

UNITY, JUSTICE AND PROTECTION: THE COLORED TRAINMEN  
OF AMERICA'S STRUGGLE TO END JIM CROW IN THE  
AMERICAN RAILROAD INDUSTRY [AND ELSEWHERE]

A Dissertation

by

ERVIN JAMES III

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

Major Subject: History

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## ABSTRACT

Unity, Justice and Protection: The Colored Trainmen of America's Struggle to End Jim Crow in the American Railroad Industry [and Elsewhere]. (August 2012)

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The Colored Trainmen of America (CTA) actively challenged Jim Crow policies on the job and in the public sphere between the 1930s and 1950s. In response to lingering questions concerning the relationship between early black labor activism and civil rights protest, this study goes beyond both local lore and cursory research. This study examines the Colored Trainmen's major contributions to the advancement of African Americans. It also provides context for some of the organization's shortcomings in both realms. On the job the African American railroad workers belonging to the CTA fought valiantly to receive the same opportunities for professional growth and development as whites working in the operating trades of the railroad industry. In the public sphere, these men collectively protested second-class services and accommodations both on and off the clock.

Neither their agenda, the scope of their activities, nor their influence was

limited to the railroad lines the members of the CTA operated within the Gulf Coast region. The CTA belonged to a progressive coalition comprised of four other powerful independent African American labor unions committed to unyielding labor activism and the toppling of Jim Crow. Together, they all worked to effectuate meaningful social change in partnership with national civil rights attorney Charles H. Houston. Houston's experience and direction, coupled with the CTA's dedicated membership and willingness to challenge authority, created considerable momentum in movements aimed at toppling racial inequality in the workplace and elsewhere.

Like most of their predecessors, the CTA's struggle for advancement fits within a continuum of successive challenges to economic exploitation and racial inequality. No single person or organization can take full credit for ending segregation or achieving equality. Many who remain nameless and faceless contributed and sacrificed. This study not only chronicles the contribution of a relatively unsung African American labor organization that waged war against Jim Crow on two different fronts, it also pays homage to a few more individuals who made a difference in the lives of an entire race of people during the course of a bitterly contested, never-ending struggle for racial equality in the United States of America during the twentieth century.

For my family and my community

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the culmination of years of sacrifice and personal suffering. I cannot imagine what my experience would have been like without the support of so many people. I credit the late Tuskegee University Professor Frank L. Toland, Sr. with using history to teach me lessons of courage and perseverance as an undergraduate. While pursuing my Master's degree at Texas Southern University, Dr. Cary D. Wintz and Dr. Merlene Pitre prepared me for the academic rigors of a terminal degree program. My Texas A&M University dissertation committee members always expressed a genuine interest in my development and helped me every step of the way.

My dissertation committee advisor Dr. Albert Broussard was never more than a telephone call away. He provided me with practical knowledge and wisdom whenever I needed it. Dr. Ernest Obadele-Starks, Dr. Glenn Chambers, and Professor Rebecca Hankins all provided me with employment opportunities I needed to sustain myself as I completed my coursework at Texas A&M University. I am equally grateful for the research assistance I received in Houston, Texas and Washington, D.C. The energetic team of archival assistants at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center helped me research the CTA Papers efficiently. Dr. Ida E. Jones's generosity and hospitality at Howard University's renowned Moorland-Spingarn Research Center was second to

none. As a young assistant professor at Paul Quinn College, I am eternally grateful for the support and inspiration I received from my fellow Quinnites President Michael J. Sorrell, Former Provost Dr. Connie B. Allen, Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Kizuwanda Grant, and Dean Kelsel Thompson.

Finally, I must acknowledge my family for supporting me ever since I left Cincinnati, Ohio, in furtherance of my education. My grandmother, Carrie M. Purvis, and my mother, Ariane P. James, both did whatever was necessary to help me complete my education at Texas A&M University. My wife, Dr. Andraya D. Anderson-James, always believed in me. She prodded me along, kept me focused, and supported me in every way imaginable. My son, Myles Anderson James, gave me one more reason to finish my dissertation despite my circumstances. The completion of this dissertation is the conclusion of a difficult chapter in my life. My prayer is that it also represents the beginning of another chapter that is just as challenging and rewarding.

## NOMENCLATURE

ACRT	Association of Colored Railway Trainmen
BLE	Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers
BLFE	Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen
BRT	Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen
BSCP	Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
CGCC	Committee on Government Contract Compliance
CTA	Colored Trainmen of America
DCRFWU	Dining Car Railroad Food Workers' Union
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Community
FEPC	Federal Employment Practices Committee
GCL	Gulf Coast Lines
HUD	Housing and Urban Development
IARE	International Association of Railway Employees
ICC	Interstate Commerce Commission
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MOPAC	Missouri Pacific Railroad
MPL	Missouri Pacific Lines
NAACP	National Advancement Association for Colored People
NMB	National Mediation Board
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board



NRAB	National Railroad Adjustment Board
NRLEC	Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee
ORC	Order of Railway Conductors
ORCB	Order of Railway Conductors and Brakemen
SACRTF	Southern Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Firemen
SUNA	Switchmen's Union of North America

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

"The price one pays for pursuing a profession, or calling, is an intimate knowledge of its ugly side."

James Baldwin

Established in 1917, the Colored Trainmen of America (CTA) registered its organization charter with the state of Texas seven years before the formation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP). Despite the historic role of this significant southern African American labor union, this organization remains somewhat obscure. Unlike the renowned Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the CTA has received relatively little coverage in scholarly historical accounts over the years.<sup>1</sup> Eric Arnesen's *Brotherhoods of Color* provides a comprehensive survey of African American labor unions that briefly references the organization. Ernest Obadele-Starks's *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* mentions the existence of the CTA while identifying various kinds of black unions established

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This dissertation follows the style of *Journal of American History*.

<sup>1</sup> Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (Berkeley, 1972). Brailsford R. Brazeal, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (New York, 1946). Sally Hanley, *A. Philip Randolph* (New York, 1989). William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925-37* (Urbana, 1991). Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge, 1990). Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Champaign, 1989). Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill, 2001). Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Chicago, 2010).

throughout the South. TAMU-Kingsville graduate student Jennifer Borrer's 1998 journal article demonstrates just how little has been published concerning the historical significance of the organization within the Gulf Coast region from a student's perspective.<sup>2</sup>

Incorporated during 1918, the Colored Trainmen of America worked diligently to redress numerous grievances filed by gulf region CTA members against the Missouri Pacific Railroad during the twentieth century. In addition to organizing black laborers, and addressing their immediate concerns within the workplace, the CTA worked to shape public policy regarding the fair treatment of African American workers on a national scale. Dating back to 1939, prominent NAACP Legal Defense Fund attorney Charles Houston and his team of civil rights attorneys advanced a considerable number of complaints filed by the CTA. During 1948, the CTA formed a committee of five highly organized black labor unions known as the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee (NRLEC). Collectively, the CTA, the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen (ACRTLF), International Association of Railway Employees (IARE), Dining Car Railroad Food Workers' Union (DCRFWU), and

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Borrer, "The Colored Trainmen of American: Kingsville, Black Labor and the Railroads," *Journal of South Texas*, 11 (no. 1, spring 1998), 74-103. Jennifer Michelle Borrer, "The Road to Success is Paved with More Than Good Intentions: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Colored Trainmen of America," (M.A. thesis, Texas A & M University at Kingsville, May 1998). Alex Chis, "Making Humble Work Come to Life," *Cultural Dissent, Green Left Weekly*, Jan. 28, 1998. Cynthia Hodnett, "The Exhibit Focuses on Black Railroad Workers," *Kingsville Caller-Times*, May 28, 2000.

the Southern Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Firemen (SACRTF) all sought recourse from both railroad industry and union discriminatory employment practices through the courts. Although still somewhat unknown compared to monumental federal court cases such as *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), *Brown v. Board* (1954), *Davis v. County School Board Prince Edward County* (1957), the legal decisions handed down in *Steele v. Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company* (1944) and *Tunstall v. Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen* (1944) are both groundbreaking railroad industry discrimination-civil rights cases filed by African American labor union members associated with two different organizations belonging to the NRLEC.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, CTA litigation activities during the 1940s are also monumental because they fused black labor activism, the civil rights struggle, and federal government intervention together in order to improve both the quality of life for African Americans. In addition to providing an abridged organizational history of the Colored Trainmen of America, this study of the CTA and its allies -prominent

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<sup>3</sup> “These decisions were ignored for several years by the Brotherhood and the railroad companies; nonetheless, they had an impact upon future public policy affecting the railroad industry. While the majority of the lawsuits were directed at southern railroad companies, northern and western railroads were also guilty of discriminatory practices. Public pressure to eliminate discrimination, however, played a more crucial role in these regions and resulted in the passage by state legislatures of fair employment practice legislation and the establishment of state FEPCs.” See Eric Arnesen’s “Negro Railway Labor Executive Committee” in *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Organizations*. Nina Mjagkij, ed. (New York, 2001), 506-507.

advancement organizations, federal interveners, and noteworthy individual supporters of national and local importance- provides a meaningful and insightful contribution to the fields of African American, labor, southern, civil rights, and Texas history.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, racial discrimination and unfair labor practices directed towards African Americans workers have been indistinguishable at times. Free-market labor competition periodically resulted in unfair labor practices disproportionately affecting African Americans since the days of Reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, this tradition of racial inequality within the workplace represents a continuation of employment discrimination that dates back to an era in American history when ideals of liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness shaped

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<sup>4</sup> Alexa B. Henderson, "FEPC and the Southern Railway Case: An Investigation into the Discriminatory Practices of Railroads during World War II," *Journal of Negro History*, 61 (no. 2, 1976), 173-187. Compilation of Laws Relating to Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration between Employers and Employees (Washington, D.C., 1947). National Archives, Fair Employment Practice Commission Records, National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas. Merle E. Reed, "FEPC and the Federal Agencies in the South," *Journal of Negro History*, 65 (no. 1, 1980). Louis C. Kessleman, *The Social Politics of the FEPC: A Study in Reform Pressure Movements* (Chapel Hill, 1948). Ernest Obadele-Starks, "The Road to Jericho: Black Workers, the Fair Employment Practice Commission, and the Struggle for Racial Equality in the Upper Gulf Coast, 1941-1947," (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1996). Charles Hamilton Houston Papers, 1895-1950, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1945," *American Historical Review*, 102 (no. 2, 1997), 340-377. Merlene Pitre, *In Struggle against Jim Crow: Lulu White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Eric Arnesen, *The Black Worker: Race, Labor and Civil Rights Since Emancipation* (Urbana, 2007).

American values and culture like never before.<sup>6</sup> Most white workers from the New Republic refused to acknowledge any commonalities they shared with black laborers.<sup>7</sup> Nineteenth century skilled African American craftsmen and laborers fared no better than their revolutionary era predecessors, as apprenticeships and craftsmen guilds remained largely off limits to them as well.<sup>8</sup>

The abolishment of American slavery provided an unprecedented opportunity for African Americans to compete for wage labor in emerging industrial centers throughout the South. Rather than continue to toil in the miry clay for landowners, scores of African American migrants flocked to emerging cities during the early part of the twentieth century in pursuit of the American dream. Theoretically, an integrated workplace provided working-class whites and blacks with an opportunity to bridge the racial divide by recognizing commonalities between the groups, but this scarcely occurred because former slaves and their descendants provided a cheaper source of labor for urban

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<sup>6</sup> Philip S. Foner, *Labor and the American Revolution* (Westport, 1976). Steven Shulman and William Darity, Jr., eds., *The Question of Discrimination: Racial Inequality in the United States Labor Market* (Middletown, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961).

<sup>8</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991).

industrialists around the country.<sup>9</sup> This only made race matters worse in some of the industrialized cities bordering the Mason-Dixon Line as well as those sprouting up out west.<sup>10</sup> While racist responses to calls for equality were generally the rule of thumb at the turn of the century, there were enough exceptional instances to foreshadow the spirit of cooperation inevitably prevailing within a few decades.

In the interim, African American factory workers, mineworkers, dockworkers, field hands, and railroad employees rarely achieved equality on the job by responding with accommodation, violence, sabotage, or walking off the job, never to return.<sup>11</sup> The modern American labor movement ushered in a series of reforms favoring nearly everyone – traditional white males, newly arrived immigrants, children, and even women. Contrary to belief, African Americans benefited very little from progressive twentieth century federal

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<sup>9</sup> Darrel E. Bigham, *On Jordan's Banks: Emancipation and Its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley* (Lexington, 2005). John V.H. Dippel, *Race to the Frontier: White Flight and Westward Expansion* (New York, 2005). Billy Hall Wyche, "Southern Attitudes towards Industrial Unions, 1933-1941" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1969).

<sup>10</sup> Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Eric Arnesen, "The Quicksands of Economic Insecurity: African-Americans, Strikebreaking, and Labor Activism in the Industrial Era," in *The Black Worker: A Reader*, ed. Eric Arnesen (Urbana, 2007), 41-71. Larry J. Griffin and Robert R. Korstad, "Class as Race and Gender: Making and Breaking a Labor Union in the Jim Crow South," *Social Science History*, 19 (no.4, Winter 1995), 425-454. Sidney H. Kessler, "The Negro in Labor Strikes," *The Midwest Journal*, 6 (no. 2, Summer 1954), 17.



measures taken on behalf of white organizers prior to the late 1930s.<sup>12</sup> Although both international unions and local level unions began creating “colored” auxiliaries during this time period, integrated labor union membership and representation remained almost unfathomable to the majority of white workers prior to the start of World War II.<sup>13</sup>

Independent segregated labor associations still managed to make a difference in the lives of working-class African Americans during the years government remained silent on the subject of racial inequality.<sup>14</sup> These organizations successfully launched the careers of several prominent African American civil rights leaders who cultivated their ability to organize and lead while enduring the harsh working conditions of America’s railways, steel mills, coal mines, and cotton fields.<sup>15</sup> Where African Americans from the surrounding

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<sup>12</sup> Booker T. Washington, “The Negro and the Labor Unions,” *Atlantic Monthly*, (June 1913).

<sup>13</sup> Sidney Kessler, “The Organization of Negroes in the Knights of Labor,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 37 (no. 3, 1952), 249. Paul D. Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (Baton Rouge, 2006). Bruce Nelson, “CIO meant One Thing for Whites and another Thing for Us: Steelworkers and Civil Rights, 1936-1974,” in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995*, ed. Robert Zieger, (Knoxville, 1997), 113-145. Kenneth M. Casebeer, “Clashing Views on the Wagner Act: Leon Keyserling’s Files,” *Labor’s History*, 2 (April 1990), 44-55. Ray F. Marshall, “Union Racial Problems in the South,” *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 1 (May 1962), 117-128.

<sup>14</sup> Eraste Vidrine. “Negro Locals,” *International Socialist Review*, 5 (January 1905), 389-391. William Kornhauser, “The Negro Union Official: A Study of Sponsorship and Control,” *American Journal of Sociology*, (March 1952), 446. Herbert Hill, “Labor Unions and the Negro,” *Commentary* (December 1959), 483.

community made up a substantial portion of the workforce, African American labor organization efforts often led to political power that occasionally led to meaningful concessions at the worksite and periodically improved the lives and landscapes of the community for the better.<sup>16</sup>

Industrious African American labor organizations took advantage of government pro-labor policies and adopted proven strategies for organized protest in various industries.<sup>17</sup> Federal government World War II production policies provided more opportunities for rank and file African Americans workers to collectively transcend racial barriers to promotions, better wages, and union membership in very meaningful ways.<sup>18</sup> This surge of mildly sympathetic federal action persisted throughout the second half of the twentieth century. During this

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<sup>15</sup> Brazeal R. Brailsford, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Its Origin and Development* (New York, 1946). James S. Olson, "Organized Black Leadership and Industrial Unionism: The Racial Response, 1936-1945," *Labor History*, 10 (Summer 1969), 475- 486. Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South* (Cambridge, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (Ann Arbor, 1979). Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Joseph McCartin, "Abortive Reconstruction: Federal War Labor Policies, Union Organization, and the Politics of Race, 1917-1920," *Journal of Policy History*, 9 (no. 2, 1997), 155-183. Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as A National Issue* (Oxford, 1981). William H. Harris, "Federal Intervention in Union Discrimination: FEPC and West Coast Shipyards during World War II," *Labor History*, 22 (no. 3, Summer 1981), 325-347. Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History*, 55 (no. 1, 1986), 90-106.

time federal intervention designed to end employment discrimination within the workplace became almost indistinguishable from measures taken to curtail institutionalized American racism in society.<sup>19</sup> This wave nearly crested when a substantial number of employers severely disrupted union efforts by associating both outspoken labor organizers and civil rights activists with communism whenever possible.<sup>20</sup>

Even these measures failed to turn back the tide of federal initiatives that furthered the civil rights movement. The 1960s civil rights provisions empowered old and new federal agencies by granting them the authority to investigate and adversely impact both businesses and unions that refused to comply with anti-discriminatory guidelines.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, these measures also called for the disbanding of the African American labor unions that

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law and the Organized Labor Movement in American, 1880-1960* (Cambridge, 1985). Valerie Jean Conner, *The National War Labor Board: Stability, Social Justice and the Voluntary State in World War I* (Chapel Hill, 1983). N.F. Davis, "Trade Unions' Practices and the Negro Worker: The Establishment and Implementation of AFL-CIO Anti-Discrimination Policy," (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1960). Merle E. Reed, "FEPC and the Federal Agencies in the South" *The Journal of Negro History* 65, (no. 1, 1980), 43-56.

<sup>20</sup> Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge, 1979). Aimee Isgrig Horton, *The Highlander Folk School: A History of Its Major Programs, 1932-1961* (Brooklyn, 1989). Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Mark Stern, *Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson, and Civil Rights* (New Brunswick, 1992). William B. Gould, "Labor Arbitration of Grievances Involving Racial Discrimination," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 40 (1969), 118. Merle E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946* (Baton Rouge, 1991).

contributed heavily to the foundation for the success of the modern American Civil Rights movement. Beginning with Richard M. Nixon, subsequent conservative U.S. presidents such as Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush took broad-sweeping activist-like measures to negate the purpose and impact of nearly a century of gradual steps taken by the federal government to achieve racial equality within American society, with the workplace being no exception.<sup>22</sup> To date, scholars have not yet fully measured how labor relations impacted the civil rights movement in the South and vice versa. The long and distinguished record of the CTA provides another opportunity for original research in this subject area.

Some early works that focus on the relationship between labor and civil rights activism tend to be too narrowly focused. Typically, a one-dimensional approach to understanding the labor movement meant contemplating how class, race, government intervention, or corporate greed directly or indirectly impacted both labor and race relations within the labor movement. Seldom is the Civil Rights movement considered a factor. Such an approach overlooks how there may be equally significant factors worth exploring in relationship to one

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<sup>22</sup> Hugh Davis Graham, "Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 26 (Winter 1996), 93-106. Steven A. Shull, *A Kinder, Gentler Racism? The Reagan-Bush Civil Rights Legacy* (New York, 1993).

another.<sup>23</sup> “This research project promises to utilize an approach that provides a more comprehensive understanding of the latter movement with black labor activism and leadership serving as its foundation.

A number of historical works reflect the experiences of African Americans relegated to both the dirtiest and most dangerous industrial jobs in America.<sup>24</sup> With a few notable exceptions, most of the seminal works focus on labor movements in Northern, Midwestern, and Western cities.<sup>25</sup> Pioneering scholarly studies examined topics such as ethnic and race-based employment discrimination, interracial cooperation, segregated unionization, and the impact of federally mandated intervention during World War II.<sup>26</sup> Generally,

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<sup>23</sup> Paul D. Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (Baton Rouge, 2006), 2-4. Alan Dawley and Joe William Trotter, Jr., “Race and Class,” *Labor History*, 35 (Fall 1994), 486-494. Herbert Hill, “The Problem of Race in Labor History,” *Reviews in American History*, 24 (June 1996), 189-208. Kathleen Neal Cleaver, “The Anti-Democratic Power of Whiteness,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 70 (1995), 166-185. Thomas Holt, “Racism and the Working Class,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, 44 (Fall 1993), 86-95. Andrew Neather, “Whiteness and the Politics of Working-Class History,” *Radical History Review*, 61 (Winter 1995), 190-196.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert R. Northrup ed., *Negro Employment in Land and Air Transport* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971).

<sup>25</sup> August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (Oxford, 1979). Joe W. Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: the Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana, 1988). Henry Louis Taylor, *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970* (Urbana, 1993). Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana, 1997). Kimberly L. Phillips, *Alabama North: African American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana, 1999). Robert Freidman, “The Attitudes of West Coast Maritime Unions in Seattle towards Negroes in the Maritime Industry,” (M.A. thesis, State College of Washington, 1952).

dichotomous theories of racism and classicism provided the underlying framework for these works with no major departures until the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>27</sup> Many of the groundbreaking southern labor history projects were also produced during this time period but the roots of these neo-revisionist works can be traced back to the late 1960s.

For instance, Historian Ray Marshall's chapter, "The Negro in Southern Unions," represents one of the most influential, early departures from the two traditional frameworks used to explain various aspects of American labor activism in the South.<sup>28</sup> Marshall believed that the long-standing "social forces" that shaped southern race relations also permeated the work environment,

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<sup>26</sup> Mary White Ovington, "Negroes in the Trade Unions of New York" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 28 (May 1906), 89-96. E. Franklin Frazier, "A Negro Industrial Group," *Howard Review*, 1 (June 1924), 140-144. Charles H. Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925: A Study in American Economic History* (New York, 1927). Charles S. Johnson, "Present Trends in the Employment of the Negro Labor," *Opportunity*, (May 1929), 126. Carter G. Woodson and Lorenzo J. Greene eds., *The Negro Wage Earner* (Washington, D.C., 1930). Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris eds. *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York, 1931). Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, eds., *Black Workers and the New Unions* (Chapel Hill, 1939).

<sup>27</sup> William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (New York, 1982). Daniel Letwin, "Interracial Unionism, Gender, and "Social Equality" in the Coalfields, 1878-1908," *The Journal of Southern History*, 61 (no. 3, August 1995), 543. Herbert Hill, "Race, Ethnicity, and Organized Labor: Opposition to Affirmative Action," *New Politics, New Series*, I (Winter 1987), 31-82. Steven Shulman, "Racism and the Making of the American Working Class," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, II (Spring 1989), 361-366. Nell Irvin Painter, "The New Labor History and the Historical Moment," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, II (Spring 1989), 367-370.

<sup>28</sup> Julius Jacobson, *The Negro and the American Labor Movement* (Garden City, 1968).

where regardless of skills, experience, and aptitude, African Americans were systematically excluded from southern unions “formed partly as [white] social organizations” and consequently remained largely “restricted to certain menial, dirty, or difficult jobs” until progressive southern businessmen and union leaders collectively realigned industrial employment practices with national trends.<sup>29</sup> This unique interpretation helped reinvigorate the scholarly debate over the nature and utility of African American labor activism in the south.<sup>30</sup> In addition to race, class, communism, and social structure, historians have also attempted to link community activism, gender, and unorganized forms of protest on the job and in public spaces to either African American labor activism or civil rights protest within the last twenty years.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jacobson, 130, 134 and 143.

<sup>30</sup> August Meier, “Negro Protest Movements and Organizations,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 32 (no. 4, Autumn 1963), 437-450.

<sup>31</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, “‘Social Equality,’ Miscegenation, Labor and Power,” in *The Evolution of Southern Culture*, ed. Numan V. Bartley (Athens, 1988). Delores Janiewski, “Seeking ‘a New Day and a New Way’: Black Women and Unions in the Southern Tobacco Industry,” in *To Toil the Livelong Day: American Women at Work, 1780-1980*, eds. Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton (Ithaca, 1987). Robin D.G. Kelley, “Hammer N’ Hoe: Black Radicals and the Communist Party in Alabama, 1929-1941,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1987). Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *The Journal of American History*, 80 (no. 1, June 1993), 75-112. Robert Bussel, “Southern Organizing in the Post-Civil Rights Era: The Case of S. Lichtenberg,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 52 (no. 4, July 1999), 528-538. Maurice Zeitlin and L. Frank Weyher, “Black and White Unite and Fight,” *Interracial Working-Class Solidarity and Racial Employment Equality*, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 107, (no. 2, Sept. 2001) 430-467. Larry Issac and Lars Christiansen, “How the Civil Rights Movement Revitalized Labor Militancy,” *American Sociological Review*, 67 (no. 5, Oct. 2002), 722-746.

Undoubtedly, Historian Eric Arnesen's body of work is most closely associated with both the subject matter and scholarship that serves as a source of inspiration for this research project.<sup>32</sup> Having written extensively regarding the African American struggle for equality in the railroad industry, Arnesen has produced several important journal articles that raise questions that warrant additional scholarship in this area. In his 1998 journal article "Up From Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race and the State of Labor History," he argued that "much remains to be learned about the "local worlds" of black...workers...about the character of black activism, about black working-class goals, about the factors promoting racial animosity and collaboration, and about the interaction amongst the state, capital, and labor in shaping particular outcomes."<sup>33</sup> For instance, his journal article "Like Banquo's Ghost, It Will Not Down: The Race Question and the American Railroad Brotherhoods, 1880-1920," provides a multi-faceted examination of challenges black railroad laborers faced during the first half of the twentieth century. Arnesen chose to measure how the "staying power" of racial beliefs of white workers impacted the racial practices that existed within both the organizational culture and the railroad labor

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<sup>32</sup> Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Eric Arnesen, "Up from Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race, and the State of Labor History," *Reviews in American History*, 26 (no. 1, March 1998), 146-174.



organizations he studied.<sup>34</sup>

In an effort to provide context for his brief historical account, Arnesen's article recognizes several competing theories associated with labor history. According to him, the "new works on race and labor follow no single model and share no consensus regarding the best questions to pose, methods to follow, or the answers offered."<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, Arnesen concluded that theories associated with race, ethnicity and nationalities are most practical for understanding the plight of African American railroad laborers. For him, early twentieth century racial inequality in industrial America is best understood by recognizing that "by conflating the causes of the ever-changing racial composition of the American workforce with those of the conflicts of social class, white workers framed their economic anxieties in a cultural mode that resonated deeply in their union halls and in their communities. At stake in the outcome was not just their economic position but their status as whites and as Americans as well."<sup>36</sup> Arnesen's assertions raise several fundamental African American labor history questions that are useful for this research project.

This project, however, does not stand solely on the shoulders of

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<sup>34</sup> Eric Arnesen, "Like Banquo's Ghost, It Will Not Down': The Race Question and the American Railroad Brotherhoods, 1880-1920," *The American Historical Review*, 99 (no. 5. Dec. 1994), 1601-1633.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 1603.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 1606.

Arnesen's work because it requires a more nuanced approach that takes into consideration the relationship between labor activism and a particular organization's struggle for social equality both inside and outside of the workplace. To date, Historian Michael Boston's book *Labor, Civil Rights, and the Hughes Tool Company* (2004) represents one of the most innovative attempts to link black labor activism to the modern civil rights movement. Boston's book chronicles how, "black workers capitalized on the country's growing commitment to civil rights and desegregation to launch an assault against institutionalized racism in organized labor...The NLRB's Hughes Tool decision overturned twenty-nine years of legalized racial segregation in unions that the NLRA, the nation's primary labor law, had codified in 1935."<sup>37</sup> Boston's work is a tremendous success at making the connection between two simultaneous overlapping struggles aimed at improving the lives of African Americans economically, socially and politically. In his literature review he credits both Alan Draper and former NAACP labor secretary Herbert Hill with being amongst the first to recognize this undeniable connection.

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<sup>37</sup> Michael R. Boston, *Labor, Civil Rights and the Hughes Tool Company* (College Station, 2005), 4.

Only a decade ago a group of new labor historians advancing the notion of interracial unions accused Hill of overlooking instances of interracial cooperation among laborers in industrial settings.<sup>38</sup> Ethically, historians are obligated to acknowledge biracial union cooperation wherever it exists but typically most of the recent scholarship continues to exercise a degree of selectivity that readily supports both their thesis, framework for analysis and major findings and conclusions. Boston admirably acknowledges his scholarly bias with a caveat confession that reads “my findings on the intersection of labor and race at the Hughes Tool generally favor the views of Hill...labor’s leadership lacked the will to eliminate racial discrimination within their unions...my conclusions are also influenced by a working-class upbringing, nine years of industrial work experience...Hill’s... interpretations bear a greater relevance to the shop floor racism I witnessed.”<sup>39</sup> Interestingly enough, Boston’s remarks provide a plausible explanation for the variance in interpretations Arnesen noted in his

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<sup>38</sup> Hill, *Reviews in American History*, 24 (June 1996), 189-208. “See the recent interracial unionism works by Roger Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!” A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (Urbana, 1997) and Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago’s Packinghouses, 1904-54* (Urbana, 1997), For recent labor scholarship on the South, see Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds., *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa, 1994), Robert H. Zieger, *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville, 1991). Rick Halpern, “Organized Labor, Black Workers, and the Twentieth Century South: the Emerging Revision,” in *Race and Class in the American South since 1890*, eds. Rick Halpern and Melvyn Stokes (Oxford, 1994), 43-76.

<sup>39</sup> Boston, *Labor, Civil Rights and the Hughes Tool Company*, 7.

aforementioned article.

How this research project views industrial race relations does not differ very much from Boston's perspective. Having been raised only a short distance from the company housing projects and industrial plants that lined the old canals dividing the communities of Cincinnati's labor force by both race and class, this research project also critically examines how race consciousness impacted the labor relations, union activity, and civil rights activism of CTA members but wherever interracial cooperation occurred it is duly noted optimistically.

This research project attempts to bridge the gap between Texas historical research and race and ethnic studies focusing on this region. Generally speaking, not nearly enough scholarship seeks to determine where, when, how, and to what extent southern African Americans participated in local, regional, and national labor activism as a means of simultaneously advancing a broader civil rights agenda that benefits blacks nationally.<sup>40</sup> The demand for scholarly interpretations still exists, particularly within the Gulf Coast region, arguably the final frontier of twentieth century American industrialism. Relatively few scholarly

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<sup>40</sup> Alan Draper, *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and The Civil Roots Movement in the South, 1954-1968* (Ithaca, 1994). David Nelson, *Divided We Stand: Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, 2001). Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station, 2000). Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, 1997). Melton Alonzo McLaurin, *Paternalism and Protest: Southern Mill Workers and Organized Protest, 1875-1905* (Westport, 1971).

studies focus on African American involvement within the state of Texas.<sup>41</sup> For Texas, industrialization is largely a twentieth century occurrence.<sup>42</sup> This makes a “sunbelt” region historical study that focuses on the relationship between Texas labor movements and civil rights protest ideal.<sup>43</sup>

First, it is important to note that this project emanates from the study of various facets of organizational history associated with the Colored Trainmen of America. In some ways, it is comparable to Historian Brazeal Brailsford's book *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, its Origin and Development* (1946). Locally, the Colored Trainmen of America (CTA) quickly earned a reputation as a highly effective African American railroad labor union. The CTA's cultural and historical significance was no less important to the African American communities within the region than the civil rights organizations that represented the interests of people of color during the era of Jim Crow. Regionally, CTA rivaled the International Association of Railway Employees, the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen, and the International

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<sup>41</sup> Michael R. Boston, *Labor, Civil Rights and the Hughes Tool Company* (College Station, 2005). Robert Eli Teel, “Discrimination against Negro Worker's in Texas,” (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1947).

