Life as it Should Be: Resocialization in the C.C.C

Celia M. Carroll

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-mvfz-wj53

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
"LIFE AS IT SHOULD BE:"
RESOCIALIZATION IN THE C.C.C.

------
A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

------

by
Celia M. Carroll
1995
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

Celia M. Carroll

Approved, May 1995

Cindy Hahamovitch
John E. Selby
Christopher Howard
Michael A. Lewis

Government Department
Sociology Department
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE C.C.C.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. THE CORPS AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. RESTORING THE FAMILY</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. REINFORCING THE WORK ETHIC</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express appreciation to Professor Cindy Hahamovitch for her patience while the writer was finding a voice and for her encouragement and criticisms on this manuscript. The author is also indebted to Professors Chris Howard and Michael Lewis for their careful reading of the manuscript and more than helpful suggestions.

Special thanks are extended to the National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni and to my grandfather, Andrew Carroll, for sharing their memories of the CCC.
ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Civilian Conservation Corps in a new light. More than just a jobs program for destitute young men, the CCC was designed to "resocialize" or re-educate enrollees in their "proper" roles as patriarchs within the family and as workers and citizens within the American capitalist system.

Camp regimen has been examined in detail to uncover the opportunities used by Corps officials to create or reinforce selected values. Unlike previous scholarship on the Civilian Conservation Corps, emphasis is placed on language and ideology as mechanisms through which social goals were pursued.
"LIFE AS IT SHOULD BE:"

RESOCIALIZATION IN THE C.C.C.
INTRODUCTION

The spring of 1936 had not been kind to the coal miners and small farmers of rural Wise County, Virginia. The economic depression which had showed some signs of improvement throughout the nation still held this region in its grip. Suffering not only from consequences of the Crash, but also from long term structural underemployment endemic to coal economies, Wise county had few prospects for the men and women desperately seeking the means to keep families together, clothed, and fed.¹ Once described as shining with the promise of the "next Birmingham," Wise had become one of the first areas in Virginia to rely heavily upon state and federal emergency relief programs.²

Economic instability was especially threatening to youth who were unable to enter the job market. Lacking work


experience, vocational training and, in some instances, elementary schooling, young people were incapable of supporting themselves, much less contributing to their family's maintenance. No doubt some abandoned their homes and entered the transient stream that filtered into the large seaboard cities, Carolina textile mills or the Florida and California migrant labor pools. Others stayed behind, working sporadically on government work relief projects or futilely trying to raise adequate crops from the poor soil of tiny mountain farms. Still others risked their lives and reputations by stealing from neighbors or scavenging coal from dangerous pits for personal consumption or to sell in town for a pittance. Even men lucky enough to secure a job at the company mines were paid starvation wages, with jobs often disappearing overnight according to the vagaries of the coal industry.

Andrew Carroll, the oldest son of a coal miner in the village of Keokee, had learned the lessons of depression

---

3Hummel, Magnitude of the Emergency Relief Program. 27-33.

well. Twenty years old in 1936, Andrew became the sole provider for his parents and five siblings after his father was temporarily crippled in a mine accident. Unable to find a full-time job, Andrew kept the family afloat by "getting around"--taking apples from a neighbor's orchard, opening up a small "gopher hole" mine with two neighborhood boys and working two or three days a month building roads under the Public Works Administration, a federal work relief program. These efforts, along with the "canned food (beef and gravy), cheese, meal and flour" provided by "the Relief," kept his family from starving. But this existence was precarious at best; no member of the family was dressed "too proper" and during the winter months "sometimes you had bread, sometimes you didn't."5

For these reasons, the opportunity to sign up with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) seemed like a godsend to Andrew and his family. One of the first programs initiated by Franklin D. Roosevelt after his inauguration in 1933, the CCC was designed to give young men temporary public employment. Lasting until 1942, the CCC was estimated to have aided almost three million men and their dependents. As its name suggests, the Civilian Conservation Corps was dedicated to "forestry, the prevention of soil erosion, flood control and similar projects" like the construction of

---

5Ibid.
roads, dams, and recreation areas. Young men selected by the Corps as "junior enrollees" were placed in camps often far away from friends and family and supervised by Army reserve officers. Given jobs heavy on manual labor, the enrollees worked long sweaty hours to earn their pay. In later years, Andrew would remember his first day of work in the CCC:

We were loaded up on trucks and then we went--I don't know how far--ten or fifteen miles. And we had to climb a mountain, all the way to the top of Stone Mountain, straight up carryin' our tools. Take one step up and slide down two...

[When we finally got to the top] we'd go to work digging out trails--oh, it must've been 'bout eight foot wide, and we cut the timber back further than that, you know, usin' old farmers' mules to pull the lumber away from the trails. It got so cold up there on that mountain, and when the fog would come down it would be like workin' in a cloud.7

In return for his labor, Andrew was paid a meager salary--thirty dollars a month (twenty-five of which was mandatorily allotted to his parents), three meals a day, lodging, uniforms, and infrequent furloughs to visit his family.8 Even according to the pay scale of the period,  


7Interview with Andrew Carroll.

CCC wages were low and the food served to Corpsmen was often less than inspiring. Nonetheless, Andrew viewed it as "money we wouldn't have got no way otherwise" and considered that even "sauerkraut, wiener, and hot tea looked awful good and tasted awful good" to a young man who had known the sharp pangs of hunger.⁹

From the camp on Moorman's River, Andrew would return home two years later, eventually finding a regular stint loading coal for the Westmoreland Coal Company during the more prosperous decades of the forties and fifties. Marrying a local girl whom he had courted on his breaks from the Corps, Andrew and his wife had fourteen children, all raised in the hardscrabble manner of the southern Appalachians. In the years following the Depression, Andrew never tired of telling about his experiences in the Corps. His months as an enrollee were "some of the best times of my life." Franklin D. Roosevelt and the CCC had "saved him from starving" and taught him valuable lessons, from "how to scribble my name " to getting "along with fellas from all over the country and... work[ing] under officers."¹⁰ All told, Andrew believed that the Civilian Conservation Corps


⁹Interview with Andrew Carroll.

¹⁰Ibid.
transformed him from an undisciplined youth into a responsible man.

Andrew was not alone in this evaluation. Contemporaries of the program and historians of the New Deal alike have had an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the Corps and its affects upon enrollees. Misgivings of any real importance occurred only during the earliest stages of the Corps' development as Roosevelt grappled with critics over such issues as determining a fair, but noncompetitive salary for enrollees, the proper administrative jurisdiction for the camps, and whether men should receive military training. William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, worried that workers in the CCC camps would be at an advantage over laborers providing similar services within the private market, thereby undercutting wage scales. Socialist leader Norman Thomas feared that the corps would take on the paramilitary flavor of youth programs in Italy and Germany, stating that "such work-camps fit into the psychology of a Fascist...state."¹¹ Pacifists in Colorado objected to the establishment of the CCC on these same grounds.¹² But after the camps had been


in operation for a short time without the anticipated dire results, these qualms faded. As Philco’s news editorialist Boake Carter wrote in 1936, "Probably, [the CCC] will be considered one of the President’s most successful experiments in labor. For, excluding the original controversy, it has drawn little or no criticism and a great deal of praise."\textsuperscript{13}

Ironically, the image of the CCC which finally emerged charged the Corps, not with subverting democracy or sabotaging industry, but with insuring that youth were not irrevocably alienated from American ideals by the dissipation of unemployment. Even strident foes of other New Deal policies found the Civilian Conservation Corps to be, in the words of a Mississippi editor, "perhaps the one oasis in the whole barren desert of abracadabra [policies]."\textsuperscript{14} Roosevelt’s "Soil Soldiers" were given a status almost folkloric, with popular images of healthy, tanned, and busily working men dominating discourse about the camps.

Given the desperate circumstances facing the nation, it is perhaps not surprising that a program which extended aid to young men was so eagerly embraced. Unprecedented


\textsuperscript{14}Clayton Rand. \textit{Abracadabra or One Democrat to Another.} (Newark, Delaware: Press of Kells, 1936). 61.
economic distress came on the heels of what many considered a decadent youth culture of the 1920's. Opportunity no longer smiled upon young men and women: educations were cut short, new workers were thrown out of their chosen careers, and many thousands were forced to travel country roads and urban "jungles" in a fruitless attempt to find work. Youth, as Herbert Hoover noted in 1930, were "the problem of our time and the hope of our nation." It was feared that present exigencies would become permanent habits. How could young people coming of age in the terrible thirties ever know the value of steady work habits if they had never worked a steady job? Would they respect the American government if it did nothing to relieve their distress? The CCC, which answered both of these concerns, seemed like the answer to a prayer. Not surprisingly, therefore, the literature which came out of the Depression period was openly supportive of the Corps. That the CCC should also address conservation at a time when farmers were battling dust storms and soil depletion only sweetened the response.

Historians removed from these anxieties might have been expected to write a much more balanced account than contemporary observers. Instead, they have largely continued in this idealistic tradition, going little beyond

---


16 Ibid. 24.
the "tree army" thesis. With only a few notable exceptions, little time or effort has been spent in detailing the results of the Corps beyond the provision of relief to the poor or the acres of woodlands reclaimed. Much of what has passed for scholarly opinion has in reality been an uncritical retread of old CCC imagery.

This paper will begin to remedy these oversights by suggesting alternative interpretive frameworks through which the Corps' organization and goals may be viewed. A major emphasis will be placed upon the role of the Corps as a socializing agency, demonstrating the ways in which camps reinforced the family ethic of men as primary breadwinners, and fostered a sense of allegiance, not only to the American government, but also to the tenets of competition, wage labor, and time efficiency so integral to the stability of the capitalist work ethic.

The men of the Corps were not, however, passive subjects of government manipulation. As we shall see, the overlap between what the Corps offered and what young men and their families wanted was remarkable. The idea that hard, honest work would bring rewards, was warmly embraced by the CCC and the general public. Perhaps the lasting power of "the American dream" (even among scholars of the Depression) explains the persistent good graces with which the Corps has been received throughout the years.

Possibly during one of his short furloughs from the
Corps, Andrew went to the small movie theater in town to see "My Man Godfrey," one of the most acclaimed movies of that Depression year of 1936. A glamorous movie, "Godfrey" moralizes about "the forgotten men"—unfortunates ignored by society and living in often squalid conditions in urban city dumps or on small town street corners. William Powell, playing the urbane Godfrey, develops a plan to give fifty of these men employment, stating that "the only difference between a derelict and a man, is a job."17 The Civilian Conservation Corps, premised on this seemingly simple idea, resonated on some inner chord with one of the most widespread fears of American Depression society—the fear that without prompt intervention young men would be lost to the ethos of work, family, and individual initiative forever.

\[17\text{My Man Godfrey (1936) distributed by Kartes Video Communications (Indianapolis, Indiana 1984).}\]
CHAPTER I
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE C.C.C

The literature of the New Deal contains surprisingly few accounts of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Much of the extant scholarship is descriptive in nature, detailing particular state projects or providing histories of the Corps' administrative life in Washington. Indeed, little attention is given to the goals of the CCC outside of natural resource preservation. Difficult to evaluate, the social impact of the Corps experience on its young recruits has been neglected in favor of cataloging acres reclaimed or approximating the monetary value of forestry work.

This extremely simplistic interpretation of Corps' goals finds its way into several larger discussions of the New Deal. Perhaps because the CCC is considered a rather insignificant program in comparison to the massive Works


Projects/Progress Administration or because its conservation aspects serve as a handy way to identify the CCC in the context of other relief programs, authors of general works have spent little time trying to decipher the intricacies of the Corps program, focusing instead on the tangible results of camp projects.20 For instance, William E. Leuchtenburg’s classic *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, refers to the CCC in only four short passages. Not surprisingly, his description revolves around the "indispensable" nature of the CCC work to soil conservation and reforestation efforts.21 Thus, even when Leuchtenburg observes that the CCC brought together "boys from the southern pines and the sequoia country of the West, boys from Bayonne and Cicero who had never seen forests or mountains before" he never indicates how this affected the "boys" personally or socially. Instead, Leuchtenburg blandly concludes that "of all the forest planting, public and private, in the history of the nation, more than half was done by the CCC."22

Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s somewhat longer discussion of

20Alternatively, some larger works choose to identify the CCC simplistically as a "pet project" of Roosevelt, a similarly uninspired description. See, for example, Frank Friedel. *Franklin D. Roosevelt*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973) 255-266.


22Ibid.
the CCC proves to be more enlightening. In *The Coming of the New Deal*, Schlesinger devotes an entire chapter to Depression-era programs devised in the early 1930's to "save the land." An avid fan of conservation, Schlesinger broadly paints the CCC, along with the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Natural Resources Board, as a pioneer in an epic struggle to reclaim the land from waste and official indifference:

> In 1930, the American earth, the foundation of all American life, was crumbling away under the lash of wind and water, while the national government stood idly by.... By 1934, a massive national effort was at last under way, aimed at checking erosion, at strengthening the soil and purifying the water, at securing the physical basis of American civilization.23

Schlesinger breaks away from this emphasis on conservation only once. Describing the CCC as an agency through which youth "reclaimed and developed themselves," Schlesinger, like Leuchtenburg, romanticizes the diverse origins of enrollees and their inexperience outside of metropolitan areas. Working in the great forests and open countryside convinced these formerly despondent youth of their individual worth and community responsibilities. Schlesinger quotes enrollees as saying that the Corps "made a man of me," "helps you get over being selfish," makes me "feel almost as if I owned the land." This moral uplift,

---

according to Schlesinger, comes naturally because as "their muscles hardened [and] their bodies filled out, their self respect returned. They learned trades; more important, they learned about America and they learned about other Americans."24

Schlesinger, then, has an intriguing double-sided theory of moral improvement and masculine responsibility implicit in his writing. First, he links moral uplift directly to hard work and productive labor. Second, Schlesinger maintains that individual morality in the United States contains a strong nationalist element. He seems to believe that the CCC was so successful because it taught respect for the values--capitalism, patriotism, the work ethic--which helped to stabilize the American system.

This theme, only hinted at and never developed in Schlesinger's work, was much more important to New Deal strategists than his brief discussion would suggest. Indeed, from the Corps' inception in 1933, F.D.R. enthusiastically promoted the CCC as a method for staving off the "threat that enforced idleness brings to moral and spiritual stability" of the unemployed.25 Quoted at length in an official CCC pamphlet many years later, Roosevelt made it clear that he was interested in using the CCC to secure acceptance of "proper" American values. Ties between

24Ibid. 338-339.

25Roosevelt. On Our Way. 43.
labor, patriotism, and the CCC were explicit:

The corps is a builder of the kind of men this nation needs. Its program, based on such tested fundamentals as good moral character, hard work, high work performance standards, thorough training on the job, physical hardihood, active citizenship and love of country has benefitted and improved the health and usefulness of a sizeable portion of the country's youth population."26

Roosevelt's statement underscored his staunch conviction that the CCC would yield social benefits to the entire country far into the future.

Some of the more recent periodical studies of the CCC have attempted to concretely determine what these benefits have been by examining the Corps in terms of social policy. From this more focused point of view, alternative and perhaps less comfortable interpretations of the CCC have been brought to the forefront.

The best example of this trend is a 1987 article written by John D. Pandiani for the British Journal of Sociology. Rechristening the CCC as the "crime control corps," Pandiani argues that the program separated and placed into camps under military discipline those most likely to commit serious crimes--poor, young, men.27

Located at a distance from major population centers, the


camps served as prisons "without bars, guards, or coercion." Pandiani interprets the crime control feature of the Corps as a consciously designed goal of the program and not merely the unintended consequence of their role in conservation work.

Why has this interpretation, Pandiani asks, played almost no role in previous analyses of the Corps? He argues that while recognized by "some members of the general public" at the time, the social control function was lost to academic scholarship for two reasons: First, it was de-emphasized by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the CCC's most respected spokesman. Because of leftist criticisms that the American Conservation Corps was organized like Nazi Germany's militaristic youth camp movement, Roosevelt deemed it prudent to downplay the CCC's social control functions. Second, the Corps's "striking correspondence with the values and traditions that had arisen around the basic American ideology [of] free enterprise" assured that the crime control mechanism would remain submerged. Contemporary observers, hungry for programs which would ease the economic misery of the times, saw the movement of men to camps in terms of giving youths "useful work for personal gain," not as a government plan masterminded to limit

28Ibid. 350

29Ibid. 352.
mobility and individual freedom.30

While intriguing (and with a good deal of historical support31), Pandiani's article does not explain why even educated young men from otherwise stable environments were packed up and sent away to camps. Nor does it account for the men who were rejected during the selection process, because they were considered "unlikely to benefit" from CCC regimen. Finally, Pandiani fails to make allowance for those Corpsmen whom "without bars or guards" simply left the camps and returned to a transient lifestyle. Pandiani's work does serve, however, as a reminder that the Corps was fundamentally a social program, despite its evergreen image.

Economic historian Robert F. Severson, Jr. and sociologist Ann Thedford Lanier have both pointed to the CCC as "a workfare solution" to the chronic underemployment of American youth. Severson's short article develops a much different standard for evaluating the benefits of the CCC than those previously employed by advocates or historians of the Corps. Measuring the CCC's "social investment" through

30Ibid. 353.

31Records examined for this paper uncovered similar references to the CCC's "crime control function." For example, Major Rice M. Youell, Virginia Superintendent of State Penitentiaries, attributed "the decrease in the number of prisoners received in that institution of the first nine months of this year to the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps Camps in Virginia, which has taken so many of the idle off of the streets." W. P. Smith, State Selecting Director, CCC to W. Frank Persons, Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary. November 22, 1934. Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, National Archives.
a comparison of the average incomes of former Corpsmen with those of the general male population of the same age group,\textsuperscript{32} he concludes that a positive long-run relationship does exist between CCC involvement and higher wage levels.\textsuperscript{33} While Severson's article has a very limited definition of social benefit, its no-nonsense handling of the Corps nevertheless deromanticizes the program, placing it on the same plan as other social policies.

Lanier's article attacks traditional interpretations of the Corps from another angle. She contends that the CCC must not be viewed as a quaint Depression-era program, applicable only to the needs of that time. Instead, the Corps idea is a viable means by which to deal with "the normal [and continuing] by-products of 'doing business' in modern industrial societies—unemployment and pollution."\textsuperscript{34} Lanier's position is believable in light of current state-sponsored programs like the California Conservation Corps. Explicitly based on the original CCC, but with modifications which allow for the equal participation of women and


\textsuperscript{33}Ibid. 124.

minorities, the California Corps is testament to the continuing power of those problems which gave life to the original CCC.\textsuperscript{35}

The work of Severson and Lanier point out that studies of the Corps must be brought up to the same standards as those of other New Deal policies, for its effects are equally long-lived. Yet, while these authors have taken important steps in demythifying the Corps, they still fall short of developing a broad based framework which explains how thousands of men came together, followed sometimes radically different paths during their enrollments and yet considered themselves "true blue" corpsmen. The key to a holistic understanding of the Corps, then, is a combination of social policy theory with the insights of contemporary observers. Depression-era works, despite their self-avowed support of the New Deal, give clues to the intended goals of the CCC, not simply its results.

The goals of the Corps were indeed expansive. \textit{This New America}, one of the first volumes on the CCC, overflows with optimism, seeing within the camps the seeds for America's rejuvenated greatness. An anthology of essays written by enrollees and officials published in 1937, \textit{This New America} is a work less of description than of prophecy. In the preface, editors Alfred C. Oliver, Jr. and Harold M. Dudley

lay out their guiding doctrine: namely, that "in this new living [within the CCC camps] may be found a new baptism of patriotism and an increased consciousness of national unity." The CCC was to be the beginning of a "reintegration" of American society where "classical idealism," "beauty," "freedom," and the "back to nature urge" would be combined to attain a "more secure balance in our economic, social, and cultural life." In Dudley and Oliver's grand design, the CCC would be the genesis of a secular American awakening.

