the programs to provide equality of opportunity and space for political dissent damaged their reputation. Using the example of the 1969 Minnesota Girls’ State, I show how public controversy erupted when Governor Regenia Hicks refused to say that she loved her country. The remarks and conduct of the African-American Girls State Governor evoked ire from conservative white delegates and the leaders of the Minnesota Legion Auxiliary. Enraged by Hicks’ defiance, Auxiliary passed her over for a coveted nomination to Girls’ Nation. The decision was debated at the state and national level, mainly on the question of whether the Auxiliary had displayed racial bias against the Girl Governor in their decision. However, the conflict exposed deeper ideological division - the rift between the traditional loyalty espoused by the Minnesota Legion Auxiliary and the “ambiguous patriotism” shared by Hicks’ and youth

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dissidents. Many white allies championed her right to criticize government policies and deny her “love” to the nation – while maintaining her status as a loyal youth leader. 29

Contests over youth loyalty and the boundaries of legitimate dissent shaped civic discussions over American military involvement in Southeast Asia from 1965-1973. These disputes also troubled the placid operations of the model governments. As in the student anti-war movement of the 1930s, youth leaders questioned whether the government had the right to obligate them and their peers to sacrifice for a Cold War foreign policy that many dissidents found unconscionable. Unlike the previous era, civic educators were not entirely successful in suppressing or resolving this dissent, and the programs became bemired in public controversy. Another blow came from the continuing controversies about admissions standards. Physically disabled students, following the employing the tactics of the Black freedom struggle to demolish racial segregation, challenged their exclusion, and by extension, asserted their claims to full citizenship and potential for leadership.

Nevertheless, these programs were immensely successful in terms of the absolute number of young citizens who participated over a thirty-five year history and in their ability to place graduates throughout all levels of the American political system. They also made a significant impact on the development of American nationalism, encouraging the spread of civic nationalism, even though the admissions process often privileged white delegates, and the curriculum relegated many talented youth leaders to auxiliary or second-class status. Ultimately, the rhetoric of equalitarian citizenship and meritocracy proved more powerful. The sponsors, located within civil society, the private sector, and the state, reaped benefits from their support. These initiatives enjoyed great popularity with young people and received acclaim from their

parents and teachers. At times, the youth governments lobbied for the interests of un-franchised young citizens, while at others, the legislature parroted the agenda of their sponsors. Ultimately, the United States gained several permanent channels to recruit and train civic leaders, offering a non-state version of national youth movements.
Chapter 1: Conservative Nationalists Enlist Youth Leaders to Rejuvenate the Old Patriotic Regime, 1934-39

In the United States of the early 1930s, it seemed that the country’s young people were in distress. The Great Depression made it far more difficult – and in some cases near impossible – for them to traverse the gap from childhood to maturity. With jobs scarce and uncertain prospects for economic recovery, young men and women were losing hope of matching the standard of living enjoyed by their parents, let alone achieving the Horatio Alger myth of individual social mobility. As a consequence of what contemporaries called the “Youth Problem,” many youth questioned traditional modes of patriotism. On college campuses nationwide, students protested compulsory military training and pledged not to fight in overseas wars. Others debated the merits of overhauling the constitution or even scrapping federalism to achieve radical political and economic reform. Many conservatives believed that this unrest was part of a coordinated plot to undermine the foundations of the Republic. To these analysts, the conspiracy to radicalize American youth extended from college classrooms to church pulpits. Some feared that conspirators had even breached the sanctity of the home, diminishing the authority of fathers over their children.

It was the end of an era. Not the demise of the Republic, as some feared, but the end of a half-century regime to foster youth patriotism in the United States. Since the 1880s, various intellectuals, government officials, educators and social activists had sought to define the United States as both a national community and an ideology. These groups had conflicting definitions of citizenship and national allegiance. However, by the mid-1920s, the American Right had won the contest to define citizenship and patriotism and controlled the means to transmit those values to millions of school-age children. Now the Right’s edifice appeared crumbling, and various private educators and patriotic organizations sought to shore up the pilings.
In response, conservative educators enlisted American youth to quell student rebellions and neutralize the influence of “subversives” by seeding high schools and colleges with intellectual shock troops loyal to a philosophy of “100% Americanism.” This purpose lay behind the creation of the American Legion’s Boys’ State and Girls’ State projects in the mid-1930s. A similar imperative inspired the smaller, California-based Junior Statesmen of America, which later became one of the largest private purveyors of civic education. These programs recruited talented youth “leaders” from high schools and college preparatories to participate in hands-on simulations of local and state government, under the supervision of adult counselors and volunteers. The organizers emphasized youth control over the proceedings, and they touted the extreme fidelity that the mock governments had to real ones. Students voted for officials, who passed legislation, while other participants interpreted and enforced those measures. By giving young people the opportunity to wield symbolic authority, planners hoped that the students would return to their communities with a renewed appreciation and dedication to the political system. By 1940 this new “regime” of citizenship programs was operating in 34 states and training 20,000 high school students annually, placing its graduates in positions of authority where they could exercise leadership over American life for decades to come.

Derived from efforts to “Americanize” immigrants and build youth “character” in the late 19th century, the programs of the new regime hewed to a conservative political vision. The admissions policies restricted access mainly to native born white males. In their presentation of American citizenship to students, the Legion and Junior Statesmen Foundation focused upon the discharge of citizen obligations – especially male military service – over the exercise of individual liberties. Furthermore, the programs initially limited their scope to local and state governments – areas where conservatives traditionally enjoyed the greatest authority. Tied to this
vision was the conscious effort to promote “clean” governments – free from the allegedly “corrupt” influence of entrenched partisanship, political machines, and solidarities based upon ethnicity or social class. These measures offered a truncated version of American politics, one which left out economic influences or radical alternatives to political institutions.

Solidly conservative in intent, the new regime was nevertheless represented a radical break with the old way of teaching American civics. In selecting youth leaders for political training, the founders of Boys’ State were consciously crafting a reactionary vanguard that would rival communist and socialist youth activists. The 19th century civics model featuring uniform textbooks glorifying national heroes, flag ceremonies, oaths and military drill, gave way to a youth-centered, individualized curriculum that appropriated many of the hallmarks of Progressive education developed by reformers like John Dewey. Yet these practices were used by the Right to safeguard the privileges and inequalities of American politics, not to level them. By recruiting apprentices from outside elite circles and offering the opportunity to wield symbolic power, these programs helped bolster youth allegiance to political institutions whose legitimacy had been badly damaged by the Great Depression.

**Contours of the 1930’s Youth Problem**

Youth coming of age after 1929 faced unprecedented obstacles impeding their full entry into American civic life. As the leading indicators of economy activity tracked their downward spiral, the prospects for the next generation seemed grim. The cohort of Americans aged sixteen to twenty-four was already the smallest since 1870, but the Depression caused the birth rate to plummet further. Even with the average American family shrinking, malnourishment and

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30 U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: Population, II, 576. Interlocking factors account for the decline prior to 1929. Since the late 19th century, many American families had
naked hunger stalked the young. Government statistics classified one out of five children in New York State as undernourished and nine out of ten in hard-hit coal mining regions of Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Illinois.\textsuperscript{31} The crash compounded hardships faced by farm youth, whose family fortunes were already depleted by the slump in crop prices in the mid-1920s. Older boys and girls risked losing support from their families, and perhaps a quarter million were turned out of their houses to roam the country’s roads, rails, and back highways in search of opportunity.\textsuperscript{32} What they found was incredible hardship, degradation, and danger that killed off their hopes for a better life. In a chilling analogy, more than one writer likened these “tramps” to the bands of Russian orphans – \textit{bezprizorni} - who haunted the USSR’s cities and hinterlands, terrorizing adults and committing crimes.\textsuperscript{33}

Of course, there were islands of prosperity amid a sea of troubles, and some fortunate children lacked any direct experience with the Depression. Nevertheless, chronic poverty nationwide challenged hallowed assumptions that the United States held more possibilities for economic opportunity, social mobility, and “progress” than any other society. The Depression threatened to euthanize the hoary American myth - immortalized in Horatio Alger’s \textit{Ragged Dick} tales – that individual merit would be rewarded with prosperity and social “respectability.”\textsuperscript{34} As

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 234.
\item \textsuperscript{34}Carol Nackenhoff, \textit{The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse} (New York: Oxford University, 1940, 11. Nackenhoff observes that these works stand as a political and economic allegory, a story in which the “adolescent of the Republic is the adolescent Republic. Both faced dangers that threaten their moral fiber, strength, purpose, and identity. Alger’s crisis of adolescence had come earlier from the United States’ transition
Louis Hartz famously observed, the “Alger myth” nestled close to the heart of Americans’ self-conception of belonging to a nation uniquely blessed with opportunities for self-improvement. If the myth proved false, then what did it mean for the “exceptional” status of the United States as a nation? Would the next generation of citizens embrace these values as fervently as their forebears, or would they lose faith and opt for radical social change? 35

The crisis had seemingly taken a straight razor to the bootstraps of an entire generation. Indeed, it appeared that millions of young people would fail to achieve the social status of their parents, let alone reach social “maturity” by the standards of the day. Traditionally, the road to independence and adulthood was paved across a substrate of wage labor, but job prospects for workers between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four were dismal. The gulf between childhood and adulthood now appeared insurmountable. Access to jobs was curtailed by legal prohibitions on child labors contained in the National Recovery Act and the parlous state of the job market itself.36 The unemployment rate for youth between the ages of 16-24 for the years 1933-36 was forty percent. Many teenagers sank into bitterness and despair, and postponed their preparations for marriage or childrearing into the indefinite future. A survey of unemployed youth in Boston in 1933 portrayed a “lost generation” in the making. With no wage work and in many cases, reduced access to schooling, daily life for older girls and young women consisted of household drudgery. “Hanging around” on street corners or pool halls dominated the social calendars for

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36Courtney Dinwiddie, Chair of the National Child Labor Committee, estimated that 700,000 children under the age of sixteen had been employed in wage work in 1930. Dinwiddie calculated that the New Deal’s NRA prohibited 100,000 from working, while eligibility status of the rest remained in doubt. See “Plans Laid to Aid Jobless Children,” *New York Times* (21 October, 1933), 17.
jobless older boys and young men. Researchers claimed that established recreational or “character building” programs, such as the Scouts or the YMCA, appeared to have little appeal for these disaffected teens.\textsuperscript{37} Idled for long bouts, some sought new diversions. The FBI’s uniform crime reports from the early 1930s linked offenses such as auto theft and burglary to youth – suggesting that that the next generation possessed less respect for the sanctity of property than its elders.\textsuperscript{38}

What of the public schools? Americans had long pinned their hopes for transmitting their values and knowledge to their progeny on public education. During the boom years of the 1920s, school districts nationwide spent liberally on school construction. At the start of the crisis, local school systems struggled to maintain the investment. Reduced budgets forced school officials to shorten the academic year, pay teachers in scrip, or else shutter the schoolhouse.\textsuperscript{39} Through its “Save our Schools” program in 1933, the American Legion attempted to convince local governments to spare schools from deep cuts.\textsuperscript{40} Legion support for schools often came with a political cost, including “red riders” to relief bills that required teacher loyalty oaths. Only massive infusions of aid from the New Deal’s Federal Emergency Relief Agency forestalled permanent closures and allowed districts to actually increase enrollment. Curricular reformers urged expanding vocational education opportunities for jobless adolescents and youth. After 1935, the newly-formed National Youth Administration offered work-fare and training to


\textsuperscript{40}Murphy, 136-137.
students wishing to continue their education in high school and college. More educational reformers well knew. The goal of universal secondary public schooling was an optimistic bet that education could enhance the life prospects of a hard-hit generation. In particular, many commentators placed great hope in vocational education. They argued that high rates of youth unemployment were the result of a mismatch between young workers skills and the technical needs of an industrial economy. The harsh truth was that in 1933, only one out of every ten to fifteen high school graduates could find full-time work. No amount of woodworking or home economics classes would bridge that gulf. Expansion of secondary schooling was a pragmatic strategy to defer the entry of young jobseekers into a job market with too few opportunities in the hope that job opportunities would return while students were sequestered from the workforce for four years.

At the very least, the massive investment of scarce resources into education was meant to prove to youth that the country’s leaders had not given up hope in the Depression Generation’s future. Yet the most educated youth seemed to harbor doubts in their elders’ good intentions, as

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42 David L. Angus and Jeffrey Mirel, *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890-1995* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1999), 60. Some of the greatest increases in secondary school enrollment occurred in the years 1930-34, as adolescents returned to the classroom when the labor market collapsed. The number of students in eleventh and twelfth grades increased during this time from 30% to 43%.


American colleges and universities of the early 1930s seethed with political discontent. This wave of unrest was a far cry of the college scene of the previous decade. Throughout the 1920s American college campuses had been bastions of ideological conservatism and pro-capitalist boosterism. Considered less politically engaged than their European counterparts, American students were driven by athletic rivalries and fashion trends. The Depression caused a belated, yet profound shift in the attitudes of this youth elite. Until 1932, the security of middle-class status insulated most college students from the growing economic miseries across the country. That year enrollment dropped precipitously, and college administrators responded by cutting service, raising tuition and fees, and slashing budgets for scholarships and student loans. Making matters worse, college graduates could look forward to a long, potentially futile search for work. Even graduates from prestigious universities could be found queuing in soup lines.

These conditions precipitated a student movement inside once conservative campuses and led to a dramatic reversal of fortunes for the once moribund campus left. Activists from the socialist League for Industrial Democracy reconciled with their rivals in the communist-controlled National Student League to channel and mobilize student outrage. While left wing organizers called for government jobs programs and solidarity with striking workers, the issue that galvanized youth protest was war. In 1933, young people in North America and Europe took notice of the ominous political and military developments worldwide, including the Japanese seizure of Manchuria and the German Reichstag’s granting of absolute power to Chancellor Adolph Hitler. Young people feared that their generation was being groomed as fodder for another global conflagration like the Great War. The student “peace” movement began when the

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46 Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University, 1993), 15-16.
Oxford Union passed a debate resolution stating that “this House will in no circumstances fight for King and country.” Across the Atlantic, student protestors adopted an amended version: “We will not support the U.S. Government in any war that it may conduct.” The popularity of the so-called “peace pledge” at elite schools such as Northwestern, University of Chicago, and Syracuse inspired students to protest compulsory ROTC and Civilian Military Training Corps (CMTC) programs at their schools. Organizations such as the National Student League (NSL) and Student League for Industrial Democracy, which included many former or current members of Communist or socialist youth movements, organized mass demonstrations against militarism. The first of these exercises, the oddly-named “Student Strike against the War,” began in April, 1934 and attracted 25,000 students, mostly from East Coast campuses.

Anti-war activists failed to decouple military training from American higher education, but their protests reverberated throughout the halls of power. In 1934, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Hamilton v. Regents of the University of California* that students had no constitutional right to refuse military service if they attended a land-grant university. The unanimous ruling affirmed the validity of ROTC programs on campus and compulsory training courses. The decision was hailed as a victory for conservatives who sought to preserve the link between American citizenship and the civic duty of able-bodied males to defend the state. Despite this rebuff, the student anti-war movement continued to garner headlines and influence federal policy. Subsequent strikes drew students in from across the United States and boasted ever larger

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47 The 1862 federal Morill Land Grant Act that created public universities throughout much of the United States included “military tactics” as one of the fields that these institutions were to teach. In 1916, Congress standardized the curriculum through the creation of Reserve Officer Training Corps programs through the National Defense Act. In 1920, the Act was amended to stipulate that such programs at public universities could either be voluntary or compulsory.


numbers: 175,000 in 1935, 500,000 in 1936, and, according to some estimates one million students marched in 1937. Partly to win over this youth movement to the Democratic Party and quell student protests, President Roosevelt announced the establishment of a National Youth Administration (NYA) in 1935. The NYA provided federal financial assistance and job training to high school and college students. In Congress, students lobbied for passage of the Nye-Kvale amendment to the 1916 National Defense Act, a measure that would make ROTC training elective. Ultimately, this measure failed, as did a 1940 bill to eliminate conscription entirely. College protests were not harbingers of a new American revolution. However, the peace “strikes” had the potential to disrupt the military’s access to college students, a prime source of the officer corps.50

Did American youth at large share the views of the collegiate crowd? Opinion surveys demonstrated that Depression generation as a whole shared some of the protesters’ reservations about militarism, but most American youth believed in military preparedness and were willing to serve in the armed forces. A poll of 13,000 Maryland youth conducted by the American Council on Education in 1936 showed solid majority (60%) who believed that wars were needless and preventable. The pollsters also asked respondents how they would act in the event of a war. Slightly over one in ten males stated emphatically that they would refuse to fight in the armed forces, and one in five females said that they would advise their “brothers, husbands, or sweethearts” to refuse. However, an overwhelming percentage (85.7%) stated that they would support the military as volunteers or conscripts, especially in an invasion.51 A 1937 Gallup poll

51 Howard M. Bell, Youth Tell their Story (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1938; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), 246. The survey also broke down the responses by ethnicity and educational attainment. The percentage of Catholic youth saying that they would volunteer for the military was far higher than Jewish youth (28.9 versus 14.3, respectively). The survey authors attributed this difference to the higher educational attainment of Jews. The survey’s data shows that teenagers and youth who had more than a 12th grade education were far less
of 100,000 youth concluded that American youth supported of large federal expenditures for the army and navy, and that nearly four in ten respondents expected the United States military to become involved in another European war.\textsuperscript{52}

To conservatives who believed that American citizenship included an individual obligation to perform military service, the peace “strikes” were abhorrent. They rejected the idea that youth elites could essentially ‘opt-out’ of military service if they disagreed with the current or future foreign policies of the United States. In 1935, the National Chairwoman of the Daughters argued that no college student who refused to perform military service ought to receive the benefits of public education.\textsuperscript{53} Spokesmen from right-wing veteran’s movements pointed out that youth of the 1860s and 1917 had enjoyed no liberty from military conscription. In particular, the American Legion applauded the Supreme Court’s ruling in the \textit{Hamilton} case and fiercely defended the need for ROTC programs in American colleges. And Legion hardliners hatched schemes to gather intelligence on the student movement and disrupt any efforts by colleges or groups like the YMCA to engage with the protestors.\textsuperscript{54}

Yet even the Legion’s representatives were reluctant to brand the majority of protestors as disloyal. To the moderate Legion Post of City College, New York, the strikers were not determined revolutionaries, but “boys and girls whose only crime was immaturity.” Such paternalistic attitudes denied the protestors political agency, and dismissed their concerns about war, militarism, and the economy in the mid-1930s as little more than the fleeting eruptions of

\textsuperscript{52}George Gallup, “Young Americans of the Depression Favor “Liberal” Politics, \textit{Illinois State Journal} (12 June 1937), Special Section, 1.


“flaming youth.” Conservatives critics may have pulled their punches because these youth came from the same middle class, native born backgrounds as they did. These youth had a pedigree that could not be questioned lightly. To denounce these children with the blanket charge of treason would call into question the patriotism those who had reared them: the parents and educators responsible for their upbringing.55

Instead, conservatives blamed a phalanx of “subversives” who sought to diminish youth allegiance to the nation and traditional patriotism. The roster of anti-American agents compiled by antiradicals was long, and it freely mixed progressives, freethinkers, and dissidents with the truly revolutionary. Teachers College of Columbia University was one of the institutions whose politically outspoken faculty drew the most fire from red hunters. Spokesmen from the American Legion accused progressive educators such as George S. Counts and Harold Rugg of filling school textbooks with “treasonous” ideas and adulterating traditional patriotism.56 These academics were overt critics of the Legion and supporters of the New Deal, and they hoped to foster reconciliation between the people of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Similarly distressing to the Legion’s anti-radical cadres were Christian pacifists who attempted to persuade that fighting wars was inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. One of the leading antiwar speakers that angered the Legion was Kirby Page, a Protestant minister, lecturer, and author, who denounced the U.S. conduct during the last war as morally equivalent to that of Germany.57 Such attitudes,


57 Kirby Page, Must We Go to War? (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), 5.
if transmitted to millions of impressionable youth, would, according to the Legion’s leadership, leave the United States defenseless to its enemies. Another source of alarm was the growth of socialist, communist, and fascist youth summer programs. So-called “red” and “brown” summer camps copied the format of youth-centered activities of the Scouts or YMCA, but aimed to create junior socialists, communists, or fascists, whose political aspirations were “alien” to the political traditions of the United States.\

American anti-radicals sought to link these “subversive” activities into strands of a vast “Red Network:” a conspiracy hatched in the bowels of the Kremlin with a mission to disrupt and destroy the United States government. Elizabeth Dilling, author and anti-radical crusader, classified left-leaning or dissident Americans such as Clarence Darrow, Margaret Sanger, and Albert Einstein as co-conspirators. Her handbook became a bible for red hunters, including those in the Legion, and Dilling herself acknowledged the information sharing and cooperation she enjoyed with the organization’s leaders. The assumption that united the anti-radical fraternity was that all forms of domestic disorder ultimately derived from foreign sources.

The existence of a preternaturally well-organized, foreign cabal did not fully absolve conservatives for allowing the collapse of the old patriotic regime and its half century project to inculcate “100% Americanism” in youth. Conservatives claimed that Americanism was an ideology as old as the Republic, and some claimed to find evidence of its spirit among the


59Elizabeth Dilling, The Red Network: A “Who’s Who” and Handbook of Radicalism for Patriots (Chicago: Elizabeth Dilling, 1934), 5. Dilling dedicated her book to “professional patriots” who supported her research, including leaders of the Illinois Department of the Legion. Commander Paul Armstrong received special praise and would later become one of the chief supports of the fledgling Boys’ State movement.
Athenians or the woodland denizens of Northern Europe. Nevertheless, American nationalism had a distinctly modern odor. Prior to 1865, there was no uniform conception of nationhood in the United States, only a patchwork of competing regional, sectional, religious, and ethnic identities. Even that iconic emblem, the Stars and Stripes, did not achieve the status of a national symbol in the North until the Confederate firing of Fort Sumter in 1861. Unlike many European nation-building projects, in which the central state dominated the nation-building project, the American effort was led by volunteers and amateurs. From the 1880s, private organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic, the Women’s Relief Corps, the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, did the most to construct a common national identity that could heal the rift between the North and South, draw in the people of the United States, and exclude all others.

American nationalists reshaped civic space and time to manufacture elements of a national culture that would bind the people of the United States together. They dotted the landscape with monuments and shrines to heroes such as Washington and Lincoln and carved sacred time out of the calendar to celebrate national icons and memorialize past sacrifices such as Washington and Lincoln and carved sacred time out of the calendar to celebrate national icons and memorialize past sacrifices such

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61 Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism*, 94-95. The ‘humiliation’ of the Stars and Stripes before the Palmetto (South Carolina) and Confederate emblems, fired support for the Union cause, and inspired soldiers and ordinary citizens to identify the banner with cause worthy of sacrifice.

62 On the amateur character of American nationalism, see Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6-7; See also Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7. O’Leary and Morgan concede that the boundary between “professional” and amateur patriots in the United States is murky, since ostensibly ‘private’ groups frequently collaborated with the agents of local, state, and national government to employ the coercive power of the government to accomplish projects such as the Americanization of immigrant. Nevertheless, both authors stress that the national government played a secondary role in these projects until World War I. Morgan contends that the federal government did not take a leading role in fostering nationalism until the 1930s. Even then, the term “Professional Patriots” continued to be used as a pejorative against right-wing nationalists, suggesting that patriot should not be a paid occupation.
as Memorial Day. To make the effect of their efforts lasting, nationalists fostered youth patriotism through a variety of organizations. Under the banner of “character building,” many programs aimed to resolve the crisis of middle class masculinity and femininity engendered by the Industrial Revolution of the late 19th century. Faced with the enormous task of imposing a common American identity onto youth psyches that would override pre-existing ethnic or national ties, nationalists emphasized emotive and ritualistic expressions of allegiance that could reach children of diverse breeding and varying degrees of cultural “assimilation.” GAR spokesman and nationalist George Balch wrote the original version of the “Pledge of Allegiance” as a daily oath that would cement youth hearts and minds to the nation. Balch also dabbled in the creation of flag reverence ceremonies and etiquette codes, cobbled together from a variety of historical antecedents. Conservative nationalists thus invented traditions that covered the novelty of nationalist rituals with a pleasing layer of verdigris.

The ultimate achievement of the old patriotic regime was the transformation of the American public education system into a factory for producing patriots. Since the early Republic, nationalists such as Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, and Horace Mann had aspired to use the common school to transmit republicanism. In the decades after the end of the American Civil War, various civic groups, including the Grand Army of the Republic, the Daughters and Sons of the American Revolution, and the Women’s Relief Corps, all vigorously lobbied local and state

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65 O’Leary, 151-55.

governments to mandate civics and history classes for schoolchildren. Key to the effort to promote their version of Americanism was the adoption of “patriotic” textbooks that glorified the virtues of the Founders and praised the perfection of republican institutions in the United States. The old patriotic regime’s overriding goal for public education was to “Americanize” the millions of children new to the United States. Nationalists, using data from the 1890 federal Census, reported that a third of children in the United States were born abroad or had foreign-born parents. Residing in communities dominated by “foreign” languages, cultures, and religions, these youngsters were suspected having an attenuated loyalty to their adopted homeland. Many nationalists voiced concern at the ability of the country the massive number of immigrants, especially newcomers of exotic racial “stock.” Ultimately, conservatives sought to restrict immigration to allow the body politic to ‘digest’ these unfamiliar ingredients, or to severely limit the influence of “foreign” traits that might be transmitted by blood.

At a surface level, the 100% Americanism espoused by conservatives was a civic ideal in which individual potential and community progress were realized within the context of the political traditions established by the American Revolution. The tenets of this ideology included the sanctity of the individual and equality of citizens under the law – ostensibly similar


69 Nick Salvatore, Eugene V. Debs, Citizen and Socialist (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1984), 11. Michael Kazin and Joseph McCarty distill the common traits of Americanisms to a handful of values, including: the primacy of individual identity over communal ties; belief in almost unlimited social mobility; absence of a state church and proliferation of diverse denominations and grass-roots piety; a potent tradition of antiauthoritarianism, and a remarkable self-confidence of the United States’ status as a unique society with a special destiny among nations. See Kazin and McCarty, Introduction, Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal (Chapel Hill, North Carolina; University of North Carolina, 2006), 10. All of these aspects would be present in different degrees in all of the youth programs featured in this dissertation.
to versions of Americanism held by unionized workers, feminists, liberal intellectuals, and African-American civil rights groups. Yet the conservative’s variety placed a far greater premium on maintaining order than on the expansion of liberty or equality. The Right cherished the fiction that harmonious social relations existed between classes and factions in the United States, and determined that persistent social conflict was the result of “agitation” fomented by outside agents. This conservative vision of American citizenship also focused upon the performance of civic duties rather than on the exercise of personal or individual rights. Such notions of order and duty were used as justifications for the repression of political opponents who threatened the illusion of social harmony.

The leaders of the old patriotic regime sometimes refrained from making explicit the boundaries and exclusions inherent in their version of Americanism in their youth work. Sharply drawn barriers could alienate parents and potential allies. Instead, conservative youth workers described the goal of their labors as the cultivation of “character.” Character encompassed a hazy set of moral values, including thrift, concupiscence, honesty, fair play, and industry, and physical and intellectual dexterity. Good citizenship was also a crucial part of “character,” but youth workers in the Scouts, Rotary, and the YMCA did not spend as much energy detailing what skills and ideas composed it. Even the patriotic youth essay contest, sponsored annually by the Daughters and later, the Legion and its Women’s Auxiliary, did not directly educate youth about citizenship and patriotism. Rather these contests rewarded youth who had an intellectual grasp and could articulate these beliefs in a few hundred words. By selecting winners by the virtue of

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71 Pencak, 11, 16-19.

their prose, rather than bloodline or pedigree, the contest sponsors could make a convincing argument that Americanism was a belief system accessible to all those who made a decent effort to apprehend its meaning.\textsuperscript{73}

Beneath the symbols and surfaces of equalitarian citizenship presented by the old regime, conservative nation-builders promoted a racialized male authority. The advance of the old patriotic was mirrored by the federal government’s retreat from the protection of African-American’s civil liberties. As the former states of the Confederacy emerged from federal occupation, one by one they instituted “redeemed” or white supremacist governments that sought to disenfranchise Black voters by legal and extra-legal methods.\textsuperscript{74} At the same time, textbook authors presented students with a history of the Civil War that ‘reconciled’ past events to present politics, downplaying the pivotal role African-Americans and slavery had played in the conflict, and glorifying the heroism and sacrifice of white soldiers of the Union and the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{75} Conservative nationalists celebrated American martial glory, especially force applied to non-white adversaries and racial “inferiors” such the Indian tribes of the Great Plains or Moro insurgents in the Philippines. The privileging of military service as the supreme act of civic loyalty diminished female citizenship and subordinated women-centered nationalists to the authority of male leaders.\textsuperscript{76} Similarly, nativists sought to re-draw the boundaries of first class

\textsuperscript{73} Morgan, 22; Joel Spring, \textit{Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio, and Television} (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1992), 42-43; for a somewhat later treatment of the pervasive spread of patriotic essay contests, see Laurie Mercier, \textit{Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana’s Smelter City} (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 2001), 117. For examples of the DAR’s rewarding of youthful articulations of love of country, see \textit{Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine} 23 (July-December, 1903), 155.


\textsuperscript{75} O’Leary, 144-45,

\textsuperscript{76} Jacobson, 264-65; Gerstle, \textit{American Crucible}, 20, 38-40.
citizenship to exclude most recent immigrants, African Americans, Asians, American Indians, Roman Catholics and Jews. Conservatives also sought to limit the influence of disruptive ideologies such as feminism and socialism.\textsuperscript{77} These efforts at exclusion and repression did not go unchallenged. Yet the chorus calling for a racially exclusive and conservative definition of “100% Americanism” increasingly drowned out dissident voices after World War I.\textsuperscript{78}

These battles to determine the content of patriotism and who settle the question of who counted as an American and what constituted “Americanism” persisted from the 1880s up through the U.S. entry into World War I. Only when conservative groups could call on the coercive power of federal government to vanquish their rivals was their victory complete. After World War One, the American Legion inherited the mantle of leadership and assumed responsibility for the nationalist projects initiated by the GAR and its allies and presided over conservative victories during the 1920s. These included the violent and legal suppression of the massive post-World War I strike wave, enacting immigration restrictions through landmark federal legislation, and securing the ascendance of a pro-business, anti-regulation Republican Party in national politics. It also marked the apogee of the ideology that only whites were entitled to first class citizenship in the United States, and this racial authority was ringed by a vast arsenal of case law, medical and scientific knowledge, cultural forms, and violence.\textsuperscript{79} It is true the American Right had potent divisions, for example, over Prohibition of alcohol or the resurgent

\textsuperscript{77} Morgan, 107

\textsuperscript{78} On the federal government’s creation of a “disciplinary state” during World War I, see Gerstle, American Crucible, 91-95. Similar arguments about the punitive actions of the state and private organizations taken against dissidents are expressed in Hansen, 185, O’Leary, 243-44, and Morgan, 126.

Ku Klux Klan. By decades end, conservatives could be well pleased at the extent of their victories.80

The Legion’s violent attacks upon left-wing radicals, especially those taken against the Industrial Workers of the World, were largely sanctioned by the American public and governing class during the “Red Scare” at the end of World War I and the early 1920s.81 Despite the resumption of “normalcy” in the twenties, the Legion lost little of its animus to “subversives.” However, the organization’s leaders urged for a tactical shift from violence towards legal prosecution and political pressure. The calls to exercise restraint occasionally failed, and the Legion movement endured vociferous criticism from civil libertarians when its members fell back into old habits.82 To counter this reputation, the Legion’s national and state Americanism committees issued scores of pamphlets and articles to promote its interpretation of patriotism to the public and bolster the organization’s credentials as a non-partisan educator of youth.83

Because of its impressive record in securing veteran’s benefits and its uncompromising record as a foe of “un-American” influences, the movement swelled into a formidable presence in the civic landscape of the United States, boasting nearly 1 million members (out of a total of 4 million AEF veterans), ten thousand local posts, and “comrades” in every branch of government at local, state, and national level. The Legion’s portfolio included veteran’s affairs, national security, and patriotism, but the movement also enjoyed substantial influence in social welfare, especially through the activities of the 400,000-strong women’s Auxiliary and service clubs such

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80 On the Legion’s and formal, if muted, opposition to the Klan and Prohibition, see Pencak, 131-37. Leonard Moore argues how many Indiana business groups opposed the Klan as rivaling those of the state’s Catholic, Jewish, and African-American communities. See Moore, 12.


82 Ibid., 164-68.

83 Ibid., 102-104.
as the 40 and 8. In terms of racial and ethnic complexion, the Legion reflected the diversity of the American Expeditionary Force. Membership in this organization was broad, rather than deep. The typical Legionnaire was a middle aged man (47), residing squarely in the middle class with a plurality of members earning income as small business proprietors (24%), located in urban settings, but in towns and cities with under 25,000 inhabitants (34%). As a movement, the Legion avoided taking strong stands on political issues such as Prohibition, race relations, and the Klan, that could fracture its comradeship. Like most other civic groups of the interwar period, the Legion marginalized African-Americans, either through segregating veterans into “Negro” posts or by placing a total ban on their presence. And Legionnaires were also consummate “joiners,” leveraging their social influence through participation in many other civic, fraternal, service, and sectarian organizations.84

Therefore, the Legion could claim that it spoke for a broad segment of the United States civic elite, and defend a version of patriotism closely identified with provincial values of their home communities. Without a doubt, the Legion was a champion of conservative causes, and its agenda often meshed with the interests of other sections of the American Right. Yet the Legion was a conservative movement of a special sort. The emphasis of these conservatives rested upon an ideal of citizenship that stressed the performance of civic duties, such as military service and monitoring of “subversive” activities, over the exercise of rights.85 This credo contrasted with


85 This last duty was given high priority in the Legion. In his history of the veteran’s movement in Illinois, Thomas Littlewood asserts that almost all posts had one member that “specialized” in the identification of Americans, and even fellow Legionnaires, who warranted surveillance because of their questionable political or social practices. See Thomas Littlewood: *Soldiers Back Home: The American Legion in Illinois* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 84. For analysis of civic republicanism, see Linda Kerber, “The Meanings of Citizenship,”
the agenda of groups like the Liberty League, which fixated upon the enlargement of economic liberties and preservation of free enterprise. Indeed, the members of the Legion and likeminded associations tended to conflate the values and mores of their home community with Americanism. When pressed to generate those values into a definition that could apply to the United States, the best theorists of the Legion National patriotism failed miserably. National patriotism was civic pride writ large, to paraphrase the Lynds’ astute observation.

The situation changed after the crash of 1929 and the Depression. First, the New Deal expanded the reach of the federal government into areas of American society – from poor relief to education, that had once belonged to local government and civil society. This intervention of the national government threatened the status of civic agencies like the Legion, which had a vested interest in preserving the wide dispersal of political power in the United States. Second, the Legion’s overweening zeal in persecuting radicals led to a series of self-inflicted wounds to the organization’s pubic reputation. Faced with growing insurgency in the labor movement in cities such as Toledo, Minneapolis, and San Francisco, Legionnaires sought to quell the sources of disorder. Some of these attempts backfired terrifically, as when an Atlanta Legion Post opposed an appearance by Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin on the erroneous grounds that she was a nudist. The efforts of the New Jersey Department to prevent union organizers from entering the state attracted hostile press coverage. Moderates within the veteran’s movement

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87 William Pencak described the debacle that occurred in 1936 when the Legion’s National Americanism Commission set out to accomplish this task. See Pencak, 5-7.
distanced themselves from the heavy-handed tactics, charging that small groups of vigilantes or hardliners were damaging the Legion’s reputation.\(^88\) The Legion was also stung when a retired Marine Corp officer, Major General Smedley Butler, testified to a Congressional committee in 1934 that a pair of Legion officials had approached him to ascertain whether he would lead a “Soldier’s Putsch” against President Roosevelt on behalf of several American industrial interests.\(^89\)

However, as many scholars have demonstrated, the Legion’s publicity problems stemmed from more than incidents. The political attitudes of the American population were shifting leftward, tending towards greater toleration of labor strikes and protests and even the public presence of communists during the Popular Front era from 1934-40. This movement created opportunities for dissidents to lay claim to Americanism’s mantle, diminishing the conservative’s hold on the language of patriotism.\(^90\) Some nationalists concluded that they were battling more than a bad reputation and the actions of “subversives,” but an entropic quality of American nationalism itself. The patriotic ardor of citizens could only be fully roused by crisis, like a war against an external enemy like the Spanish or German empire. In the aftermath of an immediate crisis, residual “hot” nationalism allowed conservative groups to circumvent the normal inertia of politics to achieve their agenda, including the suppression of labor strikes, establishment of new social provisions for veterans, and elimination of dissident groups like the IWW and the Communist Party. In peacetime, right wing populist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan awakened hot nationalism when they could draw a clear line between “us” (native-born white citizens) and

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\(^88\) Pencak, 238-40.

\(^89\) Wolfskill, 82-87.

\(^90\) The most striking example of the Left’s attempt to frame its agenda in patriotic raiment was U.S. Communist Party chief Earl Browder’s somewhat dubious claim that “Communism is twentieth century Americanism.” See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997), 129-132.
them (foreign born, Catholics, advocates of women’s equality, and African Americans) and rally support to subdue the threat through legal and extra-legal means.

However, this excited state could not last. No sooner was the immediate threat to the national body dissolved, than the vast majority of citizens slipped into a condition that political scientist Michael Billig called “banal nationalism.”\textsuperscript{91} In this basal state, citizens continue to receive ubiquitous reminders of nationality that “flag” their civic identity. The national emblem or banner hung unnoticed on public buildings, the hero’s statue in the town square passed by unaware, and panegyrics to national saviors in textbooks read absentmindedly – these are the hallmarks of banal nationalism. This was the key weakness of American nationalism. The success of conservatives in curtailing the flow of immigrants and vanquishing the alleged foes of Americanism after World War I created a near-ideological monopoly for the Right, and contributed to the political stability of the 1920s. The very successes conservatives had in achieving their goals dampened the arousal response necessary to create hot nationalism. For example, the decline in the percentage of children of foreign birth or born to foreign parents from a high of 15\% percent in 1890 to 11.6\% in 1930 sapped much of the concern over “unassimilated aliens” that energized supporters of the old regime. As much as nationalists sought to prevent the onset of banality, to maintain a permanently high state of civic alert, it seems that they were destined to failure.\textsuperscript{92}

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\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 39-44. According to Billig, banal nationalism follows the successful completion of early nationalist development, as described by Miroslav Hroch: awakening of a national idea by intellectuals, cultural diffusion of this idea, and the forging of a mass movement based upon this identity.
\end{small}
Therefore, restoration of the old patriotic regime required new programs that would counteract the “red network” and fire American youth with a lasting patriotic ardor to overcome “banality.” Fears that America’s youth had slipped from the moorings of patriotism drove delegates at the American Legion’s 1934 National Convention to mandate “Americanism” as the theme of their efforts for the coming year. Among the provisions of the convention mandate was a ramping up of existing youth programs: American Education Week, Flag Education, Teacher Oath Bills, School Awards, commissioning a college radicalism survey, and increased support for Legion baseball, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H clubs, Junior Rifle Clubs, Sons of the American Legion, ROTC, and Rotary’s annual Youth Week.

Putting this agenda into action was the top priority for a group of the Legion’s Americanism directors from six Midwestern Departments that met in Columbus, Ohio in the summer of 1935 to forge a common response to the crisis. Simply put, the self-described defenders of 100% Americanism felt encircled and besieged. Their foes had infiltrated the schoolhouse through “communistic” textbooks, defiled the pulpit by equating Christianity with pacifism, and perverted the venerable institution of summer camp into a training ground for Americanism’s enemies. The directors accepted that radicals, lacking the numerical strength to foment a mass rebellion on their own, were attempting to infiltrate sectors of American society close to children and adolescents. Their long-term goal was to breed discontent into youth and to win converts to Moscow’s cause. In the Legion’s worldview, it was tantamount to an undeclared civil war taking place in church pulpits, classrooms, union halls, and street corners between the forces of Americanism and anti-Americanism. Many grumbled that their compatriots seemed oblivious to the threat unless it faced them directly. One official from Ohio recounted the story of a Legionnaire who scoffed at the recent spread of youth radicalism, only to discover that a
teenager serving in his household was a former member of the CP-USA’s Young Pioneers and a current subscriber to several “communistic” publications. Some blamed the lack of civic alarm on the Roosevelt administration’s decision to recognize the Bolshevik Government of the Soviet Union. 93

United on the depth and scope of the new infiltration, the participants were nonetheless divided on the course of action to follow. A few hardliners proposed organizing secret committees in each Legion Post to gather intelligence on “subversive” activities in their community. In 1935, the idea of a Legion “secret service” was debated and ultimately rejected as excessive, although five years later the Legion initiated a long-standing domestic intelligence-sharing arrangement with the FBI. 94 ‘Moderate’ examples of youth counter-subversion included having local police check up on suspected radicals and persuading theater owners not to screen “communistic” movies. These measures were reactive and did nothing to promote lasting “100% Americanism” to Depression youth. In short, the Legionnaires desired a positive model that could be readily applied across the United States. 95

The Americanism Director of the Illinois Department, Hayes Kennedy, outlined the results of a pilot project that promised to meet these criteria. Kennedy, a Chicago corporate attorney and part time law professor, in partnership with Harold Card, a Taylorville high school instructor and Boy Scoutmaster, had developed a program of youth civic education that they called American Legion - Pioneer Boys’ State. In the summer of 1934, the two men had met at a Legion service group meeting and discussed their concerns about the proliferation of radical


95 Report of Inter-Department Americanism Meeting.
summer camps. The prior summer, the two men had visited one such camp while returning from a national meeting for state Americanism committees. What struck home with the two Legion educators was that these camps might convince impressionable youngsters that American institutions were “on the skids” and should be replaced with a new political order. Unlike many Legion hardliners, attorney Kennedy did not feel that the camps could be shut down legally since they operated on private property. Therefore, the participants agreed to on a course of educational prophylaxis against radicalism.96

From this conversation, the germ for the Legion’s premiere youth leadership programs sprouted. The plan for the new project was to bring together hundreds of high school boys from across the state to form a model state government, from town and county seats to the office of Governor. For seven days in early June, the boys would occupy the grounds of the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield. Accommodations were Spartan, with the boys housed in barracks, actually repurposed cow sheds. After receiving preliminary instruction from Legion officials, public school officials, and community leaders, the boys would caucus and begin to elect representatives to fill the positions. During that week, these youthful public servants would pass laws, appoint officials to run committees, hear cases at a mock court, and even “arrest” lawbreakers, the last function to be carried out by the Boys’ State Police force. Meanwhile, the activity schedule left ample time to participate in athletic leagues and music bands, as well as for

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96 Hayes, Kennedy, “Origins of Boys’ State,” Rardin’s Review [American Legion Department of Virginia], 1970, 5; Oral Interview with Helen Kennedy-Ryan and Edward Ryan [Daughter and Son-in-Law of Hayes Kennedy], 14 May, 2005. There is some confusion Hayes Kennedy’s account of the visit. Kennedy describes the camp as a “Freedom” or “Young Pioneer” camp, which would suggest a left-radical orientation. However, the details (boys dressed in brown uniforms and black boots, goose step, and Nazi salute) directly contradict this conclusion. The account was written when Kennedy was in his seventies.
educational tours of Springfield’s civic landmarks, including the State Capitol and Abraham Lincoln’s tomb.97

Nearly twenty-one hundred miles away in Los Gatos, California, a similar experiment in youth government was being organized by educational reformer Earnest A. Rogers, creator of the private Montezuma Mountain School for boys, to develop a new program for raising a generation of “statesmen” to take control of American politics. Rogers was a maverick who rejected what he described as the stultifying influence of public school curricula.98 Yet he was disturbed by the political upheavals in the Golden State, including the 1934 San Francisco general strike, novelist Upton Sinclair’s quixotic bid for the governor’s office, and labor war in the agriculturally-rich Imperial Valley, all of which he believed were instigated at the behest by unscrupulous demagogues and radicals. He believed that these disturbances aggravated the Youth Problem. Rogers’ asserted in public statements that the jobs crisis had led students to “crime and Communism.” In February 1935, Rogers hosted a Conference on Youth Ideals in Politics, inviting boys and girls from neighboring high schools to attend. The Junior Statesmen of America was formed at this meeting, with the goal of making “politics a noble profession.” The elevation of moral standards would occur through a program of youth involvement with politics, which began with the formation of JSA clubs at local high schools, in which students would select a social issue for study. Later that June, JSA hosted a summer convention in which delegates organized a mock government, selected officers and passed model legislation. To add

97Details of the inaugural Boys’ State daily events come from, Report of Hayes Kennedy, Americanism Commission, 17th Annual Convention of the American Legion, Department of Illinois (Quincy, IL0, 26 August, 1935, 70-75.

