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This Issue: Try to Shake Things Up With Your Dissent, by Teresa Baker '69



Dolores Janiewski '70 comforts a member of the Fountain House, a schizophrenic rehabilitation center in New York City. Therapy at Fountain House centers on activity, and social workers and interns join in the work. "I do everything in the snack bar," Dolores said, "from throwing out garbage to cleaning toilet bowls. I try to help the members succeed at something. I'm frustrated at times. It's hard always smiling, being kind and considerate."

Dolores is one of 20 Sarah Lawrence students who worked in the New York City Urban Corp intern program last summer.



"Try to shake things up with your dissent," the deputy mayor of New York City was speaking to an audience of over 2,500 college students (20 of them from Sarah Lawrence). It was June and the first day of the N.Y.C. Urban Corps' third summer intern program.

We seemed a small group, filling only a fraction of Madison Square Garden's new and capacious Felt Forum. It was flattering to hear Deputy Mayor Costello tell us that in the course of this summer we should be able to "mobilize energy fast enough to solve problems" and that he was interested in "immediate effects."

This was the spring of the Columbia riots, and this was three days after the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Yet he spoke with calm and with his psychologist's vantage point. He said, "Young people do not always know how to handle their guilt." Dissent as it existed at Columbia was not the only kind in Costello's eyes. He called for another form of dissent, which we were to begin to use that day. Constructive dissent was the phrase he offered, explaining, "the right to dissent may depend on how constructive it is."

Costello discarded implications that Columbia University was an isolated trouble area. "As if a Columbia could exist outside New York City!" he said. If we wanted to solve the problems of Columbia, he assured us that we had to also want to combat the insistent troubles of New York City.

By Teresa Baker '69

"TRY TO SHAKE THINGS UP WITH YOUR DISSENT,"

Most of us, I think, left that auditorium with glorious expectations of what we would be accomplishing in the summer. We had been dared to "shake up" the city government. With the summer now in the past, I can say that, of those interns from Sarah Lawrence, several did "shake things up," a little anyway. But many left the third month feeling like they, not the government, had been "shook up." Still, they were quick to say the experience was worth it. And all 20 Sarah Lawrence interns were anxious to describe what it was they found themselves up against in their offices or agencies:

"I wondered how they got anything done; it's so slow!"

"The one good person in our office is leaving."

"It was never clear what we were supposed to be doing."

"An awful lot of sloppy work!"

"No one knew what was going on."

"At times it frustrated the hell out of me."

I heard comments like these every week; it was my job to listen to them. Working in the administrative office of the Urban Corps, I talked with many interns, city administrators and community action workers.

Although they all would agree that the Urban Corps

was the best idea around for enlisting students in the service of the cities, they knew it could be better. The problems were many even within the understaffed, underfunded administration of the Urban Corps itself. For some the greatest problem was to convince the office they worked for that a college student was capable of accomplishing something or that the office itself was capable of doing more than it had.

Katy Ledford '71 was hired as a tutorial aide to work in the South Jamaica branch of the Youth Services Agency. When she arrived she found she would be doing no tutoring. Leading bicycle outings was the main part of her duties in entertaining about thirty neighborhood children. "You weren't giving them anything useful," she complained. "It isn't enough just to keep them busy. One of the workers suggested training the older ones to pass the civil service exams so they could get a job and earn some money. That would be a good idea."

But the older ones weren't responsive, anyway, Katy explained. They would say, "Ah, you can't do anything!" The younger ones were "more open as people" according to Katy. But the one tutorial aide in the office still couldn't handle them. "All the kids sat on the floor, while everyone else walked around doing their work. It was so noisy.



The Free Theater is about to perform on a street corner in Park Slope, a white ghetto in Brooklyn. The performers, all Urban Corps interns, played several shows a day all over the city. They pitched their improvisations to the mind of the particular audience to bring prejudice, especially racial, to the surface. Their concern was with the white middle class. They hoped to get under attitudes by provoking reaction and then discussion. Here, the theater's leader and creator, Arnold Middleman of New York University, has sounded his horn to start the show.

So they all just ran around. One of them was a pick-pocket."

The program could have done something, Katy said; but it didn't. "My supervisor didn't care what we did or whom we met, he didn't have to pay our salaries. (They were paid through the offices of the mayor.) So he didn't care. He said he didn't want any Urban Corps workers. I couldn't talk to him about anything."

Katy would not criticize the form of the program, the direct contact with the people. "But the actual workers were so haphazard in their work." She remembered, "They did do one good thing. They picketed a grocery store and the prices went down. The owner got really scared."

Another office of the program Katy worked for was on the corner of Second Avenue and 118th Street in Manhattan. Lorie Yarlow '70 worked there and found that it was possible to do something. In a typical week, Lorie and the four young neighborhood boys who made up her team of paid helpers, conducted three or four field trips. They took pre-schoolers to the Bronx Zoo, junior high kids to tour NBC, and high schoolers to see the show, "Walk Down My Street." It was a surprise to Lorie that she found herself so comfortable on the blocks so soon; she knew most of the children by name. But she was not without her frustrations. She had to start planning trips two weeks in advance. If the transportation was too complicated or expensive she had to cancel. Also, all the children had to have signed parent permission slips to go. They had to leave behind anyone who lost or forgot them or whose parents wouldn't sign them.

Janice Simpson '72 found frustration of a different sort. Hers was also a Youth Service office. But it had nothing to do with the neighborhood children, except accidentally. In fact, "There really wasn't enough to keep me busy," Janice said.

For Bonnyeclair Smith '69, who worked for Head Start, there was plenty to do. Her objection was to how it was done. Community Life Centers Incorporated, a Black agency funded by Head Start, was missing the boat in her opinion. "My big gripe is that, OK, so they're doing a lot; there is always a big improvement in the kids, like even 200 per cent. But they could improve much more by gearing more toward Black culture. Make the classroom more relevant to Black people."

Bonnye saw that they were "actually excluding Black culture" by avoiding the use of any picture or anything that reflected clear racial identification. Her other complaints described the common bureaucratic trials. "Too many kids. The chairs don't fit under the tables. A woman who is getting her masters in education bought all the materials. She also got this blackboard that you couldn't write on. All sorts of things like that made for an uneasy day."

Brumas Barron '71 suffered even worse bureaucratic tribulations, although she worked for an extra-governmental project. It was the Free Theater of New York, the brainchild of a New York University student who managed to get government funding. The Free Theater performed on the busiest street corners of Manhattan, the Bronx and Brooklyn to large, standing audiences. They chose white neighborhoods, because their message

Top left: Karen Gilbert '69 at the New York City Theatre Workshop where 100 children worked all winter preparing for summer productions.

Bottom left: Joan Griffin, graduate dance student, coordinated the production of a movie about Brooklyn's Park Slope. The filmmakers used crowd reaction to the Free Theatre and the institutions of Park Slope to help develop an awareness of the problems faced by it and similar communities in the city.



Upper right: A string of tennis shoes flies from a street lamp on the block where Janice Simpson '71 managed a "Youth on Wheels" office. She dispensed bikes for planned outings of the various Street Corps groups.

Lower right: (left to right) Barbara Huvumaki '69, Eli Hausknecht '70, Judy Parker '70, and Teresa Baker '69 were among the Urban Corps interns who had summer jobs in the offices of the mayor, city agencies and organizations. The program which the City of New York began three years ago is designed to provide students with an opportunity to learn about city government by doing actual work, provide a source of financial assistance to students, and attract them to public service.



“Our program wasn’t just a bandaid. . . . This was a little more, like mercurochrome maybe. It was stinging anyway, and it was doing something.”

was for the white middle class. The only black faces around were always those of three of the performers. They hoped to bring prejudice, especially racial, out into the open with their provocative shows. They usually succeeded easily; then they would move into the crowd and start talking about justice, the flag, and Negroes. These interns found they could truly “shake things up.”

The problems Brumas had were not from within the organization, but from without. It was her task to secure permits from the Department of Commerce and Industrial Development for every show, usually two a day. Not uncommonly, the group didn’t know whether it could perform at a location until the day of the performance. “One day,” she said, “I walked into the Department. The man I was to see was talking to a cop about our group. He said, ‘I really don’t know what’s wrong with this group we haven’t had any trouble with any other group in the city.’ The cops just didn’t know what to do with our group. So they created trouble by delaying the permits. They would say, ‘Why do you want to go into a community like that? Why don’t you go into the Black community and keep them busy?’” Brumas has an answer, “What do we have to tell Blacks about injustice?”

The police were suspicious of the Free Theater because it had people yelling in the streets at each performance. At one point in the show, the group asks for an audience vote on whether or not to shoot the black performer who is wrestling on the ground with a white performer. A plant in the crowd starts shouting, “Kill him, kill him!” The ice broken, the rest of the crowd then starts saying what they really think. The performers spread into the excited audience and turn the reactions into dialogue. It was an amazing thing to watch. As Brumas said, “Our program wasn’t just a bandaid as Barry Gottehrer (an aide to Lindsay) has said most of the summer programs are. This was a little more. Like mercurochrome maybe. It was stinging anyway, and it was doing something.”

No other interns were as successful as the Free Theater at “shaking things up,” But Nancy Jervis ’69 and the film crew she worked with also found that it was possible to really accomplish something. The crew was composed entirely of Urban Corps interns. Together they produced a film about the Phoenix Houses of New York City where addicts work things out in a community atmosphere. “We lived in the house for awhile first and really got to know the place. Addicts are just people with a particular kind of problem. They are very sensitive to the ills of our society. They are very articulate. We narrated the film through the voice of an addict.”

