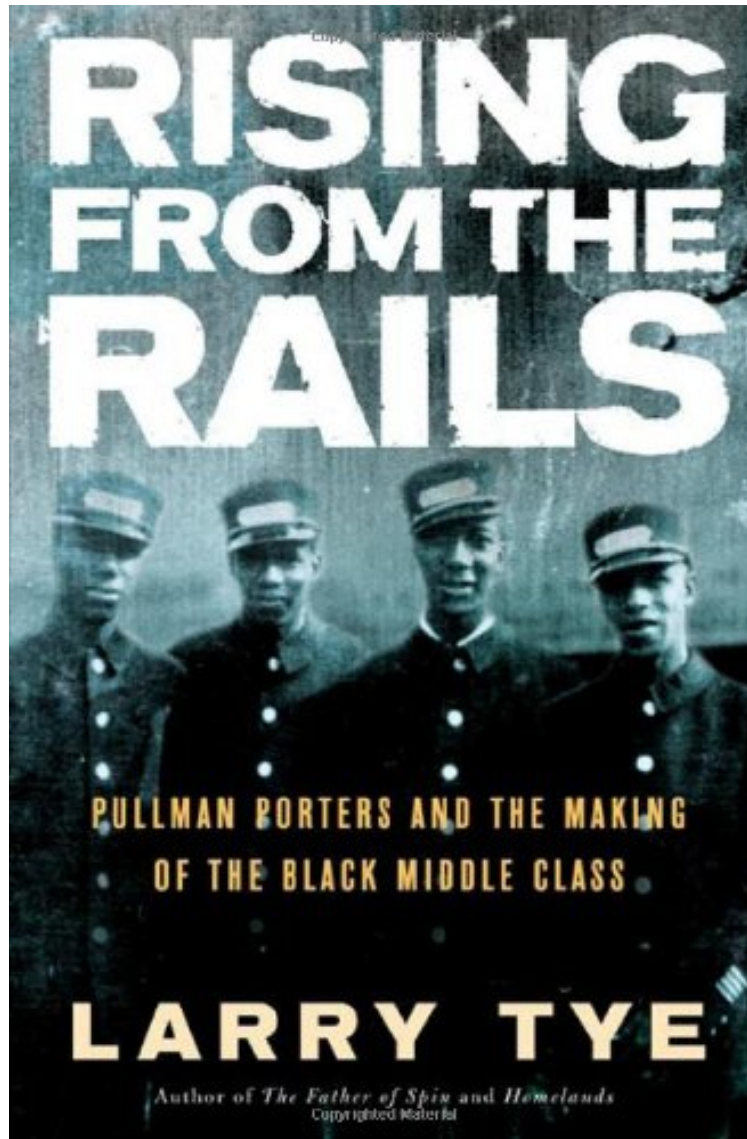


Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class

Larry Tye

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Larry Tye : Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Strategies for EmpowermentBy Purple DragonRising From The Rails tells an important story of the transition of black labor after the Civil War from slavery to freedom. After

