

DONNA SINCLAIR'S REPLIES TO QUERIES

On Feb. 25, 2021, Donna Sinclair discussed the U.S. Forest Service and civil rights in a virtual presentation. Below are her responses to questions submitted during the presentation, some of which she didn't have time to answer.

Rachel Kline: *What information do you have on the "She She She"?*

REPLY: There is a segment in my dissertation in which I discuss the She-She-She, the counterpart of the Civilian Conservation Corps program for women. This is an area that needs a lot more investigation. I bet the National Archives has resources that have not really been explored. Since this was not the main focus of my work, I placed the She-She-She into the context of federal employment and the disproportionate effect of the Great Depression on women, i.e., the fact that Eleanor Roosevelt advocated for women's engagement in conversation work and a program similar to the CCC but was thwarted by a system that viewed the women's camps as being akin to recreational camps. Women had to be in extreme poverty and could only be there for six-week stints, were paid 50 cents per week, and did not engage in meaningful work. The CCC allowed young men to re-enroll for six-month stints up to three times and earned \$30/month, with \$25 of it sent home to families. That's a significant difference in terms of economic support.

There are a number of sources available online at this point. I'm sure you've seen this article, but if not, it's helpful, Jane Kahrmandis, "The She-She-She Camps of the Great Depression," *History Magazine* (March 2008): 13–16. See also Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume 2: The Defining Years, 1933–1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 88–91, 129.

James Maxwell: *Did the panther on the 555th Parachute Battalion emblem influence the use of that panther by the Black Panther movement? It looks very similar.*

REPLY: It is the same image. The Black Panther Party says they got it from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in Alabama:

http://www.docspopuli.org/articles/Yuen/BPP_logo.html, and
<https://1book1proviso.com/2019/09/01/origins-of-the-black-panther-party-logo/>

The Black Panther Party doesn't tie it to the Triple Nickles, but Lt. Col. (ret). John Cannon noted that the Triple Nickles "were the first Black Panthers because that was our emblem, the black panther." Check out

https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/555th_parachute_infantry_triple_nickle_batallion/#.YDwSH-hKh3g, where you will find several resources on the Triple Nickles listed at the bottom. More about the story of the logo might be there, or perhaps someone reading this knows the answer and will provide it. I will be reaching out to someone I know to ask if they have a better answer!

Connor Lane: *In regards to Oscar DePriest, is there any information on his family background, socioeconomic class, formal education? I'm interested in looking into his life a bit, considering his position.*

REPLY: So nice to see you here, Connor! Here is a link to DePriest's biography in the House of Representatives, <https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/12155>. It includes information about him as well as references. Let me know if you want me to get some of the articles for you. The White House Historical Association also did a piece on him, but there are no books that I know of—seems like a good project for someone!!! <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/pathbreakers-oscar-stanton-depriest-and-jessie-l-williams-depriest>

Connor Lane: *Was re-segregating the CCC done in order to meet state/federal legislation or was it more of a social pressure due to stance on racial integration at the time?*

David Govatski: *CCC camps in the Northeast remained integrated throughout the CCC era (1933–1942) because the segregation rules were ignored. Photographs of CCC workers in New Hampshire and other New England states often show black enrollees working with white enrollees in the camp pictures. Do you think this happened in the Northwest?*

REPLY: We answered this in part at the end of my talk about the social pressures that resulted in resegregation, but here is some additional detail from what I've written:

Under community pressure to relocate camps on the one hand and demands by black organizations to increase enrollment on the other, in late 1934 [Robert] Fechner [CCC director] ordered an investigation. The U.S. Army undertook the task and reported Northeast integration and strict Southern segregation. It also found many African Americans in companies outside of their home states, in direct opposition to policy. In response, Fechner ordered repatriation of all African Americans to their home states and ordered strict segregation in all corps areas. White camps must replace exiting CCC boys with white enrollees. The report showed that:

...local authorities were using *a definite quota system* [emphasis added] in the selection of Negro CCC enrollees. Negroes were chosen in most areas only as vacancies occurred in Negro camps. Furthermore, this quota system had been established with the direct cognizance and encouragement of area and district military authorities. Several state selection agents reported to Persons that Army authorities had refused to accept colored selectees because they had 'no vacancies for colored men,' and actually had notified selection agents how many, if any, colored enrollees were required from each particular district.

