
May the Work I've Done Speak for Me: African American Civilian Corps Enrollees in Montana, 1933-1934

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Abstract

During the summers of 1933 and 1934, African-American Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enrollees contributed their labor to the white communities of Libby and Troy, Montana. Within two years, they transformed the area's infrastructure, by fighting fires, digging firebreaks, planting trees, restoring parks and recreational areas, stringing telephone and electrical wires, laying roads, truck trails and an airport runway, and erecting lookout towers.

On a June evening in 1933, twenty-five young men from the New York and New Jersey metropolitan areas stepped off a train in Libby, Montana. All of them were African American and under the age of twenty-five ("Forest Camp," 1933). Their long journey had brought them from congested cities to the countryside to work on federally funded conservation projects. During the Great Depression, their efforts, along with those of thousands of other men from across the nation, protected and preserved the country's neglected woodlands.

During the summers of 1933 and 1934, African-American enrollees in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) contributed their labor to the white communities of Libby and Troy, Montana. Several hundred black corpsmen, along with a smaller number of whites, participated in improving the landscape. They fought fires, dug firebreaks, planted trees, restored parks and recreational areas, strung telephone and electrical wires, laid roads, truck trails and an airport runway, and erected lookout towers. In addition to conservation work, some enrollees cultivated a friendly relationship with the neighboring white communities. The visible legacy of

the corpsmen, however, has been reduced to a few surviving structures, a handful of United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDAFS) records, and some newspaper articles.

The economic crisis of the late 1920s gave these young men the opportunity to work on conservation projects. Following the collapse of the stock market in October 1929, eight months after President Herbert Hoover's inauguration, millions of Americans were plunged into poverty. In 1930, approximately one million young men were unsuccessful in finding work. By 1933, unemployment totaled a staggering 13 million. Of that number, more than one third, or five million, were under the age of twenty-five. In addition to high unemployment, thousands of people lost their homes and farms to foreclosure, and hundreds of banks closed, causing millions of people to lose their savings. The Great Depression also destroyed many businesses (Himmelberg 2001, pp. 8-9; Freidel 1973, p. 300). That same year, Americans elected a president that they hoped would restore economic stability; Franklin D. Roosevelt.



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In an effort to stimulate the economy and create jobs, President Roosevelt launched the New Deal. This New Deal served as an umbrella for a wide range of agencies and programs designed to provide immediate relief for the failing economy by offering economic assistance to the poor and to struggling businesses. For African Americans, the Depression only exacerbated their economic vulnerability. Racial discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations only compounded their plight. Thousands, for example, lost their low-paying jobs as street cleaners, bellhops, and redcaps. Most of the New Deal programs provided some relief by employing thousands of blacks, rescuing them from destitution. Some programs even offered blacks vocational training, giving them marketable job skills (Kirby 1980; Sitkoff 1981; Meier and Rudwick 1976, p. 260).

Roosevelt's commitment to economic reform, was backed by the progressive social objectives of the New Deal. Roosevelt combated institutional racism by diversifying his administration. His cabinet catalyzed African-American political progress by maximizing the expertise of black specialists and advisors in different government departments. The members of Roosevelt's "black cabinet were not politicians" and few were in positions of real authority, but the president nonetheless considered them advisors (Franklin and Moss 2000, p. 429; Degler 1970, p. 13; Myrdal 1944, pp. 502-503).

The professional backgrounds of Roosevelt's African American "brain trust" ranged from medicine and law to academia. Among them were creative, intellectual, and highly respected individuals: Robert L. Vann, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, was Special Assistant to the Attorney General; William H. Hastie, the dean of Howard University Law School, served as Assistant Solicitor in the Department of the Interior; and Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and president of Bethune Cookman College, directed the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration (Franklin and Moss 2000, pp. 429-433). Moreover, this black vanguard partly fulfilled the New Deal's goal of employing highly trained intellectuals to promote relief, recovery, and reform programs.

