

Southern New Hampshire University

Alabama's Civilian Conservation Corps  
The Political, Social, and Economic Impacts of Roosevelt's Tree Army

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Master of Arts in History

By

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October 2022

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## **Abstract**

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of the most successful New Deal programs in the state of Alabama, yet little research exists that explores the social, economic, and political impact its existence had across the state. Even less historical literature exists that discusses the experiences of the Black community and the influence of segregation in the implementation of the CCC in Alabama. The CCC not only challenged political and social standards that perpetuated racial prejudice, but it also provided substantial economic relief to many Alabamians and created a legacy of environmental and natural resource sustainability and appreciation. This project will provide a much-needed addition to both state history and Black history and will broaden the current literature on the CCC nationally. The chapters contained in this project provide contextual and foundational narratives, explain the impact of the CCC from social, political, and economic perspectives, and survey the implications of the program in relation to its impact on the Black community. Throughout the research process, a variety of primary and secondary sources were consulted to ensure that a comprehensive perspective of the CCC in Alabama is communicated effectively. Each of the sources have been audited for credibility, reliability, bias, argument strength, and use of primary source material. Each source was also evaluated in terms of perspective and historical lenses used to state their arguments, as well as relevancy to the topic of this project. Sources that vary from or even contradict the argument this project intends to make were not eliminated from the selected source materials. Including these sources potentially eliminates any misinterpretation or exclusion of primary materials that may alter the expected outcome of this research project. Ultimately, this research project seeks to fill a gap in the current historiography of the CCC in Alabama which is limited and excludes the perspectives of Black corpsmen.

## **Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to my family and friends who have been unwavering in their efforts to uplift and encourage me during the ups and down of the research and writing process. In addition, I would like to dedicate this project to the corpsmen who contributed so much to the state of Alabama. Whether working on archaeological projects in Moundville, developing state park and recreational facilities, or working to protect and conserve Alabama's natural environment and resources, the men who served in the Civilian Conservation Corps not only provided for their families during one of the most difficult economic times in US history, but left behind an incredible legacy for generations of Alabamians to enjoy.

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## Preface

This project evolved from a lifelong appreciation of Alabama state parks and a shared interest in state history by my sister and myself. As the Oak Mountain State Park Naturalist, my sister, Lauren Massey, accessioned several artifacts pertaining to the CCC into Oak Mountain's historical and interpretive collections.<sup>1</sup> As she researched the origins of these artifacts, she uncovered a lost history of Alabama's state parks and soon included me in the process of artifact collection and research. Last year, I used Oak Mountain's CCC collection as the basis for an archival digitization project for a public history class at Southern New Hampshire University. It was that digitization project that illuminated a gap in the historiography of Alabama's CCC. Additionally, the accessioning of an annual depicting Black CCC camps reinforced the notion that this community is overlooked and left out of the historical narrative of this time and within much of the existing CCC literature.

The research materials utilized throughout this project include a variety of primary and secondary sources from several local and regional repositories, including the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The ADAH is home to a vast repository containing textual and photographic materials that serve as part of the foundation for this research project. In addition to the archives at the ADAH, many of the Alabama States Parks house archival and museum collections focused on the CCC, including those held at Oak Mountain State Park, Cheaha State Park, and DeSoto State Park. These collections contain items such as CCC artifacts and memorabilia, letters, documents, photographs, maps, CCC camp newsletters and annuals, and oral history recordings.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

The University of Alabama and Auburn University also house substantial regional archival materials that are not only relevant to the CCC in Alabama, but materials pertaining to the Great Depression and New Deal policies in Alabama as well. The CCC was instrumental in the development of Moundville Archaeological Site and Museum which is managed by the University of Alabama and Auburn University is connected to many of the state's agricultural programs and initiatives. Each of these repositories contain items that establish context for this research project both directly and indirectly. In addition to local archives, repositories located out-of-state were accessed for this project. The National Archives in St. Louis currently houses all enrollment records for the CCC. The National Archives in Washington, D.C., possesses a large CCC collection as well. Other primary materials have been sourced from various internet-based repositories and private collections. While other historians have utilized many of the same sources from the National Archives repositories for works analyzing the Great Depression, New Deal, and CCC, much of the local materials have remained underutilized.

Initially, this research project was intended to focus solely on the Black experience within Alabama's Civilian Conservation Corps. However, the lack of primary and secondary source material available made narrowing my focus to that degree impossible given the time constraints, logistical obstacles, and overall scope of the project requirements. It is my hope that this project will continue to fill this gap in the historiography to some degree and encourage others to discover sources that add to the historical narrative. While the Black experience in the CCC will be included in this project a major piece of state CCC history, it was necessary to include a broader interpretation of the overall political, social, and economic implications of the CCC's existence across the state. This broader context also fills a gap in the historiography as state specific CCC surveys are exceedingly rare.

Much of the current literature on the CCC approaches the program with positivity, often ignoring the troubling aspects of its implementation in the South and across much of the US. Although the CCC accomplished an abundance of positive works and created a lasting positive legacy across the nation, scholarly works are limited which discuss the racism and sexism that many experienced during the period in which the CCC existed. While practices that perpetuated racism and sexism were common during this period of Southern and American history, they cannot be excused or eliminated from the narrative as merely a consequence of the time. Americans who experienced oppression and prejudice during this time in history deserve to have their stories told as much as those who did not share these experiences. Incorporating what has been left out in a way that does not alienate or diminish the positivity but adds to the historiography is a challenge and one that is necessary to providing a comprehensive historical analysis of the CCC in Alabama.

## **Acknowledgments**

This research project would not have been possible without the assistance and support of my sister Lauren R. Massey, State Park Naturalist of Oak Mountain State Park, who first educated me on the legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps throughout the Alabama State Park system. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my parents Colette and Allen Muncher for supporting me during this entire program, and for always encouraging my passion for history. This passion has been further strengthened by the guidance of my professors at Jefferson State Community College, the University of Montevallo, and Southern New Hampshire University. Additionally, I would like to thank the staff at the Alabama Department of Archives and History for their assistance in locating key primary and secondary sources to support this endeavor. I owe acknowledgement and gratitude to Mandy Pearson and Scottie Jackson for their assistance in accessing vital information that contributed to the state parks research portion of this project. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and coworkers for their support, encouragement, and patience as I ventured through this final step toward a lifelong goal.

## **List of Abbreviations**

AAA: Agricultural Adjustment Act, 1933

ADAH: Alabama Department of Archives and History

ADCNR: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

CCC: Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933

EBA: Emergency Banking Act, 1933

FDR: Franklin Delano Roosevelt

FERA: Federal Emergency Relief Administration, 1933

FWA: Federal Works Agency, 1939

LEM: Local Experienced Men

NRA: National Recovery Administration, 1933

OMIC: Oak Mountain Interpretive Center

OMSP: Oak Mountain State Park

PWA: Public Works Administration, 1933

TERA: Temporary Emergency Relief Administration

TVA: Tennessee Valley Authority, 1933

WPA: Works Progress Administration, 1935

## Introduction

In October 1929, the US experienced a severe stock market crash, widely accepted as the official beginning of the Great Depression. In Alabama and much of the Southern US, agricultural production had already been declining for many years but was intensified by the crash. As the agricultural decline spread, industries that provided employment in urban cities also began to feel the pressure from the nationwide economic crisis. Farmers in Alabama found themselves unable to make a living in agriculture and sought employment at industrial facilities often located in larger cities. During 1929 in Bashi, Alabama, Coleman Davis faced this reality. Davis, a Black farmer, husband, and father to five children, was forced to abandon his farm and agricultural background to find a more sustainable means of income in the wake of the financial hardships leading to the Great Depression. He found work almost 150 miles away at an iron ore mine in Bessemer, a small city just outside of Birmingham. He and his family moved from their hometown and familiar way of life to survive the harsh realities of the Depression. His son Lonnie would come of age during one of the hardest economic periods in US history.

On the other side of the state, Curtis Fleming, a white farmer in Vincent, Alabama, welcomed his second daughter, Flora Colene, in December of 1929, just months after the stock market crash and onset of the Great Depression. Fleming, who had owned a small farm in rural Alabama, began to find it difficult to maintain the financial means to support his family and sought employment in Sylacauga, a more industrialized city twenty miles from his home. He found employment at Avondale Mills, a textile mill that was one of the only ones in the state which escaped the need for labor cuts during most the 1930s and 40s. While both men found more sustainable employment in the state's larger urban areas, their incomes were barely enough

to support their growing families. By 1935, the average personal income in Alabama fell to \$194 annually, a 62.4% decline from an already low average of \$311 annually in 1929.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, the hardships felt in the agricultural sector spread to industries in urban areas and those who fled their farms for a more stable way of life found themselves suffering once again.

Stories like those of the Davis and Fleming families were common across the state of Alabama in the years preceding and throughout the Great Depression. Financial hardship, unemployment, extreme poverty, mass hunger, and psychological distress plagued the state as it did the entire nation. While the overall unemployment rate in the US was over 20% by 1933, Black communities experienced even greater unemployment rates at “two to three times that of white Americans.”<sup>2</sup> Historian Robert Biles states that at the onset of the Great Depression, Black Southerners were “victimized by an omnipotent racial caste system and saddled with the lowest paying jobs.”<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Black community “suffered disproportionately from the ravages of the economy's collapse.”<sup>4</sup>

During the initial years of the Great Depression, President Herbert Hoover attempted to slow some of the economic impacts by passing laws such as the Tariff Act of 1930 which attempted to encourage domestic consumption but worsened the already volatile economic

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<sup>1</sup> “Chapter 9: Overview,” *The Future Emerges from the Past: Celebrating 200 Years of Alabama African American History & Culture*. United States: Whitman Publishing, LLC, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ashley McNeil, “The African American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps,” Moving Forward Initiative (blog), The Corps Network, 2017, <https://corpsnetwork.org/blogs/moving-forward-initiative-the-african-american-experience-in-the-civilian-conservation-corps/>.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 103.

<sup>4</sup> Biles, 103.

situation. In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt took office as President. He immediately turned his focus toward addressing the crisis of the Great Depression. He proposed a “New Deal” to rebuild the American economy and provide aid to those in desperate need. One of the programs created under the New Deal was the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC. The CCC proved to be the most popular and most successful program of the New Deal-era.

Although New Deal programs such as the CCC were incredibly helpful in providing jobs and financial relief to hundreds of Alabamians, there are limited historiographical sources that cover the influence of the CCC in Alabama specifically. The foremost work on the CCC in Alabama is Robert Pasquill’s book which documents the CCC camps and projects throughout the state for all nine years of the program’s existence. Pasquill’s book is the leading literature that identifies all the CCC camps in Alabama and offers an appendix with archival materials such as camp newspapers and enrollment records. While this book is currently the only one of its kind and serves as a valuable resource for anyone interested in CCC or Alabama history, it is more of a reference work than a work of historical analysis and interpretation. However, his extensive and detailed bibliography is an asset for discovering obscure secondary sources and narrowing primary source repositories. Other sources that feature Alabama as the setting for a CCC study include master’s theses and works focusing on specific CCC projects, such as the Moundville Archaeological Site and various projects in Mobile County.

Several of the secondary sources that will be referenced in this project discuss the CCC in a regional context or as part of a broader study of New Deal program, policies, and politics. Roger Biles’ book *The South and the New Deal* discusses the impact of FDR’s New Deal program on Southern life and politics. He examines the economic implications of New Deal policies in the aftermath of agricultural decline and unemployment across the Southern states. In

addition, he analyzes Southern politics, racial prejudice, and the impact of the New Deal in the South as a “comprehensive challenge to the South’s distinctive way of life.”<sup>5</sup> He argues that Jim Crow-era laws and policies interfered with the mission of many New Deal programs such as the CCC, which is the only New Deal program with anti-discrimination rhetoric written into its legislation. By examining the New Deal within Southern economics and political context, a deeper understanding of the overall impacts of the CCC’s development and successes can be formed.

Many other sources address the CCC in a broad, national context, analyzing and interpreting the program independently. John Salmond’s groundbreaking work *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* is one of the most cited and respected pieces of historical interpretation available on the history and impact of the CCC. An Emeritus Professor of American History, Salmond specializes in teaching Southern labour history and aspects of the Civil Rights Movement in the South. He is primarily known for his work chronicling the CCC and Roosevelt’s New Deal. Salmond provides a chronological account of the CCC lifespan, detailing its creation, expansion, policy issues, successes, and eventual dissolution. Published in 1967 during the height of the American Civil Rights Movement, Salmond’s work offers a comprehensive analysis of the Black experience in the CCC from both negative and positive perspectives. His balanced and well cited book has remained one of the most referenced resources for CCC research nationwide.

Sources specifically addressing the Black experience in the CCC are not as abundant as those discussing the CCC and New Deal-era in general. As a result, the literature referenced in

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<sup>5</sup> Biles, 157.

this research project includes articles and books that not only discuss CCC experiences, but the experiences of Black people during the Great Depression and the political, economic, and social impacts of New Deal programs. Over the last 80 years, only a few studies have been completed, most following the Civil Rights Movement, which documented the Black experience in the CCC. Works such as Calvin Gower's "The Struggle of Blacks for Leadership Positions in the Civilian Conservation Corps," Charles Johnson's "The Army, the Negro and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-1942," and Olen Cole's *The African American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps* outlined the obstacles faced by Black enrollees and praised their accomplishments and perseverance in the face of racial discrimination. While these works are imperative in understanding the CCC's role in the Black experience during the 1930s and 1940s, they comparatively represent an exceedingly small percentage of CCC literature.

The purpose of this project is to survey and interpret the CCC's economic, social, and political impacts across the state. Specifically, this project will examine the CCC's influence on the extreme levels of poverty in Alabama that had been intensified by the Great Depression. Additionally, this project will explore the political implications of the New Deal in a "Solid South" conservative state as well as the effects of segregation and Jim Crow laws on the implementation of the CCC program. Finally, this project seeks to highlight the social impacts of the CCC in Alabama, with special attention to the role of Black corpsmen and their experiences in the program. The CCC challenged political and social prejudices during a time where racism against the Black community was common and even written into law through segregation policies. Although CCC camps were eventually segregated in states with discriminatory policies, the anti-racist foundation of the CCC was a crucial step toward the push for equality. The CCC

also provided financial and economic relief to many Alabamians and influenced contemporary perspectives on environmental and natural resource conservation efforts

While there is abundant historical research analyzing the national impact and implications of the CCC, very few studies specifically discuss the CCC on the state level. In Alabama, the CCC is often recognized as one of the most successful and impactful New Deal programs and is heralded as a “great and lasting good.”<sup>6</sup> While this sentiment is an accurate representation of the CCC’s legacy across the state, there is much more to be analyzed, interpreted, and communicated within the historiography about the social, economic, and political legacies of the program. An inclusive and comprehensive history of this program in Alabama is a necessary addition to current CCC historiography and Alabama state history. The CCC brought many Alabamians out of extreme poverty and desperate living situations for themselves and their families. Their stories should be at the forefront of Alabama’s Great Depression and New Deal-era histories.

The CCC is recognized across the state as an extremely influential part of Alabama’s environmental and conservation history. Unfortunately, a significant lack of historical literature traces the nine-year tenure of the CCC in the state of Alabama. Most of the other southern states have a substantial amount of available literature that focuses on the influence and contributions of the program as well as the experiences of local corpsmen, including Black, Indigenous, and veteran CCC members. The lack of literature about the CCC in Alabama makes it difficult to identify differences in interpretations among historians on this specific topic.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Pasquill, Jr., *The Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama, 1933-1942* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2008), 216.

The literature that does exist presents the CCC story in Alabama as more of a documentary history than a narrative one. While this approach has proven helpful in gathering statistical data, such as company locations and projects, it does not deliver as a piece of historical interpretation. Fortunately, interest in CCC history is beginning to develop locally and statewide as we near the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its creation. More frequently, Alabamians are provided with programming highlighting the CCC's legacy in state parks, natural resource conservation efforts, forestry protection, and agricultural advancements. Now is the time to provide a comprehensive and inclusive historical work documenting and interpreting the CCC in Alabama.

## Chapter 1: FDR and the New Deal

### *Roosevelt Takes Office*

By the summer of 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had made a name for himself in American politics as the governor of New York by implementing policies and programs to help combat the effects of the Great Depression in his home state. As a result of his political success, Roosevelt won the nomination for presidential candidate of the Democratic Party. His popularity spread quickly across the country, including the South which had become a Democratic stronghold for much of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following fall, Roosevelt won the presidential election in what has been described as a landslide victory.

Much of his campaign successes have been credited to the support from the Democratic Coalition throughout most of the Southern states, known as the Solid South. These were also the states that felt the brunt of the Great Depression since the primary industries across the South were agricultural. The foundation of Roosevelt's presidential campaign was his plan for a "new deal for the American people" that aimed to pull the nation from the depths of the worst homeland crisis facing the United States since the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> Because of the severity of this crisis in the South and the Democratic stronghold that aimed to support the first Democratic president in over a decade, Roosevelt's plan for a New Deal solidified his popularity in states like Alabama.

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin Roosevelt, *Acceptance Speech*, Democratic National Convention, July 2, 1932.

In the years leading to the election, a majority of Americans had lost faith in Herbert Hoover's ability to guide the nation through this unprecedented economic disaster. While Hoover had come to be known as a great humanitarian focused on ending hunger and poverty during and after World War I, his approach to the federal government's role in addressing and combatting the effects of the Great Depression earned him a negative reputation by the 1932 election. Although Hoover eventually presented a plan to Congress requesting the creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to help businesses, aid farmers facing foreclosures, offer loans to states for feeding the unemployed, and expand public works projects, he firmly held to the belief that it was ultimately the responsibility of local and state governments to develop relief programs.<sup>2</sup> Because of this belief that interference at the national level was beyond the scope of federal responsibility, Hoover was blamed for the condition of the nation and accused of ignoring the needs of his fellow countrymen and women.

