

A COMMUNION WITH TOOLS:
THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS, CITIZENSHIP, SKILL DEVELOPMENT, AND
THE GREEN NEW DEAL

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of
Master of Arts
in
American History

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the people that helped make this a reality. To Mark, for helping through the rough patches of planning and writing this thesis, and for being a stalwart friend. To my committee, for coaching me through this process and giving me their full support. To my fellow graduate students in the Department of History and Philosophy, thank you for the comradery through the years and the many memories. To the faculty and staff of the Department of History and Philosophy, thank you for growing my love and appreciation for the craft of history. To Tucker, thank you for giving me a last-minute ride to pick up my thesis draft. Finally, to my family for being my cheerleaders and supporters over the years, and for pushing me to achieve my goals.

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ABSTRACT

The Great Depression was a period of intense social and cultural upheaval in the United States. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt saw the opportunity to mobilize millions of young men and other citizens in work programs focused on solving a multitude of social issues. Those issues included rising unemployment, degraded health, and the need to conserve human bodies and the lands that sustained them. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of the programs FDR hoped would strengthen the nation against the crisis. The goals of the CCC included building better citizens, not just conservation work, the infusion of cash into the economy, and the imparting of job skills. In the CCC camps, enrollees--for the most part, young men aged 17 to 28--learned a multitude of skills that focused on more than just the body, its labor, and resource conservation. The concept of citizenship central to CCC training and work programs was deeply rooted in republican ideology derived from the nation's revolutionary past. Republican beliefs regarding craftsmanship, self-reliance, and hard labor defined the ideal citizen. The CCC adapted those values to the objectives of its programs by adding a range of training and educational programs intended to develop the whole man, the whole citizen. As this thesis argues, the CCC sought to build better citizens on an enduring and vital republican model. Camp newsletters, enrollee's writings and statements, and the final director's report, revealed the process by which the CCC adapted republicanism to address the 1930s economic crisis by creating strong citizens. This thesis further argues that a modernized, updated, and more inclusive version of the Civilian Conservation Corps should be an important part of the proposed Green New Deal.

INTRODUCTION

MY FIRST AXE

“Before America gave serious attention to a shortage of energy, Eric Sloane, noted historian and illustrator of Americana wrote, ‘Perhaps the tool least regarded in America is the axe.’ Since that was published in *Second Barrel* (1969) our mode of living has accelerated. So in an age of lasers, cloning, and space probes, devoting an entire book to the use of the axe requires explanation.”

- Dudley Cook, *The Ax Book*, 1999

During the summer of 2018 I bought my first axe, a purchase spurred on by the wildfire that had come to shape that summer’s events. In 2018 New Mexico saw its water basins only reach 30-40% of their normal precipitation by July, with the 2017-2018 snowpack at record lows.¹ With fire danger in the extremes, Philmont Scout Ranch was expecting to run a rather precarious first half of the season while awaiting the monsoon rains to come in mid-July. Unfortunately for all involved, the Ute Park Fire started on May 31, 2018 as a small 150-acre fire that rapidly ballooned to 4,500 acres and growing. By its conclusion the fire would burn roughly 37,000 acres of mountainous backcountry. Most of the land burned was a part of Philmont Scout Ranch.

The Ute Park, and the later Morris Creek Fire, led to the cessation of summer season operations, and the beginning of an intense regime of conservation work. Reflecting back, it’s clear that purchasing an axe was an attempt to fit in with a group of my peers. We were all a part of the living history and interpretive program at the ranch.

¹ Susana Martinez, “Drought Declaration”, Executive Order 2018-031, State of New Mexico, July 11, 2018. https://www.ose.state.nm.us/Drought/Plan/Executive%20Orders/2018-031/SusanaMtz_Executive_Order_2018_031.pdf

With many of the backcountry camps using wood burning stoves, a unique quality had emerged amongst many of us, the masterful use of the axe. While a modest overstatement of our skill to be sure, the need to continually fuel these stoves meant long hours splitting wood. From this sprang an appreciation for a good axe. So directed by a good friend, and wary of wanting to restore an axe, I bought the Best Made Company “American Felling Axe.” This is a beautiful tool that has served me well throughout the years. This small step, reinforced by a solid feeling of machismo, led me to view the mundane job of splitting wood in a different light. Yet a good axe, or the “right ax” as Cook puts it, does not inherently make the user a better faller or splitter.² Rather, this is a skill developed and honed through instruction and practice. As such, my new tool found itself repeatedly in hand as I began to learn my work.

The significance of such a purchase did not strike me until roughly a year later. In 2019 I was once again working at Philmont Scout Ranch. Stationed at the remote backcountry camp, Black Mountain, I had brought my axe to serve in the felling and splitting of wood for our stove. On one of our sets of days off, one of my staff members had bought a book from a thrift store in Taos, New Mexico. *The Hitchhiker*, written by Anthony Brittin, is an autobiography of Brittin’s time working on the Blister Rust Control in Idaho and his experience of hitchhiking across the country to and from Idaho. Upon reading his story, I immediately identified with the narrative of seasonal conservation and outdoors work. A topic that some of us would throw around on our days off would be the idea of a “Roving Civilian Conservation Corps” program at the ranch. In

² Dudley Cook, *The Axe Book: The Lore and Science of the Woodcutter* (Lanham: Alan C. Hood & Company, Inc., 1999), 12.

the wake of the fire the previous summer, Philmont Scout Ranch had taken upon itself a massive Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) program. The goal of this improvement program was to cut shaded fuel breaks along the major backcountry roads and around every backcountry camp.

Many of us seasonal workers had spent 2018 leading or being a part of the multiple teams sent into the backcountry to thin the forests. With this experience behind us, and with a love of historical tools and living history, it should be no surprise then that such an idea of a living history program based on the Civilian Conservation Corps began to circulate among us.

Reflecting back, even the organization of the TSI work mirrored that of the CCC and modern wildlands firefighting. We were organized into our companies, battalions, and divisions, spending the bulk of our days in allotted acres thinning the understory of juniper, scrub oak, and various other plants that composed the underbrush.

I carried this interest in the CCC into my early grad work during the fall of 2019, growing it into this document here. For a brief moment, Philmont Scout Ranch operated one of the largest corps in the country. Predominantly made up of 18–25-year-old men and women. The TSI crews began cleaning and thinning a forest, that until recently, had not burned for decades. This intersection of work in 2018 and reading in 2019 left me with many questions about the state of American forests, the work I had done, and the place the Civilian Conservation Corps had in the US.

On March 9th, 1933 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gathered together the various directors and secretaries of the departments of the Interior, War, and Agriculture

to lay out his plan for a conservation program.³ This meeting would outline the basis and foundation for the Civilian Conservation Corps would be. The idea laid out in that meeting would be different from the program that would eventually take shape. A program initially conceived to put only 500,000 men to work, would eventually see a total of 3 million men pass through its ranks by the time it ceased operation. The CCC is a testament to the ability to mobilize swaths of young Americans in need of work and change to improve themselves and their environmental surroundings. In light of a global pandemic leaving millions of Americans unemployed, and the challenges of climate change facing the globalized world, there is a place for a new and reinvigorated CCC.

Proponents of such a plan look at this as an environmental agency, looking to slow or halt the effects of climate change. Yet, it is important to recall the major aspect of the CCC that is often overshadowed by the Conservation “C” within its name. Central to the Civilian Conservation Corps mission was the development of citizenship amongst its enrollees.⁴ Looking at the Corps as a foundation of citizenship through the work done and the skills taught, opens a history of citizenship in the US. The CCC history invokes beliefs and ideals with Jeffersonian and republican roots. It is this invocation of republican ideals that interests me, as my own conservation experience showed that in the absence of a goal or framework of development there is a hollowness to the work. Roosevelt revealed that an underlying goal of the Corps is the “reclamation of the young

³ James McEntee, *Federal Security Agency Final Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps*, Living New Deal, accessed April 5, 2021, 63. <https://livingnewdeal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CCC-Final-Report-of-Director-1942-.pdf>

⁴ McEntee, *Final Report*, 76.

American manhood.”⁵ What was this manhood, and how did classes and lessons on ethics, nutrition, citizenship, cement pouring, forestry, etc. restore this lost objective? With a modern Corps, now open not only to men, but to all Americans what becomes of the new goal of restoration? What are the qualities of a “good citizen?”

One of the qualities of a “good citizen” in the Corps was a skilled individual. Skill as used in this Thesis implies that at least some level of mastery has been achieved over a topic or activity. It is important to recognize mastery over what they were learning and doing, as it goes beyond the men simply exhibiting their newfound skill once or twice. It expresses the idea that the men would gain ample experience within the field that they were being educated in. Developing mastery of a skill would allow CCC men to then market it to potential employers, based on claims of mastery and competency. This once again recognizes what McEntee describes as the ability to “make good in industry.”⁶ In this sense, the Civilian Conservation Corps helped enrollees develop a array of practical and vocational skills that ranged from the complex to the mundane, and then taught them how to apply those skills to their work and personal lives.

On another level, the development of skill represents a connection with craft and workmanship. Glenn Adamson outlines this connection in the opening sentence of his book *Craft*; framing it as a “way of making a living, expressing creativity, of pushing technology forward.”⁷ Craft, skills, and labor all served as important parts of the CCC’s goal of building good citizens. The CCC also represents an attempt to revitalize these

⁵ McEntee, *Final Report*, 1.

⁶ McEntee, *Final Report*, 27.

⁷ Glen Adamson, *Craft: An American History* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 1.

elements of craft among young American men. Adamson speaks to the fascination with, and appreciation for, craftsmanship that pervaded American culture. Much like Nye's log cabin politics, Adamson's craftsmanship expanded on labor and citizenship. When craft is combined with the CCC's emphasis on vocational, leisure, and avocational training, the links between craft, skill, education, and labor all build a holistic CCC citizen.

Part of craft is how the worker or craftsman interacts with tools. Pedantically, the ax, shovel, saw, etc. are all tools that have immediately defined uses. In the case of enrollee Warren Teets, a dining tray hooked up to an electrical current becomes a tool for bear deterrence.⁸ This came after a bear repeatedly broke into the camp's meat locker. In the absence of other bear deterrents at Teets' disposal, ingenuity became the tool of necessity. This interaction between skill, craft, and their implementation creates a worthwhile connection to the labor at hand and helps to build the identity of the Corps.

Craft has a long and storied history in the overarching American experiment. It has come to represent a constant thread in an attempt to define and redefine citizenship. This definition of citizenship was contingent upon the needs of the country or the challenges perceived to be facing the country at that time. Adamson frames this evolution of craft through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries as representing the wider societal changes.⁹ The varied roles that craft played within American history fits neatly into the narrative of the CCC hearkening back to older traditions of labor and citizenship. Eileen Boris reinforces Adamson's concerns, highlighting how craft and

⁸ Warren Teets, self-interview, "Warren Teets interview regarding CCC in Yellowstone, Yellowstone National Park Heritage and Research Center, *Montana Memory Project*, April 5th, 2001. <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/21/rec/1>

⁹ Adamson, *Craft*, 300-301.

masculinity had become intrinsically tied together.¹⁰ Adamson defines craft in the 1920's and 30's in terms of how "revivalists imagined craft as a pathway back to an earlier, more authentic America."¹¹ This mindset prevails through much of American history, notably rearing its ugly head in American politics, with Republicans declaring that they will "Make America Great Again." As such, craft serves as an interesting vessel to travel the tides of history in, as it carries a lot of problematic narratives.

The CCC looked to instill in the enrollees the qualities of skill, competency, craft, education, and labor. However, to invoke the memory of one of the most cherished, beloved, and romanticized organizations in American history carries some heavy baggage. The CCC, like the New Deal it was a part of, in American political, environmental, and economic history. Coming as a response to the unbound fever dream of the previous decade, and the previous four years of financial austerity, the CCC represented a reinvestment within the labor force of the country. Similarly, a New CCC would need to focus on this aspect of its identity.

My experience leading a team in the cutting of shaded fuel and fire breaks left me with a series of questions and frustrations. Among many of my coworkers there was a sense that the work and only the work mattered. When someone asked a question the expected response was "I understand!" Shouted as a group, in a setting that was not conducive to not understanding. The days mainly consisted of coordinating my team on the acre on which we were working. Everyday started with a safety briefing where we

¹⁰ Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), pgs. 12.

¹¹ Adamson, *Craft*, 301.

outline the concerns that we had and the goals to be met. Beyond that, our job was to cut, clear, and haul the slash and timber to gumdrops, the large piles of slash set aside for burning in the winter. The days ended with a review of the day, any safety concerns, or shortfalls in the day's work. A trudge back to our camp, dinner, and evening "hanging out" concluded the work day. We would then head off to our tents to sleep, only to wake up the following day to repeat the grueling schedule of work.

The work schedule turned into a monotonous slog, and when combined with an authoritarian expectation that "we understood," morale collapsed at an astonishing rate. Yet, many of us only had a vague sense of what the goal of the work was. The obvious answer was to stop fire, but how did the work we completed contribute to that? This sense of lacking direction and organization was recognized within the Corps, and in the early days of operation the Army sought to straighten this out to provide structure. The CCC represented something beyond the simple understanding of work. The CCC looked to rebuild the citizenry of the US. This concept of citizenry built upon the idea that productive or industrious use of the land is the basis of republicanism.¹² Brittin himself represented an enduring legacy of the CCC in the American West. Nominally stationed out of Pierce, Idaho, Brittin was continuing the work of Camp Bungalow and the men of Company 603.¹³ This legacy manifested through the issuance of surplus military equipment, the structure and organization of the camps and companies he worked in, and importantly, the work he completed.

