



## The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 39

Issue 1 March - *Special Issue on Declining Significance of Race, Revisited*

Article 14

2012

### **Review of *New Deal, New Landscape: The Civilian Conservation Corps & South Carolina's State Parks*. Tara Mitchel Mielnik. Reviewed by Marguerite G. Rosenthal.**

Marguerite G. Rosenthal  
*Salem State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the Social Work Commons

#### Recommended Citation

Rosenthal, Marguerite G. (2012) "Review of *New Deal, New Landscape: The Civilian Conservation Corps & South Carolina's State Parks*. Tara Mitchel Mielnik. Reviewed by Marguerite G. Rosenthal.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol39/iss1/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [maira.bundza@wmich.edu](mailto:maira.bundza@wmich.edu).



Thinking through how environmentalists can effectively integrate anti-capitalism into their day-to-day theory and practice is an urgent necessity. While this book does not address that problem, it provides valuable tools for others to begin to do so.

*Paul Saba, Center for Biological Diversity*

Tara Mitchel Mielnik, *New Deal, New Landscape: The Civilian Conservation Corps & South Carolina's State Parks*. (2011). The University of South Carolina Press. \$34.95 (paperback).

At present, when our national government seems incapable of responding to the current economic crisis and when responsive, forward-thinking leadership is either absent or thwarted, it is instructive and inspiring to read accounts of New Deal programs that worked. This carefully researched book provides a detailed account of the workings of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in one state.

Mielnik investigates nearly every aspect of the CCC's purposes, origins, organization, difficulties and accomplishments. Before the Depression, South Carolina had state forest land but no state parks. Between 1933 and 1942, the CCC built 16, all of which stand today. The Corps also established fire prevention and control stations and reclaimed land through reforestation. Famously, it provided work, education, healthcare and proper nutrition to a quarter million young men and a few women at a time when they were idle and hopeless. Meager as their earnings were, they were the greater part of enrollees' families income during the worst of the Depression.

In the first chapter, the author provides compelling details about the impact of the Depression on South Carolina, a rural, segregated state where agriculture—primarily share cropping for African Americans—and textiles were the principal sources of economic activity. Both were clobbered by the Depression; many lost their jobs and those who kept them had their wages severely cut. With this as background, Mielnik discusses the various New Deal programs and their interfaces. She then provides detailed information about the administrative structure of the CCC that was positioned under the War Department but

where recruitment was the responsibility of the Department of Labor.

South Carolina had the highest percentage—40%—of African Americans of any state in the 1930s. The author discusses the federal government's upholding racial segregation in the CCC camps; because of their greater presence in the South, there were higher percentages of African Americans in the CCC than elsewhere, but overall, only 9% of Corps members were Black, and they were confined in camps separate from whites. Similarly, when the parks opened, African Americans were either excluded (in the case of smaller parks) or confined to designated, less attractive and less appointed sections.

First person accounts of their experiences are difficult to locate and many written documents, such as camp newspapers, have disappeared, according to the author. She has made good use of whatever primary sources she's been able to find, and they report hard work, good food, recreation and opportunities to learn some skills and basic literacy.

The book has a long middle section that provides details about the various parks built by the CCC. This section has many photographs, some showing how the buildings initially looked and how they look today. The final, brief chapter, "Learning from the Parks," provides a succinct assessment of the achievements and failings of the CCC as well as the impact of other New Deal programs in South Carolina. About the former, she concludes (p. 138) that "The CCC met President Roosevelt's dual goals of conservation of land and of men" despite having not confronted some of the State's underlying socio-economic problems.

The CCC was conceived, developed and put into operation with amazing speed. A good companion to this book is Public Broadcasting Service's American Experience documentary, *The CCC*. The book can also be paired with Robert Leighninger's *Long-Range Public Investment: The Forgotten Legacy of the New Deal* (2007). Both books demonstrate how much can be accomplished in the immediate and in the long term.

*Marguerite G. Rosenthal, Prof. Emerita, School of Social Work,  
Salem State University*