



James Youniss is a professor of Psychology at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He is currently interested in integrating concepts of youth development with political socialisation through research on youth activism. His most recent books are *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth* (University of Chicago Press, 1997) and *Roots of Civic Identity: International Perspectives on Community Service and Activism in Youth* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Both are co-authored with Miranda Yates.



Edward Metz received his doctoral degree in Human Development in 2003 from The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where he is a research associate. His current research focuses on how school-based community service requirements affect adolescents' political and civic development.

September 11, Service and Activism

A longitudinal study of American high school students

JAMES YOUNISS AND EDWARD METZ

SUMMARY

For the past decade, we have studied high school community service programmes for the purpose of learning more about the conditions that promote students' civic development. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, happened to coincide with the final year of our study of a suburban public high school near Boston, MA.¹ This timing permitted us to assess youths' views of the tragic events, and whether 9/11 had an effect on their civic engagement scores.

Short-term results revealed an immediate increase in students' political interest, an immediate decrease in tolerance for free speech, and no changes in intended future civic participation. Nine months later, students' civic

engagement scores returned to pre-9/11 levels. Descriptive findings showed that most students' understanding of the world was changed after 9/11. Fewer students, however, reported that their view of themselves had changed.

We were also able to determine whether or not students' active responses through community service had an effect on their scores on a series of civic engagement indices. The majority of students responded by attending memorial services or vigils, donating blood or supplies, or organising service pertinent to 9/11's aftermath. Statistical analyses showed that student activists who organised service had enhanced and sustained levels of intended civic participation and tolerance for free speech compared with students who responded through other means or not at all. Analyses also showed that students who attended memorials or vigils had enhanced and sustained political interest compared to non-respondents.

Introduction

For the past decade, we have studied high school community service programmes in order to learn more about the conditions that promote students' civic development. Our theory is that service has the potential to take young people out of their narrow daily worlds and to set them in a position to reflect on society and to test themselves as actors within it.

Our research has pointed out important differences among service programmes. Programmes which seem most effective provide students with a clear and compelling rationale for service, and challenge students to draw on skills they did not know they had. They put students in contact with people in different circumstances from theirs, experiencing problems different from theirs, and allow students to view their service as part of a collective value orientation that has transcendent historical meaning (e.g. Metz and Youniss 2003, Metz, et al. 2003, McLellan and Youniss 2003, Yates and Youniss 1999, Youniss and Yates 1997). This is why many nations require service of their youth as a rite of passage that brings them into the community and moves them toward active and participatory citizenship.

There happens to be solid data to support the viewpoint that service and activism during youth can lead to longer-term civic involvement. For example, Fendrich (1993) and McAdam (1988) report longitudinal findings from adults who, in their youth, participated in the civil rights movement in the American South, risking their safety to help the cause of racial integration. When these activists had reached middle-age, they differed from their peers with similar backgrounds, but who did not partake in the movement during their youth. Jennings (2002) has reported parallel results in his longitudinal study of anti-war activists. Civil rights and anti-war activists matured into adult citizens who were more likely to vote, to belong to voluntary associations, and to be involved in organising their communities. It is worth noting that these longitudinal results are also supported by retrospective studies in which recalled activism vs non-activism, differentiated mid-life adults on these same civic measures (DeMartini 1983, Stewart, Settles & Winter 1998, Youniss, McLellan & Yates 1997).

We view our own work with high school students as relevant to this set of findings. We do not equate most high school service with, say, participating in the civil rights struggle. But we agree with Jennings (2002) who proposed that whereas one cannot reproduce the civil rights or Vietnam era, one can arrange 'proto-collective action such as that represented by school politics and organisational endeavours'. (p322) We would include service as one such activity, especially service for which there is a clear and convincing rationale that can help connect youth to worthwhile historical traditions.