<sup>42</sup> Robert Maxwell, “Texas Economic Growth, 1890 to World War II; From Frontier to Industrial Giant,” in *Readings in Texas History*, eds. Cary Wintz (Boston, 1983), 183-224. Thomas B. Brewer, “State Anti-Labor Legislation in Texas – A Case Study,” *Labor History*, 11 (Winter 1970), 58-76.

<sup>43</sup> Richard M. Bernard and Bradley Robert Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II* (Austin, 1983).

Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in terms of its impact, membership, organizational strategy, and effectiveness. Instead of actually being consummate rivals, these leading organizations worked in tandem with one another at various stages of the struggle in order to fulfill their commitments to improving the terms of employment for African American railroad workers and also eliminating Jim Crow from the railroad industry. However, unlike the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the CTA chose to function outside of the AFL-CIO membership in order to remain independent in its activities.

This project contributes to the existing body of scholarship by also examining the local, regional and national significance of the overlap between black social activism and unionization participation.<sup>44</sup> The Houston-based Colored Trainmen of America Archival Papers provided a treasure trove of primary source material for this contribution to the growing body of historical works that focus on the overlap in two of America's most prominent twentieth-century social movements.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, when reviewing additional primary

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<sup>44</sup> William Joe Trotter, Jr., "African American Workers: New Directions in U.S. Labor Historiography," *Labor History* 35 (Fall 1994), 495-523. John Schact, "Labor History in Academy: A Layman's Guide to a Century of Scholarship," *Labor's Heritage* 5 (1994), 4-21. David Brody, *In Labor's Cause: Main Themes on the History of the American Worker* (New York, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> The Colored Trainmen of America Papers, 1918-1982, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library Archives, Houston, Texas. Harlem, New York. Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Microfilm. The *San Antonio Registry*, 1930-1953.

sources associated with the Colored Trainmen of America's struggle for equality, this project attempted to answer the following questions historian Eric Arnesen expressly associated with the broad field of new labor histories that focus on racial inequality. How and to what extent, did the labor movement advance or undermine the position of members of the CTA? What were the motivations of white company, local, and national union members for adopting their policies towards non-whites employed within the railroad industry?<sup>46</sup> Were black workers primarily victims of white union racism or agents engaged in their own struggles against both employers and white laborers?"<sup>47</sup>

In an attempt to discern whether CTA labor activism may have overlapped with any aspect of the Civil Rights movement this research attempted to answer the following questions. Did any of the CTA laborers individually or collectively participate in any forms of civil rights protest? Did any of the CTA members have positive working relationships with African American community leaders and both white and black politicians? Did community leaders, politicians, and civil

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<sup>46</sup> \*Note: Even the most current body of works specifically devoted to interracial unionism and the link between black labor activism and the civil rights movement still don't represent all the possibilities for fresh interpretations. For the scholarly treatment of interracial unionism see: Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill, 2003). Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coal Fields, 1908-1921* (Urbana, 2001). Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-32* (Urbana, 1990). Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans; Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Arnesen, *The American Historical Review*, 99 (no. 5, Dec. 1994), 1603.

rights activists ever attempt to exert influence over labor issues involving the CTA? If so, did they have a working relationship with industrialists that employed CTA members? Did white city officials, company employers, or black leadership ever call on CTA members to help quash tension over civil rights conflicts stirring within their respective communities? Did the CTA ever attempt to exert influence over social, political, or economic matters outside of the workplace? If so, were they successful? Did any sympathetic whites – employers, co-workers, neighbors, politicians, or community organizations ever aid or support CTA activities in and outside of the workplace?

In addition to organization, advocacy, and protest, “the price of admission” and social equality ironically meant eventually sacrificing the organization at the heart of many of the advances that benefited Gulf Coast region African American railroad workers prior to 1964. A portion of this research project also examines the dismantling of the organization following the implementation of new federal measures requiring the desegregation of all labor unions during the 1960s. Collectively, each set of questions is concerned with three different phases of African American history. The first set focuses on the continued development of African American institutions created for the purpose of improving conditions for African Americans. The second set focuses on the strategies used to effect change and the difficulties encountered. The last set seeks to both measure effectiveness and also identify persistent barriers to



equality that persists throughout American history.

Chapter 2 discusses the early foundation for creating the CTA by examining how union leadership fought for black railroad workers to receive healthcare treatment and insurance coverage equal, and not inferior, to that of their white railroad employee counterparts. The dangerous nature of the railroad jobs African Americans filled made them more likely to be maimed or killed on the job. The prospects for a decent recovery were virtually impossible without a reasonable salary or health benefits to pay for medical care. Moreover, the head of the household's inability to earn a living often meant an entire family might suffer immeasurably due to an income shortage. Others suffered the humiliation of being unable to provide a decent burial service without a quality life insurance policy.

Prior to forming their union, African American railroad workers and their families received little or no compensation for work-related time lost, permanent injuries, and the loss of life compared to their white counterparts. Through a series of successive measures, several members belonging to the CTA Grand Lodge worked tirelessly over the years to obtain reasonably priced medical treatment, coverage, and life benefits for the CTA members. Key considerations for this chapter are: What labor issues led to the creation of the Colored Trainmen of America? Did CTA union activities and labor disputes concerning injury compensation, medical care, medical insurance, and life insurance also

challenge racially motivated policies and practices? Were CTA administrative officers instrumental in the incremental gains the organization made in both labor and civil rights activism? Is there any evidence of progressive railroad personnel administrators cooperating with CTA in resolving disputes concerning injury compensation, medical care, medical insurance and life insurance?

Chapter 3 discusses how Colored Trainmen used economic purchasing power to negotiate both segregated and second-class public accommodations along the railways. African American railroad workers, primarily concerned with receiving the same quality of service and treatment they received in the most liberal places they frequented, occasionally refused second-best when there was a more satisfactory alternative to be had elsewhere. Traveling on the job from place to place, while spending good money for good food and a decent place to rest overnight, inevitably led them to test the color line along the railways.

During and after the great depression, the Colored Trainmen utilized their railroad company travel vouchers and the liberal support of progressive personnel administrators as leverage needed to eliminate the degradation they experienced in public spaces before the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. These collective and individual acts of CTA civil protest did not evolve into a full-scale social movement to integrate public accommodations within the Gulf Coast region. However, their approach does constitute a meaningful form of resistance and civil protest worth chronicling. Historiographically, this chapter provides a

novel example of another lesser-heralded act of social consciousness and civil protest by everyday working men within their daily sphere of operations.<sup>48</sup> Key considerations for this chapter are: What inspired CTA trainmen to engage in a form of civil protest outside of the workplace? How did CTA members actively engage in civil protest along the railways? Did the CTA consciously engage in a systematic, organized form of civil protest? Was civil protest by CTA members effective?

Chapter 4 discusses how the CTA worked closely with pioneering civil rights attorneys Charles H. Houston and Joseph C. Waddy to resolve CTA labor disputes. It also focuses on how CTA, Houston, and Waddy labor dispute initiatives and legal challenges also helped shape the national effort to eliminate “Jim Crow” practices from the railroad industry nationwide. The CTA possessed the organizational commitment from its members and financial resources to retain some of the best legal services money could buy during this time period. Consequently, in order to resolve union representation and contractual issues with their employer concerning seniority, time and a half, promotions, training, hiring, and firing, the Colored Trainmen of America utilized the legal services of former Howard University Law School Dean and former NAACP Legal Defense

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<sup>48</sup> Beth Tompkins Bates, “A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941,” *The American Historical Review*, 102 (no. 2, Apr. 1997), pp. 340-377. Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *The Journal of American History*, 75 (no. 3, Dec. 1988), 786-811.

Fund Litigation Director Charles Houston. Houston and his small private practice litigated some of the earliest civil rights cases of the twentieth century.

During the early 1940s, innovators Houston and Waddy created a railroad labor dispute litigation program for the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen. Other organizations such as the International Association of Railway Employees and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters followed suit shortly afterward. These developments inspired the Colored Trainmen of America to retain Houston for assistance with CTA challenges they encountered with the lines they operated within their own region. However, the legal issues CTA cases and labor disputes raised typically had much broad-sweeping implications around the country concerning racially motivated employment discrimination policies. Key considerations for this chapter are: Why is the relationship between the Charles H. Houston and the Colored Trainmen of America significant? How did the CTA, Houston and Waddy work together to improve working conditions for CTA members? How did the CTA, Charles H. Houston, and Joseph C. Waddy work together to advance the civil rights agenda of African Americans by challenging racially motivated employment discrimination policies in America? How successful was the working relationship between the CTA and Houston & Waddy, when compared to that of others'?

Chapter 5 discusses how Charles H. Houston, Joseph C. Waddy and the

Colored Trainmen of America were integrally involved in the creation and promotion of the Negro Railroad Labor Executives' Committee. It also examines the organization's agenda and how it actually impacted the CTA and other black railroad labor organizations' struggle for racial equality in the railroad industry. Comprised of 5 of the most influential independent African American railroad labor unions, the creation of the NRLEC fostered a collegial spirit among the various black railroad labor organizations by systematically forwarding them joint correspondence concerning relevant reading material, court decisions, new legislation, labor disputes, and legal strategies to ensure everyone remained apprised of progress and opportunities for protest.

Often times, these actions sparked dialogue between organizations and also created the cooperation needed to achieve objectives with far-reaching implications that impacted them all. The *Negro Railway Labor News* newspaper promoted both the spirit and agenda of the committee. Altogether, the formation of the Negro Railroad Labor Executive Committee, committee minutes, and the newspaper articles reflect another approach CTA leadership utilized to challenge racially motivated employment discrimination within both their immediate sphere of operations and industry wide. Key considerations for this chapter are: Why was it necessary to form the NRLEC? Who were the key participants in the NRLEC? What was the agenda of the NRLEC? How did the NRLEC contribute to the African American railroad labor union activism movement? How did the

NRLEC contribute to the nationwide struggle to eliminate Jim Crow from the railroad industry? What did the NRLEC achieve? How does the *Negro Railway Labor News* reflect the agenda and utility of the NRLEC? How does the *Negro Railway Labor News* reflect the issues and challenges African American railroad workers organized to redress?

Chapter 6 discusses the gradual demise of the CTA. The number of CTA successes dwindled substantially during the second half of the twentieth century. Despite being well organized and prepared to challenge the status quo, technological advances in travel, the desegregation of American society, and internal disunity within the CTA all helped accelerate the union's dissolution during the late 1960s. This chapter evaluates how both external and internal factors adversely impacted the longevity of the CTA during the second half of the twentieth century. Key considerations for this chapter are: How did the CTA utilize Houston's strategies to challenge unfair labor discrimination and racial inequality outside of the legal system? How did external factors contribute to the demise of the Colored Trainmen of America? How did internal factors contribute to the demise of the Colored Trainmen of America? How did the CTA utilize Houston's strategies to challenge racial inequality outside of the legal system?

This study removes the Colored Trainmen of America from a place of relative obscurity. It records and analyzes the activities and agenda of one the earliest independent African American labor union organizations committed to

unity, justice and protection of the rights of both members of the Colored Trainmen of America as well as the African American community. Little has been written of their sacrifices and struggles against Jim Crow in the workplace and the community from the 1930s to the 1950s.

This study also furthers historical knowledge of the Colored Trainmen of America using contemporary scholarly questions in order to make a meaningful historiographical contribution to the overlapping subject areas concerning African American labor activism and civil rights protest. To date, CTA contributions to labor activism and civil rights are scarcely cited in the most popular scholarly narratives but a more detailed study of their activities such as this one suggest this organization is certainly worthy of more consideration.

## CHAPTER II

### HEALTH MATTERS

The CTA administrative records reflect considerable union activity associated with injury reports, medical treatment, and health and life insurance coverage. The CTA struggled to obtain quality life insurance, healthcare coverage and treatment on par with their white colleagues. This chapter fills in some of the gaps concerning the union activities of the Colored Trainmen of America. It chronicles the creation and early development of this influential labor union for African American railroad laborers working within the Gulf Coast region. This chapter pays special attention to the organization's foundation, the scope of its union activities, the members' penchant for uplifting leadership initiatives, and the working relationship between CTA leadership and high-ranking railroad company personnel.

Employment discrimination only compounded the hardship African American laborers experienced while working in the railroad industry. The difficulty they often encountered on the job did not deter them from pursuing relatively lucrative careers along the railways, but it did inspire them to represent themselves in labor disputes. As African American railroad laborers, they endured more hardship than most during the height of Jim Crow. Historian Eric Arnesen concluded that dating back to "the origins of the [railroad] industry in the early nineteenth century, black railroaders were members of a labor force



stratified sharply by race. Their on-the-job experiences were structured by a pervasive system of employment discrimination that defined appropriate work for blacks, relegating them to some job categories and barring them from others.”<sup>1</sup> Consequently, colored brakemen, flagmen, firemen, and baggage handlers rarely received promotions to more respectable positions within the railroad industry. Fortunately, some colored trainmen and yardmen accumulated seniority from years of experience within their respective positions. This form of employee service recognition was just about all southern colored railroad workers could hope for within a racist Jim Crow labor market, where professional advancement was somewhat of an anomaly, and when white labor union constitutions typically precluded black membership.

Unlike today, seniority afforded ranking colored employees little job security during the early twentieth century, especially after whites started valuing jobs previously perceived as “nigger work.”<sup>2</sup> The knowledge of colored men possessing the capability of filling “white jobs” as scabs or “company men” only stoked resentment among white railroad workers.<sup>3</sup> Aided by sympathetic federal agencies and the American legal system, “white railroaders reinforced

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, 2001), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Green, *The Dictionary of Contemporary Slang* (New York, 1985), 190.

<sup>3</sup> John Hope II, *Selected Studies of Negro Employment in the South* (Washington D.C., 1955), 104.

and deepened the racial division of labor [during the first half of the twentieth-century.] Prohibiting black membership in their brotherhoods until the late 1950s and 1960s, white railroad firemen and brakemen not only denigrated their black counterparts but also campaigned for their elimination from these occupations.”<sup>4</sup> Historian William H. Harris’s book *The Harder We Run* recalls how “even though they shared the same miserable wages and working conditions, white and black workers would hardly join together in common cause. The reason was simple: race. Though poor whites and blacks often labored side by side for miserable pay, whites suffered the exploitation because of their simple consciousness that they were racially superior to the equally suffering blacks...though aware that they would remain poor, white laborers tried to prove their superiority by keeping certain skilled jobs for themselves while relegating blacks to unskilled and menial tasks.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, employment discrimination and the spirit of competition ushered in a new set of challenges for colored trainmen during the early 1900s. Ultimately, organized white railroad workers chose to systematically rid the railroad industry of colored laborers altogether.

Faced with the prospect of being phased out due to a lack of representation in collective bargaining agreements between the “Big Five” – the

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<sup>4</sup> Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (Oxford, 1992), 16.

Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers, the Switchmen's Union of North America, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, the Order of Railway Conductors – and railroad carriers, black railroad workers established their own organizations for fair and equal representation in labor negotiations. Established on April 6, 1918, seven years before the organization of A. Phillip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (1925), the CTA was among the earliest black railroad labor unions.<sup>6</sup>

“ALWAYS FOR THE RIGHT

If in Life we have an object, we should strive with all our might

To reach it by this Motto: I am always for the right.

Life's trials may be many, or goal hid from sight,

Yet our aims can be accomplished, if we are always for the right.

Though the tempter may approach us in the darkest hours of the night,

He will flee if we will but answer, I am always for the right.

Some deeds easy to accomplish may not stand for the searching light,

But the light will not affect them, if we are always for the right.

The summer sun may scorch us and the winter cold may bite,

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<sup>6</sup> Hebert R. Northrup, *Negro Employment in Land and Air Transport: A Study of Racial Policies in the Railroad, Airline, Trucking, and Urban Transit Industries* (Philadelphia, 1971), 36. Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 54.

But the joy will come hereafter, if we stand always for the right.”<sup>7</sup>

Abe S. Shannon

The CTA never functioned exclusively as a local labor union. Founding members envisioned the creation of a fraternal brotherhood comprised of as many African American railroad workers in the Gulf Coast region as possible. CTA Grand Lodge Recording Officer (Secretary) Abe S. Shannon’s poem is featured in the CTA’s Grand Lodge Constitution Governing the Colored Trainmen of America Booklet. It is a charge for the brothers to be ever mindful of their sacred duty to always be above reproach wherever they find themselves. His inspirational prose epitomizes the expectations and the spirit of the organization built upon three universally applicable cardinal principles – Unity, Justice, and Protection. These guiding principles were appropriate for men not only laboring but also living under the oppressive Jim Crow conditions most African Americans endured throughout the south.

From the beginning, the members of the Colored Trainmen of America envisioned themselves as more than simply another labor union for colored people. Collectively, their challenges were not limited to the workplace. The ever present Jim Crow “segregation system had an economic as well as a racial purpose. Serving as a replacement for slavery, the laws and practices of the

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<sup>7</sup> Abe S. Schannon, *Constitution Governing The Colored Trainmen of America: Grand Lodge Headquarters, Kingsville, Texas* (Brownsville, 1941), 48.

segregation era ensured that most black workers could not rise...the system thus ensured the political and economic dominance of whites...with few challenges from timid colored men accepting of the status quo.”<sup>8</sup> This group of sober, clear-thinking individuals took it upon themselves to approach racial oppression holistically. For them, it made little sense to struggle for equality in the workplace only to return home to a community still suffering severely from the debilitating long-term vestiges of segregation.

Together, they formed a close-knit fraternity of clean-living men that exemplified manly, God-fearing virtues. Their sphere of influence touched on several aspects of community life. Aside from wages and working conditions, their greatest concern was the health and well-being of men employed in the most physically-taxing operating positions within the railroad industry. Consequently, their struggle to obtain good medical coverage, disability insurance, and life insurance benefits are all well documented. These records reflect the practical measures the CTA pursued in order to ensure their longevity on the job. They also reveal much about the CTA’s independent initiative and determination to overcome barriers to racial parity in every aspect of employee rights.

Socially, the CTA created a lady’s auxiliary for their spouses and

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<sup>8</sup> Gary M. Fink and Merle E. Reed, eds., *Race, Class and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa, 1994), 120.

daughters. Occasionally, the organization also hosted social gatherings for the entire community. CTA members emphasized the value of education and promoted scholarships for the youth. Members frequently developed spiritually uplifting religious programming to reinforce the power of prayer as well. This was not the average labor union by any means. In addition to challenging discriminatory labor policies on the job, the CTA membership worked to create social change by engaging in both advancement and social programming for the betterment of the African American community. Generations of MPL employees bought homes and started businesses from their earnings in the Gulf Coast region. As vested men, with longstanding ties to their communities, they lived respectable lives. Oftentimes, they served their communities as leaders. The Colored Trainmen charged themselves with using their station in life to enrich their communities throughout Texas and Louisiana.

During the early 1900s, the railroad industry continued to limit employment opportunities for African Americans. White labor unions provided little to no representation to redress unfair labor practices impacting African Americans during this era. Like most colored railroad laborers, the disgruntled would-be-founding members encountered their share of racial discrimination on the job prior to 1918. Typically, hard-working men of color were barred from filling jobs as conductors and engineers. Usually they also received lower wages than white coworkers unless unions or federal agencies demanded otherwise. According to

historian Herbert Hill, “the railroad companies employed Negroes in various categories because they were paid less for their labor; naturally, the companies made no effort to establish equal wages. It could be assumed that if forced to pay equal wages, the railroads would hire whites exclusively.”<sup>9</sup>

As long as carriers and white railroad workers could profit from lower wages colored railroad workers received, employing blacks was good for business. These racist corporate policies were nothing new to black laborers. Though unsettling, skilled and unskilled colored laborers had grown accustomed to these types of disparities on the job, however, where unequal wages were tolerable for the sake of their families, the lack of some form of workmen’s compensation for extremely hazardous job-related, life-altering injuries sustained by colored brakemen and trainmen proved to be totally unacceptable. What would happen to their families if these men could no longer take care of them? This selfless consideration, along with several practical others – promotions, better wages, racial parity, union membership, and even respect – also served as a primary consideration for their decision to form the Colored Trainmen of America.

Long before American workers formed labor unions, hard-working, civic-minded members of the community across the country created benevolent

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Hill, *Black Labor and the American Legal System: Race, Work, and the Law* (Washington D.C., 1977), 335-337.

organizations to support and care for the infirm and destitute. Singularly, most industrial laborers could not do much for fallen colleagues from their communities but collectively they pooled their resources in a time of need to see friends and families through unforeseeable hardship. These benevolent societies fostered a sense of closeness among men who worked and served the community together. Eventually, some of these same organizations added an element of exclusivity by evolving into fraternal brotherhoods. Some of these very same men were integrally involved in organizing laborers and creating unions to protect their interests in the workplace. Therefore, they brought many of the fundamentals of fraternalism – the desire for exclusivity, rituals, group loyalty, protocol, organizational structure, community service, brotherly concern, and a sense of duty - with them into the union hall. Older members such as A. Flowers, Truett V. Tillmon, W.H. Jefferson, Amos F. Hayes, Jordan Jefferson, and Louis Nelson understood and acted in accordance with these key elements of union culture well while conducting union business. Their innovative initiatives concerning employment benefits speak volumes of their commitment to serving the union. Once again, the CTA demonstrated their ability to represent their own interests.

CTA union activities and labor disputes concerning injury compensation, medical care, medical insurance, and life insurance also challenged racially motivated policies and practices. Technological advances like the 1950s switch



from steam to diesel engines undoubtedly improved working conditions for colored trainmen. Technological improvements that made working conditions less hazardous also made African American railroad jobs more desirable to white coworkers although the dangerous element of danger persisted. The dangerous nature of the railroad jobs African American filled made them more likely to be maimed or killed on the job. The CTA administrative records reflect considerable union activity associated with injury reports, medical treatment, and health and life insurance coverage. Not only do they serve as a reminder of the dangerous nature of the job but they also demonstrate the significance of labor union membership for African Americans employed in the railroad industry operating trades. Through a series of successive measures, several members belonging to the CTA Grand Lodge worked tirelessly over the years to obtain reasonably priced medical treatment, coverage, and life benefits for the Colored trainmen. This is their story.

Compensation for work-related time lost was not only a consideration for the colored brakemen. Most industrial job-related injuries and illnesses also required costly medical treatment. According to historian Jennifer Borrer, the year the Colored Trainmen of America became incorporated, the Texas Railroad Commission recorded “thirteen of twenty-one train accidents involved the injury of black brakemen...One black brakeman, William Moseley, lost the tips of his...fingers...Other injuries suffered by these brakemen were concussions,

scalding by steam, cargo dropped on them while unloading cars, and hot sand and gravel causing injured eyes.”<sup>10</sup> One CTA member injured while working, “was operated on...[but] they didn’t cut his arm off, they taken [sic] 2 ½ inches of the bone out and put in a plate [sic].”<sup>11</sup> Injuries were indeed life altering but serious illnesses could be just as troublesome for men whose livelihood depended so heavily on their physical condition. After being gravely ill for over a month, the bed-ridden CTA member Ambus Horn notified his private insurer that “I have been sick...and are still sick [sic] and do not know just when I will be able to perform my Duties...I have not been able to write...I don’t know when I will be able to resume work, the doctor has not release me yet, and I am still in bed.”<sup>12</sup> The prospects for a decent recovery were dismal without a reasonable salary or health benefits to pay for medical care. Moreover, the head of the household’s inability to earn a living often meant an entire family might suffer immeasurably due to an income shortage.

By the summer of 1946, President Harry Truman signed a new Congressional bill to address these issues. Introduced by House Representatives Robert Crosser (D-Ohio), Burton K. Wheeler (D-Mont), and

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<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Borrer, “The Colored Trainmen of America: Kingsville, Black Labor and the Railroads,” *Journal of South Texas*, 11 (no. 1, Spring 1998), 74-103.

<sup>11</sup> CTA Member’s Wife to Husband, June 5, 1947, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>12</sup> CTA Member Ambus Horn to Provident Life & Insurance Co., Sept. 19, 1947, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Robert Wagner (D-NY), the Crosser bill supplemented the benefits of the railroad retirement act and the railroad unemployment insurance act by increasing “the benefits received by...railroad workers in the form of pensions, life insurance, unemployment insurance, and sick pay” and maternity leave.<sup>13</sup> Associated Press labor reporter Max Hall reported the main benefits of this amendment included the payment of regular pensions to widows of railroad workers because very few of these widows received pensions up until this point. The H.R. 1362 Crosser Bill to Amend the Railroad Retirement Act and the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act also immediately increased the benefits for total disability and raised pensions for retired workers in the lowest wage groups.<sup>14</sup> Unemployment benefits were increased from 20 to 26 weeks in a year, and the maximum payment increased from \$20 to \$25.<sup>15</sup>

The passage of this monumental legislation meant railroad workers became the first group of private industry laborers in the country to be insured under a government plan against loss of wages from temporary disability. This groundbreaking federal legislation certainly benefited African Americans employed in relatively low-paying operating positions as brakemen and firemen.

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<sup>13</sup> Max R. Hall, “Labor Unions Claim They’ve Won New Victory,” *The Associated Press*, August 5, 1946.

<sup>14</sup> H.R. 1362 Crosser Bill to Amend the Railroad Retirement Act and the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act, 79th U.S. Congress House Vote # 216; July 27, 1946.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, Hall, “Labor Unions Claim They’ve Won New Victory.”

However, this did not eliminate those institutionally unique challenges CTA members often encountered because of both their race and relative expendability within the labor force. The CTA continued to respond to these challenges with a number of measures to protect the health and well-being of both members and their families during such trying times.

Resourceful CTA administrative officers made considerable gains in both labor and civil rights activism. They utilized different approaches to achieve different outcomes both on and off the job. One creative approach to minimizing the individual work-related medical expenses of CTA members entailed obtaining group rates from select facilities contracted to treat CTA members exclusively.<sup>16</sup> CTA members worked hard to address this challenge on an ongoing basis because racism and collusion between the company medical care providers and railroad companies also resulted in second class medical treatment by physicians and hospitals. Dating back to the 1930s, CTA leadership raised concerns over the standard of care they received from both doctors and medical facilities. CTA members confined to their homes repeatedly encountered considerable difficulty receiving house calls from doctors who contracted with Missouri Pacific Lines to treat colored trainmen. Citing multiple

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<sup>16</sup> Jack R. Buzbee to B.W. Smith, June 21, 1965, box 2, folder 6, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

instances of doctors neglecting to treat CTA patients, Colored Trainmen of American General Chairman W.H. Jefferson wrote, "We Brakemen are writing you as we feel we are not getting treated justly...On January 27...I ask Dr. Moore to come out to see this Brakemen as He was low sick and need A [sic] Doctor bad and He did not come. And I went to Dr. Shelton office and explain...about his condition and he need a Doctor bad and did'nt [sic] any Doctor come...This brakemen sent his Sister in law to the Drugstore for the medicine and drug store the order to Dr. Harrison for him to OK it and Dr. Harrison curse at her just because she ask him to Ok the order to get the medicine with. On January 27, Brakemen Louis Count wife call up all the Doctor except Dr. Shelton and could not get A one to come see Louis Count she state she could not find Dr. Shelton any Place...On January 7, Brakemen John Kindrix got hurt and tried to get A Doctor out to see him and He had to hire a taxi [sic] to take him to the Hospital before he could get a Doctor."<sup>17</sup> Periodically, a CTA member would survey various facilities to establish which ones were capable of providing injured or ill members with adequate care.

Complaining of poor hospital facilities where CTA members ordinarily received treatment, CTA member A. Flowers reported the "bad conditions" of the

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<sup>17</sup> W.H. Jefferson to F. Dimmick, Feb. 2, 1937, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

hospital he visited.<sup>18</sup> He complained about the condition of the building and the service. In response to his observations, Flowers proposed the creation of a hospitable, state of the art medical facility for the treatment of African Americans. He alluded to the fact that it might be prudent for the CTA to help finance the creation of it.

CTA Grand Lodge leadership did not hesitate to report evidence of poor hospital conditions and mistreatment of CTA members to a higher authority for speedy resolution. In written reply to W.H. Jefferson, General Grievance Committee Chairman J.P. Crockrell reflects a range of concerns CTA members had regarding hospitalization during the 1930s. According to Crockrell's investigation, black and white patients were treated the same. He made it abundantly clear that "When any patient white or black is judged by the chief surgeon able to leave the hospital he must be dismissed so that there will be room for those who must be confined to the hospital, they are not rushed out as this man tells you he was but they cannot lay around there several days as the hospital is no boarding house. Every effort is made to the end that all patients will receive fair treatment, and all the best that we can furnish the amount of money we have to operate on [sic]."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A. Flowers to the Grande Lodge of the Colored Trainmen of America. Feb.12, 1944, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>19</sup> J.P. Cockrell to W.H. Jefferson, Nov. 17, 1938, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Several years passed before a member of the Colored Trainmen of America received an opportunity to sit on a non-segregated oversight board or committee to protect the interests of members receiving medical treatment for work-related injuries and illnesses.<sup>20</sup> This did not prevent the CTA from persistently raising questions about the standard of care established for injured African American railroad workers. During the 1940s, CTA officers remained in constant contact with the Employee's Association Board Members. They raised questions concerning equal facilities. They initiated investigations concerning questionable treatment of African American patients. They also lobbied for more funding for better equipment and renovations. The Board appeared to be moderately responsive. Most often, they responded with assurances of adequate treatment and facilities instead of timely adjustments made in response to complaints. This method of pacification did not deter the CTA from voicing their concerns for the proper medical care for their injured colleagues. Despite the fact that by-laws barred the CTA from having someone represent them in oversight associations and committees until 1950,<sup>21</sup> and although their

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<sup>20</sup> "The nineteenth paragraph of the by-laws do allow all organizations to place one member on the board to represent employees except the Colored Trainmen of America...we have no right to speak for ourselves." Amos F. Hayes to W.K. Sadler, Aug. 13, 1946, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>21</sup> "In our regular meeting December 17th, 1950 Mr. Louis Nelson was elected to serve as representative of the Colored Trainmen of America on the Board of Directors of the Employees Hospital Assn." Ambus Horn to C.G. Thomson, Dec. 18, 1950, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

complaints rarely received the proper attention they deserved,<sup>22</sup> the resourceful CTA leadership still managed to make certain that they utilized the proper channels available to them to voice their concerns effectively.<sup>23</sup>

The Colored Trainmen of America recognized not only the value of quality facilities and service but also quality care and treatment for members. In certain instances the CTA represented members in payment disputes over poor service and treatment they received while hospitalized. On August 21, 1938, General Chairman W.H. Jefferson reported, “that Joe Hobson has been unjustly treated...when he got his leg broke and the Doctors treated him. But his leg did not get better and while he was off suffering with his leg he was cut off the extra board. Since his leg didn’t get any better he went back to the hospital and the doctors offered his dismissal [sic] saying that he hadn’t paid his fees but this brake [sic] was hurt while he was working...and I think he is entitled to the service of the hospital association...and since he was cut off from service while he was sick with his leg he was unable to keep up his feet.”<sup>24</sup> Such advocacy

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<sup>22</sup> “In so far as his complaint made by him about being run out of the hospital is concerned, this is purely fictitious as no objection was made to him remaining there another day [sic].” J.P. Cockrell to W.H. Jefferson, Nov. 5, 1938, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>23</sup> “The Brakemen have voted in our meeting today we are satisfied with the Engineers representing us in the hospital Association.” in W.H. Jefferson to the Chairmen of the Director of the Hospital Association, June 18, 1939, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>24</sup> W.H. Jefferson to A.J. Dimmick, Aug. 21, 1938, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



went beyond the realm of racism. These were union men committed to the interests of equity and fair play in all matters pertaining to their members, including billing disputes over second-class hospital treatment.

