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Learning from the Enemy ?

The Civilian Conservation Corps in a Transnational Perspective

Kiran Klaus Patel

- 1 The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of the institutions established in Franklin D. Roosevelt's first hundred days as President. Thus, it became part of the New Deal's alphabet soup, along with other agencies that by now have an almost mythical connotation, such as the National Industrial Recovery Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority, or the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Together, they demonstrated that Roosevelt's words « action and action now » of his first inaugural speech had not been an empty promise (Rosenman, 12).
 - 2 Since the days of the New Deal, the CCC has attracted public and scientific interest. However, so far it has only been researched as part of the New Deal experience and of American history, but possible influences from abroad have not been considered. Thus, the traditional interpretation of the « isolationist » character of America in the 1930's is being perpetuated by and large.
 - 3 In this paper, a new perspective shall be added to the history of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Here, the organization is being placed in a larger, transnational context that includes the study of international perceptions and transfers from or to other countries. It will be pointed out that even in these times of crisis the American nation-state remained to be a « semipermeable container, washed over by forces originating far beyond its shores » (Rodgers, 1).
- I.
- 4 On March 21st, 1933, less than three weeks after his inauguration, Roosevelt formally asked Congress to select and organize 250,000 young, unemployed men and to put them to work. The CCC was to help underprivileged American citizens between the age of 18 and 25 who were struck by the Great Depression economically and psychologically.¹ It was hoped that a combination of hard physical work in nature, vocational training, a broad educational program, and a disciplined way of life far away from the urban centers would improve the self-confidence, physical shape, and employability of the young men (Patel 2003; Stieglitz 1999; Salmond 1967). Ultimately, the enrollees should become « law-abiding, respectable, and useful citizens » (Brown 6). By establishing the Civilian

Conservation Corps, the New Deal created a labor service : an organization somewhat similar to a public work scheme, but also including an explicit educational dimension. At the same time, the CCC was instituted as a means to restore America's depleted natural resources. Roosevelt was much more aware of these environmental problems than many of his contemporaries, and his initiative to build up the CCC must be understood in this context. In general, the Civilian Conservation Corps was meant to help and educate young, unemployed men by putting them to work at projects with an ecological dimension (Patel 2003, 159-188 ; Maher ; Stieglitz 1999, 9-20).

- 5 At the same time, the CCC demonstrated autonomous and « radical » state action—no civilian program of this size had ever been attempted before in the United States. Soon, many Americans considered this New Deal agency to be a great success. In 1936, for example, the Republican presidential candidate Governor Alfred M. Landon specifically endorsed the CCC and thus removed it from the arena of campaign criticism. Only in 1941, when mass unemployment decreased, did the knell of the CCC sound. Now, young Americans found positions on the regular job market and no longer needed the Corps. After a turbulent debate in Congress, it was therefore given up in mid-1942.
- 6 This story of the Civilian Conservation Corps has been told in many ways since the 1930's. Recollections and memoirs, some of which published during the heyday of the organization, the others ever since, provide precious insights into the life of CCC enrollees (Brown ; Butler ; Hill ; Lacy). Besides, scientific research started soon after the institution of the Corps. A small but steady stream of dissertations and other studies began to flow in the 1930s (Aydelott ; Harper ; Scheibe ; Walker), widening in the early 1960s. At the same time, the first historical studies on the CCC were published (Johnson ; Killigrew ; Saalberg ; Salmond 1967 ; Woods). An outstanding example of scholarship stemming from the liberal tradition of New Deal historiography is John A. Salmond's *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* in 1967. Salmond wrote a chronological narrative of the rise and fall of the agency, and even today his book is one of the most important contributions to the history of the Corps. The study focuses on the administrative side of the CCC from a Washington perspective. At the same time, it includes a vivid picture of everyday life in the camps. Although his overall picture of the Corps is quite sympathetic and positive, Salmond did not neglect some of the more problematic sides of the CCC. Thus, he underlined the systematic exclusion, discrimination, and segregation of African-Americans at least in some parts of the United States.
- 7 Since then, diverse studies have deepened these insights into the problems of racial discrimination in the Civilian Conservation Corps. Not only the policies leading to these deficits have been researched but also have the perspective on African-Americans experiencing the Corps under these conditions. Other ethnic minorities and their position in the CCC have also become the object of investigation, such as Mexican-Americans or Native Americans (Cole ; Gower ; Montoya ; Parman, Salmond 1965 ; Stieglitz 2001).
- 8 Building upon this strand of research, newer studies inspired by Michel Foucault's work have analyzed the social techniques of discipline and normalization as practices of the American democracy and of the CCC specifically. In these studies, an even more critical interpretation of the Corps prevails, emphasizing the militaristic, sexist, and racial elements as well as the anti-emancipatory impact on the consciousness of the enrollees. Here, the history of the CCC is not seen as a success story that might serve as a positive example for similar institutions today (Gorham 1992 ; Pandiani ; Stieglitz 1999). This