98Deborah Jocye Dodds, “Ernest A. Rogers, A Life Dedicated to Civic Education and Student Participation in the Democratic Process,” (Ed.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2003), 86-90. Dodds illustrates how Rogers’ progressive educational philosophy derived from reflection on his traumatic experiences in the public education system, as well as from a personality based upon free intellectual and spiritual inquiry. Rogers also was a proponent of Esperanto and one of the earliest disciples of Abdul Baha’i in the United States.
drama and authenticity to the event, swearing-in ceremonies were performed by real state politicians.99

It is striking that both of these conservative youth movements originated from the founders’ critique of the existing organs of patriotic training and a selective appropriation of educational models and symbols from decidedly un-conservative sources. As Corey Robin has observed of conservative movements in the United States and Europe, conservatism has been an intellectual movement capable of restless and relentless change. When the old order is subjected to attack or serious challenge from social reformers or revolutionaries, conservatives have responded in two ways. The first is an attempt to critique and reconfigure the old regime. In the case of Boys’ State, Kennedy cited the shocking ignorance of American government displayed by his first year law students. Harold Card added that, in his experience, compulsory classes did little to ignite patriotic fires within youth. Rogers blasted the school system for mortifying young minds and criticized teachers’ overreliance on coercion to achieve obedience. Rogers founded Montezuma Mountain School for boys in 1912 to liberate students from these pernicious influences of conventional education.100

The second feature of counter-attack is the absorption of ideas and tactics of the very revolution that conservatives oppose. The Legion’s idea of using summer camps to promote a political ideology was a direct response to the practice of “subversive” summer camps, and even the name “Pioneer” was a symbolic re-appropriation of a term redolent of the United States’ settler past, but which was now associated with a communist youth movement.101 The formats of

99Ibid., 159-63.
101The Illinois Legion Department dropped the name “Pioneer” in favor of “Premier” Boys’ State in 1938 to avoid mistaking the conservative youth movement with the Young Pioneers. This move highlights the difficulty for
Boys’ State and the Junior Statesmen of America, with their emphasis on demonstrating superiority of American democracy through direct student engagement, bore a striking resemblance to a major tenet of Progressive education. The resemblance came from encouraging students to test the efficacy of representative self-government in a “laboratory” setting, rather than by rote learning. This echoed John Dewey’s argument that schools must eschew coercion and foster student disposition and interest in maintaining democracy. However, these programs aimed to stabilize existing civic hierarchies rather than to reorder or redistribute political power.102

The other share of genetic influence came from established, youth character-building projects. Harold Card first experimented with mock youth governments as a Boy Scoutmaster, when he organized a Scout jamboree into a “state” and “cities,” complete with “mayors” and other elected officials responsible for sanitation and order. The improvised control systems had proven a great success, and the boys relished the taste of authority the experiment gave them.

E.A. Rogers’ interest character-building long preceded the founding of JSA. He had dabbled in projects to elevate youth morals such as his Knights of Brawn, which was inspired by the Scouts and the psychological development theories of W. Seton Hall. As a public school teacher, he had even organized a high school chemistry lab into a model government. The curriculum of the Montezuma School placed a similar premium on cultivating personality traits such as honor, honesty, and self-reliance. Indeed, the distinction that Rogers made between “statesmen” versus conservatives wishing to salvage terms such as “pioneer” and “international” that had been appropriated by the radical Left.

mere politicians was one that would have been instantly familiar to Progressive-era reformers with an antipathy to populism and the purported “excesses” of democracy. 103

By placing the boys in positions where they could see first-hand how the structures of government led to concrete results, the founders of these civic youth leadership programs believed that the program would dispel ignorance and cynicism, and produce cadres of loyal youth leaders who could tend the wheels of government. Kennedy, the chief promoter and theorist behind Boys’ State, explained the project goals to listeners of a 1936 Legion radio program.

Briefly, the Boys’ State is a program of Civic Education. Frankly, it is Americanism propaganda; in substance its purpose is to teach the youth of today, and especially the youth of high school age, that there is nothing wrong with our form of government today – that it has not outworn its usefulness; that it is just as useful, just as practical now as the day it was founded and that all it needs is an intelligent citizenry and a clean, honest, and impartial administration. 104

As the youth participants graduated from high school and went into college or other areas of adult life, Kennedy and his supporters imagined that the youngsters would mount the defense of Americanism at colleges, churches, and civic squares, using their experience of effective youth-led government to serve as counterrevolutionaries or counter-subversives. The graduates could also ward off calls from within the political class for dramatic overhauls of American federalism, including the proposed re-organization of American states into regional districts. 105

103 For a description of how Progressive-era political reformers included efforts to enlist the “people” in securing changes while encouraging anti-participatory measures, see Michael McGerr, A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America (New York: Oxford University, 2003, 216-217).


105 Kennedy’s statement that the American system of representative government, developed to rule “thirteen agricultural colonies,” suggests that he was aware of how proponents of a reorganization scheme for the United States criticized federalism as an antiquated holdover from the eighteenth century, which was an encumbrance to social reform to that a modern industrial nation required. See Delbert Clark, “Nine Groups instead of the 48 States,”
While the founders of Boys’ State and JSA sought to construct an accurate replica of a state government for youth leaders to tinker with, they also took great care to ensure that the student governments did not emulate adult politics too closely. In his rousing defense of American government, Kennedy stipulated the system only worked with and educated citizenry and “honest and intelligent” administration. The youth democracies of the leadership programs were deliberately engineered to produce “clean” governance: there was little opportunity for graft or self-dealing, few “spoils” to award to political cronies. There were no lobbyists; no campaign contributions to solicit from corporations, labor unions, or wealthy donors; no meaningful opportunities for reelection. At either program, it would be difficult for even the wiliest student politician to replicate the machine politics of Chicago or New York. Nevertheless, within three years of the first program, Kennedy reported that some of the better-prepared or overly ambitious student aspirants had prepared election materials in advance of the convention.  

With each polity engineered to avoid venality, the founders also sought to eliminate the purported evils of excessive partisanship. E.A. Rogers expressed the ethical standards of the new youth movement in a speech in 1935.

JSA will not join with propaganda, will not be sectarian, secret or partisan, will not support violence or revolution, [and] will not be controlled by outside groups for their selfish ends.

Following the precedent set at the first Boys’ State, all of the Legion’s youth citizenship programs were assigned to one of two artificial political parties. Neither party had a pre-set

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New York Times, 21 April 1935, SM5. Novelist and social critic Sinclair Lewis presented the district system as one of the “reforms” foisted upon the U.S. by a fascist dictator in his 1935 novel of a dystopian future, It Can’t Happen Here.

106 Reports of the 20th Annual Convention of the American Legion, Department of Illinois, 1938, 57.

107 Quoted in Dodds, 161-62.
ideology; students were required to devise their own platforms. Kennedy stated that students were barred from addressing controversial issues from the outside; instead, they were to devise their own. A few students chafed at the imposition of a two-party system, but Boys’ State may have offered a more diverse political landscape than many American states could claim. With no entrenched differences between the parties, and no real prospects for reelection, office-holders could afford to make compromises with their rivals. The style of instruction bore the hallmarks of clean, “objective” government: lectures and rule books provided instruction instead of back-room apprenticeships. Nevertheless, the results of this rigorous pruning back of any prior affiliations led to a strangely denatured form of government.

These issues were tangential to the major purpose of the projects: immunizing vulnerable youth leaders from ideological “contagion.” The program planners aimed to reach youth during a developmental window when they were most vulnerable to ideological persuasion. Initially, participants were eligible if they were between the ages of fifteen to nineteen. Later this range was later narrowed to sixteen and seventeen, further limited to students enrolled in the final two years of high school. Kennedy reasoned that adolescents were uniquely vulnerable to radical seduction because the influence of youth “character building” and schools was waning while their identity as citizens was not fully formed. Radicals could exploit these vulnerabilities, turning youth against the government and towards alien “isms.” Even if subversives did not win converts to their viewpoint, Kennedy asserted that their influence might prevent many young men from performing military service – leading to the destruction of the American Republic at some future crisis.108 While dedicated to the cause of international peace and reconciliation,

108In a novel turn, Kennedy argued that the Communists looked to youth because of their numerical weakness. To wit, “The Communists have long ago abandoned any hope of succeeding in their program by enlisting a substantial numbers of adults in their ranks. They well know that the ultimate hope of success in their program depends upon their winning to their cause the youth of out country.”
Rogers believed that training youth in what he called “Ameritocracy” would prevent another world war.  

The nomination process of JSA and Boys’ State assembled talented youth from all across a state, showcasing the next crop of American civic leaders. Kennedy boasted that the program drew students from “practically every nationality” and social class. As a sop to pluralism, religious services for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were offered at Boys’ State. Programs were ostensibly open to all talented youth leaders. Students’ connections to parents, neighbors, peer groups, and schools, the programs would, in theory, be temporarily suppressed so that American nationalism could take hold. Boys’ State also marked a novel way for the children of immigrants to Americanize their parents. Kennedy told his supporters of one Boys’ State delegate who diverted the money provided by a sponsor for his expenses at camp for naturalization papers for his parents, showing that the new project.

Despite claims that the new youth leadership programs broadly represented the community, the nomination process of each program largely reaffirmed existing hierarchies and social networks. Institutional support, both from the Illinois Department, as well as from dozens of civil society groups from across the state was essential to providing financial support for the students. Local Legionnaires, community groups, civic groups, community leaders and parents held responsibility to select delegates who they perceived as “future leaders.” In 1937 more than four dozen groups and hundreds of individuals sponsored boys to attend camp. It was perhaps inevitable that many these sponsors would find leadership among boys who inhabited their social networks: the children of their friends, clients, or their own families. Social insularity

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109 Dodd, 166.
111 Reports of the 19th Annual Convention of the American Legion, Department of Illinois, 1937, 61.
was a defining attribute of many conventions. For instance, at the inaugural Boys’ State of Pennsylvania held in 1939, half of the students were members with the Sons of the American Legion.\textsuperscript{112} In the racial landscapes of Illinois and California, as in many other American states, sponsorship networks largely excluded African-Americans and other children from racial minority communities. Moreover, both states were peppered with dozens of “sundown” towns and suburbs, municipalities that de jure or de facto prohibited African-Americans from residing in their borders. In these areas subjected to “ethnic cleansing,” minority nominees to leadership programs would have been exceedingly rare in communities where white civic elites had few meaningful social contacts with African-American youth.\textsuperscript{113}

The stipulation that only male students could attend Boys’ State reflected the common pattern of gender segregation for youth character building programs such as the Scouts and Roger’s Montezuma School for Boys. Certainly, hosting week-long residential camps hosting adolescent boys and girls in close proximity would present additional logistical hurdles for the organizers and require close supervision. However, the JSA and many other youth civic educational programs of this adopted a coeducational model. The Legion’s insistence on sex segregation highlights the organization’s overriding concern with safeguarding the link between male citizenship and military service. Many of the youth programs that the Legion and other conservative groups organized or sponsored were overtly martial in character, including Civilian

\textsuperscript{112} Reports of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Annual Convention of the American Legion, Department of Pennsylvania, August 10-12, 1939, 232.

Military Training Corps, ROTC, and junior rifle clubs. The Legion even claimed that its Junior Baseball Leagues prepared students for military service.

Boys’ State itself was organized along military lines. The intake procedure resembled that of military recruits. Standing in queues, submitting to a medical inspection and other small humiliations forced the boys into an unfamiliar physical discipline. Morning calisthenics and flag raising ceremonies all reinforced this physical disciplinary regime. Intake also placed the boys under the psychological authority of the counselors, who assigned arbitrary new affiliations (city, country, party) to each participant. Throughout the week, counselors wielded this authority over the boys, through obvious means such as barracks inspections but also through the softer venues, including the athletic leagues and musical band. This regime stripped the boys of the social credit of their kinship networks, social station, and regional background, clearing obstructions in order to overlay a new civic personality. The position of adult counselors in Boys’ State mirrored the one that American Legion wanted to play in the United States. The naming of barracks after past Legion commanders resembled ubiquitous presence of Legion posts throughout the country. Furthermore, the Legion monitored the Boys’ State delegates for signs of delinquency and radicalism. One of the great successes from this vantage was that the boys were willing perform surveillance of fellow campers.

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115 Gene Tunney, “Democracy and Sport,” *American Legion Magazine* 26.3 (March 1939): 52-3. The telling feature of this article a split-frame cartoon that shows a lad with bat and glove on one side, and the same boy marching with a rifle and bayonet.


117 One particularly ‘striking’ anecdote appears in a 1939 *American Legion Magazine* article on Nebraska Boys’ State, which relates how a counselor overheard a washroom exchange when one boy threatened to punch another citizen in the face if he was sent home early for disobedience. See Lawrence Jones, “Leaders of Tomorrow,” *American Legion Magazine* 30.5 (May 1941), 68.
In a carryover from the expressive nationalist culture of the old regime, the Legion’s new youth program fostered a militant devotion to Americanism that sponsors hoped would translate into a willingness to endure hardship or sacrifice. Kennedy waxed spiritual about the qualities of this ideal. He argued that the Legion did not invent Americanism; rather, much like *geist* of Georg Hegel’s philosophy, it dated back to the dawn of history, found in the aspiration of individual human beings to “rise above” their immediate circumstances.\(^{118}\) This language simultaneously pointed backwards towards past sacrifices and national glories while exhorting youth to greater achievements or progress, evoking the Janus-faced guise of the modern nation.\(^{119}\)

How to pluck these mystic chords in the hearts of high school boys challenged facing the Boys’ State organizers. In addition to familiar nationalist rituals such as saluting the flag at daybreak or visiting government buildings, Kennedy and his associates invented ceremonies and traditions to stimulate nationalist sentiment. Towards the end of the week-long convention, the boys made a “pilgrimage” to the tomb of Abraham Lincoln to recite a loyalty oath. The idea for the ceremony allegedly came from one of the boy citizens, whom Kennedy described as “somewhat inclined to be radical and we watched him very closely.” In this account, the boy asked permission to address the student assembly. When Kennedy asked the boy what he had in mind, the lad assured Kennedy, “You don’t need to be afraid of me, but I want to say something about the Legion.” In his speech, the boy reported that some of his chums had seen wreaths lain at the foot of the Lincoln tomb during their afternoon trips. He told them that he had a resolution

\(^{118}\)The idea that the spirit of Americanism predated the founding of the Republic could be found in other Legion writings. William Pencak describes a similar theme in an unpublished work written by Legion historian Robert Simmons in the mid-1920s as Hegelian. See Pencak, 5.

that he wanted read and that he wanted the Governor and Lt. Governor present for the reading.\textsuperscript{120}

So on the convention’s last full day, the 230 boys marched a mile and a half from the fairgrounds to Lincoln’s tomb in military formation, with the procession headed by the American flag. At the tomb, the Boys’ State governor and the Lt. Governor placed a wreath at the tomb. Now assembled on the steps of the monument, facing east towards the Washington Monument, the assembly gathered on the steps of Lincoln’s tomb and made the following resolution:

\begin{quote}
Whereas, we, the members of 1935 Boys’ State, Inc., of Illinois, assembled this twenty-ninth day of June, 1935, at the tomb of the immortal Lincoln and facing eastward towards the tomb of the Father of our country, George Washington, believe that The Flag of the United States of America is the greatest and dearest national object in all America today; that it symbolizes the glorious struggle upward of freedom in the past, the stabilization of that freedom in the present, and the forecast of the ultimate destiny of free men in the future; and

Whereas, the Citizens of Illinois, old and young, despite our system of public instruction, are astonishingly uninformed, and grossly misinformed respecting flag history and traditions, usage and display, etiquette, and properties, reverence and respect:

Therefore - be it Resolved, by the citizens of the 1935 Boys State and the staff thereof, That we, collectively and individually, shall dedicate and consecrate a portion of all our waking hours to acquiring a thorough flag education, and to the dissemination of this knowledge throughout our homes, our schools, our cities, counties and states, and that we pledge our earnest cooperation towards making flag education an essential basic element in good citizenship.
\end{quote}

This oration highlighted the ambivalent goals of the founders. It evoked familiar nationalist themes of heroes and the flag, yet it charged that contemporary citizens were “uninformed, and grossly misinformed” despite years of ideological indoctrination. The utopian vision of “glorious struggle upward of freedom,” which would not seem out of place in a socialist speech, was chained to the archly conservative goal of “stabilization of freedom in the present.” And the

\textsuperscript{120}The legend of the radical convert at Boys’ State grew more elaborate in further retellings. By 1941, one Legion writer described the boy as a Communist who distributed propaganda at the camp. In this version, when confronted by the Legion’s staff, the boy declared that he came from a Communist family and had come to camp with the express purpose of disrupting the program. The camp counselors dealt with this young radial by giving him a job in the office as a typist, suggesting that the best way to defang potential radicals is to co-opt them with a comfortable office job. See Jones, “Leaders of Tomorrow,” \textit{American Legion Magazine} (May, 1941), 69-70.
means to answering these challenges was sublime – “dedicate and consecrate a portion of all our waking hours” and thoroughly banal – “thorough flag education.” Rededicated to the sacred symbols of national life, the boy citizens demobilized, with the charge to rejuvenate civic life in their communities.

Kennedy considered the event a rousing success, and publicized the results of his experiment at state and national Legion conventions and to wider audiences through public speeches, radio addresses, and articles. Boys’ State counted support not just from Legion officials, but also from high-ranking political leaders, including Illinois’ Democratic Governor Henry Horner. In 1937, the counselors added a popular law school onto the curriculum, complete with a “bar” exam for aspiring lawyers and judges. Attendance at Illinois Boys’ State, which had begun with a little over 200 boys in 1935, mushroomed to 1400 by 1939. In 1936, the Departments of West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, implemented their own programs, bringing the total to 1500. Three years later, Boys’ State in twenty-four states offered instruction to 15,000. Backers boldly predicted a nationwide franchise cultivating tens of thousands of youth leaders, imbued with the highest level of patriotism.121

As the franchise spread outward from Illinois, other Departments requested guidance from national headquarters on how to proceed. In response, the national Americanism Commission issued manuals to regulate program format and student eligibility between states. These manuals stipulated that prospective delegates must be able-bodied and of good moral character.122 In response to queries over whether “colored” students could attend, the Commission advised Departments to apply local standards of civic exclusion or inclusion. The

121See table of Boys’ State population in Figure 1 at the end of the chapter.

122National American Commission, “Boys’ State: Learn by Doing,” 1939, 1942, 1945, Boys’ State File, American Legion Library. Specifically, the guidebooks warned Boys’ State directors to impress upon sponsors that
result was a patchwork of standards, ranging from token integration of African-Americans in some states and other racial minorities to whites only programs across most of the Southern United States. The most striking application of this directive was the creation of dual programs by the West Virginia Department, which held its first “Negro Boys’ State” in 1938, parallel to the all-white program established two years earlier.123 The African-American program, smaller in terms of population and status, was organized by all-Black Legion posts in the state.

Likewise, while various Legion Auxiliary Departments signaled their interest in creating a female counterpart to Boys’ State as early as 1936, the first full-fledged Girls’ State programs were organized in Kansas and Nebraska in 1939. The development and implications of these “auxiliary” citizenship programs will be addressed in Chapter 3.

E.A. Roger’s experiment in youth civic education also garnered enthusiastic reviews in its first few years. After successes in the initial conventions held in 1935-36, Rogers gave speeches to various Northern California civic and educational groups about his experimental project. In particular, Rogers was enthusiastic about the remarkable growth that the program had shown, going from 100 students from 5 high schools to over 1000 from 25 schools in a single year. Furthermore, the program seemed to be producing the kind of responsible “statesmen” Rogers felt America needed. For example, the delegates at the 1936 convention rejected a model bill that would have banned compulsory military training at public universities. JSA was seeding youth into the political process; delegates attended both the Democratic and Republican party primaries in California. These activities were covered the program’s official magazine, edited by an industrious Stanford undergraduate named Harold Charters. A number of state government and academics expressed interest and support in the fledgling measure. In 1937, Rogers incorporated JSA as a non-profit organization, and made plans to create JSA clubs nationwide.

123”Local Organizations Sponsor 2 to Negro Boys’ State, West Virginia Digest 7 June 1940, 1
The movement caught the attention of Eleanor Roosevelt, who invited Rogers to dine at the White House, Father E.J. Flanagan of Boys’ Town fame, and conservative groups such as the American Legion, which offered financial support, and Army and Navy clubs. JSA seemed poised for takeoff.

Yet the growth of JSA was far slower than Boys’ State. For one, the costs of independence were high. Rogers ultimately rejected financial support from the American Legion, and therefore lacked the institutional support that allowed Hayes Kennedy to scale up his pilot project. Initially, Rogers had hoped that JSA would be administered mainly by the “statesmen” themselves, but rapid turnover of student leaders hobbed the organization. Incorporation resolved some, though not all, of these limitations. Harold Charters died from polio in 1939 and thus deprived the movement of one of its most zealous and productive organizers, and the absence deeply affected Rogers. JSA was able to expand into more the populous South of California, and into Washington State in 1940, but JSA entered the new decade with inadequate resources and manpower for sustained growth. Nevertheless, by 1940, the small movement had trained 8,000 students and would remain a consistent feature of California civic education for years to come.

Conclusion

In the decades following the 1930s, journalists and popular historians lionized the generation of youth who came of age during the Depression as the “greatest” that any country has ever produced. Putting aside the obvious hyperbole of these claims, the idea of a greatest generation in American history largely ignores the immense anxieties that many commentators had about the civic prospects of the Depression youth cohort. A chief concern of many conservative youth workers was the apparent breakdown of many of the institutions designed to
promote civic knowledge and national loyalty, which I have called the old patriotic regime. The signs of this collapse ranged from widespread youth apathy and civic degeneration, to full-fledged campus uprisings over the issues of compulsory military service. To stem this decay, educational reformers such as E.A. Rogers and Harold Card and Hayes Kennedy created new forms of civic education aimed at politically indoctrinating adolescent leaders. These initiatives derived partly from a critique of public education, partly from a selective appropriation of progressive pedagogy and radical youth culture, and partly from the traditions of the old regime itself. They aimed to provide intensive, hands-on training in statecraft at the local and state government level; and to impart a fierce devotion to the traditional structures of American government. From small pilot projects begun in an atmosphere of crisis at mid-decade, the “franchises” of American Legion Boys’ State (along with its “auxiliary” programs) and Junior Statesmen of America seemed poised to grow during the next decade. They would face competition for youth leaders from rival entrants from liberal and progressive organizations. All would struggle to survive and develop in the coming world war, widely interpreted as an all-out confrontation between liberalism and totalitarianism.
## Figure 1
Enrollment at American Legion Boys’ State, 1935-39

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Annual Totals 220 1500 4000 9000 15000
No. States 1 4 8 18 24
Cuml. Totals 220 1700 2200 11200 26200

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124 Figures derived from published enrollment records from various Boys’ State programs. An “X” on the table indicates that no program was held by the state that particular year, and a “U” designates when the enrollment level was unknown.
Chapter 2: “In America, The Young Men and Women Would Be Told HOW, not WHAT, to Think:” Transnational Influences on United States’ Youth Movements, 1932-43

Seduction of the “Political Virgin”

Viola Ilma was a walking international incident. Just twenty-two year old, the flamboyant youth activist, Broadway actress, editor of the short lived Modern Youth monthly, and all-around enfant terrible, had been invited by an American civil liberties attorney to travel to Germany observe the Reichstag arson trial in 1933. Ilma thought the trial a dreadful bore, and disparaged the defendant, Marinus van der Lubbe, as a simpering idiot. Besides, her continental jaunt had become part of far greater drama. Now she endeavored to discover whether European leaders were any more capable of resolving their Great Depression “youth problem” than America’s hapless governing class. In spite of having only spent ten days in Germany, or perhaps because she had only been in the country long enough to form first impressions, Ilma was enthused about the spirit of Berlin, and the social changes wrought by the Nazi revolution. She met with many of the Nazi’s inner circle, including Ernst “Putzi” Hanfstaengl, and various youth leaders from the Hitlerjugend (HJ).124

Upon her return to the States, she offered her assessment of state-based youth programs to a New York Times correspondent. “Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin are concentrating their strength on the youth of their countries. Her praise of youth under the supposedly benevolent tutelage of dictators stood at stark contrast with her lament to the disorganized state of American youth.

“The Youth of America are at a loose end and have no ideals, no ambition, and no opportunity,

and what is more, they don't care.” From Ilma’s adventures came the inspiration to create the American Youth Congress in 1934, one of the largest youth federations of the 1930s, representing an estimated 4.5 million members at its peak. However, her enthusiasm for European youth programs was not unusual. Much like the conservative youth workers who created the American Legion’s Boys’ State and Girls’ State, exposure to “foreign” youth programs fired the imaginations liberals and progressives who wished to resolve the country’s “Youth Problem.” These youth workers and youth activists looked abroad for program ideas that would inject the energy and idealism of youth leaders into the body politic of the United States.125

Like their counterparts on the Right, center-left youth advocates perceived in the early 1930s the deterioration of the old patriotism regime designed to foster youth patriotism. Instead of enlisting youth leader to plug the fissures in the foundation, progressives and liberal hoped to replace the regime with new, permanent youth programs of truly national scale that would mobilize youth to reform the United States. Some of the most prominent underwriters of these projects were the American Youth Congress, the National Youth Administration, and the YMCA. While generally supportive of the New Deal’s efforts to assist youth, the designers of these initiatives went beyond the political horizon of the mainstream of the Roosevelt administration. These youth activists and workers ultimately hoped to give youth a direct voice in American politics and to recast citizenship along more equalitarian lines.

This analysis challenges recent scholarship of American citizenship and nationalism that characterizes the decade 1935-45 as a general rejection of foreign ideologies and programs in

125 I describe activists as youth who sought to reform or enhance the educational, employment, and social opportunities of their generation. By youth workers, I refer to adults who were active in youth work, including traditional “character building” efforts that started in the late 19th century.
favor of an “American way.” Valid so far as they go, these arguments overlook the significant counter-currents of transnational exchange, particularly in youth work. My article explores how youth activists and youth workers from the American Youth Congress, the National Youth Administration, and the YMCA’s Hi-Y movement, found inspiration for their own organizing efforts from their perceptions of youth programs abroad. They sought to replicate the kind of high civic morale that they saw in other countries with state-based youth programs among American high school students.

This analysis is informed by appeals for transnational approaches to United States history, made by Thomas Bender, Akira Iriye, Ian Tyrrell and others in the past decade. My work revises standard accounts of the New Deal and Depression youth movements that have largely confined their analyses to domestic politics. The permeability of American youth policy to foreign influences during the New Deal era suggests a continuation of Daniel Rogers’ “Atlantic Crossings” -- transoceanic exchanges between cosmopolitan progressives in which American reformers looked to Europe for ideas on how to improve their own society. Like their Progressive Era counterparts, New Deal era youth workers and youth activists arose from the political mainstream. As self-identified American patriots and cosmopolitans, these reformers

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126 Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 130. Gerstle argues that the social democracy of American labor was effectively countered by a conservative patriotism “constructed from the principles of individualism, states' rights, anticomunism, and suspicion of foreigners.” Wendy Wall makes the argument that 1930s U.S. Nationalists perceived fascism and communism, taken together, as a “fearsome ideological ‘other’” against which the nation could and should be defined. See Wall, *Inventing the “American Way:” The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2008), 27, 31-32.


129 Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (New York:
perceived that their counterparts (or rivals) in Europe had made striking achievements in their
development of national youth. Their goal was not to replicate Soviet or German youth models; most American youth activists and workers admired the élan that the state-based programs while being repulsed by the ideologies they perpetuated. Above all, these organizers hoped that studies of conditions abroad would inform the creation of new national initiatives to dispel the malaise afflicting the Depression Generation, and instill a “fierce faith” that would transform idle youth into “civic soldiers” for democracy. What follows are case studies of three New-Deal era youth projects that aspired to become national youth movements: the American Youth Congress (AYC), the National Youth Administration (NYA), and the YMCA’s Youth and Government. The AYC and the YMCA pursued this mission wholeheartedly and hoped to develop American youth organizations containing “all of the sweep, permanence, and significance” of European movements. By contrast, the NYA lacked the resources and authority to promote youth citizenship beyond work-study and residence training camps. However, the NYA compiled information about youth political development globally and compared American youth conditions and politics to these other nations.

Viola Ilma, founder the American Youth Congress (AYC), was a precocious member of this vanguard. Ilma conceived the AYC in 1934 from her observation of Nazi Germany's state-

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130 For an analysis of the fusion of patriotism and cosmopolitanism in Progressive era reformers, see Jonathan M. Hansen, The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), Introduction, xvii-xviii.

controlled youth movement and her desire to create an American program to that would stimulate
the same kind of civic morale. The circumstances of the Congress' birth had much to do with
Ilma's transnational background and her cosmopolitan perspective on contemporary youth
problems. Ilma's cultural identity straddled continents and her civic status defied easy
classification. She was a bilingual mixture of Manhattan, Swiss, and German-Jewish-American
heritages. In a 1934 interview, Viola struggled with the question of whether she was an American
citizen, although she admitted that she traveled on a Swiss passport. She became a naturalized
citizen in her early twenties, yet her ambiguous legal status did little to hinder her
accomplishments. Indeed, her upbringing lent her a particularly transnational outlook and
cultural fluency – she was able to swim among the denizens of Chicago's elite North Shore
circles, hobnob with cultural and political elites of New York and Washington, as well as

At an age when her peers were struggling to form their political identities, Ilma already
enjoyed a reputation as a leading voice of her generation. This envious status was largely the
result of her ambitious scheme to publish a national monthly magazine called Modern Youth. In
search of financial backers, Ilma befriended industrialist Vincent Bendix and Anne Morgan,
youngest daughter of the financier, J. Peirpont Morgan. The magazine offered poetry and
reportage, and in one case, a study of conditions in the Soviet Komsomol youth movement.

Modern Youth’s caption was “The Voice of the Younger Generation,” and that claim was

132 The confusion that Ilma had about her citizenship was understandable. Under the American immigration laws of
1855 and 1907, a woman’s citizenship derived from her father or her husband. The passage of the 19th Amendment
made this civic equation untenable. The 1922 Cable Act sought to overturn the “derivative” quality of woman’s
citizenship and establish female citizenship as an identity as separate from marriage. Therefore, Viola’s mother had
lost her American citizenship when she married a Swiss national, but regained it under the Cable Act. What did this
make Viola and her sister, who were both born in Germany? See Martha Gardner, The Qualities of a Citizen:
Women, Immigration, and Citizenship, 1870-1965 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1995), 123-24; and
and Wang, 1999), 42.
bolstered by the publisher’s policy that all who wrote or worked for the publication must be under the age of thirty. Its literary style gravitated towards masculine bravado that praised boldness and aggression, while denigrating traditional notions of American femininity. Peggy Jocelyn, a self-described “transient” teenager, wrote an article entitled “The Young Degeneration,” in which she claimed to have rejected all forms of cultural propriety. She brazenly proclaimed, “I haven't got a god, I haven't got a job, and I haven't a single pink-ruffled ideal – which is the mental state comparable to the nightmare of finding oneself in Times Square without any clothes on.” She asserted that more and more American young women were reaching the same psychological state in to survive the rigors of the Depression. As if to corroborate Jocelyn’s bleak assessment, social investigators published lurid accounts of female transients who turned to sex work to survive, or else suffered a general coarsening of their character in order to avoid exploitation.

Ilma hoped that Modern Youth’s uncompromising youth partisanship and its bracing style would help place the magazine’s at the vanguard of a political and social renaissance of the Depression generation. Yet the magazine, mired in debt, folded after six months. Ilma’s buoyant enthusiasm sagged, although she blamed “bankrupt” American youth for failing to rally to her cause at twenty-five cents per issue. Yet this failure did not diminish her influence as an “authority” on youth, and she continued to receive speaking invitations. Nor did it limit her ability to find support from well-connected patrons. In the summer of 1933, ACLU attorney Arthur Garfield Hays, who was handling the magazine’s bankruptcy process, sought to console

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Ilma by inviting her accompany him and his daughter to Germany.\textsuperscript{134}

Ilma’s trip to Europe served as spiritual recuperation; it also represented an opportunity for the youth activist to observe how issues of international conflict, recovery, and the problems of youth were being addressed in Europe. Ilma began her quest with a visit to the European hub of international efforts at peace and reconciliation based in Geneva. The Swiss capital was the home of the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference, as well as dozens of international government bodies and civic institutions such as the YMCA, the Red Cross, and the Rotary International. In Ilma’s worldview, “Geneva” was a metonym for a decadent world order, administered by a morally toothless gerontocracy. Armed with the credentials of a conference observer and her inimitable personality, she secured entry into the world of top-level American and European diplomats. The timing of her visit was hardly fortuitous. The recent withdrawal of Germany from both the League and the Conference highlighted the limitations, or the futility, of these diplomatic conclaves run by the elders. Ilma found intellect to admire in Geneva, but found it was lacking the energy to bring about economic recovery and international peace.

The collected wise men of Geneva had dismissed Adolph Hitler as a “nincompoop” and predicted that he would not survive a year as Reichschancellor. Yet Ilma could see momentous changes afoot, and saw how German youth appeared to be “in the saddle” of this revolution.

Ilma was enamored with the exercise of youth power, and this seemed to be the order of the day in the Third Reich. At the time of her German visit, the HJ’s membership enjoyed explosive growth, rising from 100,000 at the time of Hitler’s rise to power to two million by year’s end. The rapid growth of the movement came primarily from the absorption of existing movements, which were sympathetic to the politics of the Nazis. At this point, the HJ was

\textsuperscript{134}Ilma, 55.
among of the largest of German youth movements, whose membership was officially voluntary. The movement offered constituents access to recreational activities, vocational training, and a sense of belonging to a community that emphasized shared sacrifice, order, and a belief that graduates would become the next generation of leaders of the Reich. It was apparent to many in 1933 that the community that the HJ promised was intensely militarized and authoritarian. Many of the activities were obviously forms of military training – including nature hikes and rifle shooting, although the British and North American Scouting movements also included these activities. What set the HJ apart from the Scouting movement was the intensive ideological regimentation – reading of *Mein Kampf*, for example, and the frequent references in song to blood, battles and martyrdom. It offered a holistic world view with German youth at the center of national regeneration. In the words of fascism scholar Roger Griffin, that vision fused “health, nature, life, and the fatherland into a single cultic entity.” This was an alluring oasis to German youth who had grown up knowing the privation and chaos of the Weimar era. And it was a far cry from the disorganized and demoralized condition of American youth.135

Yet Ilma’s enthusiasm was not for an American version of the HJ. At a dinner with League of Nation diplomats near the end of her stay, she believed that when an American youth movement was finally created, it would surpass that of the dictators. She boasted, “Hitler had given German youngsters a patriotic spirit and hope...[but] the best youth movement could be built under F.D.R. in America, where the young men and women would be told HOW, not WHAT to think.”136

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136Ibid., 65-66.
After her return to the States, Ilma endeavored to create the platform for that future youth movement. She began by drafting a manifesto, *And Now, Youth*, in the winter of 1933. It was a fifty-six page tirade against the feminization of the American life, from marriage relations to popular culture, more of a publicity stunt than a coherent political program. While searching for a publisher, she called upon prominent New Dealers and Progressives, including Henry Wallace, Sumner Welles, Katherine Lenroot, head of the Children's Bureau, and Senator Robert LaFollette. She came away dismayed that these policy makers had little information about youth groups or her generation's problems. Outside of the Civilian Conservation Corps and “vague apprenticeship schemes,” she lamented, there was no federal strategy for youth. Later that spring, with her customary audacity, Ilma announced the idea of an American Youth Congress over lunch with *Modern Youth* alumni, only after being persuaded that a World Congress might be too ambitious a project even for her to undertake.\(^{137}\) She received backing from Anne Morgan and other donors to organize a congress that would include movements from across the political spectrum. But lacking a clear conception of what the Youth Congress would do, she sought advice from President Chase of New York University. Chase offered NYU as a host for the congress and recommended sociology professor Harvey Zorbaugh as an adviser. Shortly before the inaugural session, Zorbaugh denounced the founder for allegedly blocking the participation of liberal and radical left groups, and organized an anti-Ilma caucus, dominated by socialist and communist youth. During the conference, this caucus orchestrated Ilma’s ouster and gained permanent control of the Congress.\(^{138}\)

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\(^{137}\) Apparently, Ilma tried to sketch out the global outline of a World Youth Congress on a restaurant tablecloth, but ran out of space on the fabric to draw China and Japan. Had her group reserved a larger table, the history of 1930s youth movements may have been quite different. See Ilma, 73.

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 86-88; Rawick, 289-290. See also Cohen, 192-93.
That was the inside job. Outside, the communist magazine *New Masses* pilloried Ilma as a crypto-fascist, insinuating that her meetings with Hanfstaengl and Goebbels had been with the aim of forming an American counterpart to the Hitler Youth. Editor Theodore Draper blasted her credibility from two sides: on the one hand, he argued that she was not to be trusted because she dared to place herself at the head of a million youth army, which would shout “Heil Ilma!” on cue; on the other, she was little girl, a hapless pawn of reactionary forces.\(^{139}\) The self-described “political virgin” had never encountered such rough treatment before, and she seemed outmatched in the battle to restore her reputation. *New Masses* continued its assault on Ilma, publishing the proceedings of an interview of Ilma by James Spivak. In particular, Spivak pounced upon Ilma’s reluctance to name the financial backers of her 1933 trip and asked whether her money and her marching orders came from Berlin.\(^ {140}\) Ilma vigorously denied the charges, but was unwilling to name her trip sponsor. Subsequently, communists staged pickets outside of Ilma's speaking engagements and planted hecklers in the audiences to jeer her and pepper her with hostile questions.\(^ {141}\)

*New Masses’* withering criticism captured a central insight into the worldview of Ilma and other youth activists of the 1930s. Draper argued that “for a class analysis of every burning problem, she substitutes an age analysis.” Youth workers and activists of this era believed in “Youth” as an abstract entity that existed worldwide. This conviction transcended the Mannheim's concept of a youth generation, as a cohort of citizens entering society, linked

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\(^{139}\) Draper, 12-13.

\(^{140}\) John L. Spivak, “Who Paid Viola Ilma's Way to Nazi Germany?” *New Masses* (November, 1934): 9-11. The article itself was part of *New Masses’* series on American anti-Semitism, which bore the inflammatory title, “Plotting the American Pogroms.”

\(^{141}\) Ilma, 93-96.
together by specific historical or social problems. Draper argued that Ilma and other youth partisans substituted the revolutionary potential of the world proletariat with youth, and noted caustically that Ilma treated “every living soul under thirty is of the Lord's anointed.” He and other left-wing critics cast doubt upon the political independence of the Youth Congress when it was partly bankrolled by the House of Morgan. Indeed, Ilma naively assumed that her connections with reactionary political forces in Germany and the United States would have no influence over her or her Congress. Draper would later learn that his own blind faith in the Soviet Union left him vulnerable to exploitation when the Kremlin signed a non-aggression pact with the Nazis in 1939 and invaded Poland and Finland.

For the rest of the decade, the AYC expanded its membership base and political connections under an alliance of socialist and communist youth activists. The socialist/communist takeover of the AYC was somewhat poetic. The leftist students had been convinced that Ilma was an agent or pawn of international fascism, and their zeal was rooted in their dedication to the cause of an international working class. Despite the class orientation of the Congress’ leadership, in its outlook and activities, the AYC remained largely faithful to Ilma’s vision of an umbrella social movement that would unite Americans ages 16-25. When the Communist International made official its approval of anti-fascist or Popular Front alliances with socialists and liberals in 1935, the AYC’s leadership could now forge working relationships with liberal New Dealers most identified with the cause of youth.144 These included the National

143 These events would lead Draper to break with the Party and began his long political transformation to the camp of American liberal anticommunism from the late 1940s until the Vietnam War.
144 The combination of socialist and communist youth into an anti-fascist coalition would be a hallmark of the Popular Front era (1935-39). The fact that American university students arranged this marriage in 1934, the tail end of highly sectarian Third Period of international communism merits attention. As historian James Barrett has noted, Popular Front activity in the United States and in Europe predated the formal declaration of the doctrine at the
Youth Administration's Director Aubrey Williams and the President's personal envoy, Eleanor Roosevelt. The alliance between the New Dealer and the Youth Congress leaders that evolved after 1935 was frequently strained by the young firebrands’ impatience with the political process and with the gradualism of the liberals. However, the entente contrasted with the President’s reluctance to acknowledge the Congress in 1934, when Roosevelt was advised to refrain from sending a message of congratulations to the delegates.\footnote{Rawick, 288.}

The Youth Congress bore little resemblance to the Hitlerjugend or Italian Ballilla, or for that matter, the Soviet Komsomol or the Young Communist League.\footnote{Tracy H. Koon, \textit{Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Italy, 1922-1943} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Anne E. Gorsuch, \textit{Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents} (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 2000), 16; and Paul Mishler, \textit{Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 37.} Instead of a paramilitary youth front, or a class-based organization for proletarian youth, the Congress was a federation constituted of various collegiate, racial/ethnic, radical, and religious, that claimed 4.5 million members nationwide.\footnote{Cohen, 188.} These organizations were united mainly by a conviction that the federal government should play a greater role in shaping youth policy. Among the AYC’s affiliates and

Seventh International in August, 1935. The timing also suggests that communist youth movements operated with more flexibility and autonomy than “cogs” in machinery driven by Moscow and the New York headquarters of the CP-USA. This is not to imply that the destiny of the American Youth Congress was driven solely by domestic factors, such as the movement of immigrant youth into the Democratic Party or the “laboring” of American culture. Had the spirit of cooperation between Youth Communist League members and socialist and liberal youth not received Moscow’s blessing, it is almost certain that the “red-yellow” faction controlling the American Youth Congress would have survived for the rest of the decade because many in the CP strongly opposed the YCL’s involvement in the Congress. See James R. Barrett, “Rethinking the Popular Front,” \textit{Rethinking Marxism} 21, no. 4 (October, 2009): 531-550. See also Lizbeth Cohen, \textit{Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-39} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Michael Denning, \textit{The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century} (New York: Verso, 1997). On the internal conflicts within the CP regarding the AYC, see Fraser M. Ottanelli, \textit{The Communist Party of the United States from the Depression to World War II} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 61-62.
branches were the National Student Federation, the YWCA, African-American, Jewish, and Chinese youth groups, trade unions, civil rights organizations, and commercial and fraternal organizations. Though unabashedly progressive, the AYC largely avoided sectarian or radical language in its publications when analyzing the American youth problem; instead, it carefully presented itself as a non-partisan youth advocate.148

In keeping with its self-identified mission as a lobby for American youth, not just those of the working classes, the AYC lobbied for federal legislation that would benefit an entire generation. Its ultimate goal was a bill known as the American Youth Act, which would have mandated federal aid to all needy youth between the ages of 16 and 25.149 Its pressure tactics, including a 1937 March on Washington which included a mock youth Senate, resembled those proposed by other socialist and civic right leaders, particularly A. Phillip Randolph.150

Ideologically, the AYC stood to the left of Williams and the First Lady, and the American Youth Act was positively utopian in comparison with the limited authority given to the National Youth Administration (NYA) by the President. Despite the gulf that separated the radical youth leaders and the New Dealers, the two sides viewed the other as allies. Roosevelt greeted AYC delegates in 1937 and in their subsequent visits to the Capitol, and NYA Director Williams believed that the 1937 March on Washington aided his agency because it help persuade citizens and politicians to spare student aid programs from budget cuts.151

The AYC suffered the fate of many other Popular Front groups in the United States and


149 Cohen, 190-95.


151 Rawick, 329-330.
Europe after the surprise signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact in 1939. In the United States, the controversial pact severed the uneasy alliance between various communist fronts and American liberals. Almost immediately, communists diverted the vitriol reserved for German militarism and aggression to their erstwhile allies in the Roosevelt administration, with calls for American neutralism and criticism of the administration's “warmongering.” This shift soon burned through whatever good will the Congress had with NYA Director Aubrey and even the redoubtable Eleanor Roosevelt. At the 1940 congress, liberal and centrist delegates to the Youth Congress were alienated when all of the major speakers came out as pro-communist. Membership dwindled, and with the entry of the United States into World War II, the AYC slipped into a quiet oblivion. For her part, in 1939 Ilma recanted her earlier praise for “Berlin” and to make common cause with “Geneva” in the fight to preserve democracy against fascism.

