

THE ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICE: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS AND PROPOSED CROSS-  
DISCIPLINARY APPROACH FOR LANGUAGE SURROUNDING SERVICE WORK

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“The compassion industry is almost universally accepted as a virtuous and constructive enterprise. But what is so surprising is that its outcomes are almost entirely unexamined.”  
– Robert D. Lupton

“While we do our good works let us not forget that the real solution lies in a world in which charity will have become unnecessary.” – Chinua Achebe

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## ABSTRACT

### THE ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICE: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS AND PROPOSED CROSS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH FOR LANGUAGE SURROUNDING SERVICE WORK

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Though undoubtedly a noble pursuit, service to others is not immune to the corrosive effects of power structures, unexamined bias, and institutionalized marginalization. This thesis searches for solutions to potentially ineffective and even harmful service by exploring the language employed in four historical spheres of service in the United States: religion, business, government, and higher education. These spheres each have their own term for service: charity, philanthropy, welfare, and civic engagement/service-learning respectively. Using rhetorical and pedagogical theory from Kenneth Burke, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Paulo Freire I analyze writing and speeches from key contributors to these service spheres. This analysis demonstrates the immense impact language has on thought and action surrounding our approaches to service. It also becomes clear throughout the paper that there is an interconnection between the service threads, regardless of their efforts to remain separate. These threads form a web, or ecosystem, that thrives when the distinct service spheres interact and cooperate. The paper concludes with a case study that aims to combine service approaches from differing spheres, in which I facilitated and collected data from intentional reflection activities with short-term mission trip groups in order to rhetorically analyze their language choices surrounding the marginalized populations they served.

## INTRODUCTION

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to take issue with the lofty goals of humanitarian efforts: feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, eradicating disease, educating the masses, and bringing about world peace. Setting aside culture, color, and creed we can hopefully all agree that dedicating time and money to causes we hold dear is based on intentions to create a better world. In its pure ideological form altruism seems to be beyond reproach. However, it cannot remain an ideal; selfless service to others must be enacted in concrete ways. Once you start to ask questions about how exactly it is we are to go about “doing service” complications arise. Who should be the beneficiaries of service work? What sorts of service projects should be given priority? When is the right time to intervene? Where should we focus our efforts, in our own communities or perhaps abroad? How do we raise the money, find the volunteers, initiate relationships with underserved communities, or prove our projects are worthwhile? Why do we even serve in the first place? It is in the answering of these questions that different approaches and perspectives surface. The problem is in the particulars.

Over the course of more than four years of service experience and scholarship I have experienced both the shining victories and the hidden underbelly of the service industry. I have seen those in need of shelter reduced to numbers and turned away at the door in a mechanical fashion. I have worked in soup kitchens that place impassable barriers between those giving and receiving. I have viewed countless before and after service slideshow presentations without a mention of lasting impact. I have been told you just can't trust panhandlers because they are experts at working the system and will probably spend anything you give them on drugs anyway. I have heard those seeking service referred to as entitled, lazy, and attention seeking. I have

worked alongside volunteers who are open about the fact that they serve solely for the feel-good moments. These may seem like cautionary tales, but they are, as we'll soon discover, alarmingly commonplace.

To be clear, acts of giving and selfless service to others should indeed be seen as commendable, virtuous pursuits. In many cases the motivation and mission behind service work is pure. However, good intentions are not enough. Without examining our current rhetorical and philosophical frameworks of giving we risk perpetuating the very inequities we seek to resolve. This examination must begin with the words we use to frame our service. This paper will, in part, explore the implications of rhetorical choices throughout the history of service in the United States. During the course of my research it became clear that there is not a single history of service in the United States, but rather a web of histories borne out of differing perspectives. In Chapter One I will examine service from a religious (primarily Christian) and business perspective, while in Chapter Two I will inspect service from the lenses of government (particularly democracy) and higher education. Each strand of this historical web of service is distinct, though they occasionally overlap and inform one another. Rather than exhaustive historical narratives these chapters will examine the writings of a few influential individuals known for their rhetorical contributions to the sphere of service in the United States. Upon inspection, the rhetorical differences are immediately apparent as each of the sectors has their own preferred terminology surrounding service: charity, philanthropy, social justice, and service-learning/civic engagement. These differences in diction may seem innocuous, but they form and inform service philosophies and approaches that have concrete ramifications for the marginalized populations we serve. Far beyond being simple monikers, these terms are the catalyst for

complex perspectives that encompass the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* questions surrounding service.

This analysis will utilize the rhetorical and pedagogical theories of Kenneth Burke, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Paulo Freire. Kenneth Burke, an American literary and rhetorical theorist, asserts that man is a symbol-making (and misusing) animal. These symbols, or words, are what we use to frame our world and shape our reality. He argues that certain terms, or “terministic screens,” give rise to a context in which to view the rest of your words and become lenses through which you view the world. Terministic screens simultaneously perform three functions: reflecting reality, selecting reality, and deflecting reality. In using words we aim to describe the world around us, but we must choose our words and in doing so we are deciding which pieces of reality to acknowledge. Further, if we are choosing some pieces of reality we are also not choosing others, therefore ignoring those pieces of reality. In short when you say what something is, you are also saying what it is not. (*Symbolic Action* 44-45). To explain by way of example, consider the difference between using the word “house” and “home.” They could both be used to describe the same structure, therefore they are referencing a piece of reality; however, they are both loaded with a separate set of connotations. A “house” is a building that someone lives in whereas a “home” perhaps conjures thoughts of family, familiarity, belonging, or safety. This is a fairly benign example, but consider the potential applications in the realm of service. How can words be used to ascribe characteristics or to place people into groups? What assumptions and pieces of reality have you both selected and deflected when you call a person experiencing homelessness a vagrant, a bum, or a freeloader? To this end Burke also says there are two kinds of terms: terms that put things together and terms that pull things apart. This dichotomy is the

initial driving force of potentially harmful rhetoric; therefore, I will be using his theoretical approach to scrutinize word choice within the service sphere.

Mikhail Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher who claimed expertise in multiple fields: semiotics, ethics, literary criticism and theory, and the philosophy of language. Similarly to Burke, Bakhtin also places emphasis on the power of words, but does so by speaking extensively on the connection between words and ideologies in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. He argues that ideologies, systems of belief held by individuals or groups, are entirely made up of signs/words. These signs are always manifested in reality, belief systems that are physically embodied. Bakhtin emphasizes the fact that words are entrenched in a history of expressions that have been formulated through a web of cultural and political events (Bakhtin 1210). Stated otherwise, we cannot pretend the words we use exist in a vacuum, their connotations and historical applications are inextricable from their use today and in the future. Bakhtin's work will reinforce my connections between words used by different service lenses and their resulting ideological frameworks.

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator who advocated for a critical approach to pedagogy that acknowledged the way power structures could influence both the classroom, politics, and the larger world. Though his primary field was education, his theory has rhetorical importance due to his commentary on how potentially damaging social orders are constructed through language. He examines dehumanization and the relationship between oppressors and oppressed peoples in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He describes dehumanization as the act of stealing someone's humanity as well as labeling it, "the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (Freire 44). It is an unfortunate reality that rhetoric surrounding marginalized populations is riddled with negative

generalizations that disenfranchise the less fortunate. Freire's theory concretizes the potential impact of unexamined rhetoric and is critical when considering the effect service has on marginalized populations.

This project will culminate with Chapter Three's case study in which I attempt to bring together the above mentioned histories and seemingly disparate service lenses while facilitating summer service initiatives and intentional reflection activities in Western North Carolina. Through this practical application I am advocating for a cross-disciplinary approach to service work that takes into consideration the multiple histories and methodologies that are too often compartmentalized rather than synthesized. This will result in a clearer picture of the state of service in our country as well as allowing for the strengths of each service approach to fill in the potential pitfalls of others.

## CHAPTER ONE: FAITH AND BUSINESS

### **John Winthrop**

One of the earliest documents concerning charity in the history of the United States was composed before we were even officially declared a nation. In 1630 Governor John Winthrop penned “A Model of Christian Charity” (also often referred to as “A City Upon a Hill”) while on board the Arbella, bound for the Massachusetts Bay Colonies. This document was originally a sermon and presents Winthrop’s interpretation of scripture particularly concerning the Christian duty to give and to serve others. This single piece of rhetoric would set the tone for the forward momentum of American charity. He begins with the bold claim that, “GOD ALMIGHTY in his most holy and wise providence, hath so disposed of the condition of’ mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission” (Winthrop; caps original). In short, some people are simply predestined to be destitute. Winthrop goes on to further describe this population as, “the poor and inferior sort.” In analyzing these opening quotes I refer back to Kenneth Burke’s discussion of terministic screens. Winthrop does not even leave connotation to the imagination; he explains in using the words “rich” and “poor” he is not merely making a monetary distinction. Those who are rich are also dignified, powerful, and should be celebrated. Those who are poor are shameful and should submit to those above their station. Winthrop’s word choices are setting up a clear “us” versus “them” dichotomy from the start: the haves and the have-nots. This would certainly, in the words of Burke, seem to pull apart rather than put together. It can be otherwise described as a form of naming that results in othering, as it puts some persons in a category separate from the speaker, a category that is lower in the social hierarchy. Burke’ scholarship also touches on how words create hierarchies through what is being deflected, otherwise known as “the negative.” What is

being deflected by language must be inferred and is therefore up for interpretation. In that interpretive space you leave room for the creation of hierarchies based on value distinctions of right, wrong, good, bad, better, and best (205-206). This manifests themselves in the labels we choose to employ. In the case of Winthrop's rhetoric, these labels are ascribed even more weight as he suggests this is part of the will of God rather than simple commentary on the state of the world by man.

