

**The Civilian Conservation Corps:
The African-American Experience**

By
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Well before the age of five years old John Hope Franklin showed himself destined to be more than just an average person. He proved himself to be exceptional when his mother came to check on Franklin at the back of her classroom and discovered that he had taught himself to read just from listening to her teach.¹ From that point on he committed his life to scholarship with seemingly ceaseless energy. Duke University President remembered him as "A towering historian, he led the recognition that African-American history and American history are one. With his grasp of the past, he spent a lifetime building a future of inclusiveness, fairness and equality."²

Franklin was born on January 2, 1915 in the very small, all-black town of Rentiesville, Oklahoma to two loving parents who were an enormous influence in his life. His family moved to Tulsa when he was ten years old and upon graduating valedictorian from his high school at sixteen he entered Fisk University in the fall of 1931.³ It was at Fisk that he met Professor Ted Courier, the man who would have one of the biggest influences in his life, other than his parents and his wife. Franklin says, "my decision to focus that ambition on a career as a scholar, as opposed to a lawyer or some other pursuit, was not a response to the racial injustices that marked my freshman year, but can be directly attributed to a single individual."⁴ It was this man who helped Franklin decide to dedicate his life to being a historian.

Franklin also met the love of his life, Aurelia, at Fisk University although disapproval from her parents almost prevented their marriage. Her parents however,

¹ John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 13.

² Andrew L. Yarrow, "John Hope Franklin, Scholar of African-American History, Is Dead at 94," *New York Times*, March 25, 2009, U.S.

³ Franklin, 37.

⁴ Franklin, 44.

finally relented and Franklin and Aurelia were married on June 11, 1940.⁵ At this point in his life Franklin was continuing to show himself to be a great scholar. He had been accepted into Harvard University where he graduated from there a year after his marriage, June 19, 1941 a doctor of philosophy.⁶ This degree, however, was only a formal recognition of the scholar that Franklin was, whether he had earned a PhD or not.

After receiving his PhD from Harvard Franklin went on to achieve many things throughout his lifetime. He taught at several different universities, including the University of Chicago, Howard University and Duke University.⁷ His studies and work also afforded him the opportunity to travel around the world. He spent a year in England, traveled to Australia and while serving as president of the American Historical Association he was invited by the World History Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to give a lecture in the People's Republic of China in the fall of 1979.⁸ Perhaps the most impacting of all the places that Franklin visited was Nigeria. He traveled there with the delegation appointed by President Eisenhower after the Nigerians achieved their independence. When a Nigerian man shook Franklin's hand during his visit to Lagos and said to him "Welcome home, brother," Franklin's life changed.⁹ He admits that he never considered Africa to be his home, but from this point on, "he was prepared to adopt him and to view the soil under our feet as my home away from home."¹⁰

⁵ Franklin, 88.

⁶ Franklin, 98.

⁷ Franklin.

⁸ Franklin, 285.

⁹ Franklin, 192.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Much of Franklin's life was devoted to promoting equality among all people because he was so aware of the inequalities that his race endured prior to and throughout his lifetime. At the age of six he and his family were separated from his father for four years during the race riots in Tulsa that began in 1921.¹¹ His life was not always an easy one and he suffered from discrimination just like most other African-Americans. It was not just prejudice against African-Americans that he had personal experiences with during his life. During his graduate studies at Harvard University he witnessed Anti-Semitism for the first time. As a part of the Henry Adams Club at Harvard he was asked to serve on a committee that would be responsible for selecting the officers for the next year. He recommended Oscar Handlin, a bright scholar who would later go on to win the Pulitzer Prize. Franklin's nomination of Handlin was rejected because "he was still a Jew."¹² Having much experience with racial injustices, racial equality was something that he spent his life fighting for and wrote about quite often in his many publications and spoke about in many public speeches.

In February of 1975 Franklin was invited to be the Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities. He received a letter from Ronald Berman, the chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), notifying him that he was selected by the NEH for this honor, an honor which he gladly accepted. He was to be the fifth lecturer and his lectures would be given on the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence.¹³ The previous lecturers simply delivered one lecture in Washington D.C., however, Franklin decided to give a total of three lectures in Washington D.C., Chicago and San Francisco. The title he gave to the series of three lectures was "Racial Equality in America," and

¹¹ Franklin, 15.