The army confirmed that Fechner's policies subverted both provisions of the CCC Act and repeated instructions by Frank Persons [Department of Labor Selection Director for the CCC] to accommodate "all colored eligibles," even if it required camp reorganization. This was no voluntary segregation situation. Rather, CCC policy setting

demonstrated the concrete impact of the very stereotypes that would vex future Forest Service employees.

Fechner's decisions resulted in further constrictions on CCC access for African Americans through the mid-1930s, as separate black/white camps became the CCC standard in 1935. Fechner's quota ruling of September 10, 1934 held, and when the organization expanded that year, the increase applied primarily to Caucasians. State directors could neither enroll African Americans without individual openings nor develop new camps. When Persons refused to implement segregationist quotas, Fechner went to President Roosevelt who called the issue "political dynamite," and quietly approved the policy, asking simply to keep his name out of it. Implementation of quotas to limit CCC participation by race proceeded" (Donna Sinclair, "Caring for the Land, Serving People: the U.S. Forest Service in the Civil Rights Era," PhD Dissertation, 2015, 116–17).

As David Govatski pointed out, Northeast camps were often desegregated; however, there are a couple of key issues related to the West and interstate movement in the program. In portions of the West, like Oregon and Washington, there were very few African Americans and rural communities were often sundown towns. This means that enrolling in the CCC may or may not have been an option, depending on the community culture. More importantly, whereas there were trains of African American enrollees from cities like Chicago who headed west in 1933 and 1934, prohibiting black enrollees outside of the state meant restricted access to the CCC for African Americans. For example, impoverished white enrollees from the Dustbowl could come to the West, but the strict segregation within the South and limited numbers of camp maintained disproportionate poverty for African Americans.

Josh Howard, Passel Historical Consultants: *Thank you, Donna, for this talk and the Forest History Society for the event! My question involves segregated facilities in the Forest Service. I am only aware of a single segregated site (Green Pastures in Alleghany County, VA, 1938–1950) that also had at least one Black employee. Are you aware of any other such sites? Or alternatively, what sort of discussions were held by Forest Service officials regarding segregation and Jim Crow in assigning Black employees to work at public recreation sites?*

REPLY: I am not aware of segregated facilities or the types of discussions you reference here regarding employees, but I do know that there is correspondence at the National Archives in Department of Agriculture correspondence related to public use sites. I came across some materials when I was doing research for my dissertation that were related to federal funding for campgrounds and sites used by segregated Girl Scout troops, post–Civil Rights Act. There were also memos including threats to remove school lunch funding in Mississippi. This in an area ripe for research—it's on my internal "someday" list, but I encourage others to address it.

Victor Harris: *Did you discover Ralph E. Brock in your research? Black forestry graduate from what is now Penn State in 1906; Some consider him the first Black forester in the US. I believe he also had a brief forestry service career, but I am not certain on that.*

REPLY: I do recall Ralph Brock and quickly looked him up again because he didn't fit into what I was doing at the time, which included both a Pacific Northwest and agency focus. It seems he worked as Mont Alto State Forestry Nursery Superintendent in Pennsylvania from

1906 to 1911. He was dismissed under questionable circumstances and then went into the private sector, which is what I found for the few early African American foresters I encountered.

<https://foresthistor.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/RalphEBrock-Fall2002.pdf>

The Forest Service did not knowingly hire more than one black forester (Paul Logan) until after the Civil Rights Act passed. Here is a brief section I wrote about this, from my dissertation:

Aside from Paul Logan, only one known professionally trained African American forester worked for the Forest Service by 1960. Carroll B. Williams, Jr., served in the Marine Corps, likely went to school on the G.I. Bill, and graduated from University of Michigan with a 1963 Ph.D. in Forestry. He specialized in Entomology and Statistics, and became a “Pioneering Scientist” at the Pacific Southwest Research Station at Berkeley in 1957. Williams’ first detail took place at the Pacific Northwest Research and Experiment Station from 1958 to 1960 and he worked for the Forest Service until 1985. Two other African American foresters also had Pacific Northwest connections. James P. Johnston worked in private industry throughout his career but connected with other African American foresters through the Society of American Foresters.¹ Charles Irby obtained a B.S. in Forestry from Utah State University in 1956 and worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in White Swan, Washington, but needed experience, more education, and an open door before joining the Forest Service. Irby obtained the education by returning to Utah State in 1961 for teaching certification and then spending three years in private industry in East Africa. He joined the Peace Corps in 1968 and became deputy director in the Fiji Islands. Finally, in 1971, Irby became a recreation planner on the Mt. Hood National Forest in Oregon. Advancement required him to move first to Pennsylvania, then Washington, D.C., and finally to California, where he became a deputy forest supervisor on the San Bernardino National Forest in 1981. Eight years later he became a forest supervisor, one of the first high-level African Americans in the agency.²