Similarly, but in a more prosaic manner, Frank Ernest Hill and Kenneth Holland's study of the CCC found within the Corps a promise of something much larger. As educators interested deeply in the American Youth Commission, both men were committed to providing "adequate economic, educational, health, and recreational conditions for youth" under the auspices of the federal government. The true value of the CCC, they argued, resided not in the number of work projects completed, but in "how well or ill...it helps to shape this flesh and blood into a part of America for


37 Ibid. xv-xvi.

By restructuring an enrollee's education, leisure, and work patterns, camps could modify their actions and insure productivity in the larger work force.

To this end, the authors believed that the Corps should actively seek to become "guide" and "friend" for the young men. CCC officials were to take the responsibility of helping boys "body and soul" by policing morals, hygiene, play habits, and etiquette. They saw punishment and reward, institutionalized within camp regimen in the form of fines or promotions, as effective strategies for reinforcing proper "standards of social contact" and turning enrollees from "mistaken toward constructive attitudes." While Holland and Hill's conclusions may seem rather draconian today, both men were in the mainstream of contemporary educational theory. Samuel F. Harby provides another example. Harby, who received a PhD in educational research from the Teacher's College at Columbia University, served in the Corps for three years as an

39 Ibid. 5-6.
40 Ibid. 126.
41 Ibid. 190-219.
42 Ibid. 206, 127.
educational advisor to Delaware, New York and New Jersey camps. His study on the Second Corps area, completed in 1937, looked to the Corps' educational programs as a solution for persistent "youth problems."  

Like Holland and Hill, Harby fully concurred with F.D.R.'s conception of the CCC as "spiritual and moral" conservator of young men. Because the camps separated an enrollee from the "family and home [that] are too often retreats for him which protect his odd ways," they served as "a perfect set-up for teaching social values under controlled conditions." Therefore, camp directors were urged to teach an enrollee to "appreciate an honest day's work," "that he is helping to support his family as well as serve his nation" and "respect for property, [a] readiness and aptitude for bearing responsibility, [and belief] in the leadership of a few, and in the general citizenship of all." In short, Harby believed that the CCC had a dual role--to "educate not only for life as it is, but life as it should be."  

Resocialization--the manner in which CCC enrollees were trained for "life as it should be"--forms the primary

occupation of this paper. Resocialization is a common thread running beneath the individual experiences of Corpsmen. Friendly competition and individual expression, the role of "family breadwinner," and the tenets of labor productivity are examples of just a few of the lessons taught to enrollees within the Corps. Following chapters trace the ways that these messages were intimately intertwined with daily camp routines, transforming the Corps from a mere work project into a transmitter of carefully selected values.
CHAPTER II
THE CORPS AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

To Whom it May Concern:
I entered the C.C.C. in Oct. 1934...Previous to that time I had been out of work for six months, and I had lost hopes of ever obtaining a job again.

After my brief stay in concentration camps I noticed an increase in weight, and during fourteen months of service I have gained fifteen (15) pounds. With an increase in weight, came a general betterment of health due to good food, regular hrs. of sleep and excellent sanitary conditions....

All of these have contributed toward regaining much of my self confidence, and after this enrollment period I proposed to go out in the business world and look for employment.

William Bitner
[CCC Company 1385
Milroy, PA]\textsuperscript{48}

Letters written by CCC men to camp officials, President Roosevelt, or friends and family back home are filled with references to physical improvements experienced during the Corps. The writers were obsessed with their health, repeatedly pointing to weight gain, warm clothing, and the plentiful food and lack of disease found in the camps. But a sense of physical security, however luxurious, was not the only good offered CCC enrollees. Camps emphasized technical

\textsuperscript{48}William Bitner to Headquarters 1385, received December 13, 1939. Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives.
training and vocational guidance as crucial components of the program. Enrollees learned to master hand-tools like the bush-axe, and pick, along with tractors, jackhammers, and survey instruments to carry out their daily work assignments.

Tasks assigned in camps were as varied as their locations. Companies in mountainous regions built trails through densely forested state and national parks and fought the fires that periodically erupted during dry seasons. Those by the shore safeguarded wetlands and preserved habitats for waterfowl. Others helped construct dams under the auspices of the famous Tennessee Valley Authority, restored historical sites, or seeded a giant "shelterbelt" of trees and grasses which bisected the nation's heartland and proved a barrier to the devastation of dust storms. Though it all, enrollees were assured that skills learned in the Corps today would reap benefits far into the future:

The art of knowing how to build bridges, chop with an ax, use a saw, plant trees and exact methods of fighting fires are all valuable means of education. This is termed instruction on the job. Business men outside the CCC as well as enrollees are realizing the vast possibilities of useful training.49

This sentiment was music to F.D.R. and other CCC supporters who had envisioned the Corps as more than a temporary works program. Indeed, the Roosevelt administration's optimistic

49 Editorial in Lonesome Pine, the camp newspaper of Company 2382, Clintwood, Va. 1 (1936).
advertisements claimed that the Corps was equipping men for
satisfying careers when the national economy recovered
enough to provide private-sector employment:

Thousands of healthy, self-respecting young
men are "graduated" from the camps each enrollment
period. Many of them... go back to the farm to put
into practice what they have learned.
Not all, however, can go back to the land.
They go into almost every line of work. Success
stories are numerous....50

This practical work experience was supplemented by
formally organized vocational classes. Typewriting, engine
repair, electrical work, and forestry lessons, among others,
were offered as a "sound investment" in the future
industrial efficiency of the work force. Later, as war
appeared inevitable, the CCC expanded its curriculum to
include repair, communications, and leadership courses
specially designed to promote defense "preparedness."51

Vocational training--a natural outgrowth of a jobs
project for unskilled youth--provided the foundation for an
educational program which grew gradually larger to include
academic subjects such as chemistry, biology, and
literature, as well as art, dramatics, and basic literacy


classes. But as advanced training was not included among the original goals of the CCC, it never gained the consistency of support which characterized work projects. Offered on a voluntary basis and scheduled in the evenings so as not to conflict with work, classes were often neglected by corpsmen. Educational advisors were at a disadvantage, having to rely upon personal popularity to "sell" enrollees on the advantages of spending precious personal time in class. In addition, educational programs were often woefully underbudgeted, in some cases lacking a separate schoolroom and sufficient equipment or textbooks.

Moreover, educational advisors often faced hostility or indifference from the Army officers who supervised the camps. To these commanders, the Corps's primary responsibility to enrollees was discipline or economic relief, not the promotion of intellectual self-expression. Even some civilian CCC administrators remained unconvinced of the need for more than incidental instruction within the Corps. For example, in 1937, CCC national director Robert Fechner refused a suggestion to reduce working hours so that Wednesday afternoons and

---

52 Holland and Hill, *Youth in the CCC*. 91-165.


Saturdays could be dedicated to mandatory class work.\textsuperscript{55} Andrew's experience at Camp P-60 is a good example of the weaknesses of the CCC's seemingly piecemeal educational system. Because P-60 was located in Albemarle County near the University of Virginia, the "right smart fellas" with advanced educations were able to enroll in college courses.\textsuperscript{56} Field trips, writing for The Trumpeter camp newspaper, radio broadcasts, literary discussions and debates rounded out the educational offerings for these enrollees.\textsuperscript{57} In sharp contrast, Andrew, who had received no formal schooling before his enlistment and was illiterate, struggled upon his discharge two years later just to "scribble my name". Although literacy classes were offered, they were not compulsory and Andrew felt the incentive to earn money outweighed the future benefits of learning to read and write. Therefore, in his spare time, Andrew picked up extra money by doing small tasks others found tedious, such as kitchen duty, keeping a watch for forest fires, and shining officers' shoes instead of attending class. These extra responsibilities isolated Andrew from many of the camp and community activities.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid. 162.


\textsuperscript{57}Ibid.
planned to entertain and instruct enrollees.\textsuperscript{58}

Another former enrollee, Paul A. Lawrence, tells a much different story. In his short autobiographical work, \textit{Remembering the CCC}, Lawrence reminisces about the plays, dances, boxing matches, and weekend excursions into town that he enjoyed while enlisted in three Washington state camps. The CCC offered Lawrence exciting possibilities to develop his creative talents, even during the depths of the Depression: "Later when I was in Camp Conconolly...we produced [the play] 'Curses, What a Night' as a movie." During free time, in addition to the many sports activities, many of the men had hobbies "from belt weaving and model ship building to collecting Indian relics and petrified wood.\textsuperscript{59} Clearly very much a part of the camp community, Lawrence remembers "a strong feeling of camaraderie" brought about by "the common bond of doing something good."\textsuperscript{60} Unlike his counterpart in Virginia, Lawrence was not reticent about using his monthly personal allowance to buy luxury items such as a small, second-hand radio and a hand-cranked movie camera.\textsuperscript{61}

This simple comparison between two enrollees points out

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{58}Interview with Andrew Carroll.

\textsuperscript{59}Paul A. Lawrence. \textit{Remembering the CCC}. (San Anselmo, California: PAL Press, 1983). 77-79.

\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Ibid}. 13-14.

\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Ibid}. 32, 49.
the difficulties in generalizing about the "average" CCC youth or the "typical" camp experience. Some enrollees seemed to view the CCC narrowly, as a relief agency only, while others embraced social and artistic dividends made available to them by membership in an energetic community of young men. Some focused on the larger society surrounding their camps by marrying into local families and obtaining permanent jobs in the area where they had been stationed. In contrast, a number of Corpsmen actively destroyed community bonds, both with fellow enrollees and with town residents through fighting, drunkenness, prejudice, and dangerous or offensive hazing practices for which they were disciplined or "dishonorably discharged." Rejecting the CCC altogether, some Corpsmen "went over the hill," deserting the program because they were fed up with camp discipline, felt themselves ill-used by the strenuous work requirements or were simply unable to shake a homesickness for familiar surroundings. Clearly, because of this richness of individual experience, it is difficult to speak of "life in the CCC."

