



United States Department of Agriculture

# American Diversity Month Celebration

July 2020



Hosted by  
The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

## Message by the Secretary



**Sonny Perdue**  
**U.S. Secretary of Agriculture**

Hello USDA Family!

Today we kick off American Diversity Month. This celebration embraces USDA's transition from individual entities to the unity of OneUSDA.

And as a OneUSDA Family, American Diversity Month affords us an opportunity to highlight our unity, collaboration, acceptance of differences, and encouragement of inclusion.

Although we're apart due to the pandemic, we are making sure USDA can still celebrate American Diversity Month by offering programs virtually. Be sure to mark your calendars so you don't miss these important events.

As I reiterated in the Civil Rights Policy Statement, I expect every USDA employee to foster a workplace free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation so everyone can reach their full potential.

My vision is to have our workplace be a model for enforcement of civil rights protections – not only because it's the law, but because it's the right thing to do.

The very nature of our work here at USDA is unifying – from the Forest Service rangers who connect Americans with our forests, to our folks in Rural Development who deliver broadband access to our rural communities throughout the country.

We are dedicated to transparent, effective, and efficient customer service. This is backed by fairness and civility for our employees and external stakeholders. Our work is in service of others, so we, too, must be in service of our fellow colleagues.

Thank you for all you do every day to fulfill our mission to “Do Right and Feed Everyone.” I hope you enjoy today's program and join me in embracing American Diversity Month at USDA.

## Message by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

### A message to our OneUSDA Family

Dear OneUSDA Family,

I am privileged to serve within USDA's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, because the work we perform is so incredibly important. In challenging times like the present, our duties feel more important than ever.

As I write this note to you, I stand in my office next to a framed copy of the Gettysburg Address. It is a perfectly appropriate thing to hang in my office at what President Abraham Lincoln called "The People's Department." It is also a perfectly appropriate message to reflect upon at this time—over a century and a half later—where I also stand just down the street from demonstrators who question whether the Great Emancipator's promise that "this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of Freedom" has been fully realized. While I believe President Lincoln was right and that our country has come a long way since then, recent events confirm for me, and I believe for many of you, and for many of our fellow American citizens—even in our nation's capital—that substantial work remains to be done.

I write to you not only as your Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, but also as a black American man who is struggling with anger, fear, and frustration. I'm angered by the way I see certain of our fellow citizens treated. I'm fearful that our collective responses could worsen our relations. I'm frustrated by the difficulty of solving the racial problems that plague our diverse nation. But I'm not alone. All of us are feeling powerful emotions for one reason or another. Perhaps you feel the connection to recent events because you, too, are black. Maybe you feel vulnerable, isolated, and anxious as the loved one of a law enforcement officer. Perhaps you are living in terror as a resident of one the communities across the country where peaceful demonstrations have been hijacked by vandals and rioters. Whatever the case may be, we ought always to remember that everyone is struggling with something—you're not alone.

As a OneUSDA family, we're in this together. I call on our entire Department to unite in showing compassion and empathy for the struggles of our colleagues. This is especially important when those struggles burst forth into the open—raw and painful. Be respectful. Recognize and celebrate our differences. Be generous in giving the benefit of the doubt when the opportunity arises, because everyone is struggling with something—you're not alone.

It remains my great honor to be empowered by Secretary Perdue to help USDA become a more inclusive and respectful place for all of us to call our professional home. Sometimes that task requires laying bare the deep challenges that we face in achieving that goal. However, that honesty, coupled with the support of our entire OneUSDA family, will help us further realize President Lincoln's promise of a freer country for all.

Sincerely,  
Devon Westhill  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

Wednesday, July 8, 2020 / 10:00 am – 11:00 am EST

Virtual Event

AgLearn Registration Link: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51709>

## AGENDA

<b>Welcome</b>	Devon Westhill, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
<b>Presentation of Colors</b>	The Joint Colors of Washington, DC
<b>National Anthem</b>	The Joint Colors of Washington, DC
<b>Pledge of Allegiance</b>	The Joint Colors of Washington, DC
<b>Introduction for Secretary Perdue's Virtual Video</b>	Devon Westhill Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
<b>Remarks from the Secretary</b>	Honorable Sonny Purdue United States Secretary of Agriculture
<b>Introduction for the Keynote Speaker</b>	Tysan Williams, Director Mission Area Liaison Division Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
<b>Keynote Speaker</b>	Valerie Brown, Diplomat Senior Director of Asia Operations Foreign Agricultural Service
<b>Diversity Poem</b>	<i>"I am Diversity, Please Include Me"</i> by Charles Bennafield
<b>Closing Remarks</b>	Seena Foster, Deputy Assistant Administrator Civil Rights & Liberties, Ombudsman and Traveler Engagement

## SPEAKER BIO

**Valerie Brown**  
**Diplomat, Senior Director of Asia Operations**  
**Foreign Agricultural Service**

Valerie Brown is a native New Yorker born to Dr. Frank Brown, a Dean in the City University of New York, published writer and rare bookstore owner and to Claudia Brown, children's book author, chef and restaurateur. Valerie was raised in New Jersey and moved to North Carolina as a teenager. She graduated high school one year early and spent what would have been her final year of school, working beside her mother in the family business.

Valerie graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCA&TSU) in 1991. She received her master's degree in Agricultural Economics from NCA&TSU in 1995 where she held the office of Chapter President for Gamma Sigma Delta (National Honor Society for Agriculture). During her graduate studies, Valerie worked for the U.S. Agency for International Development where she spent a summer in Sri Lanka, evaluating the Agency's entrepreneurial program. This experience increased her desire to learn about other cultures and to expand her goals outside of her borders.

Valerie was hired by USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service in 1995 and worked in a variety of positions in Washington DC until she decided to join the U.S. Foreign Service, Diplomatic Corp. Valerie was the first African American woman to take the Department's Foreign Service Exam. Her first assignment was in London, United Kingdom in 2003 where she worked as an Agricultural Attaché. She was then assigned as the Deputy Director of the Agricultural Trade Office (ATO) in Mexico City, Mexico from 2005-2009. Directly after her assignment in Mexico, Valerie took over as the Director of the ATO in Taipei, Taiwan from 2010-2012. Valerie returned to Washington in 2012 where she worked as a coordinator of the U.S.- China Agricultural Symposium; Senior Trade Advisor in the Office of Capacity Building and Development; the Chief of the Livestock and Seafood Products Branch as well as the Office of Trade Program's Coordinator for the Sub-Saharan Africa Trade Initiative. Valerie transferred to ATO Shanghai in August 2014 where she worked as the Director, covering 5 provinces and Shanghai. In Shanghai she founded the Women of (American) Wine (WOW) group and hosted "Cooking with MeiMei." Valerie currently works in Washington, DC in the Office of Foreign Service Operations where she is the Senior Director of Asia Operations, which includes the responsibility of supervising all of the USDA's offices in China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia/New Zealand, Vietnam, India, Thailand, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Burma. Valerie's next assignment is to head the USDA's office in Dubai, UAE in 2021.

Valerie has a self-published motivational book entitled "Go Team You," and is in the process of getting a non-profit going, under the same name to encourage and instill self-worth in young people globally. She recently co-founded "Real Women Wine" which is a group focused on women empowerment and wine education. She enjoys mentoring young people and women. She is currently completing the ICF Coaching Certification Program and has launched a new business "The HEAP Project - Happily Ever After is Possible" Internal Awakening Coaches. Valerie is the single parent of 5 children, 2 which she adopted while posted in Mexico.

## SPEAKER BIO



**Seena Foester**  
**Deputy Assistant Administrator**  
**Civil Rights & Liberties,**  
**Ombudsman and Traveler Engagement**

Seena Foster is the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Civil Rights & Liberties, Ombudsman and Traveler Engagement (CRL/OTE) at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and oversees the day-to-day operations of CRL/OTE in its mission to ensure that TSA employees and the traveling public are treated in a fair and lawful manner.

Prior to her current position, Foster served as CRL/OTE's Acting Director for Traveler Engagement, Executive Advisor to the Assistant Administrator, and Manager of the Disability and Multicultural Branches. In 2017, she also served on a detail as Assistant Director for the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Budget Division, where she created DHS's defense and justification of \$44B in discretionary funds and \$7B in emergency management funds during a time of Presidential transition.

Prior to joining TSA, Foster served as a Senior Attorney at the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Administrative Law Judges from 1989 to 2014, where she served as the in-house expert to Federal administrative law judges and attorney-advisors in several national employment and labor adjudication programs. While at Labor, she also served as a Senior Policy Analyst in the Civil Rights Center, where she conducted civil rights investigations, audits, and compliance reviews of State and local government delivery of public-facing workforce development and educational programs and activities.

Foster has 30 years of public service experience establishing, streamlining, and sustaining efficient and effective national adjudication and civil rights compliance program operations through successful strategic planning, robust stakeholder engagement, and coalition building. She possesses an established track record of creating new products and services, facilitating innovative solutions, and driving results to achieve mission objectives in complex public-facing Federal government programs and activities.

Foster graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Michigan State University and earned a Juris Doctor degree from The George Washington University Law School. She is a member of the District of Columbia, Commonwealth of Virginia, and United States Supreme Court bars. She also is a member of the International Bar Association.



## DIVERSITY POEM

### I AM DIVERSITY, PLEASE INCLUDE ME by Charles Bennafield

*I'm present in every place you go  
Depending on your lens I'm friend or foe  
I'm a force to be reckoned with  
Like the winds of change I move. I'm swift.*

*I'm present when two or more are together  
If embraced I can make the good even better.  
I'm not limited to age, gender, or race.  
I'm invisible at times and yet all over the place.*

*Don't exclude me due to a lack of knowledge  
Welcome me like the recruit fresh out of college.  
Let me take my seat at the table  
Even though I may be differently able  
My experience, my passion the authentic me  
Can help add value for your company.*

*Learn about me; improve my underrepresentation  
And I can provide a competitive edge to your entire nation.  
I exclude no one I am strengthened by all  
My name is Diversity and yes I stand tall.*

*Recognize me and keep me in the mix  
Together there's no problem that we can't fix.  
I am your best hope towards true innovation  
And to many, I reflect hope and inspiration.*

*Your lives and companies will continue to change  
Thus the need for Diversity and Inclusion will also remain.  
Do all that you can to truly embrace me  
And experience life's fullness totally*

*I'm the thought lurking behind the unfamiliar face  
I'm the ingenuity that helps your team win the race.  
I'm the solution that came from the odd question that was asked.  
I stand out in the crowd when I, Diversity, am allowed to be unmasked.*

*I'm diversity embrace me and we'll journey far.  
I'm Diversity include me and we will reach the shining star.  
Coupled with Inclusion our lights burn longer  
Together we are smarter, better and stronger*

*I am Diversity  
Yes, that's me*

## POEM FOR USDA

### LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

#### *A poem to USDA from the Author Charles Bennafield*

*I am The Author of "I am Diversity"  
I am thankful for the time you have granted me  
I am passionate about Diversity and I keep it real  
I am a pastor and poet, my name is Charles Bennafield*

*I was adopted and raised on a southwest GA farm  
Raised to believe hard work never did any harm.  
The I Am Diversity poem was divinely deposited into me  
As if I were introduced to Inclusion and Diversity*

*The timing is perfect and yet just a little strange.  
We never ever really get use to seasons of change.  
So sit back and learn please enjoy the ride.  
As I share few tips and my formula called SIDE*

*USDA has launched a mission, and everyone must play a part  
Success will require a change in the mind and heart.  
By working together and encouraging everyone to use their voice  
Embracing individual differences and similarities is a matter of choice.*

*Leaders I challenge you to be Diversity Champions for the cause  
For your participation can accelerate progress or make it pause.  
Take a good look around invite "other kinds of different" who are able  
To join in with you to one day have their seat at the table.*

*If you are an individual contributor there is room for you  
Become a Diversity and Inclusion ambassador and share with others too.  
If you are on the outside and you are hopeful to one day sit  
Equip yourself, set growth goals and don't ever give up or quit.*

*I am Diversity, you are Diversity, we are Diversity. Yes, that's us.*



# Minority Contributions to Agriculture

Monday, July 13, 2020 / 10:00 am – 11:30 am EST

Virtual Event

AgLearn Registration Link: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51711>

## AGENDA

### Welcome

Damali Carr, Team Lead, Diversity, Inclusion, Policy, and Compliance Group - Civil Rights Staff  
Food Safety and Inspection Service

### Introduction to Hispanic Serving Institutions; 1890 National Scholarship Program; & Asian Student Programs

Dr. Felix R. Roman-Velazquez  
Professor of Analytical and Environmental  
Chemistry, University of Puerto Rico

Dr. Edwin Lewis, Branch Chief  
Farm Production and Conservation

Dr. Vivian Chen, Director, Emergency Medical  
Services, Forest Service

### Student Presentations

Isabel Garcia, Fresno State University, CA  
Takandris Jordan, Fort Valley State University,  
GA  
Cameron Cowart, Alcon State University, MS  
Komal Kamdar, University of Virginia, VA  
Garinn Pereipa, University of Hawaii, HI

### Employee Presentations

Americo Vega-Labiosa, AMS  
Rosiel Grajales-Cortes, NRCS  
Lazaro Sandoval, FAS  
Aaron Morris, RD  
Charles Russell, FPAC-BC

### Guest Speaker

Michael Jones, CEO  
Fresh Communities Holding Corporation  
*"From Concept to Collection Solutions for Food  
Deserts Community Micro-Manufacturing"*

### Closing Remarks

Ron Brown, Outreach Specialist  
Farm Production and Conservation Business  
Center

# Speed Mentoring

Wednesday, July 15, 2020 / 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm EST

Virtual Event

AgLearn Registration Link: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51348>

## AGENDA

<b>Welcome</b>	Tysan Williams, Director Mission Area Liaison Division, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
<b>Opening Remarks</b>	Dr. Johanna “Jeleen” Sindall, Special Assistant APHIS Veterinary Services Field Operations
<b>Speed Mentoring Groups &amp; Topic Discussions</b>	Senior Career (GS-14 – SES) Leadership Expectations, SES Advice, and Leaving a Legacy / Moderator: Carrie Moore, OHS  Mid-Career (GS-11 – GS-13) Leadership Skills, Career Evolution, and Personal Barriers / Moderator: Catrina Southall, RD  Early Career (Interns – GS-9) Applying for Jobs, Building a Reputation, and Charting a Career Path / Moderator: Tina Quarles, OASCR
<b>Closing Remarks</b>	Dr. Steven Ford, Equal Opportunity Specialist, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

## MENTORS

- Arthur Neal Jr., Deputy Administrator, Federal Grain Inspection Service, AMS
- Dr. Vivian Chen, National Director of the Emergency Medical Services Program, FS
- Dr. Alberto Pantoja, Associate Director of the Midwest Area, ARS
- Victoria Christiansen, Chief, FS
- Emily Su, Civil Rights Director, FPAC-BC
- Roberto Contreras, Civil Rights Director, FNS
- Gayle Barry, Special Assistant to the State Conservationist, NRCS
- Deltrick Johnson, Deputy Counsel, OIG
- Steve Hortin, Director of the Office of Emergency Management, FNS
- Erin Clason, District Director – Nebraska, FSA
- Wanda McNeil, Program Analyst, FNS
- Cassius Spears, District Conservationist, Northeast Regional Tribal Liaison, NRCS
- Telora Dean, Executive for IT Modernization, OCIO

## SPEAKER BIO

**Dr. Jeleen Sindall, VMD  
Special Assistant  
APHIS Veterinary Services Field Operations**



Dr. Jeleen Sindall is a Special Assistant with APHIS Veterinary Services Field Operations. She previously served as the Acting Chief Customer Officer in 2019. Her official role at the time was as Chief of Staff for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration. Prior to this, she served as the Acting Director for Asian American and Pacific Islander Affairs for the Department. Jeleen came to Departmental Administration from the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) where she served as the Chief of Staff to the Chief Veterinary Officer of the United States.

Jeleen served as the Chief of Staff for APHIS Animal Care and the Chair of their Civil Rights and Diversity Advisory Committee. She was also the Animal Care's Avian Health and Welfare Specialist, championing regulations for avian welfare and working across industry, state, and Federal entities to create a fusion center focused disaster preparedness for zoos and aquariums.

Prior to joining the government in 2010, Jeleen was a tenure-track Assistant Professor overseeing the Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery service at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine from which she received her veterinary degree after graduating from Yale University with a bachelor's degree in Psychobiology.



**Dr. Steven Ford  
Equal Opportunity Specialist,  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights**

Dr. Steven Ford serves as an Equal Opportunity Specialist in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He has more than 10 years of Federal service as a civil rights practitioner. During this period, Dr. Ford has served in a number of different positions within OASCR focused on facilitating the fair and equitable treatment of all USDA customers and employees, while ensuring the delivery and enforcement of civil rights programs and activities. A native Texan, Dr. Ford earned his B.A. from Morehouse College (2007), and his M.A. (2008) and a Ph.D. (2015) from Howard University.

# Unconscious Bias Training

Monday, July 20, 2020 / 10:00 am – 11:30 pm EST

Virtual Event

AgLearn Registration Link: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51343>

## AGENDA

<b>Welcome</b>	Joelle Bowers, Special Assistant, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
<b>Opening Remarks</b>	Dr. Karlease Kelly Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer Office of Human Resources Management
<b>Moderators</b>	Michael Dukes, 1890 National Program Lead Office of Partnerships and Public Engagements Estelle Bowmen, Assistant Director Office of Tribal Relations
<b>Panelists</b>	Tinisha Agramonte, Director, Office of Civil Rights U.S. Department of Commerce  Claire N. Lam, Acting Director Office of Minority and Women Inclusion Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation  George McDonald, Chief Youth Programs Division National Park Service  Howard Ross, Author and Founding Partner Cook Ross Consulting, Inc.  Adria Terry, Founder, A&T Equity Group
<b>Closing Remarks</b>	Roberto Contreras, Civil Rights Director Food Nutrition Service

## SPEAKER BIO



**Dr. Karlease Kelly**  
**Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer, Office of Human Resources Management, Departmental Management**

Dr. Karlease Kelly serves as the Chief Learning Officer for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dr. Kelly oversees USDA's implementation of Federal training policies including mentoring, individual development planning, leadership development, details, new supervisor training, the President's Management Council Rotation Program, the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program, and other programs to increase employee skills and development, satisfaction and effectiveness. She is also responsible for executive performance management. From 2015 to 2018, she was elected by peers who are leaders in the government-wide learning community to serve as their Chair for the Federal Chief Learning Officers Council that advances efforts to improve the Federal-wide learning community. Under her leadership, USDA was recognized as a Bronze Learning Elite organization by the Chief Learning Officers Magazine, moving up from a ranking of 67 in 2015, to 55 in 2016, and to 51 in 2017 in this benchmarking effort which consists mostly of private sector organizations demonstrating the quality of USDA's innovative programs. She also contributed to USDA's rise in the Best Places to Work Rankings, with USDA moving from a ranking of 16th out of 19 large organizations in 2013 to 7th in 2017. During her leadership, USDA also improved in the Best Places to Work category of Training and Development from being ranked 11th in 2015 up to 5th in 2017. Her efforts also led USDA to being ranked 2nd in the category of Support for Diversity in 2017.

Prior to this, Dr. Kelly served in USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) as the Assistant Administrator for the FSIS Office of Outreach, Employee Education and Training. In this position, she was responsible for developing the knowledge and skills of Agency and State employees, as well as conducting education and outreach activities to meet the needs of small and very small meat, poultry and egg processors to help them enhance their food safety and food defense systems. Dr. Kelly has over twenty years of government service at USDA. Her experience includes working as an instructor, a Program Analyst, Chief of the Program Analysis Branch at the FSIS Technical Service Center, and the FSIS Chief Training Officer.

Under her leadership, FSIS became an Authorized Provider of continuing education units, and received the Exemplar Award from the International Association of Continuing Education and Training (IACET). She was instrumental in establishing the Agency's policies related to training as a condition of employment, requiring entry level inspection personnel to pass a validated examination in order to continue working in their position. She has also established a robust distance learning program that includes e-learning courses, webinars, videos, and self-study materials. This included managing a video production team that created educational materials for the Agency.

During this time, she has worked collaboratively with employee unions and associations as well as universities to partner with them in providing educational services to Agency employees. Additionally, she created and administered an assessment center for leadership development. She spoke at a number of industry meetings about improving workforce training for government and industry employees, including an international meeting in Beijing, China. Dr. Kelly also established the Small Plant Help Desk to respond to questions small meat and poultry manufacturers about providing updated training to employees on food safety policies.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) highlighted the FSIS outreach program serving small and very small plants as unique in providing helpful resources and assistance to small businesses (GAO report 07-714). FSIS training programs contributed to the Agency winning the 2007 President's Quality Award for the Strategic Management of Human Capital.



## SPEAKER BIO



**George McDonald**  
**Chief Youth Programs Division, National Park Service**

George McDonald was born and raised in the Harlem community of New York City. He holds a BA degree with honors in Political Science from Hampton University and has done graduate work at Georgetown University and Bowie State University. Before joining the National Park Service (NPS), George worked as the Business Development Manager and Chief Conference Coordinator for Encore Management Corporation in Silver Spring MD. After considerable encouragement from his late brother Moriba

McDonald who was a historian with the National Park Service and first the Program Coordinator for the NPS Cultural Diversity Internship Program, George joined the Service first working as an Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist and then as Special Assistant to the Deputy Director. In his capacity as Special Assistant, he held leadership roles in advancing the development of the Tuskegee Airmen Historic Site in Alabama and the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City. He is most proud of his work serving as the Program Manager for the Presidential Commission for the National Museum for African American History and Culture. The successful completion of a Report to Congress and the President allowed for the development of a national museum dedicated to the achievements and contributions of African Americans to the United States after a 75-year long effort.

Beginning in 2006, George worked in a dual capacity as the Management Analyst for the Associate Director, Partnerships and Visitor Experience and as the Acting National Youth Programs Manager. He was responsible for planning and executing the successful reorganization of the entire Directorate, managing several special projects and coordinating NPS programs nationally. In July 2008 George became the National Youth Programs Manager for the National Park Service. George also successfully launched the new Youth Partnerships Program in 2008. This new funding program was designed to enhance and increase the number of underserved minority and disadvantaged population groups that participate in park activities and to provide employment and educational opportunities to minority and disadvantaged youth in our national parks. George successfully launched the Youth Intern Program to provide intellectually challenging internships to young people in the areas of natural and cultural resource stewardship. He was also responsible for writing the implementation guidance for the Public Lands Corp Non-Competitive Hiring Authority. Under George's leadership, many new dynamic and innovative youth development programs including the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Intern Program, the Mosaics in Science Intern Program, and Latino Heritage Intern Program have been developed across the country that provide education, employment and recreational opportunities to tens of thousands of young people.

George has been nationally recognized for his efforts to develop robust partnership opportunities for a wide range of diverse organizations interested in natural and cultural resource stewardship. He is firmly committed to advancing programs for youth across the country that enhances their understanding of our nation's precious natural and cultural resources and expands employment and educational opportunities to all economic, cultural, and racial groups.

## SPEAKER BIO



**Claire N. Lam**  
**Acting Director – Office of Minority and Women Inclusion**  
**Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation**

When Claire Lam immigrated to the United States of America in 1975 as a refugee amidst the Vietnam War, she never imagined that she would have a successful career in the federal government. But that's exactly what happened.

Though she spent most of her 25 years in the Department of Defense, with a short stint at the State Department and the U.S. Forest Service, today Ms. Lam serves as Acting Director of the

Office of Minority and Women Inclusion (OMWI) at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). In her current position, Ms. Lam is responsible for establishing and implementing policies for diversity and inclusion in the FDIC's management, employment, and business activities. Additionally, she leads EEO programs and manages programs associated with the requirements of Section 342 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010.

When Claire is not advancing the diversity and inclusion agenda, she enjoys her other passion: exploring and experiencing unique cultures and foods from all around the world.



**Adria N. Terry**  
**Founder, A&T Equity Group**

Adria earned her Master of Education in Higher Education Administration from Louisiana State University (LSU) and holds a Bachelor of Science in Community Leadership and Development from the University of Kentucky. Prior to her role with Hines Commercial Real Estate firm, she spent 3 years at the University of Houston as Program Manager for the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. In this role she empowered the University of Houston community to learn

about diversity, celebrate differences and foster inclusive environments through interactive diversity workshops, programmatic support and campus collaboration. Here she found her talent and passion for facilitating workshops and delivering thought provoking D&I topics to students, faculty and staff.

Currently, Adria works for Hines Commercial Real Estate firm as a Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator. In this role she supports the Hines Local Ambassadors employees with interest in D&I. This group is spread across 24 countries and works to promote diversity and inclusion efforts across the firm. Additionally, she assists the Hines Learning and Development team to present virtually on D&I and personal/professional development topics.

In 2019, Adria started her own consulting business A&T Equity Group. Her work focuses on delivering diversity workshops, small and large group facilitation, One-on-One Intercultural Development Inventory coaching sessions and Instructional Design. Through A&T Equity Group, all workshops and presentations can be customized to fit the needs and goals of an organization. Workshop topics include Diversity 101, LGBTQ Inclusion, Microaggressions, Unconscious Bias, Understanding Intersectionality and more. She is a certified Intercultural Development Inventory Qualified Administrator and enjoys meeting individuals where they are and developing their understanding of self and others. Native of Louisville, KY, Adria is excited to call Houston her new home.

## SPEAKER BIO



### **Howard Ross**

#### **Author and Founding Partner Cook Ross Consulting, Inc.**

Howard Ross is a lifelong social justice advocate and is considered one of the world's seminal thought leaders on identifying and addressing unconscious bias. He is the author of *Reinventing Diversity: Transforming Organizational Community to Strengthen People, Purpose and Performance*, (published by Rowman and Littlefield in conjunction with SHRM in 2011), and the Washington Post best seller, *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating*

*Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*, (published by Rowman and Littlefield in 2014). His latest book, *Our Search for Belonging: How Our Need to Connect is Tearing Us Apart*, released by Berrett-Koehler in May of 2018, won the 2019 Nautilus Book Award Gold Medal for Social Change and Social Justice.

Howard has specialized in the synthesis of neuro-cognitive and social science research and direct application re: Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Accessibility work. His client work has focused on the areas of corporate culture change, leadership development, and managing diversity. Ross has successfully implemented large-scale organizational culture change efforts in the area of managing diversity and cultural integration in academic institutions, professional services corporations, Fortune 500 companies, and retail, health care, media, and governmental institutions in 47 of the United States and over 40 countries worldwide. In addition, Howard has delivered programs at Harvard University Medical School, Stanford University Medical School, Johns Hopkins University, the Wharton School of Business, Duke University and Washington University Medical School, and over 20 other colleges and Universities. Howard served as the 2007-2008 Johnnetta B. Cole Professor of Diversity at Bennett College for Women, the first time a white man had ever served in such a position at an HBCU.

Howard's writings have been published by the Harvard Business Review, the Washington Post, the New York Times, Fast Company Magazine, Diversity Women Magazine, Forbes Magazine, Fortune Magazine, and dozens of other publications. He appears monthly on National Public Radio. Howard has served on numerous not-for-profits boards, including the Diversity Advisory Board of the Human Rights Campaign, the board of directors of the Dignity and Respect Campaign, and the board of the directors for the National Women's Mentoring Network. Howard has been the recipient of many awards, including the 2009 Operation Understanding Award for Community Service; the 2012 Winds of Change Award from the Forum on Workplace Diversity and Inclusion; the 2013 Diversity Peer Award from Diversity Women Magazine; the 2014 Catalyst Award from Uptown Professional Magazine; the 2014 Catalyst for Change Award from Wake Forest University; the 2015 Trendsetter in HR by SHRM Magazine; and the 2016 Leadership in Diversity Award by the World Human Resources Development Conference in Mumbai, India. He was also named an Honorary Medicine Man by the Eastern Cherokee Reservation in N.C. and given Medicine Holder designation by the Pawnee Nation.