Programmes which seem most effective provide students with a clear and compelling rationale for service

September 11 and the present study

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States occurred in the midst of our most recent study of a community service programme at a public high school. We had been tracking the class of 2002 for two years and had just begun the final year of the study when 9/11 occurred during these students' senior year. Some observers speculated that these events might spark an upsurge in civic engagement in citizens in general and youth in particular (National Organisation for Research at the University of Chicago 2001, Galston 2001, Kennedy Manzo 2001, Putnam 2002). There was anecdotal support for the notion that 9/11 would galvanise American citizens, from the sudden upsurge in patriotic signs and flags, to repeated references to America's history, and media descriptions of citizens working together on local and national responses to the crisis. Young people were involved in discussions about the ramifications of the attacks and on topics such as protecting civil liberties, racial profiling, and tolerance for alternative viewpoints (Gordon 2001, Simpson 2001). Schools and religious organisations held forums at which such matters were aired from several sides. The military campaign undertaken in Afghanistan added new issues to the public discourse that continues even today with the war in Iraq. In the weeks after the attacks, reports indicated 70 per cent of Americans gave time or money to charities (Independent Sector 2001), trust in the government increased (Putnam 2002), and television ratings for the evening news swelled (Althaus 2002).

The first purpose of the present study was to assess the effect of 9/11 on students' views, and whether the event altered students' pre/post scores on a series of civic engagement measures. The second purpose was to examine differential responses to 9/11, with special interest in students who responded actively by becoming mobilisers of community service for others. Our hypothesis was that students who took action by organising or participating in service through community organisations would probably have gained a sense of effectiveness, leading to enhanced civic engagement that would not have come from more passive engagement.

Method

The public high school in the present study was located in a suburban middle-class town near Boston, Massachusetts, with a population of approximately 25 000. Students in this school were typical for their age and status in having active and demanding lives, normal concerns regarding academic achievement and involvement in extracurricular activities and sports. Almost 80 per cent of the students in the school were white, and more than 90 per cent of graduates of this school went on to college.

The region in which the school was located was implicated in the 9/11 attacks, as two of the four hijacked aeroplanes had departed from Logan International Airport in Boston. Some victims on these planes were from the town, and numerous victims in New York City had come from the Boston area. Almost 40 per cent of the

students reported having known a friend or family member of a victim. As was the case in communities across the United States, various organisations in the town arranged memorial services and vigils soon after the attack in honour of the victims and to show solidarity with the nation. The school held assemblies for students and guidance counsellors provided support to students who were experiencing emotional difficulties. In sum, the town and school offered citizens, young and old, an opportunity to reflect on the events and the future after 9/11.

Participants

A total of 140 of 211 students (66 per cent) from the class of 2002 were included in the present study because they had the necessary data present at three points in time: the end of 11th grade or prior to 9/11 (May 2001, Time 1), the start of 12th grade or one month after 9/11 (October 2001, Time 2), and the end of 12th grade or nine months after 9/11 (May 2002, Time 3). Because we had collected data on the same measures of engagement the year before from the class of 2001, these students were used as a comparison group. A total of 156 of 223 students (70 per cent) from the class of 2001 were present at the three corresponding points in time: the end of 11th grade (May 2000), the start of 12th grade (October 2000), and the end of 12th grade (May 2001). The main reason for attrition was due to student absence on the day the survey was administered.

Background variables

Background variables included records of parents' volunteering (volunteers vs. non-volunteers), mothers' level of education (college degree vs. no degree), importance of religion (5-point scale), and students' grade point averages from 11th grade (GPA, maximum of 4). Because personal characteristics may have influenced involvement in activities such as service or extracurricular activities, personality measures controlled for dispositions of helping and empathy (Penner, Fritzsche, Cragner & Freifeld 1995). As a measure of extracurricular involvement during grade 11, students were asked how often they participated in school sports, clubs, and government. Volunteer records included service that was done beyond a school-based 40-hour service mandate. There were no differences between classes in background variables.

Two items gauged students' views on 9/11. Three scaled measures assessed students' civic engagement four months before, one month after, and nine months after 9/11.

9/11 measures

At Times 2 and 3, students were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the following statements: 'The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 changed how I view the world,' and 'The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 changed how I see myself.'

Civic engagement measures

Three measures tapped into students' capacity to be interested in, to understand, and to become involved as active citizens in a democratic society: political interest, intended future civic participation, and tolerance for free speech. All were assessed at Times 1, 2, and 3.