As unemployment, poverty, and mass hunger rates continued to rise, countless Americans became disillusioned by Hoover's conservative politics and indirect aid programs, and most of the US began to embrace Roosevelt's more liberal approach of coordinating a direct government assistance initiative. His idea was to provide federal assistance to impoverished and unemployed Americans primarily through the creation of public works programs. By the end of Hoover's presidency and the start of Roosevelt's, unemployment rates had reached 24.9% with between 13 and 15 million Americans out of work, as seen in Figure 1. Of the millions of unemployed Americans, more than one third were between the ages of 18 and 25.

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey, "The Presidents of the United States of America," White House Historical Association, 2006.

## LABOR FORCE

D 85-101

## Series D 85-86. Unemployment: 1890 to 1970

[In thousands of persons 16 years old and over except, prior to 1947, 14 years old and over. Annual averages]

Year	Un-employed		Year	Un-employed		Year	Un-employed		Year	Un-employed		Year	Un-employed	
	85	86		85	86		85	86		85	86		85	86
1970	4,088	4.9	1954	3,532	5.5	1938	10,390	19.0	1922	2,859	6.7	1906	574	1.7
1969	2,832	3.5	1953	1,834	2.9	1937	7,700	14.3	1921	4,918	11.7	1905	1,381	4.3
1968	2,817	3.6	1952	1,883	3.0	1936	9,030	16.9				1904	1,691	5.4
1967	2,975	3.8	1951	2,055	3.3				1920	2,132	5.2	1903	1,204	3.9
1966	2,875	3.8				1935	10,610	20.1	1919	546	1.4	1902	1,097	3.7
			1950	3,288	5.3	1934	11,340	21.7	1918	536	1.4	1901	1,205	4.0
1965	3,366	4.5	1949	3,637	5.9	1933	12,830	24.9	1917	1,848	4.6			
1964	3,786	5.2	1948	2,276	3.8	1932	12,060	23.6	1916	2,043	5.1	1900	1,420	5.0
1963	4,070	5.7	1947	2,311	3.9	1931	8,020	15.9				1899	1,819	6.5
1962	3,911	5.5	1946	2,270	3.9				1915	3,377	8.5	1898	3,351	12.4
1961	4,714	6.7	1945	1,040	1.9	1930	4,340	8.7	1914	3,120	7.9	1897	3,890	14.5
			1944	670	1.2	1929	1,550	3.2	1913	1,671	4.8	1896	3,782	14.4
1960 <sup>1*</sup>	3,852	5.5	1943	1,070	1.9	1928	1,982	4.2	1912	1,769	4.6	1895	3,510	13.7
1959	3,740	5.5	1942	2,560	4.7	1927	1,519	3.3	1911	2,518	6.7			
1958	4,602	6.8	1941	5,580	9.9	1926	801	1.8				1894	4,612	18.4
1957	2,859	4.3							1910	2,150	5.9	1893	2,860	11.7
1956	2,750	4.1	1940	8,120	14.6	1925	1,453	3.2	1909	1,824	5.1	1892	728	3.0
			1939	9,480	17.2	1924	2,190	5.0	1908	2,780	8.0	1891	1,265	5.4
1955	2,852	4.4				1923	1,049	2.4	1907	945	2.8	1890	904	4.0

\* Denotes first year for which figures include Alaska and Hawaii.

<sup>1</sup> See headnote for series D 11-25.**Figure 1. Unemployment 1890 to 1970, US Census Bureau Report***A New Deal*

The Great Depression was one of the most pressing issues faced by Roosevelt from the start of his presidency. He wasted no time with implementing programs, policies, and strategies to alleviate the suffering felt across the nation. As governor of New York, Roosevelt had set up a Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) that provided financial relief across the state by appropriating \$20 million for direct unemployment aid.<sup>3</sup> This social welfare program was successful until the Depression worsened and state funds began to diminish. The precedent

<sup>3</sup> June Hopkins, "The New York State Temporary Emergency Relief Administration: October 1, 1931," VCU Libraries: Social Welfare History Project, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/great-depression/temporary-emergency-relief-administration/#:~:text=On%20October%201%2C%201931%2C%20under,emergency%20relief%20of%20the%20unemployed.>

set by the creation of TERA allowed Roosevelt to approach the national crisis in the same manner. This would be the foundation of his New Deal.

Upon accepting the Democratic nomination for president on July 2, 1932, Roosevelt delivered a speech that set the tone for his presidential campaign as well as his presidency. In his acceptance speech for the presidential nomination, he pledged of himself to create “a New Deal for the American People,” and acknowledged that the nation was experiencing “unprecedented and unusual times” that required a break in tradition as well as a new approach to national leadership and social welfare.<sup>4</sup> By addressing the failures of the incumbent and the Republican party, Roosevelt was able to secure the confidence of the American people by offering tangible solutions to the economic crisis plaguing the majority of the nation. On March 4 the following year, Roosevelt was inaugurated to the presidency. In his inaugural address, he provided the American people with a shimmer of hope during one of the darkest times in US history. He stated that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” and that the nation would “endure as it has endured, [and] will revive and will prosper.”<sup>5</sup> The promises he made on the campaign trail and in his inaugural address would soon come to fruition as Roosevelt began implementing his New Deal immediately and mostly within his first 100 days in office.

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<sup>4</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address to the Democratic Convention” (speech, Chicago, IL, July 2, 1932), Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum.

<sup>5</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Inaugural Address” (speech, Washington, DC, March 4, 1933), Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum.

The New Deal was a “series of experiments in agricultural, industrial, commercial, and monetary policy.”<sup>6</sup> Many historians summarize the New Deal by discussing its three main points, or “Three Rs”: relief, recovery, and reform. New Deal legislation was passed quickly that aimed to provide relief for unemployed Americans, impact economic recovery through federal spending and continued job creation, and develop reformative policies and legislation targeted at failing mechanisms of capitalism and creating social welfare programs. The primary objective of the New Deal initiative was to “help lift the United States out of the Great Depression” by enlisting young, unemployed men into public works project programs.<sup>7</sup> Roosevelt did this by creating numerous agencies meant to tackle some of the key contributing factors to the failing state of the US economic system.

### ***FDR’s Alphabet Soup***

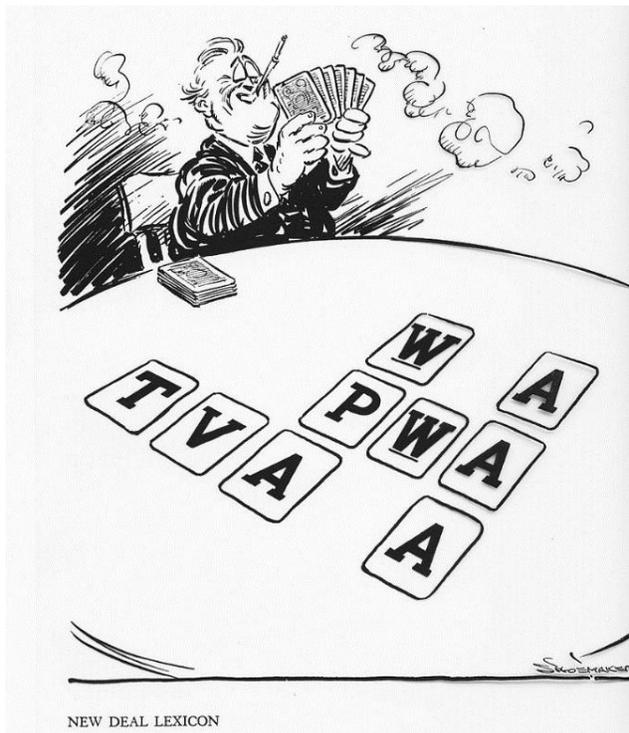
Roosevelt’s New Deal sought to influence job creation across the country by implementing several agencies that were designed to fulfill a variety of needs that aligned with the “Three Rs.” By the end of the New Deal era, numerous agencies had been created and acts passed, all known by their abbreviations earning them the nickname “Alphabet Soup” or “Alphabet Agencies,” as evidenced in one of many political cartoons seen in Figure 2. Some of the most well-known include the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Works Progress

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), 262.

<sup>7</sup> “The Civilian Conservation Corps,” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/the-civilian-conservationcorps.htm#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20the%20New,the%20Great%20Depression%2C%20Franklin%20D.&text=The%20CCC%20or%20C's%20aslands%2C%20forests%2C%20and%20parks.>

Administration (WPA), Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), Social Security Administration (SSA), Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), National Recovery Administration (NRA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), Public Works Administration (PWA), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Emergency Banking Act (EBA), Farm Credit Administration (FCA), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). While many of these agencies created jobs that required the knowledge of experienced and skilled laborers, some of these agencies did not require much in terms of qualifications to offer employment relief and financial recovery options to the widest range of citizens.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 2. Vaughn Shoemaker, “New Deal Lexicon,” *Chicago Daily News*, 1935**

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix B.

### *A Civilian Conservation Corps*

The most popular and often considered to be the most successful New Deal Alphabet Agency was the Civilian Conservation Corps, or the CCC as it became known. The CCC was born from Roosevelt's desire to put "500,000 unemployed men to work on conservation projects throughout the country."<sup>9</sup> On March 9, 1933, Roosevelt began to make his vision a reality by meeting with several directors and secretaries of specific executive departments to sketch out a rough draft of the Civilian Conservation Corps. In just six hours, the President along with the Director of the Budget, the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Judge Advocate General of the Army, and the Secretary of War drafted and presented a bill to the congressional leaders.<sup>10</sup>

The bill sent to Congress proposed the creation of "a civilian conservation corps that would put 250,000 men to work by the summer" of 1933, with wages of up to \$30 per month, and more enrollments over the next several years.<sup>11</sup> In his address to Congress, Roosevelt presented the vision he had for the union of conservation efforts and unemployment relief.<sup>12</sup> stated that the Civilian Conservation Corps would be used "in work which will not in any way

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<sup>9</sup> Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: Franklin Roosevelt, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ray Hoyt, *"We Can Take It": A Short Story of the C.C.C.* (New York: American Book Company, 1935), 7-9.

<sup>11</sup> Pasquill, 12.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix C.

interfere with normal employment, confining itself to immediate efforts to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion and similar projects” and that the “control and direction of such a work army can be provided by the existing machinery by the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, Interior and War.”<sup>13</sup> Later that same month, Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Work Act of 1933. Less than a month later, Roosevelt signed Executive order 6101, formally establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps, commonly known as the CCC.

Most of the projects assigned to the CCC were designed to “improve America’s public lands, forests, and parks.”<sup>14</sup> “State and national parks, forests, and historic sites” were developed under the CCC and appreciation for public lands increased as a result of their work.<sup>15</sup> Many of the projects in Alabama included state park development, natural resource conservation, and even assisting on archaeological sites. Public land management and environmental conservation were extremely important initiatives to Roosevelt. By making these the primary focus of the CCC, Roosevelt created a “catalyst” for the nation and succeeded in “[bringing] together two wasted resources, the young men and the land, in an attempt to save both.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Message to Congress re Civilian Conservation Corps,” March 21, 1933, Box 14, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Master Speech File, 1898-1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library & Museum, Hyde Park, NY.

<sup>14</sup> “The Civilian Conservation Corps,” *National Park Service*.

<sup>15</sup> “Theodore Roosevelt,” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/civilian-conservation-corps.htm>.

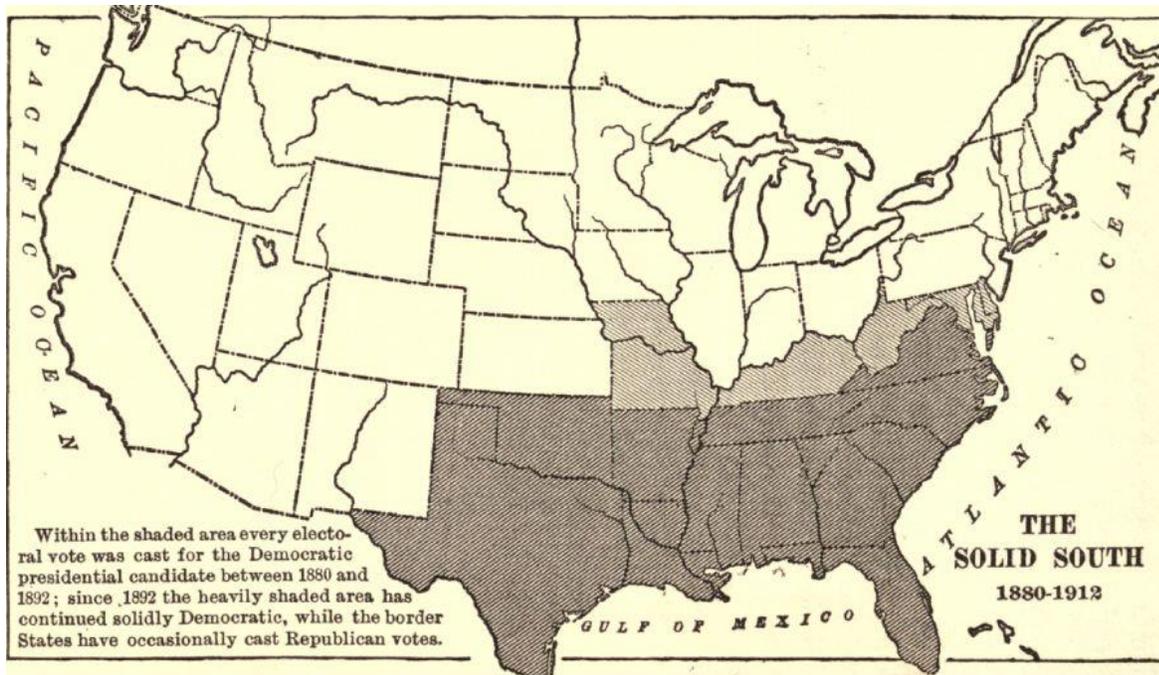
<sup>16</sup> John Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), 4.

## **Chapter 2: Southern Politics, the New Deal, and the CCC**

Much of Roosevelt's success in his first presidential campaign was due to the support of the Southern Democratic Coalition often referred to as the Solid South. As conditions worsened in the Southern states, the need for federal involvement in finding a solution to the economic and agricultural crises became increasingly apparent. Although many southerners were steadfast in their belief that the federal government should have minimal involvement in state issues, critical levels of poverty left many states with no other solution or source of relief. When Roosevelt launched his New Deal initiative, Southern states were in desperate need of federal aid. Unfortunately, deep-rooted racism and discriminatory legislation throughout the former Confederacy threatened to limit federal relief to a particular group of Americans.

### ***The Solid South***

By 1933, much of the South was adamantly opposed to Reconstruction-era progressivism's more liberal, inclusive ideals. The Republican Party had become synonymous with Abraham Lincoln, the abolition of slavery, and efforts to enfranchise Black Americans, all of which was met with opposition from the former Confederate states. The Democratic Party became the sole political party across the South from the 1880s well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as seen in Figure 3, perpetuating pre-Civil War ideologies that embraced "states' rights" narratives as well as white supremacist ideologies. This electoral bloc formed what is referred to as the Solid South Democratic Coalition, or more commonly the Solid South.



**Figure 3: Map of Solid South States, 1880-1912**

This conservative Democratic Party that held nearly all political power and influence across the South was traditionally known for supporting discriminatory policies and laws that disenfranchised Black Americans, upheld white supremacist ideals, and lobbied to restrict voting rights and access. In *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History*, Dewey Grantham states that the Solid South “embodied a distinctive regional culture and was perpetuated through an undemocratic distribution of power and a structure based on disfranchisement, malapportioned legislatures, and one-party politics.”<sup>1</sup> When Southern Democrat Woodrow Wilson was elected President in 1912, he reversed much of the socially

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey W. Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (University Press of Kentucky, 1988), i.

progressive efforts that had been made prior to his presidency. Throughout both of his terms, he “installed racial segregation in the federal government and thwarted opportunities for Black government workers.”<sup>2</sup> During his presidency, the Solid South gained even more power and influence within the federal government. Despite several Republicans holding office after Wilson, the Solid South continued to play a prominent role on the federal level, eventually paving the way for Franklin D. Roosevelt’s win in 1932.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, Herbert Hoover had been President for less than a year. As the depression worsened and unemployment rates continued to rise, Hoover’s opposition to federal relief caused his popularity to dwindle. By the 1932 elections, Hoover, who had initially embraced civil rights efforts, was loosening his stance on equality and inclusion in an attempt to gain Southern votes. He removed Black leaders from the Republican Party, refused to back an anti-lynching bill, and appointed a southern conservative Democrat to the Supreme Court. His attempt to gain votes in the Solid South ultimately cost him and the Republican Party support from Black Americans. His efforts to appeal to Solid South voters proved to be inadequate by the time of the election.

Hoover’s opponent, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was already a popular member of the Democratic Party as Governor of New York. When the Depression hit, he was quick to create aid programs that sought to provide hunger and unemployment relief. Many Americans saw Roosevelt’s platform as a symbol of hope during one of the darkest times in American history.

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<sup>2</sup> Mary-Elizabeth B. Murphy, “African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal,” Oxford Research Encyclopedias, November 19, 2020, accessed October 2, 2022, <https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-632>.

He was able to win Southern votes by appealing to farmers and agricultural workers who were experiencing the worst of the Great Depression's effects in the state. Although he was a more liberal and progressive Democrat than most of his Southern colleagues, the Solid South embraced Roosevelt's candidacy to secure more party representation in Congress and gain direct influence at the Executive level of the federal government. Additionally, Roosevelt remained relatively silent about civil rights issues during his campaign for presidency and avoided supporting programs that were solely directed at providing support to the Black community. By doing so, Roosevelt "avoided entangling [his administration] in the one issue that would assuredly have infuriated white southerners."<sup>3</sup>

Upon taking office, Roosevelt began strategizing and implementing federal aid programs that provided a more direct form of relief than that of his predecessor. This approach was widely popular, especially across the Southern United States where the effects of the Great Depression has worsened an already fragile agricultural economy. The South desperately needed economic relief, and states and local governments could not afford to bear the brunt of the financial burden of relief programs. While some saw the New Deal as gross federal overreach, a violation of states' rights, and even a form of Communism, the majority of the Solid South states welcomed the Roosevelt and his New Deal "as allies in the struggle to curb the economic imperialism of the Northeast."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Grantham, 104.

<sup>4</sup> Grantham, 104.