¹² Franklin, 65.

¹³ Franklin, 271.

they followed the racism affecting the life of African-Americans since the time the Declaration of Independence.¹⁴

The first lecture discussed Thomas Jefferson and his and the other founders attitudes toward African-Americans.¹⁵ Franklin delivered the second lecture, “The Old Order Changeth Not,” on May 5, 1975 to a crowd of one thousand people in Chicago. This lecture discussed the racism in the United States after 1820 and up through the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ San Francisco welcomed Franklin on May 26, 1975 to deliver his third and final lecture, “Equality Indivisible.” This lecture discussed the more recent struggle for racial equality in the twentieth century.¹⁷

This last lecture focuses on the injustice facing African Americans throughout the century, including during the Great Depression years. He says, “The inequities were no more glaring than in the determination to exclude Negroes from a fair share of relief and employment during the depression and the New deal years.”¹⁸ The New Deal did provide much needed relief for many people during the 1930’s, but African-Americans were discriminated against under its programs. This papers outlines the discrimination this group faced within the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to show that African-Americans were not provided with an equal opportunity to receive relief from the agency.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal was initiated as a result of the Great Depression that began to affect the American public after the stock market crashed on

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Franklin, 272.

¹⁶ Franklin, 273.

¹⁷ Franklin, 275.

¹⁸ John Hope Franklin, “Equality Indivisible in *Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 87.

“Black Thursday,” October 27, 1929.¹⁹ This was the most severe and long-lasting depression that the United States had faced up to that date in its history. The poor were hit the hardest by the crash, for example in 1932 the unemployment rate in Harlem had reached fifty percent.²⁰ As the poor were hit the hardest during the depression that means that African-Americans were also hit harder than most white people. By 1935 all property owned or managed by blacks had dropped from thirty percent to five percent.²¹ By the time that Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated in 1933 the number of Americans without work rose from eight million in 1929 to fifteen million.²²

Roosevelt’s primary task then, upon assuming the presidency was to somehow bring the United States out of the worst depression in its history. To combat unemployment in the United States, President Roosevelt said that there were three things absolutely necessary to achieve relief. These three things he presented to Congress on March 21, 1933, only a few months after his inauguration. According to FDR the three essential elements to create unemployment relief were:

“The first is the enrollment of workers now by the Federal Government for such public employment as can be quickly started and will not interfere with the demand for or the proper standards of normal employment. The second is grants to States for relief work. The third extends to a broad public works labor-creating program.”²³

FDR also believed that it was necessary for more than the government to be responsible for providing relief to the country. In a speech he delivered to the Conference on

¹⁹ The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers. "The Great Depression." *Teaching Eleanor Roosevelt*, ed. by Allida Black, June Hopkins, et. al. (Hyde Park, New York: Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site, 2003). <http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/great-depression.htm>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Three Essentials for Unemployment Relief,” March 21, 1933 <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1933c.htm> (accessed December 1, 2009).

Mobilization for Human Needs on September 8, 1933 Roosevelt calls for the participation for all American individuals in the relief effort.²⁴ Relief was being provided by both local and national governments.

Relief was not always given equally to all people, however. As Franklin remarks in his third Jefferson lecture, “It took a special brand of inhumanity to exclude hungry blacks from soup kitchens operated by religious and charitable groups, but Americans showed they possessed that special brand of inhumanity.”²⁵ It was not just local relief programs like soup kitchens that hurt African-Americans, however. The National Recovery Act was not designed to discriminate against African-Americans, but by mandating that African-Americans be paid equal wages as white employees, African Americans were in danger of losing jobs that they were fortunate enough to hold during this time. T. Arnold Hill wrote, “Negro workers are being discharged by employers whose belief in white supremacy will not tolerate their paying Negroes a wage equal to that paid whites.”²⁶ When African-Americans were able to provide cheap labor for employers they were more likely to be hired. Now, however, employers were being required to provide African-Americans with equal wages and so they would rather employ whites who were suffering from unemployment.

The same day that President Roosevelt outlined the three elements of relief, March 21, 1933 he also sent a relief bill to Congress, one of the provisions of which was the creation of a “civilian conservation corps.”²⁷ This would provide unemployed youth

²⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “An Extemporaneous Address before the 1933 Conference on Mobilization for Human Needs,” September 8, 1933 <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1933h.htm>.