**NYA: From Youth Relief to Youth - A World Problem**

The National Youth Administration (NYA) was a minor arm of the New Deal, dedicated to relief work and vocational education for the Depression generation. But among its top echelon were idealist reformers who hoped to that the agency would transform the United States into a world leader in youth policy. President Roosevelt authorized the NYA by Executive Order 7086 on June, 26, 1935, and gave the agency its motto, “Youth Must Be Served.” However, the fanfare attached to the signing ceremony far exceeded the agency’s meager resources. Despite its name, NYA was not initially as a comprehensive youth services agency; rather, it largely a successor to

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152Ibid., 374-77.

the now-defunct Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA), placed under the jurisdiction of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). As such, the NYA functioned mainly as a bursar for financial aid to secondary and post secondary students. Operating under a modest and temporary budget and with minimal staff, the NYA labored to distribute millions in aid to 600,000 students in its first year. In accordance with E.O. 7086, the NYA also became a leading provider of vocational education for needy youth, training farm youth in industrial job skills. Through summer residence camps organized for young women, the NYA taught middle class values of thrift and housekeeping to its charges.

The agency was viewed with skepticism by many in the American educational establishment. Conservatives regarded the NYA as a federal interloper into American youth fully education policy, which had long been controlled by local and state governments, and groups such as the National Educational Association and the federal government’s Office of Education. Leading educators and youth workers fulminated that the NYA was “fascist in form,” and charged that the initial allocation of fifty million dollars made to the NYA would be “setting the groundwork for a Fascist pattern of education in America.” The presence of progressive educational reformers, “Ambitious Brain-Trusters,” and cosmopolitans in the agency was considerable source of alarm. Other conservatives, particularly leading Southern Democrats,

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154 George Rawick quotes F.D.R. on the pragmatic rationale for placing the NYA within the WPA. The matter was put under the relief administration largely because there was some money there which could be made available through the relief administration.” The President was almost certainly correct in assuming that Congress would not allocate money for a separate youth administration. See Rawick, 184-85.

155 Richard A. Reiman, The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 1992), 2-3; Palladino, 42; Rawick, 188; Aubrey Williams, Administrative and Program Operation of the National Youth Administration (Washington, D.C., 1937), 1-5.

believed that the NYA plans for residence camps would subvert local patterns of class and race relations. NYA sponsorship of African American students would “make them discontented with their former lot.”

There was substance to these conservative fears, for the agency held reform-minded idealists who wanted it to take a leading role in the “crusade” to make American youth democratic. The NYA’s leadership held views on racial equality that placed it on the left margin of the administration. The agency’s mission to Black students was overseen by the African-American social reformer, Mary McLeod Bethune, and access to work-study aid and residence centers was set in proportion of the racial composition of the United States. Director Aubrey Williams, though a white man born in Alabama, was a staunch foe of racial segregation. He also had experience living outside the U.S., as a YMCA war relief worker, then as a member of the French Foreign Legion and the American Expeditionary Force. The head of the NYA advisory committee, Columbia University professor Charles Taussig, was another “ambitious Brain Truster.” During President Roosevelt's first year in office, Taussig advised the President about the menacing potential of the state youth movement in Germany. He had also been a financial and ideological backer of the first AYC in 1934. Taussig urged the president to undertake a national youth mission of similar scale as the Hitlerjugend, but one that would bring American youth back into line with democratic beliefs. He proposed an audacious civic training program for college and university students. The top fifty to one hundred institutions would send a student to Washington every two weeks, to partake of a two week program in the objectives and economics of the New Deal. While the student’s travel arrangements would be financed privately, the government would subsidize the cost of instruction. While in Washington, the

157 Palladino, 39.
158 Rawick, 186.
students would also have the opportunity to interview the president in a press conference setting. In the initial iteration of the proposal Taussig did not worry whether the instructors in these classes were Republican or Democratic; instead, his goal was to inspire passion about the changes sweeping through the national government and society at large. Later, he argued that the project would be a powerful tool for increasing the legitimacy of the New Deal. The scheme for a “Roosevelt Youth” never caught on with the President, whose strategy for improving the morale of American youth was aimed more towards filling their pocketbooks rather than manipulating their ideology.\(^\text{159}\)

The leadership of the NYA in the mid-1930s was convinced that youth discontent was not confined to elite colleges and universities, but extended nation-wide, and required immediate intervention. Agency officials described a nightmare scenario in which a “domestic fuehrer” would consolidate these disaffected youth into a mass movement and use their restlessness to cause “undesirable changes in the American way of life” was plausible.\(^\text{160}\) They did not have to look far into their imaginations to predict what sort of changes might be wrought if the grievances of youth were left untended by federal authorities. There was the example of Germany, once admired for its wide spectrum of youth movements, the assorted Bünde and Bewegungen, which after 1933 were being eliminated by the Nazis or else absorbed into the HJ.\(^\text{161}\) Closer to home, American author Sinclair Lewis jammed his typewriter keys into the anxieties of his fellow citizens with the 1935 novel It Can't Happen Here, which imagined a fascist transformation of the United States. This consensus among the agency’s leadership that

\(^{159}\)Remian, 32-35, 39-43.


youth allegiance was imperiled gave the NYA’s reformers latitude to research youth programs in other countries and to create small experiments in youth work.\textsuperscript{162}

Therefore, agency reformers looked abroad for successful models of youth work that could be adapted to the conditions of the United States. In one of the first actions taken after the signing of E.O. 7026, Aubrey Williams turned to the U.S. State Department and its Foreign Service branch for information on what measures other countries had implemented to resolve the “youth problem.” Having little information on hand, the State Department directed consular services to submit reports that that addressed a series of questions: Was there a youth problem in this country? If so, what measures had been attempted to solve it? Were these measures aimed at vocational education or a youth jobs corps? Another goal was to ascertain the results of political education programs in dictatorships. These reports, in conjunction with relevant data on youth unemployment from a report published in 1935 by the International Labor Conference, formed the raw material of the NYA's publication, \textit{Youth – A World Problem}. Williams charged his administrative assistant, W. Thacher Winslow, with the task of arranging the data from seventy-three nations into a coherent and “objective” analysis.\textsuperscript{163}

As a catalog of global youth programs, Winslow refrained from making overt judgments of other nations, and avoided the controversial question of which nations might guide youth policy in the United States. Instead, he laid out a developmentalist analysis of the youth crisis while implicitly pointing to the policy solutions that might resolve it. Winslow argued that the “youth problem” was essentially a function of modern development. Societies which still persisted with “primitive” economic conditions – subsistence agriculture or primary resource

\textsuperscript{163} W. Thacher Winslow, \textit{Youth – A World Problem: A Study in World Perspective of Youth Conditions, Movements and Programs}, with a foreword by Aubrey Williams (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1937) [hereafter \textit{Youth – A World Problem}], Foreword, ix-x.
extraction of coal, timber, or other commodities – did not properly have “youth problems” because they did not recognize youth as a social group distinct from children or adults. These societies belonged to the first of four categories that Winslow devised to classify states in relation to the stage of their youth development. Category 2 (C2) states were those that were largely undeveloped in 1850 but had made strides towards industrialization prior to 1929. Prior to the onset of the crisis, governments of these nations had made little provisions for youth unemployment and recreation, counting on market forces or civil society initiatives to furnish adequate remedies. The global depression forced these governments to undertake policies that reversed generations of ideology, as well as upset traditional constitutional restrictions on the role of national government. In particular, the crisis motivated policy makers to organize vocational education and organized leisure activities on a national scale. Using the Winslow scale, the United States ranked as a C2 society, along with Anglophone states such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain.164

Above the C2s lay the more developed youth programs of category three (C3) and C4 states, which had instituted youth welfare and social security provisions prior to 1929. C3 seems to include the Scandinavian countries, along with France, Belgium, and Switzerland. Having exhausted all avenues for territorial expansion and rapid economic growth, and favoring security and moderate prosperity over rapid growth, C3 states turned to intensive development of national youth. As mature industrial societies, they could offer robust social security provisions and vocational education programs, including youth labor camps. The political ballast of these stable societies was a growing middle class, anti-monopoly laws, and “heavy” levels of income tax. Yet

164The inclusion of these states into this group was not explicit, but the giveaway hint for the United States’ inclusion was Winslow’s description of C2s having a recent past social structure that prized “rugged individualism.”
these havens of stability had been buffeted by the waves of nationalist sentiment roiling their neighbors, and the effort to secure domestic markets from foreign competition had yielded serious social “maladjustments,” leading to increased youth unemployment and greater efforts at remediation.

C4 was comprised of authoritarian states that had established youth programs to promote an official ideology. Rather than aberrations of geopolitical development, the category represented an alternate form of modernist development. C4 explicitly held Italy and Germany, but it adequately describes conditions in the USSR. These states had been “crippled” by the Great War and the period of rapid inflation that followed the conflict. As a result, these states practiced economic autarky and a virulently nationalistic style of politics. State based youth movements organized by authoritarian governments completely regimented youth activities and organized education in accordance with the ruling ideology. A common feature among these state programs was the idolization of a single, charismatic leader who stood as the embodiment of the nation’s values. Not surprisingly, in such programs physical achievements were prized more than its intellectual development. Along with major league dictatorship, C4 also counted minor states that aped the scale and nationalist zeal of the majors. In 1937 these included Austria, Bulgaria, Portugal, Rumania, and could accommodate Estonia, Turkey, and Japan. While modern economic and social forces inevitably lifted countries from C1 and C2, Winslow's analysis suggested that the trajectory of national youth development would terminate in C3 or C4. Fascism in this scheme was not a political aberration, or a throwback to a barbaric past, but a repressive form of modernist development. Given his position as a liberal idealist, it is reasonable to conclude that Winslow hoped that the NYA would elevate the United States firmly
solidly into C3.  

The publication of *Youth – A World Problem* in the fall of 1937 raised some eyebrows. A reviewer in the *New York Times* clucked that Great Britain merited a scant three pages for its youth programs, compared with the fifteen for Germany, twelve for the USSR, and seven for Italy. In particular, the report on Germany meted out grudging praise for the scope of that nation’s recreational, vocational, and land conservation efforts that involved youth. At the same time, the section obliquely criticized the HJ for having destroyed the German *Jugendbewegung*, which were “free and natural expression of youth's reaction to its environment.” Overall, the reports for C4 also acknowledged that the youth movements of the dictatorships were modern and efficient instruments of propaganda and that “the success of youth organizations of dictatorship countries…cannot be denied. The young people have become stronger, healthier, and extremely well-disciplined…civic soldiers who serve their state unquestioningly and wholeheartedly.” At twenty pages, the U.S. section was the most comprehensive, but hardly self-congratulatory. The statistics on American youth unemployment and transient youth provided in the study were damning, and Winslow candidly described the bevy of New Deal program aimed at youth, including the FERA, NYA, and the Civilian Conservation Corps as well-meaning but piecemeal and incomplete efforts.

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165 Griffin, 33. The perception that Nazi Germany posed an alternative form of modern national development was hardly unusual for this era, even among critics who found Nazism an abhorrent political ideology. The swerve towards portraying Third Reich Germany as treading a “Sonderweg” or waging a “fundamentalist revolt against the whole tendency of the rationalization of the Western world mainly appears after 1945. See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 3-6.


167 Ibid., 32-33. Aubrey Williams also avowed that the NYA would have no relationship with any totalitarian youth movement. See Rawick, 195.

168 *Youth – A World Problem*, 83-96.
The real significance of the reports comes in the direct comparison of the US with other nations. Winslow’s categories rejected the notion of American exceptionalism outright. Economic credos that gave “free rein” to private initiative and enterprise were the holdover of an early era of economic expansion. Even the “rugged individualism” which Americans prized was a residue of a settler past, shared by other former British colonies, including Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Indeed, Winslow posited that Australia’s youth programs provided the closest parallel to the work of the NYA. Simply put, in terms of youth work, the U.S. was no ‘city on a hill;’ rather, it occupied a mediocre stratum of nations whose governments had only belatedly taken responsibility for youth development. By highlighting the weak state of American youth policy, Winslow likely intended to build up support for the NYA and to absolve the agency from charges that it was “fascist in form” or a precursor to a “Roosevelt Youth.”

Furthermore, European youth programs, including those of Germany, provided a useful model for future development because these countries had been in “the throes of economic depression and social readjustments much sooner than the United States.” In some ways, the analogy is forced; Weimar Germany suffered crippling hyper-inflation while the U.S. economy was afflicted with deflation. However, youth unemployment rate among German males ages 14-25 in 1932 ran as high as one-third, higher than the United States estimated youth jobless rate of one in five.\footnote{Peter Stachura, 	extit{The Weimar Republic and the Younger Proletariat: An Economic and Social Analysis} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 118.} Plus, the success that Germany had in slashing its youth unemployment rate by one half million between 1933 and 1935 through programs such as the Voluntary Labor Service (VLS) stunned many critics and likely served as a template for Roosevelt’s beloved Civilian Conservation Corps. The Nazis claimed that the VLS was indispensible to the material and moral regeneration of youth and the nation. In fact, the program was created in 1931 by the
Weimar government. Under the “Nazification” of the VLS, the program took on overtly nationalist trappings, and the youth who participated were portrayed in state propaganda as an elite engaged in noble sacrifice for the nation and the Fuehrer. Winslow’s criticized this “Fuehrer Prinzip” as an illegitimate abuse of youth work.\footnote{170 Dan P. Silverman, \textit{Hitler’s Economy: Nazi Work Creation Programs, 1933-1936} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 186.}

However, much of the NYA’s youth work contained an explicit ideological purpose: democratizing American youth. This assumption underwrote many of the NYA’s projects, from student work study programs to residence centers, both of which were designed to curb youth’s political alienation from American democracy.\footnote{Reiman, 124-26, 133.} Winslow qualified that study of Europe’s national youth movements did not translate into an endorsement of fascism or socialism. The “fierce faith” that these regimes inspired could be used for noble or misguided ends. In a 1937 article written for a special edition of \textit{Annals of Political Science} dedicated to discussions of the “youth problem,” Winslow offered a more critical assessment of the fascination that fascists held for youth and international athletic competitions. He observed that the “dictators” saw the competition as proxies for the struggle between nations, and had perverted harmless diversions intended for the amusement and recreation of youth into the “mass production of cannon fodder.” Yet Winslow cautioned his readers not to dismiss the lessons that could be gleaned from a study of these movements. To conclude, he argued, “that all government youth programs constitute...a menace to democratic government is illogical and absurd.”\footnote{W. Thacher Winslow, “International Aspects of Modern Youth Problems,” \textit{Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science} 194, (Nov. 1937): 165-173.} This open-minded evaluation of youth programs abroad extended into wartime, as NYA staffers paid tribute to the efficacy of the Soviet Union’s youth mission. In the agency’s 1944 Final Report, the authors attributed the

“stubborn resistance of the Russian people in warding off defeat” to the state’s “continuous integration since 1918 of youth into the national structure.” Sadly, the same praise could be applied to the invaders.\textsuperscript{173}

\textbf{YMCA and the Cultivation of Christian Citizenship}

The YMCA’s foray into American youth nation-building was contemporaneous with that of the AYC and the NYA. The YMCA of the United States was a civic group whose impact on American social life rivaled that of any private agency. In 1936, the Association claimed 1.12 million dues paying members, 3700 paid officers, and around 1100 individual Associations. The Association was based mainly in medium to large cities. At the local and national levels, the Y’s heavy reliance upon well-heeled corporate and individual donors retarded serious engagement with the controversial political and economic issues of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The YMCA studiously avoided entanglement in the divisive political and social debates of the Gilded Age and the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, focusing on the development of male physical and spiritual well-being.\textsuperscript{174}

The crash of 1929 created pressure on the YMCA’s officer corps to consider social reform as of equal importance to individual salvation. In 1931, the Association’s National

\textsuperscript{173} Final Report of the National Youth Administration: Fiscal Years 1936-1943 (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1944), 6-7. The demise of the NYA during 1942-43 came as a result of political opposition from Congressional conservatives and the federal Office of Education. In 1940, the NYA was placed within the Federal Security Agency, where the youth agency was supposed to implement vocational training necessary to place the U.S. economy on a war footing. Ironically, it was the virtual elimination of youth unemployment that convinced Congressional budget cutters that “relief” programs such as the CCC and the NYA were no longer needed. After moving the NYA once more to the War Manpower Commission, an obviously temporary agency, Congress decided to eliminate the NYA on June 28, 1943. See Rawick, 270-73.

\textsuperscript{174} C. Howard Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America (New York: Association Press, 1951), 392-93. Hopkins minces no words about the Y’s tardy arrival into a growing debate within Protestant churches about social issues. [The YMCA] lagged far behind the churches as they began to discover the social gospel in the 1880s and 1890s. Its leadership was so completely identified with the cult of materialistic success that any suggestion that its goals might be questioned would have been regarded as “communism.”
Council (NC) expanded its purpose from building Christian personalities to include a mission to build a Christian society. Building a Christian society required that local Y’s investigate the connection between the gospels and contemporary social problems. One of the Association’s leaders who reflected this dramatic shift was William Sweet. Sweet was a millionaire investment banker, former Progressive governor of Colorado, who had purchased his substantial influence in the YMCA by investing a fifth of his fortune into the construction of the Denver YMCA. After WWI he traveled extensively through Europe and served one term as Colorado’s Governor from 1923-1925. His administration was marked by a progressive political vision – opposition to child labor, support for state intervention into industry and society, and support for prohibition. Sweet held the fervent belief in “youth and in the early 1930s shared the conviction that Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union surpassed the United States in terms of youth development, including their attempts at political indoctrination.

In a 1932 article in the Association’s monthly, Young Men, Sweet diagnosed a deep social malaise affecting the nation’s youth. In his estimation, the twelve years since the end of the Wilson Administration had been the most sordid of the nation’s history. But he held that “Youth” had the capacity to regenerate the civic state. He quoted with favor the British sociologist Benjamin Kidd’s who wrote that the “idealisms of the young of each generation under the influence of the social passion are absolutely limitless” and that their power was capable of creating a new world, or sweeping away existing order that did not meet its standards. Sweet believed that the unprecedented rebellion of youth elites as evidence that American youth would

176 William E. Sweet, “The Stake Which Young People Have in Politics,” Young Men (September 1932).
not tolerate further degradation of people to below the condition of “beasts” – citing the visit of National Student League delegates to Harlan County, Kentucky. But were existing educational structures adequate to channel this energy into constructive reform that would rejuvenate the state? Sweet argued that compulsory classes in civics had “accomplished little or nothing” in establishing in the minds of young the real principles of democracy.

By contrast, Sweet found much to admire in the total regime of political socialization then underway in Germany and the Soviet Union. His admiration for the accomplishments of the Hitler Youth was unfortunate. However, the National Socialists had yet to unfurl their social and political banner onto the landscape of Germany. Sweet fell victim to the propaganda of the Nazis, which presented their political program as the justified outrage stemming from the “unjust peace” imposed upon the country at Versailles. More likely, Sweet imagined that the Hitler Youth was a more vigorous species of youth movements or Bewegungen that studded the late Weimar Republic. These groups represented the organizing impulses of youth themselves, but also the efforts of political factions and major churches to educate the new generation of citizens in Germany. Sweet confined his admiration, in any case, to the preponderance of youth at National Socialist rallies and the undeniable fact that the “youth of Germany was aroused” by politics. Sweet’s estimation of the Soviet youth programs - the state run Komsomol – was favorable and better informed. Citing the analysis of the Komsomol made by Russia scholar Harry Ward of the University of Colorado, Sweet marveled at the contrast between American and Soviet university students. While American students were generally quiescent on political matters, their Soviet counterparts were “dominated by a great purpose.”

In both cases, Sweet took pains – as did Winslow in his writings - to clarify that his admiration for these youth programs extended only as far as the government or political factions
had succeeding in rousing the younger generation into accepting its role in the civic life of the state. He concluded by stating that American youth had an enormous stake in current political discussions about ending the Depression, and he challenged youth to answer the question: Is our government as instituted by the fathers, worth saving?”

In an edition of *Young Men* monthly published a month earlier, educational reformer and motivational speaker Frank Slutz called on youth to take a more active and direct role in American politics to rescue the Republic from the machinations and “mummery” that he had seen at the 1932 Democratic Party convention in Chicago. Slutz diagnosed that the United States' ailments as the result of mismanagement by “old men whose blood runs cool, cautious, and clever.” He argued that the halfhearted imitations of enthusiasm mouthed by middle aged men in Chicago paled in contrast to the raw passion of Chinese students, imbued with nationalist fervor to salvage the republic from foreign depredations. His prescription for rejuvenating American politics was for youth to organize their own political party. Slutz's proposal for a youth party is best taken as a metaphor for adolescents and youth to view their political interests along generational lines, rather than region or existing political affiliation. Yet even a youth party would require mechanisms to train youth leaders and to channel their energies into productive channels.177

The broadsides of Sweet and Slutz offered little practical advice into what role, if any, the YMCA would play in the formation of a national youth movement for the United States. The choice for Association reformers in 1933-34 was two-fold: either to lend support to youth-controlled movements, or to develop youth politics from within the Y and scale those models into a national movement equivalent to those of Europe. The opportunity to follow the first

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177 Frank D. Slutz, “Should Young People Form a Third Party?” *Young Men* (August 1932).
presented itself first, as college students and youth activists formed groups such as the National Conference of Students in Politics, the American Student Union (ASU), and the American Youth Congress from 1933-34. Association youth workers attempted to establish a working relationship with activists, while seeking maintain an arms-length from their radicalism.

The results of this balancing act were mixed. When the YMCA of the Ohio State University (OSU) offered its facilities for the inaugural ASU Congress in 1935, it sparked intense opposition. The OSU administration had already denied the ASU’s request to use campus buildings, citing a “coal shortage.” The real reason was probably the presence of communist youth activists in the ASU’s leadership. Right wing patriot groups such as the American Legion demanded that the YMCA eject the conference. Instead of providing a middle ground between right and left wing students, the Y was drawn into the divisive partisan politics of the student movement, and the assembly threatened to devolve into farce. A Legion official boasted to a reporter that federal agents were present in the hall and a former captain of the campus ROTC ran off with the microphone early in the session. From the YMCA’s efforts students derived some benefit. James Weschler, a recent college graduate writing about the ASU gathering for the New Republic, argued that this event provided an outlet for students who were terrified about their post-baccalaureate future, and thus was a welcome antidote to the otherwise bankrupt state of “orthodox academic thought.” Yet Weschler thought it a “safe prediction” that the Ohio State YMCA would not sponsor a similar event for the foreseeable future.178

Chastened by these controversies, the Association’s National Council’s Committee on Citizenship and Public Affairs signaled its commitment to build youth political engagement through the expansion of existing programs or the development of new initiatives. The

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Committee stipulated that the movement must conform to several criteria, including “preservation of democratic principles of government and the safeguarding of civil liberties,” avoidance of war, reduction of crime, ecumenical cooperation between Jews, Protestants, and Catholics, and improvement of American race relations.” One initiative that met these requirements was an experimental high-school citizenship program in New York called Youth and Government (Y+G). Y+G was the creation of Clement Duran, a Spanish immigrant and long-time Association youth worker who had worked at Y’s across the state. As the Program Secretary for the Albany Y, Duran was responsible for organizing an annual conference of older boys from across the state. In 1936, Duran heard complaints from many of the young delegates that the program only produced discussions about social problems, which seldom led to tangible results. A climate of dissatisfaction and institutional self-examination inspired Duran to turn the Older Boys’ Conference into a workshop on youth and citizenship.\textsuperscript{179}

Duran's concern for the political stability of youth in his adopted homeland may have much to do with the circumstances of his own biography. His father, once a factory superintendent in Barcelona, had chosen to leave Spain in 1910 because of the increasing violence and inter-class conflict that afflicted Catalonia. As a teenager, Duran had found social acceptance and a rising career track through his employment with the YMCA, and gained greater status and responsibility in youth work. While Duran remained scrupulously non-partisan in his presentation of the Youth and Government project, he was indisputably wedded to the success of the American republican system. One creation story holds that Duran was inspired to create the model youth assembly while he and his wife sat waiting at a red light near the Capitol building in Albany. Duran stated that “if we could get kids into the State Capitol and let them take part in a

\textsuperscript{179} Record of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the YMCA (New York: Association Press, 1936), 45.
model legislative session, they could see for themselves how laws are made and we could really teach them good citizenship.” The youth worker was also considered a progressive in his racial views, having earned public acclaim for hiring unemployed Iroquois men to work as Indian guides at YMCA summer camps.¹⁸⁰

In his search for workable models to train American youth in citizenship, Duran likely draw inspiration from a youth parliament created under the auspices of the Canadian YMCA. In 1912, Taylor Stratten, a veteran of the Boer War and Boy’s Work Secretary, created the Canadian Standards Efficiency Training (CEST) program. Stratten defined the goals of CSET as the first “great national effort for the boys of Canada.” In a 1923 CSET manual, he attributed his inspiration to the Great War. He had been impressed by the “accomplishment of the Prussian warlords in unifying the thoughts of Germany through the emotional power of a National Ideal.” While conceding that the resulting Teutonic nationalism was “false and barbaric,” Stratten did not mask his admiration for how the ideology “welded that empire together in a mighty purpose.” In 1921, he founded Older Boys’ Parliaments in Manitoba and New Brunswick. The election of delegates followed the model of voting at the city and district levels. Over the next sixty years, youth parliaments were adopted by other provincial Associations throughout Canada.¹⁸¹

Duran’s youth legislature model was a three-stage process modeled on the New York state government. 10,000 students in 300 high school YMCA High School Youth (Hi-Y) clubs across New York State assembled to nominate Boy-Assemblymen and Boy-Senators for the legislature.


These club members also selected a Governor, choosing from a slate of candidates who provided statements of qualifications distributed by the program organizers. Groups also drafted model legislation, usually on youth issues such as providing public school sexual education, broadening access to vocational and college education, and restricting the sale of alcohol to minors. For the climax, delegates operated a model state government. The legislature debated bills and passed legislation, following the actual procedure for New York’s Assembly and Senate, and with the governor, the assembly formed agencies. All of these activities occurred under the guidance of adult political leaders and Y counselors.\textsuperscript{182}

Y+G’s goals were to furnish students with information about government agencies and offices that provided for community welfare; organize the boys [and later girls] for present and future civic obligations; finally, to teach the importance of community welfare in relationship to the boys themselves. However, the ideal to which programmers hoped to fix youthful allegiance was not a nationalist symbol such as the American flag or even an abstract ideal of “100% Americanism” but to a more amorphous and transnational conception of “Christian citizenship. This ideal differed significantly from more nationalist conceptions of youth patriotism created by the American Legion, which also created model youth government programs in the mid-1930s. Here it is profitable to examine their mottos side by side:

[A good citizen] must have the point of view that progress is essential in order that he may do as well by civilization as did his fathers before him. – C.A. Duran

[We, the citizens of American Legion Boys’ State] believe that The Flag of the United States of America…symbolizes the glorious struggle upward of freedom in the past, the

The youth workers of the Legion and the YMCA organized their civic education programs in response to the growing restiveness of American youth. But the two credos reflect widely divergent political purposes. While the Legion aspired for “stabilization” of the turbulent political climate; Youth and Government aspired for “progress.” Boys’ State aimed to weld youth leaders to their communities, signified by the national flag. By contrast, the Y+G credo aspired for adolescents to work for the benefit of the United States and a wider “civilization.”

Y+G organizers amassed support from across the state. The New York Association contributed resources and encouragement. This level of aid was matched by government officials including Congressman William T. Byrne and Governor Herbert Lehman, who directed state agencies to contribute reports on their activities for a Y+G legislator handbook. The 1936 New York legislature was a rousing success, and Duran and Burger made plans to make the program permanent. In 1937, New Jersey Y officials instituted their own version of the Hi-Y Assembly, which attracted thousands of high school youth at the local level, as well as a glittering roster of sponsors, including leaders of major banking and industry as well as local and state officials.¹⁸⁴ Even so, YMCA Youth and Government programs expanded gradually. Maryland established another Y+G program in 1934, followed by Connecticut and Idaho in 1944. However, the potential of Y+G to grow into a national movement with mass membership was apparent. With an average of twenty-five to thirty five members in each Hi-Y club, the Hi-Y clubs of New York (300) and New Jersey (187) probably sponsored civic education for 12,000 to 17,000 students

¹⁸⁴ Walenta, Passim.
annually. By the early 1940s, programmers were convinced that they held a lever capable of influencing youth politics on a far grander scale, one not seen before in the United States. 185

Each of the Depression-era youth projects initiated in the mid-1930s was inspired by European state-based youth programs. Would-be youth nation-builders in the U.S. avidly studied these initiatives and consciously borrowed elements from them in order to resolve the corrosive effects of the Depression “Youth Problem.” All three initiatives analyzed were at one time a possible contender for a permanent American youth movement. Ultimately, the private-public synthesis of civic youth leadership programs such as YMCA Youth and Government won out, as the AYC and the federal government’s NYA were destroyed by the political changes wrought by the Second World War. Transnational encounters between American youth workers and activists and European youth nationalism played a significant role in this process, and had a large impact on the development of programs designed to transmit American nationalism between generations of citizens.

Chapter 3: Tests and Testimonials: Mobilizing Young Citizens for Defense and Against Peace, 1938-42

Youth programs like Boys’ State aimed to inoculate future leaders against “un-American” influences that might undermine conservative visions of citizenship. Instructors frequently warned their charges about the dangers of “alien ‘isms” and agents representing foreign governments; rarely did “subversives” make appearances. One exception occurred at the first evening of the 1940 Illinois Boys’ State. That Saturday, June 24, the entire delegation of 1497 high school boys was assembled, expecting to hear guest speakers deliver patriotic addresses or lectures on citizenship. The assembly was seated in tight rows, ringed by cinder block walls inside one of the State Fairgrounds buildings. Many boys had changed into white T-shirts and garrison caps which the Legion distributed to each “citizen” on the first day. Upon a raised platform, Boys’ State Director Hayes Kennedy and Department Commander L.N. Bittenger sat in their dress blue uniforms, along with fresh-faced Frank Lynn, the Boys’ State Lieutenant Governor from last year. Sitting apart were two men dressed in civilian garb. One was a portly man in a dark business suit, sitting with hands clasped in his lap. His jowls were clean shaven, framed by dark hair cropped at the temples. The other was Chicago manufacturer, J.F. Roche, dressed in a suit, white shirt, and a cravat terminating mid-paunch. Kennedy stood and spoke a few words, possibly announcements for the next day. Then Commander Bittenger stood to introduce the dark-haired fat man as a friend from the war and the first of the night’s speakers.\(^{185}\)

The audience, perhaps lethargic from a heavy dinner and the heat, would have roused to attention when the speaker revealed himself as Dr. Hugo Kosloff – former sergeant of the

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Russian horse guard, surgeon, and “exchange Professor.” In a thick accent, Kosloff embarked upon a half-hour diatribe against the United States, denouncing its failings and questioning whether the boys had the fortitude to fight for their country. The boys were mostly well-behaved, although some interrupted the speech with boos and catcalls. When questioned whether they had courage enough to fight for their country, the boys roared a defiant “Yes.” As Kosloff heaped calumny upon the Stars and Stripes and mocked the quality of American patriotism, some of the boys gestured for an adult authority to cut the speaker’s microphone. Afterward, two dozen boys swarmed the platform to shout questions and jeer the portly sergeant, leading Commander Bittenger to take the microphone. He asked the Russian a question of his own – “How much did a divorce cost in Russia?” The Doctor’s retort: “Is this for your own personal information?” The Commander pressed again; this time “Kosloff” responded, without a hint of the Russian in his voice – “How should I know? I’ve never been there.” At that, the tension broke and raucous laughter rippled through the room as the boys recognized the joke played on them. Bittenger re-introduced his guest, this time as Chicago comedian and WWI veteran Jeffrey Whalen, who repeated the question: would the boys fight for their country? The roars of assent were even louder this time. Bittenger congratulated the boys for having passed a test of their patriotism and challenging an apparent subversive in their midst.  

It was absurd, though there was nothing light about the burdens and responsibilities these young people were being asked to shoulder. Kosloff’s question preoccupied parents and educators in the months leading up to June 1940. In the months prior, Germany had invaded and conquered the democratic nations of Norway, Belgium, France and the Netherlands, and driven

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186 In 1941 Whalen advertised his services as a “speaker and humorist” suitable for banquets, luncheons and ladies nights to Chicago civic club members. Among the features offered was the wit and wisdom of “Dr. Hugo Kosloff – Russian surgeon – soldier – statesman.” Advertisement carried in The Rotarian April 1941, 70.
the British pell-mell from the continent at Dunkirk. Just days before the start of Illinois Boys’ State, American newspapers printed the text of the new conscription bill, the first peacetime draft in the history of the United States.\footnote{Text for the Bill for Compulsory Military Service in this Country,” \textit{New York Times} 21 June 1940, 2.} Anxiety lingered about whether the Depression Generation would serve in the armed forces or make other sacrifices for the nation.\footnote{A Gallup survey released in early June, 1940 found 64\% of Americans favored the bill’s passage, but President Roosevelt’s mail was two to one against conscription, indicating a potential problem with any mobilization effort. Figures cited in George C. Flynn, \textit{The Draft, 1940-1973} (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1993), 12. See also Mark Lincoln Chadwick, \textit{The Hawks of World War II} (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 38-40.} To Americans in favor of intervention, the United States needed to support its European allies against German and Japanese aggression not just out of self-interest but to ensure the very survival of democracy and capitalism. They worried that young people perceive the looming world war as a contest to determine whether the future of humanity lay with liberal democracy or totalitarianism (an amalgamated term for fascism and communism). With their allegedly weak commitment to ideas of freedom and representative government (owing to immaturity, the corrosive effects of the Depression, and the influence of foreign propaganda), American youth might decide to sit on the sidelines or else constitute a “5th Column” that would sabotage national defense efforts.\footnote{On “totalitarianism” as an designation for authoritarian regimes of the left and right, an term of opprobrium which could unite in opposition anti-fascist intellectuals and liberals with free-enterprise defenders, see Wendy L. Wall, \textit{Inventing the “American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8, 65. Observers, surprised at the speed with which fascists conquered, speculated that their invasion plans were surreptitiously aided by domestic sympathizers and saboteurs. See Francis MacDonnell, \textit{Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-6.}

With few exceptions, American youth rallied to the flag to a degree not seen in other conflicts of the 20th century.\footnote{John P. Diggins, \textit{The Proud Decades: Americans in War and Peace, 1941-1960} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 14.} Overnight, it would seem, a generation notorious for its war skepticism and political cynicism set aside their qualms and wholeheartedly answered the call to
duty. Actually, the American people’s commitment to endure sacrifice was far more qualified than popular memory permits.\(^{191}\) Undoubtedly, the suddenness of the Japanese attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor galvanized support for the war and tainted the reputation of “isolationism” for decades to come.\(^{192}\) Moreover, the intensive ideological campaign prior to December 1941, led by the Roosevelt administration and pro-intervention groups, helped persuade Americans to support the beleaguered British, French, and Dutch. This essay seeks to push back the beginnings of this conversion project to the late 1930s, showing how educators and activists built support for American intervention among youth leaders. The ultimate goal of this project was to ideologically pre-mobilize the Depression generation by highlight young men’s obligation for military service, but also by promoting support for an interventionist American foreign policy.

Key to the ideological mobilization of American youth for these causes was the demobilization of antithetical political beliefs: namely, persistent skepticism about U.S. involvement in European or Asian conflicts, and resistance to compulsory military service. Despite the political and legal setbacks suffered by war resisters, as late as 1937 there was widespread public tolerance of young war skeptics. The annual anti-war protests organized by college and high school peace organizations since 1934 brought out tens of thousands of students


out of the classroom and into the streets. Against strong youth revulsion to American involvement in another war, interventionists adopted a cautious strategy of counterattack, which I describe as “tests” and “testimonies.” Administering supposedly objective tests of youth citizenship, pro-intervention educators highlighted the dissenters’ ignorance of democratic values and chauvinism. Through essay contests and mock political conventions, educators and civil society youth workers identified and elevated youth leaders who would affirm their generation’s commitment to defend the United States. They also promoted a version of Americanism based upon internationalism and tolerance of ethnic and racial difference. By the summer of 1940, when the Roosevelt administration and pressure groups ramped up efforts to convince the American public to support involvement, their task was made much easier because youth campaigners had made great gains in elevating pro-intervention youth leaders to prominence and de-legitimating dissenting voices.

Another aim of this chapter is to stimulate a discussion on how ideas of citizenship shaped the American public’s responses to the looming war. Americans did not fight and make sacrifice during World War II for identical reasons. Under repeated examinations, wartime unity reveals itself as a nexus of overlapping, sometimes conflicting, motivations. Elizabeth Borgwardt argued that government propaganda crafted by the Allies appealed to transcendent, universal human rights, rather than allegiance to specific political systems. Robert Westbrook demonstrated how American propagandists, particularly those employed in commercial advertising, transmuted these platitudinous statements into messages that addressed Americans

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193 Estimates of the protest’s size varied greatly. The American Student Union, which led the protest, estimated that one million college students and 90,000 high school students participated on April 22. This count seems exaggerated, but New York City college administrators reported that 20,000 students did not attend classes that day. See “Huge Rallies Mark Student Peace Day,” New York Times 23 April 1937, 1.

194 Borgwardt, 4.
both as individuals and as family members. Americans, he argues, were urged to join the war
effort to discharge essentially private moral obligations, duties that were not transnational or
even national but sub-national. According to these commercial messages, what was at stake in
the war was an amorphous, largely apolitical, “American Way of Life.”

[The American Way of Life]…had little to do with citizenship. It was above all a
rewarding domestic life for which Americans were fighting – a private sphere
filled with goods and services provided by those who had halted production so
that their customers might effectively defend homes that in the wake of victory
would be even more densely cluttered with commodities. 196

Wendy Wall and Kim Phillips Fein identify business groups such as the National
Association of Manufacturers and the American Enterprise Association as authors of a version of
the AWL founded on economic freedom. Labor leaders and progressives interpreted the AWL
as industrial democracy, where citizens wielded control over the economy, chiefly through labor
unions. Lizbeth Cohen analyzed how bureaucrats with the Office of Price Administration
allied with civic volunteers to mobilize consumers, a force which one economist called “the
privates of the civilian army,” to enforce price controls and rationing rules. 199 The American
Way also stretched to cover a depiction of the United States as a heterogeneous society whose
members lived together harmoniously. Benjamin Looker examined how artists and
commentators sought to connect the neighborhood as an artistic and literary trope to grand

195 Robert B. Westbrook, Why We Fought: Forging American Obligations in World War II (Washington:
Smithsonian Books, 2004), 40.
196 Ibid., 58.
197 Wendy Wall, Inventing the “American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights
198 Wall, 42.
199 Lizbeth Cohen, A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (New York:
Vintage, 2003), 66-68.
matters of war and peace, fascism and democracy, ethnic conflict and national pluralism. In short, it seems that Americans fought and sacrificed for kith and kin, consumer choice and entrepreneurial freedom, to challenge or uphold traditional gender roles, and in support of an abstract concept of wounded humanity. Is it fair to say Americans fought and sacrificed during World War II for every reason but for citizenship? To the contrary, from 1938-42 private educators invested significant attention and resources into expanding existing youth citizenship programs and developing new initiatives to persuade young people that the war mattered to them as citizens.

American youth in the latter half of the 1930s remained skeptical about military service and U.S. involvement in conflicts outside of the Western Hemisphere. A 1937 Gallup poll of 100,000 Americans aged 16-25 showed broad support for large military expenditures to defend the United States against foreign attack, but most respondents indicated they would not support American wars if the fighting took place outside of North America, a foreign involvement position some have described as “continentalism.” In 1938, the American Council on Education published a survey of 13,000 adolescents from the state of Maryland that highlighted the Depression Generation’s skepticism about war. Sixty percent agreed that wars were needless and preventable. In the event of an actual war, one in ten males believed that they would not serve in the armed forces, and one in five females said that they would advise their brothers,


husbands, or sweethearts to refuse conscription. An overwhelming percentage stated that they would support the American military only if the country was threatened with invasion.  

This skepticism was shared by the many of the Depression Generation’s most articulate representatives. In 1937, the editors of American Magazine (AM) organized a contest to identify the “leaders of tomorrow” among young men and women in the United States, its territories, and the Panama Canal Zone. Students were encouraged to ponder questions related to the political, social and economic conditions affecting the country, and to apply those ideas in a contest with the opportunity to win $2500. A panel of three judges, two selected from business, academia, or civil society, along with Editor Sumner Blossom, evaluated the entries. Almost a quarter million submitted essays for the 1937-38 competition’s on the theme: “The America I Want.”

The first year winner was Leon G. Lenkoff of Kentucky. Lenkoff was an exceptional youth on many counts. The seventeen year old graduate of Louisville Male High School had overcome strong obstacles in his life: he was a Jew living in a Southern border city, and his father died while the boy was in diapers. To defray his educational expenses, he worked at the public library. After graduation, he said that he planned to study commerce at Northwestern

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204 “Wanted – Young Men and Women Young Women who will be Leaders of Tomorrow,” American Magazine (Nov. 1937), 16-17.