Periodically CTA leadership also reassessed their relationships with primary care physicians who contracted with their employers to provide medical treatment for their CTA employees. Usually a series of complaints regarding a physician's standard of care necessitated an inquiry to determine whether it was appropriate to appoint another physician as the primary physician. For instance, a special "meeting [was] held in Booster Hall, Kingsville, Texas, at 9:30 A.M. June 2, 1944 to discuss services of Chief Surgeon...Chairmen Sadler reported to the Board his part in handling the complaints...filed by the Shop Craft Organization...after which Dr. D.A. Harrison was given an opportunity to answer the complaints made against him for his services."<sup>25</sup> The investigation prompted a member of the board to submit a motion for Dr. Harrison's resignation. Some members of the board also called for the appointment of a new chief surgeon and assistant in Harrison's place during this meeting. Fortunately for Dr. Harrison those present voted 8 to 3 not to require his resignation; however, the meeting and the motion was enough to put him on notice that any perceived breach in his professional standard of care could swiftly lead to his replacement

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<sup>25</sup> Employers Hospital Association Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting to Discuss Services of Chief Surgeon, June 2, 1944, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

as the designated surgeon for the employers of CTA members.<sup>26</sup>

Aside from shopping for group treatment rates and holding physicians accountable for professional standards of care, the Colored Trainmen of America also actively sought competitively priced group insurance plans for members rather than leave this responsibility to the railroad carrier. CTA General Chairman Truett V. Tillmon continued the tradition of highly capable, business-minded leadership when race relations around the country had reached a boiling point. Tillmon persistently wrote insurance companies seeking a comprehensive insurance plan for CTA members and their families. He stressed MOPAC's acceptance of better health and welfare plans. Buying in bulk had its advantages, as did overseeing the negotiations of these business arrangements instead of leaving them to the carriers to broker them on behalf of the colored union members. Self-interests served as a serious motivator for CTA members entrusted with this huge responsibility.

Interestingly enough, Tillmon recognized the value of comparative shopping on behalf of the CTA, as he sent the same letter to three other reputable insurance companies – Traveler's Insurance, New York Life Insurance Company, and Connecticut General Life Insurance Company- on the very same

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, "the Board was unanimous in its views to go along with his recommendation permitting Dr. Harrison to continue as Chief Surgeon and be given further opportunity to correct the situation." See page 2.

day.<sup>27</sup> Nearly nine months of negotiations passed before General Chairman Tillmon finally reached a satisfactory contractual agreement for group rate coverage with The Travelers Insurance Company.<sup>28</sup> Undoubtedly, this company's regional office located in Corpus Christi, Texas, must have been part of the appeal for the CTA. To his credit, Tillmon alone selectively searched for competitive bids for group rates for both hospitals and health care providers.

Tillmon made certain he left no stone unturned as he narrowed down his healthcare choices. In an effort to make informed decisions he typically concluded his letters asking insurers "if you have any other information that you think will be of any value to us, please send this also...It would help us too, if you will send Mr. B.W. Smith the cost of the plan which you have outlined for the Colored Trainmen of America, and also an explanation of just how this plan is to be applied or arranged, to cover the Brakemen whome [sic] we represent. I

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<sup>27</sup> Truett V. Tillmon to Traveler's Insurance, June 17, 1964, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers. Truett V. Tillmon to New York Life Insurance Company, June 17, 1964, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers. Truett V. Tillmon to Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, June 17, 1964, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>28</sup> "We agreed...a group contract...be issued to a joint policyholder (Colored Trainmen of America and the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company) and assuming that the cost of the program would be paid by the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company, that The Travelers would provide benefits in type and amount under policy GA-871234. We...also agree that for active employees the cost would be substantially the same as GA-171234 or approximately \$23.00 per month per active employee." Travelers' Insurance Company to Truett V. Tillmon, Feb. 23, 1965, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

would like to have a copy of the same.”<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Tillmon single-handedly negotiated health insurance agreement between three parties – the CTA, the Missouri Pacific Railroad, and the Travelers Insurance Company.

Although Tillmon secured a group rate, apparently insuring men in the railroad operating trades was no cheap proposition for them individually. Travelers received a monthly payment of \$23.00 from each actively employed CTA member. According to noted economist and cliometrician Samuel H. Williamson, \$23 in 1965 was no small sum for an unskilled worker. Williamson estimates this amount being equivalent to \$170 dollars for an unskilled worker in 2009. This was not a small price to pay for the much needed medical coverage they received, given the hazards of the job. Countless colored trainmen recovered from their injuries and eventually retired. Others not so fortunate suffered from both career and life-ending injuries. Fortunately, Tillmon’s predecessor CTA Grand President Jordan Jefferson worked tirelessly to provide some sense of financial security to the disabled and the families of the deceased.

During the 1940s and beyond, Colored Trainmen of America Grand President Jordan Jefferson devoted much of his tenure to acquiring disability

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<sup>29</sup> Truett V. Tillmon to Traveler’s Insurance Company, Jan. 29, 1965, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers. Samuel H. Williamson, “Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present,” *Measuring Worth*, last accessed Feb. 20, 2009, <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>.

and life insurance, as well as loss of job insurance for the members of his organization. Not since World War I, had wartime activity and corresponding economic prosperity resulted in such a substantial increase in business for American railroads. Of course, continuous improvements in alternative modes of air, water, and automobile transportation prevented the railroad industry from being the most lucrative mode of transport and travel during this new age of rapid technological innovation but business still remained relatively good prior to 1950.

Amidst this temporary boom in railroad transport, the employment opportunities for African American railroad workers continued to diminish while substantial increases in railroad activity put them in harm's way more frequently. Most often, disabled colored trainmen and the families of men who lost their lives on the job were forced to fend for themselves without any short/long-term disability and life insurance policy to sustain them. Consequently, the need for a contingency plan to meet cost of living expenses became more necessary than ever for these men during this period. Jordan Jefferson's business correspondence reflects the significant gains he made in this highly important area of labor union representation.

There is ample evidence of progressive railroad personnel administrators cooperating with the CTA in resolving disputes concerning injury compensation, medical care, medical insurance and life insurance. The seasoned and

sophisticated Colored Trainmen of America General President Jordan Jefferson skillfully acquired the disability and life insurance coverage CTA members needed by capitalizing on fundamental labor union principles that resonated with labor unions universally. For starters, Jefferson cast his net far and wide in search of “loss of job companies” that were familiar with railroad industry culture and the dangerous nature of the occupations associated with it.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the R.E.B. Company of Detroit, Michigan, specifically provided loss of insurance for railway men. According to R.E.B. Company Vice President, L.R. Mangold, R.E.B. increasingly did business “on all MOP lines [and he mailed Jefferson]...several application blanks and circulars that describes our \$5.00 and \$7.50 A Day Policies” for his consideration for the Colored Trainmen of America.

Jefferson also shrewdly appealed to the fraternal nature of some of the more liberal predominantly white labor-oriented mutual aid/job insurance organizations in order to obtain sufficient coverage for the Colored Trainmen of America. The Treasurer for Brotherhood Mutual Benefit, R.W. Scott, reaffirmed the bond between union workers a.k.a. “order men” when he thanked Jefferson

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<sup>30</sup> “We are in receipt of claim from Eddie Busby...RR Brakeman and that of Calvin Anderson also employed as brakeman...for investigation ...to place responsibility [for] accident Extra #530 north in attempting to double over resulting in derailling two cars and damaging others...Please reply so that we can go ahead with the payment of these claims.” Locomotive Engineers & Conductors Mutual Protective Association to Amos F. Hayes, Dec.13, 1948, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

for his “joint letter of September 11 enclosing names of brakemen, switchmen, flagmen, train porters, engine foremen, and switch tenders, who are members of your labor organization. This should be very helpful to us in guarding against men in your locality joining [Brotherhood Mutual Benefit] BMB protection who are not members of the labor organization...we are one of the few...companies which restricts our members to order men.”<sup>31</sup>

Jefferson’s familiarity with the fraternal nature of union culture helped him tap into an existing network of labor-related mutual benefit organizations only open to union members. The practicality of Jefferson’s contributions is two-fold. CTA members possessed financial security and also functioned on the job with a peace of mind, knowing that things would be taken care of in the event something unforeseeable happened to them while working the railways.

Sometimes members of the Colored Trainmen of America needed additional assistance in gray areas that did not fit neatly within coverage policy lines. Insurance policies did not always cover job-related medical bills. Job loss companies did not always supplement all of the wages lost as a result of being disabled or deceased. The Grand Lodge of the Colored Trainmen of America created a special fund to assist CTA members with covering wage loss and medical expenses after members appealed to the entire union for special

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<sup>31</sup>.R.W. Scott to Jordan Jefferson, Sept. 17, 1946, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

consideration. Members voted to either approve or reject financial assistance based on the circumstances. Although the outcome was not always favorable, this additional measure provided some added sense of security for Colored Trainmen who periodically found themselves stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place as a result of costly work-related injuries.<sup>32</sup>

Addressing the needs of disabled members certainly could be challenging at times, but meeting those of an entire family left behind by a deceased brother was much more difficult. The issues were not limited to diminished capacity, loss of earnings, costly medical treatment, rehabilitation, and retaining employment during recovery. On top of dealing with the loss of a primary source of income, both CTA members and family members had to also wrestle with the loss of a beloved colleague, a lodge brother, the most essential family member - the head of the household. The hazardous nature of the work the colored trainmen performed meant the leadership for the Colored Trainmen of America occasionally had to address inquiries concerning death benefits. For instance, bereaved wife, Mrs. Idell Parker wrote just such a request to the CTA seeking help. Specifically, she sought information concerning "the death benefits due to the beneficiary of a deceased member...in good standing at the time of his

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<sup>32</sup> Louis Nelson to B.W. Bacon, Feb. 21, 1949, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



death after 14 years of service.”<sup>33</sup> Although “death benefits” provided relatively little consolation for a family deprived of a loved one due to a work related injury or illness, they were far from insignificant. If nothing else, the CTA provided the funds for a proper burial and some financial means of getting by until the family could adjust and make additional provisions to supplement the loss of earnings the deceased railroad worker provided.

Contrary to Borrer’s findings, the documentation associated with the diligence of Grand Lodge Officers A. Flowers, Truett V. Tillmon, W.H Jefferson, Amos F. Hayes, Jordan Jefferson, and Louis Nelson reinforces the idea that CTA leadership was both effective and highly capable of successfully engaging in a range of labor union representation activities independently of white labor union initiatives. CTA leadership actively engaged progressive company administrators for favorable outcomes. They successfully negotiated labor disputes concerning injury compensation, medical care, medical insurance, and life insurance. They also challenged racially-motivated policies and practices. In doing so, CTA administrative officers were instrumental in making incremental gains in both labor and civil rights activism both on and off the job.

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<sup>33</sup> Deceased Member’s Wife Idell Parker to the Colored Trainmen of America, Oct. 29, 1949, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

## CHAPTER III

### REFUSING SECOND BEST

No other element of the color line defined the social status of African Americans more than the segregation of public accommodations. This method of social stratification served as a daily reminder of their second-class status in American society. Oftentimes, African Americans took incremental counter-measures to eliminate the degradation they experienced in public spaces prior to 1964. Recognizing that many individual and collective acts of civil protest have yet to find their place within the prevailing civil rights narrative, this chapter draws upon board and meal deduction correspondence to provide context for a unique form of civil protest the Colored Trainmen of America members used to challenge segregated public spaces.<sup>1</sup> It also addresses more recent historiographical questions regarding lesser heralded acts of social consciousness and civil protest by everyday working men within their daily sphere of operations.<sup>2</sup>

As an early twentieth-century African American labor union, the CTA is

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<sup>1</sup> The Colored Trainmen of America Paper, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library. box 2, Houston, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941," *The American Historical Review*, 102 (no. 2, April 1997), 340-377. Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History*, 75 (no. 3, December 1988), 786-811.

especially interesting for this line of inquiry because the very nature of members' jobs made their struggles and corresponding activism unique from their meatpacking, industrial plant, and dock-working counterparts.<sup>3</sup> For starters, early government oversight designed to protect the steady flow of goods across the country also provided a different degree of job security for African American railroad workers.<sup>4</sup>

During World War I African American railroad workers received federally mandated pay rates for the hazardous jobs most self-respecting whites refused to perform.<sup>5</sup> By 1930, African Americans were listed as eighty-five percent of the railroad firemen, one hundred percent of the railroad porters, twenty percent of the signalers and switch operators, forty-five percent of the brakemen, fourteen

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<sup>3</sup> Rick Halpern, "Interracial Unionism in the Southwest: Fort Worth's Packinghouse Worker's, 1937-1954," in *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South*, ed. Robert H. Zieger, (Knoxville, 1991). Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans; Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana, 1994). Michael R. Boston, Jr., *Labor, Civil Rights and Hughes Tool Company* (College Station, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> "Because of economic, military, and political necessities, the government, must keep the railroads operating in wartime. Therefore, due to labor shortages, the United States government took over operation of the entire American railroad industry. In 1918, provisions were made nationally which made the industry more attractive to blacks." Borrer, "The road to success is paved with more than good intentions: the triumph and tragedy of the Colored Trainmen of America," 77.

<sup>5</sup> "During World War I...the government's director general of the railroads issued an order [no. 27] effective June 1, 1918 establishing that 'colored men employed as fireman, trainmen, and switchmen shall be paid the same rate as are paid white men in the same capacities...The Fair Employment Practice Committee...Executive Order[s] 8802, 9346, 10308, 10497, and 10557," in *Black Labor and the American Legal System: Race, Work, and the Law*, ed. Herbert Hill (Washington, D.C., 1977), 340 and 373-379.

percent of the locomotive stokers, and all of the railroad conductors were white.<sup>6</sup> According to Historian Michael K. Honey, “higher status, higher paying jobs as conductors, supervisors, inspectors, or superintendents remained strictly reserved for whites.”<sup>7</sup> In some instances, the income of some black railroad workers rivaled and surpassed the earnings of many highly-educated African American professionals who lacked clientele for their expensive services.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the work environment black factory workers experienced as employees of the Hughes Tool Company, the CTA members’ workplace differed because it was a workplace without walls.

Consequently, the nature of their jobs exposed them to a variety of cultural landscapes that ranged from progressive to ultra-conservative. Traveling on the job from place to place, while spending good money for good food and a

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<sup>6</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Abstract of the Fifteenth Census of the United States, General Report on Occupations. Vol.5, Part IV, 1933* (Washington, D.C.,1933).

<sup>7</sup> “The Census Bureau, which organized its data by male and female occupation, show black men doing nearly half the work in transportation but for the most part in positions subordinate to whites,” in *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, Michael G. Honey (Chicago,1993), 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Carter G. Woodson and Lorenzo J. Greene, eds., *The Negro Wage Earner* (Washington, D.C., 1930) and *The Negro Professional Man and The Community: With Special Emphasis on the Physician and the Lawyer* (Washington, D.C., 1934). Charles H. Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925* (New York, 1927). “Black professionals operated strictly within the confines of the African American community, largely shunned from discourse and contact with white society,” in Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 33. Michael R. Boston, Jr., *Labor, Civil Rights and the Hughes Tool Company* (College Station, 2005).

decent place to rest overnight inevitably led them to test the color line along the railways. The Colored trainmen, primarily concerned with receiving the same quality of service and treatment they received in the most liberal places they frequented, occasionally refused second best when there was a more satisfactory alternative to be had elsewhere. Although their efforts did not draw national attention nor did it result in the full-scale social movement to integrate public accommodations within the Gulf Coast region, this strategy constitutes a noteworthy, meaningful form of resistance and civil protest worth chronicling.

Varying degrees of freedom experienced by CTA members traveling elsewhere inspired them to engage in a form of civil protest outside of the workplace. The perks associated with traveling along the railways were nearly as rewarding for the adventuresome Colored Trainmen as the monetary incentives. Railroad travel provided black trainmen with a means of exposure uncommon to the average southerner. Despite waves of black migration following reconstruction and during the height of World War I, most African Americans remaining in the south were inescapably bound to rural agricultural jobs, tenant farming, and sharecropping.<sup>9</sup> For Colored Trainmen, a railroad worker's job as a brakemen, fireman, switchman, and machinist was also a chance to earn a living and experience other parts of the country. Not only did

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<sup>9</sup> James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989). Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana, 2000).

employees reap the benefit of travel perks, but their spouses and children also capitalized on travel vouchers as a means of broadening their horizons.<sup>10</sup>

The Colored Trainmen of America were often immersed in the political discourse of the day during their travels. Typically, they were poised to make keen observations concerning American race relations in both rural and urban areas. The Missouri Pacific Line of the Gulf Coast region ran from hubs as far east as DeQuincy, Louisiana, and as far west as California. To be certain, MPL trains passed through many rural, sleepy towns along the way. However, African American railroad employees also had their share of exposure to major cosmopolitan cities along the way via Houston and San Antonio. As with the Pullman porters of the early twentieth century, exposure to the socially-conscious ideas expressed by urban black professionals, community activists, journalists, and intellectuals in these booming Texas metropolises profoundly shaped the views of Colored Trainmen regarding citizenship, employment discrimination, racial equality, and economic empowerment.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “the Missouri Pacific is the only railroad in the south that does not show “Colored” on the passes issued, both trip and annual. Traditionally, in the southern territory it has never been the practice to issue transportation for colored women with the prefix “Miss” or “Mrs.” And for colored men with the prefix “Mr”...I think we have gone as far as we should by omitting any reference to colored.” T. Short, memo, Oct. 2 1952, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Merline Pitre, *In Struggle against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station, 1999). J. Alston Atkins, *The Texas Negro and His Political Rights* (Houston, 1932). Falbia Turner, “A History of the Development and Social Policies of Negro Newspapers in Texas,” (Sr. thesis, Houston College for Negroes, 1936).

It is not surprising that the liberty the trainmen experienced while traveling in the line of duty transformed them. In this regard, they are no different from the early African American artists and entertainers, deep-sea mariners, students studying in the Northeast, soldiers that fought overseas and black migrants to Chicago, Detroit and Harlem.<sup>12</sup> Members belonging to each of these groups have attested to how instrumental “place” is in awaking a dormant social consciousness. Eventually, CTA members also found themselves enlightened, encouraged, and even emboldened by the taste of liberty they experienced while crossing the Gulf Coast region. Judging from the record they left behind, it is no wonder how and why they came to pursue equality and engage in mutual aid activities that reinforced notions of dignity, self-respect, and independence while traveling.

The same sense of civic responsibility that compelled black railroad workers to form a labor union to redress inequality in the workplace also inspired them to pursue equality and promote self-help elsewhere. There is no doubt that they actually managed to achieve some degree of success in their pursuits

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<sup>12</sup> Gale Barchus, “The Dynamics of Black Demands and White Responses for Negro Higher Education in the State of Texas, 1945-1950,” (M.A. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1970). Chuck Jackson, “A ‘Headless Display’: *Sula*, Soldiers, and Lynching,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.2 (Summer 2006). Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, 1999). Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (Athens, 1971). W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago, 1903). August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, eds., *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York: Oxford, 1981).

regardless of the discriminatory collective bargaining agreements sanctioned by the Railway Labor Act of 1926, the binding boilerplate terms of the Southern Carriers Conference [Washington] Agreement, the National Mediation Board, the National Railroad Adjustment Board, subsequent Supreme Court decisions that did not make discriminatory employment practices actionable.<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Borrer's findings suggests otherwise. Borrer's paper characterizes the CTA as largely a failure.<sup>14</sup> She maintains that most of the CTA triumphs were largely attributable to industry and company-wide concessions granted to white unions.<sup>15</sup> The letters exchanged between CTA and MPL leadership concerning meal and board deduction privileges for "Coloreds" tell a different story of persistent challenges to segregated public spaces using what little power and influence they had at their disposal. The CTA successfully negotiated suitable accommodations for colored brakemen on a regular basis without the intervention of white labor unions. This matter, of course, was of no concern to white labor unions.

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<sup>13</sup> Hill, *Black Labor and the American Legal System*, 341. Herbert R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York, 1944), 100-101.

<sup>14</sup> "Throughout its existence, the Colored Trainmen of America (CTA) could not consistently protect the employment of its members, therefore its successes as a labor union was limited...successes of the Colored Trainmen of America pale in comparison to the number of instances they were either rejected by either MoPac, or the NMB, or NRAB," in Borrer, "The road to success is paved with more than good intentions: the triumph and tragedy of Colored Trainmen of America," 87 and 91.

<sup>15</sup> "the CTA invested nothing in the fight, but received some of the benefits...the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen resented the CTA for using the hard work of the BRT to obtain better pay." *Ibid*, 55.



Therefore, the CTA's ability to negotiate and settle disputes regarding travel accommodations cannot be mistakenly attributed to actions of white labor unions.<sup>16</sup> A thorough analysis of over 140 letters between 1930 and 1963 reveals how tactfully CTA brakemen responded to the second class treatment they encountered throughout the Gulf region.<sup>17</sup> They also provide ample evidence of CTA union members successfully conducting labor union business independently rather than riding on the coat tails of white labor union initiatives.

The CTA trainmen spent a considerable amount of time working away from home. They used a substantial amount of salaries to pay for accommodations. While traveling, the CTA members found a good deal of comfort in a wholesome atmosphere, where they could eat a good meal, drink, and rest in peace. If left to use their own salaries to meet their lodging and meal expenses while traveling, most railroad workers—black and white-- would have periodically mismanaged their funds and been unable to sustain themselves.

Long before the men recognized how much boarding house and restaurant owners' valued their business, CTA Officers W.H. Jefferson, Amos F. Hayes, J.J. Jefferson, W.C. Kennedy and the rank and file members traveling the railways all understood the purchasing power of meal and room and board

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<sup>16</sup> "The black trainmen received much better pay and allowances for lodging and meals." Borrer, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Board and Meal Deduction Correspondence, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

deductions privileges.

Though useful, the board and meal deduction privileges were not guaranteed nor afforded to every traveling railroad worker employed by Missouri Pacific Railroad. In order to obtain this privilege, the Colored Trainmen of America worked to secure this privilege through union demands much like any other advantages they sought. Consequently, the Missouri Pacific Lines granted restaurant, café and boarding house owners' meal deduction contracts to serve and accommodate African American trainmen traveling along routes passing through town.

In exchange for a steady stream of income, café and restaurant owners agreed to the following terms established by the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Business owners agreed to only use meal deductions to cover meal tickets for meals and board. Business owners also agreed not to use the meal tickets to pay off loans or cover the cost of alcohol purchases. Colored trainmen received a deduction amount of five dollars for each individual meal ticket cafés submitted to the railroad company valued at five dollars. Aside from the five dollar deduction, the owners paid the railroad company a 10 percent service charge for handling meal deductions. The railroad company limited the amount of meal deductions the owners received on both a weekly and monthly basis. Owners delivered the signed orders directly to the railroad company to help reduce the possibility of fraud and confusion. Most importantly, the railroad company only

accepted original meal deduction orders signed and dated by the person who received a decrease in wages in order to cover travel expenses.<sup>18</sup> The CTA members were largely responsible for obtaining the tickets and using them responsibly at accommodating facilities they agreed upon collectively.<sup>19</sup>

Both the rules and process for meal deductions remained largely unchanged from the early 1900s to the early 1960s in most southern public establishments. Scores of colored trainmen utilized them while traveling along railways deep in the heart of Texas. The correspondence exchanged between cafés, Missouri Pacific Lines, and the Colored Trainmen highlights the socio-economic implications of segregated public accommodations by revealing the business-oriented interplay between workers, employers, consumers, service providers, African American and whites. The black railroad workers traveling along the railways typically sought both meals and overnight accommodations comparable to their white counterparts. Café owners solicited meal deductions privileges with MPL as a means of guaranteeing a considerable source of reliable revenue in an unfavorable economic climate.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> G.C. Kennedy to Lucy Demanguex, Oct. 2, 1937, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Railroad Superintendent to Florence Brinston, Feb. 2, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>20</sup> "This is to advise, that my request of the organization to assist me in getting the meal order deduction...we have so many of our brakemens want be in town on pay day's to pay their boad bill, and I am unable to wait." Irene Johnson to CTA, Local No. 1 Grand Lodge, Aug. 5, 1949, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

During the onset of the Great Depression very few people living along the railways of rural Texas and Louisiana could afford to be prejudiced. In some instances, providing services to whomever would pay was the surest way to stay in business during the harsh economic climate of the 1930s. Typically, café owners – black and white - capitalized on this reliable source of income by providing satisfactory meals and sleeping quarters. Generally, café owners solicited meal deduction privileges by submitting a written request to the General Chairman of the Colored Trainmen of America or the Superintendent of the Missouri Pacific Lines. Although most of the correspondence from café owners accentuated the same incentives – capacity, service, and atmosphere – some restaurants made it clear that they catered to more practical concerns of colored trainmen, while others were more subtle in their solicitations.

For instance, Eunice, Louisiana, café owner, Sarah Brown, expressed an interest in the well-being of the colored trainmen two months after the Great Depression began. Clearly, she recognized the value of establishing an arrangement with MPL when she wrote of her willingness to provide services to the Colored firemen and brakemen. Sensing the potential for racial conflict, Brown offered her services as a place where they could “get something to eat without getting into trouble.”<sup>21</sup> Diner owner James A. Howard believed it

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<sup>21</sup> Sarah Brown to C. McMillan, Jan. 9, 1930, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

advantageous to market his Harlingen establishment by notifying the CTA Grand Lodge Local #1 of “the opening of Howard’s Dining Room...Featuring home cooked food for your nourishment and clean comfortable beds for your comfort, with radio for your enjoyment.”<sup>22</sup> Over the years, Harlingen’s public accommodations for CTA members remained tentative at best but unlike Brown, who openly addresses safety concerns, Howard chose to focus more on an inviting atmosphere. Unlike Howard’s and Brown’s restaurants, a letter from Williams Café owner dated January 24, 1950 capitalizes on location and availability, thusly. The owner proposed, “since you have no place in Harlingen for Colored trainmen to eat, I am asking you to consider my place...my place is sanitary and will stand all Health Inspection surveys...it’s located one half block from the majority of train lodging places.”<sup>23</sup>

While Williams’s letter does not make it clear whether racism or a lack of regard for colored trainmen is the reason why there is no place for them to eat, it is obvious that money is a motivating factor for William’s Café providing them with this service. Apparently, the competition for MPL deduction certification was

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<sup>22</sup> Mrs. James A. Howard to Local Lodge #1, Kingsville, Texas. Feb. 1943, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>23</sup> William’s Café owner to CTA Union Headquarters, Jan. 24, 1950, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

fierce among countryside cafés and citywide franchises alike.<sup>24</sup> An impassioned written plea from Baker's Café makes it abundantly clear what these meal deductions meant to owners. Owner Harley Baker wrote the CTA vowing to handle meal deductions "with such care and precision as would render all concerned satisfied... if returned to me I promise a better service and general satisfaction among those served as well as those responsible for my getting the service... Allow me this Deduction and let me guarantee you better service and a happier group of men."<sup>25</sup>

The correspondence from owners seeking meal deduction privileges is voluminous. Café owners employed a variety of strategies to obtain them. For instance, Brown Derby Café Manager Myrna Lee Wilson went a step further by actively recruiting eighty-one brakemen "in favor of...the Brown Derby Café having the meal tickets sign" a petition she submitted to the CTA Headquarters for consideration.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Mrs. M. Webb's note endorsing the Sunset Café also included a list containing the signatures of seventeen brakemen "who would

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<sup>24</sup> "I will appreciate this business and assure you that I meet all of the requirements governing the handling of meals and will appreciate having the proper authorities calling on me for the necessary inspections." Brue Buffet to the Colored Trainmen of America, May 17, 1946, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Baker's Café to the Colored Trainmen of America, Oct. 31, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Café owner's petition bearing 81 brakemen signatures favoring "meal tickets" for the Brown Derby, May 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

be glad to eat” at her establishment.<sup>27</sup> Just how much weight the Sunset Café’s request supported by brakemen petitions carried in the selection process is undeterminable. Whatever positive influence petitions may have had could have very well been negated by scandals resulting from special arrangements between colored trainmen, and cafes committed to demonstrating some form of reciprocity.

In the interest of business, MPL superintendents recognized the value of employees who were safe, well-fed, and well-rested at conveniently located restaurants and boarding houses along the railways.<sup>28</sup> The CTA members cleverly utilized this form of company backing not only for the aforementioned practical considerations but also for challenging segregated public accommodations.<sup>29</sup> Segregated cafés and boarding houses represented one of “the multitude of ways in which social and economic distinctions based on “race”

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<sup>27</sup> Sunset Café to CTA Superintendent, Dec.12, 1947, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>28</sup> “Isn’t there some place at Vanderbilt that you could make arrangements with to handle colored brakemen? We have deduction orders with A. Shannon and if he is not going to properly take care of our brakemen then we should try to make arrangements with someone else to do it.” G.C. Kennedy to W.H. Jefferson, June 12, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>29</sup> “The request of the [CTA] Organization is that Mrs. Ave. Angle, at 2502 McKinney Ave, Houston be allowed meal Ordeal deduction to feed brakemen... [the reason for this requesting being] the McKinney [Gulf Coast Lines] offices force is a little funny about calling our men out of calling distance when their phone get out of order [sic], and we are trying to get more places close to the round house on account of keeping them in calling distant.” Amos F. Hayes to A.F. Judd, Dec. 29, 1947, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

functioned” throughout the Gulf Coast region.<sup>30</sup> They also utilized meal deduction privileges to negotiate rigid racial caste barriers commonly associated with public accommodations within the segregated south.<sup>31</sup>

Members of the CTA actively engaged a subtle but effective form of civil protest along the railways. The organization never functioned solely as another labor union for African Americans. Recognizing the power of their dollars, CTA members successfully utilized their purchasing power to obtain meals and accommodations on par with what their white colleagues. This was not a novel strategy during the 1930s. Historian Beth Tompkins Bates chronicled the rise of divergent civil rights tactics among local organizations during the early 1930s. Chicagoans’ grass roots “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign is among the most well known.<sup>32</sup> The meal deduction privileges correspondence suggests the CTA informally adopted a more subtle and sophisticated “Don’t Buy Where You Cant Eat and Sleep Well” approach to segregated cafés and boarding establishments. Generally, they accomplished their objective by first surveying

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<sup>30</sup> Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> “We are asking you to please consider Florence Brinston application she have the best place we knows off [sic] and it the only place we can find.” W.H. Jefferson to MPL Superintendent G.C. Kennedy, Feb. 9, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Beth Tompkins Bates, “A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941,” *The American Historical Review*, 102 (April 1997) 340-377.



their options along the rails.<sup>33</sup> Afterwards, they relayed their preferences to the CTA for a formal endorsement.<sup>34</sup> Once the members of the CTA reached a consensus regarding their selections, the General Chairman of the Colored Trainmen of America submitted their request to the Missouri Pacific Lines Superintendent for his official approval and authorization.<sup>35</sup>

The CTA's executive officers were overwhelmingly responsible for using the economic power created by MPL meal deduction privileges effectively. No CTA executive officer embodied the manly, dogged determination of the Colored Trainmen of America more than General Chairman W.H. Jefferson. Chairman Jefferson made countless meal deduction privilege requests during his tenure with great success. This same correspondence reflects the considerable amount of influence Jefferson exerted in MPL the meal deduction privilege selection

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<sup>33</sup> "Please give Bessie Fields at Vanderbilt, Texas. The meal order deduction privileges, As this is the only place to eat and sleep...Abe Schannon is not feeding or sleeping the Brakemen anymore." W.H. Jefferson to G.N. Helzmann, Sept. 19, 1949, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>34</sup> "We have handle [sic] this with the brakemen in our meeting and all the Brakemen agreed to ask you not to let any Brakemen have any meal ticket unless he get an order from you and the Brakemen think the way you are handle in it this year is the best way." W.H. Jefferson to G.C. Kennedy, Aug. 10, 1937, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers. "Regarding our conference with you about deduction privilege in Harlingen for the Brakemen. We are asking you please give the deduction order privilege to R.C. Canady...he is the one that Mr. Patrick was talking to you about. And Brakemen state that he have a good place to stay [sic]." W.H. Jefferson to G.C. Kennedy, Feb. 4, 1941, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>35</sup> "We are asking you to please give Deduction order privileges to Damon McGrady and James McGradit...The Brakemen are highly satisfied...and it is a nice place." W.H. Jefferson to G.C. Kennedy, July 19, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

process. It was not uncommon for the MPL Superintendent to write the CTA Chairman stating “we have application[s]...for board deduction for colored employees...Would like to have...recommendations to granting these deductions.”<sup>36</sup>

In addition to counseling MPL superintendents, Jefferson worked tirelessly to identify eating establishments and overnight accommodations that valued revenue over rigidly reinforcing racial inequality in public spaces that catered to travelers. For instance, Jefferson requested a reassignment of a meal deduction privilege in Mission, Texas, on January 8, 1939 because “the Brakemen claim that Mr. Percy have not got a good place for them [sic] to eat and they have to eat in the kitchen as the condition in there is bad.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, he did not limit his concerns to sanitation. Jefferson’s letters oftentimes denoted a certain degree of social activism, as he constantly used his position to negotiate the best possible travel accommodations for his men.

CTA Chairman Jefferson made it clear that members of the CTA also found racially-motivated mistreatment intolerable. On April 9, 1939 Jefferson’s visit to the same Mission café revealed that this establishment was unsuitable for CTA patronage because it did not have an adequate “separation for the

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<sup>36</sup> G.C. Kennedy to W.H. Jefferson, July 16, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>37</sup> W.H. Jefferson to MPL G.C. Kennedy, Jan. 8, 1939, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

colored eating quarters from the way they goes [sic] in the dance hall."<sup>38</sup> In positively untenable situations, Jefferson went above and beyond his typical efforts to secure reasonable accommodations. On one occasion, Jefferson requested a face to face meeting with the MPL superintendent to discuss a situation in Vanderbilt, Texas, where the oil field workers kept "taking all the colored places from the colored there and some of the brakemen."<sup>39</sup> Like the labor market, the situation in Vanderbilt reaffirms the notion that the economic principles of supply and demand also directly affected the permeability of the color line in public spaces situated along the railways. When white hospitality entrepreneurs had the luxury of choosing from two bountiful revenue streams – white oil workers versus colored trainmen – most often white privilege generally prevailed.

Clearly, the brakemen's collective commitment to actively reporting restaurant and boarding house conditions shaped their travel experiences along the railways. However, relaying their dissatisfaction meant little without a viable alternative. The brakemen also possessed a keen understanding of the public accommodations at their disposal within each of the communities they frequented. This enabled them to make informed decisions and sound

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<sup>38</sup> W.H. Jefferson to G.C. Kennedy, April 9, 1939, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>39</sup> W.H. Jefferson to G.C. Kennedy, June 12, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

recommendations regarding meal deduction nominations. Like the fluidity of the racial dynamics they encountered while traveling, the service and hospitality within any given place was also subject to change, depending on the circumstances. The CTA general chairman's frequent requests reflect both the variance in market forces and race relations across the cultural landscape of the Gulf Coast region.

Wherever white-owned establishments showed little regard for the "colored" dollars colored trainmen brought into the community, black establishments benefited tremendously from diminished competition. Occasionally, CTA members countered racially motivated public accommodation policies by seeking out black-owned boarding houses and eateries. In doing so, traveling CTA members not only secured satisfactory accommodations but they also contributed to the sustainability of black enterprise across the region. Though limited in terms of recourse and remedies, the CTA made the most of the economic incentive associated with meal deduction privileges. Previously cited correspondence from white business owners' reveals the refusal to accept second best sometimes resulted in CTA members enjoying better eating conditions and overnight accommodations owned by whites. Regardless of how often this happened, the unified effort of the Colored Trainmen of America consistently sent the message that they would ably contest second-class treatment.

The CTA members' form of civil protest along the railways effectively challenged Jim Crow customs in public spaces. On September 25, 1937 Chairman Jefferson explicitly wrote of the CTA's decision to consciously contest second-class treatment after members "agreed to the cancellation of the meal deductions with the two white cafés...and we request that you grant these deduction privileges to two colored cafés instead...we feel that it will be better for us."<sup>40</sup> Jefferson rarely referenced unpleasant, polarizing racial issues in his letters requesting reassignment. The assumption is that the MPL superintendent accepted this as a common occurrence for colored men traveling throughout the southern region of the United States. Just as the brakemen continued to encounter segregated public accommodations during the 1940s, the spirit of cooperation persisted between CTA and MPL leadership.<sup>41</sup>

The MPL Superintendent's flexibility and prompt replies to CTA initiatives are impressive. Though generally amenable to CTA trainmen tactics, MPL Superintendent G.C. Kennedy consistently demonstrated that he was far from obsequious. Correspondence between CTA and MPL leadership suggests that the MPL Superintendent routinely used his power and independent judgment to make his own recommendations. It is important to note that the MPL

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<sup>40</sup> W.H. Jefferson to G.C. Kennedy, Sept. 25, 1937, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>41</sup> A. Judd to Amos F. Hayes, Jan. 8, 1948, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Superintendent typically acted in this manner sparingly, believing his intervention benefited the Colored Trainmen most favorably.

Occasionally, the MPL Superintendent conducted his own independent investigations instead of relying solely on the CTA Chairmen's findings. Periodically, he denied meal deduction privileges to CTA endorsed cafés that jeopardized the well-being of his men.<sup>42</sup> The superintendent denied requests when a conflict of interest existed as well. For instance, Kennedy chose not to grant two neighboring cafés meal deduction privileges on November 6, 1943, citing "we do not desire to have two restaurants operated for the benefit of our colored employees at Kingsville and only desire to have one restaurant with meal order deduction privileges, and in as much as Irene Johnson has this privilege, we cannot consider appointment of Jim Moore."<sup>43</sup> Sometimes, the MPL Superintendent's prerogative rather than practicality determined whether a CTA endorsed café received meal deduction privileges. Ironically, unlike his predecessor from 1943, three cafés conveniently located near one another

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<sup>42</sup> "Our investigation discloses that this Dunaway place is not a desirable place for our employees to eat, and if you have some other place in mind we probably can make some arrangements." MPL Superintendent to CTA General Chairman, Nov. 1943, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>43</sup> MPL Superintendent to CTA General Chairman, Nov. 6, 1943, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

raised concerns for MPL Superintendent A.F. Judd instead of two.<sup>44</sup> As a practical matter, if proximity sometimes concerned the MPL Superintendent, so did location. On August 21, 1950, he chose to disregard a strong CTA endorsement because he “investigated this [restaurant] and [found] this is a fair place but where it is located would be of benefit to our men...It is my thought that we could probably find a place more convenient and closer to our yard office.”<sup>45</sup>

The MPL Superintendent also opted to rescind a number of highly recommended CTA nominations for meal and board deduction privileges granted to cafés with questionable reputations. For several years Baker’s Café in Houston consistently appears as a source of controversy in meal deduction privilege correspondence between the CTA General Chairman and the MPL superintendent. Ultimately, the MPL Superintendent eliminated any possibility for renewing a meal deduction privilege for Baker’s Café after establishing the basis for denial in a very detailed letter and listing the restaurant’s improprieties. Baker’s Café repeatedly violated paragraphs 1 and 2 of the meal deduction ticket contract with MOPAC. These rules prohibited the use of meal tickets from

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<sup>44</sup> “We now have granted meal order deduction privileges to Norvell...and also to Irene...and since two cafes now have this privilege, it will not be consistent to grant this privilege to Marie.” A.F. Judd to W.H. Jefferson, Aug. 12, 1949, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>45</sup> MPL Superintendent to CTA General Chairman, Aug. 21, 1950, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

being exchanged for any other product or service, including loans. Baker's achieved the dubious distinction of frequently violating these rules over the years. Five months later, Baker Café's owner tried to obtain meal and board deduction privileges through deceit. The restaurant changes its doing business as name and requested meal deduction privileges under the management of a family member. Once again, Kennedy thwarted their efforts after determining "Brinston is a relative of Baker, who operated Baker's Café, and is operating in the same location under a different name, and that Baker is actually running the café."<sup>46</sup>

Superintendent Kennedy's handling of meal deduction privileges for Baker's Café exemplifies the savvy of the final arbiters responsible for issuing meal deduction privileges. Though somewhat removed from the atmosphere that the CTA members encountered during their travels, the MPL Superintendents had a fair appreciation of both their circumstances and activities.<sup>47</sup> Every so often they made decisions that sent clear messages to both colored trainmen

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<sup>46</sup> A.F. Judd to W.F. Jefferson, Feb. 1, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers. "Deduction order privileges with Florence Brinston's Café at Houston, have been cancelled." G.C. Kennedy to W.H. Jefferson, July 5, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>47</sup> "[Re:] your letter...requesting meal deduction privileges be given to Mabel Kennedy at Mission...our investigation develops that there are several large clean tables in the Humble Café at Mission, that the food is well cooked, that there should be very little cause for complaint from the brakemen. I would like to talk to you about this before taking any further action." MPL Superintendent to CTA General Chairman, Jan. 27, 1939, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



and café owners alike. MPL railroad personnel prided themselves in being well-informed and highly capable of using independent judgment to investigate improprieties. The men employed as both CTA General Chairman and MPL Superintendent changed at least three times over the course of 25 years. During this time the cordial tone and mutual spirit of cooperation between them remained constant. The CTA members certainly capitalized on this relationship in order to acquire some level of comfort and satisfaction with their travel accommodations.

It is doubtful that the CTA could have been as successful without the support of their superintendents. The superintendents' complicity could be construed as progressive by the uninformed but the arbitration records confirm that MPL leadership did not intentionally act in furtherance of racial equality. As businessmen, MPL Superintendents realized that safe, well-fed, well-rested trainmen performed well on the job, and the colored trainmen were no exception. Reasonable public accommodations were well within their reach because the meal and board deduction privileges offered enterprising urban and rural café owners a reliable source of revenue. Interestingly enough, deduction privilege scandals involving greedy café owners and calculating colored railroad workers undermined the CTA's ability to successfully negotiate segregated public accommodations in some places.

According to the basic meal deduction guidelines, the entire system relied

heavily on the integrity of both the individuals who owned and operated the establishments and the colored railroad workers who frequented them for meals and overnight accommodations. Prior to the post-World II economic boom, the deduction privilege served as a blessing for both workers and café and boarding house owners. During this time, some railroad workers sent their earnings home to their families for support and safe-keeping. Consequently, enough of these railroad workers experienced difficulty paying for all of their job-related travel expenses to justify the issuance of meal deduction privileges. Urban café owners, who faced considerable competition from surrounding cafés, welcomed the arrangement with MPL. So did their rural counterparts who lacked a steady, sufficient amount of business because local customers were few and far between.

In each instance, the meal and board deduction privileges were essential to their job. The average hourly wage during the 1940s was 30 cents an hour in the United States. A loaf of bread cost 8 cents during this era. In the U.S., \$100 during 1940 is the equivalent of \$1,433.77 today. Because the deduction privileges were such a commodity, both enterprising railroad workers and business owners figured out early on how to enhance their value, given the minimal degree of oversight from MPL. Naturally, owners were inclined to take risks, if it meant more money for their establishments. Some corrupt owners capitalized on meal deduction privileges by allowing brakemen to use them to

purchase alcohol.<sup>48</sup> Cafés also issued short-term loans to colored railroad workers and recouped them later through interest bearing meal deduction tickets.<sup>49</sup> Occasionally, café workers levied a number of unsanctioned taxes against meal deduction tickets submitted to MPL for payment. Apparently, this issue became so problematic at one location that CTA Grand President J.J. Jefferson visited a crooked café where “as a brakeman, signed for a meal ticket at De Quincy LA before he received it the owner takes out 50 cent claims that it is for [MPL Superintendent] Mr. A.F. Judd and then after a 1cent tax is deducted out of 25 cent. I witness this with my own eyes.”<sup>50</sup> At one point, the fraudulent use of meal deduction privileges threatened to severely undermine the main source of economic leverage the CTA utilized to challenge second-class public accommodations during their travels.

#### Correspondence between CTA leadership and railroad company

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<sup>48</sup> “It has come to my attention that Irene Johnson, who holds meal deduction privileges with this company is selling beer in her establishment and that several of our Brakemen have become under the influence of intoxicants on beer purchased with meal tickets...if so, it will be necessary that we cancel meal deduction privileges with her without any delay.” G.C. Kennedy to Willie Jefferson, Jan. 8, 1938, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>49</sup> “I have on good authority that Norvell Adams, who has our meal deduction privilege, is not serving meals but is issuing \$5.00 meal deduction books and buying them back for \$2.50 and \$3.00. I am cancelling [sic] his meal order deduction privileges.” G.C. Kennedy to W.H. Jefferson, July 20, 1943, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>50</sup> J.J. Jefferson to Amos Hayes, Aug. 3, 1948, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

administrative personnel reflects the measures management took to limit the abuse of meal ticket privileges. On July 23, 1937, MPL Superintendent Kennedy wrote a scathing letter expressing his frustration and disappointment. Kennedy complained of the tendency of the brakemen to sign over their wages resulting in them often having to borrow money or sell their meal tickets for pennies on the dollar. He encouraged Jefferson to frequently restate the rules for members to follow to prevent further scandal. According to Kennedy, they had to “do something to stop the abuse of meal deduction privileges and other deduction privileges.”<sup>51</sup>

A responsive executive secretary of the CTA recognized far reaching implications of fraudulent use of deduction privileges. On September 22, 1937, he reassured the MPL superintendent that the CTA leadership deplored dishonest conduction and favored the “breaking up of the unnecessary signing of deductions for the purpose of obtaining money...this practice has become chronic, and in our opinion detrimental to the Colored Trainmen.”<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, the MPL superintendent took matters into his own hands. His chosen approach tempered justice with mercy. The superintendent cracked down on the inappropriate conduct of a few selfish cafés and colored brakemen instead of

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<sup>51</sup> G.C. Kennedy to W.H. Jefferson, July 23, 1937, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>52</sup> CTA Secretary to MPL Superintendent G.C. Kennedy, Sept. 22, 1937, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

suspending meal and board deduction privileges for everyone.

Together, the leaders of the CTA and MPL curtailed corruption by developing and distributing meal deduction privilege revocation lists to café owners.<sup>53</sup> Cooperative café owners refused to issue meal deduction tickets to anyone who abused meal deduction privileges until instructed to do otherwise. A considerable number of colored brakemen lost their ability to use meal deduction privileges over the years due to their inappropriate use of meal deductions.<sup>54</sup> It may be inferred that these men neither cared nor concerned themselves with the possibility of jeopardizing the economic incentive the CTA used to challenge segregated public accommodations on behalf of all the colored railroad workers employed by MPL.<sup>55</sup> However, the financial and social implications of their misconduct proved to be quite costly. Having to repay MPL for their losses only compounded the financial hardship created by the loss of meal deduction

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<sup>53</sup> “We will not accept deductions for meal books signed by the following brakemen: Moses Brooks, John Clark, Louis Counts, John Cohen, Fred Glover, Anthony Givens, O.D. Green, W.C. Kennedy, W.A. Killebrew, Bennie Lott, Fred Phillips, Tillman Roach, Morris Stafford, Robert Simmons, Lonnie Thornton, Jim Thornton...Do not permit them to sign deduction orders without authority from this office.” MPL Superintendent’s Office to Grider’s Café- Odem et al., June 24, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>54</sup> “You will be furnished with additional lists from time to time of employees not permitted to sign deduction orders, and these instructions must be complied with.” G.C. Kennedy to Café Owner in Houston, Texas, Feb. 9, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>55</sup> “It has been our experience that the more meal deduction privileges we extend to various points the more they are abused by the brakemen.” G.C. Kennedy to CTA W.H. Jefferson, Sept. 27, 1939, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America.

privileges.<sup>56</sup> Eventually, MPL recovered its losses, but rarely did self-serving colored brakemen regain the respect of their decent hard working colleagues. In an era when integrity may have been a man's only possession, accusations of fraud and corruption were a very serious matter that could have easily undone the incremental progress the CTA made on the job in public spaces they frequented.

The CTA's ability to successfully mitigate the effects of segregated public accommodations depended heavily on the issuance of the deduction privileges. Corrupt café owners and colored railroad workers risked having privileges revoked by using them fraudulently. This also meant risking the loss of company backing and economic power that the Colored Trainmen of America used to select satisfactory travel accommodations. Fortunately for the trainmen, it was in the best interest of the MPL not to discontinue issuing meal and board deduction privileges. The superintendent continued to issue them to colored trainmen but not without attempting to eradicate fraudulent usage of meal deduction privileges wherever possible. So long as MPL issued them, the CTA remained relatively successful at using these privileges to challenge racial segregation in restaurants and lodging establishments. Wherever this became

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<sup>56</sup> "I will be agreeable to let you draw about 40% of your earnings provided you do not sign any more deductions until you have paid up all deductions against you that are now on file in my office." A.F. Judd to W.C. Kennedy, Oct. 1950, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America.

improbable, reverting back to the familiar, inviting hospitality of the African American community was always an option and also a welcomed source of black economic empowerment for struggling small businesses owned by African Americans.

The Colored Trainmen also charged themselves with using their station in life to enrich their communities. Not only did these hard-working, civic-minded men recognize a need to challenge Jim Crow accommodations, but they also understood the importance of creating and sustaining black businesses. Aside from using the meal and board tickets to challenge segregated public travel accommodations, the Colored Trainmen of America also used their meal tickets to support black restaurants and boarding establishments. Sometimes, when these men collectively chose white over black establishments, it was politically motivated much in the way subsequent African Americans who resisted segregation targeted white-owned establishments for public boycotts and sit-ins. In some instances, some of the more enterprising black railroad workers opted to develop a network of African American owned cafés and boarding houses across the Gulf Coast region.

The CTA General Chairman frequently requested meal deduction privileges for African American businesses.<sup>57</sup> For instance, African American

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<sup>57</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (Washington, D.C., 1930). See *World War II Army Enlistment Records*; Records of the National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 64; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

entrepreneurs endorsed by the CTA General Chairmen included Bessie M. Fields, Abe “Spencer” Schannon, Jr., and Mabel Kennedy. Class considerations may have also motivated the Colored Trainmen’s choices. Historian Michael Honey suggests “the disruption of the economic system caused by the Great Depression seemed to invite a new period of lower class alliances across racial boundaries.”<sup>58</sup> Traveling across the countryside reinforced the notion that poverty and suffering were both colorblind. Regardless of race, impassioned pleas from struggling merchants obviously weighed heavily on the conscience of the General Chairmen.<sup>59</sup> A series of correspondence advocating meal deduction privileges for Norville Adams’s restaurant reflects the humanity of the CTA.<sup>60</sup> In this case, CTA members repeatedly made attempts to see to it that those meal deduction privileges remained within the families of those who initially contracted with Missouri Pacific Railroad regardless of color.<sup>61</sup> Every so often the demand

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<sup>58</sup> *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> “I wrote you sometime ago concerning the meal tickets for the Brakemen...I feel like it would be safe if you all would desire to give me meal tickets...I would like to know at one...I am hoping to hear from you son so I would know what to do.” Sallie Pettis to William Jefferson, Oct. 1, 1940. Box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>60</sup> CTA leadership to MPL management, May 13, 1940, July 31, 1943, October 25, 1943, and October 28, 1943, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>61</sup> “We are asking you to please give Novell Adams the meal deduction privilege as Lucy Domangeanx is going out business and she want her sister inlaw to take over the café.” CTA Chairman to MPL Superintendent, April 7, 1940, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



for reputable cafés and boarding facilities inspired CTA members to create their own establishments for African American railroad workers. It is not surprising that CTA General Chairman Jefferson and the CTA members strongly endorsed this option believing that everyone involved benefited immensely from this arrangement.<sup>62</sup>

The CTA successfully used meal deduction privileges to negotiate the segregated public accommodations. Although this effort required group cooperation from the CTA members traveling along the railways, the CTA General Chairman and the MPL Superintendent are largely responsible for using the power of deduction privileges to influence the selection and provision of board and dining services. The chairman routinely submitted requests for establishments that held themselves out to be genuinely hospitable towards African Americans. The MPL Superintendent often honored the CTA selections but occasionally rejected or revoked them due to improprieties. In certain instances, there were no white cafés to challenge. This was usually an opportunity for the CTA members to receive their meals and lodging from African American entrepreneurs wherever they were found.

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<sup>62</sup> This is to advise you that the Colored Trainmen employed on the Gulf Coast Lines, respectfully request that Brakemen C.H. Smith allowed meal book deduction so he may be able to feed the men at Raymondville. Brakemen Smith have went to an expence to fix a place for men working Raymondville so they would have some place to eat and sleep, and he realize what the ruling is of the Company and hope you will send some one down to impact his place." CTA General Chairman to the MPL Superintendent, Feb. 12, 1947, box 2, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Many prosperous black cafes and boarding houses were created to accommodate African American travelers. Some were created for and by African American railroad workers and their families. Collectively, CTA members used their economic purchasing power to sustain humble, ingratiating establishments –black or white – prior to the 1960s. If humanity was not the common denominator and motivation for human decency, poverty was something that resonated with everyone. African American railway workers did their part to help more than a few small businessmen profit in exchange for first class treatment during their travels. For practical white owned establishments, abandoning antiquated social constructs was a small price to pay. For African American owned establishments, it was business as usual.

Prior to the creation of The Colored Trainmen of America, rarely did African American railway workers benefit from white transportation Brotherhoods. Consequently, the CTA was created to represent the labor interests of African American railway workers. Although, the CTA successfully obtained some employment benefits from the efforts of white labor arbitration agreements, their creative use of meal deduction privileges to negotiate segregated public accommodations along the railways is uniquely their own group initiative. Both rural and urban cafés and boarding establishments recognized the value of having a steady, substantial amount of income. The CTA used the leverage created by the meal deduction privileges to upgrade their

traveling accommodations from second class, to those typically reserved for whites. Periodically, the process of selection was subject to scandal.

Improprieties threatened to undermine this strategy. However, CTA and MPL leadership consistently worked together to resolve irregularities rather than abandoned such a practical arrangement.

The written correspondence that reflects years of meal deduction privilege agreements between the CTA, MPL and public accommodation providers make it clear that the colored trainmen were socially conscious men concerned with both employment and civil rights issues. They used their station in life to challenge social mores and to uplift struggling small businessmen who willingly recognized their humanity by providing CTA members with quality services regardless of the color of their customers. Subsequent civil rights protests utilized more explicit forms of economic boycotts and protests. None are attributable to the CTA strategies mainly because their efforts have not been closely examined from this perspective until now.

## CHAPTER IV

### LITIGATING RACIAL INJUSTICE

“Some day history may record this long struggle as part of the second emancipation. No matter how dark the way, you have got to hold on, and double and redouble your efforts...we are right and on the right side and some day if we persevere we will win.”<sup>1</sup>

Charles H. Houston

In addition to utilizing economic purchasing power to challenge segregated public accommodations along the railways, the Colored Trainmen of America also employed legal services to battle discrimination within the railroad industry. Despite experiencing limited success in the courts, CTA legal activities are both admirable and worthy of scholarly consideration. This chapter explains how the Colored Trainmen of America used the legal system to challenge racially motivated employment discrimination within both their immediate sphere of operations and industry wide.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s creation of the Federal Council of Negro Affairs ushered in a new era in American race relations during the 1930s. This council consisted of 45 civic-minded members of the black elite. One newspaper columnist recounts how African Americans “had more power [and representation in national government] than they'd ever had [in American

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hamilton Houston Papers, 1895-1950, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. Howard University, box 163, Washington, D.C. The Colored Trainmen of America Papers, Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, box 18, Houston, Texas.

history].”<sup>2</sup> Among the prominent African American federal government appointees from this era were William Henry Hastie, Department of Interior, Robert C. Weaver, Federal Housing Authority, Mary McLeod Bethune, National Youth Administration, Congressman Arthur Mitchell, Dr. Ambrose Caliver, Department of the Interior, Dr. Roscoe C. Brown, Public Health Service, Lawrence A. Oxley, Department of Labor, Dr. William J. Thompkins, Recorder of Deeds, Ralph E. Mizelle, U.S. Postal Service, Joseph R. Houchins, Department of Commerce, and Eugene Kinckle Jones, Department of Commerce. Collectively, they demonstrated competency, developed relationships and effectively executed a civil rights agenda with considerable acumen, given all the barriers they had to transcend during this time period.

Historians attribute favorable civil rights measures from this time period to unprecedented access to the federal government during a time when America emerged as the protector of liberty and democracy around the world.<sup>3</sup> Such a forgone conclusion grossly overlooks the determination and political savvy these

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas C. Fleming, “The Black Cabinet,” *The Columbus Free Press*, last accessed 10-21-2010, <http://www.freepress.org/fleming/flemng83.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York, 1978).

individuals possessed.<sup>4</sup> By the 1940s, talented members of the “Black Cabinet,” along with their successors, parlayed newly gained political capital to make great gains in the struggle for racial equality. The nation’s leadership could ill afford dissension among the rank and file as America assumed its preeminent international role as the leader of the free world. Even if politically motivated, glaringly obvious institutional forms of racial oppression and xenophobia had to be minimized. The United States government hoped to avoid the appearance of being hypocritical on issues of race and ethnicity, while fighting to promote and protect democracy around the globe.

Likewise, a rise in American intellectual liberalism permeated each branch of government at the highest levels during the war years. Dating back to 1930s, New Deal liberalism, a new breed of highly influential individuals in executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, periodically served as liaisons

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<sup>4</sup> “We [African Americans] have been patient... Three generations have passed since the Civil War. It is time that America began to look forward. If America in seventy-five years cannot achieve some measure of democracy at home in time of national peril, its leadership cannot inspire much trust or respect abroad.” Charles H. Houston to Franklin D. Roosevelt, box 163-13, June 10, 1940, Charles Hamilton Houston Papers, 1895-1950, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

and advocates for high-profile African American civil rights activists of this era.<sup>5</sup> Rather than attribute the progress made in American race relations solely to one force over the other, a more practical interpretation recognizes that a politically expedient spirit of cooperation between black and white liberals advanced the causes of African Americans significantly during this era.

It was only fitting for some of the nation's most well prepared African American legal scholars to take full advantage of the opportunities availed to them in a political climate ripe with possibilities for social justice. Men like Charles Houston and his protégés William H. Hastie and Joseph C. Waddy looked for creative opportunities to invoke the supreme law of the land to secure freedom and justice for all. Seizing the day, prominent civil rights attorney Charles Houston and his team of well-trained "social engineers" made excellent use of federal policies and court compositions to challenge racial discrimination on all fronts, including labor and employment practices. Houston's extraordinary talent, energy and firm commitment to eradicating legalized racial inequality made him a legend in his own time. For socially conscious members of the CTA,

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<sup>5</sup> "My dear Charlie, I hope you have not been too busy to keep in close touch with the developments in the CCC, etc...there will be a need for an additional 3000 reserve officers to command the 600,000 CCC enrollees. 9000 to 10,000 reserve officers will be needed. There will be some force or power to get active duty colored reserve officers. I have put this matter before, The Congressman, Walter White, Tuskegee, Howard University EK [Eugene Kinckle] Jones and [Robert C.] Weaver...PRESSURE may do it at this time.....Otherwise, we may have to wait for 15 to 20 years to get another shot at it. I have written Senator LaFollette on these matters and I believe you may get his support." Arthur P. Hayes to Charles H. Houston, box 163-9, April 25, 1935, Charles Hamilton Houston Papers, 1895-1950.

news of Houston's civil rights activities traveled as fast as the railroad engines that carried the news-bearing colored trainmen and porters from coast to coast.

Houston was the equivalent of David fighting the firmly entrenched institution of racism as powerful and intimidating as Goliath. Surely, his spirit, courage, faith and determination resonated with the Colored Trainmen of America. Therefore, it is not surprising that the CTA reached out to him to retain his services. A passionate, principled man of similar ideals, it is also not the least bit surprising that Houston accepted the challenge of facing discrimination in yet another arena. Why wouldn't he? By all accounts, Houston was a natural born fighter with a sense of purpose and direction instilled in him from some of the best and brightest – African American and Caucasian.

Houston's rise to prominence is predicated on a legacy of activism that dates back to the days his ancestors chose to free themselves in the face of danger and hardship. Although he endured considerable isolation while studying at Amherst College, his professional life as a well-respected professor at the historically black Howard University in Washington, DC, insulated him from racial discrimination in the workplace. Making a choice to study among the sophisticated WASP elite of New England proved markedly different from committing to active duty military service under racist white superiors for a term of two years in the "white man's army."

Historian Genna Rae McNeil suggests that Houston's service as a U.S.



Army lieutenant in Europe during the Great War served as a rude awakening to American race relations. Nothing could have prepared him for what he both experienced and observed overseas. According to McNeil, “as a second lieutenant overseas, Charles Houston encountered racism, more virulent than he had ever known before...practiced by...white enlisted men, and his fellow officers. Because of his race...Charles...personally suffered daily arbitrary indignities and exposure to mortal danger. Talent, ability, and character were of little significance; race set men apart from one another.”<sup>6</sup> In all likelihood, having been subjected to blatant institutionalized racism while employed by the U.S. Army, Charles Hamilton Houston readily identified with the degradation the CTA experienced within the railroad industry.

