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Camp Roosevelt: A Case Study of the NYA in Florida

By Dave Nelson

In April 1940, *Life* magazine's cover story on "Government and Youth" updated an article the magazine had published on the youth problem in 1936. The cover featured a photograph of Mabel Sealey, an enrollee at Camp Roosevelt, a National Youth Administration (NYA) resident project in Ocala, Florida. The accompanying article, presented the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as boys' work relief, while the NYA provided relief for girls.¹ In the gendered language of the narrative and the photographic images, the masculine CCC project accomplished important work such as fire fighting and tree planting, while teaching its enrollees military discipline and job skills. The same article presented the NYA as overtly feminine, with photographs of girls setting tables, playing volleyball, and milling about camp. The cover, a portrait of a pretty young woman sitting in the grass, a Valentine pin attached to her sweater, drove home the point that relief work for girls upheld social values expressed in femininity and traditional female roles associated with marriage and family.

Life's gendered treatment of relief work, like that of other New Deal publicity, captured the common attitudes of the public as well

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1. *Life*, 15 April 1940. Young unmarried women of the 1940s were identified as "girls" in popular publications such as *Life* magazine. The term was also used often by NYA administrators.

as those of many social workers in regard to male and female work relief. On one level, the similarities between the programs outweighed the differences and set them apart from other New Deal efforts. Both programs focused on relief for young Americans and established age limits for participants, offered educational opportunities and fostered work ethics and idealized American values. Nevertheless, although the NYA also enrolled males, most observers characterized the NYA as a feminized work program similar to the WPA's sewing rooms, writing projects, and library work, and therefore considered its mission less important than other New Deal projects. Only after the United States entered WWII and the NYA assumed an important role in various defense projects did the organization's status move closer to that of the CCC.

An analysis of Camp Roosevelt, the NYA girls' camp featured so prominently in *Life* magazine, fills a gap in the historical literature by focusing on the interaction between Florida officials charged with implementing the relief and federal program directors, and raises new questions about the gendered nature of New Deal relief efforts. Paradoxically the gendered nature of the NYA marginalized the program and allowed supervisors more freedom to meet its goals and produce positive results than was the case for popular programs, such as the CCC and Works Projects Administration (WPA). As a result, the NYA achieved tangible and productive benefits for some of Florida's poorest young women.

In the spring of 1933, as the Roosevelt administration assumed power, many within the nation's educational, social and political circles expressed their concerns about the effect of the Great Depression on American youth. Taking their cues from events in Europe, New Deal reformers recognized that lack of jobs and declining hopes for the future fueled dissent and aided the rise of communism and fascism. Fear of similar revolutionary activities closer to home led to the conviction that youth relief was a necessary component of national efforts. As President Franklin Roosevelt's "Brains Trust" developed regulatory laws and relief programs, many within the administration simultaneously pushed for action for the country's youth, defined as those between sixteen and twenty-five years of age.² One-third of the nation's

2. Richard Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 18; Lindley, Betty and Ernest K. Lindley. *A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972, 1938), 8.

unemployed fell within that age group and each year, 2.25 million students dropped out of school in search of work.³ Charles Taussig, American Molasses Company president and 'brains trust' member warned of the possibility of America's youth fostering undemocratic opinions, as the German and Italian youth were doing.⁴ Massachusetts's Senator David Walsh stressed the need for a youth relief program so that young people do not "become demoralized and disheartened, and thus constitute a dangerous addition to discontented and radical minded elements."⁵ In 1934, one social worker wrote Roosevelt's chief relief administrator Harry Hopkins: "The young are rotting without jobs and there are no jobs."⁶ Even the President's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, used her newspaper column "My Day" to champion youth relief, arguing that "an embittered, unfulfilled and disappointed youth will be more dangerous to our future happiness than any loss in material possessions."⁷

Roosevelt needed little convincing. His concerns for youth welfare dated back to his New York gubernatorial years, and to his visits to Warm Springs, Georgia, for polio therapy during the 1920s. He always felt that the nation's youth were "special charges" of the federal government, although he often differed with members of his administration on how to help them. In 1933, Roosevelt personally drew up plans for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a work relief program designed to restore America's forests while putting young men (ages 18-25) to work.

The program was based upon Harvard philosopher William James's writings on the "moral equivalent of war," which in part argued that youth needed physical health, hard work, and good food to develop into productive, well-behaved citizens. Young

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3. Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 56; Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 7, 8. The terms "teens" and "teenagers" were not used in the 1930s.
 4. Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth*, 32; Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The New York Years, 1928-1933* (New York: Random House, 2000, 1994), 361.
 5. George Rawick, "The New Deal and Youth: the Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration, and the American Youth Congress" (PhD. Dissertation: University of Wisconsin, 1957), 178.
 6. Jack Baker to Hopkins, 2 December 1934, quoted in William Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1933-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 129.
 7. T. H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years: A Narrative of the Great Depression in America* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1999), 26.

adults' energies and emotions should be channeled into socially positive good-works projects, such as planting trees and large-scale public works.⁸ James's ideas supported the work of psychologist Stanley Hall on adolescence, which likewise argued for physical outlets for healthy citizen development, and cautioned against allowing young adults to mature too quickly.⁹ Several youth-oriented programs in the 1900s, including the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Boy Scouts, used his ideas as their founding principles.

By the 1930s Roosevelt and his advisors believed that education had failed, but they differed in the solutions they offered to address the problem. The President thought that student decisions to drop out of school often represented a rational reaction to an education system that remained uncommitted to their needs in the real world.¹⁰ He argued that his CCC program offered an alternative to traditional schools. In addition to completing conservation projects, the enrollees took classes in the evenings, and participated in hands-on job training.

