



## Co-Sponsor H.R. 854 – Statements Endorsing the Peace Corps Commemorative

At the apex of American wealth and power during the Cold War, concerned politicians of both parties called for government to define what the nation stood for, not just what it stood against, in the "American Century." The establishment of the Peace Corps marked a critical moment when, for the first time, the U.S. government appealed to citizens to serve their country in the cause of international development and peace. The Peace Corps stretched the capacity of the nation to accept that others' interests have a place in foreign policy, even if a small one. It challenged cynicism as naive and allowed Americans to give practical expression to the finest ideals of the Declaration of Independence. In doing so, it demonstrated to the world and to Americans alike that self interest and service to others are not mutually exclusive. The Peace Corps gave expression to a fundamental American ideal, the idea that the power to do good is not inconsistent with geopolitical power even in the most difficult times. What gave this message its unusual potency in 1961 was that President Kennedy and the Congress did not create the Peace Corps alone. It grew out of popular demand. Called into being at the behest of citizens from around the nation, the Peace Corps enshrined the hope, going back to the nation's founding, that ordinary citizens, working alongside others, and motivated by the American values of voluntarism, personal responsibility, civic cooperation, and international respect for the dignity of human life, could help to create a better future. It captured the imagination of the world.

- **By, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman<sup>1</sup>**



### TO HONOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PEACE CORPS AND THE IDEALS AND VALUES UPON WHICH IT WAS FOUNDED

At the close of World War II in August, 1945, Winston Churchill said:

“[T]he United States stand at this moment at the summit of the world. I rejoice that this should be so. Let them act up to the level of their power and their responsibility, not for themselves but for others, for all men in all lands, and then a brighter day may dawn upon human history.”

In all the impressive array of American international initiatives in the post-war world -- including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, NATO, and the Marshall Plan -- few if any better expressed Churchill's idea of America's responsibilities than the Peace Corps. And none offered a comparable opportunity for ordinary Americans to contribute to their nation's relations with the rest of the world. The Peace Corps was a unique product of a unique moment in time, when American power was infused with idealism and purpose, and American foreign policy was guided by citizen engagement and citizen participation. The Peace Corps materially benefitted countless peoples in developing countries. Less measurably, but no less importantly, Peace Corps volunteers carried abroad -- say rather, *lived* abroad -- some of the republic's highest and best aspirations for itself and for "all men in all lands" as well. And they brought home with them some invaluable gifts, too -- like a heightened perception of what America looks like through the eyes of others, a deepened sense of membership in the global family of man, and a renewed respect for the values and institutions that have long made America itself so favored among nations.

- **By, David M. Kennedy<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman is the Dwight Stanford Professor of American Foreign relations at San Diego State University and the author of *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s* (Harvard University Press)

<sup>2</sup> David M. Kennedy is the Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History, Emeritus, at Stanford University. He is the author, among other works, of *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, which was awarded the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for History.

## RECOGNIZING THE LASTING AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PEACE CORPS' CREATION IN 1961



President John F. Kennedy's founding of the Peace Corps in 1961 is an event in American history of profound and lasting significance, both nationally and internationally, and it deserves permanent commemoration in the nation's capital.

In the aftermath of World War II, America's role in the world changed fundamentally. For the first time in American history, the U.S. alone had the economic, military and moral power to assist other nations while ensuring global peace. But this was a daunting challenge. While the Marshall Plan helped rebuild Europe, development aid proved marginally effective in post-colonial, Third World countries persistently mired in poverty and political instability. Not well understood culturally by the U.S., these countries were being wooed successfully by America's Cold War adversaries, despite U.S. efforts and influence. By the end of the 1950s, America's growing wealth, military strength and foreign policy elicited mixed feelings. Here and abroad, we were perceived by many as arrogant and lacking empathy. *The Ugly American*, published in 1958, illustrated these perceptions. Yet Americans wondered why their generous nature and righteous aims were unacknowledged and unappreciated around the world.

This historical context was midwife to the birth of the Peace Corps, envisioned not only as an antidote to the image of the Ugly American, but more importantly welcomed as a new, constructive component of U.S. foreign policy. Merging idealism and realism, the Peace Corps was to represent America by embodying and expressing, through unselfish action, America's humanitarian values and altruistic national character. In developing countries around the globe, volunteers would live and work with host country citizens in pursuit of three defined goals: to offer direct assistance; to learn about people in other cultures; and, equally important, to enable people in other cultures to learn first-hand about Americans. Since 1961, despite changes in political mood and economic conditions, despite changes in numbers of volunteers serving and countries served, the Peace Corps mission and meaning have remained immutable.

Establishment of the Peace Corps nearly a half century ago has positively affected millions of people in Africa, Asia, the western Pacific, Latin America and Europe. But it has achieved more. It has produced an enduring American legacy of service in the cause of peace, a timeless symbol of some of America's most honorable ideals and aspirations.

- By, Doris Kearns Goodwin<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin is a Pulitzer Prize winning historian. Among her books are *No Ordinary Time*, *Wait Till Next Year*, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, and *Lyndon Johnson*. Her most recent book is *Team of Rivals (The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln)*.

*The Peace Corps Commemorative Foundation (PCCF) was founded to facilitate the creation of a commemorative work in Washington, DC, to honor the establishment of the Peace Corps in 1961 and the ideals and values upon which it is based. For additional information please contact Jonathan Pearson at (202) 293-7728, ext. 21 or [jonathan@peacecorpsconnect.org](mailto:jonathan@peacecorpsconnect.org) with any questions or comments.*