### *Jim Crow, Segregation, and the New Deal*

During Reconstruction, the period following the Civil War, “federal laws offered observable protection of civil rights for former slaves and free blacks.”<sup>5</sup> However, as white supremacist movements began to sweep across the South and white Democrats took back control of Southern legislatures, Southern States began passing regressive laws that disenfranchised Black Americans and implemented racial segregation. These laws, collectively referred to as Jim Crow laws, created a precedent for white supremacy and racial discrimination to be written into state and local government and legislation.

In Alabama, the state constitution was rewritten in 1901 with the explicit intent of “removing African-Americans from the political process” and “purifying the suffrage.”<sup>6</sup> John B. Knox, the chairman of the constitutional convention, is quoted stating “What we want to do is, within the limits imposed by the federal Constitution, to establish white supremacy in the State of Alabama.”<sup>7</sup> The 1901 Constitution accomplished its goal, formally establishing segregation and white supremacy as the law of the land and effectively disenfranchising Black Alabamians. Segregation became a part of daily life in Alabama and by the time of the New Deal’s arrival it was a fixture of Southern society and politics.

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<sup>5</sup> “Jim Crow Era,” Howard University Law Library, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/blackrights/jimcrow>.

<sup>6</sup> William H. Stewart, “The Tortured History of Efforts to Revise the Alabama Constitution of 1901,” *Alabama Law Review* 53, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 295-296.

<sup>7</sup> Max Bennett Thrasher, “The Alabama Constitutional Convention,” *Outlook* 68, no. 8 (June 22, 1901).

***“Race, Color, or Creed:” The CCC and Racial Equality***

Jim Crow legislation and the 1901 Constitution established “methods of keeping Black people in poverty” and the Great Depression only worsened the already volatile job market.<sup>8</sup> When Roosevelt developed the New Deal, his intention was to extend the benefits of the programs like the CCC to male Americans, regardless of skin color or race. Although Roosevelt is now considered to have become a relatively progressive president, much of his legislation and political agendas avoided addressing issues such as civil rights and race inequality directly. The New Deal sought to provide aid to the millions of Americans who were experiencing extreme poverty and, much to the disappointment of many white Southerners, those millions included Black Americans who were suffering disproportionately.

The President’s refusal to directly address racial concerns throughout the United States perpetuated discriminatory practices that prevented Black Americans from receiving equitable employment and aid opportunities. The coming of the New Deal and the CCC brought hope to many families in Alabama. However, racial disparity set forth by law and social norms threatened to keep Black Alabamians from realizing any of the benefits of these programs. Southern Democrats had played a significant role in Roosevelt’s presidential victory and maintaining that support would be crucial for New Deal success as well as his potential for reelection. Any stance on anti-discrimination and segregation would threaten the Solid South’s support of Roosevelt and potentially cause the New Deal programs to fail.

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<sup>8</sup> Rachel M. E. Wolfe, “The Great Depression in the Jim Crow South,” Book It Repertory Theatre Blog, August 24, 2017, <https://book-it.org/2017/08/the-great-depression-in-the-jim-crow-south/>.

Upon taking office, Roosevelt wasted no time in putting aid and employment programs into place. These programs were designed to meet needs and solve pain points across the country's interior while creating jobs and positively impacting the economy. Roosevelt's plan for the Civilian Conservation Corps was to put to work as many unemployed young, able-bodied men as possible. This demographic included a large number of Black Americans, many of whom resided in Southern states. Although inclusivity was an assumed piece of the New Deal plan, Roosevelt had avoided making any direct statements about segregation and racial disparity in relation to the New Deal's implementation and impact. This was especially concerning for Black families in Alabama and across the South who sought to potentially benefit from New Deal aid programs.

When the Civilian Conservation Corps was introduced by the Unemployment Relief Act of 1933, the subject of discrimination by race was brought to the forefront of congressional discussion.<sup>9</sup> Although Roosevelt is credited for the progressive idealism of the New Deal and the Civilian Conservation Corps, it was Illinois Representative Oscar Stanton de Priest who ensured this legislation would contain anti-discriminatory rhetoric. De Priest was born in Florence, Alabama. While living in Alabama, he witnessed racially motivated acts of discrimination and violence, and dedicated his political career to advocating for equal rights. De Priest was the first Black man elected to Congress in the twentieth century and the only Black man serving in Congress in 1933. When the time came for the passage of the Unemployment Relief Act creating the Civilian Conservation Corps, De Priest proposed an amendment that would prohibit discriminatory practices in enrollment. The amendment stated that "in employing citizens for the

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix D.

purposes of this Act no discrimination shall be made on account of race, color, or creed.”<sup>10</sup> This was the only New Deal legislation that contained anti-discriminatory language on the basis of race or skin color.

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<sup>10</sup> Unemployment Relief Act of 1933, Public Law 73-5, *US Statute* 22, 1933.

### **Chapter 3: The CCC in Alabama**

In Alabama, the Great Depression had wreaked havoc on the agricultural division of the state economy and by the time the CCC was created, larger industries were fighting to stay afloat. By 1933, unemployment in Alabama was higher than all other Southern states, with Birmingham experiencing the most extreme repercussions. As unemployed farmers and agricultural laborers flooded to the cities to find work at plants and other industrial organizations, it soon became apparent that finding work with specific skills or experience would be next to impossible. With agriculture being the leading source of economic growth in Alabama during the early 1930s, the state suffered particularly significant losses in the years leading to the stock market crash. Although Hoover attempted to implement policies aimed at providing some relief during the early years of the Depression, most of his strategies benefited larger corporations with little to no impact to the state's economic situation.

#### ***The Effects of the Great Depression and Segregation in Alabama***

Because of the racist legislation and practices throughout the southern United States, Black people became the most disenfranchised demographic group. This resulted in many members of the Black community experiencing desperate levels of poverty even before the effects of the Great Depression spread across the South. White people had the privilege of being prioritized over Black workers who were fired to make room for white people seeking employment. Archaic, antebellum-era ideals of white supremacy led to Black sharecroppers being trapped in a new form of "debt slavery," leaving them dependent upon powerful white landowners and unable to rise out of poverty. By the time Roosevelt took office, the Depression

was in full force throughout the United States and the South was feeling the brunt of its effects. While most Alabamians struggled to find work and survive, no other group suffered more than the Black community.

<i>City</i>	<i>Two-parent Families</i>	<i>Single-parent Families</i>
Mobile		
African American	\$481	\$301
White	\$1,419	\$784
Atlanta		
African American	\$632	\$332
White	\$1,876	\$940

**Figure 4: Median Family Income by Race, Mobile and Atlanta<sup>1</sup>**

Black Alabamians already held lower paying jobs than white Alabamians and were often given the less desirable jobs and tasks. Those who could find work earned half of what their white counterparts brought home, as can be seen in Figure 4. In 1930, the federal government estimated that 17% of the white population and 38% of the Black population in America was unemployed.<sup>2</sup> Black unemployment rates were especially high in the South, tripling that of white Americans in some areas. “Last hired, first fired” became a popular adage for describing the Black experience during this time. As jobs became scarce, Black men and women were fired from their jobs in order to prioritize and provide opportunities for white people.

<sup>1</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Greenberg, 21.

To make matters worse, racial segregation was a legal practice in Alabama as well as most of the South and was upheld by the Supreme Court as being within states' rights. Unfortunately, "separate, but equal" was far from the reality faced by most Black Alabamians. Not only were facilities, schools, transportation, business, etc. segregated, but spaces for Black people were almost always inadequate, unclean, and in disrepair. In addition to inferior spaces, Black Alabamians faced acts of violence if the status quo appeared to be threatened in any way. Violence was used as an intimidation tactic to keep Black people from seeking jobs and aid that could be used for the benefit white people. White administrators and officials often blatantly discriminated against Black people in distributing relief, reasoning that "African Americans did not need as many resources as white Americans."<sup>3</sup>

### *Implementing the CCC in Alabama*

Roosevelt's relief initiative brought a new hope to many struggling white and Black Alabamians alike in the form of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC was the only New Deal program that contained verbiage to protect Americans from racial discrimination when seeking enrollment. In Alabama and other states, however, the white supremacist electoral empire known as the Solid South struck back against the inclusive rhetoric of the Unemployment Relief Act that established the CCC and enforced segregation among local camps.

From its conception, the CCC was intended to employ men ages 18-25 regardless of race. Enrollment administrators were instructed by Frank Persons, the National Selection Director for the CCC and Department of Labor advisor, to disregard race when approving potential enrollees.

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<sup>3</sup> Murphy.

However, many administrators, especially throughout the South, blatantly refused to enroll a proportionate number of Black men.<sup>4</sup> Persons was reluctant to interfere with activities in the South because of the political influence of the Solid South coalition in Washington. However, as selection officers continued to exclude Black men from enrollment, the pressure on Washington for federal intervention in upholding the promise of inclusivity increased. Eventually, Persons demanded that Southern states like Georgia, Mississippi, and Arkansas begin enrolling Black men fairly or face suspension of federal aid altogether. This move prompted selection administrators to reluctantly abandon exclusion policies and begin enrolling Black men into the CCC.

In Alabama, Persons was met with less defiance in selecting Black men for enrollment. The state's Director of Relief Thad Holt had no reservations about the fair selection of Black men for the Civilian Conservation Corps but reported to Persons that issues had begun to emerge at the local level, where "councils were trying to force them not to enroll."<sup>5</sup> Once again, Persons threatened to suspend relief quotas to any area that refused to manage the selection process correctly and without racial discrimination. The threat of federal aid suspension proved to be an adequate motivation for areas excluding Black men from CCC enrollment opportunities. Nevertheless, only 776 Black Alabamians had been accepted into the CCC in the first year in comparison to "approximately 4,500 whites."<sup>6</sup> By May 21, 1933, the first group of 79 Black

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<sup>4</sup> Olen Cole, "Work and Opportunity: African Americans in the CCC," *Tarheel Junior Historian* (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Salmond, 91.

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn M. Barske, "Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed October 15, 2022, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3682>.

Alabamians selected for CCC service across the state were sent to Fort Benning, Georgia for training.<sup>7</sup>

Selection offices were scattered across the state and each reviewed hundreds of applicants for enrollment eligibility. Alabama's initial quota for enrollment was 5,500 men which would be divided between two calls for selection. Of the first call, 1,000 of the 2,150-person quota was allotted to Jefferson County alone.<sup>8</sup> The Department of Labor coordinated enrollment procedures and quotas. Men between the ages of 18 and 25 were eligible to enroll and, if selected, were required to serve six months with the option to re-enlist for up to two years, if so desired. The CCC promised enrollees access to housing, meals, clothing, and medical care. Some of these amenities had been inaccessible to many during the Depression and the CCC sought to fulfill these basic needs for the men who enrolled.

The Department of Labor was in charge of coordinating enrollment and selection processes and the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior were tasked with project planning and development. The greatest obstacle facing CCC implementation was logistical coordination. Most of the CCC enrollees were concentrated on the eastern half of the United States but most of the initial work projects were located in the western half of the country. The War Department was the only department that possessed the ability to coordinate the transportation logistics for the CCC. Specifically, the US Army was the only division of the War Department that had the

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<sup>7</sup> "79 Negro Boys Leave City for Training Camp," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 21, 1933, Newspapers.com.

<sup>8</sup> "Alabama Forest Workers Will Be Enlisted Monday," *Birmingham News*, April 23, 1933, Sunday Edition, Newspapers.com.

resources and training to “[mobilize] the nation’s transportation system and [move] thousands of enrollees from induction centers to working camps.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, most of the induction and training camps were located at Army bases, like Fort McClellan in Anniston, Alabama.

### ***CCC Training***

Once the CCC was established in the state, Alabamians flocked to selection offices for a chance at CCC enrollment. Those who were selected were then sent to induction camps for “physical examinations and conditioning.”<sup>10</sup> Because of rampant malnutrition among enrollees, Fechner stated that “one of the chief objectives of the conditioning camps was to ‘feed ‘em up’.”<sup>11</sup> Enrollees would remain in conditioning camps for 10 days before being transported to their assigned camps. While at conditioning camps like Fort McClellan, enrollees were provided with uniforms and assigned to barracks, much like soldiers in the Army. However, Roosevelt remained adamant that the “CCC boys,” as they were commonly called, would not receive any form of military training. Instead, they would be fed three balanced meals each day and participate in physical training and strengthening to prepare them for the work ahead.

Because of the state’s agricultural background, most Alabamians that qualified for enrollment in the CCC had experience with the types of projects planned. As previously stated, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior were in charge of organizing the projects that

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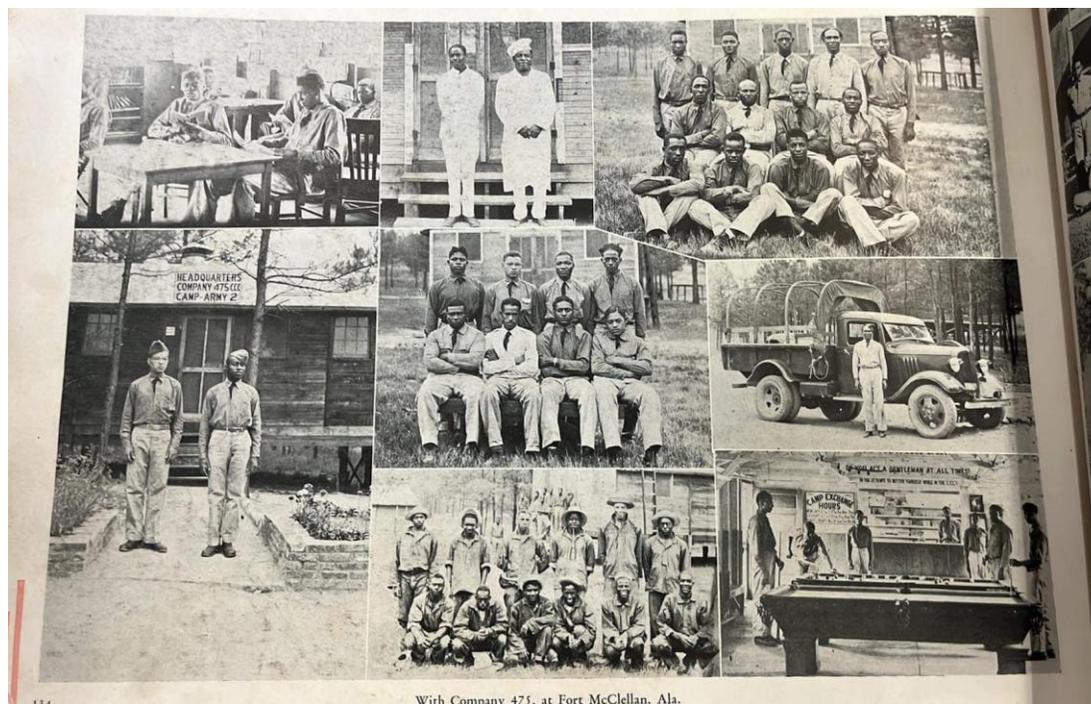
<sup>9</sup> “CCC Brief History,” CCC Legacy, accessed October 18, 2022, [https://ccclegacy.org/CCC\\_Brief\\_History.html#Wastes\\_no\\_time](https://ccclegacy.org/CCC_Brief_History.html#Wastes_no_time).

<sup>10</sup> “3,000 Alabamians to be Mobilized,” *Birmingham News*, April 13, 1933, Newspapers.com.

<sup>11</sup> Pasquill, 15.

would be assigned to the Civilian Conservation Corps. All of these projects required physical labor in various outdoor conditions. Most Alabamians were prepared for the work that the CCC had to offer. Camps like those at Fort McClellan no doubt furthered their level of preparedness.

### *Life in a CCC Camp*



**Figure 5: CCC Co 475, Fort McClellan, AL, 1936**

In Alabama, the CCC “averaged 30 camps” and “provided jobs for over 66,000 unemployed [men]” during its nine-year existence.<sup>12</sup> The first camps that were completed in Alabama were for the forestry projects. As the project assignments expanded, new camps were established that housed dozens of companies over the years. Companies were typically moved

<sup>12</sup> Pasquill, 2.

between camps across the state and the country as projects ended and new ones were assigned. Camps in Alabama were assigned projects associated with forestry conservation and expansion, state park development, soil conservation and erosion prevention, and infrastructure improvement and development.

While the majority of camps in Alabama remained segregated, CCC camp accommodations were almost identical. All CCC camps were composed of barracks, a mess hall, administration buildings, officer quarters, a bathhouse, a recreation hall, and often an education building. Many of the camps established their own newspapers and created camp scrapbooks. Camps were operated similarly to military base camps but did not participate in military training. Corpsmen were expected to retire at 10:30PM and were awakened at 6AM to the sound of reveille. Work began by 8AM and lasted for eight hours, with a lunch break at midday. Dinner followed the workday at 5PM, after which enrollees were expected to conduct regular camp maintenance and were allowed free time to attend classes, read in the library, or participate in recreational activities.<sup>13</sup>

Sports became a major part of weekly activities among CCC camps. Many of the recreational halls like were equipped with sporting equipment for baseball, basketball, football, tennis, boxing, billiards, and ping pong. In the evenings after dinner, enrollees could participate in baseball, basketball, and football leagues or challenge each other to a game of pool or ping pong to unwind after a day full of conservation work. It became customary practice for CCC camps to begin competitive sporting leagues with other camps in their area. Most of the *Camp*

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<sup>13</sup> Perry Henry Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army: A History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942* (Montpelier, Vt: P.H. Merrill, 1981), 14.

*Jester* newsletters released in 1935 by Co. 487 in Bessemer, Alabama, contain recaps and stories about baseball games held the previous weekend or information about upcoming events. Figure 6 pictures enrollees in Talladega, AL, participating in sports and leisure activities. These images appeared in the district annual and portray what life was like at the CCC camps during downtime when the enrollees were not working on their assigned projects.



**Figure 6: Various CCC Camp Activities, Talladega, AL, 1936**

In addition to recreational activities, camp leaders began to hold informal education programs. Many of the enrollees were illiterate and administrators often took it upon themselves to teach the men how to read and write. *The Birmingham News* reported in May of 1933 that many CCC enrollees were “to get a chance to develop their brains as well as their muscles” by

attending lectures and classes organized by camp leadership.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, this practice became so common that Fechner made it an integral part of each CCC camp and had the Department of Labor create positions specifically for managing education programs within the camps. Camp Education Advisor E.W. Greene is pictured in Figure 7 organizing an education class at a camp in Monte Sano, Alabama. These educational classes would prove to be invaluable to the enrollees during and after their service in the CCC.