With his staff in place, Roosevelt quickly responded to the national unemployment crisis. On March 9, 1933, he called a meeting with the Secretaries of War, Agriculture, and Interior, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, the Judge Advocate General of the Army, and the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior to create the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Edgar Brown, president of the United Government Employees, and a promi-

nent African American, served as the advisor on Negro Affairs (Gower 1976, pp. 123-135).

During the planning stages of the CCC, the president made government agencies responsible for specific administrative duties. The Departments of Interior and Agriculture were charged with supervising labor projects and providing personnel to manage the corpsmen; the War Department would oversee the enrollees' physical welfare, transportation, construction of paramilitary camps and administration, and recruitment; and the Department of Agriculture would plan and conduct projects on national forests in the continental U.S and in the Alaskan territory. Through the CCC, Roosevelt created 250,000 conservation jobs in the forests, parks, and rangelands for unemployed youths (Fechner 1935; Hogg, Honey, Lakin, and Otis 1986, p. 7). On March 21, President Roosevelt sent the draft of the CCC organizational chart in an Act to the 73rd Congress for approval, and on March 31, under *Executive Order 6101*, the CCC was established.

To some extent, the success of the CCC relied on the strength of its leadership. This prompted Roosevelt to search for a respected and accomplished labor leader to run the agency. He chose Robert Fechner, a Southerner and experienced labor union leader. During Fechner's tenure as director of the CCC, he earned a reputation as a hard-working, honest, and affable. Thus, his staff respected and admired him (McEntee 1942, p.6; Salmond 1967, p. 29).

Following the president's appointment of Fechner, the federal government initiated the recruitment process. The selection was coordinated at the state level through a quota system determined by the Department of Labor (DOL). Government regulations required the corpsmen to be between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, unmarried, unemployed, in good physical health, and from families on economic relief. The enlistment period lasted six months, with the option of additional six-month tours of duty, but not to exceed two years. In addition to the marital, health, age, and economic requirements, each enrollee earned \$30.00 monthly, \$25.00 of which went to a dependent. Normally, corpsmen used the remaining \$5 at the Post Exchange or for personal expenses. In all, the CCC provided men with shelter, food, clothing, medical care, vocational training, and tools (Fechner 1935; McEntee 1942, p. 20).

On April 7, after the CCC established its rules and regulations, the organization selected its first participant. Ten days later, the DOL opened its first 200-man camp in Luray, Virginia. By June, 250,000 enrollees, along

with 25,000 war veterans and 25,000 experienced woodsmen from the area comprised the work force. The DOL eventually established camps in approximately 1,468 forest and park lands throughout the U.S., including in the Kootenai National Forest, which surrounded the towns of Troy and Libby, in northwest Montana (Fechner 1935, p. 1; McEntee 1942, p. 8).

The African-American companies who came to the Kootenai, originated from Fort Dix, New Jersey ("Location and Strength," 1934; Salmond 1967, p.135). For men who had been born and raised in cities, the move to Montana, "big sky country" must have been a shock. The rural landscape starkly contrasted with their heavily populated and polluted hometowns; it may have been the first time that many of them breathed clean air and saw the natural landscape. The vast Kootenai National Forest encompassed 2.2 million acres in Montana and 50,384 acres in northern Idaho. The Forest's high rocky peaks, deep canyons, and mixed conifers stretched from the Canadian border to the Clark Fork Valley. Several of Montana's scenic treasures, such as the Purcell Mountains, the Yaak River, the Kootenai River, the Libby Dam, and Lake Koocanusa were also located in the region. In addition to the rivers, the region was home to 141 lakes, ranging from the tiny Alpine Lake to the 1,240-acre Bull Lake. At the heart of the Kootenai was the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness, where majestic peaks towered over their surroundings ("The Kootenai," 2003).

During the spring of 1933, the *Western News*, the Libby and Troy weekly newspaper, anticipated arrival of the New Deal laborers; its headline of April 27 read, "Expect 800 Men to be Sent Here" (1933). The article informed its readers of Roosevelt's conservation work, but failed to mention the CCC or the race of the enrollees.