Political interest consisted of how often students:

- discussed politics with their parents;
- read about politics or watched the news on television; and
- were involved in discussions on democracy or civic participation at their school.

Students responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=never to 5=daily. Reliability for the scale yielded Cronbach alphas of .73 at Time 1, .65 at Time 2, and .66 at Time 3.

Intended future civic participation consisted of the likelihood students would:

- join a boycott;
- demonstrate for a cause;
- do volunteer service;
- sign a petition for a cause;
- make a statement at a public meeting; and
- write a letter to a newspaper about an issue.

Students responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=not very likely to 5=definitely will. Reliability for the scale yielded Cronbach alphas of .85 at Time 1, .81 at Time 2, and .80 at Time 3. Past research demonstrates that expressed intentions to act in a particular way have been found to predict actual subsequent behaviours (Azjen 2001).

Tolerance for free speech was assessed by the single item: 'There are always people whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous by others. For instance, consider somebody who is against a particular religion (for example, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, etc.). If this person wanted to make a public speech, should he be allowed to?' Students responded to this question on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=definitely not to 5=definitely.

Results

The results of the study are set out in two parts below. Part I examines students' views of 9/11, and whether the event had a measurable effect (after one month and nine months) on students' civic engagement scores. Part II explores variations in students' responses to 9/11 as well as students' individual differences. Subsequent analyses tested whether various responses to 9/11 influenced students' civic engagement scores differently.

Part I

9/11's effect on students' views of the world and self

One month and nine months after 9/11, 73 per cent of students in the class of 2002 agreed that the terrorist attack changed their world view. While most students' views of the world had been altered, there was less agreement that their view of themselves had changed. At both one month and nine months after 9/11, fewer than 35 per cent of students agreed that their view of themselves had changed because of the attacks.

9/11's effect on students' civic engagement

Paired *t* tests examined changes in civic engagement scores in the class of 2002 before and after 9/11. Students in the class of 2001 were also tested over a corresponding period of time as a control. Analyses measured the immediate (Time 1 to Time 2) and longer-term effect of 9/11 at nine months (Time 1 to Time 3), and were performed for political interest, intended civic participation, and tolerance for free speech. Paired *t* tests revealed that 2002 students' political interest increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(140) = 4.45$, $p < .01$, but did not change from Time 1 to Time 3.

Analyses also revealed no differences in these students' intended future civic engagement at any time. Paired *t* tests revealed that 2002 students' tolerance for free speech decreased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(140) = 3.97$, $p < .01$. However, Time 1 to Time 3 analyses revealed no differences as students' tolerance for free speech returned to pre-9/11 levels. In the class of 2001, there were no changes in students' political interest or intended civic participation at either time. Yet, paired *t* tests revealed that these students' tolerance for free speech increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(156) = 4.66$, $p < .01$, and from Time 1 to Time 3, $t(156) = 6.74$, $p < .01$. Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations for both classes at Times 1, 2, and 3.

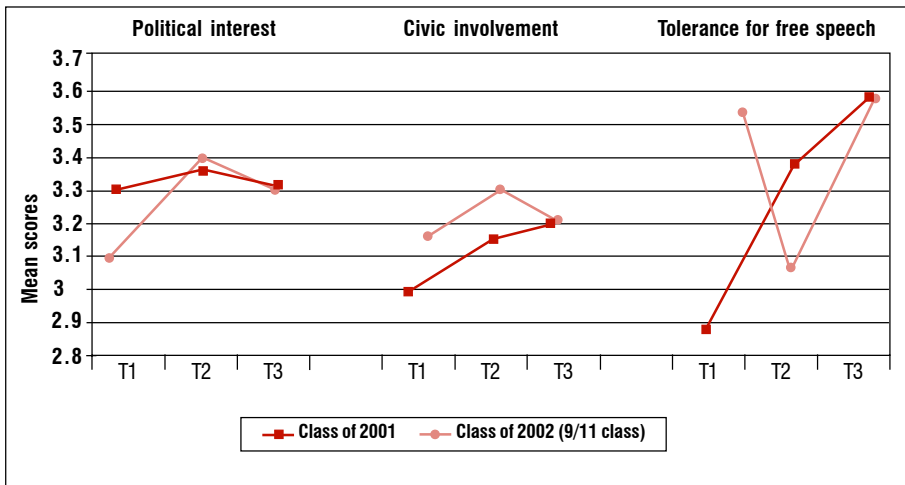
TABLE 1 Mean scores out of 5 for students' political interest, intended civic involvement, and tolerance for free speech by class over time