Meanwhile others around FDR, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Hopkins, and Aubrey Williams, pressed for fundamental reforms to attack the problems that caused so many youth to leave school. Like the president, they believed educators had failed in their job to prepare students for modern life. As a result, too many youth dropped out of school and entering the adult job market, where they competed with older workers struggling to support families. This group of reformers wanted to democratize education to serve "a wider spectrum of the nation's youth."¹¹ In the new educational system, students still in school would be encouraged to remain there, and youths who had quit for employment—either to assist in the support of their family, or merely out of frustration—could be coached to return. Job training, which was fundamental to their program, would offer immediate real-world benefits to those students not on a college track.¹² Federal intervention into education would "shock an American education

8. For more on William James, and his influence on FDR, see John Salmond's *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942; A New Deal Case Study* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967); Reiman, *New Deal and American Youth*, 33.

9. Reiman, *New Deal and American Youth*, 14-15.

10. *Ibid.*, 45.

11. *Ibid.*, 4.

12. *Ibid.*

system” into changes and transform the government pedagogical role from a mere “financier of the schools to a schoolhouse in and of itself.”¹³ However, the first steps of the ambitious reform agenda were more conservative and focused on maintaining those students currently enrolled in school.

In fall 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), an early federal relief agency directed by Hopkins, set up a trial program at the University of Minnesota to allow students to work part time in exchange for school aid.¹⁴ The following year, the program expanded to all public colleges.¹⁵ By the end of the 1934/1935 school year, over 100,000 students had received aid who otherwise would have dropped out of college.¹⁶ In November 1934, when Hopkins began looking for ideas for a youth relief agency, he turned to his assistant, Aubrey Williams.

Williams had had more experience with youth than with other relief measures and proved to be an excellent choice for the program. Raised in Etowah, Alabama, Williams spent much of his career toiling in social work and education. In 1933, he worked for Hopkins in the CWA. By spring 1934, he had switched to the FERA as the Southwest regional director. Williams recognized the impact adverse impact federal programs had on youth employment: the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) decreased the South’s reliance on sharecropping, the NRA enacted strict child labor regulations, and the Public Works Administration (PWA) barred youth from its large-scale public works projects. Consequently, he argued the Federal government owed something to needy youth.¹⁷

The resulting program, based on plans drawn up by Aubrey Williams and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, was the National Youth Administration (NYA), created by Executive Order # 7086 on 26 June 1935.¹⁸ FDR placed the NYA within the newly created Works Projects Administration (WPA) to avoid the need for congressional approval.¹⁹ The order gave the NYA an initial budget of

13. Reiman, 49.

14. Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal For Youth*, 10-11; John Salmond, *Southern Rebel: The Life and Times of Aubrey Willis Williams, 1890-1965* (Chapel Hill, 1983), 74; Rawick, “The New Deal and Youth,” 172.

15. Rawick, “The New Deal and Youth,” 172; Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 74.

16. Rawick, “The New Deal and Youth,” 173.

17. Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 41; Reiman, *New Deal and American Youth*, 80.

18. T.H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years* (New York, 1999), 269.

19. Rawick, “New Deal and Youth,” 178, 184.

\$50 million and named Williams as its director.²⁰ Roosevelt's statement issued with the order provided justification: "We can ill afford to lose the skills and energy of the young men and women. They must have their chance in school, their turn as apprentice, and their opportunity for jobs – and a chance to work and learn for themselves."²¹

The decentralized NYA allowed each state and local community to establish its own advisory board to guide NYA activities. As one historian expressed it, the NYA laid "down the broadest policy line."²² There were several explanations for the relaxed organization. The NYA's relatively small budget would not support large hierarchical administration. Moreover, the very fears that led to its creation mitigated against a more structured program. No one wanted to foster the perception that the NYA was the start of a "Roosevelt Youth," or some sort of Democratic political machine.²³ As Williams took pains to explain, "It is not designed to be or become a youth movement in any sense of the word. It is not desired that you do things that separate young people from their normal, natural connections: their homes, their families."²⁴ In addition to relief and education, citizenship training and patriotism were promoted as part of the NYA agenda to keep radical ideas away from youth.

With a small budget and short turn-around time, Williams cared little for complex, ideological curricula. During its first year, the NYA operated as little more than a relief program, with few differences from WPA projects.²⁵ In the second year, the NYA received a huge budget boost—just over 42%—and Williams and his staff set about expanding the program.²⁶

The NYA supported two major programs: high school/college student-aid and work relief projects coupled with job training. In 1935 alone, the NYA invested over \$3 million nationwide to keep 215,000 high school students in school.²⁷ Each student received \$6 a month in exchange for working a few hours a week, usually at a local government agency or library. By 1937, the number served

20. Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 269; Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 84-85.

21. Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 269.

22. Rawick, "The New Deal and Youth," 197.

23. Reiman, *New Deal and American Youth*, 97.

24. Quoted in Rawick, 195.

25. Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 128-130.

26. Reiman, *New Deal and American Youth*, 139-140.

27. Rawick, "The New Deal and Youth," 206.

by the program had risen to 410,000 students.²⁸ College students received a little more, between \$15 and \$30, depending upon needs and available funds. For those not in school, didactic work projects were undertaken, including constructing public parks and community centers, restocking fish hatcheries, working in government offices and libraries, assisting nurses in hospitals, and providing farm labor. Unlike other relief programs (e.g. CCC, WPA, and PWA), the NYA projects were tailored to the enrollee, with the educational benefits outweighing the end product.

