

Remember when being a social justice warrior was a good thing?

Why you should be a social justice warrior like Sargent Shriver



You can look it up if you think I'm kidding, but nowadays, calling someone a "social justice warrior" is meant as an insult.

Weird, huh?

Just read the online comments section of any newspaper – if you've got a strong stomach. The minute someone says something about helping the poor or fighting injustice, they're shouted down with accusations of "virtue signaling" or being an SJW.

In the Oxford Dictionary, a social justice warrior is defined as a derogatory term for "a person who expresses or promotes socially progressive views."

That might make some people flee the label, but if he were still around, Sargent Shriver would embrace the term, waltz down 5th Avenue with it and possibly do The Electric Slide with it.

Shriver, the first head of the Peace Corp and the man LBJ picked to lead his "war on poverty," was a social justice warrior back when people weren't ashamed to be one.

Wednesday, the first day of the NCCAA's annual – virtual – conference, we watched a fascinating documentary on Shriver called "American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver."

Shriver was the first president of the Peace Corps, led LBJ's War on Poverty and was the man behind Head Start, VISTA and Legal Services to the Poor. It's almost funny – almost, but not quite – to hear some 1960s politicians deride "Kennedy's kiddie crusade" or "kiddie corps."

Nobody's mocking the Peace Corps now. I'm betting that more people in foreign countries remember the names of the young, idealistic volunteers who came over to provide humanitarian aid than remember the names of the bombs that flattened their villages and homes.

After the documentary, we were treated to an address from David Bradley, co-founder and CEO of the National Community Action Foundation.

Bradley, who was mentored by Shriver, told us, among other things, that there'll be a big legislative focus on weatherization this year.

Weatherization is a huge issue for community action agencies, as well, and is also the topic of this week's Listen Up NC, the NCCAA's weekly radio broadcast done in collaboration with the N.C. Head Start Association. You can hear it Saturday at 9 a.m. on WRSV The Choice FM 92.1 and watch it on the NC Community Action Association YouTube channel or Facebook page. WRSV serves 12 counties with a listenership of over one million.

Just because Shriver thought America could end poverty doesn't mean that he was eager to lead LBJ's war on it. Here's a bit of a recorded call in which Johnson tells Shriver that he is appointing him to lead the War on Poverty:

Johnson: I'm going to make it clear that you're 'Mr. Poverty.'

Shriver: That'll knock the crap out of the Peace Corps.

Johnson: I'm not taking you away from that... If you can't run a \$100 million program with your left hand and a billion (dollar) program with your right hand, then you're not as smart as I think you are.

Ouch.



Shriver was not, the documentary noted, interested in "handouts" or what he called "cheap grace."

"It's not a program of federal handouts to alleviate poverty temporarily," he said. "It is aid to help those who are willing to help themselves by building up their skills, increasing their employability."

Watching American Idealist will cause your spine to tingle with excitement as you see this man born into privilege and surrounded by power dedicate his life to helping the poor.

Then, after your spine tingles, it'll stiffen - as you resolve to do the same.

So, if someone calls you a social justice warrior, just think of Sargent Shriver and say "Thank you."

That noble phrase needs rescuing, and the agencies of the NCCAA are uniquely qualified to do it.