**Figure 7: Camp Education Advisor E.W. Greene, Monte Sano State Park, 1930s**

Holidays were also celebrated as traditionally as possible in the CCC camps. Standard holidays observed included New Year's Day, Lincoln's Birthday (now observed as Presidents Day), Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, as well as

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<sup>14</sup> Education for the C.C.C.," *Birmingham News*, May 11, 1933, Newspapers.com.

“denominational religious holidays, be they Jewish, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, or Protestant.”<sup>15</sup> Those who could not be home with family either celebrated at the camps with other corpsmen or were invited to dinner with local families. In the CCC’s first year of service, *The Gadsden Times* reported that the men who could not go home for Christmas would be provided with celebrations at their camps. Festivities included tree decorating, a “special radio broadcast by the National Broadcast Company with messages by Director Fechner and Secretary of Agriculture Wallace,” as well as Christmas dinners.<sup>16</sup> While there is record of local families hosting CCC enrollees for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter dinners, the majority of these appear to be documenting the experiences of White corpsmen. Some local worship centers would also invite CCC members to join them for services and dinners afterwards. This is documented for both White and Black companies.

### ***Leadership Opportunities***

For White corpsmen, leadership opportunities within the Civilian Conservation Corps were often quite attainable. Although many enrollees had been unemployed and on the brink of starvation when they were accepted into the CCC, some had held positions before the Depression where they developed skills and knowledge that helped them secure leadership and administrative roles. Positions such as “camp commanders, camp educational advisers, medical officers, and chaplains, as well as...supervisory positions related to the conservation work” were

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<sup>15</sup> Salmond, 141-142.

<sup>16</sup> Pasquill, 18.

not only available to external applicants, but some enrollees as well.<sup>17</sup> Those who had displayed proficiency in certain areas were considered for leadership positions around the camps and could eventually seek higher posts during and after their service in the CCC. The War and Labor Departments typically oversaw the appointments of leadership positions within the CCC camps

While leadership opportunities were fairly attainable for White corpsmen, Black enrollees had a much different experience. Camps had already been ordered to remain segregated unless there were not enough Black enrollees to fill an entire company. Leadership positions, however, were held by White men, most often members of the military or enrollees who had been promoted or appointed into their roles. In Black camps, enrollees attempted to obtain leadership positions and eventually administrative positions within the CCC. However, these men were consistently overlooked and never seriously considered for any type of leadership role. Some camp commanders attempted to explain their reasoning for this behavior, claiming that none of the men exemplified any level of qualification for these types of positions in an attempt to deny or justify biased and discriminatory actions. However, as education programs continued to be successful and enrollees applied for additional terms of service, some Black men “gained appointments as educational advisors in the [Black] camps.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Calvin W. Gower, “The Struggle of Blacks for Leadership Positions in the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-1942,” *The Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 2 (April 1976), 127.

<sup>18</sup> Gower, 128.

## Chapter 4: CCC Projects in Alabama

The Civilian Conservation Corps was designed to conduct work projects related to the country's environment and natural landscape. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior were responsible for coordinating and organizing the projects that would be assigned to the CCC. The years prior to and during the Great Depression had created an unstable agricultural sector in the United States economic system. Years of mismanagement in farming, logging, and other agricultural industries had many national lands and forests compromised and unable to produce natural resources efficiently. In addition, funding for infrastructure, national and state park development, and beautification had become nearly obsolete as these projects were deprioritized during the worst of the economic crisis. Roosevelt's personal interest was with environmental conservation and proper management of the nation's landscape and natural resources. When he became President and needed a way to get Americans back to work, he saw the opportunity to combine his pet project with the immediate needs of the nation.

Once legislation confirmed the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps, advisors from the Agriculture and Interior Departments catalogued the hundreds of projects that needed to be completed and organized them into ten classifications, described as follows:

- Structural Improvements
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Soil Erosion Control
- Flood Control
- Forest Conservation
- Forest Protection
- Recreation and Lands

- Range Management
- Wildlife Conservation
- Miscellaneous (pest control, insect surveys, emergency work, cultural preservation, etc.)<sup>1</sup>

In Alabama, forestry conservation, soil erosion management, cultural preservation, and state park development were the four main project focuses.

### ***Forestry Conservation Projects***

In Alabama, the CCC undertook projects to “improve the state's forested lands, strengthen the forest-fire protection system, and aid in the development of new state park lands.”<sup>2</sup> During this time, Alabama was home to “over 18 million acres of forested land” consisting of several state, national, and privately owned forests.<sup>3</sup> Forest conservation projects were some of the first CCC works projects to come to Alabama. In the April 13, 1933, issue of *The Birmingham News*, it was reported that the first 500 enrollees in North Alabama would be assigned to 130,000 acres of land in Lawrence, Franklin, and Winston counties. The primary work in this area was “road building, thinning out the forest growth, and otherwise improving the forests.”<sup>4</sup> The next month, Alabama was approved for four additional forestry projects that included 210,000 acres of land located in Mobile, Covington, Cleburne, Calhoun, and Walker

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Barske.

<sup>3</sup> Pasquill, 181.

<sup>4</sup> “3,000 Alabamians to be Mobilized,” *Birmingham News*, April 13, 1933, Newspapers.com.

counties. The projects included jobs such as the “construction of fire-breaks, construction of telephone lines, forest fire hazard reduction...fire prevention and suppression...cutting of trees, and protective and improvement activities [in general].”<sup>5</sup> For the next nine years of its existence in Alabama, twenty-eight different CCC companies in Alabama worked on forestry projects.

### ***Soil Erosion Management***

Another major CCC work project type in Alabama was soil erosion control. Much of the South had participated in single crop style farming since before the Civil War, which eventually led to soil degradation. Additionally, commercial, residential, and infrastructure development had disturbed much of the natural landscape resulting in increased levels of soil erosion, which threatened agricultural sustainability. Flood damage was a profoundly significant issue facing many farms because erosion and loss of vegetation impacted natural water-control systems. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior had already begun conducting studies on soil conservation prior to the New Deal but transferred the majority of the responsibilities of the Soil Conservation Service to the CCC by 1935. Alabama cities such as Gainesville, Auburn, Clanton, Talladega, Cullman, and Dothan became home for multiple CCC companies during the program’s nine years. Soil conservation projects included farmland terracing, rebuilding water-control systems, planting trees, grasses, and kudzu, dam building, and conducting soil and sediment studies and analysis.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Alabama Gets 4 Forest Projects in National Plan,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 21, 1933, Newspapers.com.

<sup>6</sup> Pasquill, 59.

### *Cultural Preservation and Archaeological Contributions*

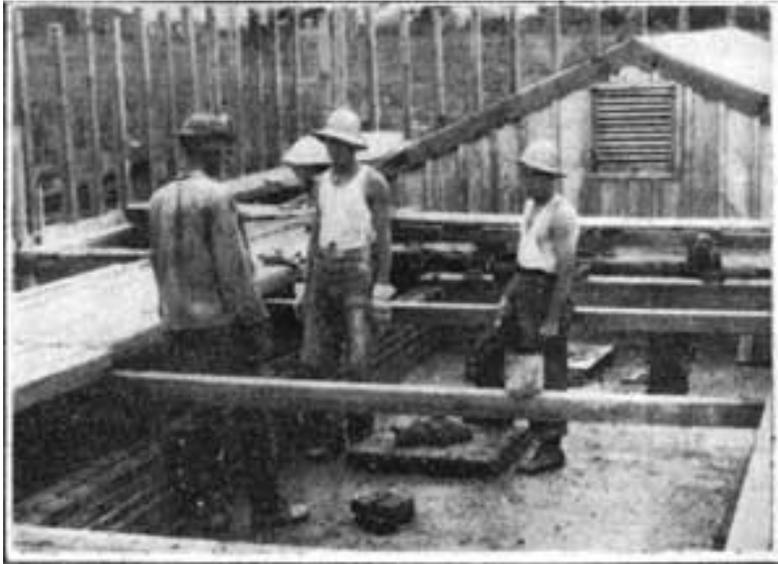
One slightly lesser-known project assigned to the CCC in Alabama is their work at Mound State Monument, now known as Moundville Archaeological Park. While archaeological work was not one of the major types of projects assigned to the CCC by the Department of the Interior, the project at Mound State Park fell under the classification of structural improvements, recreation, and miscellaneous cultural preservation. In 1934, upon the request of Dr. Walter B. Jones from the Alabama Museum of Natural History at the University of Alabama, a side camp of the Junior African-American enrollees of CCC Company 465 in Northport was assigned to Mound State Park to aid with erosion control of the ancient mound plateaus. Dr. Jones managed the site and oversaw CCC efforts to curb erosion of the most historically and culturally significant areas. The corpsmen planted black locust trees, carpet grass, and over 30,000 seedlings to control erosion at Mound State Park.<sup>7</sup> Camp Baltzell as it was called completed the soil erosion management projects, road construction in and around the park, and even took part in some archeological excavations. In 1935, Camp Baltzell was replaced with a side camp from Company 487 in Bessemer, one of the state park project camps.

Once the issue of soil erosion was mitigated, Jones petitioned for additional CCC support in excavation initiatives and the construction of the archaeological park's museum. In order to complete such an intensive archeological and construction initiative, Jones requested a full camp be assigned to Mound State Monument. O.S. Wynn wrote in the September 17, 1935, issue of *The Selma Times-Journal* that Mound State Park is "one of the most outstanding anthropological

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<sup>7</sup> Pasquill, 160-161.

sites in North America” and that the scale of the projects planned there “have been recognized as qualified for a full-strength camp to carry the work forward.”<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, this would not occur until 1938.



**Figure 8: CCC Enrollees Constructing the Jones Archaeological Museum, c. 1937**

Once it became clear that he would not be granted a full camp immediately, Dr. Jones and his wife began to train CCC enrollees from Co. 465 and later Co. 487 in archeological and excavations techniques.<sup>9</sup> Over the next two years, the side camp from Co. 487 completed extremely culturally important archeological excavations and continued work on soil erosion management efforts. By May of 1937, work had begun on the massive concrete museum

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<sup>8</sup> O.S. Wynn, “Up and Down the Town,” *Selma Times-Journal*, September 17, 1935, Newspapers.com.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen Garrison, “Walter B. Jones and Moundville,” *Alabama Heritage* (Summer 2001): 15.

“designed to aid in the interpretation of one of the most remarkable archeological sites in America.”<sup>10</sup> In October, Co. 487 was transferred to Yosemite and Jones was finally assigned a full CCC camp, comprised of Co. 444 in its entirety, to complete the museum construction and archeological excavations.



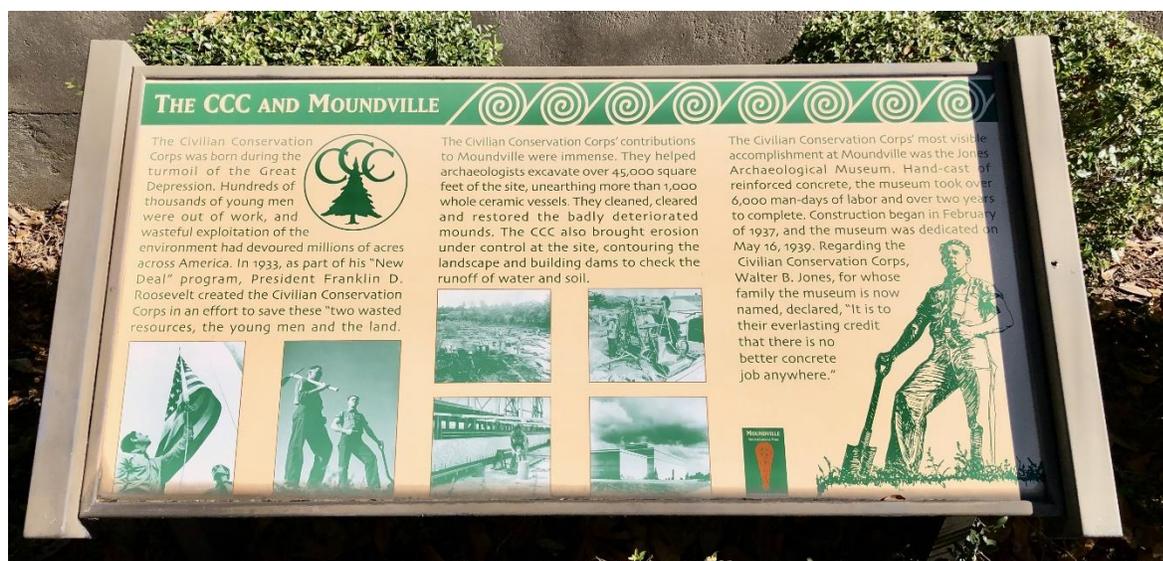
**Figure 9: CCC Director Robert Fechner presenting Dr. Walter B. Jones with the key to the Museum, May 16, 1939**

Upon completion of the museum in 1939, Jones held a dedication ceremony and grand opening reception for the public. CCC Director Robert Fechner was in attendance and, as seen in Figure 9, presented Dr. Jones with the ceremonial key to the museum, which is now named The

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert Evison, “Unique Archaeological Museum Completed: Alabama, CCC, and Service Share in Erecting Structure at Ancient Mounds,” *The Regional Review* 2, no. 5 (May 1939).

Jones Archeological Museum in his honor. To this day, Moundville Archeological Park and Museum receive thousands of visitors each year. Visitors are greeted by a historical marker, seen in Figure 10, honoring the legacy of Jones and the CCC in the development of Moundville. Without the dedication of Dr. Jones and the incredible work of the men from CCC Cos. 465, 487, and 444, Moundville may very well have been lost to erosion, preventing a key piece of Indigenous culture and history from being preserved and utilized in education programming across the country.



**Figure 10: Historical Marker located in Moundville Archaeological Park at the Jones Archeological Museum**

### *Alabama State Parks*<sup>11</sup>

The Civilian Conservation Corps was responsible for developing and constructing much of “Gulf State Park, Cheaha State Park, DeSoto State Park, Monte Sano State Park, Chewacla State Park, Valley Creek Regional Park, Oak Mountain State Park, Cedar Creek Regional Park, Little River Regional Park, Wheeler Regional Park, Chattahoochee Regional Park, Muscle Shoals and Wilson Parks, Weogufka Regional Park, Panther Creek Regional Park, and Chickasaw Regional Park.”<sup>12</sup> Structures built by the CCC in the 1930s, including cabins, culverts, bridges, and pavilions, are still standing and used daily in many of the parks listed above. While evidence of the CCC’s contributions can be found in multiple state parks across Alabama, Oak Mountain, Cheaha, and DeSoto State Parks are home to some of the most notable CCC archival collections in the state.

In October 1934, Co. 487 of Bessemer was removed from a forestry project in another part of the state and reassigned to Oak Mountain State Park. They immediately began construction of a new 6.5-mile road “from the Birmingham highway across to and into the park...[extending] to the top of the mountain.”<sup>13</sup> The company consisted of 180 men, most of whom were from central and north Alabama. Within the first year at Oak Mountain, the CCC completed the initial phase of the park road, forged a trail and constructed stone staircases to

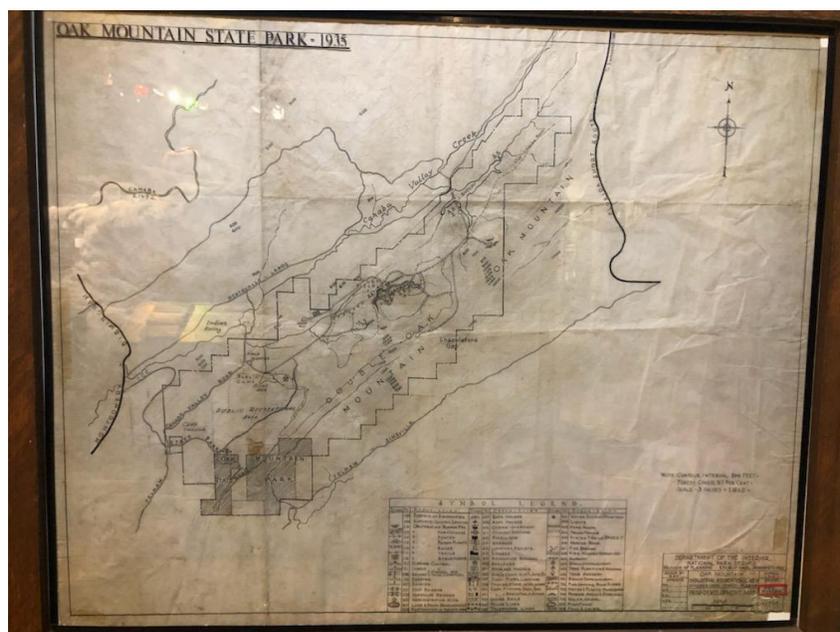
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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix E.

<sup>12</sup> Pasquill, 114-115.

<sup>13</sup> “Oak Mountain State Park Being Rapidly Developed,” *Shelby County Reporter*, September 19, 1935, Newspapers.com.

provide public access to the 30-foot waterfall Peavine Falls, and had been approved to build six cabins, a stone lookout tower, campgrounds, and designated picnic areas. In the May 15, 1935, issue of Co. 487's newsletter, *The Camp Jester*, a D. Benton writes that since the company was relocated to Oak Mountain in October, they had completed “275 acres [of] fire hazard reduction, 7.5 miles of road, and 1 bridge” with a one-acre lake and 10 cabins to be built next.<sup>14</sup> The original CCC road can be seen in Figure 11.