205 Dr. Charles C. Tillingchast, “Youth Still Seeks the Answers,” American Magazine (Feb. 1938), 59-62. Touted by the editors as “one of the nation’s foremost educators,” Tillingchast served as Principal for the Horace Mann School for Boys and presided over the Headmaster’s Association of America.

206 The judges also evaluated thousands of poems, short stories, and visual art works. The contest was clearly aimed at reaching youth enrolled in school, as the organizers urged students to seek out the advice of a teacher or principal before submitting their entry. One million students replied, and 213,000 complete packets were considered. Subsequent contests counted over a half-million completed essays annually, with the number of pages written numbering well into the millions. The contest was quietly discontinued at the end of 1941.
University. The difficult circumstances of his life may have inspired the hard-nosed tone of his essay, which the judges described as a “clean, powerful expression of Modern Youth.” In a startling opening, he addressed the prompt as if ordering from a catalog. Requesting a “beautiful new America,” he listed the qualities of his ideal country: universal opportunity for financial advancement, high standard of living, ample leisure time, education (to make citizens' leisure pursuits more worthwhile), better distribution of wealth, and less drudge work. He insisted that his perfect nation be delivered “no later than the day after tomorrow.”

After revealing that his lead-in was a provocation, Lenkoff listed decidedly quotidian hopes for America: “more spinach, more dresses and overcoats, and more refrigerators.” However, he rejected economic solutions that placed excessive power with the federal government. On the current struggle of labor against capital, Lenkoff sided with manufacturers and investors, whom he viewed as the ultimate source of prosperity in the economy. In their summary of the quarter million entries, the judges applauded his criticism of state interference in the economy, and they denigrated the other essayists who attributed “magical” powers of restoration to the federal government. In Lenkoff’s republic, individuals pursued their self-interest with a minimum of interference from the state. He believed that the potential for self-improvement and social mobility, not regulation, should spur Americans to work hard, defer pleasure, and assist the less fortunate. Lenkoff wrote that Americans should purge themselves of “jealousy” of those who had more money, so long as all had the necessities of life and many enjoyed its luxuries. For his part, the boy who worked at the public library to put himself through Louisville Male High School hoped that within ten years, he would be “situated financially” well enough to assist other boys in obtaining an education.
Consistent with his strong support of individual freedoms, he expressed opposition to compulsory military service. In his final paragraph, he wrote that it was illogical for the state to require young people to attend school and compete on the job market if their fate was to serve as cannon fodder in a remote battlefield.

What good will money do me, how will my education serve me, what price an interesting job, why should I work, why should I care – if, when I am a year or two older, my President issues an order, and a big ship carries me across half a world, to be shot at and bayonetted and crushed and trampled into the mud by some otherwise inoffensive little men… He left open the possibility of service in case of invasion but flatly stated that he would rather be called unpatriotic than fight for an American expatriate’s property. He brushed aside concerns that American involvement was needed to resolve crises in East Asia and Europe, dismissing those areas as “pesthouses,” and assured his readers that the United States could stand “a whole lot of letting alone.”

Lenkoff’s vehement refusal echoed calls for non-intervention from across the political spectrum of the United States in the mid-1930s. Like the right-wing neutralists, Lenkoff saw little profit to be gained from interfering in the “insanity” of European and Asian politics. Like war-resisters on the left, Lenkoff insisted that citizens could refuse conscription if they did not support the military ambitions of the American government, although he averred that he was no pacifist. This stance was anathema to conservatives in the American Legion or DAR. The Supreme Court too had invalidated the legal argument that college students could refuse military training in peacetime. Nevertheless, Lenkoff spoke for millions of Americans who did not believe that the government should compel citizens to perform military service in unpopular


208 Charles Chatfield describes a supreme valuation of individual worth as a major basis of conscientious objection. See Charles Chatfield, For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914-1941 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 77
wars, especially those waged outside of the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, Lenkoff’s
argument pointed to what political theorist Michael Walzer dubbed as the “problem” that liberal
societies like the United States have with conscription. Governments in these societies exist to
protect the exercise of freedom by individuals. Obligating citizens to risk their lives to “protect
their protection” undermines the state’s legitimacy. By selecting Lenkoff’s essay as the winner,
the American Magazine judges were implicitly validating these criticisms and the legitimacy of
anti-intervention views.209

Some questioned whether “continentalism” or isolationism was consistent with pluralistic
democracy. One such skeptic was Algernon D. Black, graduate of Harvard Divinity School and
leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture (NY-SEC), a progressive interfaith
organization. Black described democracy and totalitarianism not just as a contrasting but
“conflicting” ideologies, and likened totalitarianism to an advancing army, spread by military
conquest from outside and from within by infiltration and propaganda. He argued that American
youth – even those he deemed liberal and intelligent – were highly susceptible to ideological
subversion. Among the most vulnerable were the children of Italian or Germanic descent, who
might be seduced by fascist propaganda’s appeals to ethnic solidarity and claims that the regimes
were united and efficient, boasting full employment. Working class youth and those from racial
minority communities could fall victim to various schemes for speedy and drastic reformation of
the American economy, particularly those sprouted by demagogues.210

209 Walzer argues that the obligation for a citizen to risk her or his life, “to protect his protection” to quote Thomas
Hobbes,” may be owed under social contract theory to fellow citizens (as long as they are willing to reciprocate the
protection) but not to authorities in a state based upon liberal principles. See Michael Walzer, “The Problem of
Citizenship” in Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard
Ungar Press, 1962), 17, 22.
Black considered the peace movement, along with totalitarianism and chauvinist populism, as propaganda that could lead youth to isolationism or pacifism. Unlike right wing nativists, Black did not automatically conflate the peace movement with foreign subversion, although he suggested that the effect on youth’s morale during a crisis would be identical. This position, broadcast through his weekly radio program carried over the airwaves of New York City, criticized the views of some in the progressive religious community who had concluded, in the wake of revelations of government lies during World War I, that blind support for American foreign policy was incompatible with the precepts of their faith and with their ethical obligations as citizens in a free society. In any event, Black suspected that youth were vulnerable to the tactics that an antidemocratic propagandist would use to confuse and demoralize an audience. Therefore, he sought to test democracy's bulwarks. That opportunity came in 1938 when he was invited to address a youth forum in New York City. Black did not identify the venue where he spoke, possibly to spare the participants potential embarrassment from their reaction to his speech. Unbeknownst to the organizers or the audience, Black sought to test the clarity and commitment of the young people to democracy. Unfortunately, it proved all too easy to trick them. In his opening, Black identified American democracy’s “moral vocabulary,” consisting of words such as freedom, the sacredness of the individual, equality, majority rule, and spiritual values, and deconstructed each term. Freedom was a cloak for selfishness, and extreme individualism led to an atomistic society lacking common aim. Equality was a patently false concept, a risible premise of democratic rule. Majority rule substituted herd prejudices for the wisdom found in small groups or a singular conscience.²¹¹

²¹¹ Ibid., 18-20.
Turning from democracy's faulty premises, Black turned to the political conditions prevailing in the United States. He denounced the avarice and fractious conflict that needlessly divided citizens, and the corruption and ignorance that thwarted serious reform. The speaker claimed that the cornerstone of any political renewal must be the “the absolute sovereignty and authority of the nation.” The architects of this new order would henceforth privilege obedience and discipline over unruly freedom. As far as cooperation with other nations, Black dismissed it as fanciful illusion.

As for America among the nations, let us be honest here also. The peoples of Asia and Africa and Latin America are not our equals. They are backward and underdeveloped. As for Europe, it has been torn by so much strife and has become so corrupt...that its blood is water. It has no quality, no strength. Here we have a new earth and a new people. And I say, America first! Afterwards, the audience offered ovation, and Black countered: Do you people really think that I believe what I've been saying?” Embarrassed silence met his query. The speaker continued, “I made this speech because I thought that you were uninformed, confused, and gullible. I have put on an act.” He then invited the audience to deconstruct the speech, to expose the rhetorical mechanisms used by the propagandist. Black observed that he had avoided some of the more obvious tactics, such as wrapping oneself in the flag, or making an unpopular minority into a scapegoat for national problems. He merely appealed to common prejudices against foreign peoples and presented democracy's flaws in the harshest possible light.

The exposure of this vulnerability proved to Black and other interventionists of the need for new forms of civic education. In the summer of 1939 amidst the bucolic splendor of West Park, New York, Black helped organize the 1939 Work Camp for Democracy (WCD), a summer-long residential work and citizenship pilot project for 60 youth aged 17-24. Just as Hayes Kennedy and Harrold Card drew from the format of Boy Scout camps to develop American Legion Boys’ State, the design of WCD derived from existing models of youth work
camps. The campers were expected to perform manual labor, echoing the curriculum of the Civilian Conservation Corps, as well as camps operated by private agencies such as Farmer’s Union, trade unions, 4-H, and the Society of Friends.\textsuperscript{212} The work requirement was based upon the assumption that physical labor satisfied youth’s need for action and its desire to see its energy made manifest. However, WCD offered an even work-to-education balance, with the campers performing no more than four hours of physical projects such as damming streams for a swimming hole or clearing brush and poison ivy from the campgrounds.\textsuperscript{213}

Putting teenagers to work was considered meritorious in itself, but the aim of WCD was to convince the young campers that democracy was a cause “worth fighting for.” The curriculum hewed to this goal closely. The camper’s commonwealth was governed by a written constitution, and the youth elected officers to administer these rules. To build cooperative spirit, campers formed committees to manage work projects, and to lead study groups, sporting matches, and evening recreational activities. Campers also took field trips to county government offices, manufacturing plants, and youth institutions such as trade schools and homes for delinquents. The focus on having youth acquire democratic values through first hand experience was a hallmark of many civic education initiatives born in this era. The goal was for youth to learn democratic values by living cheek-by-jowl for several weeks. The format mirrored the National Youth Administration’s residence programs. Another area in which WCD resembled NYA residency programs was in the organizers’ attempt to include a representative cross section of the United States in the camper population. The WCD incorporated a small number of youth who


\textsuperscript{213} Black, 26-27. The appointment of Dr. Richard Gothe, a youth camp organizer in Pre-Hitler Germany, to administer the work projects reflected the American organizers’ recognition of that country’s expertise in this field.
had fled religious and political persecution in Italy, Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{214} To build the “political competence” that Black’s test had found lacking, campers discussed the tactics of propagandists and how to counter their arguments. They took part in discussions weighing the strengths and limitations of democracy. On the final weekend, the campers listened to radio broadcasts of the invasion of Poland and the beginning of World War II in Europe. After the close of the WCD, some of the campers travelled to the war-torn continent, as volunteers in the struggle against fascism. Many died in this cause.\textsuperscript{215}

The success of the WCD in rousing youth to defend democracy, with their lives if need be, inspired Black and the NY-SEC to create eight more youth camps, collectively known as the Work Camps for America, from 1940-41. The WCA camps followed the WCD template of alternating service work and citizenship training, and they were held at rural locations in Wyoming, Ohio, New Hampshire, South Carolina and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. Adding luster to the endeavor was WCA’s National Advisory Panel, boasting leading New Dealers such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Mary MacLeod Bethune, and Homer Rainey. Camp directors designed work projects to serve the needs of adjoining communities. And the curriculum featured treatment of domestic and international problems facing American citizens. Among the pressing international issues that the camp directors hoped to address was the plight of foreign refugees. In 1941, WCA joined with the International Student Service to rescue victims of persecution. Just as in WCD, Algernon Black gauged the efficacy of the camps not just in terms

\textsuperscript{214} The NYA’s experimental refugee program operated from May 1938 to November 1939, which resettled less than one hundred adolescent and youth refugees from New York City to rural Georgia, where it was thought they would assimilate into American culture easier and receive vocational education training. While offering sanctuary to a token number of refugees from fascism, the NYA program presents a modest exception to the Roosevelt administration’s overall failure to grapple with the problems of European refugees from 1938-1941. See Richard A. Reiman, The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 163-169.

\textsuperscript{215} Black, 29-30
of the construction of tennis courts and dams, but from the commitment of the campers to democracy. He quoted one camper who testified: “We got to know a community. We had known that certain social problems existed, but now they seemed much more alive. We could actually see them, rather than just read about the.” And most poignantly, one reported that “Many of us gained a new faith in democracy.” In his recollection of the WCA’s more than two hundred campers, Black singled out two who died in World War II, one at the Anzio beachhead and the other as a test pilot in the Army Air Force.\footnote{Black, 31-35.}

Taken in scale, the Work Camps’ efforts, limited to perhaps fewer than three hundred young men and women over three years, amounted to a pinprick on the collective conscience of the Depression Generation. Nevertheless Black’s design of citizenship education merits attention because it represented a challenge from the American non-communist left to populist isolationism and pacifism. In the mid-1930s Black himself expressed tolerance of isolationist sentiments of the American populace.\footnote{Algernon Black, Transcript of Radio Talk, delivered on 21 November 1935, Algernon D. Black Papers, Box 4, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University [hereafter Black Papers]. In the same speech, Black indicated his support for the United States joining the League of Nations, but tolerated isolationist attitudes because of the distrust Americans felt towards World War I and the intentions of other national governments.} However, by 1941 he roundly criticized isolationists and the leaders of groups such as “America First” as dupes of fascist propaganda.\footnote{Algernon Black, “Charles Lindbergh and America First,” Transcript of Radio Address, delivered on 29 April 1941 on WQXR (New York City), Black Papers.} Black also took to the airwaves to persuade young war skeptics that they bore a moral obligation to submit to the peacetime draft. In a radio address given shortly after FDR’s third inaugural address, Black acknowledged that the nation’s call to youth service came at a curious moment. During the 1930s, Black claimed, “youth was not wanted.” Now the once neglected generation was needed to work, fight, sacrifice, and possibly die for the nation. Youth could very well ask their elders:
“By what right do you call us to make such sacrifice?” To these, Black reasoned that the fascist menace was analogous to a community besieged by wild beasts or rapacious bandits, a situation in which all members could rightly be called upon for protection. But to adults who were quick to dismiss youth criticisms as unpatriotic, Black warned that youth expected a greater share of the benefits of national production and influence over policy in return for their contribution to the war effort.219

The Society for Ethical Culture was not the only center-left organization engaged in an attempt to defuse or silence war skeptics on the eve of the American entry into World War II. Leaders of the YMCA also negotiated this difficult terrain, attempting to support American involvement in the war without alienating the significant number of pacifists in its ranks. The North American YMCA had served a prominent role in World War I, providing material aid, recreation, and library services to servicemen. But in the 1920s, many Christian pacifists and war skeptics rose to prominence in the Association. In the 1930s, readers of the Association’s monthly magazine could find anti-war voices featured prominently. At mid-decade youth workers attempted to steer a course between self-described patriot groups and a vehemently anti-militarist student protest culture.220 By the end of 1941, promotional literature for the New Jersey Youth and Government program carried the motto “Democracy needs leaders in times like these.” Yet it skirted the issue of whether conscription numbered among the obligations required of youth leaders. Along similar lines, the cover of the New Jersey State Legislator guide carried this cryptic admonition from Director John Sly: “Preparation for leadership in the democratic

process has assumed a significance and urgency that is probably unparalleled in our history.” In
other words, Youth and Government stood ready to prepare youth leaders for war, or a standoff
between American democracy and totalitarianism.221

After Pearl Harbor, Youth and Government and its parent body, the High School Y,
mobilized in support of the defense effort, but organizers shied away from full-throated advocacy
of war. In Y literature, Hi-Y programs were touted as teaching high school students how to
square Christianity with war. For many young men, this lesson would entail military service,
tempered by “humility and determination to avoid storing up hatred.” Hi-Y officials conceded
that conscience might drive some youth to refuse to bear arms that could be translated into
“civilian work of national importance.” Even so, Y+G officials – again from New Jersey- touted
the propaganda value of their pet project. In one example, the editors of Princeton University’s
alumni weekly reprinted a cover story on the program, which carried out some of its activities on
the campus, along with a letter from an unnamed officer in the U.S. military. The officer thanked
the editor for the original piece, asking whether they understood how news of this program
boosted the morale of America’s fighting men as much as news of Allied victories in North
Africa or the Pacific. He took comfort in the thought that Y+G and the American armed forces
were “fighting for something which fighting alone can never save. Yet we must depend on others
now, to keep alive the thing we fight for.”222

The question of whether the United States would fight in league with its allies from WWI
remained open, in light of doubts that American youth would submit to conscription and fight

221 Work Book for “Boy-Legislators” and YMCA Clubs, circa 1943, YMCA State Committee Records, Box Y-65-
112, Folder 1942-66 B, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota.
222 The quote was from a letter to the editors of the Princeton Alumni Weekly, who had run a glowing piece on the
New Jersey Youth and Government program. The cover ran with a copy of the letter in front a photograph of a trio
of Y+G male delegates standing on the steps of the state capital, dressed in suits and serious expressions, all with
copies of the program’s Handbook for Legislators clasped in their hands. See Princeton Alumni Weekly, 6
November 1942.
overseas. The assumption was that isolationist youth suffered from a failure of morale and morals – aggravated by a decade’s worth of anti-war literature and campaigning – rather than the result of a principled consideration of American involvement in a foreign war. The view was articulated by Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish a few weeks before Hugo Kosloff thundered on a Springfield stage. Discussing the recent rearmament schemes being debated in Washington, MacLeish warned that these plans would be for naught if the country’s youth did not believe that democracy was a credo worth preserving, by fighting if necessary. He asserted that the Depression generation was skeptical of such moral convictions, regarding them as “phony” words. Their doubts in the worth of democratic nostrums were nursed by writers whom MacLeish considered the best of his literary generation – John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and Andreas Latzko. MacLeish saw no reason to disparage the “honest words of honest men, writers of great skill and integrity and devotion,” whose aim had been to immunize young people from the attempts of their leaders to foment war by waving flags and spread-eagled rhetoric. He conceded that their words had borne the bitter fruit: the present generation was “defenseless” before an aggressor ready to use force, a foe cynical enough to exploit bad feelings about the last war.

Such consternation by American elites was paradoxically wonderful news for the American Legion’s premiere youth citizenship program, the Boys’ State. Legion officials had long claimed that their youth program would resolve concerns over youth allegiance and young men’s willingness to perform military service. Consequently, enrollment grew tenfold over the

223 Latzko was a Hungarian-Jewish writer (1876-1943) who wrote several novels in German that condemned the brutality of the First World War. His books were translated into English under such titles as Men in War, Judgment of Peace, and Women in War.

summers of 1936-1939, jumping from 1,500 to 15,000. Consistent gains in several leading Departments, including Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and California, was one factor. The establishment of new state programs was another, with the number of states rising from four in 1936 to thirty-four in 1940. By 1943, the Legion estimated that 60,000 students had graduated from Boys’ State. The creation of the first full-fledged Girls’ State programs under the auspices of the American Legion Auxiliary in 1939 added hundreds to the total number of students receiving this form of citizenship training. From the initial three Girls’ State programs in Delaware, Kansas, and Nebraska, the number peaked in 1941 at twenty-one chapters. And in a dubious achievement, Boys’ State organizers in West Virginia inaugurated its first “Negro” chapter, to operate alongside the all-white version, in 1939. Supporters could safely assume that Legion programs would affirm martial obligations youth had to the state. The Legion had long inveighed against the youth peace movement. As the Kosloff episode demonstrated, the American Legion could be quite creative in its efforts to paint war skeptics as cowards or bad citizens. The Soviet sergeant played to the anxieties common to adolescent males, who were eager to avoid being ‘cowed’ before the watchful eyes of their elders, men whose gender credentials must have seemed so secure, seasoned by age and tried by wartime service.225

Messages of martial obligation at Boys’ State also came wrapped in clerical vestments. The night after Kosloff’s speech, Catholic priest F.W. Vogt, Department Chaplain of the Legion, asserted that patriotism was a gift from God. At the Sunday morning field mass for Catholics, Rev. James Haggerty, director of the Springfield Catholic Youth Organization delivered an even

225Estimates of attendance come from Reports of the National Americanism Commission on Boys’ States for the years 1937-1944. See Proceedings of the Annual National Convention (Indianapolis: American Legion, 1937-1944). Because of gasoline rationing, the American Legion recommended that Departments cancel plans to run the program in 1945. Information on Girls’ State attendance comes from Proceedings for the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the American Legion Auxiliary (Indianapolis: American Legion Publishers, 1940), 60.
starker message. “Youth can no longer drift. It must enroll in one of the two world groups: the cause of Christ, which is the cause of humanity, and individual rights, and all of the finer things due to the human heart; or the other which is the cause of the destructive dictators, who are ruling their people with an iron hand, crushing everything with their heavy tanks of war, disseminating hate instead of love as taught by the Savior.” Neither of these statements made any mention of conscription or the need for young men to defend democracy with violence, but even the dimmest lad would surely have made the connection. Pacifists and non-interventionists were cast as Americanism’s “other,” in league with the armies of hatred and darkness.226

In public descriptions of the Legion’s goals for youth citizenship, Boys’ State’s supporters frequently employed martial metaphors but stressed the essentially defensive nature of the project. Hayes Kennedy insisted that his youth-training program could counter the growing power of fascism. In an article written for the American Legion’s magazine in May 1939, Kennedy painted a bleak picture of world conditions. He wrote that totalitarian regimes had spread over half the world, and their propaganda was “paraded before the youth of the other half.” Boys’ State graduates, he claimed, serve as “democracy’s bulwarks” since the programs would imbue them with a greater familiarity with government, and a willingness to defend those institutions against foreign attacks. In one radio address, he asked his listeners to reckon the national strength not by the size of the armed forces, but by the quality of its citizenry. Elsewhere, he contrasted the conditions under which young people across the Atlantic settled their differences. European youth were being conditioned by the war to believe that political arguments could only be resolved by “instruments of death, rifle and machine gun bullets.” Under the more pacific conditions that reigned at Boys’ State, “young men are discussing and

226“Boys’ State Holds Election; County Conventions Today,” Illinois State Journal 24 June 1940, 5.
working in the affairs of government, but they are settling their differences by ballots instead of bullets.”

In the absence of a formal declaration of war, and the reluctance of many Americans to plunge into another world war, these appeals struck a delicate balance. Legion officials were sensitive to charges that the organization was composed of fascist sympathizers. Among the most prominent was retired Marine Major General Smedley Butler, who implicated two rogue Legion officials in the so-called Business Plot against FDR before a Congressional committee in 1934. Novelist Sinclair Lewis portrayed the Legion as dupes of a domestic fascist usurper in his 1935 novel, *It Can’t Happen Here*. In 1938, William Gellerman revealed the Legion’s cordial relationships with Italian fascists in the 1920s in his tell-all dissertation and book. Gellerman conceded that the American Legion never favored Adolph Hitler or his National Socialist Party, but skewered the Legion for its embarrassing praise for Benito Mussolini delivered as late as 1936. Legion spokesmen hoped to preempt criticism that would portray Boys’ State, with its bombastic appeals to national sentiment and martial trappings, as an American version of the *Hitlerjugend*. One of the first such defenses came in a 1939 Boys’ State manual published by the National Americanism Commission, which cited an editorial taken from *Wheeling* (West Virginia) *Intelligencer*. The author praised Mountaineer Boys’ State, and said that the plan “could not be criticized as a militaristic movement, such as the youth organizations of Italy and Germany. In a speech delivered at the University of Illinois in 1941, Kennedy took pains to

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227 Hayes Kennedy, “Bulwarks of Democracy,” *American Legion Magazine* 26.5 (May 1939), 24-25, 42-43; “Boys’ State,” Speech probably delivered to Legion posts and community sponsors, 1940; untitled radio address, 28 June 1940, NBC. The speech and radio address are in the author’s possession.

228 The list of those who suspected the Legion of fascist tendencies in the 1930s is lengthy. See William Gellerman, *The American Legion as Educator* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 103-106. Boys’ State did not receive attention in Gellerman’s work, but the author described the overall thrust of its education campaigns as “repressive” and anti-radical. For a broader discussion of the Legion’s ambivalent relationship with the European right during the interwar period, see William Pencak, *For God and County: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 19-23.
emphasize how the program was a rational and impartial “laboratory” for the study of American self-government. Much like a master watchmaker might train an apprentice, youngsters learned by “dissecting the machinery of government,” examining and studying its component parts, then assembling them into a “well organized institution of service” for the community. He rejected any assertion that the Legion was involved in “flag-waving” or transmission of a “reactionary philosophy” of government. Instead he argued that the principle of self-government, a prominent feature of the Atlantic Charter, was only possible if young men could exercise personal self-restraint. At Boys’ State, Kennedy claimed, the young men learned to listen to opposing arguments and tolerate political differences. They also learned how to accept the will of the majority and resolve their differences rationally and peacefully.229

Kennedy may well have understood that these assurances would not assuage those who saw the American Legion as warmongers. Therefore Kennedy offered testimony from youth alumni to bolster his case that Boys’ State was neither bellicose nor an undemocratic influence. One such testimony came from Lester Gootnick, a participant in the 1938 Illinois convention. In a speech before the Illinois General Assembly, the teenager reflected upon his experiences at Boys’ State. His remarks paid high praise to his sponsors in the Legion and set the program apart from fascist youth movements

For the first time in my life, I saw my generation in action; not the regimented mass movements of European youth, but clean, free, and individualistic activity. To see sixteen hundred boys working in harmony, willingly and cleanly, would impress even the most blasé observer.

229The editorial from the Wheeling Intelligencer was cited in “Boys’ State: Learn by Doing” (Indianapolis, Indiana: National Americanism Commission, 1939 – Boys’ State File, American Legion Archives, National Headquarters, Indianapolis [hereafter AL]. Hayes Kennedy, “Boys’ State,” Speech delivered at the University of Illinois, 1941 (in author’s possession).
In his report submitted to the 1938 National Convention of the Legion, Kennedy cited another, unnamed boy citizen, who attested to the program’s potential to transform students into apostles of Americanism. “[It] has given me the enthusiasm for further study. I want to be an exponent of democracy, loyal to its ideal. I want to be a better citizen. This is my perpetual impression of Boys’ State.”

The most compelling testimony given at Boys’ State came in 1941 from sixteen year old Napoleon “Bill” Perkowski. Perkowski was born in Chicago, the first son of Polish immigrants, Koyetan and Mary. His father and uncle manufactured piano and accordion keys in Chicago until 1931, when the Perkowskis moved to Poland to manage the family farm in the east. There young Bill worked and went to school for seven years until the country was invaded by Soviet and German armies. Realizing the danger that their son faced under occupation, Napoleon’s parents sent him out of Poland to seek safety in the United States. Leaving behind his parents and seven year old sister, Napoleon’s flight to safety ran along a circuitous route. First he travelled to Latvia in the company of his uncle, who had been expelled by the Soviets. The plan was to reach the American consulate in Riga. However, Napoleon was turned away for lack of documentation for his citizenship, and his father had to smuggle his passport and birth certificate through German-occupied Warsaw. Once his nationality was confirmed, Napoleon then embarked upon an odyssey across land and ocean: Riga to Berlin, on to Sweden and Finland, finally across the Atlantic on the troop transport S.S. American Legion.

Safe from persecution, young Perkowski still faced the arduous task of reintegrating into American life, a process eased by the American Legion. Upon his return to Chicago in 1940,

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230 Kennedy, “Bulwarks of Democracy.”

231 Biographical data about Perkowski’s early life and family is taken from press accounts, the 15th U.S. Census, and the author’s telephone interview with Perkowski on August 12, 2009 [Hereafter Perkowski Interview].
Napoleon struggled to re-master English and adopted the nickname “Bill.” Veterans from the local Legion post provided him with clothing and money, and periodically checked in on his situation. It may well have been these Legionnaires who nominated Perkowski to attend the 1941 Boys’ State in Springfield. Through his participation in Boys’ State, he found a receptive audience for his first hand observations of life under democracy and fascism. In his speeches he informed his peers of life under totalitarian rule.

I have lived under oppression and I know from experience what it means to live where freedom is denied. [In Poland] There was no freedom of speech. Spies were on the street all the time and a policeman might at any time arrest a person…just because he was well dressed.”

The story of Perkowski’s odyssey from Soviet occupied Poland to most popular citizen of Boys’ State drew the attention of the Chicago Tribune, which featured his picture and story. The article also featured Perkowski’s admonition to his peers to cherish the freedoms they had under American democracy. With visible emotion, he thanked his peers for their vote, telling them “you can’t appreciate freedom as much as I do” and advising them to value that liberty “more than anything else you have.” Perkowski’s statements no doubt gratified his Legion benefactors.

In the published version of his account, state oppression was directed against not of an ethnic minority or persecuted religious sect but a social class, marked by their good clothes and manners. How better to highlight the contrast between American Legion’s 100% Americanism, which privileged individualism and social advancement, and European totalitarianism?

Furthermore, the Legion’s faith in Perkowski’s civic potential was rewarded when he enlisted in the Army during World War II, served as a translator in Europe, where he was awarded bronze star for valor in combat. After WWII, he attended college at the Illinois Institute of Technology where he earned his bachelor and master’s degrees in science, served in the Army reserves,
reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and later worked as an engineer in the fields of automobiles and aerospace in California.\textsuperscript{232}

As a teenager Perkowski possessed all the rights of American citizenship by birth, yet like many immigrants of the early twentieth century he was initially dependent upon the munificence of social agencies for his re-entry into American society. His experience at Boys’ State is therefore emblematic of how the Legion hoped to round up so-called “hyphenated Americans” into 100% loyal citizens through its educational programs. The Legion’s support of immigration restrictions has often been caricatured as mere ethnic chauvinism. While many individual Legionnaires distrusted newcomers out of personal animus, the organization’s leadership based its advocacy for stringent restrictions based on its estimation of how many newcomers the American economy and local communities could comfortably absorb.\textsuperscript{233} “New” immigrants allegedly showed a greater reluctance to join the mainstream of American life, instead forming “colonies” and ghettos within larger urban centers. A greatly reduced immigrant rate would also allow federal officials to screen for “subversives” and radicals.\textsuperscript{234}

Within those limits, the Legion was willing to advance the citizenship claims of very small numbers of Filipino World War I veterans and recognize exceptional Chinese and Japanese-American youth prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. After that unhappy event, the California

\textsuperscript{232}The Chicago Legion’s compassionate treatment of Perkowski is remarkable, especially in light of the national Legion’s opposition to lifting immigration restrictions for refugees from German-occupied Europe. See Pencak, 262-63. “Polish Refugee Most Popular in Boys’ State,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} (6 June 1941): 12.


\textsuperscript{234}Pencak, 256-257.
Department of the American Legion was among the most vociferous advocates of Japanese internment.\textsuperscript{235}

A similar tolerance of exceptional immigrants operated at Boys’ State, yet the Legion’s strategy for achieving assimilation was woefully out of date. In the Illinois program, Perkowski was one of two Polish-Americans out of delegation of nearly 1,500. To win elections, Perkowski needed to emphasize his commitment to a set of civic nationalist values rather than religion, ethnicity, or regionalism. However, ethnic identity played a surprising role in Perkowski’s success, when the only other Polish-American boy sought him out because of his family name and volunteered to be his campaign manager.\textsuperscript{236} The Legion’s sponsorship of immigrant youth such as Perkowski would supposedly certify them as loyal citizens. Sponsoring of a token number of model immigrants held symbolic significance in the small to medium sized municipalities where the Legion’s prestige was greatest.\textsuperscript{237} However, in metropolitan areas such as Chicago and New York, “new” immigrants from Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe transmuted ethnic and religious ties into political power, in turn reshaping institutions such as labor unions, the Democratic Party, and the Catholic Church. Finally, having groomed a successful crop of civic leaders such as Anton Cermak and Fiorello H. La Guardia, who were


\textsuperscript{236} Perkowski Interview.

\textsuperscript{237} On the social composition of the Legion movement and its connection to middling and small urban communities across the United States, see Pencak, 80-82.
unapologetic about their immigrant ancestry, the “newcomers” had bypassed the nativist
gatekeepers who sought to contain their influence. 238

At the same time, other native born elites questioned the coercive regime of
Americanization enacted after World War I and preached inter-group “tolerance” of differences
between the religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds of Americans, all to aid national defense.
Prior to the American entry into World War II, a campaign for this expansive version of
Americanism was led by a coalition of groups such as the Council for American Unity, National
also formed the heart of the “American Creed,” described by Gunnar and Alvah Myrdal, whose
massive study on race and citizenship was supported by the Carnegie Foundation. While
condemning widespread disparity in civil status based upon race, the Myrdals performed a
critical service for the United States by claiming that the true character of the country was found
in a set of ideals based upon toleration and respect for individual worth, in contrast with
doctrines of race “purity” preached by the Axis Powers. The Roosevelt administration, prior to
Pearl Harbor, chose to downplay the supposed threat posed by “aliens” and immigrant “fifth
columns,” instead emphasizing the need for unity. In this spirit, observers praised an audacious
experiment to teach tolerance to all the schoolchildren of Springfield, Massachusetts. Besides the

238 Scholars of labor and race have noted that trade unions like the CIO offered immigrants access to a composite
social identity as workers and as bearers of white skin. At a level of personal interaction, the assumption that “Bill”
Perkowski, the son of Polish immigrant workers, shared a white racial identity as nearly all of the other Boys Staters
made his political commentary and democratic testimony more compelling. On the way that immigrant labor and
racial identity was reshaped by the CIO during the New Deal, see David Roediger, Working Towards Whiteness:
invested heavily in the idea that they were members of a white race and a working class, which also entailed a duty
to patrol the boundaries against trespass by racial “others,” immigrants also reaped a rich reward from their support
of the Democratic Party and Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, which administered a expanding welfare state. On the
importance of immigrant and second generation voter support for the Democrats and the New Deal, see Anthony
obvious dividends of reducing “inter-group” frictions, supporters assumed that an ideologically enlightened public would be more anti-Nazi and pro-intervention.\textsuperscript{239}

There were strict limits to the application of “tolerance” to American society. Even in enlightened Springfield, there was no place in the curriculum from 1941-44 for a discussion of the positive role Japanese-Americans played in the United States, although German and Italian contributions were noted positively. Citizenship education for African-Americans was another potential explosive. Civic education is a warrant on future claims to citizenship, with its associated liberties and obligations. Providing Black students with the same quality of civic training as whites would be tantamount to acknowledging their eligibility for full citizenship. Graduates from Boys’ and Girls’ State might would pose a powerful challenge to racial restrictions to the ballot and jury box, and possibly to social citizenship rights such as marriage and equal wages. Training even tiny numbers of Black youth for leadership, when opportunities for them to wield civic authority were scarce, risked proving the propaganda claim that Americanism was a bankrupt creed, and that precious little difference separated fascist countries from the United States.\textsuperscript{240}

\textsuperscript{239} These efforts from 1939-41 formed segments of what Richard Steele dubbed “The War on Intolerance,” although precursors for many elements, particularly in the field of youth education, were developed prior to 1939. See Richard W. Steele, “The War on Intolerance: The Reformulation of American Nationalism, 1939-1941,” in Journal of American Ethnic History 9, no 1 (Fall 1989): 9-35. Gary Gerstle and Wendy Wall have expanded upon the theme of a struggle to eliminate internal divisions on the eve of World War II in their works. See Gerstle, American Crucible, 185-189; Wall, 95-97, 105. The Springfield Plan was a comprehensive program to engineer tolerance in young citizens from elementary to high school, and the organizers in 1945 explicitly touted its success in minimizing internal divisions that could impede wartime victory. See Clarence I. Chatto and Alice L. Halligan, The Story of the Springfield Plan (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishers, 1945). On the first page the authors cite a letter to the mayor of Springfield from a GI stationed in Europe who told of a comrade recently killed in combat. The dead soldier had testified to his buddies that his willingness to fight and die came from his conviction that the lessons of the Springfield Plan ought to become a World Plan. While saluting the dead soldier’s internationalism, the authors were more limited in their vision, merely hoping that the Springfield might become an “American Plan”

\textsuperscript{240} Benjamin Fine, “Total War on Intolerance,” Liberty Magazine 4 March, 1944: 18-19, 54, 72.
Depending upon racial ideology, this putative threat to white privilege was a potential either to be nurtured or mitigated. Organizers of youth programs such as the Work Camps for America and the YMCA’s Youth and Government held racially integrated programs on the premise that adolescents, less biased than their elders, would recognize campers of different racial backgrounds as equal. They believed that the experience of democratic living would forge solidarity between the campers. As these apostles of tolerance entered public life, their enlightened attitudes would erode segregation in the United States. But the participation of non-white students was usually restricted to token numbers and almost never in excess of their race’s “share” of the U.S. population.\(^{241}\) More conservative civic educators in the Legion attempted to placate racist fears while offering limited access to Black students to the camps. The American Legion’s National Americanism Commission, which regulated the Boys’ State ‘franchise,’ stipulated that admission of minority students must conform to the prevailing racial standards in each community and state. A few Legion Departments like Virginia formally barred Blacks from the program, while others tacitly enforced a color bar. Assessing local racial conditions led to the creation of a highly irregular patchwork of state admissions standards. For example, in Illinois, African-Americans could attend Boys’ State but not the Girls’ State. Black veterans of the West Virginia Legion organized a “Negro Boys’ State” to operate alongside the one for white boys starting in 1938. In other states, African-American posts of the Legion and Legion Auxiliary

\(^{241}\) Black, *The Young Citizens*, 46-49. The use of Youth and Government delegates as apostles of integration was described by the program organizers in a 1943 presentation to the Association’s National Committee. See “A Proposed Plan for a Nation Wide Program of Youth and Government,” YMCA Archives. While the Y+G planners were explicit about their hopes of dismantling segregation, the Association approached the possible end to the color with trepidation, as white and African-American Association leaders feared what would be lost by integration. See Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African-Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 107-108, 123-127.
sponsored a handful of Black youth to attend majority white programs in states such as Rhode Island and Kansas. 242

At first glance, the creation of a segregated Boys’ State program for African American youths of West Virginia appears defeatist – a craven accommodation by Black Legionnaires to white racism. Some African-Americans felt that Black veterans had no business in the American Legion. They mocked the white leadership’s pious claims that the organization represented “all races, creeds, and colors,” while shunting African-Americans into segregated posts at the margins of the movement. In 1935 Langston Hughes penned an acid letter to Black Legionnaires in verse: “Dear colored American Legion, you can swing from a lynching tree, uniform and all, with pleasure – and nobody’ll fight for you.” Indeed, there was some “irony and pathos” to the situation of Black conservatives in the Legion, clinging to ideological principles of constitutionalism that were violated daily by their white brethren. 243

However, it could be argued that creating a self-standing program dedicated to Black youth leadership outweighed the victory of placing a one or two African-Americans into white majority chapters. First, West Virginia Negro Boys’ State instructed seventy-five students annually, and one delegation there represented a sizable minority of all the Black students to attend private youth citizenship programs from 1935-1945. WV-NBS also represented a pragmatic strategy for building up Black political institutions within the borders of a “liberal” segregationist state. While segregation was the legal standard for public accommodations in

242 In one of the most bizarre outcomes, 13-year old African-American Ellen James of Springfield, Illinois received an invitation to lecture Boys’ State delegates in June 1940 with her prize winning essay, “Abraham Lincoln, Great American,” although she could not have attended the Auxiliary’s program held a few weeks later. See “The Story of a Girl Honored,” The Chicago Defender 22 June 1940, 15.

West Virginia, African-Americans lobbied successfully for the state government to invest money in “separate but equal” public schools, housing, and institutions like orphanages. By 1940, the state had one of the highest enrollment rates for Black high school students in the South, providing many potential youth leaders for Negro Boys’ State (NBS). Throughout what Rayford Logan described as the “nadir” of American race relations (1890-1940), Black West Virginians retained the franchise, celebrated the passage of an anti-lynching law in 1921, and sent legislators to the Legislature in 1896 and 1928. Therefore, the organizers of “Negro” Boys’ State could hold out hope that at least some of the pupils might someday put their civic leadership training into practice. 244

There were firm limits upon the concessions that African Americans could wrest from West Virginia’s white civic authorities. For example, in 1938 the first WV-NBS was organized by many of the state’s leading African-American civic leaders. Just like their white counterparts, the citizens of NBS elected state officers, had the opportunity to attend the program’s law school and visited the State Capitol. The Legislature passed legislative reforms, including a ban on “bank nights,” a popular lottery held in movie theaters, and adopted James Weldon Johnson’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing” as their anthem. However, legislators “pigeon-holed” anti-lynching legislation, perhaps advised by their counselors to avoid controversy. One of the most glaring discrepancies between the white Boys’ State and NBS was the opportunities for political service

244Rayford Whittingham Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 52. Black West Virginians owed their political successes less to racial progressivism on the part of whites, but from the nearly even distribution of power between Democratic and Republican Parties in the Mountaineer States. Both sides courted African-American leaders, who were able to wrest not just money but control over Black education, including the creation of a Black school board in 1933 under Democratic Governor Herman Guy Kump. The creation of what some contemporaries called “segregation de luxe” served a dual agenda. As the editors of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, an influential African-American newspaper, observed, if white West Virginians tired of supporting the inefficiencies of a dual system, they might be persuaded to “accept their colored brother on terms of equality.” See Jerry Bruce Thomas, *An Appalachian New Deal: West Virginia in the Great Depression* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 200-203. Statistics on Black enrollment and graduation cited in James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
offered to each Boy Governor. In 1939, sixteen year old Leon Sullivan, tall, lanky, and charismatic, was elected Boy Governor of WV-NBS. Sullivan had risen to this honorary position from a background of stark poverty in Charleston, where he attended Garnett High School. Like the white Boys’ State governor, who served as a page in the Legislature, Sullivan was rewarded with a state summer job – digging sewer lines at a Charleston public housing project.245

Having incurred great cost and trouble in cultivating youth leaders, sponsors sometimes discovered that they could not control the political attitudes of their charges. This was a lesson learned to the dismay of the organizers of the 1939 American Legion Auxiliary’s Girls’ State. As suggested by its name, Girls’ State was the female citizenship training program organized by the women’s Auxiliary of the American Legion. The Auxiliary of Kansas began the first of the week long experiment in practical citizenship for high school students in June of 1939.246 The organizers imitated the Boys’ State curriculum, adopting the same state government textbook and even contracting Boys’ State alumni to serve as consultants on running a newspaper and organizing political parties.247 The Auxiliary selected 150 youth leaders of high school age who

245 “1st Model State Government is conducted by Boys of W. Va.” New Journal and Guide (Norfolk, Virginia) 16 July 1938. “Mountaineers Set up First Boys’ State,” Chicago Defender 9 July 1938. The anecdote of Sullivan’s experience at WV-NBS comes from the Marshall University webpage dedicated to their most famous alumnus. Despite the disappointing dénouement to his tenure as Boy Governor, Sullivan built a distinguished career as a religious and civil rights leader in the United States and South Africa. Soon after completing his college education, he became a protégée of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., influential pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York City. He worked with union leader A. Phillip Randolph and was elected, at the tender age of twenty one, as President of the National March on Washington Movement. Later, as the pastor of Philadelphia’s Zion Baptist Church, Sullivan orchestrated, in concert with other Black civic and religious leaders, the Selective Patronage program. This campaign, which lasted from 1959-63, urged churchgoers to boycott businesses that refused to hire Black workers, and was a direct influence upon the Southern Christian Leadership’s Operation Breadbasket in 1967.