emancipation, African Americans looked for employment in a variety of venues. With the growth of railroads, George Pullman popularized a new travel experience--the sleeping car. Pullman instituted and combined a number of features that made rail travel luxurious--safety features, expanded car size, shock-absorbing wheels and "trained" personal attendants-- the porters. One of the most important aspects was the personal service offered by these porters. To recruit porters, Pullman drew heavily from the dark skinned former slaves of the Deep South. This was done because these newly freed men fulfilled many of stereotypes of the period that centered on docility and presumption of an inherent ability to provide personal service while being friendly and discreet. This gave the ex-slaves and subsequent African American workers a degree of freedom of movement and economic opportunity heretofore unknown in this community. Though these jobs were some of the best available, they were at best a mixed blessing. The jobs were highly regimented with a strict, codified rule book covering nearly every eventuality. The smallest infraction could result in suspension and termination. This made for some tense times for the porters. The conditions though not as difficult as some agricultural pursuit were very challenging---long trips, long hours, minimal facilities for sleeping, dressing, etc. Out of the need to establish more reasonable and equitable pay and working conditions, the porters under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph established the first black trade union in the United States. Through a number of strategies, the porters won recognition of their union with the Pullman Company and did improve the lot of their workers. The union also exerted national influence on a number of issues which served to expand opportunity for African Americans--desegregation of wartime industry. A. Philip Randolph was the pioneer that proposed a March on Washington in the forties. Though the march never took place, the mere threat of the march got results. He subsequently served as the prime organizer of the actual March on Washington in 1968. Many of the tactics which would be applied during the 1950s-1960s Civil Rights struggles were developed and tried by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. These porters used their economic opportunities to strengthen their families and provide an avenue for many of their children to enter the middle class. This is a wonderful story of the unique and important chapter in American and African American labor history. Tye tells the larger labor history as well as the significant personal stories of the porters which puts a human face on these struggles for equality. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A piece of America's social history By Donald Swingle If you love modern American social history you may love this book, so much of it in the actual words of the Pullman porters who experienced it. An amazing amount of research, it is apparent, went into it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A little known history and it's legacy By C. Ellen Connally Larry Tye does a wonderful job of not only telling the story of the Pullman porters but also telling of the age in which they lived that includes a history of the railroad industry in America. He tells how Pullman Porters got by and what they did to survive. In several instances, he also shows how even though there was not always good blood between the white conductors and other white workers and the Pullman Porters, there were times when they had to work together. For older African American readers the book is a trip down memory lane, allowing them to recall stories of fathers, relatives and family friends who were Pullman porters. For younger African Americans it's a great lesson in history - and in a sense far more relevant than stories of how slaves got by. For White Americans it's a look at how their grandparents and great grandparents looked at African Americans. Included in the story of the Pullman porters is the story of A. Phillip Randolph and his sometimes lost story and his contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. One of the important things that I came away from this book with was the legacy that these men - and few women- passed on to their children and the number of significant African Americans who hold significant places in American life because of the hard work and savings of a Pullman Porter who took degradation so that their children could go to college. This book should be required reading in every African American History class! It's readable and comprehensive. On page nine there is one small error. Tye refers to a "lanky lawyer with whiskers from Springfield named Abraham Lincoln" who road the rails. Lincoln did not acquire his beard until after his election in 1860.

An engaging social history that reveals the critical role Pullman porters played in the struggle for African American civil rights. When George Pullman began recruiting Southern blacks as porters in his luxurious new sleeping cars, the former slaves suffering under Jim Crow laws found his offer of a steady job and worldly experience irresistible. They quickly signed up to serve as maid, waiter, concierge, nanny, and occasionally doctor and undertaker to cars full of white passengers, making the Pullman Company the largest employer of African American men in the country by the 1920s. In the world of the Pullman sleeping car, where whites and blacks lived in close proximity, porters developed a unique culture marked by idiosyncratic language, railroad lore, and shared experience. They called difficult passengers "Mister Charlie"; exchanged stories about Daddy Jim, the legendary first Pullman porter; and learned to distinguish generous tippers such as Humphrey Bogart from skinflints like Babe Ruth. At the same time, they played important social, political, and economic roles, carrying jazz and blues to outlying areas, forming America's first black trade union, and acting as forerunners of the modern black middle class by virtue of their social position and income. Drawing on extensive interviews with dozens of porters and their descendants, Larry Tye reconstructs the complicated world of the Pullman porter, and provides a lively and enlightening look at this important social phenomenon.