¹² David E. Nye., *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of a New Beginning* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 285.

¹³ *The Woodsman*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Camp Bungalow, Pierce, Idaho, 1936, The Ancestor Project, Accessed March 10, 2021, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/21313>

With the end of the CCC in 1942, the Second World War halted conservation work for the following years, as the war gobbled up young men to become soldiers. This left a collective memory of young, fit men building trails and planting trees in national parks and forests. Yet, this memory when examined in the light of republican citizenship, it fails to see the holistic approach to citizenship that the CCC encompassed. The dominant memory is what places the Conservation “C” ahead of the Civilian “C.” Perhaps it would have been more appropriate to call the program the Citizen’s Conservation Corps as that more accurately encapsulate the intended goals of the program.

Whatever the case, the program represented a cultural shift in America’s interaction with conservation practices. Not only in how it taught young men about erosion control, forest fire suppression, or trail construction, but also in the generations of Americans that would experience the trails, visitor centers, and vistas created by the CCC. Inevitably, such a cultural change would be central to a Green New Deal, and it is important to consider the legacy that is remembered. The CCC was a launchpad for young workers to enter the workforce with hard earned experience in a variety of fields, but it also served as an education program for the most basic and complex of lessons. Reengaging and reeducating young men in an attempt to jumpstart the nations economy.

The shuttering of the CCC in 1942 brought about the stalling of this reinvestment in America’s public lands. The Funding and manpower for the CCC evaporated with the onset of the war. Similarly the fervor to clean up Philmont’s backcountry has subsided, as there was no program or plan to pick up the torch once the excitement died down. There

is an institutional momentum that must be maintained for large scale conservation and economic projects to succeed. Projects that see long term investment with little, short term returns or benefits are a hard sell to the American public. A similar story exists in fire historian Stephen Pyne's chapter on "The Pyrocene," or in Naomi Klein's book *On Fire*. Long term environmental change will not be easy, and climate change will not wait for us to make up our minds.¹⁴

The bulk of the primary source material for this research focuses on both McEntee's 1943 Final Report and the almost universal company newsletters. These bi-monthly newsletters and newspapers give us insight into media that the enrollees themselves had a hand in creating. These documents supplemented by interviews and enrollee statements serve as the foundation for what the CCC was and what it has come to represent. Many of these newsletters are repetitious in their praise and their message, as such I do not intend to cite everyone extensively. Yet, it is important to take the time to outline the central fact that these sources do not exist within a vacuum. Rather, they exist as a foundation of sorts, whereupon each source builds an ever-stronger basis for the next. I have done my best to accurately represent this construction throughout my use of newsletters, as there are striking similarities despite the regional differences of each paper.

McEntee provides an interesting administrative obituary of the program as it wrapped up, while the newsletters give a better sense of what the program meant to the

¹⁴ Stephen Pyne, *Fire: A Brief History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 191-194; Naomi Klein, *On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperback, 2019), 282-284.

enrollees who partook in the work. It also allows for the “everyman” to give his opinion on the work completed. Much like my own conservation work in the back country of New Mexico, you can learn a lot from speaking or listening to the workers who have toiled under the cover of trees and breathed the smoke from 2-stroke engines. There is a romanticism about the image of young men and women working to complete a common goal set before them. Yet, as politicians and historians talk about what the program meant and what a new program can achieve, listening to the enrollees’ stories help to remind us what the program meant to them, and what it should mean to a new generation.

Additionally, the CCC represents a movement back to republican ideals of labor and the land. Similar to current environmental and sustainability movements in the US. Seeking to instill in young Americans a wonder and appreciation of the country’s environment and wilderness. Republican citizenship is important in understanding why the CCC evolved into the program that it became and the legacy that the CCC represents. Yet, citizenship is a collage of various aspects, these being virtue, industry, refinement, and a mish mash of other factors. These factors led to the CCC looking not just at the body, spirit, or mind separately, but at combination of the body, spirit, and mind to make the whole man. This holistic look at the enrollees and their labor helped to shape the enrollees’ perception of themselves and the work they sought to complete.

Much of this language exists throughout the camp newsletters and McEntee’s report, yet oddly enough there is another program that mirrors this language as well. There should be no mystery as to why I drew connections between my own conservation work and the CCC. The Boy Scouts of America served as a strong influence upon

Roosevelt when he began thinking about and forming the CCC.¹⁵ Especially when considering the Scout Oath; “On my honor I will do my best: To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law. To help other people at all times. To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.” It is that last sentence that draws an important link between the programs. What does it mean to fulfill those three principles, and how do they relate to the Corps? These were questions that began to help shape my research into the Corps and its goal of creating better citizens.

The modern-day Boy Scouts of America uses language similar to McEntee’s report. The BSA states that its vision is to create a place to “prepare eligible youth in America to become a responsible, participating citizen and leader...”¹⁶ The links between the BSA and the CCC demonstrate a pattern of thinking and a similarity in how each program defines citizenship. With the similarity in language, even as the BSA has evolved over the decades, it is clear that Roosevelt identified in it an important understanding of citizenship and democracy.

Another movement I wish to look at briefly is the Maker Movement, a disorganized, decentralized, and wonderful movement that seeks to revitalize the act of making and crafting within America and the wider world. I intend to only briefly look into this movement in the closing pages as there are aspects of the movement that I believe a Green New Deal can benefit from. The Maker Movement shares a few points in common with McEntee’s goals for the CCC, notably the drive to build community

¹⁵ Neil Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Conservation Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

¹⁶ Boy Scouts of America, Mission & Vision, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.scouting.org/legal/mission/>

around common interests. The Maker Movement, I believe, represents a strong undercurrent that has grown from dissatisfaction with modern work and an attempt to reconnect with hobbies, interests, and community. In this case I intend to draw on the work of Glenn Adamson and Eileen Boris in looking at craft and the place it has in American history. In my mind, the outgrowth of community organized and funded makerspaces represents a tangible result of the benefits that craft and labor have in shaping a better community.

All of these culminate in an important question of what a modern Civilian Conservation Corps will look like and focus on. President Joseph Biden recently issued an executive order that offers up a handful of answers to this question, but until a more complete plan is issued a lot is left unknown. This is something I intend to look at in Chapter three, as Biden released the executive order during the writing of this paper. Even so, there is a growing movement and momentum in the call for a new CCC. *Portside Snapshot*, a leftist news website proclaims that “85 percent of Americans support reestablishing the Civilian Conservation Corps... 70 percent of the public supports the idea of a new climate-focused corps,” this also includes a whopping 62 percent of Republicans.¹⁷ If these figures are to be believed, then it represents a solid block of Americans who see the value in a program centered on labor and the environment.

¹⁷ Kate Yoder, “Biden’s Civilian Climate Corps Comes Straight Out of the New Deal,” *Portside Snapshot*, accessed April 4, 2021, <https://portside.org/2021-02-18/bidens-civilian-climate-corps-comes-straight-out-new-deal>

My personal opportunity to work in conservation opened my eyes to the possibilities that a program presents to a diversity of young Americans. While imperfect, the program that I took part in showed an inkling of what an organized conservation effort can achieve. By the end of my 2018 season at Philmont, I was able to look out the window of the truck that picked us up from our spike camps and see the thinned forest and fire breaks. These forests stood in contrast to the ones I grew up in and visited in California. Even though the thinning only extended a little over 200 feet off the road, the changes made were astonishing. The overgrown forests of Ponderosa Pine were no more, replaced by sparsely populated groves of these towering trees. Even though these acres along the road were a mere oasis in a wider tangle of overgrown forests, it showed that a bunch of grungy teens and twenty somethings could achieve larger goals when organized and put to the task. It created long lasting friendships over the work we completed and a sense of community among those who were there when “the fire nation attacked,” a light mocking of the cartoon show *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

Driving on those same roads in 2019, it was not uncommon for one of the passengers in the truck to recount the joys and pains they had on a certain plot or acre of forest. Leaving an important legacy on the land we all love. Yet, it still stands to be seen on how long these changes will last, and the sustainability of such work programs.

CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING A BETTER CITIZEN

“Year after year the Corps took raw, timid, unsure, undernourished, young men and developed them into competent, healthy, sturdy citizens.”

-James McEntee, Second Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1943

With the onset of the Great Depression, young American men found themselves in a tenuous situation. These men lacked the adequate skills to obtain work in trying times. Roosevelt saw growing problem from the negative effects urban life had on the young male body. This recognition soon blossomed into the plan for a government program aimed at developing unskilled labor into a skilled work force. At first Roosevelt falsely categorized this deterioration as a challenge facing only urban men. When in reality, this lack of adequate skills among young men challenged both the rural and urban communities of the United States.¹⁸

Roosevelt came to see this challenge as an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Decades of industrial extraction and abuse had left the country's public lands exhausted and underutilized. Meanwhile, the young American male's body had deteriorated due to urban lifestyles. These two issues could be solved through the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the redefinition of citizenship and labor. The second and last director of the program James McEntee noted in his final directors report for the CCC, "... the Corps' principal contribution lay in the work it was

¹⁸ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 28.

doing to promote the welfare and further the training of the individuals making up the enrolled personnel.”¹⁹ This realization was not lost on the enrollees throughout their tenure in the C’s. In fact, it came to dominate much of the literature that prevailed within the camps. Camp newsletters urged enrollees to develop new skills in their free time. These skills differed from camp to camp, but common skills and courses appear in many of the newsletters. Yet not all of these skills pertained to tool usage and work force prowess. In fact, many of the skills were intangible. These skills emphasize the position that the CCC was not just for the development of men into a resource, like McEntee presents in the final report. The emphasize the importance of combining labor, skills, and citizenship under the broad umbrella of conservation.

The newsletters regularly advertised a wide variety of skills in order to engage the enrollees. They varied from machining, blacksmithing, and carpentry to nutrition, reading and writing, ethics, and drama. In this way, it became clear that from the outset the Corps placed an emphasis on the development of labor skills. It did not shirk from developing the enrollee’s finer skills. Warren Teets, an enrollee working in Yellowstone National Park, recalled of his time in the Corps having prepared him for his enlistment in the United States Army Corps of Engineers during the Second World War.²⁰ Warren was not alone in crediting the C’s with helping him develop skills for his time after the Corps, and the importance of the Corps in his life was echoed by many others. These skills do not necessarily fall into any preordained categories, but will be looked at as manual labor,

¹⁹ McEntee, *Final Report*, 67.

²⁰ Teets, interview

skilled or technical labor, and personal and intellectual skills. These definitions or categorizations clarify education in the camps.

McEntee's reflection in the final report read more like a slow awakening to the growth of developing the individual, rather than a mindful and conscious choice for skill development to be central to the Corps' philosophy. Even so, the development of a skilled labor force became a major focus throughout the tenure of the Corps and was codified in Congress' renewal of the program in 1937.²¹ The inclusion of skilled foresters and instructors laid the groundwork for the development of skills and the education of the enrollees. Hard labor and work would be combined with evening courses aimed at the education of the men into more "rounded" workers. With many of these men facing poverty at home, they took to this training a work with gusto.²² Yet, McEntee's final report rejected the notion that the Corps were just a place to give young men a paycheck rather it was an "agency for national preparedness, too."²³ The skilled labor shortage was seen as an acute national issue, one that the CCC sought to address.

This emphasis on education views the history of the CCC through a different lens. Its focus on citizenship goes beyond the simple idea of conservation and environmental labor. This focus on the men themselves helps expand the role they played in this labor rebirth. As enrollee Frank Ernest Hill remarked, the CCC was "developing their minds as well as their muscles."²⁴ This dual emphasis on physical labor and mental acuity shows

²¹ McEntee, *Final Report*, 24.

²² Jill Lepore, *These Truths* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 440.

²³ McEntee, *Final Report*, 67.

²⁴ Frank Ernest Hill, "Salvaging Youth in Distress: The CCC, Having Achieved Notable Results in Upbuilding Thousands, Widens Its Field and Recruits New Forces to Carry On the Task of Conservation," *New York Times Magazine*, 21 April 1935, 22.

that the Corps was not just meant to develop capable workers, but also sound citizens. The Thanksgiving edition of the *Midget Tribune* drove this home in its editorial stating, “now most young men have a fair academic training, but it is of little use because they have no vocational training.”²⁵ Melding body and mind strengthened skills and citizenship. Skill developed as a calculated, central mission of the organization. The Corps supplemented education, and developed skills.²⁶ CCC camps were not mere places of labor, but places meant to foster citizenship through labor.

McEntee’s final report served as an excellent source on the philosophies of the CCC and sheds light on the inner workings of the Corps. Between this report and executive order 6101 stood nine years of growth. The Corps’ founding doctrine placed an emphasis on the environment and the body, yet skill development and growth were not absent. Its roots are the same as those of the body and nature. McEntee made it clear that by 1942 and the closing of the program, the CCC had turned unskilled young men into assets.²⁷

This sentiment for turning the enrollees into national assets came from an acceptance of the national emergency facing the country. Roosevelt’s alphabet soup of programs sought to remedy unemployment through work, whether it be the Work Progress Administration (WPA), Public Works Administration (PWA), or CCC. What differentiates the CCC from the other two programs was the emphasis on manual labor.