Nevertheless, the CCC planned two camps to fall under the jurisdiction of the Fort George Wright District in Spokane, Washington, the stretch of land extending from Lake Chelan in western Washington to Libby in eastern Montana, and from the Canadian border to just south of Moscow, Idaho. Fort George Wright was responsible for constructing and supplying the forestry camps, along with their administration, sanitation, medical care, and welfare of the workers (Fort George Wright District 1939, p.3).

As expected, the corpsmen trickled into the area. On June 8, twenty-five white enrollees from New York arrived at Rexford Camp-17, a nearby camp ("Young Men," 1933). Shortly thereafter, the first group of African-Americans arrived in Libby. The local paper informed its readers that on June 19, a "special train"

passed through Libby and brought twenty-five "Negroes from New York City and with them were several white officers from the U.S. Army" for Pipe Creek, located at the Turner Ranger Station, approximately seventeen miles north of Libby. The train carried other enrollees to Pete Creek in the Yaak district, twenty miles north of Troy. To meet the area's quota, another consignment of 175 African Americans arrived at Pipe Creek the following Sunday ("Forest Camp," 1933).

In cooperation with the George Wright District, the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, under the direction of Regional Forester Major Evan W. Kelley, supervised the work crews on specific forest and road building projects. Moreover, Kelley's agency was responsible for the technical planning and execution of work projects ("Kelley Makes," 1933).

All camps followed the policies of the military and USDAFS. These agencies assigned camp names, and company and forest service numbers. The company number represented the region and order of formation. For instance, Pipe Creek, designated Company 1286, was located in Region One, and the 286th camp formed. In 1934 it was renamed to F-44. Pete Creek, was originally designated 1264 and F-18, becoming F-43 in 1934.

For the most part, the corpsmen had modest living accommodations. Each camp of 24 buildings resembled a military base—complete with a kitchen and mess hall, a recreational building, a classroom, an infirmary, a restroom, a religious and an entertainment facility, six-man tents, and additional quarters for officers and enlisted personnel. Also included were a blacksmith, a plumbing, and an automotive shop. In the early stages of the Pipe Creek and Pete Creek camps, enrollees ate their meals outdoors until the tent mess halls were completed. The camps functioned like any municipality; their water supply came from nearby creeks that and officials tested monthly for purity. Some of the structures were poorly constructed because of holes in their roofs and floors. The enrollees' bathrooms, for example, were unscreened and unsanitary. Enrollees were responsible for burning their trash or hauling it away. Kitchen wastewater was drained into a nearby cesspool. Despite the poor condition of these buildings, the enrollees at both Pipe and Pete Creek maintained marginally clean camps (Reddoch 1934; Fechner 1935).

The CCC represented an unofficial experiment in racial integration. The organization's regulations forbade discrimination based on color, race, and creed (Congressional Record 1933). Yet, despite this regulation, Pipe Creek and Pete Creek officials implemented a policy of *de facto* segregation. Since Army bases were segre-

gated, its policy also applied to the camps under its jurisdiction. Apparently, most of the west coast camps, those in California, Idaho, Utah, and Montana, contained the largest number of black enrollees. These camps, including the ones in the Kootenai, separated black and white enrollees in the barracks and in dining halls (Cole 1999, p. 16). Despite racial segregation in the camps, the races coexisted without incident.

Besides the Army's responsibility for the Kootenai's camps, the USDAFS supervised much of the work and hired several dozen "Local Experienced Men" (L.E.M.s) as superintendents, supervisors, machine operators, and blacksmiths. Officials filled some of these skilled positions with local whites at a significantly higher pay rate than the unskilled black laborers. Whereas most blacks' salaries averaged \$30 a month, the white supervisors and skilled workers earned a monthly salary of between \$100.00 and \$200.00. R. L. Hollins and Bruce Vance, the supervisors at Pete Creek and Pipe Creek, for example, received \$200.00 a month. In an effort to avoid racial animosity and maintain peace at Pete Creek, officials there hired three white and seven black supervisors, and five whites and 12 blacks as assistant supervisors (Reddoch 1934).

The Kootenai corpsmen labored long and hard. The normal routine began with reveille and raising the American flag at 6:00 a.m., and the men had to wash and dress for physical training by 6:30. After exercise, they hurried to eat breakfast at long picnic tables, seating six to twelve men. Cooks served the men such foods as bacon, eggs, and coffee. Apparently, military officials were concerned with constipation and promoted a diet that allowed the men to have regular bowel movements, so they gave enrollees prunes each morning, a high fiber food. Sometimes the men enjoyed potato cakes, fried potatoes, corn beef hash, or pancakes. After breakfast, camp officials, formed the men into platoons for roll call and inspection. No later than 7:15, the men picked up their tools and boarded trucks bound for the work-site. Four hours after starting work, there was a thirty-minute lunch break on the site. Lunch was simple, consisting of sandwiches and coffee. Then after a working for most of the afternoon, the men returned to the campsite at 4:00 p.m. (McEntee 1942, pp.18-19; Reddoch 1934).

The daily retreat ceremony began at 5:00 and involved lowering the American flag, inspection, and announcements, followed by a full-course hot meal. During the week, corpsmen dined on a rotating menu of liver and onions, beef stew, roast beef, meatloaf, spare ribs, pork chops, ham and cabbage, roast veal with dressing, and pigs' feet. Side dishes were macaroni and

cheese, corn, creamed peas, or sliced cucumbers. For dessert, enrollees had peach pudding, pineapple pie, ice cream, doughnuts, vanilla pudding, or mixed fruit. Both camps' cooks seemingly served food to suit the tastes of their enrollees. From a nutritional standpoint, the high calorie, high carbohydrate diet gave the men the strength and energy to complete ambitious conservation projects (McEntee 1942, p.18; Reddoch 1934).

In addition to providing nutritional meals, CCC officials also were attentive to the safety of the enrollees. In an effort to isolate and control the corpsmen outside of their working hours, officials restricted the men's social activities so that they had no contact with local residents, especially white women. In most of the white camps, Kootenia officials refused to allow African Americans to have a reception tent in which to entertain guests or socialize among themselves. The camp hierarchy also minimized the influence of communism on the enrollees by opening all incoming mail (Reddoch 1934). This action mirrored the federal government's efforts to suppress subversive organizations.

Overall, the CCC training gave some enrollees practical and marketable job skills. While most of the daily routines "required only the simplest types of common labor," some men became skilled in operating modern machinery and automotive equipment. At both camps, a select few men drove trucks, tractors, bulldozers, and graders, or operated jackhammers, and other pieces of heavy equipment (Cole 199, p. 64; McEntee 1942, p. 38, 77; Reddoch 1934). Some men became proficient in the use of Chevrolet half-ton stake trucks, pipers, Gallion graders, Monarch Seventy-Five Caterpillar tractors, Cletrac and Isaacson bulldozers. A small number also acquired expertise in welding, blacksmithing, carpentry, woodworking, building and concrete construction, plumbing, electrical wiring, cooking, and baking (Reddoch 1934; McEntee 1942, p. 27).

In no area did the corpsmen distinguish themselves more conspicuously than in construction. Since most enrollees had limited experience before their placement in Libby and Troy camps, their accomplishments are even more impressive. With minimal training, the corpsmen completed dozens of projects in the region. As their first major project, the Pipe Creek men built an airport. Libby officials gave the USDAFS 40 acres of heavily wooded land half a mile northeast of the city and north of the Yaak River. In August, under the guidance of the USDAFS engineers, a crew of fifteen from Pipe Creek began clearing ground for the future Libby Airport. The immense project required the clearing of an area 400 feet by 2800 feet ("Work Started," 1933).