In Florida, as in many states, the NYA program was slow to materialize. In large part, this was due to organization problems within the national office. As Williams once admitted, the NYA in 1935 “got off to a very halting, hesitant start.”²⁹ Williams was not able to meet with state directors until 20 August 1935, and even then the meeting was “little more than a pep talk.”³⁰ By October, there was still no clear work program for the agency. Further aggravating matters, Williams continued to work for the WPA for the first two years of the NYA. His assistant, Richard Brown, was the *de facto* NYA director until well into 1938.³¹ In late 1935, Williams conceded that he had only been able to give “at least one quarter of an hour a day to the NYA for the last month.”³² In the meantime, Florida took advantage of the lag time to set up its state office in Jacksonville.³³

The first order of business was the selection of a state administrator. Because the NYA was a decentralized program, the appointment of a well-prepared director was vital. Governor Dave Sholtz of Daytona recommended his hometown friend Albert Boland for the job. A local businessman, Boland was involved with the local Boy Scouts and Red Cross.³⁴ As Sholtz wrote, “he inspires confidence in the boys, and has been an outstanding boys work leader,

28. Ibid.

29. Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 121.

30. Ibid.

31. Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 125, 136-140.

32. Ibid., 124.

33. Florida's New Deal programs were headquartered in Jacksonville after Harry Hopkins—fearing corruption by Governor Dave Sholtz and his administration—moved all federal offices out of the state capital in 1934.

34. Albert Boland to Dave Sholtz, 29 June 1935, folder: “Youth Administration,” Box 121, Dave Sholtz Papers, Florida State Archives (FSA), Tallahassee, Florida.

and has a lovely family.”³⁵ Senator Park Trammel also recommended him.³⁶ Although Boland received an interview, Williams did not approve his selection.³⁷ Unlike other New Deal programs in Florida, the NYA sought people who were trained in social and education work, not simply political and business administrators.

The Florida program operated under a succession of directors. William’s first choice for the position was University of Florida (UF) president John Tigert, who refused the job on several occasions.³⁸ Finally, after much haggling, Tigert and Williams settled upon UF’s Dean of Students, R.C. Beatty. Familiar with student needs and large organizations, Beatty served as director during the agency’s the first few months of operation to set up the main office and get projects underway. Although UF remained intertwined with the NYA throughout its history, Beatty soon stepped down from his post. Joe Youngblood of West Palm Beach came in as his replacement. A graduate of Vanderbilt University with a master’s degree in education and the former superintendent of schools for Palm Beach County, Youngblood remained Florida’s NYA director until his death in 1940.³⁹ Next in the position was Charles Lavin, a veteran Florida NYA manager and former high school teacher, followed in 1942 by former national NYA-Navy liaison officer and Florida resident David B. Wright.⁴⁰

With a director in place, the state organization took shape. As one regional NYA official explained, Florida’s NYA program

35. Dave Sholtz to Aubrey Williams, 25 July 1935, folder: “Youth Administration,” Box 121, Sholtz Papers, FSA.

36. Albert Boland to Sholtz, 24 July 1935, folder: “Youth Administration,” Box 121, Sholtz Papers, FSA.

37. Albert Boland to Sholtz, 2 August 1935, folder: “Youth Administration,” Box 121, Sholtz Papers, FSA.

38. Examples can be found in President John Tigert’s correspondence files, Series 7a, at the University of Florida Archives in the P.K. Yonge Library, including Williams to Tigert 17 July 1935; Tigert to Williams 30 July 1935; Tigert to Williams 1 August 1935.

39. Homer E. Moyer, *Who’s Who and What to See and Do in Florida* (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1935), 228; National Youth Administration, *The NYA in Florida, June 1935-July 1943* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1943), 15.

40. Lavin left to enter the US Navy in 1942. Mary Hays to Charles Lavin, 7 May 1942, folder: “Florida,” Box 3, Records of the National Youth Administration (RG 119), Records of the Division of Work Projects (E 235), National Archives, College Park, Md (NA-CP); D.B. Wright to Lavin, 12 March 1942, folder: “Assignment of Navy Personnel to NYA resident centers,” Box 2, RG 119, Regional Director’s Correspondence and Data Files, 1940-1942 (E 337), National Archives, Atlanta, GA (NA-GA); *NYA in Florida, 1935-1943*, 15.

“consists of four District Supervisors who are directly responsible to the state administrator. Under the District Supervisors are the Area Supervisors who are advised in their work by a local advisory committee. Under the Area supervisors come the project supervisors.”⁴¹ Projects ranged from schoolbook repair work in Jacksonville to a school lunch program at Sarasota’s African American high school.⁴² Male enrollees constructed numerous rural schools, community centers, and playgrounds, while females sewed garments for various charity organizations, repaired library books, and assisted with clerical work in state and local offices.⁴³ In its first three years of operation, Florida spent \$1,965,254 on NYA programs and projects.⁴⁴ At the University of Florida alone, the NYA expenditures on college student aid amounted to \$315,386.⁴⁵ Despite its halting start, the Florida program operated efficiently and one NYA inspector reported in 1940, “I am of the opinion that this administrative set-up in the State of Florida is functioning very smoothly.”⁴⁶

The popular NYA enjoyed a good reputation not only in Florida, but also across the nation. When FDR dispatched an investigator to observe how the NYA was faring in its first year, his report to the president stated that the relief agency “was the best run outfit he knew of and the cheapest.”⁴⁷ From Roosevelt’s perspective the NYA served his administration well. Its program pleased his supporters on the left, and though not as prominent as other New Deal agencies, the NYA avoided charges of being too welfare-oriented by the nation’s more conservative circles. Even in the early 1940s, as other New Deal programs saw their budgets slashed, congress raised the NYA’s budget an astounding 42 percent.

Nevertheless, the NYA remained on the margins of the New Deal. It never received the press coverage that the other alpha-

41. Robert Burton to Tom Hibbens, Director of Operations, 27 March 1940, folder: “Florida,” Box 1, NA-CP RG 119, Records of the Office of Information (E 86); *NYA in Florida, 1935-1943*, 16.

42. *NYA in Florida, 1935-1943*, 9-10.

43. For an exhaustive list of NYA projects in Florida, see *NYA in Florida, 1935-1943*.

44. Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 266.

