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Experiences from City Year: A Glimpse into the Complex Roles of Racially Diverse AmeriCorps Members and What That Means for the Nonprofit Field

Orsolya Ficsor
Illinois State University, orsif94@gmail.com

EXPERIENCES FROM CITY YEAR: A GLIMPSE INTO THE COMPLEX ROLES OF

RACIALLY DIVERSE AMERICORPS MEMBERS AND WHAT

THAT MEANS FOR THE NONPROFIT FIELD

ORSOLYA FICSOR

162 Pages

In this thesis, I explore the lived experiences of alumni from City Year, an AmeriCorps education nonprofit dedicated to providing academic and social-emotional interventions to address social inequity in education in disadvantaged schools throughout the U.S. and abroad. Their thoughts and ideas reflect the complexities of working on a diverse team, serving students of color in a nonprofit organization that is limited in its ability to create structural change. Guided by an analysis of historic systems of oppression, whiteness, white saviorism, and the nonprofit industrial complex, I examine how the nonprofit sector operates as a shadow state that is restricted from taking action for structural change, designed to reinforce a neoliberal economic and political system that justifies disinvestment in social services. The lived experiences of racially diverse City Year alumni reflect the tensions between making the most of the service year while acknowledging the limitations of nonprofit work. This project demonstrates that racial identity has a major influence on the service experience and highlights the need for transparent and honest conversations in all aspects of City Year's work and beyond.

KEYWORDS: nonprofit, nonprofit industrial complex, critical race theory, white savior

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ORSOLYA FICSOR

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Livia K. Stone, Chair

Frank Beck

Christopher Wellin

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INTRODUCTION

My inspiration for this project stems from my personal experiences serving at City Year Dallas, an AmeriCorps program dedicated to supporting youth in underserved public schools. I decided to join City Year for many reasons, including the promise of potential full funding for graduate school, access to professional development training, and an education award at the end of the service year that would help pay student loans. Most importantly, I was desperate for a job that would make a difference in the world. So, although I had no experience whatsoever working with children or in education, I decided to push myself to do something completely new and far outside my comfort zone. I was drawn to the idea of being a positive figure in the lives of underprivileged children, holding tightly onto the belief that all people deserve a wholesome childhood and access to the resources necessary for one to succeed in life. I wondered, however, whether I was qualified to do the job as a privileged white person, since most of the students City Year serves are Black or Latinx. During the initial job interview, I was asked, "how do you think that your identity will affect the work you will be doing?" My answer was something along the lines of "I noticed that most of the kids City Year works with are African American, and since I am not African American, I would not fully understand what they go through. I would have a lot to learn from them." Despite doubting my qualifications, I got the job, and for one academic school year, I "proudly served as an AmeriCorps Member of City Year Dallas."

I did not know what to expect going into it, and as my research will show, this is not unique to me, and neither are the experiences and discussions that my team had throughout the year. My greatest fear was the thought that I, a privileged white girl from the suburbs of Texas, was going into a low-income school to work with students who seemingly lived in a very different world than myself. How would I be able to understand what they go through, facing

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oppression from multiple facets of society? Did I even have the right to work with them and tell them to do their homework and go to class? Were my feelings of pity for the kids symptoms of white saviorism? I also wondered, did people join an organization like this for the "wrong" reasons? How much impact could one person have in a setting where the politics and red tape of AmeriCorps kept us from advocating for structural change? Was City Year unintentionally reinforcing oppressive societal structures? Were resources invested in the right place, into an organization that imposed orchestrated optimism through its culture? How does one reconcile the tension between recognizing a broken system for what it is while persevering with optimism and genuine passion? How does one reconcile the tension between serving for a good cause and reinforcing a system of white saviorism? These were the questions that I had at the time, and they are the questions that inspired this thesis.

My subjective experiences inspired this project. My goal, however, is to examine the subjective experiences of others who served in City Year Dallas. The questions above do not have simple answers, and my hope is that this project will lay some groundwork in making sense of the complexities of nonprofit work, and the meanings which young people passionate about service attribute to it. The experiences and opinions presented in this project belong to unique, racially diverse individuals. Experiences vary by person and team, and there are also differences in City Year programming throughout various sites in the U.S., but the big-picture ideas discovered through this project say something about the nature of working in a nonprofit setting, and how service organizations can be transparent and willing to discuss the complex social meanings behind their work in serving disadvantaged communities. My intention then, is to make City Year stronger and to spark something that will change the way nonprofits provide

service in a way that is more inclusive, socially conscious, and does not shy away from difficult conversations.

An Introduction to City Year

City Year is a national education nonprofit organization founded in 1988 by Michael Brown and colleagues, former students at Harvard Law School who believed that young people dedicated to service are instrumental in addressing America's major issues (City Year 2017, 3). The program began in Boston, and now serves twenty-nine major cities in the U.S. (City Year 2018, inside cover page), several sites in the UK, and Johannesburg South Africa (City Year 2017, 4). City Year is under the umbrella of AmeriCorps State and National, a national service organization under the independent federal agency CNCS, the Corporation for National and Community Service (City Year 2018, 18). CNCS is the nation's largest grant provider that invests in volunteer and service activities focusing on areas of high need, one primary focus being education (City Year 2018, 18). To secure funding in each state, City Year works with government-appointed State Service Commissions (City Year 2018, 18). "State Service Commissions annually manage more than $250 million in federal national service grants, along with more than $100 million in matching funds from local communities" (City Year 2017, 8). Furthermore, City Year is the organizational and operational host for the Voices for National Service (VNS) coalition, a group of service organizations that advocate for bipartisan support and funding for national service programs (City Year 2018, 19). VNS receives funding from grants, gifts, and membership support (City Year 2018, 19).

As stated in City Year's training manual, the Idealist Handbook (City Year 2017), "City Year's mission is to build a democracy through **citizen service, civic leadership** and **social**

entrepreneurship. Together, these essential, interconnected and nonpartisan strategies can serve as the civic foundation for a strong, active, and responsive democracy" (3, emphasis in original). This big-picture mission reflects City Year's big-picture goal: the professional development and growth of the corps member who practices "big citizenship" (21) and continues to be civically engaged after completing their service year, acting on the idea that "a strong democracy requires active citizens who have the civic values, skills and inspiration to serve as leaders for the common good" (21). As stated in their 2018 Annual Report, "Through their transformational service experience, in twenty-nine cities, our AmeriCorps members develop their own professional and leadership skills and cultivate an enduring civic mindset" (City Year 2018, inside cover page). They are driven by idealism in everything they do, idealism being "the belief that you have the passion, skills, and courage to change the world" (City Year 2017, 4).

To put their culture of idealism (City Year 2017, 13) into action, City Year places young people between ages eighteen and twenty-five in disadvantaged schools across the country at which an estimated 90 percent of students are students of color (City Year 2018, 3). City Year strives to fill the gap between what students need and what disadvantaged schools are designed to provide (City Year 2017, 6). Through partnerships with State Education Agencies, school districts, and schools, they seek to "increase the graduation pipeline" by having corps members serve as "near peer" (City Year 2017, 7) full-time mentors and tutors to students who exhibit "early warning indicators" (City Year 2018, 2) of dropping out of school. These indicators are poor attendance, bad behavior in school, and failure in math and language arts (City Year 2018, 2). Students who exhibit these behaviors early on have a less than 25 percent chance of graduating high school (City Year 2017, 92). Poor attendance and behavior reflect the need for improvement in social-emotional skills, which include qualities like "self-awareness, self-

management, and relationship development" (City Year 2018, 5). Assisting students with these skills helps set them up for long-term success in college and career readiness (City Year 2018, 5). Research indicates that having a positive relationship with a trusted adult in the school helps students succeed (City Year 2018, 10-11), and City Year seeks to achieve this by implementing the "whole school, whole child" (City Year 2017, 91) service model. Whole school, whole child provides a "continuum of support" (City Year 2017, 91), meaning that City Year teams are present in elementary, middle, and high schools, and provide holistic services in the school, including working one on one and in small groups with students, being present in classrooms, planning schoolwide events, facilitating after school programs, and communicating with parents, teachers, and school administrators (City Year 2017, 91). One of City Year's core values, "students first, collaboration always" (City Year 2017, 16), calls for "collaboration with others – teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, community and other nonprofit partners" (City Year 2017, 16) to holistically address the issues students face in disadvantaged schools, and to empower students.

The Dallas site during the 2017-2018 school year had seven teams of an estimated ten corps members on each team, and each team was assigned to a school for the whole year. Each corps member was assigned to a specific partner teacher, and the corps member's job was to be in the classroom to help students with their work. Corps members were also assigned a "focus list," a list of twelve students with whom corps members had to complete "dosage," a required amount of hours they had to spend tutoring each student either one on one or in small group settings. Corps members were also assigned a list of students to coach in attendance and social-emotional skills. The process for choosing students for academic, attendance, and social-emotional coaching involved a combination of school district data analysis by City Year staff

and corps member observations. The way corps members delivered these interventions depended on the school, as some teachers did not want corps members to pull students from class, so teams varied in their execution of required services. Each team at each school also did a variety of school-wide programming, including facilitating afterschool programs and planning school-wide events.

City Year's culture of idealism (City Year 2017, 15) permeates everything they do, as evident by the name of the training manual, *The Idealist Handbook* (City Year 2017). The handbook contains a plethora of guidance on every aspect of service, from taking pride in serving, down to the meaning behind the uniform and how to properly style it to reflect City Year values. There is an entire chapter on Founding Stories (39), a collection of stories from different cultures that reflect City Year's values. Other chapters include a guide to City Year culture (13) and tips for "putting idealism to work" (62) – a guide for turning idealism into actionable steps. Before serving, corps members attended Basic Training Academy for the month of August with the same cohort of corps members they served with. The trainings included sessions on best practices in youth development, team dynamics, and topics in social justice, as well as many sessions on City Year values and culture which included sessions on idealism, group chants, and even instruction on how to talk about City Year. Trainings were a balance between social justice topics, best practices in youth development, and City Year culture. Trainings also continued throughout the service year, taking place every Friday within individual teams, and once per month when the entire corps of roughly seventy people came together. Many training sessions throughout the year also focused on professionally developing the corps member through networking events, LinkedIn training sessions, and resume building.

A major aspect of the culture involved ritualized activities which teams did every single day within their schools, and sometimes as a whole corps. First thing in the morning, the team would stand in a circle and recite a poem called "readiness check" – "boots and shoes tied on tight, and my socks are how I like. Fresh pants at my waist, and a belt to hold its place. Yup, in my white tee, name tag on so you know me. I got spirit, you can hear it! And a smile that's my style. I got soul for my roll, and a positive can-do." We were required to recite this poem every single morning. Another morning ritual was power greeting, which involved standing outside the school and chanting at the students as they lined up to walk through metal detectors. The chants went something like: "My name is [Emily] and you know what I got? I got a team that's hotter than hot! Batman and Superman, no one can do it like [John] can!" And whoever's name was called had to do a dance and recite the chant. Corps members' feelings about these practices varied greatly, as for some, it felt strange and sometimes even disrespectful to be acting like this given the students' circumstances. In other instances, corps members found creative ways to alter the words to chants, and some teams scrapped the practice altogether and instead played sports with the students in the morning or took the time to chat with them before class.

Other displays of City Year culture included Unity Rallies in which the whole corps went to public places in downtown Dallas to line up and do a series of prideful chants: "our boots, our boots, our boots are on fire, WHAT? We don't need no water 'cause we like it when it BURNS! two, three, four, BURNS! two, three, four, BURNS! Hold it… Clap that one out City Year!" followed by mass clapping. Furthermore, every time a corps member shared an idea with the corps during training sessions, they had to "stand and declare": "My name is [Emily] and I proudly serve on the [corporate sponsor] team at [school name]." These ritualized and militaristic practices were in place to reinforce City Year culture and a sense of pride in service, but this

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caused mixed feelings among corps members who felt that the practices were an inauthentic display meant for marketing purposes, while others bought into it and used the culture to boost morale.

Another aspect of City Year culture that the organization takes tremendous pride in is diversity, more specifically *inclusivity* – "bringing together people from different racial, socio-economic, educational, religious, sexual orientation and geographic backgrounds" (City Year 2017, 26). Inclusivity to City Year means "to create the most unified, purposeful force for good from the most diverse membership possible" (City Year 2017, 26). The 2018 Annual Report states 53 percent of City Year's alumni profile from the years 2016 to 2018 consisted of people of color (City Year 2018, 8). This number is a lump sum of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and "other" (8), while 47 percent of alumni were white.

City Year's youth development and academic intervention model is based on research in best practices for youth development. In 2010, City Year collaborated with Johns Hopkins University and Communities in Schools to conduct the Diplomas Now study of 40,000 students in sixty-two high-need schools (City Year 2017, 96). Thirty-two of the schools implemented their experimental Diplomas Now program and thirty schools implemented other programs (City Year 2017, 96). Diplomas Now involved identifying students "at-risk" of dropping out of school based on academic performance, behavior, and attendance, and providing whole-school improvement practices, including individual academic intervention and social-emotional coaching (City Year 2017, 96). Based on a data report from 2016 on sixth- and ninth-grade students, the Diplomas Now program proved to be effective in boosting the odds of graduation for "at-risk" youth from 25 percent to 75 percent (City Year 2017, 97). City Year uses Diplomas Now data to constantly improve its model. City Year's long-term impact goal is to ensure that 80

percent of students in fifty to seventy feeder patterns (the schools that students go to based on their residence from elementary through high school) reach tenth grade on time. City Year hopes to have reached 50 percent of off-track students in the communities it serves by 2023, and to serve in cities that account for two thirds of the nation's urban dropouts (City Year 2018, 17). To stay on track for these goals, City Year has an Impact Analytics Department which examines school data on all aspects of student performance, collects quantitative and qualitative data from corps members and all school personnel, including students, teachers, and principals, and a database which tracks all student interventions that corps members provide (City Year 2017, 99). Corps members regularly track student progress by recording hours and activities and assessing student behavior through online assessment platforms.

According to the 2018 Annual Report, the 2017-2018 corps members helped reduce the number of students off track in English and Language Arts by 51 percent and the number of students off track in mathematics by 50 percent (City Year 2018, 5). Corps members also helped improve the social-emotional skills of 66 percent of students identified as needing improvement in these skills (5). Research indicates that schools with City Year are twice as likely to show improvement in English and Language Arts assessment scores and three times as likely to have improved mathematics scores (16). Ninety-two percent of partner teachers agree that the presence of a corps member in their classroom helped build a positive learning environment (11). In addition to impacting the students, the 2018 National Alumni Survey reports that 82 percent of alumni say that City Year "increased the ways in which they are civically engaged" (8). Furthermore, 96 percent of alumni say that City Year helped them grow in working effectively with people different than themselves (8). Thirty-eight percent of alumni remain working in the community where they served, and 53 percent of alumni are people of color (8). The long-term

investment in these communities is reflected in the fact that 47 percent of alumni go into the education field, and 39 percent of alumni teachers are people of color (9). The numbers seem to indicate that the financial investment in hiring corps members and developing their social capital results in a sustainable return on investment in which alumni, many of whom are people of color, continue to dedicate their work to the communities and students they serve.

While the numbers show that City Year has a positive impact on student outcomes and the school environment, it is also important to consider the cost to the city and the school of hosting a City Year site. Their funding comes from partnerships with funders including the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps, and a variety of foundations, corporations, and individuals or families (City Year 2018, 1). City Year's total revenue is 162.3 million dollars, 23 percent coming from AmeriCorps and 22 percent coming from school districts and local government (City Year 2018, 52). This percentage is higher than the amount that comes from corporations (21 percent), individuals (16 percent), and foundations (16 percent) (City Year 2018, 52). This translates to a cost of thirty-six million dollars coming from school districts and local government grants. Roughly breaking it down into twenty-nine cities, and assuming there are roughly eight teams per city, it costs schools and local governments about 150,000 dollars per site (City Year 2017, 187). This price is just an exploratory grant for "Phase 1" of establishing a new site. A startup team is deployed once there is a one to two million-dollar challenge grant in place (City Year 2017, 187). The school districts also commit to paying 15,000 dollars per corps member (City Year 2017, 187). While City Year is highly costly to schools and local government, 81 percent of the money goes into program services (City Year 2018, 52). Deloitte Consulting LLP analyzed City Year's return on investment in 2017 and found that within a year, the impact of a City Year team results in savings for the school worth 97

percent of the investment, and City Year is 78 percent more cost-effective than if the schools were to contract a company that provides similar services (City Year 2018, 17).

Given the positive picture painted above by City Year's statistics, it is surprising to look back at the challenges my team faced and the feelings of hopelessness my teammates expressed throughout the year. There were some ways in which the corps was prepared for the reality of what it was going to be like to work with people different than them. During the first month of training, the corps participated in a privilege line exercise which involved taking steps forward or backward to statements like "if you have experienced prejudice because of the color of your skin, take two steps backward." The purpose behind it was to demonstrate how corps members come from diverse social backgrounds, some being very wealthy and privileged who ended up at the front of the room, while many corps members of color were closer to the back. This eye-opening experience was one of several, another noteworthy experience being a panel of representatives from Dallas Independent School District (ISD) who came to Basic Training Academy to speak to the corps about what goes on in Dallas' education system. One of the speakers on the panel was a member of the board of trustees of Dallas ISD who argued that Dallas ISD is segregated by class, not race. Her statement made the audience and the other panelists visibly uncomfortable, and it seemed that she was ignorant to how class is often used as the scapegoat for race. It seemed that the corps was aware of America's history of racism and how that history was embedded in society structurally, rendering some neighborhoods significantly less advantaged than others, resulting in poorly funded schools due to lower property taxes. Throughout our trainings on social justice topics, it was also made clear that student misbehavior had to do with the reality that many students faced living in an impoverished neighborhood. I was somewhat familiar with these issues having studied them for a semester in college, and it seemed like City

Year made an effort to cover these topics, but what I found absent from the trainings was honest and true conversation about how our positionality as an organization was problematic, especially when white, privileged corps members were recruited to serve. It seemed as if City Year assumed that each corps member came into the program with that knowledge, or possibly that they believed the corps member experience would educate the privileged white corps member.

In my experience, the training could not have prepared me for what is what like to be in the school, and as I will later present in the data section, many fellow alumni felt the same. The inflated ideologies we came equipped with felt insufficient when we faced major disagreements on our team. For example, the team was divided on whether we should be disciplinary figures for our students or be their friends. Our day-to-day job was to spend time in the classroom assisting the teacher, and to pull students from class to tutor them in small groups in either math or English and Language Arts, but some corps members understandably felt that this approach was counter-intuitive, partly because some teachers who were assigned a City Year corps member were outright against having them, and others did not want us to pull students from their classes, especially because we were not trained, certified teachers.

City Year encouraged us to be patient, not to yell, and to try to understand where the students were coming from, yet we significantly struggled to balance this with disciplinary action when students misbehaved and our way of handling the situation differed from teachers. Addressing misbehavior was also challenging when faced with pushback from students. Many team members felt that students seemed to not care about their education, and we often fell into a defeatist mindset. City Year's idealism failed to keep our spirits up at times when there was tension between the way the teachers treated the kids, the way we were expected to treat the kids, and the ways we felt the need to act in difficult situations. From my white, middle-class frame of

reference, the school was chaotic. Classroom management was weak, students roamed the hallways during class, teachers and students showed tremendous disrespect toward one another, and the school atmosphere was generally negative, confrontational, and accusatory. City Year tried to prepare us with the tools for navigating the school environment, but City Year's culture and ritualistic activities only worsened tension on our team when we masked our disagreements toward each other with the seemingly shallow "readiness checks" and morning "power greeting." My team often wondered whether City Year was making a difference, and I especially wondered if it was my place to do this kind of work since I did not look like my students.

Our team experienced multiple dimensions of tension in which there was disagreement and disconnection between corps members and teachers. The positionality of each of these dimensions made it complicated to effectively do our job, especially when the team disagreed on the nature of our job and our choices conflicted with the teachers' ideas of the right way to handle misbehavior. For example, if a student was repeatedly scolded and singled out as the "bad kid," our City Year supervisor made it clear that our job was to pull them aside and have a conversation with them about the misbehavior, yet the teacher would order the student to stay in the classroom. Or, the opposite would happen in which the student would get kicked out of class, yet our role as an attendance coach was to encourage students to stay in class. There wasn't clear communication between City Year management and school staff, which caused a lot of miscommunication. Sometimes teachers asked us to escort students to the principal's office, which City Year instructed corps members not to do. It often seemed that there was a disconnect between the corps members' role and what the teachers believed was the right way to handle situations.

Within our team, some of us were split between disciplining the students with respect and kindness versus disciplining them harshly. Those who treated the students as friends and overlooked their misbehavior were frowned upon by teachers and more disciplinary corps members for being too soft, while those who disciplined and scolded students were frowned upon by the corps members who believed that our job was to be their friends. These mismatched ideologies and methodologies were racial in nature when conversations came up about values in Black or Latinx communities. Black corps members sometimes would say things like "Black moms are mean," or a non-Black corps member would say "Black boys are angry and usually end up in jail." White corps members and corps members of color were both quick to dismiss parents and teachers as negligent. Serious group discussions about why these attitudes prevailed and what they meant based on one's racial background were often avoided and suppressed.

Upon examining City Year values, culture, statistics, and reflecting on my own experiences, there are a few things that stand out. First and foremost, after having served a full year and having experienced the challenges and short-comings of the program, I question whether it is really worth investing in City Year, and if so, is there something they could be doing differently? Could the money that goes into establishing City Year sites instead go into efforts like hiring and training skilled teachers from the communities we served who would be more likely to stay versus hiring corps members who serve for one year? Given the sense of hopelessness my team felt in making a difference in the lives of students and tiptoeing around the political red tape that kept us from advocating for structural change, it really seemed that City Year is designed more to serve as a professional development tool for corps members. This is ironic given that City Year tries to establish a sense of "trust and continuity in the schools and neighborhoods where we serve" (City Year 2017, 4). The idea behind it is that year after year, a

City Year team is present in the school. However, the teams are different each year, and each team brings a group of individuals with different motives, personalities, and work ethic. The time each corps member spends with students is meant to be only temporary, as their service year is a "rite of passage into lifelong active citizenship" (City Year 2017, 10), as evident by their name City *Year*. City Year heavily emphasizes the idea of "citizen service" as stated in their mission statement, meaning that a year of service encourages a lifetime of civic engagement. Furthermore, City Year is dedicated to "building unity, civic trust and social capital by uniting people from a wide variety of social, racial, economic, and educational backgrounds" (City Year 2017, 10). City Year seeks to achieve a more equitable world by "transforming the life prospects of those who serve by tying life-changing benefits to service" (City Year 2017, 10) which include the Segal Education award, health insurance, and a potential full ride to college or graduate school.

Service is only short-term, and a lot of resources are invested in the corps member and the Voices for National Service advocacy group (City Year 2018, 19). The political activities that City Year is involved in all have to do with advocacy for national service opportunities. In 2009, City Year collaborated with Voices for National Service, ServiceNation, and America Forward to help pass the Serve America Act, a bill that places citizen service at the center of response to the nation's most pressing needs by "expand[ing] the reach of the innovative and effective non-profit organizations by providing much needed human capital" (City Year 2017, 176). City Year continues to be highly politically active in advocating for federal policies that support enhancing and expanding national service (City Year 2017, 177) rather than advocating for specific social issues, despite the fact that City Year self-identifies as an "action tank" – "an organization dedicated to bringing about major changes in society" (City Year 2017, 174). Interesting to note

is that City Year has been around longer than AmeriCorps itself, and actually inspired President

Bill Clinton to create AmeriCorps:

> When I started running for President in 1991, I had this idea…We need more
> idealistic, energetic young people out there working in our communities, helping
> to solve problems at the grass roots level…helping people that would otherwise
> be forgotten; going to places where the private economy would not otherwise
> send them; and we also need to open the doors of college to everyone. So I had
> this general idea, and then when I went to City Year in Boston, the lights came on
> and I said this is what I want to do. (City Year 2017, 175)

Especially noteworthy is how "City Year's vision is that one day the most commonly

asked question of a young person will be 'Where are you going to do your service year?'" (City

Year 2017, 3), not, "when will structural racism end and when will schools and disadvantaged

communities of color have equity and the resources they need?" While breaking down social

oppression is at the forefront of City Year's mission, they place more emphasis on investing in

the corps member who then grows up to become a voice for change, especially corps members of

color who may or may not be from a similar community in which they serve. City Year is not

meant to solve structural problems, but rather to serve as an avenue for building social capital, as

evident by their statement that by the end of their service, corps members will "have learned the

value of hands-on involvement in democratic self-government to prepare them for a lifetime of

active citizenship" (City Year 2017, 10). It unintentionally creates a dynamic in which it seems

like disadvantaged communities need to stay in poverty for programs like City Year to exist. Is

City Year unintentionally taking advantage of disadvantaged communities to educate people

about social inequity? With how they emphasize taking pride in service, are they unintentionally

encouraging white savior mentality among the alumni who are 47 percent white? The emphasis

on self-government (City Year 2017, 10) and the quote from Bill Clinton eerily seem to indicate

a defeatist attitude that absolves the government from the responsibility of implementing

structural change, placing the responsibility onto young idealistic people who can feel good

about themselves for tutoring impoverished kids. On the other hand, one could argue that this self-government approach restores the voices of disadvantaged communities by empowering them to advocate for themselves on a grassroots level, taking a proactive approach without the need for bureaucracy.

Since City Year is racially diverse and it does indeed provide opportunities for social mobility, it is unfair of me as a liberal white person to make sweeping generalizations that City Year encourages white saviorism and divests valuable resources from already struggling communities. The service experiences and opinions of racially diverse corps members vary significantly, and while it is important to acknowledge how an organization like City Year can be problematic, it is equally important to acknowledge that it does have significant benefits, and corps members attribute meaning to their service role in diverse ways. Based on my personal experiences and observations, as well as my research, I wanted to ask alumni about their true lived experiences to answer the following research questions: does the corps member's racial identity affect their experiences, the way they navigate their service role, and the meanings they attribute to the corps member role, and does their racial background affect their perception of City Year's impact? What does this say about nonprofits in the big picture in how they work with diverse communities to try to fight social inequity? How can City Year improve its service model to address the complexities of racially diverse teams serving for a short time in disadvantaged schools?

Methods

Participants for this project were recruited through personal contacts via Facebook, LinkedIn, and personal text message. Additional participants were recruited through a network

sample. The project was also shared in a mass email in City Year's September 2019 newsletter. I spoke with a total of nineteen City Year alumni. Each person participated in a semi-structured interview ranging from twenty-five minutes to one and a half hours. Participant names were changed, and in the following data and analysis sections, I do not use any identifying information such as name, age, gender, service year, amount of years served, or school placement. Racial identity is used with permission and participants were asked how they self-identify. Each participant has been assigned a gender-neutral pseudonym. I chose to assign they/them pronouns and gender neutral names as an additional precaution to decrease the chances of City Year staff or alumni identifying the interviewee and potentially damaging the interviewee's reputation. Interviewees were asked to approve of their pseudonyms, the notes from their interview, and the use of their interview in this project to ensure proper representation of their perspectives.

I would also like to note that the literature review, particularly the sections on whiteness and white saviorism, are distinct from the data and analysis of this project. The literature on whiteness and white saviorism is meant to sensitize readers to larger issues on a macro-political level and how those ideologies are present within the nonprofit industrial complex, a system City Year participates in by virtue of being a one-year service program intended to support students without creating structural change. As a nonprofit, City Year cannot advocate for policy beyond efforts to gain bipartisan support for funding of service projects. The purpose of this project is to examine the experiences of corps members within this system.

I will begin by analyzing the literature on whiteness, particularly in an education setting, and will then dive into white saviorism and the nonprofit industrial complex to demonstrate how the nonprofit sector came to be and its implications for serving disadvantaged communities. Guided by the principles of Black feminist ethnography and grounded theory, I share the

perspectives that reflect the lived experiences, thoughts, feelings and suggestions of racially diverse City Year alumni. I seek not to discredit or harm City Year or service efforts as a whole, but rather to set up a guiding framework for addressing problematic aspects of service work and encourage honest, transparent conversations to help improve the way service is delivered in City Year and similar programs.

