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A GREEN AND ENVIRONMENTALLY JUST NEW DEAL

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The Green New Deal has recently begun refracting the rainbow. There are calls for a Red New Deal to address environmental problems affecting Native Americans. Others demand a Blue New Deal focused on our oceans, which absorb heat and carbon dioxide, as well as a Teal New Deal that would blend such aquatic efforts with the green terrestrial version. A Purple New Deal lobbies for more bipartisanship between blue Democrats and red Republicans, while a Black New Deal requests programs aimed at increasing racial equity and a Gray New Deal hopes to improve the quality of life for the elderly. There is even an Orange New Deal, although he appears to be a professional wrestler who sports denim, mirrored sunglasses, and a ginger-colored coif.¹

There is also no consensus on what, exactly, the Green New Deal is. *Rolling Stone* magazine asked its readers this question in early January of 2019, as did the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* the following month.² Their answer? It depends on who you're asking. Poll a liberal democrat and the Green New Deal is a blueprint for saving the planet. Conservatives, on the other hand, view it as a federal hijacking of the national economy that will kill jobs, destroy businesses, and hinder individual liberty.³ Then there are those who see it as an existential threat to summertime desserts. "There's another victim of the Green New Deal, it's ice cream," announced US Republican Party senator from Wyoming John Barrasso in a February 2019 congressional speech in which he claimed, incorrectly, that livestock, and thus dairy products, would be banned under the proposed resolution.⁴ Definitions also depend on *when* you are asking, since the Green New Deal of 20 years ago bears little resemblance to today's incarnation.

Three landscapes can help us better understand the green in the current crop of Green New Deal proposals. The first, a simple front lawn in Washington, DC, gave birth to the Green New Deal idea that has evolved intellectually over the last two decades. The second landscape is from the 1930s, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) initiated the original New Deal during the Great Depression. Examining that history, particularly regarding how New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) dramatically altered the physical, economic, and political environment of the United States, will suggest best practices as well as avoidable pitfalls for today's proposals. The final landscape is aspirational and includes a future reconfigured by President Biden's recently announced new and improved CCC, which he has renamed

¹ On calls for a Red Deal see, “The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth,” *The Red Nation*, http://therednation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Red-Deal_Part-1_End-The-Occupation-1.pdf. One of the most insightful calls for a Blue New Deal comes from Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, “Opinion: Our oceans brim with climate solutions. We need a Blue New Deal,” *The Washington Post*, 10 December 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/12/10/green-new-deal-has-big-blue-gap-we-need-protect-our-oceans/>. The Teal New Deal is discussed in Padma Nagappan, “Surf and Turf: Green New Deal Should be a ‘Teal New Deal,’” *SDSU NewsCenter*, 5 May 2021, https://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu_newscenter/news_story.aspx?sid=77995. David Krucoff, who is running for Congress, proposes a Purple New Deal in his campaign platform, available here <https://www.krucoffforcongress.com/>. On black and gray New Deals see, Chris Winters, “It’s Time for a Black New Deal,” *Yes! Magazine*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/06/08/black-america-wealth-racial-equity>; and Andrew Schrank & Jack A. Goldstone, “A ‘Gray New Deal’ to restore America,” 15 April 2021, *The Hill*, <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/548485-a-gray-new-deal-to-restore-america>. The Orange New Deal appears in *ThumblySqueezed*, “The Orange New Deal,” 23 June 2020, *Wrestle Joy*, <https://wrestlejoy.com/2020/06/the-orange-new-deal/>.

² Ryan Bort, “What Is the Green New Deal? We Should Know Soon,” *Rolling Stone*, 31 January 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/what-is-green-new-deal-787114/>. Lisa Friedman, “What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained,” *The New York Times*, 21 February 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/21/climate/green-new-deal-questions-answers.html>. Greg Ip, “The Unrealistic Economics of the Green New Deal,” *Wall Street Journal*, 13 February 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/an-expensive-divisive-way-to-fight-climate-change-11550055780>.

³ For an insightful assessment of opposition to the Green New Deal see, Kim Phillips-Fein, “Fear and Loathing of the Green New Deal: What the backlash to the emergency legislation reveals about the age-old pathologies of the right,” *The New Republic*, 29 May 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/153966/fear-loathing-green-new-deal>.

⁴ “Barrasso on Green New Deal: We Need Solutions, Not Socialism,” US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, 12 February 2019, <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2019/2/barrasso-on-green-new-deal-we-need-solutions-not-socialism>.