45. Report of NYA Activities at UF from 1934-1942, Series 19a, Box 6, University of Florida Archives, PK Yonge Library (PKY).

46. Report of Field Trip to Florida, 1-4 March 1940, Robert Burton to Tom Hibben 27 March 1940, RG 119, E 86, Box 1, folder: “Florida,” NA-CP.

47. Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 94.

bet agencies did. NYA historian Richard Reiman wrote that the NYA “possessed few links or ties to the New Deal as a whole.”⁴⁸ Even in the historical memory, the NYA has been relatively neglected. Only one book-length history has been written—Reiman’s own *The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade*, which dealt strictly with the ideological underpinnings of the youth program. When compared with accounts of the CCC and the WPA—whose Federal Writers Project alone has warranted dozens of studies—the NYA has been virtually forgotten by most historians.

There were several reasons for such marginality. First, by the time the NYA appeared in 1935, the sense of urgency that accompanied the origins of the other agencies had passed. However, although the perception of crisis had receded, there was still cause for concern and 3.5 million youth received some form of relief in 1935; millions more annually dropped out of school to look for jobs. In fact, during the course of the two programs, the NYA saw higher numbers of youth participation than did the CCC (which predated the NYA by two years).⁴⁹ Yet for the Roosevelt administration to advertise an emergency would beg the question of why the youth problem was not dealt with in 1933 or 1934. Therefore, the government underplayed the program when it debuted in 1935.

Secondly, as mentioned previously, the projects were smaller, more individualistic. In Florida, no major state agency was intimately linked with the NYA, as was the case with the CCC.⁵⁰ The program was less political as patronage was kept to a minimum and there were few tangible political benefits that could be gained from the liberal program. The correspondence files of Florida governors Fred Cone and Spessard Holland, both very involved in New Deal affairs, contained no references to the NYA at all.⁵¹ Beyond the choosing of a director, Florida’s “New Deal Governor” Dave Sholtz had little contact with the NYA’s operation. In fact, despite its decentralization and localized administration, the NYA had very little contact with Florida’s government. It was more of a federal program peopled with locals, than a locally run program

48. Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth*, 1.

49. Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 15.

50. The CCC in Florida was administered and advised the Florida Board of Forestry, and the Florida Park Service, both of which lobbied and promoted endlessly the already popular welfare program.

51. See the Fred Cone Papers and the Spessard Holland Papers in RG 102, FSA.

using federal funds. It seemed that while there was little to dislike about the relief program, politicians and public figures found little to attract them to it either.

Finally, as with its lack of patronage opportunities, the physical products of the NYA garnered little attention. Unlike the CCC, which in Florida operated under the Florida Board of Forestry and Parks, the NYA rarely produced any marketable commodities. NYA boys' projects constructed dozens of small schoolhouses and community centers around the state, but these were hardly items that state economic and political leaders noticed. By comparison, the CCC focused on the protection and expansion of the nation's forest and timber industries, which directly affected some of Florida's most politically connected personalities.⁵² Therefore, all aspects of the CCC's operations, from site and project selection to staffing and enrollment, faced intense local scrutiny. Except for Floridians in the education field directly connected with projects or families with members in the program, the NYA caused few ripples in political and business circles.

Gender set the parameters for public perceptions of the NYA and the association of the organization with female relief and programs doubtless played a role in its marginalization when compared to other agencies. Unlike the CCC—the other youth organization with which it was most associated—the NYA allowed females to participate. In fact, at no time did males ever outnumber females, although enrollment was often split equally between the sexes. Clearly the public associated the CCC with boys, and believed the NYA was for girls. It was an image not wholly accurate, since boys played a major role in the NYA program. But there was no other program in which to showcase and promote female youth relief. Therefore, all male relief was discussed in association with “Roosevelt's Tree Army,” while articles and photographs promoting the NYA focused on its female membership, the NYA was often referred to in the press as the “She She She.” The agency's major supporters—Eleanor Roosevelt, Frances Perkins, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Amelia Earhart—a who's who of famous American women, added to this perception. Even the two males most associated with the NYA—Aubrey Williams and the ever-sickly Harry Hopkins—hardly enjoyed a robust manly image.

52. In addition, the CCC built seven state parks, which added to the state's already burgeoning tourist trade.

Social culture of the 1930s reinforced the feminized image. Theodore Roosevelt's ideas of manliness, which promoted back-to-the-woods, strenuous activities such as hiking and hunting to counter feminine urban influence persisted. It was this ideal to which the CCC most aspired in both its choice of projects and in its image. In recent years, it has been common for veteran enrollees to remark that the CCC made men of them.⁵³ By contrast, the NYA was primarily urban in the skills taught and the projects undertaken. Instead of marching into the romanticized Jeffersonian woods, NYA enrollees congregated in urban landscapes, and learned how to manage themselves within a corporate capitalist job market. No photos of bare-chested young men wielding axes graced any NYA promotional materials. By 1940 when the previously mentioned *Life* magazine article on youth relief appeared, the NYA's feminine image had a long history. It would not be until World War II that the program began to masculinize in the public's eye.

Paradoxically, the invisibility the image of femininity accorded the NYA offered it more freedom than other New Deal agencies. Often described as the most liberal of the New Deal programs, the NYA was open to African American relief. Williams was committed to giving blacks a "fair deal" in work relief⁵⁴ and Reiman called the NYA the "most racially enlightened of all the alphabet agencies."⁵⁵ Each state had its own black advisor, and Florida educator Mary McLeod Bethune was appointed director of the NYA's Division of Negro Affairs.⁵⁶ No other New Deal program, including the CCC, featured African Americans in such prominent positions in either the national or local offices. With these achievements in the NYA, FDR was often able to appease his more leftist supporters. But it was with the normally troublesome women's relief that the NYA proved most useful and progressive.