246 The Auxiliary of Delaware created the first convention to called Girls’ State in the summer of 1938; however, it was only a day-long event. Kansas and Nebraska launched the first week-long programs a year later.

represented a cross section of the state’s population. While Girls’ State training in electioneering and legislative “log rolling” was every bit as rigorous as its male counterpart, the girls also received education from the Auxiliary on how to be “ladies.” One notable example was the tea service that the Kansas delegates took at the Governor’s mansion, a practice imitated by many other Departments over the next three decades. Other states amplified this gender socialization by adding mock socials and formal dinners to their programs. This training reflected the planners’ estimation that future female citizens would exert political influence indirectly through marriage and social intercourse. At the convention, adult organizers and many students frequented the language of courtship and marriage to describe politics and elections. Such practices and discourse signaled the gender and class aspirations of the Auxiliary, and they supported the assertion that a young woman’s destiny hung upon a socially advantageous marriage and social intercourse. The locus of their civic activity lay not in the statehouse, but at dinner parties and gatherings, where these ladies would wield finely honed feminine charm and political acumen to press for policy changes from male authorities.

Miss Mary Belle Sweet, elected as the first Girl Governor, seemed to understand how to simultaneously perform the roles of civic leader and young lady, eager to fulfill the future duties of wife and mother. Seventeen years old, Sweet was a recent graduate of Chanute High School,

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248 Data from the 15th Census was available for two-thirds of the delegates, showing a socially diverse student body. While the group was entirely native born and white, the girls came from families whose incomes derived from wage labor, farming, retail, small businesses, and professional occupations. Group photos of the 1939 Girls’ State convention appear to show two African-Americans. See U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: Population, II (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, n.d.) According to Auxiliary policy, only high school students between the ages of 15-18 were eligible, so many of the delegates would have already taken American civics courses. Besides this formal training, high school yearbooks for this group show the many had prior leadership experience, including student government, school newspapers, drama clubs and debate societies. Data gleaned from searches of Kansas Girls’ State roster names through Ancestry.com, http://www.ancestry.com/, accessed 10 October, 2010.

249 On the mixture of gender, class, and civic activism practiced by women-centered organizations such as the American Legion Auxiliary, see Francesca Morgan, Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 9-11.
where she had been active in student government, debate, and honor societies. Petite and attractive, Sweet was also a sympathetic figure for her tragic background: her parents had died when she was very young and she lived with an aunt. She campaigned on a platform of compulsory blood tests and physical examinations prior to the issue of marriage licenses. After her election, Sweet gratified her adult sponsors, including the actual state Governor - who thought her last name perfectly described her demeanor, by speaking favorably of her experience at Girls’ State. She took part in radio interviews with Director Vera Soelter in which she praised the Auxiliary and her peers for taking their responsibilities as legislators seriously. She also spoke about the need for reform of marriage and divorce laws in Kansas and the United States. Duly impressed, state Auxiliary officials dispatched Sweet to testify to the new program’s ability to train high school girls to meet their responsibilities as “women of tomorrow.”

What a difference a year made. The Kansas Auxiliary surely hoped that Girls’ State would wield lasting influence over the alumnae, especially one as adept as Sweet. In its Girls’ State publicity, the Auxiliary praised youth leaders who displayed political talent, “character,” and zeal for Americanism as the flower of American democracy. Once elevated to this level, the graduates’ political views could not easily be dismissed as unpatriotic. When the KS-ALA asked Sweet to speak before their convention about Girls’ State in 1940, they were astonished to find that the naïve and tractable girl had grown into a politically independent young woman. In her address, Sweet adopted the persona of a demure and polite young lady, characterizing herself as the unsuspecting victim of the political prejudices of her elders who censured her for posing uncomfortable questions about the economy, the rights of labor, and “this imperialist war.”

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250The narrative of Sweet’s activities during Girls’ State is taken from Speeches of Vera Soelter and Mary Belle Sweet, contained in American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Kansas, *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual convention of the American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Kansas* (Topeka, Kansas: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1939), 88-92.
Sweet recalled another speaking engagement when two or three women from a local women’s club were so incensed that they denounced her as a Communist and said deserved to be “spanked and put to bed.” Sweet challenged her audience: “Is it fair to say that we are Communists when we ask those questions?”

No one in the audience called the young challenger a Communist, but the audience’s cold reaction revealed how far afield Sweet had gone. Had the girl Governor decried the shoddy state of state orphanages, or blasted communists in the universities, she would have met with adulation. Instead, Kansas Auxiliary President Nettie Morss thanked Sweet for bringing “this challenge from the youth of your age and generation.” A musical interlude followed. The National Auxiliary President, Mrs. William Corwith, followed with a rebuttal of sorts. In impromptu remarks, she confessed that she was “disturbed” by Sweet’s public doubts, and signaled that to the audience that “there has been a change in her attitude, in her reaction to democracy.” Corwith indirectly attributed Sweet’s attitude to anti-American propaganda spread by disloyal teachers. The Auxiliary President’s rejoinder indicted a generation that had dismissed the “faith of our fathers” and refused to contribute their energies to national recovery.

Despite occasional stumbles, youth selected as “leaders” of their generation generally could be counted upon to testify to American democracy’s superiority to European dictatorship. The organizers of *American Magazine’s* Youth Forum seem to have appreciated this logic when they selected Eunice Stunkard as the winner of the Youth Forum’s article contest in 1940. The sixteen year old student of Barnard School for Girls in New York wrote about her experience

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living in Hamburg, Germany, for a year while her father, a biologist, conducted research. Responding to the theme, “Today’s Challenge to America’s Youth,” Stunkard wrote to upset the “casual American acceptance of freedom, individualism, and a God’s plenty of everything.” In a section that echoed Lenkoff’s materialist desires for America, the author contrasted the relative privation of German consumers – who endured intermittent power outages and ration cards – with the cornucopia of goods that she and her family took for granted in the States. Of more importance was the level of what Stunkard described as “systematic falsification” of truth present in nearly all aspects of education, especially history. She judged that “American education, often superficial and fumbling,” was nonetheless free from these distortions. Stunkard posed German practices such as jailing of political dissidents as opposites of American ideals contained in the Bill of Rights. In a rousing conclusion, she argued that Americans needed to distance themselves even more from German politics, especially in the treatment of racial and religious minorities.253

If the Youth Forum leaders were to be believed, behind Stunkard stood an army of youth, ready and willing to defend the United States. Forum Director John Dungan exulted at the “practical blend of realism and idealism,” and the “grim determination to make whatever sacrifices” might be necessary “to preserve American liberties,” which the readers and judges discerned within the bulk of the entries. Written in late 1939, most participants said that they would submit to conscription, support increased spending on the military, and some suggested that the United States was ready to play a dominant role globally. One girl from New Jersey put it baldly: “What Rome was to the ancient world, what Great Britain is to the modern world, America is to be to the world tomorrow.” Certainly, these entries seemed to repudiate the

continentalism espoused Lenkoff by just two years earlier in his prize winning essay. Even so, their enthusiasm for national defense was linked to economic concerns, including development of new fields of industry, increased worker wages and wealth distribution, and government mediation of disputes between labor and “capital.” In terms of social reform, American youth leaders supported “tolerance” of religious and ethnic minorities, while simultaneously pressing for greater piety. They also desired alteration to adolescent education that would ease the transition to adulthood: better access to sex education and yoking high school to paid apprenticeships. Defenders of free trade and liberal interventionists would take little comfort with the articles’ strong support for maintaining immigration restriction and economic autarky at a national or hemispheric level. In all, it was good news for elders anxious about youth’s willingness to sacrifice for the nation in the event of war, but not a blank check.254

The task of persuading American youth that there was no peaceful means of avoiding American involvement in another European conflict was greatly facilitated by the disintegration of the youth anti-war movement from 1939-1940. The peace movement of the 1930s was a bewildering coalition of youth groups, representing a diverse ethnicities, religions, and political outlooks. Even at its zenith at mid-decade, the movement was divided over questions of strategy, such as whether the peace movement should moderate its rhetoric and tactics to attract high school students and liberal college students. The movement’s leaders hailed from the American Student Union (ASU) and the American Youth Congress (AYC), groups led, if not entirely dominated by communists. Over the course of a year, the ASU sundered along sectarian lines between liberal, socialist, and communist factions over the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 and the Soviet invasion of Finland. In the dispute, communists gained the upper hand within the ASU

254 John Dungan, “American Youth Forum Article Awards,” American Magazine (September 1940), 39, 93.
and the AYC, and dictated a Moscow-inspired turn away from anti-fascism towards isolationism. The ASU sundered along factional lines, with scores of campus peace groups seeking disaffiliation. The effective end of the AYC came in the winter of 1940 with its ill-fated Youth Congress, when communist activists silenced liberal delegates and jeered President Roosevelt as a warmonger, who issued a public scolding to the red youngsters. Conservative and pro-interventionist publications, including Henry Luce’s *Life* magazine, took no small pleasure in the “spanking” delivered by the President, marking the dissidents as both radical and infantile. The impression that anti-war activists were pawns of Moscow foreign policy made it easy to mock any opposition to the war as a foreign ploy, a point not lost on the American Legion or Jeffrey Whalen.255

Even as the peace movement disintegrated, pro-intervention youth groups proliferated. Sporting names such as Student Defenders of Democracy, League of Youth for Democracy, and Student Citizens of America, and the American Youth for Freedom, these youth movements had financial links to adult pro-intervention groups such as William Allen White’s Committee to Defend America. Still a relatively small presence on most American campuses, the student groups published tracts and letters in favor of American aid to its European allies, while behind the scenes members reported on the activities of faculty and administrators thought to be isolationist. The pro-war students also attacked the “heroes” of the isolationist and peace movements, including prominent figures such as Charles Lindbergh and North Dakota Senator

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Gerald Nye, portraying their opposition as rooted in pure anti-Semitism. Of course, anti-Semitism was also present among many leading American interventionists.256

By 1941, the once-might youth peace movement was nearly defunct, leaving pro-war groups to dominate debates over the draft and aid to the Allies. The reversal of fortunes faced by anti-war students was startling. On May 2nd, Catholic University student John Oberg took part in an impromptu debate on democracy and conscription. The debate came amid the afternoon session of a youth forum on the “defense of democracy” that filled the Catholic University McMahon auditorium to capacity with students from ten nearby schools. After one of the panels, Oberg expressed his opposition to war, echoing arguments from Lenkoff’s 1937 essay. He worried that the federal government had amassed so much power that individual liberties meant little, leading to compulsory military training. In a sarcastic quip, he said, “I’m not against national selective service…I want to learn to shoot straight back over my shoulder as I run away from the enemy.”257

It was not surprising that his statement sparked opposition, but what was remarkable was the comprehensive range of arguments against him. Some students undoubtedly were appalled by his flouting of the masculine obligation to military service when he declared, “I am not afraid to say that I’m scared of war. It’s no longer a matter of riding out on a white charger with a lady-fair’s ribbon.” Georgetown student Sam Murray took a page from the American Legion’s playbook when he jumped to his feet to denounce Oberg statements as “un-American.” More

256 Chadwin, 188-189, 208-213. For the flavor of the vituperative attacks on Lindbergh, once seen as figure who commanded great sway over youth opinion in the United States, see “Lindbergh is assailed: 21 Youth Groups Assert Fliers is ‘No Longer a Hero.’” The New York Times (19 June 1941). For one example of the bare tolerance that interventionists such as Franklin Roosevelt could for Jews and Jewish-Americans, see Gerstle, American Crucible, 185. Gerstle also reports that opinion polls taken in 1942 showed that forty percent of Americans believed that Jews had too much power over the economy and society.

impressive was the criticism leveled by another Hoya, who explained that Oberg’s statement was built upon an “outworn thesis advanced by eighteenth century liberalism” that “the government that governs least is that which governs best.” The speed with which Oberg’s opponents were able to muster counter-arguments suggests that they were well acquainted with liberalism’s resistance to conscription, and it highlights how the circle of youth political discourse had nearly closed to isolationist or peace positions.

Youth who could articulate the ideological issues at stake in World War II helped pre-mobilize their peers for wartime citizenship, providing a powerful vehicle for pro-intervention messages to reach a wider youth population. Yet fears persisted that the Depression youth generation would fail to follow its “leaders” and renege on its obligations during the period of national emergency. The passage of the first peace time draft in September 1940, which registered sixteen million men for a period of twelve months, all to raise an army of 900,000, allayed concerns that the United States would be completely unprepared if war crossed the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans.258 The extraordinary care taken by Selective Service officials to ensure that the draft did not impinge upon vital sectors of the economy, including heavy industry and agriculture, and to establish ample deferment for politically sensitive cohorts like college students and conscientious objectors, gives evidence of the extreme potential for controversy.259

Another limitation born of political concern was the provision in the new draft law that prevented Roosevelt from deploying conscripts beyond the Western Hemisphere. As the draft term neared expiration in the fall of 1941, President Roosevelt faced stiff opposition from


isolationist Republicans and the draft received only lukewarm support in opinion polls. More worrying were signs of resistance to conscription among the men inducted into the armed forces. Scrawled onto the walls of base latrines and on strips of paper dropped from trucks ferrying troops came the ubiquitous meme: “OHIO.” Observers decoded this acronym as “Over the Hill In October,” a signal that conscripts would stage mass desertion when their terms expired. If that happened, those four letters would force American military planners to restart their mobilization efforts from scratch.

Conscription and war-related sacrifices also proved a difficult sell to some youth within the African-American community. Mainstream Black leaders collaborated with racially-progressive segments of the Roosevelt administration to demonstrate that African-American youth were capable and willing to exercise full citizenship. In September 1940, leading scholars and activists, including Robert Weaver and DuBois, organized a forum on the subject of “Negro Problems” with the National Youth Administration. The panel topics - “The Negro and the National Defense,” “The Negro as a Factor in the 1940 Presidential Election, and “The Negro Faces Unemployment and Underemployment” – all suggest that the event was designed to maximize leverage on the Roosevelt administration for a civil rights and jobs agenda on the eve of the presidential election. A year later, the administration and Black leaders launched a joint defense of Black troops, who had come under attack from New York Times military reporter Hanson W. Baldwin as unfit for combat duties. The unflattering description of Black soldiers

\[\text{260} \text{ Gallup polls taken in 1940 and 1941 indicated small majorities in favor of conscription and renewal of the draft, but presidential mail on the subject ran 2-1 against; Cited in Flynn, 12.}\]

\[\text{261} \text{ Kennedy, 495-96; see also Flynn, 51.}\]

on practice maneuvers, buttressed by anonymous criticisms made by white officers, threatened to undo or reverse progress made towards desegregating the armed forces made under the 1940 conscription law. Civil rights leaders feared that if African-Americans were relegated to menial or support roles in the military, as they were in World War I, it would confirm the social stereotypes of Blacks as inferior to whites. The sacrifice of African-Americans troops and war workers would offer “testimony” to the fitness of Black Americans to claim full citizenship in peacetime.263

White racism was not the only obstacle to mobilizing Black Americans during World War II; promoters sought to bolster wavering support of the American war effort among youth of the community. Confidential polling data compiled by the federal Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) in the spring of 1942 that Black Americans were far more ambivalent towards the war than their white counterparts.264 Some critics openly charged that World War II was a “white fight” between imperialist Great Britain and Germany, a struggle that Black Americans ought to take no part in. Other dissidents went so far as to sympathize with Imperial Japan, which styled itself as the “Champion of the Darker Races.” Black opinion leaders dismissed these opponents out hope that white conscripts could be drilled into competent troops, but he leveled withering criticism of African-Americans, who he charged were intellectually slower than whites. The administration’s rebuttal of Baldwin came from William Hastie, Civilian Aide to the War Secretary in a letter to editors of the Times of Oct. 2. American military officers refrained from direct comment on Baldwin’s contention, but General Ben Lear of the 2nd Army gave a half-hearted defense of Black troops on maneuvers in Louisiana and Arkansas, who “conducted themselves well in proportion to their state of training, discipline, and experience.” See “Negro Soldiers Defended,” The New York Times 2 October 1941, and “Gen. Lear Declines Comment on Criticism of Race Troops,” Atlanta Daily News, 12 October 1941, 1.

263 For the high hopes that many African-American leaders had for the 1940 Conscription Bill, which prohibited discrimination based on race and color in the selection of men aged 18 to 36 for military service, see Philip McGuire, “Desegregation of the Armed Forces: Black Leadership, Protest, and World War II,” Journal of Negro History 68, no. 2 (Spring 1983), 147-48.

as deranged, although critics ignored the history of fulsome praise to Japan given by prominent Black leaders including Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois.\(^ {265}\) The OFF’s survey was not public knowledge, though many race leaders recognized that young people in their community found little reason to sacrifice for a country unwilling to offer them full citizenship or equal economic opportunity. Tacitly, many Black youth opted to “sit out” the war if given the opportunity, seeing no gain for their sacrifice.\(^ {266}\) In May 1942, the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority organized its Midwestern regional conference under the slogan “All for Defense – Defense for All.” On one level, this theme echoed the “Double V” campaign trumpeted by the Black-owned newspaper, *The Philadelphia Courier*, in February. However, the first half of the AKA theme “All for Defense” suggests that African-American support of the war effort was as much of a concern for Black opinion leaders as fascism or Jim Crow.\(^ {267}\)

The attack on the Pearl Harbor crushed nearly all resistance to American intervention in World War II. The surprise and severity of the Japanese attack sparked a firestorm of pro-war sentiment among the American public, obliterating the once powerful dissent tradition like a truck tire rolling over an egg. Yet supporters of intervention could not have known that the war would start with such an unambiguous attack, or that the American public would rally to a two-front war in response. Anti-war sentiment had been a strong presence in youth politics for most the decades, and political leaders and opinion makers judged that these factions posed a potential

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threat to defense mobilization. Therefore, organizers of youth citizenship programs who favored intervention against fascism, if not war itself, invested a great deal of time and concern into delegitimizing anti-war youth voices and promoting representatives who could testify to American democracy’s superiority to its ideological rivals and affirm their generation’s willingness to fight and make sacrifice on its behalf.

These organizers were cheered by, and took partial credit for the obliteration of once- strong ideological and political impediments to youth mobilization. However, the victory proved Pyrrhic because mobilization erected significant obstacles to the operation of these private citizenship programs. This was somewhat of an irony, for war imposed new intellectual requirements upon American citizens: obligations such as counter-espionage, understanding who the “enemy” was, knowing the proximate causes and aims of the war, and above all, conceptualizing the war as a contest between democracy and dictatorship, and “tolerance” versus intolerance. The armed forces instructed its military personnel as part of induction training, and at the local level, public schools ramped up citizenship training. However, the bulk of propaganda was supplied by private advertisers like the Ad Council. Youth citizenship programs might have seemed tailor made for the task of preparing generational leaders to serve the country in wartime.

With the formal declaration of war, the Legion and its Auxiliary re-geared the curriculum to teach students their new civic obligations. Civil defense classes, counter-espionage courses given by FBI agents on loan from the Bureau, and first aid training were popular additions to the wartime curriculum of Boys’ State from 1942-1944. Boys’ State delegates flocked to voluntary military drill courses. National administrators boasted that the program was an effective bridge between high school and the military. In 1943, the Legion released the results of a survey of all
program alumni. 30,000 responses were returned to headquarters, showing that 91% of those who of military age (18+) were serving in the armed forces. The most significant result, according to the Boys’ State Chairman William Konold, was that almost a quarter of alumni in the military were officers. Konold concluded happily that graduates were taking their rightful station in the conflict. 268

Despite these testaments to Boys’ State’s contributions to the war effort, enrollment slumped. The decline began in 1940-1941 in states such as Illinois, California, and Pennsylvania, as war work opportunities competed for the summertime energies of older boys and young men. Summertime employment also attracted college students, the main source of junior counselors at the program. Attendance at Girls’ State programs and Boys’ States located in agricultural states such as Oregon and Kansas remained steady or grew until 1942. 269 Afterwards, most Boys’ State and Girls’ State chapters were forced to cut back enrollment or suspend operations because of the mobilization of draft-eligible young men, disruptions to civilian transportation networks, and rationing of rubber and gasoline. The repurposing of college campuses and youth camps for troop mobilization denied the Legion and Auxiliary of sites used to host the conventions. Furthermore, private advertisers, Hollywood, and the U.S. military were taking over the responsibility of educating citizens and troops about the conflict. 270 Chapters forced into


269 See Figure 1 in Chapter 1.

270 For the role of private advertisers in World War II, see Westbrook, Leff, and Blum. For the war messages of American cinema, see Larry May, “Making the American Consensus: The Narrative of Conversion and Subversion in World War Films,” in The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II, eds. Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan B. Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 71 - 102. For the increased attention to citizenship training paid by the military, see Christopher S. DeRosa, Political Indoctrination in the U.S. Army from World War II (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 8-19. DeRosa also has a good
suspension for the duration of the conflict were optimistically classified by Legion National Headquarters as “Victory Boys’ States.” A few Legion Departments such as California and Illinois doggedly worked around these handicaps; however, their efforts to keep the programs in operation throughout the conflict failed. Throughout 1943-1944, Hayes Kennedy and other high-ranking Legionnaires travelled to Washington D.C. to lobby officials in the Office of Defense Transportation (ODT) and the Office of Price Administration to obtain a waiver on travel restrictions and commodity rationing. When the ODT refused their appeal, the National Committee on Boys’ State advised Departments that all chapters would be forced into “Victory” status until the war ended. The American Legion Auxiliary followed this precedent and suspended Girls’ State entirely in 1945.271

War caused serious disruptions to other youth citizenship programs. One of the first victims was American Magazine’s Youth Forum, which quietly discontinued its annual contest at the end of 1941. Algernon Black’s beloved Work Camps of America were also closed, although Black returned to youth democracy work after 1945 with the Encampment for Citizenship.272 The YMCA’s Youth and Government managed to keep its programs open, mainly because the Association did not suffer the loss of meeting spaces like Boys’ and Girls’ State. Program directors received approval from the National Headquarters in 1943 to embark upon a ten year treatment of the greatest of all troop “morale” films, Frank Capra’s series Why We Fight, as well as troop responses to this propaganda masterpiece. See DeRosa, 20-50.

271For the distortions that war production and mobilization on the civilian economy of the United States, see Kennedy 618-623, Blum, 226-7. Reports to the Twenty-Sixth Annual National Convention of the American Legion (Indianapolis, Indiana: American Legion, 1945), 297-299. For an example of the effects of war on Girls’ State, see Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Convention American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Kansas (Topeka, Kansas: Kansas State Printers, 1943), 75-76.

272Black, The Young Citizens, 36.
nationwide expansion of the franchise, but the start of the schedule was delayed for two years.\footnote{273}{The Y+G program greatly benefitted when founder Pete Duran was promoted to the Association’s National Council in 1942. For the effects of the war on the program, see \textit{YMCA Year Book for 1945} (New York: Association Press, 1946), 49.} E.A. Rogers was likely forced to curtail the Junior Statesmen of America program, which had expanded to parts of Northern and Southern California prior to 1942, although the private Montezuma School actually saw slightly increased enrollment because of parents pulling their children from overcrowded public institutions and from a small number of foreign diplomats who Montezuma as a refuge from the chaos in their home countries. Rogers was an exception to the pattern of pro-intervention educators described in this chapter, since he opposed the U.S. entry into both world wars and remained firmly committed to finding non-military solutions to world problems.\footnote{274}{Deborah Jocye Dodds, “Ernest A. Rogers, A Life Dedicated to Civic Education and Student Participation in the Democratic Process,” (Ed.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2003), 145-146.} Nevertheless, the general trend of private youth citizenship training during this era was towards tacit or overt support of American involvement in World War II.
Chapter 4: Bonding and Bridging Social Capital in Youth Citizenship Programs, 1945-65

On August 9th, 1946 President Harry S. Truman received the first delegation of eighty teenage “senators” from the American Legion’s Forum of Federal Government, forerunner to the annual Boys’ Nation convention. Each senator had been chosen in a highly competitive selection process. They were scheduled to hold a mock assembly and debate legislation, but those activities would only occupy two of their week-long stay in their capital. The Forum was actually more of a victory lap than workshop. For most of the week, the boys were shuttled between visits to various national monuments and audiences with high ranking officials from both houses of Congress, the national Legion, as well as J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI and the Postmaster General. During these meetings, the officials briefed them on government operations and the responsibilities the young men would assume in adulthood. As a diversion from the cares of State, they attended a night baseball game.275

The meeting with Truman was the event most eagerly anticipated, though it too held more symbolic than educative value. Indeed, the President’s remarks seemed extemporaneous and somewhat forgettable. He praised the mission of Boys’ State and assured the senators that they would soon lead the nation. Impressed with the quality of young men the Legion had assembled from across the country, Truman boasted that the Republic would be “good for a thousand years” if left to their care. This last remark was perhaps unfortunate, given the fact that the United States had recently defeated a wartime adversary whose leader had promised a millennial reign. Nevertheless, the most exciting information Truman conveyed was that White

275 The scheduled events of the Legion Forum are detailed in “100 Boys in Legion’s Forum to see Government this Week,” The Washington Post (5 August, 1946), 12. The name “Boys’ Nation” was adopted by the National Convention of the American Legion in 1949.
House staff had arranged for each boy to have a picture taken shaking hands with the
President.  

The ritual of high ranking officials meeting with elite youth was repeated by other
members of Truman’s administration, as well as by representatives of the federal legislature and
judiciary. It has been carried out by nearly every president since 1946 and reflected on the
federal level the countless meetings between youth leaders and civic officials that occurred at
state-level programs. Other youth citizenship programs, including the YMCA’s Youth and
Government (Y+G), arranged similar receptions for their youth delegations. At nearly every
meeting, these youth elite were assured that they belonged to an exclusive fraternity of future
leaders, who would ensure that American political institutions would remain potent for a
millennium.

These ventures proved extremely significant in training adolescents and college-age
youth for future citizenship and reproducing the American political class after World War II.
Every year the American Legion, the YMCA, and a host of smaller agencies gave tens of
thousands of young people a hands-on introduction to American politics. While the
overwhelming majority did not pursue political careers afterwards, the experience constituted a
milestone for hundreds of officials lodged in all branches of government – including the White
House, state houses, and countless county and municipal seats. Alumni who graduated between
the years 1945-65 hold a prominent place in many sectors of American life.  

276 An account of the reception with Truman comes form Thomas A. Rumer, The American Legion: An Official
History, 1919-1989 (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1990), 255-256. Truman’s remarks to the Delegates of
Boys’ Nation from August 9, 1946 give another view. The full text of Truman’s remarks can be found at the

277 What follows is a partial list of some prominent alumni from American Boys’ State (AL-BS), American Legion
Auxiliary Girls State (ALA-GS), YMCA Youth and Government (Y+G) and the Encampment for Citizenship
(EFC): lunar astronaut Neil Armstrong (AL-BS), Senator Lamarr Alexander (AL-BS), Senator Bruce Babbitt (AL-
BS), Beau Biden, Attorney General of Delaware (AL-BS), television journalist Tom Brokaw (AL-BS), Vice
What impact did exchanges such as these make on the students? One outcome was to validate the idea that exceptional students could rise above modest origins. Meeting Truman convinced Joseph Gallegos, YMCA Youth Governor of California for 1949, that the Horatio Alger legend was alive and well in the United States. An ebullient Gallegos told his fellow Governors that meeting with the President of the United States “was a great inspiration indeed, because I know that only in a country with a form of government such as the one under which we live could a common man have such an honor. And I know intimately that that common man is myself.”

Gallegos’ comment was poignant coming from a Latino teenager from the agricultural backwater of Stockton, California. Fourteen years later, this type of ceremony took on additional meaning when President John F. Kennedy shook hands with sixteen year old William Clinton. According to an apocryphal story, upon his return to his home in Hot Springs, Arkansas, Clinton pointed to a framed photo of JFK and promised his mother that one day he too would be President. Less visible was the debilitating impact that failure or rejection might have, particularly when highly qualified competitors were unfairly denied a chance to compete.

Such exchanges were also a highly visible effort by one generation of civic authorities to groom their successors. Key to understanding the exchange is the concept of “social capital.” In his seminal essay, “The Forms of Capital,” Pierre Bourdieu reintroduced the concept of “capital” to studies of cultural and social relationships to explain what he described as the “immanent

President Dick Cheney (AL-BS), President Bill Clinton (AL-BS), Governor Michael Dukakis (AL-BS), Senator Barney Frank (EFC), journalist William Haddad (EFC), Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (AL-BS), Maj. General Michele Johnson (AL-BS), MS Senator Trent Lott (AL-BS), Indiana Senator Richard Lugar (AL-BS), newspaper publisher Allen Neuharth (AL-BS), Eleanor Holmes Norton (EFC), Governor George Pataki (AL-BS), Senator Harry Reid (AL-BS), and Gen. Eric Shinseki (Y+G).


regularities” of human institutions. He defined social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to membership in a group. A group extends a “credential” to each member, which can be translated into other forms of symbolic or material credit. Furthermore, the volume of social capital an individual possesses depends upon the size of relational networks she or he enjoys, and the volume of capital possessed by each group in which she/he can claim membership. This concept explained why human relations seldom conform to models of perfect competition and opportunity imagined by neoclassical economists. Talent, industry, and luck may be distributed evenly across every stratum of humanity, but the ability of individuals to translate those virtues into opportunities is mediated by social institutions.²⁸⁰

Moving out from the level of individual social capital exchange, other theorists extended Bourdieu’s insight to the analysis of entire communities, measuring the volume or “density” of social capital contained within. One question dividing those who study social capital is whether, on balance, such investments have been good or bad for American democracy. For example, Robert Putnam describes the period from the end of World War II to the mid-1970s as a golden age for civic associations and argues their activities enriched civic life.²⁸¹ In studies of Italy and the U.S., Putnam drew a positive correlation between the “density” of social interactions among citizens and the overall efficacy of government. In his view, civic associations increase trust between citizens, making civic institutions effective and inherently more democratic.²⁸² Theda Skocpol countered that citizens employ social capital for malign purposes as well as good. She


argued that democracy resulted from bouts of “organized conflict and distrust” (italics in the original). In this view, eras of American history with high levels of civic involvement like the Progressive Era resulted in less democratic politics and social relations. Acknowledging the skeptics’ criticism, Putnam judged social capital by whether it bonded citizens together into exclusive groups or whether it bridged social divides, making society more inclusive.

These concepts inform my analysis of private youth citizenship programs: American Legion Boys’ State and Girls’ State, the YMCA’s Youth and Government, the Society for Ethical Culture’s Encampment for Citizenship (EFC), and the Highlander Folk School (1960-61). What was their impact on American democracy? I argue that from 1945-65 these programs bear an ambiguous legacy, arising from the presence of bonding capital and bridging capital. Since eligibility was limited to youth leaders, they “bonded” participants into a self-conscious youth elite. Personal validation from highly respected adults could spur students to even greater levels of achievement after they left the camps. And the programs offered students from socially marginal backgrounds a “credential” that could be leveraged for other forms of social capital: access to higher education, social connections to other alumni, and employment opportunities.

At the same time, another goal of the programs was to “bridge” social divides. Even politically conservative programs sought to create institutional links between adult civic leaders and high school age youth, ties which surpassed the boundaries of kinship and acquaintance. Some organizers nursed even loftier goals, hoping that the cultivation of youth leaders would mitigate regional and class antagonisms and gradually eliminate racial segregation.


284 Putnam, Bowling Alone, 22-23.
On balance, bonding capital predominated at larger citizenship programs such as American Legion Boys’ and Girls’ State and the YMCA Youth and Government. These agencies tended to follow a conservative capital “investment” strategy because of their ties to leaders in business, education, and government. Students competed to win credentials that could enhance their educational and career prospects. Using the early career of Bill Clinton, interspersed with accounts from other alumni whom I interviewed for this project, I examine how students amassed capital at these events and reinvested those resources into their career development. The efforts of Legion and Auxiliary educators to sift through the masses of American youth for that generation’s “leaders” created new hierarchies and ranks. This sorting and ranking was widely applauded because the competitions were billed as meritocratic. The greatest exception was the persistence of racial discrimination in admissions policy. The struggle of students that I call “racial pioneers” to access the programs illustrates the gap between words and practice, as discrimination based upon race and gender were persistent. Conversely, the transmission of “bridging” capital shaped the format of the Encampment for Citizenship (EFC), a six week residential youth citizenship camp sponsored by the Society for Ethical Culture and short-lived youth citizenship programs offered by the Highlander Folk School. Programmers geared their curricula to promote greater inter-ethnic, inter-racial, and even inter-national ties between young people, with the explicit aim of making American society more egalitarian.

Bonding Capital: Boys’ State/Girls’ State and Youth and Government

The administrators of the largest sets of civic youth leadership programs managed dense social networks comprised of students, educators, government officials, and various other civic authorities. Students could access these contacts through the programs and through successful
passage become “bonded” to potential sponsors and access elite schools and social institutions. The social capital assets of Boys’ State/Girls’ State’ flowed from the size and prestige of their sponsors. After World War II, the Legion and Legion Auxiliary enjoyed enormous membership growth. 1946 saw the Legion and Auxiliary at their greatest numerical strength 3.3 million and 800,000, respectively, thanks to the return of millions of World War II service personnel to civilian life. Moving outward, the influence of the Legion extended to government ties, particularly strong with the armed forces and law enforcement. Thanks to these connections, Boys’ and Girls’ State achieved quasi-official status as a national youth leadership movement. Both organizations recovered from wartime restrictions and developed into nation-wide franchises covering the continental United States and a few outlying territories. By the early 1950s, branches of the franchise operated in every state of the union, although war mobilization during the Korean conflict caused declines in attendance and caused a few Northeastern chapters to temporarily suspend operation. By the end of the 1950s, outposts of model youth governments existed in territories like the Panama Canal Zone, Hawaii, the District of Columbia, and briefly, Puerto Rico. These programs peaked in attendance in the early 1960s, with Boys’ State cresting at 27,000 and Girls’ State nearing 20,000 nationwide. In 1963, the year that Bill Clinton visited the capital, both initiatives boasted impressive cumulative totals; Boys’ State alumni numbered close to one half million and Girls State exceeded a quarter million.

285 While the numbers of Legionnaires dropped markedly over the next twenty years, with a small boost from Korean War veterans, its number remained over 2.5 million. The Legion Auxiliary actually grew from 1946-1965, nearing the one million mark in 1955.

286 To cite one example, the FBI relied upon reports of domestic “subversion” and espionage compiled by local Legion posts from 1940-66 as part of its confidential “Contact” program. See Athan Theoharis, “The FBI and the American Legion Contact Program, 1940-1966,” Political Science Quarterly 100, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 271-286.

287 Figures on Boys’ and Girls’ State attendance are derived from reports of program directors given in the Summary of Proceedings of the National Convention of the American Legion from 1946-1968.
These resources, material and human, allowed the Legion and Legion Auxiliary to model an impressive range of government and non-governmental operations in their programs. In addition to the traditional activities related to mock assemblies, many states instituted a law school and civil service program to train government appointees. Most programs sponsored a daily newspaper, and few developed specialized courses to train lobbyists and public safety officers. Pennsylvania Boys’ State even instituted a bank. Incoming students were given workbooks on state government which could range from fifty to one hundred pages in length. This assigned reading was in addition to the substantial information presented at the daily lectures by counselors and guest speakers. Counselors developed awards and incentives to recognize merit outside of youth elections, which occasionally devolved into popularity contests. Electoral drama and candidate charisma still counted, but these measures simulated the complexity of civic life in actual municipalities and states. The curriculum was built on the assumption that rational order and bureaucracy should control the functions of a modern government.288

Similarly, the YMCA saw its membership swell to 1.66 million after 1945, thanks to Association war work with the armed forces and youth. From 1950 to 1970, the organization made even more impressive gains. Membership doubled (1.84 to 3.8 million), and the share of Americans belonging to the Y increased.289 The spillover effect was that the Association had ample resources to lend to promotion of Youth and Government. From 1943-53, the number of states hosting model legislatures tripled from ten to thirty-three. Even at its peak in the mid-


289Figures on YMCA membership are taken from Association yearbooks from 1946-70. See YMCA Year Book and Official Rosters for Calendar Year 1946 (New York: Association Press, 1947), 29.
1960s, Y+G still did not cover the entire continental U.S., although the association of Hawaii founded a permanent program in 1950. Gauging the total of youth served by the Y+G movement is difficult since the Y’s National Committee reported attendance figures for the program sporadically, and only counted the number of youth legislators. From 1936-46, the YNC estimated that 3600 teens had participated as legislators cumulatively, but by 1950, the figure was 7000 annually, and by 1959, 10,800 per year. However, the true size of the Y+G government movement may have been far larger. For example, the 1965 California Youth Legislature had 400 participants, but approximately 1500 additional students participated at the local Association level but did not go to the Capitol, bringing the state total to 1900. If other states had a similar ratio of Capitol/non-Capital participants, then a fair estimate would place the number of Y+G participants at slightly more than 50,000 students annually.290

The Y+G program also underwent a “feminization” of its membership. Starting in the mid-1950s, growing numbers of high school girls joined Tri-Y clubs and the Y+G. In 1950, Hi-Y clubs for boys were roughly 2.5 times as large as the population of Tri-Hi-Y (250,000:97,000). While the absolute number of Hi-Y participants peaked in 1955 at 269,000, Tri-Hi-Y attendance continued to grow rapidly, which presumably led to more young women in the Y+G. In 1962-63, the declining trend line of Hi-Y met the incline of Tri-Hi-Y, and from then on, girls became the majority of participants in Y programs for high school students. 1962 was also the year in which the combined Hi-Y and Tri-Hi-Y population peaked at 415,000. By the mid-1960s, the number of female students participating in Tri-Hi-Y began to stagnate, while numbers of young men in Hi-Y spiraled downward.

290 The estimate is extrapolated from membership statistics gleaned from Association Year Books and a study of the 1965 California Youth Legislature commissioned by the Pacific Southwest Area Council and National Council of the YMCA. See V.M Robertson, “California YMCA Youth Legislature Study, 1966,” Hi-Y State Folders, California, YMCA Archives.
In terms of curricular development, the various state Associations administrators experimented with changes to citizenship training offered by the model assembly program. One of the most significant was the addition of a model United Nations General Assembly in the early 1950s, a development whose ideological and political significance will be addressed in the next chapter. Some Associations shifted focus from the state level onto small authorities, including model county governments. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, planners in the Hi-Y, the parent body of the Y+G, were moving away from the statehouse in their efforts to develop student awareness of national and transnational social conditions. Youth workers in Chicago and Detroit organized meetings between suburban and urban adolescents in an attempt to find common solutions to the problems of poverty and unemployment. Associations in the cities of San Francisco and Oakland, California took their students on tours of East Asian countries and around the borders of the United States. Similar tours of Europe, including trips to the 1960 YMCA World Youth Conference in the Netherlands, highlighted the connections that American youth had with their counterparts globally.²⁹¹

With a combined annual total of 100,000 students in these programs, it is clear that organizers were not fashioning mass youth movements. The 1960 federal census numbered the population of Americans between the ages of 15 to 19 at over thirteen million; therefore, the programs served less than one of every hundred adolescents in the early 1960s.²⁹² Instead, the aim was to cultivate a youth elite from across the United States and a handful of outlying territories. The American Legion came closest to achieving that goal. A 1962 survey of Boys’

²⁹¹ Descriptions of these programs is provided in the *YMCA Year Book and Official Roster for Calendar Year 1960* (New York Association Press, 1961), 67-69.

State Directors showed that the model governments recruited widely from across the nation’s high school population. Among those states reporting, participation rates ranged from a low of twenty-eight percent in Kentucky to complete participation of secondary schools in neighboring Tennessee. Nationally, the median figure was seventy-nine percent of high schools sending one or two students to Boys’ State that year.\textsuperscript{293}

Civic youth leadership programs in American territories such as Puerto Rico, and pre-statehood Alaska and Hawai’i, illustrate the functions of bonding capital. Youth organizers from the Legion and YMCA perceived saw the children of US citizens as a critical population in need of political education. Establishment of Boys’ State or Y+G in these territories cemented the bonds between the extra-territorial jurisdictions and the parent state, legitimating the American possessions not as spoils of colonial expansion but appendages that shared the political culture of the homeland. At the Boys’ State for the Panama Canal Zone (PCZ), students created the fictional polity of Lockport, complete with city government and a canal commission, arrangements that made no mention of the Panamanian government whose authority ended at the walls to the American-held zone. Creation of Boys’ and Girls’ State programs in the PCZ may not have directly contributed to growing animosity felt by young Panamanians towards the American domination of the country’s economy and politics in the late 1950s, which boiled over into violent clashes between U.S. soldiers and Panamanians in 1959 and 1964. But the programs were a symbolic provocation, similar to the refusal of American officials to permit the Panamanian flag to be flown in the Zone.\textsuperscript{294}

\textsuperscript{293}“Boys State Questionnaire Survey – 1962” American Legion Library Pamphlet File, American Legion Library, Indianapolis, Indiana [hereafter American Legion Library].

Second, because the students in these outlying citizenship programs were mainly the children of white parents from the mainland, these civic education projects oriented students’ political compasses towards the mainland’s institutions and traditions. It also heightened the students’ identities as expatriates or creoles, and reified the gulf that separated American youth from the native population. In the case of Mexico where the number of American dependents was too small to warrant creation of a separate Boys’ State program, which might have outraged local sensibilities, the American Legion sponsored travel costs for a small number of teenage boys to attend Pelican Boys’ State in Louisiana, itself a white-monopoly government.295

The public profile of youth leadership programs on the mainland was enhanced by a network of supports in education, government, and mass media. At many high schools, teachers groomed candidates for nomination, or aspiring youth leaders would seek out program veterans for the benefit of their experience.296 Another source of information was the press. By the early 1950s, journalists had adopted a fairly uniform approach to writing about these faux youth governments, praising the teen regimes as salutary to the body politic and applauding the participants as political leaders in waiting. This was most true for print media, especially in small and medium size markets where the influence of service associations was most pronounced, and in capital city press bureaus, which covered the events during the recess periods of the state legislative cycle. The state conferences were newsworthy in their own right, thanks to high-powered political leaders who graced the proceedings. For example, among the forty-four Departments that organized a Boys’ State chapter in 1948, over half (25) boasted a keynote

295“Crossroads Boys’ State” 1957, Boys’ State File, American Legion Library. Both the American Legion and Legion Auxiliary administered multiple civic education projects throughout Mexico, including the High School Oratorical Contest, from the 1950s through the 1990s.