²⁵ “Equality Indivisible,” 87.

²⁶ Arnold T. Hill, “An Emergency is On!” *Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life*, September 1933 <http://newdeal.feri.org/opp/opp33280.htm>.

²⁷ The Associated Press, “Points of First Roosevelt Bill Aimed at Unemployment Relief,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1933, page 1.

of the United States the opportunity to earn up to thirty dollars a month “for the maintenance, construction or carrying on of public works for which sufficient funds are not available.”²⁸ Their work would include such things as forestation, road repairs within public forests and parks with the goal of preventing such things as soil erosion and floods. As a further incentive to join the program, the bill provided for the men housing, food, clothing and medical services in addition to their weekly pay.²⁹

President Roosevelt asked in his message to Congress that day for the bill’s adoption. He claimed in the address “that 250,000 men can be given temporary employment by Early Summer (*sic*) if you give me authority to proceed within the next two weeks.”³⁰ He admitted that “It is not a panacea for all the unemployment, but it is an essential step in this emergency.”³¹ Roosevelt’s plea for passage of the relief bill seemed to be effective as the bill was passed by both the Senate and the House of Representatives and the President signed it into law on March 31, 1933 with the addition of two amendments. The first amendment, proposed by Representative Byrns of Tennessee simply sought to change the word “property,” in Section 2, to “real estate.”³² The second amendment that was introduced in the House of Representative carried a little more importance. Representative De Priest of Illinois introduced an amendment that after the bill was put into effect there would be no discrimination on the basis of “race, creed or color.”³³

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

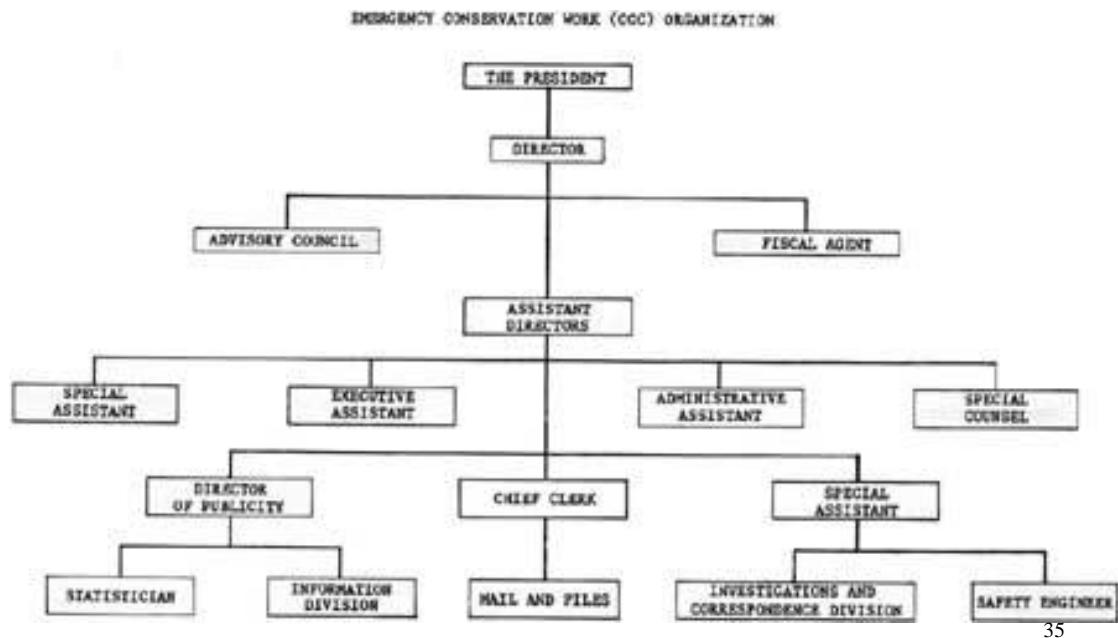
³⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The President’s Message,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1933, page 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² “House Passes Bill for Forestry Jobs,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1933, page 1.