interpretation can only be understood before the background of several studies on the educational dimension of the Corps that had come to a different conclusion concerning its pedagogical value. Especially the research from the 1950's and 1960's had considered the Corps as a very positive example of federal involvement into education, and often combined this interpretation with the plea for a « new CCC » (Eberly/Sherraden ; Herlihy ; Putnam ; Sherraden). These voices were by no means unsuccessful, since several initiatives—such as JFK's Peace Corps, LBJ's National Job Corps, or the California Conservation Corps—explicitly referred to FDR's CCC.

- 9 Apart from these diverging interpretations of the educational side of the Corps, various studies have focused on the practical work that the enrollees undertook, such as fire fighting, forest planting, or road construction. While some historians concentrated on the agencies that organized the work projects for the CCC boys, others have analyzed the long-time effects of these efforts. For example, Cornelius Maher has recently argued that the Corps played an instrumental role in bridging the transition from Progressive Era conservation to post-World War II environmentalism (Maher ; Otis ; Paige ; Savage).

1 : CCC men at fire fighting (Federal Security Agency : 37)²

- 10 If many of the studies discussed so far share an institutional point of view from top down, others have also taken the regional and local dimension into consideration. Thus, they investigated how the CCC was accepted, modified, or even resisted by groups and individuals all over the United States. Not all regions and states have been covered, of course, but the variety of roles that the Corps and its camps played according to its specific regional or local setting has become clear (Hendrickson 1976 ; 1981 ; Lyons).
- 11 In total, the Civilian Conservation therefore cannot be described as a « well-known but little-researched New Deal programme » (Gorham 1992 [2] : 229) any longer—substantial research has been done in the last decades. However, important elements have been neglected so far. The history of the Corps was not only shaped by factors of American history but also by factors beyond the American borders. The foreign experiences that played the most important role in the history of the Corps came from Nazi Germany—a country that stood for directly opposing political principles.
- 12 In spite of their dramatic political difference, there are some similarities between the measures in the field of economic and social policies between New Deal America and Nazi Germany (Garraty 1973 ; 1987). One of them is that both societies counted on a labor service as a major means to fight the Great Depression. Therefore, this article explores the role that the German labor service played in the history of the CCC.
- 13 These two institutions, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the German *Arbeitsdienst*, were the two largest labor services of the 1930's worldwide. There also were similarities in the field of their work projects and their institutional setup. Before this background, the German counterpart had a shaping influence on the history of the CCC. More precisely, its perception of National Socialist politics impinged on New Deal social policy. Certain options were tabooed in America as they were stigmatized as « fascist »—although this interpretation is quite disputable. Thus, the political scope of action was substantially narrowed. In other cases, that have been totally neglected so far, even intercultural transfers from the Third Reich to the New Deal can be found that contradict the predominant picture of the tremendous difference between the American democracy and the German dictatorship of the 1930s.

II.

- 14 In early March 1933, when Roosevelt was inaugurated President of the United States, the Great Depression had reached its climax. Therefore, the new administration considered bold and audacious measures necessary in order to fight the economic, social, and cultural crisis. The CCC was a part of this program, and it was a hastily designed organization. On March 14, Roosevelt asked four of his cabinet members to plan such an institution and, just one week later, he already sent a message to Congress demanding the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps. According to the bill, the President was to be granted broad and only vaguely defined competences to build up the agency.
- 15 Due to the situation and the general atmosphere, most Americans supported the extreme experiment. Therefore, only a few members of Congress were against the bill. Nevertheless, some influential voices criticized Roosevelt's program. Labor, for example, was strongly against the measure. The President of the American Federation of Labor, William Green, denounced the bill: « It smacks, as I see it, of Hitlerism, of a form of sovietism » (Joint Hearings : 46). Green did not express his fears very precisely and, of course, « Hitlerism » had not yet shown its full face in late March 1933, when Green made his statement. Nevertheless, his anxieties were symptomatic for those parts of the American political elite that feared the USA might go the same way as the Soviet Union or fascist Germany and Italy.
- 16 This criticism was given substance when it became clear that officers of the U.S. Army would run the CCC camps and that the military in general would play a major role in the Corps. On the one hand, the Army's involvement is understandable, since the federal government had few resources to establish an institution as large as the CCC. The intense time pressure was another reason why the task of creating the Corps could only be managed by drawing on already existing organizations. In the « lean » American state of the early New Deal, only the Army had the institutional resources—the staff, the know-how, and the material requirements—to organize and lead the camps in which the men were to be housed. Other jobs were handed over to different federal institutions : for example, the Secretary of Labor was responsible for recruiting the men. Robert Fechner, as Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, was put in charge of a comparably small head office, and his position was primarily that of a mediator. The fact that the Civilian Conservation Corps was substantially shaped and influenced by the U.S. Army thus had chiefly organizational reasons (Patel 2003, 159-169).
- 17 On the other hand, this point proved to be crucial for the public debate over the CCC. Even if Green's anxieties were rather vague, he and other critics could point to an immediate example of their worst case scenario : the development of the German labor service after the Nazis' seizure of power during the very weeks the United States was launching the Civilian Conservation Corps. As mentioned before, a somewhat similar institution to the CCC existed in Germany. At the end of the Weimar Republic, in 1931, the German government had established the *Freiwillige Arbeitsdienst* (Voluntary Labor Service –VLS) primarily to fight mass unemployment. The VLS addressed young, unemployed men, organized them in camps and put them to work in projects such as flood control, soil conservation, or forest protection. At the same time, the German labor service had an educational dimension, similar to the CCC. The young men, some of whom had never worked at all, were to be reintegrated into society. Besides, some protagonists of the Weimar Republic labor service had much more far-reaching goals than their American counterparts. For them, this organization was meant to bridge social, religious, and

especially political tensions among the participants and, altogether, it was intended to serve as the cradle for a new national identity.

- 18 When the Nazis came to power in early 1933, they did not dissolve the VLS, but reshaped it according to their ideology. From now on, it was called the « school of the nation ». *Reichsarbeitsführer* Konstantin Hierl, who led the organization from 1933 to 1945, glorified it as prototype of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* (Hierl : 380-82). Besides this propagandistic function, the Third Reich introduced pre-military training into the VLS and, in general, tried to turn the labor service into a paramilitary institution (Patel 2003, 51-90).

2 : Nazi Labor Service Leader Hierl (in the Front) with Hitler at the Party Rally 1936 (Gönner : 145)

- 19 Leading American newspapers reported on all these changes in Germany. For instance, the *New York Times* wrote about all steps the regime undertook in order to force the VLS into line—just as it informed about the general situation in Germany.³ Given the developments in Germany and the role of the army in the organization of the CCC, some Americans feared that the Corps could also be turned into a paramilitary institution with hundreds of thousands of young men as an unconstitutional army for a potential dictator. At the same time, the accusation that Roosevelt on the whole was trying to get hold of competences far beyond those legitimized by his presidency was not uncommon at the beginning of the New Deal. Liberal publishers such as I. F. Stone, communist newspapers like the *Daily Worker*, and economists like Robert F. Brady shared few opinions, but in the days of the early New Deal they all feared that Roosevelt might lead the country into fascism (Kennedy : 218-247 ; Winkler).

3 : Drill at a Camp of the Nazi Labor Service (Gönner : 225)

- 20 The establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps was one of the important factors nourishing these worries. Not only did organized labor hold these views with respect to the Corps, but, for example, liberal journals such as *The Nation* or *The New Republic* as well. Even after 1933, they argued that the involvement of the army could be the starting point of a development toward fascism. The American socialists and communists were of the same opinion. Similar criticism was voiced at the other end of the political spectrum by conservative members of Congress, who opposed the quasi-dictatorial powers given to Roosevelt in order to establish the Corps (Swing ; McKay 1934, 1935 ; Salmond 1967, 114-15). Consequently, as early as spring 1933 the German labor service became the deterrent embodiment of American anxieties about the CCC's future.
- 21 Even if most of these fears were voiced at the fringes of the American political discussion, Roosevelt took great pains to allay them. Beginning in 1933, the CCC and the President himself reiterated that major differences separated the American labor service from its German counterpart. Only this strategy of calming the anxieties made it possible for the CCC bill to be passed by Congress in the last days of March 1933. Fechner and his staff emphasized that there was no military training and no other kind of drill in the Corps. In line with this stance, Roosevelt rejected all political attempts to introduce such a training. When, for example, assistant secretary of war Harry Woodring suggested in January 1934 that the CCC should develop a more military character, the American public was outraged. The White House dissociated itself from Woodring's statement and forced him to apologize publicly (Woodring ; Warren). All similar initiatives, often expressed by high army officers, were also not successful. At the same time, the American public and especially the press kept a close watch on developments within the Corps. Every hint of

military drill was harshly criticized as « fascist » or as a form of « Hitlerism » (Hagood).⁴ Thus, in the first years of the New Deal the perception of the Nazi labor service had a major impact on the CCC. It was the polar opposite from which the Corps distanced itself. Moreover, the perception of the Nazi labor service narrowed the American scope of action : Some options, such as the militarization of the CCC, were tabooed because they allegedly resembled developments in Germany.

- 22 Despite this political context, the CCC became one of the most successful New Deal agencies. Hundreds of thousands of young, poor Americans passed through its camps : by 1942 the total number stood at nearly 3 million men (Salmond 1967 : 221). The enrollees of the Corps were given shelter, food, work, and an educational program in order to improve their chances for future employment. Vocational classes included, for example, cooking, clerical work, stone masonry, forestry, and road building. On a more fundamental level, illiterates were being helped. In 1936, after three years of operation, the Corps had taught more than 35,000 men to read and write. Enrollees with a high standard of education had the chance to complete their high school education or to continue with college work in evening classes. In addition, the Corps offered classes including arts and crafts, dramatics and music. At the same time, the practical work of the Corps helped restore America's depleted natural resources. A popular nickname for the CCC was « Roosevelt's Tree Army » : Planting trees was regarded as its primary field of work. In fact, the CCC was responsible for more than half of all the forest planting ever done in the history of the United States up to the 1940s. However, even more camps were engaged in other types of projects, such as fire fighting, flood control, wildlife restoration, or road construction. In the light of its accomplishments, it is not surprising that the Corps was highly regarded by the American people. Surveys show that it was among the most highly esteemed New Deal institutions. The CCC was not just Roosevelt's pet agency, but also something like the pet agency of the nation (Patel 2003 : 272-296, 376-398 ; Salmond 1967 : 102-134-29).

4 : The CCC at work (Federal Security Agency : 55)

III.

- 23 However, 1938 brought major changes for the Corps. America was now discussing the questions of a future war and the country's preparation for such a challenge. In this context, the military potential of the CCC was seen in a new light, and the interpretation of the National Socialist labor service changed dramatically. It was the President of the United States of America himself who took an unconventional step. Roosevelt ordered a lengthy report on the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD), as the Nazi labor service was called since 1935, from the U.S. embassy in Berlin—not to procure propaganda material against the Third Reich, but as a source of information and inspiration. In Berlin, Henry P. Leverich, was asked to prepare the report the president had requested. Leverich, Third Secretary of the Embassy, had already written several shorter pieces on the RAD, and in order to carry out this new task, he even worked in a Nazi labor service camp for a few days.⁵ He completed a substantial, 60-page report in July 1938, and it landed on Roosevelt's desk a short time later. The analysis was based on a thorough, intensive research. The President did not read the study himself, of course, but he was briefed in its major findings.⁶ It was also circulated within the CCC and all related institutions.⁷
- 24 In this case, no direct influence can be traced from the Nazi organization into the reform process of the CCC. All the same, these developments show an unexpected willingness to study the Third Reich as a source of policy ideas. They are even more remarkable if one

considers the relationship between Germany and the United States in the years after 1933 when the New Deal and especially the CCC endeavored to distance itself as much as possible from all totalitarian solutions including the Nazi labor service and the Third Reich as a whole.

- 25 The American interest went even further in a different instance. At the end of 1938, the administration considered introducing air mechanic training for the CCC boys. The United States did not have enough of those sought-after aviation specialists for a future war. In August 1938, the assistant secretary of war, Louis Johnson, informed the President that this lack of experts was « one of the most serious problems as regards national defense. » Johnson referred to the « notable examples » of « England and Germany » where some 15,000 to 20,000 boys were being trained.⁸ As part of this discussion, the U.S. government analyzed the German RAD and other Nazi agencies. Especially the *Flieger-HJ*, a branch of the Nazi youth organization, was considered to be a relevant source. Finally, classes for air mechanics were introduced into the CCC, and the Nazi experience obviously had been a source of inspiration in the process.⁹
- 26 Interestingly, there was no public resistance to this adoption even though the *New York Times* reported about the American investigation into Nazi air mechanics training for the CCC.¹⁰ Considering that American involvement in a war against Germany was becoming increasingly likely, these developments are quite astonishing. They are even more surprising in the light of another debate. In the same year, Roosevelt was attacked severely due to his alleged consular ambitions. Many Americans, especially conservatives, mistrusted the President's plans. These suspicions culminated in the debate over the reorganization bill in 1938—a proposal to empower the President to reshuffle agencies and to concentrate competences in the hand of the Executive. In this case just as in the discussions over the CCC, the perception of recent developments in Germany served as an argument against the President and his policy. According to this interpretation of the Nazis' political success, dictatorships arise from a steady accretion of power to the Executive. Representative Bert Lord of New York, for example, admonished : « Germany once had a good government, but, little by little, they gave power and authority to their President [...]. If we pass this bill [Roosevelt] will have powers to correspond to the powers given to President Hindenburg. Hindenburg did not become a dictator, but Hitler did. » (Quoted in Leuchtenburg : 278 ; Dickinson) In view of these political arguments, it is even more astonishing that there was no recognizable public indignation when the Roosevelt-Administration considered to copy initiatives from the Nazi dictatorship in the field of vocational training.

5 : Vocational Training in the CCC (Federal Security Agency : 81)

- 27 But how should one interpret these new modes of perception and transfer between the German dictatorship and the American democracy? First, the analysis of National Socialist practices was just one of several sources that fed the American reform discussion. Since experiences within the CCC and other American institutions were also consulted, it is difficult to evaluate the exact role the German example played in the process of American policy formulation.
- 28 Second, the United States did not copy the Nazi initiatives directly. On the contrary : American officials emphasized the fundamental differences between their own political goals and those of Nazi Germany. Roosevelt himself expressed this most clearly when he thanked the American ambassador in Berlin, Hugh Wilson, for Leverich's report on the

RAD. In a letter dated 3 September 1938, the President pointed out : « All of this helps us in planning, even though our methods are of the democratic variety ! »¹¹ Indeed, no evidence can be found that the United States imitated German practices that had a strong ideological dimension. The racial and highly aggressive policy of Nazi Germany did not make its way across the Atlantic. However, in politically more neutral areas such as vocational training the United States was interested in Germany's experiences. All in all, this reveals the degree to which America was part of international discussions and the extent of its willingness to learn from other states—although this transnational dimension is often overlooked in the American public and in American historiography.

- 29 Third, these transfers show that some features of the Nazi regime were considered worthy of being copied. The policies of the Third Reich did not seem totally irrational ; in fact, some of its economic or social programs were attractive to foreign observers. Considering their direct, functional goal, some measures proved to be successful and usable. In their German context, they always served two major aims : preparation for a military conflict and the conduct of war on the one hand, and the implementation of the National Socialist racial ideology on the other hand. However, they could be disconnected from this context and transferred to another society and its political culture. Then, they could be filled with a new meaning. In this way it was possible to integrate them into the democratic context of the New Deal successfully.
- 30 In light of these observations, it is less remarkable that the intensive examination of the Nazi labor service by American experts was not an exception. At the end of the 1930s, the same experts scrutinized other institutions of the Third Reich, such as the recreational organization *Kraft durch Freude* or Nazi public work schemes. In some instances their findings were also forwarded to the President of the United States, the idea being that they could be used to help set the course for America's own policies.¹²

IV.

- 31 The positive view of the RAD, however, only lasted for a short period of time. In 1940, the CCC was opened to all young American men, even if it continued to recruit primarily unemployed young men. The new impulse strengthened those who wanted to broaden the educational dimension of the Corps. The driving force behind these efforts was Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, an exile from Germany. As Professor at Dartmouth College in Vermont and a former Professor at Harvard, he gathered a group of students and focused their interest on a special project for the CCC. The students set up a camp in which new, more experimental educational methods were implemented. These were supposed to change the CCC enrollees into more autonomous citizens. In general, the attempt was inspired by a communitarism *avant la lettre*.
- 32 This democratic experiment, however, became a target of growing public criticism. The main accusation had to do with Rosenstock's German origin. The outraged assault of the press did not care to differentiate. It was correct that Rosenstock had been involved in German labor service projects before he had emigrated to the United States. But his critics failed to note that the German professor had been persecuted by the Third Reich. Instead, they turned him into a precursor of the Nazi labor service though his labor camp initiative in the Weimar Republic had been of a democratic, communitarian kind (Rosenstock). The negative perception also prevailed in an investigation of the House of Representatives established to research the Rosenstock issue. There, harsh criticism was voiced against Rosenstock's experiment « on the ground that it smacked of Germany's work camps. »¹³

- 33 This interpretation of Rosenstock's background was possible only because little was known in the United States about his time in Germany and about the VLS in general. In sharp contrast to the relevance of the Nazi institution to the American discussions, the VLS was hardly ever publicly alluded to in America. Only some of the experts on CCC education held a rather positive view of the VLS: According to Kenneth Holland, the author of several studies on education in the CCC, the VLS camps « would have prevented a great many youth from becoming enthusiastic Nazis », had they « been developed on a large scale by the government at a much earlier date » (Holland: 89-90).¹⁴ But this interpretation found little resonance in the United States. Even Fechner, Roosevelt, and the top echelons of the Corps were more ignorant than unfriendly to the VLS. As a result, those who were highly critical of Rosenstock and the VLS were able to carry the day. The experimental camp was removed from the control of Rosenstock and his students. Finally, it was dissolved at the end of 1941 (Patel 2003 : 175-177 ; Preiss).
- 34 In general, the perception of the German labor service had come full circle : even more than had been the case in the early days of the New Deal, all references to Germany were seen as illegitimate, even if they drew on democratic initiatives such as Rosenstock's communitarian experiments. The astonishing openness that had marked the year 1938 had vanished. In the face of World War II, which America was about to enter, anything that was or seemed to be German was unacceptable to the American public.
6 : CCC Camp (Federal Security Agency : 9)
- 35 The problems of camp education and Rosenstock's role were *one* factor why the CCC weakened in 1941. Even more important for this development, however, was the decline in unemployment due to the surging wartime economy. Young men were now able to find regular jobs. Whereas the CCC had organized an annual average of some 300,000 men between 1933 and the beginning of 1941, it only included 190,000 enrollees in mid-1941. Considering the economic situation, it was clear that the Civilian Conservation Corps was no longer needed as a means to fight youth unemployment. As Rosenstock's attempt to convert the Corps into a pedagogic instrument had failed and as most Americans only wanted the CCC to be an instrument of relief, it had become superfluous. Over Roosevelt's opposition, Congress abolished it in June 1942 (Patel 2003 : 168-169).
- V.
- 36 Important features of the history of the CCC can only be explained by considering the American perception of its German counterparts, the VLS on the one hand and the Nazi *Reichsarbeitsdienst* on the other hand.
- 37 A negative image of the Nazi institution shaped the CCC right from the beginning. Certain options, such as the militarization of the Corps were denounced as « fascist » and therefore not pursued for a long time—even though a militarized CCC would not necessarily have had a fascist or a totalitarian character. Embedded within the pluralistic and democratic political culture of New Deal America, it could have served military goals without militarizing or terrorizing society. However, the political atmosphere of the early New Deal society made it impossible even to discuss the options of military drill or training publicly. This demonstrates how much the American image of the German labor service shaped the scope of New Deal policy—the power of perception proves to be a major political factor.
- 38 The primary reason behind the change that occurred in 1938 in the way the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* was perceived was the astonishing openness of the President of the