From Publishers Weekly What have the poet Claude McKay, the filmmaker Oscar Micheaux, the explorer Matthew Henson, the musician "Big Bill" Broonzy and college president Benjamin Mays in common? They all worked for the Pullman Company, which until 1969 owned the sleeper cars for and ran the sleeper service on the U.S. railroads, and was at one time "the largest employer of Negroes in America and probably the world." Blacks, preferably those with "jet-black skin," supplied "the social separation... vital for porters to safely interact with white passengers in such close quarters." Although Tye makes the general case for the centrality of "The Pullman Porter" in the making of the black middle class (and in much of American cultural life), the particular porter becomes supportive detail for a highly readable business history at one end and labor history at the other. Former BostonGlobe journalist Tye (The Father of Spin) interviewed as many surviving porters as he could find as well as their children, and immersed himself in autobiographies, oral histories, biographies, newspapers, company records—wherever the porter might be glimpsed, including fiction and film. Entertaining detail abounds: Bogart was a solid tipper; Seabiscuit traveled in a "specially modified eighty-foot car cushioned with the finest straw." So does informing detail: the long hours, the dire working conditions, the low pay, the lively idiom, the burdensome rules. While "The Pullman porter... was the only black man many [whites] ever saw," Tye shows what whites never saw—the grinding, often humiliating, realities of the job and the rippling effect of steady employment in the upward mobility of the porters' children and grandchildren. 40 bw photos not seen by PW. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist Although Tye focuses on Pullman porters and the formation of the black middle class, his analysis of class perceptions and race relations reverberates to the current day. Following Reconstruction, industrialist George Pullman took advantage of the limited opportunities available for freedmen, hiring and exploiting blacks--the darker the better--to serve as porters on his railroad. The porters suffered low wages, long hours, and weeks if not months away from home. In addition, they were expected to adopt a servile demeanor to provide comfort to the mostly white patrons of the Pullman sleeping cars. But the upside was employment, travel, and middle-class values and opportunities. Moreover, the fight for union recognition through A. Phillip Randolph's leadership was the basis for progress for blacks during the pre-civil rights era. The porters' labor dispute and efforts to include blacks in more favorable positions in the war industry led to the first march on Washington. Tye also explores the tension between the perception of Pullman porters as docile servants and their challenge to the status quo. Vernon Ford Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

"This book brings to life the stirring story of the civil rights legacy of A. Phillip Randolph and the Pullman porters, which is an inspiration to those of us following in their footsteps. Kudos to Larry Tye for giving us this wonderfully readable, and incredibly important, history."--Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.

"Larry Tye has written a much-deserved love song to the forgotten men of the civil rights and labor movements – the Pullman Porters who defeated a major corporation, helped finance numerous civil rights battles, spread news and culture nation-wide, and set a high standard for dignity." –Julian Bond, Chairman, NAACP Board of Directors

"This is one terrific book. It's a chapter of American history about which few of us know much, and it's a reminder of what life was like for African-Americans in this country, at least until the last few decades. But it's mostly about these men-- their courage, their tenacity and their hopes and dreams for their children and grandchildren. Many of them are no longer with us, but they should and would be rightly proud of how much their kids and grandkids have achieved and how much they have given to this country." –Michael Dukakis, Former governor of Massachusetts, former vice-chair of Amtrak board

"This book does a magnificent job in relating how a relatively small group of struggling workers shaped not only the African-American community but all of the United States. The story of the Pullman porter is no less important than any other struggle for civil rights in the American labor movement." –James P. Hoffa, General President, International Brotherhood of Teamsters

"Larry Tye's *Rising from the Rails* recreates an important chapter in the history of black people in this country: the hard earned passage of thousands of blacks into the middle class. By examining the progress of the Pullman porter - from the step and fetch it caricature to pensioned union member - Tye captures one of black people's many struggles to achieve equality. This is a story all Americans should know." –Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Senior Managing Director at Lazard LLC and author of *Vernon Can Read!: A Memoir*

"*Rising from the Rails* chronicles the pioneering role the Pullman porters and their leader, A. Philip Randolph, played in building America's union movement. This vividly told story should be required reading for those who care about labor history, race history, and US history." –John J. Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO