By CHERYL L. WEST
Directed by CHUCK SMITH

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SPECIAL THANKS | The cast and crew of Pullman Porter Blues, GeNarrations participants, Lucy Smith, Goodman Theatre.

This study guide is published by Goodman Theatre’s Education and Community Engagement Department for participants in the Student Subscription Series.

For more information related to Pullman Porter Blues, activities, lesson plans and resources, please visit the Goodman’s Education website at: www.goodmantheatre.org/engage-learn
Each story developed around train memories for Pullman Porter Blues in GeNarrations, a writing workshop for senior citizens in which participants develop personal narrative performance pieces based on themes raised by Goodman productions.

By Patricia Crowe
It was 1950. Union Station was mammoth. The train was massive; I needed stairs. A conductor welcomed me with “All Aboard.” I sat on velvet seats for about a minute. “Here comes the conductor.” I quickly got back into my seat. The bathroom never stopped moving. At night, I was stuffed into the sleeper, kissed good night, curtains were closed, and I was supposed to sleep. I heard people walking through the car; my two sisters’ feet are in my face, I have to go to the bathroom, and someone hid the ladder. This was my first train trip.

A ‘Rude’ Awakening, by Marie Shelton
We would take the train to visit our grandparents in South Carolina each summer. I believe that I was a victim of Jim Crow segregation. It was late. My sister and I were awakened by my mother. We had to move to another passenger car. We had crossed the Mason/Dixon Line, which geographically separated the North from the South on legal separation. The car we were in had black and white passengers. We couldn’t enter the South like that. We moved to a car with all blacks. It was not comfortable, but I promptly fell asleep again.

Railroad Story With My Grandfather Merced, by Frank Avila
Bombs bursting! Gunfire! General Pershing chases Pancha Villa

who leads an army of Mexicans including my grandfather Merced Alvarado. Pancha Villa used the railroad to transport his men and ammunition. Grandfather Merced rode the railroad north to Chicago and worked on the Illinois Central Railroad. He walked the tracks checking for repairs. It was safer for him to work on the railroad with gringos in Chicago than to fight gringos in Chihuahua, Mexico. My family moved up to Chicago by way of the railroad, and to this day Mexicans are still using the railroad to immigrate to the USA.

Chicago, Ill., to Dallas, Texas... Here We Come!, by Michele Hansen
My sister, Roxanne, and I accompanied our grandparents to the train terminal where the conductor did stand on the bottom step to yell out, “All aboard!”

Armed with schoolwork, since we would be missing a full week, and one suitcase each, we settled into our assigned “car.” A porter took our suitcases and gave us claim tickets.

I felt so grownup at 8 years of age to be sitting with my 9-year-old sister across the aisle from our grandma and grandpa Clark.

Our seats were huge with high backs; however, Grandpa showed us how each could be reclined for naps...little did we know the Pullman sleeping cars were sold out and we would be spending all night in our same seats!

Lunch was provided by our grandparents in the form of SPAM sandwiches...we watched with great interest as Grandpa used a “key” that was on the can to remove the lid, proceeded to slice SPAM while Grandma held out slices of white Wonder Bread.

Thank goodness there were condiments to ad...made SPAM more palatable. To our surprise, the leftover SPAM would be served to us for dinner, too! As darkness settled in, Grandpa showed us how to tuck in newspapers in lieu of blankets to keep warm...just like railroad “hobos!”

I developed a new appreciation for oatmeal and buckwheat pancakes as we ate breakfast in the train’s dining car the next morning!
Writing the Blues: An Interview with Playwright Cheryl L. West

By Lesley Gibson

Playwright Cheryl L. West is a Chicago native, born and raised in the city whose rich history she brings to light in Pullman Porter Blues. We talked to the award-winning playwright of Jar the Floor, Play On! and Before it Hits Home (among many others) about the legacy of Pullman porters, Chicago and the fascinating Blues music that amplifies this production.

Lesley Gibson: What was the impetus for Pullman Porter Blues?

Cheryl L. West: My grandfather worked on the postal trains, and long after he retired he talked about his experiences traveling around the country on them. He had such a sense of romanticism and nostalgia. When I was a little girl I took an early train ride, and I always remembered the porters well—they seemed to be such happy men, always smiling. After I started reading about them I discovered that Pullman porters were the first labor union to be recognized for African Americans, and they did so much in terms of activism. It was such a compelling story, and offered me a chance to explore what was behind their smiles.

LG: What did you discover? Did it affect your romanticized idea of your grandfather’s experience and your own on trains?

CLW: Before the union was established, these men worked 400 hours a month or 11,000 miles a month on the train to get full pay. Sometimes 20 hours straight without a rest, and when they did get a rest they had to be in the smoking car, where people came in and out all night to use the bathroom; if someone needed them they had to get up. But one thing that I noticed was that when people shared anecdotal stories or memories of porters, they always came back to the sense that these were such dignified men. They were impeccably groomed, paid attention to detail and took great pride in their work. When you hear people tell stories about porter interactions, they always comment on the incredible service. It certainly gave me awe and respect that there were so many things I didn’t know, and so many things that made me proud to be telling this story.

LG: What interested you about telling their stories through Blues music?

CLW: There is a line in the play: “The Blues help you say what you feel and feel what you can’t say.” So often these men were silenced but that didn’t mean they didn’t feel what was happening. How did they override that, how did they survive and thrive, how did they continue to give such great service and yet be pretty much dead on their feet? And still continue to smile and make passengers feel like they couldn’t wait to serve them? That’s amazing to me, and the music helps to explore these questions.

LG: But this play isn’t structured as a musical; it’s more of a play with music. Why did you choose to punctuate the drama with occasional songs, rather than weave songs into the drama like in a full-blown musical?

CLW: At the heart I wanted to tell a very dramatic, complex story, and I thought that a musical could only skim the surface of that. I’m using the Blues to help tell the story, add context, and set the tone. Music transports you in a different way—a sensory way—and for people hearing that music behind or underneath a scene just transforms them on a sensory level. They feel it in their bodies, they tap their foot, and have the same feeling of when they first heard that song.

LG: Some of the songs performed in the play really illustrate that, and so many of them (“This Train,” “Panama Limited Blues,” “That Lonesome Train Took My

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT FOR PULLMAN PORTER BLUES

Goodman Theatre is proud to acknowledge the following individuals for their support of the 2013/2014 Season and Pullman Porter Blues.

The Edith-Marie Appleton Foundation/Albert and Maria Goodman
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Below: Amelia Workman (Anna Mae Simpkins) and Patrick Clear (Mr. Slasvick) in rehearsal for Lynn Nottage’s By the Way, Meet Vera Stark. Photo by Liz Lauren.

Baby Away”) are about trains. Did you know there were so many Blues songs out there about trains?

CLW: [Laughs] Yes there are an incredible amount of Blues songs about trains! There is just so much nostalgia about the trains—people talk about the trains taking you somewhere, taking your lover somewhere, all throughout American history. And then there are some very specific things that the great Blues singers sing about. Music was so much a part of the journeys on the train; Sister Juba even has a line about “the tracks gave birth to the Blues, all up and down from the Delta to up North.”

LG: The play even opens with the rhythmic pounding of slaves in Mississippi building the railroad tracks and singing a bluesy work song.

CLW: It’s so amazing how many African Americans worked on building these railroads. Back in the slavery days, plantation owners would lease their slaves to the railroad and make quite a bit of money to help build the tracks. So the play’s opening chant features Hezekiah—Monroe’s father—and his generation, who were still slaves, and who we don’t see in the play. They helped build tracks in Mississippi, and in the opening he’s singing about riding the train to freedom. Those field hollers eventually became the Blues when instrumentation was added. People had a way of singing the Blues to communicate, or just to emote in a way that they weren’t allowed. When people built the railroads and they would chant those rail songs, they were a precursor to the Blues.

LG: Pullman porters have such a rich history in Chicago—why did you want to bring this story “home”?

CLW: So many Pullman porters lived in Chicago, and it is my hometown. One of the most important things I learned about the porters that I did not know was that they were early cultural conduits, they were taking newspapers from Chicago (the Chicago Defender) and getting them down to the South to let people know there were jobs up North. They were one of the major facilitators of the Great Migration in the 1930s and ‘40s.

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This play is also very decidedly “Chicago” and I’m so excited for it to be here. I think that local audiences will understand the language in a way that only someone from Chicago could. It’s very specific—every line has its own rhythm, and when I have a Chicago actor do my language it just rolls off the tongue, the cadence is so beautiful.

“The Blues help you say what you feel and feel what you can’t say.”

–Monroe, in Pullman Porter Blues

The Evolution of the Blues

In the early twentieth century, scores of African Americans—propelled by stories in the Chicago Defender of better paying jobs and greater social freedoms—left rural southern communities and came to Chicago. They brought the melodies and stories from their lives in the bayous of Louisiana and the Mississippi Delta, and nestled in communities on Chicago’s South and West sides where these stories and traditions mixed. There, from the stages of neighborhood bars came America’s quintessential folk music: the Blues.

The Blues descends from slavery’s pain. Field laborers, denied instruments while laboring in the sun, created music that lived on the driving hum of a voice. As slavery vanished and Jim Crow laws took its place, guitars and pianos contributed bluesy five-note scales and minor chords to songs that meditated on life in New Orleans and on the Delta. A new genre of music slowly took shape, but it needed freedom to fully form.

Chicago’s stockyards and steel mills, along with the perception that the city harbored greater racial tolerance, made it a crucible of the new American experience as more families migrated North. But the new émigrés soon met James Crow, Jim Crow’s subtle cousin, upon arrival. After laboring in city factories, black communities came together in nightclubs to commiserate and share soothingly familiar tunes, played on electric guitars and microphones. A new, urbanized Blues that took inspiration from city life, thrived.

By the 1930s and ‘40s, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Muddy Waters and many other legends packed Chicago’s Grand and Monogram theaters. Capitalizing on the movement, music studios began releasing “race records” that spread this African American sound. Carrying subtle social messages within contemplative and sometimes raucously bawdy lyrics, the Blues became more than music. It became a social force, giving African Americans a voice that embodied the experience of—and inspired—listeners.