Nevertheless, running beneath different camp schedules and encompassing the very dissimilar backgrounds of individuals was the dedication of all CCC officials to the

"moulding of this plastic material" of youthful minds. As rescuer of youth from what one Virginia agent called "that dreadful thing known as home" with its insecurities and continual frustrations, the Corps believed it could capture the men's allegiance and direct them in the paths that they should follow. While Army officials might differ from educational advisors or soil conservationists about which values should be emphasized within a given camp, all were agreed on the necessity to use their influence in some manner. This conviction formed the central strand of thought tying together the experiences of Corpsmen from around the country.

Often resocialization occurred directly through the organization of camp life itself. For example, the strict regimentation of activities enforced the norms of promptness and accountability, reminding enrollees of their responsibility to work steadily each day: "the park foreman organize their work successfully only with reliable men, men on the job, men who manage their time and place so that they can always be present. This company is going to function


64Virginia State Selection Agent quoted in memo from William A. Smith, VERA Administrator to W. Frank Persons, Assistant to the Director of the CCC. June 18, 1934. Civilian Conservation Corps Records. National Archives.
with reliable men...."65 Competition, on several levels, was built into the camp system. Men were "ranked" at different times throughout the enrollment period to determine their value as members of the work projects or educational programs. Those who were judged as above average received promotions to positions of authority with a matching increase in monthly salary.

Less formally, men were encouraged to compete among themselves even outside of working hours. Individual barracks were rated for cleanliness, companies compared records on response time to fires or number of trees planted, and athletic teams and debate societies proliferated.66 Enrollees were encouraged to practice and improve their skills in every area of life. Straightened beds and straining muscles were to shake youth out of their despondency by making them feel empowered to plan for and control their futures. All around them, camp life reinforced the belief that "faithful, unremitting daily effort toward a well-directed purpose...was the price of noble and enduring success."67

65Captain C. G. Riggs, Commander of CCC Company 217, to his men. Quoted in lead editorial for Happy Days. August 5, 1933.

66The "productive" use of leisure time was one of the major tenets of Corps educational programs. Sports of all kinds proliferated and were encouraged by camp officials.

67Clyde W. Babb (Company 477, Blue Mountain, Mississippi) in lead editorial for Happy Days. Sept 30, 1933.
These competitions were not, however, to mirror the fierce struggle for jobs and food that existed outside each camp’s sheltering walls. President Roosevelt was approvingly quoted in the national Corps newspaper *Happy Days*:

Too much in recent years, large numbers of our population have thought of success as an opportunity to gain money with the least possible work. It is time for each of us to cast away self-destroying, nation-destroying efforts to get something for nothing and to appreciate that satisfying rewards and safe rewards come only through honest work.

That must be the new spirit of the American future. You are the vanguard of that spirit.68

Competition was to be friendly and fraternal, establishing "brotherhood" and a respect for others and the common good. Authority, in the form of referees, was to be respected, losses were to be taken without complaint and the skills of others applauded. To this end, camp activities like basketball games were easily converted into pedagogical experiences. From a Virginia camp newsletter:

**Camp Fechner Song Yells and Things to be Remembered**

I will remember that the reputation of the Camp depends upon my conduct during the game and after it.

(Followed by the Yells "On For Fechner" and "Fight for the Old Red and Black."

(1) I will endeavor to make Camp Fechner known for its good sportsmanship.

---

68Franklin D. Roosevelt quoted in *Happy Days*. July 20, 1933.
(2) I shall not indulge in personal remarks, whistling, hissing...
(3) I will remain quiet while opponents are making free throws. 69

Indeed, men were inundated from almost every angle with messages. For example, math books which taught enrollees how to tell time also stressed the importance of being punctual and prepared. "The man in the picture missed the truck back to camp because he was not ready," one book intoned, "[and] a long hike was the price he had to pay. Have you ever had to pay for not being ready?" 70

Enrollees were also encouraged to write letters detailing "what the CCC has meant to me." Laboriously scribbled or typed in correct form for a clerical class, these "thank you" letters were constant reminders to men of all they "owed" the government. 71 Radio-plays and speeches glorified the work of CCC "pioneer enrollees" who


71Hundreds of these letters are filed in the Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives. Memos attached to the letters by camp officials indicate that letter writing campaigns did not originate spontaneously but in response to requests made by agencies in Washington. See for example, Carl Wideseth, District Educational Advisor, Minnesota District CCC to Dr. D.E. Wiedman, Seventh Corps Area Educational Advisor. December 20, 1935. The letters themselves, which are often formally typed, three or four to the page, with only the signature of the Corpsman personally inscribed, lends credence to this explanation.
were preserving the glories of the American landscape.\footnote{James J. McEntee, Director of the CCC, over radio station WMBG, Richmond, Virginia. 5:45-6:00 p.m. May 6, 1940. Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives.}

Short-story contests mushroomed, with some of the "prize winning" creations being recycled through camp literature, in \textit{Happy Days}, or other non-CCC affiliated periodicals.\footnote{For example, enrollee Harold Griffin's prize-winning story "Sap among the Dingbats," a \textit{bildungsroman} set in forestry camp, was published in Scribner's Magazine 97 (1935). 179-182.} Corps officials scouted for "success stories," those real life accounts of "CCC men who made good" which were publicized in Corps pamphlets and provided a steady diet of press releases to local papers\footnote{Letters written to former enrollees requesting updates on their lives were used to find appropriate subjects for these stories. Additionally, beginning in January, 1938, all state Directors of CCC Selection were requested to supply a quarterly report on those "former CCC enrollees who have attained outstanding success in private life." Memo from Dean Snyder, Administrative Assistant to Frank Persons, to Guy D. McKinney, Assistant to the Director of the CCC. January 6, 1938. Civilian Conservation Corps Record, National Archives.}.

Corps newspapers also attempted to reinforce selected principles. \textit{Happy Days}, the national newspaper of the Civilian Conservation Corps, was an odd mixture of comic strips, amateur poetry, and human interest stories which kept Corpsmen abreast of what their sister camps were doing. Upbeat articles on heroism, hard work, and political speeches were submitted by camp journalists and prefaced by editorials praising the CCC, a heady pairing that testified
to the effectiveness and value of the Corps. Many editorials were culled from local camp newsletters, with their presence on the national editorial page necessarily privileging them above other "letters to the editor." Not surprisingly, opinion pieces selected to be published reflected "acceptable" values:

Today marks the end of the first and a most glorious chapter in the Administration's treatment of its youth...Back in April, when Roosevelt electrified the nation with his idealistic, yet practical plan of salvaging the out-of-work youth, by opening up to them the opportunity of work..., critics shook their heads. It could not succeed. It had never been done before. The people's money will be squandered. How apt human beings are to err in their judgment....

Moreover, because opinions within Happy Days were culled from the ranks, the paper reflected the sanctions of peer pressure. A script written by enrollees with the "proper" attitude, Happy Days aimed at the recruits' sense of pride to achieve desired responses. Issues from homesickness to dishonorable discharges and matters of the heart were counseled within the pages of CCC papers, with the same conclusions: the CCC was worthwhile, would prove beneficial, and those who could endure its grueling work schedules and separation from family and friends would be memorialized forever as American heroes on the domestic front. Although ostensibly a mere source of information, Happy Days functioned as a vehicle for the circulation of

acceptable values among its readers.

Thus, the Corps experience, while seemingly as varied as the number of men in the camps, was focused towards one end--building up allegiance to and the stability of the "American way of life." Corps officials carefully scrutinized the content of the CCC program to insure that appropriate cues were being sent to recruits and to the public. The Corps was not merely trying to give young men work, but to mold their impressions and keep them from becoming alienated from the basic social units believed to be essential for the stability of the nation. Men were considered "successful" if they demonstrated an appreciation for any facet of the program or for any set of values espoused by camp officials. In this manner, a great number of enrollees were allowed to maintain their integrity as individuals while in the Corps without threatening the coherence of the program as a whole.
CHAPTER III
RESTORING THE FAMILY

About that time the CCC camps opened and nearly every boy in Fairview signed up. Of course, it was worthwhile, and they took a burden off their families which was a help. But there was nothing comparable for girls. They had an NYA sewing program, I remember. But I never learned to handle a needle.

CCC took a load off the job market, but only for older men. At that time, women weren’t competing for the same jobs. So it didn’t help us any.

Kate Pemberton
Fairview, West Virginia 76

The Crash of 1929 wreaked havoc far greater than even the business panic and rising unemployment figures would suggest. Men and women out of work meant starving children, mounting debt, and pressure on all family members to participate in efforts to make ends meet. Observers worried about how this heightened financial burden would affect fragile family structures and America’s social balance for years to come:

Does anyone ever go through the terror of losing his economic security without experiencing a lasting alteration of personality? .... But

the significance of unemployment... is that it damages men as profoundly as any other experience out of which social-work problems arise. It is even possible that the alteration of personality and the development of defense mechanisms and anti-social compensations are even more sure to take place and proceed more promptly to dangerous lengths in a jobless person than in one exposed to almost any other disaster....

Social workers made these gloomy predictions about the psychological effects of the Depression based on the Victorian, middle class idea that men were 'naturally' the family breadwinners. In contrast, women and minor children were viewed as the economic and emotional dependents within a family unit. Unemployed men were therefore expected to be the hardest hit by the Depression because their sense of failure was two-fold—they lost not only economic security but also their role as family providers.


78 Feminist scholars have been aggressive in their attempts to show that such a family "ideal type" was a myth more than a reality, especially among lower class and minority groups. Moreover, during the period 1910-1940 even native, single white women increased their numbers in the so-called "female occupations" of clerical work, nursing, retail, etc. See Alice Kessler-Harris. Women Have Always Worked. (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1981) and Winifred Wandersee. Women's Work And Family Values, 1920-1940. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). That the patriarchal, Victorian ideal failed to describe many families is beyond dispute. Yet because public policies are more based on perceived reality and prescriptive thinking than on an understanding of extant social relations, the patriarchal family is the model upon which this discussion must be based.
Grossly inadequate standards of living among families where unemployed fathers struggled to find work shocked the nation, as did tales of men forced to leave their families to search for jobs or because they could no longer maintain family economic leadership. Just as frightening to contemporaries as these scenarios, however, was one where the family remained intact but wives assumed responsibility for the family’s income. Because of the unique dynamics of a sex-segregated marketplace which reserved some jobs for women only, wives could sometimes find jobs more easily (albeit at lower "female" wages) than their husbands. This situation led, some social researchers believed, to the deterioration of the man’s status within a family, especially when he was left at home to tend children while the wife worked.79

The working mother trend,80 worried those who


80 No quantitative analysis of the number of women forced for the first time into wage labor exists because of the incompleteness of statistics on that subject. Anecdotal evidence and limited case studies like Komarovsky’s, however, point to an increased concern about the stability of intra-family power structures. A possible explanation for the concern over new women workers is Depression-era hypersensitivity to the composition of the labor force and a confusion of new female wage laborers with those women who had
believed male breadwinners were key to the maintenance of strong and stable families. Women workers faced increased scrutiny about their motives for holding jobs. "Pin-money" critiques became common, with women accused of using their salaries to buy luxury items, taking the bread out of the mouths of working men and their families. In response, the National Economy Act of 1932, along with other state and local ordinances, prohibited the employment of more than one family member by the government, pushing many working wives out of the labor force. Labor unions also became increasingly hostile to women's chapters, disparaging the ability of "poor undernourished, stunted, weak girls" to bear the burdens of permanent unionization and advocating the exclusion of women from many jobs. Even such a prominent female leader as Frances Perkins, soon to become Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, was sharp in her criticism of women workers, calling them a "a menace to society."

Furthermore, observers threatened that an exodus of

been working outside the home long before the Depression.


82 Abramovitz, Regulating the Lives of Women 224.


84 Frances Perkins, quoted in Humphries, "Women: Scapegoats and Safety Valves in the Great Depression." 105.
married women to jobs outside of the home would endanger the emotional well-being of minor children. Eleanor Roosevelt, although a strong women's advocate on other issues, nevertheless publicly maintained that a woman's first responsibility was to her family, in the role as housekeeper-nurturer. Small children allegedly suffered at the hands of other family members who could not provide the mother-love and constant attention so necessary for early development. Family advocates, such as Marie Dresden Lane and Francis Steegmuller, supported the notion of a "living wage" which would give male workers a salary adequate to family's needs, allowing mothers to return to domestic responsibilities. Similarly, Lane and Steegmuller supported state child care grants for single mothers so that a "mother could stay out of the labor force without discomfort... and during the child's pre-school years, at least[,] she should be encouraged to remain at home."  

Older children and young adults faced their own dangers

85Humphries, "Women: Scapegoats and Safety Valves..." 106.


88Lane and Steegmuller, America on Relief 78.
from a disrupted and supposedly "out-of-balance" family life. The father's loss of the primary earning role left him in precarious possession of his family's loyalty and respect, endangering patriarchal prerogatives.89 Young men growing up in this allegedly emasculated environment were therefore of especial concern. Government observers and educators worried that boys who matured during the insecurities of the thirties would be unable to properly form families of their own. Like their fathers, young men were expected to take a lead in providing for their families but, also like their fathers, most were unable to find more than part-time, poorly paid jobs. Employment opportunities for youth were blocked by the long lines of experienced workers waiting ahead of them at unemployment agencies.

Frustrated and overwhelmed with responsibilities to their families which they could not fulfill, many of these youth began to haunt street corners in gangs or left home in search of jobs elsewhere.90 Transiency, with its stream of young "hobos" riding cross-country freight trains, made a great impression upon the collective American

X

89Milkman., "Women's Work and the Economic Crisis..." 53.

imagination, \(^91\) because it seemed as if an entire generation might be alienated from stable economic and family life. In the words of "eminent" psychiatrist C. Charles Burlingame of the Hartford Retreat:

This group [of men aged eighteen to thirty] includes those who have had to cope with the difficult task of gaining an economic foothold during the Depression as well as those who have never found a niche for themselves. What this mental and spiritual stagnation forced upon this latter group is doing to them, time alone will tell, but I am somewhat apprehensive of it. These people have been subjected to a kind of pressure that their elders have never known. \(^92\)

The Civilian Conservation Corps was, in part, an effort to deal with the problems of these vulnerable young men. Placement in a camp took them off the streets and supplied nourishment and shelter. Camp loyalty instilled a sense of "rootedness" to replace disrupted family life. In this safe environment, the Corps reinforced the family ethic and the role of men within it as the primary wage earner and


\(^92\)Dr. C. Charles Burlingame from the annual report of the Hartford Retreat quoted in Loveless, "Is the CCC a privileged American?" an entry for the Civilian Conservation Corps Story Contest. Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, National Archives (1936) 3-4. Burlingame makes it clear in later passages that he is referring solely to young men and makes an exception to his gloomy prophecy for those "who have benefitted by such training as the Civilian Conservation Corps offers, because I believe through character training, and the adjustment made by boys in these camps, plus the discipline, they emerged better able to compete in the struggle for existence." 4.
patriarchal authority.

Flowing logically from these principles was the idea that women were properly considered as dependent creatures, sexual objects, and potential mates, but not as equal claimants to the title of breadwinner. To this end, gendered stereotypes proliferated the camp experience. Math texts used in camp classes, for example, contained illustrations of courtship entirely irrelevant to the lesson material. Girls were blushing maidens sitting proudly beside CCC beaus on a buggy ride to town or leaning shyly on a white picket fence awaiting his arrival.93 Complementing this image of quiet domesticity was one of women as anonymous sirens. The concept of "angles," for example, was demonstrated in this same series by the limbs of a female dancer stretching upon the floor.94 Cartoons in Happy Days and other camp newspapers featured this same shapely woman (with varying hair and outfits) as the adoring admirer of young CCC men or as scantily clad ornamentation for front and back covers.95 Even official Corps promotional pamphlets portrayed women solely in these

93Howard W. Oxley, Director of the Office of CCC Camp Education. Camp Life Arithmetic Workbook No 5. (June 1940). 4, 84.

94Howard W. Oxley, Camp Life Arithmetic Workbook, No.4 56.

95See, for example, the covers of the Camp Fechner Pow-Wow, University of Virginia Archives.
ornamental and/or domestic terms: laughing bathing beauties were shown enjoying a CCC conserved lake while mothers cooked and tended babies at newly constructed CCC parkways and camp sites.  

Counterpoised to these images were those of the men entering the Corps. In classical advertising format, CCC pamphlets show the young man who needs to be recruited—he is slight, dirty, and unattractive, with a forlorn expression and a ragged cloth cap. After becoming a full-fledged enrollee, however, the recruit is pictured (often shirtless) as all rippling muscles and glistening skin, holding a pick, a length of pipe, or a survey instrument, captured in all his new-found confidence by the Corps camera. The CCC had transformed him from a youth into a man by giving him the training and attitude necessary to tackle a man's responsibilities. As one observer noted:

I remember many of these boys. Their shoulders were drooped and their faces pale. They were out of jobs, and financially and mentally broke.  

Now they walk erect. They...are smiling, free from worry. They act proud, proud of themselves, their work and most of all,

---


98McNutt, The CCC at Work. 33, 41, 43, 73.
Manly responsibilities, according to the Corps, lay first and foremost with the family. Stated simply, the CCC was designed to give men what was often their first taste of bearing the financial burden of dependents. Part of this socialization was done in very straightforward terms—enrollees were required to allot from twenty-two to twenty-five dollars of their thirty dollar salary to their families at home. These allotment checks were more than just payments to a man’s parents to recompense them for his labor. Rather, they were geared to benefit the men themselves by instructing them how to work for the benefit of others. Early in the program, this meant that even enrollees without known relatives were required to enter into a sponsor relationship with a needy family to whom their wage checks were donated.

Moreover, when camps were located close to small communities, men were allowed to hold dances with local girls and were encouraged to become involved in church services and other civic organizations. This direct, positive contact served two purposes: it bolstered support

---


100 Hopkins, Spending to Save 129.

101 Salmond, The Civilian Conservation Corps 60. Later on, enrollees without families had their earnings deposited within a savings fund, arguably an economic lesson of another kind.
for the Corps among townspeople, and insured that men continually had before them role models of family life, as well as opportunities to meet potential mates.\textsuperscript{102} In some instances, junior Corpsmen were even allowed to break the regulation that enrollees be single, if they married during their enlistment period.\textsuperscript{103}

While the problems of single young men were being addressed, at least partially, by their recruitment into the CCC, poverty and unemployment among single women was largely ignored. Perhaps because young women were more readily reabsorbed within the family,\textsuperscript{104} were too embarrassed to stand in relief lines\textsuperscript{105}, or were seen as less of a social threat than their male counterparts,\textsuperscript{106} reports of female transiency and desperation were considered "exaggerated" by

\textsuperscript{102}Based on Virginia camp activities in McCarthy, \textit{Civilian Conservation Corps, District No. 4, Third Corps Area} yearbook.

\textsuperscript{103}Interview with Andrew Carroll.

\textsuperscript{104} Milkman, "Women's Work and the Economic Crisis" 73-82.

\textsuperscript{105}Depression-era feminist author Meridel Le Seuer contends that the single poor woman would go "for weeks verging on starvation, crawling in some hole, going through the streets ashamed, sitting in libraries, parks...shut up in the terror of her own misery until she [became] too supersensitive and timid to even ask for a job." Thus, "there are no social statistics concerning her." "Women on the Breadlines" in Elaine Hedges (ed.) \textit{Ripening: Selected Work, 1927-1980}. (Old Westbury, New York, Feminist Press, 1982). 141-143.

\textsuperscript{106}Humphries, ""Women, Scapegoats and Safety Valves..."" 113.
government officials.\textsuperscript{107} What government aid was made available conformed to accepted family norms by assigning to each gender those roles supposedly suited to their unique tastes and temperaments. Women were relegated to work projects such as sewing rooms or hot lunch programs which were domestic, nurturing, or clerical in nature, while men were assigned heavier and more public positions.\textsuperscript{108}

Women's leaders such as Eleanor Roosevelt, however, saw a need for some social program that touched women's lives more directly. Unmarried women, they believed, also needed to be educated in the new realities and responsibilities of the Depression social order. In 1934, the White House Conference on Camps for Women suggested the establishment of residential centers based on the CCC model as the best way to provide this instruction. Given limited funding by Harry Hopkins and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, twenty eight camps were set up during the summer of 1934, serving about 1800 women.\textsuperscript{109}

Like their CCC counterparts, women's camps were designed not only to provide relief but to re-educate enrollees for the problems of Depression society. But, unlike the Corps, women's camps were intended to challenge

\textsuperscript{107}Hopkins, \textit{Spending to Save} 126-129.