Howard is also a former Rock 'n Roll Musician and has taught meditation and mindfulness for more than 20 years, including his role as co-founder and Lead Facilitator for the Inner Journey Seminars. Howard founded Cook Ross Inc., one of the nation's leading Diversity and Inclusion consultancies. He sold the company in July 2018 and founded Udarta Consulting, LLC.

Howard keynotes and speaks regularly at Conferences for SHRM, SHRM Diversity, the Forum for Workplace Inclusion, National Association of Corporate Directors, ATD, the World Diversity Forum, and dozens of others. He can be reached at [howard@udarta.com](mailto:howard@udarta.com).

## SPEAKER BIO



**Tinisha Agramonte**  
**Director, Office of Civil Rights,**  
**U.S. Department of Commerce**

Tinisha Agramonte, the Architect of the First Generation Professionals Initiative, a first of its kind Federal government diversity and inclusion program, is a highly regarded Civil Rights Champion whose personal and professional mission is to advance equitable opportunities for all. She has 25 years of experience in the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), diversity, civil rights, and human relations arenas as a civil servant, consultant, university instructor, and trainer/facilitator. Agramonte has held leadership positions with various Federal agencies, including the Departments of Commerce, Veterans Affairs, Army, and Air Force, and the U.S. Small Business Administration. In those positions, she worked at various locations throughout the world including England, Japan, Germany, and here -- stateside.

Agramonte was appointed to the Senior Executive Service (SES) in 2013. She currently serves as the Director, Office of Civil Rights for the Department of Commerce (DOC). In this capacity, she serves as the principal advisor on equal employment opportunity (EEO), diversity and civil rights. She provides leadership, direction, and guidance on ensuring a Model EEO workplace that is well postured to successfully achieve DOC's mission. Throughout her 20-year federal career, she has led agencies through transformation efforts, strategically embedding and integrating innovative and forward thinking EEO, civil rights, and diversity programs into day-to-day agency operations. Agramonte led and implemented policies and programs that impacted workforces up to 300,000 employees and were recognized as best practices in the federal government.

Early in her life, Agramonte was identified as an at-risk youth. With the help of mentors and educators who saw potential in her, she was able to overcome significant challenges. Because of their guidance, she realized the potential they saw in her and was encouraged to reach unimaginable heights. For this reason, and as a First Generation Professional, Tinisha is compelled to "pay it forward" by ensuring ALL people have the access, opportunities, encouragement, and support needed to realize their fullest potential.

Agramonte was an adjunct instructor for Chapman University, teaching senior-level Diversity Management courses. Additionally, she taught EEO and Alternative Dispute Resolution courses for the Air Force's Human Resource Management School.

She received her Bachelor's degree in Mass Communications from California State University, Hayward and her Master's degree in Human Relations from the University of Oklahoma.



## SPEAKER BIO



**Roberto Contreras**  
**Civil Rights Director, Food and Nutrition Service**

Roberto Contreras has served as the Civil Rights Director at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) since 2016. Prior to becoming the Director, Mr. Contreras held various positions within USDA since he started his Federal career in 2007, including: Branch Chief of Complaints, Civil Rights Investigator, Special Emphasis Program Manager, and Outreach Specialist.

Mr. Contreras is first generation Mexican-American and a first generation college graduate. He graduated in 2004 from the University of Nebraska-Kearney. Mr. Contreras has committed his professional career to Civil Rights, serving as a Spanish Translator/Interpreter for the state of Nebraska in an immigration detention center while going to school. Prior to moving to Virginia, Mr. Contreras served as the Special Assistant to the Nebraska Director of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) where he created the first statewide translation unit to ensure individuals with Limited English Proficiency received services in their native language.



**Michael Dukes**  
**1890 National Program Lead**  
**Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement**

Michael Dukes serves as the 1890 National Program Lead to the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement in the Office of Secretary at the United States Department of Agriculture. His portfolio includes managing the 1890 National Scholarship program, the Booker T. Washington Fellowship program, as well as, coordinating the partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Thurgood Marshall College

Fund for their student internship program. Michael currently serves as USDA's lead for the White House Initiative making Historically Black Colleges and Universities more competitive for Federal employment. He previously served as a Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager for Departmental Management, in the Office of Human Resource Management at USDA where he worked on workforce analytics and special emphasis programs. In addition, he formerly served as the lead analyst on the White House initiative "My Brother's Keeper", where his contributions led to groundbreaking and innovative mechanisms for Federal hiring and recruitment strategies for diversity. Michael has previously served as the Chairperson for the Civil Right Executive Advisory Team at USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Services (NASS), while working in the Information Technology Division, as a Senior IT Specialist. Prior to arriving at USDA, Michael worked in both the private and federal sectors, as a Senior IT Consultant for Booz Allen Hamilton and for the U.S. Army Family Morale and Welfare Recreation Command.

A Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania native, Michael has a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science and Engineering from the illustrious Johnson C. Smith University. In addition to his undergraduate degree he has earned his Master's Certificate in Project Management from George Washington University, and a Federal Acquisition Certificate for Project and Program Managers.