Regardless of problematic labeling, Winthrop goes on to argue that although no one can defy the station fated for them by God, those who are wealthy have an obligation to give to the poor. In his own words:

...every man might have need of others, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection. From hence it appears plainly that no man is made more honorable than another or more wealthy etc., out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his creator and the common good of the creature, man. (Winthrop)

Through this description it is clear that Winthrop sees social stratification not as a dividing force, but as something meant to draw God's people together. Burke often refers to words in terms of building bridges or drawing dividing lines due to his definition of rhetoric as identification, the process by which we form connections by finding similarities between others and ourselves. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke moves away from the traditional definition of rhetoric as the study and practice of persuasion and instead sees identification more fitting due to the communal nature of word and speech. Burke reminds us that rhetoric is always addressed; it always has an audience. This collective process of identification leads to consubstantiation, when we see ourselves as part of the same group as another individual while still retaining our uniqueness

through other distinct qualities (*Rhetoric of Motives* 22-21). Forming these human connections can build bridges and lead to better understanding of those around us, but, as already shown in Burke's exploration of terministic screens, just as humans have the capacity to use their words for great good, they also have the potential to do great harm. In Burke's own words, "one need not scrutinize the concept of 'identification' very sharply to see, implied in it at every turn, its ironic counterpart: division. Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 23). With this metaphor, particularly potent for this current analysis given the religious perspective from which Winthrop is speaking, Burke highlights one of the most essential struggles in arriving at rhetoric that does no harm: differences in language. In this case I am not referring to entirely different languages, but rather different ways of interpreting the same language that lead to miscommunication and even refusal by some to acknowledge the impact of their use of language. Here we see a concerted effort by Winthrop to endorse charitable efforts while simultaneously alienating the less fortunate members of his community. Yet, even as his words draw dividing lines Winthrop insists that his assertions are meant to bring people together. This is a clear case of a singular interpretation not allowing for difference. Winthrop likely received no dissenting opinions in opposition to his proclamations, as the group to which he was speaking was a homogeneous group of Puritans.

The language of the sermon continues similarly with calls to bear the burdens of others and to give extravagantly to build up your own church and Christian family. Winthrop frames charity as part of the covenant made with God upon becoming a Christian. He warns against the dire repercussions of breaking a holy covenant and asserts that the only way to avoid the wrath of God is:

...to follow the counsel of Micah, *to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God*<sup>1</sup>. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of other's necessities... We must delight in each other; make other's conditions our own. (Winthrop; italics original)

It is important to point out here that Winthrop is focusing on charity only to those within his own community. The sermon is laced with biblical allusions and direct quotations of verses<sup>2</sup> that would be common knowledge to his intended audience. He also inserts modifiers that limit charitable reach, such as when he identifies an individual in distress worthy of assistance as a "Christian brother." He affirms this even more directly when he reminds his listeners to, "put a difference between Christians and others. Do good to all, especially to the household of faith" (Winthrop). This faith-based call does not seem to extend to anyone who would be considered an outsider. To recap, Winthrop's sermon creates a hierarchy that ties wealth to worth through use of terministic screens, is entirely oblivious of its stratifying implications claiming unification as a main goal, and identifies such a specific audience that outsiders are excluded.

Certainly not confined to this sermon, localism was standard where early American charity was concerned. As Jeremy Beer's work *The Philanthropic Revolution* states, "American charity in the eighteenth century was almost always local. Large gifts in the colonial era were typically given to 'local institutions, in response to local needs'... The limited goal of those providing charity was to alleviate suffering insofar as was possible within the constraints of

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<sup>1</sup> This phrasing is taken directly from Micah 6:8

<sup>2</sup> Including, but not limited to selections from 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 John, Matthew, Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, and Deuteronomy

social order” (Beer 38). This philosophy combined “take care of your own” and “know your place” mentalities predicated on an assumption that stepping outside established social order would be worse than shirking duty to charity. This early form of American service saw charity as confined by rigid parameters: it was a religious, local, and individual responsibility. However, as the social and political climate of the United States shifted, so too did the nation’s perception of and approach to charity.

### **Benjamin Franklin**

The first major change in the American conception of charity came as The American Revolution and the Enlightenment shifted national thought away from individual responsibility to give and more toward the creation of charitable institutions. Benjamin Franklin, who is described by some as the patron saint of American philanthropy, was a forerunner of this new approach. His stated goal was to, “improve the human condition by encouraging the growth that contributed to greater comfort and health” (Beer 40-1). Franklin himself did this through the establishment of volunteer fire departments, libraries, and free schools for poor children. Though his goal was betterment of the community, his beliefs concerning approach contrasted with those of the past. In his essay “On the Price of Corn and Management of the Poor” he states, “I am for doing good to the poor but I differ in opinion of the means. I think the best way of doing good to the poor, is not making them easy in poverty, but leading or driving them out of it” (Franklin). Use of the phrasing “doing good to the poor” here is striking as it implies who has agency the situation. When something is done to you, you may be passive or you may be resistant but either way you have no input in or impact on the transaction. This essentially drains the humanity out of charitable efforts as the recipient is characterized as an object rather than a participant in the process.

Further on in this essay Franklin makes it clear that his overall conception of the marginalized people of America is certainly not a positive one. He questions, “are our poor modest, humble, and thankful; and do they use their best endeavors to maintain themselves, and lighten our shoulders of this burden? On the contrary, I affirm that there is no country in the world in which the poor are more idle, dissolute, drunken, and insolent” (Franklin). The message here is clear, Franklin believes poor people are required to be thankful, respectful, and demure. In referring to the poor as “this burden,” he is likening them to a load carried begrudgingly by others again negating their humanity. Together Franklin’s disdain for the poor and his history of service to the community seem to be dissonant, however he argued the two were connected. Franklin saw the very structure of giving in the United States to be contributing to a system of dependency, effectively giving the destitute no reason to rise above their station. As evidenced by his callous rhetoric, Franklin clearly prized pragmatism over compassion.

I will turn here to Mikhail Bakhtin to highlight the concrete dangers of the blanket stereotyping of underserved populations displayed by Franklin. Bakhtin aligns with Burke in his treatment of words as imperfectly depicting reality, but also takes it a step further in cementing their importance in the tangible world. For Bakhtin words cannot be separated from their ideological contexts:

Every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality. Every phenomenon functioning as an ideological sign has some kind of material embodiment...a sign is a phenomenon of the external world. Both the sign itself and the effect it produces (all those actions, reactions, and new signs it elicits in the surrounding social milieu) occur in outer experience. (Bakhtin 1211)

By this logic, saying that words are of little importance in the supposed action centered charitable sphere is counterintuitive as the two are inextricably linked. The power of a simple phrase to influence a system of belief becomes even clearer when we examine Bakhtin's process of *heteroglossia* (another's words in another's language). This process begins with a *word*. The word alone may have meaning, but existing on its own its power is limited. As Bakhtin asserts, "The entire reality of the word is wholly absorbed in its function of being a sign...The word is not only the purest, most indicative sign but is, in addition, *a neutral sign*" (1213; italics original). This is to say that words are present in every meaning-making situation and thus have representative power. However, this power is not inherent, it is only in using words that we give them meaning. *Word* transforms into *utterance* when it is spoken aloud and addressed. Here we see meaning being created because, "word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between the speaker and listener, addresser and addressee" (Bakhtin 1215). This *utterance* transforms into *theme* when it is exchanged between individuals in a particular context, but in a way that cannot be reproduced. It finally reaches the stage of *heteroglossia* when it can be reproduced in a variety of scenarios while retaining meaning to everyone who hears it. At this moment it is imbedded in the fabric of society, understood and (by and large) accepted. Heteroglossia may impact our thought processes and action subconsciously.

To offer a concrete example, consider the societal power of the stereotype. The stereotypical image of the poor as defined by Franklin is that of a lazy, system-working, vagrant. When considering the image of panhandlers, individuals on welfare, and individuals experiencing homelessness today it is clear that not much has changed. Stereotypes have staying power that can filter down through generations. To fight back against stereotypes Bakhtin argues

we need to move away from I-experience and toward we-experience. He describes I-experience as an almost animalist understanding of the world, it is formed through singular ideologies that do not allow for difference, leaning toward echo chambers. We-experience on the other hand is formed through examining multiple ideologies that overlap and potentially contradict in order to synthesize them and form a more complex view of reality (Bakhtin 1216). It is important here to recognize that we-experience, “is not by any means a nebulous heard experience; it is differentiated...The stronger, the more organized, the more differentiated the collective in which an individual orients himself, the more vivid and complex his inner world will be” (Bakhtin 1216). Stated otherwise, we benefit from encountering and meaningfully considering different perspectives. Where charity is concerned it is quite easy to slip into a mentality that assumes no further perspectives are needed. Acts of giving or service meet little resistance due to their “inherent goodness” and therefore they often go unexamined. This is dangerous as it does not require thorough understanding of marginalized communities, refuses to acknowledge potential preconceptions or prejudices, and often it does not even take into consideration the voices of those being served. It is in this space that charity becomes oppressive. The positive impact of Franklin’s charitable institutions is undeniable, but also undeniable is his contribution to proliferation of negative images surrounding underserved populations. Glazing over the undesirable segments of his legacy in the charitable sphere is akin to erasure.

As stated previously, this time in American history marked a shift in how charity was conceived and implemented. In addition to questions surrounding *how* to do service work nationally, there was also reevaluation of *who* should be served. On the religious front during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, The Second Great Awakening exploded the previously confined jurisdictions of local charity. This evangelical Protestant religious revival led by New York Presbyterian Pastor

Charles Grandison Finney, “began in the wake of the revolutionary ethos as a democratic reaction to the Deism of the Enlightenment and the radicalism of the French Revolution...Rejecting the colonial-era pattern of church establishment and Calvinism's belief that God shaped our destiny, the charismatic Finney said that people were morally free agents who won salvation by their own effort” (Holloran). This can be connected back to Franklin’s description of the poor as a burden. In a society that values individual effort, people who are in need of public assistance are immediately degraded. Personal responsibility taken to the extreme runs counter to the ideals surrounding service to the community. That being said, this time of Christian revival emphasized “universal reformation of the world” and as a result charity became a much more national concept. Additionally, the perception of a person’s circumstance being predetermined came into question as citizens rejected passivity and moved toward a worldview that valued actively working toward a vision of a more perfect society (Beer 42). This was centralized around pure evangelism, but also extended to the church’s approach to charitable efforts.