\textsuperscript{109}Ware, \textit{Beyond Suffrage} 113.
the traditional nature of American society, including the conventional conception of the woman's role in industrial society. Headed on the national level by "worker's education" specialist Hilda W. Smith, female recruits were given instruction in social and economic issues and encouraged, in historian Richard Reiman's words, "to question existing social conditions, ponder matters of social justice, and comprehend their place as workers in a depression economy."\(^{110}\)

The camps' ability to introduce values inconsistent with patriarchal norms soon began to concern state NYA administrators. Intellectualism, which had been acceptable when camps were of limited size and relative obscurity, became worrisome as women's centers expanded. As the program grew (to ninety camps and 5,000 women participants in March 1936\(^ {111}\)), so did resistance from administrators. Much of this obstinacy was tied to the conviction that women had little business challenging the American social system. As one state director put it (perhaps more virulently than most): "What could these little girls be interested in social problems for, they get enough sadness at home. Give them lightness and cheer, good recreation, a little home

\(^{110}\)Reiman, *The New Deal And American Youth* 145.

economics—but leave economics alone."112 "Worker's education" was phased out and replaced by more traditional patterns of women's relief, training enrollees in domestic work, home management, and arts and crafts.113

Perhaps the most telling example of how far women's camps fell below their radical, experimental aims is visible in the tremendous funding disparities between CCC camps for men and NYA camps for women. If the Corps was designed to teach young men about stable wage earning and family responsibility, women's centers were structured to underscore female economic dependence upon others. Performing no physical labor outside of providing for personal needs and caring for the campgrounds—both extensions of domestic chores—women received no salary, only a fifty-cent per week personal allowance.114 Acting as a surrogate for campers' fathers/husbands, the NYA constructed a patriarchal power relationship between women and the state, nullifying the camps' exciting potential as a source of female social awareness.

Only a short three years after their birth, residential


113 NYA camps were only one of a long list of federal relief policies that reinforced the sexual-stereotyping of women in the work force, relegating them to "caring" roles (nursing, hot lunch programs) or domestic chores (sewing rooms, canning factories) which supposedly suited their inclinations better. See Ware, Beyond Suffrage 109.

114 Ware, Beyond Suffrage 112.
education centers for women were closed during budget cuts. NYA officials cited the camps' expense and limited clientele as reasons for the decision. Ironically, supporting a female camper cost the federal government only slightly more than half the cost of employing the average male CCC enrollee. Unlike the men's Corps, however, women's camps failed to "capture the imagination of the American public" and never built a base of popular support. Little opposition was raised to their demise.

The women's camp saga is important to an understanding of the Civilian Conservation Corps because it lends credence to the theory that residential camps were explicitly designed to infuse values within the youth who attended them, whether in CCC camps or NYA centers. Moreover, the fearful responses of state NYA administrators to the unorthodox instruction of women's camps suggests that government officials considered such camps to be extremely effective devices for transmitting values. So effective, in fact, that innovative women's curricula was quickly transformed to reflect the family ethic and its conservative doctrine of "woman's place." Concerned that the family was

115 The annual per capita budget approved for NYA camps was $585.00 ($11.25/week) as compared with CCC per capita annual expenditures of $1,000. Computed with information given in Reiman, The New Deal and American Youth 146 and United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Eight years of CCC Operations, 1933-1941" Monthly Review of Labor. 52 (1941). 1409.

116 Ware, Beyond Suffrage 114.
too strained by economic upheaval to fulfill its socializing role, the government was forced (or felt itself to be forced) to take over the role of parent to the nation's youth--providing for women, apprenticing men, and teaching them both their proper roles within the family.

Focusing on the "family ethic" shatters the squeaky clean image so long a popular theme in studies of the CCC. What emerges instead is a picture of the government using youth camps to strengthen patriarchal power structures inside of families and within the labor force. Both the CCC and the women's centers championed two-parent families with men as primary wage earners as normal, stable and optimal. Clearly, the CCC experience was much more complex than the myth of the Corps as a simple, guileless and unprogrammatic relief program would suggest.
CHAPTER IV

REINFORCING THE WORK ETHIC

Mark Green of 6216 Perry Street, Kansas City, Missouri, whose last CCC experience was with the Biological Survey on the White Water River Refuge at St. Charles Arkansas, in 1937 has made good since leaving camp. Green obtained work in December of that year...and is now drawing down $225.00 a month as material man on a 6" pipe job....

Green's CCC training has stood him in good stead....Here he obtained valuable experience in the erection of a lookout tower. His crew was largely responsible for the speedy completion of that job.

Entering the CCC as a boy of eighteen, Green left it a man of 22, four years later with valuable work experience and training in handling men to carry back with him to civil life. Green's case is an outstanding, though not a rare, case of a CCC boy who made good in a big way.

From the file "CCC Men who have Made Good."
Civilian Conservation Corps Records117

The work ethic vied with the family ethic as one of the most important lessons taught to enrollees during their terms in the Civilian Conservation Corps. Much of the Corps program was geared toward training men for an industrial schedule. As we have seen in Chapter II, the values of steady work, prompt arrival at the workplace, and acceptance

117Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives.
of authority all formed a goodly portion of CCC goals for enrollees. Therefore, completion of a full six month enrollment period was touted as a stamp of approval for youth who had never before held a full time job. An "honorable discharge" from the CCC was valuable because it proved that an enrollee had been disciplined enough to meet the Corps' exacting standards:

When industry begins to hit on all four...cylinders again, it will need to reach out for those young men who have always been the bulwark of society....If it is wise, it will draw into its folds young men who have been trained in the ways of work, young men who have taken knocks and pushed through....A forest worker's certificate of "graduation" from such a school as that of the Civilian Conservation Corps should prove a valuable "ace in the hole" when the time comes.118

While this "work training" interpretation of the Corps program is insightful, it provides only a partial understanding of the obstacles facing CCC administrators as they attempted to develop the labor potential of enrollees. The Corps was not, after all, training men of a non-capitalist consciousness into the rigors of wage labor for the first time. Many CCC enrollees, despite their youth, had a good deal of work experience of some kind. For example, a 1936 Virginia Department of Public Welfare study estimated that only over "20 per cent [of CCC enrollees within the state] had never had a regular job," meaning that the vast

118"One Sure Ace in the Hole." Happy Days. July 1, 1933.
majority of recruits were the victims of unemployment rather than inexperience.\textsuperscript{119} These unemployed men felt themselves to be well prepared to meet the requirements of commercial production; they simply needed an opportunity to work. As one former enrollee succinctly remembered, "I didn't need discipline, I already had that."\textsuperscript{120}

Even the most inexperienced enrollees, moreover, were products of the capitalist American culture. The childhood and teenage years of most recruits coincided with the decade of the Roaring Twenties, a period when the "rightness" of the American market system was affirmed in fervent, and sometimes violent terms.\textsuperscript{121} Improved transportation, communication, and marketing techniques brought the latest in fashions, labor saving devices, and entertainment to small towns (at least on a periodic basis) and large cities alike.\textsuperscript{122} Wage labor and production for the market were also familiar institutions for most children growing up in


\textsuperscript{120}Interview with John Purdue. (Stuart's Draft, Virginia). July 1, 1994.

\textsuperscript{121}The anti-labor violence at Centralia, Washington involving members of the IWW is just one example of the tactics that were used to put down opponents of the American socio-economic system. Geoffrey Perrett. \textit{America in the Twenties}. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). 92-98

\textsuperscript{122}Edward Ayers, throughout his book \textit{The Promise of the New South}, explains how even the rural Southern states, considered the most backwards regions of the country, were affected by the rhythms of production and consumption, although on a smaller scale than the rest of the country.
American families, from those of farm laborers and coal miners to school teachers and office clerks.

The problem for Corps officials, then, was not how to bring about a change in enrollee’s economic world-view but how to keep already market oriented youth from becoming discouraged through unfulfilled aspirations. Most CCC recruits desired a foothold within the capitalist society, not the disruption of private enterprise or the institution of a new social order. But this did not mean that enrollees were blind to the injustices of American society nor that they were able to forget past hardships in return for a meal, a bed, and thirty dollars a month. Emotional wounds were still too fresh and too deep to heal miraculously upon induction into the CCC. Camp officials were, therefore, in the uncomfortable position of having to acknowledge this restlessness and cynicism and provide a forum for their expression, while at the same time funnelling them away from any larger critique of American society.

The Corps struck this balance through an educational program which emphasized a special language of economic inclusiveness and opportunity. Enrollees were taught that they were not defenseless individual pawns pushed around by

123Interviews with former CCC’ers (Carroll, Millkie, Painter, Purdue, Robeson) along with testimonials throughout Happy Days and in smaller camp newsletters are in universal agreement on this point.
external forces, but rather important players in a cooperative economic venture. As Harry Overstreet, Professor of Adult Education for Columbia University, wrote in an issue of *Happy Days*:

> It seems to me that this (CCC education) is not just a temporary emergency situation. It promises to be one of the big things in America; it's education in citizenship.... We are in decades of social bewilderment, of social confusion. You can raise the morale of a youngster just as soon as you make that person believe that he is in on the family enterprise. But if you let the youngster feel that he has nothing to do with that thing, down goes his morale.124

In this way, the same Corps programs which at times mercilessly pummeled men with the "shoulds" and "should nots" of workplace etiquette also guided enrollees gently by manufacturing a sense of camaraderie and mutual obligation among workers. Enrollees should labor faithfully and hard, the reasoning went, because they owed it to one another and to their country. By tying job discipline to more positive images such as masculinity, the Modern Pioneer, and the success story, Corps officials managed to reinforce the work ethic within almost every camp activity.

Masculinity as an image within the CCC has already been discussed to the extent that responsibilities as family breadwinner were impressed upon enrollees. But the image

---

was more complex, extending beyond the patriarchal context to include what can best be described as a form of *machismo* where manhood was related directly to productive labor. Throughout Corps literature, there are references to a "partnership between the man and the job."\(^{125}\)

Those who labored earnestly earned the respect of work crews and supervising officials. These "real men" proved their virility by their ability to "take it"—rising early, finishing their duties on time, never taking personal break on Corps time, and never complaining.\(^{126}\) "Softies," on the other hand, were "petted, pampered" boys unused to hard work and those to whom Corps discipline came as an unexpected shock.\(^{127}\) These men were to be pitied but not abandoned as they might become accustomed to a man's burden. A third type of enrollee, however, the "slackers," and "the


\(^{126}\)The phrase "we can take it" appears continually throughout CCC promotional materials, newspapers, and enrollee literature until it became the "unofficial motto of the CCC." Civilian Conservation Corps Facts." Published by the National Association for CCC Alumni." Also see, Reen Maynard (Company 1638). "Education." *Happy Days*. June 2, 1934.; Robert L. Miller (Company 999, Pine Grove, California). "It's a Great Life." (Entry for a CCC Short Story Contest). Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives.; Captain C.G. Riggs (Company 217). Lead Editorial. *Happy Days*. August 5, 1933.

\(^{127}\)"A CCC Rookie." (Company 873, Ottine, Texas). "I Was a 'Softie.'" *Happy Days*. July 24, 1934.
Afraid Type,"\textsuperscript{128} were to be scorned by their fellows. Dishonest youth, these enrollees wasted time through imaginary illnesses, working only when supervised, or gossiping in the ranks during work hours. Seeing only the sore muscles and burned skin that accompanied CCC work, these Corpsmen failed to understand that because work was one of the primary responsibilities of a man, worthy workmanship at all times was the badge of honor:

\begin{quote}
Don't make results your god. Do your best every day and results will take care of themselves. Don't work merely to please anyone particular person, but work because it is right to work and do the job well. Right is worth the whole world because it is the only eternal. Do right because it is right to do right and the joy that it will bring.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

This imagery worked well because it was aimed at an enrollee's sensitive feelings of self-worth and effectively took advantage of peer pressure as a method of social control. Anyone could prove himself to be a respectable member of the Corps merely by working well within his crew. This "objective" standard of measurement allowed men of several ethnic, class, and educational backgrounds to relate to one another on a fairly equal basis. This aspect of the work ethic impressed enrollees who believed that the Corps taught recruits "to work with other people, to respect other people, [including those] who had ideas very different from


\textsuperscript{129}Ibid.
[their] own ways of thinking." Moreover, "masculinity" dovetailed nicely with another image frequent in camp life: that of the enrollee as Modern Pioneer.

Beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner's eloquent delivery of the "frontier thesis" in 1899, common wisdom held that the settlement of the West and the rise of large scale urbanization stifled opportunities for upward mobility and outward expansion. The fading of the frontier frightened those who believed that the essence of what made America great was disappearing. The Depression merely heightened this awareness of social change. Those qualities which made up the American self-image—economic independence, ambition, mobility—were mocked by the long lines of unemployment and parodied in the wanderings of young hobos. Corps officials set out to alleviate this mood of declension by depicting the Depression as a kind of latter-day frontier and the CCC as the proving ground for twentieth-century pioneers.

The story of Andrew H. Collins provides an excellent example of how this image played out both within the Corps and in the popular media. On 20 February 1939, W.R.G.

130 Interview with John Purdue.; Similar responses from Andrew Carroll, Robert Robeson (Seattle, Washington. June 30, 1994), and Paul Painter (Rossville, Georgia, June 15, 1994).

131 Hobos were, according to one sociologist writing in the twenties, "belated frontiersmen." This unfettered lifestyle appealed to many before the Depression, when it began to be seen in a more pejorative context. Nels Anderson. The Hobo. (1923) in Perrett, America in the Twenties 89.
Bender in the Office of Education authored a memo regarding the story of Collins, a former farm laborer who, with CCC training and a good deal of personal perseverance, became a gas station proprietor.\textsuperscript{132} Collins' case came to Bender's attention after Collins had responded to a request for his life story after leaving the CCC. Bender was intrigued by the story because Collins not only credited the Corps with lifting him into the ranks of the petite bourgeoisie, but also because his continued effort to reach that goal\textsuperscript{133} proved that youth had the fortitude of their pioneer ancestors:

The frontiers for the youth of old may be gone but today for those who have a spark of ambition, the CCC has done wonders to improve the outlook and rehabilitate physically of [sic] young men.... to the extent of giving them impetus to continue on their way with new hope.\textsuperscript{134}

A survey was attached with the memo that included more information on Collins' lifestyle and personality. He was found to be "very honest and hard working" and at "5'9" and 200 lbs...from good American stock."\textsuperscript{135}

In the next four months, the story took shape so that

\textsuperscript{132}Memo from W.R.G. Bender, Department of the Interior, Office of Education to Guy D. McKinney, Assistant to the Director of the CCC. 20 February, 1939. Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{133}Collins was forced to rebuild three times after the destruction of his station by storms.

\textsuperscript{134}Bender memo.

\textsuperscript{135}Ibid.
by June 11, Collins was immortalized in the Sunday Magazine Section of The Baltimore Sun as the hero of "Boy Meets Adversity." Writer Paul Kearney echoed quite closely the themes first expressed in Bender's memo:

"The frontiers are gone," sigh the sophisticates that never saw a frontier. "What is there left for youth to conquer?" Well, there's Adversity, for one thing. What matters if the future cloaks an unexplored terrain populated by hostile savages—or an economic desert on hunger lurks behind the cacti of insecurity....

[Herein follows the Collins story.]

"The trouble today," protest certain citizens, "is that Americans have lost their initiative." What do you think?136

The closeness of the CCC interpretation to the final story as published in The Sun attests to the influence of CCC publicity divisions in determining what was said about the Corps from the outside. More importantly, it testifies to Corps attempts to convince both enrollees and the public that the Depression did not signal the end of the American way of life. Challenges and hardships had always been a part of the national experience, with the Depression merely another chapter to the age-old struggle for security. As Americans had always managed to meet their obligations with strength and sacrifice, they would again prevail over this

136Paul W. Kearney. "Boy Meets Adversity." This Week: The Baltimore Sun (Sunday) Magazine. June 11, 1939. Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives. The Collins story is just one of several collected by the CCC Division of Planning and Public Relations.
latest crisis\textsuperscript{137}.

On another level, the frontier image was used to reinforce the work ethic by glorifying the supposedly selfless labor of pioneer ancestors. But this usage, founded on a misconstruction of American history, established a false relationship between enrollees and their past. While Corpsmen physically followed in the tradition of their idealized (or imagined\textsuperscript{138}) forefathers, blazing trails and building rough stone buildings and bridges, they had little chance of replicating the frontier feat of owning capital through sheer physical labor. The results of their efforts would stand only as monuments to their labor, not as inheritable legacies:

When in years to come the children
Of these Modern Pioneers
While viewing some lone spot of wondrous charm,
May slowly gaze around
With a thought of pride and joy,
And dream that this road Daddy built
When he was but a boy.

Many a day with axe and shovel
He had fallen trees [one] by one
Just to bring this wondrous beauty

\textsuperscript{137} Civic education programs within the Corps stressed this rough and ready interpretation of American history. Along with fostering a "mutual love for their country and its institutions" these classes taught enrollees how fortunate they were to be living free in a democratic country like the United States. Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{138} Many recruits were the children or grandchildren of urban immigrants.
To his and other worker's sons.\textsuperscript{139}

Although the Modern Pioneer was supposedly cut from the same cloth as his ancestor, a vast difference existed between the two in terms of practical and economic goals. Pioneers of the past had been ignorant or heedless of the damage that settlement was causing to the environment. Their wastefulness resulted from a desire to maximize returns upon their investment or from their ignorance of modern farming techniques and led to the near ruination of American natural resources:

Well, you see, when our forefathers first settled this country, they found it wonderfully stocked with natural riches—fertile lands, vast forests, abundant game, plentiful water. Nature and the Indians had been the only tenants for many centuries; and they had been kind to it. We white men were not as kind.\textsuperscript{140}

In contrast, Corpsmen were taught to be acutely aware of the effects of every swing of the axe and every plowing of the field. The job of the Corpsman was not, in short, to shape the land to his own needs, but to restore lands for the use and enjoyment of others. Preservation, rather than exploitation, of land was the ultimate goal of enrollees' labor.

Ironically, then, Modern Pioneers were anomalies within the tradition to which they claimed to fall heir. To the


\textsuperscript{140}McNutt, \textit{The CCC at Work} 30.
authentic frontiersman, sweat and labor contained the promise of ownership and the right to use or abuse the land as they saw fit—hardly a selfless act of labor. With luck, even the most careless homesteader could produce a crop adequate to his needs and build a legacy for his children. No such promise awaited the Modern Pioneer. Sweat and toil for these men translated, not into the ownership of land, but into a monthly wage, the hope that his training might land him a job, and the prospect that "his and others workers' sons" might one day gaze upon Corps' handiwork. Proprietorial concern for the land was granted to Corpsmen, but proprietorship was not. The only lasting benefit of CCC work accrued to the nation and (supposedly) to the enrollee's self-respect. CCC men were to work bravely like the pioneers and to selflessly endure hardship and long hours simply because "you'll be proud of yourself--and of your country." However faulty and misleading it may have been, the language of Modern Pioneering accomplished its goal of reinforcing the work ethic as it encouraged men to work sacrificially even when the expected long-term personal benefits of their labor were minimal.