**Figure 11: National Park Service Map of Oak Mountain State Park, 1935**

Between 1936 and 1937, the CCC had completed constructing three parking areas, 3.5-miles of telephone lines, eight miles of trails, multiple cabins, firebreaks, culverts, bridges, a dam, pavilions, and staff housing, including the park caretaker's cabin. The construction of a

<sup>14</sup> D. Benton, “We Do Our Park,” *Camp Jester*, May 15, 1935, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

park lodge built from stone quarried in the park was scheduled to begin in April of 1937 and completed by 1939. Much like the stone for the lodge, all of the natural materials needed for completion of park projects was sourced directly from the state park. Long leaf pines were used as timber to build cabins and sandstone and other rock materials were quarried in the park to build culverts, bridges, foundations, chimneys, and pavilions.

During this time, Oak Mountain State Park was being considered as a potential candidate for a National Park. An additional 1,000 men that were primarily part of the WPA had been transferred to an 8,000-acre area connecting to Oak Mountain State Park by the National Park Service. This area was being developed as mostly recreational, with lakes and cottages for “family use” and other facilities for “Birmingham civic and welfare organizations” such as “boys’ and girls’ camps.”<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> After merely three years of steady work in the park, there were only a few projects left to complete. Unfortunately, these projects would be transferred to the WPA from the CCC as Co. 487 was unexpectedly relocated to Yosemite National Park in California.

Cheaha State Park, located at the highest point in Alabama, was another recipient of CCC assistance.<sup>17</sup> Opened in 1933, Cheaha State Park is “Alabama’s oldest continuously operating

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<sup>15</sup> “Work Continues in Oak Mt. Park,” Shelby County Reporter, October 21, 1937, Newspapers.com.

<sup>16</sup> Pasquill, 146.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix F.

state park.”<sup>18</sup> The two main CCC companies that were assigned to Cheaha State Park were Companies 465 out of Munford and 468 out of Oxford. Company 465, one of the most well-known African American companies in North Alabama, began construction of a 30-foot “earthen dam with a concrete core wall” that created the six-acre recreational lake named Cheaha Lake as well as several miles of truck and service roads leading into and throughout the park.<sup>19</sup>

Construction of the lake and the dam was the largest project in the state park and much of the lake was dug by hand by CCC enrollees of Co. 465. When Co. 465’s Cheaha State Park Side Camp SP-7 was set to be abandoned in 1935, much of the remaining projects were transferred to Co. 468 which had been working in another area of the park as well.

Initially Co. 468 had begun work on the Oxford-Cheaha Road in 1933 under a state forestry project. In April of 1934, however, they were transferred to the state parks division where they continued work on the road and prepared for others. By the end of that year, they had completed several projects including the thirteen-mile road leading into the park and to the top of Cheaha Mountain. Work had begun on Bunker Tower, an iconic stone watchtower located at the peak of Cheaha Mountain, and several other projects throughout the park were underway. By June 1935, Bunker Tower, the caretaker’s cabin, four vacation cabins, and a stone dam creating a reservoir that supplied water to the caretaker’s cabin and the recreational cabins were nearing completion and additional projects were expected into the next year including a stone bathhouse,

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas V. Ress, “Cheaha State Park,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, March 7, 2019, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2565>.

<sup>19</sup> Pasquill, 141.

additional cabins, a mechanics garage, four miles of trails, nearly thirty miles of road, and planting of native trees and plants were either completed or nearing completion.

When the CCC concluded work at Cheaha State Park in 1939, Companies 465 and 468 had equipped the park with miles of roadways and foot trails, constructed Cheaha Lake, repopulated the park with native plants, built “a stone bath house at Cheaha Lake, eleven stone cabins, two stone pavilions, and the Bald Rock Group Lodge” as well as Bunker Tower, which has become a symbol of Cheaha State Park and currently houses the CCC Museum, one of the most inclusive CCC museums in the state.<sup>20</sup>

DeSoto State Park was another major CCC project that began in 1934. Located near Mentone and Fort Payne, Alabama, DeSoto State Park was officially known as State Park #5 and consisted of land that had primarily been donated by local residents by the time CCC Company 472 arrived to begin work. Immediately after the camp was constructed, Co. 472 began developing the park. Initial projects included the construction of a fence surrounding the entire park, truck roads, culverts, campgrounds, and a nursery. Just as with development of Oak Mountain and Cheaha State Parks, all of the building materials were sourced directly from inside the parks. A sandstone quarry was established in 1934 and soon after, Co. 472 started building park structures and recreational cabins.

CCC Co. 472 worked diligently to shape the park into what visitors see today. Structures such as pavilions, cabins, a caretaker’s house, a bathhouse, a “grease shop and oil storage

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<sup>20</sup> Ress.

house,” bridges, culverts, a lodge, and a contact station at the original entrance were completed by 1939, with plans for additional structures to be built over the next several years. Power and telephone lines were also installed throughout the park and several roads that travelled the span of State Park #5 were graded and paved with chert. By 1937, Co. 472 had completed “ten overnight cabins, five miles of foot trails, and six miles of cherted roads,” in addition to guardrails, entrance posts, and park signage.<sup>21</sup> The park opened on May 24, 1939, with all projects completed on time and plans for future additions. The *Dekalb County Times* reported that nearly 4,000 people attended the park’s grand opening and the CCC enrollees who had dedicated their time and efforts into the park’s creation led tours of park structures and recreational spaces for the grand opening. Today, the contact station at the original entrance to the park, seen in Figure 12, houses DeSoto State Park’s CCC Museum.



**Figure 12: Original Entrance and Contact Station, DeSoto State Park, c. 1939**

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<sup>21</sup> Pasquill, 132.

Several CCC companies served the state parks division and contributed to the natural beauty and accessibility of Alabama's most visited state parks. Projects in state parks often intersected with forestry and soil conservation projects and it was common for companies to be transferred between each division. Although state park projects were similar between parks, each structure is unique to the park it inhabits. Materials used to build park structures were sourced directly from the parks they were serving, and while floorplans, layouts, and guidelines were typically generic and streamlined, the native natural elements captured the personality of the landscapes that surrounded them. Additionally, the CCC enrollees that worked tirelessly to develop state parks that serve to protect Alabama's wildlife, conserve natural resources, and educate the public through outdoor access and recreational spaces created a lasting legacy that generations of Alabamians have enjoyed and will continue to enjoy for years to come.

## **Chapter 5: The Social Implications of the CCC in Alabama**

The Civilian Conservation Corps completed countless projects in Alabama that contributed to environmental conservation, natural resources preservation, state park and recreational space improvements, infrastructure development, and economic revival. While these projects have had an everlasting impact on Alabama's overall environmental and economic sustainability, the social implications of the CCC's legacy in Alabama are equally impactful.

### ***Family Survival***

The Great Depression put an unprecedented amount of stress on individuals and families in every corner of the United States. Many Alabamians were already struggling to make ends meet by the time of the stock market crash, but the economic crisis that affected the agricultural sector drove many into desperate levels of poverty. Unemployment rates skyrocketed and the number of homeless Americans rose drastically. Families faced the threat of starvation daily. The sudden experience of extreme poverty caused a sharp decline in the mental and physical health of countless Americans.

Families in the South were often quite large. It was common for families to comprise of ten or more children. This family structure would be difficult to sustain even prior to the Great Depression, but with the added stresses of unprecedented unemployment rates, the agricultural crisis, and unstable prices, providing enough food, shelter, and clothing for an average family was often impossible. Many rural families and farmers relocated to urban areas to find employment at factories, industrial plants, and quarries or mines. Jobs that had traditionally been considered "African American work" were being vacated to provide opportunities to struggling

white families, creating an even more dire situation for the Black communities in and around the state's largest urban areas, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile. Those who could find stable employment often did not make enough to ensure the survival of their families.

When details of New Deal programs like the CCC became known, excitement spread among the families who were the most severely affected by the Depression. The promise of a consistent livable wage, shelter, food, physical conditioning, and rewarding projects created a sense of hope throughout the United States and Alabama. One of the stipulations of enrollment in the CCC was that \$22 of the \$30 each corpsman made was to be sent home to their families. The remaining \$8 was more than enough to sustain the enrollee while employed by the CCC. Not only did the program save thousands of Alabamians from starvation, but it also provided employment for enrollees and the potential for a stable lifestyle for their families, most of whom surely would not have survived the Depression otherwise.

### ***Education in the CCC***

In addition to financial sustainability for Alabama families, enrollees in the Civilian Conservation Corps were provided the opportunity to attend educational classes during downtime or in between projects. As stated in Chapter 4, many corpsmen were illiterate at the time of their enrollment. Fellow enrollees and camp leaders began informally teaching corpsmen how to read and write, in addition to teaching them skills needed for many of the assigned projects. As the need for and interest in educational programming grew, CCC Director Robert

Fechner realized the potential benefits of establishing an education division within each CCC camp and immediately “took the matter up with President Roosevelt.”<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 13: Writing Class at CCC Camp, 1933**

Within the first year of its existence, the CCC began to implement vocational and general education courses. Each camp was assigned Education Administrators and experienced or skilled enrollees had the opportunity to assist with training and education programs within their camps. In some neighboring communities, local educators offered their services to the CCC camps as seen in Figure 11. General education courses often included lectures and practical training on subjects such as American and local history, English, writing, arithmetic, art, typing, and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Fechner, “The Educational Contribution of the Civilian Conservation Corps,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 19, no. 9 (May 1937), 305.

reading. Eventually, camps were equipped with education centers and equipment such as textbooks, projectors, desks, and blackboards.

Not only did enrollees have the opportunity to attend formal education classes during their tenure in the CCC, but they also learned skills that would be marketable once their 18-month enrollment period ended. Most of the projects assigned to the CCC required specific skills that many of the enrollees did not possess. As a result, enrollees had to receive on-the-job training often led by camp leaders or experienced enrollees. This training gradually evolved into vocational classes held after work hours. Vocational courses included training in areas such as journalism, bookkeeping, auto mechanics, cooking, welding, surveying, carpentry, masonry, photography, and landscaping. In Figure 12, CCC enrollees attend a masonry class in preparation for a building project.



**Figure 14: Brick Masonry Class at CCC Camp, 1933**

Once Fechner officially incorporated an educational program into CCC camp life, the CCC and Department of Labor published pamphlets and basic texts that served as guidebooks for many of the trades related to CCC work. Education Advisors supervised general education and vocational training. Fechner also provisioned the addition of Local Experienced Men, or LEMs, from surrounding communities as skilled technicians in the camps to assist with training in their trade of expertise.<sup>2</sup> In Alabama, many of the men who enrolled in the CCC had some level of transferable skills or knowledge that was crucial to completing projects. Most of the camps established in Alabama contained LEMs that specialized in varying crafts such as woodworking and carpentry, blacksmithing, logging, farming, masonry, or welding. Rural Alabama lifestyles prepared the men for much of the outdoor projects, while those who had been laid off from factories and other industrial centers were more prepared to take on construction and infrastructure projects.

In an article defending the decision to implement educational programs in CCC camps, Fechner wrote that “from the beginning, CCC education has emphasized the elimination of illiteracy, the correction of common-school deficiencies, training on the job, vocational instruction, cultural and general education, and character and citizenship development.”<sup>3</sup> Roosevelt and Fechner believed that service in the CCC would enrich the lives of those who enrolled and better prepare them for employment after their service and as the effects of the Great Depression faded from American life.

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<sup>2</sup> Salmond, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Fechner, 306.

### *The CCC's Impact on Physical and Mental Health*

One of the claims made by Roosevelt and his team was that the CCC not only provided financial relief, but an increase in overall health, morale, and spirit. Physical conditioning, balanced nutrition, education, skill building, financial stability, and experiencing the great outdoors of America were all benefits of CCC enrollment that contributed to better physical, emotional, and mental health among those who served. The CCC invested in developing “strong, healthy, vigorous young men” and promoted a disciplined lifestyle.<sup>4</sup> In addition, character traits such as “neatness and cleanliness, and a knowledge of personal hygiene” as well as respecting the “rights of others and to be tolerant of the other fellow’s point of view” were actively promoted as part of the intangible, yet valuable benefits of the CCC.

The attention to physical, emotional, and mental health benefits set the CCC apart from other relief programs that focused solely on financial or economic recovery. As CCC popularity grew, the number of enrollees accepted into the program grew as well. The expansion of the CCC meant a promise of hope for countless men and their families. Salmond states that while the CCC’s impact on “hope regained or horizons broadened” cannot be measured, these positive experiences and “changes were a reality in the camps.”<sup>5</sup> Once the positive impact on overall mental health became apparent, promotional materials for the CCC included rhetoric that

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<sup>4</sup> Federal Security Agency, *The Selection Process: A Guide for Selecting Agents of the Civilian Conservation Corps*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 1941, 8.  
<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/253380#page/17/mode/1up>.

<sup>5</sup> Salmond, 130.

reflected the psychological benefits of enrollment in the program, such as the promotional poster pictured in Figure 15.



**Figure 15: Poster by Albert M. Bender Promoting CCC Benefits, 1935**

Articles in the CCC newsletter “Happy Days” portrayed the positive perspectives that CCC life was creating. Local newspapers interviewed enrollees and soon it was understood that the Civilian Conservation Corps “rekindled hope for the future and faith in America and its way of life.”<sup>6</sup> While enlisting in the CCC was for many a “final act” and “culmination of a long

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 132.

period of despair and helplessness,” it proved to be the moment that would set them on a better path for their futures and the futures of their families.<sup>7</sup> The testimonies of enrollees, their families, camp directors, and others associated with the CCC support the notion that the benefits of the CCC went far beyond the tangible or visible results of their work. The impact on morale and mental health was just as significant as the conservation initiatives assigned to the program. Salmond stated that Roosevelt would have been “justified in pointing with pride to the Corps’ achievement in the conservation of youth as well as natural resources.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Racial Prejudice in the 1930s*

Although the CCC was the only New Deal program to have anti-discriminatory rhetoric written into its legislation, it did not escape the unfortunate social norms of discrimination based on race and sex that was common during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Racism and sexism were commonplace in Alabama as it was throughout the Southern United States and in many other areas of the nation. Racial discrimination and violence caused hundreds of Black Southerners to leave the area and seek employment in the Northern, Northeastern, and Western states during the early 1930s in the Great Migration. Those who remained, experienced extreme poverty and the threat of violence daily. With the implementation of the CCC in Alabama, many Black Alabamians saw a chance to provide for their families during a time of unprecedented economic hardship.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 132.

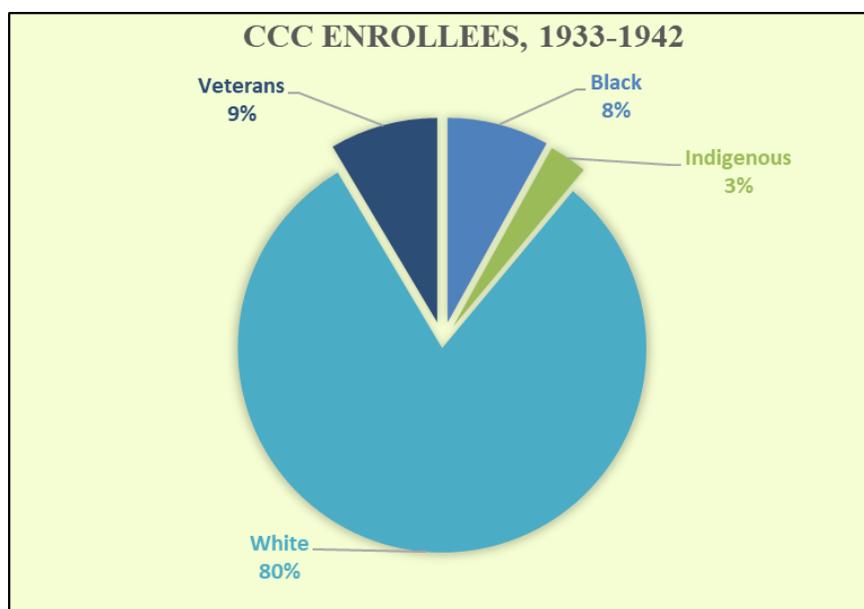
Unfortunately, social mores in Alabama presented obstacles for equal enrollment opportunities. Segregation was the law of the land in Alabama and much of the South, and the CCC was not excluded from its grip. “Rampant discrimination” prevented Black men from receiving even close to the same opportunities for enrollment as their White counterparts. During the first several months of the program’s deployment, the amendment to the Unemployment Relief Act outlawing discrimination based on race proved to be relatively ineffective, particularly concerning the practices of Southern selection agents. Almost immediately, reports began to reach Washington that selection agents were “deliberately excluding [Black men] from all CCC activities.”<sup>9</sup>

While the selection of Black men for CCC enrollment in Alabama was less discriminatory than other Southern states, it was nowhere near equal. In many parts of Alabama and the South, the Black population greatly outnumbered the White population, yet enrollment numbers remained unbalanced. Counties and cities where the majority of the population was Black reported enrollee numbers that were not representative of the Black to White ratio. For example, in Dallas County, Alabama, over 75% of the population was Black, but the ratio of White to Black CCC enrollees was “more than two to one.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>10</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford, 1981): 51.



**Figure 16: CCC Enrollment Demographic, 1933-1942**

By the end of the CCC’s first year, a mere “6 percent of CCC enrollees were African Americans,” and this percentage remained disproportionately low even in majority–Black states and communities.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the decade, this percentage increased to nearly 10 percent. When the CCC disbanded in 1942, a total of roughly 250,000 Black men out of 3 million enrollees served in the CCC during its 9-year tenure, as can be seen in Figure 14.

Although blatant discrimination practices ceased during the program’s initial selection process, states including Alabama with Jim Crow-era segregation legislation in place began to demand that CCC camps be segregated and argued that federal intervention was infringing on state rights and autonomy. Program administrators as well as the CCC director Robert Fechner

<sup>11</sup> “Oscar Stanton De Priest,” History, Art, & Archives, United States House of Representatives, accessed October 16, 2022, <https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/12155>.

acquiesced, interpreting segregation policies as maintaining a “separate but equal” approach and was therefore non-discriminatory and well within legal operation of the Unemployment Relief Act. The idea was that camps would be segregated, but enrollees would be selected, treated, and paid equally. During the program’s tenure, the number of Black enrollees continued to increase, and enrollees received equal pay and housing during their service in the CCC.