# First Generation Professionals Symposium

Wednesday, July 22, 2020 / 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm EST

Virtual Event

AgLearn Registration Link: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51339>

The First-Generation Professions (FGP) Symposium aims to establish a community of practice amongst first generation professionals and highlight the journey, successes, and challenges facing first generation professionals. Additionally, the event will assist participants in understanding barriers and challenges facing First Generation Professionals, including the unconscious bias many FGPs face.

## AGENDA

### ***A Conversation with a First Generation Professional***

#### **Welcome & Overview**

Torey Ian Powell  
Event Chair & National Coordinator for  
Agricultural Youth Programs  
Office of Partnerships & Public Engagement

#### **Moderator**

Lisa Yellow-Luger  
USDA Liaison at Sitting Bull College  
Office of Partnerships & Public Engagement

#### **Speaker**

Horace Hodge  
USDA Liaison at Prairie View A&M University  
Office of Partnerships & Public Engagement

### ***Unconscious Bias & First-Generation Professionals Training***

#### **Speaker**

Tinisha Agramonte  
Civil Rights Director  
U.S. Department of Commerce

# Next Generation Symposium

Monday, July 27, 2020 / 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm EST

Virtual Event

AgLearn Registration Link: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51710>

## AGENDA

<b>Welcome</b>	Dr. Christien Russell Special Assistant Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
<b>Opening Remarks</b>	Adriano Vasquez Civil Rights Director Foreign Agricultural Service
<b>Panelists</b>	Dr. Chandra D. Holifield Collins Soil Scientist Agricultural Research Service  Charles Alexander Russell II Equal Opportunity Specialist Farm Production and Conservation Business Center  Keisha Tatem State Conservationist Natural Resource Conservation Service  Shantel King Resource Conservationist Natural Resource Conservation Service  Sharon Rice-Hicks Acting Team Lead (Senior EEO Specialist) Forest Service
<b>Q&amp;A</b>	
<b>Closing Remarks</b>	Jeffrey Galloway EEO Specialist Foreign Agricultural Service

# Closing Ceremony

Wednesday, July 29, 2020 / 10:00 am – 11:00 am EST

Virtual Event

AgLearn Registration Link: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51439>

## AGENDA

### **Welcome & Introduction of Keynote Speaker**

Carrie Moore  
Insider Threat Program Manager  
Office of Homeland Security

### **Keynote Speaker**

Joon S. Park, Deputy Administrator  
Administrative & Financial Management  
Mission Area Business Center  
Chief Operating Officer  
Agricultural Research Service  
Research, Education & Economics

### **Shining Stars Presentation**

Ramonda Reed  
Technical Advisor, Office of Civil Rights  
Food and Nutrition Service

### **#TogetherWeAreStronger Interns Video**

Ja’Niyah Best – Summer Intern  
Mariana Espinoza - Summer Intern  
Michelle Opoku - Summer Intern  
QuaryShon Pittman - Summer Intern  
Miracle Proctor – Summer Intern  
Jamila Tate - Summer Intern  
O’Cheye Williams – Summer Intern

### **Closing Remarks**

Winona Lake Scott  
Associate Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

## SPEAKER BIO

**Joon S. Park**  
**Deputy Administrator,**  
**Administrative & Financial Management / Mission Area Business Center Chief Operating Officer,**  
**Agricultural Research Service, Research, Education & Economics**

Mr. Joon Park is the ARS Deputy Administrator for Administrative & Financial Management (AFM) / Mission Area Business Center Chief Operating Officer in Washington, DC. Mr. Park leads an organization of nearly 600 business professionals throughout the United States that provide human resources, financial management, extramural agreements, travel, information technology, acquisition, property/fleet management, security, facilities engineering and safety services to the four USDA Research, Economics & Education (REE) Agencies: Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Economics Research Service (ERS), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Mr. Park has held other positions with the USDA Agricultural Research Service to include serving as the ARS Human Resources Director in Beltsville, MD from 2010 -2012 and as the ARS South Atlantic Area Deputy Area Director for Business Management in Athens, GA from 2007 - 2010. He also served as a civilian with the Department of Defense Naval Air Systems Command for 11 years prior to joining USDA. Mr. Park graduated from Liberty University in 1996 with a B.S. degree in Government and received his Master of Business Administration (MBA) from The Johns Hopkins University in 2002.

# ADM 2020 Shining Stars

Shining Stars are USDA employees who are doing awesome work inside and/or outside of the office. This includes going above and beyond in working in their community with underrepresented groups, working to advance diversity in agriculture, or a special project.

Congratulations to all Shining Star Recipients and Nominees!

## SHINING STAR RECIPIENTS

- Amir Ali, Compliance Investigator, FSIS
- Danielle Gibb, Program Specialist, FNS
- Harley Hughes-Malloy, Consumer Safety Inspector, FSIS
- Kaneisha Miller, Soil Conservationist, NRCS
- Linda Whitmore, Management Analyst, FAS
- Lisa Wilkins, Supervisory IT Project Manager, FS
- Paul Zinskie, Consumer Safety Officer, FSIS
- Robert Wilson, Resource Soil Scientist, NRCS
- Susan Johnson, Enforcement Investigations and Analysis Office, FSIS
- Venus Welch-White, National Rural Energy Program Coordinator, RD

