
THE CIVILIAN

CONSERVATION CORPS

RECOMMENDATIONS

of the

AMERICAN YOUTH COMMISSION

of the

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

FOREWORD

In this statement the American Youth Commission presents its findings and recommendations concerning one of the largest and most important of the new youth programs of recent years, the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The staff studies on which the present statement is based began with a comprehensive three-year investigation of the social and educational aspects of the CCC camps. After this investigation had been completed, the Commission was invited to assist in the development of an experimental training program in ten CCC camps in the Fifth Corps Area. This project was carried on for a period of 18 months, ending June 30, 1940. It provided an opportunity to test a number of proposals for improvement and brought the staff of the Commission into close contact with every phase of CCC administration. Staff reports on the original investigation and the later experimental program are now being completed for publication by Kenneth Holland, associate director of the Commission in charge of the studies.

The discussion of citizenship training in the present statement is based in part on an investigation of civic education in the CCC by Oliver H. Bimson, William G. Carr, and G. L. Maxwell of the staff of the Educational Policies Commission. The investigation was undertaken at the request of the American Youth Commission, which expresses its great appreciation for the assistance received.

This statement was considered and given preliminary approval at a meeting of the Commission on November 11 and 12, 1940. The draft statement was then referred to a committee consisting of Dr. Alexander, Dr. Dykstra, Dr. Givens, Reverend George Johnson, Dr. Mordecai Johnson, and Dr. Zook, which gave final approval to the statement in revised form on December 6. The following members were unable to be present at the meeting and did not participate in the formulation of this statement: Mrs. Fisher, Dr. Studebaker, Dr. Van Waters, and Mr. Woll.

FLOYD W. REEVES, *Director*

THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

More than 2,500,000 young men have been enrolled in the CCC since 1933. There are now some 260,000 junior enrollees, between the ages of 17 and 23, in about 1,360 CCC work camps scattered all over the United States. A larger number of boys enter the CCC each year than the number who enter the colleges and universities of this country as freshmen. Work camps are no small factor in the life of the American people.

Because of the importance of the Civilian Conservation Corps as an agency for the care and education of youth, the American Youth Commission has been making a thorough study of it for some years. The Commission is convinced, from the extensive information obtained in this research, that the CCC is performing a service that is essential to the national welfare and of great value to the young men who participate. But the CCC has outgrown both its initial objectives and the machinery originally established for its operation. The information in the hands of the Commission points to a number of desirable changes in both the form of the organization and the nature of its program.

Forerunners of the CCC

The idea of placing youth in work camps goes back at least as far as Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, both of whom believed in the dignity of labor and its fundamental value in human life. Another suggestion for work camps came in 1912 from William James in his well-known essay, *The Moral Equivalent of War*. Through universal service in work camps, as James said, "The military ideals of hardihood and discipline would be wrought into the growing fiber of the people; no one would remain blind, as the luxurious classes now are blind, to man's real relations to the globe he lives on . . . our gilded youth would be drafted off . . . to get the childishness knocked out of them and to come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas. . . ."

The first actual work camp was organized abroad in 1920 by Pierre Ceresole, a Swiss, with the help of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Society of Friends. Ceresole's group of young men, some of whom had fought on opposite sides in the World War, labored in the rebuilding of devastated areas in northern France.

The first nation to set up work camps was Bulgaria, which did so in 1920. In Germany some experimental camps were started in 1925 under private auspices, and these were taken up and expanded by the Brüning government in 1931, before Hitler came to power. The idea is not an invention

of the Nazis even in Germany. The work camp has become effectively established as a useful democratic institution through the operation of successful camps in Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, England, and the United States.

Purpose of the CCC

The Civilian Conservation Corps was established in 1933 to provide work relief and to conserve and develop natural resources. After it had been operating for several months, the training of the enrollees was recognized as an important additional objective and provision was made for a camp educational program. As the years passed, it became increasingly apparent that the development of the young men during their stay in the camps was not only a major function of the Corps, but perhaps its most important objective.

It was thus natural that when the first federal reorganization plan was developed under the Reorganization Act of 1939, the CCC was assigned to the Federal Security Agency, to which also were assigned the National Youth Administration and the Office of Education. In his message to Congress transmitting the reorganization plan, the President said of the CCC: "Its major purpose is to promote the welfare and further the training of the individuals who make up the Corps, important as may be the construction work which they carry on so successfully."

In recent months, increased attention has been given to the usefulness of the CCC in connection with national defense. The value of the Corps for physical development, for creating a large body of citizens accustomed to camp life, and for training in specialized skills, from cooking to truck driving, is emphasized by the defense crisis. On the other hand, it has become clear that the CCC work camps are not well adapted to serve as special military training centers. The present need for military training can be met more effectively and economically through the military training camps now being established.

The American Youth Commission is convinced that the central purpose of the CCC should be that of improving the health, skill, and efficiency of the boys who are enrolled, to help them become useful and successful citizens in whatever occupation they may afterwards enter. The conservation work accomplished through the Corps should be regarded not only as valuable in itself, but also as an essential element in teaching youth a realistic appreciation of the true values in national life and a patriotic sense of membership in the national body of citizens.

Who Are the Enrollees?

Although no one young man could be picked from the 260,000 and called a typical CCC enrollee, a sort of synthetic individual can be described who

combines the characteristics that are most frequently found in the actual individuals who make up the Corps. At the time of entrance into the CCC this composite enrollee is between 17 and 18 years old, weighs 145 pounds, and is 5 feet 8 inches tall. His health is fairly good, though the physical requirements of the CCC are not so strict as those of the Army.

He has been living in a six-room house or flat, with his father and mother and four brothers and sisters. The home is not luxuriously furnished. There is no running water, no indoor plumbing, and no telephone or electric refrigerator.

The father and mother were born in the United States and went through the seventh grade in school. The father is most likely a farmer or an industrial worker. He has been out of work for about six months in the previous two years, and the family is on the relief rolls.

The boy himself has a little more schooling than his parents, having completed eight grades and part of the ninth, though it took him nearly eleven years to do it. His skill in reading and arithmetic is less than sixth-grade level. He believes that schooling helps in getting a job, and that he would be better off if he had stayed in school longer, although he is somewhat critical of the things he was obliged to study while in school.

As for work experience, he has done some odd jobs around the home, but he has worked for pay only a few months in his whole life, averaging between \$8.00 and \$9.00 a week. He has a commendable belief that the CCC will teach him how to work and he likes the idea. He has no feeling that hand labor is a disgrace, nor that happiness depends on having "lots of money."

For each of the points that have been described, our typical CCC enrollee is shown with the characteristics that appear most frequently in the entire group of junior enrollees. But it is clear that to think of the CCC as composed largely of youth like this would be to miss some of the most significant facts about the membership of the Corps.

Important segments of the CCC community include the 20 per cent of enrollees with foreign-born parents, the 10 per cent who are Negroes, and the 37 per cent from broken homes. Over 40 per cent of the enrollees have had no previous work experience. Three per cent are practically unable to read and write, and 22 per cent have not progressed in literacy beyond the level of the average child who has completed the fourth grade. On the other hand, 13 per cent have graduated from high school, and a few have attended college before entering the Corps.

An important minority of the enrollees come to the Corps with significant prior work experience. Many new enrollees already have good basic habits and aptitudes. These provide much of the enrollee leadership talent, without which it would be very difficult to operate the Corps.