United States himself. There had been reports on the RAD before, but it was only due to the personal interest of Roosevelt that these sources were treated as precious pieces of information in the reorientation process of the Civilian Conservation Corps. In 1938, no public outcry followed when the federal administration publicly discussed adopting Nazi measures, and when some elements were in fact integrated into the CCC. This would have been unthinkable in 1941. Now, a distorted picture of the German exile Eugen Rosenstock hindered a reform discussion that might have given the organization a new meaning. In times of rapidly declining unemployment, only a major restructuring process and especially a broader educational target could have provided the Corps with a new legitimacy. However, similar to the early New Deal years, a negative view of the German labor service had severely limited the scope of discussion in the US. Thus, these perceptions had a major impact on the history of the CCC between 1933 and 1942.

- 39 All in all, this leads to three conclusions. First, the CCC like many other modern institutions was shaped by lessons learned from or in other countries. Germany was an important reference in this case. Over a long period the Corps distinguished itself from seemingly similar Nazi initiatives. It might not seem surprising that Americans for a long time strongly opposed all features that resembled Hitler's labor service. In some instances, however, the anxieties seem exaggerated from today's perspective, even if they can be explained by the extreme challenges all democracies were facing in confrontation to the two big political alternatives of the 20th century, fascism and communism. At the same time, the question arises whether these critics also used the accusation of resembling German measures solely as an argument to fight programs they opposed for other reasons.
- 40 Even more astonishing than the attempts to delimit American policy from Nazi initiatives are the intense analyses and the transfers from Nazi Germany to the United States at the end of the 1930s. Every explanation of this openness has to remain hypothetical to some extent. Obviously, Roosevelt's personal interest played a major role in this process, as did the crisis that the Corps found itself in at the time. Probably, the non-existence of an extreme right wing faction broadened Roosevelt's scope of action, too : Since there was no rightist or fascist organization of any influence in America, and since no organization advocated copying the Nazi institution in the United States, it was less problematic for a democratic politician to show interest in the German model. These factors made possible a discourse that was less burdened by taboos and considerations of political correctness.
- 41 Second, this points to a general phenomenon : Societies not only cooperate and compete politically, economically, and culturally. Also, their elites observe each other. This is especially true for modern societies. Sometimes, states and other entities try to distance themselves from seemingly similar developments, and the perceived objects thus become important factors in discourses. In other cases, political elites are ready to learn from their objects of observation, and sometimes they go so far as to follow Ovid's famous saying in his *Metamorphoses* : « It's proper to learn even from an enemy. »
- 42 Third, the analysis of these perceptions and transfers has methodological implications, too. Only by investigating potential influences of similar organizations within the same national context *and* abroad, a full picture of an institution or of a historical development can be gained. In the last few years, some studies—such as Daniel Rodger's *Atlantic Crossing*—have shown how fruitful these new approaches beyond a nation-centered historiography can be (Rodgers).¹⁵ This article has argued that the perception of the German labor services left deep imprints on its American counterpart. However, all

existing studies on the CCC overlooked this transnational, transatlantic dimension and thus ignored one crucial factor in the development of the Corps. Therefore, recent calls to internationalize American History and to situate American national history more fully into its larger transnational and intercultural global context can only be underlined (Patel [2]; 2004; Bender). It is not always necessary to abandon the perspective of national history. Placing American history in an international framework and thus understanding American history better can also be a plea for a comparative history that includes the examination of perceptions and transfers between national entities. Especially for the history of the 19th and 20th century, for which the concept of nation played such a predominant role, these approaches seem to be most promising.