53. For example of such pronouncements, see the CCC oral history collections at both the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at UF, and at the New Deal Initiative at FSU. Also see Dave Nelson's master's thesis, "Relief and Recreation: The CCC and the Florida Park Service," (Florida State University, 2002).

54. Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 61-62.

55. Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth*, 47.

56. Bethune, who first met ER in 1927, was originally one of the thirty-five members of NYA National Advisory Committee chosen by FDR. Blanche Weisen Cooke, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1999), 160; Nancy Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln* (Princeton, 1983), 151.

Women's relief generated problems for social workers throughout the New Deal. Of the four million workers the CWA aided in 1933-1934, only 300,000 were women.⁵⁷ Hopeful female workers faced many barriers, not least among them the prevailing social attitudes towards working women in a predominately male work sphere. Other problems were institutionally based, such as the CWA's (as well as the WPA and PWA) prohibition against females working on large-scale construction projects, or the CCC's male-only enrollment. Many social workers lamented that lack of progress among female-based relief. One WPA worker summed up the situation: "For unskilled men, we have the shovel. For unskilled women, we only have the needle."⁵⁸ As the comment suggests, sewing projects comprised the bulk of women's relief, with over 56 percent of the WPA's women's relief situated in hundreds of sewing rooms.⁵⁹ In Florida, sewing rooms appeared in Jacksonville, Lakeland, Tallahassee, Tampa, Deland, Pensacola, Panama City, Kissimmee, Key West, Plant City, and Ocala.⁶⁰ In response to the lack of creativity regarding relief for females, some reformers wondered where was the "She She She?"

Hilda Smith acted on the challenge and submitted plans for a series of resident camps for women.⁶¹ A Bryn Mawr graduate and later dean of the college, Smith served as program director for FERA's women's service. She often complained of the inequalities between male and female relief: "The CCC camps with their millions of dollars for wages, education, work, travel, and supervision constantly remind me of what we might do for women from these families. As [is] so often the case, the boys get the breaks, the girls are neglected."⁶² In late 1933, Smith opened a camp in New York State for women relief through the state's ERA.⁶³ By 1934, FERA had opened twenty such camps across the country, eventually

57. Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 39.

58. Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 40.

59. Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, 109.

60. *NYA in Florida, 1935-1943*, 9.

61. The primary general history on resident camps during the New Deal is Susan Wladaver-Morgan's PhD dissertation, "Young Women and the New Deal: Camps and Resident Centers, 1933-1943," (Indiana University, 1982). Taking a macro approach, she compared resident camps for young women with those for young men and with programs from other agencies, such as public schools, reformatories, Scout programs, and settlement houses.

62. Smith to ER, 15 May 1940, quoted in Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, 114.

63. Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 154.

housing over 8000 women by 1937.⁶⁴ One camp was located in Lowry Park in Tampa, Florida.⁶⁵ The camps provided necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing while providing a communal and democratic living experience.⁶⁶ Unlike later NYA camps, job training was not an important aspect of the program. Women stayed from one to four months, and engaged in domestic work such as sewing and cooking.⁶⁷ In 1935, the camps were transferred to the NYA. Then in 1937, Congress voted to end the program, a decision Eleanor Roosevelt surprisingly defended with the argument that “more could be done for a larger number of girls with the money used in some other kind project.”⁶⁸

That “other kind of project” turned out to resemble the recently cancelled FERA-originated women’s camps, with one important difference. Concerns over rural youth had permeated the NYA headquarters from the start. Many NYA projects were urban, focusing on public schools, universities, and government offices, and many staffers—including director Williams—felt that rural tenant families were being left behind. The solution was to concentrate the rural youth in resident centers, where enrollees could learn basic job skills and gain valuable communal experience that would result in productive, socially responsible, employed citizens.⁶⁹ The focus on job skills, in addition to the inclusion of males, differentiated the resident centers from the FERA’s original women’s camps. For Williams, resident centers provided a method to socialize and integrate rural youth into American society.⁷⁰ The camps were often located in abandoned CCC camps (as was Tampa’s Camp Desoto), on college campuses, and even old hotels.⁷¹ In Florida, five resident centers opened between 1938 and 1939. Two were for African Americans: Camp Bethune in Daytona, a small female camp; and Camp Franklin, a coed camp housed in three dorms on FAMU’s campus in

64. The number of camps doubled in 1935. Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth*, 149; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, 113.

65. *Southern Accent: Florida*, 11.

66. Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, 112.

67. Rawick, “The New Deal and Youth,” 173.

68. Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth*, 151.

69. Lindley and Lindley, *New Deal for Youth*, 86, 94; Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 134-135.

70. Reiman, 144.

71. John Salmond, “NYA at the Seaside: A New Deal Episode,” in *Southern California Quarterly* 65 (Summer 1973), 198.



A typical residence at Camp Roosevelt, 1940. Today, much of the camp exists as a suburban neighborhood, located in southern Ocala just off S.E. Pine Street (US 301/441) approximately one mile north of the Ocala Drive-In theater. *Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives.*

Tallahassee.⁷² Two others were established for white males: Camp Desoto in Tampa (Sulphur Springs), and the Cherry Lake resident center.⁷³ But the largest of the camps, Camp Roosevelt, implemented Hilda Smith's ideas of the "She She She" camps for females.

On 5 May 1938, the first group of NYA female enrollees arrived at Camp Roosevelt in Ocala, a small farming community in the North-Central Florida County of Marion, an area known mostly for its proximity to the roadside attraction Silver Springs.⁷⁴ The camp predated the establishment of a NYA resident center by several years having been constructed to house laborers and engineers for the temporarily abandoned Cross Florida Barge Canal project. After

72. *Southern Accent*, 6.

