

**Justice Talking:
Six Years of Conversation and Reflection on the Meaning of Service
Illinois AmeriCorps Programs
Various Locations in Illinois
2006 - 2007**

Introduction

Now entering its sixth year, Justice Talking (JT) is a unique discussion series which gives AmeriCorps volunteers, staff, and alumni an opportunity to reflect on their chosen form of civic engagement. JT generates challenging, open discussions about service, justice and civic engagement. Each session is oriented around one or two brief but provocative readings. Group size stays below fifteen, when possible, and all sessions are facilitated by an instructor attentive to the questions raised by the participants as well as the readings. Whether we look at Jean-Jacques Rousseau's consideration of our obligation to others, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's portrait of service gone awry, or Langston Hughes' treatment of the consequences of difference, the goal of the JT series is clear: to think, speak, and listen carefully, with the hope that we can enhance our understanding of why we do what we do—and thereby improve what we do.

Participants

JT has served volunteers, staff, and alumni at Public Allies, Project YES, Hope Worldwide, PCC Westside AmeriCorps, City Year Chicago, Center for Urban School Improvement AmeriCorps, and CAAAELII. It is also intended to function as a pilot program for other state national AmeriCorps organizations, and to cultivate a corps of facilitators from within the partner organizations themselves. JT is a program sponsored by the Illinois Humanities Council.

Guiding Questions and Readings

The set of themes and readings is dynamic. Groups are encouraged to make suggestions which the JT series endeavors to incorporate. Planned for the 2006-2007 series:

- What is the meaning and content of their commitment to public service?
- What does it mean to choose to serve?
- What or whom are we serving, and why?
- What is social justice, and what is the character of its call?

Sessions	Readings	Guiding Questions
Session 1	Second Samuel, 11-12:15 “America” by J.M. Whitfield	What is injustice?
Session 2	“Republic” by Plato (four excerpted definitions) “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr.	What is justice?
Session 3	“Reveries of the Solitary Walker” by Jean-Jacques Rousseau “The Lovers of the Poor” by Gwendolyn Brooks “The Use of Force” by William Carlos Williams	What is compassion? What is duty?
Session 4	“I Shall Not Beg for My Rights” by Henry MacNeal Turner United States Constitution, Amendments 1-10 United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights	What is a right? What does it mean to claim a right?
Session 5	“Autobiography” by Benjamin Franklin (excerpts) “Where Were We” by Dave Eggers	Why do we try to do (or be) good? How do we do good?
Session 6	“Recitatif” by Toni Morrison “The Lives of Animals” by J.M. Coetzee “Reflections on Gandhi” by George Orwell “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes	What others, or what sorts of others, do we care for?
Session 7	“The Drum Major Instinct” by Martin Luther King, Jr. “Luella Miller” by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman	Why choose to serve?
Session 8	“The Wife of his Youth” by Charles Chesnutt	What should social leadership look like?

Special Features of this Conversation

In the Chicago area, the JT series tends to meet for seven 90-minute sessions over a span of a few months. For AmeriCorps organizations whose members are geographically scattered, JT would be most effective as part of quarterly retreats. JT is flexible enough – in terms of logistics and content – to meet the specific needs posed by a diverse range of organizations.

Feedback

- *I think this was one of the best parts of Public Allies, a chance to sit and think without being 'trained.'* (Public Allies Volunteer)
- *The discussions prompted me to evaluate service/justice/etc. for the first time really. I was able to find a vocabulary to describe my ideas and feelings.* (PCC Westside AmeriCorps Volunteer).
- *More than anything, know that the JT program is making an impact on my life as I venture into this life after formal education. These discussions are very much welcome and I am grateful.* (Hope Worldwide AmeriCorps Volunteer).

Facilitator

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