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NOTES

1. In later years, these provisions concerning the age were altered several times. Most of the time, however, the CCC was open to men between 18 and 25.
2. For pictures of the CCC, also see <http://newdeal.feri.org/>
3. E.g. « Young Nazis Hail Labor Service Plan, » *NYT*, 17 June 1933 ; « Labor Conscription Less Likely in Reich, » *NYT* 17 November 1933 ; « Labor Service to Prepare German Youths [sic !] for Army, » *NYT*, 29 March 1935 ; « Nazi Organ Prints Attacks on France, » *Chicago Tribune*, 18 February 1933. Also see Hönicke.
4. For reactions, see National Archives and Record Administration/Hyde Park (NARA/HP), Official Files (OF) 268, Box 2, McKinney to Early, 7 March 1934. Other example: *ibid.*, Box 4, Moseley to Early, 15 September 1936 ; « General Proposes CCC For All of 18, » *NYT*, 13 September 1936 ; « CCC Assailed By War Foe, » *NYT*, 15 September 1936 ; « Plan for C.C.C. Drill Rejected at White House, » *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 September 1936 ; « Subversive Forces, » *Washington Post*, 13 September 1936 ; « Oppose Military CCC, » *Topeka Daily Capital*, 24 September 1937.
5. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (PA/B), R 47647, Hierl to Reichs Ministry of the Interior, 25 April 1938 ; for Leverich's earlier reports see NARA/HP, Record Group (RG) 59/862.504/447, Report Leverich, 3 June 1935 ; *ibid.*, 862.504/451, Report Leverich, 8 June 1935 ; *ibid.*, 862.504/452, Report Leverich, 17 June 1935.
6. National Archives and Record Administration, College Park (NARA/CP), RG 59/862.504/545, Wilson to Secretary of State, 29 July 1938 ; NARA/HP, OF 58B, Box 4, Welles to FDR, 22 December 22 1938 ; NARA/HP, President's Private Files (PPF), Box 32, FDR to Wilson, 3 September 1938.
7. E.g. NARA/HP, Taussig Papers, Box 3, Confidential Remarks, 1938 ; NARA/CP, RG 35.2, Box 770, Fechner to U.S. Veterans Administration, 14 January 1939.
8. NARA/HP, OF 58B, Box 4, Johnson to FDR, 12 August 1938.

9. *Ibid.*, Memo Hopkins, 15 August 1938 ; *ibid.*, NARA/CP, RG 407, Box 47, Fechner to Adjutant General, 23 May 1939.
10. E.g. « CCC Men for Air Pilots », *NYT*, 28 August 1939 ; Krock.
11. NARA/HP, President's Secretary Files (PSF), Box 32, FDR to Wilson, 3 September 1938.
12. NARA/HP, PSF, Box 157, Delano to FDR, 18 November 1940 ; *ibid.*, PSF, Box 32, Wilson to FDR, 11 August 1938. Some of these documents have now become available on: <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>.
13. « Sharon, Vt. Camp under Quiet Study, » *Boston Herald*, 6 February 1941, also see « Pioneer CCC Plan Pushed in Vermont, » *NYT*, 2 February 1941 ; « CCC Camp again Assailed, » *Boston Herald* 12 February 1941 ; « Attacks on the CCC, » *Arkansas Democrat*, 13 February 1941 ; « More about the Sharon CCC », *Milwaukee Journal*, 14 February 1941 ; Barkley.
14. Holland had visited German VLS camps in 1932. However, Holland's interpretation of the VLS is quite questionable—only some of the initiatives within the VLS, such as Rosenstock's, had such a positive potential.
15. Yet Rodgers discusses the borrowings of social politics from Europe by the United States from 1870 to 1945 without analyzing the transfers from the Third Reich.
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INDEX

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