

The Register-Guard

Opinion

The forgotten diversity of the pioneering timbermen

Posted Mar 4, 2020 at 12:01 AM

Descriptions of the iconic Oregon timberman in the Page One article “The Oregon timber worker’s truth” (Feb. 23) are only partially accurate. Another truth of the “pioneering Oregon timberman” has been largely erased. Despite Oregon’s notorious exclusionary laws, a multi-racial workforce came together to help build the foundation of Oregon’s timber economy.

African American loggers traveled from America’s Deep South to Oregon to take work as skilled loggers during the first decades of the 1900s. Japanese laborers, who originally came to Oregon to farm, were hired to build the railroad tracks and trestles that brought felled logs from the mountainsides to the mills. Filipino and Chinese workers also brought their skills to the timber economy. When economic conditions in the 1920s caused a slump in the lumber market, logging companies and mills closed, forcing timber workers of color to move to urban centers.

The “pioneering timbermen” of the Pacific Northwest were a more diverse group of pioneers than Oregonians have been taught. Come learn more at the coming historical exhibit, “Timber Culture: Race & Equity in Oregon,” which uncovers this neglected but rich part of Oregon’s timber past. Beyond Toxics, the NAACP and Mayor Lucy Vinis will host a public reception on March 27 at the Broadway Commerce Center.

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