

A Thesis

entitled

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: The Civil Rights Movement

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts in History

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May 2015

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An Abstract of  
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The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was an African American union which was organized in 1925 by A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, Edward Daniel Nixon, and other porters. Randolph formed this union to deal with the plights of black porters who worked for the Pullman Company. The union treated these men like slaves, forcing them to work long hours, subjected them to discrimination and racism, and gave them no voice to deal with these issues. The BSCP worked to resolve these problems and improve working conditions. The Brotherhood succeeded in these goals by being granted a charter to the AFL in 1935, becoming the first black union to be accepted into a white organization. Two years later in 1937 the BSCP signed a collective bargaining agreement with the Pullman Company, giving the workers shorter hours, higher wages, and better working conditions.

Brotherhood members utilized direct action, mass pressure, the media, and mass demonstration to force the Federal Government to act. These strategies and tactics were learned while working in the union and directly influenced the civil rights movement. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters brought and used these tactics in the threat to

march on Washington in 1941, work with the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood forced President Franklin Roosevelt into signing Executive Order 8802 which aimed at eradicating discriminatory hiring practices utilized in the defense industry. The order created the FEPC, which worked towards obtaining jobs for African Americans. The Brotherhood worked directly with the FEPC through the March on Washington Movement in order to gain access to the defense industry for blacks in the United States. E.D. Nixon, a porter, helped orchestrate the Montgomery Bus Boycott and worked towards ending segregation on busses. The members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters took what they learned for the union and gave their financial support, knowledge, strategies, tactics, and work to these three civil rights events.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. My dad Dave, my mom Cindy, stepmom Nicole, and my brother Jacob and Sister Lauren have helped me more than you will ever know. I would like to thank Dr. Todd M. Michney for his guidance, support, patience, and work with me throughout the thesis. Dr. Michney has put in countless hours editing my work, teaching me how to be a better writer, and provided moral support throughout the entire project.

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## **Preface**

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) was a trade union organized in 1925 under the direction of A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, Ashley Totten, B.F. McLaurin, E.D. Nixon, and E.J. Bradley. The BSCP was the first all-black union to be accepted into the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and negotiated a collective bargaining agreement with the Pullman Company. The Pullman Palace Car Company was started in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by George Pullman. Mr. Pullman revolutionized the sleeping car by making it luxurious and giving passengers on long trips privacy. The members of the union worked towards improving African Americans wages, hours, and working conditions. The BSCP focused on the railway industry and were able to advance blacks socially and economically. Brotherhood members went on to become leaders influential in the Civil Rights Movement. They worked towards improving education, ending segregation, stopping discrimination, and preventing lynchings. The BSCP worked with the March on Washington in 1941, the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. The FEPC was a government appointed committee who worked towards breaking down racial discrimination in the defense industry. The contributions made by the Brotherhood members were key to the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the FEPC, and the threat to march on Washington in 1941. The BSCP started the modern civil rights movement with the organization of the union in 1925. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car

Porters brought forms of direct action, mass protest, and fundraising capabilities to the threat to march on Washington; work with the FEPC, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

The Pullman Porters first attempted to organize in 1909 but were unsuccessful. The Pullman Company routinely fired anyone who attempted to organize the porters, until A. Philip Randolph agreed to lead the union. The BSCP formed to handle grievances from porters who worked for the Pullman Company. They focused on improving wages, shortening work hours, improving working conditions, and eliminating racism towards porters on the railways.<sup>1</sup> The porters were forced to work long hours, received low wages, and faced racism and discrimination. Before the union was organized the porters only drew a monthly salary of \$60-67 a month, had to log 11,000 miles a month, and averaged only three hours of sleep on train rides.<sup>2</sup> In 1935, the BSCP was invited to join the American Federation of Labor (AFL), becoming the first all-black union to be accepted into the organization. In 1937 the Brotherhood signed a collective bargaining agreement with Pullman, winning the porters better wages, hours, and treatment on the railroads.

Randolph and the BSCP won their struggle against the Pullman Company by utilizing the media, forms of mass protest, mass demonstration, and pressure. The BSCP set up conferences to educate porters and the black community about their battle with Pullman; utilized black newspapers and their own organ, *The Black Worker*, to gather support for the union; threatened to strike; recruited support from the African American community; and went through legal channels in an attempt to force the Pullman

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<sup>1</sup> Brailsford R. Brazeal, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: Its Origin and Development* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-212.

Company to negotiate with the BSCP. Their conferences took place in Washington D.C., Chicago, New York, Boston, Kansas City, St. Louis, Detroit, and Oakland.<sup>3</sup> The BSCP additionally held mass meetings for the porters and the public to gather support and funds. The Pullman Company did everything in its power to ensure the BSCP was not successful. Pullman repeatedly fired porters who joined the union, utilized intimidation and violence, issued propaganda against Randolph and the Brotherhood, and ignored the BSCP as a union. Over 1,000 porters were fired from 1925-1937 for participating in the union, and Ashley L. Totten was assaulted and nearly killed for his activities in the BSCP.<sup>4</sup>

When the BSCP first organized it presented demands to the Pullman Company. The Brotherhood wanted recognition as official representative of the porters, wages increased to \$150 a month, pay for preparatory time, more rest and sleep on long trips, a reduction to two hundred forty hours a month, better methods for hearing worker grievances, and for Pullman to sign a contract with the BSCP to incorporate these demands.<sup>5</sup> Randolph and the BSCP leaders wanted to give the porters economic advances and fair treatment in the workplace. The demand for black economic advancement was additionally used for the March on Washington and within the FEPC. In order to accomplish these goals the BSCP had to recruit support for the union. The members did this by using the railways; they talked to porters and blacks in pool halls, bars, hotels, churches, and public venues as they travelled along the railway. Randolph emphasized mass pressure as a way to force the Pullman Company to negotiate with the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>4</sup> "Pullman Brotherhood Head Severely Clubbed," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 27, 1929.

<sup>5</sup> Brazeal, *Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, 23.

BSCP. When the leaders of the BSCP spoke at events they attacked the company and brought publicity to the way it treated its African American employees. Randolph believed the only way to advance African Americans socioeconomically was to force whites into action. These lessons stuck with the leaders and members of the BSCP and they took these experiences and utilized these forms of mass protest and pressure in the Civil Rights Movement.