Unfortunately, Black companies in many parts of the country received negative treatment from the communities surrounding their camps. Black corpsmen often experienced harassment from locals and CCC leaders received complaints from local community leaders requesting the relocation of Black camps. Alabama, however, proved to be the most moderate state concerning this issue.<sup>12</sup> Generally, communities in Alabama and even other Southern states reported the least number of complaints and even issued reports praising “the high standard of the work accomplished” by Black corpsmen.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, it was Governor Bibb Graves, a liberal progressive and reformed Klansman, who established one of the best operated and most effective statewide CCC programs for Black corpsmen.

Without the CCC, many Alabama families would not have survived the difficulties of the Great Depression much longer. CCC enrollees and their families benefited from the program in many ways. Financial stability, physical and mental health improvements, and general education and skill training were just some of the CCC’s positive impacts on Alabama society. Additionally, racial segregation in Alabama made implementing the only New Deal program to

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<sup>12</sup> Salmond, 93.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

contain anti-discriminatory rhetoric extremely difficult. Black men initially faced racial prejudice at enrollment posts. Eventually, Black Alabamians were able to gain access to the countless benefits of the CCC, including sending funds to their families, participating in education and training classes, and contributing to some of the most important projects across the state. While camps were segregated in Alabama, the federal pushback that state and local leaders received challenged discriminatory legislation and policies in a manner unprecedented to that point in the twentieth century.

## Chapter 6: Economic Impact of the CCC in Alabama

The Great Depression only worsened an already fragile economic situation in Alabama. Agriculture was a major economic sector in Alabama. Farmlands covered a sizable portion of the state, but years of poor farming practices left much of the soil damaged and untenable. In addition to agricultural hardships, industries across the state and in major cities like Birmingham and Mobile were struggling to find skilled labor as former farmers flocked to urban areas to find work. As the Depression worsened, factories were forced to either scale back their labor force or shut down altogether. In Birmingham, employment dropped from a “high of 100,000 full time employees to only 15,000” within the span of only a few years.<sup>1</sup> With the arrival of the CCC, Alabamians with backgrounds in both economic sectors saw an opportunity for stable employment.

### *Alabama Agriculture and the CCC*

Since Alabama became a state in 1819, the majority of its economic structure was based on agricultural output. After Reconstruction, Alabama’s plantation economy evolved into sharecropper and tenant-style farming, “encompassing well over 65 percent of all farmers” in the state.<sup>2</sup> Many Southern historians argue that “this new system empowered landowners and oppressed those who worked the land as much as slavery had,” and in Alabama this sentiment

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<sup>1</sup> Madison Underwood, “Alabama Wasn’t Part of the Dust Bowl, but That Doesn’t Mean the State Didn’t Feel Similar Effects,” AL.com, November 20, 2012, [https://www.al.com/spotnews/2012/11/alabama\\_wasnt\\_a\\_part\\_of\\_the\\_du.html](https://www.al.com/spotnews/2012/11/alabama_wasnt_a_part_of_the_du.html).

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth E. Phillips, “Sharecropping and Tenant Farming in Alabama,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, April 24, 2015.

often proved to be true. Those who worked on lands they did not own found themselves in a cycle of poverty that was often impossible to escape without leaving to find employment in industrial cities like Birmingham. Although agriculture was the leading source of economic production in Alabama by the late 1920s, poverty rates associated with this system negatively impacted Alabama's economy overall.

Another factor that negatively affected Alabama's agricultural economy was the single-crop system of farming, or monoculture farming. Since before the Civil War, the primary crop grown in the South and Alabama was "king cotton." Across the state, little else was grown and generations of cotton farmers planted and harvested the same lands year after year. While monoculture farming has some advantages to productivity efficiency, it is a major contributing factor to soil degradation. Not only does the single-crop system impact soil quality, but it also creates an attractive environment for pests. In the 1910s, an insect called the boll weevil migrated from Mexico and devastated Alabama's cotton crop. Facing financial ruin, many farmers were forced to diversify and began incorporating food products such as peaches, pecans, and peanuts into their crop outputs.

Before many states felt the beginning stages of the Great Depression, Alabama was already experiencing a harsh economic decline. The boll weevil crisis, damaging farming practices, and cotton prices that plummeted to "the lowest levels since the 1880s" created an unstable way of life for farm families in the state well into the late 1920s.<sup>3</sup> By 1931, agriculture

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew L. Downs, "Great Depression in Alabama," Encyclopedia of Alabama, October 1, 2019, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3608>.

was still the predominant occupation with “48 percent of total workers employed in this field.”<sup>4</sup> Land ownership saw a 22 percent decrease in the decade leading to the Great Depression and the average farm size shrunk by almost 10 percent. By the time the rest of the nation was feeling the pressure of the Great Depression, Alabama had been experiencing economic decline for over a decade.

The Civilian Conservation Corps brought with it the promise of economic recovery. In Alabama, this meant a focus on soil conservation and environmental sustainability. Erosion and poor-quality soils were the remnants of generations of monoculture farming practices. The boll weevil crisis and record low cotton prices further contributed to the dire economic situation. By the 1934, 83 percent of Alabama, an estimated 27 million acres of land, had become useless because of soil erosion alone, according to the *Alabama Erosion Survey of 1934*.<sup>5</sup>

That same year, Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees, in coordination with the Soil Erosion Service, began conducting soil erosion control demonstrations across the state, as seen in Figure 15. Techniques such as crop rotation, terracing, water control, and strategic planting helped local farmers mitigate risks to future production and restore soil vitality. In addition,

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<sup>4</sup> “Alabama’s Changing Economy through the Twentieth Century,” Alabama Business and Economic Indicators, Culverhouse College of Business Center for Business and Economic Research, July 26, 2019, <https://cber.culverhouse.ua.edu/2019/07/26/alabamas-changing-economy-through-the-twentieth-century/>.

<sup>5</sup> Pasquill, 5.

surveys were conducted that evaluated “soil type, topography, and extent of erosion” in order to develop plans for cultivating the land.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 17: CCC Enrollee, Co. 3474, Blue Pond Plantation, 1937**

### *Alabama Industries and the CCC*

While the Industrial Revolution had maintained a stronghold in the Northern and North-Eastern United States, the South had been slow to industrialize. Cities like Birmingham and Mobile eventually became the major industrial and urban centers in the state, but much of Alabama remained rooted in agriculture. When sharecropping, tenant farming, and boll weevil infestations led to breakdowns in cotton production and distribution, farm families reached an unprecedented level of poverty. In addition, farms were failing because of poor farming practices

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

and soil erosion prevented many farmers from being able to cultivate their farmlands. During the late 1910s into the 1920s, many farmers and their families migrated to urban, industrialized areas to find work. Textile mills, steel mills, factories, and mines became a desirable source of reliable income for many families during this time.

When the rest of the country began experiencing the initial pangs of the Great Depression and rural citizens flocked to cities to find work, Alabamians were already being laid off from the industrial jobs they had sought refuge in during the decade prior. This anomaly resulted in a mass exodus from major cities and a return to rural life in an attempt to regain the agricultural lifestyle and economic means they once possessed. Sadly, the agricultural situation had worsened and many families were left homeless, in desperate levels of poverty and facing starvation. Those who remained in the major cities like Birmingham, struggled to find any source of income as the Depression worsened.

Factories, mills, and mines began closing at alarming rates. According to Matthew Downs of the University of Mobile, only half of the “nearly 3,000 mines and mills operating in the state in 1929” were still in operation in 1933.<sup>7</sup> Iron and steel production had been the economic signature of Birmingham since the late nineteenth-century, earning the city the nickname “Iron City.” Between 1929 and 1931, iron and steel mill employment declined by 28 percent. When word reached Roosevelt about Birmingham’s 25 percent unemployment rate, he commented that the city was the “worst hit town in the country.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Downs.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

While the projects conducted by the CCC were primarily focused on natural landscape and environmental conservation, some of the work required materials that would need to be provided by manufacturers in multiple industries. Steel, iron, coal, and timber products among other materials and supplies would be needed to complete projects such as bridges, dams, telephone lines, and roadways. By purchasing supplies and materials from manufacturers in various industries, the CCC boosted demand in the industrial sector of the economy and in turn, impacted job creation. Without the demand for these products, many factories, mills, and mines might have faced the same fate as countless others at the height of the Depression.

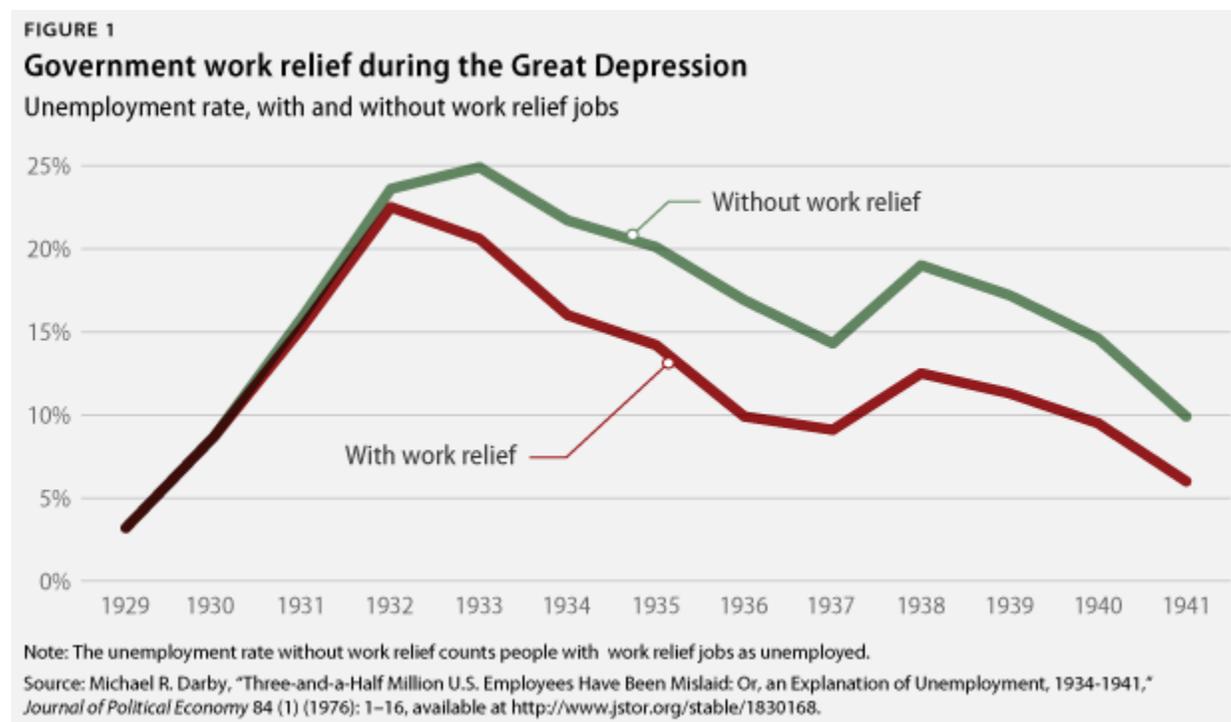
### ***A Boost to Unemployment and Poverty Rates***

Although the Great Depression severely impacted the people of Alabama, much of the state was already experiencing harsh levels of poverty. Unemployment rates in Alabama cities were much higher than other states and rural Alabama had been experiencing extreme poverty even before the Great Depression swept the nation. Agricultural setbacks such as several droughts, pest infestations, soil erosion damage, and monoculture farming resulted in a critical decline in agricultural production. Unstable prices and increased cost of farming supplies and equipment further contributed to the agricultural crisis. In addition, industrialized cities like Birmingham faced economic difficulties as supply and demand became unreliable and factories, mills, and mines began layoffs and closures. By the time New Deal programs like the CCC began to be implemented, unemployment rates in Alabama were the highest in the country and both the agricultural and industrial sectors of the state's economy were failing.

With the labor crisis in Birmingham reaching unprecedented highs, workers with valuable experience and skills were either unemployed or working in a position where they were overqualified and underpaid. Layoffs and closures created a volatile situation and stability was essentially nonexistent. The Civilian Conservation Corps changed the outlook for the futures of countless Alabamians who were in serious need of financial relief, stability, and a healthy lifestyle. CCC projects in Alabama and elsewhere often required the expertise of a skilled worker to either complete the project or train others in their field. Men who had found purpose and lost it, were able to regain a sense of meaning by applying their knowledge in a manner that was valuable to their communities and their families. Once enrollment in the CCC reached its end, hundreds of men entered into the workforce with valuable, marketable skills that would prepare them for employment as the job market stabilized.

Without the establishment of the CCC in Alabama, thousands of men and their families would have continued in a cycle of poverty and unemployment, and many would not have survived the worst years of the Depression's impact. Unemployment rates had already reached record highs and future outlooks depicted a very grim picture. Federal and state economists alike predicted that without some type of government intervention, unemployment rates would continue to grow, leading to an unrecoverable level of economic decline, poverty, and a hunger crisis. The CCC prevented such a crisis from continuing to threaten Alabama's economy and citizens. By providing jobs and financial assistance, the CCC not only bettered the lives of enrollees and their families, it prevented the state from plummeting to potentially unrecoverable levels of economic devastation. As evidenced in Figure 16, government work relief programs

such as the Civilian Conservation Corps prevented unemployment rates from worsening across the country. States like Alabama with the worst rates overall reflected similar results.



**Figure 18. Employment Rates and Work Relief during the Great Depression**

## Chapter 8: The Legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps

### *Nine Years of the CCC in Alabama*

From the time it was announced, the Civilian Conservation Corps represented the beginning of an end to a period of hopelessness, fear, and despair in Alabama. During its tenure, the CCC provided jobs for thousands of Alabamians, challenged racial discrimination practices, supplied financial assistance to families across the state, and took part in developing and preserving the natural landscape of Alabama. Forestry initiatives, soil erosion control projects, infrastructure maintenance, cultural resource management, and states parks and recreational facility development were some of the major accomplishments made by the CCC from 1933-1942. By the time of its disbandment, “the CCC had built 1,800 miles of roads, 61 lookout towers, 490 bridges, and 188 buildings and strung 1,430 miles of telephone of lines across the state.”<sup>1</sup> Its mission to accomplish “greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources” proved to be incredibly successful and has left a lasting impression and legacy across the state.<sup>2</sup>

### *Black History in Alabama*

After the progress of the Reconstruction Era, Alabama, like many other states of the former Confederacy, adopted regressive laws and policies that blatantly reinforced racist and discriminatory agendas. In fact, the Alabama Constitutional Convention of 1901 explicitly made

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<sup>1</sup> Barske.

<sup>2</sup> Roosevelt, “Inaugural Address” (1933).

their objective “to establish white supremacy in this State”<sup>3</sup> and disenfranchise Black and poor white Alabamians. In the 1920s, Marie Bankhead Owen was named as the second director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, following in her husband’s footsteps. As an “adamant and unrepentant racist,”<sup>4</sup> Owen made it her mission to redefine how Alabama history should be taught and what should be considered part of Alabama history altogether by purging the state’s “history, iconography, and culture of all traces of Reconstruction.”<sup>5</sup> She essentially attempted to erase any part of Alabama history that told a story other than the one she envisioned.

Owen’s history of Alabama celebrated the triumphs of the Old South, depicted the creation of the Confederacy as a noble cause for states’ rights, and developed a hyper positive, whitewashed version of Alabama history that has caused Black voices to be excluded from the narrative even today. Incorporating details of the Black experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama helps bridge the social and cultural gaps left by Bankhead and Southern historians who shared her views. Fortunately, the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) has been diligent in their efforts to correct the mistakes made by Owen in her interpretation, documentation, and collection of state history, and others are beginning to follow their lead.

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<sup>3</sup> John B. Knox, Alabama Constitutional Convention of 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Kyle Whitmire, “How a Confederate Daughter Rewrote Alabama History for White Supremacy,” *State of Denial*, Alabama Media Group, February 16, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Whitmire.

As the Civil Rights Movement swept across the nation just a few decades after the height of the CCC, Alabama became ground zero for much of the movement's activities, both good and bad. The exclusion of Black voices and experiences from the narratives of state history began to come to light. Educators, civil rights activists, and historians have since endeavored to ensure that Alabama history becomes whole and is representative of the experiences of all Alabamians. With these efforts, additional documents, photographs, artifacts, and oral histories have been included in the state's historical narrative.

While this positive progress has been made, there is still much to be done to uncover and interpret these lost elements of Alabama's past. Families of Black CCC enrollees have begun discovering ephemera related to their relatives' history and have begun allowing archival repositories to accession these items for their historical value. Just recently, a 1936 CCC District "D" annual was acquired by Oak Mountain State Park. The annual contains images, rosters, and narratives about Black companies and camps. This valuable piece of history has been used to connect families to their relatives and fill in gaps in local and family histories.

### ***The End of the CCC and the Onset of WWII***

By the time of its disbandment in 1942, Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps work relief program had put "3 million young men to work building and restoring America's natural resource infrastructure."<sup>6</sup> As evidenced in Figure 16, CCC camps spanned the nation from its creation and corpsmen of all races, colors, and creeds were responsible for projects that have had a lasting

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<sup>6</sup> McNeil.

impact on the nation's economy, infrastructure, natural resources, park systems, society, and culture. In Alabama, the program employed over 66,000 men during its nine-year tenure and helped many Alabamians survive the worst years of the Great Depression.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 19: Map of CCC Camps across the US, 1934-1942**

Many believe that Roosevelt foresaw US involvement in European affairs and began the CCC as preliminary military recruitment and training. In his first inaugural address, he mentions that unemployment could be overcome by “treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war” with “direct recruiting by the government itself.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, most of the men who were qualified to enroll in the CCC, had previously worked in the CCC, and were currently enrolled in

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<sup>7</sup> Pasquill, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Roosevelt, “Inaugural Address” (1933).

the CCC would either volunteer or be drafted into the military upon US entry into World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Furthermore, in 1940, changes were made to the CCC selection guide that included an amendment to the program's role in national defense. It states that the "proper function of the Civilian Conservation Corps in aiding the nation to supply its various defense needs...is to continue the existing basic CCC program, giving emphasis to those types of vocational trainings which have direct applicability to national defense needs...in accordance with the desires of Congress and the President."<sup>9</sup> While it can be debated that Roosevelt did not have war in Europe as a leading motivator in the CCC's creation, the training that the program provided undoubtedly helped prepare men for military life.