## SHINING STAR NOMINEES

- Angela French-Bell, Special Assistant to the PPQ Deputy Administrator, APHIS
- Carol Ford, Enforcement Investigations and Analysis Officer, FSIS
- Catrina Southall, Equal Opportunity Specialist, RD
- Dr. Christien Russell, Program Analyst, OASCR
- Dr. Deborah Edwards, Supervisory Veterinary Medical Officer, FSIS
- Dr. Durgaprasada Rao Atluru, Supervisory Veterinary Medical Officer, FSIS
- Dr. Dwayne Blakeney, Supervisory Veterinary Medical Officer, FSIS
- Elizabeth Messervey, Equal Opportunity Specialist, RD
- Emmanuel Dosu, Budget Analyst, FS
- Fahmida Chhipa, Equal Opportunity Assistant, NASS
- Jean Mah, Senior Data Analyst, FSIS
- RD Data Analytics Team - James Barham, Kasey Martin, Christopher Aston, Amanda Hope, Valerie Handy, RD
- Rebecca De La Torre, Partnership Coordinator, FPAC-NRCS
- Steve Mamber, Senior Data Analyst, FSIS
- Tedd Buelow, Native American Program Coordinator, RD
- Torey Powell, National Coordinator-Agricultural Youth Programs, OPPE



# USDA Civil Rights Contacts

## Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

### **DEVON WESTHILL**

Phone: (202) 720-3808

Email: [Devon.Westhill@usda.gov](mailto:Devon.Westhill@usda.gov)

### **TED GUTMAN**

Phone: (202) 720-3808

Email: [Theodoreh.Gutman@usda.gov](mailto:Theodoreh.Gutman@usda.gov)

## Farm Production and Conservation

### **EMILY SU**

Phone: (202) 401-1919

Email: [Emily.Su@usda.gov](mailto:Emily.Su@usda.gov)

## Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)

### **ROBERT CONTRERAS**

Phone: (703) 305-2195

Email: [Roberto.Contreras@usda.gov](mailto:Roberto.Contreras@usda.gov)

## Food Safety

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

### **ANGELA KELLY**

Phone: (301) 504-7746

Email: [Angela.Kelly@usda.gov](mailto:Angela.Kelly@usda.gov)

## Marketing and Regulatory Programs

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

### **CLIFTON GILCHRIST**

Phone: (202) 720-3980

Email: [Clifton.Gilchrist@usda.gov](mailto:Clifton.Gilchrist@usda.gov)

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

### **LA SHON D. COLE**

Phone: MD: (301) 851-4193

Email: [LaShon.D.Cole@usda.gov](mailto:LaShon.D.Cole@usda.gov)

## Natural Resources and Environment

Forest Service (FS)

### **CHRIS MOORE**

Phone: (703) 605-4858

Email: [Christopher.Moore@usda.gov](mailto:Christopher.Moore@usda.gov)

## Research, Education and Economics

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Economic Research Service (ERS)

### **TRACEY TROUTMAN**

Phone: (202) 720-6161

Email: [Tracey.Troutman@usda.gov](mailto:Tracey.Troutman@usda.gov)

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

### **JUNE TURNER**

Phone: (202) 720-8257

Email: [June.Turner@usda.gov](mailto:June.Turner@usda.gov)

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

### **DRENDA WILLIAMS**

Phone: (254) 742-9808

Email: [Drenda.Williams@usda.gov](mailto:Drenda.Williams@usda.gov)

## Rural Development

### **SHARESE PAYLOR**

Phone: (202) 692-0097

Email: [Sharese.Paylor@usda.gov](mailto:Sharese.Paylor@usda.gov)

## Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs

Foreign Agricultural Service

### **ADRIANO VASQUEZ**

Phone: (202) 720-8907

Email: [Adriano.Vasquez@usda.gov](mailto:Adriano.Vasquez@usda.gov)

## Office of the Chief Financial Officer

### **DARVIN BENNETT**

Phone: (504) 426-7567

Email: [Darvin.Bennett@usda.gov](mailto:Darvin.Bennett@usda.gov)

## Office of the Inspector General

### **KELLY MCGOVERN**

Phone: (202) 779-2740

Email: [Kelly.McGovern@oig.usda.gov](mailto:Kelly.McGovern@oig.usda.gov)

# Acknowledgments

## USDA American Diversity Month Planning Committee

Devon Westhill - OASCR  
Winona Lake Scott - OASCR  
Denise A. Banks – OASCR  
Theodore Gutman - OASCR  
Tysan Williams, Co-Chair – OASCR  
Carrie Moore, Co-Chair - OHS  
Gwen Edmondson - OASCR  
Edna Gomez Velez - FNS  
Tiffany Wallace - FPAC  
Christien Russell - OASCR  
Joelle Bowers - OASCR  
Tina Quarles - OASCR  
Michael Dukes - OPPE  
Catrina Southall - RD  
Torey Powell - OPPE  
Angie Vandell - RD  
Sequana Janifer – OASCR  
Lisa Mason – APHIS

Damali Carr - FSIS  
Sharon Rice-Hicks - FS  
Jefferey Galloway - FAS  
Lisa Coleman - OASCR  
Ron Brown - FPAC  
Nathan Harvey – OGC  
Ali Muhammed - AMS  
Sheila McKie – FNS  
Gale Mason – AMS  
Dora Flores – AMS  
Ja’Niyah Best – OASCR  
Quaryshon Pittman - OASCR  
Marianna Espinoza – OASCR  
O’Cheye Williams - OASCR  
Michelle Opoku – OASCR  
Jamila Tate – OASCR  
Miracle Proctor - OASCR  
Ryann Durant - OSEC

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Office of the Secretary  
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Office of the General Counsel  
Office of the Executive Secretariat  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Farm Production and Conservation Business Center (FPAC)  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Food Safety and Inspection Service  
Foreign Agricultural Service  
Forest Service  
Rural Development  
Office of Executive Services  
Office of Homeland Security

**Closed Captioning will be provided during events.**  
**To request a Reasonable Accommodation, please contact Lisa Coleman at**  
[Lisa.Coleman@usda.gov](mailto:Lisa.Coleman@usda.gov)

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