

Riding the Rails: Black Railroad Workers in Canada and the United States

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Riding the Rails: Black Railroad Workers in Canada and the United States

Jenny Carson

Stanley G. Grizzle, *My Name's Not George: The Story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1998)

Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001)

AT THE DAWN of the 21st century, African American and African Canadian history has much to celebrate. The fields have come a long way from their early focuses on the pathological effects of slavery and racism, and on Black “race” leaders and middle-class organizations such as W.E.B. DuBois and the NAACP. By turning to a new set of sources — oral histories, folklore, literature, and songs, to name only a few — scholars have begun to recover the agency that ordinary African Americans and African Canadians exercised, even in the face of the repressive Jim Crow South.¹ Eric Arnesen’s and Beth Bates’ studies on Black railway workers in the United States, along with Stanley Grizzle’s account of life as a porter on the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), combine much of what is good about the new scholarship. Relying on Black trade union records, the Black press, and oral interviews, where possible

¹See for example Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford 1977); Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History*, 80 (June 1993), 75-112; Venus Green, *Race on the Line: Gender, Labor, and Technology in the Bell System, 1880-1980* (Durham 2001); Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge 1997).

Jenny Carson, “Riding the Rails: Black Railroad Workers in Canada and the United States,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 50 (Fall 2002), 275-95.

the authors have allowed the workers to speak for themselves. The result is a sometimes sad, and sometimes triumphant story of a group of workers who, in the face of extraordinary racism, established independent organizations that simultaneously fought for economic equality and Black civil rights.

Examining the works of Grizzle, Arnesen, and Bates together, one sees the striking similarities that characterized railway work north and south of the 49th parallel. Through exclusionary union practices, discriminatory hiring and promotion policies, and oftentimes violence, White railway workers and trade unionists allied with management and the state to erect a racially stratified occupational structure that confined Black workers to poorly paid jobs such as laying tracks and portering. While a relatively small number of Black men obtained jobs as switchmen, brakemen, and firemen, it was not until the 1960s that Blacks in Canada and the US gained access to higher-paying skilled jobs such as engineering and conducting. Such gains were achieved through the valiant struggles Black workers launched, opting sometimes to work from within the House of Labour, and at other times through independent all-Black organizations.

Taken together, the works under review demonstrate that in both Canada and the US, Black railroaders' organizations were racial unions "forg[ing] a unionism that was as much, if not more, about race and civil rights than it was about class." (Arnesen, 101) The men found in the pages of these books were civil rights pioneers who made invaluable contributions to the broader political and legal struggles for racial equality. Given the important role that these workers played within their communities, however, surprisingly few works have examined their experiences. This is just one of the many reasons why scholars will welcome the recent works of Grizzle, Arnesen, and Bates.

In the year that Canada achieved nationhood, George Pullman established the Pullman Palace Car Company, improving the conditions of long distance travel. Exploiting racial ideologies that associated African Americans with service work, from the beginning Pullman hired (cheap) Black labour to serve his mostly White passengers.² It was widely assumed that the perceived social distance between Whites and Blacks would enable passengers to feel at ease while temporarily living in close quarters with a "servant on wheels." (Grizzle, 25-6) Between the 1870s and 1950s, railway companies assured potential customers that they would enjoy a luxurious, comfortable journey, pampered by a smiling, eager Black porter.

As one might expect, porters in Canada and the US were subjected to a host of discriminatory working conditions. On trips that sometimes lasted as long as six days, porters were expected to cater to every whim of their passengers, remaining at their beck and call both day and night. (Bates 5, 18-23) They routinely worked as many as 400 hours a month, suffering from both sleep deprivation and long separations from their families. Not surprisingly, porters were also among the most poorly

²William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925-37* (Urbana 1977), 1-3.

paid workers on the railroad. In 1926, the average salary of a porter in the US was \$67.50 a month, or \$810 a year. In the same year the American government estimated that it cost \$2,000 a year to sustain a family.³ In Canada, porters who had worked for the CPR for over three years were earning between \$75 and \$85 per month. Such wages stood in stark contrast to the \$268.57 per month earned by White conductors.⁴ Moreover, once the cost of the porters' uniforms and a number of other work-related materials were deducted, Black railroad workers in Canada and the US could take home as little as \$50 a month.⁵ While the tips that they received constituted a necessary supplement to their paltry wages, the tipping system reinforced the servile nature of the work, underlining the porters' dependence on the benevolence of Whites. Grizzle of the CPR described tipping as one of the most humiliating aspects of railway work: "I felt uncomfortable every time I extended my open palm to receive a tip ... it was the same kind of approach as begging-dehumanizing, demoralizing and degrading." (42)

However, with a lack of employment alternatives, before World War I Black men in Canada and the US actively sought employment on the nations' railways. Working in one of the few occupations that provided relatively steady employment, porters were known as "labor aristocrats," including among their ranks many of the communities' most highly educated citizens. (Bates, 23) With their relatively high wages, porters were able to buy houses and cars, and in some instances send their children to university. By 1930, 12,000 African American porters worked for the Pullman Company, making it the single largest private employer of Blacks in the US. (Bates, 23-5) Hundreds of Black men in Canada also found work on the railroad, concentrated primarily in urban centers such as Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Montréal, Halifax, and Vancouver.⁶ While a small number of women secured jobs as Pullman maids, porterettes, and cleaners, ultimately we learn very little about these workers from the books under review.

Railways have long captured the historical imagination, celebrated for their important role in nation building. Today, the railroad is eulogized in poetry, literature, films, and other forms of popular culture. But there is a dark side to the building and maintenance of North American railways. In the last twenty years, a number of scholars have examined the experiences of the Chinese and Mexican immigrants brought into Canada and the US to perform the backbreaking dangerous

³Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, 17.

⁴Agnes Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada: An Ethnically Submerged Split Labour Market," in Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth, eds., *Canadian Working Class History*, (Toronto 1992), 677-8.

⁵Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, 17; and Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada," 677-8.