²⁵ *Midget Tribune* (1). (1936). Published by Utah State History; digitized and hosted by J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah. pg. 80 https://utah-primoprod.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=digcoll_uuu_11dha_cccn%2F1414269&context=L&vid=UTAH&lang=en_US&search_scope=EVERYTHING&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=everything&query=any,contains,The%20Midget%20Tribune&offset=0

²⁶ McEntee, *Final Report*, 68.

²⁷ McEntee, *Final Report*, 73.

The distinction between these programs was important for getting organized labor to not object to the CCC's passage through congress. Maher frames this separation of mechanized and manual labor as a compromise for Roosevelt. The country was seeing 25 percent unemployment and needed a solution.²⁸ This divide in labor is important for understanding the goals of the CCC. Far larger, and arguably more influential, the WPA looked to solve many of the problems that the CCC also sought to tackle.²⁹ The WPA also looked to put men to work, but unlike the CCC its target audience was not the raw, untrained youth of the country, but the experienced laborer. Often times, these were married men with families who were without a job. The WPA also employed a wide variety of specialists far beyond the simple work that the CCC worked to achieve. The WPA provided work for artists, historians, playwrights, and a variety of other artistic expressions.³⁰ Simply put, the scope of the WPA exceeded that of the CCC. The WPA was targeted with providing more technical and mechanized jobs to workers. Where the Corps' much narrower focus allowed for it to be more direct in the scope of its work.

During the inception of the Corps, labor and the body were bound together as essential to the program's success. Neil Maher strengthens this with his book *Nature's New Deal* explaining how conservation of the nation and conservation of the body were intrinsically tied in the CCC.³¹ The balance of body and mind indicates as Maher suggests, a conservation of the American male's body, but it also hints at the importance

²⁸ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 79.

²⁹ Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929 – 1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993), 265.

³⁰ McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 268-269.

³¹ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 77.

of labor to the mind. As both the newsletter *The Midget Tribune* and McEntee's report suggested, that labor in the CCC is central to developing a good citizen.

Labors importance to citizenship would be realized through McEntee's emphasis on the program making "good citizens." Yet the skill of being a "good citizen" was nebulous, difficult to define, and hard to gauge. Simply put, it was a subjective measure. The equation of labor and citizenship was clearly seen when looking at the skills provided by each camp. In camps like Gunlock or St. George in Utah, skills in sportsmanship, ethics, and culture were regularly included in the evening classes.³² These skills went beyond labor and conservation and told of a more holistic approach to the CCC. This combination of tangible and intangible skills emphasized the importance of the men themselves and the importance of what they were achieving. This is clear when reading McEntee's final report from 1943. There was a sense of pride in his writing that conveys how he felt about the conservation work, yet it is secondary to the pride he exuded when talking about what the program achieved for the enrollees.

The work of developing good citizens began at the most basic of levels including personal care. Enrollee A.J. Hill of Company 1806 from Fort Sills, Oklahoma noted that he soon learned "...consideration for my fellowman, something you learn quickly when living with 200 other guys like yourself."³³ The need for hygiene awareness made it clear that while not an intentional skill to be taught, the Corps helped to fill in the most basic

³² *Arizona Strip* (1), Published by Utah State History; digitized and hosted by J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s67t22ph> and Midget Tribune, University Utah Archives, Accessed February 11, 2021.

³³ Merrill, Perry H., *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, (Barre: Northlight Studio Press, 1981), 92.

gaps in a young man's education. While not the focus of this thesis, the body and the skills were closely tied to the Corps' identity and execution. Maher's *Nature's New Deal* examines this in more depth, but it is important to note the CCC's and Maher's emphasis on appearance: well-rounded, muscular men doing work in the outdoors. Hygiene, health, nutrition, activity, all of these and more are skills that the Corps taught the enrollees. If McEntee was correct in saying that the Corps was meant to create good citizens, then it was clear that this citizenship began with appreciation of oneself.

Civic engagement through work and education hearkens back to many of the early republican values trumpeted by the founding fathers. Jefferson comes to mind immediately, as his infatuation with the yeoman farmer is apparent through much of his political beliefs. Yet, republican citizenship went beyond just the farmer out on the frontier. Jefferson's legacy was important in building an evolution of what a republican citizen was, but also what one was not. Roosevelt paralleled this thinking, with his earlier characterization of the degradation of the body and the citizen by the evils of urban life. FDR's cousin Theodore Roosevelt echoed this with his calls for a "strenuous life."³⁴ Republican citizenship became centered on the body and soul, but it also framed citizenship as incompatible with urban lifestyles and the city.

Jefferson helped lay the foundation for a national program overseen and directed by the Army.³⁵ The historian Harvey Meyerson's *Nature's Army* outlines, the first organized national labor force was that of the United States Army. Meyerson's book

³⁴ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 32-33.

³⁵ Harvey Meyerson, *Nature's Army: When Soldiers Fought for Yosemite* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 14.

looks at the role the Army played in developing the infrastructure of the early national parks. Much like their descendants during the Depression, soldiers formed the backbone of a labor force building and maintaining the national parks. While the Corps' goals and missions were not set military doctrines, there was an evident connection between republican ideology and the virtue of labor. The CCC stands as another link in the genealogy of republicanism and labor, representing a movement of labor back into the environment.

The idea of labor being integral into citizenship, identity, and politics was evident in “The Railsplitter” a 1909 depiction of Abraham Lincoln by the artist Jean Leon Gerome Ferris. The painting depicted a young Lincoln, pausing in his work of splitting wood for fence rails. Wiping his brow and resting his axe, he represented a picturesque image of the classic American frontiersman. Off to the side the viewer can see a crushed felt hat, a rumpled waistcoat, and an open book. Knowing Lincoln, the reader presumed that the book was likely some political treatise or commentary on law. It might be possible, that in-between the drudgery of splitting rail, Lincoln had been reading aloud to himself, something he was oft to do.³⁶ The book's inclusion created the image that Lincoln was equally committed to working both his body and mind. Nye likens this imagery to what he describes as “Log Cabin Politics.”³⁷ It creates a kinesthetics to the picture, a politician who is working not just to be physically fit, but mentally as well.

³⁶ Mark Fiege, *Nature's Republic: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 165.

³⁷ Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 60-61.

The rail splitting, hardworking image of Lincoln fostered this idea of republican citizenship through labor and working on the land. It also served as a clever implementation of the log cabin and “bootstraps” mythos that became a strong theme within American history. The CCC fits nicely within this narrative that about American labor. The Corps sought to instill a sense of republican virtue into the young men in the country in an attempt to strengthen and revitalize the labor pool of the country. The log cabin also solidified, culturally, the image of wilderness and rough and tumble frontiersmen as desirable to politics and citizenry.

Lincoln and the Republican party’s view of citizenship expressed the idea of blending of labor and industry. Every citizen was a free laborer or independent producer, not beholden to the government.³⁸ This emphasis on labor and work laid the groundwork for McEntee’s and the CCC’s ideas on who and what the citizen was.

The regimentation of the Corps, while much lighter than that of the Old Army life, clung to the belief of value in work. The enrollees began their mornings with calisthenics and exercise, and while forbidden from drilling, their activities demonstrated the importance of health and exercise were exhibited at every available turn.

Beginning with the individual started once leaders in the Corps realized that many enrollees lacked basic labor skills. The Corps found that just under half of the enrollees had never been employed, with only 13 percent having completed high school.³⁹ This further highlighted the importance of skill development within the camps. The Corps

³⁸ Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 855.

³⁹ Merrill, *Roosevelt’s Forest Army*, 11.

offered an insight into one of the many factors facing young men during the Depression. With the enrollment age starting at 17, it was clear that even basic skills such as hygiene needed to be addressed. Yet, this was not an organization targeted only at young, unskilled men throughout the country.

The Corps also sought to employ veterans, American Indians, and skilled craftsmen in various roles. Local Enlisted Men or LEMs served as the educators and instructors, to the enrollees. These instructors were invaluable to the “passing down” of labor skills to the new generations of workers. There is a history to how tools and equipment are used. Labor historian Brian Donahue’s article “Historian with a Chainsaw” recognized the importance of the adage “learn by doing.”⁴⁰ Donahue identified this in his own teaching methodologies as an important way to teach skills. Teaching through the usage and application of tools can help to give the student a better understanding of how the tool was used, carried, handled, or cared for. Understanding how skills were taught and how tools were used. LEMs presented the brought this teaching methodology to the table, as they themselves had the experience need to pass on skills. The employment of these experienced workers diversified the education of the enrollees and offered employment to men who would not have been able to enroll under the standard enrollment qualifications.

A challenge to the belief in labor creating better or good citizens was the importance of mechanization to the American lifestyle. Mechanization came to dominate

⁴⁰ Brian Donahue, “Historian with a Chainsaw: Teaching Environmental History in the Field,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Environmental History Revisited (October 2011), 33-35. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23209955?sid=primo&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

American industry in the years leading up to the Great Depression, notably within the agricultural sector.⁴¹ Mechanization posed problems for the Corps and its emphasis on labor. The Corps pushed back against the use mechanized labor, and instead placed an emphasis on the manual labor.⁴² This separation of mechanized and manual labor helped to mitigate inter-agency conflict between the CCC and organizations like the WPA or PWA. Additionally, labor leaders and unions saw the CCC as a threat to organized industrial labor. FDR sought to downplay this possible conflict by appointing labor leader Robert Fechner to the Directorship of the CCC.⁴³ His appointment made it clear that CCC was not meant to be a threat to organized labor. Fechner's appointment was aimed at appeasing organized labor as both Fechner, and his assistant director James McEntee, came from the International Association of Machinists. These men represented the interests of organized and skilled labor, and their appointment by Roosevelt was an attempt to ease any conflict between the government and the private sector.

Robert Fechner, a native Tennessean, was no stranger to hard labor. Beginning at age 16, Fechner worked his way up through the machine shops of the Georgia Central Railroad. Fechner started his rise within the union when he organized a strike for shorter work days.⁴⁴ This gumption and drive led Roosevelt to recognize him as the man who could handle the job of getting the CCC into action. Fechner brought with him the fellow machinist and labor leader James McEntee. McEntee, like Fechner, was a machinist and toolmaker by trade. The two men had met in 1911, becoming close friends and

⁴¹ McElvaine, *The Depression*, 37.

⁴² Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 78-79.

⁴³ Merrill, *Roosevelt's*, 6; Maher, *Nature's*, 79.

⁴⁴ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 80.

associates. Both of these men gained their positions through determination and hard work, and the ability to bridge the important gap between New Deal policies and organized labor. It is also clear that both McEntee and Fechner's desire to train men to be skilled workers came from their own experience as toolmakers and machinists. As machinists represented a skilled, industrial era job that required great understanding of machines and precision. This appreciation for labor, craft, and the ability to complete work to a high level of quality instilled in both leaders a determination to shape the CCC into a program that could produce skilled laborers.

Fechner and Roosevelt sought to limit the usage of mechanization within the CCC. Mechanized labor was to be the realm of the WPA and other labor initiatives. Even so it was not uncommon for the work being done to require some mechanization. Camp Gunlock, located in the community of Gunlock, Utah, bemoans the loss of one of their tractors in the mud. The paper, *The Midget Tribune*, announces that the "cat" had sunk so deeply into the mud that the enrollees had to use as separate tractor to pull it out.⁴⁵ The limitation on mechanized labor further helped to dig into the Jeffersonian aspects of labor in the US. The conflict of man versus machine was a constant thread in industrial and post-industrial American history. Deeply ingrained within the American mythos was the sense of craftsmanship and labor. Built upon a romanticization of the individual and their work.⁴⁶ This mythos sought to deepen the connections between labor, skills, and citizenry to the environment and labor.

⁴⁵ "Cat" slang for Caterpillar, *Midget Tribune*, September 16th, 1937, 75.

⁴⁶ Adamson, *Craft*, 8.

Both the *Midget Tribune* and Camp St. George's *Arizona Strip* serve as interesting looks into day-to-day life and work in camps. These bimonthly papers followed a clear pattern with the arrival and departure of new enrollees. Additionally, they present a strong look at the life of the enrollees in the camps. Throughout the editorials there is information on the work enrollees undertook and the goals of the Corps. The April twenty-eighth, 1937 edition of the *Midget Tribune* pushed "rookies" to seek opportunities to learn and educate themselves. It clearly listed expectations for the new men, primarily: decency, cleanliness, cheerfulness, and promptness.⁴⁷ This language once again sounds eerily similar to that of the Boy Scouts, specifically the Scout Law, which scouts pledged to be cheerful and clean. While I found no documents indicating a one-to-one lifting of these ideals from the Scout Law, we know that Roosevelt took inspirations from the BSA. It is unsurprising then that Roosevelt chose to include elements from the Scout Law.

When comparing these newsletters to McEntee's final report it is clear that the task of creating good citizens was starting to look like a complete rebuilding of the young adult male from the ground up. What differs here though is that being a "good citizen" as the Corps perceived went beyond that of just body health, but delved further into conduct, labor, and productivity. Much like in the painting of Lincoln, and the inclusion of a book in the lower corner, education and knowledge served as important pillars in the structure of the Corps.

⁴⁷ *Midget Tribune*, University of Utah Archives, 48.

This is where the subject of the final chapter, the Green New Deal that has found itself being kicked around congress does not fully recognize or define in its current form. Biden's Climate Corps gives more shape to the program, yet it is still to be seen what this will entail. This too is the subject of Maher's book, as it focuses more on the health of the human body, and the body politic of the Corps.