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW: WHITENESS, WHITE SAVIORISM, AND THE

NONPROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

When I initially embarked on this project, I was guided by the notion that nonprofit work encourages white savior mentality and does not push white volunteers to examine their positionality in the communities they serve. I also assumed that nonprofit work only provides band-aid solutions to complex structural problems and divests funding from communities that could be used more effectively in different ways. For example, the millions of dollars going into establishing a new City Year site could have been better used to fix homes, remodel schools, or hire more teachers with higher salaries. The literature on nonprofits and volunteerism demonstrates that these issues are indeed buzzing topics. Central to much of the literature is the need to understand whiteness and how it operates as a hegemonic force, not just within nonprofit organizations but in the economy and the way the system is set up to use nonprofits as an excuse to not have to implement true structural change.

In the following literature review, I begin by discussing the literature on whiteness and how it manifests in education, as this will be central to analyzing City Year's work in an educational setting. Brittany Aronson's (2017) essay, "The White Savior Industrial Complex," will then lead into a discussion about the concept of white saviorism, leading into a discussion of the concept of an industrial complex, particularly the nonprofit industrial complex. I will then address solutions to the issues present in the nonprofit field. Last, I will briefly discuss Black feminist thought and grounded theory as the theoretical frameworks for my research.

Whiteness and America's History of Racial Inequity

All modern disciplines carry the traces of colonial thought and it is our
responsibility as scholars to study and teach the genealogies of our disciplines and

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to dismantle that legacy, through decoloniality. (Jaffe 2018, interview with Gloria Wekker)

One would assume that America's history of racism is common knowledge. However, what often goes overlooked by those who are unaffected by racism is how racism and segregation did not end with the abolishment of Jim Crow in 1965. The effects of history persist and are both visible and invisible, depending on where one lives, one's life experiences, one's familial background, and the attitudes one grew up with in their family and community. Any scholarly discussion of racism should emphasize this complex history, but depending on one's social circle, the conversation may manifest in the form of some sort of myth of meritocracy discourse. In "How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America," Karen Brodkin (1998) describes how her Jewish family attributed their success to hard work, not recognizing that their success also had to do with the removal of social barriers (26) as many previously marginalized groups of European immigrants became "whitened" (27) throughout history and were uniquely positioned to attain the "American Dream." America's discriminatory and racist practices remained ultimately hidden to the white middle class elite whose parents and grandparents were recipients of affirmative action programs and institutional policy which disproportionately placed them in a position of privilege to attain the benefits promised by the "American Dream" discourse.

The post-WWII era saw what Brodkin describes as an "expanded notion of whiteness" (1998, 36) as both the categorized old and new (formerly seen as inferior) whites – Irish, Italians, Jewish people, and immigrants of southern and eastern Europe - became integrated into the middle class and the "American Dream" discourse (38). The GI Bill of 1944 was designed to assist soldiers returning from war in buying a home, finding work, and attending an institution of higher education (38). However, women and people of color were excluded from these benefits,

were denied access to jobs, and those who had jobs during the war were the first to be laid off to make jobs available for white men coming home from war (43). As Brodkin states, "Irish, Jews, and southern and eastern European Catholics were all held back until they were granted [...] the institutional privileges of socially sanctioned whiteness" (41). Major institutions such as the U.S. Employment Service, the Federal Housing Administration, the military, and the Veterans Administration denied GI benefits to African Americans, especially those who were dishonorably discharged (disproportionately) from service, rendering them ineligible on the surface, masking the discriminatory practices utilized by these institutions which set white men up for success (43). Institutions of higher education implemented similar discriminatory practices, resulting in only a small number of African Americans who gained access to higher education and became the Black middle class (44).

The federal government's failure to uphold equitable practices in the employment, housing, and higher education sectors, which disproportionately favored and provided voluminous benefits to white GI Bill recipients, left people of color, particularly African Americans, on the margins of society. Meanwhile, As Brodkin explains, the benefits and affirmative action programs that came with the post-war era resulted in "mass entry into a middle-class, home-owning suburban lifestyle. Together they raised the American standard of living to a middle-class one" (1998, 46). The myth that those who achieved success did it solely through hard work and dedication, or "picked themselves up by their bootstraps," as the cliché saying goes, hides the fact that federal programs which whitened formerly discriminated Europeans and provided numerous benefits to them were major agents of success for white people. Present-day high-poverty neighborhoods resulted from these discriminatory policies and practices. The Federal Housing Administration actively promoted racial segregation and

restrictive covenants against African Americans, even after 1948 when the Supreme Court outlawed these covenants (47). Without government assistance to purchase their own homes or attend university and facing redlining policies that forced Black Americans to live in certain areas, the Black peers of Brodkin's father struggled financially when they returned from war service.

The recipients of these post-war programs have left a legacy of privilege which their descendants continue to enjoy in the present, while "media demonization of African Americans and Central American immigrants as lazy welfare cheats encourage feelings of white entitlement to middle-class privilege" (Brodkin 1998, 52). The demonization of people of color is accompanied by a denial of white privilege and the ability to avoid any discussion on racism and whiteness. In "White Fragility" (2011), Robin DiAngelo defines whiteness as "the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people over people of color" (56). Whiteness upholds racism. According to DiAngelo, "whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color" (2011, 56). The privilege that comes with whiteness allows white people to avoid discussing issues of race. DiAngelo states that words like "urban," "inner-city," and "disadvantaged" are often used as codenames for racial categories (55). Racially specific words like "white" or "privileged" are absent from discussion, and the avoidance of racialized language prevents serious discussions about issues of race and allows white people to maintain a sense of comfort that the issue does not affect them (55). DiAngelo draws from her experiences doing cultural sensitivity trainings and argues that facilitators of these trainings often avoid talking about racism and privilege for several reasons, including lack of competency on the white

facilitator's part, pressure from employers to keep the training content desirable, and perhaps the defense mechanisms of a Black facilitator in a room full of white people (55). Furthermore, white people have the privilege of seeing themselves as individuals and not part of a "racially socialized group" (59) while people of color are seen in racial terms – always "the Black man," not just "the man" (60). There is also constant contradiction between universalist and individualist ideologies (59). On one hand, white people see themselves as the default representatives of humanity, but accusations of benefiting from white privilege trigger defensiveness as white people claim that they are all individuals (59). As DiAngelo states, "Whites invoke these seemingly contradictory discourses—we are either all unique or we are all the same—interchangeably. Both discourses work to deny white privilege and the significance of race" (60).

Whiteness and white privilege entails participation in a racist system. This is not an easy concept to swallow for a white person who is mostly ignorant, and facing this reality often results in what DiAngelo defines as "white fragility…a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (2011, 54), or simply put, "lack of racial stamina" (56). This fragility is a result of a lack of exposure to other perspectives than what one is accustomed to, and even when one places oneself in a position of questioning whiteness and talking about their privilege, it is voluntary and temporary. White people are not forced to constantly examine their attitudes and positionality unless somebody points it out or they voluntarily choose to examine it themselves.

The defensiveness that often results when people confront white ignorance is what Alison Bailey (2014) refers to as "white talk" (38), a term coined by Alice McIntyre (1997, 45) that describes the excuses which white people often make to preserve their sense of innocence,

statements along the lines of, "I have Black friends," "I never mistreat Black people, so I'm not racist," or "I face oppression too as a woman." Bailey argues that "white talk persists because it has an enduring and powerful moral, ontological, and epistemic pay off for white folks" (Bailey 2014, 40). The justificatory and responsibility-evading language of white talk allows one to only engage in discussion about racism on a superficial level from a place of comfort (2014, 43) in which the white person believes that they are proving their innocence and refraining from seeing themselves as part of the problem (2014, 44). It is scary for white people to see themselves as a problem, since they believe themselves to be well-meaning and good (2014, 46). The willful ignorance of white talk is invalidating and dismissive and highlights the privilege of being able to walk away from the brutality committed against people of color historically, the lived experiences of people of color in the present, and the discomfort of acknowledging that one is complicit in a system of racism and social inequity (2014, 49).

Peggy McIntosh (2009) describes white privilege as the invisible knapsack: "an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious" (12). She describes her experiences and how recognizing that privilege is one way to be accountable (12). She describes that she never had to recognize her privilege because she was taught to see herself as the default way of being – "an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will" (13) and her privileges were "made to feel are mine by birth, by citizenship, and by virtue of being a conscientious law-abiding "normal" person of goodwill" (13). Several themes stand out among the privileges she lists, one being housing, having the peace of mind that she can find a home near people who look like her in a favorable area (13). Another common theme is representation, knowing that her race is represented in books, grocery stores, and hair salons (14). Furthermore, her behaviors are not

attributed to her race, whether they are perceived as positive or negative behaviors (14). These

are aspects of daily life that are more hidden than obvious acts of racism (15). McIntosh argues

that white privilege implies dominance based on race, and she distinguishes "between earned

strength and unearned power conferred systemically" (16) to suggest that society should strive to

make positive advantages the norm for all people (16). The way to do this is to acknowledge

these inequities (18).

Whiteness in Education

> White teachers then, and most now, aren't required to have any analysis of
> systems of white supremacy or anti-Blackness, *and their own complicity in both*,
> before they enter classrooms to teach Black children, some of whom will be
> introduced to those realities *by the behavior of these white teachers*. Having done
> little or none of the necessary work required to examine their complicity, what
> gives these teachers the right to teach our children? (McKenzie 2014, emphasis in
> original).

Whiteness and white privilege are central to much of the literature on education and

teacher education. The literature critiquing the education system highlights its positionality in

what bell hooks (2003, 10) calls the "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy." In her

book *On Intellectual Activism*, Patricia Hill Collins (2013) talks about "pattern[s] of relationships

across differences in power" (223). One power difference she talks about is voyeurism in which

privileged people treat the experiences and lives of the oppressed as a spectacle to behold, to

entertain themselves by seeing how the "other" lives (2013, 223). A classroom is a prime

example when Black students are only called on when issues pertaining to Black people are

discussed (2013, 223). Furthermore, academic colonialism (2013, 224) refers to when

marginalized people are the subjects of study and are exploited for personal gain. Whiteness,

white supremacy, and white privilege are important to examine in this sphere because, as Collins

(2009) states, schools are "gatekeepers for what can be said and done […] Schools are places

that mold ideas, that, through a variety of ways, in a so-called hidden curriculum, reward us for seemingly appropriate ideas and behaviors and punish others" (4).

White teachers are frequently critiqued in the literature for their inability to examine their whiteness, their complicity in a racist education system, and the harm that this does to students of color. In "Check Yourself Before You Wreck Yourself and Our Kids," Cheryl E. Matias (2013) defines whiteness as "a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemology, emotions and behaviors that get normalized because of white supremacy" (69). Matias describes her experiences as a Black, urban-focused teacher educator who teaches culturally responsive education. Matias had grown up having had liberal white teachers who possessed savior mindsets that her teacher candidates also embody. She argues that celebrating diversity without examining whiteness first is ineffective in equipping white teachers to work with students of color. Matias argues that white teachers must examine their whiteness within a critical race theory framework and must acknowledge how they are complicit in maintaining white supremacy (68). Describing a white teacher, Matias states:

> Despite learning about their culture, responsive pedagogies, and languages, Haley was emotionally and mentally unprepared to deal with her whiteness, a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemology, emotions and behaviors that get normalized because of white supremacy. Essentially, Haley's white liberalist educational training, which mainly focused on learning about the "Other" helped her mask and deflect insecurities of learning about herself. Did she really think she could waltz into an urban classroom, rich with students of color, without acknowledging that they would recognize her as White? (69)

Matias's literature review covers a variety of scholars on critical whiteness studies in teaching, and based on her research, she demonstrates that whiteness is hegemonic within education in which white teachers are not asked to interrogate their whiteness, and the education they provide does not respect or value anything that is not white. White teachers, then, even having trained in culturally responsive training, still enter the teaching sphere with prejudices

and an unawareness of their complicity in a white supremacist education system that pitches white teachers as saviors and in which whiteness is the normalized, invisible default (2013, 73). Matias further states that education is heavily biased toward "white-sensitive curricula, white strategies, and white standards against which their future students of color will be measured" (74). White teachers must study, examine, and talk about their whiteness and how they are complicit in a system of white supremacy (76).

In their essay "Teaching in color: a critical race theory in education analysis of the literature on preservice teachers of color and teacher education in the US," Keffrelyn D. Brown (2014) examines teacher education for teachers of color and the challenges they face, including having to operate within a normalized white culture that does not value the knowledge and experiences of teachers of color nor does it set them up to effectively teach social justice. Teachers of color are essentialized in their motivations for becoming teachers, which ignores the unique experiences of teachers of color (340). Brown argues that in teacher education, even for teachers of color, race must still be critically addressed (340), and teachers must be recognized as having unique experiences that are different from dominant society (341).

Whiteness also manifests as a dominating force when the speech styles of students of color are marginalized and deemed inappropriate for communicating in academic settings (Alim 2006). In "Talkin Black in This White Man's World" (2006), Hip Hop culture scholar H.S. Alim argues that Black Language is constantly scrutinized in academic settings inside and outside the classroom while the white-dominated education system ignores the fact that it is a complex speech style. Alim explains that speakers have the ability to shift speech styles voluntarily, indicative of exceptional intelligence and self-awareness. Katie Hejtmanek (2015) has a similar argument in her study of a youth psychiatric facility in which hip hop is not only a form of

therapeutic intervention but has significant meaning in a broader political and cultural context (2015, 14). According to Alim, there are complex linguistic features and rules of language use that go ignored or judged by the school environment. Alim argues that Black Language (2006, 54) is often described as disrespectful and abrasive, ignoring the cultural significance of the linguistic style in establishing a sense of solidarity within a judgmental and hostile academic and social context (59). Furthermore, the verbal creativity in the Black Language is also ignored, and even well-meaning teachers subscribe to linguistic supremacy that enacts whiteness by constantly correcting Black speech without allowing for its use in creative outlets. The scrutinizing of Black speech is indicative of racist attitudes that manifest in the form of "linguistic supremacy" (59). Alim argues that the problematization of Black Language has more to do with Black prejudice and perceptions of whiteness as the default way of being, disguised by the idea that there is a standard English speech (57). While some have argued that Alim's arguments are controversial, and in some ways essentializing, his work certainly highlights the fact that every judgement made against people of color is embedded within a larger prejudiced ideological framework.

To tie into the next section, I discuss a study by Brittany Aronson (2017), a former urban elementary school teacher, called "The White Savior Industrial Complex." This will set the stage for a discussion about the genealogy of white saviorism and later, the nonprofit industrial complex.

The White Savior

In her essay, Aronson (2017) asks, *"How will our children ever believe in themselves if we don't take a risk to believe in them first?"* (38, emphasis in original). Originally inspired by

the movie *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese 2007), Aronson set out to make a difference in the world with positive intentions motivating her to be a driving force for lifting children of color out of poverty, a mindset which she reflects on as a product of a white savior complex that she was unaware of until she took a class on Critical Race Theory during her early teacher education. Aronson now facilitates a teacher training program with urban teachers.

Aronson (2017) conducted her study in a six-week Applied Educational Psychology course in which she taught teachers about white bias in education and simultaneously analyzed her student's work. The class consisted of nineteen white students, one African American student, and one Nigerian student. She found that her students expected a teacher to be a figure of guidance and advocacy, a role model, and a motivator. This is often how teachers are depicted in pop culture films such as *Dead Poet's Society* (Weir 1989) and the *Magic School Bus* (Cole, Degen, and Martin 1994-1997).

Aronson's analysis centers around the film, *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese 2007). For the first exercise of the class, students were shown a clip from the movie and were asked to analyze it. Aronson found that students provided "deficit-oriented responses" (2017, 46) in which they believed that students from impoverished communities do not care about their education. Aronson argues that these responses demonstrated ignorance of factors such as the broken education system, placement in classes with outdated materials, and educators who are poorly trained and culturally incompetent. Aronson compared attitudes from the beginning and end of the six-week course and found that students still did not stray from "white saviorism" (46) in their discourse. She states that there is an "underlying assumption that the teachers, herself included, are the stable influences in their students' lives…[and] this white female teacher [in *Freedom Writers*] positions herself...as if she is the only one that provides care for her students,

and she can be congratulated for taking on this *burden"* (48, emphasis in original). The idea that this teacher can be the only caretaker because her values do not align with that of the students is a white savior mindset that can cause harm to the child while elevating the teacher's sense of pride. Furthermore, Aronson observed myth of meritocracy ideologies among her students who believed that people fail due to their own shortcomings. This is what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) refers to as abstract liberalism, a form of colorblind racism is used to justify the absence of differential treatment through the idea that people are responsible for their own failures (28). Aronson reflects that this six-week course was not enough to result in a paradigm shift among teachers who were from a white middle-class background where white savior attitudes are reinforced through teacher education. The problem has a much wider scope. As Aronson argues,

> in the larger system of white supremacy, *we are falsely taught being white is better so it makes sense why we would instill our white values upon students of Color. We falsely believe ourselves to be the "chosen ones" who can save these children through our hard work ethic, our creative teaching methods, and our enthusiasm and dedication.* (2017, 51-52, emphasis in original)

The literature on white saviorism frequently shows up in the form of film critiques and journalism. Before I get into this, I want to provide a brief genealogy of where white saviorism comes from. In previous paragraphs I examined whiteness, and this white hegemony is the heart of the idea that everything white is the default, natural way of being. Alison Bailey (2014) describes how colonization homogenized diverse and unique groups of people and lumped them under one term based on perceived racial categories, enabling colonizers to perceive these groups of people as problems (2014, 9). The problematization of groups of people as obstacles to achieving nation building allowed colonial powers to perceive them as inferior, but instrumental to colonization (9). Bailey states that "if African labor was needed for agriculture, then Africans were understood as identical to beasts of burden" (9). As Bailey argues, the construction of these groups as inferior constructed the perception that Europeans are civilized and examples of good

(9). As Bailey states, "Positioning some groups as problems invariably places other so-called 'civilized' groups in position to 'solve these problems'" (9). White people therefore regularly try to prove their goodness by doing charity work in poor countries and disadvantaged neighborhoods, "fail[ing] to consider how the residents of those communities sometimes resent outsiders' help" (10).

In their capstone titled "Working through the Smog: How White Individuals Develop Critical Consciousness of White Saviorism," Jamie Willer (2019) frames white saviorism on three levels: individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional and systemic racism, within which are white savior mentalities, white savior narratives, and the white savior complex in that order (11). At the core resides the racist mentality that is evident in a larger cultural framework and therefore within institutional structures. Willer argues that

> The white savior narrative requires the othering process in order to position white dominant society as the "saviors" to the "less fortunate racial others." Depoliticizing and de-historicizing the white savior narrative permits a situation where the racial "other" appears to be naturally the less fortunate person in need of saving while the white person is naturally the charitable savior. (15-16)

In his book *The White Savior Film*, Hughey (2014), critiquing the white savior trope in film, applies it to society on a larger scale, stating that

> varied intercultural and interracial relations are often guided by a logic that racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites). Such imposing patronage enables an interpretation of nonwhite characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities. (2)

To set the stage for explaining white saviorism, Hughey argues that "whiteness is associated with either normativity or idealism—linked sets of behaviors, achievements, and statuses to which all who desire social and economic mobility should aspire" (2014, 4-5). Whiteness is constructed as a default desirable way of being (5), reflecting what the literature so

far has demonstrated to be the case in education settings. Drawing from critiques about whiteness, Hughey suggests that whites feel victimized, fatigued by complaints from people of color about racial inequity, and yearn for a post-racial era of reconciliation, and the white savior trope in film represents the well-meaning white person doing good. This reinforces white supremacy in a way that is not explicit (8).

Hughey states that white saviorism emerged alongside the idea of the "noble savage," a term that emerged from John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* in 1672. The "noble savage" is characterized as a native who is simplistic, spiritual, and unspoiled by modernity (2014, 9). As Hughey states,

> This racialized idea fit well with the romanticized and uneasy belief that a burgeoning industrial society was moving away from its time-honored roots, thus losing touch with humanity's true moral instincts. With growing colonial contact and an increasingly media-saturated world, the notion of a white messianic penetrant of a naturally pure and unspoiled culture of noble savages slowly trickled into the popular imagination. Soon the characters of the noble savage and the white colonizer became staples of popular culture and an all-too-seductive device by which racial difference and interaction were interpreted. (9)

Hughey notes that "manifest destiny" implied the divine right of white American colonizers to impose their way of life and morals onto the colonized (9). This was the attitude practiced toward slaves and Indigenous people, as evident in the expression "Kill the Indian, and Save the Man" (9). Hughey also mentions Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" (10), a poem interpreted to be a critique of the idea that it is white man's responsibility to rule non-whites who are perceived as dysfunctional. What Hughey is describing here is what Aronson described in her critique of the movie *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese 2007) in which the white teacher shows the "dysfunctional" kids the way. White saviorism also permeates political landscapes, religion, and even environmentalism (Hughey 2014, 11-12). Hughey uses the words

"messianic" and "paternalistic" to imply that there is a religious and gendered aspect to white saviorism.

Hughey's book is one of many literary works about film that critique the white savior trope. Popular culture in the form of film, therefore, was a major influencer of white saviorism in real life, which is why critiques of it come up so much in film and journalism. Hughey uses film because "the social practice of consuming film has proved an efficacious strategy for promoting economic stability, stabilizing national identity, and endorsing both implicit and explicit racial messages since the first films appeared" (2014, 13). In their book *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*, Vera and Gordon (2003) argue that "we need to study movies not only because of what they tell us about the world we live in but also, and most importantly, because movies are a crucial part of that world. In the simulations of the moving pictures we learn who has the power and who is powerless, who is good, and who is evil" (8). Watching motion pictures is a popular recreational activity that has taken off especially since the invention of television in the 1950s. The majority of popular films celebrate whiteness and make white privilege invisible (10). Vera and Gordon dedicate a chapter of their book to unpacking whiteness and its meaning, using terminology such as "sincere fictions of the white self" (15), referring to "deliberately constructed images of what it means to be white" (15). What they mean is that humans, by producing and consuming stories about themselves in the world they live in and take for granted, rarely examine these fictions (15-16), and through this process, the white self remains invisible and results in the denial of white privilege (15). Similarly, they talk about the "sincere fictions of the savior," (33) depicting the white person as a messianic figure who saves people from oppression, disease, weakness, etc. (33). White savior films depict the white

protagonist as a charismatic leader who minorities depend on (50), and these depictions trickle into the way people view themselves in real life.

In his article "Blindsided by the Avatar: White Saviors and Allies Out of Hollywood and in Education," Julio Cammarota (2011) points out that the populations receiving white people's help "would have been fine and not in need of rescuing were it not for the exploitation of the saviors' people in the first place" (248). Cammarota analyzes white saviors as they are often depicted in popular media and education as the only agents for social change in films such as *The Blind Side* and *Avatar*. There is a common theme of a "white person [guiding] people of color from the margins to the mainstream with his or her own initiative and benevolence" (243). There is little room in these narratives for powerful people of color who exhibit tremendous courage, agency, and leadership in social and political movements against oppression. The "false generosity" (244) of the white savior complex entails helping a handful of individuals without challenging oppressive structures that create the perceived need. People of color are often portrayed as "helpless" (244) in pop culture, perpetuating the discourse that white leadership is necessary to create social change. As Cammarota states, "this higher status buttressed by racism, classism, and general elitism allows white and wealthier people to feel superior over the supposedly downtrodden others" (252), and this mindset is embedded within the idea of helping a community in need.

In their film review "Progressive in Theory, Regressive in Practice: A Critical Race Review of Avatar," Ketchum, Embrick, and Peck (2011) also offer a critique of James Cameron's *Avatar*, stating that "This is the central tragedy of white savior films. Minorities are portrayed as limited but sympathetic characters and whites are portrayed as superior, with limitless potential, and most important, necessary to solving any problems experienced by

minority groups" (2011, 200). Similar to "noble savage" tropes in film, the "natives" are portrayed as spiritual and physically capable, while the white person is portrayed as intellectually and technologically capable (2011, 199). Similar to Hughey's (2014) and Vera and Gordon's (2003) arguments, Ketchum, Embrick, and Peck argue that film both reflects society and reinforces what is deemed "normal" (2011, 200). Another film critique that discusses the white savior trope in a way that is applicable to the real world is Mark Lievisse Adriaanse's (2015/2016) "Saving Those Who Cannot Save Themselves: The Narrative of Saviorism, Otherness, and Humanitarianism in Kony 2012." Adriaanse critiques the short film Kony 2012 (Russell 2012), saying that the activists portrayed in the film portray a "Western humanitarian narrative, which construes a triangular relationship between *savages*, *victims*, and *saviors*, […that] victimizes local Ugandans, who have neither the voice nor the agency to end the conflict themselves, and are in need of a *savior"* (17, emphasis in original). These power relations therefore exhibit a form of neocolonialism that reinforces perceptions of Western dominance and superiority.

White saviorism is also frequently discussed in social media analysis and journalism. In her thesis "Branding White Saviorism: The Ethics and Irony of Humanitarian Discourse on Instagram," Cooney-Petro (2019) analyzes Instagram posts of Peace Corps volunteers and how these posts are used as personal branding of the individual as a savior in the country they are serving in. Cooney-Petro's argument is that the use of social media serves as validation for volunteers of their morality. Cooney-Petro argues that this white saviorism is a form of present-day colonialism. In her essay "'Reason to Hope?': The White Savior Myth and Progress in 'Post-Racial' America," Nicole Maurantonio (2017) critiques journalists' portrayals of the murder of Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man from Charleston, South Carolina who was killed by

Michael Slager, a white police officer. Mayor Keith Summey and Police Chief Eddie Driggers of Charleston condemned Slager's actions and were described in the media as glimmers of hope. Their disapproval of the murder and their sympathetic responses to the community earned them much glorification in the media accompanied by a reputation of white redemption. Maurantonio uses Hughey's (2014) book to analyze what happened here and argues that this color-blind and "post-racial" portrayal of the white savior is a "mythic construction of Whiteness" (2017, 1142), and it is important to examine the structures behind these constructions "to engage the issue of racism and its pervasiveness in contemporary United States. Without it, victims of color will continue to be forgotten to devastating effect. Such attention requires active resistance to the White savior myths that reify color-blind ideology in public discourse" (2017, 1142). In order to overcome the invisibility and the harm of these power dynamics, discussions about race and whiteness need to be in the spotlight, especially in journalism.

One journalist who is frequently cited in the literature on white saviorism is Jordan Flaherty (2016) and his novel, *No More Heroes: Grassroots Challenges to the Savior Mentality*. Flaherty defines the savior mentality as "the idea that a hero will come and answer our societal problems…" (2016, 8). According to Flaherty, Christopher Columbus embodied a similar mentality in which he believed that Natives needed saving through conversion to Christianity (14). These savior patterns continue into the late 1990s and early twenty-first century. A person exhibiting the savior mentality believes oneself to be superior and correct, while refusing to re-examine oneself and listen to the people they are trying to "save." (18). As Flaherty states, "many people are involved in liberation movements in their free time while their day job is at a charity or other nonprofit that does not challenge the status quo" (18). A prime example that Flaherty describes is Teach for America, an education nonprofit that is an example of how a

well-intentioned education organization can harm the community it serves. According to Flaherty, TFA places emphasis on volunteerism instead of systemic change. Between 2008 and 2013, mass layoffs of teachers in major cities displaced 324,000 teachers, and vacancies were filled by young, mostly white, inexperienced corps members (103). During this time, TFA remained silent about major issues such as the school-to-prison pipeline and inequitable distribution of funding for public schools, and instead blamed the failure of the education system on teachers (103). In New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina was seen as an opportunity to rebuild the education system, and schools were given to charter operations that fired veteran teachers, replacing them with 400 TFA teachers per year following the disaster (106). New Orleans' public school system was over 90 percent Black, and mostly white teachers were sent to run these schools (107). The teachers displaced by mass layoffs were majority Black women (108). It is also important to note that TFA is designed to create turnover, since corps members only serve a two-year term.