³³ *Ibid.*

With the passage of this bill the Civilian Conservation Corps came into existence, but under the title of Emergency Conservation Work (ECW), for it was not until 1937 that the name was officially changed to the Civilian Conservation Corps.³⁴ Executive Order 6101, issued on April 5, 1933 was the official beginning of the ECW and named Robert Fechner as the director of the program and created an advisory council that was made up of representatives from the Department of Labor, War, Interior and Agriculture. The chart below shows the hierarchy of the ECW, with the president, FDR at the top, the only person that to whom Robert Fechner reported.



The ECW was established on the basis of population percentages, so the 250,000 men they planned to employ was based on a percentage of the national population. Not only was the overall number of enrollments based on a percentage of the population, but so was the percentage of whites and African-Americans that would be employed within

³⁴ John C. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and The National Park Service, 1933-1942: An Administrative History*. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/ccc/ccc/images/fig128.jpg (accessed November 14, 2009).

³⁵ http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/ccc/ccc/images/fig128.jpg

the Emergency Conservation Work. The ECW never sought to admit less than the proportionate number of African-Americans into the Corps.

In a letter dated June 4, 1936, Director Robert Fechner stated that up to that point the ECW had never employed less than the designated amount of African-Americans and at that time the percentage was actually higher than the current percentage of African-Americans to the total American population.³⁶ “There has been no discrimination against Negro enrollees but to the contrary, as stated above, the total percentage of Negro enrollees at the present time is larger than at any time since this work started.”³⁷

Although De Priest’s amendment was added to the law the ECW practiced segregation throughout its life span claiming that “segregation is not discrimination.”³⁸ As of July 1935 there were no longer any integrated Emergency Conservation Work camps on an order issued by Fechner for the “complete segregation of colored and white enrollees.”³⁹

Robert Fechner was not the only one to see segregation as something other than discrimination as long as they were afforded equal opportunities, or in the case of Louisiana equal accommodations in transportation. Louisiana state law number 111 of 1890 stated that people of different races, whites and blacks specifically, were not to travel together in railway cars.⁴⁰ Passengers of different races were to be placed in separate coaches equipped with equal accommodations. Any person who refused to comply with this law would not be allowed to on the train and if they did not comply with

³⁶ Robert Fechner, “Letter to Thomas L. Griffith, Jr.” September 21, 1935
<http://newdeal.feri.org/aacc/aacc04.htm>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Project Director, New Deal Network “African Americans in the Civilian Conservation Corps,”

⁴⁰ Plessy v. Ferguson. May 18, 1896. No. 210. <http://0-www.lexisnexis.com.helin.uri.edu/us/lacademic/search/casessubmitForm.do>

the seating arrangements once on the train they would be faced with a fine, or possibly jail.⁴¹

The Supreme Court confirmed the constitutionality of the Louisiana statute when it decided that it violated neither the Thirteenth nor Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution in the landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson*.⁴² Homer Plessy boarded a train on June 7, 1892 in the coach designated for white passengers. Plessy had seven-eighths white blood and one-eighth African-American blood so he was “entitled to every recognition, right, privilege and immunity secured to the citizens of the United States of the white race.” The conductor, however, decided that Plessy should have to sit in one of the coaches designated for African-Americans. Plessy refused to obey the conductor’s order, however, and was removed from the train and taken to the parish jail of New Orleans. The Supreme Court ruled that, “A statute which implies merely a legal distinction between the white and colored races has no tendency to destroy the legal equality of the two races, or reestablish a state of involuntary servitude.”⁴³

John Hope Franklin encountered his own difficulties with the transportation system when he was a young boy, not in Louisiana, but in his home state of Oklahoma. When Franklin was a child living in Rentiesville he and his family would have to take shopping trips to the nearby town, Checotah, for things they could not get in their small town. It was on one of these trips when Franklin, his sister and his mother boarded the train and seated themselves in a white coach, it being the one that stopped where they could board. When the conductor noticed them in the coach he ordered them to move to another coach, Franklin’s mother refused not wanting to subject her children to the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

danger of going between coaches while the train was moving. The conductor stopped the train, not to let them change coaches but to throw them off the train.⁴⁴ The Supreme Court decision allowed more instances like what happened to Franklin and it also could be used as a justification for the CCC's doctrine that "segregation is not discrimination."