Many Black men who served in the CCC fought in WWII as well. Some of the most notable heroes of WWII were the Tuskegee Airmen, "Black servicemen of the U.S. Army Air Forces who trained at Tuskegee Army Airfield in Alabama" and "constituted the first African American flying unit in the U.S. military."<sup>10</sup> Most of the Tuskegee Airmen had either served in the CCC or had been positively impacted by its presence in the state. Many of those who served in WWII reported that life in the CCC prepared them for the conditions of military life and strengthened their spirits and bodies in a way that contributed to their survival before, during, and after the war.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Selection Process: A Guide for Selecting Agents of the Civilian Conservation Corps*, Library of Congress.

<sup>10</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Tuskegee Airmen," accessed October 7, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tuskegee-Airmen>.

### *Contemporary Perspectives on the CCC*

Contemporary perspectives of the Civilian Conservation Corps reflect the program's progress across the nation. Politically, arguments about the degree to which New Deal programs were progressive, liberal, conservative, communist, or socialist are still relevant and have been compared to and applied to today's political climate. Studies have been done from an economic perspective to analyze the effectiveness of New Deal policies and programs on addressing the ramifications of the Great Depression and to evaluate them for application to the current state of the American economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is currently a piece of legislation that has been introduced to the United States Congress called the Restore Environmental Vitality and Improve Volatile Economy by the Civilian Conservation Corps Act or shortened to the REVIVE the CCC Act. Its purpose as outlined in the text of the bill is to “help relieve the widespread distress and unemployment in the United States; to train and support career advancement, leading to long-term employment opportunities; to provide for the restoration of depleted natural resources in the United States; to conserve and improve community natural resources; to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon; and to enhance climate change adaptation and resilience.”<sup>11</sup>

In Alabama, most would agree that the incredible works accomplished by all who participated in the CCC across the state should be honored and the stories that have been lost should be told as a key piece of Alabama's history. As the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCC's creation

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<sup>11</sup> REVIVE the CCC Act, H.R. 5191, 117<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record*, vol. 167, no. 154 (September 7, 2021): H4510.

approaches, more attention is being directed at studying its impact on the state's economy in the aftermath of the Great Depression and on current conservation perspectives and efforts.

Educational programs have become more frequent in the past few years and the CCC collections at Alabama's state parks have received more visitors as knowledge of the CCC's part in shaping the landscape of Alabama has spread.

As recently as this past Spring, Howard Vaughn, one of the few surviving CCC enrollees from Alabama, was recognized by the state of Alabama, the city of Pelham, and Oak Mountain State Park for his work in the most popular and successful New Deal program.<sup>12</sup> Vaughn was presented with a plaque celebrating his many achievements in the CCC and during his life after enrollment. He was then presented an award by Lauren and Alex Massey, Oak Mountain State Park Naturalist and Oak Mountain State Park Ranger, for his service in the CCC. In presenting the Oak Mountain State Park Spirit of the CCC Award on behalf of the Alabama State Park division, Mrs. Massey stated that she "would not be here doing my dream job and Alex doing his dream job if it weren't for the CCC and the work" they accomplished during their nine-year tenure.<sup>13</sup>

The legacy of the CCC in Alabama was not only known in the years during and following its existence but continues to live on in the contributions these men provided to the public. The CCC not only offered impoverished, unemployed, and suffering Alabamians hope for survival during one of the harshest economic conditions in the nation's history, it promoted

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix G.

<sup>13</sup> Lauren Massey, Presentation of Oak Mountain State Park Spirit of the CCC Award, Pelham Library, March 2022.

environmental and natural resources conservation initiatives across the county and throughout the state. During a time when racial discrimination plagued the South, the CCC forced many states and localities to take step in the right direction and cease discriminatory and exclusion practices based on a person's skin color.

While this first act of federal defiance in the face of the Jim Crow South did not launch a nationwide civil rights campaign, it represented the positive changes that would slowly begin to take place over next several decades. The establishment of the CCC and Roosevelt's more progressive New Deal tactics influenced the shift in American political parties and ideologies. The Civilian Conservation Corps' social, political, and economic impact in Alabama and throughout the rest of the nation will continue to benefit generations to come.

## Conclusion

The Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama is responsible for many projects, which include conserving the state's natural resources and developing Alabama's state parks. Although the incredible social and economic legacy of the CCC has been briefly discussed in some statewide historical education programming, the stories of Black CCC members and the circumstances surrounding the segregation of the CCC in the state have been widely excluded from the historical narrative. Unfortunately, this has been a common theme in state history until recently.

The absence of comprehensive historical interpretation and analysis of the Black experience in Alabama's Civilian Conservation Corps and the CCC's legacy creates a historiographical gap on both state and national levels. In Alabama, the CCC was instrumental in developing the state's recreational facilities as well as conserving the state's natural resources, forests, and soil. Not only did the CCC provide exceptional conservation and infrastructure work across the state, but it also gave thousands of unemployed men of all races, colors, and creeds the opportunity to provide financial assistance to their families, educate themselves, and develop a sense of belonging after a physically, emotionally, and psychologically exhausting era of poverty.

Camps in Alabama remained segregated, but the CCC forced state and local authorities to abandon discriminatory practices that kept Black Alabamians impoverished and prevented them from receiving federal aid. While some states adamantly refused to comply, forcing Frank Persons to threaten quota removal, Alabama Governor Bibb Graves and state Director of Federal

Aid Thad Holt advocated for fair selection and enrollment practices, eventually developing one of the leading CCC programs for Black Americans in the nation. For the first time since Reconstruction, Black Alabamians were provided with an opportunity for equal employment and education. Although the ratio of Black to White enrollees remained inequitable, Black enrollees and camps were responsible for some of the most important projects in the state.

Furthermore, the condition of the state's resources and the public appreciation of Alabama's wildlife has led to a continued interest in conservation and preservation efforts. Without the work of the CCC, it is likely that Alabama would have experienced an agricultural crash more severe than the decline witnessed prior to and during the Great Depression. In addition, the CCC played a leading role in the fight for civil rights across the country and in the South. Racial discrimination plagued the South and until De Priest, Roosevelt and the administrators of the CCC upheld anti-discrimination legislation pertaining to selection practices, the Solid South had received little to no opposition from Washington on the matter.

As previously stated, little historical literature documents the CCC and its impact throughout the state of Alabama, especially compared to the amount of historical literature documenting the CCC's efforts in most of the other southern states. The CCC had a profound impact in the state and more historical material should be developed to reflect this fact. Furthermore, even less literature highlights the Black experience in the CCC in Alabama. The research and interpretations contained within this project bridge a gap in the historiography of the CCC in Alabama as well as a gap in the narrative of Black experiences during this time.

These gaps were filled by referencing several secondary and primary source materials that have either been previously overlooked or underutilized. Addressing some of the more unpleasant pieces of Alabama's past also contributed to bridging some of the gaps left by previous historians of Alabama and New Deal history. Additionally, establishing a contextual history regarding the success of the CCC in Alabama is key to understanding the program's lasting effects, even for current and future generations. Chapters 1 and 2 provide the appropriate contextual history needed to place the CCC within state history. By comprehending the implications of Southern politics, the impact of the Great Depression, and the intricacies of the New Deal, one can better interpret the social, political, and economic influences of the CCC in Alabama and the rest of the country, as discussed within Chapters 3 through 7. Finally, Chapter 8 builds upon the historical foundations set in the previous chapters by summarizing the success of the CCC and communicating its influence on Alabamians during the war years into the contemporary era.

This project was subject to many research obstacles, most of which were related to travel limitations and costs. Some primary and secondary sources that would have scaffolded many of the claims made throughout this project are located in out-of-state repositories and only accessible in person. Unfortunately, time constraints and travel costs prevented in person access during this research process. While some of the repositories had digitized materials and responded to research inquiries sent via email, some proved to be inaccessible from a distance. Should this project develop further, whether as a personal endeavor or as the foundation for a doctoral dissertation, these sources will be accessed and utilized in order to contribute to bridging the gaps left by decades of white washing and revisionist history trends. Hopefully as

the CCC's story continues to be spread, more materials will become available for research use and the stories of the men who served in Roosevelt's "Tree Army" can be heard and appreciated by generations to come.

### Appendix A: CCC Artifacts from OMSP Collection



Appendix B: Periodic Table of New Deal Programs

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S PERIODIC TABLE NEW DEAL PROGRAMS

1 Franklin D. Roosevelt

NUMBER Corresponds to book 4

1933 BEGINNING DATE 1936 END DATE

PROGRAM ACRONYM AAA

PROGRAM TITLE AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ADMIN.

58 NUMBER 1891 DATE OF BIRTH 1979 DATE OF DEATH

NAME Rexford Tugwell

3 RFC

4 AAA

5 CCC

6 CCC

7 CWA

8 FCA

9 FDIC

10 FERA

11 HOLC

12 NIRA

13 NLB

14 NRA

15 PWA

16 TVA

17 USEP

18 FCC

19 FMCC

20 FHA

21 Edward Flynn

22 William Green

23 William Harbison

24 Leon Henderson

25 Sidney Hillman

26 High Johnson

27 Edward Steinfeld

28 David Lilienthal

29 Douglas MacArthur

30 A.E. Morgan

31 NRC

32 NYA

33 Adolf Berle

34 George Dern

35 James Farley

36 John Garner

37 Harry Hopkins

38 Cordell Hull

39 Harold Ickes

40 Henry Morgenthau

41 Francis Biddle

42 George Peek

43 USMC

44 FSA

45 Frances Perkins

46 Daniel Roper

47 Claude Swanson

48 Homer Wallace

49 Claude Wickard

50 William Woodin

51 Harry Woodring

52 Homer Cummings

53 Mary Bethune

54 Rexford Tugwell

55 USHA

56 CAA

57 FCIC

58 MLB

59 TNEC

60 BOB

61 Bernard Baruch

62 Lewis Douglas

63 Mariner Eccles

64 Felix Frankfurter

65 Charles Hughes

66 Robert Jackson

67 Philip LaFollette

68 Robert LaFollette

69 Florene LaGuardia

70 Herbert Lehman

71 Raymond Moley

72 Aubrey Williams

73 David Niles

74 Frank Walker

75 George Norris

76 Thomas Pendergast

77 Samuel Rayburn

78 Samuel Roosevelt

79 Robert Wagner

80 Burton Wheeler

81 Benjamin Cohen

82 Thomas Corcoran

83 Great Depression

84 Blue Eagle

85 Green Belt Program

86 "Court Packing"

87 Prohibition

88 Hoover Dam

89 Eleanor Roosevelt

KEY

THE ROOSEVELTS: FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (1882-1945), ELEANOR ROOSEVELT (1884-1962)

PROGRAMS: RFC (1933), AAA (1933), CCC (1933), CWA (1933), FCA (1933), FDIC (1933), FERA (1933), HOLC (1933), NIRA (1933), NLB (1933), NRA (1933), PWA (1933), TVA (1933), USEP (1933), FCC (1933), FMCC (1933), FHA (1933), NYA (1933), NRC (1933), NYA (1933), USMC (1933), FSA (1933), USHA (1933), CAA (1933), FCIC (1933), MLB (1933), TNEC (1933), BOB (1933)

AGRICULTURE AFFILIATES: FMCC (1933), FFA (1917), NIRA (1933), NYA (1933), NRC (1933), NYA (1933), USMC (1933), FSA (1933), USHA (1933), CAA (1933), FCIC (1933), MLB (1933), TNEC (1933), BOB (1933)

ECONOMIC AFFILIATES: RFC (1933), AAA (1933), CCC (1933), CWA (1933), FCA (1933), FDIC (1933), FERA (1933), HOLC (1933), NIRA (1933), NLB (1933), NRA (1933), PWA (1933), TVA (1933), USEP (1933), FCC (1933), FMCC (1933), FHA (1933), NYA (1933), NRC (1933), NYA (1933), USMC (1933), FSA (1933), USHA (1933), CAA (1933), FCIC (1933), MLB (1933), TNEC (1933), BOB (1933)

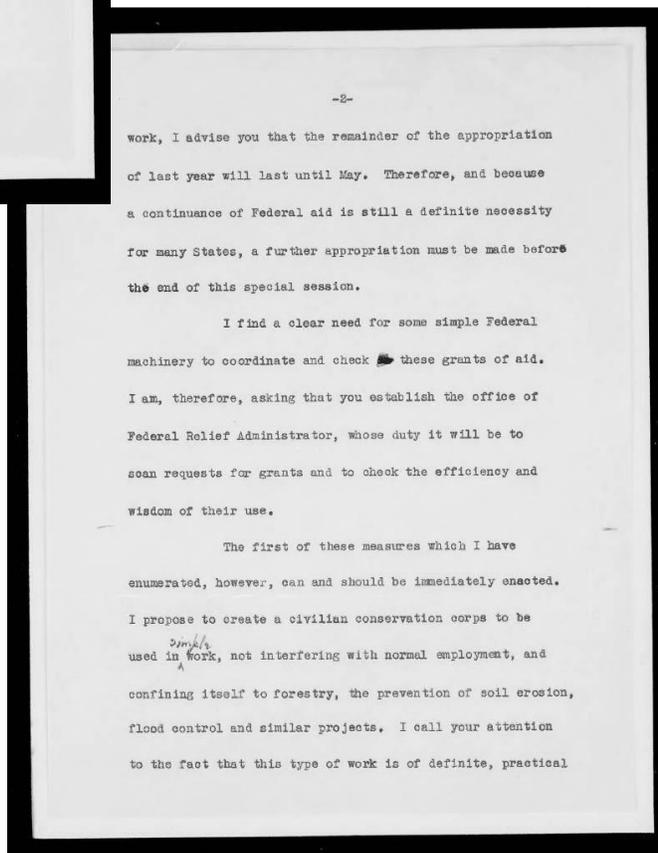
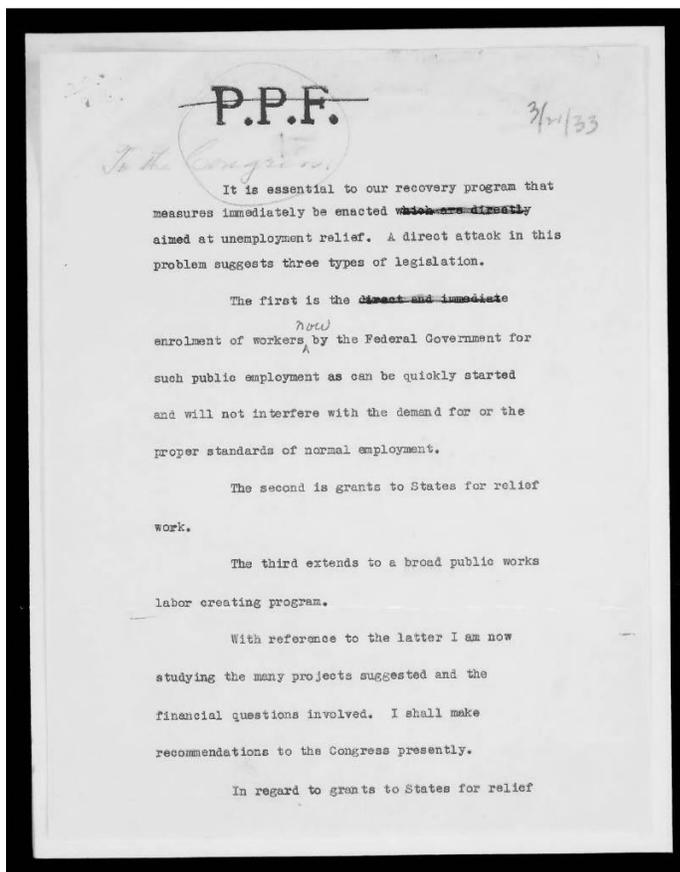
ADVISORS AND SUPPORTERS: Bernard Baruch (1873-1965), Lewis Douglas (1894-1980), Mariner Eccles (1891-1972), Felix Frankfurter (1882-1959), Charles Hughes (1862-1948), Robert Jackson (1892-1954), Philip LaFollette (1866-1943), Robert LaFollette (1865-1925), Florene LaGuardia (1878-1947), Herbert Lehman (1876-1964), Raymond Moley (1892-1985), Aubrey Williams (1896-1981), David Niles (1900-1983), Frank Walker (1891-1981), George Norris (1861-1944), Thomas Pendergast (1872-1945), Samuel Rayburn (1869-1961), Samuel Roosevelt (1867-1944), Robert Wagner (1874-1952), Burton Wheeler (1892-1975), Benjamin Cohen (1894-1984), Thomas Corcoran (1891-1984), Great Depression (1929-1939), Blue Eagle (1933-1938), Green Belt Program (1933-1938), "Court Packing" (1937-1938), Prohibition (1919-1933), Hoover Dam (1931-1936)

THE PERIODIC TABLE OF NEW DEAL PROGRAMS WAS CREATED BY THE PERIODIC TABLE OF NEW DEAL PROGRAMS AND IS AVAILABLE TO ALL FOR REPRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION. PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE PERIODIC TABLE OF NEW DEAL PROGRAMS AND IS AVAILABLE TO ALL FOR REPRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION.