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Twenty Seasons with Chuck Smith

With the season-opening production of *Pullman Porter Blues*, Chuck Smith kicks off his 20th season as a resident director at the Goodman. Already one of Chicago’s most respected directors when he joined the Goodman’s Artistic Collective in 1993, Chuck’s remarkable array of acclaimed productions here has made him a true national icon. Along the way, he has amassed credits as a highly regarded educator, television director and author, won numerous local theater awards, and was named a “Chicagoan of the Year” by the *Chicago Tribune*. It’s not a stretch to say he has created some of the most riveting Goodman productions of the past two decades. Among them are:

**THE AMEN CORNER**
James Baldwin’s vibrant study of a Harlem minister who must confront the ghosts of her past featured powerhouse performances and soaring gospel-infused musical sequences. Chuck’s acclaimed staging was subsequently produced at the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston, where he received the Independent Reviewers of New England Award for best direction.

**THE GIFT HORSE**
Among the many gifted writers championed by Chuck Smith through the years is Lydia R. Diamond, whose contemporary comedy *The Gift Horse* was a Theodore Ward Prize winner in 2001. The story chronicled the romantic crises of a group of young urban dwellers portrayed by an energetic and engaging cast.

**A RAISIN IN THE SUN**
Lorraine Hansberry’s classic portrait of a family’s attempts to transcend their impoverished surroundings received an eloquent, highly charged production from Chuck, whose own childhood was spent in the same South Side neighborhood as the characters. With blistering performances, the work received unanimously glowing notices from Chicago’s critics.

**AIN’T MISBEHAVIN’**
The classic tunes of the incomparable Fats Waller laid the groundwork for one of the Goodman’s most irresistible musical entertainments. Chuck’s incisive direction turned an often-underrated musical revue into a colorful portrait of the joys and sorrows of the African American experience, and provided a showcase for the talents of such masterful performers as E. Faye Butler and John Steven Crowley.

**PROOF**
Chuck cast a powerful quartet of African American actors in this story of a young woman’s struggle to deal with the aftermath of her father’s death. Featuring indelible portrayals by Karen Aldridge (as the haunted Catherine) and Ora Jones (as her overbearing sister), *Proof* was rapturously received by audiences in its extended Owen Theatre run.

**CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY**
The Goodman’s first collaboration with future Pulitzer Prize winner Lynn Nottage came with Chuck’s warmly sympathetic chronicle of a 1950 Brooklyn family in transition. Nambi E. Kelley and Bakesta King played the adolescent daughters struggling to deal with the arrival of a white stepmother, played by Karen Janes Woditsch.

**RACE**
David Mamet’s controversial examination of racial and sexual politics was the basis for one of Smith’s most successful Goodman productions, and one of its most discussed. Although audiences disagreed as to the intentionally ambiguous events of the play, no one disputed the power of Chuck’s interpretation, which many critics noted as far superior to the play’s Broadway premiere.
Add a wail, a holler, and a twang to a story filled with ups and downs, throw in some really creative hyperbole—now you’re singing the blues. Historically, the blues has been a musical outlet to stage protest against myriad forms of personal wrongdoings, bodaciously brag and signify, scream the plight of the marginalized and ultimately identify routes to freedom and survival. The blues serves as chronicle—history through song.

The Recipe:
Songs are written by combining melody and harmony. Place those elements in a pre-determined combination of musical phrases to create the song’s format (or form). Melody is the part of a tune you can sing. It is a linear progression of individual notes presented horizontally in sheet music. Harmony is a combination of two or more notes played simultaneously (which creates chords) and often incorporates the melody of a song. Harmony is presented vertically in sheet music.

While blues themes can be quite varied, the structure of most tunes follows very similar patterns. The most common way that blues is presented is by use of the 12-bar form in 4/4 time. Bars, also known as measures, are small sections of the music that incorporate the beat and time. 4/4 means there are four beats to a measure and the quarter note gets the beat. (Sing “Mary Had a Little Lamb” in your head. It’s in 4/4 and almost all the notes are quarter notes.)

In blues tunes, the most common chord progression, or harmony, uses just three chords built from the first, the fourth, and the fifth notes of a basic Western scale (“do,” “fa” and “so”). They are represented by Roman numerals I, IV and V.

The Words:
Typically, the verse in the 12-bar form is broken into three 4-bar sections. The sections often use call and response both musically and lyrically to punctuate the story being told. In each verse the lyrics are usually the same for the first two sections and the words in the last four bars serve as a response to them.

A version of Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton’s “Hound Dog”, incorporates all the common elements mentioned above. The first verse begins a bit before the first bar; that’s called a pickup (see example below).

The response to the “call” also can be instrumental. Can you hear it in Muddy Waters’ “Mannish Boy”?

The blues sound resonates throughout popular music. Its common elements are fundamental to rock and roll, jazz, and other genres. The blues continue to bear witness to history by wrapping our joys and pains in a common format that can be shared by many.

Lucy Smith is a Chicago-based singer, composer, and bandleader. Her quartet frequents the Chicago jazz scene and her musical collaborations include works for theater, film, and spoken word productions. Her latest project, Autumn in Augusta (AIA), is a blues, gospel, and jazz-fused tribute to her mother. AIA’s new CD, “Songs My Mama Would Like,” has garnered rave reviews. Lucy is currently the music director for Chicago’s Fourth Presbyterian’s “Jazz at Four” service, and she is the producer/coordinator for the music stage at the Artists of the Wall Festival in Chicago’s Rogers Park neighborhood. Learn more about Lucy at:

http://www.lucysmithjazz.com
http://www.autumninaugusta.com

For blues clips and more, visit us online!
www.goodmantheatre.org/watch-listen

Blues Formula
BY LUCY SMITH

1st bar (I chord) 2nd bar (I chord) 3rd bar (I chord) 4th bar (I chord)
(You ain’t nothin’ but a hound dog) Stop snoopin’ ‘round my door

5th bar (IV chord) 6th bar (IV chord) 7th bar (I chord) 8th bar (I chord)
hound dog Stop snoopin’ round my door

9th bar (V chord) 10th bar (IV) 11th bar (I chord) 12th bar (I or V chord)
tail But I ain’t gonna feed you no more

1st bar (I chord) 2nd bar (I chord) 3rd bar (I chord) 4th bar (I chord)
(You ain’t nothin’ but a)

5th bar (IV chord) 6th bar (IV chord) 7th bar (I chord) 8th bar (I chord)
hound dog Stop snoopin’ round my door

9th bar (V chord) 10th bar (IV) 11th bar (I chord) 12th bar (I or V chord)
tail But I ain’t gonna feed you no more
Jim Crow and the Notion of Separate but Equal

BY WILLA J. TAYLOR

This article was originally written for The Good Negro in the Goodman’s 2009-2010 Season.

Whenever you come to the Goodman to see a play, your teacher gives you a ticket that shows exactly where your seat is in the theater. And when you go to McDonald’s or to a restaurant you can sit anywhere you like. But during the late 1930s, the time period in which Pullman Porter Blues is set, this was against the law.

Slavery had been legally abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1865. For a time immediately following the Civil War—during Reconstruction—the federal government had been able to enact some protections for newly-freed slaves. But when Reconstruction ended in 1877, states began passing laws to ensure that segregation of the races continued and the U.S. Supreme Court upheld racial segregation and the idea of “separate but equal” in its 1896 ruling, the case of “Plessy vs. Ferguson.” Between the end of the Civil War and 1964, Jim Crow laws existed in every state and the District of Columbia. Only Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, Tennessee and Vermont never enacted legislation, although segregation was enforced by custom in many communities. Here are some examples of Jim Crow laws:

Theaters
Every person... operating... any public hall, theatre, opera house, motion picture show or any place of public entertainment or public assemblage which is attended by both white and colored persons, shall separate the white race and the colored race and shall set apart and designate... certain seats therein to be occupied by white persons and a portion thereof, or certain seats therein, to be occupied by colored persons.

Promotion of Equality
Any person... who shall be guilty of printing, publishing or circulating printed, typewritten or written matter urging or presenting for public acceptance or general information, arguments or suggestions in favor of social equality or of intermarriage between whites and negroes, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to fine or not exceeding five hundred (500) dollars or imprisonment not exceeding six (6) months or both.

Education
The schools for white children and the schools for Negro children shall be maintained separately.

Wine and Beer
All persons licensed to conduct the business of selling beer or wine... shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to the two races within the same room at any time.

Intermarriage
All marriages between a white person and a Negro, or between a white person and a person of Negro descent, to the third generation, inclusive, or between a white person and a member of the Malay race; or between the Negro and a member of the Malay race; or between a person of Negro descent, to the third generation... and a member of the Malay race, are forever prohibited, and shall be void.

Housing
Any person... who shall rent any part of any such building to a Negro person or a negro family when such building is already in whole or in part in occupancy by a white person or white family, or vice versa when the building is in occupancy by a Negro person or Negro family, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five (25) nor more than one hundred (100) dollars or be imprisoned not less than ten or more than 60 days, or both such fine and imprisonment in the discretion of the court.
America exists as we know it today because of our railroads. Without railroads, small towns would scatter across our country, unable to grow to the size of huge cities such as Chicago. The United States would not extend all the way to the Pacific Ocean, travel would only be affordable for the wealthy, and moving people and goods across the country would take weeks and weeks. But how were the railroads built and who built them? Who helped make America what it is today?

In the early 1800s, canals served as the primary way of moving goods from one place to another, but America was industrializing rapidly and required a faster way to distribute products. The greatest minds of that time began creating possible solutions to this problem, and in 1825 the inventor John Stevens built the first American train locomotive in his own backyard, three years before British inventors across the Atlantic Ocean perfected this technology. Cheap and easier to build than canals, railroads soon gained popularity as the most efficient method of transportation in America. Different companies built separate railway lines, each bearing a unique name and connecting different parts of the country. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, called the B&O for short, was the first rail line built in America. It connected the industrial city of Baltimore to a dock on the Ohio River. Developers created most of the earliest lines for similar purposes: to carry industrial goods from factories to ports, where canal boats would transport them to their final destination. Trains also were the speediest way to transport passengers from place to place, soon taking the country by storm. Multiple railroad
companies built huge, special train stations called “union stations.” As it was a union of multiple companies in one place, passengers could move between different lines. Many of these union stations still exist and operate today. Over time, companies built more and more rail lines to transport people and products and soon the United States was expanding into the Great West. The Transcontinental Railroad, finished in 1869, snaked its way from Iowa to the San Francisco Bay and helped create states including Colorado and Utah.