⁵ Thomas Friedman, “A Warning from the Garden,” *The New York Times*, 19 January 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/19/opinion/19friedman.html>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For a discussion of this speech and Obama’s Green New Deal see, Stefan Nicola, “Obama’s Green New Deal,” *European Energy Review*, January/February 2009, <https://www.elektormagazine.com/index.php/files/attachment/3490>.

the Civilian Climate Corps. Together, this trio of landscapes can help us build on the successes of the original New Deal while avoiding several consequential mistakes involving equity and environmental justice.

The Evolution of Green New Deal Ideologies

Today’s Green New Deal began with yellow. Specifically, it emerged in 2007 when *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman looked out his window on a balmy 65° F (18°C) day and saw bright yellow daffodils blooming in his front yard. The problem? It was early January and he lived in Washington, DC. Sixty-five degrees in the middle of winter in the nation’s capital! “Don’t know about you,” he wrote the following week in an op-ed titled “A Warning from the Garden,” “but when I see things in nature that I’ve never seen in my life, like daffodils blooming in January, it starts to feel creepy, like a *Twilight Zone* segment.” Friedman then explained to his readers that the prior month was the fourth warmest December on record, and the previous year, 2006, was the warmest year in America since 1895.⁵

In the same op-ed, Friedman also called for action and looked back in history for guidance. After dismissing a “Manhattan Project on energy,” he turned instead to FDR’s response to the Great Depression, which Friedman explained focused on a broad range of federal programs and industrial projects. “If we are to turn the tide on climate change,” he argued, the federal government must invest similarly in clean energy technologies including solar, wind, and hydro power, and fund it through carbon taxes on power utilities, factories, and even on car owners. “The right rallying call,” Friedman concluded, “is for a ‘Green New Deal.’”⁶

While Friedman’s thinking about a Green New Deal originally focused on those bright yellow flowers, in 2008 the Great Recession broadened the concept. It was also a presidential election year, and then-candidate Barack Obama pitched a “climate energy plan” that echoed Friedman’s suggestion by proposing an increase in investment in clean energy technology by \$150 billion and an 80% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2050. By the time Obama became president, he had begun promoting the plan as a solution to the economic crisis as well. “My presidency will mark a new chapter in America’s leadership on climate change,” he claimed in mid-November, and will “create millions of jobs in the process.”⁷ Obama then wrapped his Green New Deal proposal, which aimed to address two crises—climate change and the Great Recession—into the \$800 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also known as the stimulus plan.

These ideologies behind the Green New Deal remained fairly stable for the next decade, until November 13, 2018, when activists from the Sunrise Movement held a sit-in in US Representative Nancy Pelosi’s congressional office and demanded a Green New Deal for climate change. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democratic Party candidate who had just been elected to Congress from Queens, New York but not yet taken office, joined the sit-in and drew national and international attention.⁸ Three months later Ocasio-Cortez and her Democratic congressional colleague from Massachusetts, Ed Markey, submitted House Resolution 109, better known as the Green New Deal resolution. Similar to Friedman’s op-ed, Resolution 109 focused on climate change by, for instance, calling for net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It also emphasized rebuilding the economy, much like Obama’s plan, by noting that a Green New Deal would “create millions of good, high-wage jobs in the United States.” Yet Resolution 109 was significantly different than previous proposals because it set the entire Green New Deal within an environmental justice context. Not only should it address historic inequalities affecting poor, minority, indigenous, and other disempowered groups, the resolution stated, but a Green New Deal must be developed “through transparent and inclusive consultation, collaboration, and partnership with frontline and vulnerable communities, labor unions, worker cooperatives, and civil society groups.”⁹

Two years later, when President Biden signed Executive Order 14008, the *Wall Street Journal* called it “the Green New Deal in disguise” and criticized the White House for being a “convert” to the AOC-Markey resolution.¹⁰ The newspaper had a point. Although the executive order, which was titled “On Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,” never once mentions the Green New Deal, it nevertheless highlights the three ideologies that had evolved over the past two decades. Like Friedman’s op-ed, Biden’s executive order calls for government investment in clean energy technology in order to fight climate change. It also mentions job creation, similar to President Obama’s plan, more than one dozen times. There is even an entire section, titled “Securing Environmental Justice and Spurring Economic Opportunity,” dedicated to ensuring equity for historically marginalized minority and poor communities, just like the AOC-Markey resolution.¹¹ Somewhat surprisingly, Biden’s executive order refrains from mentioning the original New Deal. The closest it comes is a one-paragraph directive to establish a Civilian Climate Corps modeled on the original Civilian Conservation Corps, which became one of the most popular New Deal programs of the 1930s. But here again the reference is cautious, including only vague instructions to “mobilize the next generation of conservation and resilience workers” to “conserve and restore public lands” and “address the changing climate.”¹² Which begs the question – what might the *first* generation of conservation workers from the Great Depression era teach us about the current Green New Deal?