Meanwhile, Williams had a distinguished career in which he worked at the Northeast Experiment Station, on National Science Foundation Advisory Panels, and even as a lecturer at Yale School of Forestry from 1969–1972.³ Yet, despite his many distinctions and forestry training, Williams held a different kind of authority—as a project leader and scientist—than the classic district ranger. It would be the 1990s before a scientist became chief for the first, and as of 2014, only time. Although Williams lectured at Yale,⁴ very few Blacks attended the foremost forestry school in the nation. Angela Kuhne, Assistant Dean in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (F&ES) at Yale, notes that the school kept no records on gender or race until 1980; however, photographs and surnames indicate some students of African, Asian, and Hispanic descent by

¹ Mayberry, *Share the Vision*, 179–80.

² *Ibid*, 178–79.

³ *Ibid*, 177–78.

⁴ Yale’s first African American student graduated in 1857. “Who Was the First African American Student at Yale?” *Yale Magazine* online (May/June 2014), available at <https://www.yalealumnimagazine.com/articles/3876>, [accessed July 28, 2014].

1960. Even so, only a small proportion of minority students graduated in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Of the 1,531 graduates of Yale's F&ES School between 1980 and 2000, 4.5 percent were students of color, and only thirteen (one percent) were African American.⁵ (Sinclair, "Caring for the Land, Serving People," 201–02).

Alexa Valladolid: *Can you repeat when the downsizing began? Why do you think downsizing impacted minority groups so heavily? Is it tied to what roles they were playing in the agency?*

REPLY: This is, in part, where *entwined diversification* comes in. Downsizing, reductions in employees of color, and reductions in timber harvest were connected, as was the emphasis on forestry as the path to leadership:

In 1990, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the Northern Spotted Owl, whose habitat covered 57 million acres, as threatened. In 1991, Judge William Dwyer placed injunctions on federal timber sales and restricted logging on most national forests and some private timberland. Meanwhile, possible listings of other threatened and endangered species drew national attention to Northwest forests and impacted the entire agency. The injunctions highlighted the need for a conservation plan and led President William J. Clinton to hold a forest summit in Portland, Oregon, in 1993, followed by development of the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan.⁶ This plan set aside habitat for owls, reduced timber harvests on public lands, significantly decreased agency funding, increased economic aid to timber workers and communities dependent on timber revenue, and resulted in massive "reductions in force" (RIF's) or "downsizing" in the region.

Between 1987 and 2010, the Region 6 workforce decreased by half, from nearly eight thousand to fewer than four thousand employees.⁷ Significantly, these job losses contributed more than thirty percent of African American and nearly forty percent of American Indian job losses in the agency *nationwide* during the same period. Although many employees may have transferred to different regions, the old adage "last hired, first fired" took its toll in the Forest Service in relation to *both* women and minorities, especially because agency retention occurred in relation to seniority. (Sinclair, "Caring for the Land, Serving People," 21).

⁵ "Forestry & Environmental Studies Degrees Awarded by Race and Gender," compiled by Yale University Archives and received via Angela Kuhne, Personal Communication by email, June 12, 2013. Records indicate 13 African American graduates, 22 Hispanic graduates, 26 Asian graduates, 7 graduates who claimed two or more races, and a single American Indian/Alaskan Native male graduate during the twenty-year period, 1980–2000. Dr. Kuhne notes lack of reliability regarding use of photographs and surnames to document race/ethnicity, but post-1980 records indicate that very few students of color obtained degrees in Forestry and/or Environmental Studies at Yale.

⁶ "Ecosystem Management," United States Department of Justice website, <http://www.justice.gov/enrd/4712.htm> [accessed March 2, 2013].

⁷ University of Washington, Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, "Timeline," <http://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Curriculum%20Packets/Evergreen%20State/Section%20III.html> [accessed February 9, 2013].