Laying railroad tracks across the country was tremendously hard work, and railroad companies had to choose workers strategically. They knew that skilled, white laborers would expect higher pay and better treatment. Under harsh conditions, they were more likely to act out against their bosses or go on strike. A cornerstone of American culture at that time, racism imbedded itself in the railroad industry just as deeply. From the late 1820s to the 1850s, Southern railroad companies bought and sold hundreds of male slaves to construct the Southern Railway lines. Since slaves were considered property and held almost no human rights, companies could make them do as much work as they wanted and expect no retaliation. When Union Pacific built the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s, it supplemented its workforce with thousands of Chinese immigrants for similar reasons. Although not slaves, these Chinese workers were willing to work in dangerous conditions for much less pay than American workers, sending most of their wages back to their families living in China. Along with Army veterans and Irish immigrants, they cut down trees, hauled lumber, and used newly-invented dynamite to blast tunnels through the mountains of California. In short, the foundation of modern-day America was laid by the slaves and immigrants willing (or forced) to do the work no other Americans would, despite the fact that these individuals could never enjoy the same rights and respect as white Americans.

In the 1890s, passengers could step onto a train and watch the countryside zoom past, stepping off a few hours or days later in a faraway city. Traveling by train was a luxury and a privilege; because of this, passengers would usually dress up for a train trip. The interiors of the Pullman train cars exemplify how lavish train travel could be, as does the architecture of many central stations. However, the entire railroad industry began to decline after the invention of the automobile and the final blows came with the creation of the Interstate Highway System and the dawn of commercial air travel in the 1950s and 1960s. Americans liked the ease and independence of cars, and planes traveled much faster than trains did. Since then, the train industry has experienced drastic changes. Railroad companies, once booming, went bankrupt or merged together to survive, and formerly bustling train stations fell quiet. In 1971, to ensure the survival of passenger trains, Congress created Amtrak, which took over 20 out of the 26 operating rail lines in the country, as well as inner-city services.

Nowadays, the most common way to travel by train is in a city or when commuting from the suburbs into a city. While taking an extended train trip is still possible and popular in many circles, the appeal of cross-country train travel is in the nostalgia, not the novelty. Today, we still can glimpse the former glamour of train travel in the grand architecture of Union Stations and in the works of art depicting their luxury. The majesty of the railroad is a thing of the past, but trains have permanently left their mark on America by helping us to grow—in industry, in size, and in wealth—into the nation we are today.
When he titled his 1996 autobiography *My Name's Not George*, Stanley G. Grizzle seemed to be stating the obvious. But Grizzle, the child of Jamaican immigrants, had spent years working on trains as a Pullman porter, where he carried luggage, shined shoes and turned down beds as an employee of George Pullman. His white passengers consistently called him George, echoing the nineteenth-century practice of calling a slave by his master’s name—so Grizzle’s book title represents his objection to the demeaning tradition he endured for much of his working life. While he and his coworkers were not enslaved, their jobs required long hours and afforded little pay and less sleep. At all hours of the day, they tended to customers’ needs and whims, which ranged from benign tasks like fetching glasses of water, to more onerous ones like caring for and cleaning up after drunk, unruly passengers. Pullman porters, immaculate in crisp jackets, performed their duties with dignified smiles, taking pride in their stately appearance despite their exhaustion and frustration.

In her play *Pullman Porter Blues*, Cheryl L. West depicts three generations of Pullman porters all working on the same train on a summer day in 1937; the family is fictional, but their circumstances are firmly rooted in history. These men, who range in age from 19 to 70, have vastly different experiences of the complex era they span: the century between slavery’s end and the civil rights movement. Monroe, the grandfather, works the rails stoically and proudly, ever grateful that he enjoys freedoms that previous generations of his family never knew. His son, Sylvester, expects more than liberty: he craves a bigger piece of the American dream, and campaigns adamantly for better working conditions and pay for Pullman porters. Both men have pinched pennies for years to fulfill their mutual dream of sending Monroe’s grandson (Sylvester’s son) Cephas to college and medical school. But Cephas, who at 19 can’t grasp the historical forces that shape his father’s and grandfather’s insistence on education, is enamored of the immediate paycheck and sharp uniform offered by his summer job as a Pullman porter.

The men owe their livelihood, such as it is, to George Pullman, the nineteenth century entrepreneur who engineered the Pullman sleeping car and founded and operated the Pullman Company in Chicago. As railway companies laid tracks across the country, Americans were newly able to travel easily from region to region. And as demand for travel increased, entrepreneurs like Pullman saw a market for luxurious accommodations. The first Pullman car, which featured both daytime and nighttime configurations, debuted in 1864, and when President Lincoln was assassinated the following year, a Pullman car carried his body from Washington, DC, to Springfield, Illinois.

**SYNOPSIS**

It’s June 22, 1937, the night of the Joe Louis/James Braddock world heavyweight championship, and three generations of Sykes men—African American train porters—are heading from Chicago to New Orleans aboard the Panama Limited Pullman Train. Cephas is a 19-year-old college student working a summer job, a wide-eyed first-time traveler with a love of the rails. His father, Sylvester, is on a mission to create better working conditions for the porters by organizing a union. And his grandfather, Monroe, takes pride in his duties and attempts to keep his son and grandson out of trouble when their good intentions clash with the strict rules governing porters. Together the three men grapple with the changing times, as the train speeds South to the tunes of a live, onstage band.
Crowds of mourners lined the streets to bid farewell to Lincoln; in this way the savvy Pullman advertised his car to thousands of Americans. From the late 1860s onward, the Pullman car became synonymous with luxury travel, appealing especially to middle and upper middle class customers, who could only afford such extravagance as an occasional treat.

The first-rate service on Pullman cars was provided almost exclusively by African American men—a popular saying of the day was, “Abe Lincoln freed the slaves, and George Pullman hired ‘em.” In the years immediately following slavery, prejudice and lack of education barred blacks from many professions, and they often turned to service jobs. According to George Pullman's reasoning, African Americans were highly adept at service and willing to work for low wages, because many of them were recently freed slaves. Former porter and historian Greg LeRoy recounted, “A Pullman porter was really kind of a glorified hotel maid and bellhop in what Pullman called a hotel on wheels.” The Pullman Company just thought of the porter as a piece of equipment, just like another button on a panel—the same as a light switch or a fan switch. As the decades passed, young Pullman porters no longer recalled the days of slavery, but they inherited some of its dynamics from their fathers. At its peak in the 1920s, the Pullman Company employed approximately 20,000 African American men. It also employed black women as Pullman maids; these women tended to the special needs of female passengers. They styled hair, assisted with bathing and looked after children. Like their male counterparts, they earned little and excelled at their jobs in part because they had learned the finer points of servitude while they were still slaves.

As Pullman porters, the men earned steady paychecks and the chance for extensive domestic travel. They were expected to keep their uniforms tidy, speak crisply and carry themselves elegantly—and therefore garnered more respect and prestige than did blacks who held manual labor or factory jobs. But as it became generally known among Americans that all Pullman porters were black, some white passengers regarded them as a slave-like group. George Pullman's hiring practices capitalized on the residues of the master/slave relationship: accustomed to considering African Americans as slightly subhuman, many people took decades to adjust to conceptualizing black workers as citizens with jobs and rights, rather than as servile creatures who existed solely to do their bidding. Consequently, in addition to referring to porters as “George” or “boy,” some passengers asked porters to perform tasks far outside their job descriptions. At least one porter recalled being asked to bark like a dog for his passengers’ amusement. Others were asked to sing, dance and allow children to ride on their backs. In response to such requests, porters were required to be obliging and docile, or they risked losing their jobs—or worse. An article in the New York Negro World, dated May 29, 1920, describes an incident in which a porter did not immediately kowtow to his customer’s desires, with disastrous consequences. When a woman asked him to arrange her berth, the porter responded that he would do it as soon as he finished with the berth he was working on. The woman promptly sent a telegram to the next station, claiming the porter had insulted her. When the train arrived at the station, the porter was removed from the train by the town’s deputy sheriff; a mob then overwhelmed the sheriff and lynched the porter. While such incidents were rare, this man’s tragic fate exemplifies the powerlessness that dominated Pullman porters’ lives.

The porters also suffered from overwork and lack of rest—they labored up to 100 hours per week. On overnight runs, they were allowed three hours of sleep, but passengers’ needs and whims often prevented them from getting it. They had to sleep in the train’s smoking room, where customers could smoke and chat at any hour of the night. And before a train left the station porters spent three or four unpaid hours preparing their cars. They had to account for every item on board—glasses, blankets,
silverware—and if a passenger stole an item, the Pullman Company deducted the cost from the porter’s already meager paycheck. Therefore, they relied on tips to make ends meet. If a porter had an unlucky run with lots of troublesome, thieving passengers and low tippers, he might have arrived in his destination city with little money in his pockets, and desperate for sleep. Depending on the region, he might have had difficulty finding lodging and food, as many businesses still refused to serve African Americans. And meanwhile, he spent significant time away from his family and home city, which often led to marital discord and disconnection from his community. These indignities were compounded by the lack of advancement opportunities for even the hardest-working porters; higher-level positions on the trains (such as conductor) were held by whites only.