As a result of TFA's displacement of Black teachers, students at several high schools organized protests and activist groups (Flaherty 2016, 109), angered that the teachers they loved were replaced by young white people who, according to activist Jonshell Johnson, organizer with United Students of New Orleans, "seemed to be overly caught up in the partying culture of New Orleans, taking extra days off during Mardi Gras season and other festive holidays" (in Flaherty 2016, 110). The TFA members and students whom Flaherty interviewed expressed that TFA made them uncomfortable. One student described it as feeling like nineteenth century Indian boarding schools where the white teachers forced their ways upon Native American children (112). TFA teachers who struggled the most were those with an inflated sense of idealism and

self-righteousness, and these volunteers simultaneously suffered from mental health issues and alcoholism (113).

This idea that volunteers receive more out of their service than they give, and may in fact cause harm, all while possessing a savior mentality, can be characterized as an industrial complex. The next section will discuss this concept in more detail.

The Nonprofit Industrial Complex

In a series of Twitter posts, novelist and activist Teju Cole (2012) coined the term "White Savior Industrial Complex (WSIC)" in response to the short film Kony 2012 (Russell 2012) to describe white people who perceive themselves as bearing the burden of helping or fixing people less fortunate, particularly people of color. Cole uses "industrial complex" to imply that white saviorism is an industry in which white individuals emotionally profit from the oppression of the people they think they are helping while they are ignorant to the larger systems of oppression behind the immediate issue. Cole's intention in characterizing white saviorism as an "industrial complex" is to use "direct speech" to overtly call out white saviorism (Cole 2012).

The term "industrial complex," according to Ruth Wilson Gilmore, describes a system in which "an entire realm of social policy and social investment is hostage to the development and perfection of means of mass punishment" (Gilmore [2007] 2017, 42). Gilmore is referring to the military and prison industrial complexes, industrial systems which profit from the continuation of war and mass incarceration. For example, in a military industrial complex, profit depends on the existence of war so that profits can be made from selling weapons. In a prison industrial complex, private prisons push for higher incarceration rates ([2007] 2017, 41-43), all under the guise of ideas like "tough on communism" or "tough on crime" (42) for the purpose of

maintaining legitimacy of state power (43). Teju Cole (2012) applies this concept to whiteness

and white savior mentality. Cole uses WSIC to describe white people doing humanitarian work

to feel good about oneself without the awareness of the full extent of the patterns of power

behind the problem they are trying to fix (2012). The WSIC is invisible to the white savior under

the "banner of making a difference" (2012), an inflated sense of pride about doing good while

ignoring the implications of such actions. These white "leaders" often lack the cultural

competency and humility necessary to understand the relevant issues or how their good

intentions may be reinforcing inequitable social structures. Beginning with the assumption that a

certain community is disadvantaged and in need of intervention, the racial, economic, and

political structures behind the problem are overlooked. Well-meaning people then focus on the

immediate needs of a disadvantaged group to satisfy their emotional need to make a difference

(2012). These ideas are embedded in a much larger discussion about economics and policy

which I dive into in the following paragraphs.

According to Boyd and Sandell (2012), the unequal power structure that nonprofit work

and volunteerism reinforces is situated within the broader scope of neoliberalism and global

capitalism (2012, 263). Nonprofits in the bigger picture participate in and are complicit in this

global system of inequity. In the Foreword of *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, Soniya

Munshi and Craig Willse ([2007] 2017) trace the nonprofit industrial complex to neoliberalism,

an ideology that is "predicated upon the belief that the maximization of social good requires

locating all human action in the domain of the market" (xiv), an unregulated market. Munshi and

Willse go on to argue that "when neoliberalism moves from a set of ideas into practice, it

requires an active state to direct the dismantling of social welfare programs, the deregulation of

labor and trade, and the protection of the wealth and assets of transnational corporations and a

global elite class" (xiv). In other words, the major inequities caused by the "free market" are due

to conscious efforts of the state to concentrate wealth and power into the hands of a few. In the

Introduction of *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, Andrea Smith ([2007] 2017), summarizing

Rodriguez ([2007] 2017) and Gilmore ([2007 2017), states,

> While the PIC [prison industrial complex] overtly represses dissent the NPIC
> manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus,
> functioning as a 'shadow state' constituted by a network of institutions that do
> much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the
> areas of education and social services. The NPIC functions as an alibi that allows
> government to make war, expand punishment, and proliferate market economies
> under the veil of partnership between the public and private sectors. (8)

Smith ([2007] 2017) is arguing that the nonprofit sector serves as an excuse to allow the

state to continue dismantling public social welfare programs to prioritize major corporations in

the public sector. The support that government and corporations then give to nonprofits produces

the illusion of public-private partnerships while allowing the state to maintain social inequity.

Similarly, Dylan Rodriguez ([2007] 2017) defines the nonprofit industrial complex as "the set of

symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and

owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political intercourse, including and

especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements, since about the mid-1970s" (21).

Rodriguez argues that the nonprofit industrial complex is intertwined with the prison industrial

complex, a system meant to profit off of imprisonment, particularly prisoners of color, to

maintain a "law and order" (26) state that was designed to criminalize and pathologize activists,

intellectuals, and people of color who are perceived as radical and threatening to the "peace" and

order of "white civil society" (26-27). Movements intended to create social change are

constrained to operate within specific institutions that work symbiotically with the "law and

order" state (26). Grassroots movements, therefore, are stripped of the ability to create change

without the help of private foundations (26) that constantly require them to jump through excessive hoops (29).

In critiquing philanthropy, Rodriquez ([2007] 2017) describes George Soros' Open Society Foundations as a naïve vision in which constant dialog between opposing ideologies is meant to level off social issues yet reinforces the positionality of social movements within "the constraints of bourgeois liberal democracy" (27). The foundational giving and philanthropy of George Soros reinforces social organizations as dependent on the system. As Rodriguez argues, "Open Society's narrative of reconciliation and societal perfection marginalizes radical forms of dissent which voice an irreconcilable antagonism to white supremacist patriarchy, neoliberalism, racialized state violence, and other structures of domination" (28). Rodriguez is arguing that corporate philanthropy and the nonprofits that claim to be the hub of social justice are still a part of the "establishment Left" that normalizes a white civil society and criminalizes radical social movements (37). This is the NPIC in practice, reproducing neocolonial power relations which Rodriquez defines as "the institutionalization of a relation of dominance" (39).

Like Rodriquez, Ruth Wilson Gilmore ([2007] 2017) traces the nonprofit industrial complex to the prison and military industrial complexes, stating that "an entire realm of social policy and social investment is hostage to the development and perfection of means of mass punishment" (42). These forces legitimate the power of the state (43) by letting the voluntary sector pick up the slack, and this system is maintained by producing "socially strengthening rewards" (44). Nonprofits are forbidden by law to advocate for social change, and many turn to "organized philanthropy" (46) to retain a sense of freedom from the state. Even grassroots groups, according to Gilmore, operate within the "shadow of the shadow state" (46) – they are

not third-sector nonprofits (the shadow state), but they operate in its shadow by focusing on small projects rather than larger societal issues (47).

In his study of corporate philanthropy in China, Liao (2013) describes that corporations participate in philanthropic activities because it boosts their reputation and their sales (97). Through this study, Liao examined charity donation and volunteer service. Liao found that charity donations not only boost the reputation of the company and encourage customer recognition, but donations and volunteer services also drives employees to work more efficiently (107). However, volunteer activities themselves do not benefit the corporation as this results in labor and material cost (107). I will discuss volunteerism in a later section.

The systems that create the need for these organizations have a long history in the dismantling of the welfare state, which has much to do with racial prejudice. In *Another Kind of Public Education*, Patricia Hill Collins (2009) describes the social welfare state as the "quintessential public institution" that has been under attack since the 1960s, particularly in the 1980s under the Reagan administration (21). The attacks on public institutions during the 1960s and '70s was also a time when historically marginalized groups were becoming eligible for government benefits (21). The government attacked these public programs in a way that was seemingly colorblind, but as Collins states, "racial politics have framed social welfare policies such as Social Security, unemployment compensation, and services to poor children and families since their inception in the 1930s" (21). Furthermore, the African American middle class made up a significant portion of public sector employment, and the Reagan administration's dismantling of the public sector was therefore damaging to middle class African Americans (22). This shift toward privatization is a market-based solution that leaves many people behind (23)

and creates a negative view of the "public" sector (25). Charitable work then, is presented as the solution for fixing the issues created by privatization.

According to Brian H. Smith ([1990] 2014), the idea of charitable work can be traced further back in history to the middle ages when religious institutions such as churches provided services for the poor as a means to instill Western values that reinforced colonial power (28-29). Secular charitable organizations emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and those organizations were also granted tax immunity, like religious institutions (12). Nonprofits in the present continue to justify their presence by the fact that they provide valuable services that the government does not (16). Furthermore, "they also strengthen the stability of the social, economic, and political system in heterogenous democratic societies by relieving certain real or potential tensions" (16). These organizations are meant to stay in their place or risk losing tax-exempt status if they participate in partisan politics (16).

Nicole P. Marwell (2004) states that the War on Poverty in the 1960s was a federal effort and political strategy dedicated to addressing impoverished communities, and funding under these policies was allocated to private Community Action Agencies (CAAs) (268). These agencies were intended to deliver services and garner political support on the federal level (269), but state and local governments saw these groups as a threat, and in 1967, Congress passed the Green Amendment, requiring funding to be passed only to the action agencies that local elected officials deemed legitimate, giving them control over funding allocation (268). This bill inhibited CAAs from taking political action (269). Because of this, "the CAA's ability to create social change for the poor was severely constrained by their lack of *electoral* political capacity (269, emphasis in original). As a result, CAAs took to protesting, which led to the government cutting funding toward the end of the 60s (269). The Reagan era saw shrinkage of the federal

government and the privatization and devolution of public funds (267). Marwell defines

privatization as "the contracting out of public services to private third parties, the primary

example being the contracting of nonprofits by government organizations to provide services to

citizens in need (267). Marwell defines devolution as "the transfer of decisions regarding the

details of spending public funds from the federal government to states, counties, and

municipalities" (268). In this system, local and state governments decide which nonprofits get

funding (268). The literature so far can be summarized to say that governments do not want

nonprofits to have power; they want power to remain central. The privatized structure in which

modern nonprofits operate is the legacy of twentieth century policies (269).

Similarly, in "The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector," Lester M. Salamon (1994) describes the

nonprofit sector as a "third sector" from which all of America's social movements emerged

(109). Nonprofits are the institutions that fill the gaps that the state does not (110). Salamon

states that the growth of the nonprofit sector is coming from three different directions: from

grassroots activists, from public and private institutions, and even from government policies

(112). Salamon, like Marwell (2004) and Collins (2009), states that nonprofits expanded during

the Reagan administration as a way to curb social spending (114-115). Salamon describes several

crises that led to this. The first is the "crisis of the modern welfare state" in which a decline in

economic growth in the 1970s led to the belief that the spending on social welfare in previous

decades was causing a decline in private investment. The public was less willing to pay for this

social safety net and many believed that this was discouraging people from taking personal

responsibility (115-116). Next, the "crisis of development" in Africa, Asia, and Latin America

led to the idea of "assisted self-reliance" or "participatory development" (116) which allowed the

impoverished to be active in grassroots development efforts. Last, Salamon argues that the

(perceived) failure of socialism, which he seems to be using synonymously with communism,

led to the formations of "market-oriented cooperative enterprises" and experimentation with

nongovernmental organizations as a result of increasing distrust of the state (117). All this

happened simultaneously with developments in communication and global economic growth in

the 1960s through the 1980s (117-118). As Salamon argues, the issue with nonprofits is that they

are not immune to "inevitable tensions that arise between flexibility and effectiveness, grass-

roots control and administrative accountability" (119). Furthermore, "far from an instrument of

grass-roots independence, non-profit organizations have sometimes functioned as vehicles for

extending the influence of national political leaders" (119). Salamon argues that government,

especially in America, is a major funder of nonprofits and turns to them often to solve society's

issues (120).

It is interesting to look at the historical role of governments in shaping the nonprofit

sector and the idea that governments use nonprofits to push political agendas. The political

agenda that I interpret is the reinforcing of capitalism as the dominant force in society. In *Against

the Romance of Community*, Miranda Joseph (2002) states,

> At least in the United States, when the imagery of community is invoked,
> nonprofits are a central feature and, conversely, nonprofits are imagined to be
> expressions of community. […] At the same time, nonprofits are defined through
> their relation to capital. Nonprofits are supposed to be *not* for profit – the capital
> they accumulate cannot be distributed as profit – but they are also not non-
> capitalist and especially not anticapitalist. Nonprofits are often posited as the
> institutional form in which community complements capital. […] Largely run on
> women's voluntary and low-waged labor and providing services once thought to
> be women's work (religion, education, social welfare), nonprofits might be seen
> as a site of reproduction that supports for-profit production in much the way
> women's domestic labor has done. (70)

According to Joseph, nonprofits fill the space left by capitalism, a system that unequally

distributes wealth (2002, 73). Into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "private voluntary

organizations" were identified by the U.S. government and capitalists as a way to prevent

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expansion of communism (Joseph 2002, 89). Joseph argues that the concept of "community" offers a space which is not communist but still represents the desires for things that are not capital, and by doing this, "nonprofits function as a hegemonic apparatus, articulating the desire for community with a desire for capitalism" (73). Furthermore, Joseph refers to Carnegie's manifesto on philanthropy which describes philanthropy as a means to suppress socialism (91). The inequities created by capitalism, under Carnegie's manifesto, can be curbed by using philanthropic funding to support public institutions like universities and public libraries (91). Joseph states that into the 1970s, nonprofit organizations expanded to "hegemonize potentially anti-capitalist populations" (91). Joseph describes that this was done under the guise of encouraging cultural inclusivity, referring to Christina Klein (2003).

Klein (2003) describes that global containment and integration were the fundamental ideologies of postwar foreign policy to contain communism and create the illusion that countries could coexist through capitalism (24). Containment meant keeping communism from spreading, and integration refers to open global free trade to ensure codependency between nations (25). Part of this was the "cultural Cold War" (50) which involved various "cultural diplomacy programs." As Klein states, "the People-to-People program emerged out of this cultural diplomacy framework: it was aimed at an international audience and designed to spread American culture, values, and ideas overseas" (50) in an effort to contain and do away with communism as part of the "free world" economy (50). The idea behind it was to "create that sense of multiracial, multinational community" (53). Joseph (2002) argues that by suppressing communism and keeping capitalism in power under the ideological guise of cultural integration, "the strategy shifted away from direct government programs and toward state-supported private organizations […and] capitalists and capitalist states repeatedly deployed nonprofits, in moments

of crisis or expansion, to hegemonize potentially anti-capitalist populations" (91). There appears

to be a paradox – nonprofits operate in excess of capitalism and simultaneously for capitalism.

Joseph seems to be arguing that nonprofits are supposed to act as a pressure valve to deal with

the inequities created by capitalism, and they are supposed to simultaneously maintain a sense of

community which satisfies the need for "something other than capitalism." This system,

however, upholds capitalism by never really challenging it on a structural level.

Joseph's (2002) point is illustrated by the work she did in an ethnographic study of

participants in a nonprofit organization called Theatre Rhinoceros, a gay theatre in San

Francisco. Joseph was interested in why people chose to participate in Theatre Rhinoceros

programs, what the theater thought of itself, and what gayness had to do with it (103). One of

Joseph's informants was angry because they felt gay voices were not being heard and that in

order to be heard, gay theater or gay actors had to conform to mainstream capitalism and act in a

way that is palatable for the mainstream (111). This is the "hegemony building strategy of the

mainstream" through which Joseph's informant "becomes precisely the absent subject of

capitalism, a problematic resistant subject, the site of crisis that capitalism tries to address

through the deployment of nonprofits" (111). What Joseph is arguing overall is that on one hand,

nonprofits are designed by people in power to get the people they serve to participate in

capitalism while also fulfilling their desire for rewards outside of capitalism, such as community.

As Joseph states,

> If nonprofits are haunted by the specter of communism insofar as they are sites at
> which agents of capitalist expansion seek to engage subjects as bearers and
> producers of capital, they are also haunted by the specter of communism insofar
> as they are sites where participants enact their Romantic longing for something
> other than capitalism, for collectivity based in gift exchange, "cultural" identity or
> interest, and where they get help in fulfilling their communal obligations. (117-
> 118)

Perhaps another way to illustrate this is to look at Peace Corps. Peace Corps was established in 1961 by Kennedy, and VISTA (not under the AmeriCorps umbrella yet) was established in 1964 (Flaherty 2016, 100). During this time, the US did not want to be seen as purely heartless capitalists, and they created Peace Corps to send volunteers out to other countries to help "promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served" (Kallman 2015, 75). Based on Joseph's (2002) arguments, Peace Corps seems to fit the description of fulfilling the need for community and values other than capitalism while protecting the US's reputation through the illusion of multiculturalism and reinforcing the free market.

VISTA, now under AmeriCorps, is another interesting case. It is federally funded, and as Flaherty (2016) states, it consisted of primarily white volunteers who were unaware of the structural causes of the conditions the people they served were living under, and even had prejudices against the people they served. However, some VISTA volunteers became politically active as they clashed with political leaders and supported civil rights causes, resulting in Richard Nixon banning political involvement of VISTA volunteers (Flaherty 2016, 101). Bill Clinton then founded AmeriCorps in 1993, and in 1996 the Corporation for National and Community Service wrote, "National service has to be nonpartisan. What's more, it should be about bringing communities together by getting things done. Strikes, demonstrations, and political activities can have the opposite effect. They polarize and divide" (as quoted in Flaherty 2016, 101). This demonstrates what the literature in previous paragraphs has argued, that nonprofits are designed to not fully challenge the state, but rather to "get things done" by addressing immediate needs that do not change political, social, and economic structures.

Richard Buery (2012), Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives in New York City, argued in an article for the Huffington Post, a news and opinion blog, that it should be a commonsense principle that the government provides services and safety for all people, especially vulnerable citizens. When the government fails to do its duty, it partners with nonprofits to pick up the slack. The Huffington Post has an entire section dedicated to the nonprofit sector, an indicator that nonprofit work is a buzzing topic in left-leaning popular media. Buery states that nonprofits are closer to people. They understand people and their needs, and they get the job done cost-efficiently. However, the government has a strict set of guidelines for how services should be delivered, and these guidelines set limitations on the ability of nonprofits to come up with competing, innovative ways to deliver services. Furthermore, Buery explains that success is often measured by how much money the organization can raise since governments are not willing to pay the realistic price, and the money which the government invests needs to be returned if unused, resulting in an organization-wide rush to spend the remaining funds on something that could have been invested in the future of the organization. Government funding also has hard limits on costs of overhead such as program design, Human Resources, and operations.

In a case study of community development in Cleveland, Ohio, researcher Jeffrey Lowe (2008) states, "cities must cater to the demands of the global economy and address the social needs of their citizens, especially those that exist at the margins" (39). Lowe goes on to argue that this need to "cater to the global economy" is counter to the need to serve marginalized communities across the US who are not benefiting from the rise of the upper and middle classes in affluent urban centers. In this global economy, one can observe a pattern in which low-income families are displaced through revitalization efforts in the name of community development,

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which in turn leads to gentrification. The consequence of gentrification is increased racial polarization. The effects of the racial history of the U.S. are still seen and experienced today in society and a government that does little to fight it, leaving the work of serving citizens to poorly funded and poorly structured nonprofits which often find themselves powerless to create change on a structural level.

Flaws and biases in government policy often create structural inequities. The social service organizations designed to address these needs are subject to government regulations and bureaucratic practices that waste time, resulting in major setbacks for the organizations (Buery 2012). Flaherty (2016) argues that these charitable organizations serve as a band aid and a distraction from systemic change which involves political action (2016, 23). Flaherty states that "the more private citizens volunteer, the less the government has to spend" (25). As a result, the money that funds these organizations is seen as a personal contribution that makes individuals or corporations look good while they reap the benefits of tax deductions on the money which they collected by exploiting workers (2016, 22). By relying on this model, the system is reinforced and structured solutions such as taxing the rich seem unfeasible (2016, 27). The next section will examine volunteerism, including why volunteers decide to join, and how volunteerism is gendered and classed in nature, potentially reinforcing social inequity that many volunteers face while simultaneously elevating white volunteers.

Volunteerism

Something worth mentioning is the concept of the career, particularly the subjective career. Stebbins (1970) defines the subjective career "as the actor's recognition and interpretation of past and future events associated with a particular identity, and especially his

interpretation of important contingencies as they were or will be encountered" (34). Stebbins suggests that individuals have predispositions about their life track based on previous experiences, and this influences interpretation of life events (35). Career turning points happen based on an awareness of what has happened to the individual and what they perceive the future to be in that identity (35). Career does not necessarily mean jobs, but rather a life trajectory in pursuit of *something*. Stebbins suggests that "falling behind one's reference group is likely to heighten one's awareness of his career, aiding the tendency to retrospection and prospection in this field of activity and occasionally influencing behavior" (36).

The subjective career refers to one's personal view of themselves within an objective career path. Stebbins gives uses the example of taking an exam to illustrate this point. An exam is objectively a necessary step in attaining a degree, but if one does a better job than they expected, they begin to perceive themselves differently within a career track (1970, 38). This is what Stebbins refers to as a "consensually held contingency" – one's conscious career choice based on their frame of reference or experiences (38). As Stebbins states, "the subjective career is, among other things, a personalized image of the career pattern as the actor relates its ramifications to himself" (39). A job promotion is another example, it is a natural part of a career line, but the subjective experience is different depending on where one finds oneself in life. It can mean something as great as one's biggest achievement or one can see it as a small step in the grand scheme of their aspirations (39). The "individual-objective" career is "the progress of an individual (or cohort of individuals) through a career line" (39).

I draw attention to this because individuals have many reasons for joining a nonprofit or volunteering. As my research in the data section will show, interview participants have diverse reasons for joining City Year and it means something different for each of them as far as their

career paths. City Year service is meant to be a temporary experience that ideally prepares corps members for a lifetime of civic engagement, but this means something different to a corps member who is from the community they serve and wants to earn money for college or "give back" to their community, versus a crops member from an affluent, likely white background who only uses the experience as a stepping stone for something like going to graduate school without the intention of supporting their service community long-term. The way these career trajectories are shaped by society can arguably either cultivate more adherents to capitalism or cultivate those who challenge capitalism and social inequity. The way social service work and volunteerism is encouraged needs to be conscious of what this means for social inequity in the bigger picture.

The motivations that corps members have for joining an organization like City Year vary depending on a wide range of factors. Ryan Ceresola's (2015) study of AmeriCorps members examined whether extrinsic motivations (such as pay) or intrinsic motivations (such as altruism) drive corps members' decisions to join AmeriCorps. Ceresola sought to answer three critical questions:

> why do AmeriCorps members enter, and why do they stay with, the AmeriCorps program? How do AmeriCorps members conceive of their identities in the program, and do these identities align with what is promoted by AmeriCorps? Finally, what influence, if any, does the extrinsic reward of pay have on collective identity formation? (24)

AmeriCorps aims to instill a strong sense of pride in its corps members for doing challenging work along with creating a sense of solidarity with the communities they serve, but they offer substantial benefits that may persuade people to join for personal gain. Ceresola (2015) found that members had different reasons for joining, but the majority did it for instrumental reasons such as finding a job after the program. The ones who reenlisted for a second year, however, tended to do it for more selfless reasons. Twenty-one out of twenty-two

interviewees did not identify with the prideful AmeriCorps "identity," but those who did share a sense of AmeriCorps identity were unified by the experience of living on low AmeriCorps pay (32).

Ceresola (2015) also reports that the AmeriCorps member body as of 2015 was 41 percent white; 25 percent African American; 24 percent Hispanic, Native American or Pacific Islander, and 10 percent Other (30). He argues that AmeriCorps significantly underrepresents people of color and is skewed toward the white middle-class. He states that "AmeriCorps promotes an image of an altruistic, passionate worker immersed in volunteerism and focused on benefiting communities" (29), yet the data clearly shows what the previous literature has illustrated: these community-focused efforts favor white participation and inevitably impose white middle-class values. As the literature on whiteness has shown at the beginning of this literature review, whiteness is central to white savior mentality, which is easy to assume that corps members possess if they are not forced to interrogate their whiteness. This results in an inflated glorification of one's own efforts. This seems contradictory to what Flaherty (2016) was arguing about the poor mental health of TFA corps members who tend burn out and turn to drugs and alcohol. Burnout can be either the result of having approached the work with a sense of saviorism and realizing that one failed, similar to what Matias was arguing about white teachers, it could mean that corps members truly believe they did great things, or it could mean that they grew tremendously from the experience.

While AmeriCorps is skewed toward white corps members, it is important to note that another study of AmeriCorps by Christopher A. Simon (2002) found that the program has taken measures to recruit more people of color, an effort reflected in City Year's intentional diversification of the corps. The benefits of AmeriCorps were found to equally affect all

participants. However, there are still problematic aspects of intentional diversity that are often unaddressed. For example, AmeriCorps is still a program that depends on largely middle class youth to serve in low-income schools for a short time. It doesn't allow for corps members to develop sustained relationships with the community, nor does it allow for grassroots community action. This type of work appeals to white idealists who can serve for one year and reap the benefits of service.

City Year's success in attracting Corps members through its advertising of incentives and strong culture could have something to do with the popular discourse surrounding nonprofit work among millennials. A study from Bentley University (2018) showed that 84 percent of millennials prefer to work for a cause, but 79 percent of respondents place higher importance on a good work environment than a paycheck (Bentley University 2018, 3). The 2015 Deloitte Millennial Survey yielded similar results in which millennials place high importance on working for a company that contributes to the well-being of communities and society at large (2015, 18). These findings inform the popular narrative reflected in an article from the media outlet Nonprofit Pro (Gousse and McCrosson 2018) which argues that attracting millennials to the nonprofit sector entails certain best practices. According to the popular discourse, there is a strong emphasis on the need for culture, flexibility, opportunities for growth in leadership positions, accountability through clear goal setting, and investment in modern technology (2018). Furthermore, the nonprofit organization should provide generous benefits to compensate for minimal salaries (2018).

City Year is highly aware of these best practices and does in fact sell the position by emphasizing the leadership roles corps members take on, the opportunities for growth through professional development, the promise of benefits, and the importance of City Year culture.

Whether the benefits City Year and AmeriCorps offer outweigh the benefits corps members

provide through their service is questionable and subject to debate. For example, conservatives

have criticized the AmeriCorps stipend as going against the culture of volunteerism by providing

external benefits (Simon 2002, 673). Wolch ([1989] 2014) argues that volunteerism has its own

ideological convictions on both the political left and right. On the right, "voluntarism is

necessary to counter views which are hostile to capitalism, economic growth, hard work, and

discipline" ([1989] 2014, 199). On the left, the purpose of volunteerism is to serve as a "concrete

legal/institutional form" for "grassroots participation, decentralization of power, alternative

economic development strategies, and greater self-determination, especially for the

disadvantaged" (200).

Wolch ([1989] 2014) argues that there is also a pragmatic approach that volunteerism has

practical benefits (201). Wolch defines volunteerism as a shadow state: "a para-state apparatus

with collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, administered

outside traditional democratic politics, but yet controlled in both formal and informal ways by

the state" (201). In this system, it is seen as more practical to leave it to voluntary groups to

provide services and solutions to social problems so that the state doesn't have to restructure

anything (202). Wolch argues that this is dangerous because the state can maintain these

structures as long as the voluntary sector can step in to treat the symptoms of the problems (217).

It is also more convenient for the state to cut funding from shadow state voluntary agencies than

to cut funding from state agencies and direct programs (207). This is also convenient because

voluntary sector workers can get the job done without pay or benefits (217). When it comes to

AmeriCorps though, corps members are paid, but they are paid less than minimum wage to take

on enormous tasks for which they are untrained and ill-prepared. This may benefit the affluent

white corps member who has the financial means to work for a year on less than minimum wage, but it has different implications for a woman of color, for example.

Karen Bojar (1998) suggests that volunteer work is gendered (36). She explains that historically, women have been doing volunteer work such as charity and social service while men tended to do career-changing things like serving on a board of directors or partaking in political activism (36). Volunteering tended to be a larger part of women's lives than men's (36). Bojar taught a class at the Community College of Philadelphia in which students, most of whom are women, get class credit for volunteering and are given the chance to reflect on the experience (37). Bojar observed that upper-middle-class women were more likely to volunteer and receive recognition for their efforts, while low-income women did a lot of volunteering as well but didn't think of it as work and instead saw it as simply doing service for the common good (38). Volunteering has historically been a way for women to utilize their talents and find purpose in life (38), but a 1973 statement from the National Organization for Women (NOW) labeled volunteerism as a hit-or-miss band-aid approach that prevents social change (39).

Volunteerism as an end in itself was frowned upon from a feminist perspective (Bojar 1998, 39). However, Bojar highlights that some middle-class feminists saw volunteer work as an opportunity for career advancement (39). While Bojar says that NOW's statement may be extreme, "it does raise some important questions and reflects a legitimate (and prescient) concern that a parsimonious government will abdicate its responsibilities to its citizens and try to substitute 'hit or miss' volunteer efforts for much-needed social programs" (40). Bojar argues however, that "determination to attack a social problem at its roots can be an outgrowth of the experience of direct service" (40). Questions surrounding volunteerism are regarded differently in different lines of feminist thought. The "equal rights feminists" are characterized by

individualist values while the "cultural feminists" are more communitarian (40). Bojar observed that low-income students are less likely to be suspicious of the "ethic of care" (41) that is frowned upon in feminist literature. It is complicated because most of Bojar's students want the recognition for their work, but also want to stick to the voluntary tradition (41). The problem is that work in education and human services is typically done by women, and this type of work is highly underpaid, much less than the hours and effort they put into it (42).

Bojar seems to be arguing that working for a cause out of the goodness of one's heart can be harmful, especially to women, when they are doing the work and not receiving recognition or adequate compensation. Volunteer work in this sense is gendered, but when it comes to disadvantaged people, it's a similar concept – they internalize it as doing service out of the goodness of their heart, something that isn't to be compensated, yet this is harmful because it reinforces social inequality. In looking at AmeriCorps, one can look at it as the corps member getting many benefits out of it and not doing much for the community, or one can look at it as the corps member doing an enormous amount of work for very little compensation. In a sense, social inequity is reinforced when disadvantaged people do volunteer work for a cause without proper compensation. Voluntary work is in this sense reinforcing the power of the capitalist state because volunteers are tasked with fixing these social ills for little to no pay while getting no recognition. At the same time, it is exploitative if white people do it because they have the time and money to do something that pays so little, and they detract resources from the community they are supposedly serving. It really depends on who is doing the work and what they are getting out of it in proportion to their needs and aspirations for their future.

Service learning is another interesting angle to examine this from. Bickford and Reynolds (2002) critique the notion of service learning, which refers to college coursework that is meant to

create a connection with organizations and members of a community. As Bickford and Reynolds state, these programs "are intended to cause an assigned encounter with difference" (231) which reinforces rather than challenges power relations and perceived differences by asking "how can we help people?" instead of "why are conditions this way?" (231). In their literature review, Bickford and Reynolds identify themes of issues that come up in service learning, including the search for otherness or othering of service recipients by middle class students (232). Students go into their service work with particular biases, and service work may enhance those biases. As Bickford and Reynolds state: "their experience, when accompanied by reflection, makes them better writers, better learners, or better citizens, so the theory goes, *if* it does not make their social and cultural biases further entrenched" (233). Bickford and Reynolds argue that service learning often overlooks the need to examine why these services are necessary to begin with (233). Another theme that Bickford and Reynolds identify in the literature is that it is not effective to have short projects that do not encourage long-term commitment. There are also challenges when volunteers encounter an unfamiliar community, and they need to be set up with tools to navigate the situations they find themselves in (236). The next section presents potential solutions from the literature to the issues of nonprofit work and volunteerism.

Solutions

Simply put, structural issues need to be examined through the lens of critical race theory, and volunteers and nonprofit workers need to engage with difficult questions of why things are a certain way and how their positionality may be reinforcing social stratification. Shaw and Spence's (2004) study, "Race and Representation in Detroit's Community Development Coalitions," is a particularly interesting case study of how the racial divide in Detroit created

tension between the Detroit Save Our Spirit coalition (SOS), a majority white community development organization, and Coleman Young, a Black man running for mayor. According to Shaw and Spence, the purpose of community-based development organizations (CBDOs) is to build a community based on the principles of anti-urban renewal, anti-poverty, multicultural cooperation, and racial equity through economic empowerment. These efforts were often hindered by interracial dissention, which manifested as competing visions between CBDOs and political leaders, and as tension between white community developers and the communities they served. Shaw and Spence call this the "paradox of race in community development" (127). Shaw and Spence describe the efforts of SOS as an "urban social movement rooted in cross-cultural, pluralistic community building" (125), an attempt to challenge mayor Coleman Young's policies and to overcome racial fissures through a multicultural inclusion model. Furthermore, some members of SOS claimed that residing in the community is a way of understanding and claiming the right to represent neighborhoods of majority Black individuals. This is problematic because a white person choosing to live in a Black community is still a reflection of privilege and a sense of entitlement to represent people of color, along with the assumption that the individual would be welcomed in that community. Uneven or seemingly biased representation was the major culprit of the conflict between SOS and Detroit mayor Coleman Young in the 1990's. Young's primary strategy for revitalizing Detroit was to invest in big businesses to create jobs, while SOS advocated for neighborhood revitalization. As a Black man, Young claimed to be a better representative for Black people, even though many community members opposed his policies. He rejected SOS' efforts on the basis that he knew the community's best interests through racial solidarity. Shaw and Spence argue that representation is a crucial aspect of community development, and that "community development advocates should not simply seek to neutralize

race and racism but consider how race and racism are inextricably a part of the capacity-building problem" (139-140).

Shaw and Spence (2004) argue that race matters in political and social movements because people of color have high expectations from community developers to be culturally competent and to have shared experiences. It is also a matter of deciding who reserves the right to represent a community. However, race is often ignored in community development literature. One argument for low Black representation in CBDOs, as the literature in the previous section partially demonstrated, is that there is an absence of well-paying positions, and that only affluent white people have the means to take time to be community developers. Flaherty (2016) states that people with the most time on their hands and the most privilege end up being the ones who "give their time" and are the first to put it on their resume (23). Furthermore, major service organizations, which strive to be leaders in social change, tend to hire mostly white service workers. Service learning can reinforce social inequity in similar ways, but Boyd and Sandell (2012) offer a different perspective.

Based on a study of an Internship Class at San Francisco State University's Women and Gender Studies program, Boyd and Sandell (2012) hesitate to embrace the idea of "civic engagement" because its historic focus on shaping the ideal citizen "can unwittingly underplay the role the corporate university and nonprofit sector have in maintaining rather than disrupting the status quo" (251). The WGS program they are referring to is designed to provide students with an internship class in which students do unpaid service for a nonprofit to "experience tension between theory and practice" (255), the idea being that the knowledge they would gain about the workings of the nonprofit sector would be useful in later careers (255). But, it turned out that "the internship course functions as a practicum where students gain first-hand

knowledge of the ways the nonprofit sector perpetuates an underpaid, and unevenly gendered

and racialized, labor force that absorbs many of the burdens of the shrinking welfare state" (255).

This attempt to link campus and community (255) has led to many developments that connect

campus learning with community service, or in other words, civic engagement (256). Boyd and

Sandell analyze statements from the U.S. Department of Labor and the National Association of

Colleges and Employers stating that interns need to get something out of their internship (256).

This course challenges students to think about the nonprofit industrial complex and how their

work fits into the broader scope of capitalism: "Indeed, by deconstructing the premise and

function of nonprofit organizations and internships and addressing their unevenly gendered and

geopolitical histories, students and instructors alike grapple with and confront our own

participation in these troubling histories and structures" (257). This course helps students

critically analyze their positionality and make connections boradly:

> The shadow state thus does the work of the state but under the guise of social
> justice and by redirecting protest into service […and] nonprofits act as a band-aid
> that deflects energy away from broader social change but also how the tax code
> and structure of foundations and charities consolidate economic and political
> power with the elites. This framework enables students to identify ways that their
> internships fit into the logic of the NPIC and thus are often complicit with rather
> than a challenge to broader structures of global capitalism and neoliberalism. This
> conceptual shift enables students to name some of the contradictions and tensions
> they feel during their internships: that their organization must identify and
> catalogue measurable outcomes to receive current or secure future funding; that
> their supervisors must spend significant amounts of time writing grant proposals;
> and that difficult decisions must be made between providing direct services and
> developing a longer-range vision of social justice and transformation. Throughout
> the internship course, students develop a language to critique the broader politics
> of internships at the same time that they are interns receiving course credit but not
> wages. (260)

This course enables students to reflect and take action (262). Boyd and Sandell suggest

steering away from the concept of "civic engagement" and more toward the concept of "critical

engagement" to put social justice at the forefront and challenge neoliberalist ways (262). This

class allows students to challenge these structures, not just to be complicit in them. Its purpose is to recognize the contradictions of the nonprofit sector as they are situated in global capitalism and neoliberalism and to realize that this is everywhere, and the answers are not clear cut (263).

While service learning highlights differences and otherness, Bickford and Reynolds (2002) argue that activism can be a solution for forming "relationships based on connection" (237) – it requires the recognition that societal structures create differences. These differences can be assets in the "shared goal of creating social change" (237). Feminist thought comes into play here. Bickford and Reynolds describe that this form of consciousness-raising emerged form second-wave feminism (239) that calls for understanding the causes of oppression. They suggest drawing from methodologies in women's studies and feminist research including collecting and analyzing data to make connections between the issue at hand and the larger structures behind it (241). Furthermore, it is important to analyze the perspectives of willing research "participants" (240). It is important to examine these issues holistically and encourage activism and true analysis of one's positionality and complicity in social and institutional structures that create the need (247). Bickford and Reynolds argue that instead of organizing service learning through difference, it should be organized through points of connection and alliance and a "shared goal of creating social change" (237).

Ruth Wilson Gilmore ([2007] 2017) also advocates for grassroots activism, citing movements like Pacifica Radio – a pacifist/anarcho-feminist movement in 1949 (48), urban antiracist activism in the Jim Crow south (49), and the agricultural activism of the 50s (49), but she warns that this kind of grassroots organizing also incited a women's movement in the 60s whose lobbying put Nixon and Reagan in office, creating the structures that nonprofits are now intended to fix (50). Her argument is that either side of the political spectrum can use the same

tactics, and therefore grassroots organizations should "move away from project-driven portfolios" (51) and focus on long-term change. As Lester Salamon (1994) similarly argues, "The third sector has clearly come of age on the global scene, but it must now find ways to strengthen its institutional capacities and contribute more meaningfully to the solution of major problems" (122). Instead of one-time grants and feel-good philanthropy, there needs to be sustained institutional support for nonprofits.

Referring back to Nicole P. Marwell's (2004) work, the system of patronage between the federal government and CAAs ended with the Green Amendment, but present-day community-based organizations (CBOs) can establish this system of patronage on the local level, meaning local elected officials can use what Marwell calls a "patronage-type exchange" (269) that serves to "create and turn out a reliable voting constituency" (270). Marwell argues that present-day nonprofit and community-based organizations fill the gaps that government does not in disadvantaged neighborhoods (269). Marwell did fieldwork in a low-income Latino area in New York City to examine the service provisions, community building activities, and electoral politics of eight local community-based organizations (271) to examine the policy-influencing potential of community-based organizations that are typically limited in their scope. Marwell argues that reciprocity, meaning that service recipients also become involved in the mission of the organization, is key to community building within the scope of community-based organizations (275). Marwell argues that with devolution, community based organizations have the power to engage people locally and pressure policymakers to allocate resources (278), but they risk losing nonprofit status since nonprofits are forbidden from aligning with a political party (278). Marwell is arguing that community-based organizations that only provide service fail to become involved politically, while community-based organizations that have a reciprocal service model

of community building engage the community itself in service efforts and are therefore able to influence legislation, at least on a local level. (287) Because of devolution and privatization, community-based organizations are able to have political influence (287). Instead of the patron-exchange system between the federal govt and CAAs, there can be a patron-exchange system between local government and CBOs. This is how nonprofits can have an influence on policy if they add this to their service model. If CBOs are cautious, they can engage in a "resources-for-votes exchange" (278). Within this system, the CBO distributes resources and benefits to clients who are also voters, but resources come to the CBO from the elected official (278). This form of exchange requires organizational adherents (276) who align themselves with a particular CBO and support them. These adherents are also voters who can vote for the elected official who channels money into that CBO. Marwell calls this the "triadic exchange" (277). For the adherents to be reliable voters, the CBO needs to educate them about the larger political climate within which they operate, and they need elected officials to see that the CBO has influence over their clients as voters (281).

Last, in a blog called Nonprofit AF, an author who goes by "Vu" (2020) argues that there is inequity where philanthropy is concentrated, and to demand change, we (meaning activists) need to demand that those in power be involved in these conversations. Voices need to be mobilized at the grassroots level, and they must show up in numbers. Organizations also need to be involved in legislation. Organizations that are not doing an ethical job need to be called out and shamed, as the author puts it. Vu also points out that less than 10 percent of funding goes to organizations that are led by Black, Indigenous, or POC, and 92 percent of foundations are led by white people, so organizers need to have no fear in speaking out. As Vu states,

> we have to understand that people and institutions with privilege have all the
> formal […] power, and formal power does not yield without being challenged.

But to effectively challenge power, we must examine the personal conflicts we each have and wrestle with what we are each willing to give up to realize a world we know is possible.

Kleinman and Kleinman (1996) make a similar point to Vu saying that one must understand partisan political agendas, and policy makers as well as program builders must understand how they may do harm with their work (18). To do this, they must understand "the existential side of social life" (19), examining interdisciplinary sources such as history, social science, and the humanities among others to understand why social inequity persists. As they state, "the goal is to reconstruct the object of inquiry and the purposes of practice" (19). Accompanying this, there must be personal accounts of suffering – "narratives, ethnographies, and social histories" (15) to illustrate lived experiences. This is what I intend to do in this thesis.

Theoretical Framework

Having examined the literature, the contribution I intend to make with this thesis is to amplify the voices of people who actually did AmeriCorps service. Their perspectives are unique to their experiences in having intersecting identities, and their lived experiences as well as suggestions in having served for one or two years in City Year are extremely valuable if any change is to be made that addresses the issues presented in the literature review. I am guided by Black feminist theory and grounded theory in presenting my data.

In her book, *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins ([2000] 2014) describes that Black feminist thought as critical social theory emerged from Black women intellectuals who, while having had different experiences, faced multiple levels of oppression in terms of race, class, and gender (12). Collins states that

> the assumptions on which full group membership are based – Whiteness for feminist thought, maleness for Black social and political thought, and the combination for mainstream scholarship – all negate Black women's realities.

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Prevented from becoming full insiders in any of these areas of inquiry, Black women remained in outsider-within locations, individuals whose marginality provided a distinctive angle of vision on these intellectual and political entities. (12)

In other words, Black feminist thought presents an activist perspective that is from a completely different and unique angle. Collins ([2000] 2014) describes a speech from Sojourner Truth at a women's rights convention in 1851 in which Truth spoke the famous words "and ain't I a woman?" challenging and deconstructing the concept of *woman* by describing images of hard labor that was typically ascribed to men (14-15). Through this lived experience and her recollection of the experience, Truth proves to be an intellectual, according to Collins, deconstructing the actual meaning of *intellectual* (15). As Collins states, "doing intellectual work of the sort envisioned within Black feminism requires a process of self-conscious struggle on behalf of Black women, regardless of the actual social location where that work occurs" (15). Therefore, Collins is arguing that the lived experiences of Black women in various domains of life as artists, poets, writers, teachers, mothers, etc., constitute knowledge and intellectualism in a variety of ways that are not considered intellectual by hegemonic scholarly institutions (16-17). Along these lines, I present the experiences and voices of City Year alumni who possess intellectual knowledge and lived experiences of what it means to be a corps member in City Year Dallas.

It is also important to note that qualitative inquiry as a research method is problematic, as Dr. Venus Evans-Winters (2019) demonstrates in her book *Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry*. As Evans-Winters states,

a common platitude in qualitative research is that our worldviews color how we interpret data or what we see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. However, I extend the conversation by asseverating that Black women's ways of knowing, cultural and spiritual beliefs continue to be marginalized, suppressed, or bastardized and propagated as trite or esoteric at best. Sadly, conversations on data analysis in

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qualitative circles are still dominated and policed by those of the White educated elite. (2)

Evans-Winters (2019) argues that the data analysis that comes from these dominant structures is limited in worldview (2), and I want to acknowledge that my work is not immune from this. As a white person, there is always something that is beyond my awareness, and although I make an effort to be aware, I still cannot claim to represent Black voices. Furthermore, by maintaining confidentiality in using gender-neutral pseudonyms, there is an entire realm of gender identity and the social experiences that accompany it, particularly that of Black women, which will not be addressed in this project. Last, my research is also not purely ethnographic, as the interview process was semi-structured and did not allow for participants to share full narratives. In an attempt to be guided by the principles of Black feminist inquiry, I present quotes from participants that reflect their ideas and experiences, and I want to emphasize that their input is what makes this project truly valuable. Recognizing that my work is problematic by virtue of being a white graduate student studying racial identity, I hope that by presenting the voices of my participants and sharing this project with City Year, their ideas will influence City Year's programming.

Drawing from my data, I will develop arguments about the corps member experience and their implications for the nonprofit field. This approach will be guided by grounded theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), "grounded theory is a *general methodology* for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (273, emphasis in original). Grounded theory is interpretive and includes the perspectives and voices of research participants (274). The researcher then analyzes these perspectives and draws conclusions to apply to a broader picture (274). Grounded theories are

"systematic statements of plausible relationships" (279). I will examine the relationship between

racial identity and the corps member experience, and what that means for the nonprofit field.

CHAPTER II: JOINING CITY YEAR AND PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE

As demonstrated in the introduction, I want to first emphasize that City Year's efforts do lead to measurable positive student outcomes in English and Language Arts, Math, and Social Emotional skills. City Year's contributions are meaningful and valuable, but no service program is immune to complicated issues and controversies. This is what I set out to examine through the lived experiences of racially diverse AmeriCorps members.

The first thing I wanted to examine is why people decided to join City Year and how well alumni felt that City Year prepared them for the service experience. City Year offers many benefits to corps members, including an education award, professional development throughout the service year, and opportunities for continuing education. I wanted to examine if corps members' reasons for joining differed based on their lived experiences as racially diverse individuals, and having gone through the service experience, I wanted to see if interviewees looked back at the beginning of their service as having been adequately prepared for what was to come, or the opposite, having felt unprepared for the reality of the experience. I also asked some interviewees what their expectations were going into the program, and their perceptions of the right or wrong reasons to join a program like City Year. I wanted to see if interviewees felt that City Year encouraged white saviorism, and I wanted to compare expectations versus real lived experiences of racially diverse corps members to see if there was a discrepancy based on prior experiences either working with or living in disadvantaged communities and how this affected their perception of the corps member role.

Why Did You Join City Year?

I would first like to draw attention to Taylor's[i] statement:

I'm sure that we could all say that at one point- yeah, we're here for the kids, but I think there's much deeper reasons why we're there in the first place, I mean, some of us are there because it's something to do after you graduate and you don't have a job [laughs], people who wanted to just- or try and to do something good, I guess, […] I would say we did all share a common purpose that we were there to make sure like these kids had something better than what they had before, and what that meant, I think, for me, is I can't change your school, I can't change the education system, I can't change how you're taught, I can't change your whole life, but at the very least, maybe I can make the experience you have with me something that is positive and enjoyable. And if even it's only like maybe two to five minutes, hey, like at least it's five minutes more than what you would have had. And that's kind of depressing […] but also it's realistic in recognizing that you are just a small part of their life, and it's not realistic too, really, given the fact that we're there for only one year and given how many kids there were and, like you may make a significant impact, you may not, and in the end like the main struggles of their life are gonna be there […] But I think in the end […] the purpose is that we're all there for the kids […] to just make sure the kids had something better.

Nearly all interviewees placed emphasis on simply being there for the kids and wanting them to have something better. Interviewees also expressed a desire to work with youth, a desire to experience working for a nonprofit, and most importantly, a desire to be a part of something bigger than just a job. A few went into it thinking that they wanted to explore education.

One corps member, who I call Perry[ii], was drawn to City Year for a completely unique reason – Perry was drawn to the red jacket they saw a campus recruiter wearing. They thought the jacket was cool and wanted to know how they could get one. What made Perry actually sign up and commit was reading and watching videos about the schools City Year serves in and the impact it has on people. City Year seemed to create a space where contrasting cultures found similarities in each other. Perry was interested in exploring the essence of how people perceive people of different racial backgrounds. They did not have any expectations going in, it was a completely new experience. They never signed up to do a long-term volunteer experience before,

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so it was out of their element. They wanted to find opportunities to improve themselves and potentially help someone else. They wanted to at least share their experiences and connect with different cultures, both with people in CY and the students. What stands out about corps members' reasons for joining is that while there is an overarching desire to make a difference, so many unique reasons draw corps members, such as the red jacket in Perry's case. This shows that City Year is effective in their recruiting because they appeal to people from many different walks of life who have many aspirations and interests, and City Year in a way provides an opportunity for someone to take their next step in building their career.

Interviewees also had interesting things to say about their perceptions of why others, including their own team members, joined City Year. The vast majority felt that even if people had side motivations, people for the most part were united by the desire to support the students and that supporting the students was the "right" reason for joining. As far as the "wrong" reasons for joining, an interviewee I call Austen[iii] observed that people just wanted the service year to be over and were there just to be there, either for building their resumes or for earning the education award (a six-thousand-dollar scholarship earned at the end of the service year to pay off student loans or to put toward education). Austen felt that these corps members were not truly there for the students.

An interviewee I call Laine[iv] similarly felt that earning the education award was a "wrong" reason for joining. As Laine observed, people complained constantly but stuck it out through the year for the education award even if they felt like they couldn't stand the organization, the students, or their teammates. Since these corps members didn't quit, Laine assumed that people were there for the wrong reasons. What stood out to Laine was that there are

many other AmeriCorps programs, so the fact that corps members chose to work with kids despite hating it showed that they were not there for a common purpose.

Another interviewee who I call Max[v], was particularly frustrated when people on the team would complain about the low stipend or say that they were not getting paid enough to do the job, but Max was also conflicted because they recognized that some of their teammates were not as financially well-off. Another "wrong" reason that came up was described by an interviewee I refer to as Peyton[vi] who observed that one third of their team did not care if the students improved as long as their service made the corps member look good on paper. Despite City Year's attempts to challenge the notion of patting oneself on the back, Peyton felt that it is inherently back-patting, especially because City Year was founded by Harvard graduates. The biggest site is Boston, so they are recruiting from prestigious schools, and there are people who think, "I'm such a good person, I'm doing this for a year before law school." As Peyton felt, people don't see it as a way to inspire others or challenge themselves, but rather as a way to get something.

The majority of the alumni I spoke with did not categorize right or wrong motivations. There was an awareness that someone could be motivated in part by the benefits of service and still primarily "be there for the kids." In fact, some recognized that the benefits presented opportunities for corps members, especially for those from disadvantaged communities. I did not find any correlation between the racial background of the corps members and their motivations for serving or their criticism for the motivations of others. There was criticism from Black, Latinx, and white interviewees alike, but those critical perceptions were more strongly associated with team happiness. Alumni who generally reported a positive experience were more likely to praise their teammates and believe that everyone was there for a common purpose. For alumni

from exceptionally unhappy teams, they were more likely to disapprove of their teammates' motivations and believe that they were there for the wrong reasons. This is where I began to notice that team dynamics and personality come into play. I will address this in later sections.

Preparing for Service

I asked alumni how prepared they felt for the service experience, especially because corps members are recruited from a variety of academic majors and age groups. This seems odd because working with students is a huge responsibility. Recruiting people who have no experience working with youth raises the question as to whether the program is designed more for providing an opportunity for professional development for the corps member instead of providing quality service to students. Some have no experience with youth development and do not plan to continue working in education, while others go into it with the intention of becoming educators. City Year advertises the program to people of all academic backgrounds and experiences, promising to train each corps member adequately for their service year. While it is valuable for people to have experiences with disadvantaged communities, being a City Year host site is very costly to the school (see introduction). It raises the question of whether resources are invested in the right place when they could be going toward more grassroots efforts of empowering a community, such as hiring and training skilled teachers, especially from the communities being served. The service year is especially questionable if corps members move on after their service year having gained a ton but having given little to the community. It seems to reinforce an inequitable power dynamic in which the corps member socially profits from the disadvantages the communities face.

The trainings that are meant to prepare corps members for the job cover a broad range of topics, including academic tutoring, social-emotional coaching, social justice, team building, City Year culture, and self-exploration. It can be eye-opening for those who are not familiar with working in disadvantaged neighborhoods, but the general attitude can be summed up in an interviewee I call Jackie's[vii] statement: **"I don't think anyone or an organization can truly, truly prepare you for working with children or how to reach a child. I think that that is something that you have to find on your own that you figure out in a journey through yourself."** City Year taught Jackie about the tangible things such as the neighborhood, the norms and the culture of the school, and reminding them why they were there, but Jackie also told me that the training did not prepare them for the intangible aspects of the experience. An interviewee I call Grier[viii] shared a similar perspective, stating **"a lot of people that do City Year maybe are not that familiar with that environment, and […] I don't really know how you can prepare people for that other than just them experiencing it themselves."** Grier and Jackie's comments mirror what many others felt, that no matter how much training one gets, the experience of being in the school will inevitably be different than the expectations one might have going into it.

When other interviewees felt that the trainings could never really prepare you for the experience, they seemed to be referring to the complexity of everything involved in service, like serving for long hours on diverse teams in struggling schools. Some interviewees felt that the trainings did not train corps members for tangible things, while others felt that it did. I interpret tangible to mean things that are visibly applicable to the work, such as tutoring. I interpret the "intangible" to mean that, as an interviewee I refer to as Oakley[ix] said, the real experience is not teachable. The attitudes and perceptions of others, particularly the teachers, is an intangible thing that can only be grasped by having true conversations with them. City Year tends to overwhelm

with an enormous amount of content in trainings, but several interviewees felt that the most helpful thing in preparing one for the experience was to have conversations with those who had done it. These conversations were not part of the trainings; they were had informally when corps members would pull a staff member or team leader aside to discuss what was on their mind or ask for advice. Every team leader had done City Year before, and they were often approached by corps members to give honest advice about the situation at hand (team leaders are not specified to maintain confidentiality).

Even having those conversations, however, made it clear that one still cannot be fully prepared. An interviewee I call Skyler[x] attended a documentary showing about City Year to gain an understanding of what the work would look like, and that really helped them to understand the reality of what they would be dealing with, including some potentially really tough situations, that they won't always be prepared to handle. Skyler related this to their aspiration of becoming a doctor. Nothing can really prepare one for how they are going to react to those moments when something happens to the patient that one cares about. Therefore, according to Skyler, the training sessions covered the "could- be's." The only way to see if one is prepared for CY is to be in the classroom and start engaging with people to apply the information from the trainings. Skyler didn't necessarily feel that the trainings were tangible things, but they did feel like the sessions were informative and at the very least helped them prepare.

Interviewees generally felt that there is just no way to prepare for how emotionally heavy the experience is, especially with long hours and high expectations. Taylor emphasized that City Year is only one year. "It's so little time. It's City Year but really, it's just ten months, so how much training can you realistically expect to offer? And even if it's top of the line training, is it really enough?" Taylor didn't think so.

An interviewee I call Avery[xi] was an outlier when it came to this aspect of training because they grew up in one of the communities that City Year serves. Avery told me that "what I do remember is just them explaining the environment, and I thought that was kinda weird, 'cause […] I went to like schools like that? So I was like, why are they explaining the environment, like aren't all schools like that?" Avery felt that the schools were made out to be much worse than they really are. Avery identifies as Hispanic and grew up in the community they served in. Avery was surprised by the trainings which seemed to overexaggerate how awful the environments are in the host schools. Since Avery had gone to a similar school, they didn't think much of the environment. For example, it made sense to Avery that students use swear words, and Avery felt that City Year was inflating the problem. However, Avery also shared that they realized through the trainings that the schools City Year serves in are not supposed to be the norm. Other corps members who also came from similar communities or identified with the students racially felt that City Year was a learning experience for them. This shows that City Year is a learning experience for corps members across racial and socio-economic backgrounds.

Analysis

In this section, I examined why people join City Year, what their expectations are going into it, their perceptions of the right or wrong reasons to join, and how prepared they felt to take on a year of service working with students in under-resourced schools. It seems that people join City Year either out of a general desire to work with youth in a nonprofit setting, or because they are looking for the next thing in a transitional time of their lives. The way City Year advertises the program draws people in when they are able to read about the impact corps members have on students' lives. This type of marketing appeals to young idealists who want a service experience,

but in a way that doesn't require long-term commitment. City Year is understood from the beginning to be a temporary job, something that will be over after eleven months and will offer great benefits upon completion. Given this reality, some interviewees have strong opinions about why someone shouldn't join City Year. For example, if someone is only in it for the education award, it is indicative of them having alterior and arguably adverse motivations for joining. However, the majority of interviewees believed that even if someone has secondary motivations, the important thing was to keep the well-being of the kids as the focal point. Weighing whether it is fair to offer so many benefits to corps members will be discussed in a later section. However, it is helpful to take note that City Year is meant to be a temporary experience, and City Year as a *learning* experience seemed to be heavily emphasized in the way interviewees described navigating the service year.

Across racial identities and backgrounds, there seems to be a consensus that the training did not and *could not* prepare corps members for the work they would be doing. Those who felt more prepared felt this way because of previous life experiences, but generally, corps members felt unprepared across racial identities. Training taught people from more affluent backgrounds that the school would be chaotic, and in mentally preparing for that, training prepared them to not be fully prepared. Alumni from a community served by City Year also did not feel prepared because they acknowledged that no two people experience something the same way. The emotional reality of working with the students and being in their school environment was still emotionally taxing for all corps members due to the overwhelming challenges the students faced which corps members had no control over. Corps members also felt burdened by the extremely long hours they worked, the extremely low pay, and the many demands which corps members were expected to meet. It is important to keep in mind that the school's needs, teachers' needs,

and students' needs, as well as the corps members' frame of reference are diverse. Some interviewees felt that the most effective way to understand and prepare for the experience was to talk to people who had done City Year before. This was more helpful to corps members than the formal trainings, which shows that narratives were the best form for clarifying the complexities of serving in an organization like City Year. It points to the idea that these honest conversations are a major part of the answer to breaking down barriers on multiple levels, both organizationally and societally. As the data will show in the following sections, the service experience is highly complex, and perhaps the best way to train corps members is to create an environment where open conversation about difficult topics can equip corps members with the tools to learn their school environment before implementing initiatives, and to carry these active listening skills into their future jobs.

CHAPTER III: CITY YEAR CULTURE AND TAKING PRIDE IN SERVICE

I turn now to the attitudes of interviewees regarding City Year culture and the

organization's constant emphasis on taking pride in service. The culture of City Year is

fascinating and unique because it goes beyond an unspoken organizational culture. Corps

members are required to outwardly perform City Year culture through ritualized chants and

activities in nearly every aspect of service. There is nothing quite like it, which is why

interviewees had so many interesting things to say about it. Some outright hated it, while for

others, it made them feel like they belonged to something greater than themselves. I personally

felt it was silly and sometimes disrespectful and ignorant to the struggles that the communities

we were serving in faced, but I observed that many corps members in my cohort found it

empowering. I wanted to see what the culture meant to people depending on their backgrounds

and why they did or did not take pride in the service role, as this would shed light on whether

City Year really does facilitate an inclusive and socially conscious environment that is conducive

to challenging social injustice.

City Year Culture from an Individual, Team, and Student Perspective

Idealism is at the core of everything City Year does, as hinted by the title of the training

manual, *The Idealist Handbook* (City Year 2017). City Year culture consists of a kaleidoscope of

activities which seek to encourage pride in service and motivate corps members on especially

tough days to maintain a sense of idealism. The corps member's initial exposure to the culture

takes place the very first day they step into the training office. Corps members sit through entire

sessions on City Year pride consisting of a variety of self-care or self-help activities and the

recitation of inspirational proverbs followed by founding stories that teach some sort of lesson

about humanity. If a corps member stands up to share something, they have to stand and declare: "My name is [insert name here] and I proudly serve as an AmeriCorps member on the [insert corporate sponsor here] team at [insert school name here]! [insert group chant here- i.e. We da bomb, dot Comstock!!]." They are taught an appropriate response to everything, from shaking their hands up and down when something resonates with them, to the way they describe the experiences of the day. During the service year, every morning begins with a circle of reflection and recitation of a "readiness check" chant followed by "power greeting" which involves chanting at students and dancing while they line up at the school entrance to go through metal detectors. As mentioned in the introduction, corps members who were given the freedom to do so tailored their performance of City Year culture to their team values and school environment.

Jackie was part of a team that was viewed by interviewees as a particularly successful, cheery, and overall happy team that really embraced the culture. Jackie felt particularly fond of the culture and told me:

> City Year did a great job with embracing and understanding other cultures to create the culture of City Year. I love that City Year would use […] the encouragement and wisdom of Martin Luther King and Gandhi […], and a lot of different proverbs and really, really reach back into every single part of the earth for me to feel like here in Dallas, I can do this, I can use this, you know, so I think the City Year culture is effective if you truly, truly believe it. And I believed it and I loved it.

An interviewee I call Armani[xii] expressed similarly positive views and felt that "it's not easy being able to get that many […] people to get along perfectly, you know, I think the culture kind of helps with that, it's something that- that everyone can kind of relate to." Armani shared that the City Year culture helps everyone have something in common, even while there are different cultures in different cities that City Year serves. While some felt that it was silly, they still acknowledged that it served a greater purpose.

Others were more critical of the culture. Several interviewees expressed that the culture was limiting because if their ideas conflicted with the culture, they couldn't be implemented. As Grier stated,

> The culture can kinda distract from the mission that it's trying to- it's trying to reach, and just because it's like, it's like if you have a good idea and you want to implement it, maybe you can't because it doesn't quite coincide with City Year culture, or you present the idea and it's like, 'oh, well, you should add this part of it so that it's more City Year culture-y,' and it kind of, you know, changes the idea or can limit what, you know, like what you want to do.

Taylor's views point significant criticism at City Year culture:

> Oh, I hated that part. That was probably actually the worst part of City Year that I had not anticipated and felt betrayed by. [laughs] […] It's almost like something you would expect to see in like a TV show, […] Is this really happening? Are these people for real? Like there's all this weird clapping and chanting and incorporation of buzzwords that honestly don't really add much to culture so much as make me despise the institution I work for. […] I guess like the whole purpose is to […] bring people together? Or like establish a positive culture? But it just feels almost kind of restricting. Restricting in the sense that like you're supposed to use these words and you're supposed to dress this way and you're supposed to chant and clap and do all these things that not everyone wants to do.

Beyond examining individual feelings of culture, it is also important to look at what the culture does to teams because the responses of interviewees indicated that it could either make or break the team, and that affected how the team approached their students and the overall service year. Team dynamics in turn affected how the team embraced or rejected the culture. Skyler described that it really has to do with how individuals come together and agree to be a part of something bigger. If a team is able to do that, the culture will be a success. Skyler's team came to the consensus that they will give the students the best they can every single day. They felt that if they allowed City Year culture to manifest, it helped them perform in a way that had a greater impact on students. As Skyler shared,

> I think it's really just the mindset of the team and a desire to, like, just push through and not be so negative around the concept. 'Cause like, if I think back, like I can't believe I power greeted every day! [laughs] I really can't believe it, I-

but, at the same time, it did, you know, like some days I didn't want to do it, I wasn't up for it, but at the same time, I knew like okay, this- this person's gonna give it, and if they're gonna give it, I'm gonna give it too, and it's just for fifteen minutes, or it's just for thirty minutes. And when I looked at it that way, it was like alright, I can do this for thirty minutes and that's all I have to do.

Those who embraced the culture also felt that it encouraged them to check on each other or serve as a teaching experience for those who were unfamiliar with the community they served in. Other interviewees who did not have positive experiences recalled how their teams found ways to cheat the culture or eliminate certain rituals altogether in the absence of their supervisors. Many individuals didn't like it or take it seriously, and that brought others down on teams that already had toxic dynamics.

Perhaps the most important part of examining the culture is to look at how it impacts the students. In the experiences of corps members, students seemed to have a sixth sense in which they saw through everybody and their intentions. When asked how students received the culture, specifically the morning power greeting, interviewees' answers indicated that it depended on how the team performed it, and more importantly, how the team creatively adapted it to the specific school and age level. Students overall seemed to enjoy it, and sometimes made fun of it in a lighthearted way. If students outright hated it, successful teams changed the way they made themselves available. It seems that the definition of power greeting evolved for different teams, as some simply scrapped the chants and talked to the students or played sports with them instead, such as Perry's team. Some teams were successful with chanting and found creative ways to deliver it.

Jackie made an interesting point that the racial diversity of City Year made it easier for students to accept the culture. Jackie saw that the students were surprised by this diversity at first because they were probably expecting "a certain look." Jackie explained that when students hear "idealism," or "I'm here to tutor you, I'm here to mentor you, I'm here to create afterschool

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programs," a lot of under-represented students just see one thing, and that can be one gender, one race, one orientation, typically a cis white woman. The diversity and inclusion on Jackie's team was a surprise for the students, but Jackie felt that students welcomed it because they were hearing these positive messages from diverse and positive people. Students saw that City Year does believe in education and they seemed to love and respect it. As Jackie said,

> It wasn't just this A-Type male who you know, 'probably ran for some office as a Republican and now he has all this money and he's gonna come and tell me to stay in school,' you know, it was relatable, they saw us fall and then they saw us get back up and still be able to encourage them, so it was- it was a different picture, the message came across a whole lot different.

The dominant attitude among interviewees was that the team has to figure out what works for them. Each school is unique, and each team brings different strengths to the table. What works for one team might not work for another. For example, Perry went back and visited their school and saw that the sports and games Perry's team played didn't work for the new team. Perry felt that their team just consisted of naturally high-energy people, so figuring out the team dynamic is important, as well as finding what people enjoy doing and what they are good at. Individualizing power greeting for the school and for the team is key in being successful. However, interviewees felt that students overall understood that power greeting was something positive being done for them. As Jackie said,

> I'll say this. Do I believe power greeting enriched every single student's life when they came into the school that morning? I don't know. But, did they realize that it was something we wanted to bring into the table for them and just be a positive light? I think they understood that. […] I don't know if chanting was enriching, but I do think the concept behind being a positive face, a positive energy first thing in their morning, I do think that was important.

Perry, pretending to be a student, said:

> I don't remember this one guy's name but he was part of that group of people that danced every morning, and those people were really cool, and one day they made me smile, and I went about my day kind of like- and I had a really good day like,

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for at least the first hour of school before shit got real, like but that first hour man, was real cool.

The Meaning of Taking Pride in Service

As City Year culture permeates every aspect of the service year, pride is supposed to be injected into every part of the culture. From the "stand and declare" practice to unity rallies which involve lining up in a public space and performing a series of militarized chants and movements depicting City Year's mission and values, City Year pride is expected to be performed as a marketing tool and as a way to motivate corps members to stick it out through challenging working conditions and minimal pay. Corps members sit through training sessions in which they are asked to reflect on why they are proud to serve. Some corps members find it unifying, reminding them that they are serving their country for a cause greater than self. Others feel that it is merely an orchestrated, false pride that is forced upon them. My reasoning for examining pride is that I assumed that it would correlate with white saviorism, with the assumption that the white corps member would be more likely to embrace pride when they believe that they are making a profound difference in the lives of under-privileged kids. What I found was that nobody bought into it without question.

Multiple interviewees expressed that they felt City Year pride was fake, forced, and simply a marketing tool. Avery and Grier drew emphasis to how it was required to mention one's corporate sponsor or foundation during "stand and declare," and this became the team's identity in a way. For example, one had to say "I proudly serve on the [corporate sponsor] team at [Middle School Name]," not "I serve on Team [Middle School Name]." In Grier's words: "it just felt weird, like […] you can't just say 'I'm serving at this school,' because that's what it's about, you have to put like this whole other corporate side of it, so no, I didn't like that." Perry also felt

especially wary of this: "I question any injection of pride into a script or a motto, anything that has to be repeated." To Perry, taking pride in their work meant having to reflect: why should I be proud? Why am I here? What is it I need to experience or have experienced that should make me proud to do this? Perry felt that pride isn't something that can be forced or coerced, and that it is almost a sense of manipulation to expect someone to recite their pride every day. According to Perry, one should be proud of things one can't change, such as racial identity, or things they have worked hard to achieve, but the forced recitation of pride is just a marketing technique. As Perry described, corps members are having to use this fake pride to convince corporate sponsors that corps members deserve to be there, that the corps member role is validated by statistics and by person-to-person experience, so for the donors who don't get to see the day-to-day work, that façade of pride motivates them to give money. Perry felt that it's important to internalize pride, not recite it in a shallow fashion. What Perry was really proud of, for example, was their nephew who made regional band on bassoon at an under-resourced school in Houston. As Perry said, people who make regional on bassoon are usually white, so Perry is *proud* of their nephew because they know what he had to go through to get that position and that he didn't have the same resources as other kids. It's talent and dedication that got him there. Perry does not have to be told to be proud in order to be proud.

Others saw City Year pride as a way to practice humility. The team Armani served on, for example, was really passionate about what they were doing and the impact they were having. They were willing to do whatever it took to see success in their students. What "proudly serving" meant to Armani was recognizing the role they play in the community. As Armani stated, "we're not heroes… we're just stepping stones and we need to be okay with that, like we need to be proud of what we're doing but we also need to be very humble with the role that we've been

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bestowed in this community" They didn't hold their students' hand the whole time. Instead, they

prepared them with tools and used themselves as a boost. As Armani said, "I'm proud of the

work that I'm doing because I'm humble in the role that I know that I am in." Laine shared a

similar view:

> I think that that piece is significant and I say that because I do think that it is a privilege to serve. Everyone isn't able to serve, to do the things- to work ten to twelve hours a day, to be put in a low-income community to basically be challenged, because City Year is a challenging environment, and so I think that, speaking for myself personally, I felt proud to serve as an AmeriCorps member knowing that I have the ability to give back to a community that I grew up in.

> Laine's emphasis on taking pride in giving back to a community they grew up in really

demonstrates humility and the empowerment of corps members to take on leadership roles as

young people of color. This shows the presence of an internalized and self-aware sense of pride

that one can gain from true introspection. An interviewee I call Jules[xiii] felt similarly:

> It's taken, you know, since that time has passed, to just reflect sometimes and be like, you know, I should be proud of like the school or the community in which I am serving in and whatnot […] it would get tiresome sometimes, but like, I realize there is going to be nobody else being as vocal about this community or this school, like I am that voice, so I do have to come off in a way that's like […] I'm still proud of the community that I'm serving.

For some, like Skyler for example, service is something they identify with:

> I loved it but, I think for me, service is like fundamentally a part of who I am, and I don't think that everyone who served would agree with that statement. I think some people serve because they believe they need to or they should or that's the right thing to do, but I think some people serve because it genuinely is a part of who they are, and- and they couldn't imagine not serving someone, you know? […] it kinda just reminded me every day that serving isn't an obligation, because there's millions of people who never served. But, it's a opportunity to really try to make a difference in someone else's life in a very small, tangible way.

Analysis

Although City Year seems to try to impose culture and pride on corps members, interviewees were very much aware of this and took the time to analyze City Year culture and pride and what that meant to them. City Year designed everything to be militarized and orchestrated to present the corps as this uniform body of idealists who are serving for a cause greater than themselves, but corps members simultaneously retained a sense of individuality while reflecting on their role in the grand scheme of City Year's mission and what it meant to them. City Year's practices are designed to make City Year stand out as an organization and make a statement to society about how they represent disadvantaged communities and serve as young advocates standing up for social justice for other young people. None of the nineteen interviewees blindly followed City Year culture or pride.

White saviorism therefore is not applicable here, at least not among interviewees. Taking pride in serving and feeling as though one is representing the students in some way comes off differently from, for example, a Black corps member who shares similar experiences with the students versus a white corps member who perceives themselves as the only answer to lifting students out of poverty. Based on the assumption that someone possessing a white savior complex would unquestionably take pride in serving and pat themselves on the back for helping impoverished children, none of the white interviewees exhibited a white savior complex.

I would also characterize white saviorism as blindness to how one comes off to others, particularly students, in the way they perform City Year culture. No white interviewees exhibited this mindset, and interviewees across racial categories reflected in depth on the purpose of their performance of pride and culture. The experiences of corps members in performing City Year culture and pride shows that corps members are hyper aware of the social dynamics at play and

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make a conscious effort to analyze it and find their own meaning or way of performing a culture of positivity that acknowledges society's ills, but still maintains a sense of positivity.

The corps members' relationship to City Year culture had more to do with personality, team dynamics, and management than racial identity, but racial identity also served as a source of pride for corps members of color. Among corps members, I found that City Year culture was embraced or criticized in relation to the perceived usefulness of those activities in serving the students. The activity in some way needed to enhance the team's ability to stay positive, put others first, and be a part of something greater than themselves, and this depended on a variety of factors. Personal attitudes affected team dynamics, and team dynamics affected how teams embraced or rejected City Year culture. All of these factors affected student receptiveness. Most of the disdain for the culture seemed to come from poor team dynamics and lack of freedom to explore what City Year pride and culture should look like for a particular team. When corps members felt that they were not allowed to interact with the kids in a way that felt meaningful and had to instead use buzzwords and a structured way of doing things that took away the freedom of getting to know their school, they seemed more resentful of the culture. Activities like the unity rallies, which took place on whole corps days when the corps was physically removed from the school environment, were especially frustrating to interviewees and were seen as a waste of time, as merely a time to show off and not directly contribute to a cause that would be worthy of the corps members' time. If teams had a toxic dynamic, it especially complicated their relationship with City Year culture.

It did seem likely that racial diversity of teams affected student receptiveness to corps members in general. When Jackie said that students expect a certain look, Jackie was implying that City Year's idealist culture conjures images of white people trying to help impoverished

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kids, but seeing people of different racial identities being a part of this together chipped away at those stereotypical images of the white savior and created a more welcoming and inclusive space for students.

In looking at City Year's practice of forcing corps members to perform pride, it seems that nobody really bought into it without examining why. None of the interviewees shallowly patted themselves on the back. Even those who openly rejected the pride and criticized City Year for forcing them to stand and declare still reflected on what and why they were proud to be serving. Armani's way of seeing pride as humility solidifies the concept that corps members are aware of how they can only do so much, that they are not saviors or heroes, but they can be a *steppingstone* to something greater than oneself.

This humility is mirrored by Laine and Max's emphasis on service as a *privilege.* Being able to serve for one year is seen as a privilege because the corps member stipend is extremely low, and many people from disadvantaged communities cannot afford to do this kind of work. Furthermore, as Max said, "Especially to serve for one year, to literally walk in and out of the community and never touch it again, like, not have to live, go through- be a student in these schools, like that is a privilege." Max saw it as a privilege that they could only serve for a year and then walk away from what was reality for the students.

It seems that the corps members who identified the most with the communities they served in especially felt honored. They did not view themselves as saviors. In this sense, racial identity does influence one's sense of pride. The white interviewees were more likely to be cautious of how they took pride in what they did, and some outright criticized other white corps members who they perceived to be patting themselves on the back. Interviewees of color took pride in their identity and the community they were serving. That being said, interviewees of

color also criticized City Year's practice of forcing a sense of pride onto people, especially because it is done as a marketing technique and this detracts from truly reflecting on why one would take pride in the service role.

It is also important to account for tension between the individual and the group, as this tension is present in both the relationship to City Year culture and to City Year pride. The individual has a racial identity, but the team as a whole does not. While City Year prides itself on inclusivity and diversity, its militarized practices in a way erase the individual and the life experiences informed by racial identity. Serving a cause greater than self is one of City Year's core values, but this seems to dismiss the importance of individual experiences as a motivation for signing up to be a part of City Year. Many corps members come from the communities they serve and have experienced social inequity, and "a cause greater than self" implies that the goal is to break down social inequity. As such, personality and personal experiences impact one's relationship to City Year culture and what taking pride in service means to them, and if individuals are not in a team setting that facilitates open conversation and deep thought about these topics, it is very difficult for the team to find a unifying identity that allows them to learn their school and be creative in how they perform City Year culture, its intention of which is to show the unity among racially diverse young people in breaking down social injustice.

I asked corps members for three layers of information: how they felt about City Year as individuals, how their team felt about it, and how students responded to it. These layers speak volumes, since they each add onto one another. The most successful teams, while not entirely objectively measurable, were the ones where corps members were given the freedom to explore and express what motivates and inspires them. This can be a source of pride, knowing that one has taken the time to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of the students and the school.

This way, instead of patting oneself on the back, one is able to recognize that they are just a small part of something bigger. Corps need to be given the space to examine where they are serving, why, and what their part in it means. City Year culture can help or hinder this process, and the key lies within allowing teams to think through what it means for them as opposed to forcing them to participate in or perform a sense of pride and culture which is not a one-size-fits all.

CHAPTER IV: NEGOTIATING RACIAL IDENTITY: THE SELF, THE TEAM, THE

STUDENTS, AND THE SCHOOL

I have presented and analyzed data on why corps members join City Year, how prepared

they feel for the experience, and their relationship to City Year culture and pride based on their

racial identities. So far, I have found that racial identity does influence how they interpret their

position within the service role, but there are other important factors like personality and team

dynamics involved. In this section, I present and analyze data that dives deeper into these topics.

I begin by presenting internal conflicts that corps members experienced. I wanted to see if corps

members experienced difficult or uncomfortable feelings when they noticed something outside

themselves that caused inner turmoil, such as white corps members experiencing cognitive

dissonance about their positionality, or corps members of color feeling that they had to act a

certain way because of their racial identity. Second, I examine team dynamics and how racial

and/or cultural barriers or differences affected how corps members worked with each other. I

then turn to how corps members felt about how their racial background impacted their team

relationships. Last, I turn to a discussion of how corps members felt that racial identity impacted

their relationships with the schools they served in. The data presented here further answers the

question of whether racial identity affects the corps member experience and what can be done to

challenge the way City Year delivers services so that it fosters a more inclusive and transparent

environment.

Internal Conflicts and Racial Identity

The internal conflicts that came up frequently among interviewees had to do with the

difficulty of the service role and feelings of helplessness when faced with issues far outside the

scope of the corps member role. Corps members across racial identities felt significant stress in

the corps member role. Max, a white corps member, shared a particularly detailed account of

cognitive dissonance, which although they didn't overtly say was due to their whiteness, still

seems to have something to do with them being from a more affluent background and the shock

experienced from observing what appears to be an abnormally dysfunctional school

environment. As Max illustrates,

> That was a really hard year, like that was definitely the hardest year of my life, just because I- I didn't feel supported and I- it's just not comfortable to look to see how much we are failing as a country, how we are failing kids, right? And so I think like, internally, I'm like, I wanted to do more but I can't, and like, I don't even have the ability to and I'm foolish to think that I can even make any sort of change. And that […] felt really defeating, you know?

To illustrate the inner turmoil they felt, Max shared:

> I would get terrible chest pains driving to the school every day, like, *ah*, I just-total anxiety like, physical chest pains, like *ahh*, *dread*, and then I just would be in those halls and just feel like, you know, carrying a million pounds on my back and I remember one day I just had to like walk out into the parking lot and I like sat on the curb and I called my mom and I was like crying and I was like, it had just hit me that like this stress that I feel of just physically being in this place […] it's permeating the rest of my life and my relationships, it's all I can think about, it's consuming me, and I was like, this is what these kids have been doing for twelve years! Like these kids have been living in this kind of stress for twelve years and they have like infinite- like they have learned to cope with it in like their own way, and they're doing the best that they can and like, how dare any of us who get to leave this scenario [snickers] shortly and become kind of a dream, how dare any of us like tell those kids that they- that they're the problem or like they're not good enough or, you know, whatever teachers tell those kids or- it's-oh my god, like we're not creating any sort of environment for them to thrive, and like I think it just really hit me that like any sort of stress that I have pales in comparison to these kids and how long that they had those stress- that stress. And so I think- honestly I thought, even though it's so painful, it was like, how can I quit? How can I just say, 'okay, enough, I'm gonna get out of this situation now because I can.' It just seems very selfish to do that.

One major source of inner conflict that interviewees recalled was that they were

concerned about the well-being of the kids and if one was doing enough to support them. People

wondered if they were connecting with students in a meaningful way, and simultaneously

wondering if they were doing enough for the students. It was hard for people to know what the students were going through, but helping them in any way seemed like a daunting task because there weren't very good resources or guidance on supporting students academically or emotionally. Echoed throughout interviews was this sense of heaviness that the corps member felt, in part because the hours were long and grueling, and partially because they were haunted by the thought that their efforts were not enough given the societal structures within which City Year operates.

Perry's internal conflict resonates with Max's quote above. Perry was especially impacted by the long hours and minimal pay, especially because Perry constantly wondered if they could be doing something else with their time. Perry wanted to pursue a career in acting, and the year they spent making very little money could have been spent working somewhere else where they could have made enough money and had the time and energy to invest in their acting career. Perry stayed because they had made too many connections with the students to just leave in the middle of the semester. They also realized that they were learning something about themselves through their interaction with their partner teacher and their students. They respected all these people enough not to leave them with things unresolved, especially with a student whom Perry was teaching to journal and manage their emotions. Perry couldn't just leave that because they too were learning how to deal with their own emotions. As Perry described,

> Before I got into City Year, like I was meditating every day, I was reading every day, I was exploring, I was like going to just random restaurants, going hiking, searching for things. When I got into City Year, like I- I couldn't- I just couldn't find the patience to meditate anymore. I'm sitting here telling my students, like 'yo, like this is what we need to do, […] but when I got home, like I just could not bring myself to do it […] I wanted to do something mindless, I wanted to sit and like play a video game and like *escape* from- from some of the things that I went through that day from the stress. I wanted to go and just watch a- a- movie- like just watch movies and sit down or, you know, go drink or go smoke or just go do something that was so opposite of what I was doing from day to day to kind of

like to- to find like balance in myself, and I started to realize that I wasn't meditating anymore, and not that it's City Year's fault, but it's my way of coping but like I shouldn't be doing anything that is stressing me out this much that makes me not even wanna fucking meditate, and so *should I be here*? In the end is some of the things that I thought. In the end like I realized like, yo like, no matter what, like you're doing something for someone that you might not get an opportunity to do anymore, A. because you're reaching the- the age cap, but B. because like, this is a very specific experience and- and yeah, I don't think I could have had that experience in any way anywhere else.

Interviewees who came from similar backgrounds as the students talked about their journey in terms of personal growth in realizing that while they faced similar challenges, the experiences were still different. Avery, for example, realized that they still had privilege not having gone to a middle school which they perceived to be as bad as the one they served in. They didn't feel guilty, but it was hard knowing that the students are not situated in a healthy learning environment. They also saw looking back that their middle school teachers were more supportive. They also noticed different dynamics of the neighborhood because they lived in a slightly higher income area than their service school's neighborhood. This helped them appreciate their school retrospectively. Skyler offered a very similar perspective in the sense that they too shared some similar experiences with the students, but the challenges Skyler faced were not the same:

> I looked like so many of my students, and I share a lot of experiences that my students had, but I was in a much better position than them, and I think I got a better grip of my Blackness with working with City Year and realizing that poverty in one place is not the same as poverty in another place, and each quote-unquote 'hood' is- is different they battle different things, different circumstances, different levels of violence, different types of things, and there's a streamline of things that we all can relate on, but there's some things that I just didn't understand, and it was humbling to realize that. That even though I looked like them, I couldn't be prepared for everything that they had to go through.

The quotes from this section reflect a big theme that frequently arose in my conversations with alumni: the service experience is highly emotionally taxing, and it is a learning experience for

corps members across all racial categories, as no experience is the same, even among people with similar backgrounds or racial identities.

Racial Identity and Cultural Backgrounds in Team Dynamics

It is important to examine how corps members come into City Year with unique experiences, and their racial identity as well as their cultural backgrounds do impact their experiences and the way they perceive themselves in their role, as well as the way they are treated by others. Black and Latinx interviewees more often recalled being treated differently based on their racial identity than white corps members did. When white interviewees were asked about their experiences in the service role as a white person, many noted that they either felt shut down or out of place, and there were definitely times when they felt fear that students or school staff were not going to like them. However, despite these difficulties, white corps members overall felt that as long as they approached the students with respect, they were liked and had an overall positive experience. When the kids did point out their race, it was perceived as jest, not to actually try to hurt the corps member. This "joking up" is taken as light humor because it isn't invoking a history of racial oppression the same way it would if a white person were to make fun of a person of color.

White corps members also pointed out the behaviors of others across racial categories. For example, Max observed that people on their team perpetuated stereotypes about their own race. Max's Black teammates would sometimes describe students as "this type of Black people," "they're gonna behave this way," or "their mom is not gonna do that because they are this way," or saying things like "oh yeah, she's real ghetto" about teachers. Max felt that this set the bar low and perpetuated harmful stereotypes.

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Corps members of color recalled experiences of being treated or viewed a certain way by white corps members and sometimes corps members of color. Laine shared that a white teammate had trouble relating to the students, and the white teammate told Laine that the students liked Laine because Laine is Black. This truly affected Laine because they did not see it this way. They saw it as their students liked and respected them because they respected the students. Laine knew how to connect with the students because they cared about the students and respected them, so they struggled knowing that the team attributed their success to their racial identity. Laine didn't want the team to think students favor them for being the "cool Black person." Laine felt that the students will respect you if you respect them and if you allow yourself to be vulnerable.

Several Black interviewees expressed experiencing microaggressions or feeling hyper aware of how others perceived them. For example, an interviewee I refer to as Reese[xiv] experienced people changing the way they spoke when they spoke to them. Others described specific instances of being singled out based on their race, feeling lumped together with the Black people on their team, observing a Black person feeling like they were the odd one out, or being singled out as the Hispanic teammate who was always asked for advice about language or culture. One interviewee shared that as a Black person, they would often receive praise just for being in the space, as if they were unusual. People thanked them for being at the school and praised the way they carried themselves. They were praised for taking on responsibilities in mentoring and engaging with younger people of color.

One would expect that the intentional diversification of a City Year cohort would allow for corps members, particularly Black and Latinx corps members, to celebrate their racial identity. Given the paragraphs above, however, it is not surprising that only a few interviewees

expressed that they could really celebrate their racial identity. Another thing that came up was the fact that people gravitated toward those similar to them. Taylor observed this with students who gravitated toward corps members who looked like them, and Taylor's team members separated themselves by racial groups from the start. Teammates treated each other differently based on their racial identities, and the students sometimes treated corps members differently as well. Taylor felt that it is hard to place a finger on how these dynamics manifest because they're subtle.

This type of "natural" cliquey behavior along racial categories reflects one of Bonilla-Silva's (2006) four frames of colorblind racism – naturalization – in which segregation is justified on the grounds that people choose to associate with those who look like them (28). Racism is present in these social cliques in the sense that a racist society has conditioned people to be wary of one another. It makes sense that corps members of color gravitate toward one another when they experience microaggressions from white counterparts, and it makes sense for white corps members to separate themselves out of discomfort and insecurity with their whiteness. Although this kind of self-segregation "makes sense," it also perpetuates a divisiveness that is a symptom of internalized racism.

Simultaneously, corps members' cultural backgrounds also influenced their relationships with their peers, as well as their particular life circumstances. I mention culture only in a way that an interviewee self-identified, as it is important to be mindful of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2006) four frames of color-blind racism, one of which is cultural racism which he defines as commonly held beliefs about racial categories that are attributed to culture (28). In what follows, I present what interviewees defined as their culture, not what society perceives as their culture. One may perceive of their culture in terms of how they grew up, where they grew up, and the

unique circumstances surrounding their life. One can perceive their racial identity as part of their culture, but one's specific life circumstances also contribute to what they view as their culture. People across racial categories also come into the service year with unique experiences and life circumstances. Skyler, for example, although a Black person, grew up slightly more affluent than their peers. Prior to City Year, Skyler had experienced being told that they are not Black enough. In City Year, Skyler recalled that people were surprised that they had gone to a four-year institution, wanted to be a doctor, and drove a nice car, and Skyler was even told that they "sounded white." These experiences were similar to Skyler's childhood. However, Skyler grew up having more than others, so Skyler's family constantly told them that they sound like a white person, dress like a white person, or that they're lucky they have a nice car, so when the students did the same thing, it just reinforced the idea that when people who look alike have different backgrounds, especially financially, it can make it difficult to relate to one another.

Reese observed many instances of ignorance or insensitivity on their team and disagreeing viewpoints of what it meant to be Latinx and how exclusionary or inclusive that term can be based on what your original ethnicity is and based on the country that you're from. Reese observed cultural nuances that team members were not exposed to and didn't understand. Avery, who self-identifies as Hispanic, similarly felt a lack of understanding from their team. Avery described themselves as family-oriented and came from what they perceived to be a very traditional Hispanic family, and their team didn't seem to understand that.

In the bigger picture, one interviewee pointed out that City Year's culture itself is not for everyone, especially on a diverse team. The extent to which people wanted to follow City Year rules or school norms was also a cultural difference in terms of how one was raised to abide by the rules or how much one bought into City Year culture. These issues are a culmination of

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differences in racial identity, culture, and unique life circumstances. Bringing together all these

diverse people can create tension when corps members come from a variety of socio-economic

and cultural backgrounds. Some corps members come to City Year with preconceived notions of

what things are like in certain communities, and sometimes they might not be mindful of how

their displays of wealth or their perceptions of the world can cause tension. An interviewee I call

Jordan[xv] shared an example of this:

> It makes some people uncomfortable, and even just like speaking to myself, I
> know […] some of the schools that we serve at in Dallas isn't considered like
> 'bad' where I'm from. So, [I'm] able to come in and not think like things are […]
> 'bad,' but it's just the way things are sometimes, or that's just how it is, like in
> this type of community, but with them bringing in people from like different
> socioeconomic backgrounds and different ethnic backgrounds, I feel like they
> have the best interest with their approach, but again, I feel like that can allow
> some people to bump heads because, example: Imagine you having a teammate
> who may come from a more wealthier family, […] has like a really nice car, is
> always able to like have like really good food everyday, […] telling like plans on
> like what they're doing like for the weekend and which some of those other
> teammates may not be able to do or afford, […] I think all of those things like
> play a big part in those two different approaches with the socioeconomic
> background and the ethnic background, or the ethnicity of the team, so, yeah, I
> just really think that's something that's like the big part and I don't think a lot of
> people are like mindful when those types of things occur, but I was like very
> observant and I've noticed how people react, how some of the teams have reacted
> to someone who is maybe a little bit more well-off than they are and things that
> they're able to do and [it's like], 'yo, I don't- I can't do that, like I *wish* I could do
> that but I can't.

Despite these challenges, interviewees across racial identities seemed to feel that

diversity was a good thing, and that City Year's practice of diversifying the corps presented

opportunities for growth by pushing corps members out of their comfort zones as long as there

was space to have open conversations about these topics. A few corps members did feel that their

team was able to have open conversations and was able to accept each other's backgrounds and

experiences and learn from them. Armani, for example, argued that it helps people learn from

each other, especially because it isn't just about racial identity or culture, it's also about different

classes, sexes, and individual identities. They told me that everyone has different ideas, different ways their minds work, and different ways they approach things. Armani felt that this diversity brings more ideas to the table to help solve problems. Reese felt similarly:

> I think it's a great opportunity for [corps members] to really be exposed to a situation to where they cannot choose the people to surround themselves with because as people, we're just gonna be around people who make us more comfortable, and a lot of the time it's either people who identify like we identify, whether that's racially, ethnically, by language, by religion, by, you know, whatever or even like, you know, class, so I think it's common how we find comfort as a group of people, for us to do that but I do think that like I think it's a powerful experience for you to not be able to, you know, necessarily choose who you engage with. And City Year actually does a good job at like mixing it up even if like when the people get there, they still cluster together.

Beyond racial identity and cultural differences, conflicts on teams came up due to different personalities and corps members simply being in different stages of life. As Grier felt,

> City Year has just- like they- they pride themselves on the fact that it's so diverse and people coming from everywhere, but it just makes it really hard to work together when everybody comes from different backgrounds, working at different kind of working environments, and then some people are straight out of college, haven't really worked a- like a 'big boy' job before, or some are even like right out of high school, and so just like, some people are just in different stages in their life and doing different things.

The ambiguity of the corps member role paired with inadequate direction led to various interpretations of the corps member role, which led corps members to judge each other's work ethic. Teams that especially struggled seemed to share a defeatist attitude, and they often struggled with dishonesty and lack of transparency.

"Complaining culture" came up in interviews a few times among interviewees who reported feeling exceptionally unhappy or viewed their team in a negative way. Many complaints against team members had more to do with work ethic and personality than racial identity. As Jordan put it, negotiating the corps member role is going to be in the works forever. Corps members work with diverse teachers from various backgrounds and the corps members come

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and serve from all over the country. According to Jordan, one has to take into consideration who they are partnering with and the experiences of each individual.

Working with Students

The racial identity of corps members was a significant factor of how they perceived themselves within the role and how they interacted with the team, but racial identity played an especially significant role in working with the students. Issues of how to balance mentoring, caring for, and disciplining students came up often in conversations over building relationships with students. These ideas of how to appropriately accomplish this task frequently intersected with ideas of race, however they sometimes intersected in unpredictable and inconsistent ways for different corps members. Laine demonstrates why it is crucial to have discussions about racial identity:

> [For most] organizations, especially a nonprofit like City Year, sometimes it can be really uncomfortable to talk about things like this [racism and implicit bias], but it's also extremely important and imperative. You have a group of people coming in to work in an underprivileged, under-resourced school with students who are grade levels behind, struggle with their social emotional competency, it is so important to talk about race because if- when the students see you, the first thing that they will notice about you is- especially if you work at a school [where the] majority of their population are African American students, and so when you have corps members that aren't Black [placed into] the school, the students will want to try you. They *will* try you, not *want*, they *will* try you, to test you to see what is this person all about, why you here? Especially if they know the history of City Year, most of these schools that we've been at, we've been in partnerships with them, so if students see you, they know that you serve your one year, and then you leave. And so, the kids that we work with are really smart. They wanna know what you're all about, and so having that conversation about race, having that conversation about what it's gonna be like for you, if you don't identify as a person of color, to walk into a classroom with students who have X, Y, and Z going on, and they take out their problems or their frustration or their anger on you or on other students, how do you deal with this?

> How do corps members deal with being "tried?" This is a particularly valid question to

ask when disciplinary approaches from corps members communicate something about their

background or invoke racist histories. The disciplinary approaches corps members took varied greatly and extended to both extremes, from being friends with the kids and using little to no disciplinary action to taking on a significant disciplinary role by using harsh language. Taylor referred to this as "the spectrum of discipline severity." For the most part, interviewees seemed to feel that it was a balancing act. It's important to have compassion for the students, but it is also important to set boundaries. Among corps members, it is important to have conversations about how racial biases impact how one treats the students and how students perceive the corps member. Especially when it comes to white corps members, they may have biases that influence the way they interact with students or the specific students they gravitate toward. As Taylor described,

> It was something I tried to be cognizant in terms of how I treated students because I think recognizing that there is biases and stereotypes and also just natural. inclinations to associate with people who are more similar to you, it was something that I actively tried to combat by first acknowledging in myself that, hey, this is something you're probably gonna do, be prone to be doing, so you need to- to stop [laughs]. And that's something that I wish that City Year had focused some more on because I think it's ignorant to act like biases don't exist.

An interesting way these biases may show up is in the form of pity. An interviewee I call Ash[xvi] brought up an interesting point that in some ways their team may have been more patient because the kids were from disadvantaged backgrounds. If the kids were acting out, it made them wonder what's really behind it, and it made them have more grace and empathy for students knowing that they were struggling. Interviewees emphasized the importance of simply showing up for the kids and providing a safe and enjoyable environment under the assumption that they must be going through a lot as disadvantaged students of color. While this approach that corps members took does reflect genuine concern for the wellbeing of the students, this undertone of pity that is not always welcome. Avery put it into perspective:

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I think you should just treat them as equal, you know, like I wouldn't want
someone treating me different just 'cause I'm Hispanic and they would be like
'oh, [they're] Hispanic, I don't know what [they're] going through.' […] yeah I'm
Hispanic but I'm not going through too much these days [laughs].

While this "I need to just be there for them" mentality is problematic, the genuine

concern for the students and the urgency to focus on their social-emotional well-being came up

often as a more meaningful way to connect with students, since tutoring often felt like one was

simply checking a box and reporting hours but not taking time to build genuine relationships

with students. The reality is that while corps members perceived students to be struggling

emotionally, corps members were also struggling, and this desire to be there for the students

seems to serve as a coping mechanism, or a way of reassuring oneself that they did their best to

help in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Interviewees of color did express that their racial identities made it easier to work with

students, and they observed that white corps members sometimes struggled. Several interviewees

pointed out that race is the first thing students see, and with that, students might have certain

assumptions about white corps members and their intentions. Grier's viewpoint shows what this

might look like from the kids' perspective:

I felt like the students maybe felt like 'you don't know what I'm going through
[…] you don't know my life, like you say you're here to help, but really like we
know you're gonna be gone next year,' and like it's just harder for them to open
up to somebody like that I feel like, whereas me, I'll come in and I'm talking
Spanish to my students already from the first day, like I already got in, you know,
like they already accept me, it's like, 'oh this [person], this [person] knows, I can
identify with that [person],' so I think it's definitely a cultural barrier for some
corps members, and I mean, it doesn't even necessarily have to be white people.

Laine shared a similar thought:

I, being an African American [person], I knew how to relate to these students
'cause we have similar experiences. And I think that with some of the trainings
that my impact manager gave to my teammates, they struggled with these because
they didn't feel like they truly connected or related to the students, so trying to be
the disciplinarian was difficult for them to like really put their foot down because

they [didn't want to] seem like that, oh, that white person that is coming in and trying to tell them what to do.

Laine's quote demonstrates that disciplinary approaches were influenced by racial identity. White corps members hesitated to take on a disciplinary approach in an attempt to distance themselves from this image of the "white person that is coming in and trying to tell them what to do," in other words, the white savior image. Grier explicitly invokes white saviorism when they state:

> I think that City Year- guess it would probably be the same across all of the US but, here in Dallas especially, if you're white, you're gonna have a harder time, like that's just a fact I think, not just because you come from a different upbringing, because that's not necessarily true for all white people, but like whenever you get into the school, there's a certain kind of animosity towards you, by the students, and even sometimes the teachers, just because we're going into these schools that are predominantly Black and uh Hispanic, and we're living in a time where it's very divided and the way that the sociopolitical climate is in the world and just like things that people talk about on the internet that gets spread on the internet, I just feel like it's a tough time for a white person to step into that community and just be like, 'hey, I'm here to help you, I'm here to, hopefully give you a better life,' you know, it's like- it's like the whole like white knight thing.

The above quotes demonstrate that white corps members are perceived as having a more difficult time working with the students. They experience cognitive dissonance within themselves, but they also face scrutiny from teammates and students alike, and this scrutiny seems to reflect that white corps members are by default perceived as people with savior mentalities. This is a valid assumption given how whiteness and white saviorism often manifests in service work settings, and intentional diversification does not eradicate this issue. Even supposedly "aware" or "woke" white corps members still carry a certain attitude of pity toward the students and feelings of hopelessness that are indicative of a mild form of internalized white saviorism. Their pity and emotional distress could mean that they initially came into the role thinking they could change lives, but the reality they faced forced them to examine their

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whiteness. White interviewees did seem to be aware of their whiteness coming into the service

role, but that does not erase the fact that their teammates and students perceived them a certain

way and that they did in some ways see themselves as someone who, in theory, should be

changing lives.

Corps members of color also faced challenges in working with the students, but their

experiences had more to do with the way they compared their experiences to that of the students.

When it came to corps members of color, some felt an additional responsibility, and their ways

of approaching the students may be inappropriate coming from a white person. As Skyler

described:

> I did at times feel an extra pressure to show them how to be the best Black people
> they could be, and I felt like I was being a crutch if I was too nice, if I blew
> everything off, because in my world, I feel like as being a Black and brown
> person, I have to be more prepared, more well-dressed, more articulate, more
> presentable, more educated than my counterparts, and that was something that I
> wanted my students to realize, that your best has to be better than everyone else's
> best because there- because society is already looking for you to be at your worst,
> so yeah, I do think that is a different dynamic because for you [a white person],
> one, that pressure may not even be there, and also for you, it may come off
> differently if you were to say to your Black student, "yeah, like the world sees
> you as less-than.

As Skyler pointed out, certain statements such as "the world sees you as less than" can come off

very different from a Black corps member than a white corps member. If a white corps member

were to say this, it could come off as if they actually believe this statement, and those things are

important to be mindful of.

Perry described their experience in terms of the sheer emotionally taxing effect that

working with disadvantaged students has on the corps member:

> There's only so much trauma that someone can listen to in a day that- before it
> begins to impact your life because you think about it, right, like you- you want to
> help these children out so bad and you know to an extent you can [but in] a larger
> way, like you can't really help them because you're only there for a year but, as
> much as you can do, like try to figure out as much as you can do to like make

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their, you know, to give them different ways of thinking about their situation or
ways to like navigate their situation as much as you can.

The desire to help students in a seemingly hopeless situation comes off different from corps

members of color than white corps members. Everything white corps members do in working

with the students can be interpreted to invoke racist histories which white people are complicit in

but are not victims of. Therefore, it is important for white corps members to unpack how their

attitudes and behaviors may not be appropriate in that space in a way that it would be appropriate

for corps members of color.

These tensions are apparent in corps members' disciplinary approaches. For example, one

interviewee felt that a Black teammate was perceived as being especially harsh with students felt

that that approach was not appropriate. On another team, a white corps member labeled the

students as rowdy and took a more disciplinary approach, offending a Black teammate who felt

that the white teammate was racist and didn't understand the students.

Overall, harshly disciplining the students was frowned upon by the majority of

interviewees. They weighed the possibility that students maybe were not getting enough

attention at home or were asking for attention, but they believed disciplining was not City Year's

place. Avery observed team members say things like "you need to act right or I'm gonna whoop

your ass, or whatever, and I'm just like, that's not right, like you ain't gonna whoop nobody's

ass." Being best friends with the students wasn't a perfect approach either, so corps members

strived to find a balance and be consistent.

Despite the racial issues mentioned above, overall, corps member racial diversity was

seen as beneficial to students. An interviewee I call Kendall[xvii] shared this perspective:

I think for students, it's good to introduce them to people, to role models, you
know, from these different backgrounds and introduce them like in a- in a good
capacity, in a capacity that's, you know, you have all these different people on
this City Year team, and they're all here to help you, they do have diversity, you

know, it's not just one look about them, like all these people, they're so different but they care about you succeeding. […] I don't think it's helpful to coddle students and act like they need to be sheltered from people who have, let's say, higher- more privilege, you know? […] because for life, that's not how it works. When they get out of middle school, high school, they're gonna meet so many different people.

Kendall's perspective reflects what Jackie had talked about in a previous section - that students expect a certain (white) look but seeing this diversity can be beneficial to students if they see that corps members really care about them together. Under this idea, the diversity of corps members is good because it gives students opportunities to build different kinds of relationships with different kinds of corps members. It seems quite possible that Black corps members overall built stronger relationships with Black students and Latinx corps members built stronger relationships with Latinx students, but the strength of these relationships doesn't mean that Black students didn't also learn important things from and about Latinx and white corps members or that Latinx students didn't learn significant things from Black and white corps members. However, because the culture of City Year stressed one idealized model of relationship building with students, it meant that corps members from a variety of backgrounds struggled to settle for a particular approach when they observed conflicting approaches from different corps members, and also importantly, from teachers.

Relationships with the School

An additional layer of complication came up when corps members had to negotiate their roles within a school environment that didn't agree with City Year's way of doing things. The idea behind City Year's near-peer model is that students are much more receptive to role models who are closer to them in age. However, some schools were not briefed on City Year's purpose and did not have a clear understanding of why they were being forced to partner with young

inexperienced corps members. Some corps members were partnered with teachers whom they perceived to be harsh with the students, and City Year's idealist model in which corps members were trained sometimes created an awkward power struggle. Some teachers were openly against City Year, feeling that City Year undermined their classroom authority or that corps members were inexperienced. Some corps members showed empathy toward teachers, hesitating often in their partnership knowing that they had no teaching experience. Sometimes teachers blamed City Year for student misbehavior, and often times corps members felt conflicted about how to support a student who had just been kicked out of a classroom or scolded. Corps members across racial identities had something to say about the way certain teachers handled students. Ideas of discipline sometimes intersected ideas of race, but what seemed more prominent was the power struggle between City Year's and the teachers' ideals of working with the students. The most successful teams were able to overcome and build transparent and inclusive relationships with teachers and school administration.

Skyler's team had a particularly positive experience in which they were getting positive affirmations the whole year and were constantly reminded about how much they were valued on campus by both teachers and staff, and that was another part of why they continued to hold onto the culture the way they did, because from the principal to the custodial staff, people let them know that they loved them. The team really tried to show that they are advocating for teachers and staff. Even when things were hard and they wished they would be heard more, teachers would still remind them that they were valued and encouraged them to keep going. Having these positive relationships also depends on having the time to build sustainable partnerships. Schools that were briefed on City Year and had long-standing partnerships with City Year were generally more successful in working collaboratively. Communication with and inclusivity of the school

staff (principal, teachers, custodians, etc.) was key. Corps member partnerships with teachers

also depended on that transparency and open communication to overcome assumptions about

each other and to understand the school's expectations.

Analysis

> We learn from somewhere else, whether it's first-hand through your parents or a
> other close relative, or second-hand by like, you know, friends, something you see
> on TV, or you hear through other people, you know? So, like, I mean, I think
> there is a reason why a lot of people in any profession are able to be so successful,
> and I think specifically with like people who work in the nonprofit world or even
> find themselves like doing a lot of social work, I think that ability to relate to
> people is super high and super strong, so in general, you know, their background
> is impacting how they're actually giving quality work and often times like how
> they're even able to best support the people that they been charged to care for or
> support, and simply because they've been through similar experiences and they
> want to help others avoid being in the same predicament.
>
> <div align="right">-Reese</div>

There are multiple layers of complexity in how corps members navigate the experience of

working with disadvantaged students on a diverse team in a diverse school. Corps members

experience inner conflicts, disagreements on the team about the corps members' roles, racial and

cultural differences, and disciplinary approaches toward the students. It is evident that racial

identity and one's background in general influences their experiences in City Year. Some issues

are unanimously felt, but even then, there are differences in perception that can be racial in

nature. Many interviewees were very heavily impacted by the emotional demand of the job

combined with very low pay and demanding hours, yet they felt guilty because they recognized

that they were in a unique and somewhat privileged place to be serving the students. At the same

time, many noticed that even if they had come from a similar background as the students, they

reflected on how their experiences were still different from what students went through.

Working with diverse teammates was a major learning experience for many. There were disagreements between teammates that were racial in nature. Several corps members of color reported experiencing microaggressions directed at them. Judgement also came from others about one's financial background or cultural nuances that people didn't understand. Other times team conflict had much to do with a lack of communication. This can be racial in nature, but much of the time it had to do with individual personality and work ethic. The unhappiest teams lacked good communication and were very quick to pass judgement onto their teammates, and corps members tended to adopt a defeatist attitude which the schools sometimes mirrored. Unhappy teams seemed to cultivate a culture of complaining and bottled-up feelings. Because corps members are supposed to wear many hats and the service model is not a one-size-fits-all, the ambiguity over the corps member role also caused conflict on the less happy teams whereas the teams with better cohesion trusted each other to do what was best. The fact that City Year brings together so many diverse people who have very different backgrounds in terms of racial identity, work experience, culture, and life experiences cultivates an environment of conflict if the space isn't made for *inclusivity* of diverse experiences and diverse people.

In working with students, racial differences were especially apparent. As echoed throughout this project, race is the first thing people see, especially students who are accustomed to negative experiences from working with white people in general. Black and Latinx corps members felt that they related to the students better overall and observed white teammates struggle in some ways. Racial and cultural differences somewhat influenced the disciplinary approaches corps members took, however, the majority of interviewees agreed that there needs to be a balance in disciplinary approaches. The corps member is not supposed to be a disciplinary figure necessarily, but they do need to set boundaries while understanding and

having empathy for why a student might be acting a certain way. It is important to be mindful of how one comes off to students, especially as a white person for whom it is not appropriate to approach students by telling them that the world expects them to fail, and it is also problematic to look at them with pity because that still reinforces an unintentional savior mindset that it is one's job to lift the student out of their situation. This approach from a white corps member comes off differently than from a corps member of color. It is also problematic for white corps members to judge the disciplinary style of corps members of color.

Corps members agreed that it is important to be there for students emotionally and build relationships with them to truly get to understand what that specific individual student needs. Students can be going through similar experiences and reacting to them very differently, so it is important to really get to know one's students. Furthermore, it is important to get to know one's partner teacher so that disciplinary approaches can be more consistent. While racial identity did not come up as a significant barrier in teacher-corps member relationships, it is noteworthy that teachers are also racially diverse and have diverse life experiences that influence their teaching styles. Even if a teacher of color is perceived as harsh by corps members, it is not a productive solution to judge and dismiss them.

How were differences overcome? The reality is that many times, they were not. Some teams never overcame, they simply put their differences aside for big projects, and otherwise let each other be and bottled things up. On the practical side, some interviewees mentioned that they would have needed more leadership from their impact manager while others stated that their impact manager gave them the freedom to explore, and that is what made them successful. It shows that team leadership is also a constant balancing act and requires substantial skill in understanding one's team.

Skyler emphasized the importance of empathy, especially in a society where one is constantly told to fear and think the worst of one another. Skyler feels that there is a lack of empathy for people who bear the brunt of police brutality, or people who come across the border and are labeled as illegal, and the only way to overcome is to humanize everyone and help each other walk in each other's shoes. Skyler feels that empathy is especially important when it comes to conflicting personalities, and also when having difficult conversations about touchy subjects like politics, or even something like complementing someone's hair without being disrespectful. Having compassion for others and validating each other's identities is crucial because it allows for open conversation, and if these things are present, team members can appreciate what each unique corps member brings to the table. This was the case with Jackie's team - they respected what everyone brought to the table. They wanted to be the best together, to defend each other's strengths and understand weaknesses while encouraging each other to grow. To create this unity and balance, there has to be constant conversation from a place of respect. People have to be real and transparent, focusing on being the best together. As Jules put it,

> If you are open to it, if both of you are open to it, if the space is created, there is an opportunity to like talk about those cultural differences and get an understanding of it, because I think anytime people hear somebody say something that they don't really agree with, it automatically becomes a misunderstanding, and especially when no one addresses it or like, at least try to get more clarification, then it becomes a problem. There needs to be a space that's created where people feel safe in a sense and feel comfortable to like, express those types of feelings and thoughts about different situations and what not, and I don't think that space has been created yet, and so I think most of the time it is left up to corps members or their impact managers to create that space for people to do that.

Going back to the research question, the lived experiences of City Year alumni shows that one's racial identity does affect their experiences, the way they navigate their service role, and the meanings they attribute to the corps member role. When working with diverse communities, it is important to have open and honest dialog about people's experiences and what

they mean in the service role context. The main takeaway is that it is important to have transparent conversations about these topics within the team, with City Year administration, and within the school setting, especially because teachers are the ones truly at the front lines working with students in disadvantaged communities. Several interviewees felt that City Year shies away from having these honest conversations because they did not see them as politically correct, but these issues need to be acknowledged because, as the above paragraphs demonstrate, corps members experience significant tensions on an individual, team, and school level. There also needs to be accountability in hiring corps members and in curating teams. The teams that had the most positive relationships built trust with the school, with each other, and with their students. They had honest and true conversations and were open to learning. This team cohesiveness depends in part on personalities but putting together these teams also depends on City Year management and how they help teams cultivate this open environment in which corps members can have open conversations.

CHAPTER V: CITY YEAR IN THE BIG PICTURE

So far, I have examined the personal experiences of corps members to answer: does the

corps member's racial identity affect their experiences, the way they navigate their service role,

and the meanings they attribute to the corps member role? I have presented evidence that racial

identity does impact the corps member experience, but there are many other things to consider as

well, including personality, team leadership, work experience, and life experiences. Now, I seek

to answer: does the corps member's racial identity affect their perception of City Year's impact?

What does this say about nonprofits in the big picture in how they work with diverse

communities to try to fight social inequity? Based on corps members' responses, how can City

Year improve its service model to address the complexities of racially diverse teams serving for

a short time in disadvantaged schools?

Is There Really a Need for City Year and Similar Organizations?

I ask this question because yes, there is a need for more resources and services in

disadvantaged communities, but is *City Year's work* really needed? Are they having enough

impact that it is worth it to invest in them instead of channeling the money directly into programs

that could support grassroots growth by investing in education itself? Are there enough people

working in nonprofit to actually be effective? As described in the introduction, City Year does

have a measurable impact and results in a return on investment. While very expensive, the

numbers show that City Year is still a cheaper investment in a school than if the school were to

hire people to provide a similar service. As the literature review showed, nonprofits pick up the

pieces where the state does not want to make structural change. Nonprofits are also subject to

strict regulations in which they cannot advocate for policy changes. The corps members at the

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front lines don't quite have the time to really learn what their community needs and how to help

in a culturally responsible way, and City Year expects them to deliver a specific program model

that does not work for all teams. While City Year strives to build lasting partnerships and

encourage a civic mindset among corps members beyond the service role, the corps members

themselves who establish rapport with students are only there for a short time. Structural racism

maintains the inequities that leave City Year's service communities at a disadvantage, and

bringing in a big organization that leaves little room for grassroots community development can

unintentionally reinforce racially charged social inequities. The lived experiences and

perspectives of racially diverse corps members will shed some light on how these issues can be

addressed.

According to Taylor, having City Year is definitely beneficial, but is not a perfect

solution, as the need far outweighs what City Year can provide:

> Yes, I think there's a very large need for this level- like just further academic and
> personable and personal relationships with good role models. I think that that's
> very valuable, like I gained- I went to a *good* public school and I wish *I* had [a
> mentor] [laughs], […] I feel like every school could have them, and I think any
> school would benefit from them at the very low and at the very high end of need. I
> don't think there's any school that would be harmed by it, 'cause how can you-
> how could you be harmed by having people closer to your age helping you with
> school and just talking to you like you're a normal person? I don't see how that
> could be damaging to anyone, and I think that the schools that really do need it
> need a lot of it and they need more than what is provided. I think that the
> organizations that operate right now, like they're doing good but it's just like the
> need, it just so far outweighs than what can be provided.

Simultaneously, nonprofit workers do not work in ideal conditions, and they are poorly

compensated for doing very demanding work. In this sense, it makes sense that the service year

is only designed to be one year. Yet when corps members only serve for one year, students and

communities become the "other," subject to the volunteer gaze only for the corps member to take

what they need from the experience and move on with their lives. Jackie demonstrates this

concept beautifully:

> You will have situations where people go in and then for them, like they really are impacted and they're touched, you know, what's in the heart reaches the heart […] You're impacted, however the students have not been impacted. They impacted you because you never- you probably have seen only one picture of students from this neighborhood, and so you just assume their behavior to be X, Y, and Z, and that myth is now debunked, you know, so you are impacted, but it's like, for some students, they feel like a pawn, they feel like a puppet show, you know, like 'I'm supposed to change this dream in your heart and you're gonna go off and live great with your world and, yet I'm *hungry*,' you know what I'm sayin'?

Jackie went on to argue that if there were more funds for public education or social service work,

schools wouldn't need to rely on temporary, inexperienced and overburdened workers:

> I don't think there is enough people in nonprofit. I don't think there's enough people and I don't think there's enough *willing* people, and half of the reason why is because it is not high pay. And I'm not saying you should do everything for money, but you want to be realistic. […] Education is a *vital thing in our lives*, but it's *so* underpaid. […] In my school, literally the *air* wasn't working in *hot* Texas. *Air wasn't working*! […] And in the winter, […] the heat wasn't working for an entire week. *An entire week.* Like, games were canceled because it was unbearable, so it's just- I just feel like […] people are working in unbearable conditions, […] you want me to work, for instance, fifty hours a week and get all this paperwork turned in to you, but I still have to make sure this student can get a C, so they won't be in this class again for the third time, you know? It's- it's so- I feel like it's just so demanding, and I just don't think that people are compensated or even just appreciated enough in that field. I just feel like if people are better rewarded, better resourced, and better paid, I think that can help.

Jackie describes that the work is indeed very demanding with little compensation, and at the

same time, their quote demonstrates that because the nonprofit sector is underfunded, it is not

designed to create structural change. Jackie's quote demonstrates the contradictions of the

nonprofit industrial complex.

Oakley's view reinforces the idea that City Year might not be the best solution. They

referred to nonprofit work in general as a "bandage treatment" that doesn't address "the root of

the problem." They added, "I don't see any long-term effects outside of the school system."

Nonprofit work as a band-aid solution seems fitting, since City Year is not involved in any kind of political action besides lobbying for funding of service roles. The training manual overtly states that it is a transitional role for corps members before they enter the next stage of their lives. In this way, City Year seems to be designed to fit perfectly into the concept of the nonprofit industrial complex, especially because the community at large is not perceived to be impacted at all by many corps members.

Grier expressed their frustration with this:

> I don't think City Year affects the community past the school. […] There is some focus on trying to impact the community and trying to involve the community, and like in theory that makes sense and it sounds good, you should get the community involved, but like it just doesn't work because it's just- like the position doesn't allow for it, like how are we gonna do that? How are we gonna do that when we're working fifty hours a week at school and we're getting paid nothing and like there's so much that we have to deal with in the school, how are we gonna reach the community? I feel like it stretches us too thin and it just- it doesn't have enough of a impact to be worth it. If that was like its own thing, like [if] there was a part of the corps that was just specifically focused on working on community outreach, like that would probably be more beneficial, but just leaving it to the corps members to figure something out, just, I don't think it works.

Community in this sense can be understood to mean anything that is beyond the immediate school environment. The immediate neighborhood faces poverty due to structural inequity in a way that City Year cannot fix, and those who reside in an impoverished community are not consulted or included in City Year's work. Grier doesn't think that City Year has enough of an impact to be worth it. Change needs to happen on a government level, as Avery says:

> The issue is bigger than what these nonprofits can do to help them, [it's] on a bigger level, like a government level, not […] 'oh, let's put a Band-Aid on this.' And that's what I feel like these organizations are. […] The idea of them are good but are they really like, helping? How do we know for sure that it's because of City Year that some of these kids graduate and go to school or some of them keep going or like how do you know it's not 'cause they want to do it, you know?

The idea of helping individual students gets romanticized in popular discourse surrounding service work. Embedded within this discourse is the reality that volunteers and corps members

really don't have the means to change anything structurally. When an organization hires a large group of young people and places them on teams for a short period of time in which their team dynamic is hit or miss, it brings up the question of whether it was worth it to invest in a program like that, especially if nothing is being done to address the structural issues that keep students in poverty. It forces one to reflect on whether resources are being put in the right place when having these corps members who are highly underpaid and significantly overburdened costs the schools an enormous amount of money. This money, arguably, could go toward hiring more skilled teachers, for example.

Max argued that AmeriCorps has its own agenda, and it is marketed as a temporary position in which one can make a difference and save poor urban children. Max believes that if it wasn't marketed in this way, they would lose 75 percent of their corps. Max seems to be suggesting that the work appeals to affluent, mostly white corps members who can afford to do this kind of work and emotionally profit from doing it. Along this line of thought, the argument that simply being there for the students is beneficial to them can be somewhat of a stretch. There are significant limitations that corps members serve under, and while their work could be beneficial, it is limited in scope by virtue of the one-year AmeriCorps service term.

Who Benefits the Most from City Year?

I examine the argument that the service year does more for the corps member and has a lasting impact on them rather than having a lasting impact on the community. The work City Year does can seem like volunteerism at its finest in which corps members show up for a short time to do a small project that results in emotional validation for the corps member. As described in the introduction, City Year prides itself on being a transitional role that seeks to develop the

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individual as a civic-minded leader. Corps members receive substantial professional development trainings and receive major benefits like a full scholarship to graduate school and an education award. They get to leave the experience behind, never having to look back if they don't want to. As Max said, "honestly, I think that City Year probably impacts- and I think they know this, and that's kind of the goal of AmeriCorps generally, that it has a greater impact on us, the people who are serving, than it does on the people we are serving." However, City Year tries to train corps members to continue to care and be involved in disadvantaged communities. This is what Max argued sets City Year apart from Teach for America, since City Year takes time to build community partnerships by maintaining a yearly presence in schools. I found that many interviewees continued in education or service roles in the nonprofit sector. As Oakley put it,

> In some ways, the organization does focus a lot on the corps member, but I also might argue to say that by focusing on developing the skills of a corps member, you're creating like, a person who is now more mindful about their impact in the community for the future.

Arguably, one way City Year can especially have an impact beyond the school is by serving as an opportunity for individuals from disadvantaged communities to gain access to resources by becoming City Year corps members. As Avery said, "I think an organization that's gonna go out and try to help low-income communities, I think they should be trying to get more low-income corps members. And I know it's hard 'cause like the stipend isn't a lot but it's those corps members that are in those communities." Avery felt very strongly about this, feeling that City Year is exploitative by giving opportunities to corps members but not to the communities. "You're getting your resources from a government-funded organization, and- but like at the same time these communities need the government to fund them. Like all of that money that goes into AmeriCorps could be going into these communities.

Reese also expressed the importance of investing in the corps member, but they felt that

City Year does not do *enough* for the corps member:

> National service is important, but also, right, like, especially with what a lot of young adults are facing like in terms of not being able to pay for higher education or not being able to enroll in classes or find a job, like I would definitely think that like programs like City Year are great at like really serving as a pipeline for young talent that is looking and needs, you know, a job or needs a opportunity to like, earn scholarship money […] but [there is] not necessarily a lot of effort and energy being put into the corps member to actually make sure that they're developing a lot of professional development skills that, you know, everybody needs to just be successful or to actually excel in their next professional role.

Interviewees agreed that working with the students is important and beneficial, despite

the limitations of the corps member role presented above. However, activities that were viewed

as a complete waste of time were the AmeriCorps service days, one-day volunteering activities

which the whole corps was required to participate in to learn about different organizations

serving Dallas. As Oakley described,

> I just think about a lot of the activities that we did that were like community-based activities that were outside of the school, and it would [be] things like, I don't know, planting trees in a park for like one- you know, two hours or something like that, and then never returning to that organization or like doing any further work with them, and that just seems to be like a ongoing theme. Like we would go and work for like a food pantry, but we'd only work there for like two hours and then like peace out. And I mean it's not always necessarily a bad thing 'cause sometimes those organizations do want those, you know, short-term volunteers just for a day, like sometimes that's fine for them and they get their message out about their organization, so not necessarily like a bad thing, I just don't think it was like a long-lasting effect in the community.

Something similar that my team observed firsthand was when Care Force, a branch of

City Year corps members who travel the country to do one-time service projects, facilitated a

volunteer day for a large group of corporate employees (company name intentionally omitted). It

was interesting how prior to their service day, a Care Force manager met with our team to ask

about the school's beautification needs. The manager asked us to think big about what we think

should be done. I wondered how realistic that could be, given that the volunteer group was only

coming for one day. The school courtyard needed benches where students could sit and socialize, and they did indeed build these benches, but the other major project that ended up happening was typical: painting. Art does boost morale, but the murals the volunteers made were left unfinished, were poorly done, and the largest one depicted generic scenes from downtown Dallas which were not relatable or encouraging to the students. Furthermore, the paint was really easy to peel off the walls, and by the end of the schoolyear, the inspirational words and generic silhouettes in the gym were nearly gone. This was frustrating because City Year could have instead hired a local artist to paint something that showcases local art and culture and that would have lasted a longer. While Care Force did try to understand our school's needs, the visiting corporate volunteers simply just *volunteered* in the most typical way, meaning they showed up for a few hours to quickly complete some shallowly altruistic project that did not have a lasting impact.

Interviewees generally felt that they had a lasting impact by building genuine relationships with students and focusing on the social-emotional side of their work, not so much on academics. As Perry described, the students are going to remember what someone says and their experiences with that person as they go about life. Perry felt that everything they did is going to pay off, even if all they did was listen and share their own experiences with the students. Perry felt that being there for the students emotionally does make a difference the most, and students remember the corps member emotionally more than one realizes. Simply being there for students as a positive person in their lives for a time leaves an impression on them, and alumni who went back and visited their school after their service year can attest to this. City Year's work might not be a perfect solution, but within its scope, it is important to really take the time to understand what the school and the students need.

Corps members often question the impact of their work when they focus too much on the fact that the corps member doesn't have control over what goes on at the students' homes. This is why, as Jordan described, focusing on the social-emotional learning aspect of young people is a little bit more important than the academic aspect because when working with students, the things that have deterred them from doing well in school have been the things taking place outside school. Jordan felt that being involved with parents helps to make those outside school connections, although it isn't always the best approach, but one can always try to find more ways to be resourceful to parents. Along these lines, it is an investment in the student; corps members are mentoring the individuals who may become the change they want to see in their community. What this requires, according to interviewees, is to go above and beyond by being present in every aspect of the student's life, including going to football games, band concerts, and even practicing school spirit. Peyton felt that their team did not have an impact beyond the school, particularly because their team did not go above and beyond like others. They didn't go to after school games or school functions and they didn't participate in school spirit. A successful team, in Peyton's view, was a team that did go above and beyond to have a successful school partnership that addressed the social-emotional well-being of the students.

Can City Year Do More to Address Structural Issues?

Realistically, change is not going to happen overnight, especially from the efforts of a politically neutral nonpartisan organization like AmeriCorps. Therefore, it is important to provide services that address immediate needs, but efforts should not stop there. This section presents the views of corps members about how they believe one can make a difference when faced with these limitations. As Jackie described,

I just feel like it just- it constantly goes back to the top. I'm not going to, as an organization, partner with another organization that I don't feel has the heart and mind for these students. Again, that goes back to me and my team- we didn't care- I didn't care about no political red tape. Like, I'm gonna say what I feel […] because I know I'm saying it out of the benefit of this child, you know what I'm sayin'? […] I grew up on the south side of Chicago […] and I've seen a student be stomped- and that's when I was a student, not even where I served- but I've seen a student in a fight and be stomped nearly to unconsciousness and later pass away, you know, so like you tellin' me I can't break up this fight, I'm not listening, […] I'm sure the parent of that child will be grateful for that example that I broke up that fight. So I just think if we partner with people and organizations that are like-minded like us, then, you know, we won't have that.

As Jackie's quote demonstrates, there is a lot of "red tape" in City Year around the things corps members can do and say. Corps members are not supposed to break up fights or talk to students about politics because arguably, it is not City Year's place, but corps members find themselves in situations where it just does not seem right to walk away from a serious situation. Dealing with these situations is a constant balancing act.

Again, City Year is meant to be a transitional learning experience for young people. Its purpose is not to create change on a massive scale, but to train young people to be civic-minded beyond the corps member role. While City Year encourages discussions about social justice among corps members, they are cautioned against having these discussions with students. My team particularly struggled with this because we were in very real situations that required real action. The red tape was especially challenged among people who had lived through certain experiences in disadvantaged communities, and the red tape didn't stop them from being honest with students. It is challenging for corps members because everything they experience is a result of politics, as Taylor describes:

I mean, good luck stripping away all your political biases, whatever they are. […] I think maintaining as neutral- political neutrality is possible, is good, provided you can be genuine about it. […] I see why they make us do it, and- but it is very difficult and challenging because […] the reason why you're there in the first place is due to politics. It's the reason why the schools don't have enough

funding, it's the reason why the teachers there are improperly trained, you don't have enough money, you don't have enough staff, you have poor neighborhoods that don't receive enough resources and help, it's political in nature of the problem itself, the problem is due to politics, like it's politics and society, and to ignore that would be stupid […] I think pointing to the problem and letting the kids decide from there is what I found to be beneficial for me. Like, it's not- I'm not here to say what the solution is, and I'm not here to say who's wrong or who's doing bad things to make this problem the way it is, so much as pointing out to the kids like, 'that sounds like a problem,' like 'this school is trash,' they would tell me all the time, like 'yeah, that's a problem, right? […] what do you think should be done?' […] How can it be fixed, and what role does the government play in that? Because the government does play a role and to act like it doesn't would be stupid, but you can still maintain political neutrality by saying 'what do you think the government should do?' I'm not gonna say what they should do, but what do you think? Like, I think putting that decision on them or at least allowing them to think for themselves about what the solution should be helps maintain your neutrality and allow them to develop their own ideas.

Taylor's diplomatic response demonstrates that corps members can approach difficult topics with students by getting them to think for themselves as opposed to corps members preaching or indoctrinating them with political views. This could be a way to encourage grassroots change in students who learn to think through issues and perhaps become politically active later in life. Furthermore, some would argue that creating structural change is not City Year's place, as an interviewee I call Sydney[xviii] said:

[The] thing is, I don't really know if like, it's something like City Year's place to be making structural changes to the world. I think it should be making efforts toward bettering the world, obviously, but what- I mean besides like supporting underserved populations to like, getting educations and whatnot. I don't really know what like, structural things could happen, especially because, like you said, it's supposed to be an apolitical organization. […] Which isn't say [it's] like not important, like working at a food bank for instance, that's not really structural change but it's still meaningful, it still has an impact.

The idea that "it is still meaningful, it still has an impact" should not be neglected. It is true that structural change is just not realistic given the nature of the service role and, as Sydney also mentioned to me, corps members are not all liberal democrats like many assume. Even liberal democrats, as the literature demonstrates, still may not be fully aware of their positionality in the

service role. The landscape of AmeriCorps complicates how these conversations are to be had.

Kendall emphasized that these rules are in place because even adults can't handle conversations

where there are conflicting opinions. Kendall, similar to Sydney, felt that this is not the time to

push one's agenda onto the students, especially when they might hear opposite opinions at home.

The general consensus among interviewees was that there isn't much the corps member can do to

create structural change, but they can make sure that their part has a positive impact, as Skyler

states:

> Even though I can't fix it, I'm just gonna make sure my part is different, and I
> think that with City Year, it lies true, like I can't fix how awful the education
> system is, I can't fix that, you know, people in this country vote for things that are
> very harmful to public education and those who do not have the financial means
> to go to a charter or to move to a different zip code for a better school, but, I am
> gonna do my best to be that one piece of hope for that student that maybe it can
> get better, or maybe if I try a little bit harder, I will be surrounded by people who
> can make it better, and that's all you can do. So, it was hard and it was frustrating
> at times but it was also for me a motivation that this is just gonna be my part in
> the bigger picture and I hope that this little piece really impacts the student to give
> their best and their all and to make lemonade out of their situation.

Being there for the students again comes up as this meaningful task that will truly have an

impact in some way. I wouldn't argue that corps members take on a defeatist attitude. Instead,

they have realistic views that acknowledge the limitations of their role while they simultaneously

do their best to impact the students. Furthermore, corps members are not barred from being

politically active outside of City Year, and in fact City Year encourages corps members to be

politically active outside the service role. Armani, for example, didn't feel constrained by

AmeriCorps. When Armani was in uniform, they were not allowed to take a political bias, but

when they were not in uniform, they still took part in their political responsibility as an

individual. Armani felt that the rules that City Year has in place keeps a nonprofit like this going.

As much as Armani wished they could talk to the students about politics, they felt it didn't really

affect them because they were able to do what they strongly believed in doing as an individual in

their community. This is, after all, the purpose of City Year: to educate corps members about

these issues and encourage them to become civically engaged outside the service role. That,

however, still does not change the fact that many corps members feel frustrated, as Jules

described:

> I think when you come into City Year, you really want to change the structure. I
> think that's what everybody says, you wanna change the structure, like you wanna
> change the education system [laughs], the one that is like heavily guarded and
> built and all that. It's the small changes that you make. So you can make the
> changes inside that will slowly but surely- it'll take time- will change what that
> structure looks like, and I think, kinda like my takeaway from my City Year
> experiences, they're not telling me to like, go be a teacher, they're not telling me
> to like stay in nonprofit, I think when they do have us go through those social
> justice trainings or when they do have us do trainings on abuse and things like
> that, it is making us *aware,* because a lot of the times, I think a lot of the reasons
> why all this crap is going on in the world is because people are just not aware of
> anything, and I think the moment you become aware, […] you really understand
> the issues and you can clearly see how all of this happened, and you can see the
> breaks in everything. So how I look at my City Year experience, like it has just
> made me more aware of a lot of things, and because of that, for me, I have chosen
> to go on this path. For somebody else, they have chosen to go on the path of
> teaching. For somebody else, they have chosen to, you know, continue on on their
> journey in medicine or in law, but because they have this awareness now, that is
> going to, you know, further push the reasoning why they wanted to be in this
> industry in the first place, and I think it gives them a better understanding when
> they do face, you know, certain situations that they can recall back from their City
> Year experience.

Awareness is key in what Jules is saying. Serving in City Year builds *awareness* that alumni

carry with them in whatever role they pursue later in life. This can be especially powerful if the

alumni becomes somebody in power, particularly if they are a person of color. Skyler felt that

people from City Year should be in positions of higher power because they can use that inside

knowledge to influence policy and educate people about what goes on in disadvantaged

communities.

As the above quotes demonstrate, it is important to use discretion when one discusses

social issues with students and with fellow corps members. The way to navigate the red tape is to

do what Jackie was told by a staff person at City Year: learn your school, learn your students, learn your staff. That is where you will know what you can and cannot do. Jackie did make sure not to overstep the rules of the school, but when it came to things like breaking up fights, which City Year explicitly told corps members not to do, Jackie still did it because it was understood by school staff and the team that Jackie was doing it in the students' best interest. Jackie's school had meetings with the team where these boundaries were understood, and they also had a good relationship with the school counselor who supported Jackie in breaking up fights. This way, it's better if you cross the red tape with other people and have their support. Again, it depends on how one gets to know their school because then one can know where they are needed most, and in some ways one can address some structural issues, at least at the school level.

Again, I argue that it takes honest and true transparent conversations between corps members, school staff, and City Year staff to truly understand where people come from and why they feel the need to respond to situations a certain way or why they think the way they do. Like Taylor, Reese brought up the point that everything the corps member does in City Year is due to a situation that came from someone inflicting something on a group of people, and it's hard to not talk about ways that City Year could at least alleviate the effects of things like structural racism. Interviewees felt that it is reasonable that City Year doesn't want corps members talking about politics; one shouldn't be spewing their opinions from the news, but it's not against AmeriCorps policy to encourage people to vote or think for themselves, which in turn can be empowering. However, when it comes to things like why one shouldn't refer to people as "illegal aliens" or use the "N" word, Reese argued that it shouldn't even need to be explained, it is a matter of basic human rights, not politics. As Reese said, it's not even about discussing it in front of students, it's about discussing in general why it's wrong to have that thought process. Reese

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felt that these things can be discussed as social issues without it being political, but it also shouldn't be showcasing both sides when that can be so dehumanizing. Empowering people requires talking about it. Having these conversations and understanding these issues is one way in which corps members can navigate their service role in an impactful way without imposing on the school or community, and they can understand how to operate in a racially diverse environment. The corps member experience is a balancing act on multiple levels- weighing the actions of the school with City Year's values, one's team values, individual values, and cultural and racial backgrounds. By gaining this awareness through the City Year experience or by helping others gain this awareness, one can carry that knowledge beyond the service role, which again, is City Year's purpose.

The Ideal City Year

The reality is, as Avery said, structural racism will not go away as long as there is racism, and nonprofits cannot change society, but the way individuals approach the problems can make small changes. This section presents what interviewees feel could be some practical changes that City Year could make to move beyond providing immediate band-aid solutions. It is evident that City Year does have an impact, but that impact is limited to what the individual corps member can do to leave their mark. It is problematic that City Year is a temporary job that is supposed to train a corps member beyond the service role while it costs the community so much money, but at the same time, it is impactful enough that it should continue to hire young people, particularly young people of color, to serve in disadvantaged communities.

First and foremost, it is important to have conversations about why one's race matters in the work that they do in the context of being a corps member in a temporary position on a

racially diverse team serving in a disadvantaged community that is predominantly Black and

Latinx. As Laine states,

> Although it's been around since 1998, [City Year] still has a lot of honest and true conversations that they need to be having with each other, with corps members, with staff members, and at the headquarter level. And so, one thing that I've learned is that City Year does a lot of 'oh, we are a very diverse organization, we wanna focus on inclusion, inclusivity, and equity,' and it's like, sometimes, it can become a- this is an organization that talk the talk but doesn't really walk the walk. So, how do we set up our corps members to feel successful in the classroom? Yes diversity is important. But, how do we set someone up that doesn't have a similar background to our students for success? So if someone is coming in, let's just say I am a Caucasian woman in my early twenties, I, you know, attended private school my entire life, I made it through college, I graduated [in the] fourth year, you know, I haven't really experienced any true hardship than, you know, [just] going through life, like 'hey, I heard about City Year, I wanna do it, it seems like a really cool opportunity. I get to work with kids and I think I would really like this.' But, when you walk into that classroom, you [laughs] see so many things, your eyes are open to a lot of things. You are seeing students that haven't eaten meals in three days, their lights were cut off, their parents- it's only a single-parent home, and so of course they're gonna come to school and then act out and misbehave, they're not gon- they're not gonna listen to anyone, they're not gonna listen to their teacher, they're definitely not gonna listen to their City Year. And so, I think that we set these people- or we set corps members up for success by being honest, one. I think that City Year kinda sugarcoats things- not kinda, City Year *sugarcoats* things. They give you the pretty side of it.

Laine is arguing that there are honest conversations that need to be had about what the

experience will be like, and how one's positionality and everything they bring into the space will

impact student perceptions and one's experiences. While City Year does have positive effects on

schools and communities, it still is not the most impactful for the school and community when

corps members hate the experience for the many reasons discussed in the previous sections. As

Laine said, a lot of corps members suffer trauma from serving a year in a school. A corps

member might have completed 1700 hours, but they hated it and didn't learn anything from it.

Laine argued that corps members need to know what they are getting themselves into and City

Year needs to ensure that they are setting people up for success by giving them tools for working

with students of color. Staff can be especially helpful in this situation if they themselves have served and understand the corps member and community experiences and can share these perspectives with corps members.

It is also important to examine whether hiring diverse corps members is a good idea, and how City Year can screen corps members more thoroughly. As mentioned in earlier sections, there are positive outcomes when students see racially diverse corps members caring about them, and it can be an opportunity for growth, but it can also be troubling when white corps members don't understand how they come off to their team and students. Opinions varied across the board. On one hand, City Year does hire a lot of corps members from affluent backgrounds who get a lot out of the program and never come back, and on the other hand, they also hire from the communities where they serve. As interviewees and I have argued, City Year can be a steppingstone, a "pipeline" of opportunity, so in this sense, hiring from disadvantaged communities could be more impactful. As Avery said, "I think City Year should… try to get more corps members to serve *their* communities and not get corps members to serve *a* community." The way it is currently done is more along the lines of voluntourism. Corps members can apply to any city they want, and some interviewees argued that it appeals to rather affluent people because their parents can help pay for living expenses. According to Jules though, to increase hiring locally, financial changes need to be made to make the experience feasible for low-income corps members.