In addition to the onerous task of chopping down trees and blowing up stumps with dynamite, the enrollees and L.E.M.s removed rocks, grass, weeds, and leveled the ground. By the summer of 1934, much of the work was completed, and the airport opened for the USDAFS and other municipalities ("Local Stuff," 1934).

That first year the Pipe Creek corpsmen also began construction on Pipe Creek Road ("Forest Camp," 1933). The building lasted through the summer of 1934, when the corpsmen completed the road. This part of the highway connected with a road on the south side of the Yaak River and served as the main artery between Libby and the Yaak and the Turner Mountain Ski Resort Area. While building the Pipe Creek Road, the enrollees also built a road into the Loon Lake district, and another one that extended eastward, connecting with the main highway in Rexford. These three highways allowed traffic for the first time to travel through the northern part of the county ("Twenty Miles," 1933).

Near the end of the CCC's inaugural year, President Roosevelt and Fechner decided that the corpsmen would benefit from a more comprehensive educational program (McEntee 1942, p.53). As a result, during their off-duty hours, CCC instructors introduced a voluntary educational program that was designed to eradicate illiteracy and improve the health habits of the men. Many of these new students had never completed high school. Some were illiterate and had few job skills (McEntee 1942, pp. 26, 52-53).

The officials at Pete Creek hired an educational advisor to oversee academic instruction and physical education. Because of the small number of literate enrollees, the program focused on recreational activities. The enrollees, however, had the opportunity to borrow books from the traveling library, an important part of the CCC's educational program. The library's reading selection included several national newspapers tailored for African American readers, so that corpsmen could remain abreast of national and regional news. The traveling library also subscribed to newspapers and magazines that were written by and for African Americans. Having only six health-care-books, the camp's members, however, received no regular classroom training on first aid, but they did receive limited instruction on the subject (Reddoch, Troy 1934).

In contrast, officials of the other camp never hired an educational advisor; this was a clear example of the CCC's inability to standardize its program. An African American enrollee, instead, served as an educational coordinator. The subjects taught at Pipe Creek reflected a traditional military curriculum of reading, writing, pub-

lic speaking, arithmetic, shorthand, drawing, piano, and trap drumming. The program also provided vocational training in barbering, and automobile repair. In contrast to Pete Creek, Pipe Creek borrowed books from the traveling library and its own library. The number of illiterate men at Pete Creek was fewer and unlike their counterparts in the other camp, they received formal training in first aid (Reddoch, Libby 1934; Chafe, Raymond, and Korstad 2001, pp. 190-191).

The educational program made it possible for some corpsmen to overcome their academic deficiencies; some enrollees after finishing their service went on to complete elementary school, a smaller number advanced into or finished high school, and a few even earned college degrees. The program, albeit marginal, did induce a large percentage of enrollees to continue their educational pursuits and secure employment after their tour of duty (McEntee 1942, 53; Wright 1940, p. 400).

Fortunately, not all activities in the CCC consisted of strenuous manual labor and academic course work. Officials of the white camps in Montana, allowed enrollees to attend "Liberty Parties" in neighboring towns and in residents' homes (Ober 1976). Racial segregation, however, kept African Americans in the Kootenai at what local residents considered a safe distance. To shore up the enrollees' morale, officials promoted several types of recreational activities. Between dinner and bedtime at 9:30 p.m. and on weekends, baseball, basketball, tennis, volleyball, and boxing allowed blacks to engage in friendly competition with white enrollees and locals. Sports, boosted the morale of the corpsmen and helped to alleviate racial antagonism.

Some Pipe Creek enrollees, excelled in baseball. Their team, the "Colored Giants" frequently displayed their athleticism against the white Libby squad. Players from both sides and locals often bet on the outcome of the games several of which the Giants won easily ("Two Ball," 1934). Local headlines often read, "Colored Giants Scalp Opponents in Sunday Game," or "Colored Giants Capture Prize at Sunday Game" ("Colored Giants," 1934; "Colored Giants Capture," 1934).