Joan Golden: *Why are there fewer African Americans in FS now. Any ideas?*

Laurie Mercier: *What explains the decline in percentage of BIPOC employees over past few decades?*

REPLY: See my response to the question on downsizing. There have been long-term impacts associated with downsizing associated with timber reductions, changes in civil rights law that permitted but no longer required numerical goals, lack of resources and privatization of public programs committed to social diversification, and lack of commitment to achieve parity with the civilian labor force. There were multiple training programs for employees in the 1980s and 1990s that helped to increase the number of women and people of color in the agency. There were also civil rights trainings for existing employees. Some of this continues to exist, but not at the same level and, it seems to me, it's not enough to overcome the discomfort for African Americans of working in overwhelmingly white communities. It is clear that real mentoring programs are needed in rural communities, alongside community education. In addition, as I wrote to someone who reached out after the program, mentoring and helping to create social cohesion is key to retaining African American employees. Earl Ford became a central figure for a number of African Americans in the Forest Service on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest because he held regular barbecues, developed personal relationships, and made sure employees had access to support systems.

Flexibility is also key. Gloria Brown told a story in which she had two HBCU students working for her and provided them with a truck to get back and forth from work, though that would not normally happen. Why? They felt unsafe out in the open in a very rural community. Safety should be number one.

Employees need to be educated about microaggressions and implicit bias, and just as importantly, they must be held accountable if they cross the lines. There are folks (examples in my dissertation) who had some really awful experiences, only some of which they shared with me, and nothing was done about it.

Deanne Shulman: *To what do you attribute the recent decline in diversity within the FS?*

REPLY: There is a decline in the number of African Americans but overall the minority workforce is slightly higher, 21% compared to 18% in 2011. The proportion of Hispanic/Latino employees has increased by 3% during this same time period. Some of the slight increase may also be due to folks identifying as “two races or more,” a category that has become more common as people claim mixed ancestry. At one point, there were close to 2,000 African American employees. Now (March 2021) there are 1,174, i.e., 3.2% of the current Forest Service workforce. In Feb. 2020, the Forest Service noted that 3.8% of its workforce was African American (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/excel/february-black-history-month-0>). American Indian/Alaska Natives are another group that have declined over the past ten years, from 3.46% to 2.6% (Office of Personnel Management Federal Workforce Data, <https://www.fedscope.opm.gov/>).

Regarding your question about the reasons for the decline, I addressed this in part at the end of the talk, but to reiterate, I see a number of factors at work. There has been a lack of resources that support a pipeline of diverse employees, including privatizing and outsourcing

residential youth programs; reduced flexibility related to training programs, a shift to online diversity trainings that don't require the interpersonal connections that facilitated cultural understanding (As a state employee, I've taken similar trainings); and what I've called *diversified conformity*, an appearance of diversity (i.e., descriptive representation) which goes beyond conforming to mobility requirements required by the Forest Service, for example, to include "accommodation by diverse employees to agency, male, and white culture." Some of this had to do historically with forestry as the gold standard for advancement, with the Tuskegee Program a great example that seeks to address that element through natural resource education.

But that is not enough to address the cultural elements of conformity. Creating a workforce reflective of the nation's diversity would recognize the need for a *bounded flexibility*. Much like ecosystem management, social diversification requires experimentation within boundaries, reshaping organizational culture to incorporate alternative, non-traditional employee values. With bounded flexibility, change can happen "on the ground." The issue at the agency level is to figure out how much flexibility is too much, and how much actually enhances operations. The other very important issue is educating the workforce to reduce backlash. Workforce Diversification takes commitment at EVERY level, but begins with leadership and accountability at every level, from the presidential administration to the ranger station. Funding and Flexibility are critical to workforce diversification through youth programs, cooperative education, internal upward mobility programs, internal and external pipelines, and partnerships. Workforce diversity takes commitment and accountability, flexibility and Funding. Specific lessons for USFS/natural resource organizations include the need for white male allies and mentors; formal and informal networks; and support of special emphasis groups alongside access to leadership/autonomy.

Mack Hogans: *Donna: Great job! Well done. I was NOT CEO of Weyerhaeuser. I retired as Senior Vice President.*

Anonymous Attendee: *Thanks for addressing the issue of investment. Congress needs to fiscally invest in these efforts/engagement to make true changes within the agency. There can be "support" but if there aren't dollars there will be no change.*

REPLY: I agree!