Charles Houston wore many hats. Most notably, Houston served as Special Counsel for the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund from 1935 to 1940. By 1945, Houston also served intermittently as an invaluable member of the President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practices during the presidencies of

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<sup>6</sup> Genna Rae McNeil. *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia, 1983), 42.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman from 1945.<sup>7</sup> Despite all of his public responsibilities, he managed to maintain a productive law practice in partnership with his father William L. Houston, longtime comrade William H. Hastie, who handled the bulk of the cases along with three gifted associates, and support staff members James G. Brawley, Joseph C. Waddy and Margaret A. Haywood.

Soon Houston's cases associated with his firm's private practice became nearly indistinguishable from those he pursued on behalf of the public's best interests. Houston remained committed to practicing public interest law because he believed "the only way I can be a safe free citizen is to make sure that every black man has his rights."<sup>8</sup> Houston and his small group of elite black lawyers actually carved a niche for themselves as the earliest civil rights attorneys. Even in the private sector they earned a living for themselves by passionately defending and representing the rights of those who suffered from the far reaching effects of legalized, institutional racism. According to McNeil's work, Houston, admittedly not "a labor law expert... would try to fight for the operative

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<sup>7</sup> "My dear Mr. President: The issue of the Capital Transit case far transcends the question whether a few Negro workers shall be placed on the platforms of street cars and buses...It raises the fundamental question of the basic government attitude toward minorities. The failure of the Government to enforce democratic principles and to protect minorities in its own capital makes its expressed concern for national minorities abroad somewhat suspicious, and its interference in the domestic affairs of other countries very premature." Charles H. Houston to Harry S. Truman, box 163-17, Dec. 3, 1945, Charles Hamilton Houston Papers, 1895-1950.

<sup>8</sup> Charles H. Houston to CTA General Chairman Amos Hayes, May 8, 1943, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

[railroad] workers...and...called on a new member of the firm, Joseph C. Waddy, to assist with the legal fight to protect the rights of Negroes in the railway industry...from 1939...Houston primarily focused his attention on black workers and racism in the area of railway labor.”<sup>9</sup>

As Houston researched both the railroad labor law and discriminatory practices impacting African American railway workers, he discovered that throughout the railroad industry blacks “suffered serious discrimination not only by employers but also by railway labor organizations, and the provisions and administration of the Railway Labor Act. The partisan National Railway Adjustment Board often...in cases involving disputes between black workers and the “Big Four” brotherhoods had become a labor court enforcing inequitable decisions.”<sup>10</sup>

During the early years, Houston and Waddy developed a railroad labor dispute litigation program for the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen. Other organizations such as the International Association of Railway Employees and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Locomotive Firemen followed suit shortly afterward. By 1943, the team of Houston and Waddy already litigated three International Association of Railway Employees (IARE) labor disputes from previous years. According to their

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<sup>9</sup> McNeil, *Groundwork*, 156-158.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 158

annotated report concerning the status of pending litigation, they filed suit in the in the following cases.<sup>11</sup>

In *Steele v. L & NR. Co., Circ. Ct., Jefferson County, AL Equity No. 52279*, this case was tried on its merits, and awaiting decision of the Chancellor. The objective of this case was to enjoin enforcement of S.E. Carrier's Agreement, and the Agreement of May 12, 1941. This case is highly significant because it also sought to determine whether a white labor organization serving exclusively as a collective bargaining agent of a craft or class of railway employees is obligated to represent railway employees of all races without discrimination.<sup>12</sup> In *Rolex v. Atlantic Coast Line R. Co., U.S. Dist. Ct., E.D.VA., Civil No. 670*, the attorneys filed both a complaint and answer. They were awaiting trial on the merits in hopes of enjoining enforcement of an S.E. Carrier's Agreement and the Agreement of June 1941. In *Hinton v. Seaboard Air Line R. Co., U.S. Dist. Ct., E.D.Va., Civil No. 674*, they filed for an injunction pendente lite against Seaboard protecting the right of Negro firemen to make diesel runs and to qualify on diesels. The attorneys also filed an answer in this case. This case was also awaiting trial to enjoin enforcement of the S.E. Carrier's Agreement of May 15, 1942.

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<sup>11</sup> Houston and Waddy to CTA et al., Sept. 18, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>12</sup> 323 U.S. 192 - *Steele v. Louisville & NR Co.*

Within four years of handling these disputes, Houston and Waddy's reputation started spreading among African American railroad labor organizers. The Colored Trainmen of America reached out to Houston for similar assistance with the challenges they encountered with the lines they operated within their own region. In a letter addressed to Charles H. Houston, Attorney at Law, dated December 14, 1943, Colored Trainmen of America Grand President Jordan J. Jefferson wrote "I understand you handled the wedge [sic] dispute between the L.A.A. Railroad Co. and the Colored Brakemen and they ruled for the Brakemen. I am seeking information. What would your fee be to handle a wedge [sic] dispute with the Labor Board for the Colored Trainmen of America that are employed by the Missouri Pacific R.R. Co...if you can't handle the expected case will you advise me who I can employ to handle the case for the Colored Trainmen of America?"<sup>13</sup>

Initially, Waddy, now the seasoned National General Chairman of the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen, responded to Jefferson's inquiry concerning services and fees. His response dated December 21, 1943, indicated that he personally resolved the dispute between the colored firemen and brakemen and the Louisiana & Arkansas Railroad. Without reservation Houston's trusted protégée responded with all the makings

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<sup>13</sup> " Jordan J. Jefferson to Attorney Charles H. Houston, Dec. 16, 1943, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

of a first-rate lawyer.

Subsequently, Waddy inquired for more specifics concerning the case. His response included questions concerning the CTA, their employer, and the other labor union organizations. Eventually, he concluded his reply by suggesting “the best way to get everything straightened out and understood would be for me to come to Kingsville and get the information first hand. I am willing to make this trip for \$25.00 per day and expenses. If you do not want to do this then some member who knows all of the facts should arrange to come here and go over the matter with me.”<sup>14</sup>

The records reflect that over a year passed before the CTA responded to Waddy’s requests. Part of the delay may be explained by Houston’s concerns regarding a conflict of interest. Prior to committing his firm to CTA representation, Houston established he could “do so only where such work does not conflict with the work I have already undertaken for the other two organizations. Therefore...I would first have to get the consent of Mr. Lewis of the International because the International operates in the same territory as the Colored Trainmen of America.”<sup>15</sup> It is likely that the CTA attempted to exhaust every conceivable measure before hiring legal services in the interim.

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph C. Waddy to Jordan J. Jefferson, Dec. 21, 1943, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Charles H. Houston to CTA Amos Hayes, May 8, 1943, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Amos F. Hayes, the General Chairmen of CTA, agreed to forward the contract and provide more details concerning the case for Waddy's consideration. In his reply to Waddy he informed him "we are sending you all the information that you have asked for including the Contract we have with the Company, and our present rates...according to the President's award."<sup>16</sup> He reported 800 men being members of the CTA. He complained of railroad officials' unwillingness to grant them overtime. Consequently, the CTA hoped Houston and Waddy would be able to resolve this through the mediation board. Hayes closed his letter enthusiastically by requesting that Waddy provide recommendations concerning what could "be done so that we may begin this fight at once. We are informed of the fine work you did for the men in Louisiana and Arkansas Rail Road and we are very pleased with that type of service."<sup>17</sup>

In an interesting twist of fate, Uncle Sam called upon Houston's comrade at arms for social justice to fight in World War II. As Waddy trained in the sweltering heat and humidity at Camp McCain, Mississippi, Houston agreed to look CTA "papers and make recommendations to you in Mr. Waddy's absence."<sup>18</sup> In a legal memorandum, Houston and Waddy assessed the CTA's

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<sup>16</sup> Amos F. Hayes to Joseph C. Waddy, March 1, 1944, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Houston to Amos Hayes, March 13, 1944, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

challenges and pondered the appropriate strategies for resolving foreseeable labor disputes. Fundamentally, they concluded much of the CTA disputes stem from the fact that the “the Negro brakemen and yardmen are in the majority on...the Gulf Coast Lines and the white brakemen are in the minority. The Colored Trainmen of America hold a contract, effective January, 1, 1929...The BRT also hold an agreement dated August 15, 1920, with the NOT&M covering white yardmen...The Brotherhood takes the position that the railroad keep and hire white men available at all times to cover all the jobs that were originally covered under the agreements.”<sup>19</sup> Houston and Waddy concluded “after studying this matter, and conferences with the committee, Secretary Cole of the National Mediation Board, and with the Interstate Commerce Commission, we are of the opinion that there are at least three approaches” to fighting for racial inequality on behalf of the CTA and other African American railroad workers employed by the Gulf Coast Lines.<sup>20</sup> According to the memorandum these brilliant legal tacticians drafted, they could consider utilizing three approaches to resolve CTA labor disputes.<sup>21</sup> One, they could hold an election and have the Colored Trainmen of America take over the entire crafts of road brakemen and yardmen. Two, they could bring an action in the courts for a declaratory

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<sup>19</sup> Houston and Waddy, memo, February 28, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



judgment to determine the relative rights, duties and legal relationships of the Colored Trainmen of America and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen growing out of the existence of the several contracts. Three, they could recognize that the problems of the colored brakemen and yardmen of the Gulf Coast Lines, and the methods of meeting them are similar in kind to those of other Negro railway employees in the train and engine service; and that before the organization can make a successful attack it must consolidate its position and inaugurate an overall process designed to protect the Negroes now in service, and open up new avenues of employment for other Negroes in the Railroad industry.

The first approach was not entirely plausible during the time Houston and Waddy drafted their memorandum because the Colored Trainmen of America lacked the membership numbers and monetary resources to prevail in representation elections. The second approach made more sense because it eliminated confusion and clarified contractual terms for black railroad workers. The third approach received the strongest endorsement from Houston and Waddy. In anticipation of the staggering expenses associated with organizing and challenging racial inequality in the railroad industry in the courts, both men called for the recognition of commonalities and the pooling of their resources to fight collectively. The memorandum instructed the Colored Trainmen of America to “begin at once on a program of consolidating the ranks of all the colored

brakemen and yardmen and begin to build up a treasury that can be used to put over the suggested program.”<sup>22</sup> To some extent, the record suggests that the CTA considered all three approaches over a considerable number of years associated with the existence of the organization. Most often, political expediency, costs, and sound legal advice from Houston and Waddy consistently determined how the CTA met their challenges.

Although exclusive representation rights were unobtainable for the CTA until their numbers and finances increased, and the creation of a program that inspired collective action among black railroad workers required more group cooperation from various factions, litigation proved unavoidable for the members of the CTA in the days ahead. Inevitably, the CTA filed suit for an injunction using the legal services of Charles H. Houston and Joseph C. Waddy. In anticipation of dissent among the CTA members, Jefferson reminded the men of the need for solidarity. His membership memo made certain the members understood that “with all Officers and Members of C.T. of A. that whenever either division or district has to go into a lawsuit, federal courts & employ lawyers, the entire staff of the C.T. of A. is all concerned as a unit.”<sup>23</sup> Declaring a “state of emergency, “CTA President Jordan J. Jefferson also disseminated another

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jordan J. Jefferson, memo, July 16, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

notice informing the colored trainmen of the details concerning the cause of action that “forced the Colored Trainmen of America...to employ Mr. Charles H. Houston and Mr. Joseph C. Waddy for General Representation and Policy Guidance on their problems in a Legal Manner.”<sup>24</sup> Houston, Texas, Attorney, F.S.K. Whittaker filed the CTA motion for an injunction in the San Antonio, U.S. District Court to stop the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen from receiving an award from the Adjustment Board for their claims against the colored brakemen for mileage on the Gulf Coast Lines.<sup>25</sup> The CTA also filed another suit against the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen for a representation dispute at the same time.<sup>26</sup> CTA leadership made certain two sizable installments on July 29 and August 11 to cover the costs in a timely manner. Perhaps, Houston and Waddy would see to it that justice came just as swiftly.

Securing this caliber of legal representation to fight on behalf of the Colored Trainmen of America was no small affair. Both Houston’s and Waddy’s involvement in the CTA affairs symbolized a sense of purpose and direction the organization worked diligently to maintain. The CTA possessed the organizational commitment from its members and financial resources to retain

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<sup>24</sup> Jordan J. Jefferson, memo, Aug. 2, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Waddy to J.J. Jefferson and Amos F. Hayes, July 31, 1947, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

some of the best legal services available. The membership across the Gulf Coast region paid their dues faithfully. Likewise, the caseload of these two legal scholars primarily addressed legal issues with broad, far reaching implications. The members of the CTA understood the significance of this business relationship.

Shortly after the retainer fee payment, Houston notified the CTA “I have to come to Texas next week....I am going first to Houston to confer with Whittaker, from there to San Antonio to check the court situation and pick up as much information as I can concerning the court and its procedure, and third, I should like to meet with the men at Kingsville or some central point along the line. It might be possible to have a couple of meetings which would give me an opportunity to explain to the men what we are doing.”<sup>27</sup> This visit served as the perfect opportunity to consummate this historic partnership in the fight for social justice. The Colored Trainmen of America were known throughout the Kingsville, Texas, African American community for their social gatherings largely planned and executed by the women’s auxiliary.

Not more than three days later Ms. Bessie Holliman, President of the CTA Ladies Auxiliary, received a letter from Jefferson requesting she and the other female members “please...be on hand for the purpose of rendering a [reception]

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Houston to Jordan Jefferson, Aug. 20, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

program of your own style” to celebrate this monumental event during Houston’s visit.<sup>28</sup> According to the minutes from the event, “on his arrival he was honored with a dinner served by the Ladies Auxiliary...the hostesses for the wonderful dinner were Mrs. Summons, Mrs. Bavon, Mrs. Smith, Ms. Syles and Mrs. Jefferson. The Interior Decoration displayed at the dinner was superb...After dinner was served, Lawer [sic] C.H. Houston, along with 14 C.T. of A. members assembled at the Kings Star Baptist Church, where a large audience waited for Houston speak.”<sup>29</sup>

Houston expressed his appreciation for the welcome he received from the people of Kingsville. He reminded them of the business at hand by making a poignant speech concerning his newly formed business relationship with the CTA. Houston’s remarks expressed both optimism and called for group cooperation between Houston and them all. Houston impressed upon attendees that, “this is my fight as well as yours...As far as the railroad is concerned I do not think there is any possible fight that the C.T. of A. cannot win...The Negro railroad man is the most favorable industrial man that we have and we will win this case...the white man wants his job. I cannot win this fight alone, but I can

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<sup>28</sup> Jefferson Jordan to Bessie Holliman, Aug. 23, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Colored Trainmen of America Meeting Minutes Transcription entitled “The Colored Trainmen of America Presents Charles H. Houston,” Aug. 29, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

plead your case.”<sup>30</sup>

Once Houston impressed upon the audience his sense of optimism and purpose, he moved on to discuss the specifics of the struggle to overcome racial inequality in the railroad industry. Houston continued his impassioned remarks by pointing out the wage discrepancies, race-based labor assignments, discriminatory promotion practices and labor assignments. According to Houston, “a white man that starts out, he starts low for a while, but a white man gets a promotion, but the Negro does not get a promotion, because they say that a Negro should not have it...They consider that the Negro cannot stand a promotion or an examination.”<sup>31</sup> Houston’s remarks summed up the spirit of the CTA. They also characterized their challenges and those likely encountered by African American railroad workers around the country. His comments also foreshadowed the dogged determination he displayed in all his professional endeavors involving the Colored Trainmen of America. True to his word, he’d “always...put up a good fight” regardless of the odds.<sup>32</sup>

In some respects, the CTA received much more than they bargained for in terms of services rendered by Houston and Co. In addition to the two cases above, both Houston and Waddy simultaneously cast their nets far and wide for

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<sup>30</sup> Speech transcription entitled “High Points of Speech Given by Lawyer C.H. Houston,” Aug. 29, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

opportunities to challenge racial injustice within the railroad industry. The dutiful attorneys-at-law attempted to cover all the bases before entering a courtroom to resolve conflicts at considerable cost, while the CTA prudently pursued conflict resolution strategies through the National Mediation Board.<sup>33</sup>

First, Houston and Waddy instilled in their clients the importance of knowing company policies, labor laws, key railroad industry practices, and collective bargaining practices. Houston provided the CTA and other black labor organization clients with extra copies of Title 45, United States Code, Annotated because it covered “the subject of railroads, including the Railway Labor Act. This volume not only gives you the text of the Railway Labor Act but also all the court cases interpreting the act...If the Grand Officers wish any more copies [be sent] also please advise ...It is our recommendation that a copy of this volume should be ordered by the grand officers to be kept at each local’s headquarters. We believe that our organizations will grow and the men will develop more loyalty as they become more thoroughly acquainted with and intelligent on the law which governs the conditions of their employment.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “We acknowledge receipt of copy of your letter of July 31, 1947...in reply thereto, you are advised that it is our desire to secure representation rights for all of the employees of the Gulf Coast Lines (Missouri Pacific Lines in Texas and Louisiana...), in respective crafts and classes named in the application.” Jordan J. Jefferson to the National Mediation Board, Aug. 15, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Charles H. Houston to CTA Jordan J. Jefferson, memo, March 31, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Houston and Waddy also attempted to build bridges between black labor organizations with similar interests. They achieved this by putting organizations in communication with one another and keeping them abreast of the latest issues and advancements in the struggle for racial equality in the railroad industry. These veteran civil rights attorneys represented more than one black labor union organization around the country. They also represented the International Association of Railway Employees (IARE), the Southern Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Firemen (SACRTF), and the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen (ACRT). Both lawyers recognized how frequently their cases raised similar legal questions and fought similar labor disputes. They also understood that the pursuit of racial justice within the railroad industry was a costly endeavor that might be more easily defrayed if the organizations approached their challenges jointly, whenever possible. Consequently, Houston used joint letters periodically to notify the Executive Officers of the Colored Trainmen of America, The Association of the Colored Railway Trainmen, and the International Association of Railway Employees of potential causes of action that led to mutual advancement.<sup>35</sup>

In one instance, Joseph P. Waddy wrote CTA executive officer Amos F. Hayes apprising him of a recent development concerning federally mandated

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<sup>35</sup> Charles H. Houston, memo, Nov. 5, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



industry-wide pay rate increases members of the CTA were eligible to receive. Within a few days of an announcement concerning pay raises for their white craftsmen counterparts, Waddy notified Hayes that “the BRT and the ORC have accepted wage increases in the amount of 15 1/2 cents per hour, effective November 1, 1947. We suggest that you immediately serve a thirty day notice on the Gulf Coast Lines requesting a thirty per cent increase in rates of pay. Of course, you will not get 30 per cent but by making such a request you will have leeway for bargaining so that you can settle for the same thing the BRT did. Your 30 day notice should be on the organization’s letterhead and should follow the attached form.”<sup>36</sup>

In keeping with Houston’s instructions, Hayes drafted the notice to the Chief Personnel Officer of the Gulf Coast Lines in Palestine, Texas, requesting “the Colored Trainmen of America, the authorized representative and collective bargaining agent under the Railway Labor Act, as amended, for colored road brakemen and yardmen on the Gulf Coast Lines, hereby gives you 30 days’ notice of the desire of those employees to amend their agreement covering rates of pay, rules, and working conditions in such a manner as will provide a thirty percent increase in the present rates of pay...Under Section 6 of the Railway Labor Act...we request...you fix a time and place for...conferences on this

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Waddy to Amos F. Hayes, Nov. 15, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

proposal.”<sup>37</sup> On December 11, 1947, the National Mediation Board responded to the CTA’s petition with a hearing notice for case no. 1929. Their written response scheduled the hearing date for January 12, 1948. The notice also provided a restatement of the issues and preliminary findings. The mediation board characterized this issue as a “protest against a violation of agreement dated April 4, 1935, governing rates of pay, rules and working conditions....on Gulf Coast Lines.”<sup>38</sup> In its preliminary findings concerning this issue, the National Mediation Board questioned whether the April 4, 1935 agreement entitled like classes of Gulf Coast Lines employees (yard foremen and helpers) providing the same services under the same working conditions to receive the same pay rates specified in item 2 of the agreement.<sup>39</sup>

During the spring of 1948, the National Mediation Board investigation discovered that, contractually, the Colored Trainmen of America did not actually have an actionable case. According to Jordan J. Jefferson’s May 1948 case summary, they learned from experience that this particular agreement, initially made the basis for the claim filed with the National Mediation Board, “was only good for certain purposes, and that is on Rates of pay and rules and workin [sic]

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<sup>37</sup> Amos F. Hayes to Gulf Coast Lines Chief Personnel Officer, Fall 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>38</sup> National Mediation Board to Colored Trainmen of America, Dec. 11, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

conditions, and no good for Craft of Class representation. Because we don't have a certified citify of Class Representation to comply our agreement for such representation, Mr. Charles H. Houston and Mr. Joseph C. Waddy, our Attorneys, have informed both Hayes and I That No agreement Was good without a Cetified Citific [sic] of Representation if any one Attacted it, and that cetified Citific Citific is no Good without an agreement...The B. of. R. T. have a yard agreement covering Engine foremen and Yard Helpers and aclompied By a Certified Cetific [sic] Of Representation Protecting Engine Formen and Yard Conductors With No exceptions this Certific Cover the entire Gulf Coast lines."<sup>40</sup>

Subsequently, this news prompted the CTA to withdraw their claim within a few months. Although not expressly stated in the NMB Secretary Robert F. Coles's case file closing notice, the CTA lacked the requisite standing to proceed with their claim.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, Jefferson's official claim withdrawal request to the NMB limited his rationale to "upon further consideration the Colored Trainmen of America have decided to withdraw, and hereby does withdraw its application for investigation of representation dispute among yardmen employed by the Gulf Coast Lines, filed herein July 29, 1947."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Jordan J. Jefferson, memo, May 16, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Robert F. Cole, memo, July 19, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Jordan J. Jefferson, memo, June 23, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Waddy's detailed case file closing letter to the CTA added context to the implications of proceeding. Waddy reminded the CTA how "pursuant to your request for a statement from us as to the reasons we advised you to withdraw the representation dispute...you are advised of the following...After the hearings before the board we spent a great deal of time studying the evidence that had been submitted to the board...Under present conditions there is no way that the BRT can take over representation of the colored brakemen from the CTA...If the National Mediation Board should rule against the CTA we would have given the BRT a weapon to harm us that it does not have at the present time...We could not have withdrawn the Board's decision...The main purpose of all of our activities is to keep the men their jobs and to keep the avenue of employment open for other Negroes. So far that has been accomplished."<sup>43</sup> In retrospect, it is puzzling how Houston and Waddy both overlooked this critical detail, given how competent and seasoned they were at civil procedure law. This legal issue, however, was more of a contractual and business law matter. Both men surely did as much as possible to learn as much about the intricacies of railroad and labor laws. The CTA officers also failed to catch this gross oversight. Like anything else, some lessons are learned on the job. Moreover, mistakes are unavoidable periodically. The lawyers and labor union members received

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph C. Waddy to Jordan J. Jefferson, July 18, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

practical on the job training through trial and error. Most importantly, they learned from their experiences and cultivated knowledge and expertise with each challenge.

Two months later, Waddy and Houston regrouped from the procedural setback, reassessed their strategy, and proceeded to move forward. First, they took inventory of all their overlapping African American railroad laborer disputes. In the interest of transparency, they shared their current case load information with the executive officers of the CTA (one case), IARE (seven cases), BSCP (3 cases), and the ACRT & LF (3 cases). Two subsequent joint letters to these black railroad labor organizations provided both reassurance and direction. Houston began by discussing both implications and the odds by indicating “the men must understand that the Brotherhood (BLT) is fighting a desperate delaying action because if we win all of the cases now pending we will have eliminated most of the advantage that the Brotherhood now gets from depriving Negro firemen of membership...The Brotherhood has...called in new lawyers for every new case. Our few hundred men are fighting an organization with over 100,000 members and millions in the treasury...we are not complaining but we want the men clearly to realize just what both they and we are up against...The men now have the best jobs that any Negro industrial workers have. If they are going to keep these jobs they have got to begin raising a great deal more money

for a defense fund.”<sup>44</sup>

Less than ten days later, Houston and Waddy’s follow-up correspondence described how employment opportunities for African American railway workers continued to deteriorate. Management continued to be both hostile and unresponsive towards African American railway workers. Some African American railway workers also experienced demotions through reclassification during this time. None of these conditions served as a major deterrent for Houston and Waddy. They called for new tactics, more funding, and continued group cooperation. Citing previous success, they drew upon previous experience with hardship by recalling how “before we won Steele and Tunstall, we lost Teague in the Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati; and we lost both Steele and Tunstall in every lower court until we reached the Supreme Court of the United States. Since that time the Brotherhoods have been studying how to turn the tables on us and beat us.”<sup>45</sup>

The CTA’s Allen Hampton case personified the Colored Trainmen of America’s protracted, costly battle for racial equality within the railroad industry perfectly. In the plaintiffs’ memorandum in support of a motion for injunction pendente lite of *Allen Hampton et al. v. Guy A. Thompson et al.* six African

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<sup>44</sup> Houston and Waddy to George Palmer, Sept. 18, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Houston and Joseph C. Waddy, Sept. 27, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

American passenger brakemen sued individually “and for all the brakemen as a class, to enjoin the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen...and Guy A. Thompson, trustee...of the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company and its subsidiaries (including the St. Louis, Brownsville, & Mexico Railway Company and the San Antonio, Uvalde & Gulf Railway Company) from enforcing an award of the First Division of the National Railroad Adjustment Board, dated June 2, 1947 (Docket No. 12584, Award No. 11566) which would result in the displacement of the plaintiffs and other brakemen.”<sup>46</sup> The CTA filed a motion to enjoin the BRT from making any claims or recognizing any claims under the void award.

Aside from indirectly addressing racial inequality in the *Allen* case, Houston and Waddy went further by expressly noting “the weighting of half the First Division with labor members from unions barring all Negroes [sic] in train, engine and yard service solely because of race produces such inequality as to violate the [1866] Civil Rights Act (U.S.C. see 41) [which reads in part] ‘All persons within the jurisdiction of the United States shall have the same right in every State and Territory to make and enforce contracts...and to the full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of persons and property as is enjoyed by white citizens’.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Houston and Waddy, memo, October 12, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

The legal memorandum detailing the labor union defendants Spangler Lodge No. 52, Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, Unincorporated, and Davy Crockett Lodge No. 369, Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, Unincorporated response provided more context by narrowing down the legalese to the crux of the matter. Citing the National Railroad Adjustment Board's finding that that the July 31, 1932 agreement was "verbal and fully recognized by the interested parties," attorneys Oliver and Peace argued that this legal issue mainly "involved a jurisdictional dispute...This question, in turn must hinge on the interpretation of the contract, customs, and usages which the Colored Trainmen of America have on the St. L.B.& M. railroad, as compared to the contract, customs and usage which the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen locals hold...For, as we have seen, in the absence of any contract, either railroad would have the right to employ anybody it saw fit, or any phase of its operations as it saw fit, and there would be no "seniority" or job property rights of which the Colored Trainmen of America and plaintiffs could be deprived."<sup>48</sup> The attorneys for the defense provided compelling case citations that spelled out pertinent precedents concerning contractual considerations and procedural rules for collective bargaining within the American railroad industry. Clearly, the absence of a written contract as evidence in this dispute, along with procedural issues, both served as

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<sup>48</sup> Defense attorney memo, Jan. 1, 1949, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



substantial setbacks.

On April 20, 1948, Judge Ben M. Rice, Jr. filed a ruling against the CTA, citing that his decision on the case be stayed until the plaintiffs' complaint could be both remanded and decided properly by the NRAB. The CTA chose not to revisit the complaint with the NRAB prompting the judge to rule against the CTA outright because his court was "without jurisdiction to hear and determine the cause of action alleged in the plaintiff's pleadings, and therefore, the relief prayed for by plaintiffs should be, in all things denied."<sup>49</sup> Ever the eternal optimist, Houston provided more uplifting words of encouragement. Houston wrote, "I am not particularly surprised... I am glad that he decided the case on the question of jurisdiction...for the comfort of the membership of the CTA, I would remind the men that the U.S. District Court first decided the *Tunstall case* against us on the question of jurisdiction. We are already planning our next move."<sup>50</sup> In preparation for an appeal, the team of Waddy and Houston shrewdly submitted proposed Findings, Conclusions and Order in order to "bring the case to a head without a long, expensive trial." Still, prosecuting this case required a great deal of effort and energy up to this point. However, the legal strategy did not lead to a major victory for the CTA after devoting precious resources to it.

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<sup>49</sup> Judge Ben M. Rice's legal decision, April 19, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Charles H. Houston to Jefferson J. Jordan, April 23, 1948, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Houston's November 18, 1948, appellant argument before the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals was no more successful. In his letter to a federal appellant lawyer Houston recounted his experience. It is particularly enlightening because it adds another dimension to the nature of the struggle that rarely receives the proper attention. Not only are the laborers fighting an uphill battle in the workplace, but so are their attorneys. Justice was certainly not color blind during this era. In Houston's letter he vividly recalled how he encountered considerable prejudice in the courtroom while representing the CTA. He described how the judges often ignored him but they were usually responsive to white opposing counselors. In some instances, he believed his position was often misinterpreted and misrepresented deliberately. Again, Houston did not lose confidence or his faith in the legal system. Instead, he chose to end his recollection optimistically by writing "the last work in this case has not been said. I am still after the First Division of the Adjustment Board...We were thrown out all the way up in Steele and Tunstall until we got to the Supreme Court of the United States. When you are a Negro lawyer fighting discrimination you get hardened to such things and they do not discourage."<sup>51</sup>

Sadly, the stress associated with Houston's professional commitment to topple Jim Crow finally took its toll on his health. During the fall of 1949,

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<sup>51</sup> Charles H. Houston to Leon M. Despres, Jan. 11, 1949, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Houston experienced heart problems that inevitably led to his death. An October 28, 1949, letter from Houston chronicled his prospects for recovery. Houston informed CTA President Jefferson J. Jordan "I am making progress slowly. This week the doctors have permitted me to listen to music on the radio. Next week they will permit me to read newspapers. I doubt they will let me sit up for another two weeks. I shall probably be in the hospital until the end of November and be home in bed for another month, but I want you to know I am still in the fight. This is just time out between rounds."<sup>52</sup> Jordan responded sympathetically to the news of Houston's deteriorating health by reading Houston's "letter today in the Hall and the entire membership join me [sic] in prayer for your speedy recovery. I asked one of the Brothers to see if he could find a nice Bushell of fruit for you and family which I think he will be able to do so."<sup>53</sup>

Charles Houston's father acknowledged Jefferson's letter by writing "we were very much touched by your expressions of sympathy and your report that you and the members joined in prayer for his speedy recovery. It was very kind, and a demonstration of fine friendship in you and others to remember him in that way. Let us hope that your prayers will be answered and that he will be restored

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<sup>52</sup> Henrietta Houston to Jordan Jefferson, Oct. 28, 1949, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Jefferson J. Jordan to Charles H. Houston, Nov. 6, 1949, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

to us in good health.”<sup>54</sup> Just six months later, however, Charles H. Houston suffered a major heart attack and died before he could witness the fruits of his own labor manifested in more landmark legal decisions that toppled Jim Crow.