Some Kootenai corpsmen were excellent amateur boxers. Having competed in several matches with white camps, Pete Creek's boxers displayed remarkable skill, winning the majority of their matches. The white locals marveled at the tacticians in the camp's boxing stable: the Dixie Kid, James Rand, and John Davis, all of whom were undefeated in the ring ("Two Clever," 1933).

Apart from competing in athletic events, some African American corpsmen used song and dance to regale their comrades and the locals. A remarkably tal-

ented quartet from Pipe Creek became immensely popular. The men formed the group while daily singing spirituals in the camp kitchen. Within a few months, they were in great demand throughout the region, performing for large audiences and even for Governor Ben C. Ross of Idaho. After the concert the governor shook hands with them and declared that the men were in "more demand than [he] had been." The quartet's fame encouraged promoters to arrange for the men to perform throughout the state, to travel to Spokane, Washington for a radio broadcast and to make a series of personal appearances ("Negro Quartet," 1934).

Although most enrollees enjoyed their work and the recreational activities, some had difficulty adjusting to the camp environment and regimen. Since most corpsmen came from the east coast, only a few ventured beyond the confines of the camp. Almost half the enrollees, however, received administrative and dishonorable discharges, most likely because they were suffering from homesickness. The rural isolation of the Kootenai, was nothing like the bustling cities on the east coast. There was little that camp officials could do to make the transition to life in the wilds of Montana easier for men who were accustomed only to an urban environment (Reddoch 1934; McEntee 1942, p. 83; "Jim Crowism," 1933).

Officials at both camps had to discipline enrollees. Over the course of their enrollment, dozens of corpsmen received dishonorable discharges for refusing to work. These acts of insubordination may have reflected the arduous nature of their work or even their desire for officials to send them home (Reddoch 1942).

In addition to camp officials enforcing policy, local law enforcement sometimes became involved. On July 12, 1933, Troy's sheriff received a phone call from an army lieutenant at Pete Creek, asking the officer to apprehend David Butler, a "certain Negro" enrollee who had stolen \$200.00 from other corpsmen, purchased a train ticket, and boarded an outbound train for New York without authorization. Following the sheriff's failed attempt to stop the train in Libby, a newspaper reported that the police commandeered it in Whitefish, Montana and took Butler into custody ("Negro Worker," 1933). Upon accepting Butler's plea of guilty, District Court Judge J. E. Rockwood sentenced Butler to two years hard labor in the penitentiary at Deer Lodge, Montana ("Given Two," 1933; District Court Case No. 401).

There was one non-work related fatality at Pete Creek. On July 13, William Coppedge, an African American drowned while swimming in the Yaak River. Initial efforts by officials to retrieve his body from the water

failed ("Worker Drowns," 1933). The following week, an angler, however, found Coppedge's body in shallow water. CCC officials sent his body to Spokane, where a funeral home prepared it and shipped it to his hometown, Brooklyn, New York ("Body," 1933). Coppedge's tragic death failed to detract from the enrollees' accomplishments.

After the successful first season of the African American enrollees in the Kootenai, some Caucasians expressed resentment about serving with them. Tom Taylor, a white University of Montana student and Pete Creek enrollee, wrote a letter of complaint to Congressman Joseph P. Monaghan, a Democrat from Montana's First District about having to work in an integrated camp, and about how he and other whites were paid less than some black enrollees were. According to Taylor, who earned \$36 a month, he had no problem with qualified and hard-working blacks receiving higher pay than whites. He, however, insisted that "a Negro with almost no education can loaf and read western stories from morning until night and draw pay at the rate of \$45.00 per month (more than his immediate superior, a Corporal in the U.S. Army)." The disparity in pay infuriated Taylor, who claimed that officials forced "Western white men" to "live and work with a mob of hoodlums, Negroes above all, with whom they would not ordinarily associate under any circumstances? And if they are to be forced to remain in the same camps (or go jobless) why can they not be given more money as a class?" Taylor argued that whites were worthy of receiving a higher salary, because some of the "colored enrollees" were useless and unable to complete their woodworking tasks, "yet, they receive the same pay as local men, chiefly ambitious young men who would earn every cent if paid three times as much as at the present." Thus, he demanded that the camp's structure changed to separate "white men and colored" (1933).

Taylor's racist remarks were shared by CCC personnel and the surrounding communities. C.S. Webb, the camp's Forest Service supervisor, for example, offered a similar view. Webb wrote to Regional Forester Evan W. Kelley and said, "The mixing of whites and Negroes in the CCC camps is a matter of policy. Probably the policy might well be different in different localities. It is something which, perhaps, should be given further study before another season" (1933). The racial animosity that whites had towards African American enrollees posed a problem for CCC officials and politicians, in Montana and in Washington, D.C. Their criticism of the agency and of blacks would intensify in the following year.

Despite the racism of CCC personnel, the African American enrollees returned in 1934. Again, they worked consistently and diligently on their conservation projects. From May 1, to August 31, 1934 the enrollees at Pipe Creek strung 10.7 miles of telephone lines, paved 14.4 miles of truck trails, and built fire lookout towers, on Swede Mountain, Big Baldy, and Lost Horse. In addition to these accomplishments, the enrollees maintained an additional twenty-three miles of telephone lines, and 35.5 miles of truck trails, a remarkable achievement ("Negro Quartet," 1934).

As in the previous year, some members of Pipe Creek had run-ins with the law. On May 16, in the County Court, Robert Sutton, a Pete Creek enrollee, pled guilty to the attempted rape of Laura Heaney, a white resident of Troy. Her testimony persuaded the court to sentence Sutton to eight years of hard labor at the state penitentiary ("Negro Sentenced," 1934; District Court Case No. 412). Clearly, the charges against Sutton were incorrect, because a camp inspection report listed the incident as an "attempted rape," refuting Heaney's allegation of rape. During the Jim Crow era, African Americans received long prison terms for allegations of inappropriate behavior against white women (Reddoch, Troy 1934).

The following month, only one other crime occurred at Pete Creek. On June 5, after Dwayne Smith had admitted in court to stealing \$14.00 from the pocket of a fellow enrollee, he pled guilty to grand larceny. Based on Smith's confession, Judge Rockwood sentenced him to two years in the state penitentiary ("Negro Gets," 1934; District Court Case No. 413). In both cases, the corpsmen received lengthy prison sentences, perhaps reflecting the climate of prejudice.

Besides these two criminal convictions, a few enrollees were involved in a minor accident. On the evening of June 30, loose gravel caused a truckload of enrollees to skid off Pipe Creek Road and plummet seventy-feet down a perpendicular embankment before finally landing on its side. One corpsman, Albert Hutchinson of New York City was seriously injured. His coworkers rushed him to Libby's main hospital, for treatment. Although several men were badly bruised and emotionally shaken, they were quite fortunate to escape serious injury ("Truck Carrying," 1934).

Despite this accident, both camps continued their forestry work. While serving, they developed fire-fighting skills. Having come from urban areas, the corpsmen would have never seen a forest fire, much less extinguish one. In September 1934, approximately 100 corpsmen from Pipe Creek, valiantly fought fires. According

to one account, during a Canadian border fire, the "colored boys from Harlem," who were "absolutely unskilled," and two other white camps, built over 18,000 feet of fire trenches with a sixty-foot boundary between the U.S. and Canada (Frame; "Negro Quartet," 1934). Their service preserved the natural beauty of the region by preventing its destruction.

During the CCC's second year, Fechner praised the accomplishments of these two black camps and all camps throughout the nation, stating that "hundreds of communities have discovered that a Civilian Conservation Corps camp is a bright spot on the business map for the individual community." He added that most communities had immediately recognized "the commercial benefits of a CCC camp and have done many things to facilitate work projects and to promote social interest between towns people and Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees" (Fechner 1934, p.7). These comments referred to the cordial relationships that the Pipe Creek and Pete Creek, and some other African-American camps had developed with neighboring white communities. In September 1934, the director's administrative actions, however, belied his words by appeasing racists who opposed the use of black by ordering that "all Negroes in camps outside their home states were to be repatriated as soon as possible, that they be replaced by white enrollees, and that strict segregation was to be maintained in all Corps areas" (Salmond 1967, p. 96).