The BSCP relied on media coverage and publicity to recruit supports, union members, and pressure the Pullman Company. Randolph sent articles to black newspapers around the country including *The Chicago Defender* and *The Pittsburgh Courier*. The articles detailed the struggle the BSCP faced against the Pullman Company and the reasons its leaders wanted to represent the porters. Webster worked with black churches and the press in Chicago, porters across the country utilized the press and churches. These outlets were later used in the March on Washington, work with the FEPC, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

While the BSCP worked for twelve years to sign a collective bargaining agreement with the Pullman Company, it was not easy for the men of the union. Most of the leaders of the union were fired once it became known they worked for the Brotherhood. Randolph himself did not draw a salary until after the agreement with the company was reached. Brotherhood members lived very poorly during their struggle, and faced violence from the Pullman Company. The leaders worked tirelessly to advance the porters economically and socially, and were repeatedly denied.

Most of the fundraising for the Brotherhood and to help pay members who had been fired was done by the women of the BSCP. The fundraising was done through the Women's Economic Council, which was created the same time as the Brotherhood in 1925.<sup>6</sup> These women did not only include porter's wives, but any women who wanted to support the BSCP. There were chapters located throughout the country. To raise the funds the women sponsored public dances, parties, card tournaments, bake sales, raffles, boat rides, and picnics.<sup>7</sup> The local councils did not have to answer to anyone except the heads of the union, Randolph had the ultimate say and as long as they worked for the BSCP and supported their goals they were left alone. After the BSCP signed a collective bargaining agreement with the Pullman Company in 1937, the council was renamed the International Ladies Auxiliary.<sup>8</sup> The work of the women in the Brotherhood was vital to their success in defeating the Pullman Company, they provided much needed funds.

By the 1930s the BSCP began to use federal law and policy to gain entry into the AFL and sign a collective bargaining agreement with the Pullman Company. The BSCP's attempts to join the AFL prior to 1935 were blocked, white racism being the main reason. President Roosevelt passed the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act, which in section 7a gave workers the guarantee to collective bargaining rights. Roosevelt additionally passed the Emergency Transportation Act which outlawed company unions.<sup>9</sup> The Pullman Company forced porters into their company union to keep them out of the BSCP, so the National Industrial Recovery Act (and starting in 1935, the National Labor

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<sup>6</sup> Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, 50-51.

<sup>8</sup> Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, 71.

<sup>9</sup> David Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line: A. Philip Randolph and Civil Rights in the World War II Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23.

Relations Act) gave the Brotherhood a legal way into negotiations with the Pullman Company. The Pullman Company could no longer deny the BSCP the right to negotiation. In August on 1937 Randolph and BSCP officials reached a deal with the Pullman Company, which covered hours, wages, and working environment. As a result of the contract, the monthly pay increased to \$90-100, work hours were cut to two hundred-forty, grievances were to be taken into account, and thereafter the BSCP and only the BSCP would represent the porters.

This project demonstrates how the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters built a cohort of Civil Rights leaders. The members of the union worked tirelessly for twelve years, utilizing mass protest, demonstrations, actions, mass media, and legal avenues to extract a collective bargaining agreement from the Pullman Company. But their efforts did not end there. Following this victory, Brotherhood members went on to work with the March on Washington Movement, the FEPC, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

### **Main Arguments**

The main argument for this project is that the creation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925 built a cohort of civil rights leaders. Brotherhood members utilized direct action, mass pressure tactics, the media, and mass demonstration which for the first time in the modern Civil Rights Movement led to Federal Government intervention. The leaders and rank-and-file members of the BSCP proceeded to get involved in Civil Rights events after their battle with the Pullman Company. The lessons, strategies, and activities the porters utilized in their struggle would later be used in the March on Washington, the FEPC, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. A. Philip Randolph

and Milton P. Webster constructed the idea for a March on Washington to create equal employment opportunities for African Americans. The BSCP raised funds, recruited people to the movement, established conferences and March on Washington Movement chapters, and served on committees once Executive Order 8802 was signed. Without the support from the BSCP the threat to march on Washington and the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) would not have happened. After the FEPC was created, BSCP members worked directly with the Committee to win jobs for African Americans in the defense industry. The Brotherhood ensured the success of the FEPC. E.D. Nixon took the strategies and organization tactics he learned in the union to start and orchestrate the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Nixon contacted ministers and civil rights leaders after Rosa Parks was arrested and planned a demonstration to fight segregation on the busses. Without the organization, strategies, funds, and recruitment of Nixon, the bus boycott would not have happened or succeeded. Each of these events in the Civil Rights Movement was influenced by BSCP, and the work of its members contributed to the success of the March on Washington, the FEPC, and Montgomery Bus Boycott.

### **Methodology and Concepts**

The project is organized into three separate chapters. The first chapter discusses the BSCP role in the threat to march on Washington in 1941, which resulted in the signing of Executive Order 8802 and the creation of the FEPC. The second chapter demonstrates the work the Brotherhood did once the FEPC was created and the lengths to which the BSCP went in order to employ African Americans in the defense industry. Chapter three discusses the work done by E.D. Nixon, a BSCP member, in the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. The frameworks utilized in the project are labor,

economics, mass organization, direct action, and mass protest. Brotherhood members utilized these strategies in the civil rights movement. The BSCP focused on advancing blacks economically and socially. The BSCP accomplished these goals by using forms of mass protest, mass organization, and mass demonstration of African Americans.

### **Literature Review: Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters**

William H. Harris in his book *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925-1937* (1977) argues the leadership of the BSCP assured the union's success. Harris asserts the union's use of propaganda and publicity is the reason the porters and maids were able to win a collective bargaining agreement for the porters. In contrast to Harris, Larry Tye in his book *Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class* (2004) argues the success of the union is attributed to the rank-and-file membership of the BSCP. Tye argues the porters and maids were the ones who laid their jobs on the line to combat the racism and inequality Pullman used on black porters.