Landscape Change and the Original New Deal

When stocks crashed on October 29, 1929, 320 billion in today’s dollars evaporated from the market, 9,000 banks quickly failed, and one in four Americans soon became unemployed. Three years later when FDR became president, he launched what he called a “New Deal for the American people” by creating a slew of federal programs aimed at putting Americans back to work.¹³ While the Works Progress Administration created jobs building public roads and the Public Works Administration did similarly for public buildings, the Federal Arts, Theater, and Writers’ projects hired unemployed painters and sculptors, actors and directors, and writers, editors, and publishers to make art for the American public. As these and dozens of additional New Deal work programs illustrate, solving the country’s economic emergency was paramount for Roosevelt. Yet it was not the only crisis on his mind early in 1933, and the new President expressed his concerns in a message to Congress on March 21. After explaining that federal work programs were essential to the nation’s economic recovery, the President then reminded politicians of “the news we are receiving today of vast damage caused by floods on the Ohio and other rivers” due in large part to deforestation along their banks. Roosevelt dismissed the notion that these disasters were natural and instead blamed human negligence during industrial development. To make up for such neglect, he urged Congress to take action to “conserve our precious natural resources.”¹⁴ The United States, Roosevelt was arguing, faced a second national emergency involving nature.

To combat simultaneously these two crises—one economic, the other environmental—FDR created a host of New Deal programs that put unemployed Americans to work conserving natural resources. The Soil Conservation Service, for instance, hired workers to help farmers contour plow their fields, plant drought-resistant crops, and conserve soil and water on agricultural land. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) gave out-of-work laborers jobs constructing dozens of dams along the Tennessee River to control floods, conserve water for irrigation, and produce cheap hydroelectric power. Last but not least, the Civilian Conservation Corps provided paychecks to unemployed men who are remembered most for planting lots and lots of trees.

These conservation programs illustrate an important but forgotten fact: the original New Deal of the 1930s was *already* green. So when Barack Obama envisioned a green stimulus plan to fight both climate change and the Great Recession, he was actually taking a page from Roosevelt’s Great Depression playbook. President Biden is doing

www.elektormagazine.com/index.php/files/attachment/3490.

⁸ For one example of this coverage see, Felicia Sonmez, “Ocasio-Cortez rallies protesters at Pelosi’s office, expresses admiration for leader,” *The Washington Post*, 13 November 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/ocasio-cortez-addresses-environmental-protesters-waging-sit-in-in-pelosis-office/2018/11/13/abd39c38-e766-11e8-bbdb-72fdbf9d4fed_story.html.

⁹ “Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal,” House Resolution 109, 116th Congress, 1st Session, 7 February 2019, available at <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hres/109/BILLS-116hres109ih.pdf>.

¹⁰ Editorial Board, “The Green New Deal, in Disguise,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 April 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-green-new-deal-in-disguise-11618267156>.

¹¹ “Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,” Executive Order 14008, 27 January 2021.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ FDR uttered this phrase during the summer of 1932 in his acceptance speech for the Democratic Party presidential candidate nomination. For a transcript of the speech see, “Document of the Month – July: FDR Pledges a ‘New Deal for the American People,’” Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/document-july>.

¹⁴ Roosevelt’s Congressional address is reprinted in its entirety in Edgar Nixon, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Conservation, 1911–1945* (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, 1957), 143–44.

¹⁵ James McEntee, Federal Security Agency, “Final Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, April 1933 through June 30, 1942,” RG 35: CCC, Entry 3: Annual, Special, and Final Reports, NARA, 14.

¹⁶ On the overall history of the Civilian Conservation Corps see, Neil M. Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2008); and John Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Duke University Press, 1967).

¹⁷ McEntee, “Final Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps,” 41.

¹⁸ For these final totals, see *ibid.*

¹⁹ My conception of landscape comes most directly from readings in cultural and historical geography. See especially Carl Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” *University of California Publications in Geography* 2, no. 2 [12 October 1925]: 19–54; J. B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (Yale University Press, 1984); J. B. Jackson, “A New Kind of Space,” *Landscape* 18, no. 1 [1969]: 33–35; and D.W. Meinig [ed.], *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1979). For an informative description of landscape as an organizing concept, see Mart Stewart, “What Nature Suffers to Groe”: *Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680–1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), prologue, 11–12.