### **Andrew Carnegie**

In post-Civil War America charity as a whole began to meet some unexpected skepticism. This was not necessarily a criticism of the spirit behind giving and service, but rather a critique of exactly how charity was being done. Critics condemned charity, which they referred to as “indiscriminate giving,” as being unhelpful and perhaps even worsening systematic poverty. It was during this time that the first major shift in terminology occurred, as importance was placed on service as “philanthropy” rather than “charity.” This was a massive departure from the past as until the nineteenth century American engagement in charity meant, “to affirm, if only implicitly, particular theological claims arising out of traditional Judaism and Christianity. With the rise of

philanthropy, the nature of these theological claims changed dramatically. They became bound up with the attempt to assert technological mastery over the social world” (Beer vii). The national shift from charity to philanthropy occurred due to a move away from a view of giving with a biblical bent to one that could be described as more scientific and utilitarian. This can be attributed in part to the shift in national thought that came with industrialization: machines were replacing workers, manufacturing exploded as an industry, the technology of trains made distribution of goods easier, and cities were becoming hubs of business. Citizens sought to emulate the streamlining they saw happening around them during this period of industrialization, approaching service in a more mechanistic, product over process manner. Philanthropy in its earliest stages involved strategic giving, close monitoring of aid recipients, and measuring the performance outcomes of altruistic organizations. Despite lingering biblical rhetoric, this was primarily done in order to maintain a capitalist driven economy as well as to advance industry and technology. This is unsurprising as the most well known philanthropists were also incredibly successful businessmen (Beer 1-4).

Perhaps the greatest example of the philanthropic businessman is Andrew Carnegie. The self-made millionaire’s legacy of giving is considered by some to be unparalleled. *The Almanac of American Philanthropy* lists among his accomplishments supporting the construction of over 2,800 lending libraries around the globe, founding one of the world’s great research universities, endowing one of the nation’s most significant grantmakers, and establishing a plethora of charitable organizations that are still active today. Before his death in 1919, he is believed to have given away over 350 million dollars, which would equate to over 4 billion dollars today (Lenkowsky). Undoubtedly a product of his time, Carnegie was a skeptic who claimed to find some truth in all religions, but he leaned more heavily toward the scientific discoveries of the

day, such as Darwin's theory of evolution, to guide his worldview and morality<sup>3</sup>. He managed to incorporate philanthropy into American values without falling back on the religious compulsion generally coupled with charity. As *The Almanac of American Philanthropy* states, "By linking giving not just to traditional religious values and moral imperatives to care for the needy, but also to preservation of the American economic and political system, Carnegie extended the rationale for philanthropy" (Lenkowsky). This is done most effectively in his essay titled "The Gospel of Wealth," which was a pivotal work in influencing the national shift from charity to philanthropy.

Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth," published in 1900, serves as a guide for how wealthy individuals should distribute their money. Interestingly, the first half of the piece is entirely devoted to convincing the reader of the inevitability of poverty and inequality. Carnegie even goes so far as to assert that social stratification is a sign of positive progress for civilization overall, stating, "The contract between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization. This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial" (15). This stance of the inevitability of inequality echoes the sentiments of Carnegie's philanthropic predecessors. Highlighting his utilitarian perspective he goes on to say that, "It is well, nay, essential, for the progress of the race that the houses of some should be homes for...all the refinements of civilization, rather than that none should be so" (15). Again, though his justification did not have the same roots in faith, this approach was familiar and thus resonated with his audience. From here Carnegie builds up to the central question of the work which is: "What is the proper mode of administering wealth after the laws upon which civilization is founded have thrown it into the hands of the few?" (19). He

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, Carnegie's approach to philanthropy has been labeled by some as social Darwinism. His service philosophy certainly leads toward a "survival of the fittest" approach.

explores distributing money through inheritance (which he suggests encourages dependency and idleness) as well as leaving wealth to the public after death (which he equates to hoarding) before arriving at what he deems the true solution: wealthy individuals should consider it their duty to:

...consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer, and strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community – the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves. (Carnegie 25)

The message here is clear: the marginalized are incompetent and they cannot be trusted. There is a direct correlation drawn between wealth and wisdom. Therefore, the poor must be carefully monitored and those with wealth and power should be entirely in control of when, where, and how they are helped. This is framed as being for the good of the community overall. The move away from indiscriminate charity even seems to swing as far to the other end of the spectrum into discriminative charity as Carnegie is clear in his belief that not all people are worthy of assistance. He tells his reader that “In bestowing charity the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves...those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance” (Carnegie 27). This suggests that poor individuals who do not put forth enough effort of their own somehow forfeit their right to worthiness, and perhaps even their right to be considered human. Disturbingly, it also perpetuates prejudice that may have been a contributing factor to the person in question’s current socioeconomic and social status. Nevertheless, Carnegie’s philanthropic influence was incredible. Ideas espoused in the *Gospel of Wealth* would

be positively embraced by American society under the moniker of scientific philanthropy to avoid association with the charity of the past.

This rhetorical shift from charity to philanthropy was more concerned with a change in popular cultural norms and values rather than overhauling approaches to service; the goal was to keep service relevant. Meanwhile, the hierarchical dichotomy between those who serve and those who are served was still firmly in place. Paulo Friere would refer to these two groups as the oppressor and the oppressed. As Freire goes on to explain, “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human” (Freire 55). Based on the way that Carnegie talks about the populations he serves (they are less intelligent and they cannot be trusted to make their own choices) he is clearly taking on the role of oppressor and his philanthropic acts can be categorized under Friere’s definition of false generosity, which he coins as a way to describe the oppressor attempting to appease the oppressed with supposed acts of charity. He claims that, “Any attempt to ‘soften’ the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their ‘generosity,’ the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well” (Freire 44). These acts of giving highlight the oppressed’s reliance on the oppressor and can even generate a belief that without the oppressor the oppressed would sink even further below their current station in life. This is an uncomfortable, unpopular thought and one that is generally hushed or skimmed over. For if we are to truly examine our charitable actions in light of our privilege, many of us (even the most well-intentioned) will find we have

inadvertently become oppressors. While violence is certainly not the intention of these individuals or charitable organizations, their discourse creates dangerously stratified and exclusionary atmospheres.

### **Jane Addams and Dorothy Day**

Carnegie and his contemporaries' philanthropic perspective, though clearly backed by money and influence, did not stand unopposed. By this time the sphere of giving and service was large enough to be referred to as the "philanthropic sector," and this sector was seeing a rise in mixing new philanthropic approaches with older charitable traditions. Community foundations sought to unite disparate charitable efforts and settlement houses had activists living in the same homes as those they served (Beer 86-7). Jane Addams, a proponent of settlement houses and also known as the mother of social work, was a strong advocate for reforming then-current philanthropic practices. In 1889<sup>4</sup> she co-founded a settlement house called Hull-House which supported a variety of causes including, "the labor movement, ongoing social clubs for immigrant groups, offering English courses, sponsoring widespread health and well being studies, offering kindergarten, advocating for public parks, and ensuring city services did not neglect the poor in the neighborhood" (Hamington 166). Settlement houses could certainly be described as philanthropic organizations, but their emphasis on community and relationships set them apart. Though a committed progressive, Addams also worked to return the humanity to service work. She described prominent philanthropists' relationship with the marginalized as trying to be "good to them" but not "with them" (Beer 87). As discussed earlier with the analysis of Benjamin Franklin's rhetoric, sometimes these small prepositional phrases can alter meaning entirely. Traditional charitable structures rely on the premise that charity in essence is the act of

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<sup>4</sup> Note this was the same year Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" was penned

*doing* something *to* or *for* someone else. This oversimplified definition can become problematic and, as Freire points out, those attempting to serve others must see their work as being done, “with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (Freire 48). Internalized rhetoric of doing for others rather than doing with others is inherently oppressive and can further marginalize underserved populations by not recognizing their voice and vote as a valid part of the process. These acts of charity are also usually a form of prescription on which the oppressor assumes they know the needs of the oppressed without consultation. Addams balked at the attempt to make service chiefly concerned with efficiency. She asserted that it should instead aim at “the creation of a community of feeling, a set of human bonds, which are in themselves perhaps more valuable than the services themselves” (Beer 87). This work of humanization must start with the words we choose to use when discussing marginalized individuals and service initiatives.

This attempt to merge approaches of charity and philanthropy would continue barely a generation later through the work of Dorothy Day. Along with Peter Maurin, a French Catholic layman and friend, Day founded the Catholic Worker movement in 1933. This coincided with a time of incredible need in our country: the Great Depression. Taking a page out of the book of settlement houses from the past, this movement also had organized aid centers, but they rebranded their hubs as houses of hospitality. The first such home, known as The Catholic Worker house, “provided a roof for a small group of homeless in New York, and subsequently, its residents became involved in a number of endeavors including a popular soup kitchen, a worker's school and a maternity guild” (Hamington 167). The goal was to provide radical hospitality as well as to campaign against inequity. Day’s own spiritual conversion served as a catalyst and resulted in a melding of previously held social stances with newfound biblical

tenants. She asserted that, “typical conception of Christian charity needed to be broadened to include not only the corporal works of mercy but also the spiritual works of mercy—including education, activism, and publishing. In this way, she was able to preserve the central tenets of the biblical charitable tradition while incorporating the concerns and insights of those who criticized this tradition as propping up an unjust socioeconomic order” (Beer 91). To do this Day launched *The Catholic Worker*, a penny press that spoke out against injustice and called for Catholics to join together to offer the social assistance the government had failed to provide.