73. *Ibid.*

74. The date 5 May 1938 comes from *Southern Accents: Florida* (Ocala, 1938), 7.

the University of Florida partnered with the WPA to run an adult education center at the facility from 1936 through early 1938—an expensive though pedagogically successful project that FDR personally ended after several members of Congress complained about its high costs—Aubrey Williams brokered a deal with the Army Corps of Engineers to lease Camp Roosevelt indefinitely.⁷⁵ The fee for use of the site was one dollar a year. By the time that the NYA assumed control of Camp Roosevelt, UF had already spent \$800,000 improving the facilities, which now numbered over 100 structures, and included a dining hall, a large fully equipped kitchen, more than fifty modern cabins—each electrically heated with shower/bath—and extensive recreational features.⁷⁶

While on an inspection tour of African American NYA projects in 1939, Director of Negro Affairs and Florida scholar Mary McLeod Bethune visited Camp Roosevelt and described it as “splendid,” noting that it “offers excellent environment for the white youth (quite a contrast!)”⁷⁷ The local WPA maintained the grounds, plumbing, security, and electrical maintenance, while the State Board of Education and the Marion County Board of Public Instruction provided seven teachers for vocational training.⁷⁸ Upon arrival, each girl received a physical and dental examination by the two resident physicians and staff dentist.⁷⁹ By 1939, the medical staff had distributed forty-six pairs of glasses and performed forty-two tonsillectomies.⁸⁰ Enrollees were encouraged to organize a student government, and publish a camp newsletter—

75. *Southern Accent*, 6-7. Senator Claude Pepper to Robert Dill, Florida WPA director, 4 December 1937, folder: “General Extension Director, 1937,” Box 41, Series P7a, PKY. For more information on the UF-WPA adult education center, see the Camp Roosevelt Records in the Florida State Archives. The projects director, Dean B.C. Riley gathered these materials between 1936 and 1938. Records include the original agreement between UF, the WPA, and the Army, as well as curricula and extensive photographs.

76. Camp Roosevelt Records, Folder 1, Box 1, FSA; Senator Charles Andrews to John Tigert, 12 October 1937, folder; “General Extension Director, 1937,” Box 41, Series P7a PKY; *Roosevelt Round-Up* June 1938. Today, many of the structures still exist as part of a residential neighborhood, now located in central Ocala as the city boundaries have greatly expanded.

77. Report on Visit and Observations of NYA Activities in Florida, 12 July 1939 by Mary Bethune, folder: “Florida, 1938-1939,” Box 3, RG 119, Records of the Negro Office (E 119), National Archives, College Park, MD (Na-CP).

78. *Southern Accent: Florida*, 7.

79. *Southern Accent: Florida*, 9.

80. *Ibid.*

the *Roosevelt Round-Up*. Social dances were common, as were weekend trips to local attractions such as Silver and Rainbow Springs.

Although health and recreation were prominent features of life at Camp Roosevelt, the educational program, including class work and hands-on training remained central. While education in the CCC was optional (a fact not always mentioned in its promotional materials), it was a vital and integral element of the NYA program in Florida. Camp Roosevelt enrollees were required to attend classes Monday through Friday, four hours a day. Girls chose between several tracks—Commercial, Catering, Homemaking and Beautician training—depending on their educational background.⁸¹ Later, after the camp became coed, enrollees could earn a certificate in recreation.⁸² The Commercial course lasted for one year, with girls earning a certificate in one of three areas: secretarial, stenographic, and bookkeeping work.⁸³

The beautician school was a fifty-week course that enabled students to accumulate one thousand hours work experience and qualify for a professional state operator's license.⁸⁴ The remaining two courses were shorter, requiring only five months in the camp school. In both courses, students learned cooking, decorating, cleaning; in the catering course they learned additional business and marketing skills.⁸⁵ The anticipated result was employment in either the restaurant business or in the service industry. Later, though it was never very popular, the camp offered a certificate in photography, primarily training students in film processing and developing. Students in this track took many of the photographs of Camp Roosevelt housed at the Florida State Archives. In addition to their coursework, enrollees were required to work in the afternoons, usually in the sewing rooms, producing garments for charitable organizations. This was how the students earned their pay—\$24 a month of which a portion was taken for food, medical services, and laundry services. What remained the enrollee was free to spend as she wished.

Students at Camp Roosevelt were trained in skills for the traditional female employment of the 1930s: sewing, homemaking and

81. *Southern Accent: Florida*, 4-9; *Roosevelt Round-Up*, June 1938.

82. Ralph Studebaker to Joe Hall, Florida Department of Education, 19 February, 1941, folder: "Camp Roosevelt," Box 1, Camp Roosevelt records, FSA.

83. *Roosevelt Round-Up*, June 1938.

84. *Southern Accent: Florida*, 8-9.

85. *Ibid.*



NYA trainee learning commercial art at Camp Roosevelt, 1940. *Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives.*

housecleaning, waitressing, clerical and beautician employment, and nursing assistance. What today would be construed as conservative and perhaps counterproductive skills to teach young women were at the time practical for producing immediate results in a society with most employment avenues closed to women. Policy makers advised that industrial job training should be undertaken only “if real employment opportunities for youth existed.”⁸⁶ The goal was to find employment for women in the local job market, not to challenge prevailing gender roles. It must be remembered that most of these women would not have entered the workplace in the first place without the NYA’s assistance and training.

86. Minutes of Conference on Girls Work, 1940, Memphis, Tennessee, RG 119, General Subject Files of Regional Office, 1940-1942 (E 338), Box 11, NA-CP.