296Author Interviews with American Legion Girls’ State participants Joyce Hughes (MN-1956) and Regina Hicks (MN-1969).
address from the current Governor or Lt. Governor during the week. Other notables included FBI officials, state Supreme Court justices, and leaders in the State Legislature.297

As the programs gained in size and public stature, they drew the attention of wire services and monthly magazines with national readership. The capital press corps attended the programs when President Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall delivered foreign policy statements at the national-level conventions.298 Thereafter, high officials from Republican and Democratic administrations, as well as Supreme Court Justices and high level officials from several executive agencies, including the FBI and Department of State, met students. And the programs reached a national audience thanks to a 1948 essay on New York State’s Y+G program, entitled “Seedbed of Leadership,” written by state senator Thomas Desmond. The article was originally published in the faltering Liberty weekly but was spared obscurity when republished (in condensed form) by Reader’s Digest. It offered readers a glimpse into the New York program, praising the seriousness and intelligence of the teenage participants, and touting the youth “bills” enacted into legislation by evidence of the collective political agenda of teenagers and as evidence of social progress. Desmond’s title “Seedbed for Leadership” was later adopted as the motto of the Y+G program.299

Positive media coverage also insured these adult-led youth programs against a particular form of capital depreciation. Starting the 1950s and 1960s, the post-war U.S. saw the blossoming of a semi-autonomous adolescent sub-culture. American teenagers developed their own lifestyle, complete with impenetrable slang, provocative dress and musical tastes that all seemed precisely

calibrated to antagonize their elders. The well-springs of this sub-culture – including African-
American folkways and working class blue jeans – lent the teen scene a sexually dangerous edge.\textsuperscript{300} Moreover, the moral anxiety that attended teen culture frequently crossed over into political alarm, as would-be censors and pundits warned that communists and other “subversive” agents might use music and sex to ensnare unwary youth. By contrast, youth leaders publicly competed for adult approval and aped the dress and manners of the “squarest” politicians. Perhaps to counter this potentially negative public image, press coverage of youth leaders dwelled as much on their social popularity and physical attractiveness as their policy views. Newspaper photographs of female solons occasionally resembled glamour shots of movie stars, and depictions of boy governors, like Gary Cunningham of 1962 Missouri Y+G, dwelled on their “personable, relaxed mien” and athletic prowess on the gridiron. Some of these leaders may have been “cool” and popular in their high schools, but reporters took pains to assure anxious readers that the “kid were alright,” politically speaking.\textsuperscript{301}

The conventions presented opportunities for students to vie for recognition and social capital. The competitive process winnowed out the merely interested from the ardent, favoring those who had prepared their campaigns most assiduously. Earlier life experiences had taught many to seek status through official channels, through academic achievements, student government, or athletics. Simply securing a nomination to one of these programs raised a student’s public profile. For example, Bill Clinton reported that the principal of Hot Springs high school announced the names of the two students who were selected to attend Boys’ State over


the public address system.\textsuperscript{302} And in scores of American communities, from small hamlets to medium sized cities, local newspapers would print lists of Boys’ State and Girls’ State participants in their distribution area. The African-American press took special pride in highlighting the accomplishments of “race youth” at these events, with their participation taken as proof that African-Americans were fit for full citizenship. Even delegates to segregated “Negro” Boys’ and Girls’ States won praise for their accomplishments.\textsuperscript{303}

During the convention proceedings, local and regional press covered the results of the races of the highest offices and tracked the progress of model legislation. Besides giving the journalists a chance to rub elbows with articulate and enthusiastic teens, the events offered a colorful story for the metro pages while the real state legislature was on recess. The prestige and psychological boost that students gained from the ground level of participation could persist long after the conference. The Legion and Legion Auxiliary required students to report on their experience to their sponsors, usually to a small group from the local post. This was an opportunity for an articulate student to revel in electoral successes or at least to avow a deeper appreciation of American civic life. Many of the former delegates that I interviewed reported that during the next academic year, they also received special attention or respect from students, teachers, and administrators, especially in senior-level civics classes or from aspiring youth leaders eager to learn what the convention experience held for them.\textsuperscript{304}

\textsuperscript{302} Bill Clinton, \textit{My Life} (New York: Knopf, 2004), 60.

\textsuperscript{303} Annual write-ups of Legion youth citizenship programs were present in many African-American newspapers. I found regular coverage of these programs from 1945-65 in the \textit{Chicago Defender}, the \textit{New Journal and Guide} of Norfolk, VA, the \textit{Afro-American} of Baltimore (MD), the \textit{Atlanta Daily World} of Georgia, the \textit{Cleveland (OH) Call and Post}. For a representative of the style of coverage, see “Norfolk youth Run Away with Boys’ State Offices,” \textit{New Journal and Guide} (Norfolk, VA) 9 July 1949.

\textsuperscript{304} High school social networks, peer-based and student-teacher, as sources of information about these programs emerges from my interviews with Girls’ State alumnae Regina Hicks and Martha Preus, and Boys’ State alumnus
The popularity of the programs rested upon two assumptions cultivated by organizers and supporters. One was the claim that the most successful participants won admittance to an exclusive fraternity of political leaders and alumni, who would mentor an ambitious but inexperienced tyro and facilitate access to elite schools or public service positions. Organizers fostered social networks between generations of participants by recruiting junior counseling staff from among program veterans. Retuning students from law schools or military academies were especially prized. Most coveted was the involvement of graduates who achieved success in politics. Delegates to the 1962 Y+G National Convention thrilled to know that their brethren included Idaho Senator Frank Church (class of 1937-ID) and Andrew Hatcher (class of 1937-NJ), conspicuous as an African American serving as the assistant to Press Secretary Pierre Salinger. In this rarified atmosphere, the heads of the delegates might have swum at being lauded as “future leaders of the country” and having politicians pay attention to their ideas and views. To their credit, program organizers never claimed that all graduates would go on to achieve high office. Doubtless they understood that optimistic youth would assume that their future would unfold into an ever-greater series of accomplishments.

Even the most naïve teen striver could not believe that a political career could be won by sheer virtue of a handshake with a celebrity politician. He or she might conclude that the program staff anointed youth leaders far away from the public glare. Looking at Bill Clinton’s tenure at Boys’ Nation, that moment appeared when Clinton attended a lunch with the influential Senator J. William Fulbright organized by the Legion. Clinton’s fellow Arkansas Boys’ Nation

William Leaver. See Author Interview, Regina Hicks, 21 December 2007; Author Interview, Martha Preus, 10 April 2006; Author Interview, William Leaver, 27 November 2006.

305 “America’s Leaders...Tomorrow: Youth and Government,” 1962, Hi-Y Folder, YMCA Archives. This was not Hatcher’s first turn as a poster-boy for the Y+G; the first was the on the pages of New Jersey Y+G program from the late 1930s.
Senator Larry Taunton felt a mixture of wonder and perhaps envy with Clinton seeming “so at ease” and “the instant affinity between Senator Fulbright and Bill.” These meetings may have sealed in Clinton’s own mind his fitness for political leadership. Prior successes in high school government and Boys’ State had primed him for this opportunity. According to Clinton’s mother, so enthused was her son with the experience that young William pledged that someday he would reside in the White House. Clinton came to Boys’ State already invested with the support of his high school teachers and principal, in the hopes of leveraging future connections from the experience.306

Successful use of the social capital accumulated at these programs often rested upon factors outside the control of the participants. For example, after JFK’s assassination in Dallas, Clinton received invitations from civic groups eager to hear his impressions of the slain leader. Nevertheless, Clinton’s efforts to parlay his Boys’ Nation experience into a position in Senator Fulbright’s office were initially rebuffed. It took campaigning with Judge Frank Holt across Arkansas in his 1966 bid for governor to win the assistance of nephew Jack Holt, Jr., who made a call to Fulbright’s administrative assistant, Lee Williams, on Clinton’s behalf. At the crucial interview, Clinton again recounted his Boys’ Nation meeting with Fulbright, and Williams brought him on board.307

Success at one of these programs was a semi-convertible unit of social currency or credit. By any measure, Boys’ Nation was an exceptionally valuable line on Clinton’s resume, placing him within an extremely small subset of his generation. But the exchange rate for this particular currency, minted by the American Legion, was more favorable with sectors of the American

306 Maraniss, 11-17.
307 Ibid., 81-82. See also Clinton, 90.
government associated with the apparatus of state security. Recruiters from the military service academies were present at many of the Boys’ State programs, reflecting the ideological and often personal connections between the armed forces and the Legion. 308 It is likely that Boys’ State offered similar advantages to students aspiring to join the Federal Bureau of Investigation. By contrast, the YMCA forged connections within the ranks of liberal Democrats and Republicans, including prominent national figures such as Hubert Humphrey, Adlai Stevenson, Eugene McCarthy and Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren. 309

Convertibility of social credit rested upon variables largely outside the influence of the students as well. At the state level, organizers cultivated relationships with individual politicians, who in turn saw the youth governments as a reservoir of potential interns and campaign workers. College officials enthusiastically hosted the citizenship programs as a way to make contact with potential recruits. Georgetown University was the site of the Boys’ State for the District of Columbia since the late 1950s, and if Clinton’s decision to attend Georgetown after Boys’ Nation was coincidental, it is almost certain that admissions officers at that school would have been familiar with Boys’ State and that his participation would have increased his chances for admission.

Americans could tolerate and even applaud the elevation of tiny numbers of teenagers to such prestigious heights because the programs appeared to offer equality of opportunity to high school students. According to the terms of the American myth of individual success, social class and pedigree mattered far less in accounting for a delegate’s accomplishments than grit, determination, and talent. Students from relatively obscure backgrounds like Clinton or Joseph

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308 “Boys’ Statesmen Hear a Briefing on the Academies,” *The Washington Post*, 5 July 1962, A1. During the 1930s, the U.S. military academy awarded the American Legion with four nomination slots.

309 Each of these political leaders took part in multiple Y+G national conventions and spoke highly of the program’s goals and the quality of the youth who participated.
Gallegos appeared to rise in direct proportion to their merit, often defeating the scions of wealthy or well-connected families in the process. Organizers trumpeted the electoral successful racial minority students, including 16-year-old Edward Gong of Miami, Florida, who trounced his white rival to win the presidency of American Legion Boys’ Forum on National Government in 1947. Gong’s election to the highest office of Boys’ Nation signaled the start of an illustrious public service career. Gong went on Harvard University and studied law. In 1967 he was elected as the first Asian-American member of the Florida State Senate.310

Also in attendance with Gong that year were two African-Americans: Senators Alfred Rogers of Connecticut, who came within three votes of winning the vice-presidency, and Donald Clayter of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The two Black delegates complimented all involved in the event -- fellow students, Legion organizers, and the staff of American University -- for the respect and equality they enjoyed during their stay in the Capital. Both boys were housed at American University and shared dormitory rooms with fellow Senators from their state. Rogers’ compliment was carefully worded to suit the lexicon of civic nationalism: “We have been treated like an American should be treated here.”311  In 1949, Boys’ Nation had three African-American Senators from Maryland, New York, and Wisconsin.312 At the state level, Black candidates within integrated programs continued throughout the 1950s to win the highest offices of Boys’ State, Governor and Lt. Governor, in several states. By the mid-1960s, African-American newspapers had largely dispensed with mentioning the election of Black governors in integrated

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programs, presumably because the practice was becoming too commonplace to merit attention.313

The success enjoyed by racial pioneers within integrated programs created dissonance because many still excluded African-Americans or restricted them to second-class programs. Organizers and students generally supported integration, but the process of dismantling racial barriers was slow and fraught with conflict. On the surface, the Legion, ALA, and the YMCA in 1945 each allowed local law and custom to regulate racial admissions policy. But the war caused Y leaders to reconsider the Association’s stance on segregation. In 1946 the National Council issued an Interracial Charter for local associations to “work steadfastly” towards the abolition of racial discrimination. Y+G publicity materials featured prominent images of white and Black teen legislators working together as equals. The YNC issued stronger resolutions in 1952 and 1963 that state programs integrate, but it lacked the power to discipline local associations that ignored its recommendations. Even in the generally progressive racial climate of the Y+G program, there was occasional opposition to desegregation. Instead, criticism from African-American media helped put pressure on recalcitrant associations. When the Oklahoma association decided in 1951 to establish a state Y+G as an interracial venture, reporters from the Atlanta Daily World highlighted the ban on African-American participation in neighboring Texas.314 Three years later, youth legislators in Alabama called on their adult representatives to resist pressure to desegregate public schools following the US Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown

313 “Youth Elect Nick J. Hall as Governor, Afro-American 23 December, 1961, 17. Hall was something of a CYLP prodigy, capturing the Governorships of Boys’ State and YMCA Y+G in the same year.
decision. Aside from these setbacks, by the early 1960s Hi-Y clubs and the Y+G movement were formally integrated.\footnote{Nina Mjagkij, 	extit{Light in the Darkness: African-Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946} (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 126-132. While the YMCA eliminated racial discrimination on paper, many associations found themselves ministering to racially exclusive clients because of white flight from American cities and the founding of suburban Y’s. See Clifford Putney, “From Character to Body Building: The YMCA and the suburban Metropolis, 1950-1980,” in Men and Women Adrift: 	extit{The YMCA and the YWCA in the City}, eds. Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 231-233.}

Prior to 1945, racial admission policies of Boys’ State and Girls’ State programs generally fit into two categories: token integration and whites-only. The notable exception to this binary was “Negro” Boys’ State of West Virginia. Increasing pressure from the press and from within the Legion movement itself led many Southern organizers to fashion separate programs for Black students. In 1946, African-American participants at a workshop on “Community Organization and Leadership” singled out Virginia’s whites-only American Legion Boys’ State as a target for potential desegregation. Faced with criticism from Black Legionnaires and African-American press, the Virginia Legion justified its stance on the grounds that it would have to build a “separate state” for Black students.\footnote{Train Crusaders – Picott,” Richmond News Digest, 	extit{Afro-American} 13 July 1946, 17} In 1948, a left-wing veteran’s group, the American Veteran’s Committee (AVC), challenged the ban by sponsoring four Richmond boys, two white and two Black, to Boys’ State. The AVC’s spokesman Marvin Caplan explained that the move was a test case, designed to “inject the very essentials of democracy into what the American Legion calls the 49th State.”\footnote{Caplan’s quote comes from “Boys State is ‘For Whites Only,’ Its Director Says,” 	extit{New Journal and Guide} 17 June 1948, E26A. The AVC, founded by liberal and progressive World War II veterans, positioned itself as the antithesis of the conservative, and older membership of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. For a discussion of the AVC’s conflict with established veteran’s organizations and its call for the elimination of racial discrimination, see Robert Francis Saxe, “‘Settling Down’: Domesticating World War II Veterans’ Challenge to the Postwar Consensus,” Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2002, 181-183.}
Southern Legion Departments gradually relented under intense pressure. The Legion refused to admit the African-American delegates sponsored by the AVC on technical grounds, and the Director of VA-BS added that the two would have been refused admission because the program’s charter limited attendance to “Virginia white boys.” Yet that September, the Virginia Legion unveiled plans to establish a Booker T. Washington Boys’ State to accommodate these students.\textsuperscript{318} Virginia and Louisiana, which also began a Bayou Boys’ State in 1949, followed in the wake of the North Carolina Department, which had established a segregated Boys’ State in 1947 and Girls’ State in 1949. Tennessee and Georgia fashioned their “Negro” Boys’ State chapters in 1953-54. These “Negro” programs were inferior to those reserved for whites in terms of size and opportunities for interactions with the politicians and institutions of the state government. Predictably, the creation of Jim Crow programs also failed to quell harsh criticism from prominent voices in the African American community. For example, editors of the Norfolk, Virginia \textit{New Journal and Guide} summed up the 1949 Booker T. Washington Boys’ State as a “misadventure in civics.” They wrote, “The whole procedure as designed instills in the Negro boy that he is something separate and apart” and that dual programs only served to “justify and perpetuate government by minority rule.”\textsuperscript{319}

Besides instilling pride in the achievements of Black youth, these programs also held forth the possibility of persuading southern whites that African-American youth were ready to embrace civic equality. In 1955, newspaperman Carl De Vane hinted that North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges’ visit to Tar Heel Boys’ State might have caused the Executive to “change his tune” when he stated at a farmer’s convention that “most colored and white people

\textsuperscript{318}\textit{Legion to Provide First Colored Boys’ State in Va},” \textit{New Journal and Guide} 7 May 1949, D1.

were anxious to go to school as they were before the court ruled [in the 1954 Brown case].”\(^{320}\)

However, such an optimistic reading was unwarranted even for the prospects of an integrated Boys’ State. For the rest of the decade, Kentucky was the only Boys’ State to drop its ban on Black students in 1956, following a poll of delegates in 1955 that found no substantial opposition among the white students to integration.\(^{321}\)

Disputes between supporters of racial equality and racial exclusion or separation would long bedevil the veteran’s group. Though the Legion’s national body formally recognized the equality of veterans of all races in the mid-1950s, there were holdouts. The Virginia Legion beat back a push from Black Legionnaires to scrap the Booker T. Washington program in 1957. That failure only spurred other African-American civic leaders to redouble their efforts. In another instance, the Legion’s national leadership voted in 1959 to expel the 40 and 8, an elite fraternal organization for Legion leaders, because it refused to admit non-white veterans. The 40 and 8 continued to exert a role over Boys’ and Girls’ State through its fundraising activities. Half a decade later segregation was still the rule for many Boys’ and Girls’ State. VA-BS remained lily white until 1966, and the integrated program had its first African-American governor in 1973. South Carolina was the last Legion Department to desegregationist pressure, only admitting Black delegates in 1968.\(^{322}\)

What of the youth leaders themselves? Their statements and actions suggested qualified support for racial equality in American civic life. Youth delegates elected scores of minority students to office and passed model legislation to formally end segregation or at least soften the


\(^{322}\)Long-time Palmetto Boys’ State Director Rev. Sinclair Lewis defied political pressure from one of South Carolina’s most powerful public officials by breaking the color line. Information comes from Gene Morehouse, interview with the author, 23 July 2007.
edges of the system. In proposing these measures, youth legislators indicated their willingness to create the conditions in which the individualist “merit myth” could apply to greater numbers of American citizens. The 1949 Y+G National Assembly passed a mildly-worded resolution calling on American youth to develop a spirit of “tolerance” towards all races and nationalities, and recommended that public schools not segregate on the basis of race or religion. But the impact of the resolution was softened by the stipulation that desegregation measures be consistent with state law and achieved “gradually.”  Three years later, the Y’s National Assembly issued a far stronger and more detailed series of recommendations that called for correcting discrimination and segregation in housing, employment, public facilities, and education. A survey of 1965 Youth Governors highlighted racial integration as the chief concern for the United States. A 2 to 1 margin favored the passage of federal civil rights legislation, although more were inclined to state “moderate” versus “strong” support. Significantly, 75% of Governors were satisfied with the strong stand taken by the federal government on civil rights.

At the state level, youth legislatures wrestled with the same controversies relating to segregation as did adult government. Measures to provide greater funding for Black public schools in Mississippi passed the Magnolia Boys’ State Assembly of 1950. An even more courageous proposal to eliminate the dual system of state-funded public schools in Louisiana reached the floor of Pelican Boys’ State Senate in 1955. Before a public audience and the press in the real Senate chamber, the junior Senators debated the inflammatory measure until the adult

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323 Reports of the Work Groups, National Conference of Boy Governors, July 16-19, 1949, Hi-Y Folder, YMCA Archives.


counselors dissolved the youth assembly before a vote could be taken. Contrary trends were also common. The 1955 Georgia Y youth legislature called on the real state assembly to defy the Supreme Court’s desegregation order. And in a singular case, a delegation from 1961 Magnolia Boys’ State gained first hand knowledge of direct action politics when they paid visits to Freedom Riders held in the Jackson Country jail. The boys may have been following the advice of the local paper, whose editor scornfully recommended that white Mississippians should “go to the zoo” to see the protestors. But the imprisoned Riders turned the table and drove Boys’ Staters into uncomfortable silence when they serenaded the teenagers with militant songs and offered them CORE pamphlets.

The path was even rockier for African-American youth in the Girls’ State and Nation movement. In 1949, Ohio’s Girls’ State elected 17-year-old Joan Rankin as Governor, the first time that an African-American had won such a high office in the program’s history. Rankin, a student at Cincinnati’s St. Mary’s High School and a National Honor Society member, was intelligent, beautiful, and a musically talented. By custom, the Governor was granted one of the coveted slots in the national program. Yet the Ohio Auxiliary declined to nominate Rankin for the honor, citing their reluctance to expose her to embarrassment and prejudice in segregated Washington, D.C. It might have been the Ohio Auxiliary’s goal to avoid a potentially inflammatory situation in which white and African-American students shared dormitory housing and swimming pools at Girls’ Nation; then the resulting controversy was unintended and self-inflicted. Within days of the ruling, African-American newspapers across the South and Midwest blasted the Auxiliary’s decision as racially bigoted, and white-owned newspapers across Ohio followed the story. A major theme of these stories was Rankin’s professed willingness to “lead

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the fight” against Jim Crow in the Capital. Rankin was eloquent in linking her struggle with
the principle of “true democracy.” Galvanized by her defiance, African-American civic groups
such as the 10,000 member Ohio Democratic League and the NAACP, as well as the American
Veteran’s Committee demanded that the Auxiliary reverse course. The Rankin case became a
cause célèbre in the African-American community of the Midwest, thanks primarily to the
Cleveland Call and Post, which ran numerous front-page articles and editorials in support of her
bid, and the Chicago Defender. The story also was covered by the Associated Press and reprinted
in newspapers across the state.

The Ohio Auxiliary tried vainly to deflect criticism that its administration of the Girls’
State program was prejudiced against African-Americans. Mrs. Carl Zeller, director of the Girls’
State program, emerged in the media-created narrative as the principal antagonist to Rankin’s
cause. Zeller argued that the rejection had not been a personal slight against the “darling girl,”
and out of fairness, the Auxiliary would not send the other delegate, who was white, to Girls’
Nation either. Understandably, this decision satisfied no one, but it did earn Zeller public
mocking. The rejection of a second Black Girls State Governor in Nebraska only added fuel to
the fire. The position of the Ohio Auxiliary seemed even more untenable because Auxiliary
officials in Washington had confirmed that Rankin would have been accepted without prejudice.
Even the Department Commander of the Ohio Legion beseeched the Auxiliary to send Rankin to
Girls’ Nation. Ultimately, the Auxiliary relented when the AVC offered to defray the costs of
Rankin’s trip. Rankin attended Girls’ Nation and took part in all activities, including the visit to
the White House, and she shared a swimming pool with her white peers - all without incident.

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329 “Truman, Congress on Sport over Tan Girl’s D.C. Trip,” Afro-American, 9 July 1949, 1.
The recognition that Rankin gained from her public struggle for inclusion in Girls’ Nation appears to have opened doors for her. The following year, she enrolled at the Ohio State University, Columbus, and was selected to serve on the Ohio Commission on Youth and Children, a state-level body that contributed to the decennial White House Conference on Youth and Children.331

Yet the press treatment of the Rankin case revealed a profound ambivalence about the role that women should play in American politics, as the tone of the coverage swerved from admiration for her determination and intelligence to eroticized descriptions of the Girl Governor’s body. Newspaper descriptions lingered over “comely” appearance and “tan” complexion, and glamour shots that featured her long legs clad in summer shorts and sandals.332

The favorable presentation of Rankin’s body in print was reflected broadly, and accounts of her story in white-owned newspapers emphasized her extremely light complexion. In photographs, Rankin’s direct facing of the camera was an implied transgression of what Laura Wexler described as the tradition of the “averted gaze” that visually inscribed gender and racial subservience. Rankin’s photos from this time show her looking directly at the camera and the viewer, with one notable exception. The photo accompanying the announcement of her marriage to William Davis in 1950 shows her demurely looking downward.333

Had Rankin attended Girls’ Nation one year earlier, she might have heard a call for women to play a stronger, more direct role in American politics delivered by Republican Representative Katherine St. George. St. George chided American women for being too

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332 Photo caption for “Governor of Ohio Girls’ State Denied Trip to D.C.”, *Afro-American*, 16 July 1949, 12.

pampered for politics – having been “carried around on a roseleaf and having everything handed to them.” She warned that “the old days when women in politics were supposed to be masculine are gone forever” and recommended that “women in politics should be themselves.” Yet St. George qualified her bold assertion with the admonition “always put your family first, but after that go out and do what you can for your country.” The photos of young women in the California Y+G Model Assembly of 1954 hewed to an even more conservative ideal of female submission, contrasting images of male students delivering speeches or reclining in Senate armchairs with those showing girls knitting on the floor of the Legislature or throwing arms around their dates at the evening dance social.

Despite a surge in attendance in the Girls’ State and growing “feminization” of the Y+G starting in the mid-1950s, organizers and students remained ambivalent about investing social capital into young women’s potential as civic leaders. Male leaders continued to dominate the highest levels of the Y+G throughout the 1960s. At the 1965 national Youth Governors’ Conference, two of the forty-four participants were female, and a year later that number had only risen to four. In Legion Auxiliary Girls’ State, the curriculum in many states continued to reflect the duality of civic roles that the students were to inhabit. Alongside competitive and hard-fought elections were the feminine trappings of white glove tea with the wives of male politicians, fashion shows, beauty contests, and elaborate preparations for Boys’ State/Girls’ State dances.

**Bridging Capital: The Encampment for Citizenship and Highlander Folk School**

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335. “Boys and Girls, These were Busy Days,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 February 1954, Part III.

To those denied the ability to compete for social capital because of racial or gender discrimination, or else shunted into secondary or “auxiliary” programs, these competitions for capital may have seemed like rigged games. Radically different expectations of student involvement governed citizenship programs based on promoting equality and bridging social divides between delegates. The most significant effort in this field was the Encampment for Citizenship (EFC), inaugurated in 1946 at the Fieldston School of the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Algernon Black developed the Encampment, drawing from models such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration, the Society of Friends, and even Weimar-era German youth movements. The Encampment’s immediate ancestors were the Work Camps for Democracy and the Work Camps for America. Like the Work Camps, the EFC assembled approximately one hundred campers for a six-week residential program in democratic living, although Black eliminated most of the physical labor requirements of WCD and WCA. Campers were a diverse mixture of older teenagers and young adults, balanced by sex and representing a cross-section of American society. In terms of educational attainment, college students predominated, with two thirds of the 1957 and 1958 Encampments having at least one term of college experience.

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337 For discussions of the format and goals of the WCA and WCD, see Supra, Chapter 3.

338 Two works inform my analysis of the EFC from 1945-64. The first is Algernon Black’s book on the Encampment, which provides a narrative account of the programs origins and thematic treatment of its curriculum and goals. On the roots of the EFC, see Algernon Black, The Young Citizens: The Story of the Encampment for Citizenship (New York: Ungar Press, 1962), 27-29, 36-38. The second is a series of four studies of the EFC also published in 1962. The surveys were conducted on the members of the New York Encampment from 1955-59 and the effort was led by Herbert Hyman, noted authority on public polling based at Wesleyan University. Hyman’s team interviewed the campers prior to attendance, upon exit, then six weeks and four years afterward. Because of the depth of the study, it offers an exceptional glimpse into the effects of the six-week program on the political and social attitudes of the participants. See Herbert H. Hyman, Charles R. Wright, and Terence K. Hopkins, Applications of Methods of Evaluation: Four Studies of the Encampment for Citizenship (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1962).
Besides the conscious effort to mix urban, suburban, and rural youth into the student body, Encampment personnel actively recruited campers from racial minority populations, with a particular emphasis on reaching American Indian youth. The initial success of New York EFC led to Encampments in California in 1958 and Puerto Rico in 1961. From 1946-1965, approximately 4500 young people took part in the Encampment. The EFC’s influence was also apparent in the formation of youth residence camps operated by the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee from 1960-61. These programs all developed bridging capital whose mission was to forge interracial solidarity among the campers while grooming them to be agents of social change back in their home communities.339

While striving to create a diverse camper population reflecting the mid-20th century U.S., camp directors were interested in creating a moral elite. Planners screened student for leadership potential, although they included youth with a far greater variety of lived experiences than was typical for Boys’ State or Y+G. EFC drew campers who were workers, veterans (especially from 1946-50), college students, and high school dropouts. Residents of inner city slums and children of sharecroppers shared space with the children of suburban neighborhoods and remote reservations. Even so, EFC recruiters tapped youth from some the same adult-led youth programs and social networks as did the YMCA and the Legion, including Scouting, student councils, and church youth groups. This tendency towards “inbreeding” was aggravated by alumni, who were responsible for recommending forty to fifty percent of new campers. Starting in the late 1950s, the Encampment directors also began sponsoring small numbers of foreign students to attend the New York and California programs.340 While foreign students were also

339Black, 74-76; Hyman, 92-95.

340 The EFC’s most radical experiment was its Puerto Rico encampment. The camper population, held at one hundred, was divided into one quarter U.S. born Puerto-Ricans, one half non-Puerto Ricans from North America,
invited to Boys’ State as observers, the EFC granted these international campers equal status to their American counterparts.

The EFC staff made laudable efforts to attract a diverse group of campers. However, by formally excluding youth with mental and physical disabilities, as well as “emotional adjustment” problems, the program fell squarely in line with the discriminatory policies of other youth citizenship training courses of this era. Algernon Black, writing in 1962, explained the disability bans were necessary to conserve scarce physical resources. This explanation neatly matched the rationale given by the American Legion and Legion Auxiliary. The blanket bans appeared quite hypocritical, given how deeply both groups were involved with disability issues among veterans. By sealing off those students whose bodies and minds were marked as “abnormal,” the administrators were complicit in efforts to ignore or quarantine the disabled from the civic realm. Black’s refusal was in some ways even more inexplicable because he argued that it was important for campers to understand how processes like war, racism, and poverty shaped the bodies and psyches of their campmates. For example, Black cited the educative value of including campers whose bodies bore the scars of warfare or prison camps, and defended the presence of an African-American camper whose disruptive behavior stemmed from his emotional distrust of whites. 341

The social environment of the Encampment was geared to promote cooperation rather than competition among the participants. Encampment staff was selected for their altruism and tolerance of racial diversity and ideological difference. This bias was acknowledged by Algernon

one quarter from the Commonwealth, and the remainder from other parts of Central America, South America, and the Caribbean islands. The Puerto Rican experiment involved older campers between the ages of twenty-three and thirty-five, placing it outside the direct purview of this dissertation. See Black, 333-339.

341 Black, 48, 71-72, 114. The Legion’s National Committee on Boys’ State recommended a ban on the disabled in the late 1930s, and it appears that the prescription was followed by most Boys’ State and Girls’ State chapters until the early 1970s.
Black and confirmed by entrance and exit interviews given to EFC participants from 1955-59 by Hyman, Wright, and Hopkins.342 EFC campers also rated as more liberal and more tolerant than delegates to the 1964 and 1965 California Youth and Government program. Even working with campers selected for inter-racial tolerance, EFC organizers labored to create an inclusive and egalitarian social environment. Much like Boys’ and Girls’ State, EFC staff assigned campers to Spartan living accommodations, mixing youth from different backgrounds. The campers took meals as a group, and attended mandatory lectures, film forums, and “town meetings” together—all to foster “community spirit.” To overcome barriers that years of social conditioning had imposed on the campers, counselors encouraged students to recognize the intellectual, physical, and spiritual strengths of each camper. Some bridging efforts were ham-handed or played to racial stereotypes. For example, Director Black occasionally praised African-American campers for their skill at basketball or singing, while other staff sought to draw out reticent American Indians from the Southwest by asking them to perform tricks with a lariat. At other times, counselors were required to mediate disputes or intervene to prevent harassment. In one example, staff reprimanded a white Midwestern boy who angered and embarrassed some African American female campers with remarks that he believed were “humorous and clever.” Overall, EFC staffers seemed sincere in their desire to break down social barriers and foster an egalitarian community.343

However, EFC counselors grappled with the disruptive, or at least distracting, potential of youth sexuality. Their approach to this issue stood in stark contrast to the Legion and Legion

342Black, 72-73. Hyman, Wright, and Hopkins, 100-102. Hyman and his team measured the attitudes of the campers at intake and compared them to data from national surveys of youth attitudes compiled by the National Opinion Research Center in 1947.

343Black, 104.
Auxiliary and the YMCA. The Legion and Legion Auxiliary opted for sex-segregated programs, and counselors applied curfew and restrictions on the student’s movement. Girls’ State delegates endured stricter surveillance than Boys’ Staters. Counselors sometimes relented to pressure to hold dances and socials when the two conventions coincided, but those interactions occurred under the watchful eyes of the staff. Nothing in the formal organization of these programs would have prevented homosexual activity, although it seems that the barracks atmosphere, exhausting schedule, and adult surveillance would all have posed significant obstacles to intimate contact. The Y+G program was coeducational after 1945, but counselors segregated the high school students by sex either in dormitory housing or assigned under the supervision of host families.344

For reasons both practical and ideological, the EFC staff opted to manage, rather than repress, sexual expression in the camps. Algernon Black addressed these efforts with unusual candor in 1962. Unlike the other youth citizenship programs that dealt almost exclusively with high school age populations, the Encampment drew an older group of young people who had widely divergent sexual attitudes and experiences. Some he described as quite sophisticated in their knowledge and views, while other lacked basic facts about human reproduction or else held “puritanical” beliefs. A camp nurse on the premises was qualified to provide sex education, while staff discouraged campers from “pairing off” or engaging in “public petting.” Such activities could be an annoyance to the other campers, not to mention a severe distraction from the overall goals of the program. However, Black acknowledged that during the first week of Encampment a few romantic couples inevitably formed.345

344 Nothing in the formal organization of these programs would have prevented homosexual activity, although it seems that obstacles would have been high. The boys and girls were almost always strangers to one another, and the compressed schedule of the convention would be difficult to surmount. According to some of my informants, a “locker room” mentality frequently pervaded Boys’ State, allowing the participants to acknowledge the homoerotic potential of the social environment, while still affirming their heterosexual identities.

345 Black, 136.
Program counselors seem to have managed these potentially disruptive situations and incorporate discussions of sexuality into the citizenship curriculum. Black observed that removing social prohibitions on inter-religious or inter-racial contact spurred sexual attraction. In the case of a young woman who became enamored with an older male camper, a European refugee, Black speculated her infatuation represented a psychological transference of empathy for his past. Yet he allowed the relationship to develop because he believed that to quash it would deny the couple’s autonomy as individuals. Within the regular framework of workshops and discussion sessions, campers took on provocative topics such as inter-racial marriage and unpacked the possible consequences of achieving social equality.

Unlike Boys’ State or Y+G, where competition for accolades and offices dominated social relations, the EFC program placed greater emphasis on development of inter-personal relations. Even so, the operation of the Encampment required that campers organize a government to keep order and handle delegated responsibilities such as kitchen cleanup. The campers usually opted for a town meeting format or a representative parliament. These ad hoc bodies did not always achieve optimal results; town councils occasionally devolved into turmoil. There were also attempts by “politically sophisticated” factions to orchestrate elections of favored candidates, and even a few attempts to impose a dictatorship (mainly in jest, but a few times suggested in earnest). Black also signaled that students might have selected a racial minority candidate to salve their conscience about social injustice. Opposition to program rules, especially curfew, sometimes united the campers against the adult counselors. But as the camper government matured over the six weeks, and individuals began to identify with the goals of the EFC, the adult staff delegated more camp duties to them.346

346 Black, 124-129.
The lack of formal hierarchies did not result in a program that was intellectually lax or sloppy. The Encampment boasted a curriculum rivaling an undergraduate level political science course. Almost all the forty-two days was crammed with lectures, workshops, film forums and discussion groups, as well as field trips and recreational activities. Much like Girls’ State, campers learned how bills became laws and the various functions of government agencies. What is more remarkable is that many of the EFC workshops instructed students in techniques of political bridge-building such as organizing a press conference, assembling a delegation to visit appointed or elected officials, and door to door canvassing. The 1953 Encampment put some of these skills to work when they interviewed New York City residents whose housing was slated for demolition, as part of a study of “slum clearance” plans. The instructional emphasis on collective or group political action may account for one reported change among the campers: namely, alumni left the Encampment slightly less optimistic of the ability of a lone individual to achieve political change, but more optimistic about the ability of groups to do so.\textsuperscript{347}

Most campers reported their satisfaction with the didactic parts of the program, despite its personal toll. Physical fatigue was an ever present rival to learning, and delegates savored the small respites from a grueling schedule. The curriculum taxed the campers’ psyches too. For example, the 1946 Encampment featured a reprise of the infamous “civics test” that Algernon Black delivered at a 1938 youth forum in New York, in which delegates were tempted by an authoritarian speaker. Campers also wrestled with initial loneliness and disorientation, the unfamiliar regimentation of camp life, and the strictures on personal movement and independence.\textsuperscript{348} More important to the campers were the profound emotional benefits from the

\textsuperscript{347} Black, 249, 255, 265.

\textsuperscript{348} Hyman, 125-26.
experience. Some campers, heretofore insulated from unpleasant American realities, were
disturbed by first-hand accounts of racism or poverty from their peers. Hyman argues that these
disturbances were intellectual awakenings, and from this disequilibrium came deeper
understanding of other campers’ circumstances and the growth of inter-racial solidarity.349 At the
end of the six-week course, participants were bonded together into surprisingly durable
relationships. Four years out, Hyman’s surveys showed that eight out of ten campers could recall
the name of other camper’s, and of that number, half had contacted or visited a former campmate
in the last year.350 Finally, through their reunions and more recently, the use of social media
technology such as Facebook, EFC campers attest to the relevance of these relationships decades
afterward, even after the end of the program in the late 1990s.351

Did the experience have lasting effect in terms of changing individual attitudes towards
democratic inclusion and political involvement? The goal of the EFC was to imbue young people
with commitment to values that the organizers felt were the foundations of democracy: respect
for the rights of individuals of diverse backgrounds, toleration of political dissent, and support
for constitutional practices. Entrance surveys indicated that the incoming campers already had
stronger belief in these ideals than the U.S. adult population. They also showed greater optimism
about the amelioration of war, racial discrimination, poverty and disease. In the exit surveys,
campers were even more enthusiastic about the possibility of change. Measured at intervals of

349 Ibid., 127. These awakenings were a common product of the discussion groups, but they also occurred during the
leisure opportunities away from the camp. For example, Hyman cites cases in which white campers became aware
of racial hostility directed towards African Americans in their group while in social settings such as bars and street
corners. In one particularly negative episode, an interracial pair of campers walking through the streets of New York
City was cursed by a bystander who thought the two young people were romantically linked.

350 Ibid., 266-267.

351 Information on alumni activities of EFC participants comes from the official alumni website:
six weeks and four years after the end of the experience, surveys showed that the initial optimism of alumni waned markedly, but that their commitment to diversity and civic action remained higher than their initial responses and far higher than a control group of American college students.\footnote{352}{Hyman, 280-282.}

In terms of practical impact, EFC seems to have made alumni more willing to participate in civic life. However, some campers found the challenge of implementing some facets of camp life into their home community – especially the new found respect for interracial equality – too daunting. Among the majority of campers who went on to college, the experience seems to have motivated a large minority (40%) towards a deeper level of political and civic engagement. Four years after the EFC, nearly all of this subset reported having taken part in political discussions in the last week, and half had written to a public official. This compares favorably to the one third of college-educated Americans who acted similarly, and dwarfs the 15% rate for American adults. Moreover, EFC graduates were among the serial joiners that Robert Putnam described as the mainstays of a rich American civic life, as campers were often to be found among the most active members and leaders in campus and community associations. In these organizations, alumni often were instrumental in removing barriers of race or religion. Director Black cited unnamed campers who performed this service, including one who persuaded a German cultural group in Ohio to admit Jews and another who attempted to desegregate social clubs at her college.\footnote{353}{Black, 111-113.}

While the Encampment tended to make students more likely to challenge social inequality, the experience was compatible with the acquisition of “credentials” or traditional
forms of social capital. The program also enjoyed the public support of progressive leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Eleanor Roosevelt. Roosevelt was a particularly staunch ally, touting the success of the program and defending the program from claims made by the American Legion that the EFC’s training was “un-American” and “socialistic.”

Hyman concluded that few campers became “radicalized,” although he conceded that the Encampment made them more willing to tolerate the expression of radical ideas. Given the left-wing bias of the program and the campers, it is unsurprising that many alumni gravitated to liberal and internationalist causes. The EFC counted alumni who won prestigious Fulbright and Eisenhower fellowships and a sizeable number of campers went on to serve in the Peace Corps. Like graduates of the other youth citizenship training courses, EFC alumni represented their generation in the corridors of power. A camper from the 1946 program went on to represent Catholic Newman clubs at the decennial White House Conference on Youth and Children in 1950. Alumni also served as on the staff of prominent liberal senators such as Frank Graham, Estes Kefauver, and John F. Kennedy.

In a few instances, the inter-racial encampment inspired a few alumni to challenge segregation. While these confrontations had limited impact, the inter-racial solidarity cultivated

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355 One of the questions that Hyman’s team used to gauge political tolerance was to ask whether students would permit a Communist Party member to broadcast his or her ideas over the radio in peacetime. In 1955, the percentage who answered “yes” after the program rose from 61% to 76%. The percentage who felt that it was more important to safeguard civil liberties of the innocent than to discover Communists remained at over ninety percent. By contrast, 81% of Americans in 1954 would ban Communists from the airwaves, and sixty four percent thought it was more important to “find all the communists.” Figures cited in Hyman 140, 153.

356 Black, 302-304.
by a similar youth camp at Highlander Folk School (HFS) in Tennessee led to more dramatic outcomes. Highlander had already gained renown for its support of the burgeoning civil rights movement. From 1953-61 HFS brought together white and African-American college students to share ideas on how to challenge segregation in the South, including members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In 1958, HFS began its citizenship schools to teach Black adults to qualify for voting in Southern states. The youth residence camp begun at Highlander in 1960 mirrored the multi-racial population and curriculum of the EFC. The organizers collected a racially diverse group of forty high school students from nine southern and four non-southern states. The goal of the program was to mold this group of white, Black, American Indian, and Mexican-American youth for life into a vanguard for desegregating public schools. The most powerful lesson of the program was learning how to cooperate in work and recreational settings, upsetting the traditional social conditioning that separated young people from different racial communities. The 1960 program also produced a major challenge to Jim Crow that began with the arrest and conviction of three participants, who refused to sit in the back of a Greyhound bus on their way back to Birmingham, Alabama. Their appeal and civil suit against the Greyhound Corporation pressured the Justice Department to investigate the interstate incident. The success of the first camp convinced HFS staff to organize a second, but those plans were aborted in the spring of 1961.

Highlander had long been in the crosshairs of Southern conservatives angered by the school’s training of interracial unionists and citizenship work with African-Americans. The foes of the

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358 Ibid., 180-181.
school scored a major victory in May when the Tennessee State Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling revoking the school’s charter and closing the facility.\textsuperscript{359}

In this chapter I have analyzed how private associations managed the investment of social capital from one generation of civic authorities into youth leaders. Looking from the commanding heights, programs that specialized in creating bonding social capital, including American Legion Boys’ State and YMCA Youth and Government, were significant for helping shape the American political class for decades afterward. For the tens of thousands of young men and women who sought nominations to these exclusive events and competed for status and awards, these programs were an opportunity to dramatically enhance their career prospects. The “credential” extended to successful participants could open doors to elite schools, potential patrons, or offer other forms of material or social capital. The success of Bill Clinton in obtaining and reinvesting social capital derived from the American Legion was exceptional, but the competitive process that I have described was comparable for thousands of his contemporaries from 1946-1965. As importantly, countless participants found validation of their importance as future citizens, and more than a few achieved a modest boost to their future careers.

Program organizers asserted that the competitions created youth meritocracies, based primarily upon individual talent and performance. However, the field of competition was biased, favoring those who already possessed advantages, and essentially preserving privileges accruing to whiteness and masculinity. Until the end of the 1960s, African-American students were restricted from participation in many Southern states. Even where formal bans did not exist, non-white students of both genders, and female students were frequently shunted into inferior (as judged from potential social capital resources) auxiliaries or subordinate roles in integrated programs. A handful of exceptional young people challenged these restrictions. These “pioneers”

\textsuperscript{359} Ibid., 245-246.
bypassed the formal admissions process to reach other program stakeholders (the press, community leaders, educators, and government officials) to amass sufficient social capital to overturn the bans. This appeal to public opinion could be grueling, and success was never assured.