Thus, in addition to utilizing economic purchasing power to challenge segregated public accommodations along the railways, the Colored Trainmen of America also employed legal services to battle discrimination within the railroad industry. Overall, the results of CTA collective bargaining claims and legal cases were not nearly as successful as those associated with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the International Association of Railroad Employees. Nonetheless, their struggles were not in vain. Charles H. Houston and Joseph C. Waddy’s involvement in CTA labor disputes raised the level of consciousness of black railroad workers and emboldened them to challenge both their employer and white labor unions based on their sound understanding of their rights, their contracts, and railroad labor industry legislation. Instead of viewing their success in terms of wins, losses, and successful settlements, it is much more practical to put them into context in terms of the incremental progress they made in a much broader civil rights struggle.

When viewed in these terms, it becomes apparent that every step towards racial advancement and equality is no less significant, regardless of whether the

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<sup>54</sup> William L. Houston to Jordan J. Jefferson. Nov. 10, 1949, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

act is some random form of protest or a highly orchestrated set of legal strategies implemented by some of the brightest African American legal scholars this country has ever known. For Hamilton, Waddy, Jefferson and the CTA it was simple. Half the battle was understanding one's rights and speaking up. Winning in the face of virulent racism was more a secondary consideration. Most often, these extraordinarily resilient individuals rejoiced at the opportunity to be heard and made the most of every opportunity. Periodically, justice was color-blind, and it was parceled out sparingly in most instances but this made these leaders more determined, focused, and committed to fight.

## CHAPTER V

### STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

“As the Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Association [NRLEC] announced: Our fathers and grandfathers pioneered the railway industry, and we intend to hold this employment and broaden its base until every vestige of segregation and discrimination, and every limitation on a man’s right to hold a job on the railroad based on race, creed, color or national origin is wiped out.”<sup>1</sup>

Charles H. Houston

In an effort to assist the Colored Trainmen of American in their fight against racial injustice along the railways, attorneys Charles Houston and Joseph Waddy implemented a plan that promoted unity among black railroad organizations and promoted the challenges they faced across the country. This chapter focuses on how these measures led to the formation of the Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Committee and the scope of this organization’s activities. According to Historian Eric Arnesen, “Houston did more than offer legal representation in the black independents; by the late 1940s, he actively sought to shape them into a more effective, coordinated movement.”<sup>2</sup> From 1948 to 1949, Houston and Waddy implemented a plan for collective action among the leading African American railroad worker labor organizations. This

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<sup>1</sup> Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Microfilm. Charles H. Houston, NAACP Annual Convention Speech, July 14, 1949, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Microfilm.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, 2001), 220.

two-pronged strategy consisted of forming a committee of black railroad labor leaders and publishing a newspaper devoted to informing black railroad laborers.

This chapter utilizes both Harlem's Schomburg Center archival material and CTA papers to trace the integral involvement of Houston, Waddy and the Colored Trainmen of America's in the creation and promotion of the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee.<sup>3</sup> It also examines the organization's agenda and how it actually impacted the CTA and other black railroad labor organizations' struggle for racial equality within the railroad industry. The formation of the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee, committee minutes, and the *Negro Railway Labor News* articles reflect another approach CTA leadership utilized to challenge racially motivated employment discrimination within both their immediate sphere of operations and industry wide.

Waddy and Houston believed that forming a committee comprised of black railroad labor leaders from different railroad companies and different labor organizations would both increase their understanding of the complex networks of railroad companies substantially and further facilitate familiarity among their

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<sup>3</sup> Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Microfilm. The Colored Trainmen of America Papers, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, boxes 18, 20, and 35, Houston, Texas.

clientele industry-wide. Likewise, the creation of a widely distributed publication would help clarify the universal concerns of black railroad workers and potentially minimize costly litigation strategies by facilitating information sharing concerning labor disputes and racial discrimination within the railroad industry.

Historian Theodore Kornwiebel recently reaffirmed the merit of this strategy when he recounted how, in one instance “seemingly up against Goliath, black trainmen organized a Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Committee and filed charges with the FEPC. In 4 days of hearings, 50 victims of discrimination – firemen, plus brakemen switchmen, train porters, dining car waiters, and car cleaners – testified to the multiple injustices they suffered.”<sup>4</sup> Once the hearings concluded, the FEPC instructed seven unions to end racial preferences. Twenty railroads received orders to honor seniority.

Dating back to February 28, 1947, Houston and Waddy started developing plans to unite black railroad workers and promote their issues. Together, they drafted a legal memorandum summarizing potential strategies for empowering the Colored Trainmen of America. It also recognized the value of uniting black railroad laborers to more effectively communicate issues and address challenges. From the beginning, the attorneys expressly called for “a recognition on the part of the colored brakemen of the Gulf Coast Lines that their

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<sup>4</sup> Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *Railroads in the African American Experience: A Photographic Journey* (Baltimore, 2010), 76.



problems and their methods of meeting them are similar in kind to those of other Negro railway employees in the train and engine service...and that before the organization can make a successful attack it must consolidate its position and inaugurate an overall program designed to protect the Negroes now in service.”<sup>5</sup>

These men understood that the struggles of each individual black railroad labor organization had far reaching implications that potentially impacted railroad workers across the nation. Cultivating a shared sense of unity, purpose and direction among them could only help to advance their causes collectively, especially those requiring costly litigation strategies. During that same year, Colored Trainmen General Chairman Amos F. Hayes wrote enthusiastically in support of Houston’s vision, “I am glad to know you are trying to sell the other Railroad Organization the ideal making this...one big fight for industrial democracy for all Negro through the United States of America...everybody...is striving to finance the cause to the end that we may win.”<sup>6</sup> Hayes’s reply is typical of how CTA leadership frequently responded to initiatives by Houston and Waddy. The client-attorney relationship persisted based upon mutual respect and admiration.

Both Waddy and Houston believed that the overall success of black

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<sup>5</sup> Houston and Waddy to the CTA, memo, Feb. 28, 1947, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Amos F. Hayes to Attorney Charles H. Houston, Oct. 10, 1947, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

railroad laborers depended on their ability to develop the same bonds between black labor organizations. Each of them fostered this collegial spirit among the various black railroad labor organizations by systematically forwarding them joint correspondence concerning relevant reading material, court decisions, new legislation, labor disputes, and legal strategies to ensure everyone remained on the same page. Often times, this sparked inter-organization dialogue and cooperation between organizations. Before the formal creation of Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee, CTA members actively worked toward this end. During the month of November 1947, CTA Grand President Jordan J. Jefferson acted on this strategy by cordially thanking International Association of Railway Employees Grand President Arthur Lewis for "the splendid co-operation...given us in the way of assisting Mr. Waddy with our representation dispute...we look forward to a continuation of the same close relationship that we have had with you."<sup>7</sup>

On March 17, 1948, Waddy and Houston's vision finally became a reality. Waddy notified the executive members of the DCRFWU, IARE, the ACRT, the SACRTF, and the CTA that "at last...proposed Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee to meet on third day after...hearing on Motions in Palmer

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<sup>7</sup> Jordan A. Jefferson to Arthur Lewis, Nov. 14, 1947, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

case...heard March 23, 1948.”<sup>8</sup> This meeting marked a new era in the CTA’s struggles against racial inequality and discrimination in the workplace. CTA leadership figured prominently within the NRLEC and worked diligently to resolve labor disputes that broadly impacted African American laborers outside the Gulf Coast region. This meeting also marked another step in the long history of cooperation in the spirit of advancement among African Americans.

During this era, black laborers and professionals utilized their tenacity and talent to work together more closely for the benefit of the race. Not surprisingly, both Waddy and Houston were in attendance along with Archibald Bromsen, a New York labor attorney actively involved in black railroad labor disputes along the eastern seaboard and parts of the Midwest. During January, 1948, “the Federation of Southern Colored Locomotive Firemen unions...engaged... Bromsen...to represent the Federation in its fight to protect the jobs of Negro firemen.”<sup>9</sup> All told, ten representatives from five major African American railroad labor organizations participated in the historic gathering. The individuals present at the NRLEC initial meeting included Charles H. Houston, Archibald Bromsen, Joseph C. Waddy, S.H. Clark, J.F. Little, Jr., George P. Lawrence, Jordan Jefferson, Edward Jason, Wesley Friffin, Arthur Lewis, J.D. Marshall, Oscar

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph C. Waddy to NRLEC Executive Committee members, box 35, March 14, 1948, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Archibald Bromsen, memo, Jan. 30, 1948, microfilm, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954.

Green, and Daniel Benjamin. Altogether, they represented a broad-cross section of railroad employees from around the country. They also represented various railroad laborer occupations within the industry. Clearly, this was meant to be a working meeting.

The men obviously dispensed with the cordial formalities, rolled up their sleeves, and got down to business. During the six-hour session, the attendees mainly set out to establish the preliminaries – organization name, individual concerns, committee objectives, procedure and protocol, terms for participation. The minutes from the first few meetings provided detailed insight concerning the principal actors at the forefront of this initiative along with their efficiency at establishing policy and direction for the newly formed organization. Oddly, neither A. Philip Randolph nor the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is listed among the attendees. Dating back to October 28, 1947, A. Philip Randolph filed lawsuits on behalf of 21 “Negro firemen...members of his Provisional Committee to Organize Colored Locomotive Firemen of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.”<sup>10</sup> During this juncture of the movement, it was unclear whether the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters “pledge to wage a campaign for the hiring of Negro workers in skilled classifications” and “the lawyers engaged by Randolph...Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., former Deputy Housing Expeditor; Irving J.

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<sup>10</sup> “Fight of Southern Negro Skilled Railroad Workers against Lilly White RR Brotherhoods,” *Railroad Workers Link*, Nov. 1, 1947. 1.

Levy, former Solicitor of the Dept. of Labor, and Henry Epstein, former Solicitor-General of the State of New York” served as a source of controversy.

Randolph’s BSCP attorneys Rauh, Levy, Epstein were all liberal Jewish attorneys with considerable political influence within American politics and a proven commitment to social change.<sup>11</sup> The NRLEC later attributed the tension between A. Philip Randolph and the NRLEC membership to A. Philip Randolph’s propensity to misinform and divide black railroad workers in the operating trades. However, neither Randolph’s absence, nor his alleged negligence, and choice in labor attorneys, stopped the committee from developing an agenda and executing their plans to topple Jim Crow within the railroad industry for the benefit of all racially oppressed railroad workers.

A facsimile reprint of a transcription from the minutes taken during the first Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Committee meeting held in Washington, D.C. on March 6, 1948 contains a substantial amount of information concerning the humble beginnings of the NRLEC. This information reflects the earliest

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<sup>11</sup> “Young Joseph and his brother and sister grew up in a well-to-do Jewish household with a strong emphasis on education... In 1947 he became the senior partner in his newly established law firm, Rauh and Levy, and began a long career as a labor lawyer, numbering the United Auto Workers and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters among his clients. A lifetime member and longtime board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Rauh was also an effective behind-the-scenes lobbyist on behalf of national civil rights legislation and is credited with helping to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968,” in Ann T. Keene, "Rauh, Joseph L., Jr.," *American National Biography Online* (Feb. 2000), last accessed 2-11-2011, <http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-01307.html>.

gathering of devoted African American railway workers and black union administrators committed to creating the organization. It also reflects the development of universal policies and the nationwide dissemination of a reputable railway newspaper focusing on the issues and concerns of African American railway workers.<sup>12</sup>

The Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee reconvened on April 14, 1948 for their second meeting. "The big five" minus one (the BSCP) – the ACRT and LF, CTA, IARE, SACRT, and DC & RFW– were once again well represented. This time new participant rank-and-file railway employees George Palmer of Atlanta, GA, Nelson Wingfield of Charleston, SC, Eugene Carter of Manchester, GA, M.F. Wilkie of Ashville, NC, W. Ray of Atlanta, GA, H.R. Barnett of Knoxville, TN, J. Bass of Chattanooga, TN, Walter Cain of Columbia, SC, Lee Browning of Chattanooga, TN, Elmore Wilkins of Spencer, NC and Hugh Porter of Spencer, TN were also in attendance. As were attorneys Bromsen, Houston, and Waddy.<sup>13</sup> Trustee Bromsen rehashed the topics from the last discussion "by reviewing aims of this federation...particularly the need for cooperation and participation of all Negro Railway Labor Organizations."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Negro Railway Labor Executive Committee, memo, March 6, 1948, microfilm, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954.

<sup>13</sup> Negro Railway Labor Executive Committee. Minute's transcript. April 14, 1948, microfilm, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

With Arthur Lewis elected and presiding as the temporary Chairman of the executive committee, Joseph C. Waddy moved forward to the business at hand by asking whether “all presidents of the organizations present...and their organizations were in accord with the objectives set forth...all...unanimously agreed to the objectives.”<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, the conversation turned to legislative initiatives. Once again, Bromsen led the discussion by proposing an amendment to Railway Labor Act. Houston followed with the idea of forming a citizen’s committee and also formally vocalizing support for other minority groups in their fight against discrimination.

The Colored Trainmen of America Grand President Jordan A. Jefferson played a pivotal role from the onset. From the beginning, Jefferson made certain the CTA benefited from the formation of the NRLEC. During the second session Jefferson “moved...that in the near future a special edition of the paper be issued on the discussion held during Att’y Houston’s report.”<sup>16</sup> Benjamin’s contributions were limited to reports concerning the 40-hour week movement, the railroad pension conference and a proposal for strengthening the Railroad Retirement Act by securing benefits for railroad workers who retired from the industry after many years of sacrifice, dedication, and service along the railways.

Waddy went further by suggesting the NRLEC “adopt a resolution in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

support of a more liberal Displaced Persons Bill, and an amendment to the Immigration Law to extend admission and grant citizenship to all Asiatic peoples.”<sup>17</sup> Judging from the motions submitted by Houston and Waddy, the early civil rights attorneys were thinking very broadly about the relationship between labor, civil, and human rights. It is evident that they had reached the conclusion that no one is totally free from the vestiges of racial discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere until everyone is. Clearly, a more practical consideration governed their thought-processes – there is strength in numbers.

While establishing the organization’s objectives and procedures proved paramount to the newly formed NRLEC, the discussion of the organ, the official voice of the NRLEC dominated the second meeting. If all in attendance agreed on nothing else, they understood the need for industry-wide communication of ideas, universal challenges, hardships, and successes shared by black railroad workers. Other contemporary advancement organizations of the day used publications to create awareness and spread information effectively. The NAACP published the *Crisis* magazine. The National Urban League published the *Opportunity* journal. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters published the *Messenger*.

For starters, it was finally decided that the publication would be called the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



*Negro Railway Labor News*.<sup>18</sup> The executive committee agreed to limit the first edition released during May 1948 to 10,000. Given all the startup challenges the committee pushed the release date back to June 1948. For the June/July 1948 edition, the ACRTLF, Inc. received 1200 copies; IARE 1500 copies, CTA 750 copies; SACRT 1000 copies; DCRFWU 1500 copies. Black railroad workers customarily shared written publications or discussed topics and news content along the railways. The printing cost depended on the size of the periodical but for the moment representative members of the executive committee all agreed to help defray the cost of the publication by contributing fifty dollars for each edition. They established the price of postage based on bulk mailings to “key individuals.” They also understood the inclusion of photos would require more funding.

The NRLEC members worked tirelessly on the style, format, and details of the new newsletter. Attorney Archibald Bromsen received all periodical submission as the acting editor. Each associate organization provided “ details of their respective organization; giving review of the common problems confronting the Negro railway worker...The legal staff of each associate organization will contribute a column dealing with the legal phases of the work of each organization involved.”<sup>19</sup> In addition to spreading the word concerning labor

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

and railroad industry developments, the attendees also agreed to “send delegates to the major conventions of such organizations as the NAACP and the National Urban League. Each organization would be responsible for its delegation and the cost involved.”<sup>20</sup> Naturally, the periodical also reported these events, especially when related to labor, the railroad industry, and civil rights issues. Charles Houston’s July 14, 1949 NAACP Annual Conference in Los Angeles, CA speech entitled “The Legal Struggle for Protection of Minority Workers’ Rights on American Railroads” is a classic example of supplemental material published in the *Negro Railway Labor News*.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequently, in anticipation of the distribution of the second issue during June 1948, a June 11 NRLEC press release from New York announced, “In an effort unique in Negro labor unionism, five organizations of Negro railroad workers have pooled their strength...The five unions committee...newspaper is

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “This speech may sound anti-labor or anti-union; but basically we are not fighting the Brotherhoods as much. What we are fighting is the discrimination and Jim-Crow in the Brotherhoods. Nobody recognizes more than the Negro firemen and brakemen how much the big-four Brotherhoods have done to raise wages and improve working conditions on the railroads. What the Negro firemen and brakemen complain about is the big-four Brotherhoods raise Negro wages and improve Negro working conditions up to the wages and working conditions of the other firemen and brakemen; then just as soon as the wages are raised and working conditions improved set about to limit or completely eliminate Negro employment from these standardized jobs.” Charles Houston Speech at Annual Convention from NAACP Headquarters, August 9, 1949, microfilm, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954. Secretary Ruth W. Ransom to Robert Wood, July 14, 1949, microfilm, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954.

being planned as a monthly four-page publication and it is edited by Daniel Benjamin, Eastern Vice President of the DCRFWU...the subscription price is one dollar per year.”<sup>22</sup> An editorial board was created later to include none other than CTA Grand President Jordan J. Jefferson, John D. Marshall, Solon Bell, S. H. Clark and Arthur Lewis.

The first edition of the newsletter foreshadowed the depth, quality and utility of the publication. On the very first page of the June/July 1948 vol. 1, no. 1 issue of the *Negro Railway Labor News* bulletin, the Negro Railway Labor Executive Committee boldly proclaimed to the world both their hard-earned, rightful place in railroad industry and their intent to fight to remain a part of it. In front page section readers learned, “in the past 25 years, the Negro railroaders have joined the unemployed rolls, expelled from the industry in which most of them spent a lifetime. To halt the drive to turn our industry into a Jim Crow pattern five unions with Negro membership have created the Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Committee. And jointly we are publishing this first issue of the *Negro Railway Labor News*...We Negro workers are no strangers, no newcomers to the industry. We were at work, firing and laying tracks, when the going was real rough, when railroading was still in its infancy...We will not be

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<sup>22</sup> NRLEC press release, June 11, 1948, microfilm, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954.

driven out.”<sup>23</sup>

A variety of news stories were included in the first edition along with this bold proclamation. Some focused on the progress of lawsuits.<sup>24</sup> Others provided details concerning adverse actions impacting black railroad workers and also celebrated careers and achievements.<sup>25</sup> Some of the most revealing news pieces in the *Negro Railway Labor News* were the regional reports provided by members of the NRLEC editorial board. Editorial Board members ACRTLF President S.H. Clark and IARE President Arthur Lewis chose to rehash the significant role their respective labor organizations played in establishing the ground-breaking legal precedents associated with the Tunstall and Steele cases of 1944. Instead of mainly addressing broader concerns, the CTA Grand President chose to focus mainly on CTA membership activities in his first public address. According to Clark, the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen “fought...and served the railroads in varied capacities for

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<sup>23</sup> *Negro Railway Labor News* 1 (no. 1, Sum., 1948).

<sup>24</sup> “The great victory won in the U.S. Supreme Court in the Tunstall and Steele cases established that a railroad union cannot discriminate against any member of the craft for which it holds a contract with the carrier, even though it excludes members of that craft from their organization on the basis of color.” See “Tunstall-Steele Victories Praised by many Papers,” *Negro Railway Labor News* 1 (no. 1, Sum., 1948).

<sup>25</sup> “After 43 years of service for the Central of Georgia, A Charlie Linton is shown above receiving a \$25 U.S. Savings Bond as a “courtesy” award from the Federation for Railway Progress, an organization of railroads...as a fireman...now a porter...Linton is an example of downgrading suffered by Negro rail employees” See “CG Ex-Firemen Wins \$25 Prize” in *Negro Railway Labor News* 1 (no. 1, Sum. 1948).

more than thirty years...we sponsored and twice carried to the U.S. Supreme Court, the famous Tunstall Case, which has become the landmark in railway labor law” under the leadership and direction of “C.H. Houston and J.C. Waddy, Washington, national general chairman.”<sup>26</sup>

Arthur Lewis, President of the International Association of Railway Employees, stressed how his organization had “played an important part on behalf of the Negro railway workers, particularly those employed in the train and engine service” dating back to 1934 and “in the Steele case...we forged our way to the United States Supreme Court...determined to eliminate the discriminatory practices of the railroads and those labor organizations which bar Negroes from membership.”<sup>27</sup> Lewis’s discussion of Steele was certainly newsworthy but it was his call for unity and cooperation which represented a new phase in the struggle to topple Jim Crow within the railroad industry.<sup>28</sup> No longer was it

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> In *Steele v. Louisville & N. R. Co.*, 323 U.S. 192 (1944) The U.S. Supreme Court held The Railway Labor Act imposes on a labor organization, acting by authority of the statute as the exclusive bargaining representative of a craft or class of railway employees, the duty to represent all the employees in the craft without discrimination because of their race, and the courts have jurisdiction to protect the minority of the craft or class from the violation of such obligation.

advantageous for organizations to pursue their interests as various factions fighting the same battle. Lewis's remarks called for "full cooperation among all Negro railway workers if career opportunities as well as continued employment are to be available. We must coordinate all forces, resources, and past experiences in order to realize any benefits...Our future success will depend upon our careful thinking and planning, to see to it that the hazards which have held back our progress and ravaged our forces in the past must never come upon us in the future."<sup>29</sup> Colored Trainmen of America Grand President Jordan J. Jefferson's frequent contributions were especially insightful because they shed additional light on CTA activities and issues as well as reflected the significance of the NRLEC bulletin. In his first column in the June/July 1948 he used relatively little space for his introduction. Jordan reiterated the purpose and objectives of the National Railway Labor Executive Committee. He also briefly alluded to the recent creation of CTA Ladies Auxiliary No. 3 in Houston, Texas.

By July 13, 1948, the paper gained considerable notoriety as a result of the black press it received from widely distributed newspapers such as the *Washington Afro-American*. In a newspaper article entitled "Railroad's Forgotten Men Now Have a New Voice" the paper announced "a new voice in the wilderness of job problems...the color bar kept train service employees (firemen and brakemen, particularly) out of white train service organizations and they

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

were divided among themselves by rivalries and misunderstandings. Now they have a basis for joint undertakings in the NRLEC ...we bear watching.”<sup>30</sup>

Nothing could have been truer, so long as no technological advances facilitated further displacement.

The corresponding NRLEC minutes from roughly the same time of the year suggest that for the time being the federation viewed the refinement and success of the *Negro Railway Labor News* as the top priority.<sup>31</sup> Managing editor Daniel Benjamin reported on the expenditures associated with the paper, while Waddy, Bromsen, Lewis, Clark and Jefferson expressed concerns regarding content, quality and distribution. Waddy’s recommendation, “that courtesy copies be sent not only to Negro organizations but to white progressive organizations including labor organizations,” received overwhelming support. Procedurally, members made motions for alternates to attend and they also revisited the discussion concerning the development for “a legislative program would work constructively to the betterment of Negro Railroaders...It was pointed out that a positive program will not only stop the loss of jobs but will increase opportunities for them. It was proposed that... [the NRLEC] appoint committees for the purpose of studying and implementing legislation in the

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<sup>30</sup> “Railroad’s Forgotten Men Now Have a New Voice,” *The Washington Afro-American*, July 13, 1948.

<sup>31</sup> NRLEC Meeting Minutes, July 1, 1948, box 1, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954.

industry.”<sup>32</sup> This initiative was actually represented during the early formative stages of preparation for the FEPC hearings initiated by African American U.S. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

The NRLEC minutes from 1949 suggest that the organization not only remained intact but continued to efficiently work towards the execution of its objectives. Houston remained embattled in court and continued to call for more training and education necessary to qualify African Americans for railroad jobs and promotions. Aside from reporting on “litigation...pending in court” Houston also recognized “the importance of training young Negroes to qualify for jobs in the industry and pointed out that if Negroes fail to qualify for jobs in the industry, it would weaken the fight against discrimination.”<sup>33</sup> With the numbers of African American railroad workers dwindling significantly, Houston understood the importance of black railroad workers holding on to what they had and kept the doors open for the younger generation. By this time, the NRLEC also promoted employment training and education as one of its core objectives.

An NRLEC member of a different black labor organization introduced the employment training and education component. Forty-seven year veteran of the railroad industry and member of the Association of the Colored Railway

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> NRLEC meeting minutes, Feb. 12, 1949, microfilm, Blacks in the Railroad Industry Collection, 1946-1954.



Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen, Inc. Bro. Parrish initiated the conversation concerning the employment prospects of Negro railroad workers. Parish expressed how much “he deplored the efforts of the white unions and the railroads to drive out of the industry and emphasized the necessity of carrying on the work of the committee.”<sup>34</sup> Charles Houston reinforced Parrish’s concerns. He suggested that the organizations should subscribe to the trade papers of their crafts, and the Railway age, org of the other carriers.” Interestingly enough, Attorney Bromsen’s remarks provided some indication of the relationship between NRLEC member organizations and A. Philip Randolph. During the session, Bromsen proposed a special edition of the paper “exposing the Randolph fiasco where is confusing the status of Negro brakemen.” No one expressed any objections to this idea.

Lastly, meeting attendees directed their attention to the *Negro Railway Labor News*. Nearly a year passed since the NRLEC introduced the monthly periodical into circulation. Upon reflection, the members contemplated the implementing four measures for improving the paper. They agreed to use a direct mailing system to distribute the newsletter to each subscriber. The NRLEC committee members also agreed to bundle orders to distribute the newsletter to organizations. They also established a rigid rule for submitting the material for the paper in a timely manner. The members also believed the paper should be

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

sent to the librarians of the leading colleges and advancement organizations such as the Urban League, the NAACP.<sup>35</sup> The Negro Railway Labor Executive Committee's continuous effort to organize, communicate, and cooperate benefited the railroad workers while the editorial board attempted to incorporate these practical adjustments in a timely manner.

A year from the first publication, the NRLEC's *Negro Railway Labor News* headline reported how "Houston's FEPC testimony roasts jim crow policies of railroads and brotherhoods'." Houston's undeniable presence at the FEPC represented a remarkable achievement for the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee, and more importantly for African American labor union activism. According to this edition of the paper, "attorney Charles H. Houston...testified for the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee [at] the May hearings...held by a subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor, with Rep. Adam C. Powell of New York, as chairman...The four [white] brotherhoods...tried very hard to deny they practiced discrimination but it didn't do them any good, for Att'y Houston was there and several times in the two days of railroad hearings, he took the witness stand and demolished dishonest arguments. One fact emerged clearly at the hearings: that the railroads and the railroad Brotherhoods are among the worst in the country. The other clear fact was that the testimony put in the record by the co-counsel for the Negro Railway

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Labor Executives' Committee was the most effective presented by any single witness heard in the many days of hearings. The Third fact underlined the emergence of the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee as a major force in the railroad industry, in the campaign for equality."<sup>36</sup> In addition to acknowledging Houston, the paper includes CTA President Jefferson's announcement "in the Allen Hampton case, we were able to hold the BRT off our streamliner jobs," and also heralds Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. as a "FEPC Champion" for "forcing railroads' brotherhoods to testify."<sup>37</sup>

Aside from participating in the FEPC hearings, the NRLEC persistently brought their agenda before the government and the American public by initiating a variety of different challenges during this time period. The June/July 1949 edition of the *Negro Railway Labor News* includes a plethora of initiatives "in play." For instance, NRLEC member the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen waged a \$4,000,000 lawsuit filed by attorney Charles Houston against the Frisco Railroad to protect the seniority of Negro railway workers and "to open up jobs to Negro Workers on the railroads and in all public utilities" after "the [big] four operating unions, who do not admit Negroes as members, signed an agreement with the Frisco, providing that no

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<sup>36</sup> "Houston's FEPC testimony roasts Jim Crow policies of railroads and brotherhoods" in *Negro Railway Labor News* (Sum. 1949).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Negro worker would be employed in any train, engine or yard job except as porters from” March 14, 1928.<sup>38</sup> The Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen prevailed in this legal dispute by getting the Frisco and the Brotherhoods to void the contract. Just three months later A. Philip Randolph’s organ for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters announced the legal ruling against the Big Four railroad brotherhoods and the Frisco Railroad. The threat of losing four million dollars in damages to the plaintiffs inspired the defendants to cancel a twenty-one year old agreement barring Negro workers from employment in train, engine and yard service out of desperation. However, “the dramatic and belated cancellation announcement did not stop the trial. The Negro brakemen’s attorneys went ahead to prove damages and expense of previous conspiracy.”<sup>39</sup> In most instances, the gains made by members of the NRLEC during the late 1940s and afterward were incremental steps that advanced the rights of black railroaders. Rarely, did they have extremely broad implications but small concessions such as this one both added momentum and foreshadowed a slow, stubborn shift in direction.

Oddly enough, the same edition reported less than complimentary news concerning A. Philip Randolph and his inability to effectively organize and represent Negro railroad workers in the operating trades. This edition made it

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “Negro Ops shatter '28 Jim Crow pact” in *The Black Worker* (May 1949).

abundantly clear to the public that A. Philip Randolph and his Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were not a part of the NRLEC. The article entitled “Randolph’s Record in the Operating Trades” provided a candid, less than flattering assessment of Randolph’s labor activism concerning the rights of black railroad tradesmen. It alleged that Randolph divisively used his Provisional Committee to Organize Southern Colored Locomotive Firemen to create confusion and division among tradesmen. The article claimed Mr. Randolph mailed “circulars from his headquarters, which becloud the facts and confuse some of the operating men. There is some Napoleon in the man and he insists that he’s doing the job of fighting discrimination all by himself. The facts are, however, that on a dozen fronts the Negro Operating Unions are churning up the campaign for equality while Mr. Randolph talks big and does harm...as far back as July 1947.”<sup>40</sup> Clearly, the NRLEC did not view Randolph as a genuine comrade in the struggle to eliminate racial discrimination in the railroad industry. They used the newsletter to make their opinions of Randolph widely known among black railroad workers.

The NRLEC sharpened its unrelenting criticism of Randolph’s inability to represent black railway operators in a subsequent article on the same page. In the article entitled “Signs weak M-K-T Contract” *the Negro Railway Labor News*

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<sup>40</sup> *Negro Railway Labor News* (Sum. 1949)

reported that Randolph signed “a contract with M-K-T for the head-end porter” brakemen. These brakemen were lead into his ‘Provisional Committee’ by a campaign of scare and high pressure, and taken out of the Unions of the Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Committee. The J. 3 contract is drawn on the company’s terms and provides the railroad can cut the pay of the men anytime it decides to eliminate any one or more of the....services...listed.”<sup>41</sup> These bold declarations by the Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Committee left little room for reconciliation between Randolph’s labor activism machine and the newly emboldened NRLEC. Surprisingly, these NRLEC public assertions grossly contradict the federation’s cardinal principle of unity.

The NRLEC obviously felt empowered and supported by the key supporters within both the movement and the federal government during the late 1940s. In retrospect, alienating an influential and effective African American labor activist such as A. Philip Randolph had to be counter-productive despite how much notoriety the NRLEC gained towards the end of the 1940s. It remained unclear whether Houston and Waddy were the driving force behind the new momentum of the struggle to topple Jim Crow within the railroad industry. Yet, only Randolph’s struggle for racial equality persisted for nearly 30 more years.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

The January/February 1950 edition of the *Negro Railway Labor News Railroad Briefs* foreshadowed the significance of Houston's death. Regretfully, the absence of Houston "created a gap which no other man can fill."<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the NRLEC made do with Waddy and Bromsen serving as co-counsel, as did each individual organization. Individually, the NRLEC continued to deal with local and regional issues that adversely impacted their membership. In his monthly column, Colored Trainmen of American Grand President Jordan J. Jefferson celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> annual convention at Kingsville. Again, he recognized the cooperation and assistance provided by the women's auxiliary. He also made it a point to remind readers that the CTA remained focused on "important problems affecting...our memberships' welfare."<sup>43</sup> Most revealing in the January/February 1950 edition, however, are Jefferson's remarks concerning the impact of new technological advances within the railroad industry. Seniority, promotions, and hiring became secondary concerns for men whose jobs depended on the use of steam engines.

During a time when the black railroad workers in the operating trades were fighting merely to remain employed within the railroad industry, the switch from steam to diesel-powered engines drastically compounded their woes. The railroad industry's conversion from steam to diesel engines weighed heavily on

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<sup>42</sup> *Negro Railway Labor News* (Win. 1950).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

the hearts and minds of both black and white railroad workers. A study by the Association of American Railroads determined that during final months of 1949, “a total of 1,623 engine crews who had engines a year ago are without them today... on Nov, 1 1947, the railroads had 33,111 steam and 5,292 Diesel engines. But one year later steam engines had gone down to 29,615 and Diesel up to 7,165. The difference...1,623 less.”<sup>44</sup> In November and December of 1949, “the wholesale frenzied layoffs which the railroads continue to slug many thousands of rail workers... [was] described as the worst layoffs in over 30 years...the 40-hour week, won to ease the strain on workers in the industry and hold on to jobs is developing into its opposite...reducing our forces...add to the burdens of the men.”<sup>45</sup>

The Colored Trainmen of America Grand President Jefferson echoed these sentiments by candidly stating “the installation of diesels has hit us hard. Work for our trainmen and yardmen is down 38 percent as compared to last year. And the mechanical department employment has been cut 70 percent. Our railroad ships in Kingsville and DeQuincy are almost shut down completely. We have brakemen on the board who have held regular jobs for the last 8 to 10 years.”<sup>46</sup> Although largely still divided, the issue of downsizing due to the

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<sup>44</sup> “Scrap 1,623 Engines, Crews in One Year,” *The Black Worker* (Dec. 1949).

<sup>45</sup> “Chief Talks 30- Hour Week to Save Jobs,” *The Black Worker* (Dec. 1949).

<sup>46</sup> *Negro Railway Labor News* (Win.1950).



industry-wide conversion to diesel engines facilitated more cooperation between the races.

Jordan H. Jefferson, the CTA and the NRLEC resolved to keep fighting tenaciously. During the summer of 1950, Colored Trainmen of America Grand Officer Jordan Jefferson seized the opportunity to galvanize railroad workers based on universal issues concerning both blacks and whites. CTA Grand President Jefferson attended the National Labor Conference for Negro Rights as a delegate for both the CTA and the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee. Jordan served as one of the keynote speakers at the Chicago convention attended by an estimated 3,000 industrial laborers. Recognizing his experience, passion and capacity to lead, the delegates also voted Jordan onto a National Committee of labor leaders from 25 different states and various labor unions from around the south. Only thirty of the conference attendees worked for railroads. This number was relatively low compared to the number of steel workers, automobile workers, packing workers, and electrical/farm equipment workers in attendance. A total number of 30 black railroad worker attendees was a small number, especially when Chicago employed a substantial number of African American railroad car porters. This suggests that the Randolph's grip over the BSCP presence in Chicago was firm. His membership in the Chicago area clearly exercised a good deal of group loyalty regardless of their commonalities with other labors attending this event.

Jordan's brief presence at the conference proved significant. He rallied organized laborers and helped shape the future direction of the movement. The July 1950 edition of the *Railroad Workers Link* praised Jordan's for his conference contributions when it reported "the widespread anti-Negro discrimination practiced in the railroad industry was blasted time and again by key speakers at the June 10-11 National Labor Conference held in Chicago...Railroaders in impressive numbers were there to hear the details of their industry laid bare...And in the huge mass meeting at which Paul Robeson spoke a Negro railroad union leader, too, and told thousands in the open-air Packinghouse Union's Center that he welcomed the rousing support the conference was summoning for the battle to outlaw Jim Crow in the industry. He was Jordan J. Jefferson of Texas, President of the Colored Trainmen of America, a railroad brakeman with 35 years of service."<sup>47</sup> Apart from being one of the most talented African American entertainers of his time, Robeson also served as an outspoken labor and civil rights activist.<sup>48</sup> Jordan's CTA report covering his attendance at the conference is highly insightful. Jordan revels in the details, describing how "it was real pleasure to us to see our white brothers who were there jointly with us a pledging their support to our common fight...in

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<sup>47</sup> "Negro Rails Win Labor Support," *Railroad Worker's Link* (July 1950).

<sup>48</sup> Shirley Graham Du Bois, *Paul Robeson, Citizen of the World* (Connecticut, 1972). Philip S. Foner, *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews, 1918-1974* (New Jersey, 1978).

the speeches at this wonderful railroad panel the Negro and white delegates got to know each other real well and we are sure that in the future they will help the fight of all of us...the railroad workers took part in a panel on the south which some of our most grievous problems were presented to the delegates...In the Call that assembled the Conference it was noted that the railroad industry is one of the places where the fight for just is most necessary. *The Call* says, 'there is no section of the Negro workers that is hit harder than the Negro railroad workers, many of whom are being driven out of all types of jobs in the railroad industry, some which they held during slavery'.<sup>49</sup> In the end, conference attendees pledged to help confront challenges with the National Adjustment Board in Chicago. Attendees from the south and elsewhere agreed to support the insertion of Fair Employment Practices Clauses into all labor contracts. They also agreed to return to their cities, towns and states to lobby for the passage of FEPC laws to eliminate discrimination in local projects.

The unity and agenda established as the result of the conference is partly attributable to the active participation of NRLEC member CTA Grand President Jordan J. Jefferson and four other railroad worker colleagues. Collectively, they worked together to develop "a program of genuine equality...at the June 10-11 National Labor Conference...The Railroaders, Negro and white, who were there

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<sup>49</sup> Jordan J. Jefferson's *National Labor Conference for Negro Rights Report* entitled "1000 Negro and White Labor Leaders Pledge their Support to the Negro Railroad Men of the South" (June 1950).

in good number, joined in the deliberations of the great Conference. The outstanding document to come out of the actions of the one thousand working men and women present, was the spelling out of a campaign for full job equality.”<sup>50</sup> The Model FEPC Clause drafted at the conference called for the elimination of discrimination in hiring practices, promotions, apprenticeships, job training, discharges, and collective bargaining activities.<sup>51</sup>

Undoubtedly, the establishment of the FEPC Model Clause is the crowning achievement of the conference. Aside from being a major step for all laborers, it also served as a high mark for NRLEC so far as their ability to advance their agenda and appeal to a broader struggle. Former FEPC Committee member Houston’s repeated attempts to participate in U.S. Congressional hearings concerning the FEPC during the 1940s underscored the importance of creating the NRLEC endorsed FEPC Model Clause.<sup>52</sup> Following World War II, most industrial laborers, especially African Americans, understood the value of government regulation and intervention in American labor relations. The “Double V Campaign” did little to improve race relations in American

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Rawn James, Jr, *Root and Branch: Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall and the Struggle to End Segregation* (New York, 2010), 182-187.

industry after World War II.<sup>53</sup> Much like the effect it had on World War II industry, a stronger FEPC during peacetime could also substantially curtail unfair labor practices and racial inequality in the workplace.<sup>54</sup>

During a time of unrivaled economic prosperity in American society, racial tension remained problematic with little federal recourse for black railroad workers in the South because the “FEPC’s opponents and detractors far outnumbered those who even passively cooperated. One might wonder how the Southern FEPC offices could function at all. They faced a rigid system of segregation backed up by the state laws and traditions which regulated how people of the two races must work, eat, sleep, ride drink, be entertained, converse, and even be buried. In this framework, the FEPC had to work against job discrimination in the face of the opposition of most federal agencies and private contractors and the overwhelming hostilities of the vast majority of the white population.”<sup>55</sup> While ending Jim Crow practices within railroad industry was their foremost concern, they understood that promoting measures that strengthened the FEPC would appeal to all organized laborers in such a way that the American government would have to make policy adjustments

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<sup>53</sup> Maureen Honey, *Bitter Fruit: The African American Women in World War II* (Columbia, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> Louis Ruchames, *Race, Jobs, and Politics, the Story of the F.E.P.C.* (New York, 1953).

<sup>55</sup> Merle E. Reed, “The FEPC and the Federal Agencies in the South,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 65 (no. 1, 1980), 43-56.

irrespective of the power and influence American industry exercised over the federal government. Dating back to its creation under President Roosevelt, the Executive Order 8802 and subsequent FEPC order 9346 “did not provide the necessary enforcement provisions....discrimination on the railroads constituted the most difficult and crucial problem facing the committee.”<sup>56</sup> Although the FEPC continued to lack the enforcement powers for years to come, this progressive show of leadership and solidarity that transcended race and occupation foreshadowed the future direction of both civil rights and labor activism and their overlapping concerns.

The fight to rid the railroad industry of Jim Crow segregation customs and practices served as a training ground for some CTA members who also challenged racial inequality in American society. Under the tutelage of Charles H. Houston, members of the CTA learned how to more effectively organize, understand their rights, pool their resources, wage legal battles, and promote awareness. It is not surprising that the Negro Railway Labor Executives' Committee Editorial Board for the *Negro Railway Labor News* achieved so much during the late 1940s, given the tenacity and talent the organization possessed. The team of top-quality union organization administrators of the NRLEC stayed abreast of industry issues. They developed policies and initiatives to address them. The NRLEC's presence at Adam Clayton Powell's U.S. Congressional

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<sup>56</sup> National Negro Labor Council, *Let Freedom Ride the Rails* (Detroit, 1950).

Subcommittee's FEPC 1949 hearings is a primary example.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, NRLEC member and CTA Grand President Jordan J. Jefferson's integral involvement in the creation of the FEPC Model Clause at the National Labor Conference for Negro Rights Report is another example. The NRLEC editorial board used the paper to relay critical information and recruit rank and file black railroaders, amassing an effective, enlightened proletariat that could no longer afford to be ignored regardless of their dwindling numbers and the short life span of the NRLEC. The United States Congress listened and responded favorably over the years through incremental progressive measures.

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<sup>57</sup> Hearings on Federal Fair Employment Practice Labor Act, Before a Special Subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor, 81st Cong. 1st Sess. 220 (1949).

## CHAPTER VI

### THE END OF THE LINE

“The Railroad man’s upward climb involves complex economic and political problems all of which cry for wisdom as we seek and search for a concerted movement.”<sup>1</sup>

The fate of the Colored Trainmen of America took a turn for the worst following the untimely death of the pioneering African American civil rights attorney Charles Hamilton Houston in 1950. This chapter chronicles the demise of the organization. In the wake of his death, the organization suffered from disillusionment due to an unexpected vacuum in leadership. Both external and internal factors continuously whittled away the spirit of group cooperation Houston worked tirelessly to instill in both CTA and NRLEC members. Externally, changes in social climate, train transport technology, and railroad industry practices all worked against African American railroad workers from the 1950s onward. These external sources of pressure led to internal dissent and splintering among members, who envisioned something different for the CTA, in the midst of great social change in American society. In the final analysis, the CTA outlived both its purpose and direction. Nor was it possible for the Jim Crow inspired organization to overcome the inevitable forces of change ushered in by the modern civil rights movement, especially not without maintaining the close-

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<sup>1</sup> Federated Council Report of Merger Committee, memo, Oct. 4, 1960, box 35, March 14, 1948, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



knit group cohesion that once served as the foundation for this organization. This final chapter reveals how the CTA continued to challenge racial inequality through labor and civil rights activism after Charles H. Houston died. It also chronicles the demise of the CTA. In a much broader sense, this chapter also reflects the ending of a set of antiquated American institutions rooted in centuries of racial inequality in American society. The dissension the CTA experienced also foreshadows the emergence of a new generation of black leadership with divergent views; the splintering of black advancement organizations with philosophical differences; and the subsequent formation of new institutions founded upon the promise of equal opportunity and results during a period of revolutionary changes in American race relations.

Following World War II, the Colored Trainmen of America continued to utilize the multi-pronged approach they inherited from their chief strategist Charles Houston. In order to be heard, the CTA continued to adapt. The organization functioned more so as a special interest group during the second half of the twentieth-century. CTA members actively participated in the political process by evaluating and endorsing progressive political candidates who called for racial equality. The members of the organization also utilized lobbying techniques to help shape public policies concerning racial inequality in the workplace and elsewhere. Political engagement became even more prudent when the relative prosperity black industrial laborers experienced as a result of

President Roosevelt's liberal New Deal and World War II policies gradually dissipated once patriotic U.S. World War II veterans returned home to pursue the American dream. With democracy being secured in much of the free world, American industry no longer needed to comply with federal policies designed to ensure wartime productivity during the following decades. The all-white Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen seized this opportunity to begin "what was apparently to be the last multi-employer campaign to eliminate Negro fireman."<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of seniority, both the significance and status of black industrial laborers changed in the American labor market. Productive, reliable, hard-working African Americans found themselves' relegated to surplus status as white WWII patriots trickled back into the American labor force. The wartime double victory campaign failed to achieve black equality on the American home-front. However, African Americans received a quality political education between 1939 and 1948. The emphasis on democracy during wartime heightened both the political awareness and political engagement of African Americans. The death of the longest-sitting president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, made political theatre even more engaging for African Americans because of the inroads African American made in public policy during his tenure. The renewed sense of economic and political empowerment served them well during the duration of the modern civil rights movement. Long-time Washingtonian Charles

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<sup>2</sup> *Negro Employment in Land and Air Transport*, 71.

Hamilton Houston understood this opportunity and groomed his clients accordingly. They too, learned to manipulate the American political process through trial and error.

Not only did Houston teach the members of the CTA the value and importance of understanding terms of employment, contractual agreements, and federal rules and policies that benefited them. He also instilled in them the importance of connecting the labor movement against employment discrimination with the civil rights struggle. In his absence, much of their continued success hinged on the CTA membership mastering three vital skills necessary to combat racial inequality. First, the members of the CTA needed the ability to recognize wrongdoing in the workplace. Second, members also needed the ability to follow procedures for systematically reporting grievances. Third, members needed the ability to access policymakers and negotiate processes required to redress inequities. These skills proved to be transferable whenever their labor movement objectives overlapped with their civil rights agenda. Houston's death in April 1950 served as a substantial setback to the CTA in terms of advocacy. Fortunately, members of the CTA acquired all these skills in abundance. They certainly needed them in the coming days, given the tumultuous times awaiting them ahead, and so they pressed on.

Recognizing the changing political landscape two years earlier, the CTA demonstrated their understanding of the importance of engaging in the political

process. During the general election year of 1948, the CTA evaluated various political party planks concerning labor and racial equality. Undoubtedly, inspired by monumental legal victory of Houston's young protégé Thurgood Marshall, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) empowered this bold group of politically active black Texans to take their agenda to the election polls.<sup>3</sup> Collectively, they realized that they represented a small but meaningful contingent of eligible voters that might exert some degree of influence over candidates courting them for a block vote that might make all the difference in major elections. Specifically, on the issue of civil rights, the political planks of the three competing parties - Progressive Party, Republican Party, and the Democratic Party - differed thusly, according to the qualitative analysis performed by the Colored Trainmen of America.

During this time period, the Democratic Party alluded to achievements associated with previous presidencies of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman instead of advancing novel, specific remedies aimed at redressing racial disparities in American society. The Democrats recalled how they were "responsible for the great civil rights gains made in recent years in eliminating unfair and illegal discrimination based on race, creed or color."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the

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<sup>3</sup>*Smith v. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944)

<sup>4</sup> CTA Evaluation of 1948 Civil Rights Provisions of the Democratic Party, July 14, 1948, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Democratic platform called upon the U.S. Congress to support the president in guaranteeing “the right to equality of employment.”<sup>5</sup> The Republican Party addressed equal employment opportunities in ambiguous, coded terms, declaring the constitutional right “of equal opportunity to work and to advance in life should never be limited...because of race, religion, color, or country of origin. We favor the enactment and just enforcement of such Federal legislation as may be necessary to maintain this right at all times in every part of this Republic.”<sup>6</sup> The Progressive Party condemned segregation in all its forms and in all places. The Republicans called for “a Presidential Proclamation ending segregation and all forms of discrimination in...Federal employment [and also]...demand[ed]...fair-employment practices legislation.”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the Democratic Party made no promises with so much to lose. The Republicans refrained from alluding to any attempt to desegregate American society with so much to gain. The Progressives adopted the strongest position, recognizing that they needed the most support. Longtime Washingtonian Charles Houston realized how invaluable this exercise in political education would be in the years

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> CTA Evaluation of 1948 Civil Rights Provisions of the Republican Party, June 23, 1948, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>7</sup> CTA Evaluation of 1948 Civil Rights Provisions of the Progressive Party, July 23, 1948, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

to come. In fact, it helped prepare the CTA for their active participation in the Congressional FEPC Hearings during 1949.

The Colored Trainmen of the America's NRLEC membership participation helped influence both Truman and the U.S. House of Representatives' continued support for the FEPC following World War II. Historian William P. Jones concluded "the FEPC was the first federal attempt to measure and eliminate discrimination by unions in government contracted jobs...The Committee heard over twelve thousand cases between 1941 and 1946, settling nearly 5,000 (42%). Through 32 public hearings, committee members scrutinized the racial employment policies of 132 private companies, 38 labor unions and 5 government agencies. Nearly two million minority workers found employment with the federal government during World War Two."<sup>8</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Committee on June 25, 1941 by signing the Executive Order 8802. By 1943, Executive Order 9346 strengthened the FEPC by adding a non-discrimination clause requiring compliance by all industrial companies holding government contracts. Instead of allowing the wartime FEPC initiatives to lapse, President Harry S. Truman followed Roosevelt's lead concerning the FEPC following the World War II. Although not in favor of social integration, Truman professed to believe in

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<sup>8</sup> William P. Jones, "Black Workers, Organized Labor, and the Struggle for Civil Rights," *Left History*, 8 (Spring 2003), 145-154.

creating equal opportunities for people of color. Despite being politically motivated, Truman took progressive measures to combat discriminatory practices in American society. For example, he desegregated the U.S. military. William H. Hastie served as the first African American Judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals. Truman lobbied to make the FEPC permanent. He also established “the Fair Employment Board (EO 9980) and empowered it to review allegations of discrimination...and to make nonbonding recommendations” in 1948.<sup>9</sup> He also issued an Executive Order 10308 for the creation of the Committee on Government Contract Compliance. The CTA and NRLEC membership took full advantage of the favorable political climate. The organization implemented several timely measures to promote awareness and generate support for new FEPC initiatives between 1949 and 1951.

Recognizing that there is strength in numbers, CTA/NRLEC members partnered with other organizations and leaders to work collectively to promote public policy initiatives designed to end discrimination. For instance, a delegation of CTA members participated in the Legislative Rally to End Discrimination and Segregation in Washington, D.C. on February 11, 1949. The list of attendees and participants reads as a who’s who among America’s emerging progressive,

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<sup>9</sup> Wayne Arthur Santoro, "The Civil Rights Movement's Struggle for Fair Employment: A "Dramatic Events-Conventional Politics" Model," *Social Forces*, 81 (no. 1, Sept. 2002), 177-206. See Michael R. Garner, *Harry S. Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale, 2003).

outspoken advocates for social justice. The impressive lists of attendees included human rights activist Clark H. Foreman, Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, Sen. Hubert Humphrey, educator Mary Church Terrell, entertainer Paul Robeson, Judge Raymond Pace Alexander, Magistrate Judge William C. Hueston, Sr., Dr. E.B. Nixon, and Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois. The conference focused on topics such as civil rights legislation, anti-poll tax initiatives, anti-lynching legislation, FEPC legislation, interstate transportation legislation, discrimination in the military and federal government legislation, and segregation and discrimination in the District of Columbia. A comprehensive list of panel discussion topics reflects the groundwork that served as the foundation for some of the most successful gains in the struggle for racial equality following World War II.

At the end of the conference, the attendees resolved to take the following five steps towards racial equality. First, they agreed to publicize the conference activities and agenda to the “fullest” in their respective hometowns. Secondly, they’d provide reports on their activities to their local social and civil rights organizations. Thirdly, they’d increase civil rights activity within their respective communities “by gathering signatures, circulating leaflets, ect.”<sup>10</sup> Fourthly, “they’d maintain contact with congressmen and senators... [and encourage their

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<sup>10</sup> Legislative Assembly and Rally to End Segregation and Discrimination Follow-up Memorandum, Feb. 11-12, 1949, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



friends to watch their] congressman's and senators' actions on the civil rights fight" and they'd continuously informed of the interests of their African American constituency.<sup>11</sup> From 1949 onward, the CTA followed these directives accordingly.

Within three months of President Truman's integrated inauguration activities, the Colored Trainmen of America returned home from the rally. They circulated a memorandum listing their achievements in their fight against racial inequality in the workplace shortly afterward. In the May 7, 1949 memo entitled "What has the Colored Trainmen of American done for us?" the achievements listed included items dating back to 1937.<sup>12</sup> The CTA successfully attached an amendment to the Railway Labor Act that both strengthened the rights of employees to organize and created the National Railroad Adjustment Board for the disposition of individual claims and grievances. The CTA also successfully lobbied for the enactment of the Railroad Retirement Act after the first one had been held unconstitutional. The CTA accepted credit for helping attach an amendment that liberalized the Retirement Act, with respect to disability retirements. The CTA also lobbied for the enactment of Unemployment Insurance Act and subsequent amendments covering sickness and maternity.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Colored Trainmen of American Grand Lodge Memorandum, May 7, 1949, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

The CTA also participated in the negotiation of the Washington Job Protection Agreement for the protection of employees during the consolidation of carriers. The CTA also lobbied for a twenty percent increase in the benefits for those retired, unemployed or sick. The CTA also participated in the negotiations of the National Vacation Agreement that provided employees with a contractual right to vacation time. All of the foregoing matters have had a very vital and material effect upon the well being of each individual employee and family. According to the CTA, these measures initiated by their organization “made possible comforts and pleasures that otherwise would not have been possible.”<sup>13</sup> This impressive list of accomplishments was relatively small compared to the new challenges black railroad workers encountered after World War II.

Tuesday, May 10, 1949, the NRLEC actively participated in the U.S. House of Representatives hearings on the Federal Fair Employment Practice Labor Act before the House Committee’s subcommittee on Education and Labor. Leading CTA members of the NLREC provided key documentation, testimony and support for these hearings. Committee Chairman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (Rep. - NY), John F. Kennedy (Rep. – MA), and Richard M. Nixon (Rep. – CA) are among the esteemed members of the Committee of Education and Labor. The list of witnesses who provided testimony is extensive. They represent a variety of interests. For instance, Negro civil rights spokesman

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Charles Houston is listed as the general counsel for the Negro Railway Labor Executive Commission. Members of the opposition such as Stetson Kennedy and others are listed as representatives of the Ku Klux Klan and Columbians. This highly polarized legislation provoked a litany of testimony from widely-respected individuals such as CTA union advocate Charles Houston.

Chairman Powell initiated Houston's participation by asking would Houston discuss all the things he had "done in the field of FEPC because I consider you the most valuable witness who will probably appear in the course of the entire hearings."<sup>14</sup> Houston responded by introducing himself as general counsel of the Negro Railway Labor Executive Committee. He explained that committee was comprised of the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen, Colored Trainmen of America, the Dining Car and Food Workers Union, International Association of Railway Employees, and the Southern Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Firemen. He also added that he served as a former member of the wartime Fair Employment Practice Committee.<sup>15</sup> A series of poignant, elegantly stated remarks concerning H.R. 4453 followed his introduction. Houston chose to refrain from discussing the constitutionality of the legislation. With the exception of a few concerns,

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<sup>14</sup> Hearings on Federal Fair Employment Practice Labor Act, Before a Special Subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor, 81st Cong. 1st Sess. 220 (1949) 122-123.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

Houston indicated he was largely in favor of it. First, he requested the committee consider amending it to include a requirement for a non-partisan committee. He also pointed out how states already recognized the importance of addressing this issue of legally combating racial inequality. Houston explained 32 progressive states already enacted “legislation against discrimination in public employment, 13 states with legislation against discrimination in ...private employment, and...in 10 states...fair-employment-practice bills have been introduced in 23 state legislatures.”<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly enough, the accompanying table reflecting these statistics excluded nearly all southern states. Houston pointed this out by stating “if we eliminate the South, we realize that at least the rest of the country, which has accepted the Constitution, a majority of the Northern, Eastern and Western States already have FEPC legislation or they have introduced bills.”<sup>17</sup> Next, Houston directs the subcommittee’s attention to the topic of industrial employment discrimination. According to Houston, “one of the most reactionary areas of employment concern transportation and transportation workers...It is in every one of the big train service organizations, especially interstate. They all have bars against Negroes, Mexican-Americans, Japanese Americans, all of the minorities, because they restrict membership to whites...the large scope of the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 127.

war industries and the plans for the rapid conversion of peacetime industries ...calls for establishing a uniformity of practices so that we are not faced...with the varying standards of the States.”<sup>18</sup>

Houston specifically addressed the concerns of CTA members before the subcommittee. Houston succinctly pointed out “in the railway industry, the Negro workers have been up against the proposition that they were not members of the unions which drew the contracts; they did not have any voice in selecting union officials who made the contracts or who policed the contracts. So any time you have a worker who has no voice in the selection of the official, no right to remove that official in case of misfeasance, that worker, I say, is working and holding his job by sufferance, and has absolutely no protection and cannot be protected unless he is inside the labor union...the 5 labor members [of the National Railroad Adjustment Board] are chosen from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (BLFE), the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT), the Order of Railway Conductors (ORC), and the Switchmen’s Union of North America (SUNA). Every one of those five unions has a Negro color bar. Now, to ask a Negro fireman to take his grievance before the National Railroad Adjustment Board...with five labor members chosen by unions which bar Negroes from membership, is not adjudication, but confiscation. For that reason, I say that it is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 127.

most important to have this commission nonpartisan because of the vast power that is exercised by them...On the whole, I would say that the total situation has improved. It has improved because State FEPC's have proceeded from a point of the Executive order. On top of that, we are now in a move of wider integration of minorities in all phases of American life, and that inevitably reflects itself in a wider integration in labor."<sup>19</sup>

Judging from Houston's remarks, the testimony he provided is among most important submitted by witnesses. There is no doubt that his research and candid remarks helped advance the FEPC legislation. The hearings to discuss HR 4453 and companion bills started on May 12, 1949 and ended on May 26, 1949. The hearing led to the 1950 approval of the FEPC bill in the U.S. House of Representatives. Houston's appearance at the hearing simultaneously represented a strong showing by the NRLEC membership. Houston's protégés seized this moment by parlaying their organization's active involvement into the political capital. Moving forward, the CTA frequently used their access to liberal politicians and bureaucrats to continue pursuing their agenda during the second half of the twentieth century.

During the 1950s and 1960s CTA leadership persistently wrote high

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 129-134. For more hearing testimony by Charles H. Houston see hearing transcription see pages 197, 258, 277, 283, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290. Hearings on Federal Fair Employment Practice Labor Act, Before a Special Subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor, 81st Cong. 1st Sess. 220 (1949).

ranking federal officials seeking support in the struggle to eliminate racial inequality in the workplace and elsewhere. By then, industry-wide changes further circumscribed employment opportunities for African American railroad workers. Public policymakers rarely possessed the power and influence to bridle the impact of free market innovation and competition that adversely affected African American railroad workers. Narrowing post-war opportunities for employment and advancement necessitated unity and group cooperation more than ever. Divergent visions and approaches among CTA leadership and other prominent African American railroad labor union organizations further limited the success of the organization during the next three decades. Nonetheless, dissension among the ranks did not prevent CTA leaders from appealing to liberal policymakers for help with the struggle to end racial discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere.

The organization's active political involvement in organizing and shaping anti-discriminatory public policies across the country crested after CTA Grand President Jefferson garnered support for the "Model FEPC Clause" among 3,000 attendees of the National Labor Conference for Negro Rights during the summer of 1950 (See chapter 5). Fortunately, Democrat Harry S. Truman's 1951 creation of the Committee on Government Contract Compliance (CGCC) did not represent the end of progressive federal public policy initiatives aimed at combating racial inequality prior to the 1960s. Republican President Dwight D.

Eisenhower also made advances in the struggle against racial inequality.<sup>20</sup> He utilized federal authority to create more opportunities for equality in American society. Eisenhower reinforced Truman's Executive Order to desegregate the U.S. military. His appointment of Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren paved the way for a series of favorable landmark civil rights decisions. He used federal troops to enforce school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. Eisenhower also signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957. This foreshadowed ever-increasing federal backing of civil rights initiatives in the public sphere. Clearly, overt-government sanctioned racial inequality was on its way to becoming a thing of the past during the second half of the twentieth century. However, regulating racial inequality in private industry remained much more challenging now that the war was over. As the transportation industry evolved, America's heavy reliance on the railroad industry for transport and travel diminished. The CTA, however, continued to challenge racial inequality within the workplace and elsewhere.

External factors continued to contribute to the demise of the Colored Trainmen of America during the second half of the twentieth century. Black railroad workers employed in the operating trades, who once benefited from nominal FEPC, NRAB, and ICC oversight during World War II, were not exempt

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<sup>20</sup> David A. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginning of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York, 2007).



from the loss of job security many black industrial laborers experienced in the aftermath of the war. Changes in social climate, policymakers, and corresponding public policies rendered the CTA much less successful despite the new momentum the modern civil rights movement gained during the second half of the twentieth century. According to historian Herbert R. Northrup, “senior Negroes were laid off, while white employees with less seniority were retained. Jobs...were abolished, recreated, and white workers employed to fill them. Even when the seniority system was followed, senior white[s]...were able to displace junior Negro helpers during layoffs. The reverse, however, was not generally possible.”<sup>21</sup> This national phenomenon partly explains the demise of the Colored Trainmen of America.