Fechner had his doubts about the competency of African-Americans within the organization. Roosevelt sent a very brief letter to Fechner in September of 1935 to put in "colored foremen" in the camps consisting of young African-American men.⁴⁵ Fechner was uneasy about this order, however. Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes sent a response letter to Fechner, also in September, addressing the "doubts" that Fechner had about putting African-Americans in charge of the African-American camps. For a man who claimed that African-Americans faced no discrimination in the Civilian Conservation Corps, he was hesitant to place African-Americans in charge of camps, based on the color of their skin. Ickes, however, assured Fechner that there would be "no menace to the program...in giving just and proper recognition to members of the Negro race."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Franklin, 20.

⁴⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Letter to Robert Fechner," September 27, 1935 <http://newdeal.feri.org/aaccc/aaccc07.htm>.

⁴⁶ Harold Ickes, "Letter to Robert Fechner," September 20, 1935 <http://newdeal.feri.org/aaccc/aaccc06.htm>.



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

September 26, 1935.

*900 Regulations
(Supervisory Personnel - Colored)*

My dear Mr. Fechner:

I have your letter of September 24 in which you express doubt as to the advisability of appointing Negro supervisory personnel in Negro CCC camps. For my part, I am quite certain that Negroes can function in supervisory capacities just as efficiently as can white men and I do not think that they should be discriminated against merely on account of their color. I can see no menace to the program that you are so efficiently carrying out in giving just and proper recognition to members of the Negro race.

Sincerely yours,

Harold I. Pches

Secretary of the Interior.

Hon. Robert Fechner,
Director, Emergency Conservation Work,
Washington, D. C.

*File
10/1/35*



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Despite his misgivings and prejudice against those of the African-American race Fechner was praised for his work with the CCC and the CCC itself was seen as a wonderful agency. The Corps became very popular and “letters, telegrams and messages flooded the Director’s office most of them demanding new camps in their state.”⁴⁷ While the CCC was growing in popularity and seeking assistance, certain states, like Ohio, were particular about the type of people that should be allowed to work in their

⁴⁷ <http://newdeal.feri.org/aaccc/ickes.jpg>

⁴⁸ "CCC Legacy." *Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy Home Page.*
http://www.ccclegacy.org/ccc_legacy.htm.

state. One Ohio town refused to allow a company of all African-Americans to work in one of the camps set up by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The camp was built and properly supplied, but the only company that was available to work in the camp was an African-American company. The objective of the camp was never completed because the citizens of that community refused to see such a large group of African-Americans living within their midst. Fechner admitted that because of towns like these, as this was not the only instance of discrimination, “occasionally their refusal meant that the Camp would not be established.”⁴⁹ This meant that not only would improvements not be made, but that there were that many fewer opportunities for men to earn relief from the Great Depression.

Fechner insisted in multiple letters, like his letter to the Secretary of the Interior, that African-Americans were in no way facing discrimination within the Civilian Conservation Corps, for “the total percentage of Negro enrollees at the present time is larger than at any time since this work started.” However, certain companies of the Civilian Conservation Corps were denied employment in certain areas, like Ohio, because of the color of their skin. Fechner had to adopt the policy of having Civilian Conservation Corps representatives speak with the governor of a given state to ensure that an African-American camp would be accepted in a community.⁵⁰ They were denied work in certain areas because of the color of their skin and the distrust of the general public meant that they did face discrimination within the program.

Luther C. Wandall, an African-American enrollee in the Corps, mentioned his own experience with discrimination in his memories of his enrollment. He began his

⁴⁹ Robert Fechner, “Letter to Robert J. Buckley,” June 4, 1936 <http://newdeal.feri.org/aacc/aacc05.htm>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

career in the ECW not really knowing what to expect. He had heard mixed reports before he joined two years after the creation of the Corps. He had heard of poor conditions, where one boy claimed to have almost frozen to death, but others claimed that it was a fine job.⁵¹ His account begins with the registration process and his departure to his assigned camp. On the day of his departure he arrived at Pier 1 on the North River in New York at eight o'clock in the morning along with one thousand other young men ready to depart to their designated camp. Wandall describes the crowd as boys, with only a few middle-aged men who were accompanying the boys as cooks in the camps. The boys were given physical examinations and after completing the exam they were loaded onto buses for the trip to Camp Dix in New Jersey.⁵²