		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Political interest	N	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD
Class of 2001	156	3.31 (.91)	3.34 (.93)	3.32 (.90)
Class of 2002	140	3.08 (.89)	3.40 ^a (.84)	3.30 (.87)
Future intended civic participation				
Class of 2001	156	2.99 (.71)	3.14 (.67)	3.19 (.59)
Class of 2002	140	3.16 (.62)	3.28 (.63)	3.22 (.67)
Tolerance for free speech				
Class of 2001	156	2.87 (1.34)	3.38 ^c (1.38)	3.57 ^c (1.11)
Class of 2002	140	3.53 (1.12)	3.04 ^b (1.34)	3.55 (1.08)

Note: For the class of 2002, Time 1 was four months prior to 9/11, Time 2 was one month after 9/11, and Time 3 was nine months after 9/11.

- ^a Paired *t* tests revealed that students' political interest in the class of 2002 increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2.
- ^b Paired *t* tests revealed that students' tolerance for free in the class of 2002 decreased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, but remained constant from Time 1 to Time 3.
- ^c Paired *t* tests revealed that students' tolerance for free speech in the class of 2001 increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, and from Time 1 to Time 3.

FIGURE 1 Mean scores out of 5 and Standard Deviations for students' political interest, intended civic involvement, and tolerance for free speech before (T1), one-month (T2), and nine-months (T3) after 9/11 for the class of 2002. Scores from the previous year from class of 2001 are listed as a comparison



Part II

Students' responses to 9/11

Having assessed the effect on all students in the class of 2002, we were next interested in students' efforts in response to 9/11. In the October survey, approximately four weeks after 9/11, we asked students in the class of 2002 whether they had:

- attended a memorial or candlelight vigil;
- donated to causes related to 9/11;
- performed service related to 9/11; or
- done nothing in particular.

Students were also asked if responding to September 11 was meaningful and to explain why.

Memorial services/vigils

Seventy-one per cent of seniors had attended a memorial service or a vigil, such as the candlelight vigil held four days after 9/11 in the town square. Students said they were moved emotionally by such public events that took place just days after the attack. A female vigil attendee wrote, 'My friends and I held candles in the center of town and we sang patriotic songs. Many people came out to join us and cars honked as they drove by. It showed how much the community was coming together.' A male student who attended an ecumenical service at his church wrote, 'To see everyone come together in the interfaith ceremony and put down their differences was most meaningful to me.' Themes of unity and patriotism were repeated by the majority of students who participated in these kinds of events.

Giving money and donating blood or clothes

Post-9/11, there was ample opportunity for Americans to contribute to fundraisers and to donate money to relief efforts. A large portion (64 per cent) of the class of 2002 did so. Many gave through the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund, others through a school fundraiser, while still others gave at their church or temple. Some students' written responses expressed their feelings of inadequacy donating money. A male student reflected, 'I didn't really feel like there was anything I could do besides give money. I wish there was something else I could do to make use of myself.' A smaller portion of students (16 per cent) donated blood and clothes to aid victims and relief efforts. A male said, 'I had never donated blood before 9/11. I think it is one of the few things I could have done that would make a difference at this point.'

Service

In response to 9/11, 18 per cent of seniors said they had performed community service, often in addition to having attended memorials or vigils or having donated money, clothes, or blood. All of students' service in response to 9/11 was performed under the auspices of the school or community institutions, and took the form of organising and managing public events or leading discussions on 9/11. Examples of the former included organising blood drives or raising money for victim's families through the Red Cross and other community organisations. Several students organised one such fundraiser within their school. A male member of the drama club wrote, 'We decided to organise a fundraiser with proceeds from the Senior Class Play going to the

Students' service in response to 9/11 took the form of organising and managing public events or leading discussions on 9/11

American Red Cross as a gesture that our high school is behind the effort to help victims as well.' Other students organised and assisted in running the town candlelight vigil, ecumenical services at their church, or the school assembly. One female student reflected, 'I helped set up and run the candlelight vigil at my church. It was a very emotional, peaceful, and moving experience to be involved. I felt good for helping out.'