²⁰ McEntee, "Final Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps," 35.

²¹ According to CCC studies, each Corps camp pumped approximately \$5,000 per month back into the local economy through the purchases of goods and services. On monthly expenditures by CCC camps in nearby economies, see Robert Fechner, "Third Report of the Director of Emergency Conservation Work: For the Period April 1, 1934 to September 30, 1934," RG 35: CCC, Entry 3: Annual, Special, and Final Reports, NARA, 7. On the \$32 billion spent in local communities by the CCC during its nine-year existence, see McEntee, *ibid.*, 33.

²² "CCC Also Spends," *Business Week*, 4 May 1935, 12.

²³ For a more extended examination of these ecological blunders, and ecologists' critique of them, see Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, especially chapter 5.

²⁴ On discrimination of African Americans in the Corps see, Olen Cole, *The African-American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps* (University of Florida Press, 1999). For a similar examination regarding Hispanics see, Maria Montoya, "The Roots of Economic and Ethnic Divisions in Northern New Mexico: The Case of the Civilian Conservation Corps," *Western Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1995): 14–34. For a critical assessment of the CCC's Indian Division see, Donald Parman, "The Indian and the Civilian Conservation Corps," *Pacific Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (February 1971): 39–56.

²⁵ There is a rich literature on the inequities of New Deal soil conservation programs during the 1930s. See, for instance, Sarah T. Phillips, et al., "Reflections on One Hundred and Fifty Years of the United States Department of Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 87, no. 3 (2013): 314–67; and Debra A. Reid, "African Americans and Land Loss in Texas: Government Duplicity and

the same today, even though he refuses to mention the words "New Deal" in his executive order. While avoiding the moniker may be politically astute, especially when even mainstream Republicans are in the habit of calling FDR a socialist, ignoring this history is shortsighted since the successes and failures of the original green New Deal can provide guidance for a new and improved 21st-century version.

The original Civilian Conservation Corps is a case in point. Created on March 31, 1933, the CCC hired unemployed, unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 25 whose families were on state relief rolls. These "enrollees," as they were called, were stationed in approximately 1,400 camps, each housing 200 men, scattered across the country. "The Nation awoke to find the landscape dotted with tented CCC camps and active young men," explained the Corps' second director, James McEntee, "in the forests, on the western plains, in the mountains, on the banks of streams and lakes."¹⁵ Although CCC enrollees began laboring mostly on forestry projects in state and national forests, their efforts expanded into soil conservation work in 1934 when the Dust Bowl walloped the Great Plains, only to broaden once again later in the decade to include the development of recreational infrastructure in state and national parks.¹⁶

Such work by CCC enrollees, McEntee declared, "started a change in the landscape of a Nation."¹⁷ The statement was far from hyperbole. During the program's nine-year existence CCC enrollees planted more than two billion trees, or one half of the trees planted in US history up to that time, helped farmers slow soil erosion and conserve water on 40 million acres of farmland, and built 800 new state parks while improving hiking trails, campgrounds, visitor centers, and other recreational amenities in dozens of national parks and forests throughout the country. All told, conservative estimates indicate that CCC work projects altered more than 118 million acres, an area larger than the state of California.¹⁸

Such landscape changes coincided with economic transformations as well.¹⁹ To physically alter the natural and built environment, the Corps hired more than three million unemployed Americans and paid them \$30 per month, \$25 of which was mailed home to each enrollee's family, for a grand total of \$700 million or more than \$10.5 billion today.²⁰ Such conservation work was also an economic boon to local

communities, which took in \$32 billion, or the equivalent of a half-trillion dollars today, by supplying nearby Corps camps with goods and services such as food and fuel.²¹ As *BusinessWeek* magazine explained in May of 1935, "Hundreds of communities have discovered since the CCC was organized two years ago that the neighboring camp is the bright spot on their business map."²²

While fostering these benefits, however, the extensive landscape changes undertaken by the Corps also involved serious mistakes. Environmentally, the CCC introduced non-native species to halt soil erosion, such as Japanese kudzu, which continues to spread uncontrollably across the American South today. Enrollees also degraded ecosystems by, for instance, draining swamps for mosquito control, and they decreased biodiversity by planting trees in plots composed of single species arrayed in perfectly straight rows. The Corps even destroyed wilderness by building hiking trails, fire breaks, and motor roads through previously undeveloped regions of national parks and forests. While such errors can be somewhat forgiven, since the science of ecology was in its infancy during the 1930s and CCC administrators could therefore easily disregard criticism by ecologists, the Corps' political failures are more difficult to explain away.²³