Day deeply distrusted the government and its attempt to assist those living in poverty; she viewed the system as ineffective and mechanical, desperately lacking humanity. She wrote in *The Catholic Worker* about her observations of interactions between public welfare workers and the aid recipients, describing the investigators as impassive in contrast to the anguish displayed by those being investigated. As noted in "Religious Women in Modern American Social Reform" by Sabrina Noelle Marsh, “Day suggested that the required efficiency and scale of modern public and private benevolence organizations designed to suit the standards imposed by scientism undermined in a significant sense the dignity of the very people they were tasked to help” (Marsh 163). Stated otherwise, Day believed that the pendulum of service had swung so far into the realm of scientific philanthropy that it had forgotten compassion. Day sought to synthesize her faith with modern humanitarian approaches, effectively rejecting the historic divide between charity and philanthropy. Her approach unapologetically went against the grain, in fact, “No other twentieth-century American so thoroughly challenged while simultaneously deepening the tenets of both traditional charity and scientific philanthropy” (Beer 93). Day had great faith in the power of people, much more so than philanthropic conglomerates or government funded social programs. In the July-August 1933 issue of *Catholic Worker* she

observed that, “People are becoming conscious of the inequalities of the social system and are awakening to their responsibility toward their neighbor” (Marsh 148). Here those in need are humanized as they are referred to as “neighbors” rather “the poor,” “the destitute,” or worse. Their struggle is also acknowledged as one engendered by inequality rather than a lack of character or effort.

Though their work spanned different decades, both Addams and Day recognized what Freire would refer to as their status as an oppressor. They also understood the recognition that a hierarchy exists is not enough. As Freire advocates, the next step in the process is for oppressors to stand alongside the oppressed to better understand their situation. They must also take into consideration the fact that words are powerful lenses that form their ideologies, impact their actions, and can potentially marginalize the very people they seek to serve. To quote directly, “The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love” (Freire 49-50). Both Addams and Day fought fervently for humanization, their work with both settlement and hospitality houses brought them into community with those on the margins, and their writing reveals a keen awareness of the impact of word choice on attitude about and approach to service work.

### **Bill and Melinda Gates**

All of that being said, it can be argued that the communal approach is not always feasible; particularly for the massive, globally concerned grant awarding foundations of the present. One of the most well known American philanthropists of today is Bill Gates. An entrepreneur first, the co-founder of Microsoft was a billionaire by the time he was thirty-one and was named

wealthiest man in the world by *Forbes* every year from 1993-2007. His current net worth is estimated around 85.6 billion. Gates followed in the footsteps of his charitable father, making his first donation (of 2 million dollars) to his old high school. Gates seriously stepped into the world of philanthropy in 1994, when he sold some of his Microsoft stock to create the William H. Gates Foundation. In 2000 The William H. Gates Foundation merged with another of the family's philanthropic endeavors, the Gates Learning Foundation, to form the currently-running Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation ("Bill Gates"). Only six years later the financial reach of the organization grew exponentially with an incredible gift given by billionaire investor and family friend Warren Buffet: \$30 billion in stock holdings up front and a promise to give additional stocks annually. With that much money the possibilities seemed endless and the country looked on eagerly wondering what the Gates would do. Following the advice of Buffett, Bill Gates decided to start writing annual letters to share the foundation's goals and track its progress. This would be in addition to annual reports that would be pure breakdowns of the numbers.

The first annual letter was written in 2009 and the tradition continues to this day. In the early letters Gates earnestly discusses the transition from businessman to philanthropist. As Gates notes in his first letter, "The common sense of the business world, with its urgency and focus, has strong application in the philanthropic world. I am sure I will make mistakes in over-applying some elements from my previous experience and will need to adjust" (*Annual Letter*, 2009). Here Gates is making clear his understanding that the profit driven world of business and the humanitarian driven world of philanthropy can be connected, but should not be equated. This is a step away from the ideology of some of his business predecessors, such as Carnegie. It is also a shift in tone, as Gates approaches his foray into philanthropy with a certain degree of trepidation rather than arrogance. This perhaps begins to shift the service hierarchy. Whereas

previous philanthropists saw themselves as necessarily above those whom they served, Gates began by humbling himself. Wishing to invite other businessmen and women into this philanthropic venture, in June of 2010 Bill and Melinda Gates started an initiative in conjunction with Warren Buffet called “The Giving Pledge.” This was a call to wealthiest individuals in America to commit to donating at least half of their wealth to philanthropic efforts (during their lifetimes or after their death). This was not a legally binding contract, but rather a moral commitment. Within the first two months the response included more than 200 billion dollars in pledges. However, even such grand gestures of philanthropy were met with a certain degree of suspicion and criticism. An article titled “Billionaire Pledges: The Innovative Financing We Need?” observed that this pledge:

while a step forward for some charitable causes, points to the dilemma of winners and losers in philanthropy. When the fate of beneficiaries of large sums of money is in the hands of a few individuals, philanthropic priorities can change direction overnight and have a profound impact. The high-level nature of “The Giving Pledge” announcement illuminates the inequality in the funding of issues and disadvantaged populations that can arise when a few people decide charitable priorities. (Adams, vanFleet, & Winthrop)

Though these wealthy individuals may have had the purest of intentions, the fact that they had the means to support causes in such an extravagant way in essence means that they get to decide which causes matter. Charitable intentions aside, the power dynamics remain. As pointed out by Friere, oppressors do not always know that they are being oppressive, in fact many will fervently oppose claims to that effect. While the philanthropists are here attempting to stand “with” as called for by Freire, the power discrepancy created by money is still a factor that cannot be ignored. Despite the philanthropic accomplishments of the Gates Foundation, it continues to

draw criticism and skepticism due to the potential influence and impact of business ties that Bill Gates cannot seem to escape.

That being said, the annual letters became a way for the Gates to not only quantify, but also in some ways to validate their giving to skeptics. Over time the Gates became champions of their causes, but also champions of responsible giving. The 2017 annual letter, written by both Bill and Melinda Gates, is written to Warren Buffett to address how his initial gift of \$30 billion dollars to the Gates Foundation was allocated. The letter explains where this money was distributed as well as the many vulnerable populations it was able to assist. Bill begins with a comment about business that shows considerable growth from his first letter:

Of course, philanthropy isn't like business. We don't have sales and profits to show you. There's no share price to report. But there are numbers we watch closely to guide our work and measure our progress. Our goals are shared by many other organizations working to save and improve lives. We're all in this together. So most of the numbers we look at don't focus just on how we as a foundation are doing, but on *how the world is doing*—and how we see our role. (*Annual Letter, 2017*)

From 2009 to 2017, Gates seems to have recognized even more clearly the distinction between his entrepreneurial work and his humanitarian work. Though he recognizes the importance of numbers there is also acknowledgment that this should take a back seat to humanity. The choice of the word “role” here is also important as it suggests that there are multiple roles to play. The Gates' do not see themselves as saviors just because of the power their money wields; rather, they understand they are a piece in the process.

Melinda Gates also comments on the relationship between philanthropy and business, beginning with differences and moving toward potential partnership, “That's the magic of

philanthropy. It doesn't need a financial return, so it can do things business can't. But the *limit* of philanthropy is that the money runs out before the need is met. That's why business and government *have* to play a role if the change is going to last" (*Annual Letter*, 2017). Accepting the limits of philanthropy is critical; in fact in this quote Melinda Gates is alluding to three of the four threads in the web of service this paper aims to describe<sup>5</sup>. These different sectors bring to the table an intermingling of organization, money, policy, humanity, and intent that have the potential to make service efforts even more successful. Melinda Gates describes this web as, "an ecosystem of partners that shares its genius to improve lives and end disease" and Bill goes on to emphasize that, "This ecosystem includes our foundation, but goes far beyond it...Building this ecosystem is one of the most important things we've done—because we're going to need every bit of this capacity to solve the next challenges" (*Annual Letter*, 2017). Though the potential pitfalls of large humanitarian conglomerates loom large, the Gates' understanding of their finite roll in an even larger system is encouraging. Their goals of fostering a service network or, to borrow their wording, ecosystem echo my own. However, as the Gates' have presented, this chapter only touches on some of the threads in the web. To understand the more fully formed picture we must also examine the contributions of democracy and higher education to the service sphere.

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that the word charity is not used once in the entirety of the letter.

## CHAPTER TWO: GOVERNMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Up until this point this paper has focused on service in terms of charity and philanthropy. Analyzing the particular word choices in both the religious and business-minded overlays of these spheres of service shows the potential for rhetoric to alternately alienate, uplift, discredit, defend, or even demonize underserved populations. From Winthrop's discussion of the marginalized as "the poor and inferior," to Franklin's characterization of the "idle, dissolute, drunken, and insolent," to Carnegie's discussion of inequality as, "highly beneficial...nay, essential," it is clear that even historic champions of service have done immeasurable harm with their words. This chapter will continue to explore rhetoric that enhances as well as subverts humanitarian efforts. Though the previous chapter was concentrated on the service arenas of religion and business, the influence of government and higher education has already been noted in a few key pieces of rhetoric. For example, Dorothy Day voiced her distrust for government assistance programs while advocating for education and Melinda Gates asserted that government has a critical role to play in the ecosystem of service. This chapter will delve into the particular contributions of these two service perspectives while also highlighting moments where the four spheres overlap further.

### **The Founding Fathers**

While our country's relationship with freedom is certainly fraught, the Declaration of Independence's statement that "all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (US 1776) set a philosophical precedent for our nation's government. This moment was meant to recognize individual autonomy and reject the sovereignty and overall political

structure of England. The rhetorical importance of the shift of members of a nation being viewed as subjects versus citizens cannot be overstated as this reframed the power of the people. Rather than bowing to the will of an authoritarian, citizens could now actively participate in the formation and legislation of the government. The founding fathers were in essence creating a nation out of the documents they penned; therefore, every word had immense significance. Consider the following immortal preamble, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America” (U.S. Constitution, Preamble). These words establish the United States as a country that cares for the common man and mutually promotes social welfare.