Non-respondents

Overall, 85 per cent of students responded to September 11 with one or more forms of action. Fifteen per cent of students, however, did not report active involvement related to September 11.

Because many students were involved in multiple forms of response, students were categorised into four response groups based on the following hierarchy. Students who performed service, regardless of whether they had donated or attended a memorial event, were placed in the server group (n=25). Those who had donated supplies or given blood, regardless of whether they had attended a memorial event, were placed in the donor (n=22) group.² Students in the commemorator group (n=73) had neither performed service nor donated in response to 9/11. Students in the non-respondent group (n=21) were not involved in these forms of activities. The remaining portion of this section elaborates on differences in background variables related to students' responses, and examines whether responses to 9/11 influenced their civic engagement.

Individual differences in responding to 9/11

Past research has demonstrated that a major methodological issue confronting all non-experimental studies of service is whether service leads to changes in outcomes, or whether individual differences lead some students to self-select into service while

discouraging others (Stukas, Clary & Snyder 1999). In the current study, students who responded as servers had higher mean scores on several background measures. For example, servers were more likely to be female, they were more involved in school clubs and had higher scores on the empathy measure when compared to students in the other response groups. Students who were non-respondents had lower scores on importance of religion and their parents had volunteered the least. While acknowledging that such individual differences were likely to have played a role in whether and how students responded to 9/11, the second part of this study examined the role of service in response to 9/11 as a facilitator of students' civic engagement. Mean scores and percentages of background variables by students' response to 9/11 are noted in Table 2.

Servers were more likely to be female, they were more involved in school clubs and had higher scores on the empathy measure when compared to students in the other response groups

TABLE 2 Mean scores and percentages of background variables by response groups to 9/11

	Servers	Commemorators	Donors	Non-respondents
	n = 25	n = 73	n = 22	n = 21
Percentage male	28%	53%	64%	62%
Percentage whose parents volunteered	60%	53%	68%	48%
Percentage of mothers with degree	72%	73%	74%	81%
Percentage that volunteered grade 11	75%	57%	50%	65%
GPA	3.02	3.02	2.85	3.47
Importance of religion	2.82	2.88	2.89	2.47
Helping	3.38	3.29	3.33	3.01
Empathy	3.77	3.56	3.43	3.41
School sports involvement	3.78	3.78	3.68	2.83
School club involvement	3.24	2.78	2.73	2.56
School government involvement	1.92	1.67	1.82	1.22

Note: GPA and Importance of religion were on a four-point scale. The items thereafter were on a five-point scale.

Responses to 9/11 and views of the world and themselves

Less than 45 per cent of students who did nothing in response to 9/11 agreed that their view of the world had been changed at one month and nine months after 9/11. Seventy to 90 per cent of students who responded to 9/11 (servers, commemorators, and donors) agreed that their view of the world had been changed at one- and nine-months after 9/11.

Almost 55 per cent of servers agreed that their view of themselves had been changed by 9/11 at one month and nine months. About 30 per cent of commemorators and donors and about 10 per cent of non-responders agreed that their view of themselves had been changed at one month and nine months.