As the twentieth century progressed and slavery receded further into the past, Pullman porters (like the fictional Sylvester in *Pullman Porter Blues*) increasingly grew angered by their low pay and poor working conditions. While unionizing was a common strategy for disgruntled workers in the early twentieth century, the mainstream labor movement largely excluded African Americans; their fight for higher wages was segregated from that of whites. In 1925, after several unsuccessful attempts at unionization, a group of Pullman porters approached A. Philip Randolph, an aggressive African American labor organizer. Randolph proved an adept leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; however, he faced resistance not only from the Pullman Company but also from middle class blacks who feared antagonizing the company that employed so many members of their community. Still, Randolph built up support over time, especially in Chicago, where the Pullman Company was based and where most Pullman porters made their homes. His efforts were publicized through the *Chicago Defender*, the African American newspaper that, since 1905, had glamorized northern life and spurred the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North. The paper called attention to labor efforts as well as countless other race issues, and gave blacks much-needed news, support and a national sense of community. Pullman porters themselves carried copies of the paper throughout the nation, including to southern states where its distribution had been banned. This caused tension between porters who were pro-union (like Sylvester in *Pullman Porter Blues*) and porters who feared that efforts to unionize would backfire and worsen conditions for black workers. Meanwhile, porters’ wives back at home in Chicago lent their support to Randolph’s efforts, becoming members of his “Inside Committee.” Decades before the civil rights movement, these citizens primed the pump for the sweeping change that would come to fruition in the 1960s and beyond.

Despite Randolph’s best efforts, the Brotherhood ultimately wielded little power, and the Pullman Company resisted signing an agreement. After a difficult decade, the Brotherhood was on the verge of collapse when Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. Also known as the Wagner Act, the new law gave workers the right to organize unions and negotiated collective bargaining agreements. Randolph’s efforts and the support of the *Chicago Defender* were instrumental in bringing about this change.

LEFT: A 1901 cartoon in support of a Pullman porters union depicts a frail, tattered porter—in contrast to a plump, well-dressed porter “As we used to know him”—demonstrating a decrease in tips over time. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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The Abbott Fund is pleased to continue its support of Goodman Theatre as a Corporate Sponsor Partner for Cheryl L. West’s *Pullman Porter Blues*. Our longstanding partnership reflects a shared commitment to continually enriching Chicago’s vibrant culture through world-class productions.

-Elaine Leavenworth, Vice President, Government Affairs, Abbott; Goodman Trustee

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Act, this statute guaranteed private sector employees the right to organize into trade unions, to engage in collective bargaining and to strike. At last, the law was on the Brotherhood’s side. In 1937, the Pullman Company (by this time George Pullman himself was long dead) recognized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The company reduced working hours from 100 per week to 60, and raised wages. For the first time in history, an African American union had successfully negotiated with a large, powerful company. For the next few decades, the new rules remained in effect. But eventually, with the increasing popularity of commercial aviation, demand for railway travel declined. By the 1960s, few passenger cars remained on the tracks. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters eventually merged with the much larger Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks in 1978.

As the last generation of Pullman porters die off and their era fades rapidly into history, Cheryl L. West examines their importance in her masterful play Pullman Porter Blues. These men not only performed their jobs with tact and grace, but also successfully navigated a society that no longer enslaved them, but still overtly oppressed them; their experience represents and reflects the reality of the black experience in early twentieth-century America. Many Pullman porters never lived to see the civil rights movement; very few survived to see an African American in the Oval Office. But their influence remains with us today as we navigate the still-challenging waters of race in America.

The Brown Bomber and the Cinderella Man

In an era of legendary boxing matches, the heavyweight championship bout between Joe Louis and James Braddock on June 22, 1937, remains an iconic event. Louis, dubbed “the Brown Bomber” by the press, was the first African American in a generation to be a serious contender for the title; Braddock, whose unexpected defeat of Max Baer in 1935 had earned him the heavyweight title and the nickname “the Cinderella Man,” had been expected to take on Max Schmeling, the fierce German boxer who had handed Louis his first professional loss a year earlier. Anti-Nazi sentiment (and the promise of a larger purse for Braddock) convinced his handlers to substitute Louis; and a capacity crowd of nearly 42,000 gathered to view the fight in Chicago’s Comiskey Park (joined by millions of radio listeners).

The match would be one of the hardest-fought in recent history. The older Braddock, beset by chronic arthritis, was able to knock his opponent down in the first round, but Louis’ superior strength systematically wore the champion down, resulting in an eighth-round knockout. Some white fans decried the outcome, many remembering the controversial post-victory grandstanding of the first black champion, Jim Johnson, two decades earlier. But African Americans were jubilant; as author Langston Hughes noted, “No one else in the United States has ever had such an effect on Negro emotions—or mine. I marched and cheered and yelled and cried, too.” Louis would retain his title for nearly 12 years, defending it 25 times.
Pullman Maids Remembered

BY MARGARET SMITH

*Pullman Porter Blues* allows us a unique window into the daily lives of three generations of Pullman railroad porters. These men lived incredibly taxing lives characterized by insubstantial pay and demeaning conditions. Although the porters are remembered for standing up against their poor treatment, history largely forgets the Pullman maids, the female train employees who, arguably, endured an even tougher existence than did their brother porters.

At first glance, it might appear that working on the Pullman trains was a step up from the work options available to African-American women in other spheres. Maids were charged with taking care of white women and children passengers on the trains, doing everything from serving food and giving free manicures to cleaning restrooms and nursing the sick. While the duties themselves weren’t markedly different, they came with several perks. Some Pullman maids reflected positively on the fact that while working on the train, “at least Miss Ann, like the scenery, kept changing.” Wages too seemed an exciting improvement. The promise of a salary nearly three times as much as other jobs open to African Americans at the time, was indeed an attractive offer for both porters and maids alike.

Even though it would appear that, in theory, by riding the rails the Pullman maids had reached a largely improved social and economic position in life, in practice the oft forgotten lives of Pullman maids were rife with unforeseen hardship and riddled with double standards.

Both porters and maids dealt with the fact that despite initial promise, by almost any standard of comparison, Pullman employees were grossly underpaid. The quantity of unpaid labor, excessive hours, and lack of sleep rendered the higher salary rate essentially meaningless. A. Philip Randolph, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union founder and leader, criticized these working conditions, likening them to modern indentured servitude at best and slavery at worst. Indeed many scholars agree that the working conditions for African Americans on the trains reflected Pullman’s racial paternalism, greed, and even veiled endorsement of Mississippi Sen. W.K. Vardaman’s belief that “the way to control the [Negro] is ... never pay him more wages than is actually necessary to buy food and clothing.” While porters made on average $400 less than what was measured to be the minimum annual wage needed to support a family, one cannot forget that the maids made markedly less than their male counterparts did both in salary and tips.

Although porters and maids were both subject to unfair wages and hours, Pullman maids’ lives were made increasingly difficult by the threat of physical and sexual intimidation while on the job. Maids were sexually harassed not only by passengers, but by fellow train personnel. Pullman managers and union officials could do little to protect them. *Pullman Porter Blues* playwright Cheryl L. West brings light to this disturbing phenomenon via the character of Sister Juba. While reflecting on the sexual assault she endured from a conductor, she laments that she was “just some poor ass colored maid who ain’t got the right to say no or count on her man to say it for her (104).” Sadly, many women shared this experience and the accompanying feeling of powerlessness.

Life for a Pullman maid was often socially difficult as well. Many expressed feelings of loneliness. At times the maid was only female crew member aboard. This made Pullmans’ prohibition on socializing between porters and maids particularly isolating. There was even a double standard when it came to lodging. While Pullman provided sleeping arrangements for porters during layovers, maids were expected to seek shelter at the local YWCA, which came with a strict curfew.

The second class citizenship of Pullman maids was ultimately cemented by the decision of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters to cut “Maids” from the union title, further marginalizing their sisters. Whether the comparatively low number of maids, sexism, or a combination of the two is to blame, this decision unequivocally solidified these women’s near erasure from history.

Clearly, while both the men and women employed by the Pullman Palace Car Company experienced their share of hardship, the Pullman maids’ economic and social challenges could arguably be considered worse. These women may have existed in smaller in numbers than did porters, but their experiences were no less important.
Train Travel
BY MELODY EKSTROM

Today traveling consists of endless airport security lines or claustrophobic Amtrak trains. By and large, travel is considered something to be endured in order to reach a final destination. This experience vastly differs from travel in the 1930s. The ‘30s were a time of luxurious train cars rather than crowded Amtrak services. Dressing for travel was more refined than the modern staples of jeans or sweatpants. Traveling was an event, and Pullman helped make it so.

The Pullman Palace Car Company instituted sleeping cars where passengers might actually be able to catch some shut-eye, and provided legitimate dining options for travelers. Pullman did not operate trains; rather it leased its sleeping cars out to railroad companies in return for all profits beyond the regular train fare. Pullman provided sleeping cars, porters, and other staff and supplies necessary to run the sleepers. On top of all of this, service, and the Pullman porter, ran central in Pullman's business model.

When the Depression hit America, Pullman upgraded and adapted many of its services to continue drawing passengers. The ‘30s witnessed increasing privacy options in Pullman travel, with additional private bedrooms and the option to buy out the upper berths. In a time when most homes did not have air conditioning, Pullman also added the feature to its cars, making for a more comfortable travel experience. People would occasionally ride the train simply to escape the heat.

Pullman was the first-class travel option. Ralph Wallace of the Saturday Evening Post called it a “hotel on wheels.” Representing the height of comfort and leisure, Pullman travel came with a dining car, luxurious lounging cars, and even an on-site barber. Porters maintained the cars and catered to passengers’ whims. There existed the likelihood of running into famous actors, authors, politicians, and sports heroes. Anyone who was anyone traveled Pullman. For those whose name might not carry weight on its own, Pullman offered an escape. The train car represented an insulated, temporary community where an active imagination could invent numerous possibilities of romance and adventure. In 1938 Fortune magazine attested, “The bulk of the Pullman Co.’s business always has been with the great American middle class.” Indeed, tastes of luxury included “set-out” sleepers that allowed travelers stopping in smaller cities along the route to be detached from the train if the stop occurred during the middle of the night. They then were allowed to wake up at a more convenient time.