CTA President Jefferson revealed some astonishing facts during his presentation at the National Trade Union Conference for Negro Rights. His “Fact Sheet on Railroad Industry” reflected how many of the changes in the railroad industry adversely impacted Negro railroad workers by the 1950s. Some of the statistics reflected the continuous lack of opportunity for advancement of Negro operating trade employees experienced in the railroad industry. Others reflected the loss of opportunity they experienced as a result of changes within the transportation industry. According to the fact sheet Jefferson reported during the

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<sup>21</sup> Herbert R. Northrup, *Negro Employment in Land and Air Transport: A Study of Racial Policies in the Railroad, Airline, Trucking, and Urban Transit Industries* (Philadelphia, 1971).

early 1950s, "Of the 125,000 Negro railroad workers, not one is an engineer, signalman, telegrapher, dispatcher, and yardmaster. There are no Negro railroad clerks, typists, information or ticket agents. There are a diminishing number of Negro firemen and brakemen...and those that are left are losing their jobs. In the railroad shops, there are a small total of mechanics. A few more are employed as non-promotable "helpers"; the rest are laborers. In maintenance of way, the bridge and building department's skilled crafts are denied them, and they are hired for track gang laborers only. In the clerical departments, the railroads have set up groupings marked off by separate rosters, and confine Negroes to year freight handlers, terminal mail and baggage jobs, and depot cleaners."<sup>22</sup> Discriminatory hiring and promotion practices within the railroad industry remained a leading cause of blacks being disproportionately under represented in the railroad operating trades.

Both racially motivated union practices and cooperative relationships between industrial and government oversight agency leadership also contributed to the reduction of African American opportunities for equality within the railroad industry. The absence of an economy stimulated by wartime production needs further exacerbated the challenges they experienced. Jefferson reported how

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<sup>22</sup> Jefferson's Fact Sheet on Railroad Industry Memorandum to the CTA Membership, 1950, box 35, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

“the National Mediation Board...and leaders of the railroads joined the anti-Negro campaign...They have zealously played Jim Crow to divide workers... The four operating Brotherhoods, since 1905, have conspired agreements which provided that the railroads quit hiring Negroes for skilled operating jobs. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen is engaged in a campaign to oust the Negro brakemen who still survive and are employed on the railroads. The Brotherhood of Local Firemen and Enginemen served notice on all 21 Southwestern railroads that it desired a contract which would reduce Negroes to 50% of the firemen’s jobs where they were a greater percentage and on all railroads they were to be kept from employment on Diesel engines.”<sup>23</sup> According to prominent African American policymaker Robert C. Weaver, the Mediation Board also stated “that it was expressly understood that this agreement in no way interfered with the right to the union and carriers to negotiate other agreements” that also restricted employment and promotion opportunities for Negroes as helpers on non-steam-powered trains.<sup>24</sup>

After World War II, further approval and implementation of racially biased employment policies created between industry administrators, union leaders, and government oversight agency members within the railroad industry persisted. Once the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Steele v. Louisville & N. R. Co.*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Robert C. Weaver, *Negro Labor: A National Problem* (New York, 1946), 105.

- 323 U.S. 192 (1944) that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen had to represent non-member Negro Firemen without discrimination, “unions began to abandon exclusion by formal means, or to adopt more subtle forms, due to the following: expansion of Negro employment in jurisdiction covered by unions especially in jurisdictions covered by these unions...competition between unions for Negro votes in representation election...actions by government agencies...and a fear of the loss of exclusive bargaining rights.”<sup>25</sup> Although the means of discrimination may have changed during the postwar period, the motivation for doing so really did not.

The *Pittsburgh Courier's* Double V Campaign failed. Once again blacks were relegated to second-class citizens after the looming threat of war ended. One of the post-World War II discriminatory labor policies the CTA vehemently opposed included the “promotion” proposals. According to CTA president Jefferson, the promotion proposal mainly benefited firemen operating on the southeastern railroads. This new promotion system impacted African American railroad workers because all firemen and helpers were eventually selected and required to take examinations for promotions. Jefferson’s fact sheet suggests that, “those who declined to take the examinations or fail to qualify for promotion shall be dismissed from the service...The Trainmen secured an

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<sup>25</sup> Weaver, 105. Also see Ray Marshall, *Negro Worker* (New York, 1967), 59, and *Steele v. Louisville & Nashville R.R.*, 323 U.S. 192, 202-203 (1944).

agreement...and has since then been in frenzied pursuit of all Negro brakemen jobs on all railroads...today, when on the Frisco, for instance, only 2% of the workers in the operating department of that railroad are Negro. All four operating trades have pursued their vicious discriminatory policies.”<sup>26</sup> CTA members continued to challenge these unfair labor practices on a case by case basis. However, they achieved with less success as returning white war veterans often took their places. Fortunately, they were not alone in this uphill battle.

In the past, such blatant forms of discriminatory employment practices rarely aroused the interests of the NAACP. This organization always weighed the political and economic considerations associated with speaking out. Usually, these two concerns heavily dictated the organization’s strategies for addressing issues impacting the African American community. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka* decision and other recent federal policy support African Americans received during this era led the NAACP to begin to broaden its agenda. NAACP National Labor Secretary Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. was largely responsible for committing the NAACP to addressing labor issues more aggressively during his tenure from 1948 to 1978.<sup>27</sup> Affectionately known as “the 101<sup>st</sup> U.S. Senator” and “the lion in the lobby,” District of Columbia NAACP

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<sup>26</sup> Jefferson’s Fact Sheet, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Denton L. Wallace, *Lobbyist Away From Limelight: LION IN THE LOBBY Clarence Mitchell Jr.’s Struggle for the Passage of Civil Rights Laws* (New York, 1991).

Bureau Chief Mitchell is widely recognized as the most prominent African American lobbyist of the Civil Rights era.

In response to the new challenges African American laborers endured, Labor Secretary Mitchell developed and disseminated a revised “NAACP Labor Manual.” The comprehensive manual contained current information concerning new policy initiatives as well as a range of procedural processes for redressing unfair labor practices and employment discrimination.<sup>28</sup> The manual explained the objectives, structure and duties of the NAACP Labor Department. It also served as an invaluable reference guide for rank and file CTA members to address their grievances by properly observing the rules and procedures. The manual encouraged disgruntled employees to methodically follow specific steps to increase their likelihood of success.

First, complainants are encouraged to obtain vital information for their complaints. Next, they are schooled on what to do in the event they experience a number of different employment discrimination scenarios. Laborers learn how to handle a refusal to hire or discriminatory dismissal scenario. They also learn what to do when they aren’t being promoted, don’t receive training, and receive unfair wages. Occasionally, the inability to do either resulted in a waste of time, money, and effort. The CTA understood the value of all three precious commodities. CTA archival material is filled with evidence that reflects how the

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<sup>28</sup> Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr., *NAACP Labor Manual* (New York, 1947).

organization utilized the manual in the years leading up to dissolution of the organization. These sources also reflect their ongoing effort to enlist support from influential policymakers.

The unemployment of nonwhites increased by 200 percent between 1953 (4.1%) and 1961(12.5%).<sup>29</sup> It was not until 1964 that this rate returned to below 10 percent. Northrup concluded that the employment of African Americans declined precipitously between 1950 and 1960.<sup>30</sup> His statistical research reveals that in 1950 the U.S. railroad industry employed 143,497 African Americans. By 1960, the number of African Americans employed by the U.S. railroad industry decreased to 77,194. In the spirit of the highly controversial agreement above, the number of African American railroad workers did decrease by roughly 50 percent over the next two decades. The aforementioned policies and industry practices partially explain the drastic reductions in African American employment in the railroad industry. Post World War II technological innovations also worked against them as well.

In addition to discriminatory practices CTA members encountered, the financial instability of MOPAC also jeopardized their job security. The railroad industry suffered considerable financial setbacks during 1950s due to

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<sup>29</sup> Department of Labor, *Manpower Report of the President, 1966* (Washington, 1966), 127.

<sup>30</sup> *Negro Employment in Land and Air Transport, 75.*

technological innovations in travel and transport. Commercial air travel and transport made the railroad nearly obsolete. The constant construction and improvement of roads and highways also made interstate trucking and travel a more convenient and cost-effective alternative to trains. The Missouri Pacific Railroad Company experienced substantial losses as a result of these challenges. This leading employer of Colored Trainmen of America members petitioned for reorganization in U.S. District Court on October 4, 1956 in hopes of remaining solvent.<sup>31</sup> On December 31, 1956 the U.S. District Court approved of the company's plans for reorganization. This only served as a temporary reprieve for a long-term problem.

It is noteworthy that the CTA did not limit its workplace concerns to racial issues. The organization's leadership also lobbied for government support for the railroad industry for the benefit of all railroad laborers. Grand Lodge Officer Leamer Williams of Kingsville, Texas, received a reply from U.S. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson thanking him for sharing his concerns regarding the railroads. In turn, Senator Johnson assuaged his concerns by responding "I am sympathetically aware of the serious trouble facing this industry. And I want to be helpful in effecting some plan to assure improvement. In light of your interest, I was pleased to schedule S. 3778 for action by the Senate and am delighted to

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<sup>31</sup> Interstate Commerce Commission Order, memo, Dec. 4, 1956, box 18, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



report that the bill passed the Senate on June 11<sup>th</sup>...It was a pleasure for me to support this bill, and I hope you will continue to call on me as your friend and Senator.”<sup>32</sup> This bill benefited all railroad employees. In an effort to remain viable in a competitive transportation market, it permitted “railroads to adjust their rates to meet the competition of all other modes of transportation.”<sup>33</sup> To some extent, Senator Johnson’s reply reflects good form but it also suggests that the CTA exercised some degree of influence over public policy initiatives impacting the railroad industry by appealing for support from their elected officials. This approach helped the CTA deal with many external factors that threatened their livelihood. No such remedy existed to cure what ailed the ageing organization from within.

In addition to external factors, internal factors also contributed to the demise of the Colored Trainmen of America. CTA Local President Williams’ acute awareness of the economic woes the railroad industry experienced during the second half of the twentieth century inspired him to take controversial measures to safeguard members of the CTA. Not everyone agreed with Williams’ initiatives nor did they agree about what was best for the CTA in the coming years. Periodically, differences in opinion among the members

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<sup>32</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson to Leamer Williams, June 16, 1958, box 20, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>33</sup> MOPAC Vice President, memo, May 29, 1958, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

prevented the CTA from resolving issues effectively. The internal strife that the CTA experienced was not uncommon for many organizations devoted to social justice. Confusion and resistance sometimes accompanied changes in leadership. Yet, a lack of group cohesion was usually temporary under these circumstances.

During the 1960s, Williams's predecessors, superiors, and subsequent leaders were forced to consider new strategies for success that did not always bode well with all the members, particularly the older members. New leadership, new ideas, and new directions posed challenges for many advancement organizations during the height of the civil rights movement. The CTA is no exception. Although institutionalized racism within the railroad industry and technological innovations in transport undermined the job security of CTA members, internal challenges also partly explain the demise of the Colored Trainmen of America during this era.

On February 27, 1960, CTA President J.A. Howard, Jr. met with presidents of the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen and the International Association of Railway Employees to create "an organization whereby all members of the railroad industry would be as one and more particularly the firemen, brakemen, switchmen and train porters."<sup>34</sup> In less

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<sup>34</sup> John W. Whitaker to A. Philip Randolph, March 29, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

than a month later, A. Philip Randolph responded to Whitaker's initiative. His reply acknowledged how black labor unions in "this field are too small financially, and organizationally weak, to maintain independent units to do an effective job for the Negro railway employees."<sup>35</sup> Although executives from the CTA, IARE, ACRT and LF, and eventually BSCP all seriously entertained the idea of merging, CTA membership at the local lodge level largely disapproved of Howard's initiative. This innovative maneuver created internal conflict within the organization partly because it meant an alliance with longtime CTA foe A. Philip Randolph. CTA members believed Randolph deliberately created confusion and division among black railroad laborers for the benefit of BSCP membership. Senior member and former CTA Administrative Officer Amos F. Hayes promptly objected to the prospect of merging. On October 31, 1960 Hayes wrote Williams a scathing complaint protesting "against the unwarranted, and unauthorized action of Mr. James Howard, Jr...Mr. Howard was sent by the Grand Lodge as a good will gesture to the meeting of the International Association of Railroad Employees by the Grand Lodge with clear instructions he was not to sign any type of document...We must, therefore, work fast in order to block the possible effects of the president's folly. In view of this action on the part of our President (Mr. James Howard, Jr.), I call upon him to resign, and if he does not do so then

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<sup>35</sup> A. Philip Randolph to John W. Whitaker, April 21, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

he should be impeached.”<sup>36</sup>

Howard must have sensed trouble brewing among the rank and file members of the CTA. His lawyer wrote him on November 4, 1960 assuring him “the Draft instrument signed by you on behalf of the Colored Trainmen of America...not only does not bind the Colored Trainmen of America to a merger, but on page 2, the last paragraph clearly contemplates that the merger is subject to the verification of the majority of the local lodges of each individual organization.”<sup>37</sup> Recognizing the increasing threat of African American railroad workers being displaced, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters International, President A. Philip Randolph, personally appealed to CTA President J.A. Howard, Jr. calling “for unity among Negro railway workers, in order to achieve a greater measure of security...the Negro railway labor organizations will either merge to survive or not unite and perish...I hope we may come prepared to discuss details of developing some kind of unity of the Negro railway labor organizations.”<sup>38</sup>

Both Randolph’s and Whitaker’s appeals apparently fell on deaf ears among CTA members of various lodges. On November 12, 1960, Local Lodge

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<sup>36</sup> Amos F. Hayes to Leamer Williams, October 31, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Brown to J.A. Howard, Jr., Nov. 4, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>38</sup> A. Philip Randolph to J.A. Howard, Oct. 11, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

No. 1 President Leamer Williams reported back to Whitaker that the “report of the Merger Committee was read in our regular Local Meeting...All members strongly opposed merger plans and voted “No.”<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, twenty two out of thirty-one IARE lodges in 7 different states voted for the merger.<sup>40</sup> In less than a month, CTA Local Lodge No. 2 President Felton Armstead reported “This report has been taken under careful and impartial consideration by our Local. Due to our present foresight of the coming crisis, we have voted to remain a separate organization as we have been in the past.”<sup>41</sup> Howard followed suit by unequivocally dispelling any notion that the CTA members approved of the merger. By the end of December, Howard notified IARE International President Whitaker “that the local lodges of the CT of A voted one hundred percent against the merger.”<sup>42</sup> Not only did Howard’s actions create friction internally, it also distanced longtime NRLEC labor union allies.

The Grand President of the Association of Railway Trainmen and

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<sup>39</sup> Leamer Williams to John W. Whitaker, Nov. 12, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>40</sup> John W. Whitaker to J.A. Howard, Dec. 17, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Felton Armstead Letter to John W. Whitaker, Dec. 7, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>42</sup> James A. Howard, Jr. Letter to John W. Whitaker, Dec. 26, 1960, , box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

Locomotive Firemen J.F. Little, Jr. replied to Howard's report. Little wisely cautioned Howard concerning the implications by suggesting that by the CTA "not joining with us will leave one weak link in the chain we had hoped to strengthen by joining hands. I am sure that you realized that within the next ten years there will be less employees in the railway industry and unless something new develops, the Negro will suffer the loss of many jobs. This will be attributed to what is called "Automation." That is to say electronics will do much of the work now performed by men. The positions of operating these devices will go to white men who will not care about the Negroes now given so much in getting trains to their destinations."<sup>43</sup> Howard's premature signing of the alliance agreement without a vote before the members implies that he fully understood the benefit of partnering with the other African American railroad labor unions. He also understood the unwelcome changes within the industry looming on the horizon. The older generation of CTA members preferred to adhere to certain traditions. For them, partnering with the BSCP conceded weakness. The newer generation embraced change. For them, partnering with the BSCP and other black labor unions represented the possibility of strengthening CTA bargaining power in labor disputes.

By the end of 1960, President Eisenhower agreed to create a commission

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<sup>43</sup> J.F. Little, Jr. to J.A. Howard, Jr., Jan. 9, 1961, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

comprised of railroad labor management and public representatives. On January 15, 1961, Eisenhower formed the commission to redress sweeping changes in the industry adversely impacting the future of American railroads.<sup>44</sup> The decision to redress the shortcomings of The Railway Act also benefited African American railroad workers. Roughly 4 percent or 2,100 of 53,310 firemen were black by 1961. African American railroad workers continued to call for the elimination of charters containing exclusionary Jim Crow membership policies in international unions. They also pushed for more opportunities in apprenticeships and the elimination of racial seniority lines in collective bargaining agreements. The NAACP echoed these concerns by successfully filing claims with the President's Committee on Government Contracts.

Progress ushered in significant changes in railroad industry labor practices. Even racist internationals recognized the necessity to make adjustments in order to remain both viable and competitive. Both the AFL-CIO mandated that internationals abandon racist bars to membership or risk possible exclusion from the AFL-CIO. The Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen amended its constitution to admit African Americans by 1961. The Order of Railway Conductors followed suit despite the fact that relatively few African Americans

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<sup>44</sup> IARE International President's Report October – November – December, memo, 1960, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

worked as conductors. Meanwhile, CTA members continued to experience employment discrimination tactics associated with new opportunities. On April 16, 1963, CTA General Chairman Truett V. Tillmon wrote MOPAC Railroad Superintendent R.W. Parker to protest the “conduct of investigation and to evidence as presented in the investigation which support our position that Brakeman Bailey have been unjustly disciplined.”<sup>45</sup> On October 29, 1963, CTA General Chairman Truett V. Tillmon wrote MOPAC Trainmaster K.M. Holloway requesting the he take action to protect the rights of a CTA member after he was denied the opportunity to work in his regular position directly behind the engine. Moreover, Tillmon also relayed how the conductor was reportedly “abusive and quarrelsome and that his department is not what is required of all employees in their dealings with their subordinates, and each other.”<sup>46</sup> Despite Tillmon’s effort to resolve countless grievances favorably, the CTA experienced opted to make another abrupt change in leadership. The organization voted to replace Grand Chairman Tillmon after members decided that he mishandled several complaints.<sup>47</sup> It is plausible that a lack in leadership continuity during these days

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<sup>45</sup> Truett V. Tillmon to R.W. Parker, April 16, 1963, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Truett V. Tillmon to K.M. Holloway, Oct. 29, 1963, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Leamer Williams to James A. Howard, Jr., May 20, 1963, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.



weakened the organizational effectiveness. It also made the organization more susceptible to dissolution and defectors. Disunity is not a defining characteristic of the CTA but it was a key factor in the final days of the organization.

The July 2, 1964 enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill made eliminating the color bar from union membership much more expedient for both predominantly white and black labor unions. Federal law made it illegal to bar membership based on color. Moreover, the July 5, 1965 creation and enforcement power of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) also made enforcement of federal anti-discriminatory policies much more likely. First, the CTA responded by contemplating the idea of renaming the organization by dropping "Colored" from the name and enlisting white members. They also considered changing the name of the organization to the Coastal Trainmen of America. Before CTA members could fully explore these ideas, both the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Order of Railway Conductors and Brakemen started competing to coax African American CTA members to join their respective organizations.

Once again, CTA members disagreed over what was the most appropriate course of action. This lack of cohesion weakened the CTA internally, especially when faced with dwindling numbers in membership and limited opportunities for advancement within the industry. On June 8, 1966, the BRT wrote the African American trainmen working out of Kingsville, Texas, yards. They wrote Colored

Trainmen to dispel discouraging rumors that suggested those who signed up with BRT would likely lose their seniority. According to the BRT, this type of propaganda was “malicious and misleading, and the only purpose is an attempt to prevent Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen from securing additional members.”<sup>48</sup> On July 16, 1966, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen met with the African American trainmen to answer questions concerning membership.<sup>49</sup> In a written appeal to the CTA, Texas BRT Organizer Isaac Hollis, Jr. recognized that “thru unity there is strength, and by pooling their resources they will have strength...to promote the general welfare and advance its members interests, social, moral, political, economic, and intellectual to protect their families by the exercise of benevolence.”<sup>50</sup> Veteran CTA member Amos F. Hayes apparently believed the Order of Railway Conductors and Brakemen might be a fit for CTA members. Hayes communicated with the ORCB Chairman V.O. Niles by letter and telephone but alluded to the fact that he really needed to “discuss the matter with...President Williams ...in pursuing the matter.”<sup>51</sup> For some members, the opportunity to become a member of another organization became more enticing

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<sup>48</sup> R.R. Green to Kingsville Brakemen, June 8, 1966, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>49</sup> I.J.Benton to the Colored Trainmen of America, July 17, 1966, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> V.O. Niles to Amos F. Hayes, June 13, 1966, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

as the circumstances within the CTA seemed to worsen. Two months later, James A. Howard reported on the dire financial status of the CTA. He reported the “Grand Lodge has no money, not even enough to pay its current bills. The Local Lodges had a little money but at the rate it is going now they won’t have it long.”<sup>52</sup>

Members were not only defecting from the CTA. They continued to lose their jobs and be overlooked for promotions due to new requirements and new job demands and expired agreement terms. Tillmon complained of “the method the Trainmaster is using in giving the Brakeman the Conductor’s examination...W.H. Jefferson who has 46 years of service...as engine foreman...failed on the Conductors examination given by Trainmaster Holloway. Then a few days later the Company hired some young White Boys [sic] with little if any Railroad experience and upon giving them a couple of hours of examination promoted them to Conductor...That is one of the most disgraceful acts of discriminating I have ever seen. I am told not a single brakemen who took the 2 day exam passed.”<sup>53</sup>

January 1, 1967 marked the beginning of an accelerated seniority rights termination agreement aimed at retiring African American railroad laborers

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<sup>52</sup> James A. Howard to Abe S. Schannon, Dec. 1, 1967, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>53</sup> James A. Howard, Jr. to Truett V. Tillmon, Dec. 25, 1967, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

between the ages of 65 and 70. The agreement signed by the CTA General Chairman and the MOPAC Labor Relations Director stipulated that seniority rights terminated for those who have reached the age of 69 years old. Each year after that, from 1968 to 1971, the age of termination was progressively lowered from 68 to 65.<sup>54</sup> Obviously, this agreement shifted the priorities of the organization. On March 2, 1967, Tillmon wrote MOPAC Labor Relations Director C.B. Sayers requesting an update concerning the status of Health and Welfare – Hospitalization Plan for retiring members.<sup>55</sup>

This agreement adversely impacted the organization's prospects for longevity. Excluding rare individuals like Amos F. Hayes, who joined the BRT during September 1967, it effectively removed most of the loyal, longtime members from the roster over the course of five years.<sup>56</sup> Younger members with budding careers in the railroad industry flocked to predominantly white organizations when they received an opportunity.<sup>57</sup> Inevitably, this became a

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<sup>54</sup> MOPAC Memorandum of Agreement, memo, Jan. 1967, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>55</sup> C.B. Sayers to T.V. Tillmon, March 2, 1967, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Jenkins letter to CTA, Sept. 7, 1967, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

widely accepted option within the CTA.<sup>58</sup> By now, high-ranking members believed the organization was well on its way to becoming defunct and hoped to make this a seamless transition. Still, others disagreed with how CTA affairs were being handled during a time of considerable change. For example, CTA member Aaron Gant wrote James A. Howard requesting his resignation “for the good of the Lodge.”<sup>59</sup>

During 1967, the Brotherhood of Railroad trainmen succeeded the Colored Trainmen of America as the certified bargaining agent for the Railroad employees previously represented by the CTA.<sup>60</sup> According to the state of Texas, the incorporation charter for the Colored Trainmen of America expired on June 13, 1968; however, the membership persistently voted against moving forward with officially completing the dissolution of the corporation and dissolving the assets between 1967 and 1969.<sup>61</sup> Leamer Williams remained steadfast in his leadership role. He spent nearly two years repeatedly writing the ranking CTA officers requesting their participation in the dissolution of the CTA. He

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<sup>58</sup> Leamer Williams to CTA Membership, Jan. 12, 1969, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>59</sup> Aaron Grant to James A. Howard, Nov. 13, 1967, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Ben A. Glusing to CTA Officer Aaron Gant, May 7, 1968, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Wheeler to CTA Member Preston Parker, June 13, 1968, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

urged them to move forward. Williams insisted that this would happen on his watch no matter what.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, the remaining members of the Colored Trainmen of America came together to dispense with the formalities of dissolving the organization.<sup>63</sup> By this time, membership dwindled down to 200 members. The minutes from this session reflect not only the topics but also the tone and temperament of individuals closely associated with the operations of the CTA throughout its history. Some members reminisced about the purpose and successes of the CTA. Others speculated about decisions and actions taken on behalf of the organization more recently. Bickering proved unavoidable. In the end, the discussion of membership authorization cards for other organizations, and also how best to dispense of the assets dominated the discussion. During this session, they elected to freeze the monetary accounts after covering the remaining debts. They also elected to keep the Grand Lodge building in Kingsville, Texas, but permit its use for local civic organizations. Following a coffee break, the men briefly discussed both the office supplies and organization's records. Then one of America's oldest African American railroad operating trade labor unions officially adjourned one last time. Subsequent

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<sup>62</sup> Leamer Williams letter to Aaron Gant, January 12, 1969, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

<sup>63</sup> CTA Grand Lodge Meeting Minutes, March 30, 1969, box 1, The Colored Trainmen of America Papers.

activities were limited to tying up loose ends.

Both external and internal factors limited CTA opportunities for labor and civil rights activism during the second half of the twentieth century. Drastic changes in American culture and society during the 1950s and 1960s - chiefly the improvements in completing modes of transportation, railroad industry innovations, desegregation of public institutions, the integration of railroad labor unions, and the creation of the EEOC - undermined the fundamental purpose for creating African American labor unions. More individuals traveled by commercial airlines. Others chose to drive on newly created interstate highways that linked distant places. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision initiated the desegregation of American society. The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights bill outlawed racial discrimination in public accommodations. Logically, if the passage of federal laws made it illegal for the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen to exclude blacks from union membership, then these laws also rendered black organizations founded in response to these circumstances irrelevant. During the 1960s, the survival of so many black organizations relied upon adaptability. For the CTA, this did not occur. By law, the organization outlived its primary purpose by 1969.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The Colored Trainmen of America was one of the most influential African American railroad labor unions of the twentieth century. They were instrumental in challenging racial inequality issues of both local and national importance prior to the 1960s. During the early 1900s, African American railroad employees of the Gulf Coast region endured Jim Crow customs and practices both on and off the job, with little intervention from white labor unions and government oversight agencies. Consequently, the black railroad workers in Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida empowered themselves by forming the Colored Trainmen of America (CTA) by 1918. Initially, they were primarily concerned with fighting employment discrimination on the job. However, the nature of their jobs often exposed them to the harsh realities of segregated public spaces. It became obvious to CTA members that the racial inequality associated with both employment discrimination and segregated public spaces overlapped. In both instances, the men were treated as second-class inferiors unworthy of the same treatment as whites. Consequently, their struggle against racial inequality on the job and in the community became one in the same as the CTA became a national force within the railroad industry.

Initially, the CTA members organized to improve their terms of employment. The dangerous nature of their jobs inspired the union to actively



seek quality healthcare, health benefits and life insurance. CTA Administrators worked diligently to ensure that the members received both quality benefits and medical care on par with their white-colleagues, despite the resistance they often encountered. This proved somewhat challenging because healthcare providers and health benefit companies often treated blacks differently. Fortunately, cordial relationships between CTA officers and MOPAC administrators worked together to obtain quality coverage and care. Occasionally, this also meant challenging discriminatory policies and institutions together.

The CTA members often challenged the color line during their travels. During long runs, members sought quality service and treatment along the railways. Black railroad workers selectively used their meal deduction system to obtain satisfactory room and board accommodations. Periodically, the CTA members relied on railroad company travel vouchers and liberal support of progressive personnel administrators to help minimize racism in public spaces during the first half of the twentieth century. By all accounts, there is sufficient reason to believe they were relatively successful.

The collective and individual actions of pioneering civil rights attorneys such as Charles H. Houston and Joseph C. Waddy also advanced the labor disputes of the CTA members. Houston and Waddy did not limit their representation to purely labor affairs. This dynamic team of lawyers made legal

challenges to racial discrimination based on constitutional issues concerning equality. In the cases of *Steele* and *Tunstall*, this dynamic team of lawyers also focused on how the CTA, Houston, and Waddy labor dispute initiatives and legal challenges also helped shape the national effort to eliminate “Jim Crow” discriminatory practices from the railroad industry nationwide. The CTA possessed the organizational commitment from its members and financial resources to retain quality legal representation money could buy during this time period. Consequently, in order to resolve union representation and contractual issues with their employer concerning seniority, time and a half, promotions, training, hiring, and firing, the Colored Trainmen of America utilized their legal services.

Charles H. Houston, Joseph H. Waddy and the Colored Trainmen of America were also integrally involved in the creation and promotion of the Negro Railway Labor Executives’ Committee. Comprised of 5 of the most influential independent African American railroad labor unions, the creation of the NRLEC fostered a collegial spirit among the various black railroad labor organizations by systematically forwarding them joint correspondence concerning relevant reading material, court decisions, new legislation, labor disputes, and legal strategies to ensure everyone remained an agent of progress and opportunity for future successes. Often times, these actions sparked constructive dialogue between organizations and also led to greater cooperation necessary for

achieving objectives with far-reaching implications that impacted them all. The *Negro Railway Labor News* newspaper promoted both the spirit and agenda of the committee. Altogether, the formation of the National Railroad Labor Executive Committee, committee minutes, and the newspaper articles reflect another approach CTA leadership utilized to challenge racially motivated employment discrimination within both their immediate sphere of operations and industry wide.

The gradual demise of the CTA was unavoidable. The number of CTA successes dwindled substantially during the second half of the twentieth century. Despite being well organized and prepared to challenge the status quo, technological advances in travel, the desegregation of American society, and internal disunity within the CTA all helped accelerate the dissolution during the late 1960s. Collectively, these three key variables of progress actually retarded the development of the CTA during the 1960s.

This study removes the Colored Trainmen of America from a place of relative obscurity. As an early independent African American labor union organization committed to unity, justice and protection of the rights, the Colored Trainmen of America worked diligently to advance the rights of both CTA members as well as members of the African American community. The CTA fought for better wages, better assignments, promotions, quality healthcare, pay raises, health insurance, and life insurance on the job. During their travels along

the railways they fought for better overnight accommodations, quality dining experiences on par with their white contemporaries, and also periodically challenged other public aspects of the color line as well. Although the CTA overcame a considerable number of barriers to racial equality, the organization could not bridge the ever-increasing gap between the outdated views older membership and the innovative ideas of a younger generation of visionaries. Moreover, technological advances and federal intervention also ensured the demise of the organization. Some organizations are simply not meant to stand the test of time. Nonetheless, the courage, commitment, and accomplishments of the CTA certainly will not be forgotten. This pioneering organization will be remembered for its monumental service to African Americans during the height of Jim Crow. This study furthers historical knowledge of the Colored Trainmen of America and preserves the legacy of the organization.

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