Youth programs like the Encampment for Citizenship and the short-lived residence camps of the Highlander Folk School aspired to bridge social divides and foster an inclusive and egalitarian society. Accomplishing this goal required careful management of the campsite environment and negotiation of the multiple pressures and conflicts accompanying a diverse collection of young men and women. More remarkable was that the campers were motivated less by hope of capital accumulation than altruism and idealism. Therefore, the legacy of these programs was far less ambiguous than the bonding initiatives operated by the capital-rich Legion, Legion Auxiliary, or the YMCA.
Chapter 5: “Use Salesmanship and You Can Sell America”:
Youth Leaders and the Formation of Consensus Politics at Home and Abroad,
1942-65

By the late 1940s, youth civic leadership programs such as Boys’ State and YMCA Youth and Government were fast becoming permanent institutions capable of training tens of thousands of students in American government. The goal was ostensibly to strengthen democracy in the United States. But what were the specific goals that these youth leaders were being tasked? One answer to this question comes from a dinner speech given at the 1949 YMCA National Conference of Boy Governors, which in 1952 became the co-ed National Youth and Government Assembly. Like similar gatherings in the nation’s capital, the Boy Governors had spent almost a week discussing weighty social concerns and issuing policy recommendations and model legislation. Outside of these activities, the youth leaders basked in the adulation of their sponsors and political leaders. Awed by the grandeur of the Capitol and the White House, stirred by ceremonies at the Jefferson Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknowns, they now pondered how to preserve that ardor and transmit that feeling to their fellow citizens. Before an audience comprised of students, YMCA officials, and several Congressmen and Senators, youth Governor James Cooke of Oregon told his colleagues that their task was to return home and “use salesmanship to sell America.”

The call to “sell America” echoed from many quarters of the United States after World War II. In 1946 the National Conference of Christians and Jews discussed ways to “resell” an American identity based upon tolerance of religious, ethnic, and racial difference. A more


361 Ibid., Chapter 3 on the construction of a “tolerance” based American nationalism.
common interpretation of selling America, however, was the campaign to educate Americans about the benefits of capitalism. Indeed, this was the interpretation that Cooke gave. Like a manager rallying an underperforming sales team, Cooke urged his fellow Governors to believe wholeheartedly in the product they were touting. “We are leading the world it seems in practically every line of business and our belief.” With confidence in their nation and individualism, Americans could overcome any obstacle. The only threat to the American millennium, it seemed, was self-doubt. Citizens who craved the security of government regulation would throttle individual ambition and striving. Cooke warned, “there is an attitude or belief among some people today [that] it is less significant to be an American. When we quit being leaders, when we quit accepting the philosophies [that] the individual can take care of himself, win a place in the world, when we start to have the social welfare state or state socialism…that is when we will begin to lose our leadership.

In a similar vein, pro-business groups at this time sought to curb labor militancy and roll back much of the New Deal in a bid to restore the freedoms of the marketplace, but labor unions, cultural elites, and government officials also touted their versions of America and sought to shape the tenor of domestic politics and the contours of American foreign relations. Historians such as Wendy Wall, Kim Phillips-Fein, Laura Belmonte, and John Fousek have shown that amid this intense competition, a post-war “consensus” emerged, based on support for “free enterprise,” anti-communism, and belief in America’s status as “leader of the free world.”


363 Speech of James Cooke.

364 John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Wall; Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American*
While these authors have performed admirable work in analyzing the content and cultural products of the American “consensus,” we know little about how young Americans adopted—and adapted—these messages as their own. Without understanding how the young interpreted the call to “sell America,” it is difficult to explain the longevity of consensus politics. Without this understanding, the products become little more than what Robert Griffith described as a massive “detritus…scattered about the American cultural landscape.”

Through their participation in prominent citizenship programs like Boys’/Girls’ State and Youth and Government, and lesser known project like the Society for Ethical Culture’s Encampment for Citizenship, youth leaders helped propagate the consensus order. Like the rest of their generation, these students had been immersed in a sea of propaganda—produced by advertisers, civic associations, and government agencies—all designed to promote some facet of American civilization. At these events youth elite were recruited to fashion those messages. Thanks to the publicity provided by sponsors, media, and the state, the model legislation produced by youth assemblies and the statements of particular youth leaders were being broadcast to regional, national, and even international audiences. Youth leaders were charged with devising strategies to suppress domestic communists, quell labor conflicts, and manage juvenile delinquency. Others missions reflected the new international agenda of the United States. Students argued the merits of various foreign policies, all the while affirming U.S. claims to global leadership. Furthermore, the programs helped to recruit young adepts to serve the


nation abroad in a host of professional capacities: as diplomats and humanitarian aid workers, policy makers, and soldiers. These discussions took on additional importance after the Korean War as policy makers deployed select cadres of American youth to the Third World to perform counterinsurgency and humanitarian missions.

_Uncertainty in the Post-War Era_

Victory in World War II signaled the end of brutal warfare but heralded an uncertain future. As millions of Americans looked forward to the return of their loved ones from foreign battlefields and bases, the more astute recognized that the economic and social conflicts from the 1930s might also return. Would peace bring the resumption of high unemployment, uneven growth rates, and endemic labor strife? The strike wave of 1945-46, the greatest in the country’s history, seemed to forecast an era of renewed class conflict.\(^367\) Militant labor organizers fought for control of the shop floor and to gain access to internal financial information of private firms.\(^368\) Equally worrisome to business leaders was the state’s increasing control over the economy, a trend which began in the New Deal, accelerated during World War II, and now appeared on the march again in President Truman’s Fair Deal. Truman’s nationalization of the steel industry during the steelworkers’ strike of 1952 alarmed critics who feared the power of an unchecked federal government. To the more pessimistic, the free enterprise system – flanked on

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\(^{368}\) Ibid., 111. See also Nelson Lichtenstein, _Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit_ (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 237.
side with onerous regulations, high individual and corporate tax rates, and militant labor on the other - seemed on the verge of total eclipse.\textsuperscript{369}

In response, a broad coalition of business leaders and trade associations launched a massive effort to re-sell capitalism to the American people. In tone, the publicity campaign resembled the propaganda of the Liberty League from the mid-1930s.\textsuperscript{370} Yet the new boosters of American capitalism, often known as “corporate liberals,” accepted some government intervention into the economy as beneficial, and even acquiesced to limited forms of employee collective bargaining.\textsuperscript{371} Many of these corporate liberals represented mid-size and large firms that profited handsomely from government contracts during the war.\textsuperscript{372} Their ideological viewpoint found expression through the creation of groups like the Advertising Council The Ad Council’s public service announcements conflated capitalism with democracy, and pushed an ideology that overweening state control of the economy would inevitably lead to political tyranny. They also glossed over capitalism’s faults and the glaring inequalities the system produced. To bolster civic faith in the heritage of the Republic, public relations officials organized the creation of a “Freedom Train,” a locomotive reliquary containing copies of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights that was viewed by millions of school-age children.\textsuperscript{373} The

\textsuperscript{369} Phillips-Fein, 33.


\textsuperscript{371} Griffith, 394; Wall, 190-191.

\textsuperscript{372} George Lipsitz cites the statistic that among the 18,000 firms that shared $175 billion in U.S. government contracts from 1940-44, two thirds (117 billion) went to just 100 companies. He argues that these firms hoped to perpetuate the advantageous relationships between labor, government, and corporations into the postwar era. See Lipsitz, 57-59.

\textsuperscript{373} Wall, 201-203.
firms behind these campaigns paid handsomely for this “economic education,” spending an estimated $100 million dollars annually in the early 1950s.\footnote{Griffith, 389.}

To the right of corporate liberals, conservatives also saw American youth as a critical audience to reach and convert. In 1945, General Motors distilled the arguments of Friedrich A. Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* – already condensed for *Reader’s Digest* - into a booklet with eighteen illustrated panels, depicting how state economic planning would inexorably lead to dictatorship.\footnote{Published first in *Look* magazine in 1945, the General Motors booklet was published as part of the corporation’s “Thought Starter Series.” The 1945 *Reader’s Digest* condensed version of *The Road to Serfdom* and the booklet’s contents may be also be found in Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, with the Intellectuals and Socialism (London: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 2001), 71-89.} Another presentation aimed explicitly at children was the animated film, *Make Mine Freedom*, commissioned by the conservative Christian Harding College and produced by animators William Hannah and Joseph Barbera. In the nine-minute cartoon, a snake oil salesman, personifying statist ideology, cons a farmer, industrialist, and an industrial worker into signing away their constitutional freedoms for bottles of “Ism.” The hapless customers are saved from a future as concentration camp inmates when another character, “John Q. Public,” is roused from his nap on a park bench. “Public” then speaks eloquently on the virtues of constitutional liberties and convinces the other three to drive the devious huckster out of town. The film’s creators presented statism as the common enemy of all Americans, although the film took no position on the question of who would resolve conflicts between these classes.\footnote{*Make Mine Freedom*, animated by William Hannah and Joseph Barbera, 9 min., Sutherland Productions, 1948, internet. \url{http://www.archive.org/details/MakeMine1948} Accessed 21 March 2012.}

However, these attempts at “democratic indoctrination” were temporary projects that treated young people as passive consumers of ideology. A more permanent approach was to
foster youth leaders who could spout the same ideology and sway their peers to accept that message. In 1943, the YMCA’s Youth and Government board of directors, boasting prominent corporate liberals such as George Gallup, Nelson Rockefeller, Warren Burger, and Herbert Lehman, proposed using Clement Duran’s citizenship program for this purpose. In the Board’s analysis, American youth had come of age during a period of extended and abnormal government activity. Left uncorrected, young people might support government policies that would further undermine American capitalism and ultimately representative government. The Y+G would attend to the political and economic training of a youth elite, who then would transmit a corrected interpretation of government activity to their peers.377

Through the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Y’s efforts bore fruit. In 1952 Michigan Boy Governor Thomas Ray brought a state convention of YMCA delegates to its feet with his stirring tribute to America’s heritage of “freedom to work.” He warned that this ethos was at risk from citizens searching for “artificial securities.” The strength of the post war economy flowed from moral lessons passed down from the Pilgrims, who interpreted the Biblical admonition that “as a man shall sow, so shall he reap” as a repudiation of socialism. As with other warnings against socialism from this era, Ray’s speech did not condemn labor unions by name or single out welfare programs for repeal. To do so would might have violated the terms of consensus politics and alienated many of his sponsors. Instead, he left it to the listeners to identify which parts of the New Deal order were hostile to basic American freedoms. Ray delivered his

theological summation of economic issues to rapturous applause and the state directors recommended that the National Committee reprint his speech in a brochure.378

Not all youth citizenship programs pushed the corporate liberal agenda as strongly as the YMCA. Reflecting a corporatist view of industrial relations, the Society for Ethical Culture’s Encampment for Citizenship (EFC) offered a Labor Workshop whose purpose was to affirm the federal government’s role in resolving labor disputes. A government mediator was invited to coach the campers for a dramatic role-playing exercise based upon actual labor cases. The counselors attempted to maintain fairness by assigning roles opposite to the social background of the campers, with middle class students given the role of union leaders while working class youth acted out the positions of corporate leaders. Three campers judged the case and compared their findings to those of government mediators.379 While the youth verdicts were sometimes at odds to those of the government, the process upheld the state’s claim to be neutral arbiter and its power resolve conflicts. The campers also debated the merits of open and closed shops and the 1947 Taft-Hartley labor legislation. During periods when labor conflicts coincided with the EFC term, as during the 1959 steel strike, or a 1962 New York City hospital workers’ action, members of the Labor Workshop took responsibility for educating their peers as to the issues at stake.380

378 Correspondence, Joel E, Nystrom to E.E. Barnett, Jay A. Urice, J.E. Sproul, and George Corwin, February 20, 1952, Collection US.Y.30, Box Y-66-108, Folder F, YMCA Archives. The recipients were members of the YMCA National Committee.


380 The New York City action involved the mainly Puerto Rican and African-American non-professional workers at area voluntary hospitals. It was led by Leon J. Davis, president of Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Workers Union, AFL-CIO. Davis was briefly imprisoned for refusing to honor a court order to end the strike. See “Long Island…Inside Out,” _New Pittsburgh Courier_, 4 August 1962, 5. For an account of 1199’s efforts to win recognition for hospital and pharmacy workers, see Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, _Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: A History of Hospital Workers’ Union, Local 1199_ (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), particularly pages 103-111.
One criticism leveled against the labor education curriculum from within the program was that campers were potentially biased towards corporate managers and government regulators. This complaint has some merit. EFC founder Algernon Black acknowledged that most campers hailed from middle class backgrounds, but he asserted that each Encampment held enough working class children for ideological balance. He also pointed to the seriousness with which the campers approached their role-play exercises. However, the campers tended to see labor conditions under ideal conditions. When the Labor Workshop observed conditions at nearby factories, their chaperones took them to tour model workplaces with bright, air conditioned environments. In another case, when a member of the kitchen staff was injured on the job, the Workshop members informed and provided the injured worker and campers with the results of their investigation of state worker compensation provisions. One wonders what lessons the junior regulators would have learned from touring a New York City sweatshop or if the EFC had simply fired the injured worker. These were elements of a labor education that assumed class conflict was a disorder of democratic politics, which would ideally find resolution with neutral government referees.381

These programs sought to promote the ideology that government should resolve class conflict and promote human wellbeing. However, a few dissident students rebelled against these forms of state intervention, and their protests roiled the otherwise placid waters of the model assemblies. Delegates to Boys’ Nation and the YMCA Youth Governor’s Conference gave robust support to the Taft-Hartley labor law.382 In 1961, New York YMCA Associate Secretary

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381Black, 274-277.

382 1948 Boys’ Nation, 1952 National Y+G Conferences.
Howard Shinn was forced to defend the program against charges that it was a “John Birch effort among the young” or affiliated with the Young Americans for Freedom. The controversy began when a boy legislator, Charles Stinger, refused to allow a representative of the state’s welfare bureau to distribute a document to the Y+G Welfare Committee describing the functions of her office. The committee then rammed through a bill authored by Stinger that drastically cut eligibility to state welfare benefits. The resource advisor decried the “steam-roller” approach to her supervisor and the “destructive” impact of the legislation. This complaint prompted Raymond Houston, State Commissioner of Social Welfare, to question the program’s neutrality in an editorial to the New York World Telegram. While admitting that he was exasperated by Stinger’s tactics, Shinn reminded Houston in a letter that the teen legislators were operating on their own recognizance. The purpose of Youth and Government was to create a forum in which youth leaders would develop their civic leadership skills, even at the risk of occasionally sanctioning rude behavior or smoothing out ruffled feathers.

Despite drawing complaints from adult advisers, these citizenship forums offered conservative and libertarian youth a platform to express their ideological positions without fear of lasting censure or sanction. The model governments constructed by the Legion and the YMCA offered idealized versions of the public sphere in which advantages of class and social capital were ironed out or suppressed. Under these conditions, the mock governments often functioned as meritocracies, free from nepotism or cronyism. In such a radically simplified

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383 Houston’s rhetorical tarring of the Youth and Government with right wing groups like the Birchers or the Young Americans for Freedom illustrate how American liberals attempted to portray conservative activists as beyond the pale of consensus politics. See Lisa McGirr, Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 129.

384 Correspondence, Ray Houston to Howard Shinn, February 1961, Box y-65-112, Folder B, YMCA State Committee Records, YMCA Archives. Stinger’s bill would have given the Governor the power to appoint the State Welfare Commissioner, and cut benefits for unwed mothers and able-bodied men who quit working “for no reason.”
political environment, traditional nostrums about individual merit seemed valid and self-evident. Students who were fervent believers in this credo often enjoyed profound advantages over their peers. At the famous 1963 Boys’ Nation convention, Bill Clinton and the other senators found them ideologically outmatched by Richard Stratton of Leland, Illinois. Stratton found ideological clarity and political purpose in the hard-line conservative vision of Barry Goldwater, and his speeches were peppered with aphorisms from the Arizona Senator’s book, *A Nation of Sheep*. Although Stratton’s mono-biblic worldview exasperated his peers, they voted him President, placing him at the apex of an extremely steep pyramid and lending his political views further credence.  

385 After graduation, Stratton went on to study law at Harvard University and became a practicing attorney in Northern California. Participation in programs like Boys’ State or Nation could be a portal into other youth conservative movements such as the Young Americans for Freedom. For more than a few youth conservatives, the Right offered teenagers a way to conceptualize and resist the suffocating presence of authority, one that bore less risk than espousing Marxism.  

**Youth Anticommunism**

The American Legion paid less direct attention to economic policy in its citizenship programs. Instead, the Legion and its political allies maintained orthodoxy in youth politics through its near-obsessive hunt of alleged “subversives.” The definition of subversive educational practices applied by the American Legion and its political allies was exceptionally

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385 David Maranis, *First in his Class: The Biography of Bill Clinton* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 17-19. See also “Rally Backing Vietnam Policy Pushed despite Peace Moves,” *Washington Post* 2 January 1966, B19, which describes how Boys’ Nation President Ron McCoy was invited to speak at a pro-war rally organized by the YAF.

broad, and the red hunters’ aimed to reverse a generation of pedagogical reform. In the minds of some activists, American education fell from an edenic state sometime in the early 1930s when a group of faculty from Teacher’s College at Columbia University had toured the Soviet education system. The tactics used to achieve this revanchism belong to the category of legal coercion or “hard sell.” The Legion pressured state legislatures to mandate loyalty oaths for school personnel. As in its 1930s battles with “progressive” educators, the Legion’s red hunters sought to identify teachers and textbooks that did not pass patriotic muster, singling out instructors who dared to explore the class background of the Constitution’s framers, or criticized the economic policies of Alexander Hamilton. Having located “subversives” in the classroom, the Legion referred the hapless teachers for further investigation by a host of local, state, and national anticommunist inquiry boards, including the House Un-American Commission. Even scant evidence of “disloyalty” or “un-American” beliefs could lead to dismissal from employment or other legal sanctions.

Not satisfied with its ability to purge “subversives” from public life and education, some Boys’ State programmers sought to train the next generation of red hunters. An outstanding example comes from the 1950 Michigan Boys’ State. Michigan State University (MSU) had hosted Wolverine Boys’ State for thirteen years without incident, until an editorial blasting the program for promoting “bald-faced fascism” and “militaristic ideas” appeared in the pages of the


388 The Daughters of the American Revolution offered this helpful suggestion to parents concerned about that their children were being indoctrinated by communists or fellow-travelers. “If your child comes home from school questioning the success of the American Way and debunking the founders of our glorious history, you may be SURE he has the WRONG TEACHER, TEXTBOOK OR BOTH. See editorial, Daughters of American Revolution Magazine (September 1951), 691.

389 Selakovich, 332.
student newspaper, the *State News*. The author of the inflammatory piece was a graduating senior named McKee whom the American Legion had contracted as an advisor to the Boys’ State daily newspaper. While McKee applauded the curriculum’s format as high-minded, he was uncomfortable with its martial trappings, including marching and reveille. But his discomfort turned into outrage, when he saw that the Legion, in concert with advisors from the Michigan Bar Association, staged a mock perjury trial for a suspected “communist.” McKee’s objection reflected the argument that the perjury charge had been perverted into a political weapon in the hands of anticommmunist prosecutors, which had been used to destroy the career of Alger Hiss in 1949. Others questioned whether it was fair to judge a person in one decade for activities that existed within the pale of American politics in another.

These criticisms stoked controversy when applied to the Legion’s youth citizenship program. McKee argued that the Legion was to blame for permitting the process to degenerate into a show trial, in which the spectators booed whenever the word “communist” was mentioned, and hissed when the defendant took the stand. The trial itself ended in a hung jury because the panel could not decide which side had argued most effectively. In a revealing turn of phrase, McKee grouped these offenses as part of the Legion’s attempt to pass out its “American bill of goods.” When news of McKee’s comments reached the delegates to the Legion’s State Convention, they fired back a resolution that insisted that the editorial “follows the familiar Russian communistic pattern and form” and demanded that the MSU administration and the


391 For a discussion of liberal discomfiture with the misuse of perjury trials to identify Americans who had links to the Communist Party, see Susan Jacoby, *Alger Hiss and the Battle for History* (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2009), 10-11, 31.
Governor’s office to launch investigations into the incident. Eager to placate the powerful veteran’s lobby, the MSU Board of Publications that supervised the *State News* decided to suspend the paper for the summer, fire the student editor, and appoint a new editorial board and faculty advisor. The editorial staff rallied support for the embattled paper among faculty, and campus newspapers in Ann Arbor and Berkeley registered their concern, though these measures failed to prevent a clampdown.³⁹²

The fate of the MSU student paper demonstrated the Legion’s hyper-sensitivity to attacks on its prize youth civics project. The closure of a college newspaper was exceptional and sparked concern from other university journalists, but the MSU administration took the position that students did not enjoy unlimited freedom of expression. It did not help McKee’s cause that the United States was at the precipice of a long and bloody conflict, as President Truman had recently deployed the American Navy to the waters around the Korean peninsula. In the words of one MSU official looking back on the incident, the “circumstances” of an imminent war against “an identified Communist enemy” and the “aroused” emotions of the people of Michigan fully justified the extraordinary move.³⁹³ This rationale does not explain the aggressive exclusion of left-wing student groups like the American Youth for Democracy undertaken by Michigan university officials starting as early as 1947. The hand of administrators may have been forced by the state legislature’s anticommunist committee in that case, but the schools dispensed with hoary notions of academic freedom with unseemly haste. It was darkly ironic that MSU

³⁹² Correspondence between Louis Bell, Editor of *Daily Californian*, and James Denison, Administrative Assistant for Public Relations, July 13, 1950, Hannah Papers.

³⁹³ This explanation was offered in January 1970 by James H. Denison, Consultant to MSU President Hannah, in an addendum to the documents related to the State News Suspension. As a coda to the incident, Denison reported with apparent satisfaction that the State News editor later went on to serve in the Army officer corps. On a later visit to his alma mater, he sought out Denison and apologized for his “attitudes and actions.”
repressed criticism of a citizenship program that ostensibly about teaching American values such as freedom of speech.\textsuperscript{394}

Another pillar in the American Legion’s plans for immunizing American youth from communist “contagion” was its advocacy for passage of Universal Military Training (UMT). Besides providing a reservoir of manpower for future military operations, the Legion argued that the barracks would exercise a powerful deterrent to the growth of subversive ideologies. However, the scope of UMT was somewhat at odds with the character of Boys’ State, which furnished little meaningful pre-induction training. The UMT was directed at millions of draft-age young men, far wider than the youth elite cultivated by Boys’ State. Both programs promoted military service as a condition of citizenship and civic leadership. Military officers and representatives of service academies were given liberal access to the Boys’ State delegates to recruit the next generation of officer candidates.\textsuperscript{395}

Legion officials pressured Boys’ State legislatures to support a bevy of antiradical measures, including teacher loyalty oaths, bans on the Communist Party, and UMT. From 1948-50 nearly half the youth legislatures passed model legislation or policy recommendations in favor of these measures.\textsuperscript{396} Even allowing for a degree of self-selection (Legionnaires were more likely to nominate students sympathetic to military service than not) and the tendency of delegates to curry favor with their sponsors by backing their political agenda, this percentage suggests overt influence. The pressure that Legion counselors placed on individual legislators did

\textsuperscript{394} For information about Michigan State University’s early purges of communists, see Ellen Schrecker, \textit{No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities} (New York: Oxford University, 1986), 86.


\textsuperscript{396} Figures derived from summaries of Boys’ State Surveys for 1948 and 1950, respectively.
not come as a *diktat* or ultimatum. Instead, we have ample evidence that Boys’ State counselors employed a “substitution strategy.” For example, when delegates recommended desegregating Louisiana public schools in 1955, counselors suggested that the boys substitute an alternative measure, compulsory ROTC training in high school. Passage of a desegregation bill would have outraged most white Legionnaires and state officials in Louisiana, and conceivably jeopardized the future of Pelican Boys’ State. ROTC had little connection to educational equality, but the call may have reflected the counselors’ belief that a dose of military discipline would prevent such insubordination in the future.\(^{397}\)

YMCA Youth and Government assemblies addressed concerns that American youth were unprepared to resist the blandishments of communist agents, but these bodies relied more often upon persuasive or “soft-sell” tactics.\(^{398}\) The 1949 YMCA National Conference of Boy Governors passed a resolution calling for American public high schools to establish comparative courses that would outline how liberal democratic, fascist, and state socialist governments operated. To insure that the students in these classes did not become captive audiences for radical ideologues, instructors would undergo rigorous certification and training by the state. The attraction of such antiradical measures was long-lived. In 1961, the Y+G program of Virginia passed an almost identical bill. By establishing the new program’s anticommmunist credentials

\(^{397}\) This substitution strategy as a way to suppress or divert controversial legislation emerges clearly from the accounts of Boys’ State alumni. See Hugh Murray, “Race and Social Science,” *Telos* 105 (Fall 1995): 173-174; and Leaver, William. Telephone Interview. 26 November 2006.

\(^{398}\) Despite its high profile campaigns to pressure American youth adopt 100% Americanism, the American Legion entertained suggestions that less heavy-handed efforts would yield similar results. In a May 1957 editorial carried in the *American Legion Magazine*, the editors expressed interest in adding a comparative government class to the regular high school curriculum.
early on, the proposal may have helped deflect potential criticism that the interracial program was also politically radical.\textsuperscript{399}

Under the rubric of “ideological clarification,” the directors of the Encampment for Citizenship maintained a comprehensive anti-totalitarian curriculum. During the run-up to the American entry into World War II, nearly all civic educators asserted the importance of preventing young people from succumbing to totalitarian ideologies of the extreme right and left. After 1945, the Legion and the YMCA occasionally paid lip service to the danger posed by right wing authoritarians, but the EFC treated both as continuing dangers to American democracy. Ideological clarification entailed giving campers the tools to recognize and evaluate the tools used by propagandists. Algernon Black administered his “democracy test” at several Encampments, and reported with pride that the campers were suitably skeptical of the provocateur’s claims. In addition, campers watched and discussed films such as Leni Riefenstahl’s \textit{Triumph of the Will} and William Wellman’s \textit{The Ox Bow Incident} to understand how ostensibly rational and “free” societies tried to crush individual dissent. The Encampment also offered a Civil Liberties workshop taught by a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union. During Senator Joseph McCarthy’s 1954 investigation of alleged communists in the armed forces, the EFC civil liberties workgroup published their analysis of the threat that the hearings posed to American democracy. Well pleased with the workgroup’s conclusions, the Society for Ethical Culture’s Fieldston School (host to the New York EFC) reproduced and disseminated the document for the edification of its members and supporters.\textsuperscript{400}

\textsuperscript{399} Virginia Y+G Handbook, Box 150, Youth and Government, 1951-1972, YMCA Archives.

\textsuperscript{400} Black, 191, 257-260.
By adopting non-coercive models of ideological training, the EFC and the liberal wing of the YMCA Y+G belonged to what might be called a developmental therapy school of anti-authoritarianism. A growing number of psychological and statistical surveys of youth suggested that authoritarian political views were common among adolescents. The cause of this apparent lack of commitment to radicalism was not contagion from radical ideologues or subversives in the classroom. Rather, ignorance of American political traditions and immaturity lay at the root. In 1951, a survey of American teenagers conducted by researchers at Purdue University showed that younger adolescents showed little respect for the rights of the accused and opposed restraints on the ability of police to coerce confessions. Fortunately, the same data indicated that as these young people were politically socialized and matured as individuals, their “tolerance” of civil liberties increased. The Purdue study also showed support for civil liberties was weaker among students polled in regions of the country with high levels of social inequality and stratification like the South. Studies of Y+G and EFC students confirmed that participation tended to make young people more tolerant of political dissent and opposing ideas. Such studies lent support to the more liberal model of civic education and highlighted the positive effect that citizenship education could play in the development process.401

Juvenile Delinquency

Beyond dealing with the perceived threat of communist infiltration or authoritarian personalities, citizenship programs offered a platform for youth leaders to propose remedies to

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other social threats. Chief among these was the juvenile delinquency, a retread of earlier fears of civic degeneracy from the mid-1930s. James Gilbert described the episodic concerns over delinquency, demonstrating that fears of disorderly youth lay close to the surface of public’s consciousness. During World War II, African-American and Latino youths frightened white leaders as they acted out scripts of racial and civic rebellion by donning the “zoot suit.” Moral censors fretted over the laxity of “victory girls” who indulged in intimate congress with servicemen. Also troubling were “latchkey kids” or “eight hour orphans,” children left unsupervised while their parents contributed to the war effort. The YMCA’s National Council took note of wartime delinquency as a factor in its decision to expand the Y+G program.

These wartime anxieties over delinquency were prologue to the heated debate in the mid-1950s on the question of whether the United States was creating a “shook up” generation prone to delinquency and disorder. On one side stood psychologists such as Benjamin Fine, author of 1,000,000 Delinquents, and Frederic Wertham, who diagnosed mayhem in the pages of comic books. They were allied with ambitious politicians like Senator Estes Kefauver who hoped to ride popular outrage over comics and delinquents straight into the White House. Kefauver was a leading supporter of youth citizenship training courses, and graduates of Y+G and EFC served on his staff. On the other side stood youth leaders sought to defend the reputation of American


405 Gilbert, 143-146.
adolescents as law-abiding while offering strict regulations of individual acts of social disorder. Some criticized the way that the disruptive behavior of a small number of adolescents dominated media accounts of youth, drawing attention away from youth’s accomplishments. In 1959 Washington State’s YMCA Youth Governor Ray Cairncross lamented that news of a boy achieving the rank of Eagle Scout or a girl winning a scholastic honor was buried deep in the newspaper, if covered at all. By contrast, if a sixteen year old was arrested for burglary, the incident broke into the front page.406

As if to compensate for the damage that a disorderly minority would cause to their generation’s reputation, youth legislatures recommended, and frequently ratified, stern punishments against those who abetted delinquency. The California Y+G assembly of 1952 set the bar for punitive legislation, establishing curfews during early morning hours of the weekend. The legislature also passed bills that mandated for five years imprisonment for those found guilty of narcotics sales, and twelve years for repeat offenders. Pushers who used minors to transport illegal drugs could net ten, twenty year sentences and life imprisonment for third time offenders. The Assembly also proposed raising the number of the state’s narcotics inspectors from twenty-four to three hundred.407

The enthusiasm for disciplining disorderly teenagers bears multiple interpretations. Comparing the relatively conservative attitudes of the California Y+G assembly for 1964 and 1965 to the EFC surveys of Hyman, Professor V.M. Robertson of George Washington University concluded that the discrepancy lay mainly in the age difference of participants in the two

406 Speech of Ray Cairncross, Youth Governor’s Address at the Opening Joint Session of the Washington Youth Legislature, April 23, 1959, Washington File, Y+G, YMCA Archives.

407 Mary Ann Callan, “Youth Handles Government Reins at California Model Legislature,” Los Angeles Times 28 February 1952, Part III.
programs.\textsuperscript{408} The law and order politics of these teenagers may have forecast the ascendance of more punitive social response directed against drug users and urban rebels.\textsuperscript{409} Without discounting the validity of either interpretation, there is another explanation for these attitudes. Many of the legislatures that proposed sweeping increases to youth criminal penalties proposed lowering the voting age from 21 to 18. Furthermore, the youth assemblies were able to cajole or wrest statements of support to a lower voting age from guest politicians from both parties by demonstrating their sober-minded and serious dedication to social concerns. Youth leaders may have voted for both sets of bills to demonstrate their readiness to assume civic authority. The bills distanced the authors from the unruly sectors of their generation and aligned them with adult authority. The proponents may have been attesting to their qualifications for full citizenship. Was it a show of good faith by the salesmen?

\textit{U.S. as Global Policeman}

Calls for youth to use “salesmanship” to “sell America” echoed beyond U.S. national borders. The attack on Pearl Harbor ended the ideological stalemate over the limits to American foreign relations that bitterly had divided the country’s youth of the late 1930s. Simultaneously, the U.S. entry into World War II created new debates about how to reshape the world in the American image. Even before the tides of battle shifted decisively in favor of the Allies, planners began to draft the architecture of the post war world, devising the legal, economic, and security


foundations of what they hoped would be a more stable and prosperous future. Civic associations also carried out planning sessions, developing schemes that relied heavily upon deployment of American youth to foreign fields. They envisioned how citizenship programs would serve the nation’s global interests in the post war era through the production of youth cadres who could serve as diplomats, humanitarian workers, policy makers and soldiers. In essence, programmers were selling youth on the idea that their civic duties included maintenance of American commitments abroad, and selling the country on their brand of “youth leader” as a perfect tool to achieving foreign policy goals.

In 1942, the Legion’s national Boys’ State committee unveiled its postwar policy recommendations that placed the youth program at the center of a revamped foreign service. The committee’s plan first called for the creation of a diplomatic academy, akin to West Point or Annapolis. This idea had been floated at a few National Legion Conventions, but the novelty was that the various Boys’ States [and possibly Girls’ States] would serve as feeders to the new school. The ostensible goal of this proposal was to professionalize the Foreign Service, reducing political cronyism in the selection of American diplomats. However, this plan would also seed the Service with youth whose political views had been approved by the Legion, giving the veteran’s organization an unprecedented influence over the United States diplomacy. Ten years earlier, the Legion had expressed disapproval with President Roosevelt’s decision to normalize relations with the Soviet Union, and until Pearl Harbor it ranked the USSR as the primary threat

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411 Ibid., 189-190.
to U.S. national security.\footnote{Boys’ State Handbook for 1942, American Legion Pamphlet File, American Legion Library.} If Boys’ State graduates found a significant presence in the Foreign Service, as well as in the espionage and military corps, as the committee proposed, the Legion would have the power to shape American cooperation with communist countries.\footnote{William Pencak, \textit{For God and Country: A History of the American Legion, 1919-1941} (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989).}

The organizers of the YMCA’s Youth and Government and the Encampment for Citizenship also developed plans during the war that would employ their graduates as agents of a more enlightened and cooperative U.S. foreign policy. In their 1943 outline for a national citizenship program, the program directors diagnosed what they saw as a serious flaw in American political culture. During 1917 and 1939 policy makers were paralyzed, unable to fashion a coherent response to the international crises until too late. There were deep roots this tendency towards policy drift, requiring a generational commitment by the YMCA to produce a cadre of youth leaders capable of exercising mastery of events. The directors hoped that regular infusion of knowledgeable and dedicated civic leaders would lead to more successful management of the problems in the future years 1945 and 1965.\footnote{National Youth and Government Proposal.}

Before these agencies could implement their ambitious plans for post-war foreign relations, they needed to persuade students that citizenship now entailed global responsibilities, and that these burdens were a consequence of national greatness. Much of this ideological education had already been performed prior to the arrival of young people at the training courses. Youth could learn about various roles of the United States as steward of the international economy or as the global “cop on the beat” from myriad sources –commercial advertisements for oil, air travel, or Coca-Cola; inside school textbooks; and sermons delivered from the pulpit each
By the time students arrived for advanced ideological training, they were generally well primed. Youthful articulations American global leadership often laid bare the national hubris couched in the adult appeals. One delegate to the 1947 Maryland’s Boys’ State warned a reporter covering the convention that Americans should be wary to extending aid to the stricken of foreign lands, lest the United States fall into a position of having to “spoon feed” them permanently.416

Students who could articulate their vision of U.S. global leadership were often richly rewarded. Michigan Boy Governor Thomas Ray won praise for his summary of foreign policy challenges facing the US, offering a rather sophisticated analysis of world affairs since the collapse of the British Empire. He argued that the chief obstacle to American plans for a secular millennium of peace and prosperity was a “growing nationalistic spirit” around the world. This spirit had dissolved the empire, and its demise left a power vacuum that should only be filled by the United States. Only an American victory in a global contest for supremacy would assure “peace on earth.” Making an apparent allusion to the Korean conflict then raging, he claimed that this possibility justified “any effort which might be required.” The boy governor echoed earlier arguments about how the Youth and Government trained youth zealots of the same caliber as produced in Nazi-era Germany and the Soviet Union. Ray’s speech thrilled the delegation, and drew the attention of state leaders who suggested that he was a “top candidate for future opportunities, including the national Youth and Government program.”417


416 “‘Boys’ State’ Divides on Labor Law Subject Washington Post (1 July 1947), B2.

Programmers in the larger training courses usually did not challenge this exceptionalism or attempt to dissuade the apprentices that their destiny was to inherit the mantle of global leadership. In fact, the programs frequently aggravated these pretentions. Meetings between President Truman and Boys’ and Girls’ Nation delegates were captured on film and disseminated on motion picture newsreels. In the mid-1960s, the USIA featured recordings of Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s speech before these delegations as part of its Voice of America broadcasts. Furthermore, the Legion, YMCA, and the EFC all invited student representatives from abroad to witness the program’s operations. The Legion and the YMCA confined their role to spectators, with the intention that they would implement similar citizenship training back homes. However, the EFC granted these students equal status to the American delegates, and invited young men and women from Germany, France, Japan, Ghana, and Guatemala. The choice of countries reflected different American foreign policy agendas, including post-war rebuilding and reconciliation of the industrial core states to controlling the development of the resource-rich periphery. The presence of these campers helped sell American life to outsiders, giving them a “feel” of what the United States had to offer. EFC also granted international students space to express admiration and criticism of the United States. One American participant remarked that it was a “surprise and a humbling experience to hear…how much other countries look up to us and admire America – and how critical they are of our foreign policy.”

418 The broadcast of Rusk’s address before the youth delegation met the standards of Voice of America (VOA) broadcast. The speech was not just evidence of “straight news,” which was the agency’s original mission. These programs also served a propagandistic function, furnishing listeners with information on the United States’ educational processes and domestic political institutions, as well as attesting to the nations “respectability and reliability.” VOA broadcasts were heard by an estimated seven to ten million listeners living in Eastern and Central Europe and the USSR. See Belmonte, 87.

419 Black, 146-150.
Educating international students about American democracy was a secondary mission of these programs. Overall, the purpose of including international relations in the citizenship curriculum was essentially to create a more sensitive American proconsul. In particular, the YMCA hoped that American intervention abroad would be driven by a humanitarian strategy rather than martial aims. Articulating the need for an interventionist and humanitarian U.S. foreign policy, program planners forged alliances with likeminded liberals. At the 1952 Y+G National Convention, Minnesota Senator Hubert H. Humphrey sold his vision of American youth’s duty to remake the world for good.

You are living to see America the Good Samaritan. You are living to see America have the most noble and wonderful opportunity that was ever given to a people, and sometimes, in my superstition, I think that we were destined for it. The United States of America was the only nation that came out of World War II without being bombed. We are the only nation that came out of World War II stronger politically, economically, financially; the only nation in the world where families were still intact, where industry was still productive, where agriculture could still produce more food for the people than was needed.

Humphrey also saw divine judgment on interwar American foreign policy.

I think that God Almighty literally looked down upon the American people and said, “This is your opportunity; you failed once in 1920. The American people (or at least the US Senate) walked out of the League of Nations; we turned our back on world responsibility, but we were given a second chance. We were given a chance not to write a declaration of independence, but a declaration of interdependence, and we are doing something about that declaration of interdependence.”

A rising star in the liberal firmament, Humphrey offered a vision of American intervention that fit well within the Cold War consensus while differing on strategy. One of “lessons” that policy makers derived from recent history was the necessity of liberal democracies to protect smaller states. In this view, the United States through inaction had failed to deter

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aggression in Europe and Northwest Asia in the 1930s, when the costs of confronting Germany and Japan may have been far less. This was the lesson that underwrote the Truman Administration’s support of anticommunist governments in Greece and Turkey, and informed the decision to repel the “invasion” of South Korea by the communist North. Humphrey’s declaration of interdependence also included points that could be taken as criticism of the administration’s overreliance on military force to quell communism. “I do not think that bullets will stop communism. They may stop some communists… but [they] are not enough.” In place of armaments, Humphrey called on Americans to pursue a more lasting form of anticommunism. Instead, he stated that the country should cultivate new breeds of “missionary,” to serve political, economic, spiritual, and educational fields. These sons and daughters would go to the Far East and “irrigate the land with the water that is there, [rather] than with their own blood.” This was one of the first iterations of a proposal that Humphrey would introduce into the Senate eight years later – a measure that the Senator dubbed the “Peace Corps.”

The Peace Corps was a mission particularly well suited for graduates of programs like Youth and Government and the Encampment for Citizenship. Both programs fed graduates into the Corps, and a survey of Y+G participants in California in 1964 showed that forty percent were interested in the program. The EFC curriculum offered many of the challenges that Corps members would face in the field. Students in the EFC were chosen from potential candidates who demonstrated high levels of altruism and low levels of ethnocentrism. For a six week period, they endured relative hardship and material deprivation to achieve a greater appreciation of democracy. They lived cheek by jowl with young people from across the country, and with a

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number of campers from Europe and the developing world. As a bonus, the EFC program “immunized” students from propaganda tactics that might be employed by native communists abroad. It also exposed them to some of the failings of the United States, at home and abroad.

Youth and Government planners also structured the national program to encourage study of international problems that would yield ideas for international peace and cooperation, but youth delegates occasionally frustrated those ambitions. The Foreign Policy working group at the 1952 National Y+G Assembly used the venue to issue bellicose recommendations, signaling its approval of American aerial bombardment of Yalu River dams, which provided flood control and irrigation in North Korea. The group also believed the “bombing of the Manchurian staging area necessary to achieve total victory” and that the danger of expanding the war into Northwest China should be accepted as a “calculated risk.” Such recommendations did not sit well with the Y+G’s adult leadership, who denigrated such proposals as “uninformed” and “irresponsible.” In keeping with the Association’s preference for international cooperation and peacemaking, New York’s Y+G publicized the creation of a Korean “Boys’ Town,” a Youth and Government program organized by Hi-Y alumni who were serving in South Korea as part of the Army’s 5th Regimental Combat Team.422

Y+G organizers redoubled their commitment to multilateral diplomacy through the addition of a Model United Nation (MUN) starting in the early 1950s. The YMCAs of Maine and Pennsylvania established the global assembly as an alternate program. And similar to the way that Y+G had asked students to place themselves in the role of a simulated state legislature, the MUN required that Hi-Y clubs select a member-state of the UN General Assembly or

Security Council and research its recent history and current concerns. The culminating experience was usually a mock General Assembly for the various “nations” to propose resolutions and conduct debate. By 1957, several more states had added MUN as either an alternative to state government courses, or in the case of the Indiana Hi-Y, completely substituted international assembly for the model statehouse. MUN also reflected the growing interest that American high school and college students had in world affairs. Student visits to UN Headquarters in New York were an ever-popular activity for Hi-Y clubs across the Atlantic seaboard. Through these initiatives, which were copied by other organizations at the high school and collegiate levels nationwide, the YMCA sought to legitimate US participation in these international bodies and to prepare a generation that respected the work of diplomats and Foreign Service officers.423

During the 1960s, Y+G organizers gave added emphasis to foreign policy and international governance in the elite branches of its youth citizenship program. Along with the visits that national Y+G delegates paid to the three branches of the federal government, the youth governors were given a selection of foreign embassies to visit, including such strategically important states as India, Sierra Leone, the Union of South Africa, South Vietnam, and the Soviet Union. By mid-decade, the Reader’s Digest Foundation, the major sponsor of the Convention, organized a quasi-state dinner in which the Governors broke bread with the ambassadors of sixty nations, as well as a glittering assembly of prominent American leaders and journalists. The presence of so many political luminaries testified to the continuing prestige of these annual events, and quite possibly was meant to showcase the caliber of the American nation’s best and brightest youth leadership. The meetings also made a deep impression of the

423 1962 Youth and Government Program, YMCA Archives.
delegates. A post-convention survey of the 1962 Youth Governors showed that many listed Foreign Service as a vocational ambition.424

Within the Legion’s Boys’ State movement of the 1950s, there were calls for the creation of a Boys’ World government body, but these proposals foundered upon the rocks of the American Legion’s distrust of the world government. During this period, the Legion’s National Convention issued several high-profile resolutions charging that the UN was honeycombed with communist agents, especially its Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Putting aside the validity of the charge, the Legion’s mistrust reflected deep seated concerns among American conservatives that the world body sought to strip sovereignty away from the American people and place it in the hands of unaccountable bureaucrats and hostile foreign powers. It was a worldview that was resilient to evidence that the international body could be remarkably ineffective in the face of rivalry between the member states, and whose actions could be easily checked by the veto power wielded by any one of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The UN was, in short, a poor bogeyman for the Right’s day-terrors about foreign domination and subversion.