Practical job training paid off for many enrollees. In one month alone, eight graduates from the Commercial Section found employment, including a bookkeeping job for a Belk-Lindsey department store, the Goldmedal Dairy, Camp Blanding and two restaurants; secretarial work for two government agencies; typing for the Ocala Chamber of Commerce; and cashiering for J. C. Penny's.⁸⁷ While the work was hardly the path to riches, the jobs were more than the students could have expected before attending Camp Roosevelt. Students in the Beautician School were encouraged to take the State Board of Examiners' qualifying examination before graduating. Many did so successfully, and upon receiving their NYA beautician certificate were hired as junior operators in area shops.⁸⁸ As the state beauticians regulations changed, so did the classes. The goal was not mere relief and make-work, but rather to prepare the enrollees for real-world employment. Similar success stories could be found in the photography section as well.

NYA administrators realized their efforts could only challenge the *status quo* so far before colliding with the preconceptions and expectations of the camp's enrollees. The *Roosevelt Round-Up* was full of gossip, poems, songs, and stories about love, marriage, and raising families. According to one administrator who met with Eleanor Roosevelt in regard to training at resident camps, girls "do not wish to go any distance to work in specific trades. So many of these girls marry shortly after leaving the projects that I believe both the work and the training progress should prepare these girls for taking their places in their home communities."⁸⁹ A 1949 *New York Times* article analyzed female college graduates from 1934, and discovered that for most of the graduates, paid employment was merely a "stop-gap before marriage."⁹⁰ NYA administrators concluded that if they could not always channel women enrollees towards gainful employment, they could at the least improve their home and parenting skills.

87. *Roosevelt Round-Up*, November-December 1940.

88. May 1939, folder: "Florida," Box 1, RG 119, E 86, NA-CP.

89. Mrs. Winthrop Lane to John Pritchard, Region III director, 27 Sept. 1941, folder: "General Correspondence, Mrs. Winthrop Lane, Jan-Dec 1941," Box 2, RG 119, E 337; NA-CP. Mrs. Winthrop Lane (Margaret Lane) was the Chief of the Service Projects Section in Washington, D.C. Born in 1888, she was the wife of Progressive journalist Winthrop D. Lane. Before accepting her position with the NYA, she worked as a real estate broker in New York City.

90. Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 67.

Concerns over anomie and poor citizenship in the United States only increased with the outbreak of war in Europe and Asia. At the NYA Regional Conference on Student Work in 1941, the problem of youth dissent was a hot topic. "I think you will agree with me that we are going to have to find some solution to the problem," began one participant, "or youth will take over at the helm, and act for themselves without the support of the adult generation...when our youth can no longer respect the adult generation, it is then that I fear that era."⁹¹ References to citizenship and patriotism were common throughout Camp Roosevelt's newsletter, the *Roosevelt Round-Up*. Some references were innocuous, such as the following quotation from an article on cakes: "You see names like Snow, Pound, Gold, Sponge, Angel's Food, and Devil's Food. Aren't these picturesque and descriptive? Just think. No other country has so many varieties of cakes as we have in America."⁹² Other references were didactic in nature, such as Camp director's Thelma Goforth's contribution on vocational education. "However worthy and hard workers we may try to be, in order to be successful, we must know how to live and work with people...We are not only learning vocations which will enable [us] to support ourselves, we are also learning to live with people."⁹³ Another article linked good medical health with civic pride: "Then after prescriptions are given, the Good Citizen will feel her responsibility for carrying out these instructions."⁹⁴ Perhaps inspired by the patriotism in the camp, enrollee Loretta Tindall wrote an editorial in 1940 on the developing war in Europe: "We should not falter when the time comes for definite action—one way or the other. This nation ...is truly the stronghold of democracy."⁹⁵ At every turn, the camp promoted the girls' actions, skills, and duties as examples of civic pride and patriotic duty.

In 1939, as "war clouds gathered over Europe" a "gradual change of the [NYA] program" took place.⁹⁶ Construction projects were replaced by workshops and "a more intense training

91. Dr. A.C. Flora, Transcript of 1941 NYA Student Work Conference held 7-8 March, 1941 at the Hotel Peabody in Memphis Tennessee, Folder; "Minutes," Box 10, RG 119, E 338, NA-GA .

92. *Roosevelt Round-Up*, April 1940.

93. *Roosevelt Round-Up*, October 1938.

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Roosevelt Round-Up*, November-December 1940.

96. *NYA in Florida*, 17.

schedule was set up,"⁹⁷ according to the Florida NYA's final report written in 1943. As explained in the report, by 1939, the NYA had begun to channel much of its operations towards defense work. Not only was this a survival tool in a political climate that was inching away from relief work and social reform, but it was also a calculated move to keep the agency functioning as a vital work relief program designed to provide employment opportunities to youth. Though the shift was unpopular with the left—the NYA's most loyal supporters—it was clear that defense industries would soon prove to be the nation's largest and most dependable employers.

In April 1939, the NYA moved to the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and began receiving its funds directly from Congress instead of receiving a portion of the WPA's budget. Then later that year and in 1940, the NYA's budget was increased as most other New Deal programs—including the still-popular CCC—experienced drastically reduced appropriations. Meanwhile, NYA administrators made sure that women were seen as a valuable asset to the war effort. Camps were encouraged to contact local Civil Defense agencies, "so that our girls may feel a part of the Civil Defense program."⁹⁸

The shift to defense, especially by late 1941, resulted in a masculinization of the NYA's public image. At Camp Roosevelt, the transformation was literal as boys were enrolled for the first time. New instructors were brought in—as was a new camp director (Goforth was demoted to girls project supervisor)—and new classes added.⁹⁹ In addition to the earlier "female" courses, classes for males only on auto mechanics, wood shop, and aviation repair were added to the curriculum.¹⁰⁰ The shift can be seen in the NYA recruitment brochure, "Opportunities for American Youth," published in 1942 by enrollees at Camp Franklin at FAMU.¹⁰¹ According to the leaflet, opportunities abounded in the NYA for "youth who are unable to serve their county in the battle lines," because they "are too young to

97. Ibid.

98. Mrs. Winthrop Lane to John Pritchard, Region III director, 27 Sept. 1941, folder, "General Correspondence—Mrs. Winthrop Lane, Jan-Dec 1941," Box 2, RG 119, E 337, NA-CP.

99. J.R. Moorehead came in as new director in January 1941, *Roosevelt Round-Up*, February 1941.

100. *NYA in Florida*, 31.

101. The brochure can be found in folder: "Florida," Box 3, RG 119, E 235, NA-CP.

serve in the armed forces, or who have been rejected or are otherwise not qualified for military service.”¹⁰² The unspoken premise is that one can still be a man through serving in the NYA. Projects for young women were dealt with in a secondary fashion and listed as “regular work.” Aside from defense job skills, there was very little mention of educational opportunities. The Florida NYA’s final report—*The NYA in Florida, 1935-1943*—written in 1943 by Oswald Sexton, former director of Camp DeSoto, was similarly male-centric with over two-thirds of it dealing with male defense and construction projects of the agency’s last two years.¹⁰³

Although Camp Roosevelt’s male enrollees had the obvious advantage by 1942—many were sent to work projects in other states¹⁰⁴—efforts were still made by NYA administrators to secure employment for female enrollees. For safety reasons young women were not sent to out-of-state projects; camp administrators worried that they were more vulnerable to attack or injury as they traveled long distances on back roads in trucks.¹⁰⁵ Many also anticipated resistance to female defense work. One administrator warned, “Great care should be exercised in the selection of girls for assignments to these [defense] projects. Failure to select girls who can be successful at shop work makes the whole plan of using girls in this capacity vulnerable to criticism.”¹⁰⁶ Another suggested that since “most of the work done by girls in private industry is on the assembly line...[A]nd further due to the fact that up to the present time the industry has neither been induced nor ready to place female labor on the heavier type of operation,” the NYA should work to “give girls work experience in the actual assembly and subsequent repair” of “radios or small motors.”¹⁰⁷ Others

102. Ibid. The phrase “or are otherwise not qualified” might be code for African Americans, who enjoyed few opportunities for military service in the 1940s.

103. A copy of the report can be found in Robert Beatty’s files, Series 49a, Box 6, folder: “NYA, 1942-1943,” PKY.

104. See D.B. Wright to Leroy Sherman, Asst Director, NYA Division of Youth Personnel 27 May 1942, and Leroy Sherman to C.I. Dillon, Florida State Shops Adviser, 31 March 1942, folder: “Florida,” Box 3, RG 119, E 235, NA-CP.

105. Concerns of long distance travel for NYA girls can be found in D.B. Wright to Dr. Mary Hayes, director, NYA Division of Youth Personnel, 4 June 1942, folder: “Florida,” Box 3, RG 119, E 235, NA-CP.

106. Regional director John Pritchard to Mrs. Winthrop Lane, 20 September 1941, folder: “General Correspondence—Mrs. Winthrop Lane, Jan-Dec., 1941,” Box 2, RG 119, E 337, NA-CP.

107. Marie Carr to Mrs. Winthrop Lane, 23 October 1941, folder: “General Correspondence—Mrs. Winthrop Lane, Jan-Dec. 1941,” Box 2, RG 119, E 337, NA-CP.

suggested jobs suitable for NYA female enrollees included drill work, assembly inspections, spot welding, lathe work, and shop cleaning.¹⁰⁸ The agency expected to train girls in work for which there were employment opportunities in a given area.¹⁰⁹ And thanks to the war, young women were making inroads—if only temporarily—into fields normally reserved for men, with the NYA leading the way.

Unfortunately for those young women interested in NYA job training, those inroads proved all too short. By late 1941, the Joint Committee on the Reduction of Non-Essential Federal Expenses, headed by Virginia's Senator Harry Byrd, who was no friend to the New Deal, cut the NYA's budget.¹¹⁰ In September 1942, the NYA organization moved again, this time to the War Manpower Commission, eroding the NYA's financial security and its future congressional backing as priorities shifted towards the war effort.¹¹¹ Finally on May 23, 1943, Byrd's committee recommended the NYA cease its operations, describing it as "costly" and "top heavy."¹¹² Less than one month later, on 20 June 1943, Congress eliminated the NYA altogether.¹¹³ Camp Roosevelt's equipment and structures reverted back to the Army Corp of Engineers.

Modern observers can easily look back upon the Camp Roosevelt project as little more than an anomalous experiment in an uncertain period. Overall the program ran for too short a time, and affected too few women to make a significant impact on the economic and political lives of female Floridians. And yet, the program introduced hundreds of women to the urban job market, and provided them with skills they would have never obtained otherwise. In 1939, a former Camp Roosevelt enrollee wrote of her experiences at the camp, expressing a viewpoint that many enrollees probably shared. "If I were asked today the question, 'Can you type?' I can thank God and the NYA that the

108. Regional director John Pritchard to Mrs. Winthrop Lane, 20 September 1941, folder: "General Correspondence — Mrs. Winthrop Lane, Jan-Dec., 1941," Box 2, RG 119, E 337, NA-CP.

109. *Ibid.*

110. Salmond, *Southern Rebel*, 148.

111. *Ibid.*, 149.

112. *Ibid.*, 157.

113. *Ibid.*

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answer is 'Yes!' A person with a steady income cannot know what the NYA checks, however small they were meant to me and hundreds of other high school graduates who were not fitted for a special position in life."¹¹⁴ While many young men likely had similar experiences in the NYA, for women the program was more than a feminized relief program. For the women who lived there—poor, rural, and armed with few opportunities for advancement—the program advertised as the CCC's female counterpart provided something no other program did; it offered a chance at economic independence.

114. *Southern Accent: Florida*, 10.