By including education and skill development, the Corps demonstrated that the Corps sought to improve more than just the enrollees physical bodies. While McEntee claimed that education and skill development were core to the Corps original purpose there is a certain small lie about it. Educational and vocational classes were a program that developed fairly early within the Corps, but not at the start of it.⁴⁸ These classes were an addition that grew out of a common recognition by Director Fechner, the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), and President Roosevelt.⁴⁹ In reality these educational classes began as more of an ad hoc event. Where the camp commanders would bring in teachers and educators from the local communities to help teach the enrollees. Over time these ad hoc classes changed into the organized program that McEntee described in his final report. This educational program coordinated the departments of labor, defense, and education to develop a well-rounded, yet individualized program for each camp.

While the initial organization lacked the means to support education and training, it quickly spread throughout the camps. To ensure uniformity throughout ever camp the

⁴⁸ McEntee, *Final Report*, 26.

⁴⁹ Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, 19.

War Department was placed in charge of facilitating the program.⁵⁰ Its goals, laid out as military objectives, were “The removal of illiteracy; Correction of common school deficiencies; Training on work projects; Vocational instructions; Cultural and general education; Avocational and leisure time training; Character and citizenship development, and assisting enrollees to find employment.” An expansive list to be sure, yet it was the last two points that are the most important in defining the CCC. Those three points of character, citizenship, and future employment serve as the touchstone for the core principles of the program and served as the first time they are codified in the CCC. With military precision, the Corps transformed itself into an efficient, educated, and skilled workforce to rehabilitate the American economy and environment.

This commitment to educate the enrollees not only highlighted the importance of citizenship to labor, but reinforced McEntee’s earlier words on creating assets to the economy. This came from a director writing the final report in 1943 after the camps were shuttered. With the benefit of hindsight McEntee is able to say, “when the war came, these men were ready.”⁵¹ It is interesting to see how the leadership of the Corps viewed the work done for the men as more important than the work done for the nation’s environment.

With the focus on the enrollees, it is no surprise that while reading McEntee’s final report, one can start to rebuild a hierarchy of needs the men should have fulfilled. McEntee laid this plan out similar to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Laying a foundation of basic needs on top of which more complex needs can be layered. These basic needs

⁵⁰ McEntee, *Final Report*, 26.

⁵¹ McEntee, *Final Report*, 73.

manifested themselves in interesting ways. Take food for example. The basis of good morale within the Corps was good food.⁵² This outlines what I consider to be one of the most interesting skill sets that were taught in the Corps; the *simple* act of cooking. Creating a straightforward equation: good food equals good morale which means fewer morale and discipline issues. Enrollee Warren Teets' highlights the importance of food in camps. A good meal could buoy spirits and improve work, whereas a bad meal would have lasting effects and lower morale. Enrollee Chuck Krall, who worked at Camp Nine Mile, reinforced this when he recalled the many baked bean sandwiches he ate during his stint in the Corps. Krall stated that was his "first and last time eating baked bean sandwiches."⁵³ Even within my own conservation experience this holds true, inadequate chow destroys the morale of workers and causes productivity and learning to drop.

Gone were the days of salt pork and hard tack, old Army fare, replaced by large quantities of mostly quality foods. Ignore the baked bean sandwiches. This would be a detail that would long outlive the Corps in its implementation as well. Later forest service employee Anthony Brittin recounted the copious amounts of food, remarking that the men could "eat as much as we wanted but were not to throw anything away."⁵⁴ Brittin's experience came nearly 20 years after the Corps ceased operations. Brittin represented one of the many labor legacies of the CCC, as Brittin Worked the Blister Rust Control (BRC) a job familiar to many enrollees. This mentality persisted throughout the Corps and reinforced the goal to rebuild American workforce's body and mind.

⁵² McEntee, *Final Report*, 76.

⁵³ Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, 92-93.

⁵⁴ Anthony Brittin, *The Hitchhiker* (New York: Vantage Press, 2010), 35.

Morale aside, food and nutrition were important to the work and the skills that the men were required to develop. Maher highlights the rebuilding of enrollees' bodies through copious amounts of food and physical labor.⁵⁵ Yet, even something as mundane as what the enrollees were eating was a subject of education. Camps often brought in educational advisors to teach the enrollees about proper nutrition and health.⁵⁶ This perspective of taking the mundane and turning it into a teachable subject is important when understanding the framework of what the Corps was aiming to accomplish. The Corps was not just rehabilitating forests, parks, and fields, but also reforming the young male workforce. McEntee notes that on average the enrollees gained anywhere from "12 to 30 pounds" each.⁵⁷

Food and nutrition helped to instill in the enrollees a growing sense of social justice and perspective on the state of the nation. Enrollee Wendel Bulger of Custer, South Dakota remarked on the desolates "wastes" of South Dakota and the expectation that Indian families could survive in such barren areas.⁵⁸ Bulger's reflection read like a depressing realization of the issues with the reservation system. It also raised some important questions about the interactions the men had with one another. The shared experience of work, labor, and living in close proximity with men from different walks of life helped to awaken them to, if not bridge the gap of race and ethnicity. Simple statements recognizing the segregation of barracks, yet acknowledging the collective

⁵⁵ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 94-99.

⁵⁶ *Midget Tribune*, University of Utah Archives, 82.

⁵⁷ McEntee, *Final Report*, 112.

⁵⁸ Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, 74.

work done, revealed a sense of questioning the status quo.⁵⁹ Although fleeting, and likely not intentional, this consciousness of social injustice helped to open enrollees eyes to social issues in the country.

This reformation of the work force relied on the most basic of building blocks. The establishment of the CCC was established to rebuild the American workforce in the face of the Depression, and the way to accomplish that, as McEntee stated, was to rebuild young as good citizens. Much of this sentiment hearkened back to Jeffersonian ideas of citizenry. Through the improvement of the land, man improved himself. There was a sense of yeoman farmers carving out an existence for themselves within the American wilderness.⁶⁰ This aspect of citizenship within the Corps represented what McEntee meant when he described the building of a better citizen. Benjamin Franklin epitomized this idolization of work and citizenry through a different lens, stating “that... good apprentices are most likely to make good citizens.”⁶¹ Franklin’s view of labor, craft, and the role that apprentices play in propagating citizenship, typified the meaning of the work the enrollees did. The question could be asked, are not enrollees just latter-day apprentices of new skills and jobs?

As McEntee stated the terms “competent, healthy, sturdy...” defined the ideal citizen.⁶² While healthy was an easy to define, competency and sturdiness were more nebulous definitions of citizenship. It is clear when reading McEntee’s final report that

⁵⁹ Merrill, *Roosevelt’s Forest Army*, 70; Thomas W. Patterson, “A Forest Camp Disgrace”: The Rebellion of a Civilian Conservation Corps Workers at Preston, New York, July 7th, 1933, (*New York History* Vol. 82, No. 3, Summer 2001) pgs. 242-241.

⁶⁰ Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 49.

⁶¹ Adamson, *Craft*, 20.

⁶² McEntee, *Final Report*, 75.

these terms fit into the ill-defined category known by the words “well-rounded.” Was this well-rounded citizen like Lincoln, sleeves rolled up, pausing in between swings to read about law and politics? McEntee’s answer would be yes. The enrollee that left the CCC would be a young man who had obtained a basic education. An education that included the mastery of vocational skills. These young men would have proper etiquette and good hygiene. The enrollees would leave the camps with a solid head on their shoulders and strong work ethic. This emphasis on rounding out the enrollees education represented an important focal point for defining citizenship and republicanism.

The ideal citizen, in the minds of McEntee, Fechner, and Roosevelt was a man, who through training, education, experience, and labor, worked to be industrious and productive in his community. He would accomplish this through his ability to take care of both himself and his family. He would demonstrate initiative to take charge and to get work done. He was a man who could be counted on to work collectively for the betterment of his peers and for the achievement of goals. He was someone able to work with others from different walks of life and experiences in order to reinvigorate their countries environment and labor force. This man was a good steward to the land, someone who cared for the environment and the impact he had on it. To McEntee, a competent man was all these things and more. When all of this is summed up, a competent man was dependable, hardworking, healthy, and industrious.

With this understanding of competency established, it is clear that collectivism, in conjunction with self-reliance, education, skills, and virtue represented the whole man to McEntee. The Corps looked at the whole man and attempted through its various modes of

education to institute a more wholesome development of the citizen. McEntee may not line out exactly what he meant by competent citizens, but after reading his report it is clear that competency looked at the whole man⁶³ It is important to note, and something to discuss later, that McEntee and the Corps struck a balance when defining the ideal citizen. This balance was between individual and communal growth and development. This balance was important to McEntee's vision of a well-rounded man, as selfish individuals hurt the community they worked in. This philosophy of balancing the individual and the community helped to shape how the CCC approached skill development.

The Corps' insistence on education came from the goal of rebuilding the American labor and rebuilding competent, sturdy citizens. The CCC aimed to build strong male bodies reminiscent of republican farmers. These were men sustained by their labor on the land and educated and engaged within their communities. They were reliant upon no one but themselves, and not beholden to the "man." Ultimately the CCC achieved this goal when the country geared up for war, but it also went further. It tapped into a sense of community that differed from the lone farmer on the prairie. The CCC gave young men the opportunity to learn new skills and to gain a competent education away from home. It gave these same men the opportunity work together with their peers to overcome obstacles. Finally, the CCC offered young men the opportunity to forge comradery, friendship, and community through the work they did. The opportunities afforded to enrollees were unlike anything offered before or since, and the enrollees

⁶³ McEntee, *Final Report*, 69.

would have been fools to ignore such a chance. As one camp newsletter put it,

“REMEMBER, EDUCATION DOESN’T COST, IT PAYS!”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Arizona Strip, June 6th, 1936, University of Utah Archives

CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST CUT

“The Civilian Conservation Corps was created to provide work relief and to conserve and develop natural resources. As the Corps progressed, it became more apparent that the Corps’ principal contribution lay in the work it was doing to promote the welfare and further the training of the individuals that make up the enrolled personnel.”

- James McEntee, Second Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1943

With the first swing of my axe, I knew I had a winner, a well-balanced axe that fit my hand and my swing perfectly. Yet, over the intervening winter, I did not get much use out of it, as I was apartment bound and finishing up my undergraduate degree. So, come the following Philmont season in 2019 I was excited to put it to work. Arrogantly and selfishly, I told my backcountry staff that none were allowed to use my personal axe for felling and splitting. Instead they would be relegated to using the scattered handful of axes stored in the poorly weatherproofed shed. In retrospect and reflection, this opens my eyes to just the sort of cult of the axe that I had joined. I selfishly guarded the knowledge and use of the tool I so prized. Thinking back on such interactions makes me wonder to what degree did such a culture exist among the enrollees, especially as men from the cities and from the countryside began to intermix. It gives me a chuckle to think back on the tribalistic defense of which many of us guard that which I hold close.

Skills and tools as central tenets of the Civilian Conservation Corps made it clear that such a guarded, protective, suspicious defense of knowledge and education would not have survived long among the enrollees. The skills that the CCC taught enrollees run

the gamut from simple educational material up to explosives handling. This breadth of skills reinforced McEntee's earlier point about citizen development, as the scope of what the Corps, achievement grew. This is why it is important to also look closely at the specific skills young men were taught.

The breadth of the educational opportunities for the enrollees both on and off duty was truly staggering. Taking to heart the extensive objectives laid out by the Department of War and the Department of Education.⁶⁵ The men were inundated with options in correspondence, sewing, diesel mechanics, photography, forestry, and more. At Camp Bungalow, near Pierce, Idaho, offered twenty-one evening learning opportunities offered to enrollees during their time in camp.⁶⁶ Enrollees could learn anything from jackhammer usage to mess management and much in between. Often these were sold as "Opportunities for Wide-Awake Enrollees" to learn new skills. In some cases, newsletters would put together a list of reasons why an enrollee should take these classes. The argument would go like this: "1. They are free. 2. They are vocational. 3. Certificates are issues to you when you finish." The third point makes it clear that these programs were meant for the rebuilding of the work force and certifying the competency of the men. The drive to engage enrollees once again helped to frame these educational opportunities in the light of citizenship as they expanded beyond labor skills. These skills were not necessarily to be used while young men are enrolled in the CCC, but once again skills to be brought with them when they joined the wider work force. The CCC pushed enrollees to take the opportunity to learn a new skill. It cannot be reinforced enough, but

⁶⁵ McEntee, *Final Report*, 26.

⁶⁶ The Ancestor Hunt, *The Woodsman*

they would get certification in transferable skills. Allowing the enrollees to market these skills, with proof of competency, to the wider labor industry.⁶⁷ Perry H. Merrill, a former State Commissioner of Forests and Parks correctly surmised in his history of the CCC, the men learned vocations and careers, not just a smattering of skills.⁶⁸ This distinction of skills as vocational and career based, further reinforced the fact that CCC was aimed at long term revitalization, not short hobbies.

Within many of the camps a sense of rambunctious energy and a lightheartedness pervaded the work culture. Camp newsletters were filled with jokes or comics designed to add levity to young men's lives and surroundings.⁶⁹ Neil Maher captured this energy in *Nature's New Deal* through photographs of camp life. One photograph of note depicted a comical scene of an enrollee receiving a fresh shave with a double-bit ax.⁷⁰ This photo filled with smiling and laughing enrollees, even though it was a staged advertisement, the photograph was a fun and enjoyable portrayal of the enrollees. The act of shaving a young man's face with a double bit axe was a good bit of absurdist humor. Yet, it made a statement about using such a tool to shave a face. Tools served as a focal point for the work being done and a connection the enrollees make with it. There was certainly a level of machismo in such an act, but it also reflected the perception of tools in different ways whether in comedy or practical use.

⁶⁷ Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, 81.

⁶⁸ Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, 66.

⁶⁹ *The 570 Times*, Vol. 1, no. 1-4, July 5, 1935, The Ancestor Hunt, date accessed April 20, 2021 <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/20975> ; *The Arizona Strip*, University of Utah Archives

⁷⁰ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 152.

Much like the depiction of railsplitter Lincoln, the iconography and imagery of the CCC enrollees is important to understand as it offers insight into the lives, culture, and community of the camps. A close shave with an axe fed directly into a sense of machismo surrounding their work. Yet, another common image began to emerge. Within the grounds of the Savenac Nursery in Lolo National Forest stands a statue of a CCC worker. This statue depicts a youthful, bare chested man briefly resting, like Lincoln he carries an axe casually in right hand. In the crook of his left arm he carries his crumpled work shirt. A wide hat with upturned brim sits upon his head to shield him from the strong sun. Likely returning from a day of hard work felling trees and clearing the land. Exhausted from swamping, the removal tree limbs after they have been cut from the tree, he walks back to the camp after the day's work.

Another example can be seen in the covers, art, and titles of a handful of the books used in the research for this thesis. Merrill fills his cover with a collage of photos; bare chested men doing stone work, an enrollee in his dress uniform, the barracks, and men catching a break from the work. Merrill's cover gave the reader idyllic portrayals of what the CCC was. Neil Maher's book likewise features a poster of two bare chested enrollees. Hard at work planting a young sapling, one leans over to pat the dirt down, while the other places another shovelful of dirt around the tree. All of this was superimposed on a shining, flowing American flag. The titles of *Nature's New Deal* and *Roosevelt's Forest Army* evoke this connection of labor and the land.

Whether it be a picture of an enrollee shaving with an axe, or a bare chested, young man returning from a day's hard work, the imagery presented a compelling history

of the CCC. Tools took on an identity in the work we do, and the skill to wield such a tool brings with it an identity all its own. In the same way my axe took up its own identity after I purchased it. Many popular depictions of the CCC chose this imagery to portray young men with their tools chiefly displayed in the forefront of the image. There is a subjectivity to the brands and techniques used. Like skinning a cat, there are multiple ways to sharpen an axe, fell a tree, or use a shovel. One could read Dudley Cook's *The Axe Book* and walk away with a different method of felling than had one only read Eric Sloane's *A Reverence for Wood*. These nuances bring to life the individuality of work and tools. These images of men and their tools were, for lack of a better word, propaganda for a country sorely in need of positive images. Posters, like the one that adorned *Nature's New Deal*, unsubtly hammer this home with a flowing and shining American flag.

Engagement with skills, education, and labor was not just propaganda. Course enrollment statistics served as a point of pride for camps, as it demonstrated this enrollee engagement. The shaping of bodies and minds had practical morale effects in the camps. Company 562 of Prichard, Idaho proudly proclaimed in their camp newsletter that "Ninety-eight percent of the enrollees are taking one or more educational courses..."⁷¹ This announcing of statistics emphasized the importance of the classes to the enrollees. That summer, Company 562 offered classes in American music, piano, reading and writing, forestry, tool care, and a smattering of other topics. The ninety-eight percent also only represented the men taking a minimum of one or two courses. Of that ninety-eight

⁷¹ *Voice of the Pines*, Aug 15, 1937, The Ancestor Hunt, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/20933> .

percent of enrollees, a further sixty percent were taking three or more classes.⁷² This represented that the enrollees understood the value of the educational classes in the CCC. The *Arizona Strip* even came up with a short rhyme for the enrollees to remember: “At least one course I’ll take, in camp 2558.”⁷³

It is clear that the emphasis on, and portrayal of, the enrollees, their work, and the tools of their trade was not just propaganda. Camps genuinely took pride in their enrollment and engagement numbers, as it showed the efficacy of these education programs. The skills discussed in this chapter are organized into a handful of rough categories that I feel describe each one the best. As such, I have labeled a number of these skills and vocations as “hard” skills devoted to labor skills like jackhammers, machining, and diesel mechanics. While other skills are labeled as “soft” skills; such as leadership, communications, and citizenship. A few may fall in between these categories, which are not definitively rigid. Additionally, these definitions are not meant to imply a value judgement or importance, but rather to represent a divide similar to tangible versus intangible skills. Pragmatically, it is hard to quantify sportsmanship or citizenship, but easy to determine whether or not someone can drive a vehicle or handle explosives. This division serves to clarify presentation of the skills into more defined categories. Upon reflection, one could pull an interesting narrative from my distinctions between hard and soft skills.

The Civilian Conservation Corps took young American men from all walks of life and reintroduced them to manual and skilled labor. This concept was not wholly original

⁷² *Voice of the Pines*, Aug 15, 1937.

⁷³ *Arizona Strip*, May 13, 1936.

to Roosevelt and the New Deal. Rather this belief in building a better citizen through labor on the land evokes earlier Jeffersonian ideas of labor. The Jeffersonian idea of land improvement and corresponding citizenship is strongly echoed throughout McEntee's report as he closes out the CCC's tenure. It is then important to appraise the work that the men did and the way in which they understood and interacted with their labor. To this end, Perry H. Merrill's *Roosevelt's Forest Army* serves as a gold mine of information into the lives and reflections of the enrollees. As the state forester and liaison to CCC leadership in Vermont, Merrill had the opportunity to see a large number of different programs throughout the state. In the years after his retirement, Merrill began writing his book by reaching out to as many CCC veterans as possible. He then compiled these letters into his book.

Many of the enrollees shared with Merrill that they believed that training and personal improvement were central to the function of the CCC. "I am still impressed with the CCC and what it did for the country's resources including what it did for the men" recalled Jesse Kirby of Camp Hurricane, Utah.⁷⁴ Kirby was just one of many who reflected on the positive influence of the Corps on his life. It becomes a fairly standard response from men when asked about their time and service within the Corps. It does raise the question of rose-tinted-spectacles, and how men perceived the work they did. Many men walked away from the Corps with a metaphorical toolbox filled with new skills to be deployed in the workforce.

⁷⁴ Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, 74.

The basic aspect of all work taught and completed in the CCC was safety. The safe operation of machinery, handling of explosives, felling of trees, or simply the knowledge of the dangers present for the various types of work being done.⁷⁵ Camps handled the mitigation of dangers in various ways. Common methods employed were the use of safety meetings. The previously mentioned Camp Gunlock would have weekly meetings at 5:30 pm on Wednesday.⁷⁶ These meetings sought to inform enrollees of the danger of the work they were doing, serving as open forums for feedback. The *Midget Tribune* mentions that this was due to the large number of enrollees who were strangers to dangerous work. These meetings would help explain the work to the men and reinforced the safety the men needed exhibit while doing it.

The work the men did still was the most important instruction and training they received. It was the “backbone” of the educational program, as McEntee said it.⁷⁷ The enrollees worked and lived in the environment, and in doing so they learned to be better citizens. This interpretation of labor fits neatly into the fabric of American history. Industry called for the improving of the land through working upon it.⁷⁸ If industry and the land were framed as central to citizenship, then the “hard” skills of clearing land make much more sense to their importance in the enrollees’ labor. Within the first year of operation, enrollees displayed, with vigor, their ability to work in the land.

McEntee’s report cites “18,531 miles of fire-breaks cleared” and “2,757,419 acres for control of tree and plant diseases.” These and many more figures paint a staggering

⁷⁵ McEntee, *Final Report*, 22-23.

⁷⁶ *Midget Tribune*, Vol. II, No. 2 Mar 17, 1937, University of Utah Archives.

⁷⁷ McEntee, *Final Report*, 26-27.

⁷⁸ Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 159; Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 49.

picture of the work done in the first year of operation. Each and every task the enrollees took up required their physical labor and skills to complete. With vigor and skill, under the watchful eyes of LEM's, young men slowly reshaped their bodies into well-tuned and skilled machines.

Culturally the CCC also demonstrated many of the emerging values of the time, through the skills they taught the enrollees. One of the more common skills listed was how many men learned to drive and, despite Roosevelt's promise of only manual labor in the CCC, operate heavy machinery.⁷⁹ Yet, driving represented just how central automobiles were becoming to mechanized work, and how the ability to drive became a marketable skill. An extension of driving was the widespread mechanics classes taught in the camps. These two skills often went hand in hand in enrollee descriptions of their education, as it seemed only natural for them to learn about the maintenance of the vehicles they operated.

Another common skill offered to the men was cooking. Enrollee Warren Teets' previous reflection on electrifying dining trays added a comedic flair to his time in the Corps, but his interview also looked at the other benefits of the work he did. Teets' recollection of his time on "KP," or kitchen patrol, also reflected the opportunities that men outside the enlistment age could find. Teets spoke almost reverently about the head cook, named Pop, and the lessons he taught the younger men.⁸⁰ On-the-job training was often passed from more experienced men to the new enrollees. This led to less of a top-down approach to teaching in the camps. Democratizing education beyond just the

⁷⁹ Merrill, *Roosevelts Forest Army*, 84, 89.

⁸⁰ Teets, Interview,

educational advisors. Charles Britten, no relation to Anthony Brittin, recalled that “I had a chance to help the Educational Adviser in the evenings. I taught typing and a little class in journalism.”⁸¹ In a sense, turning the typewriters and pens of the enrollees into implements of citizenship.

One of the jobs of enrollees was Blister Rust Control (BRC) in the northwestern states of Idaho and Montana. This work consisted of the pulling of currant and gooseberry plants known as “ribes” or “ribies” in order to control the spread of the tree disease known as Blister Rust. This was a tree fungus that travelled not from tree to tree, but from the currants to the pine tree. This work has both a unique environmental and labor legacy for the region as both the CCC enrollees and Brittin were attempting to quarantine the spread of the fungus.⁸² Brittin’s time working on the BRC served as almost a time capsule of the work and labor done in the 1930’s under the Corps, and while there are marked differences in the experience it is clear to see where the similarities lay. Both generations of workers carried the ubiquitous hoe dag, a hoe-like tool with a fork on one side of the head and a hoe on the other. This was the ideal tool for grubbing and leveraging out the ribes.

The work the men completed also highlights one of the important tenets of the CCC as an economic institution. The pulling of ribes and halting the expansion of Blister Rust in the Clearwater National Forest was based on the extractive value of white pine.⁸³ This protective work to economic assets for regions was important to the scope of the

⁸¹ Merrill, *Roosevelt’s Forest Army*, 84.

⁸² Brittin, *The Hitchhiker*, 38; *The 570 Times*, July 5, 1935, The Ancestor Hunt.

⁸³ Brittin, *The Hitchhiker*, 38-39; *The 570 Times*, July 5, 1935, The Ancestor Hunt.

Corps' work and achievements, but also at times its failures. Did the BRC reduce the spread of Blister Rust? In the end it was not, ultimately due to further research that demonstrated the hardiness and range that Blister Rust exhibited outstripped the attempted quarantining of the disease through the work of the BRC. Even so this legacy of work presents a revealing story of just how influential the CCC was in developing the relationship between the labor goals of the CCC and the economic goals of the Forest Service, and the reality was that the BRC was meant to protect a resource for economic gain.

Upon arriving at Camp Hildebrand in Pierce, Idaho, Brittin was given a crash course in camp life and living. It was instantly clear that many regulations from the Corps carried over to life in the camps. Rules regarding appearance, hygiene, equipment, and work are shared, each one of these garnered from years of operation.⁸⁴ Men were expected to be clean shaven and well-trimmed. They were expected to not wear their caulked, boots with spikes in the soles for grip, in the dinning tent as the boots chewed up the floor. Reiterating what enrollee A.J. Hill of Company 1806 said earlier, hygiene for oneself and the community sat as a basic starting point for developing a well-rounded citizen, these expectations of hygiene and cleanliness were the same for Brittin and his compatriots.

Hygiene was not just linked to the physical bodies but to the language of the enrollees as well. Educational Advisor Ralph Lackey of Company 603 in Pierce, Idaho, noted in a newsletter editorial that "Nothing causes as much lack of respect for a man as a

⁸⁴ Brittin, *The Hitchhiker*, 30-38.

lot of unseemly, crude, vulgar words.”⁸⁵ This attention to personal conduct is what was meant by the education of “soft” skills to enrollees. There is less of a definitive ability to measure or the effectiveness or depth of adoption of such skills. There are no graphs or forms outlining the decrease of swearing in camps. Yet, it did demonstrate the importance of how the enrollees carried and viewed themselves. Lackey continued on, “Would a prospective employer hire you if he heard your language?”⁸⁶ Once again lackey outlined the importance of reforming the men as they entered the workforce. The inclusion of etiquette made it clear that the CCC instilled a presence of mind in the work the enrollees did. The corps sought to instill in the men a pride, not just in their labor, but in their conduct as well.

Work and education classes were not the only experiences enrollees gained. Nearly every newsletter read for this thesis contained a section devoted both professional and amateur sports. Common to newsletters was the announcement of camp-based sports like baseball, basketball, and football.⁸⁷ Many camps formed sports teams that would travel to the other camps in the region to play games. Sports offered an outlet for the enrollees to engage in physical activity and exercise, but also an outlet for developing teamwork amongst the men as well. Sports represented the “avocational” skills that the Army laid out in their objectives for the program.

Yet baseball and football were not the only sports, as some camps sought to put the skills the enrollees were learning to the test as well. For example, Camp Upper

⁸⁵ *The Woodsman*, Volume 1 No. 5 Aug, 9, 1936, The Ancestor Hunt.