It would be short-sighted to assume that affluent people are all there for the wrong reasons, but to ensure that people are there for the right reasons, City Year could be more selective with whom they hire. Jackie believes that "what comes from the heart reaches the heart," and having in-person interviews could be a better way to read applicants and their

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intentions. City Year could also facilitate trial periods in which corps members could discuss emotional videos about poverty in Dallas or have prospective corps members read thought-provoking literature. These things come up during the trainings, but building them into the hiring process might better select those corps members who are there because they truly have a heart for that community. Prospective corps members could shadow a corps member to simulate the experience so that they know what to expect because as this project has shown, nobody really knows what to expect going into it, and it's a big responsibility once someone is actually in the school.

City Year should be more selective with whom they hire, and they should also be more selective with the way they curate teams. The teams of the alumni I interviewed can be placed on a spectrum ranging from very happy and cohesive to absolutely miserable. Some teams, like Jackie's, were very strong. They worked together, practiced transparency and respect for one another, and took the time to learn their school. They also were not afraid to have real conversations. Other teams, like Max's, were constantly in conflict and seemed to disagree more often than not. These things often came down to individual personality and team leadership. Some impact managers really took the time to get to know corps members to see who would work really well together, and this needs to be practiced consistently. Managers on the happier teams also gave the corps members freedom to see what works for them in how they deliver different aspects of service while practicing enough leadership to facilitate a problem-solving environment. A poorly put together team was cited as a major, if not the biggest, source of unhappiness and overall ill experience, and interviewees from the unhappier teams also felt that they had less impact on the school and surrounding community.

The trainings are another big part of City Year that people have varying opinions about, especially the "whole corps days" spent at the office. They were useful in some ways because they allowed for corps members to have a mental break or catch up with what others were dealing with and bounce ideas off each other. Some people found this time for sharing ideas very useful, while others thought it was a complete waste of time. In terms of the actual trainings themselves, as people have said, there's really no preparation a person of privilege can have for going into that area of low socioeconomic background. However, the way those corps members are taught to understand those communities could be better. Corps members could be offered a lot more guidance on tutoring and most importantly, on providing social-emotional support to students. They could maybe have trainings on specific situations for addressing misbehavior, or heavy issues like suicidal ideation or sexual violence. Trainings could also be a good time to show documentaries and articles to get people thinking and to be more knowledgeable about the spaces they are serving in. Corps members need to have honest conversations about what the service year is going to mean for them, and there needs to be more training on history and critical race theory. One training activity that really seemed successful in getting corps members to empathize with others and be aware of their privileges was the privilege line exercise. As an interviewee I call Charlie[xix] described,

> I actually thought [the privilege line] was pretty cool, like just a very non-sugar coated way of showing just difference. Like, we like to say 'oh we're all equal, blah blah blah,' it's like, no we're not! Because that's just the reality of this world and this country right now, and so I think City Year could have expanded on that more and further, and just talking about culture and race further and like what you're gonna experience, and like we don't wanna stereotype, but like, you'll probably see this, or you should know this, and then maybe getting some teammates to expand on it, especially the ones that grew up in those communities.

Charlie felt that the experience was a learning curve, and they had to be ready to absorb their surroundings. Charlie felt that "I think talking about race and culture is such a big part because

you are literally just part of that community like 10 hours a day. If you're gonna be interacting with 100 kids that are part of that community for 50 hours a week, like you need to know more things."

However, there are challenges to keep in mind here too. Taylor, for example, felt negatively about the privilege line, arguing that it was invasive and uncomfortable for people. Taylor felt that while it is important to come together and discuss backgrounds and experiences, and we may never have experienced what these kids go through, Taylor wondered if it is really City Year's place to make someone go through a training for whom it could be traumatic, especially if they experienced a traumatic event which the trainings were covering, such as police brutality, family violence, or poverty. Is it City Year's place to take advantage of others' suffering to teach other corps members about these realities? As Taylor describes:

> Why should someone's suffering be your lesson, just for you? […] It's very much like 'uh, okay, now you're just a subject to be learned from, like your pain and suffering is now just an- a lesson plan [laughs]. And that's exhausting and it can be degrading, so I don't know […] if City Year should have done that; it would have to be done very carefully. [sighs] And I think there were parts that were not done carefully, […] in some ways triggering of other people and kind of showcasing other people's pain without really asking if that was something they were comfortable doing […] people are crying because you're just like 'take two steps if you have a dad!' and like if you don't have a dad and you see everyone step forward, like what do you think you're gonna think about? [laughs]. Or like if you're- if you see yourself taking tons of steps forward and you're looking back like 'ohhhhhh, now I feel bad for stepping forward every time' [laughs]. And, like that's, you know, that's the guilt of privilege, and- but in the end though, you have literally people across the whole spectrum of pain uncomfortable, and not really aware that this was gonna happen [laughs].

Taylor argued that by having people advertise their problems or lack thereof, it makes them feel like there's a level of shame and guilt. The privilege line exercise is a valuable exercise, but it has to be an exercise that people are briefed on beforehand and consent to. Taylor feels that a more sensitive way to educate corps members could be to

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[challenge] people to be present with others. We'd all come from [various] walks of life, and we all come to this exact same spot this exact same time. So even though we all came from different roads, we all came here, but recognize that we're all very still different even though we're all here for maybe a similar purpose. And I think recognizing that and broadening your mind to the experience of others is good, and I think the sensitive way to go about that though is to- you have to make it a choice. You can't force people to be exposed, you can't force people to expose themselves, and you can't force people to be open. So I think it has to be done very much in a way that, one, is it has to be done as a challenge for them […] and acknowledging that regardless of your privilege, this is gonna be uncomfortable, […] and just being honest about that process, I think is important.

Jackie's team exemplified this comfortability which Taylor is talking about. On Jackie's team, they made space where people felt comfortable talking, and if they didn't want to talk, at least they could see what others were serious about and were inspired by others' reasons for wanting to make a difference. These spaces weren't forced, they were subtle, relaxed, calm and inviting, and every single member on the team was who they were, vulnerably, openly, authentically. It wasn't luck. Jackie felt that it might have been destiny, but there was also research involved.

Another theme that emerged was the importance of community partnerships. Jules pointed out that in Dallas, City Year has a greater presence in one particular community. This has to do with the fact that the city of Dallas shines a light on a certain community in which schools are experiencing lower enrollment than any other community, so there are a lot more initiatives invested there. Jules feels that these partnerships should expand to operate on a grander scale to have a strong presence in other parts of Dallas. As Jules said, "how can we take some knowledge from what the city is doing and how can we replicate that in the other communities that our other schools are in?" Jordan shared a similar idea:

[City Year needs to be] collaborating with other community organizations to really take action in like all of these things that we say that we value, right, so like 'students first, collaboration always' is a value that we live by. Also like 'social justice for all.' We can have conversations about these things each and every day, but I feel like if there's no action taking place, then the conversations and action

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steps that we come up with are kind of not- I mean, it's kind of like being used in vain in a sense. So it's like, well how can we preach about all these different things but not actually put the work in to see them come to light, so just being more involving and […] doing as we say we will do based on the conversation, so that's how I feel.

Furthermore, as Max argued, City Year could be more locally driven instead of the current model in which City Year is imposed onto the community. There needs to be more understanding of what a community actually needs. Jackie shared this perspective as well, arguing that in order for this work to really be beneficial, corps members need to take the time and slow down, to understand what students need. As Jackie described, City Year's work needs to be inclusive of parents, and they could help facilitate a space where students and parents can build something together. Service efforts need to take a more grassroots approach to provide services that are actually needed as the community sees it. The projects which interviewees either did or saw other volunteer groups do in the schools were not done the most consciously or with the community's needs in mind. Again, this has a lot to do with management, coordination, leadership, and transparent communication on all levels to challenge what works and what doesn't, especially when racially diverse corps members are serving in disadvantaged communities and the existence of a massive bureaucratic organization like City Year depends on the existence of structural racism and urban poverty.

When assessing community needs, school partnerships are another important thing to examine. Many interviewees felt that the school partnerships were unsuccessful because the school staff was not clear about who City Year is and why they are there, and there wasn't time invested in actually getting to know the school and their needs. If these conversations are not had with the schools, there will be an us versus them mentality, and that is very counterproductive to City Year and the school's mission. These conversations need to set corps members us for success in working with their partner teachers. A productive teacher partnership is conducive to

supporting students holistically. At the end of the day, teachers, and particularly students, form relationships with the corps members, not the red jacket, as Grier felt. Grier felt that social-emotional support is the most important thing corps members can bring, especially because the corps is so diverse. Working with students in this way to make sure they are in a good place mentally and they feel valued and respected in the school helps with other aspects of their school life. Laine felt similarly that it is really important to focus on social-emotional consistency because corps members are working with students different than themselves who do act out because of things going on at home, so getting through to the student is really important. Furthermore, as Skyler said, it is exhausting for the kids to be pulled away from their friends publicly for tutoring sessions, and it makes the kid immediately feel like something is wrong with them, so corps members could be more resourceful to students as a tutor if corps members and teachers worked together to create a structured time frame in which students could come back privately. If there is a positive relationship between the corps member and partner teacher, students also benefit from that consistency. Interviewees who worked with high school kids also argued that it would make sense if older students could reach out to their City Year for mentorship, since in the real world, it is a part of networking.

Perhaps the biggest point that came up among almost every interviewee was that corps members are stretched too thin. While the corps member is supposed to maintain a presence in the classroom, they are also expected to plan their own tutoring lessons, to be a tutor and mentor, an attendance and social-emotional coach, to plan and facilitate afterschool programs, to plan schoolwide events, to communicate with parents, and to participate in random volunteer projects. Because there are so many expectations, interviewees often felt that they were not doing a thorough job. There was a constant tension among corps members to either push themselves to

grow in a skillset in which they were lacking or to focus on their area of strength, and this varied

by team. Some felt that they didn't really get to tend to the things that mattered most. Therefore,

in order to have a greater impact, the overwhelming majority of interviewees suggested that

corps members should specialize and be hired for specific tracts instead of having to do

everything all together at once. To illustrate this view, Max shared that some people were not

good at tutoring, but they were really good at talking to the staff and planning large events. It

didn't make sense for everyone on Max's team to do the exact same thing. Max felt that it would

have been wiser to split corps members into different jobs. For example, corps members

interested in teaching could be hired for academic work like tutoring or assisting in a classroom.

Others could be hired for counseling or social work, to plan after school activities, to plan events

in the community, to establish external donor relations and build capacity, or to do family

outreach. With so many responsibilities placed on each corps member, they don't get to spend as

much time perfecting any one of these skills in a way that benefits the community. Corps

members should be hired to do what is specific and valuable to a profession they want to pursue.

City Year needs to play to the person's strengths, community strengths, and what the school

actually wants and needs.

Analysis

This section examined the views of alumni on whether there is a need for City Year,

whether City Year has an impact beyond their school, and what they feel should change. I

presented their views because their firsthand experiences show that City Year still has work to do

to ensure that they deliver the most impactful service possible in a racially diverse setting. It is

important to design a service model that creates a racially inclusive environment in which people

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with different backgrounds, particularly those who share similar backgrounds with the students, can share their views and ideas openly. It is also important for white corps members to understand how they might come off to students, teachers, and fellow corps members, and these difficult conversations are essential for City Year to be successful.

Interviewees really took the time to think through these issues and felt that the needs outweigh what City Year can provide. While some argued that there is no harm in City Year's programming, I argue that this is only true if corps members truly are given the right balance between freedom and guidance to think through their positionality, have difficult discussions with their fellow corps members and City Year leadership, and are given the time and tools to really learn their school and community. City Year is not meant to fix structural issues, and contrary to what I expected, many corps members perceived their work to be impactful and were humbled by the experience as opposed to having a savior mindset. Many also took these lessons with them after their service year. This shows that City Year does have an impact beyond just the service year, but City Year can also do more to allow corps members to be a part of investing in a community long-term.

CONCLUSION

This project sought to answer: does the corps member's racial identity affect their experiences, the way they navigate their service role, and the meanings they attribute to the corps member role? Does their racial identity affect their perception of City Year's impact? What does this say about nonprofits in the big picture in how they work with diverse communities to try to fight social inequity? How can City Year improve its service model to address the complexities of racially diverse teams serving for a short time in disadvantaged schools?

I want to emphasize once more that City Year's work does make valuable and meaningful contributions to student outcomes that are observable and measurable, both through corps members' experiences and City Year's data collection methods. Diversity can also be beneficial, as demonstrated by the data in which corps members felt that the diversity on their teams helped break down racial barriers. These benefits are not to be dismissed, but it is simultaneously important to examine and analyze the aspects of City Year's work that are problematic and can be improved through dialog between all levels of City Year programming.

Through the literature review, I demonstrated that systems of historical racism and white supremacy have created societal conditions in which whiteness is the unexamined norm in education, the economy, and government. Through the work of scholars like Cheryl E. Matias (2013) and Keffrelyn D. Brown (2014), I demonstrated that white teachers are often complicit in systems of oppression, and their teacher training does not challenge them to confront and reflect on their whiteness. White saviorism, a system of white supremacy that reinforces whiteness as a redeeming force for "others," is fed to society through pop culture films which influence how viewers perceive reality. Paired with economic and political forces, those who possess savior mindsets often take on volunteer roles and continue to be complicit in the nonprofit industrial

complex, a system in which capitalism and neoliberalism reinforce ideologies that justify the dismantling of social services, leaving the work to the nonprofit sector, a shadow state that is unable to create structural change to address the root of the problems it is trying to solve. The work of nonprofits is racial and gendered in the sense that women, particularly women of color, who are overburdened and underpaid, often take on these roles. Simultaneously, liberal and affluent white people take on these roles to advance their careers. While white saviorism was not overtly present in the data, white saviorism is still embedded within the nonprofit industrial complex, a system which nonprofits, particularly City Year, participates in.

Taking on the AmeriCorps member role as a step in career advancement has different meanings for diverse individuals. City Year is designed to be a form of career advancement. When affluent white people take on this role, it unintentionally reinforces social inequity in that they gain a tremendous amount of benefits from the experience only to move on and not have to look back. Corps members of color similarly receive benefits from the experience, but as interviewees have argued, they gain access to opportunities in a way that helps to dismantle social inequity. On the other hand, given the gendered, classed, and racial history of service work, relying on highly underpaid people of color to do service work is still problematic, and there needs to be significant restructuring of funding to make it feasible for corps members from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate.

In the simplest terms, the corps member experience has a different meaning for different corps members. However, there are some observable common themes. Racial identity definitely does affect the service experience, especially because of City Year's conscious efforts to recruit racially diverse corps members to work together with dominantly Black and Latinx students. Race is involved in every aspect of the experience, from recruitment, training, getting to know

the team, interacting with school leadership, and working with students. Race is the first thing students see. When working in a community that is disadvantaged because of structural racism, racial identity affects how corps members navigate their role and conceive of themselves within it. However, there is diversity within racial categories in terms of unique life circumstances, so these experiences are not consistent or generalizable. What I found the most generalizable is that interviewees were cognizant of, or at the very least attempted to be cognizant of how their racial identity impacts their work with students, teachers, teammates, and City Year staff.

Racial identity impacts the meaning corps members attribute to their role, with corps members of color more likely to take pride in what they do, but only after truly exploring what they believe they should be proud of. White corps members were more likely to shy away from pride and to question City Year's idealist culture, while recognizing that they are in a position of privilege. Because no two people have the same experiences, corps members of color also recognized ways in which they might be more privileged than their students, and they too felt that they had grown from the service experience.

Racial identity does not seem to affect how corps members view City Year's impact; rather, corps members as a whole recognize that nonprofits are limited in scope within the structures in which they operate. However, corps members do see the value in their work and believe that they can make the most of it by focusing on what they perceive to be the most important: building relationships with students and understanding what students truly need. This way, they may impact the students beyond the immediate year if they leave a positive lasting impression. In the big picture, nonprofits are meant to address small-scale issues, but by investing in the corps member, City Year arguably has a long-term impact by serving as an eye-

opening experience that may inspire a corps member to take on a career in a field that will allow them to challenge structural issues.

That being said, while City Year tries to be racially inclusive and raise awareness of social issues, it participates in the nonprofit industrial complex simply by being under the umbrella of the Corporation for National and Community Service. It receives federal, corporate, and philanthropic funding to address symptoms of societal problems, and it cannot advocate for any political policy besides funding for service opportunities. This does not mean that City Year should be demonized, but it is important to recognize and raise awareness of the larger issues behind why City Year exists.

Implications

Having answered the basic research questions, the purpose of this project is to give suggestions as to how City Year can improve as an organization, and how those who serve can chip away at systems of oppression. Having presented the literature and data, I would like to draw attention once again to a quote from Bill Clinton, the founder of AmeriCorps:

> When I started running for President in 1991, I had this idea…We need more idealistic, energetic young people out there working in our communities, helping to solve problems at the grass roots level…helping people that would otherwise be forgotten; going to places where the private economy would not otherwise send them; and we also need to open the doors of college to everyone. So I had this general idea, and then when I went to City Year in Boston, the lights came on and I said this is what I want to do. (City Year 2017, 175)

There are several things that trigger discomfort about this quote. When Clinton stated that idealistic young people can help those who would "otherwise be forgotten," white saviorism is only a fraction of the issues to unpack. Clinton may have meant it with a sense of compassionate pity, but it can be interpreted to mean that he is telling the blatant truth: the government does not care about people who have historically been left behind, and it doesn't want to. He mentions the

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private economy, clearly highlighting how neoliberalism and capitalism are not designed to create social equity, and in fact intentionally do quite the opposite. This quote represents the attitude of a capitalist system that, in essence, does not want to be taken down, and is happy to deploy young idealists to try to fix the problem so that the system itself doesn't have to do anything. The government in a sense dances with these nonprofits to the extent that the government and economy benefit from the public image of partnering with an organization, but at the end of the day, the work these nonprofits do is limited in scope if they are to retain nonprofit status. While Bill Clinton may have had the best of intentions, and AmeriCorps did impact many people, it is time to challenge these ideas and move past a system that deploys underpaid volunteers to be overburdened by structural issues that they are prohibited from challenging.

City Year's emphasis on civic engagement and big citizenship is an ideology that is deeply committed to maintaining the status quo, and, according to Boyd and Sandell (2012, 251), it is committed to leaving the racialized and gendered labor force to try to provide what the welfare state was meant to do (255). As stated in the introduction of this project, in 2009, City Year collaborated with Voices for National Service, ServiceNation, and America Forward to help pass the Serve America Act, a bill that places citizen service at the center of response to the nation's most pressing needs. This demonstrates what Boyd and Sandell argue, that the nonprofit shadow state is designed for "redirecting protest into service" (260). What needs to be done instead is to put "*critical engagement*" at the forefront (262, emphasis added).

To sum up what interviewees suggested, and as Patricia Hill Collins (2013) argues, there is a need for spaces in which dialog can occur and power relationships can be equalized (224), but to achieve transformation in the long-term, there need to be "coalitions around common

causes" (225) to help move past these differences. This requires "commitment to a specific issue [that] mandate[es] collaboration as the best strategy for addressing the issue at hand" (225). Collins argues that there needs to be empathy, and having empathy requires, for example, a white person to examine their privilege and positionality in a Black person's oppression (227). Simultaneously, Collins argues that "members of subordinate groups must also work toward replacing judgements" (227). According to Alison Bailey (2015), spending time in uncomfortable spaces (48) is how we can move past the white comfort zone and do away with white talk as a defense mechanism against deconstructing social inequity. The vulnerability that comes with this discomfort can be treated as a source of knowledge (50). This involves taking responsibility for one's actions, being open to discussing your missteps, and treating "anger, fear, and anxiety as natural reactions to moving closer to knowledge" (52).

Racial identity is a major influencer of the corps member experience, and it needs to be at the forefront of conversations about City Year's work, especially because interviewees shared that they experienced microaggressions and differential treatment from staff and teammates alike. While racial identity was a major influencer of the corps member experience, experiences were also affected by management, leadership, personalities, and individual experiences. No two experiences were alike, even within racial categories. The most important place to start is to allow for open, transparent conversations on all levels of City Year programming, challenging corps members to examine their positionality and the societal structures within which nonprofits operate. Above all, there needs to be grassroots leadership, particularly from people of color who possess unique knowledge and awareness, that involves the surrounding community and school administration in partnership with City Year. It is not necessarily feasible to have City Year in every under-resourced school and having too many partnerships would take a lot of resources

and staff power, so it is important to involve teachers, school staff, and leaders from local

nonprofits in the work of a City Year team to ensure maximum impact.

It is clear that the success of City Year depends greatly on critical engagement and

transparency on all levels. However, it is important to be cautious of how certain approaches to

encouraging dialog can lead to tokenization and essentialization of corps members. This is what

Collins (2013) refers to as voyeurism "in which privileged people treat the experiences and lives

of the oppressed as a spectacle to behold (223). It has been mentioned throughout the project that

corps members were successful when they communicated with empathy and transparency with

their partner teachers and fellow corps members. This kind of dialog requires honesty and

humility, and City Year leadership can practice this by encouraging corps members to think

critically about the meaning of the service role and to bring these topics to the forefront by

asking hard-hitting questions. For example, instead of requiring corps members to write down

and share their "why I serve statement," which usually might say something like "these kids go

through so much and are left behind by the education system and I'm here to help," they could

be challenged to think more along the lines of, "I'm here to serve because the system is broken,

but this position does not allow me to change the system. Here is what I think of this and how we

can challenge the system." Trainings could really encourage corps members to identify how their

positionality might be problematic, and to create safe spaces for corps members to have

challenging discussions. Trainings could also include documentary viewings, article discussions,

and empathy exercises on a much larger scale. Staff can also be transparent about the challenges

corps members will face, and instead of enforcing strict red-tape rules, staff could work with the

corps member to identify solutions. The issue is that City Year touches upon these things briefly,

but it focuses too much energy on asking corps members to perform City Year pride and culture

in a very orchestrated way that does not adequately allow for critical engagement. There needs to be a balance between embracing the culture while critically analyzing it and making it meaningful to oneself.

There needs to be consistency in how impact managers manage their teams in a way that allows for freedom but still provides guidance. To really help people work with diverse team members, students, and school staff, there should be a diversity department for each City Year location, not just headquarters. Focusing on the student and community needs is the most important above all, and this requires truly taking the time to get to know one's team, school, students, and community. There needs to be transparency on many levels, especially from above, all the way up to AmeriCorps leadership. Many rules and stipulations come from AmeriCorps itself, so it would be powerful for corps members to be able to talk to somebody who works for AmeriCorps and be able to ask them hard-hitting questions. Open channels of communication would help people understand AmeriCorps, why they do service a certain way, and why these rules and regulations are in place. Perhaps this could provide space for corps members to challenge things on an organizational structural level. What all this builds up to is that having this transparency on all levels would be empowering to corps members who in a way could advocate for the communities they serve, and if more corps members are hired from the communities they serve in, this would help City Year take a more grassroots approach and make way for racially diverse corps members to empower their own communities.

I also want to clarify that while this project focuses on what *City Year* can do, I am not advocating for ignorance of what needs to be done on a massive economic and political scale. In light of current events regarding the Black Lives Matter movement against police brutality, the #DefundThePolice and #InvestInCommunities movement highlights the urgency for the need to

restructure how public funding is allocated. As stated on the Black Lives Matter website (2020), "We call for a national defunding of police. We demand investment in our communities and the resources to ensure Black people not only survive, but thrive." City Year's new CEO, Jim Balfanz, an alumnus of City Year Boston from 1994, released a statement on June 5ᵗʰ, 2020 titled "Black lives matter. Black students matter. Black futures matter." In his statement, Balfanz says,

> we oppose racist policies and everyday racist practices and actions—all of which are propped up and sustained by centuries of anti-Blackness and racist beliefs—that oppress and silence Black people. […] While a commitment to diversity, inclusion and belonging has always been one of City Year's core values since our founding, we acknowledge we have equity work to do—inside and outside the organization—and are committed to doing more to drive change and break down systems that drive educational and racial inequities. We as a team and as an organization are committed to relentlessly reviewing and improving our own policies and practices. […] The beliefs that created these inequitable systems are not new. They have been part of our history from 1619 to today, and while some of the laws have changed, systemic racism is in the air we breathe and the water we drink. And I, as a white, cisgender male member of our community, am personally committed to continuing the self-work, to constantly re-examining the implications of my privilege, to learning, unlearning and growing as a person, so that I can best partner with my teammates and our community in our mission to create equitable learning environments for students and AmeriCorps members.

This statement from the new CEO is an excellent move, at least from a marketing perspective, and it shows that at the very least, leadership seems to be aware of the structural issues addressed in this thesis. But are they aware of how corps members actually feel, and are they willing to listen? Only time will tell as an increasingly divided political climate unfolds, but it is my hope and intention that the views and experiences of the diverse alumni who gave their time and honest perspectives to participate in this project will influence change within City Year and society at large.

Directions of Future Research

This project examined the experiences of corps members, but an important aspect of the corps member role, the relationships corps members build with students, is worth examining in future studies. As stated in the introduction, City Year does have a measurable, meaningful impact on student outcomes both academically and emotionally. Interviewees often emphasized the importance of taking time to understand students and build quality, genuine relationships with them, and studying the corps member-student relationship can provide valuable insight into the broader impact of education service work. Studying the corps member-student relationship can also reveal in more detail how students themselves feel about working with diverse corps members. City Year's work is backed by research in best practices in child development, but the way students either resisted or embraced working with a corps member points to a need to deeply examine how working with the corps member impacts the student and why students may or may not be receptive to this service. Future studies could also involve the adults who worked with a corps member in their childhood. These studies could allow a variety of things to surface, such as student attitudes about racial diversity, the education system, and their perceptions of themselves within society. Student insights could be a driving force for innovation in service work and political activism.

A study of corps member-student relationships can also reveal whether corps members approach their work from a savior mindset or if City Year and similar programs effectively enable corps members to reflect on their motivations and biases. This project touched upon this, but an extensive study on white saviorism in service work can help to pinpoint the reasons behind these attitudes on an individual and societal level. Studies on white saviorism can help reform service work in a way that challenges corps members and volunteers to reflect on their

own perceptions to challenge the systems that conditioned them to see themselves a certain way relative to the people they are serving.

There is potential for future studies to be much more broad and ethnographic. There are many different angles to approach City Year from, and it could be beneficial to study City Year from the perspective of organization theory. Ethnographic studies could also involve participant observation in shadowing corps members, attending school board and staff meetings, and participating in City Year's planning and administrative process. Studies could examine relationships between corps members and teachers, City Year staff and corps members, corps members and parents, and community perceptions of City Year. Furthermore, since City Year has a presence in major cities throughout the U.S. and abroad, surveys and interviews could span throughout sites in the U.S. and even internationally.

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APPENDIX: NOTES

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[i] Taylor identifies as mixed – Asian and white
[ii] Perry identifies as African American
[iii] Austen identifies as black
[iv] Laine identifies as African American
[v] Max identifies as White
[vi] Peyton identifies as white
[vii] Jackie identifies as a Proud Black [Person]
[viii] Grier identifies as Latinx
[ix] Oakley identifies as white
[x] Skyler identifies as Black/Jamaican American
[xi] Avery identifies as Hispanic
[xii] Armani identifies as Chicano
[xiii] Jules identifies as Black American
[xiv] Reese identifies as Black
[xv] Jordan identifies as a Proud Black [Person]
[xvi] Ash identifies at white
[xvii] Kendall identifies as mixed – Caucasian/white and Hispanic
[xviii] Sydney identifies as white and their ethnicity as Caucasian
[xix] Charlie identifies as white and their ethnicity as Latinx