Most obviously, the CCC discriminated against women and older men by excluding them from the program. The Corps also assigned African-American enrollees to segregated camps that were overseen by white administrators, and placed Native American men in a separate and unequal "Indian Division," without residential camps, to perform conservation work on reservations and to develop the southwestern United States for tourists, who were most often white, wealthy, and from other regions.²⁴ Additionally, the great majority of local communities that benefited financially from nearby Corps camps were situated in rural areas, where most CCC work took place, and were once again predominately white.

The social inequities practiced by the CCC were not unique during the New Deal era. The Soil Conservation Service, which reconfigured millions of acres of farmland, specifically aided landowners, therefore excluding tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and agricultural workers who during the Great Depression were much more likely to be African American and Hispanic than white. As a result, many of these minority

Discrimination Based on Race and Class," *Agricultural History* 77, no. 2 (2003): 258–92.

²⁶ Melissa Walker, "African Americans and TVA Reservoir Property Removal: Race in a New Deal Program," *Agricultural History* 72, no. 2 (1998): 417–28.

²⁷ For an example of similar principles put forth by environmental justice activists see, "Justice40 Recommendations," <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2021/03/16083513/Justice40-Recommendations.pdf>.

²⁸ For current rates for minorities see, <https://usafacts.org/articles/unemployment-rate-september-2020/>; for women see <https://econofact.org/impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-womens-employment>.

²⁹ For a discussion of environmental problems facing suburbia due to climate change see, Robin M. Leichenko & William D. Solecki, "Climate Change in suburbs: An exploration of key impacts and vulnerabilities," *Urban Climate* 6 (2013): 82–97.

³⁰ The original CCC educated its enrollees through on-the-job training during work hours and also through after-work educational classes. On the overall impact of the Corp's education program on its enrollees see, Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 86–91. For a detailed blueprint regarding training enrollees in a new Civilian Climate Corps see, Trevor Dolan, et al., "Building the Civilian Climate Corps: How New Deal Ambition Can Mobilize Workers for America's Clean Economy," *Evergreen Collaborative*, https://www.evergreenaction.com/policy-hub/Evergreen_ClimateCorps.pdf.

³¹ For this poll see, "Voters Support Reviving the Federal Civilian Conservation Corps Jobs Program," 11 September 2020, https://30glxtj0jh81xn8rx26pr5af-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Polling-Memo_-_Reviving-and-Expanding-the-Civilian-Conservation-Corps-2.pdf.



farmers were forced to abandon agriculture and move to cities for work.²⁵ President Roosevelt's TVA, which completely transformed the 600-mile-long Tennessee River Valley, also discriminated on several fronts. In order to construct dams, the program seized land by eminent domain from African Americans at much higher rates than from white residents, paid Blacks less than whites for their land, and hired fewer minorities on TVA construction projects, and at much lower pay, than their white counterparts from the same economic class.²⁶

An Environmentally Just Civilian Climate Corps

The history of the original green New Deal during the 1930s, and in particular that of the Civilian Conservation Corps, can serve as a roadmap for a Green New Deal landscape of the future. This is even more important since President Biden's executive order "On Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad" is extremely short on specifics regarding his call for a Civilian Climate Corps. To ensure that this new program builds on the successes of the original while avoiding its mistakes, a revived Civilian Climate Corps should abide by the following principles.²⁷

Most obviously, a new CCC must be more demographically inclusive. Unlike the original program, today's Civilian Climate Corps must be accessible regardless of gender, age, race, and marital status, and be open to other individuals whose sexual orientation, gender identity, and disabilities would have excluded them from the Corps in the 1930s. Such inclusivity is a matter of economic justice, since today's unemployment rates for women, older Americans, and nonwhite people remain higher than the national average.²⁸ The program should also be open to immigrants and allow enrollment to help them gain eventual citizenship. Finally, a new CCC must be fully integrated, without separate camps or programs for African Americans and Native Americans, as there were during the Great Depression.

