

Robert Fechner Defends Segregation in the CCC (September 21, 1935)

In this letter to Thomas K. Griffith, the director of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Robert Fechner, defended the CCC's policy of segregation, arguing that it did not amount to discrimination. He maintained that African-American enrollees, although segregated, received equal treatment in all respects and that they had not complained about their treatment. Nonetheless, there is persuasive evidence that African-Americans received proportionally fewer CCC jobs and other New Deal benefits.

Robert Fechner to Thomas L. Griffith, 21 September 1935

Robert Fechner to Thomas L. Griffith, 21 September 1935, "CCC Negro Selection" file, BOX 700, General Correspondence of the Director, Record Group 35, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

September 21, 1935

Mr. Thomas L. Griffith, Jr.

President

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

1105 E. Vernon Avenue

Los Angeles, California

Dear Mr. Griffith:

The President has called my attention to the letter you addressed to him on September 14, 1935, in which you ask for information relating to the policy of segregation in CCC camps.

The law enacted by Congress setting up Emergency Conservation Work specifically indicated that there should be no discrimination because of color. I have faithfully endeavored to obey the spirit and letter of this, as well as all other provisions of the law.

At the very beginning of this work, I consulted with many representative individuals and groups who were interested in the work, and the decision to segregate white enrollees, negro enrollees, and war veterans, was generally approved. I believe that the record of the past thirty months will sustain the wisdom of our decision.

While segregation has been the general policy, it has not been inflexible, and we have a number of companies containing a small number of negro enrollees. I am satisfied that the negro enrollees themselves prefer to be in companies composed exclusively of their own race.

This segregation is not discrimination and cannot be so construed. The negro companies are assigned to the same types of work, have identical equipment, are served the same food, and have the same quarters as white enrollees. I have personally visited many negro CCC companies

and have talked with the enrollees and have never received one single complaint. I want to assure you that I am just as sincerely interested as anyone in making this work of the greatest possible value to all who have a part in it.

Sincerely yours,

(Sgn) ROBERT FECHNER

ROBERT FECHNER

Director

RF/bp