Responses to 9/11 and changes in students' civic engagement

Paired *t* tests were employed to examine the immediate (Time 1 to Time 2) and longer-term (Time 1 to Time 3) changes in civic engagement scores among the four response groups. Paired *t* tests revealed that servers' political interest increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(25) = 2.61, p < .05$, but did not change from Time 1 to Time 3. Paired *t* tests showed that servers' intended future civic participation increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(25) = 3.12, p < .01$, and from Time 1 to Time 3, $t(25) = 2.33, p < .05$. Paired *t* tests revealed that servers' tolerance for free speech remained stable from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(25)$, but increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 3, $t(25) = 2.31, p < .05$. Paired *t* tests revealed that donors' political interest increased from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(21) = 2.83, p < .01$, but did not change from Time 1 to Time 3. There were no changes in donors' intended civic participation or tolerance for free speech at any time. Paired *t* tests revealed that commemorators' political interest increased from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(73) = 2.45, p < .05$, and from Time 1 to Time 3, $t(73) = 2.70, p < .05$. There were no changes in commemorators' intended civic participation at either time. Paired *t* tests revealed that commemorators' tolerance for free speech declined significantly from Time 1 to Time 2, $t(73) = 3.17, p < .01$, but remained constant from Time 1 to Time 3. There were no differences in mean scores in any of the three civic engagement measures among non-respondents. Table 3 lists the means and standard deviations for each response group over time, and the significant paired *t* test analyses.

TABLE 3 Mean scores (out of 5) for students' political interest, intended civic participation, and tolerance for free speech by response groups to 9/11 over time

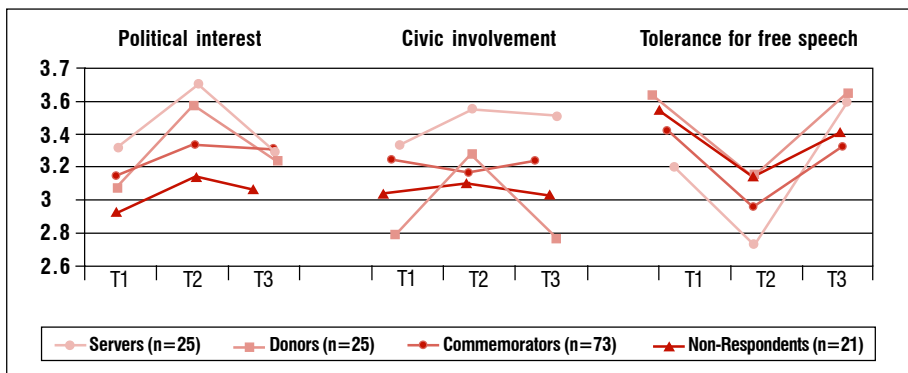
		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Political interest	N	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD
Servers	25	3.28 (.63)	3.67 ^a (.67)	3.31 (.62)
Donors	22	3.06 (.87)	3.56 ^a (.73)	3.24 (.88)
Memorial Attendees	73	3.13 (.90)	3.33 ^a (.87)	3.31 ^b (.90)
Non-Respondents	21	2.89 (1.09)	3.17 (.93)	3.07 (.99)
Intended civic participation				
Servers	25	3.29 (.51)	3.51 ^a (.60)	3.55 ^b (.66)
Donors	22	2.97 (.69)	3.26 ^a (.67)	2.95 (.64)
Memorial Attendees	73	3.22 (.62)	3.18 (.60)	3.22 (.67)
Non-respondents	21	3.06 (.62)	3.09 (.65)	3.09 (.63)
Tolerance for free speech				
Servers	25	3.20 (1.19)	2.75 (1.33)	3.60 ^b (.98)
Donors	22	3.64 (1.03)	3.13 (1.35)	3.64 (1.08)
Memorial Attendees	73	3.50 (1.10)	3.14 ^c (1.39)	3.41 (1.18)
Non-respondents	21	3.42 (1.26)	2.95 (1.31)	3.30 (1.13)

Note: For all groups, Time 1 was four months prior to 9/11, Time 2 was one month after 9/11, and Time 3 was nine months after 9/11.

^a Paired *t* tests revealed a significant increase in mean scores from Time 1 to Time 2.

^b Paired *t* tests revealed a significant increase in mean scores from Time 1 to Time 3.

^c Paired *t* tests revealed a significant decrease in mean scores from Time 1 to Time 2.

FIGURE 2 Mean scores out of 5 for students' political interest, intended civic involvement, and tolerance for free speech before (T1), one month (T2), and nine months (T3) after 9/11 for the class of 2002 by students' responses

Conclusion

The short- and longer-term impact of 9/11

The September 11 terrorist attack had an immediate and far-reaching impact on people in the United States and the world. The destruction of symbolic property, the loss of approximately 3 000 lives, and the supposed purpose behind the events, caused the nation to reflect on its political and economic position in the world. Given the recent history of the United States, 9/11 and the ensuing war in Iraq stand as the major geo-political events in the lives of today's young Americans. It is potentially for them the WWII or civil rights movement of their grandparents' era, or the Vietnam War of their parents' generation.