This first part of Wandall's account of his experience shows no sign that the African-American young men like himself were shown any different treatment than the white boys ready to start their new jobs. It was not until that evening when they arrived at Camp Dix "that Mr. James Crow first definitely put in his appearance."⁵³ At the registration at the pier a "C" was placed on his record and when he arrived at the camp all of the African-Americans were told to wait in the back to be registered and taken to the tents where they would be sleeping. He then describes the condition of the tents in which the African American boys were forced to sleep in. The tents, he says, "were the worst in Camp Dix. Old, patched, without floors or electric lights."⁵⁴

Another young man, Eddie Simons, had quite a different experience within the Civilian Conservation Corps. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* reported in 1934 that

⁵¹ Luther C. Wandall, "A Negro in the CCC," *Crisis*, August, 1935, 244, 253-254.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Simons was dishonorably discharged from the Civilian Conservation Corps without his last month's pay because he refused to fan the flies off of an officer. Lieutenant J. A. Elmore of the sixteenth infantry was temporarily in charge of Camp No. 5 in North Lisbon, New Jersey. When Simons refused to swat the flies flying around Elmore, claiming that that was not what he was being paid for Elmore fired the boy despite Simons' clean record.⁵⁵ The N.A.A.C.P. took up Simons' case, however, and petitioned to Robert Fechner to give the boy an honorable discharge and the money that he was owed. Fechner agreed to investigate Simons' case and after three weeks agreed that Simons be honorably discharged and paid in cash the money that had initially been withheld from him.⁵⁶

The United States Army was a significant contributor to the Civilian Conservation Corps from its inception. The army was a very necessary part of the CCC because it was the only organization capable of moving, housing and controlling all the new enrollees.⁵⁷ The United States Army at this time still practiced segregation. During World War I thousands of African-Americans enlisted in the army, although the common practice was to have these men serve as laborers within the army instead of fighting alongside the white men. There were however, a select few units of African-Americans that did fight and contribute in the war. African-Americans units, like the Tuskegee Airmen who never lost an escorted plane, played a significant role in the Second World War, although they

⁵⁵ "CCC Youth Refuses to Fan Flies Off Officer; Is Fired," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, January 13, 1934, 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Joseph M. Speakman, *Into the Woods: The First Year of the Civilian Conservation Corps*, The National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/fall/ccc.html>.

still fought in segregated units.⁵⁸ The army was not officially desegregated until a few years after the end of World War II on July 26, 1948.⁵⁹

Many officers of the United States Army were used to command the camps and companies, if only temporarily. It was one such officer who had Simons fired for refusing to swat the flies away from him during the day. It can be assumed then that the practices of the army would then be used in the daily operations of the CCC. Luther Wandall recognized that this may be the case when he declared, “of course it reflects, to some extent all the practices and prejudices of the U.S. Army.” This, along with the fact that of the officers participating in the CCC “many of them were southerners.”⁶⁰ This may be a part of the reason for the discrimination that the African-Americans were subject to throughout the existence of the CCC.

By 1940 the war in Europe became the primary concern for President Roosevelt and the American public in general. The war in Europe had officially begun in 1939, but it was not until after the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 that the United States formally became a part of the second world war. In early 1941 on January 6, almost a full year before the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, FDR delivered his annual address to Congress.⁶¹ In his speech, the raging war in Europe was the issue to which he devoted the most attention. He claims in his address that at no other time has the United States of America been so at risk of destruction from other world nations. He

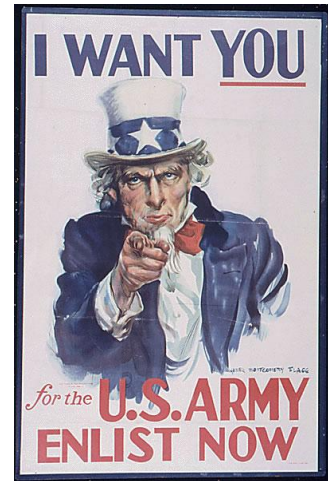
⁵⁸ “World War II,” African Americans in the U.S. Army, <http://www.army.mil/africanamericans/timeline.html>.

⁵⁹ Mike Pryor, “Sixty Years After Integration, Opportunities Abound for Minority Soldiers,” United States Department of Defense, July 28, 2008 <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=50615>.

⁶⁰ Luther Wandall.