The usual red tape plagued this group, too. “We spent a whole week talking to people in the agency so that we wouldn’t step on anyone’s toes,” Nancy said. But that

was more understandable to her than the time that they couldn’t get any film. “We were renting equipment that costs thousands. We were out of film and lost a whole day of shooting time simply because we had to buy it through one store with a city contract. The store couldn’t get it to us in time for some reason.”

Joan Griffin; graduate dance student, helped with the coordination between the film crew and the people in the agency. She became so sold on the importance of the work of the Phoenix House that she now plans to use her dancing as a rehabilitative tool. She is hoping to teach there on a part-time basis during the school year.

Another house, the Fountain House, a schizophrenic rehabilitation center, had two Sarah Lawrence interns. Shoshanna Zwickelberg ’70 and Dolores Janiewski ’70 joined the “members” in two of their business enterprises, the thrift shop and the snack bar. Therapy is activity there, and the Urban Corps interns joined in the work. “I do everything in the snack bar,” Dolores said, “from throwing out garbage to cleaning toilet bowls. I try to help the members succeed at something. I’m frustrated at times. It’s hard always smiling, being kind and considerate. We have to learn how to do these things so we can teach the others.”

Shoshanna noticed that “the emphasis of the place is on extroverting people,” something which she believed Sarah Lawrence could use too. To improve Fountain House, both girls suggested more structure, more staff, and more young people with the necessary enthusiasm.

The calmer Urban Corps jobs and the least frustrated interns were found in the American Museum of Natural History. They didn’t have the chance to “shake things up,” but they did get incomparable experience in their fields of interest. “Between what I do and the people I meet, I mean, what could be better?” said Cynthia Goddard ’71. Her research for a curator of Asian ethnology gave her fresh insights into a recent sociology paper she had written on the structure of the Negro family, and it has inspired her to pioneer in the field of urban anthropology.

Nadine Seltzer ’69 was also attracted by the people at the museum. “Scientists are fascinating people who are fascinated by the mind. And every other scientist is a musician here.” In the ichthyology department, Nadine reclassified the skeletons of dry fish. “I really got a feeling of what an academic atmosphere is. It’s not like the real world. It’s relaxed.”

Barbara Havumaki ’70 had a position similar to those at the museum. Working for the Metropolitan Regional Council, she researched everything from air and water pollution to recreation and open space to jet noise. “It’s



Brumas Barron '71 prepares to accompany the Free Theatre on her tambourine.

a very relaxed and constructive atmosphere here," she said. "Terrific people. They get a lot done. Constantly on the ball. As a result of this job, I've given a lot of consideration to going into government."

The Metropolitan Regional Council is a specially-funded, new organization and not actually part of the government of New York City. The girls who did research for regular government offices found it less exciting, but still worthwhile.

As Judy Parker '71 put it, "The actual work was often very boring, but I was finding out about government. At least I felt I was doing something constructive. It's important to be doing work for people who need it." Judy worked for the Mayor's Commission on Physical Fitness and the Urban Action Task Force. Her office ran a program called "Broadway in the Streets" which brought movies and entertainers into ghetto neighborhoods for free. Some had criticized the program as just a diversion, but Judy reasoned, "New York City is an entertainment center, yet there are millions of people who have never seen a show. Entertainment is a really good thing for people who have bad lives."

"The whole Task Force serves as a problem squelcher," Judy went on, "but it also enables the people to be heard and then their problems to be acted upon."



Lorie Yarlow '70 organized and conducted cultural and recreational activities for the neighborhood children around her New York Street Corps Office at 118th Street and Second Avenue. The City's Youth Service Agency runs the program in 27 poverty areas.

She added that the job had been a great opportunity for her to see what government is and could be.

Karen Gilbert '69 also found herself doing boring work, but staying on because she believed so much in the program she was with. She worked in the office of the New York City Theater Workshop which trained and directed 100 children in a full stage production. "It was the greatest thing I've ever participated in. Those kids had been in intensive training all winter. They were so disciplined, it gave me inspiration."

The jobs these Sarah Lawrence girls did are fairly representative of the variety available through the Urban Corps. Each intern applies for a position according to his interests. He qualifies through the Federal workstudy program on his campus. Among the other kinds of internships were psychiatric aides and lab technicians in hospitals, announcers and researchers for a city radio program, interviewers for the Urban Coalition, community workers for the Model Cities program, and legal aides for community legal services.

Mayor John V. Lindsay has commented nationally that the Urban Corps could take 10,000 more students into New York City immediately. He has backed the program as an alternative to military service. With the money and the Congressional support, it could happen.

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