Along with Tye and Harris, Beth Tompkins-Bates in her book *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America* (2001) demonstrates the struggle the BSCP had against the black community along with the Pullman Company. Most African Americans did not support the Brotherhood. The black community believed Randolph and the union would only hurt blacks in the workplace, by getting them fired, reducing their hours, and provoking harsher treatment by Pullman employees and whites on the trains. They viewed labor unions as organizations that reduced black employment. At a time when many companies outright excluded them from employment, Pullman was seen

as a friend to blacks. Another topic in the history of the BSCP is the role of women in the union. Melinda Chateauvert in her book *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (1998) argues the wives and women of the union deserve just as much credit for the success of the BSCP. The women did large amounts of fundraising, and fought for their own political agenda emphasizing race, gender roles, and class.

In *Tearing Down the Color Bar: A Documentary History and Analysis of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (1989) by Joseph Wilson, he discusses the combination of leadership and members in the success of the union. Wilson argues the leaders of the union were not the only ones who made the union successful; the members of the BSCP should also be credited. Wilson argues there was a large active membership in the BSCP, unlike Harris who argues the leaders were the sole reason for success. Jack Santino in his work *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (1989) argues the porters were treated like slaves. Santino demonstrates the identity developed by porters. The men kept their personal and work identities discrete; they worked for the company, and worked with the union to improve their situation. The porters had to improve their social status to eradicate the slave system utilized by Pullman. The slave system was formed through harassment from whites, harsh working conditions, long working hours, the threat to be fired, and no way to resolve these complaints. The Pullman Company used these practices to keep the porters from gaining more respect and dignity, and to keep them in their place.

The topics previously covered and arguments in the history of the BSCP range from labor issues, gender issues, social issues, and participation in the union. The

scholarship written on the BSCP has focused on who made the union successful.

Although there is a fair amount of research done on the subject, one field which is not discussed in detail is the union's connection to the Civil Rights Movement. This project will link the BSCP leaders and rank-and-file members to the Civil Rights Era. The contribution of the project will show how the BSCP gained experience through the union and carried these experiences into collective and individual civil rights activism. BSCP members used the skills they acquired to improve African Americans economically and socially. Randolph's work in the Civil Rights Movement is discussed in detail in the BSCP history. This project will show a direct connection between the BSCP members and the Civil Rights Movement which has largely been left out of the history of the union.

### **Civil Rights Movement: March on Washington 1941**

In William P. Jones's work *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (2013), he insists A. Philip Randolph initiated the modern Civil Rights Movement in 1941 when he threatened to march on Washington. While this project uses the threat to march on Washington in 1941, it argues the start of the Civil Rights Movement was in 1925 with the creation of the BSCP. In "March on Washington Movement," an article by Tony Martin, he discusses the collaboration between Randolph and Webster to come up with the idea to march on the capital. Martin discusses other members of the BSCP in movement, and how the march was formed around mass organization and mass pressure in order to accomplish the equal employment of blacks in the defense industry. In *The Origins of the African American Civil Rights Movement 1865-1956* (2002) Aimin Zhang gives Randolph credit for the

March on Washington, but does not acknowledge the contributions of any other BSCP members. David Welky in his work *Marching Across the Color Line* (2014) places Randolph as the leader and gives credit to the BSCP for raising funds and spreading the word for the March on Washington Movement.

In the historiography of the March on Washington Movement Randolph is included as the main orchestrator of the threat to march and the ensuing movement. My project agrees that he played a vital role, but at the same time demonstrates the work done by other members of the BSCP. Most of the authors in their works do not discuss the important work the porters played, for example raising money, recruiting support from blacks, sponsoring and speaking at conferences. I place myself in the conversation to show the leaders and activists of the BSCP that have been left out of the history. The project enters the ongoing debate on the origin of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Most historians argue the Civil Rights started in the 1940s. I argue it originated in 1925.

## **FEPC**

Dominic Capeci Jr.'s article "Wartime FEPC: The Governor's Committee and the first FEPC in NYC, 1941-1943" (1985) argues the work done by the governor was the reason the FEPC was successful in New York City. Capeci demonstrates the struggles the New York state FEPC encountered with discrimination, but does show examples of success in the city. William J. Collins in his article "Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production" (1978) agrees with Capeci. Collins gives statistics to indicate success the FEPC had outside of the South. In "The Politics of Civil Rights: The FEPC, 1941-1946" (1978) James Nuechterlein argues that the FEPC struggled. He argues that racial barriers

still dictated wartime jobs, and through pressure some victories were won, but overall the FEPC was not successful. Jennifer Fraire in her article “The Fair Employment Practices Committee in Atlanta” (1995) focuses on the South, and argues there were minimal victories for the FEPC. Adam Fairclough in his work *Better Day Coming* (2001) argues the FEPC was created and enjoyed success because of the NAACP, with only some help from Randolph.

The BSCP worked with the FEPC to help improve employment for African Americans by giving financial support to the March on Washington Movement, pressuring companies to hire blacks, and set up committees for the March on Washington Movement. My project asserts the members of the BSCP, along with Randolph, forced the legislation which created the FEPC. I additionally argue the FEPC enjoyed some success in its first years. The FEPC aided African Americans in finding employment in war-related industries, some of the first victories for blacks in the workplace discrimination. The BSCP’s involvement in the success and creation of the FEPC has thus been overlooked historically.

### **Montgomery Bus Boycott**

In Zoe Colley’s book *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (2013) she argues Dr. Martin Luther King and the Women’s Political Council (WPC) deserve credit for the success and creation of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This is contrary to Adam Fairclough in his work *Better Day Coming*, where he argues the success was determined by white racist action in Montgomery. Fairclough asserts King only came to prominence when white citizens began to persecute

him for his role in the boycott, and that a boycott could have occurred anywhere in the South during this time. He argues the racist whites deserve credit for catalyzing the event when they lashed out against blacks who supported the boycott, giving it national attention. Unlike Colley, Fairclough does argue that E.D. Nixon was one of the main orchestrators of the movement. Hudavedi Balci and Faith Balci in their article “Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Montgomery Bus Boycott” (2011) argues Parks, King, and the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) were responsible for the bus boycott, they do not include Nixon. They argue mass demonstration was the key for success. Felicia McGhee-Hilt in her case study *The Real Down to Earth Communication was through the Churches and Word of Mouth* (2009) asserts African Americans in Montgomery were the reason for success and creation. Hilt argues the communication of the boycott went through the MIA, word of mouth, and churches. Danielle L. McGuire argues in her work *At the Dark End of the Street* (2010) demonstrates how Jo Ann Robinson and the WPC initiated the bus boycott. After hearing of Parks arrest Robinson went to Alabama State University to print off thousands of flyers telling African Americans about the one day boycott on Monday, December 5.<sup>10</sup>