⁸⁶ *The Woodsman*, Volume 1 No. 5 Aug, 9, 1936, The Ancestor Hunt.

⁸⁷ *Midget Tribune*, Volume 2 No. 2 Mar 17, 1937, University of Utah Archives.

Beaver in Pierce, Idaho hosted an axe and saw competition for the enrollees. Members of Company 603 competed both as teams and individuals to either saw or chop logs the fastest. For the saw teams it was a tight race with each finishing within ten seconds of each other. The axe competition was even tighter with the top participants finishing within a second of each other, ultimately with the Superintendent Morin being able to chop through an eight-inch log in 33 seconds.⁸⁸ Such feats and more demonstrate a competitive nature to the skills and work the men were learning and a sense of pride and accomplishment in what they achieved. Channeling their work, competition, and knowledge of tools, these men applied their competency and proficiency into tangible results. They are associating this achievement with cooperative work; strengthening the sense of community and teamwork to overcome challenges.

Teamwork and its associated language was common throughout the media the men would read. The editor of the *Midget Tribune* reminds enrollees to “educate yourself and remember, the secret to success is how well you get along with people.”⁸⁹ This emphasis on collective accomplishments mirrors the “real-world” implications of citizenship, politics, and the effects they had on one another. The “real-world” aspect was an important factor to consider when looking at the wider effects of the CCC. It reinforces the idea that the CCC and the enrollees did not exist within a vacuum, devoid of the external world. Rather, the enrollees were virtuous citizens in a wider republic.

⁸⁸ *The Woodsman*, Volume 1 No. 5 Aug 9, 1936, The Ancestor Hunt.

⁸⁹ *Midget Tribune*, Volume 2 No. 2 Mar 17, 1937, University of Utah Archives.

McEntee frames this in the sense that enrollees did not have a choice, but to work together or quit.⁹⁰

This blending of competition, skills, and labor created a more complete picture of what the Corps saw as a better citizen. The enrollees were challenged to work together in order to achieve common goals; in the case of the sawing and chopping competitions it was a monetary reward. Yet, they are also learning to combine labor, competition, and their bodies into a developing idea of citizenship. These qualities are representative of those “softer” skills previously mentioned. That a better citizen is not merely someone who can saw the log the fastest, but someone who can work with others to achieve such a goal.

This important distinction can be further seen when reading Merrill’s interviews and letters, as it was not uncommon for men to mention the different walks of life from which the enrollees came. Enrollee O.W. Strange, Company 858 out of Douglas, Wyoming, said that his commanding officer taught him how to be a “man among men.”⁹¹ There was a lot packed into such a phrase. The most obvious is the male oriented language the phrase was. Being a “man amongst men” is an incredibly masculine phrase, but it is similar to the Latin phrase “*primus inter pares*” or first among equals. This is the belief of servant leadership. This is the idea that while men all are equal, the CCC enrollees were better equipped and ready to step up as leaders.

It is clear that when combined with objectives of the military and the labor Army Officers developed, that these soft skills helped to define what the CCC saw as a “better

⁹⁰ McEntee, *Final Report*, 81.

⁹¹ Merrill, *Roosevelt’s Forest Army*, 98-99.

citizen.” The Corps wanted young men who were physically and morally sound, clean in their conduct, appearance, and action. The CCC wanted men who stood out as leaders among their peers, and who worked together to overcome the challenges of life in America. The emphasis of masculine language helped to emphasize the connection to the yeoman farmer of Jeffersonian creation. The language of citizenship permeates the literature of the CCC, within Camp Gunlock’s weekly safety meetings being concluded by the Company officer gave talks dedicated to “Government and Citizenship.”⁹² Unfortunately, there were no transcripts of these talks.

This combination of sportsmanship, citizenship, etiquette, and hygiene the CCC crafted what McEntee, Fechner, and Roosevelt saw as the ideal citizen. In this process these men also helped to create a sense of community. The CCC instilled in these young men a strong work ethic and comradeship. This sense of community represented a clear break from definable skills or vocations. Like citizenship, its definition is subjective. It is likely that each person would define community in different terms. Even so, the idea that the men built communities within each camp, with distinct cultures shaped by the ever changing flow of enrollees represents a microcosm of American democracy.

The brute energy of chopping wood or hauling “ribes” and the subtleties of citizenship were not the only skills and education the enrollees learned. Correspondence and writing classes rivaled forestry, mechanics, and driving for the most common class offered at each camp. The ubiquity of the course reflected the educational gaps that the enrollees had experienced while growing up. Correspondence and writing classes also

⁹² *Midget Tribune*, Vol. II, No. 2 Mar 17, 1937, University of Utah Archives.

helped to bolster the rhetoric of citizenship in the CCC. It also allowed the men a channel through which to express themselves, as often the camp newsletters would have poetry, joke, or open response sections to which enrollees could submit their works.

This deluge of educational courses and on the job training meant that the men were learning vocational and life skills at a breakneck pace. Taking in the whole person, this approach to the citizen as a compilation of skills, ethics, morals, and beliefs grounds the CCC in both the beliefs of the era and expressed the limitations of what it achieved.

This blending of both self-reliance and the collective mindset of working as a team helped foster important elements of community among the enrollees during their time in the CCC and when they returned home to the places they had left. It drove home the holistic image of citizenship as the end goal of the CCC and represents where a modern reimplementation of the program should begin as it seeks to fix many of the same issues faced the country in the 1930s.

CHAPTER THREE

BUILDING A BETTER TOMORROW

“The Civilian Conservation Corps was handicapped from the beginning by the fact that no master conservation program was available.”

- James McEntee, Second Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1943

Recently, the call for action against climate change has grown, and this call has become organized into a plan known as the Green New Deal. This title, meant to invoke the collective memory of FDR and his New Deal, has become the yardstick by which Democrats measure themselves. Yet, the Green New Deal (GND) goes beyond the simple borders of nation-states. The GND is a rallying cry for global environmental reform. The GND is a program that looks to completely overhaul both the American economy and the country’s infrastructure. This goal is not unlike the goal of the CCC to overhaul the public lands of the country. Due to this similarity in purpose I believe that the GND can learn a lot from its New Deal Era Predecessor.

Looking specifically at the United States is important, as the rhetorical question of “why is a discussion of skill development in the CCC pertinent to an international environmental movement?” The answer to the question is straightforward. Naomi Klein’s *On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal* explains the importance of environmental reform, but only briefly, three distinct times, mentions the need for a Conservation Corps and their purpose.⁹³ Klein, a prolific author on politics and the

⁹³ Klein, *On Fire*, 37,39, 290.

environment, uses her book as an elevator pitch to the reader. She artfully lays out the pros, cons, and urgency of a Green New Deal. Yet, Klein goes beyond the simple narration of the need for the GND. Instead she interweaves both the history behind the opposition to the GND and personal anecdotes. Kate Aronoff's book *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal* further drives home the need for investing in both the environment and people. Aronoff envisions environmental labor programs as an important part of the GND, even if she does not mention the CCC by name.⁹⁴ Aronoff focused more on the how and what of the GND, whereas Klein's is more ideologically focused. Addressing the role the CCC played in the New Deal is important to outlining what a new program will look like. The history of the CCC is relevant in helping to establish what a new program would look like. Once again recognizing that the CCC was not just focused on the environment, but on the enrollees as well. The CCC failed in many ways, whether it be a failure to uphold principles of equality in employment or for damage to the environment it claimed to protect.⁹⁵ By invoking the name of government program with an 82 percent approval rating, the GND and its proponents must recognize the power that such a program has historically.⁹⁶

House Resolution 109 is an important step in the articulation of a GND. The document succinctly outlines the multitude of points of focus for the GND. Notably it calls for high wage jobs, universal education, and skill development and training.⁹⁷ It is

⁹⁴ Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni, Daniel Aldana Cohen, and Thea Riofrancos, *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal* (London: Verso, 2019), 171.

⁹⁵ Patton, "A Forest Camp Disgrace," 241-242.

⁹⁶ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 165.

⁹⁷ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal*, 116th Cong., 1st sess., 2019, H. Res. 109, 11-13, <https://library.bowdoin.edu/research/chicago-gov.pdf>

almost as if there was a historical program that met these goals. The Green New Deal encompasses more than a revitalized Civilian Conservation Corps, but it appropriates many of the founding principles behind the CCC. The desire for the GND to focus heavily on labor rights and education highlights in many ways how a modern, new CCC should have a place in the Green New Deal. The CCC served as a central pillar for the New Deal both in its time and in the collective American memory.

The CCC came to be the poster child of the New Deal and the efforts of the Roosevelt Administration to put Americans to work. As such, a new CCC should mirror that effort as a central and highly visual program. A new Corps should serve as a rallying cry and advertisement for the work to be done and what could be achieved. Any movement for a GND should make use of such imagery and language as an argument to bring back jobs to economically depressed areas.

Klein's manifesto on the Green New Deal serves as a steppingstone to the direction a New Civilian Conservation Corps should take. Additionally, looking at the material culture and expression of these new ideals through art and propaganda. This chapter will, if only briefly, look beyond the CCC to other New Deal Programs and their modern reincarnation under the proposed Green New Deal. Should there be a rebirth of this program, there should be intent behind its goals and an adherence to McEntee's claim that the Corps was meant to build better citizens through the rebuilding of skilled laborers and better citizens.

Betsy Gaines Quammen's work, *American Zion*, helped to direct my thinking for this chapter. The prevailing question that this book raised, in my mind, is what happens to

these ranchers, miners, loggers, and auto plant workers who stand to lose their jobs with the radical, yet necessary changes required to stabilize our environment? This question balances both the importance of the objective facts about environmental degradation and the subjective emotions of those who stand to lose their jobs. The often-responded answer, so much so that it has become a meme, is that they should go to college or find employment in the tech industries. In the end Quammen endorses tourism as the industry for the “New West,” yet the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates the vulnerability of such a solution.⁹⁸ Klein, Aronoff, and others answer this question with the importance of the public sphere in implementing the Green New Deal. Many of the projects like light or high-speed rail will require government interventions.⁹⁹ The house resolution makes this abundantly clear as well, recognizing that this is not a solution to be solved by private entities or through tourist enterprises.¹⁰⁰ This is where implementation of a skill driven Civilian Conservation Corps comes to the forefront in rebuilding the nation’s environment as it has the staying power to make meaningful change.

Realizing the importance of retraining and redeveloping the skills of the workers is an important first step in launching the GND.¹⁰¹ Naomi Klein, Richard Lamm, and Michael McCarthy note that many parts of the US – predominantly in the West – have been designated as “sacrificial” zones for extraction. Owned and leased by the federal government, these lands were opened up to exploitation or used for the testing of atomic

⁹⁸ Betsy Gaines Quammen, *American Zion: Cliven Bundy, God & Public Lands in the West*, (Salt Lake City: Torrey House Press, 2019), 291-299.

⁹⁹ Klein, *On Fire*, 81; Aronoff, *A Planet to Win*, 171.

¹⁰⁰ H. Res 109, 2019, 3-5.

¹⁰¹ Klein, *On Fire*, 179.

weapons.¹⁰² By investing in a new CCC, there stands an opportunity to turn these sacrificial zones into Green Investment Zones. There is a need to reinvest in these landscapes, not for the aestheticism of white-middle class tourism, but for creating a deeper connection between communities and the environment. This reinvestment has political repercussions but it also fundamentally recognizes the importance of developing a skilled and modern labor force and corps of citizens. Recognizing the central objective of citizenship that McEntee, Fechner, and Roosevelt outlined as important to the CCC. This is the principle reason behind the inclusion of McEntee's quote as the opener to chapter 2. By targeting land and community, the Green New Deal draw from older republican values of land and labor. The language of republican citizenship may not present itself as Jefferson's yeoman farmers, but it does point to stronger community investment in their local environment.

Additionally, Klein's ideas resemble those of the Directors and the President understood, that "skills" were not just the using of tools or swinging of an axe, but something much more. These skills are not just the installing of solar panels or windmills, but the education of the workers themselves. Much as the Corps originally taught skills in typing or correspondence, the new CCC needs to invest in developing skills in subjects like digital nativity and green industry jobs. The goal of a revived CCC should be that of rebuilding and retooling the workforce to be geared towards the green industry, but also to re-educate and reinvigorate this workforce to be more knowledgeable about the work they do, and to be responsible citizens in the twenty-first century. Instilling ownership

¹⁰² Richard D. Lamm and Michael McCarthy, *The Angry West: A Vulnerable Land and its Future* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), 236-240.

and “buy in” to the Green New Deal represents the foremost challenge and goal of a new CCC.

Simply working without understanding why falls short of the ideology laid out in McEntee’s report. Unlike the original CCC, the funding of which ended after nine years with the start of the Second World War, this modern program would need to be established for the long haul. Yet, many of the goals originally outlined in the Corps’ objectives are easily reapplied to modern day conservation needs. It should be clear that the Corps’ vocational and educational goals must be broad when looked at historically, but with goals for educating and employing Americans from across the country. The classes offered may no longer be in diesel mechanics, but rather in forestry, agriculture, and sustainability. Unsurprisingly, many of those skills were taught in the Corps during the New Deal, and now need to reflect the changes in science and understanding that have occurred since.

There is level of subjectivity and bias brought on by the different educational opportunities’ enrollees had. Republican citizenship has deep roots in traditional male and female gender values and roles. Because of this, the most obvious concern with the definition of citizenship within the CCC is that it only pertained to men. One of the major reasons for this, as Maher points out, is Roosevelt’s belief that work and labor were fundamental male rights.¹⁰³ Such a framework or foundation is incompatible with a modern-day reimagining of the program. Additionally, this reincarnation of the program must brave the quagmire of what constitutes a good citizen in the 21st century, and who

¹⁰³ Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, 81-82.

decides such a definition. Finally, the CCC made dubious environmental decisions. Historic preservationist Bonnie Stepenoff raises these concerns through the benefit of hindsight. Stepenhoff notes in her article on landscape preservation that it is easy to look back and question the environmental effects of damming a river, suppressing fire, or introducing invasive species into the landscape.¹⁰⁴ This complicates the legacy of the CCC as it made environmental sacrifices at the cost of aesthetic values. A modern reinterpretation of the program needs to unpack this baggage. It is entirely possible that the new program would be enlisted to remove invasive species introduced by the original CCC. This culminates in a need for deep reflection and planning on the part of the new organization, as repeating the mistakes of the original agency is not likely to be a winning idea.

These questions present a challenge for those seeking to champion a new CCC. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez observes the political implications of such a program, noting how the Corps reshaped the political landscapes in areas camps were deployed.¹⁰⁵ Specifically she identifies the reality that communities that benefitted from the Corps went from voting for the Republicans to voting for the Democrats under Roosevelt. Ocasio-Cortez's approach identifies the importance of communicating the program to the public, and earning community buy in. In its day, the Corps was not immune to criticism. The Left decried it as a fascist plot to militarize young men, for example. Meanwhile the Right classified it as a communist plot for the government to

¹⁰⁴ Bonnie Stepenoff, "Wild Lands and Wonders," In *Cultural Landscapes*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 103.

¹⁰⁵ Klein, *On Fire*, 290.

take over labor as in the Soviet Union. It is likely that this language will return with a vengeance.

In light of these criticisms, Corps should include more enrollees with a wider breadth of recruitment beyond just young males, aged 17-25. One of the important groups of workers were the Local Enlisted Men (L.E.Ms). This local participation reinforced the idea that the Corps was not simply there to change the environmental landscape, but the political landscape as well.¹⁰⁶ It also serves to answer the question of what happens to the miners, loggers, and rancher hands that are set to lose jobs and livelihoods. This is likely to be the most important group to focus on as they represent a strong core of voters within the US.

The need to “sell” the GND has led to the revival of yet another New Deal approach, albeit without federal funding and in a more ad hoc fashion. The Creative Action Network has unofficially revived the championing of change through the creation of posters and other media to artistically promote the program. Much like the Works Progress Administration’s (WPA) posters from the New Deal, Creative Action Network seeks to present the argument for the New Deal through colorful and engaging means. These artistic expressions once again highlights the need to focus beyond the simple labor and work of the Corps, but also on the other aspects and programs that were initiated during the New Deal. Creative Action Network released the *Posters for a Green New Deal* art book as an attempt to grow the audience and to advance the argument for the movement. Not only does the book seek to artistically portray the myriad of causes

¹⁰⁶ Aronoff, *A Planet to Win*, 111.

championed by the Green New Deal, but each poster in the book sports a short blurb endorsing and explaining the goal of each artist. These posters represents an opportunity for investment within the cause from the artists but also a public forum for their beliefs for the program.

The many posters within the art book demonstrate the call to action. These posters are similar to the WPA posters from the 1930s, and in a way this collective approach helps to democratize the goals of the Green New Deal. Something McEntee would love, as one of his main goals for the CCC was to introduce the men to democracy while refining them through education, art, and beauty.¹⁰⁷ Importantly, the posters demonstrate a shift from the previous images and iconography described. Gone are the bare-chested enrollees or the tall athletic Lincolns. What replaces them now are a diverse cast of Americans. Jordan Johnson's "Sustainable Farming" displays a female farmer, with broad brimmed hat, brown overalls, and hoe in hand waving at a male compatriot driving a tractor through the rows of plants. No longer is a single subject the focal point of the posters, but rather the idea of community and collective work as important to the messaging of a new "green" agriculture. It is also important to note that in this poster, the female subject is the one in possession of the tool, while her male counterpart is relegated to the use of the tractor.

A modern reincarnation of the Corps has the power to build a better citizen through the work new enrollees do and the communities they strengthen. One of the important goals of the CCC, and why its leaders limited enrollment to a maximum of two

¹⁰⁷ McEntee, *Final Report*, 75.

years, was that the program was to act as a springboard for workers returning to the workforce. This enrollment limit reinforced the need for skill development and education. Workers need to be armed with the requisite skills to return to their communities with useful, competent understandings of “green” labor.

With the urgency of climate change many of the original goals of the CCC remain. Enrollees will be needed to combat droughts, wildfires, environmental degradation and more. The list goes on and on as we recognize the scope and challenge ahead of us. The GND’s focus on the environment and labor needs to hold true to the fact that the environment is not a place devoid of humans. H. Res 109 identifies that the bulk of the work that needs to be completed is primarily in infrastructure, manufacturing, and construction.¹⁰⁸ This move away from the national parks and wilderness areas is important as it recognizes that this divide between nature and the urban core does not really exist. Those spaces hold value as H. Res 109 consistently reinforces the need to overall infrastructure redevelopment. Sustainable infrastructure like light rail or robust waste management systems are integral in lessening the impact of the concrete jungle on the wider environment.

To democratize such a program would mean that efforts must not be centralized, concentrated, or overly focused on traditional environmental spaces like national parks or wildernesses. This new CCC, focused on education and skill development. needs to be a program aimed at all citizens. H. Res 109 places a lot of responsibility for its implementation on the community. This is where a program similar to the CCC sets its

¹⁰⁸ H.Res 109, 2019, 7.

foundation and focus. The CCC's attention must be on building community among enrollees and connecting with the communities where the camps and projects are located.

An important question regards the reconciliation of the republican concepts of citizenship with the pragmatism of the GND. Returning to McEntee's quotation from the first chapter, what does a sturdy, healthful, and competent citizen look like in light of the Green New Deal? These are questions that must be answered in building a lasting and meaningful change in America. H. Res 109 covers some of these questions through the simple answer of work, education, and community. It broadens its reach by setting ambitious goals for the program. Seeking "to create millions of good, high wage jobs in the United States; to provide unprecedented levels of prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States; and to counteract systemic injustices;" the Green New Deal is not aiming to fix simple issues.¹⁰⁹ While a chunky block of text, it does outline what the resolution believes are the main outcomes to be sought. As noted earlier, many of these issues can be tackled through the revitalization of infrastructure and the jobs such activities would provide.

A good place to start in revitalizing and reforming a CCC in the GND is the need to remove the military structure and command. One aspect that should be retained is the laser focused objectives which they brought to the education and training of enrollees. What began as a dual mandate of putting young men to work and conserving natural resources needs to be broadened and reinforce into labor, environment, and economy under the GND.¹¹⁰ There must be a retooling of republican ideas on citizenship to

¹⁰⁹ H. Res 109, 2019, 5.

¹¹⁰ McEntee, *Final Report*, 26.

represent the modern understandings of the environment and industry. This can be achieved by first removing the military control and opening enrollment to all young American adults, not just men. A new CCC represents the opportunity to build a springboard program from which the US can launch the expansion of green industries with a labor force up to the challenge. While this is idealistic, it is also an achievable goal. Especially since the CCC showed that it was possible and realistic to mobilize large swaths of young Americans.

A new CCC has the ability to revitalize vocational training throughout the US. This movement should come to mirror the STEM and STEAM movements that defined education in the late 2000's and 2010's. The new CCC serves as a response to the overcorrections that came as a part of this education push. With this in mind it is no surprise then, that scholarships like Mike Rowe Works have begun to spring up and advocate for the pushing of young Americans into trade jobs. Named, founded, and organized by the TV host, the foundation claims the “we’ve [the United States] made work the enemy” and that the foundation is “on a mission to help close the skill gap.”¹¹¹ Rowe established this foundation with the goal of funding a reinvestment in trade and vocational work. Noble goals, but this begs the question, why must a private foundation spearhead such a movement? It should also be noted that unlike how the foundation pitches it on the website, vocational labor and education are not antithetical to each other. The CCC demonstrates that these two fields are fully capable of being integrated together and reinforce one another.

¹¹¹ “About,” Mike Rowe Works, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.mikeroweworks.org/>

Nowhere is a such an idea more clearly articulated than in Richard White's "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living." White lays out the contradictions of environmentalism and labor in the environment.¹¹² Much like labor and education, the positions appear to be in conflict with one another. Yet, as White outlines, the reality is that neither can exist without the other. The fusing of skill development, education, labor, and the environment is a delicate dance that is central to a successful GND and reimplementation of the CCC. This investment in in both labor and the environment allow Americans to learn more about how our environment functions. The CCC often spent time education farmers on better land use practices. New programs aimed at sustainability along these very same lines are not only important, but they are possible to implement.

Although White's paper is now dated to some degree when compared to Quammen, Klein, or Aronoff, there is still an unfortunate truth to what White's central thesis is. Humans have divided labor and the environment into two separate realms. The environment of the Bundys' and the ranchers is the same environment as that of Klein's seasonal vacation to the Sunshine Coast. In her chapter on forest fires in North American forests, Klein describes apocalyptic amounts of smoke blotting out the sky. Yet, the chapter reads like a tourist who is upset that smoke ruined their vacation.¹¹³ While I do not believe this was the authors intent. In the fall of 2020 Bozeman, Montana, as with much of the West, was covered by smoke from similar mega fires. Unlike Klein, this did

¹¹² Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist or do You Work for a Living": *Work and Nature, Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton &, 1996) 171-172.

¹¹³ Klein, *On Fire*, 207.

not ruin a vacation, it is simply a fact of life. There is no way to isolate the environment from labor as even fighting wildfires requires the mobilization of women and men. One of White's more pertinent lines highlights this dissonance in the sense that "much of the technology we now condemn once carried hopes for a closer and more intimate tie to nature."¹¹⁴ As Donahue and his chainsaw demonstrate, labor, technology, and the land are not antithetical to each other.

A new CCC should seek to mend this division, to remind Americans that the environment is not just the national park that one visits on the weekend, or the national forest that we hike in. Rather it is a place where humans have for generations communed with labor. This was a goal that the CCC set out to accomplish and in the end achieved. It sought to rebuild young American men into better citizens who fostered a greater sense of community awareness through the labor and work they accomplished across the country. This very same goal is what needs to be the benchmark of a reborn Civilian Conservation Corps, as reengaging with our environment in sustainable ways should not just be sold as purely a fix for nature, but as a long-term reinvestment into our citizens and their communities.

The language of both the individual newsletters and McEntee should live on in a new program, and with the goals remaining relatively unchanged. This new program needs to strive to build "competent and sturdy citizens" still. The modern political and environmental landscape has demonstrated why the CCC is so important to today. The emergence of Covid-19 and the ensuing global pandemic further reinforces this point. In

¹¹⁴ White, "Are You an Environmentalist or do You Work for a Living": *Work and Nature*, 182.

the era of “fake news” and intense political division, Representative Ocasio-Cortez’s notion that locating these camps in disaffected communities who have felt abandoned by their government would be a proud political achievement.

Community stands as one of the most important parts of both a new CCC and the GND, as each rely on a healthy amount of community broad participation. But the GND is also important in the sense that to make meaningful green changes strong communities are needed. Adamson makes the compelling case that this importance can already be seen in the Maker Movement.¹¹⁵ The makers, spurred on by greater access to resources and information, and lowering of barriers to entry, have modeled what democratized craft and labor can provide to the individual. Yet, Adamson points out that there is a false choice presented to many makers and craftspeople. This is the choice between being an individual, self-made craftsman and the community.¹¹⁶ This false choice is exactly what the CCC counteracted through its reshaping of young men into good citizens. Through craft, vocational skills, and intangible qualities, the CCC demonstrated that good citizens were both good leaders and individuals, but also strong members of a community who could work together to achieve common, collective goals.

This democratization of craft can easily be seen through Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, and I remain more positive than Adamson on what such a revitalization of craft, skill, and labor can hold for this country. The Craftsman may no longer be the ideal citizen, but they hold out the promise of reconnecting with labor through our hands and hearts. Makers are the latter-day craftspeople who have expanded the scope and

¹¹⁵ Adamson, *Craft*, 306.

¹¹⁶ Adamson, *Craft*, 316.

community of those involved. Craft should not be defined by petty definitions of what does and does not qualify as “craft.”

Community is the cornerstone from which the church of the Green New Deal must be built in order for it to succeed. It is no surprise, then, why Maher spends an entire chapter on the CCC and community. Initially resistant to the CCC, many rural communities slowly came to understand the importance and the benefits that the camps brought to the local area.¹¹⁷ As Representative Ocasio-Cortez has noted time and again, this should be a central goal for the GND, demonstrating the benefits of the program and earning the support of the communities it affects.

This sense of community is not just limited to local or surrounding communities. The GND needs to work to instill the understanding of the local, national, and international community. Greenhouse gases and rising sea levels do not respect national borders and represent a threat to even those not living on the coast. A loose knit community that models this multi-level approach is the Maker Movement, as it shows that these various levels of community are achievable and should be integrated into the GND. At the lowest level, community makerspaces give the opportunity for neighbors to come together in a space where tools, equipment, and education are all easily accessible. These makerspaces represent a space where craft, education, skill, and citizenship find a common ground in an open and democratic space. Imagine, for a moment, a community where the people have free and equal access to the tools and information that could help them to repair, build, or rejuvenate furniture, clothes, phones, computers, or various other

¹¹⁷ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 116-117.