As part of this demographic inclusivity, a Civilian Climate Corps must also be more geographically equitable. The work of the original CCC and other New Deal conservation programs was focused predominately on rural America, involving projects in remote forests and parks, on agricultural lands in the middle of the country, and across undeveloped regions such as the Tennessee River Valley in the

southeastern United States. Because of this geographic bias, city residents, many of whom were people of color facing quite different environmental problems, failed to benefit either economically or environmentally from nearby Corps camps and their conservation work. The situation was similar for suburban communities, which now house the majority of Americans and face a unique set of environmental issues due to rapid and often unplanned overdevelopment.²⁹

Along with revising where it locates work projects, the Civilian Climate Corps must also expand what types of projects it undertakes. A new CCC can still conserve natural resources including timber, soil, and water, much like its 1930s counterpart, and also develop recreational amenities in state and national parks, whose infrastructure has been crumbling for half a century due to underfunding by state and federal governments. But the Civilian Climate Corps must also tackle a host of new environmental problems, many of them in urban neighborhoods, that have emerged since the Great Depression era. Enrollees in the new program must therefore work on remediating toxic waste sites, mitigating water pollution, and greening cities by creating neighborhood parks and community gardens.

In undertaking an expanded array of projects, the Civilian Climate Corps must also be guided by at least two groups of experts. On the one hand, trained scientists must inform the work undertaken by the new program in order to maximize the environmental benefits while limiting unintended and collateral ecological damage, such as that which plagued the original CCC. Yet a new and improved Corps must also acknowledge, seek out, and prioritize local and experiential knowledge gained over generations by residents who live and work near Climate Corps projects. It is these local and indigenous people who often know best regarding not only what environmental problems affect their communities most, but also which political, economic, and ecological strategies will actually work to correct them.

Finally, as President Biden already acknowledges in his executive order, a new CCC must focus its work on the most pressing environmental problem of our age: climate change. To help communities adapt to the effects of climate disruption, contemporary enrollees could build climate-resilient infrastructure by, for instance,



restoring wetlands along rivers and floodplains or by constructing green stormwater management systems that capture more rainfall in urban areas. They could also help mitigate climate change by helping to develop green energy systems, such as solar panel installations across the Sunbelt. Today's enrollees could even do as their forebears in the original CCC did and plant trees to sequester carbon. Moreover, all of this climate work undertaken by enrollees in the new program could serve as vocational training, as it did in the original Corps, but in this case for jobs in an emerging green economy dedicated to clean energy, environmentally sustainable infrastructure, and ecologically resilient local communities.³⁰

Three Green New Deal Landscapes

The Green New Deal began with a simple, but dramatic, landscape change. It emerged from a patch of Thomas Friedman's front lawn, where bright-yellow daffodils blossomed unexpectedly in the gray mid-winter of Washington, DC. This small shift in a reporter's garden, however, jump-started a much larger idea that evolved over the next quarter century into a political policy and grassroots movement. The Green New Deal now has local, national, and international organizations behind it, lobbyists promoting it, and academics writing about it. One of its programs, the Civilian Climate Corps, also has widespread public support. According to a recent poll from Data for Progress, 75% of likely voters support a revised CCC, including 80% of Democrats and a surprising 74% of Republicans.³¹

Yet to ensure that the Green New Deal overall, and the Civilian Climate Corps in particular, are successful and just, a second landscape proves instructive. Today we drive on roads constructed by the Works Progress Administration and drop off our children and pick up books at schools and libraries built by the Public Works Administration. Many of us also eat food, turn on lights, and sleep under the stars in campgrounds that all have connections to original green New Deal programs such as the Soil Conservation Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. While this New Deal landscape from the 1930s continues to shape our daily lives, we must remember that it benefitted some Americans more than others and continues to do so today.

So what would a more environmentally equitable Green New Deal landscape look like one hundred years from now? To begin with, it might have wind turbines planted across the former Dust Bowl, right alongside farms that the Soil Conservation Service replanted with drought resistant crops in the 1930s. It would hopefully include a complete reconfiguration not of entire river valleys, as was the case in Tennessee during the Great Depression, but rather of municipal water systems in cities such as Flint, Michigan. There may also be new parks, different from those developed by the original CCC on the state and national levels, situated instead atop remediated toxic waste sites in frontline communities like Newark, New Jersey, which currently suffers from too little green space and too many Superfund designations. Finally, future Green New Deal landscapes must be envisioned, planned, and built not just by administrators in Washington, DC, but through a coalition of scientists in collaboration with local residents from disadvantaged communities. Such a green, and environmentally just, New Deal not only would once again start "a change in the landscape of a Nation," but more importantly could dramatically alter the country's political terrain as well.



IMAGE CREDITS

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The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope (1905) by Henri Rousseau, public domain.

Editorial

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The Color of Yearning

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