This is not to say that the Legion shunned discussion of international issues. The Legion and its women’s Auxiliary maintained strong ties with transnational associations like the Rotary International and their members cultivated person-to-person ties across national borders. Similarly, Boys’ and Girls’ State and Nation programs dedicated a substantial portion of the curriculum to discussion of foreign policy topics like development aid and security cooperation agreements such as NATO. Similar to the Y+G, Boys’ Nation delegates offered support and

424 The results were five out of thirty among those who indicated a vocational choice, from a total of thirty-six governors. Directory of Youth Governors from the 1962 National Youth and Government Conference, YMCA Archives.
advice to war planners during the Korean War. Cultivating youth leaders to serve the state through its military, diplomatic, espionage corps, Boys’ State planners showed a keen understanding that these missions would occur far beyond national borders. When Secretary of State Dean Rusk addressed an audience of delegates from Boys’ and Girls’ Nation in 1966, he argued that the United States must “make good” on its promise to defend South Vietnam lest communists think all American alliances were “just a bluff.” With the knowledge that his message would be re-broadcast to the Soviet Union by the Voice of America, Rusk was essentially pledging the lives of many in that audience to the success of the project.425

Youth imbued with a strong sense of American righteousness were prime candidates for missions in foreign lands requiring long periods away from superiors and handlers. For a decade following the end of fighting on the Korean peninsula, American military strategy shifted away from deployment of conscript armies. Some of the turn can be attributed to domestic political concerns. The unpopularity of the Korean War and conscription dragged down the popularity of the Truman administration, and helped cement Republican control of the White House for the rest of the decade.426 Under President Dwight Eisenhower’s New Look military policy, the United States relied more upon nuclear deterrence to ward off communist aggression in Europe and East Asia.427 However, ICBMs could not achieve all US foreign policy objectives, particularly missions in the decolonizing countries of the periphery. For this reason, during the Eisenhower administration, the U.S. military experimented with the creation of ranger units who


could serve in the periphery. President John F. Kennedy threw its support behind these Special Forces, particularly those in the Army’s Green Berets. These irregular units would train and lead indigenous military units belonging to non-communist governments in the developing world. Much like the Peace Corps members, the Green Berets would subsist on the same fare and endure the same living conditions of the “natives.” As historian Thomas McCormick noted, both organizations drew upon youth elites who were responding to exhortations from their leaders to remake the Third World in America’s image.

These new missions were entailed significant risk to the participants, and they could not be accomplished by ordinary American youth. Many observers feared that the failure of domestic civics education and youth character building jeopardized the capacity of service personnel to protect national security abroad. During the Korean War, Americans were horrified by the harsh interrogation techniques, including simulated drowning and beatings, used by North Korean and Chinese interrogators against prisoners of war (POWs). But far more chilling were accounts of how the captors had been able to elicit military secrets and even confessions of war crimes by means of psychological tactics that were popularly known as “brainwashing.” These accounts suggested that the Communist Chinese possessed fiendishly effective tools to warp the minds of even loyal American servicemen, fears amplified in the 1959 novel, the Manchurian Candidate.

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The truth behind the success of communist brainwashing was less fantastic than the creation of unwitting “sleeper agents.” U.S. Army psychologist Major William E. Mayer conducted an extensive study of United Nations POW’s in North Korean and Chinese prisons. Based on 200 interviews with American prisoners and review of several hundred case files, Mayer determined that about one third of the men had been turned into “progressives.” Chinese prison authorities used the term to describe a POW who had become an informant or a political sympathizer. Progressives were not ill-treated by their captors. Instead, “brainwashing” was a “well-thought-out educational” effort, combined with intensive psychological management. The Chinese employed instructors who were young and well-educated, often the product of American universities. Rather than attempting to “sell Communism,” Mayer suggested that the instructors “unsold America” by suggesting that the soldiers were fighting in unpopular war at the behest of Wall Street financiers.431

Mayer laid the blame for the low resistance to brainwashing at the feet of the American education system, which he argued had given inadequate training to these men. He concluded that POW’s who lacked confidence or understanding of the American war aims, and those with weak religious convictions, were most susceptible. Interestingly, brainwashing had almost no effect upon African-American prisoners because the guards had alienated them by segregating Black from white soldiers. Furthermore, Mayer attributed the comparatively high death rate among American prisoners compared to Turkish prisoners to a breakdown of military discipline among the former. Again, the schools were to blame because, Mayer argued, American youth did not receive enough training in character development and personal discipline. Therefore, once the Chinese removed the American officers from the camps, the unit cohesion of the enlisted

men collapsed, and the Americans failed to care for their comrades when they were injured or ill. So impressed was Mayer by the Chinese brainwashing that he predicted that if the techniques were perfected, they were render mechanical weapons obsolete, or at least needless, since the United States was engaged in a “war of ideas” with the forces of communism.

One former American interrogator of Japanese prisoners of war took issue with Mayer’s sensational portrayal of the dark arts of brainwashing. Kenneth Lamont argued that American interrogators had achieved political conversions with similar methods, in spite of the “Japanese military man’s notorious devotion to bushido and Yamatodamashii (the Spirit of the Japanese Race).” Nevertheless, Mayer’s study exploded a bombshell on American’s confidence in the public education system and its ability to impart its political values to the next generation. Some the criticisms aimed at the schools were scurrilous or politically motivated, as in the case of inflammatory “exposes” like E. Merrill Root’s 1959 Brainwashing in the Classroom. Mayer’s conclusions were picked up by more sober-minded critics, who added this data to the chorus of denunciations of Americans schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s. University of Illinois historian Arthur Bestor pointed out the education system’s inability to produce students who could exercise critical thinking or demonstrate basic mastery of civics. At the decennial White House Conference on Children and Youth of 1960, Thomas Curtain of Tufts University referred to Mayer’s study and charged that American adolescents still suffered from a basic lack of

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433 E. Merrill Root, Brainwashing in the High Schools: An Examination of Eleven High School Textbooks (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1958). As suggested by the title, Root directed his criticism towards allegedly “subversive” history and social studies text. Taking Mayer’s one-third conversion rate as his starting point, he argued that the Chinese had merely aggravated doubts that American students had about their country from their earlier indoctrination into “collectivist” thought.

knowledge and confidence in democratic values. He cited programs such as American Legion Boys’ State and ALA Girls’ State with favor while lamenting that private effort were too “sporadic” and the founder’s aims too “conflicting” to be appropriate to serve as a model of universal civics education. The programs were insufficient in size to directly inoculate millions of American service personnel; however, they were more than adequate to staff the cadres of elite units who could be counted upon to sell America – by hard and soft methods – far from home.435

Portrayed in the language of commerce, missionary work, and poker, a chief goal of youth citizenship training from 1945-1965 was to prepare leaders to “sell” America. Whether it was touting the virtues of American capitalism to prevent further destruction of the “free enterprise” system at the hands of labor militants and government regulators, or ensuring that American foreign policy interests were served in the developing world, youth leaders were selected for their persuasive abilities and groomed to serve in positions of civic authority. The ideological training provided by these training courses generally validated the terms of the post-war consensus, although there was some space (especially on the right) for delegates to voice their own dissent.

Epilogue: “The Ambiguous Patriots”

“The social climate of the United States has not favored public patriotism for some time,” a July 18, 1969 Wall Street Journal editorial reported. “Searching our memory, we conclude that no patriotic statement by a public official has impressed the public deeply since John F. Kennedy in 1961 advised Americans to “ask not what your country can do you – ask what you can do for your country.” The editors judged that the troubled national mood had made overt expressions of patriotism “useless at best and hypocritical at worst.” What remained that summer were expressions of “a hesitant, ambiguous patriotism”: motorists who bought American flag decals to paste upside down on their windshields; a “patriotic” poem written by John Updike (in London) lauding America for her “dry grass, ugly eateries, and vacant lots;” and what the Journal cited as the most intriguing – the case of African-American high school student Regenia Hicks.436

Hicks stood at the center of a battle over her conduct at the 1969 Minnesota American Legion Auxiliary’s Girls’ State. The convention began auspiciously, as the other delegates flocked to support the Minneapolis teen’s campaign for Governor. If the convention had ended shortly after the election, Hicks might have symbolized progress towards racial integration within the conservative citizenship program. In her inaugural address, she pledged to transform the harmony of their “mythical state” into a reality of peace and understanding.437 If the counselors followed program tradition, Hicks would receive an automatic promotion to Girl’s Nation. But controversy dogged her tenure. She alarmed some with her criticism of the Vietnam War and sympathy for rioters in the wake of the King assassination. Her candor won over a few


437 Regenia Hicks, unpublished speech given before Minnesota Girls State delegation, May 1969, in author’s possession.
allies, among them Martha Preus, white daughter of a Presbyterian minister from St. Paul. Yet Hicks’ detractors far outnumbered. When a group approached the Auxiliary demanding the Governor’s ouster, the counselors arranged a private conference to allow Hicks to clarify – or retract - her comments. Any chance of comity evaporated when they asked how she felt about her country. She answered that she respected and believed in her country, and was willing to work to improve it, but she did not love it. The Auxiliary’s leadership decided to pass Hicks over for promotion to Girls Nation in favor of a white delegate.438

The Auxiliary counselors believed their response was fair and measured – they resisted calls to unseat the governor while rebuking Hicks’ controversial opinions. However, when the story broke in the local press, the number of supporters and detractors multiplied. The question of whether Hicks could be patriotic and not love her country divided the Twin Cities and the state. Members of the local Black community, veterans groups, newspaper readers, as well as representatives of the state and federal government all took sides. Within a month, the affair had garnered national attention, receiving coverage in the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Journal. Clearly more was at stake here than a sightseeing tour of Washington, D.C.

The Hicks’ case and similar disputes during the late 1960s and early 1970s open a window onto a much-storied era. Of course, the familiar theme of adolescents rebelling against stodgy adult minders was present. Historians date the unraveling of the post-war consensus to the late 1960s and early 1970s, citing the Vietnam War, economic inflation, urban decay, political violence, the Watergate scandal, and the stalemated civil rights movement as factors contributing to the “fragmentation” of American society.439 Some have turned to psychological metaphors to


describe the result, asserting that the United States entered a “decade of nightmares” or suffered a collective “nervous breakdown.” Gary Gerstle argued that the era’s traumas led American liberals to repudiate civic nationalism, viewing it as a cynical mask for the “domination of weaker countries abroad” and the subjugation of racial minorities and women at home. Unable to believe in the vision of an inclusive and cohesive national community, liberals turned to multiculturalism and other forms of identity grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity.

These arguments have merit but are limited in their applicability. The anguish of policy makers and anxieties of cultural elites did not necessarily reflect the attitudes held by other segments of the population. For example, recent scholarship on the origins of the modern American conservative movement portrays a “sixties” with a completely different cast of issues, heroes, and antagonists. For a significant portion of American youth, the “sixties” did make its appearance on daily life until much later. However, these episodes showed how badly out of touch many youth citizenship programs were with the tenor of American youth culture, and the stifling limits their curricula placed upon political expression. A mock government program


limited to the study of state institutions, ignoring the role of mass demonstrations and protests, was untenable in 1969. Furthermore, these conflicts illuminate larger doubts about the viability of American civic nationalism, in the face of persistent discrimination and inequality as well as the renewed appeals to race and other socially ascribed identities.

The late 1960s marked a period of relative decline from their peak at the decade’s start, but it is worth noting that American Legion Boys’ State and Girls’ State continued to bring together tens of thousands of adolescents from different social strata and cultural backgrounds. The conventions offered opportunities for “fraternization” between bright, articulate youth leaders.

Even Regenia Hicks reported that she initially felt ecstatic to be surrounded by girls “who were at the top of their class” and active in student government. One of the few African-Americans at the Minnesota program, Hicks likened her experience to being an exchange student from a foreign country serving as an unofficial representative of that society. She recalled with a little humor that she was approached many times by rural whites who confided: “Gee, You’re the first Colored Person I’ve met.”

Amid the confusion and tumult of late 1960s youth politics, the youth leaders promoted by the Legion might have seemed to offer hope for the besieged and somewhat bewildered defenders of “100% Americanism.” The president of the 1967 Boys’ Nation, Alan Keyes, displayed mastery of this nationalist lexicon. A sixteen year old African-American from Texas, whose father was an Army sergeant, Keyes was a gifted speaker who took first prize in the Legion’s oratory contest. He embraced the deeply conservative model of patriotism espoused by the predominantly white veteran’s group. Addressing the Legion’s National Convention, Keyes asked, did American greatness come from cities, blackened by riot smoke, or from the force of bombs? No, greatness flowed from its national values, which coursed through “the blood of its

443 Author Interview with Regenia Hicks, 2007.
citizens and towers in the majesty of their courage and their faith.” He invoked this patriotism to overcome the current “economic and political considerations” and vanquish “evils which separate the nation from a glorious future.” His speech gratified his sponsors, and Keyes would later go on to complete graduate studies Harvard University. Afterwards, he served under Jeanne Kirkpatrick in the U.S. Foreign Service, at one point serving as an Ambassador to the United Nations.444

However, Keyes’ attitudes were hardly representative of the views held by Black American youth in 1967, and the Legion itself was slow to recognize the growing radicalization of American youth.445 In May 1964, special correspondent to the American Legion Magazine Jeff Endrst described youth in the United States and Western Europe as more politically quiescent than their counterparts in Warsaw Pact countries.446 But a year later, National Commander Donald Johnson took notice of “teach-ins” against US policy in Vietnam cropping up at universities like Columbia and Michigan, Ann Arbor.447 By the fall of that same year, speakers at the Legion’s National Convention decried the “accelerating breakdown for law and order in the United States.” To locate the wellsprings of youth rebellions, Legionnaires blamed the usual suspects: Communists and “outside agitators.” The Americanism Commission


445 For example, investigations into the Newark unrest of 1967 undertaken by the New Jersey Governor’s office and the federal Kerner Commission found deep seated grievances among Black youth towards local government, the police, and opportunities to gain employment and decent housing. While only a small percentage of Black youth (11%) took active roles in the rioting, many more African Americans were “bystanders” or took no side in the conflicts. See Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorders, Report for Action: An Investigation Into the Causes and Events of the 1967 Newark Race Riots (New York: Lemma Publishing Corp, 1968); National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: Bantam Books), 1968.


published Congressional documents obtained from surveillance of the U.S. Communist Party outlining efforts to forge alliances with “New Left” groups such as Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and Students for a Democratic Society. Analyzing the eclectic Black nationalism of Robert Williams, founder of Radio Free Dixie, Black Legionnaire Leavitt Ashley Knight, Jr. seemed at a loss to explain Black Power’s ideological appeal to African-American youth until he concluded that Williams and other Black nationalists must receive their marching orders from Havana and Beijing. These foreign influences, Knight argued, undermined the “legitimate causes of American Negroes.”

By the end of the decade, it would have been impossible for the most myopic observer to have missed the explosions rippling through U.S. student populations. Besides the well-known rebellions at university campuses like Berkeley and Columbia, 1968-1973 marked the zenith of high school insurgency. One survey of school principals had 59% of the respondents in high schools and 56% of junior high administrators reporting some form of unrest in 1969. Protest was even becoming a regular feature of Boys’ State as politically sophisticated students tried to import demonstrations and protests into the model governments. In the summer of 1968, Connecticut Boys’ State delegate Peter Rachleff was shocked to hear a Legion counselor

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449Leavitt Ashley Knight, Jr., “The Communist Blueprint for the American Negro,” ALM (October, 1968): 6-10. As a strident advocate for Black armed and fugitive from federal law, Williams was lionized by Black Americans and by the governments of Cuba and the People’s Republic of China, which offered him sanctuary. By 1968, Williams was contemplating his eventual return to the U.S., though by that point he was more of a “pawn” than “player” in Black American and Cold War politics. See Timothy B. Tyson, Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 1999), 301.

450Gael Graham, Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University, 2006), 4-6.
threaten to cave in the head of an anti-war activist who asked to debate Vietnam in front of the delegates. A year later, Legion counselors at Michigan Boys’ State vacillated over whether to permit a group of students, led by delegate William Leaver, to stage a peace rally. Conflict also emerged amid the bucolic environment of the Encampment for Citizenship as antiwar campers in Great Falls, Montana railed against some members of the Encampment’s New York governing board who felt that young people should have supported American foreign policy in Vietnam.

Boys’ State officials nursed suspicions that “new left” elements were seeding their programs with dissidents, but there is little evidence that an army of “outside agitators” from the SDS or the Black Panthers lay behind these rebellions. Quite simply, the Legion officials were slow to recognize the changes in the young people entering the citizenship camps. Dissidents like Leaver and Rachleff had amassed significant political experience outside of student government and debate societies prior to their attendance at Boys’ State. William Leaver had volunteered for Democratic candidates during the 1968 presidential elections and frequently discussed the civil rights movement with his upper middle-class white parents and high school peers. As a high school student in New London, Connecticut, Peter Rachleff participated in school demonstrations and walkouts along with African-American students against white racism in the wake of the King assassination. Regenia Hicks came to Girls’ State in 1969 with experience in student government and participation in the protest culture of Minneapolis. She was a star pupil from a comfortable middle-class background, daughter of a school teacher and a defense worker.

451 Author Interview with Peter Rachleff, 4 August 2011.


She skipped classes at Central High School to attend Black Panther Party rallies and anti-war protests. Martha Preus described her early political socialization in a St. Paul high school in the following terms.

There I was real active…All my friends and everybody I knew were all involved. We would skip school and go on different marches. We had bomb threats at our house when Dad was on the school board because of the bussing issue…It was just a time of activism. Kids were reading Ramparts magazine and Punch and [Albert] Camus and thought they were little revolutionaries. It was such a mixed time, and I had friends who were going off to serve, and friends who were little Abbie [Hoffmans], so you had the extremes…But I believed in the political process, to a certain degree.  

Not only did these students have exposure to radical politics, but they had the expectation that their dissent would not be summarily quashed by authority. Hicks and Preus were both well-respected members of the high school communities for their academic achievements and social connections. Despite her dissidence, Regenia Hicks did not anticipate becoming a lightning rod for controversy at Girls’ State. In the first few days of the convention, as the delegates sorted themselves into cities and political parties, she had found great support for her ambitions. During the candidate debates, Hicks stated her opposition to the war as well as her opinion that the Black freedom struggle might require more than lunch-counter sit-ins and peaceful rallies. In the aftermath of Dr. King’s murder, she expressed sympathy for those who took part in urban rebellions, including the Black residents of North Minneapolis.

It seems likely that had the mainly white, conservative delegates known of Hicks’ political stances, they would have opted to vote for another gubernatorial candidate. However, the Auxiliary staff had assured the students that the model government would operate with minimal adult interference. The promise of neutrality was broken when the counselors intervened against Hicks, judging her unfit for promotion. Prior to her election, the staff found Hicks “docile and charming.” However, after her installation, the new Governor declined the

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454 Author Interview with Martha Preus, 10 April 2006.
customary meeting with the program Director, stating “I know what to do; I don’t need any help.” According to her critics, Hicks refused to salute the flag and allegedly walked out of meetings when a speaker mentioned patriotism or law and order. The Auxiliary claimed that it had become involved in the matter only when “30 to 40” of the 480-member delegation approached staff members and asked how they could impeach Hicks. The staff discouraged the petitioners from this drastic step. Summoning the Governor to dispel rumors of militancy, Hicks remained defiant, informing her interrogators “I believe what I believe; I’ll tell only what I believe, and I will not change my belief.” She also affirmed her support for a revolution or civil war in the cause of racial justice. Finally, when asked for her feelings about the United States, she replied that she respected her country, believed in it, and was willing to work for the betterment of it, but that she did not love it.”

Martha Preus was one of the few delegates who rallied to the Governor’s cause. Initially, Girls’ State held little attraction. She chafed at the sterile concrete landscape of the fairgrounds and initially felt like a “little revolutionary” in contrast to delegates who were from “all of these small towns in Minnesota…going around like it was the Miss America pageant,” a reference to the conservative gender roles accepted by many of the other participants. Preus gravitated towards the handful of girls with shared politics or neighborhoods, including Regenia Hicks. She recalled that the attacks by delegates were “horrible” and that the Auxiliary counselors offered no support to Regenia. In many ways, she argued that the disproportionate electoral success of the miniscule number of African-American or bi-racial students at Girls State reflected what she

455 Lisa Kelm, Editorial, Minneapolis Tribune, 6 July 1969, 4C. In her letter, Kelm identified herself as one of the delegates who challenged Hicks’ fitness to serve as Governor and provided a copy of the letter given to Legion Auxiliary Counselors.

456 The quote is taken from “The Ambiguous Patriots,” 6. Also corroborated with Author Interview with Regenia A. Hicks, 24 October 2005.
called “typical Minnesota liberal politics.” In the gubernatorial contest, both African-American candidates were “vivacious and intelligent,” and they were also assisted by a sense that the delegates wanted to select a leader who would symbolize the possibility of political reconciliation at a time when race relations were “awful.” Another factor was that voters only had a couple days to get to know the candidates, and personality, not policy was the determinant.

In an unmistakable rebuke of the rebellious governor, the Minnesota Auxiliary nominated two white students to attend Girls’ Nation. Confused and wounded by the ordeal, Hicks told to a New York Times reporter: “Maybe I did things they say. I don’t remember. They had just put me through the wringer and when I walked out the door all those white girls were smiling and I wanted to cry.” Looking back on the incident in 2005, Hicks stated that her disappointment came from her perception of a double standard in the Auxiliary’s interpretation of proper behavior by American citizens. “My understanding about our country was that it was founded by people who were protestors.” “Everything seemed to ride on the fact that I had said I didn’t love the country.” With this statement, Hicks claimed a political lineage stretching back to the founders of the Republic, regardless of her ascribed racial identity, and drew justification for her action from a potent tradition of anti-authoritarianism contained in the American Revolution.

When the story broke in the local media of the Twin Cities, the core issue was whether Hicks was a patriotic American engaged in time honored traditions of dissent, or a spoiled child demanding special treatment. Robert T. Smith, a columnist for the Minneapolis Tribune interviewed Mrs. Harold Forcien, director of Minnesota Girls’ State about the incident. When asked why Hicks was passed over for nomination, Forcien remarked that Hicks’ attitude was unacceptable. “She is pushing. She thinks that she should go to Washington. It’s something that

she has built up in her mind.” Though the Legion Auxiliary flatly denied that race played a role in the selection, the quote also hints at Forcien’s displeasure that an African-American girl, once praised as by counselors as “docile and charming,” would embarrass her sponsors with her political views. Columnist Smith disagreed and wrote that he found good citizenship in a “black girl who takes a healthy interest in a worthy project such as Girls’ State” and judged that her patriotism might be superior to her “white sisters who come from easier backgrounds.”

In clearest form the conflict between the Minnesota Auxiliary and Regenia Hicks flowed from a fundamental gulf in each side’s conception of Americanism. Forcien and the Auxiliary stressed in their criticism the value of self-censorship as well as not “pushing” too hard through protest or public controversy. Obedience to authority was a primary responsibility of Americans, especially to women who largely accepted the idea that female citizens should serve as auxiliaries to males. On a practical level, Girls State might prove impossible to manage if the student citizens continually challenged the decisions of the adult supervisors. The Auxiliary’s staff had ruled, and they expect Hicks and the other young women to submit to that decision. By contrast, Hicks’ forthright assertion of her right to attend Girls Nation drew from historical precedent of American citizens to seek redress of grievances. Her language stressed individualism, reflecting a rise in rights-based patriotism – the freedom from the tyranny of an unjust authority. But her strategy to hold the Auxiliary’s feet to the fire also relied on her support from the African-Americans from Girls State and the Twin Cities.

Such inflexibility also reflected an ossified leadership structure all too common in the Legion and Legion Auxiliary youth citizenship programs. In the mid-1930s, moderate Legionnaires like Hayes Kennedy and Harold Card had adopted much of the child-centered and participatory aspects of Progressive education, applying those tools to curbing student

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radicalism. Kennedy had also called on his fellow Legionnaires to combat “subversives” through legal channels instead of vigilante violence, and to prove the superiority of Americanism through education, rather than coercion. Thirty years later, that intellectual engagement had largely evaporated. Many chapters were administered by the original generation of counselors from the 1930s and 1940s, some of whom were grudgingly relieved of their duties by infirmity or death. Gradual, belated change did occur. A few Boys’ State chapters followed the lead of California and Massachusetts and eliminated the “militarist” trappings that had marked the conventions since the late 1930s.459 Other state programs quietly transferred the duties of supervising the delegates from aging Legionnaires to the alumni of recent conventions, who undertook to modernize the curricula and admissions policies. Rev. Sinclair Lewis, an alumnus of Palmetto Boys’ State of South Carolina who took the reins of the program in 1965, personally recruited the first twenty African-American delegates for the 1966 convention. This move, taken against the wishes of one of South Carolina most prominent political leaders, ended racial segregation within the Legion’s franchise, though it placed the program at the rear echelon of youth politics.460

Auxiliary staff steadfastly maintained that the race played no role in Girls State. In press statements, Auxiliary representatives pointed to the Girls State handbook to explain how Hicks’ statements and behavior would have disqualified if she were white. The organization leaders also sought to inoculate themselves from criticism by arguing that their chapter had nominated an African-American to Girls Nation in 1956. However, the ploy backfired when Joyce Hughes


460 Telephone Conversation with Rev. Sinclair Lewis, April 11, 2007. Lewis attended Palmetto Boys State in 1949. After one year of college he served in the Korean War, finished his education and returned to run that program from 1965 onwards.
held a press conference to defend Hicks along with two other Girls State alumnae: Althea Robins, Hicks’ rival in the Governor’s race and Rosie Milliman, a white delegate who served as Governor in 1968. Hughes declared that she would not serve as a “shield” for the Legion, and recounted her own experience as a delegate. Though her tenure as a Minnesota Girls State Governor and Girls Nation delegate occurred thirteen years earlier, the emotions provoked in 1956 remained vivid.

Describing her experience at the 1956 Girls’ Nation on local television, Hughes stated that she found the convention “dehumanizing.” Specifically, she recounted how she was assigned to a dormitory with the other Minnesota delegate, in contrast to the Legion’s policy of rooming delegates randomly. This move was ostensibly to avoid offending the sensibilities of the white delegates who might feel uncomfortable with a Black woman. In a sharp critique, Hughes quipped that the Legion Auxiliary had nominated to Girls Nation not as a Black woman but as someone with “a black face and a white mind.” The intervening years had taught to distrust the promise of color-blind patriotism. “I have come to recognize, as Regenia Hicks recognizes, that flag-waving Americanism and hip-hip-hurrah patriotism as taught by the American Legion” are no guarantee of human rights and human dignity. Such activities often mask entrenched prejudice, and respect for the inanimate flag covers cruel disregard for living, breathing human beings.

Furthermore, prominent voices from Minnesota public education and state government threatened to remove their support from the program. A rupture with these stakeholders would

461 According to Regenia Hicks, the television panel also included 1969 Girls State alumnae Hicks, Preus, and Althea Robbins.

doom Girls’ State. On July 2nd, the Association of Afro-American Educators, which represented almost all Black teachers in Minneapolis, criticized the Auxiliary as engaging in “double-thinking, double-talking, and double dealing.” The Association demanded that the Board of Education scrutinize the criteria used by the veteran’s group to select candidates to insure that the programs were “consistent with the goals of public education.”

Building on this momentum, an African-American member of the Minneapolis school board, Nathaniel Ober, suggested that the city should consider withdrawal of its students from Girls’ State, pending a more satisfactory explanation. Two of the state’s largest teachers’ unions, the Minnesota Federation of Teachers and the Minneapolis Federation, demanded the Auxiliary provide “valid reasons” for its action. From Washington, D.C., Congressional Representative Joseph Karth wrote to Legion Adjutant William Hauck to report the displeasure of his constituents and to advise Hauck that Minnesota Governor Harold LeVander might intervene to ask the Legion to reverse its decision.

The Legion Auxiliary maintained that its ruling was color-blind. However, many of the Legion’s supporters proved unable or unwilling to make such a distinction. Soon after Joyce Hughes took to the public airways, the Hicks’ household was bombarded with racist phone calls. Anonymous callers derided the young woman as a “filthy nigger” and suggested that “go back to Africa” – the last phrase a provocation that challenged the recipient’s citizenship and patriotism. In addition, Hicks recounts that she often heard clicking during calls, a sound she interpreted as...


464 “2 Teacher Groups Give Support to Miss Hicks,” Minneapolis Star, 12 July 1969, np.

evidence of an FBI phone tap.\textsuperscript{466} Joyce Hughes paid a different cost for her involvement. Hughes was at the time married to Dr. Henry Smith, a former Governor of Negro Boys State in Virginia, who opposed his wife speaking publicly in the Hicks case. Hughes argues that the episode placed a heavy strain upon the relationship with her husband, coincidently a graduate of Virginia’s Negro Boys’ State.\textsuperscript{467}

As the public war of attrition exacted damage upon all sides, conditions ripened for a face-saving compromise. Having passed over Hicks, the Minnesota Auxiliary could not easily undo its decision. However, the national Auxiliary relented to allow Hicks to “observe” the proceedings of the convention. In addition, she would be given time to express her feelings about the divided society of the United States as the opening speaker. A group of African-American professionals and business owners, moved by Hicks’ struggle against the Auxiliary provided financial support for a week in Washington D.C. Hicks also received an invitation to visit with Representative Donald Fraser. Before the primarily white delegates, Hicks spoke of her ordeal and the value of dissent in American society. A \textit{Washington Post} reporter interviewed eighteen Girls’ Nation senators for their reactions. A few abhorred her speech but most expressed either general sympathy or “grudging reluctance to accept militancy.” For a few, the speech proved revelatory in exposing the feelings that African-Americans had towards their country.\textsuperscript{468}

Following the course leading from her high school activism, Hicks applied for admission at the embattled Cornell University. Even before her confrontation with the Auxiliary, Hicks recalled that she had been inspired by a May, 1969 \textit{Life} magazine article on the armed takeover

\textsuperscript{466} Given the FBI’s close relationship with the Legion, this is not an outlandish claim. However, Freedom of Information Act requests for records on Hicks from the FBI offices in Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, and Albany, New York reveal no evidence of any surveillance.

\textsuperscript{467} Author interview with Joyce Hughes, 8 December 2005.

of university buildings by militant African-American students.\textsuperscript{469} When asked whether she was politically active at university, she replied “Cornell was politics” but that she refrained from involvement with student government. In fact, disenchantment or burnout from years of activism led to a hiatus from even voting until the presidential election of 1976. After initially pursuing a career in medicine, Hicks switched to child psychology, a perused a doctorate in that field. She is currently a policy analyst for the American Institutes for Research.\textsuperscript{470}

For Martha Preus, the controversy left her feeling more jaded about the political system and confirmed in her feeling that the American Legion and the Auxiliary were conservative and racist. She attended the University of Minnesota and Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. In the mid-1970’s she traveled through Europe for five months. When she returned to the States, she had planned to save up enough money to go back but followed her boyfriend up to Alaska. She became the first female oil pipeline controller, a job where she stated with pride that she controlled twenty-five percent of the United States oil supply. She remained in Alaska up through the early 1990’s before moving to Berlin with her children. Since the mid-1990’s she has worked as a corporate human resource consultant and educator in Germany as well as Kenya and Ghana. Preus explained that living outside the continental U.S. was not as difficult because her family had many branches in Europe and African through the Lutheran Church. Preus and Hicks continued their friendship for forty years.

\textbf{YMCA Youth and Government}


\textsuperscript{470} Author interview with Regenia Hicks, 21 December 2007.
The YMCA Youth in Government program in the late 1960s largely spared such racially charged controversies, though planners struggled to keep the curriculum relevant to the turbulent times. One innovation the developed was the “confrontation” program added to the curriculum of the National Youth Governors Conference, designed to raise youth awareness of the urban crisis. The Youth Governors would visit Washington D.C.’s 12th Street YMCA to speak with the staff and inner-city clients. The youth leaders, many of whom came from privileged circumstances reported dismay at the conditions that the District’s African Americans endured and shock at the deep resentments directed at white Americans. A questionnaire asked the Governors that year to reflect on any new understandings about the urban crisis. One anonymous respondent reported:

Yes, I live in Omaha where we have a ghetto and have had riots. The one thing that I never realized that one of the Twelfth Street YMCA pointed out to me was that ghetto Negroes hate whites passionately. This has changed my whole view on this subject and started me to think on how we can overcome this major handicap.

I gained insight into the causes of the riots – how they get started and why they originated. Realizing that the “Establishment” has founded the fundamental causes for this conflict, I know that the “system” must be changed; but I also know that it should be changed only through the “system” itself – like Mrs. Shirley Chisholm is trying to do.

I have found that colored people in ghetto areas do not want to integrate. They do, however, want a better way of life. I have found that the reasons for most racial problems is not racism but the middle class not understanding the lower classes.471

As meaningful as these exchanges may have been for the elite youth governors, the Y+G model could hardly capture the complexity of political developments that were occurring outside the formal boundaries of the state. On June 21st 1968, Nevada youth governor Kenneth Kizer snuck away from the home of his host family and wandered through the National Mall. There he encountered Resurrection City. Resurrection was the ambitious but ultimately failed effort by the

Poor People’s Campaign, the brainchild of the slain Martin Luther King, to raise awareness of economic injustice. Nearly four decades after the event, Kizer clearly remembered the shantytowns erected on the National Mall that housed three thousand people from African-American, white, Hispanic, and American Indian communities. Though the camp was beset by inclement weather, violence, including the loss of King, and criticism by white liberals for highlighting class politics, Resurrection was a marvel to Kizer that evening, and the young man’s experience was capped by a concert given by Aretha Franklin and her father.472

**Disability Admissions Scandals**

Two years after the Hicks incident, Boys’ State and Girls’ State administrators found themselves embroiled in controversy over their ban on handicapped students. Two disabled teenagers, Holly Reed of Columbus, Ohio, and Scott Reed of Plantation, Florida, both received recommendations to attend the youth leadership programs only to find their entry blocked. The scandals unfolded in much the same fashion as in the Hicks case, as the students used the press to publicize the alleged injustice of their rejection, building support among the public, government officials, former “Staters,” and even some notable Legionnaires who criticized the ban. On the other side of the debate, the Ohio Auxiliary and the Florida Legion initially took a defiant stance that the admissions standards were a private matter. They also reasoned that in a fast-paced, stressful environment, disabled students would not be able to compete with other students on an equal basis.

472 Author interview with Kenneth Kizer, 7 March 2007. For the history of Resurrection and the Poor People’s Campaign, see Amy Nathan Wright, “Civil Rights ‘Unfinished Business’: Poverty, Race, and the Poor People’s Campaign” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 488-89.
Reed and Trees proved ideal challengers to the notion that disability should automatically disqualify students from attending the democracy camps. Reed was blind since infancy; however, her parents were adamant their daughter learn and play the same as sighted children. While she was frequently shunted into “special education” programs during her school years, she stated that she felt that she had little in common with students who were also classified as “handicapped.” She and other blind students who attended schools with the sighted felt estranged from those who attended schools for the blind exclusively. At Eastmoor High School in Columbus, Reed was an honor student and well-respected by many of her instructors. The initial impulse to attend Girls State came from a blind student named Linda Alexander who Holly befriended during her stay at summer camps for the blind. Alexander related how she had attempted to win admission to the competitive program during her junior year only to have her hopes dashed by the Auxiliary’s ban on disabled delegates. “At that moment, I decided that I wanted to go to Girls State,” Reed recalled in a 2006 interview.\textsuperscript{473} Reed also received crucial support for her bid from her instructors and the principal at Eastmoor High.

Scott Trees lacked fingers and toes because of a congenital condition. In spite of this disability, Trees competed in his high school’s swim team and had learned how to bowl, play basketball and ping-pong.\textsuperscript{474} He also nurtured political ambitions, running three times unsuccessfully for the office of student body president and expressing a desire to attend Harvard Law School and become a U.S. Senator.

Both students appear to have keenly perceived that being accepted as equal to other high school students required that they be exceptional. And twenty years before the passage of the

\textsuperscript{473} Author interview with Holly Reed, 14 December 2007.

landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, there was potent symbolism in having disabled students attend. Beyond an issue of simple fairness and recognition of the talents of the disabled, these events served as an important portal from juvenile ambition into the wider realm of adult politics. As with exceptional youth leaders from traditionally marginalized backgrounds, a disabled Girls State or Boys State governor could showcase the potential for Americanism shorn of its exclusionary traditions. If, as the counselors of the Ohio Auxiliary and the Florida Legion claimed, the blind and disabled were incapable of matching the demands of a marathon week of campaigning and passing legislation, it did not speak well for the prospects for the disabled of America to offer much to the country other than to serve as objects of pity. For Reed, the Auxiliary’s ban on disabled students was hypocritical. “I couldn’t understand how the Legion [Auxiliary] that was supposed to be for veterans could have such a policy, especially when some of their members were on oxygen.”

Events would quickly show that the American Legion and the Auxiliary held beliefs about the disabled that were far out of step with much of the American public as well as the state governments in Columbus and Tallahassee. The news broke on the Legion Auxiliary’s decision to bar Holly Reed through the wire services on March 22, 1971.475 Within a month, the State Legislature in Columbus was considering motions to ban the Legion and the Auxiliary from using state facilities while the disabled were prohibited from attending their programs.476 Governor John Gilligan also personally interceded on behalf of Reed, asking the Auxiliary to reconsider its decision. Reed eventually declared that she would not attend even if the Auxiliary

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476In a rich morsel of irony, the American Civil Liberties Union, the *bete noir* of the Legion, argued that it would be illegal for the Ohio Legislature to single out the Auxiliary for sanctions. Rather, the ACLU recommended that the Legislature consider a general ban on all groups that discriminated against the disabled. See “ACLU Raps Assembly for plan to bar Girls’ State,” *Chronicle-Telegram* (Elyria, Ohio) 26 April 1971.
rescinded its ban.\textsuperscript{477} During the 1971 Buckeye Girls’ State, one delegate was reprimanded distributing handbills that questioned the fairness of the admissions policy. Farther south, Scott Trees received invitations from five Florida Legislators inviting him serve as their aides in the State House. He accepted the offer of Senator Verle Pope to work as a messenger, although he despaired of overcoming the opposition against his bid.

While it is unclear how news of their rejection came to the attention of the Associated Press reporters, there is little doubt that Reed and Trees were adept at presenting their case for admission with aplomb and even a little bravado. In response to the claim that the program was too rigorous for the handicapped, Reed doubted whether the term applied to her at all.

“Handicapped is a term they use and it implies that a person is hindered or held back. And I don’t feel hindered at all.” When Florida Adjutant General Ralph Johnson was invited to debate Scott Trees at Winter Park High School, he argued that the exertion of an average day at Boys State was physically equivalent to walking twelve miles.” Buoyed by high school students chanting, “Let Scott Go,” Trees asked Johnson for the chance to prove that he could run twenty miles. There was a caveat behind each student’s pleas – namely, that discrimination against the disabled was unjust because they were able to function as equals to the able-bodied. Through talent and sheer willpower, they overcame the limitations of their respective disabilities. This is quite different from an alternative argument that American society had the moral and legal responsibility to make alterations to allow the disabled to participate more fully in civic life.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textsuperscript{477}The Auxiliary remained resolute in its ban on disabled students until 1974, under pressure from the Ohio Attorney General.
In June 22, 1996, William Clinton, the first alumnus of Boys’ State and Nation to hold the office of President of the United States, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the citizenship program that had begun at the Illinois State Fairgrounds under the direction of Legionnaires Hayes Kennedy and Harrold Card. Clinton took note of that milestone in his remarks to a co-ed delegation of Boys’ Nation and Girls’ Nation Senators. The demographic diversity of the youth audience was far greater than it been when Harry Truman received a similar delegation in 1946. For example, one of the boy delegates from Illinois was Musab Balbale, a Muslim and child of Indian-American immigrants, who won the election for Boys’ State Governor against two charismatic rivals: Anteco Bryant, an African-American from East St. Louis, and Sean Stephenson, a young man confined to a wheelchair by congenital birth defects. Clinton’s speech hewed closely to the themes that his predecessors developed in their addresses to youth leaders: self-deprecating humor about his age, appreciation for the Legion’s work, and exhortations to the “senators” to resolve social problems that might impede the United States march into a secular millennium.478

Looking past Clinton’s pop-culture references and wonky policy recommendations, his speech revealed difficulties facing youth civic leadership programs like Boys’ and Girls’ State, as well as doubts about the direction that American nationalism would take into the twenty-first century. The President’s opening remarks poked fun at the age of the leaders of the Boys’ Nation program, including Director of Activities Jack Mercier, who had supervised Clinton’s first White House visit in 1963. The succession problems that plagued the Legion and Legion Auxiliary in the late 1960s had not been resolved. Youth-centered programs run by what anonymous observer called “the Legion gerontocracy” would experience ever greater obstacles to recruitment and

insuring that the curriculum maintained relevance to high school age students. The generation gap were particularly glaring in Girls’ State programs, and many delegates to the programs in the 1980s and 1990s chafed at the counselor’s expectations of femininity and close surveillance of the delegate’s activities. While the YMCA Y+G and the Encampment for Citizenship seem to have managed leadership succession issues more successfully than the Legion, these organizations struggled to maintain the viability of their programs. One difficulty was overcoming the skepticism and disaffection of American adolescents and young people felt towards the political system, a pattern of disengagement revealed in tests of civic knowledge and opinion surveys. Another problem was financing program infrastructure when their associational sponsors suffered from declining membership and shrinking balance sheets. In the late 1990s, a few Boys’ State and Girls’ State consolidated and the EFC suspended operations altogether.

Clinton’s 1996 speech also highlighted doubts about the possibility of establishing a common set of political and national values that could unite citizens from all parts of the United States, and transcend divisions of ideology, ethnicity and racial identity, social class, national origin gender, and physical condition. Without a national center, the United States might suffer from the kind of sectarian strife that scourged the people of Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and the Middle East. Fears from the 1990s that multiculturalism would lead to the “balkanization” of the United States have receded somewhat from the public imagination. The problem of youth civic disengagement that faced reformers like Pete Duran, Hayes Kennedy, and Algernon Black in the 1930s persists, despite the current outpouring of recommendations and policy papers suggesting programmatic fixes. Some libertarians and left anarchist critics suggest that the answer to this youth problem lies outside the state, and offer utopian visions of autonomous communities lashed together by the market or grass-roots affiliation. Perhaps these would be attractive places
to take vacation, but it is difficult to imagine how such societies would maintain or improve investments in public education, infrastructure, and research and development. There may not be an imminent population crisis in the American leadership class, but the representative character of the country’s democracy would be lost without sustained and meaningful participation from the young.
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