To dig further into the above quotes we must again break it down to individual word choice and consider the purpose and impact of these terministic screens. Regardless of how elementary it may seem today, suggesting that “all men are created equal” was indeed a revolutionary sentiment. While it may have initially meant to equate rulers with common citizens, the language of this single line has been examined for centuries as a way to argue freedom for a multitude of marginalized populations. It has been revisited time and time again in our nation’s history as we attempt to perfect our professed commitment to valuing all people, without qualification or exception, as stated in our nation’s first declaration. Further, this sentence includes “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as “inalienable rights.” Stated otherwise, it cannot and should not be contested that all citizens have the right to live freely with the ability to pursue what gives them joy. Regardless of whether or not the Founding Fathers had

the United States' future impoverished citizens in mind when writing these words, the precedent was set.

Pairing the diction of the Declaration of Independence with that of the Constitution's Preamble creates an even more full picture of the pledge our government made to its citizens at the outset. Opening with "We the People" places the citizens at the forefront rather than any acting government entity or single representative. It also implies that the relationship between the people and the Constitution is direct; it was not simply created "for" the people, it is "by" the people. This is then followed by a list of things which the will bring about a "more perfect Union." While a great deal of time could be devoted to unpacking each of these, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on the vow to "promote the general Welfare." In the most general terms, welfare can be defined as "well-being, prosperity, success; the health, happiness, and fortunes of a person or group" (OED), however, in terms of how this word is implemented in a governmental structure it is also helpful to define it more specifically as, "organized provision for the basic physical and material well-being of people in need, esp. financial support as provided for by legislation" (OED). To summarize, some of the foundational documents of our nation claim that 1) all United States citizens are equal and should be afforded the same rights without exception and 2) it is the responsibility of the nation and the people to invest in the health and general well-being of all citizens in an organized way, including in providing monetary support. This displays an ideology founded in generosity, pursuit of equity, and respect for all humanity.

Utopian as these goals seem, the social realities of the United States have often historically been disconnected from the values professed at our nation's core. In fact, prior to 1900, there were zero federal aid organizations and very few state funded relief efforts in the

United States. The idea that promoting welfare was the job of the people was taken incredibly literally as government agencies refused to step in. Social welfare work was primarily left to privately run charitable organizations or philanthropic ventures such as those mentioned in Chapter One. Despite the commitment to “the general welfare” stated in our Constitution, conceptions of our national identity seemed to stand in opposition to these claims. An article from The Constitutional Rights Foundation’s quarterly newsletter, *Bill of Rights in Action*, suggests that this was due to the fact that, “Americans had always prided themselves on having a strong sense of individualism and self-reliance. Many believed that those who couldn't take care of themselves were to blame for their own misfortunes” (“How Welfare Began in the United States”). This is otherwise known as the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality; this sort of preconception was likely gleaned from some of the popularized rhetoric examined in Chapter One. The scarce state and locally run assistance services that did exist during this time were problematic to put it lightly:

Conditions in these institutions were often deliberately harsh so that only the truly desperate would apply. Local governments (usually counties) also provided relief in the form of food, fuel, and sometimes cash to poor residents. Those capable were required to work for the town or county, often at hard labor such as chopping wood and maintaining roads. But most on general relief were poor dependent persons not capable of working: widows, children, the elderly, and the disabled. Local officials decided who went to the poorhouse or orphanage and who would receive relief at home... Also, not only did a general prejudice exist against the poor on relief, but local officials commonly discriminated against individuals applying for aid because of their race, nationality, or religion. Single mothers often found themselves in an impossible situation. If they

applied for relief, they were frequently branded as morally unfit by the community. If they worked, they were criticized for neglecting their children. (“How Welfare Began in the United States”)

This is a clear example of those in the position of power owning the role of oppressor and further subjugating the already disenfranchised. Though charitable and philanthropic organizations did what they could to bridge the gap, this only helped those who lived in close enough proximity. However, issues of poverty would soon gain national attention, as the plight of single mothers in particular was the first issue that brought questions concerning welfare to the attention of the White House.

### **Theodore Roosevelt**

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt called a White House conference on how to address the national rise in need for support of poor single mothers and their children. The collective decision was that it would be better to invest in ways to keep family units together in their homes rather than forcing them into costly institutions. To do this, individual states began to introduce “mother’s pensions.” The particulars of amount and allocation were left to local officials, but by 1933, all but two states in the union had their own variation of a mother's pension program. Though a positive step, it is important to note here that mother's pensions primarily benefitted white widows. These programs predominantly excluded mothers who were divorced or abandoned as well as minority mothers and their children (“How Welfare Began in the United States”). Though progress was initially slow, everything was upended in the wake of the Great Depression. Seemingly overnight, the national need soared far beyond what local humanitarian efforts could provide. In an article about social welfare in the United States, Arthur J. Altmeyer, U.S. Commissioner for Social Security from 1946 to 1953, states, “at the outset of the Great

Depression, it was hoped that the private welfare agencies would be able to meet the needs of the increasing number of unemployed workers. This proved not to be the case. Soon the States and then the Federal government was obliged to provide funds to assist local public relief agencies” (Altmeyer). The use of the word “obliged” here is telling, as it is clear that federal welfare programs were born out of dire necessity rather than compassion or commitment to constitutional ideals.

In his State of the Union Address on January 4, 1935, President Roosevelt aimed to tackle the issues of unprecedented national poverty and unemployment head on. However, upon a close reading his proposition seems to send a mixed message about welfare’s place in our national narrative. He begins on a positive note, observing that, “Throughout the world, change is the order of the day. In every Nation economic problems, long in the making, have brought crises of many kinds for which the masters of old practice and theory were unprepared. In most Nations social justice, no longer a distant ideal, has become a definite goal” (Roosevelt). With this message of positive change, letting go of old ineffective practices, and addressing crises with social justice in mind Roosevelt seems to be building toward an endorsement of social welfare. He continues along this train of thought as he laments, “We find our population suffering from old inequalities, little changed by vast sporadic remedies. In spite of our efforts and in spite of our talk, we have not weeded out the over privileged and we have not effectively lifted up the underprivileged. Both of these manifestations of injustice have retarded happiness” (Roosevelt). Coupled with the previous quote it seems as if Roosevelt will next call for a coalescing of these unsuccessful “sporadic remedies,” perhaps into a federally sponsored aid program? However, he soon turns a sharp corner when he starts to discuss the burden of debt that has been placed on the Federal Government. With the economic factor in mind he declares:

The lessons of history, confirmed by the evidence immediately before me, show conclusively that continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fibre. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit...The Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief. (Roosevelt)

In short, the claim is that when we give out money to the poor, they will inevitably become lazy and dependent. This is the refrain that haunts welfare efforts to this day.

The rest of Roosevelt's address attempts to answer the question surrounding what should be done about the millions of unemployed Americans. Here the whiplash effect gets even more confusing as he begins by stating that federal money will be directed to local aid efforts, but this will be reserved only for those who were struggling with poverty before the Great Depression. Concerning those who do not fit into this category he boldly claims, "With them the problem is different and the responsibility is different. This group was the victim of a nation-wide depression caused by conditions, which were not local but national. The Federal Government is the only governmental agency with sufficient power and credit to meet this situation. We have assumed this task and we shall not shrink from it in the future" (Roosevelt). Following the trajectory of this speech it seems as if the president wished to remain on both sides of the fence. On one hand, he declares handouts produce helplessly reliant citizens, but on the other it is the duty of the government to help those in need in times of crisis. He seems to altogether ideologically reject the very ideas he is proposing. It is all the more confusing that in the same year Roosevelt helped pass into law the controversial Social Security Act, which set up a federal retirement program for citizens over 65, guaranteed one-third of the total amount spent by states for assistance to needy and dependent children younger than sixteen, and provided federal

welfare aid to impoverished elderly citizens, needy blind individuals, and crippled children (“How Welfare Began in the United States”). This was a highly-contested piece of legislation that was reviewed by the Supreme Court over claims that it was unconstitutional due to overstepping federal jurisdiction. The ruling came down to interpretation of phrasing. The court arrived at its ruling through “a liberal interpretation of what is known as ‘the welfare clause’ in the Federal Constitution which reads, ‘The Congress shall have the power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States’” (“How Welfare Began in the United States”). Critical here is the reminder that this piece of legislation only passed due to a single phrase written into our founding documents: promote the general welfare. Though this was certainly a victory at the time for welfare proponents and aid recipients, there would be many more battles to fight in the years to come.

### **Lyndon B. Johnson**

In the 1960s the administration decided that rather than small battles, they were ready to wage an all out war, the War on Poverty to be exact. Standing in the shadow of the recently assassinated John F Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson vowed to push forward the progressive policies of his predecessor. In Johnson’s 1964 State of the Union address he suggests that not much progress had been made in eradicating poverty on a national level. He bleakly observes that “many Americans live on the outskirts of hope -- some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity. This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America...Our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it” (Johnson). The final sentence of this quote demonstrates an important paradigm.

Johnson aimed to fight poverty at its roots by addressing foundational causes rather than treating surface level symptoms. This manifested itself in a litany of laws and programs such as The Economic Opportunity Act, the Office of Economic Opportunity, Job Corps, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), and Head Start. These programs promoted early education, vocational training, and volunteerism with a focus on at risk populations (Cooley). All of these programs are still running today.

Unfortunately, Johnson's War on Poverty was not endorsed by all, in fact it seemed to have more detractors than supporters, "From the outset, Johnson encountered resistance to the War on Poverty from almost all quarters: from the South on issues of race, from conservatives who thought that federal money should not be used to help the poor, and from liberals who thought that the reforms did not go far enough" (Cooley). Additionally, the War on Poverty's pursuits were stymied due to economic resources being rerouted to another contentious battleground: the Vietnam War.