The military participated in the immediate enforcement of this directive. On September 10, 1935, Robert L. Collins, the Adjutant General of the War Department ordered that, "Colored personnel" had to serve in "colored units within their own states of origin. Therefore, in the future, the segregation of colored men by company, while not mandatory would be the general rule and earnest effort will be made to reduce the total number of colored men in white units" (1935). Clearly, Collins's order violated CCC policy. President Roosevelt's failure to intervene and uphold the regulations represented his willingness to accommodate the prevailing racist system.

Nationally, African-Americans working near white communities in this capacity was uncommon, because states formed CCC camps that reflected the ethnic makeup of the region. The use of blacks in Montana was therefore a monumental experiment, because CCC officials never set out to "create a nationwide system of integrated camps" (Salmond 1967, p. 91). Given the mores of the era, the structure of the camps invited hostility from white institutions that practiced and defended racial segregation. From its inception, the CCC

permitted integration only in those regions with minimal African-American enrollment was, and where it had proven impossible to form black camps (Alexander 1976, p. 76). The black camps in Montana, therefore became a point of friction with local whites.

There was only one racial incident between a corpsman and a local. Nevertheless, some white locals held to the same prejudices of the CCC director and military officials. Although a USDAFS inspector argued that "colored enrollees" in Troy "conducted themselves very satisfactorily in every way," the racist atmosphere also prompted him to observe that, "citizens in this territory are prejudiced against the company for no reason other than because of their race" (Reddoch, Troy 1934). President Roosevelt designed his New Deal program to regenerate the economy, but it failed to specifically rescue African Americans. Although the CCC gave them practical job skill, it barely improved their social or economic status, because like the New Deal itself, it ignored segregation.

Moreover, the CCC discriminated against African Americans by excluding them from its ranks. Its officials ignored the language of the legislation: "That in employing citizens for the purpose of this Act, no discrimination shall be made on account of race, color, and creed" (Congressional Record 1933). Although the CCC hired thousands of Americans, African were only six percent of the total number of enrollees in 1935. Historian Nancy Weiss argues that the number of African Americans was "less than adequate when measured against the disproportionate relief needs of blacks" (1983, p. 55; Cole 1999, p. 14). Gunnar Myrdal expressed a similar sentiment: African Americans "were grossly under-represented in the program. In the rest of the

country, on the other hand, Negroes had more representatives [supervisors] proportionately in the CCC camps than in the general population" (1944, p. 362).

In retrospect, the CCC provided corpsmen with only limited job skills. A CCC historian posited that although the organization failed "to provide enrollees with specific skills to enhance their long-term employability, it did succeed in developing healthy attitudes, renewed spirits, and self-esteem." In essence, the organization was a "short-term and insufficient solution" for the problems plaguing young African-American men in the 1930s. Most of the enrollees came from urban areas and their main duty was forest preservation. This duty "must have seemed artificial and impractical-or at the very least, to have very little relevance to their past and future" (Cole 1991, p. 126).

Undoubtedly, the African-American enrollees' hard work and dedication at Pipe Creek and Pete Creek enriched the quality of life of the residents living in the Kootenai region. Within two years, they transformed the area's infrastructure, by constructing an airport, building roads, creating fire lookouts, erecting and maintaining telephone lines. Furthermore, the use of African-Americans in a predominantly white region indirectly improved race relations as athletics forged a tenuous bond. Racism however, brought their service in the region to a premature end. In 1934, on the local and national level, the racist sentiments of local and federal government policy makers encouraged the removal of all African-American enrollees, permanently transferring them from the white towns. Despite their repatriation the legacy of the African Americans in the Kootenai endures in the structures they built and the forest they saved.

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