PART ONE

MOBILIZATION FOR CHANGE
TEACHING TOWARD PRAXIS AND
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT*

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Introduction

Increased interest in the political sphere on the part of young people has been noted in a wide range of popular and scholarly arenas. Headlines of a recent Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) press release report that “More College Freshmen [are] Committed to Social and Civic Responsibility” (Engle 2006: 1) claiming that in 2005 more freshmen expressed that it is important to help those in need than in over 25 years. They assert that this translates to higher practical and intellectual level skills (Engle 2006: 2). HERI also reports that students express a significant increase (11.6% percent) in their desire to “help promote racial understanding,” “help others who are in difficulty,” and “influence social values” between their freshman and senior year (Hurtado, Sax, Saenz, Harper, and others 2007: 24). In June 2007, a poll by the New York Times, CBS News, and MTV reported that “Young Americans Are Leaning Left” (Nagourney and Thee 2007). These authors state that young people are more likely than the general public to favor universal health care (62 percent versus 47 percent), inclusive immigration policy (30 percent versus 24 percent) and gay marriage (44 percent versus 28 percent). Young people believe that their generation can make a difference and they are taking greater interest in the political and social world (Nagourney and Thee 2007).

While these findings speak to increased concern about social issues, they do not necessarily reflect only one perspective. HERI’s report on national norms of the American Freshman for Fall 2006, indicates that:

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