⁶Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, xi; Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 18, 23-6; and Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada," 674.

work of laying the tracks.⁷ The past decade has also produced a small number of works that examine the experiences of African American porters; less, however, has been written about Black porters in Canada. While the story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) and its charismatic leader, A. Philip Randolph, has been told and retold, we know far less about the founding of this important union in Canada. Grizzle's personal account of life on the CPR provides Canadian scholars with a unique opportunity to learn more about an organization that made an "indelible stamp on the history of social activism in Canada" (Grizzle, 27), and about a group of workers who are only beginning to receive the scholarly attention they deserve.⁸

Grizzle himself is an extraordinary individual. After working for twenty years as a porter for the CPR, he went on to become the first African Canadian employee of the Ontario Ministry of Labour, and the first Black judge of the Court of Canadian Citizenship. (104-7) For his lifetime dedication to civil rights, he was awarded the Order of Canada in 1995. Grizzle's account, ambitious in scope — in a mere 110 pages, he rushes us through the formation of the BSCP, the Depression, World War II, and the legal battles launched in the 1950s by Blacks and other minority groups — tells the story of his half-century struggle to combat the legalized and *de facto* racial segregation and discrimination he encountered both on and off the railroad.

With the recent and not so recent work done by Robin Winks, Constance Backhouse, and James Walker, it should come as no surprise to learn of the myriad ways in which Canadian workers and capital allied to produce a racialized division of labour that preserved the best jobs for White men.⁹ Grizzle's story begins in 1918, the year when a Winnipeg porter on the Canadian National Railway (CNR) founded the Order of Sleeping Car Porters. With John Arthur Robinson at the helm, the new un-

⁷Patricia Roy, *A White Man's Province* (Vancouver 1989), 37-63; Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal 1990), 10-4, 25-38, 48; and Barbara A. Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of WWII* (Austin 1999).

⁸By 1940, there were roughly 1,000 Black railroad workers in Canada. Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (New Haven 1971), 425. For other first hand accounts of porters see Jack Santino's *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggles: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana 1989), and his film by the same name, produced in 1982 by Benchmark Films. See also David Perata's *Those Pullman Blues: An Oral History of the African-American Railroad Attendant* (New York 1996).

⁹Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*; Constance Backhouse, *Color-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto 1999); and James W. St. G. Walker, "Race," *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada* (Toronto 1997). For additional readings on race and ethnicity see Franca Iacovetta with Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca, eds., *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s* (Toronto 1998).

ion applied to the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE) for membership. (18) Revealing that White Canadian workers were no less racialized or racist than their counterparts to the South, the CBRE refused to admit the porters.¹⁰ When the workers turned to the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) for membership, they were again turned away, this time for not being part of a larger (white) union. The workers refocused their attention on the CBRE, and in 1919 were granted full membership status.¹¹ It was, however, a limited victory as the workers were segregated along racial lines, with White dining car and sleeping car conductors in one union, and Black porters in another. (18) The segregated union structure, maintained by discriminatory hiring and promotion policies, lasted until the mid-1960s when the unions were integrated.¹²

Politicized by the “small but significant victory” on the CNR, in 1919 the Order of Sleeping Car Porters turned its attention toward the privately owned and run CPR (18). Winning the porters over to a pro-union perspective was no small task. In 1915, Montréal porter Thomas Morgan O’Brien had established the Porters Mutual Benefit Association (more commonly known as the Welfare Committee). Like George Pullman’s Employee Representation Plan, the organization functioned as a company union, offering the workers financial assistance and a grievance procedure. In 1919, when a small group of workers launched an organizational drive to establish a union independent of the company, the CPR responded by firing 36 porters. It was not until the 1940s that Black railroad workers would try once again to establish an independent organization.¹³

Influenced by the growing success of the BSCP south of the border, in 1939, Montréal porter Charles Russell called upon BSCP President A. Philip Randolph to help the CPR porters establish their own organization. In July 1939, Randolph and BSCP Vice President Bennie Smith began the organizational process among porters in Toronto and Montréal. In the same year the BSCP extended full membership status to the CPR porters (by this time the American Federation of Labor (AFL) had awarded the BSCP an international charter). After years of clandestine organizational work (of which we hear very little as Grizzle was overseas fighting in the war), the BSCP established formal organizations in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg in 1942. Soon thereafter, the porters voted overwhelmingly for BSCP representation, ending the twenty-year domination of the company union. In 1945, the newly certified organization negotiated its first collective agreement, winning

¹⁰For a discussion of the racial identities of White workers see David Roediger’s now seminal work *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London 1999); and Barrington Walker, “‘This is the White Man’s Day’: The Irish, White Racial Identity, and the 1866 Memphis Riots,” *Left History*, 5 (1999), 31-55.

¹¹W.E. Greening, *It Was Never Easy 1908-1958: A History of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers* (Ottawa 1961), 58-60.

¹²Calliste, “Sleeping Car Porters in Canada,” 675-7.

¹³Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 423-4; and Grizzle, 14-9.

wage increases, vacation and overtime pay, shorter working hours, and most importantly, union recognition. (19-23)

Grizzle describes the victory as nothing short of miraculous. It was the “first time in Canadian history that a trade union organized by and for Black men had signed a collective agreement with a white employer.” (23) The economic improvements won by the union brought the porters the financial security to “buy houses and go out to restaurants,” (53) as well as to establish community institutions such as the Toronto United Negro Credit Union. (63-4)

Stanley Grizzle’s account demonstrates that the union’s influence extended far beyond the Canadian labour movement. As in the US, the BSCP in Canada functioned as a civil rights organization, from which Black men such as Stanley Grizzle launched struggles for first-class citizenship. As a member of the Toronto Labour Committee for Human Rights, in the 1950s the Brotherhood joined forces with a number of other progressive organizations to challenge discrimination in housing, public facilities, and employment. The Brotherhood also initiated legislative change, playing an important role in the passage of the Fair Accommodation Practices Act in Ontario, and in the enactment of the Federal Fair Employment Practices Act. The Brotherhood also lobbied for the creation of a Human Rights Commission and for more liberal immigration policies.¹⁴ (88-103)

Like their counterparts south of the border, Canadian porters also turned to the courts to fight racial discrimination. In 1955, after a protracted legal struggle, two porters were promoted to conducting jobs, becoming the first Black men in North America to be hired as sleeping car conductors. It was an incredible victory, which Grizzle argues, made “our union brothers in the United States ... envious of us.” (70)

Grizzle’s account acknowledges the important role that the Ladies’ Auxiliary played in the success of the union. Established by female relatives of porters in Montréal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Vancouver, Ladies’ Auxiliaries performed important administrative tasks such as raising funds for the fledgling union and for the establishment of an educational program. (82-3) As one of very few organizations run for and by Black women in Canada, the history of this Auxiliary merits further research. Melinda Chateauvert’s recent work on the Ladies’ Auxiliary in the US provides a useful model for future scholarship.

While Chateauvert discusses the important contributions that the Ladies’ Auxiliaries made — collecting dues, organizing secret meetings, publicizing the

¹⁴Those interested in the relationship between organized labour and the post-World War II struggle for human rights should refer to Carmela Patrias and Ruth A. Frager, “‘This is our country, these are our rights’: Minorities and the Origins of Ontario’s Human Rights Campaigns,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 82 (2001), 1-35 and Ross Lamberton’s “‘The Dresden Story’: Racism, Human Rights, and the Jewish Labour Committee of Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 47 (Spring 2001), 43-82. Lamberton’s footnotes alone reveal the impressive amount of recent work in this field.

Brotherhood's message — she reveals as well their marginalization within a male-dominated movement that rested upon notions of manhood rights, and by conventional gender expectations that limited the scope of respectable female behaviour. Chateauvert also examines the small group of women who obtained jobs on the railway. She has discovered that, like their White union brothers, African American leaders of the BSCP shunted Pullman maids, porterettes, and cleaners into the Ladies' Auxiliaries where they received little support.¹⁵ Most likely Black women in Canada dealt with many of the same issues, trying to etch out a place for themselves in the shadow of men such as Stanley Grizzle. It is time to retrieve their stories.¹⁶

Grizzle's account offers insights into the development of cross-ethnic and cross-racial relationships within Toronto's working class. He writes in particular about the relationship between the Jewish and Black communities. In the 1950s and 1960s, the BSCP worked with the Jewish Labour Committee to monitor the implementation of civil rights legislation. Karl Kaplansky, the Director of the Jewish Labour Committee, provided indispensable aid in the seminal court case that saw the promotion of the first black railroaders to conducting jobs.¹⁷ Noting that Jews were often the only group who would rent to Blacks, Grizzle describes it as a "community of suffering," arguing that: "[e]ven today, I think there is still a very strong bond between the African Canadian and Jewish communities in Toronto." (32) Further research into this alliance would be useful to scholars of race and ethnicity, as well as labour.

Grizzle's account also reveals the many divisions within the Black community. He is particularly critical of the Black middle class, arguing that it failed to support the organizational activities of the porters, urging them to keep "keep quiet," and stop "talking about discrimination." (87) Grizzle, however, saves his harshest criticism for African Canadian churches, describing them as "peripheral friends of the unions." (80) While church leaders allowed workers to hold meetings in their buildings, they "didn't favour joining hands with the unions too strongly."¹⁸ (80) It

¹⁵Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana 1998), 2-18.

¹⁶For existing work on Black women in Canada see Peggy Bristow, et al., eds., *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto 1994).

¹⁷For a discussion of Kaplansky's efforts to fight Jim Crow in the Canadian Labour Movement see Lambertson, "The Dresden Story," 48-59; and Grizzle, 71-81, 92-5.

¹⁸For a different account of the relationship between the Black church and Black workers see Sarah-Jane Mathieu's and Judith Fingard's discussions of the Reverend Doctor J. Francis Robinson, a Black Minister in Halifax who, by all accounts, was more militant and class conscious than his working-class congregates. Sarah-Jane Mathieu, "North of the Colour Line: Sleeping Car Porters and the Battle Against Jim Crow on Canadian Rails, 1880-1920," *Labour/Le Travail*, 47 (2001), 18-20; and Judith Fingard, "From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c.1870-1915," *Acadiensis*, 24 (Spring 1995), 58-9.

was not until Randolph had gained widespread support that Black churches were willing to officially recognize the BSCP. Such comments remind us of the need to pay particular attention to local context.

Where this account is disappointing is in its failure to discuss ethnic differences within the Black working-class. Grizzle has a tendency to use Black and African Canadian interchangeably, obscuring the varied backgrounds of the workers. Agnes Calliste's and Sarah-Jane Mathieu's works on Black railroaders in Canada have revealed that many "African Canadian" porters hailed from the US and the West Indies. In an effort to drive down wages and undermine the trade union activities of White workers, Canadian railroad companies aggressively recruited (cheap) Black immigrant labour, offering economic incentives to Caribbean governments willing to work with their labour agents, and flouting restrictive immigration laws that prohibited the importation of foreign-born labour.¹⁹ The result, Calliste argues, was the creation of a double, split labour market that divided Blacks from Whites, and African American from African Canadian workers.²⁰ Immigration policies favourable to Canadian employers enabled industrialists to assemble a "class of black railroaders representing a melee of ethnicities, nationalities, and political cultures."²¹ Unfortunately, Grizzle does not address these divisions, or discuss how, or if, a unified trade union movement emerged. We know that the exclusionary practices of the CBRE led Black workers to establish their own organizations, but we know less about what these locals actually looked like or how African Canadians, African Americans, and Caribbean Blacks interacted within these organizations. While Black porters in the US were also divided along racial and ethnic lines, American scholarship has also failed to address these divisions.

Understandably, Grizzle's account does not discuss the emigration of Black workers to Canada within the context of larger transnational labour patterns. Sarah-Jane Mathieu's recent work demonstrates that, during World War I, African American workers from the South migrated not only to the large industrial centers of the northern US, but also to cities such as Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver. West Indians likewise extended their sights as far north as Canada. These highly mobile workers, some of whom were joining family members already in Canada, while others emigrated alone, constituted a new "class of transnational industrial workers who capitalized on employment opportunities without regard for regional or national borders."²² Mathieu's work joins a growing body of scholarship that applies comparative analysis to the study of the working class.²³

¹⁹Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada," 678-81. Mathieu, "North of the Colour Line," 10-11, 18-20, and 25-41.

²⁰Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada," 678-81.

²¹Mathieu, "North of the Colour Line," 37.

²²Mathieu, "North of the Colour Line," 26.

²³Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern, eds., *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History* (Houndmills 2002); and Donna Gabaccia and

Lastly, because Grizzle lived in Toronto and worked on the CPR, his memoir does not address the experiences of Black railroad workers outside Toronto, or in the Order of Sleeping Car Porters. As the first Canadian stop on the Pullman line, by the late 19th century, Montréal had emerged as one of the main destinations for Black railroad workers emigrating to Canada,²⁴ an examination of these workers' experiences would contribute to the existing scholarship on African Canadian labour.²⁵ Studies such as Judith Fingard's examination of Halifax's Black transportation workers are in woefully short supply.²⁶ Much could also be gained from comparative analyses that examine the experiences of Black porters in a number of urban centers. But all these criticisms are merely to point out that this is an area of scholarship that would benefit from further research. Grizzle's story will hopefully rekindle interest in the experiences of Black railroaders in Canada, and in the Black Canadian experience more broadly.

Those interested in the black working-class experience in America will find much of interest in Arnesen's and Bates' recent scholarship on African American railway workers. While both books were published in 2001, the authors approach their subjects in vastly different, but in many regards, complementary ways. Bates has produced a community study that examines the role of the BSCP within the context of Chicago's African American community, and in relation to the rise of a new style of Black political protest. While most studies have examined the Brotherhood through the eyes of its leadership, Bates broadens her analysis to explore the Black community's role in the union's rise to power. In doing so, she contributes to a growing body of scholarship that links working-class agency to community forces outside of the formally recognized trade union movement.²⁷ Focusing on the grass-roots organizational activities of the Chicago BSCP during the inter-war years, Bates demonstrates how the union won the support of Chicago's African American community, in the process infusing Black political protest with a distinctly working-class agenda.

Arnesen has produced a more traditional labour history, focusing on working conditions and trade union activities. His work covers a broad period, beginning at the end of the 19th century and concluding with today. While Arnesen discusses the BSCP and Randolph, he makes his most valuable contribution by shifting the focus away from the highly visible porters to an examination of Black switchmen, brakemen, and firemen. Of the 136,065 Black railroaders working in the US in 1924, we

Franca Iacovetta, eds., *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto 2002).

²⁴Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada," 674; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 332; and Grizzle, 58.

²⁵Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada," 678-9.

²⁶Fingard, "From Sea to Rail."

²⁷See Robin D.G. Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem"; and Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*.

learn that in the South nearly 14,000 obtained semi-skilled craft jobs.²⁸ Despite this relatively sizeable number, to date there have been no extensive examinations of these workers' experiences.²⁹ Arnesen also directs our attention to Black dining car waiters, cleaners, and red caps, who, along with Black switchmen, brakemen and firemen, have received surprisingly little historical attention.

Arnesen begins his study by asking how Black railway workers in the South gained access to semi-skilled craft jobs. Criticizing recent works (especially whiteness studies) for letting capital "off the hook," Arnesen argues here and elsewhere that management hired Black workers to undermine the unionization efforts of White craft workers, and to obtain cheaper labour costs.³⁰ Railroad companies were more than satisfied with the outcome. Not only were Black craft workers cheap and highly efficient, they also prevented the emergence of strong craft unions in the South. Arnesen argues that because they refused to organize Black men, craft unions in the South never enjoyed the successes of their counterparts in the North, where Black workers were confined to service jobs. (10, 25-35) For their part, African American workers jumped at the opportunity to earn higher wages while doing work that was free of the stigma associated with service work.

In the last decade, historians have uncovered moments of interracial co-operation between White and Black workers in coal mines, packinghouses, and on the dockyards.³¹ Arnesen has found no evidence of any such co-operation between White and Black railroad workers in either the North or South. Through an exhaustive analysis of trade union papers, railroad company records, and court records, Arnesen reveals the role of White workers and trade unionists in the construction and maintenance of a racially segmented occupational structure. From

²⁸Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York 1931), 284-5.

²⁹Sarah-Jane Mathieu argues that before the establishment of the CBRE, Black men in Canada were hired as switchmen, brakemen, waiters, cooks, baggagemasters, nightwatchmen, and coopers, enjoying far more occupational mobility than Blacks in the US. This is an interesting observation in light of Arnesen's discussion of African-American switchmen, firemen, and brakemen. Taken together these works suggest that in the Southern US and Canada, Black railroaders enjoyed more occupational mobility than their counterparts in the northern US. Mathieu, "North of the Color Line," 14-15.

³⁰Eric Arnesen, "Up From Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race, and the State of Labor History," *Reviews in American History*, 26 (1998), 156. For Arnesen's most recent discussion of Whiteness scholarship see his "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," and "Assessing Whiteness Scholarship: A Response to James Barrett, David Brody, Barbara J. Fields, Eric Foner, Victoria Hattam, and Adolph Reed," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall 2001), 3-32, and 81-92.

³¹Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-54* (Urbana 1997); Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill 1998); and Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana 1994).

their founding in the 1870s, the four big Railroad Brotherhoods (conductors, engineers, firemen, and trainmen) used a combination of constitutional exclusions and racially separate seniority lists to maintain a division of labour that preserved the highest paying jobs for White men. (28, 34-41) Until the late 1960s, the railroad remained one of the most highly segregated industries, with Black workers largely confined to service jobs such as portering and red capping, and to separate unions such as the BSCP. Those fortunate enough to obtain jobs as switchmen, brakemen or firemen, found themselves excluded from the White craft unions. Arnesen tells us, however, that White workers paid the price, for “[i]f wage differentials were a badge of white superiority over blacks, they also ironically prevented whites from receiving a proper ‘white man’s wage.’” (33) Why then did White craft workers refuse to organize Black men, when it so clearly would have been to their economic advantage to do so?

Miners, meatpackers, and longshoremens worked in trades that required little skill or training. Knowing that they could be easily replaced by cheap Black labour, White workers in these trades set aside their racist practices and admitted Blacks into their unions.³² Working in semi-skilled trades that required some training, White craft workers on the railroads felt no such compulsion. Time and time again White railway workers used their trade union journals to assert that Black men were incapable of learning the skills needed to work in the craft trades. (27) Arnesen also points to psychological motivations, arguing: “Notions of racial hierarchy were inscribed not only onto white railroad workers’ ideological outlook but onto their personal and occupational identities.”³³ (28) White workers’ desire to confine Black men to poorly paid service jobs not infrequently manifested itself in racial violence. In the economic uncertainty of the immediate post-World War I period, 650 White switchmen in Memphis launched a five-day wildcat hate strike to protest a dual seniority system that was working to their disadvantage. (66) In the summer of 1921, “midnight assassins” across the South hunted down African American brakemen, killing at least two men. (81) In 1931, a shooting war in Mississippi killed at least six African American railway workers. (120) For the most part, however, white workers did not have to resort to racial violence, knowing that they could depend on the state to support their racist practices.

While employers failed to maintain solidarity along colour lines, hiring Black men to work alongside White craft workers, Arnesen’s analysis of court and labour records demonstrates that throughout the 20th century, White railroaders were able to use the state to pass discriminatory legislation. Although White workers never

³²Eric Arnesen, “‘Like Banquo’s Ghost, It Will Not Down’: The Race Question and the American Railroad Brotherhoods, 1880-1920,” *American Historical Review*, 99 (December 1994), 1626.

³³Arnesen, “‘Like Banquo’s Ghost, It Will Not Down,’” 1629, and 1632. For an expanded discussion of the “psychological wages of whiteness” see Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness* and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York 1995).

achieved total exclusion of Blacks from the craft trades, by the late 1910s they had won formal quotas restricting the number of African Americans who could work as firemen, trainmen, and brakemen. (38-9, 126) In the immediate post-World War I period, the White Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen (BRT) went to the courts for permission to merge separate seniority lists. Federal officials acquiesced. In the context of the high unemployment, the integration of the lists led to the mass firings of Black workers. Overnight, African American switchmen, firemen, and brakemen were replaced by unemployed White workers (68-83).

Given the intense segregation and discrimination on the railroad, the history of Black railway workers in the US could easily have been told as a story of unremitting failures, hardships, and setbacks. Fortunately, Arnesen has resisted this temptation. For the last decade, Arnesen has been urging labour historians to examine Black workers' responses to the racism that they encountered at work and in the labour movement. Along with the recent works of Rick Halpern, Daniel Letwin, and Tera Hunter, Arnesen's study reveals that, despite the discriminatory practices of White trade unionists, capital, and the state, Black workers were able, through collective and individual action, to counter some of the most deleterious effects of racial discrimination.

Arnesen's study of Black railroad workers has uncovered a rich and complicated world of African American trade unionism, both North and South of the Mason-Dixon line. Seeing separate Black organizations as "small, weak and helpless," Black trade unionists such as A. Philip Randolph chose to work from within the House of Labour, even when that meant accepting subordinate status as a Jim Crow local. (147) Others, such as dining car waiters Robert L. Mays and Reinzi Lemus, envisioned change through autonomous all-Black organizations. Where Arnesen is at his best is in his examination of the smaller, independent unions that Black workers constructed alongside the Brotherhood. Well into the 1940s, after the BSCP's success as an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), a number of Black labour activists remained committed to independent trade unionism, eschewing affiliation with either the AFL or the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The reasons for their preference are many. As Arnesen argues and has argued elsewhere, separate locals provided Blacks with opportunities to assume positions of leadership, gain valuable organizational skills, set their own agenda, and in some instances, bargain directly with management. (117, 139-42) Organizing independently also spared black workers the certain racial abuse they would suffer in an interracial union.³⁴

Due in part to the government's creation of the United States Railway Administration (USRA), World War I saw a dramatic increase in independent Black trade

³⁴Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labour: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930," *Radical History Review*, 55 (1993), 60-2; and Arnesen, "Up from Exclusion," 157. Arnesen argues that blacks in racially separate unions protested not so much their exclusion from white unions, but rather the unequal status of the segregated locals.

unionism. Under the leadership of William G. McAdoo, the USRA increased wages on the railways, established an eight-hour workday, eliminated wage differentials, and, perhaps most importantly, provided a forum for Black workers to launch work-related grievances. (49-56) Emboldened by the new legislation, Southern dining car cooks and waiters began establishing independent local and regional associations. In 1915 Robert L. Mays established the Railway Men's International Benevolent Industrial Association (RMIBIA), an organization devoted to unionizing workers across craft lines. The union testified before the USRA, lobbied the government, and initiated lawsuits against discriminatory practices. Arnesen notes, however, that like other independent Black railway unions, the RMIBIA attempted to protect jobs that were already open to African Americans, not fight for access to better positions. (56-65, 83)

Arnesen offers one of the first discussions of the experiences of red caps, workers who were responsible for carrying passengers' luggage and, on occasion, performing janitorial work in the station. Most, but not all of these workers were Black. (151-61) Forced to depend entirely on their meager tips, during the 1930s red caps began organizing, sometimes into independent organizations, and at other times into AFL-affiliated locals. In May 1937, red cap representatives met in Chicago where they established the International Brotherhood of Red Caps (the IBRC changed its name in 1940 to the United Transport Service Employees of America, or UTSEA). While the new union was interracial, soon after its formation a group of White workers withdrew their support, transforming the organization into a relatively powerless Black union. According to Arnesen, African American leaders of the IBRC then "took a fateful step," withdrawing from the AFL and establishing their union as an independent organization. (162) Under the energetic leadership of Willard Townsend, the newly certified union rejected affiliation with the AFL's Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks, later opting for affiliation with the CIO. By 1943, the workers had won seniority rights, shorter working hours, and coverage under New Deal labour legislation. The new contract represented a major victory on behalf of a group of workers who, despite extraordinary obstacles, established a national union that effectively represented its members. (162-80)

By shedding light on the experiences of these previously ignored historical actors, Arnesen's work opens up a whole new set of questions. With its focus on working conditions and formal trade union organizations, *Brotherhoods of Color* spends less time situating those unions within the context of their communities. For example, did independent Black unions derive support from local institutions such as Black churches? Did they enjoy the support of the Black press? Did the smaller organizations have women's auxiliaries? All are questions that can be answered through the sort of careful, detailed research that so obviously underlies Arnesen's work.

Arnesen also turns to an examination of the porters. Recently, the New York Labor History Association sent out notices advertising their upcoming conference

on Asa Philip Randolph. Much to their surprise, high schools from all over New York City wrote back asking who A. Philip Randolph was.³⁵ Arnesen's and Bates' works do much to restore the important role that Randolph and his union played in the organized labour movement and in the African American community.

The formation of the Brotherhood was in many ways a reaction to Pullman's company union. In 1920 Pullman established the Employee Representation Plan (ERP) to handle the workers' grievances. The Company also took over the Pullman Porters and Maids Protective Association (PPMPA). Under Pullman the reorganized committee (now called the Pullman Porters Benefit Association of America) provided disability and death benefits, as well as a small pension plan. While the organizations provided the porters with a modicum of economic stability, they fell far short of providing the protection of a bona fide trade union. Frustrated with the limitations of the ERP, in 1925, three NYC porters approached Randolph to found and lead an independent organization of porters. (Arnesen, 87-8; and Bates, 51-5)

Randolph was in many ways the logical candidate for the job. Born in Florida in 1889, he migrated to NYC in 1911 where he began taking courses at the City College of New York, and the socialist Rand School of Economics. Soon thereafter he joined the Socialist Party and, in 1917, co-founded and co-edited the socialist magazine, *The Messenger*. (Arnesen, 89-90) In the mid-1920s, he broke ties with the Socialist Party, complaining that it had "no effective policy toward Negroes, and didn't spend enough time organizing them." (Bates, 37) Disappointed also by the Communist Party's failure to make racial equality a priority, by the mid-1920s, Randolph believed that the mainstream labour movement offered "the only weapon [black] labor had to work with." (Bates, 38) From the union's inception in the mid-1920s, Randolph set his sights on wresting an international charter from the AFL.

Randolph's leadership was essential to the eventual success of the union, as was his wife's support, a factor we hear nothing about from either Arnesen or Bates. Lucille Campbell Greene met and married Asa Philip Randolph in Harlem in the spring of 1913. A graduate of Howard University, she opened one of the first beauty salons in Harlem. Over the course of her life she worked as a hair culturist, teacher, social worker, and political activist. Through such employment Lucille was able to financially support her husband. Soon after their marriage, she was using her posh salon on 135th Street to distribute *The Messenger*, and to spread information about the BSCP among the wives and daughters of the porters. Frequently, profits from the salon went to sustain the magazine and the fledgling union. During the first ten years of the Brotherhood's existence, when Randolph was not receiving a regular paycheck, Lucille kept the couple afloat. As one porter remembered: during the "dark days ... Sister Randolph carried him."³⁶ Unfortunately, no one

³⁵New York Labor History Association, "A. Philip Randolph: The Great Labor and Civil Right Leader," 4 May 2002.

³⁶Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, 7-9, 43-5, 66, 154, and 8 for quotations.

seems to have discussed her role with the exception of Chateaufvert, whose work on Pullman women will likely remain on the margins of labour history.

Immediately following the formation of the Brotherhood, Randolph took the organization to Chicago, home of both the Pullman Company headquarters and the largest number of porters. Randolph focused his attention on winning over the support of the Black community. In the 1920s the Pullman Company enjoyed the widespread support of Chicago's South Side. The company donated vast sums of money to Black institutions such as the Wabash Avenue YMCA, the Urban League, the Provident Hospital, and Quinn Chapel, the city's largest and most important Methodist Church. (Arnesen, 87; and Bates, 41-58) Management also carefully cultivated the support of key business and religious leaders. Given the racist practices of organized labour, many of the porters were unsurprisingly reluctant to alienate the anti-union Pullman Company by supporting Randolph's new and unproven union.

The first ten years of the BSCP's existence have been described as the "bleak" period. With under 700 members, a failed strike action in 1928 crushed the union and, according to historian William Harris, "almost finished [Randolph] as a labor leader."³⁷ Within less than a decade, the Brotherhood would become one of the most powerful Black organizations in the US. Arnesen and Bates examine the union's rise to prominence from very different angles. Bates examines the grass roots organizational activities that were taking place in Chicago's Black community between 1928 and 1933, while Arnesen focuses on the role of the state and the emergence of industrial unionism in helping workers such as the Black railroaders organize during the Depression decade. (Bates, 7-12; Arnesen, 94-6, 152)

Arnesen attributes the Brotherhood's success largely to the passage of New Deal labour legislation. "For all of their leaders' dedication, the rank and file's energy, and the broad support of their allies, the BSCP and the Joint Council succeeded largely because the federal government adopted policies that proved neutral or even favorable toward organized labor." (86) He identifies the Amended Railway Labor Act of 1934 as the most important piece of legislation. The new act gave workers the right to bargain collectively and access to the National Mediation Board and the National Railroad Adjustment Board. Perhaps most importantly, the new legislation outlawed the ERP. With the support of the state, the BSCP "rose from the organizational ashes to deliver a decisive defeat to Pullman's company union." (86) The emergence of the CIO, an industrial union committed to organizing unskilled workers, women, and Blacks, forced the AFL to rethink some of its racist practices. (85-86, 92, 110) In 1935, the BSCP was finally granted an international charter from the AFL, a first for a Black organization. Two years later, they signed their first collective agreement, securing wage increases, overtime pay, maximum working hours, and a new grievance procedure. (92, 95, 108, 126)

³⁷William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (New York 1982), 88.

In her study of 1930s Chicago, Lizabeth Cohen argues that the organizational efforts of rank-and-file workers during the 1920s provided the necessary groundwork for organized labour's successes in the 1930s. By the mid-1930s, unions such as the BSCP had a strong, skilled leadership that knew how to use the state to win better working conditions. Cohen also identifies a transformation in workers' attitudes, as working-class women and men came to see the state as responsible for protecting their economic interests.³⁸ Arguing that the organizational activities of the BSCP in the 1920s were central to their success during the Depression, Bates similarly examines the influence of the workers' activities at the grassroots level.

In its early years, the Brotherhood launched a campaign based on the rhetoric of manhood rights, calling upon workers to end their paternalistic and demeaning relationship with George Pullman. The union's gendered rhetoric was infused with slavery metaphors that likened the porter to a slave, linking manhood rights with economic freedom. Securing a living wage and an independent union was as much about dignity and self-respect as it was about economic survival. (Bates, 8-12, 30-2, 89-93; and Arnesen, 101)

While the rhetoric of manhood rights rested upon notions of passive, dependent women, Bates' research tells a different story. In Bates' work we hear about clubwomen such as anti-lynching crusader, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who supported the Brotherhood's campaign as part of a larger movement for Black civil rights. (9, 65-74) Seeing the BSCP as a social movement intent on finishing "the unfinished task of emancipation," Black clubwomen supported the Brotherhood in the early years when friends were hard to find. (10) In a perhaps unnecessary privileging of race over gender, Bates tells us that Black women saw their struggles "mainly in racial terms," working with "black men to improve the place of black Americans." (9)

In 1926 Black women in Chicago founded the Chicago Colored Women's Economic Council, an auxiliary of the BSCP. The association did important organizational work, raising money for the union, publicizing the union's message, and organizing labour conferences. (Bates, 72-4, 78-86, 113-8) Because the BSCP did not initially enjoy the support of the Black press, Bates argues that African American women's networks played a vital role in spreading the Brotherhood's message to the larger community. Black women also worked with progressive White women's organizations. Interestingly, we learn that the single White woman fighting alongside the porters and their wives was Mary McDowell, the first president of the Chicago Women's Trade Union League. (66, 78-86)

The BSCP also relied on the support of existing Black organizations. In an effort to unite the many progressive organizations within Chicago's Black community, in 1927, BSCP Vice President Milton P. Webster founded the Chicago Citizens' Committee for the BSCP. (Bates, 81) Through labour conferences, organizations such as

³⁸Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago. 1919-1939* (Cambridge 1990).

the Ladies' Auxiliary, the YWCA, and the NAACP joined forces over issues of shared concern. The Committee campaigned for a federal anti-lynching bill and fought Hoover's appointment of racist, anti-labour Judge John J. Parker. (86-8, 96-110) These labour conferences also enjoyed the support of many middle-class African Americans who were drawn to the Brotherhood's message of economic empowerment. (Bates, 101-05) Most importantly, Bates argues that these activities created "local protest networks" that were instrumental to the BSCP's success. By convincing the Black community that a union could be a vehicle for fighting racial discrimination, and that collective action was a powerful tool, the BSCP broke down the community's longstanding resistance to organized labour. (8) Creating a pro-labour perspective, the union laid the foundation for future co-operation with the Communist Party (through the Unemployed Councils that fought the eviction of destitute White and Black families during the Depression. (111-3) Bates' analysis of local struggles offers an important complement to Arnesen's focus on legislative and trade union activities.

In 1936, Randolph, along with several Communists and disaffected NAACP members, founded the National Negro Congress (NNC), of which he became the first president. (Bates, 129, 135-8) In 1936, men and women labour activists in Chicago established a local branch of the Chicago NNC, known as the Chicago Council. Composed of men and women from organized labour, the BSCP, the Ladies' Auxiliaries and the Communist Party, the Chicago Council adopted new militant tactics to reach the Black working class. It also joined forces with the newly organized CIO, helping both White and Black steel workers organize under the newly formed Steel Workers' Organizing Committee. (Bates, 135-42) Perhaps most importantly, these new-crowd networks convinced older civil rights groups such as the NAACP, that if they wanted to survive the Depression, they were going to have to incorporate the concerns of working-class Blacks.³⁹ (7-11, 128-35, 142-7)

Bates accords the BSCP a central role in what she describes as a historic shift in African American protest politics. The BSCP formed part of a growing movement that rejected the moderate strategies of "traditional black betterment associations" such as the NAACP and the National Urban League (NUL), in favour of a new style of politics that rested on direct, militant collective action. (7-13, 122) Before World War I, mainstream middle-class Black organizations such as the NAACP spoke in "moderate voices," pursuing a "politics of civility" based on "petitioning the dominant culture for rights that already belonged to black Americans." (6, 11-12) Older civil rights organizations relied on a one-on-one approach, appealing to the consciences of liberal Whites such as Eleanor Roosevelt. (129-35) Many of these earlier civil rights organizations and activists were anti-union, counseling workers to ally with paternalistic Whites such as George Pullman.

³⁹Part of the NAACP's acceptance of these new strategies was their desire for the money and energy that labour unions would bring to their flagging organization. Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 144-5.

By the early 1920s, however, the moderate and often legalistic approach of the older organizations was being replaced by the New Negro Movement that used mass meetings, boycotts, picketing, and direct confrontation to fight racial discrimination. (110-13, 127-35) Insisting that Black men and women independently fight for first-class citizenship rights, the Brotherhood served as a model for other African American organizations fighting for racial equality. Placing the concerns of working-class Blacks at the center of Black national politics, BSCP efforts resulted in “reordering [the] priorities of the old guard ... contributing to a realignment of power relations in black communities.” (147)

Bates also argues that the new style of politics “flowed from grass-roots networks to the boardrooms of national black organizations and then back again.” (7) During World War II, the new militant tactics first practiced by the BSCP exploded on the national scene with Randolph’s March On Washington Movement (MOWM), which sought to end racial discrimination in defence industries. (148-50) With Randolph and the Brotherhood at the helm, the MOWM locals served as “incubators for teaching mass protest politics.” (162) By the time of the proposed March, (which was called off when FDR issued Executive Order 8802, ending discrimination in defence industries, and mandating the Fair Employment Practice Committee to oversee the order) the new protest tactics enjoyed the widespread support of the NAACP, the NUL, and the YMCA. (156-61) The coming of age of the new-crowd networks occurred when Walter White of the NAACP used these new militant strategies in the United Auto Workers’ strike at Ford’s River Rouge Plant. (129, 146-7) Bates’ sophisticated analysis demonstrates the connection between community action and national politics.

While Bates establishes the role of the BSCP in a shift toward a more militant Black political program, one is left wondering about the role of other organizations in this transition. One also wonders if this transformation occurred in other urban centers such as NYC where the BSCP had a strong local chapter. All these are questions to be addressed by future scholarship.

But the porters were not the only group organizing during this period, a point which Arnesen brings to light by extending his research beyond the New Deal successes of the porters. Once again, Arnesen directs our attention to the dining car waiters. In an effort to unite the disparate AFL-affiliated dining car locals, in 1937, trade unionist and Communist leaders Ishmael Flory and Solon Bell established the Joint Council of Dining Car Employees (Joint Council). By 1942, the union’s 9,000 members had won small wage increases, shorter working hours, a grievance procedure, and seniority rights. (96-101) Politicized by wartime rhetoric of democracy, Black workers also engaged in informal protests at work. In 1945, Edward McCoo, a Black man who was taking his son’s body from Utah to Chicago for military burial, was ejected from the dining car of the South Pacific Railway Company. The Black waiters on board walked off the job, refusing to serve any passengers until McCoo had been readmitted. (105)

Interestingly, the Brotherhood and Joint Council do not seem to have considered affiliation with the CIO. As Lizabeth Cohen and others have argued, during the Depression, the CIO in Chicago vigorously recruited Black workers, creating a “culture of racial unity” between workers of different ethnic and racial backgrounds.⁴⁰ In the 1940s Black meatpackers, stockyard workers, tobacco workers, and auto workers responded favourably to the CIO’s overtures.⁴¹ With the new union at least rhetorically committed to racial equality, one wonders why Randolph never wavered in his commitment to the AFL. It certainly was not because of the AFL’s egalitarian racial practices. Both the BSCP and Joint Council used their insider status as AFL affiliates to criticize the racist practices of organized labour, arguing for the expulsion of racist unions. (Arnesen, 107-15, 189, 217; Bates, 104, 139-41) Why, when so many other Black labour leaders embraced the CIO, did Randolph not consider breaking ties with the AFL?

In the 1940s and 1950s, a period that saw a marked decrease in the availability of jobs on the railroad, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (BLFE) again tried to push Black workers off the railroad. In the face of the latest assault African Americans turned to the courts for protection. Roughly the last quarter of Arnesen’s book examines African American railroaders’ attempts to win legal protection of their jobs. (204-15)

In the 1940s, two independent Black organizations, the International Association of Railway Employees, and the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen, hired prominent civil rights lawyer Charles H. Houston to argue their case for fair representation before the courts. (Arnesen 203-7) Under the Amended Railway Labour Act of 1934, only one union, that which had received a majority of the workers’ votes, was recognized by the state. When White workers voted in favor of all-White unions, African Americans found themselves in the difficult position of being “represented” by an organization that they were not permitted to join. In the past the courts had proved unwilling to intervene on behalf of Black workers, but in the 1940s, due in part to the changing composition of the Supreme Court, the courts began to regulate union practices. In the seminal 1944 *Steele* and *Tunstall* cases, the court ruled that a union must “fairly” represent *all* its workers. (207-9) Individual unions, in this case the BLFE, could not use racially discriminatory contracts to push African American workers off the railroad. A major victory perhaps, but, as Arnesen points out, the decision did nothing to compel White unions to admit African American workers. (204-10)

On the whole, the courts proved reluctant to intervene in favour of Black railroaders, maintaining that, as private associations, unions were free to set their own admissions policies. Ultimately, Arnesen concludes that the courts followed a

⁴⁰Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 325-49.

⁴¹Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein have also linked the CIO to the Civil Rights Movement. Korstad and Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History*, 75 (1988), 786-811.

“minimalist path,” eroding employment discrimination at a “glacial pace.” (226) It was not until the 1964 Civil Rights Act (CRA) that railroads were forced to promote qualified African Americans to engineering or conducting jobs, or, that White unions such as the BRT and Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers were forced to admit Black workers. (231, 235) The inclusion of Black men in formerly all-White unions signaled the end of separate Black associations. In 1972, the UTSEA merged with the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks (BRAC), the racist White union they fought against during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1978, the BSCP followed the same path, also merging with the BRAC. (236-7)

Arnesen contends that, for the most part, the changes brought about by the CRA and the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission came too late to help many Black railroaders. In the 1950s, a decrease in passenger traffic led to a decrease in jobs on the railways — a fate African American railway workers shared with workers employed in basic industries. Just when African Americans had won the right to move up the occupational ladder, the larger forces of deindustrialization eliminated their jobs. (238, 241-2, 249) Further, in interviews with men employed on the railroad in the post-CRA period, we hear stories of continued racial discrimination. (243-6) In 1996, African American workers at Amtrak filed discrimination charges against the company. (246).

Despite all this, Arnesen concludes on a somewhat optimistic note. He identifies Black railroaders as having played an important role in securing legislation that protected the rights of all Black workers. (250-1) *Brotherhoods of Color* chronicles an amazing story of Black railroaders’ persistent efforts to fight the oppression they encountered on the job and within the organized labour movement. Eric Arnesen has produced a well researched and meticulously crafted piece of scholarship that will undoubtedly be essential reading for scholars of both labour and African American history.

Bates has also made an important contribution to the scholarship on Black labour history. Most importantly, she has demonstrated that the Black community played as important a role in the Brotherhood’s success as the Amended Railway Act or the emergence of the CIO. She offers a nuanced portrait of a community that, while divided across many lines, could put its differences aside to fight the larger forces of racial discrimination. She has retrieved the important role of key players such as the Ladies’ Auxiliary, the NNC, and the MOWM.

Read with Grizzle’s memoir, these works reveal that Black railway workers north and south of the 49th parallel confronted a racially stratified occupational structure that confined all but a small number of Black men to poorly paid, demeaning service jobs such as portering. White workers, capital, the state, and courts, all share responsibility for the racism that Black workers encountered on the nations’ railways. As these accounts demonstrate, however, Black railroad workers were not merely victims. In the face of persistent segregation and discrimination, Black railroaders established their own organizations, opting sometimes to affiliate with

the AFL or CIO, and at other times to maintain their jurisdictional independence. Grizzle's, Arnesen's, and Bates' works demonstrate that at all times these organizations were "racial unions" fighting simultaneously for civil rights and economic equality. (Arnesen, 101)

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