⁶¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Address to Congress,” January 6, 1941 <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1936a.htm>.

says, “I find it, unhappily, necessary to report that the future and the safety of our country and of our democracy are overwhelmingly involved in events far beyond our borders.”⁶²



Contrast Between the Two Enlistment Posters

By the end of the summer in 1941 the number of enrollees in Corps had dropped to 200,000 from its previous 500,000 a few years earlier.⁶⁵ People were no longer applying to the Corps because the war industry created many jobs that were more desirable to people than working in a camp far away from home. The posters above show the difference in the interests of the American people. The poster on the left was issued in 1935, to try and encourage the enrollment of young, able men to enlist in the Civilian Conservation Corps to help the United States escape the world-wide depression that had so severely impacted the lives of so many in the country. The poster on the right, printed during World War II shows the new priority of the United States, to bolster the enlistment in the army to fight in Europe in World War II.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/new_deal_for_the_arts/images/work_pays_america/ccc_work_play_head.html.

⁶⁴ <http://www.veteranshour.com/world%20war%20II.htm>.

⁶⁵ “CCC Legacy.”

The government tried many tactics to try and compensate for this loss of interest. After the director of the Corps, Robert Fechner passed away in December 31, 1939, James J. McEntee was appointed the new director. He announced that the CCC's new objective was to "take an active part in the prosecution of the huge new national defense program."⁶⁶ Conservation now took a backseat to the defense of the country. Instead of training and educating young boys to help in the conservation of the nation's natural resources now the aim of the CCC was to provide "a huge reservoir of trained man-power upon which industry and the national defense services can draw."⁶⁷ McEntee, however, assured the public that the conservation efforts of the CCC would not be entirely forgotten. However, most of their time in these camps was now consumed with training these young men for the armed forces. For example, on August 16, 1941 all enrollees in the CCC camps were to be trained from then on in simple military formations.⁶⁸

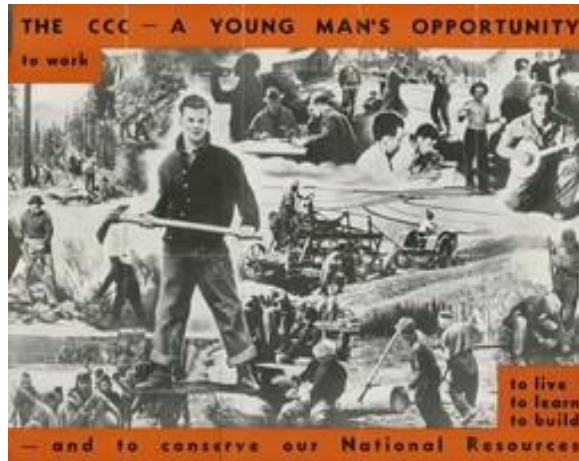
Along with claiming the CCC now stood for the national defense of the country, the government for the first time since the creation in 1933 of the Civilian Conservation Corps in a sense began to recruit African-Americans to enroll in the CCC. Previously they had been allowed into the Corps because that was what the law required, but they were not specifically sought after to join the program. It was not until the war began and started taking young white men away from the CCC that the government tried to fill the vacancies within the camps with African-Americans.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ James J. McEntee, "The CCC and National Defense," *American Forests*, July 1941
<http://newdeal.feri.org/forests/af740.htm>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ John C. Paige

⁶⁹ Project Director.



CCC Recruitment Poster⁷⁰

This poster, meant to recruit young men to enlist in the Civilian Conservation Corps clearly has a targeted set of men that it sought to reach. Some of the figures in the poster are tiny and unclear, but what can be noticed, particularly among the most prominent of the men in the picture, that they are all white. This poster was issued in Wisconsin in 1939 to try and enlist the help of young men, the target being white men as there are no African-American young men represented in the poster.

It was not until 1941 that a pamphlet issued by the United States government illustrated a desire for African-American participation. The pamphlet, titled “What the Civilian Conservation Corps is doing for Colored Youth,” lists the number of African-American enrollees who have participated in the program since its foundation.⁷¹ It also lists the number of African-Americans employed in such positions as typists, educational advisors, medical reserve officers, chaplains and engineers. The pamphlet also says, “Through the experience and training received in the CCC, boys learn how to live

⁷⁰ http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=14890&letter=c

⁷¹ Edgar Brown, “What the Civilian Conservation Corps is Doing for Colored Youth,” Washington DC, 1941 <http://newdeal.feri.org/aacc/aacc03.htm>.

together and work together amicably.”⁷² What it does not say, however, is that they may learn to “work together amicably,” but only with those young men who have the same color skin.

African-Americans were also not the only minority group that from which young men were enrolled in the CCC. There were Hispanics, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos and even Native Americans enrolled in the Corps.⁷³ However, it seems that no other group was discriminated against in such a way as the young African-American enrollees were singled out. In Luther Wandall’s description of his experience in the CCC he briefly talks about a young Puerto Rican man that he came into contact with at Camp Dix. This young man was not separated from the whites, like all the African-American young men, although Wandall recalls that the Puerto Rican boy’s skin was darker than his own. This man, however, chose to be placed with the African-Americans as opposed to staying with the white young men. Wandall says that decision of the young Puerto Rican “was regarded as pitifully uninformed by the officers.”⁷⁴

The Civilian Conservation Corps could not hold up against the new and higher paying jobs that the war provided the young men of the country. The ECW was only supposed to exist until 1935, but FDR asked Congress to extend the program which they did until March 31, 1937 when they passed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 on April 8, 1935.⁷⁵ It was after this point that steps were being taken to try and make the ECW a permanent government agency. Congress refused to establish it as a permanent agency but on June 28, 1937 when the ECW was officially renamed the

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Olen Cole, Jr., *The African-American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 17.

⁷⁴ Luther Wandall.

⁷⁵ John C. Paige.

Civilian Conservation Corps, Congress extended its life yet again. However, between September and November of 1941 133 camps were disbanded due to a lack of enrollment of at least 165 men.⁷⁶ It was finally in June of 1942 that the House of Representatives voted 158 to 151 to refuse any additional funding for the agency.⁷⁷ Prior to this Director McEntee ordered that all camps be closed as soon as possible unless “the camp was engaged in war work construction or in protection of war-related natural resources.”⁷⁸ Congress officially called for the end of the CCC on July 2, 1942, only approving a budget of \$7.5 billion dollars to be given to the CCC in order to cover the cost of terminating all the camps.⁷⁹

The Civilian Conservation Corps left behind a great legacy, however. Working under the National Park Service and the National Forest Service, the Corps contributed greatly to each agency, as an estimated eight hundred parks were constructed across the United States by the CCC. The CCC was also responsible for planting nearly three billion trees, constructed public roads and buildings and many other great things for the natural world in the United States.⁸⁰ Most of all, however, the young men who participated in the CCC were able to help, and perhaps save the lives of their families during the Great Depression.

Despite the discrimination that the African-American men in the program faced they were among those who benefited and contributed greatly to all the things that the Corps accomplished in its brief existence, just as white young men profited from it.

Despite the discrimination that surrounded Wandall during his time in the CCC he left the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ “CCC Legacy.”

⁷⁸ John C. Paige.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ “CCC Legacy.”

Corps feeling “gratified rather than disappointed with the CCC.”⁸¹ He acknowledged the prejudice that he faced but he says that “as a job and an experience, for a man who has no work, I can heartily recommend it.”⁸² The Corps operated during a period of desperation for many people in the United States so any type of relief was welcome for those who were able to receive it. Wandall felt his experience a positive one, but he was one of the lucky few to be able to receive aid from the program. The number of whites and African-Americans within the Corps was disproportionate to the amount of need required by each group.

If discrimination had not been the practice in the CCC there may have been more of an opportunity to employ more African-Americans. If, for example, the camp in Ohio had been allowed to operate that would have created any number of jobs for those enrolled in the CCC. The case where the young man was fired for not fanning the flies away shows again the treatment to African-Americans. There may have been countless other instances of this in which the NAACP did not take up the case. It seems that FDR’s Civilian Conservation Corps could have learned something from John Hope Franklin who said,

“I can only hope that they realize, as do I, how interdependent we all are and how much more rewarding and fulfilling life is whenever we reach a level of understanding where we can fully appreciate the extent of our interrelationships with and our reliance on those who came before us, kept us company during our lives, and will come after us.”⁸³

⁸¹ Luther Wandall.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Franklin, 8.

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