- THE ROOSEVELTS**
- FDR was the 32nd President of the United States and served during the Great Depression and World War II. He implemented many programs, collectively called the New Deal, to aid the ailing nation.
  - Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady, was very influential in the creation of New Deal Policies.
- PROGRAMS**
- The RFC lent several thousand banks & agricultural lending institutions afloat with the loans and other funding & distributed.
  - The AAA was the primary agricultural legislation of the New Deal, reducing crop production to increase prices. It was declared unconstitutional in 1935.
  - The CCC was responsible for employing millions & undertaking conservation projects across the country.
  - The CCC established & aided the agricultural industry.
  - The CWA was formed as a temporary public works program to provide additional jobs for the unemployed.
  - The FCA was formed to save farmers from defaulting on their loans.
  - The FIC will provide insurance to depositors in commercial banks.
  - FERA provided direct relief & work relief to millions of unemployed & needy during the Great Depression.
  - The HOLC purchased & insured 20% of loans from the country.
  - The NIRA developed an industrial code system & provided relief. It was declared unconstitutional in 1935.
  - The NIRA was set up to handle labor disputes of the NIRA. It was replaced in 1935 by the NLRB.
  - The NIRA was declared unconstitutional as part of the NIRA.
  - Created as part of the NIRA, the PWA provided jobs working in public works projects all over the country.
  - The TVA set out to transform the disadvantaged areas of the Tennessee Valley. Its goals included soil conservation, health services for farmers, removing poor land from use, & supplying hydro-electric power.
  - The USEP is responsible for job finding assistance & labor exchange.
  - The FCC was created to regulate all non-government based wired & non-wired communication.
  - The FMCC was responsible for providing loans to farmers.
  - The FHA granted home ownership to a new group of people by lowering required down payments & increasing repayment periods.
  - The NYA provided self-administration for Native Americans by allowing land consolidation & self-governance.
  - The NIRA was created to hear & decide grievances in the railroad industry.
  - The NIRA was created to study the country's natural resources. It was declared unconstitutional in 1935.
  - The SEC was formed to regulate the stock exchange & ensure protection for investors.
  - The NLB was created under the NIRA to give unions a higher standing with employers.
  - The NRC was implemented to help stabilize the coal industry & preserve the resource. The majority of the NRC was declared unconstitutional in 1935.
  - The NRC was formed to regulate the NRC.
  - The NYA was devoted to furnishing the education of young people and to finding them employment.
  - The NYA was formed to improve land use practices & offer assistance to those living on poor land. Some people were relocated to new suburban communities developed by the NYA, Greenbelt Program.
  - The NYA provided electricity to rural America.
  - The NYA distributed benefits to related workers & their families & served as a social insurance program.
  - The CCC encouraged farmers to plant crops that were beneficial to soil rather than those that depleted soil.
  - The NYA was formed to provide assistance to related & the unemployed.
  - The NYA provided millions of jobs working on public works projects across the nation. In 1930 the name was changed to Works Projects Administration.
  - The NYA provided assistance to companies to increase employment, modernize & maintain shipping routes, & preserve a successful merchant marine.
  - The NYA fought rural poverty, by providing training & providing educational support, the NYA is well known for its photography project which captured the Great Depression on film.
  - The NYA loaned money to states & communities for low cost construction.
  - The NYA assisted economic & safety regulations in commercial aviation.
  - The NYA established the agricultural economy by providing farmers against devastation of their crops.
  - The NYA established labor objectives & conducted research on labor in the maritime industry.
  - The NYA reviewed the problems of the American economy in the wake of the Great Depression.
  - The NYA established the budget of the Federal Government.
  - The NYA consolidated all federal programs that dealt with public works.
  - Created to replace the NRC & NRC, the NYA studied social & economic issues.
  - The NYA of the New Deal policies, to be added upon the Federal Government. This increased the efficiency & strength of the Executive Branch.
- NATIONAL RECOVERY ADMINISTRATION AFFILIATES**
- Flynn served as a regional administrator of the NYA from 1933-40.
  - Green was involved with several labor programs of the NYA, including the Labor Advisory Board of the NYA and NLRB.
  - From 1933-37 Harbison served as a divisional administrator of the NYA.
  - From 1934-39 Henderson worked in the Research & Planning Division of the NYA, after which he worked with the SEC until 1942.
- AGRICULTURE AFFILIATES**
- Hillman served on the Labor Advisory Board of the NYA, the National Industrial Recovery Board, & the Advisory Board of the NYA.
  - After helping to create the NYA, Johnson was head of the NYA, where he remained until 1934.
  - Stettinius served as a member of the Industrial Advisory Board as a liaison to the NYA from 1933-39.
- ECONOMIC AFFILIATES**
- Serving on the board of the NYA from 1933-45, Lilienthal helped to popularize & strengthen the program.
  - An Army Chief of Staff, MacArthur created the foundation & administration of the CCC.
  - In 1933 Morgan was appointed chairman of the NYA, until he was dismissed due to being too lenient in 1938.
  - Skidde served as the chairman of the NYA from 1934-35 & then served as an advisor to the NYA in 1938.
  - Peck served as an administrator of the NYA for the first 6 months of its existence.
  - Tugwell served many positions during the New Deal. He influenced the AAA, NYA & NYA, & served as Under Secretary of Agriculture.
- CABINET MEMBERS**
- Berle was a member of FDR's Brain Trust before serving as counsel for the RFC. His advised FDR, wrote speeches, and became the Assistant Secretary of State in 1938.
  - Farley held the position of Postmaster General in FDR's Cabinet from 1933-40.
  - Garner served as FDR's Vice President from 1933-40.
  - From 1933-38 Hoover administered FERA, CWA, NYA & the Federal Surplus Relief Administration. He became Secretary of Commerce in 1939.
  - Hull served as Secretary of State from 1933-45.
  - As Secretary of the Interior from 1933-45, Ickes was involved with many New Deal programs. He was director of the NYA & held positions in the NYA.
  - Morgenthau played an integral part in the New Deal Administration as head of the Federal Farm Board & Secretary of the Treasury.
  - The first female cabinet member, Perkins served as Secretary of Labor from 1933-45 & drafted significant New Deal legislation. She the NYA, she also played a key role in the creation of Social Security.
  - From 1933-38 Roper served as Secretary of Commerce & worked on several New Deal programs, including the NYA.
  - Swanson served as Secretary of the Navy from 1933-39.
  - Morgenthau played an integral part in the New Deal Administration as head of the Federal Farm Board & Secretary of the Treasury.
  - The first female cabinet member, Perkins served as Secretary of Labor from 1933-45 & drafted significant New Deal legislation. She the NYA, she also played a key role in the creation of Social Security.
  - From 1933-38 Roper served as Secretary of Commerce & worked on several New Deal programs, including the NYA.
  - Swanson served as Secretary of the Navy from 1933-39.
  - Woodin was an early ally of FDR and served as Secretary of Treasury in 1933.
  - Woodring served as Secretary of War from 1933-40.
  - From 1933-38 Cummings served as Attorney General.
- NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION AFFILIATE**
- Bethune was the highest ranking African American in the New Deal due to her position on the advisory council of the NYA. She was also a member of the "Brain Trust."
- ADVISORS AND SUPPORTERS**
- Baruch served as an advisor to FDR. Several of his former employees headed New Deal agencies including High Johnson & George Peek.
  - Douglas served as Budget Director from 1933-34 before he resigned over disagreements about FDR's economic policies.
  - Eccles helped draft the Banking Act of 1933 & the legislation which created the FIA.
  - Frankfurter was a friend & advisor of FDR who helped draft the Securities Act of 1933 and in 1939 was appointed to the Supreme Court.
  - Hughes was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1930-41. He led the court to invalidate the AAA & NIRA, among other New Deal programs.
  - Jackson served as counsel for the Department of Treasury & the SEC. He was appointed Solicitor General in 1934 & Attorney General in 1940, before moving on to the Supreme Court.
- PUBLIC WORKS AFFILIATES**
- From 1933-45, Williams worked in the RFC, FERA, NYA, NYA, & NYA.
  - Niles worked as a relief administrator for the NYA and as FDR's administrative assistant.
  - Walker served on the Executive Council & National Emergency Council, which coordinated the alphabet agencies. In 1940 he became Postmaster.
- NEW DEAL EVENTS**
- The Great Depression was a worldwide economic downturn which lasted throughout the 1930's & caused widespread economic devastation.
  - The Blue Eagle was the official emblem of the NYA.
  - As a part of the NYA, it developed successful labor union committees as a housing experiment.
  - A plan that proposed reshaping the Supreme Court to allow additional Presidential appointments.
  - Prohibition outlawed the sale of alcohol. It was repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933.
  - The Hoover Dam was completed in 1935 as a PWA project.

## Appendix C: FDR's Message to Congress Proposing the Civilian Conservation Corps,

March 21, 1933



-3-

value, not only through the prevention of great present financial loss, but also as a means of creating future national wealth. This is brought home by the news we are receiving today of vast damage caused by floods on the Ohio and other rivers.

Control and direction of such work can be carried on by existing machinery of the departments of Labor, Agriculture, War and Interior.

I estimate that 250,000 men can be given temporary employment by early summer if you give me authority to proceed within the next two weeks.

I ask no new funds at this time. The use of unobligated funds, now appropriated for public works, will be sufficient for several months. Before the close of the special session an additional appropriation will be necessary to carry the work on until the regular session.

-4-

This enterprise is an established part of our national policy. It will conserve our precious natural resources. It will pay dividends to the present and future generations. It will make improvements in national and state domains which have been largely forgotten in the past few years of industrial development.

More important, however, than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work. The overwhelming majority of unemployed Americans, who are now walking the streets and receiving private or public relief, would infinitely prefer to work. We can take a vast army of these unemployed out into healthful surroundings. We can eliminate to some extent at least the threat that enforced idleness brings to spiritual and moral stability. It is not a panacea for all the unemployment but it is an essential step in this emergency. I ask its adoption.

*The White Horse*  
March 31, 1933.

March 21, 1933

It is essential to our recovery program that measures be enacted which are directly aimed at unemployment relief. A direct attack in this problem suggests three types of legislation.

The first is the direct and immediate <sup>in substance</sup> ~~enactment~~ of workers by the federal government for such public employment as <sup>can be quickly started and will not interfere with the</sup> ~~is necessary for the prevention of soil erosion and~~ Howard ~~is a~~

The second is grants to states for relief work.

The third extends to a broad publicworks labor <sup>creating</sup> ~~expanding~~ program.

Direct A.

With reference to the latter, careful consideration must be given to the many details of projects properly included under such a measure, also to the major financial questions thus raised. I am, however, at work on this subject and I shall make recommendations as soon as a practicable program has been completed.

Neither am I proposing at this moment the immediate appropriation of further funds for grants in aid. I am informed that the balance appropriated last year for this purpose will last until May. I shall ask for further appropriations before the end of this special session but there is needed immediately a measure which will insure full economy and efficiency in the expenditure of these vast sums by the states. With the Federal government assuming such an extended financial obligation it has the right and duty to provide for itself the machinery to direct its expenditures wisely. I am, therefore, asking that you establish the office of Federal Relief Administrator, whose duty it will be to scan requests for grants and to check the efficiency and wisdom of their use. <sup>THis</sup> By a wise exercise of the authority of such an administrator, relief work of all sorts throughout the United States may be effectively coordinated.

The first of the measures, however, enumerated above,

- 2 -

can and should be immediately enacted. I propose the creation of a Civilian Conservation Corps, to be used in work which will not in any way interfere with normal employment, confining itself to immediate efforts to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion and similar projects. The control and direction of such a work army can be provided by the existing machinery by the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, Interior and War. I estimate that two hundred fifty thousand can be given temporary employment by early summer, if we can start the machinery within the next two weeks. It is perfectly practical to use unobligated funds now appropriated for public works, thus imposing no additional burden on the Treasury at this time. The sort of enterprise suggested by this measure is an established part of our national policy. It is aimed at the conservation of the precious natural resources of our country. The results of such work will pay dividends to the future generations. It will make possible the carrying out of improvements in national and state domains which have been largely forgotten in the past few years of industrial development. It is a contribution to our essential national wealth.

More important, however, than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work. The many months of unemployment in which so many able bodied and healthy men and women, particularly the young, have been reduced to an enforced idleness, as everyone knows, in the very nature of things has threatened spiritual, moral and physical dangers too serious to be ignored. This project offers a direct relief alternative to this disintegrating process. It takes a vast army of the unemployed out into moral and physically healthful surroundings. What we expend for this purpose is practical insurance against the threat that unemployment offers to our national man power. It puts the reclamation of human moral in the forefront of our recovery program.

RECORDS OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
 RECORD GROUP 233

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT  
 OF MARCH 21, 1933  
 RELATING TO  
 UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES  
 NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE  
 GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
 WASHINGTON, 1955

TO THE SPEAKER:

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It is essential to our recovery program that measures immediately be enacted aimed at unemployment relief. A direct attack in this problem suggests three types of legislation.

The first is the enrollment 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.

With reference to the latter I am now studying the many projects suggested and the financial questions involved. I shall make recommendations to the Congress presently.

In regard to grants to States for relief work, I advise you that the remainder of the appropriation of last year will last until May. Therefore, and because a continuance of Federal aid is still a definite necessity for many States, a further appropriation must be made before the end of this special session.

I find a clear need for some simple Federal machinery to coordinate and check these grants of aid. I am, therefore, asking that you establish the office of Federal Relief Administrator, whose duty it will be to hear requests for grants and to check the efficiency and wisdom of their use.

The first of these measures which I have enumerated, however, can and should be immediately enacted. I propose to create a civilian conservation corps to be used in simple work, not interfering with normal employment, and confining itself to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion, flood control and similar projects. I call your attention to the fact that this type of work is of definite, practical value, not only through the prevention of great present financial loss, but also as a means of creating future national wealth. This is brought home by the news we are receiving today of vast damage caused by floods on the Ohio and other rivers.

Control and direction of such work can be carried on by existing machinery of the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, War and Interior.

I estimate that 250,000 men can be given temporary employment by early summer if you give me authority to proceed within the next two weeks.

I ask no new funds at this time. The use of unobligated funds, now appropriated for public works, will be sufficient for several months.

-2-

This enterprise is an established part of our national policy. It will conserve our precious natural resources. It will pay dividends to the present and future generations. It will make improvements in national and state domains which have been largely forgotten in the past few years of industrial development.

More important, however, than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work. The overwhelming majority of unemployed Americans, who are now walking the streets and receiving private or public relief, would infinitely prefer to work. We can take a vast army of these unemployed out into healthful surroundings. We can eliminate to some extent at least the threat that enforced idleness brings to spiritual and moral stability. It is not a panacea for all the unemployment but it is an essential step in this emergency. I ask its adoption.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

The White House,  
 March 21, 1933.

## Appendix D: Unemployment Relief Act, March 31, 1933, Public Law 73-5, 48 STAT 22

S. 598 (PUBLIC...No. 5...73d CONGRESS)

SEVENTY-THIRD CONGRESS RECEIVED  
MAR 31 1933

SEVENTY-THIRD CONGRESS RECEIVED  
MAR 31 1933

Seventy-third Congress of the United States of America;  
At the First Session,

Began and held at the City of Washington on Thursday, the ninth day of March, one thousand nine hundred and thirty-three.

AN ACT

For the relief of unemployment through the performance of useful public work, and for other purposes.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That for the purpose of relieving the acute condition of widespread distress and unemployment now existing in the United States, and in order to provide for the restoration of the country's depleted natural resources and the advancement of an orderly program of useful public works, the President is authorized, under such rules and regulations as he may prescribe and by utilizing such existing departments or agencies as he may designate, to provide for employing citizens of the United States who are unemployed, in the construction, maintenance and carrying on of works of a public nature in connection with the forestation of lands belonging to the United States or to the several States which are suitable for timber production, the prevention of forest fires, floods and soil erosion, plant pest and disease control, the construction, maintenance or repair of paths, trails and fire-lanes in the national parks and national forests, and such other work on the public domain, national and State, and Government reservations incidental to or necessary in connection with any projects of the character enumerated, as the President may determine to be desirable: Provided, That the President may in his discretion extend the provisions of this Act to lands owned by counties and municipalities and lands in private ownership, but only for the purpose of doing thereon such kinds of cooperative work as are now provided for by Acts of Congress in preventing and controlling forest fires and the attacks of forest tree pests and diseases and such work as is necessary in the public interest to control floods. The President is further authorized, by regulation, to provide for housing the persons so employed and for furnishing them with such subsistence, clothing, medical attendance and hospitalization, and cash allowance, as may be necessary, during the period they are so employed, and, in his discretion, to provide for the transportation of such persons to and from the places of employment. That in employing citizens for the purposes of this Act no discrimination shall be made on account of race, color, or creed; and no person under conviction for crime and serving sentence therefor shall be employed under the provisions of this Act. The President is further*

S. 598—2

authorized to allocate funds available for the purposes of this Act, for forest research, including forest products investigations, by the Forest Products Laboratory.

SEC. 2. For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act the President is authorized to enter into such contracts or agreements with States as may be necessary, including provisions for utilization of existing State administrative agencies, and the President, or the head of any department or agency authorized by him to construct any project or to carry on any such public works, shall be authorized to acquire real property by purchase, donation, condemnation, or otherwise, but the provisions of section 355 of the Revised Statutes shall not apply to any property so acquired.

SEC. 3. Insofar as applicable, the benefits of the Act entitled "An Act to provide compensation for employees of the United States suffering injuries while in the performance of their duties, and for other purposes", approved September 7, 1916, as amended, shall extend to persons given employment under the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 4. For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act, there is hereby authorized to be expended, under the direction of the President, out of any unobligated moneys heretofore appropriated for public works (except for projects on which actual construction has been commenced or may be commenced within ninety days, and except maintenance funds for river and harbor improvements already allocated), such sums as may be necessary; and an amount equal to the amount so expended is hereby authorized to be appropriated for the same purposes for which such moneys were originally appropriated.

SEC. 5. That the unexpended and unallotted balance of the sum of \$300,000,000 made available under the terms and conditions of the Act approved July 21, 1932, entitled "An Act to relieve destitution", and so forth, may be made available, or any portion thereof, to any State or Territory or States or Territories without regard to the limitation of 15 per centum or other limitations as to per centum.

SEC. 6. The authority of the President under this Act shall continue for the period of two years next after the date of the passage hereof and no longer.

*Ray H. Cannon*

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

*Charles McNary*

Vice President of the United States and  
President of the Senate.

Approved  
March 31<sup>st</sup> 1933

*Franklin D. Roosevelt*

**Appendix E: Department of the Interior, CCC Work in Alabama Video, National Archives  
and Records Administration**



[https://youtu.be/-ArpLe\\_A0zk](https://youtu.be/-ArpLe_A0zk)

### Appendix F: Cheaha State Park CCC Museum and Photos of Georgia Calhoun, daughter of CCC Enrollee of Co. 465



**Appendix G: Lauren and Alex Massey Present the Oak Mountain State Park Spirit of the CCC Award to CCC Corpsman Howard Vaughn, accepted on his behalf by his daughter Pam Penrod, February 26, 2022**



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