Standing in contrast to the Modern Pioneer was the image raised to a high art form during the Corps' existence—the success story. In this scenario, the sole purpose of the Corps was to help men attain employment and material

141Ibid. 102.
advancement. No high-toned moralizing about manly or patriotic duty was needed. The idea that the Corps was placing men in jobs sold itself. Capitalism, these stories asserted, was still a basically sound proposition. The problem was not with business, per se, but with those "industrial captains [who] adopted that principle [of survival of the fittest] in production and distribution, till it became a case of dog-eat-dog" with workers taking the cuts to finance cutthroat practices.142

The Corps saw itself as a partner with F.D.R. in planning a new, fairer capitalism where "might did not mean right" and where capital and labor worked together to rejuvenate the economy. To this end, Corps officials explicitly linked the fortunes of enrollees to the needs of businessmen. The Corps maintained that employers wanted to give people decent jobs but had to choose those workers trained and suitable to their needs. CCC vocational training was to bridge this impasse by keeping a line of communication open between community business leaders and local Corps educators. In this way, recruits could be assured of jobs after their enrollment period and employers could be guaranteed that CCC’ers were being trained to business specifications. As one Corps training officer related:

142"Peavy" (Camp Fechner, Virginia). Editorial Pick in Happy Days. August 26, 1933.
I was talking to a man the other day, from a telephone company. I asked him if they had employed any CCC boys and if so how they got along. He said they worked right along, but that they did not have the pace that they want their men to have. We should train the boys [to have] a little more stick-to-it-iveness.\textsuperscript{143}

Businesses were also encouraged to cooperate with local camps in the establishment of special classes or internships for enrollees.\textsuperscript{144} Success stories provided tangible evidence that such a cooperation between business and the working class could be forged. And they showed that jobs did indeed exist for young men. Throughout the newspapers of the nation were stories of average men receiving steady salaries and making themselves valuable members of their communities:

As an educational and training institution the Corps has improved the employability of more than 2,000,000 young men, taught some 80,000 illiterates how to read and write and raised the educational level of hundreds of thousands of young men.

It has taught green youngsters how to work, helped them develop proper work habits and attitudes and in many instances trained them in skills which aided them to find employment. Our records show 505,000 enrollees left the camps to accept offers of jobs before they had completed


\textsuperscript{144}See, for example, U.S. Army Information Services press release. November 11, 1934. Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives.
Of all its goals, the CCC seemed to be most proud of its ability to serve as what one enrollee called "a stepping stone to bigger and better opportunities."146

At the root of the CCC success story, one finds the work ethic in its baldest form. The men who "made it" were those who had best exhibited (or were portrayed by Corps writers to have best exhibited) the determination, willingness to work, and fortitude allegedly instilled within them by Corps enrollment. Success stories were held out as the final enticement to enrollees to adopt proper working patterns. For those enrollees whose sense of masculine self-worth was impervious to the taunts of Happy Days editorials or who prized their leisurely pace of work above the future dividends to the nation's children, the success story could provide an angle through which their attention (and their labor) could be captured.

Ultimately, the Corps had to give reasonable assurance that it could locate jobs for those enrollees who were willing to work faithfully within the camp. And it had to

---

145 James J. McEntee, Director, Civilian Conservation Corps. Radio Address over WMBG, Richmond, Virginia. 5:45-6:00 P.M. May 6, 1940. Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, National Archives.

146 Henry C. Hebig, Jr to Guy D. McKinney. December 14, 1938. Civilian Corps Records, National Archives. Of course, the letters and complaints of those men who did not receive employment, or whose adjusted attitudes did not aid their search for employment, are missing from Corps records.
prove that such work habits, when carried into the private market, would lead to some measure of personal reward. The success story, although anecdotal and showing only the best side of the Corps experience, was proof enough to satisfy enrollees tired of the desperation and hopelessness of Depression.

In the language of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Horatio Alger’s heroes were not dead nor in retirement. But neither were they to be found making a fortune on Wall Street. Responsible men, good citizens, and hard workers, the Corps’ new protagonists combined the best of America’s imagined past with the hope of her future. Dressed in olive green, these Depression heroes swung the pick-axe and the hammer to the tune of hoped-for future success.
CONCLUSION
SIXTY YEARS LATER

WHO ARE WE?

We are the young men of the 1930’s who made up the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933 to 1942. We are the men who mended the scarred land, the eroded fields, the muddied waters of our creeks and rivers, and the depleted woodlands of our country.

We were educated and given job opportunities, honor, respect, and a purpose in life.

All over this country, the work we did with our hands, our minds, and our bodies, still stands today as a monument to the youth of the 1930's and what we accomplished...

A CCC Alumnus

Former enrollees of the CCC are proud of their involvement in an organization that "put our mark on the land" and earned for the youth of the 1930's a "place in history." Members of the National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni (NACCCA), for example, have kept alive traditional images of the Corps as a "builder of men" by sponsoring reunions and dedication services and by providing information to researchers studying the New Deal. Through these efforts, the NACCCA

147 "Who are we?" NACCCA publication. Unspecified date.
148 Ibid.
promotes the rhetoric of the Corps with the freshness of a Happy Days editorial. "All of my C.C.C. experiences," writes one alumnus, "have helped me all through my life:"

First of all, it gave me the knowledge that I was capable of taking on any job and doing it well and that I could always set my sights on some sort of supervisory position. My experiences with so many youngsters gave me the ability to be an excellent judge of character...

Last but not least, I HAD FUN, the most fun period of my whole life....We [enrollees] went through a tough period in our life, and became better citizens from our experiences, accepting our fate, learning from it and truthfully benefitting from it.149

The CCC was successful, NACCCCA members conclude, because it was adept at attaining its goals. Men who needed a respite from the burdens of economic struggle found a job. Men who needed friendship, found solidarity and brotherhood in the camps. Men who needed an education, aspired to a vocation, or merely wanted to help their family were counseled along the right paths.

The effectiveness of the CCC is proven, these alumni maintain, by its imitation in several post-New Deal social programs. The Corps' vocational philosophy has been incorporated into youth training programs such as the Jobs Corps. Ecological aspects are reflected in state conservation camps and by the N-Triple C's portion of the

149Correspondence from Leo Williams, NACCCCA member. (Seattle, Washington) June 27, 1994.

73
nationwide AmeriCorps youth service organization.\textsuperscript{150} Even the CCC's emphasis on military-style discipline as a solution for "youth problems" is once again popular in boot camps for juvenile offenders. In each of these programs can be found an echo of the original Corps.

Yet, despite these eagerly claimed legacies, there is a sense that the "real" CCC has somehow been lost in its translation to newer policies. In the words of NACCCA Regional Director Bob Robeson, "the whole problem was that [the government] discontinued the CCC during World War II, and the country just kind of forgot about us after the war. Just forgot about us."\textsuperscript{151} Too much bureaucratic overhead, the introduction of women and minorities equally into the camps, and the relative health of the economy since the Depression have changed the dynamics of youth programs. Openness to cultural diversity and the lack of large scale social disorder make it unlikely that enrollees within new Corps programs can be as easily guided into "proper" attitudes as were the original recruits. Fragmentation of the middle class consensus regarding gender roles, the responsibility of citizens, and the meaning of American history make the creation of a cohesive (and enforceable) system of values at best a dubious proposition.


\textsuperscript{151}Interview with Robert Robeson.
Thus, while the basic administrative framework of the CCC can be preserved and its conservation or vocational goals transferred into new policies, the heart and soul of the CCC was uniquely a product of New Deal ideology. The Corps' vision of "life as it should be" was inherently capitalist, conservative, and patriarchal. The familiar, well-worn images cultivated within the camps offered an emotional haven to that generation of young men exhausted by years of turbulence and chaos.

The Civilian Conservation Corps, then, was much more than a "make-work" relief program for Depression youth. Historical evidence clearly points to the use of the CCC as a mechanism for the resocialization of men into attitudes deemed healthy by government and camp officials. The success of the Corps in this area is impressive—the family and work ethic flavored enrollees' letters and stories in the 1930's and continue to do so even today. Yet the Corps did not "brainwash" young men against their will. Rather, it was as an exercise in skilled social policymaking, giving to enrollees what they wanted most in those gloomy Depression years—hope. By salvaging the language of the American Dream and the nuclear family, the CCC assured men that their homes and their aspirations could be safeguarded even through unprecedented economic crisis. The power of this imagery in American culture and within individual American souls should not be underestimated. When harnessed
efficiently, as by the Civilian Conservation Corps, it can prove remarkably potent—even sixty years later.
Bibliography

Secondary Sources


Addington, Luther F. *History of Wise County (Virginia)*. Wise County, Virginia: Bicentennial Committee, 1956.


Lawrence, Paul A. *Remembering the CCC.* San Anselmo, California: PAL Press, 1983.


Primary Sources


National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni. "Who are we?" Unspecified Date.


Oxley, Howard W., Director of the Office of CCC Education. *Camp Life Arithmetic Workbook Series. Volumes 1-5.* 1940.


Rand, Clayton. *Abracadabra, or One Democrat to Another.* Newark, Delaware: The Press of Kells, 1936.


Civilian Conservation Corps Records, National Archives, Washington D.C.
Records Groups: RG 35.45, 35.64, 35.99, 35.101.
Conferences 1939, Box #8.
*Happy Days*, National Civilian Conservation Corps Newspaper, 1933-1940.

Virginia Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Newsletters.
University of Virginia Archives, Charlottesville, Virginia.
The *Linden Leaflet*, Amelia, Virginia (2350th Co.). April, Unspecified Year.
*Potomac Post*, Fort Hunt, Virginia. (Camp NP-6-VA, 23339th Co.) March 1, 1936.
The *Pow-Wow*, Camp Fechner, Virginia. (Camp SNP-2, 350th Co.) February 8, 1936.


Interview with Cecil Q. Flowers, NACCCA member (Jackson, Tennessee). July 12, 1994.

Interview with Lloyd Milkie, NACCCA member (Kansas City, Missouri). July 10, 1994.

Interview with Paul Painter, Southeastern Regional Director, NACCCA (Rossville, Georgia). June 15, 1994.

Interview with John Purdue, NACCCA member (Stuart's Draft, Virginia). July 1, 1994.

Correspondence from Leo Williams, NACCCA member (Seattle, Washington). June 27, 1994.
VITA

Celia M. Carroll


In August 1994, the author entered Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia as a graduate student in the Department of Political Science.