

Lincoln STAR

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Job Corps Justifies Itself In Public Esteem

WASHINGTON — The controversial Job Corps, once the "enfant terrible" of the poverty program, shows signs of developing into a solid citizen with a streak of civic consciousness.

At least, that's the encouraging word from poverty chief Sargent Shriver, who declares that since last May there has been "no single incident of any serious proportion in any Job Corps center."

The same cannot be said for our college campuses and urban ghettos. As the 115 Job Corps centers wind up their week-long "Salute to Communities" program, Public Relations Director Herbert J. Kramer wryly observes:

"While middle-class American youth was indulging itself in riotous behavior on Southern beaches during Easter week-end, America's poor kids in our Job Corps were working, learning, and expressing their gratitude towards local communities in constructive ways, rather than destroying property, slandering adults, and violating at least eight of the ten commandments on the beach at Fort Lauderdale."

Kramer says that only one conclusion can be drawn from the changed atmosphere in Job Corps centers: "Poor kids do not want to be poor, they do not want to be alienated, they do want to belong and participate."

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As an example he cites the "complete reversal" at Camp Rodman in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where riotous behavior once shocked townspeople and congressmen alike. The city council has recently issued a vote of confidence in the camp director. Other cities that once spurned corpsmen

are now inviting them to civic events and parties in private homes.

Although the drop-out rate is 21 per cent, the corps' present strength is 35,000, with a goal of 41,000 by July. Nearly 65,000 have had Job Corps training in the past two years, and Congress now requires that one-fourth of the enlistees be women.

The average Job Corps enlistee has a fifth grade ability in reading and math, but gains one to two grade-levels during a nine months stay in camp. A third of those who enter the program cannot read a simple sentence or solve a second-grade arithmetic problem, in a land where we have long prided ourselves on our free public school system.

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A year ago Congress was complaining of the lack of discipline in job camps. Since then the administration has been tightened, and over half of all corpsmen are "earning perfect scores on reporting to work on time, following instructions, obeying rules, and the like."

This is rather remarkable inasmuch as two-thirds of these youngsters had previously been asked to leave school because of disciplinary, educational, financial or other reasons.

They represent the hard core of disadvantaged youth. Yet a recent survey indicates that of approximately 50,000 Job Corps "graduates," 26,000 found jobs, 5,000 returned to school, and 3,500 entered military service.

The corps has had an exceedingly rough shakedown cruise for the past two years, but perhaps smoother seas are ahead.

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