“disposable” do-dads. Idyllic and impossible? Possibly, but if the goal of the GND, as H. Res 109 portrays it, is to enact fundamental societal change, then investing in communities in this way strike me as a good place to start.

The Maker community does not just exist at the local level either. Adam Savage recently released his memoir, *Every Tool's a Hammer: Life Is What You Make It*. In it, Savage spends the bulk of the book talking about the importance making has had on his life and the community that exists to support it.¹¹⁸ Savage is arguably one of the most well-known makers and champions of the movement, hosting both a YouTube channel dedicated to making and having staffed and led conventions focused on making. Savage's celebrity in the world of making demonstrates the reach that craft and community has. It benefits from one of the few good aspects of social media, the ability to connect people over similar interests.

I do not share Adamson's skepticism of the maker community and the craft in general, as he worries about the continuation of the bootstrap's mythos.¹¹⁹ Rather, I share Savage's enthusiasm for craft and making. This comes from the belief in the importance of the 3 R's of sustainability; reduce, reuse, recycle. The maker movement allows for the ability to engage people through craft, but also to build sustainable practices on the local level. The ability to access tools and equipment necessary to repair and revitalize the large amounts of “stuff” we seem to accrue can help to limit waste. The GND needs to capitalize and tap into this mode of outreach and community organization. Are makers better citizens? Possibly. What I can say with some level of certainty is that the Maker

¹¹⁸ Adam Savage, *Every Tool's a Hammer: Life is What You Make It* (New York, Atria Books, 2019), 1.

¹¹⁹ Adamson, *Craft*, 298-299, 316.

Movement, the CCC, and the GND all share an emphasis on community, craft, and labor. Three very important elements when considering and defining what citizenship means.

The Green New Deal has many obstacles to overcome and many lessons to learn, but the goals are clear. Reviving a skill and community-based program like the CCC represents an opportunity to capitalize on enduring CCC goals and on public good will. President Biden took the initiative with one of his early executive orders. Signed January 27, 2021, the President's order seeks to "conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate."¹²⁰ As of now, April 2021, President Biden's Civilian Climate Corps hearkens back in name to the Civilian Conservation Corps. Only time will tell how deep that connection will go, and the scope of the work the organization will be able to complete.

This leaves open the question of how much this new Civilian Climate Corps can serve the same function as the CCC. It is likely that this is possible, so long as the Civilian Climate Corps remains focused on those original goals and objectives of the CCC. Currently, though, H. Res 109 is mired in the politics of Capitol Hill and leaving a freeze on any progress on the GND. The Climate Corps, on the other hand, is one of the first climate centered policies to take its first steps. It is almost fitting that the Civilian Climate Corps and the Civilian Conservation Corps were both formed through executive orders to bypass Congress. The Climate Corps should use this status as a basis for

¹²⁰ Joseph R. Biden Jr, "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad," January 27, 2021, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2021), Sec. 215.

becoming, much like the original CCC, the most prolific and visual program of the GND. Drawing on the cultural capital the CCC invokes when spoken of. Building buy in and support in the same way that the original program did. This focus on action is needed to flush away the deluge of accusations that such a program is socialist. The program needs to target the deep red and Heartland communities throughout the country, as these are the communities that stand to gain the most from the GND. *Posters For A Green New Deal* offers interesting insight into this. Not through anything explicit, but through the simple act of inviting Americans into the GND. Propaganda is a dirty, manipulative word, yet it is the most accurate description of what the Climate Corps will need to do. Propaganda for a program that looks to uplift communities and individuals into better citizens.

CONCLUSION

THE WORK TO BE ACCOMPLISHED

Of all of the by-products of the depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps may prove to be the most worthy of a permanent place in the American way of life in the years after the War.

- James McEntee, Second Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1943

While writing this thesis, the question of citizenship weighed heavily on my mind. Did I become a better citizen through the labor and conservation work I participated in? This question opens a lot of introspection into what good citizenship entailed. For many years our nation defined this through Jeffersonian means. At first it meant yeoman farmer or frontiersman, on the edge of the “civilized” world marching west across North America. A good citizen was someone working with their hands, clearing and improving land in some great mission to settle the West. Overtime this image of the ideal citizen continued to grow and develop. It became more refined and more important as industrialization and mechanization in the workforce grew. Mechanization slowly separated young men from the civilizing and citizen building influence of labor and land. Men were left to fallow in the shadows and smoke of the industrial landscape. This degradation of the male citizen finally came to a head with the onset of the Great Depression. All of these factors culminated in the mass movement of the CCC to return young laborers to the land.

This narrative has all of the simplicity of a great Myth, with heroes throughout, Lincoln splitting rails for fences, President Harrison’s Log cabin, and young, shirtless

Americans working in the National Parks. The myth outlines the evils of industrialization and separation men from the land. It depicts the victorious reclamation of citizenship and labor by young men. Yet, in the intervening years since the Great Depression little has been done to cement this supposed victory. This is a question that McEntee asked in the final report. McEntee insisted on the long term need for a continued program once the war has finished.¹²¹ Nothing, aside from either state, private, or non-profit conservation corps, ever materialized on a federal level again.

Now as the world progresses deeper into a postindustrial and digital age citizenship and the role it will play in the coming years must be redefined. The Green New Deal is a bandaid so long as it views itself as a temporary and solely environmental endeavor. The favored term of historians and politicians right now is “holism” or “holistic” approaches to history, the environment, and the economy. If holism is to be applied to how we view the GND, then this holism needs to confront the degradation of meaningful citizenship.

Echoing Cronon, White, and Donahue, humans are not separate from nature, rather they and their labor are deeply involved within its structure.¹²² Fire historian Stephen Pyne articulates a similar argument when looking at fire and its role in nature. Humans coevolved with fire; it is integral to the human experience. Reintroducing fire into the landscape is much like reintroducing ourselves into landscape and environmental history. Ron Goode, a North Fork Mono elder and fire practitioner, envisions this as both the return of fire and people to the land. Goode describes this method implementation as

¹²¹ McEntee, *Final Report*, 71.

¹²² White, “Are You an Environmentalist or do You Work for a Living”: *Work and Nature*, 171-172.

“ecocultural restoration” where both the land and the communities flourish.¹²³ While Goode frames this through the lens of indigenous lifestyles, it does establish a model that could be emulated elsewhere. This is something that the GND must come to terms with. How will we reconnect with the environment and what will that look like? To build a better citizen, much like fire, we need to introduce it into the land most starved of it. Representative Ocasio-Cortez’s words on how the New Deal and CCC programs changed the political landscape represent important insights into the value of the program. She also outlined some of the steps that must be taken here as well. When we look at nature or the environment as encompassing humans as well, the GND must not stop at renewable energy and landscapes. The goal should not be to just clean up our air, water, and soils or to only beautify our national parks, forest, and wilderness areas. Instead it should be to renew all of the aspects of our environment, humans included.

Combining labor, citizenship, and environmentalism into the same program is instrumental in reviving the CCC. As said above it is a reinvestment, and transaction of sorts, where enrollees are not just working a job, but are furthering themselves. In the end, while reading the interviews and letters that Merrill gathered into his book, it becomes very clear that many of the men interviewed saw the CCC as a powerful force that launched many of their careers. Many also saw the program as the best days of their lives. Puerto Rican-American enrollee Ralph “Chiqui” Figuerosa credited the CCC with teaching him English and helping him to launch a 30-year career in the US Airforce.¹²⁴

¹²³ Jonathan W. Long, Ron W. Goode, and Frank K. Lake, “Recentring Ecological Restoration With Tribal Perspectives,” *Journal of California Native Plant Society*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (November 2020): 14.

¹²⁴ Merrill, *Roosevelt’s Forest Army*, 73.

Another enrollee, Alden Lane, credited the discipline and rigor of the Corps as important in teaching him to save money and to strive to set and obtain higher goals for himself.¹²⁵ Remarks like these are incredibly common throughout much of the literature about the Corps.

One does not have to look far for an enrollee to wax rhapsodic about their time in the organization. There are definitely many pairs of rose-tinted spectacles being worn when one reads these reports. They gloss over the undoubtably miserable experiences that many likely had in the program, and if my own conservation work is to be any indicator, it is fairly hard to be a happy camper in your work when it has not stopped raining for multiple days on end. Yet they target the underlying benefits of the work being achieved. The CCC represented an opportunity for young Americans to lift themselves out of the Depression. An opportunity, in which the bootstraps myth was less of a myth and more of a reality. The CCC was an example of a massive federal expenditure of taxpayer dollars reinvested into the working class across the country.

The CCC offers an opportunity to hit the restart button on vocational and skill-based training within the US, as well as an opportunity to retool the economy to be oriented towards greener industries. This restart promises to redefine republican ideals of land, labor, and citizenship in terms relevant to the needs of sustainable communities in the twenty-first century. Yet caution should still be exercised. Romanticism of craft, labor, republican ideals, and the better citizen of the CCC are dangerous. The trail is fraught with the troubling incantations of “Make America Great Again” or the

¹²⁵ Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army*, 81.

problematic bootstraps mythos. The GND represents an opportunity to pump the breaks and readjust course. Adamson is right to view craft warily, as Eileen Boris also identifies this thread of machismo, gender, and gatekeeping of the “ideal” craftsman and citizen.¹²⁶ Yet, it is important to not go scorched earth, burning out all the ideas, both good and bad.

In a similar vein it is important to step back and remember that for all the victories of the CCC there are numerous failures to be confronted. Importantly, the same concerns over gender and citizenship that Boris identifies in the arts and crafts movement can be seen in the literature of the CCC. It must be remembered, that in forming the CCC as a program exclusively for young men, Roosevelt once again affirmed the commonly held belief that labor was an inalienable right for men, but not for women.¹²⁷ Such language and viewpoints remind us that should the GND be brought into existence, and a New Civilian Conservation Corps be invoked, that there is a vast amount of cultural baggage that must be shed in order to build a more equitable program for the future. H. Res 109 echoes and endorses this language as well the GND is as much about the environment as it is about social and climate justice. Aronoff, Klein, and the others are correct in identifying that in the coming climate crisis, the socio-economically disadvantaged are the ones likely to suffer the most.¹²⁸ This opening up of both the CCC and the GND represents the opportunity to continually break down even more barriers to entry in the work force.

¹²⁶ Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor*, 12.

¹²⁷ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 81-82.

¹²⁸ Aronoff, *A Planet to Win*, 5-7; Klein, *On Fire*, 156-157.

By facing climate change head-on with both a plan and the programs to mitigate the disaster that is headed at us at full bore, we stand a chance of avoiding the worst that such a climate catastrophe has to offer. The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration demonstrate that as a country the US is capable of mobilizing large numbers of unemployed Americans to counteract economic and environmental strife. The CCC takes this a step further in demonstrating, that through the combination of work and education, that a better citizen can be created. Drawing upon lessons learned from the Arts and Crafts movement, the modern Maker Movement, and the need to fill the millions of vocational jobs across the country, a revitalized CCC has the opportunity to give the next generation the foothold it needs in order to address the climate crisis.

In the end, the closing of McEntee's final report endures. McEntee served as a stalwart defender and champion of the program, hoisting the standard after the death of Fechner in 1939. McEntee correctly identifies Roosevelt's CCC as a bright spot in the history of conservation to that point.¹²⁹ Biden's Civilian Climate Corps stands to serve as a similar bright spot and rallying point for environmental and conservation causes. Time will tell how true this will be. Even so, the achievements of the CCC set high expectations for this new program. McEntee summed this up perfectly by framing the CCC as representing a "transmutation of human energy into lasting physical improvements benefiting all people."¹³⁰ A tall order for President Biden's new program, yet I am hopeful. The supposed bi-partisan support for the modern program represents a

¹²⁹ McEntee, *Final Report*, 101.

¹³⁰ McEntee, *Final Report*, 101.

possible changing of the guard, and a coming to terms with the climate catastrophe staring us in the face.

We must not lose sight of what the real goal and lasting achievement of the CCC and its work to build better citizens. It is easy to draw on our cultural memory of the Corps and the work completed in the national forests and parks, yet much harder to convey many of the intangible effects of the CCC. Both President Biden and House Resolution 109 make it clear that the priority for their proposals is the climate and the adverse effects climate change is having on the country. Yet, each proposal takes time to recognize the importance of uplifting the human component of the environment as well. This acknowledgement is a good sign as H. Res 109's repeated mentioning of training, education, community, and skilled labor recognizes many of the same challenges that Roosevelt, Fechner, and McEntee themselves saw in the 1930s.

I am cautiously optimistic about President Biden's Climate Corps as it represents at least a tentative support for meaningful change within the executive branch. It also signals the important role labor will play in retooling the economy for a Green New Deal. Much like the work I completed in 2018, we can start to see the light through the trees and we are filled with hope. Yet, we need to remember that just at the edge of our vision, the forest darkens once again. There is hope in President Biden's executive order, much like there is also hope in House Resolution 109. Can work, labor, skills, education and community build a better citizen in a post digital age? That still stands to be seen. As *Portside Snapshot's* statistics note, there is an appetite on both sides of the aisle for some sort of program, if petty squabbling does not defeat the movement before it has a chance.

This fear leaves a semi-bitter taste in my mouth. In the end the CCC represents a liminal time in American history. A time where a federal program invested heavily into its citizens in the hope to make them better.

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