

Peace Corps

Organization: Peace Corps

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Description The Peace Corps was created in 1961 by the John F. Kennedy administration to "promote world peace and friendship" by sending Americans overseas to assist underdeveloped countries. By the end of 1963, about 7,300 volunteers were working in forty-four countries, primarily in education, community development, agriculture, health care, and public works. Although early volunteers initially displayed great enthusiasm, many were unprepared for the physical hardships, lacked language skills, and displayed an ugly ethnocentrism that clashed with local cultures. Others became frustrated at the slow pace of change and bureaucratic obstacles that impeded progress in Third World societies suffering from the legacies of colonialism.

The Peace Corps, like the US Agency for International Development, formed part of the American effort to "modernize" the Third World in order to prevent impoverished peoples from falling prey to communism. As a Cold War instrument, however, the Peace Corps proved to be somewhat unreliable. In some countries, such as Bolivia, nationalists disparaged the volunteers as Yankee imperialists and demanded their expulsion. In other countries, Peace Corp Volunteers sympathized with indigenous peoples and popular movements that challenged US-backed regimes. Contact with other languages and societies, on the other hand, did promote a greater appreciation for multiculturalism. The Peace Corps, therefore, played a mixed role in the global effort to spread the American dream.

Suggested Reading: **Cobbs Hoffman, Elizabeth.** 1998. *All you need is love: The Peace Corps and the spirit of the 1960s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rice, Gerard T. 1985. *The bold experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press.

Siekmeier, James F. 2000. A sacrificial llama? The expulsion of the Peace Corps from Bolivia in 1971. *Pacific Historical Review* 69: 65-87.