

Transcript of “The Long Fight for Porters’ Rights” – Episode 4

Richard Provencher (RP): This episode contains offensive and potentially harmful language that refers to Black communities in Canada. Some of the stories that are shared also include vivid descriptions of physical and verbal violence that may be difficult for some listeners to hear.

Discover Library and Archives Canada presents “Porter Talk.” This production explores the lived experiences of Black men who laboured as sleeping car porters for both the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways during the twentieth century. Their voices, along with those of their wives and children, relay stories of both hardship and resilience.

This is the first season of *Voices Revealed*, a series that amplifies the voices of underrepresented and marginalized communities held within Library and Archives Canada’s vast oral history holdings. Narratives of injustice, conflict, persistence, and resolution enable us to understand how the past powerfully defines our present. They also provide compelling insights that push us to imagine new directions for our collective future. My name is Richard Provencher and, as your host of the first season of *Voices Revealed*, I am pleased to guide you through the stories that are at the heart of “Porter Talk.”

[402546 \(Video in the Key of Oscar\), File 2, 5:10](#)

Bill Cunningham (BC): Did the railways treat the porters’ communities across the country fairly in a historical sense?

Stanley G. Grizzle (SG): Not really, not really. The railways were ruthless employers. We-we had no rights that they were bound to respect. We were treated like uh, things rather than human beings. I’d come in from Vancouver uh, after four nights on the road, back to Toronto, and uh, I would be shipped off the next night. And if I didn’t agree to go, there would be action taken against you. Not overt penalties, “But uh, we won’t forget that you turned us down this time.” And we, we worked sometimes over 400 hours a month. For \$60 or \$75 dollars a month. Over 400 hours of work. No pay for overtime ...

[402546 \(Video in the Key of Oscar\), File 2, 16:26](#)

BC: You’re doing a book on the Black porters across the country. What’s the kind of bottom line of that book? Why are they so important to-to the Canadian- to Canadian history?

SG: I think that one of the best lessons that can be learned from the-the presence of sleeping car porters, uh, all Black men, is that um, they can do it themselves. We organized a union, without a government grant. On our paltry income, we were able to do for ourselves, organize a union ... So the lessons that the porters can give to the community, and it’s important that the-the history of the porters be documented, is that uh— you have the ability if you wish, to-to throw off the shackles of uh, of-of slavery and uh, free yourself.

RP: When Stanley G. Grizzle was interviewed by CBC journalist Bill Cunningham in 1991, he repeatedly emphasized the inherent inhumanity of portering. A predominantly Black profession dating to the 1870s, porters did not experience improvements to their exploitative working conditions until the mid-1900s. They continued to face employment practices reminiscent of slavery.

Evelyn Marshall Braxton, who was related to a long and extensive line of sleeping car porters, shares a story about the indignity her father-in-law faced on the rails:

[417386, File 2, 27:43](#)

Evelyn Marshall Braxton (EB): I remember my father-in-law told me that, uh, when there was no ah union when he was a railroad porter.

SG: Who was that?

EB: Um, Christopher Marshall, but he was born in Barbados, and he said one lady came on the train and she would, was calling him: “Sam and Sam and Sam.” And he says, “My name is not Sam. My name is Christopher,” which he was proud of that name. And, however, conductor wrote him up and said he was rude to the- to this, uh, passenger. Of course, there was no union, and he went up and the CPR called him, said, “I told him my name was Christopher. I am not Sam, never has been Sam.”

SG: Mm-hmm.

EB: So he said, “Well, you have to write and apologize to her.” He said, “I will not. I came from Barbados and I have my trade and here’s your keys.” [laughs] He was his own union, he was his own brotherhood man [laughs] and he went on from there and went to his trade and he continue on and he- and he made a good life for himself ...

RP: Mrs. Braxton’s father-in-law was unique in his ability to take back power from the passenger and the company official who rendered him invisible. His expertise and self-assuredness went on to define the life he created for himself beyond the rails.

Most men, however, could not make a similar career move. Educated or not, Black men had few opportunities that accorded them a stable wage outside of portering. These men formed bonds, and it was these tightly woven social worlds that enabled them to subtly navigate the disrespect and discrimination they routinely faced on the job. They dreamed up imaginary stories about their passengers, which allowed them to predict their personalities and devise creative ways to collectively respond to their demands. Flagging potential problems ahead of time and working together as a team to address them when they occurred, were subtle but important forms of dissent.

This camaraderie was cross-border, as porters forged connections while regularly making their way across Canada and the United States. Their shared experiences both on the job and in society at large connected them to the larger battles they waged against anti-Black racism in both countries. As privileged members of their communities, they knew that raising their voices was the only way to fight for a better world.

Quiet resistance allowed porters to manage passengers, but white supremacy defined the exploitative corporate culture they faced when butting heads with company officials. And it was of little help for them to appeal to the Canadian trade union movement given its similar foundations.

As a result, the drive to unionize was complicated, a long-haul battle for the ages. Porters rolled up their sleeves and chipped away at the cause, bit by bit, over many decades. Those who worked for the Canadian National Railway (CNR) fought to change working conditions through their

membership in the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees. While those employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) sought the ability to form a union, free of company control.

Dr. Steven High, Professor of History at Concordia University and the author of *Deindustrializing Montreal: Entangled Histories of Race, Residence, and Class*, gives us an overview of the Canadian labour movement, the colour barriers implicit within it, and the early challenges that CNR porters faced when organizing:

Steven High (SH): Now, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees is one of the first Canadian unions ... And, and so, and it was, you know, a major player on the, on the CNR or the Grand Trunk, and then later the Canadian National Railway, which was government owned after, after World War I. The porters are Black and they're not allowed to join these unions ... And so they organized, right?

So the Order of Sleeping Car Porters emerged in 1917. And it's the first sort of large-scale Black union in North America. It precedes the organization of Black porters in the United States by about a decade. And so they organized both on the Canadian National Railway and they were trying to organize the Canadian Pacific Railway, but that, that corporation was very, very anti-union and they basically fired all the Black organizers, who then, most of them took on jobs in the CNR.

And so you had this Black union, right? And they wanted to join the labour federation, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, which is the house of labour. And, and the Federation sort of said, well, you know, you have to join an existing union. You have to join this Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees. But that union had a white-only clause. And so it took a year, right ... when that union, you know, manages to vote out that clause, to change that clause in order to incorporate this Black union into this, you know, into this white union.

And so it becomes like a multiracial experiment ... [T]hey're facing all kinds of discrimination within the union. They have separate seniority lists, right? So if you are a porter, you can't, you know, there's no social mobility. You can't get promoted into become like a conductor, right, because those are separate seniority lists or perhaps a separate union. And so really, once you're hired into a position, you're pretty much locked in ...

RP: The Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees eliminated the white-only clause from its constitution in 1919, becoming one of the first unions in Canada to remove racial restrictions from its membership policy (High 117). Black railway workers became full members, organizing into all-Black local unions that lobbied hard, albeit with little early success, against the CNR's segregated job classification and seniority systems. Meanwhile, the CPR stuck to its anti-union stance.

The slow pace of change was a hard pill to swallow for some porters and especially those who had supported fellow white workers during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. Listen as Dr. Mathieu, Associate Professor of History at the University of Minnesota and author of *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955*, shares this little-known history with us:

Dr. Saje Mathieu (SM): ... [S]leeping car porters in Winnipeg were at the biggest, most important, most transformative, most alarming strike that we get in 1919, right? The thing that makes it clear to government and Canadians writ large that unions are not going anywhere. And what Canada needed to do in part to have post-World War I peace is to recognize that, embrace that, and fold it into the way that we think about work, right? Super transformative. And it's also part of a global work protest culture that we get after World War I.

The way that I found out that porters were at the strike is, a note, like a little slip in the porter records where they acknowledged the donations that they had made to the very union that would not have them. The very union that for years had said: "You're not man enough. We don't respect the work that you do enough. You would bring us down if we included you. You can't be a part of this machinery that defines modernity and manhood and work." And rather than do what many might have done, which is to cross their arms and go, "Well, how does that bottle feel on the side of your head, striker?" They instead rolled up their sleeves, risked their jobs, because it isn't as though they could get a different job if they got fired, right? And showed up ...

The strikers are walking right past where porters are living by the train tracks. They're walking right past their stores, their apartment buildings, they're watching that energy that could so easily turn against them as foreign labour taking their jobs, right? And instead they bravely say, "I'm joining that group, I'm joining that march." So this group that is invisible is also highly visible when it's time to take a risk ...

... [I]t's yet another sacrifice that in some ways might be more dangerous than the war effort. Because we don't know how that's gonna end. That strike was alarming to Canadians. Violence is what everyone expected, right? And then they're immigrants, they could be deported. So it's a risk on multiple levels. And then the third thing that's really important to me about that moment and the contributions that the porters sit together around a table and decide this is what they will value, right? What's so important about that ... is that those are monies that they are taking out of their children's mouths. Those are monies that they could have put to any number of other uses ... That was the cost, that was the cost of a lunch at a diner. That was the cost of a beer. That was the cost of a movie ticket. That was the cost of a date with their spouse. That was the cost of a more comfortable pair of shoes to do their work. And so if we're looking for how unions mattered to these men who are not coming from union traditions as immigrants from Kansas, they're not, as immigrants from, or migrants from Canadian farms, right, there you have it. There you have it on the streets of Winnipeg during the most dangerous time to be on those streets. There you have it in putting their name to paper on those contributions to strikers' funds. And then you still have that same set of men after calm returns to Winnipeg say "Yeah, where were we?" "Yeah, no Black people. You haven't proven that you understand and value unionism. Let's just wait. Let's just wait. We're moving too fast. We're moving too fast."

RP: Although the CPR refused to support a union, it did formally recognize the Porters' Mutual Benefit Association in 1921. Unfortunately, this was a company-controlled body that did little to improve working conditions.

After the Association's creation, the CPR established enrollment procedures, donated office space, collected dues for sickness and funeral benefits, and welcomed association representatives to attend management grievance committee meetings (Williams 64).

But, as Harold James Fowler, who ran out of the CPR's Toronto Division, and Roy Williams, who was situated in Calgary, tell us, this paternalistic approach to sidestepping trade union affiliation was all smoke and mirrors:

[417393, File 1, 3:53](#)

SG: All right, um, when you started as a porter, do you recall a Porters' Welfare Committee?

Harold James Fowler (HF): Well, if you got in a little trouble, you go up there and the boss has got his job, uh, whoever his goal was up for you, so it's a begging committee because it had no power.

SG: I see, so it looked after the, uh-

HF: It attempted to.

SG: -the grievances of the porters-

HF: Yeah.

SG: -the sleeping car porters?

[417402, File 2, 19:52](#)

Roy Williams (RW): [W]ell, um, it-it-it was a company outfit and they dominated. They-they—the porters had very little room to say-

SG: Right.

RW: -and they— it wasn't, uh— whatever they said, it wasn't, uh, considered very important as far as the company is concerned. In other words, the company ruled with an iron hand, and, uh, it was most, uh, when a grievance arose why it was, um, done by the local superintendent platform inspector, and they had the final decision.

SG: Oh, I see.

RW: And many times they, uh, the rulings that they handed down, it was very unfair to the-to the porters involved, and it was many a men were dealt unjustly through this company.

RP: Dr. Dorothy Williams, author of the formative texts *Blacks in Montreal: 1628-1986* and *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal*, explains how this company strategy both rendered the men powerless, and divided them:

Dr. Dorothy Williams (DM): That was called gentle union busting ... and it wound up pitting one Black man against another ... [T]here were Black men who felt, you know what, we're getting screwed by CPR. So if CPR wants to put money into our community, we're gonna let them. Then there are others that, hell no, we don't want to have anything to do with them because that muddies the waters when we're trying to negotiate with them later on. And they will own us if we continue to accept their largesse. So you have these two competing views ... [S]o it was not a unified Black force, right, which made it easier for the company to operate exactly at the letter of the law. Well, you're not an official union. We really don't have to sit down at the table and negotiate with you.

RP: Despite the problems inherent in it, the Porters' Mutual Benefit Association became an important organization for the men. It provided meeting rooms, recreational facilities, and in some locations, spaces to accommodate those who were on layovers (Williams 64).

But the exploitative work conditions, which included low wages and extreme sleep deprivation, along with the company's near complete control over punishments, grievances, and firings continued. We return to the conversation Mr. Williams had with Stanley Grizzle to understand the deep consequences that resulted from belittling porters:

417402, File 2, 30:38

RW: ...[W]e were-we were never safe-we were never safe, we never saw— we didn't know— in other words, I didn't know when I was gonna get fired, you know. I-I could be fired from the-from the flip of a platform inspector or some employee, maybe, that wasn't connected with [inaudible 00:30:41]. And then my-my word didn't—wasn't very much. In other words, I was on a low key. I was kind of a-a boyish. You know, I-I couldn't-I didn't have the privilege to speak up when— knowing that I was right. And I-I took a lot-a lot of abuse and I was tired of taking abuse. In other words, I-I couldn't talk back to defend myself when I know I was in the right. I was more or less like, uh, you know, like a boy ... And I felt that with a union, I have-I had protection and I could have a hearing and have a proper hearing as other employees, which we did not have with this, uh, company committee. And I felt- I, oh, I needed, I felt we needed a change to better our conditions.

RP: Over time, porters realized that the CPR would never relent in its anti-union stance. The company-controlled Porters' Mutual Benefit Association would have to disband if change were to occur. Porters, led by Winnipeg- and Montreal-based labour activists John Arthur Robinson and Charles E. Russell, began to look south of the border for help.

Dr. Melinda Chateaufvert, author of the classic text *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, takes us through the successful union movement that had simultaneously rolled out in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century:

Melinda Chateaufvert (CM): The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was originally dreamed up, if you will, by people in Chicago who worked as sleeping car porters, and who wanted to organize. There had been various efforts on the part of the Pullman Association to keep a lid on any kind of organized resistance to Pullman labour policies. And, of course, that began here in the United States with the Great Railway Strike of 1892, led by Eugene Debs ...

One of the outcomes of the Great Railway Strike and one of the outcomes of Debs' organizing among the railroads is the really the radicalization of the railway brotherhoods, which had been around for quite a while.

So to organize the sleeping car porters, people took that idea, men took that idea of, we want to have a Black brotherhood that represents the sleeping car porters, and we want that to be on the same level as the railway conductors and other brotherhoods within the railway unions. Of course, those railway unions were all racially segregated and had specific lines within their constitutions prohibiting the membership of Black workers. So again, there was another reason to organize sleeping car porters in order to represent Black workers almost generally in the railway trades.

In organizing then, they were looking around for somebody who they could hire to be the president and lead organizer of the Brotherhood, of what would become the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. And they chose not to find somebody in Chicago, in part because Pullman's surveillance strategies and apparatus was so great that they knew that anybody that they tried to find there would face all sorts of repercussions.

So instead, they went to New York, and they found A. Philip Randolph. Randolph had had some experience organizing, not successfully, but trying to organize other Black workers and he was well known as the publisher of a radical magazine known as *The Messenger*, which regularly spoke to Black socialists on socialist issues, but for a Black audience. So that is who they ended up engaging to become president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters to lead the organizing campaign.

RP: Together, Robinson and Russell reached out to Randolph in 1937, a man who, through the refinement of his leadership skills and organizational tactics, went on to play an instrumental role in the American civil rights movement. Despite the initial failures he had organizing Black workers, he spent much of the interwar period working with Pullman Company sleeping car porters to establish the first Black-led labour organization to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor: The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. In fact, he had just successfully negotiated its first contract that year.

Robinson, Russell, and their pro-union supporters viewed this new transnational alliance with the American Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters as one of the only ways to push back against both the CPR as well as the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, a body that continued to advocate for a white-only union model.

However, taking this bold next step, as Montreal-based George Forray tells us, was not without risk. Being aligned with this American union movement could result in job loss and even blacklisting. And once blacklisted from portering, these men would be left with few options for supporting themselves and those who depended on them. As a result, not every porter viewed the drive to organize favourably.

[417383, File 1, 35:35](#)

SG: Tell us about the, um, how the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters came on the scene.

George Forray (GF): Oh, well now, when the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters came in, everything was so hush, hush. Actually, nobody knew what was being transpired, excepting like the men who was on this Welfare Committee, because they were the ones that were approached naturally by the BSCP. The BSCP sent their scouts here beforehand and, uh, they were the ones who canvased the different members and the welfare group at the time was more or less the voice, we'd say, of the porters. And, uh, although half the porters I imagine weren't even aware of this thing going on.

SG: Okay.

GF: But the ones who were involved, everything was very hush hush because of the fear of, uh, what we'd say reverberations on the part of the company. And, uh, at that time, unions was not recognized in Canada, per se. And, uh, it was more or less during— after the— well, when the war

got going in full swing, then the different laws were enacted by the government and, uh, made it where it was, uh, uh, it had to be accepted by the various large organizations that employed over and above a certain number of employees. So they couldn't actually turn them down, but there was a lot of reverberations besides a lot of, uh, backlash we could say from that.

SG: Right.

GF: And, uh, so the men had to be careful because they had nobody to protect them. The welfare group was there, but, uh, they couldn't actually help a brother if he was in dire problems with the company.

SG: Right.

GF: They could only intercede in minor cases. You know, it's just to say, like, you have a representative, somebody speaking for you, to back you up because the men in those days, you must remember, they were very timid. They were very timid and bulldozed by the company. And all men were treated like little boys by whoever that was white and represented, uh, the company. I mean, they could bulldoze a-a porter 'cause you were just part of the-the, uh, equipment. That's what they used to call us, part of the equipment. As long as the cars rolled, we rolled. No rights.

RP: As soon as Robinson and Russell established sound relationships with Randolph and other leading officials within the American-based Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, moves to organize CPR porters into the newly named International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters began in quick succession. Mr. Williams gives us a sense of the events that transpired and his role in the process in Calgary:

417402, File 2, 21:40

SG: ... [T]ell me about the organizing of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Were you involved in the organizing of it?

RW: Yes, I was, um— I took part in the organizing— the-the porters, when-when-when we got the word that, um— from the delegation, um, from Montreal, that, uh, Brother Randolph was coming to organize in Canada well, um— And they-they-they advised us to-to set up our committees and start collectin' dues for this— uh, for his, uh, appearance in Montreal with the-with the committee there and we, um— I was elected to, uh, collect dues in Calgary, one of the first to be collecting dues in Calgary for the men, which was \$2 a man.

RP: Organizing CPR porters continued during the Second World War, made easier by the travel these men did and the information they shared across Black communities within both Canada and the United States.

In 1942, Robinson passed on the leadership mantle to his nephew, Arthur R. Blanchette and, within a year, he and Randolph had negotiated one of the most lucrative union contracts in history. The adoption of the Wartime Labour Relations Regulations in 1944 surely helped their efforts; this was national legislation that protected workers' right to unionize in places that fell under federal jurisdiction (Williams 88).-The first contract, between the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the CPR, was signed in February 1945.

Despite this major win, a difficult transition period lay ahead. Joseph M. Sealy, who served as the President and Vice President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' Montreal Division, explains:

[417386, File 1, 31:08](#)

Joseph M. Sealy (JS): ... [I]t took a long time for the platform inspectors, whether it was Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, or Vancouver to really understand and appreciate what a union meant.

SG: Right.

JS: So therefore, they broke the rules so many times, and so many times they have been slapped with these infractions.

SG: Right. Which resulted in claims then.

JS: Claims. Right. And they had to pay them.

RP: Challenges aside, gains made in the historic first collective agreement negotiated between the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the CPR in 1945 dramatically improved working conditions for Black men. Odell Holmes, who served as the President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' Calgary and Vancouver Divisions, and Mr. Sealy describe some of the highlights that came about after its implementation, speaking in depth to the power they were able to take back as a result:

[417389, File 2, Time: 30:06](#)

Odell Holmes (OH): ... Our working conditions were- we, eventually, got down to a 208-hour month.

SG: From?

OH: From, uh, from-from, I forget now what we- what we, what it did figure out to, when you did work 30 days a month, 24 hours a day, it was 700 and some hours or something like that. But, you know, we got it down to 2-208 hours, which was pretty well standard with most of the working classes across Canada. It didn't coincide with the Pullman Company at that time. I think they were working 205, but we did get down to 208. So, that was a-a real reduction in hours. And, uh, we gained more respect from management. We, uh, we incr- our pay was increased, considerably, and, uh, we had, uh, enough. It improved our ability to go before management and argue our points, and discuss our time. And we didn't have to take the-the platform man's word or whoever-whenever we approached, take his word for it and say, "That was it, and that's all you were goin' get." We could go in and show him by the rule book that, uh, we were entitled to this or whatever. And he had to abide by it because, uh, they learned, the management learned what it was to-to work under a signed contract.

SG: Right. Mm.

OH: So, in every respect, it was a dramatic change. All for the better.

[417386, File 1, 35:47](#)

SG: Well, how about individual treatment by individual company representatives towards the porters? Was there a-a more [crosstalk]?

JS: Oh, well, that's something that-that is beautiful for— to me to explain to you. That was something because when I first started, I never knew what my name was, but soon as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters came in, instead of being called Porter, John, Henry or anything else, I was called JM Sealy, to the end. I knew who I was. I received more respect from the inspectors and from the- and from the- uh-uh, well, what should I say, management?

SG: Mm-hmm.

JS: As a matter of fact, uh, I became— I don't wanna travel too fast. Anyway, it wa- it was much better. Everything was much better. It was a pleasure to go to work.

RP: Meanwhile, CNR porters, who were members of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees union, plotted about how best to break the company's segregated job classification and seniority systems. In 1927, the company and the union agreed to divide employees into two groups: Group 1 included all dining car employees and sleeping car conductors, while Group 2 consisted of porters. These separate collective agreements stated that seniority and promotion of these employees would be limited to the groups into which they were hired. Black workers were thereby locked into portering, barred from transferring to other jobs or being promoted within the CNR's ranks.

With little progress made in the intervening years, Randolph called on CNR porters to join with the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters after its first collective agreement was signed with the CPR in 1945. Mass rallies across the country, which drew thousands, forced some change. In particular, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees appointed a special Black representative, E.L. Swift, to take porters' grievances to Management. As a result, Black trade unionists stuck with their interracial union. This development went on to serve as an important first step in helping other Black men rise to senior positions in this national union (High 124).

Changing the CNR's segregated job classification and seniority systems would take decades (Calliste). In fact, it was not until 1964, with the creation of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers, that all waiters, supervisors, and other non-skilled groups came together under one collective agreement free of colour barriers. This development also eventually led to the establishment of a highly controversial combined seniority list that made it possible for CNR sleeping car porters to climb industry ranks.

There are very few testimonials in Stanley Grizzle's interview collection about the impact these union wins had on CNR porters. It is however safe to say that the sentiments shared by those who worked for the CPR, and whose experiences dominate his collection, can be applied across the board. Let's listen to some of the concluding remarks Charles Allen Milton Hog and Clarence Este made when Grizzle asked them to summarize the impact the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had on their lives, their families, and their communities.

[417405, File 1, 30:45](#)

Charles Allen Milton Hog (CH): ... Well, I can say that the input of the um, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters on the Black community as a whole cannot be underestimated, because in those days the Black- the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in most parts of the country was a Negro- Negro's voice. That's the only voice that they had ... They gained an amount of self-respect for themselves and dignity ... Even on today's youth, you can go back and trace it back that the- the uh, the elementary and most elementary thing that today's youth can, can is that um, self-respect and dignity. And that was the- the theme, in my opinion, on the foundation of which the Brotherhood was built, and preached its gospel. And that sank into the Black man, and up to this- to this day, it is still exists.

[417386, File 1, 6:34](#)

SG: Um, do you think that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, uh, contribute anything to the total community, either the total community or the Black community in particular, other than raising wages and improving working conditions?

Clarence Este (CE): No. Yes, it did. It develop— it, uh, established— it established in the minds of the porters a certain- uh, a certain amount of-of-of, uh, pride. And that was exemplified in a way that porters, knowing that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were behind them, could fight for justice. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters gave them courage and gave them that right to not to be- not to be downtrodden, to stand up for justice, for truth, and for that, what would benefit the interest most.

SG: All right. Do you think that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters helped to spawn any other organizations or to give any other organizations in the community added strength?

CE: Yes, it certainly did because at what— at one time the Brotherhood-Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was the main organization in Montreal. Anyone wanted counsel and wanted support and sustenance could find it through the means provided by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

RP: The union gains we just heard about would not have been possible without the strong and devoted women who stood with porters. Coming up in the fifth episode of “Porter Talk,” we’ll meet some of those who stepped up in their homes and stepped out in their communities. Without their commitment and persistence, little would have been possible in light of the men’s absence working on the rails.

[417401, File 2, 46:34](#)

Helen Williams-Bailey (HWB): Well, I think with anything, um, the women should support the men in their lives. And um, I guess you’ve heard that old phrase behind every good man, there’s a great woman. [laughs]

[417402, File 1, Time: 27:27](#)

Frank Collins (FC): Yeah, and-and you had to have the women behind you before you had a strong union because if you didn't have them working with you, you were nowhere.

RP: If you’re interested in hearing more from Helen Williams-Bailey, Frank Collins, and others who welcomed Stanley Grizzle into their homes in the late 1980s, subscribe to *Discover Library and Archives Canada*. You’ll receive episodes as they are released, which introduce you to these men as well as their wives and children. Together, they give voice to Black life on and off the rails during the twentieth century. Leading Black scholars and historians help us contextualize porters’ experiences, enabling us to understand the myriad ways these citizens faced obstacles and persisted nevertheless.

Thank you for being with us. I’m Richard Provencher, your host. You’ve been listening to “Porter Talk,” the first season of *Voices Revealed*.

Special thanks to our guests: Dr. Melinda Chateauvert, Dr. Steven High, Dr. Saje Mathieu, and Dr. Dorothy Williams. You can find biographies of each person who participated in this episode in the show notes. There you will also find an episode transcript with embedded timestamps that link you

to the original interview content in the Grizzle collection. Feel free to explore and share these stories widely!

We also acknowledge those who translated this episode as well as those who did French voiceovers for it: Roldson Dieudonné, Gérard-Hubert Étienne, Gbidi Coco Alfred, Lertz Joseph, Euphrasie Mujawamungu, Frédéric Pierre, and Christelle Tchako Womassom.

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Acclaimed musician and producer, Paul Novotny, composed "Jazz Dance," the theme song for "Porter Talk." Joe Sealy, famed jazz pianist and son of a porter, is also featured on the recording.

All other music in this episode is from the audio library at BlueDotSessions.com.

This episode was produced, written, engineered, and edited by Tom Thompson, Jennifer Woodley, and Stacey Zembrzycki.

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