And yet, this ideal does not represent the realities of travel for all passengers at the time. Travel for African Americans contrasted starkly with the cushy service Pullman porters provided to white passengers. Jim Crow cars were older and more decrepit. Even after air conditioning was introduced, Jim Crow cars only had open windows. Added with the fact these cars often were placed close to the engine, this meant smoke and cinders would blow in on passengers. Dining service was uncommon, and blacks were not allowed in dining cars unless the last row of tables next to the kitchen was blocked off with a curtain. Black U.S. Rep. Arthur Mitchell indicated these conditions were still in effect as of 1937, when he was evicted from the air-conditioned “white” area of the Pullman to ride in a car that lacked air conditioning and carried a putrid odor. The bathroom lacked wash basin, water, soap, towels, or flush toilet.

African Americans may not have been allowed to use “white” cars, but whites could use Jim Crow cars to smoke, gamble, and drink if they wished. The conductor also could set himself up in the car to do paperwork. The brakeman might store equipment; the butcher may store his supplies. All of it could add up to significantly less room for black passengers. Extreme separation of this kind would last throughout the ‘30s, and Jim Crow laws of various kinds would continue to linger through the civil rights movement of the ‘60s. While modes of travel in the past often are idealized and recalled with great fondness, it is important to remember travel standards were not the same for all passengers.

While the idea of a Pullman car today is steeped in issues of race, it also simultaneously conjures images of the glory days of travel. Much of the history of train travel is written with Pullman holding a monopoly on luxury travel. Pullman ensured its place at the top of luxury travel through the ‘60s and the rise in popularity of the airplane eventually brought an end to the Pullman Palace Car Company.
A man ambles along rural train tracks. Gravel pokes through the worn-out soles of his scuffed shoes. Ragged clothes hang limply on his thin frame. His face is sunburnt, and streaks of dirt remain from the last time he splashed it with water. On the end of a stick swings a pack with all of the worldly possessions the man has to his name. Seemingly pulled straight from the pages of a Mark Twain novel, this man is the popular image of the hobo who lives within the cultural consciousness. He sees all of America from small town to big city while hopping on and off various trains.

The existence of hobos in America stretches back to the 1870s and displacement caused by the Civil War. However, hobo culture grew to include those who did not fit into society, such as the political revolutionary, as well as those who could not support themselves. Those who lived their lives on the road had a unique culture unto themselves. Separate from a physical community, they developed their own code of ethics. Chalk hobo markings informed future wanderers about things such as whether a residence was good for a free meal. Hobos developed specific lingo that helped them communicate about their lives on the road. While somewhat synonymous today, a hobo and a drifter and a bum were very different back then. Hobos existed at the top of the hierarchy, as resourceful independents who were willing to work and often were traveling about from job to job. In fact, the term hobo comes from “hoe-boys” of the west who used to take their hoes around with them during harvest season. A drifter moved from community to community with no singular purpose or end destination in mind. A bum existed at the bottom, more willing to beg than work.

The onset of the Depression forced many more into a life of tramping. Hobos boasted traveling around the United States on little to no money, yet their lives were constantly filled with danger. Ten cents was usually enough to ensure a ride from brakemen demanding money. Yet, there existed a strong tradition of violence against trespassers. Riders could be badly beaten, or forced to jump from moving trains. Women faced this potential physical abuse, with the added worry of sexual assault. The YWCA estimated there were 145,000 female hobos, or “sisters of the road,” in the 1930s.

Matters of basic hygiene also became an issue on the road. One former tramer recalled the difficulty in finding public restrooms after years of the Depression. It was unwise to look for a place to sleep in an unknown hobo camp after dark; the odds of settling in something unpleasant were high. The need for drinking water drove some to the point of eking what moisture was possible from the bottom of ice compartments on refrigerator cars. One could only hope when happening upon a creek or pond that the water was not contaminated.

A hobo was provided with a relatively commitment free life, and the ability to see the country. They paid the price of assurance of safety and security. The impetus for a life on the road for some hobos was the same romantic notions of seeing the larger world that incited a large number of Pullman porters to sign on to the job.

**Some Hobo Lingo!**
- **Cally:** police station
- **Calling in:** using another’s camp fire
- **Dipsey:** workhouse sentence
- **Flagged:** refused
- **Gooseberry:** a clothesline
- **Jungle:** a place where hobo workers meet and cook their food
- **Jungle buzzard:** one who begs off the hobo
The Black Press’ Influence on Civil Rights

This article was originally written for the study guide for The Ballad of Emmett Till in the Goodman’s 2007-2008 Season.

In October 1942, two 14-year-old African Americans—Charles Lang and Ernest Green—were taken from their jail cells in Mississippi and quietly lynched. As their bodies dangled over the Chickasawhay River, they became two of the more than 3,000 African Americans who were lynched in the U.S. between 1882 and 1951. Their tragedy might have shocked the nation—if the nation had been informed of it. But these grotesque murders, like so many before them, caused no ripple in the mainstream press. African Americans were only mainstream news when they committed a crime. But in the Black Press, lynchings were front-page material.

Despite the inception of Negro papers in the Northeast, most were published in the South, often on the presses of African-American churches. After the Civil War, the Black Press became integral in the unification and stabilization of southern African-American communities. When Reconstruction ended in 1876, however, these publications had to be wary of the harsh atmosphere of Jim Crow South. The truth was often censored using violent means. In 1892, for example, Ida B. Wells denounced the lynching of three friends in her paper, The Memphis Free Speech. In reaction, a lynch mob destroyed her offices and would have killed her, had she not been in New York at the time.

In 1905, however, a Chicago printer named Robert Abbott founded the Chicago Defender, which would not be silenced in the South or anywhere. Abbott produced the first issue of the Defender on his landlady’s dining room table and circulated a modest 300 copies of this edition. But with its tradition of sensationalism, sarcastic wit and biting rhetoric, the self-proclaimed “World’s Greatest Weekly” quickly blossomed in Chicago. Reporters became heroes of the black community. Through their writings, they established a separate world that liberated African Americans from mainstream depictions of their inferiority.

Having found success in the Midwest, Abbott did the unthinkable: He sent the Defender into the segregated South. From the safety of Chicago, Abbott could make the bold protests that Southern writers could not voice without fear of retribution. By the 1920s, the Defender had a circulation of more than 150,000, and even this number, though impressive, is misleading. Each copy passed through the hands of at least five readers. Every crime against African Americans was publicized in bold black ink on the front page of this now national publication.

But even as the Chicago Defender and other Negro newspapers such as The Pittsburgh Courier and the New York Amsterdam News became a fundamental cornerstone of the African-American community, the mainstream press refused to take the Black Press seriously. The plight of Black America remained shamefully invisible to most of the white population, until the death of Emmett Till. The first news story about the abduction and lynching of a 14-year-old from Chicago, who was in Mississippi visiting his mother’s hometown, broke on Aug. 29, 1955. This pithy piece said little other than that Emmett was missing. But as the heinous facts of the case unfolded, Emmett became the beaten and bruised face of Jim Crow South not only nationally, but internationally as well. He became famous, and the racism of the South, infamous.

The world would learn that two white men had dragged Emmett from his uncle’s home. They beat him, shot him and dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River with a metal fan wrapped around his neck with barbed wire. Despite authorities’ hasty attempt to bury the body in Mississippi, Emmett’s disfigured corpse was returned to Chicago on the condition that his casket would remain closed. But Emmett’s mother, Mamie Till, wanted to see her son. And once she had seen him, she wanted the world to see what had been done: “Let the people see
what they did to my boy.” An open-casket funeral service was held for Emmett, and for three days thousands flocked to Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ to witness the wrath of Jim Crow.

Weeks later, Jet magazine published photographs of Emmett’s corpse to “let the world experience man’s inhumanity to man,” and the Chicago Defender circulated the same images. America was traumatized. The world was aghast. Horrified editorialists came out of Germany, France and Belgium. From Italy, William Faulkner—Mississippi’s most famous son—issued a statement:

If we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, we don’t deserve to survive, and probably won’t.

For the first time, American mainstream media took interest in the murder of an African American in the South. At least 50 reporters and photographers filled the small courthouse for the first day of the trial. Life, Look, The New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Sun-Times, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and The Detroit News were represented, among others. The events surrounding Emmett’s murder were also among the first of the civil rights movement to be covered by the emerging medium of television. The nation and the world attentively followed the proceedings; everyone knew when Emmett’s murderers were set free by an all-white, all-male jury after four days of testimony and only an hour and five minutes of deliberation.

Although Emmett’s murderers were never punished, their trial established that the African-American condition deserved and required mainstream attention. Because of Emmett Till, America would be prepared for the events that would erupt later that year in Montgomery, AL. Mainstream publications would cover the bus boycott of Rosa Parks and the emergence of the civil rights movement’s new young leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. The Black Press would be there as well, but as the African-American narrative became our country’s narrative, the Black Press began losing its monopoly over African-American stories, journalists and readership. The Black Press publications helped desegregate America, and to a certain extent, their purpose became ironically anachronistic in the healthier world they created. Whereas such powerhouses as the Chicago Defender and Jet were able to adapt, most of the smaller publications sheathed their swords and faded out of circulation. But they, like Emmett, will never fade from history.

Fighting Back Against a Racist White Press

Newspapers have been a cornerstone of American society since the beginning of the 1700s, but just as the country was dominated by Caucasians, so too was the media. African-American stories were rarely, if ever, featured. Renowned African-American journalist Vernon Jarrett noted, “We didn’t exist... We were neither born, we didn’t get married, we didn’t die. We didn’t fight in any wars... we were truly invisible unless we committed a crime.”

Starting in 1827, however, Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm brought African-American issues to print in Freedom’s Journal. Circulating the streets of New York City, the Journal was the first African-American-owned, -operated and -oriented weekly publication. The front page of the first edition boldly read, “We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us.” With this proclamation, the Black Press was born. Over the next 125 years, 2,700 Negro papers would come and go as voices for a disenfranchised people and its warriors in the widespread war against racial persecution. Phyl Garland, a current African-American journalist, asserts that “the Black Press never pretended to be objective because it didn’t see the white press being objective and it often took a position, it had an attitude. This was a press of advocacy.” Witnessing countless injustices toward its constituents, the Black Press refused to detach itself from the emotion that vibrated the African-American population.

As America closed the door on the ugliness of the 19th century—with its inhumane slavery, brutal Civil War and frightening establishment of Southern Jim Crow laws—it greeted the 20th century with the hope for renewal. But the country was far from whole. Segregation engulfed the country: in the South by law and in the North by neighborhood and socioeconomic stratification. The Black Press covered this, of course; black journalists became local heroes for keeping their communities informed and unified. Yet, the mainstream media did not recognize racism in America as a story, and the white public remained astonishingly ignorant. All this changed, though, in 1955 when the story of Emmett Till’s death broke through the media’s color barrier and brought the truth of America’s inequality to the front page of every newspaper, black and white.
The Unionization of the Pullman Porters
BY VINCE PAGAN

Labor unions began to form in the United States after the end of the Civil War in the mid-19th century, paving the way for organizations such as the American Postal Workers’ Union, American Federation of Government Employees, and even the Actors’ Equity Association.

All of these unions have had their own sets of trials and tribulations, but perhaps one of the most inspiring stories in the history of labor unions is that of A. Phillip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The following timeline gives a summarized history of the work and triumphs of Randolph and the Brotherhood.

1866 – The National Labor Union (NLU) is founded by William H. Sylvis. Although the NLU would be disbanded in 1873, it would set a precedent as the first national labor federation, leading the way for the American Federation of Labor and other organizations seeking rights for laborers.

1868 – Thanks to the hard work of Sylvis and the NLU, Congress passes a statute that provides an eight-hour work day for government workers. Unfortunately, loopholes in the statute would keep many employers from adhering to its stipulations, particularly in the cases of many workers of color, including the employees of the newly founded Pullman Palace Car Company.

1886 – The American Federation of Labor (AFL) is founded in Columbus, Ohio, by a group of craft unions but takes measures to maintain the segregation of locals within its ranks.

1889 – Eugene V. Debs, former Indiana state senator, founds the American Railway Union (ARU) in an effort to fight for fair wages, lower rent, and fewer layoffs for the railway workers of the United States.

1894 – More than 4,000 Pullman Palace Car Company factory workers, which exclude individuals who work on the trains themselves, such as conductors and the Pullman porters, stage a wildcat strike against the Pullman Palace Car Company in response to Pullman’s massive layoffs, rent increase, and wage reduction because of an economic crisis that lowers demand for luxury travel. Debs and the ARU attempt to help the Pullman factory workers, but the company, still led by inventor George Pullman, refuses to acknowledge the union or its representatives. The strike collapses after three months, the ARU is disbanded, and Debs is sentenced to prison for violating a court order. In response to the strikes, President Grover Cleveland designates the first Monday in September as Labor Day.

1900-1920 – Labor organizers within the Pullman Palace Car Company continue to attempt unionization but are met with isolation and job loss by the company. Among them is Milton Price Webster, future vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Groups including the Urban League, the Socialist Party of America, and the Communist Party begin to focus their efforts toward the rights of black workers.

1920 – The Esch-Cummins Act (also known as the Transportation act) is passed in Congress, creating the Railway Labor Board (RLB) to regulate wages and settle disputes, and forcing railway owners (Pullman Palace Car Company included) to negotiate with unions. Unfortunately, since labor unions are still segregated, Pullman porters are not afforded the benefits of the law.

August 25, 1925 – Five hundred porters, former and current, meet in Harlem to discuss their next steps toward organizing, choosing A. Phillip Randolph as their president. By 1925, Randolph organizes a union of elevator operators in New York City and had been president of the National Brotherhood of Workers of America, which was dissolved in 1921. Randolph and the rest of the porters at the meeting that night in Harlem decide to call their union the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) and adopt the motto, “Fight or Be Slaves.”

November 1925 – After two straight weeks of meetings with porters and labor organizers, vice president of the BSCP Milton Weber forms the Chicago division of the BSCP. The Brotherhood’s Chicago division would become the center of the international BSCP because of its persistence in the fight for recognition by the country and the various railway owners. Chicago was also the home of the Pullman Palace Car Company headquarters.

1926 – During the early stages of the BSCP, the union spends much of its energy on conflict with the Pullman Palace Car Company and rival unions within the AFL, as well as attempting to make itself heard in a segregated and racist community. The National Railway Act passes, creating the National Mediation Board (NMB), which
holds the charge of mediating and facilitating any disputes brought against a company by its workers’ union.

September 1927 – Randolph attempts to involve the federal government (under President Calvin Coolidge) in its work for better wages and working conditions by bringing a case against the Pullman Palace Car Company to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and asking them to assist in their fight and investigate Pullman. The ICC rules that it does not have jurisdiction over the Pullman Palace Car Company and will not help the BSCP.

1928 – Randolph and the other leaders of the BSCP decide that the best course of action for the porters of the Pullman Palace Car Company is to strike; Randolph chooses to tread lightly, hoping that the mere threat of a strike may bring the Brotherhood to the attention of the NMB, which would finally bring Pullman to the table and provide recognition for the Brotherhood. The BSCP votes in favor of a strike.

July 1928 – The NMB refuses to act on behalf of the BSCP, completely disregarding the precedent that was set when it assisted a group of white railroad workers with a strike against their employer. The NMB officially dismisses the case and Randolph calls off the strike four hours before it is scheduled to begin.

October 29, 1929 – The stock market crashes in the United States and brings the country into a global economic crisis known as The Great Depression.

1930 – 1934 – The BSCP continues to work toward the rights of the porters of the Pullman Palace Car Company, although only the original 12 men who founded the company (Randolph and Webster included) are standing behind the Brotherhood; many of their most prominent backers have withdrawn their support. Roughly half of all porters nationwide hold memberships to the BSCP.

1934 – After an amendment is made to the Railway Labor Act (RLA), ensuring an “unhindered right of employees to join a labor union,” Randolph demands

that the NMB certify the BCSP as the representative of the Pullman porters.

June 1, 1935 – After winning an election held by the NMB, the BSCP is certified by the NMB and given a charter as a federally recognized union under the AFL.

July 5, 1935 – President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Wagner-Connery Act, which guarantees employees of private organizations can engage in collective bargaining for better wages and work conditions, and gives them the freedom to take collective action (e.g. strikes, walkouts, etc.) if necessary.

1937 – The BSCP signs its first collective bargaining agreement and becomes officially recognized by the Pullman Palace Car Company. Randolph becomes president of the National Negro Congress, an organization that unites many major black civil rights organizations of the time.

1941 – Randolph, with the support of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Eleanor Roosevelt, and Fiorello La Guardia, forces the administration to end discrimination by defense contractors and establish the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), which is meant to enforce the order. Milton Webster works to make the FEPC integral in correcting workplace discrimination.

1948 – Webster’s hard work with the FEPC pays off when President Harry S. Truman signs Executive Order 9981 banning segregation in the U.S. military.

1963 – Randolph, side by side with Bayard Rustin, social activist and director of Randolph’s Committee against Discrimination in the Armed Forces, is the driving force behind the historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

1978 – The BSCP merges with the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks (BRAC).

May 17, 1979 – A. Phillip Randolph dies in his home in New York City.

1985 – Leroy Shakleford, former BSCP member and president of BRAC’s Sleeping Car Porters Division, retires and is replaced by Michael Young and his successors, officially ending the direct lineage of BSCP leadership. Young is the first non-African American to lead the group.


BELOW: A Pullman Porter helps a woman aboard a train, circa 1880. Image courtesy of Bowling Green State University.
The Great Migration and How Chicago Changed: Chicago’s South Side, then and now

BY WILLA J. TAYLOR

This article was originally written for the study guide for The Ballad of Emmett Till during the Goodman’s 2007-2008 Season.

Standing in front of the church where Emmett Till was memorialized, alongside rows of boarded-up businesses, dilapidated buildings and overgrown vacant lots, it is difficult to imagine that the South Side of Chicago was once considered the Black Metropolis, the capital of African-American life and culture in the U.S.

But leading African-American historian and author Timuel Black remembers the South Side’s glory days. Although born in Birmingham, AL, Black moved with his family to Chicago when he was 8 months old. He built his life here, first as a social worker, then as a teacher—and always as a chronicler of the world in which he lives.

Professor Emeritus of Social Science at the City Colleges of Chicago, Black is the author of two volumes of interviews with South Siders that narrate the impact of the Great Migration on Chicago’s black history: Bridges of Memory: Chicago’s First Wave of Black Migration (2003) and Bridges of Memory 2 (2006). While the second volume explores the second generation of African Americans in Chicago, the first concentrates on those who left the social, political and economic oppression of the South for what they expected to be the Promised Land, only to find new forms of segregation and prejudice. This first wave of Southern immigrants settled in the stockyards and steel mills of Chicago and started small businesses in what came to be known as the “Black Belt” on the South Side. They brought forth the jazz, blues and gospel music for which the city is now renowned.

Long before this influx of Southern immigrants, there existed an ancestry of blacks in Chicago, beginning with Jean-Baptiste Pointe Du Sable—a Haitian trader who established the first permanent settlement at the mouth of the Chicago River in the 1780s—and continuing with the escaped slaves and freedmen who founded the city’s first communities in the 1840s. By 1890, the black population had reached 15,000.

Concentrated on the South Side by restrictive covenants and de jure segregation, the black community developed its own class system and social strata. Domestics and laborers lived in proximity to a small but growing middle class of business owners, doctors, lawyers and other professionals. In 1878, attorney Ferdinand Barnett established Chicago’s first black newspaper, the Conservator, which advocated militant protest and racial solidarity. His wife, Ida B. Wells, brought her anti-lynching campaign from the South, joined the women’s suffrage movement and was one of the founders of the NAACP in 1900.

The first wave of migration continued into the 1900s, and by 1910 Chicago’s black population had risen to 40,000. With the growing community came the establishment of such institutions as Provident Hospital, the Wabash Avenue YMCA (the first African-American-focused Y in the country), the Chicago Urban League and additional newspapers including the Chicago Defender. The political clout of these institutions paved the way for such black politicians as Oscar Standon De Priest, who became the first African American elected to Congress since the Reconstruction.
By 1910, 78 percent of Chicago’s black population lived south of the Loop between 22nd and 31st streets, with State Street to the east and Wentworth Avenue to the west. But as the population grew with the continued migration, the Black Belt extended south of 39th Street toward Garfield Boulevard, Grand Boulevard and Washington Park, and east across State Street to Cottage Grove. The race riots of 1919 were the result of encroaching integration and the economic pressure for jobs.

The 1920s brought the explosion of the “Black Metropolis,” better known as Bronzeville. Concentrated between the intersections of 37th and State and 47th and Grand Boulevard (now King Drive), Bronzeville became the epicenter of black Chicago life. Large black churches such as Quinn Chapel AME and Pilgrim Baptist Church drew thousands of worshippers each Sunday, and jazz and blues clubs helped to establish Chicago’s place in the musical pantheon.

The Great Depression undercut much of this progress and, by 1939, blacks constituted 40 percent of relief rolls and half of all black families relied on some government aid.

The Great Depression undercut much of this progress and, by 1939, blacks constituted 40 percent of relief rolls and half of all black families relied on some government aid. Direct-action campaigns targeted white merchants who wouldn’t hire blacks. The Depression, however, also led to a wave of black literary and artistic expression. Inspired by the Harlem Renaissance, artists such as Richard Wright, Willard Motley, William Attaway, Frank Davis and Margaret Burroughs offered nuanced impressions of black urban life, while Gwendolyn Brooks gave poetic voice to everyday black Chicagoans. The second wave of migration began with the creation of new jobs to support the World War II effort. By 1950, Chicago’s black population escalated to more than 500,000. This new wave of Southern blacks encountered a bifurcated Chicago. On one hand, Chicago was the mecca of black life in the U.S.; it was home to the most famous black man at that time, heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis, and the most widely read black newspaper, the Chicago Defender. Blacks had secured hard-won advancements in the steel and meat-packing industries, creating a stable black working class. And members of the black middle class continued to thrive as the owners of movie houses, hotels, restaurants, real estate, banks, insurance companies, department stores and shopping districts.

On the other hand, there was still widespread discrimination. Stores outside the Black Belt refused to hire African Americans, so black workers were limited to servicing only the black communities. The already-overcrowded, slum-like conditions were aggravated by the exorbitant rent that landlords charged for what they called “kitchenettes” and “basement apartments.” To ease the housing crunch, the Chicago Housing Authority proposed new public housing projects, but they were restricted to African-American neighborhoods, making these areas even more congested.

“This is the world, the society, that Emmett Till was born into,” Black explains. “It’s important to understand that Emmett was poor, but he was not poverty stricken. He lived in a vibrant, thriving community that had doctors, lawyers and the first 12 black certified public accountants in the country. Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong strolled these streets and played in the clubs here.”

Standing before A.A. Rainer and Sons Funeral Home, where Emmett’s body was taken after it arrived in Chicago, Black describes the scene: “This was still a segregated neighborhood. The Rainers had pioneered here; they were the first in the community. People filled the streets for days, waiting to get inside.”

It was A.A. Rainer Sr. who took charge of Emmett’s body at Mamie Till’s request. “They had a reputation of care in the community,” says Black. “They treated everyone who came here as if they were family, and I think that is what Mamie wanted. She wanted Emmett treated right.”

For the service, Emmett’s body was moved to the Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ, a massive building on 40th Street. This decimated area was once part of the thriving center of the Black Metropolis. The clubs where Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Williams performed are now gone. The public housing that Ida B. Wells championed has been bulldozed. Many of the black-owned businesses that supported the community are either boarded up or torn down. Although there are signs of gentrification, the Black Metropolis is no more.
On the south side of Chicago, the neighborhood of historical Pullman moves more like a small suburban town than the hustle and bustle of the city of which it is part. Resident and history buff Arthur Melville Pearson states, “for those looking for a genuine sense of community, this is ideal. Here in Pullman, whether it is over the back fence or sitting on the front porch, we are up close and personal.” Both a Chicago and national landmark, and contender as a national park, the area between 111th and 115th streets just west of Lake Calumet hasn’t changed much since it was first built by George Pullman to house the factory workers for his Palace Car Company. Looking to overcome the general problems of the Industrial worker-manager relationship, Pullman imagined a town where clean living and a strict moral code would enhance his workers’ productivity. Originally lauded, Pullman’s controlling paternalistic view would spell the ultimate downfall of what was named the Pullman Social Experiment.

Basing his plans on European company towns including Essen, Germany, and Saltaire, England, Pullman bought 4,000 acres of prairie just south of Chicago; only about 600 of those acres were used for the factories, town, and housing. The town was completed in 1884; however, the first families began moving in as early as 1881.

Voyeuristically philanthropic, Pullman ran the town with expectation of an average 6 percent return on the cost of building and maintenance. Employees were not allowed to own their homes; therefore all housing was rented from the Pullman Palace Car Company. While each home had uncommon amenities for the period such as indoor plumbing, gas light, even steam heat, the company set the fees for resources including water and gas at much high rates than normal. Pullman sold gas at $2.25 per thousand cubic feet when Chicago was charging $1.25 per thousand cubic feet. In addition, the company chose what types of retailers were allowed to set up shop in the town and at what prices they could sell their goods. The sale of alcohol was not allowed in town, although one could purchase liquor in nearby communities. The town had no community government; rather a town agent managed the community. The agents, even the members of the school board, were always staunch supporters of Pullman and company policy. Emblematic of the paternalistic idea, Pullman played god to his employees.

Envisioned as a utopia for Pullman’s skilled white factory workers, non-Pullman white employees lived in the town as well. Contrary to popular belief, Pullman porters were not part of Pullman’s social experiment. Porters resided in an area north of Pullman town and were not allowed to live with the factory workers. Population density constituted one of the greatest problems for Pullman town. Governing bodies never controlled population size and the town grew from its initial 1,800 residents to 12,000 by the 1893 recession.

Pullman’s controlling policies, combined with the economic strife of the recession, ultimately caused the experiment’s downfall. In response to the economic decline, Pullman cut wages and hours of its employees, yet despite the urging of Chicago officials, he did not lower rent prices or sale prices of goods. By this time, Pullman employees constituted two-thirds of the resident
population, having been given preference over other renting applicants. Unfortunately, residents owed more than $70,000 in back rent, preventing the company from evicting them. Originally a utopia, Pullman quickly fell in destitution. A powder keg, Pullman workers went on strike in May 1894, later supported nationwide by the American Railway Union via a boycott of Pullman cars on lines in 27 states west of Chicago. Although it reached national headlines, the strike and subsequent boycott were ultimately crushed by September. Conditions were no better at the company or in town; Pullman even cut the number of employees at the factory to 600. Officials were concerned about Pullman citizens after the area was annexed into the city of Chicago in 1889. They asked George Pullman for funds to provide aid for the failing town. Refused, Chicago officials turned to state aid for help. Although triumphant at suppressing the strike, Pullman’s experiment was deemed a failure. The Supreme Court would condemn paternalism and declare the establishment of the model town as a violation of the Pullman charter. Pullman died five years later, and in 1907, housing was divested to private control.

Today, the name Pullman encompasses both the historic area and the neighborhoods of North Pullman and West Pullman. Despite its initial makeup, Pullman has become more diverse. While a fire in the early ‘90s took out the administrative building and clock tower, more than 95 percent of Pullman’s original buildings are still intact. The neighborhood strives to revitalize some of the unused older buildings. The south side of the Chicago is constantly deemed as a haven for crime and danger, but residents don’t see that in their little area of Pullman. Although not directly connected with the Pullman Palace Car Company, many employees still lived in the town after the factories closed in the 1950s. A picture of the past today, Pullman serves as a reminder of one of the most disastrous social experiments in labor history.

BELOW: Pullman strikers outside Arcade Building in Pullman, Chicago. The Illinois National Guard can be seen guarding the building during the Pullman Railroad Strike in 1894. Image courtesy of The Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project.
The History of Train Safety
BY SAM CHADWICK

Trains in the 1930s were in a time of transition. In 1937, the 921-mile trip from Chicago to New Orleans would have taken about 20 hours, reaching top speeds in the 60- to 70-mile per hour range. While a coal-fired steam locomotive would have pulled the train in *Pullman Porter Blues*, the Illinois Central’s Panama Limited was given the Streamliner treatment in 1942, changing to diesel-electric engines and lighter-weight passenger cars similar to the ones still used by Amtrak today. During the golden age of passenger rail in the late 1940s, the trip time from Chicago to New Orleans dropped to 16 ½ hours, with the streamlined Panama Limited reaching a top speed of more than 100 miles per hour thanks to the flat terrain of the Midwest. Interestingly, one can take almost the exact same trip today on Amtrak’s City of New Orleans, which started life as the Panama’s daytime “sister” train but was reincarnated as an overnight train after termination of the Panama Limited service. Today, the trip takes about 19 hours with top-speed stretches of 79 miles per hour.

While Pullman porters still were fighting for the right to unionize in 1937, railroad workers’ unions had formed by the early 1900s. Combined with new government reporting on railroad accidents and an increasing interest in new technology from the railroads, this ushered in a new era of railroading. Over the span of about 20 years, a number of key regulations was passed by the U.S. Congress, including the 1893 Safety Appliance Act (mandating the use of automatic brakes and modern car couplers), the 1908 Ash Pan Act (forbidding the use of ash pans that had to be dumped by a worker beneath the locomotive), and the 1911 Boiler Inspection Act (regulating the use and inspection of locomotive boilers to help avoid boiler explosions). As a result, the fatality rate for railroad employees in 1930 was almost a fifth of what it was in 1900. These measures and others were some of the first steps toward modern railroad safety culture.

As demand for freight and passenger railroads declined in the post-World War II era, worker fatality rates unfortunately trended upward as railroads had less money to invest in maintaining equipment and infrastructure. This trend continued until the deregulation and massive restructuring of the railway industry that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Post-deregulation, railroad companies began to strengthen their position as a critical freight transportation mode and once again could invest in their infrastructure and rolling stock. Today’s railroad companies cultivate a strong safety culture that emphasizes employee education, maintenance of infrastructure, and development of new technology, with the goal of protecting railroad workers and the public. This has resulted in the lowest railroad employee fatality rates to date, with the industry working toward a goal of zero deaths.

We all can work to improve railroad safety by reducing the number of fatalities due to highway-rail grade crossing collisions and trespassing. According to Operation Lifesaver, nearly 300 fatalities due to grade crossing collisions and 450 fatalities due to trespassing occurred in 2012. While this is half the number of deaths that happened 20 years ago, lowering that statistic requires the efforts of both the railroad companies and the public. Teaching young drivers to “Stop, Look and Listen”—and reminding older drivers of the same—can help reduce this source of fatalities.

Of course, employee safety is only part of the equation. The safety of railroad passengers and railroad communities is paramount, and many of the policies and technologies currently being developed have the primary goal of reducing risk to these groups. Safely meeting the growing demand for both freight and passenger rail transportation is the primary concern of the industry today. While railroad accidents are at their lowest rate since safety data collection began, recent events in Canada and Spain highlight the fact that there is still work to be done.

Sam Chadwick is a civil engineer with a background in railroad safety. She enjoys studying the history of rail around the world, hoping the lessons of the past will inform the transportation infrastructure decisions of the next century.
The Long Journey Home  
BY LOUISE FINLEY

This narrative was originally published in a collection of stories from GeNarrations participants around Race in the Goodman’s 2011-2012 Season.

For many generations, my ancestors lived and worked south of the Mason-Dixon line as tenant farmers. They cultivated the soil, produced crops of cotton and corn, and raised livestock. But after the Great Depression of 1929 struck, sharecroppers, due to then limited economic resources, found it hard to weather the storm and many of them left the farm. My parents migrated north to the far south side of Chicago.

It was a cold day in January when my little brother, Lewis, and I left Woodruff County, Ark.. We arrived at the train station around dusk-dark. The depot was deserted except for the train conductor, who stood on the station platform waving his lighted lantern back and forth, flogging the evening passenger train down. I could hear the train whistle blowing, way down the tracks, even before the train came into sight. Pretty soon, the Illinois Central train pulled into the station, letting off clouds of steam and then coming to a squeaking halt.

A Pullman porter hopped down from the train and checked our identification tags and amidst hugs, kisses and good-byes, the porter scooped up our old suitcase and took us aboard the train.

Somewhere along the way, before the train reached Memphis, Tenn., the train made a stop and picked up a little colored girl named Marie Anne, around 7 years old, just like me. She was going to St. Louis, Miss., to join her parents. The train arrived in Memphis on schedule and we were placed in the care of a woman from the Travellers Aid Society.

The woman walked us through the “Colored Only” waiting room on until we reached the “White Only” waiting room and there she seated us on a bench across from her office. A few white people sat scattered around the room. Two young white men sat across the aisle from us.

It was relatively quiet in the waiting room, when all of a sudden, the two young men let out with a loud yell and then they started tossing coins at us. The coins were hitting us all over our bodies and then falling to the floor. Marie Anne and Lewis slid down from their seat on the bench and were chasing all over the room, picking up the coins. The two young men were laughing so hard that they were almost choking on their own saliva. I sat there glued to my seat and watched the humiliating spectacle. My grandmother told me one day, “Missy, honey, we are just as good as anybody, maybe better than a lot of them. We are a proud people. Lord have mercy, child, do you hear what I’m trying to tell you? We a proud people and don’t you ever forget that, Missy.”

I positioned my body on the bench. I sat very erect, with my shoulders thrown back and my head held high, and I stared dead straight ahead. I didn’t bat an eyelash. I defied them. Those two young men couldn’t believe what their eyes were seeing. They pelted me with coins. I could feel the coins coming at me, like bullets being fired from a pistol, but I didn’t flinch. I didn’t move a muscle.

At some point in time, I heard a voice come over the loudspeaker in the waiting room, “Train 413, coming up to track 9, train leaving in 15 minutes for Chicago. All aboard.” I took Marie Anne and Lewis by the hand and we headed for the nearest exit from the white waiting room. Train 413 had pulled onto the loading dock and a noisy crowd of colored folk were hurrying and pushing, trying to climb aboard the train. Once again, Marie Anne, Lewis and I were placed in the caring hands of a trusted Pullman porter. And that ole freedom train sped on down the tracks.

I was half-asleep when I felt a tugging at my sleeve. It was my brother, Lewis. “Sistah, I’m hungry,” he said. I looked down into my brother’s little, innocent face and my eyes started to cloud over with tears. I got our shoebox down from the luggage rack and made way to feed Lewis.

I gave my little brother the biggest piece of fried chicken from the lunch. Lewis looked up at me with gratitude in his big brown eyes. He cocked his little head to one side and gave me a big snag-a-tooth grin. And then my little mischievous brother, Lewis, raised his right arm, with his fist clenched tight, high above his head and, to my surprise, the little boy dumped a handful of quarters in my lap.
Theatre Etiquette with Chuck Smith
BY GOODMAN EDUCATION

What should I wear?

Definitely dress nicely but comfortably; try business casual. No tank tops, ripped jeans, etc. Baseball caps or hats must be moved once you enter the theatre. The Goodman is air-conditioned so be sure to bring an extra sweater or dress warmly.

What should I bring?

Only what you really need. Electronic devices such as PSP, Nintendo DS, smart phones, and laser pointers are not permitted during the show. If it makes noise or is distracting, please refrain from having it out in the theatre. A purse, bag, or backpack is fine. School supplies are not necessary. Remember that you are here to sit back, watch and enjoy, so don’t bring anything you don’t need.

(Please remember):
No smoking, and no eating or drinking while inside the theatre.

What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?

Only if it is an emergency. Otherwise, it’s very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

Have respect for other audience members. This means no talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking. (For your safety and others’!)

Artistic Associate Chuck Smith. Photo by Brian Kuhlmann.
How should I respond to what’s going on on the stage?

Honestly but appropriately. If you find something funny, then laugh—but don’t laugh for five minutes straight or laugh so hard that you need to leave the theatre. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most important, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feed back but might be extremely offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors for having given it a try.

What to do during Intermission:

Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, walk, use the restroom, get water and discuss the play with your friends.

We do ask that if you are sitting on the main floor that you remain downstairs and if you are sitting in the mezzanine that you remain upstairs. There are restrooms on both floors.

When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby will flash several times; that is your cue to get back to your seat because the performance is about to begin!

What to do after the show:

There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that’s on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.

What to do before the show:

When your class arrives, your teacher will let the Education staff know how many people are in your group. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance.

If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission. Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program.

Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

And remember the Golden Rule of Theatre-going:

Theatre artists are paid professionals. When you enter a theatre, you are entering their work space. Respect their work as you would have them respect yours.

Enjoy the Show!
Reading Your Ticket
BY GOODMAN EDUCATION

As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman’s Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is a seating chart—a map of all the seats in the Albert Theater—and an explanation of how to read your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They’re here for you!

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This will guide you to the lobby door closest to your seat—aisle numbers are on plaques that hang above the doors to the theater.

The section of the theatre you will be sitting in: Main Floor or Mezzanine

This is your seat number, located on the edge of the bottom seat cushion.

The row where your seat is located, noted in a letter on the side of the end seat of each row.

Day and date of performance

Curtain time

Play you are seeing and its author

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Goodman’s Albert Theatre

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Albert Ivar Goodman Theatre—Main Floor

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Albert Ivar Goodman Theatre—Mezzanine

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Stage
After you have seen the show and discussed your responses in the classroom, it’s time to let us know what you thought! Your response letter plays an important role at Goodman Theatre. All of the letters we receive are forwarded to our artists, and you may get a response!

Pick one of the artists involved with Pullman Porter Blues whose work was particularly memorable to you—an actor, designer, the playwright or the director—and write that artist a letter describing your experience at the show and your feedback about his or her work. Be honest and ask any questions that are on your mind.

Send us your letter within one month of seeing the show, and we’ll forward it on to that artist!

Important information to include:

• Your name, age and school
• Your mailing address (where a response may be sent)
• Any questions or special observations you want to share with the artists!

Send your letters to:
Education and Community Engagement
Goodman Theatre
170 North Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60601

Or email us at:
education@goodmantheatre.org

Here is a great student letter we received in response to Animal Crackers:

Dear Cast and Crew,

I would have to say that every single one of you have done a superb job in this play. All the effort you have put forth into this play has resulted in a memorable experience for all of us. I thought it was clever that the actors, actresses and the orchestra interacted with the audience. From viewing the original film of Animal Crackers, I think the cast played in the play and the original cast of Animal Crackers very similar! This play might have been the first encounter of the Marx brothers for many teenagers and children and I believe that the crew and cast of Animal Crackers proved that early comedy can also be entertaining and memorable!

The director’s vision of the play was a rather conscious one. Exposing the Marx brothers to the vast majority of people who never knew about them and bringing back nostalgic memories to the older audience was a great idea. This play was actually my first play and a first trip to Goodman Theatre. I myself, as a young adult, finally realized that plays are enjoyable and gratifying. The play had all the elements of emotion and slapstick comedy which made it a great one. The technical aspects as well as the props were amazingly set to follow each scene. My favorite scene had to be the scene where Harpo and Rivelli tried to clear up the misunderstanding of “The Flash.” I though the script was very flowing and comfortable. Was there any improv involved? I did not find any negative aspects of this play. I have found the play and the ambiance of Goodman Theatre very positive. I give Animal Crackers two thumbs up.

Sincerely,
A CPS student

Goodman Theatre Education & Community Engagement is also online!

Check us out on Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/goodmaned

Or Twitter:
http://twitter.com/GoodmanEd

We love hearing your thoughts, so don’t be afraid to drop us a line, comment, tag us in a note, @reply, or retweet us. Also check out our online educational resources for more information regarding the play you’ve seen, or anything else you’d like to know about how our programs (and theatre) work!

Keep checking in for updates online!