### **Ronald Reagan**

In 1976 presidential hopeful Ronald Reagan introduced a compelling character to crowds on his campaign trail: the Welfare Queen. At each stop he regaled the crowd with tales of this law-evading woman who had learned how to work the system in order to live the high life. According to Reagan this woman "has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexisting deceased husbands. And she's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over \$150,000" (Reagan). It is also worth noting that this Welfare Queen was usually depicted as a woman of color, which worked to deepen

damaging racial stereotypes of the day<sup>6</sup>. Though the validity of this story is uncertain, the desired affect was attained. As intended, this caricature incited outrage amongst Reagan's constituents and worked to bolster the credibility of the image of welfare recipients as lazy freeloaders rather than individuals in need.

After a successful presidential campaign, Reagan continued his crusade against welfare, frequently citing its inherent flaws and effectively demonizing its presence in his speeches.

During his 1986 State of the Union address Reagan asserted:

In the welfare culture, the breakdown of the family, the most basic support system, has reached crisis proportions—female and child poverty, child abandonment, horrible crimes, and deteriorating schools. After hundreds of billions of dollars in poverty programs, the plight of the poor grows more painful. But the waste in dollars and cents pales before the most tragic loss: the sinful waste of human spirit and potential (Reagan).

Reagan's line of logic here seems to suggest that welfare is the cause of social ills such as poverty, crime, and deteriorating schools. At the very least the suggestion is that welfare makes all of these things worse. This entire quote is guilty of faulty causality as it neglects to directly connect welfare to the social issues mentioned. In fact, it ignores larger frameworks that attribute to generational poverty including, but not limited to, racial discrimination, lack of accessible job or educational opportunities, as well as policies and taxes that favor the wealthy. In addition, in bemoaning the loss of "human spirit" we hear echoes of Roosevelt. This language, though perhaps initially innocuous, has been passed down and further twisted over time. In the sphere of

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<sup>6</sup> Many believe that this story was based on a woman known as Linda Taylor (though she used many other aliases). After evading arrest for years she was eventually arrested, charged, and found guilty of perjury, having four aliases, and receiving \$8,000 fraudulently from welfare services.

government where word becomes law, the consequences of rhetorical choices are undeniably concrete. Consider Reagan's 1987 radio address in which he claims, "More must be done to reduce poverty and dependency and, believe me, nothing is more important than welfare reform. It's now common knowledge that our welfare system has itself become a poverty trap—a creator and reinforcer of dependency" (Reagan). Reagan is pushing a narrative in which restructuring or perhaps even dismantling welfare is the nation's number one priority, more pressing than the drug epidemic sweeping the nation, more volatile than hostilities with foreign nations, and more dividing than deepening political rifts along party lines. This rhetoric effectively gave the American public a place to focus all of its pent-up anger, confusion, and concern: toward the poor.

### **Bill Clinton**

Further proving that resistance to government aid agencies crosses party lines, when Democrat Bill Clinton campaigned for the presidency in 1992, he promised to "end welfare as we know it." Clinton's stated goal, like many before him, was to help people make the transition from welfare to work. More specifically, he proposed that anyone receiving welfare should be employed within two years. ("Welfare to Work: The States Take Charge"). Clinton worked diligently with Congress in order to sign into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. This monumental piece of welfare reform brought to an end the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children program that had been enacted by Roosevelt sixty-one years prior. The law that took its place, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, authorized states to design their own welfare programs and to encourage recipients to work ("Welfare to Work: The States Take Charge"). Consider the first two words of the title of this ordinance: "personal responsibility." In choosing this label and promoting it as the opposite of welfare (or at the very least the better

alternative) there is an implication those who have been on welfare in the past were essentially irresponsible. In many ways the approach to welfare seems to have moved backwards. The negative connotation associated with welfare has been so effectively executed that we have nearly reverted to a place of questioning the original values stated in our founding documents.

### **Politicians of Today**

You only need to flip on the news or scroll through Facebook to see that the language surrounding the welfare debate has not changed much. The image of the unmotivated, parasitic, conniving Welfare Queen still looms large in the national narrative and in political discourse. Take for example a recent interview with Utah Republican Rep. Jason Chaffetz on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2017. When asked about his party's plan to increase the cost of health insurance he deflected responsibility by insisting, "You know what? Americans have choices, and they've got to make a choice. And so, maybe, rather than getting that new iPhone that they just love, and that they want to go and spend hundreds of dollars on that—maybe they should invest it in their own healthcare" (Chaffetz). The ludicrous underlying assumptions of this statement abound: that all struggling Americans are struggling because of poor financial decisions, that the poor should never be allowed luxuries, that the cost of an iPhone is equivalent to comprehensive healthcare, that their current situation is fundamentally their fault, and the list could go on. As Stephen Pimpare, author of "A People's History of Poverty in America," puts it, "Chaffetz was articulating a commonly held belief that poverty in the United States is, by and large, the result of laziness, immorality and irresponsibility. If only people made better choices — if they worked harder, stayed in school, got married, didn't have children they couldn't afford, spent what money they had more wisely and saved more — then they wouldn't be poor, or so the reasoning goes"

(Pimpare). Unfortunately, statements like this are no longer shocking as we have been hearing iterations of them since welfare was formally founded as a social aid program.

However, I think it is important to remember that all of this amounts to centuries of rhetorical manipulation by politicians that has meant to dilute, subvert, or outdate the original constitutional claim that we as a nation are dedicated to promoting the general welfare of our citizenry. As Pimpare points out, “this stubborn insistence that people could have more money or more health care if only they wanted them more absolves the government of having to intervene and use its power on their behalf. In this way of thinking, reducing access to subsidized health insurance isn’t cruel, it’s *responsible*, a form of tough love in which people are forced to make good choices instead of bad ones” (Pimpare). This tough love tactic is suspiciously devoid of compassion and clearly puts numbers (profit margins, federal spending, etc.) before people. This also raises the question, who exactly gets to determine the definition of “good” or “bad” in this context? There are power dynamics associated with who is in charge of these value judgments and it is often marginalized populations that are left out of the conversation and at the whims of political decision makers.

### **Democracy Meets Education**

Of course, this union is still being perfected. Our country’s record of discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, etc. is disheartening to say the least. Though the system can be used to oppress, it is this same system that allows for change if the people demand it. Protesting, picketing, lobbying, and grassroots organizing all have political connotations while simultaneously being socially focused. The United States’ democratic ideals allow for approaching service from a social welfare and justice approach. This is the sort of service work frequently found on our college campuses. Often, when democracy meets the academy, stepping

outside of the confines of governmental structure, it takes on a new life. Consider the work of philosopher and educator, John Dewey. He believed that education and democracy had a bond that extended beyond the common sense need for an educated voting populace in our country. In his work *Democracy and Education* he asserts:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action. They secure a liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests. (101)

In other words, living in a diverse and participatory society allows for a richer understanding of the world, and is in many ways a liberating experience. Many of the issues with humanitarian efforts in the sphere of government come from a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the issues across lines of difference mentioned by Dewey such as class and race. Also an unavoidable hindrance is the singular nationalist perspective that one would expect from a sphere that is literally an entity of a nation's government. However, ideals that come from our government, such as democracy can be observed and enacted elsewhere, specifically in the sphere of higher education.

Before we dive too far into comparisons it is first important to note that colleges and universities were not always the hubs of civic duty that many claim to be today. In fact, early in our nation's history they prided themselves on the opposite: seclusion for the sake of scholarship. As an examination of the history of the academy by civic engagement theorist Jerzy Hauptmann reveals, "The typical role of the higher learning institutions in the United States of the 18th and 19th centuries was to be isolated from the communities, concentrating only on the personal developments of the students. The academy was located on a hill looking down on its environment from a superior position" (Hauptmann 3). Thankfully this approach did not remain forever; as scholars, students and professors alike, climbed down from their ivory towers they began to recognize the need in their surrounding communities. Mirroring Dewey's comments on communal learning, Friere suggests, "authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication (Freire 64). This allowed many scholars to move beyond purely theoretical work and toward civically engaged scholarship.

To return to the inextricable overall interconnectivity of these seemingly disparate histories of service across both chapters, it is worth noting that historically it is the purview of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching<sup>7</sup> to determine whether or not an institution of higher learning can receive official Community Engagement Classification. Founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1905 and chartered in 1906 by Congress the foundation is an independent policy research center that focuses on education at all levels. Though the foundation has certainly evolved and changed over time, the link to Carnegie is an example of crossover

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<sup>7</sup> In January 2017, the Carnegie Foundation began to transfer management of the Community Engagement Classification application process to the Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University. This transition will reach completion by late February 2017.

between service spheres. Perhaps even more connected than religion and business perspectives of the previous chapter, democracy and higher education are often wrapped up in each other's definitions. Take the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's exhaustive definition of community engagement for example, which states, "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." Emphasis here is placed on mutuality and equal footing, which promotes breaking down societally instituted barriers and power structures. The definition further states that community engagement's purpose is, "the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). Language choice here is key as words primarily associated with higher education, such as scholarship and curriculum, are combined with what is traditionally seen as constitutional diction such as strengthening democratic aims and civic responsibility. This definition alone exhibits the fact that the two service spheres inform one another, and this shows further in their approaches to service.

It is important to mention that higher education's initial approach to service did not match the above-mentioned aims. This is partially due to the fact that the sphere fell victim to a lack of specificity. Early theorist in the field of civic engagement Jerzy Hauptmann notes that the initial goals of service in higher education were grand and ambitious: "a free society, higher standards of living, involvement of citizens and better prepared students" However, the academy would

need to shift their focus from the macro level to a more micro level in order to be affective. As Hauptman further comments, “These goals and others similar to them obviously were quite desirable, but they were never clearly identified and their achievement because of the impossible measurability was difficult to ascertain” (4). Early scholars set parameters for civic engagement in order to increase potential impact. These required service efforts to be rational and goal centered concentrating on results and consequences, be by nature nonviolent, emphasize interrelationships, and acknowledge their place in a global framework. In addition, to be certain of results necessitated periodic assessment and evaluation of outcomes (Hauptmann 7).

The civic engagement/service-learning emphasis of the academy could be considered a subset of the democratic approach to social justice. As shown in Chapter One, historically many service initiatives that sought to help the plight of the poor were, by necessity, the purview of the wealthy as they centered on charitable giving rather than service work. Expendable income was seen as necessary in order to make a meaningful impact. However, theorists in the field of civic engagement warned that, “the elites have not been able to solve the manifold problems facing communities and organizations. Surely enough, they have been constantly approaching solutions, but their efforts did not always produce the desired results... Involvement of as many groups and individuals as possible is a demand of civic engagement” (Hauptman 5). This is a critical shift and one that birthed Service Learning Centers in colleges and universities as well as establishing civic engagement as its own discipline. This field studies the act, context, and impact of service work as well as the pedagogy surrounding service reflection. As prominent scholar in the field of engagement Tania Mitchell points out, current critical service-learning pedagogy sees community engagement as, “both a process and a goal” (“Critical Service-Learning as a

Philosophy “264) and calls for mindful interaction with the community, “to be shaped by intention and action” (“Critical Service-Learning as a Philosophy” 264).

### **Reflection is Key**

Critical service-learning stands in contrast to traditional service-learning which focuses on volunteers, individual change, and student development. In the late 1990s-early 2000s critical service-learning surfaced as a term to describe a form of service-learning with a social justice orientation that worked to redistribute power amongst all participants in the service-learning relationship, to develop authentic relationships in the classroom and community, and to operate from a social change perspective. Situated in the academy it is important to remember that this approach does not just include acts of service, it necessitates a classroom component. The pedagogy of this methodology fosters a critical consciousness, allowing students to combine action and reflection in classroom and community to examine both the historical precedents of the social problems addressed in their service placements and the impact of their personal action and/or inaction in maintaining and transforming those problems. As Mitchell explains, “If students’ causal explanation of a social problem such as poverty, illiteracy, or homelessness points to flaws or weaknesses in individuals’ characteristics, it is quite likely that they have missed entirely the social justice dimension of the problem” (“Traditional vs. Critical Service Learning” 55). This demonstrates the higher education service sphere’s emphasis on fostering a deeper understanding of root causes of social inequity and the role service can play addressing these injustices. Moving beyond a commitment to service projects or initiatives, this expands service’s parameters to include educating those who choose to serve. What sets service-learning apart from other forms of service is definitely its commitment to fostering self-awareness in volunteers. Service Learning Centers place high importance on self-reflection and assessment as,

“Responsibility for the results and their consequences plays a central role in civic engagement. It is essential to keep in mind that it is not only institutional responsibility within the existing frameworks, but first and foremost individual responsibility related to one’s goals and values” (Hauptmann 6). Though the field would not put it in these terms, this is akin to perpetual rhetorical analysis of one’s own language.

Mitchell goes on to suggest that “Dialogue, reflections, and writing assignments can encourage the analysis that allows students to understand real world concerns and the systemic causes behind them” (“Traditional vs. Critical Service Learning” 55). Encouraging individual reflection and classroom conversation is key. Students may pass by manifestations of social stratification and inequality every day; they may even volunteer regularly in their communities. However, if they are not encouraged to question current realities, to dig for root causes of stigmatized issues, or to wrestle with the implications and consequences of their own choices it is possible that they will retain a surface level understanding of service. Building on the theory and practice of her peers through a literature review in “Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models,” Mitchell continues to assert that reflection is a powerful tool, going as far as to say that, “Critical reflection is central to transformative learning and service-learning practice and may contribute to authentic relationships in the classroom. Engaging in critical reflection requires questioning assumptions and values, and paying attention to the impacts and implications of our community work” (50). Use of “critical” as a modifying word throughout service-learning theory emphasizes the importance of exercising careful judgment, taking the time to observe and analyze, as well as a commitment to questioning norms. Reflection allows students to hone their critical eyes and voices. Mitchell goes on to address the formatting possibilities of reflection activities, suggesting

that “While journaling is often used to encourage critical reflection...[other practitioners recommend] that students share their writing in front of an audience to receive and respond to feedback. This exchange develops authenticity through vulnerability and trust-building. This exercise also creates a space for students to be challenged, question their ideas, and integrate new perspectives into their thinking” (“Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning” 61). This is the point at which reflection can change from a personal endeavor to a communal one. Sharing journal entries and having classroom conversations about service experiences and frameworks requires students to articulate their viewpoints, encounter difference, and synthesize their perspectives with others. This affords the opportunity to create a classroom environment that reflects the sort of society service-learning practices seeks to create: a society that hinges on honesty, reciprocity, and engagement.

These classroom values stem from critical examination of a teaching philosophy known as banking education, a term coined by Paulo Freire in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Banking education is essentially a teaching model where students are considered empty vessels in which the instructor is to deposit their knowledge. Students are expected to blindly follow the teacher without question and the teacher is generally considered the owner of law and truth in the classroom. Reflection functions as a means to move away from this in the service-learning classroom. As students reflect on service-learning experiences they are generating their own knowledge separate from the teacher. When these journals are shared in the classroom students have the ability to offer their experiences, engage in discussion, and own the conversation. In this reflection based classroom model the instructor is still present but is functioning in the role of facilitator while the students lead the conversation. Mitchell is in favor of “disrupting the banking dynamic” and declares, “How power relationships are produced and reproduced should

be ongoingly observed and critiqued, with a consciousness geared toward reconfiguring power relationships to reverse current (and expected) hierarchies in traditional service practice” (Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning 58). Without reflection concerning the power structures in which service is situated, movement toward change may be forestalled. Reflection allows for movement from individual journaling, to classroom discussion, to identifying root causes, and hopefully toward meaningful action and change. Asking students to reflect throughout the process of their critical service-learning is not a negligible part of the process. It allows for wrestling with historic, cultural, and social realities that impact their work, it promotes co-creation of knowledge, changes the hierarchy of the classroom, and it pushes students to dig deeper promoting the transition from word to action.

### **The Civically Engaged Rhetorician**

In her article “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change” Ellen Cushman calls for rhetoricians to take a more definitive step into the realm of civic engagement. She suggests that, “One way to increase our participation in public discourse is to bridge the university and community through activism<sup>8</sup>. Given the role rhetoricians have historically played in the politics of their communities, I believe modern rhetoric and composition scholars can be agents of social change outside the university” (Cushman 7). Service Learning Centers should not be the only hubs of civic engagement on university campuses; this is the purview of the rhetoric and composition classroom as well. Cushman suggests that in order to do this instructors should “take into our accounts of social change the ways in which people use language and literacy to

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<sup>8</sup> Given the particular attention to language throughout this project, it is worth noting here that “activism” is not a term that has been fully explored as a concept separate from charity, philanthropy, welfare, civic engagement, or service-learning. In the context of this paper, activism here is taken to mean civic engagement, though I acknowledge the potential for differentiation.

challenge and alter the circumstances of daily life...In other words, social change can take place in daily interactions when the regular flow of events is objectified, reflected upon, and altered” (12). This approach is a way to use life as text, in much the same way I have been analyzing rhetorical choices surrounding service for this project. Here Cushman seems to advocate for living a life of service rather than confining service endeavors to singular moments or projects. She hints at rhetorician’s unique position as a scholar of language and how this expertise should translate into our awareness of social inequality and our investment in fostering spaces in the higher education sphere that combat these inequalities. Our classrooms should mirror the societies we seek to create.

## CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY

### **Theoretical Basis**

During the summer of 2016 I conducted an original IRB-backed study that gathered data on the rhetoric charitable volunteers use when describing unfamiliar underserved populations. All of this data was then collected and analyzed looking for language patterns and potential shifts in rhetoric from the first activity throughout the course of the week. This case study combines rhetorical perspectives with intentional reflection principles from the service-learning sphere. The study takes into account rhetorical concepts mentioned in previous chapters such as terministic screens, identification, ideology, dehumanization, and relationships between the oppressor and oppressed. It also employs critical service-learning reflection techniques such as journaling and group discussions that aim to examine preconceptions and uncover root causes of social inequities.

### **Research Questions and Design**

This research project was predicated on the exploration of three central questions:

1. What sort of rhetorical choices are charitable volunteers currently making when describing the marginalized individuals they seek to serve?
2. What impact can guided intentional reflection activities have on these rhetorical choices?
3. What happens when you combine the terminology and approach of different service spheres into a single service experience?

In order to explore these questions I partnered with the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, a conference and retreat center in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Y Blue Ridge hosts service groups year round, offering them lodging on their campus and connecting them to aid

organizations across Western North Carolina with which to serve. This program is open to any interested group, but primarily targets college alternative break and youth mission trip groups. Having worked for this organization previously, I knew that the summer service demographic was primarily made up of youth groups on short-term mission trips. Participants ranged from middle and high school students to their adult chaperones. The volunteers worked with a variety of nonprofit organizations addressing service focuses in the Western North Carolina area such as food insecurity, poverty, homelessness, and environmental stewardship. The accompanying reflection activities asked questions about previous service involvement, tracked experiences throughout the service week, and examined the particulars of how students talked about those they served. Throughout the course of the summer I collected reflection data from seven different church youth groups with approximately 230 total participants<sup>9</sup>. Writing samples were collected through reflective activities before, during, and after the volunteers' weeklong stints of service. I will go into further detail on the particulars of these reflection activities later, but the overview and chronology of the activities is as follows:

1. Day 1 – Upon arrival before going to service sites volunteers wrote letters to themselves. For this letter volunteers were prompted to answer questions about their previous service involvement, expectations for the week, and preconceived notions of the populations they would be serving.<sup>10</sup> Materials used were simple pieces of notebook paper and writing utensils.

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<sup>9</sup> This number is an approximation as some individuals chose to abstain from reflection activities, were only there for some of the sessions, or participated, but did not receive parental permission for their reflections to be used in the study.

<sup>10</sup> At the end of their service week venture they were all given back this initial letter so that the group could reflect on their experience and potential growth away from the parameters of this study if they so chose.

2. Day 2 – This involved a group activity aimed at differentiating between forms of service. After being briefed on the definitions and differences of the terms groups brainstormed their own examples of service projects/initiatives that would fit into each of the categories. Materials used included giant post-it paper given to each group and markers from brainstorming.
3. Day 3 – We discussed the power of labels and how they have the potential to “other.” Volunteers first wrote names they have been called that hurt them, but soon after covered these with what they want to be known for. After this volunteers were asked to consider commonly accepted labels or stereotypes for the populations they were serving. Materials used were small sticky notes and writing utensils for individual words and giant post-it paper for display.<sup>11</sup>
4. Final Day – Volunteers were asked to write a letter telling a “future server” what they liked about serving, what was unexpected, what was difficult, and what they wished they knew before they served for the first time themselves. As with Day 1, materials used were simple pieces of notebook paper and writing utensils.

### **Variables and Limiting Conditions**

The variance in service experience of participants impacts this study in that some volunteers came from communities that may already practice critical service-learning methods, while others had never been on a mission trip before. However, this is the sort of variance you would expect when sampling any given random population. More important to note is that three of the groups that participated in this study had worked with me in the past. I worked as a volunteer

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<sup>11</sup> There was a reflection option for day four in which volunteers were asked to write about their service day first from their own perspective and then from the perspective of someone they met while serving. However, most groups opted out of this day for leisure time so there were not enough writing samples collected to merit analysis.

coordinator with YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly the previous summer, though we did not have an intentional reflection component to our service weeks at that time. This is worth noting as these groups had already established familiarity and trust with me, therefore they were more open to new activities and more willing to share freely in their reflections. Finally, I recognize that both the sample size and length of this study are too small to accurately suggest any changes in rhetorical choices by the volunteers will be lasting. However, each group experienced an intensive week of reflective service immersion that could hopefully serve as a building block for fostering more intentional and critical future service endeavors.

### **Collected Data**

As stated above, the collected writing samples began on day one of their service week with a letter to themselves. Throughout the summer these initial letters displayed a contrasting mix of trepidation and over-confidence. One common denominator was the level of candor; the students were certainly not shy about speaking their minds. One student noted, “I’m nervous about helping because sometimes it’s difficult to help people who are addicted...It’s also sometimes scary to see extreme poverty,” while another worried, “They might have had a rough life and could be fragile.” Comments like this generally suggest a lack of experience with vulnerable populations. Those that are more concerning to me were the ones that assert their dominance over the populations they sought to serve, albeit inadvertently. This was done through suggestions that those in need of assistance were incapable as volunteers made claims that they had come to serve for reasons such as, “I already know these people are troubled and need assistance from others,” “I am more fortunate than them and they need our help,” and “They can’t do it themselves.” These comments mirror some of the rhetoric from Chapter One’s discussion of service in the religious sphere. These comments rely on traditional charitable

conceptions of marginalized populations as helpless or perhaps even inept. These claims were often backed with religious authority, for example one letter reads, “I am here because people need my help and God has called me here.” As has been demonstrated in the previous two chapters, these minute rhetorical choices have the potential to impact entire service perspectives, regardless of how genuine the volunteers’ motivations may be.

Also prominent in the initial letters are comments that imply an expectation of reciprocity such as, “You are here on this mission trip at the YMCA because you believe the work you do will really make a difference. I think you also hope that you will make some sort of change or realization that will make a difference in you too.” This is a common sentiment in which a volunteer expects to experience personal transformation as a result of a service experience. This is subtle, but it suggests that for service to be worthwhile, it must come with a personal revelation. Another letter bluntly states, “They need our help. Hopefully they are nice.” This comment implies that those served should be thankful and show their appreciation outwardly in order to fulfill the volunteer’s expectations. In both of these examples the volunteer expects to get something in return, whether that be a personal revelation or apparent gratitude from those they serve. This is different than the reciprocity and mutuality discussed in the service-learning sphere as the volunteer is going into the service experience with an expectation that they have earned or are owed something from the marginalized populations they serve. These initial letters were used as a baseline to keep track of the change in rhetorical choices made by volunteers in other reflections throughout the week.

Day two’s group activity aimed at differentiating between four distinct forms of service: doing for, doing with, being for, and being with. I began by introducing these new terms to the volunteers and offering a few examples. “Doing for” focuses on what the problem is and how

you can solve it. While good intentions may abound, this model is transactional rather than interactional. It focuses on what you have to offer more than it does on an exchange, and that is where it becomes problematic. The “doing with” method is more about coming alongside those you are serving to work toward a goal together. This involves conversation and coming to an understanding and therefore humanizes those you serve. Using this as an alternative terministic screen can potentially avoid the othering. The third type, “being for,” focuses on advocacy, being a voice for those who are habitually unheard. Using this method of service involves lobbying for policy change through rallies, protests, writing to legislators, and generally spreading the word about the plight of those who are underserved. Again, this is an altogether different terministic screen that opens up another realm of possibilities for how to serve others. The fourth and final type is “being with.” This method is frustrating for many because it does not seem to involve direct action. In fact, the focus is rather on remaining still and being there to listen to those who simply need to share their story. This method of presence and rhetorical listening stands in direct opposition to the original model of “doing for” because it prizes fostering relationships over solving problems. After being briefed on the definitions and differences of the terms groups brainstormed their own examples of service projects/initiatives that would fit into each of the categories<sup>12</sup>. This day did not necessarily produce any rhetoric to analyze, but rather introduced new terministic screens that volunteers could employ when describing their service and relationships with those they served throughout the week.

On day three we discussed the power that labels and stereotypes can wield. We talked about how they have the potential to “other” and create dividing lines between groups. Using

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<sup>12</sup> The terms used in this section (do for, do with, be for, be with) were introduced to me in a service workshop by one of my undergraduate professors. In my research I have found that they are used in other sources, however I have been unable find their place of origin or an author who claims to have coined them.

sticky notes, volunteers first wrote names they have been called in the past that hurt them. Soon after, they covered these with sticky notes displaying what they most want to be known for in the future. After this, volunteers were asked to discuss commonly accepted labels or stereotypes for the populations they were serving throughout the week. The most popular word offered to describe popular conceptions of those marginalized population the volunteers had interacted with was “lazy.” Other negative labels included: addict, dirty, illegal, selfish, whore, worthless, nothing, useless, unwanted, attention seeking, and system-worker. These words could have been taken straight from portions of the philanthropy or government sections of this paper. This reflection activity shows that these negative conceptions are still pervasive in our society. Regardless of if the volunteers truly believed them, they had heard them before and knew them to be widely accepted stereotypes. They are woven into the fabric of our culture and in our history of service. In the same way that they covered their own negative words, the students then covered these stereotypes of marginalized peoples with sticky notes revealing what words they would use to describe some of the people they served after having the chance to talk and get to know them a bit better. These included: hardworking, funny, deserving, caring, generous, persistent, compassionate, grateful, loving, passionate, and humble. Through the process of forming relationships and examining personal bias, impressions of marginalized populations can dramatically change.

In the final reflection volunteers were asked to write a letter to a “future server.” In this letter they were told to discuss what they liked most about serving, what was unexpected, what they encountered that was difficult, and what they wish they had known before they served for the first time themselves. Some letters demonstrated direct use of the newly introduced terministic screens such as when a volunteer remarked that “service is not just helping other

people, it is also being with them too.” Others showed synthesis of concepts and consideration of the struggles that underserved populations face. For example, one volunteer counsels their future server by saying, “Don’t just do projects that you think would be helpful to someone, but rather get to know more about the group or people you wish to help and ask them for their needs. It is easy for us to think we know what a person needs to better their lives, but unless we have walked in their shoes we may not truly have a clue what things would help them.” These reflections are the first steps in breaking down the damaging oppressor vs. oppressed dichotomy. Some volunteers even recognized the total rhetorical overhaul necessary for critical reflection with comments noting their observation that, “This has been a type of immersion experience as if you were learning a new language.” This revelation is crucial. As the history of the service spheres suggests we have been making some of the same rhetorical missteps in the service sphere for centuries. A change requires new rhetorical choices that will hopefully change perspectives and approaches surrounding service. I do not think I could have stated better than one volunteer who wisely comments:

We live in a world that teaches us implicit bias, prejudice, and a whole host of other harmful attitudes that impact every choice we make including our drive toward altruism. What I mean by this is that even if you aren’t explicitly taught to have animosity toward other people groups, you were probably taught you were ‘more fortunate’ and therefore you should pity, fix, and/or save people who are different than you. Let me just go ahead and name all of that as a part of The Big Lie.

Many of these reflections demonstrated exponential growth in terms of diction and understanding of the larger context surrounding service including power structures, implicit bias, and institutionalized marginalization. However, a longer study would be needed to track the

longstanding impact on rhetoric and how this potentially influences volunteers' approach to future service endeavors.

### **Final Remarks**

Throughout both my case study and research I have found that service is most the effective and the least harmful when multiple service spheres are involved. When the charitable impulse to care for neighbors of the religious sphere is combined with the results driven, money-backed philanthropic sphere of business; or when the government's responsibility to invest in the health and general welfare of all citizens joins alongside the root cause and reflection-concerned sphere of higher education there is often unexpected success. Though the spheres often intend to remain separate, together they offer the potential to combine compassion, drive, funding, common sense, legal backing, structural support, critical thinking, and self-reflection. Though the approaches and perspectives may vary or even clash, all of these are necessary for service to be successful. If we truly wish to reach those lofty goals of service we must refuse to isolate our approaches. We cannot continue to compartmentalize our efforts to the detriment of those we seek to serve. We must instead embrace a holistic service ecosystem and in doing so we must also commit to choosing the words that shape our world more wisely.

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