The author’s arguments range from the WPC, MIA, King, Nixon, Robinson and others when discussing the creation and success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. While all of these people and organizations contributed, my project will demonstrate how E.D. Nixon, a porter and BSCP member, bailed Rosa Parks out of jail and was the original organizer of the boycott. Nixon’s work in the BSCP influenced him to get involved in Civil Rights activities. The project additionally argues the success of the boycott was

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<sup>10</sup> Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 80.

attributed to mass organization and mass protest. My work will further the understanding of how the BSCP built leaders such as Nixon. Although the Brotherhood did not have as much direct involvement in the boycott, the experiences from the union shaped Nixon who along with Jo Ann Robinson helped start the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The March on Washington Movement 1941**

The work done by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters with the March on Washington in 1941 resulted in Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 and the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) within the U.S. government. This order banned discrimination against any person based on their race, color, creed, or national origin in the defense industry.<sup>1</sup> The idea to march on Washington was constructed by A. Philip Randolph the President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), and the international vice president Milton P. Webster on a train ride from Washington D.C. after speaking with President Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>2</sup> The proposed march goals were to end the discrimination and segregation of African Americans in the military and defense related industries. Although the march never took place, it did result in new legislation to aid in the ending of discrimination in the defense industry, accomplishing one goal of the movement. The creation of the FEPC and the executive order got Randolph to call off the march, but he said these pieces of legislation had "only scratched the surface" of the

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Order, 1941-1950, Box 22, Folder Executive Orders Drafts, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Martin, "March on Washington Movement," *The Journal of African-Afro-American Affairs* 3, no. 1 (1979): 63.

racial problems widespread in the United States, as the FEPC lacked an enforcement mechanism.<sup>3</sup> While Randolph and Webster generated the idea for the march, they were not alone. Benjamin F. McLaurin, C.L. Dellums, Ashley Totten, E.J. Bradley, Theodore Brown and other Brotherhood members lent support financially; set up conferences, recruited African Americans to join the movement nationally, and served on committees after Order 8802 was passed. The first executive board for the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) was named in 1943, including T.D. McNeal, B.F. McLaurin, and C.L. Dellums all Brotherhood members.<sup>4</sup> These BSCP members were active in the Civil Rights Movement, they led chapters of the BSCP and were involved in starting the union.

The BSCP helped fuel the idea of a march on Washington. The idea dated back to Coxe's Army in the 1890s and women's suffrage marches in 1913.<sup>5</sup> After the executive order was enacted the Brotherhood went to great lengths to see it was carried out and enforced by working and providing money to the MOWM, and aiding the FEPC. Randolph formed the March on Washington Committee, which was later renamed the March on Washington Movement.<sup>6</sup> The BSCP created local divisions and committees throughout the country to aid the FEPC and win jobs for African Americans. This did not come easy as the defense industry repeatedly denied blacks jobs, even with a labor shortage.<sup>7</sup> Companies and unions discriminated against African Americans and white workers refused to work alongside blacks. In 1942 blacks constituted only three percent

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<sup>3</sup> William L. Van Deburg, *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 73.

<sup>4</sup> "Executive Board Named by MOWM," *New York Amsterdam News* (New York), May 1, 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy Barber, *Marching on Washington: the Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Beth Tompkins-Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 161.

<sup>7</sup> George Q. Flynn, *The Mess in Washington: Manpower Mobilization in World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 150-151.

of the military labor force, although they made up ten percent of the country's population.<sup>8</sup> The MOWM chapters were formed and run by the local brotherhood members. While other organizations pledged to stand behind the March on Washington Movement, namely the NAACP and the National Urban League, they did not contribute much money or work in the organization.<sup>9</sup> The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters achieved a tremendous victory against the Pullman Company in 1937, and some members took what they learned and went on to engage in civil rights activities like the March on Washington Movement in 1941. This new form of mass protest and mass demonstration would be utilized throughout Civil Rights history.

### **1.1. Spreading the Word about the March**

The idea to march on Washington first spread throughout the South. Randolph met with Roosevelt countless times urging the president to make a statement against segregation and discrimination in the armed forces against African Americans. One example of these meetings took place on September 27, 1940. Randolph met with President Roosevelt in an attempt to stop discriminatory practices against African Americans in the military and war industry. Randolph along with NAACP Executive Director Walter White and BSCP member Webster met with the president and asked "Mr. President, it would mean a great deal to the morale of the negro people if you could make some announcement on the role the negroes will play in the armed forces of the nation."<sup>10</sup> On the ride home Randolph told Milton P. Webster, "I think we ought to get

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 62.

<sup>10</sup> "African Americans and the U.S. Military," University of Virginia, [http://whitehousetapes.net/clips/1940\\_0927\\_randolph/](http://whitehousetapes.net/clips/1940_0927_randolph/).

10,000 Negroes to march on Washington in protest, march down Pennsylvania Avenue, What do you think of that.”<sup>11</sup> Although Webster questioned how they would get that many people to Washington D.C., he agreed something had to be done about this problem, since all their previous efforts had failed. This idea of direct action, mass pressure, and demonstration in an attempt to force the Federal government to act would later be utilized throughout the modern civil rights movement. The act of pressuring whites in the government and on the local level was the only process which seemed to result in progress in the freedom struggle. These new forms of protest and demonstration were momentous for the Civil Rights Movement. The Brotherhood learned these lessons from their battles with the Pullman Company. The BSCP employed strikes and put pressure on the company to achieve their goals, the same principles and actions which they put to use for the March on Washington.<sup>12</sup>

After the proposal and number of hopeful attendees was set for the march, Randolph and Webster began campaigning immediately. The first time stop was Savannah, Georgia. During their meeting Webster recalled, “It scared everybody to death.” The prospect of marching on one of the most segregated cities in the country did not seem possible to them.<sup>13</sup> The two men continued on throughout the South, spreading the message in Jacksonville, Tampa, and Miami. Randolph implored to the masses to support a March on Washington. He believed the only way to fix social and economic injustices were mass pressure and demonstration, with the aim of forcing the President

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<sup>11</sup> Jervis, Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), 248. This occurred after countless meetings with the President and conferences which did not bring about any change in African American discrimination and segregation.

<sup>12</sup> Tompkins-Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 16. Tompkins-Bates shows the ways porters won their victory over Pullman using strikes and pressure tactics.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 248.

and Congress to enact legislation for African Americans. An example of mass pressure is how Randolph and other black leaders threatened to have 100,000 African Americans march on Washington. President Roosevelt felt pressure from blacks and to avoid a march he issued the Executive Order. Randolph and other leaders pushed for African Americans to force Roosevelt into action. Following these meetings on January 15, 1941 Randolph submitted an article to black newspapers across the country. The article stated,

...only power can effect the enforcement and adoption of a given policy, however meritorious it may be. The virtue and rightness of a cause are not alone the condition and cause of its acceptance. Power and pressure the foundation of the march of social justice and reform . . . power pressure do not reside in the few, and intelligentsia, they lie in and flow the masses. Power does not even rest with the masses as such. Power is active principle of only the organized masses, the masses united for a definite purpose....I suggest that TEN THOUSAND Negroes march on Washington, D.C....with the slogan WE LOYAL NEGRO AMERICAN CITIZENS DEMAND THE RIGHT TO WORK AND FIGHT FOR OUR COUNTRY...One thing is certain and that is if Negroes are going to get anything out of this national defense, which will cost the nation 30 or 40 billions of dollars that we Negroes must help pay in taxes as property owners, and workers and consumers, WE MUST FIGHT FOR IT AND FIGHT FOR WITH GLOVES OFF.<sup>14</sup>

Randolph believed the only way to succeed in getting anti-discrimination legislation was to force Roosevelt and the government into action. To ensure the movement's success, Randolph went outside the BSCP to enlist other African American civil rights groups in the cause. Randolph contacted men such as Walter White (President of the NAACP), Lester Grange (National Urban League), Rayford Logan, Charles Houston, and other civil rights leaders to support Randolph and the

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<sup>14</sup> Introduction to the Papers of Clarence Mitchell, January 15, 1941, Clarence Mitchell Papers, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio.

Brotherhood.<sup>15</sup> Randolph convinced the men to put their differences and rivalries aside to assist in the March, for it bettered all African Americans in the labor force.

Randolph also utilized *the Black Worker*, which was the official organ of the BSCP. In an article titled “When Negroes Don’t March”, Randolph wrote,

Negroes have a stake in National Defense. It is a big stake. It is vital and important stake. But are we getting our stake? No. Nobody cares anything about us. We are being pushed around....Our answer is: Let the Negro masses speak....Let no black man be afraid We are simply fighting for our constitutional rights at American Citizens. We are not saboteurs. We are no Quislings. We hold no allegiance to an alien state. This is our own, our native land. Let us fight to make it truly free, democratic and just...We are Americans. We are patriots. We are fighting for the right to work! We are fighting for the right to live! We believe in National Unity. We believe in National defense. We will fight for Uncle Sam! We are opposed to totalitarian tyranny, Fascist, Nazi and Communist.....Indeed, we would rather die on our feet fighting for Negroes’ rights than to live on our knees as half-men; as semi-citizens, begging for a pittance. Let the Negro masses speak!<sup>16</sup>

This demonstrates the way the media was utilized for the March on Washington. It educated the rank-and-file members of the union to what they were fighting for and how to bring about changes for African Americans throughout the country, while continuing to support the war effort. The article from the *Black Worker* promoted unity, support for their country in the war, and promised not to hurt the war effort. The BSCP did not want to alienate its members. The movement sought to give African Americans jobs and denouncing the war effort might set them back in their pursuit of legislation.

While Randolph and the Brotherhood recruited people throughout the country for the March, it was limited to blacks only. Randolph said, “We call not upon our white friends to march with us, there are some things Negroes must do alone. This is our fight

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<sup>15</sup> Kersten, A. *Philip Randolph*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-140.

and we must see it through.”<sup>17</sup> Even while seeking help from FDR, African Americans relied on self-help to accomplish their goals. Although many supporters of the March on Washington did not agree with this stance, the BSCP leadership did. They along with Randolph believed the only way to achieve their goals was to achieve victory by themselves, and not utilize white allies. C.L. Dellums who was the fourth international vice president for the BSCP and head of the Oakland chapter, weighed in on the subject.<sup>18</sup> He said, “We told our white friends over the country why this had to be a Negro march. It had to be for the inspiration of Negroes yet unborn. We told them all we wanted was their moral support, to stand on the sidelines and cheer us on. We were unalterably opposed to segregation, but we also knew that Negroes needed an example of Negroes doing something for themselves.”<sup>19</sup> The men of the Brotherhood believed that African Americans needed to accomplish this march on their own, or they would never be taken seriously.

An additional reason to limit the membership of the movement only to blacks was to bar the inclusion of communists. After the Soviet Union signed a pact with the Nazi’s, communists in the United States were not trusted. The communist party did not support President Roosevelt. They bashed his new deals policies and him embracing militarism.<sup>20</sup> Randolph sought to correct the mistake of the National Negro Congress (NNC) in 1940, of which he had been president. When the NNC moved away from its antifascist stance, communists took over leadership of the organization that year and

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<sup>17</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 60-61.

<sup>18</sup> Letter, January 26, 1959, Box 10, Folder Dellums, C.L., The Records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 254.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Arnesen, “No ‘Graver Danger’: Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question,” *Labor* 3, no. 4 (2004): 13.

doggedly followed the Stalinist line and attacked the Roosevelt Administration.

Randolph denounced the organization's change in ideals and left the Party, which marked the end of the NNC.<sup>21</sup> The BSCP and Randolph did not want to make the same mistake as the Congress, and believed the inclusion of communists would subvert the aims and goals of the movement.<sup>22</sup>

After Randolph and Webster declared their plans, the Brotherhood sprung to action. They carried their message across the country using the railroad system. They effectively used their mobility to recruit African Americans. Journalist Roi Ottley-observed "those efficient couriers – the Pullman porters – carried the word to Negro communities throughout the country," commenting on the demonstrations they set in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, and other cities the Brotherhood were located.<sup>23</sup> This action additionally led people to use local churches, pool halls, and public venues to raise awareness about the march and its objectives. The work done by the porters was instrumental in spreading the word about the march. As the movement continued, white newspapers around the country inadvertently publicized the march. Newspapers such as the *New York Times* picked up on Randolph's correspondence to Roosevelt and gave publicity to the march from a source African Americans were not expecting.<sup>24</sup> Black newspapers also picked up the story and began to publicize the event, but the work of the BSCP cannot be overlooked when discussing how the march's ideals, goals, location, and time were broadcasted around the United States.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 254.

<sup>23</sup> Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Kersten, A. *Philip Randolph*, 59.

## 1.2. Attention of the White House and President Roosevelt

All of the vitality the movement created garnered the attention of the White House, President Roosevelt, and the FBI. The FBI reported to Roosevelt of the plan “to make a tremendous demonstration against Jim-Crowism and imperialist war at the national seat of government.”<sup>25</sup> In a meeting with Randolph, Roosevelt pleaded with the civil rights leader to call off the march. According to Randolph, he told Randolph “he didn’t want a march on Washington because it would end up in violence and bloodshed and no doubt some people might get killed.”<sup>26</sup> Randolph did not back down from his threat, and told the president he would continue on with the march. Roosevelt tried to convince Randolph the proposed march could not be accomplished. Randolph did not back down and told the president the Negro people wanted him to “issue an executive order requiring that all workers have a right to jobs in the munition plants and in other industries, and even in the government, because the government is the worst offender.”<sup>27</sup> This demonstrates the pressure tactics Randolph, the Brotherhood, and other supporters used against Roosevelt and the government. The movement was built upon the idea that the only way to get anything accomplished was to force the government to act.

The growing angst in the Roosevelt Administration and Congress forced the President to use other channels to end the march before it occurred. Roosevelt called together his wife Eleanor Roosevelt, Aubrey Williams who was the head of the National Youth Administration during the New Deal era, Anna Rosenberg who was the national

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<sup>25</sup> Merl E. Reed, “The FBI, MOWM, and CORE, 1941-1946,” *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 4 (1991): 466.

<sup>26</sup> “A. Philip Randolph Interview by Thomas H. Baker,” LBJ Library, University of Texas, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/>, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

director of the War Manpower Commission, and New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia. He instructed Joseph P. Lash to get Williams and “Go to New York and try to talk Randolph and White out of this march. Get the missus and Fiorello and Anna and get it stopped.”<sup>28</sup> Roosevelt chose his wife and Mayor La Guardia because they had a good relationship with Randolph and thought they could talk him out of the march. Williams worked with black youths. Anna Rosenberg was an advisor to the President. Mrs. Roosevelt told Randolph she was in favor of what the movement sought to accomplish and that the African Americans of the country deserved to have defense industry jobs and some legislation should come of it.<sup>29</sup> However, Randolph and White were not going to cave in, and they continued to pressure Mrs. Roosevelt, La Guardia, and others the same way the movement planned and put pressure on the president. This would lead to a final meeting with President Roosevelt.

After meeting with his own people, the President requested a meeting with Randolph to settle the issue before the march occurred. At the meeting on June 18 present were Roosevelt, the secretary of war, secretary of the navy, Sydney Hillman who worked for the Office of Production and Management, LaGuardia, Anna Rosenberg of the Social Security Board, Aubrey Williams who worked with the National Youth Administration, and representing the march were Randolph, Walter White, Frank Crosswaith, and Layle Lane.<sup>30</sup> The mass pressure and threat of mass demonstration forced Roosevelt to meet with the march leaders; the administration could not ignore the publicity and ultimatum that Randolph, the Brotherhood, and other groups put on them.

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 255.

<sup>29</sup> “A. Philip Randolph Interview by Thomas H. Baker,” LBJ Library, University of Texas, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/>, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Martin, “March on Washington Movement,” 64.

Roosevelt asked for another meeting in a last effort to call off the march. But when faced with this request Randolph responded by saying, “Well, I cannot call this off, the people are ready to come to this march from all over the country: California and Chicago; Jacksonville, Florida; Atlanta, Georgia; all around the country.”<sup>31</sup> Recruiting individuals to come to the march was primarily done by the Brotherhood. After this stalemate the March leaders told Roosevelt the only way they would call off the march is if he issued an executive order to address the issues of discriminatory practices used in the hiring process for the military industry and segregation in the armed forces.<sup>32</sup> This is an example of how Randolph did not back down and continued to pressure Roosevelt, something he and the Brotherhood had learned from their battle with the Pullman company. During their time fighting the company they issued statements and held conventions to speak out of the discrimination African Americans faced in the war industry.<sup>33</sup> The use of the media to garner public attention and refusal to give in were strategies used for the march on Washington in 1941, these same tactics can be connected to union activities the porters supported and undertook to combat the racism they faced in their struggle against the Pullman Company.

### **1.3. Creation of Executive Order 8802**

After the staunch action put forward by Randolph, the president did not have much of a choice. Even Mayor LaGuardia added, “Well, I’ll break off from my former position and say to you that something has got to be done as Phil Randolph says. Now, I

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<sup>31</sup> “A. Philip Randolph Interview by Thomas H. Baker,” LBJ Library University of Texas, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/>, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>33</sup> Cornelious L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 164.

happen to know him and you're not going to change him. We're not going to change him. You're not going to be able to change him, and he's not going to change for me or Mrs. Roosevelt or the President."<sup>34</sup> Thus the President guaranteed Randolph his wish and committed to issuing Executive Order 8802 in exchange the march be called off.

Roosevelt promised that the leaders of the movement would be able to approve of the order once it was written. Joseph L. Rauh was given the task of writing the Order. Rauh was the chief legal draftsman for the Office for Emergency Management.<sup>35</sup> Randolph had a problem with the first draft. He argued there was no mention of the federal government in the order and that "the federal government is guilty, too, of discrimination against Negroes as far as jobs are concerned."<sup>36</sup> Rauh revised the draft several times and argued the federal government should not be included. But when he took this grievance to Roosevelt the President agreed to put the government in the order without any fight.<sup>37</sup> A. Philip Randolph, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and other organizations that supported the movement are credited for this historic victory for African Americans

Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941 and effectively ended the threat to march on Washington.<sup>38</sup> The African Americans involved in the March movement won a landmark civil rights battle against the President and employers of the United States. Randolph held a celebration in Washington after the legislation was passed. Mayor LaGuardia was the chairman of the committee and he along with Randolph spoke at the meeting. Only about 1,000 people attended the spectacle, the low

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<sup>34</sup> "A. Philip Randolph Interview by Thomas H. Baker," LBJ Library, University of Texas, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/>, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 258.

<sup>36</sup> "A. Philip Randolph Interview by Thomas H. Baker," LBJ Library, University of Texas, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/>, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>38</sup> Martin, "March on Washington Movement," 64.

number of people attributed to the lack of time to get the word out of the Executive Order being signed.<sup>39</sup> It did not matter how many people turned out to hear the two speak. Randolph, along with the Brotherhood forced the government and Roosevelt to enact the civil rights legislation.

While Executive Order 8802 did not discuss African American participation in the military, it did help tremendously for employment in the defense industry. The Order prohibited discrimination in hiring of African Americans in the defense industry or the government. Implementing the Order was left to the companies and labor organizations. The war industry was no longer allowed to discriminate against any persons based on their “race, creed, color, or national origins.”<sup>40</sup> In theory at least, this granted all African Americans throughout the country access to defense jobs. The Order also created the Fair Employment Practices Committee, which held hearings when discrimination complaints arose, although they did not have the power to enforce the Order. These hearings and the work of the March on Washington Movement chapters aided in giving African Americans jobs in the defense industry, and set a precedent for antidiscrimination hearings.

The first two points of the Order instructed all departments and agencies of government to take appropriate measures to assure there was no discrimination in hiring; this included all contracting agencies to ensure defense contracts included a non-discriminatory provision. This measure was emphasized by Randolph. To include the

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<sup>39</sup> “A. Philip Randolph Interview by Thomas H. Baker,” LBJ Library, University of Texas, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/>, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Executive Order, 1941-1950, Box 22, Folder Executive Orders Drafts, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

government was to assure discrimination in the workplace was now illegal. The next two points state the FEPC would investigate complaints of discrimination and act on these complaints if valid, by holding public hearings and publish educational information in an effort to eliminate discrimination. Points five and six worked towards creating local councils to make recommendations to the FEPC and investigate discrimination in the matter of federal employment. Seven and eight discussed the recommendations to the Secretary of Labor on state employment and to compensate these cases as they see fit, by charging the company with using or not using discriminatory practices in hiring. These provisions attempted to end discrimination on the local and national level. The following two points addressed national defense contracts and penalized companies who did not follow the discrimination policy set forth by the order. The last point dealt with labor organizations and unions, forbidding them to use discrimination in the workplace and in the hiring of employees.<sup>41</sup>

All of these points made in the Executive Order were met with fierce resistance nationwide. One example is at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company. When the company promoted black workers to shippers and caulkers, the white workers were appalled. White workers rioted and attacked black workers with pipes and clubs.<sup>42</sup> In Cincinnati, 174 businesses or forty-six percent openly refused to hire African American workers.<sup>43</sup> The Brotherhood worked towards combatting the efforts of companies who continued to practice discrimination. BSCP members picketed

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Merl E. Reed, "The FEPC, The Black Worker, and the Southern Shipyards," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (1975): 454-455.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew E. Kersten, "Publicly Exposing Discrimination: The 1945 FEPC Hearings in Cincinnati, Ohio," *Queen City Heritage: The Journal of the Cincinnati Historical Society* 52, no. 3 (1994): 10.

companies who used discrimination, the media in an attempt to publicly humiliate companies, and aided the FEPC workers with funds.

#### **1.4. The March on Washington Movement**

After the announcement of Executive Order 8802 and the creation of the FEPC, the Brotherhood and Randolph did not stop their work with the March on Washington. The BSCP members shifted their attentions to the newly created March on Washington Movement, Randolph and the men of the union did not stop their actions once the Order as signed, they continued to fight to ensure discriminatory practices were stopped in the military industry. This movement was created as a watchdog over the executive order. It was put in place to assist the FEPC, gain support from other African Americans in the fight for fair employment, and to ensure the order was carried out. The March on Washington Movement (MOWM) established chapters throughout the country located in cities affiliated with the BSCP. These cities included New York City, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Los Angeles, Oakland, and others. The MOWM chapters held conferences, recruited people, fought for African Americans who still faced discrimination, and raised funds to help support the movement. While Randolph and the Brotherhood did receive support from other organizations they were the primary force behind raising money, educating the public, employing members, and fighting for African American employment in the war industry.

One of the men behind the March on Washington Movement who is not discussed by many historians is B.F. McLaurin. McLaurin was named the national secretary for the

March on Washington by Randolph.<sup>44</sup> He was born in Jacksonville, Florida. McLaurin became an orphan at the age of nine after witnessing his father being lynched; he worked odd jobs before joining the BSCP.<sup>45</sup> McLaurin was also one of the main orchestrators of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; he along with others helped Randolph organize the porters of the Pullman Company.<sup>46</sup> As the national secretary he was tasked with setting up conferences for the movement. These conferences were held to educate the public and additionally recruit African Americans to the MOWM. McLaurin set up conferences in New York City, Chicago, Detroit, Ohio, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. While in the Brotherhood he was one of the top organizers in the eastern zone.<sup>47</sup> McLaurin additionally set up MOWM chapters in the South, in Montgomery and Mobile, Alabama.<sup>48</sup> His actions in the Brotherhood helped McLaurin prepare for the job he did with the March on Washington Movement.

The first conference set up by the March on Washington Movement was in New York City. This meeting took place at Madison Square Garden on June 16, 1942.<sup>49</sup> Randolph was the National Director for the March on Washington Movement.<sup>50</sup> The planning committee included two Brotherhood members, B. F. McLaurin and Ashley L.

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<sup>44</sup> Letter, January 13, 1945, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement "C of D", A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>45</sup> Biographical Paragraph, Box 106, Folder B.F. McLaurin Misc. The Records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>46</sup> "B.F. McLaurin, 83, An Ex-Labor Leader and Rights Official," *New York Times*, 24 March, 1989.

<sup>47</sup> Larry Tye, *Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 133.

<sup>48</sup> "Alabama Gets 3 'March' Chapters," *The Chicago Defender* (National Edition), October 31, 1942.

<sup>49</sup> Program, June 16, 1942, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Circulars 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Totten.<sup>51</sup> Both of these men were instrumental in putting the conference together, and called out to the members of the BSCP to raise funds to pay for the conference.

McLaurin contacted men such as Walter White of the NAACP and others to attend the New York Conference.<sup>52</sup> Before the New York Conference Totten sent out a letter to porters asking them to support the MOWM financially and encouraged the men to come to the meeting.<sup>53</sup> In this letter Totten included giving credit for the March on Washington Movement to the BSCP.<sup>54</sup> They also included a small admission price to cover the costs. Totten was the international secretary-treasurer for the BSCP.<sup>55</sup> Additionally Totten like McLaurin had worked to organize the Pullman porters. In the early 1920s he tried to organize the porters to no avail. He then reached out to Randolph to lead the organizing efforts after he was fired from the company.<sup>56</sup> The work done to recruit people to the conference, raising funds, and planning the conference demonstrates how McLaurin, Randolph, Totten, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were instrumental in arranging and organizing the first conference for the MOWM.

The conference amassed over 23,000 African Americans at Madison Square Garden.<sup>57</sup> These people assembled to hear how they could assist in getting blacks fair employment in the wartime industry, which was promised in the executive order.

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<sup>51</sup> Letter, June 11, 1942, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement A-B, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>52</sup> Planning Committee, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conference 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>53</sup> Letter, April 20, 1942, Box 10, Folder Totten, Ashley 1942-1963, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Letter, July 2, 1941, Box 9, Folder Correspondence Smith, Bennie, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>56</sup> Jack Rummel, "Totten, Ashley L. (1884-1963)," (Facts on File: New York, 2011), 196.

<sup>57</sup> Poster, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Circulars 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Randolph and other Brotherhood officials additionally invited members of the press to attend the conference; they gave out press passes for reporters and photographers in an attempt to bring national coverage to the MOWM.<sup>58</sup> They invited white and black newspaper reporters, most of whom accepted their press passes and attended. The lone paper which had negative reviews was the *Pittsburgh Courier*, whose dislike of Randolph dated back to the 1920s.<sup>59</sup> The white papers did not attend the conference, but FBI informants attended to keep tabs on the message being presented.<sup>60</sup> Ashley L. Totten, the Secretary for the BSCP, helped recruit African Americans to this demonstration. He sent letters out urging blacks to “FIGHT to win DEMOCRACY first for the Negro and all darker races,” calling upon them to give money to the movement, attend the conference, and honor every African American by signing up for the MOWM.<sup>61</sup>

The program for the New York City conference included African American leaders from different groups throughout the country. The chairman for the event was Dr. Lawrence Mance Ervin,<sup>62</sup> an established doctor in New York City who tended to African American needs from out of his home. The conference included messages, music, and prayers from religious figures from the New York area, emphasizing that Black churches were key community institutions. While Totten and McLaurin set up the conference, two other Brotherhood members Milton P. Webster and A. Philip Randolph spoke at the meeting. To begin the conference Randolph was led in by 100 Pullman

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<sup>58</sup> Letter to *The Amsterdam Star-News*, June 11, 1942, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement A-B, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>59</sup> J.C.D. Johnson, “Sleeping Car Porters Deny Allegations of Publication,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 4, 1926.

<sup>60</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 95-98.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Ashley L. Totten April 20, 1942, Box 10, Folder Totten, Ashley 1942-1963, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>62</sup> Program for Mass Meeting at Madison Square Garden, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conference, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Porters in uniform along with fifty maids who worked on the rails.<sup>63</sup> This exhibits the work of the BSCP in the MOWM, the national director was led in by his follow workers who worked hard to make the conference happen.

While at the conference Randolph and Webster both spoke on the newly formed MOWM and the FEPC. Webster was named to the FEPC by Roosevelt. He presented an eight point program on the MOWM, utilizing the opportunity to educate the black masses on the movement, how they could get involved, and why they should get involved.<sup>64</sup> Webster argued the only way for African Americans to secure jobs in the war industry and to ensure Executive Order 8802's success was to put pressure on companies and the government. Randolph was the last to speak at the meeting, addressing the African Americans in the crowd to promote the MOWM, and reiterated how important it was that it was an all-black movement. He employed his famous slogan "The Watchword is Forward," which he explained "I am against them Japs. I'm against them Germans, them Italians, and I'm also against them Negro hating crackers down south."<sup>65</sup> This demonstrates how the MOWM still supported the war effort, but wanted to combat racism on the home front. The MOWM did not want public perception to believe their members did not support the war effort against fascism home and abroad. The movement supported the war and giving African Americans and other minority's equality at home. This is much like the Double-V campaign set forth by the *Pittsburgh Courier*. The *New Amsterdam News* wrote after the conference, "all walks of life were represented, some of our most prominent women doctors, lawyers, school teachers, social workers,

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<sup>63</sup> Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, 210.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 165.

housewives.”<sup>66</sup> The movement spread throughout the country, concentrating on cities where the Brotherhood had established chapters.

The next conference for the MOWM was held in Chicago. The meeting took place from June 30 to July 4, 1943, at the Metropolitan Community Church.<sup>67</sup> This meeting was constructed by the National Secretary of the MOWM, B.F. McLaurin, along with the new Assistant National Secretary Pauline Myers. To recruit and raise money for this event Myers, McLaurin and local BSCP members distributed leaflets throughout the city, sold stamps, and hung banners to encourage African Americans to attend the rally.<sup>68</sup> Myers was recruited for the March on Washington Movement by Randolph. She had been working for the movement part time but made full time in December, 1942; her initial salary was personally paid by Dellums, Bradley, and Totten.<sup>69</sup> Myers salary was paid in full by the Brotherhood, they collected money for BSCP members in order to hire her to be McLaurin’s Vice President.<sup>70</sup> Her salary totaled eighty dollars a month paid for by Bradley, Totten, McNeal, Pat, Smith, