

Steve Bruno
Lewis & Clark College
History Department
October '98

hm
625-5025
Payer
833-9166

*The War at Home: The Early Years of VISTA and Local
Community Action Agencies in the State of Oregon*

- 1) Introduction: The War on Poverty
 - a) The problem of poverty in America and the need for action
 - b) Sargent Shriver, director of Peace Corps, appointed to direct the war
 - i) Shriver's views on poverty in the wealthiest nation in the world
 - (1) Problems in the US
 - (a) Richest nation ever
 - (b) Mobile economy, opportunity for jobs
 - (c) Excess food while thousands starve
 - (d) Enough economic experience to be able to do something
 - (2) Various kinds of poverty and Americans' rights to level of basic subsistence
 - (a) Education
 - (b) Food
 - (c) Medical care
 - (d) Legal services
 - ii) Shriver's role in constructing the "war"
 - c) Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity
 - i) Initially, the war enjoys support from politicians at all levels
 - ii) Problems with local, county, and state governments and the authority over poverty programs
 - (1) "Maximum Feasible Participation" clause and broad language interpreted many different ways
- 2) The purpose and mission of VISTA
 - a) Functions as a "domestic Peace Corps"
 - b) Teach illiterate to read, teach job skills, provide medical services, strengthen communities by being a part of them
 - c) Get communities to stand on their own feet before leaving
 - d) Roles of volunteers (diverse group)
 - (1) Teachers
 - (2) Tutors
 - (3) Organizers

- e) Work to help eliminate poverty in all walks of life
 - (1) Indian Reservations
 - (2) Mexican immigrant camps
 - (3) City slums
 - (4) Poor, rural communities
 - (5) Alaska

- 3) Oregon attracts VISTA program
 - a) Role of the University of Oregon
 - b) Recruitment of volunteers
 - c) 6-week training program for volunteers
 - d) Services Performed by Volunteers in Oregon
 - i) Work with migrants
 - (1) Hillsboro farm-trespassing incident
 - (2) Role of VISTAs in migrant camps questioned—farmers fear organization of migrant laborers
 - ii) Work in urban slum settings
 - (1) Mr. Bruno's experiences in Salem
 - (a) Tutoring high school dropouts
 - (b) Running coffee house in church basement
 - (c) Organizing community groups
 - iii) Work in rural communities
 - iv) Work on Indian Reservations

- 4) Conclusion
 - a) War on Poverty takes the back burner
 - i) Vietnam War draws funds and public attention away from war on poverty, beginning in '67
 - ii) Community action criticized harshly for structure and design problems
 - iii) Structure the program still causing problems in Nixon administration
 - iv) Difficulty of measuring success
 - b) Budget cutbacks in the 70s
 - c) VISTA survives as one of the few programs able to keep its head above water
 - i) Americorps and the attempt at keeping VISTA alive