In our study, more than 70 per cent of the students agreed that 9/11 changed their understanding of the world one month and nine months later. In our measures of civic engagement, 9/11 also appeared to have altered, albeit temporarily, students' views. For one thing, students gravitated toward watching the news on television and toward discussing the events and their meaning with parents and friends, and classmates in school. Students also exhibited less tolerance for free speech immediately after 9/11, highlighting the tenuous nature of balancing individuals' civic liberties with the safety of a larger community in a democratic society. Neither effect was sustained after nine months, as students' scores returned to their pre- 9/11 levels. These findings mirror those reported for American adults over the same period of time (Traugott, Brader & Coral 2002).

Findings from our study also speak to youths' responses to 9/11. As in other communities in the United States, we found that the students at this high school had limited opportunities to respond actively to 9/11, as the immediate manifestations of the attacks did not coalesce into concerted and ongoing action. For instance, while more than 60 per cent of our students volunteered the year prior to 9/11, less than 20 per cent of students were able to volunteer in response to 9/11. Skocpol (2002) and other commentators have assessed this phenomenon and astutely noted that the opening stages of the nation's war against terrorism, unlike other wars, left Americans with an urge to act, but uncertainty about how to do so constructively. In the absence of such mobilisation, it is not surprising that only a few high school students found concrete ways to invest their energies more deeply in our political system.³ Yet, because of the ongoing war in Iraq, the first portion of findings from this study must be viewed as preliminary. 9/11 may still be the defining event for this generation, and its impact may be more evident as the full course of events is played out.

Service in response to 9/11

The main purpose of this study was to examine the significance of taking public action in dealing with 9/11. In the current study, a small number of student activists helped to mobilise their peers and other members of their community by working with organisations such as Red Cross, churches, and other civic groups. The

percentage (18 per cent) of students who became involved in such action corresponds roughly to the percentages of activists in past studies (Youniss, McLellan & Yates 1997). This point also illustrates the motivation and determination of these students to instigate their own service projects when few opportunities were available. While it is likely that pre-9/11 differences may have influenced their involvement, service in response to 9/11 appears to have played a role in enhancing these students' intended future civic involvement and tolerance for free speech.

The longer-term effectiveness of service can also be seen through a comparison of the mean scores of the servers and the donors. In the intended civic involvement measure, the concrete and meaningful experiences afforded by service seem to have sustained these students' intentions for future civic involvement after nine months, whereas the donors' initial increase in civic intentions dissipated after the same period of time. These findings are reminiscent of what Flacks (1988) has called 'making history'. In reflecting on the civil rights movement, for example, Flacks notes that student participants constructed history not by observing it, but acting in conjunction with larger organisations, such as the coalition of black churches in the South. Although the popular media made light of student activism at the time, it is not the case that most of the activists left their youth behind to settle into non-involved middle-class lives. In fact, some of the strongest longitudinal data we have indicate that activists sustained their political fervour through their 50s by remaining mobilisers for various causes (Jennings 2002, Youniss et al. 1997). This is not to say that the student activists in our sample are destined for lives of political involvement. It does suggest, however, that their constructive dealing with an important political event demonstrates the processes by which activism can combine with a historical context to affect the course of individual lives.

The concrete and meaningful experiences afforded by service seem to have sustained these students' intentions for future civic involvement

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Notes

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- ² Donating money was not included as an active response to 9/11.
- ³ We should point out that as this article was being written the nation was involved in war in Iraq, a war that could be thought of as an extension of 9/11. Initial reports have illustrated the extraordinary efforts of young people to respond to the war by co-ordinating anti-war movements and demonstrations, teach-ins, and through relief efforts to aid the Iraqi people (eg. Mangan 2003, Toppo 2003). Despite the fact that this study was completed in May, 2002, we were recently informed by a school official that more than 100 students at this high school participated in anti-war demonstrations in the days prior to the war in Iraq.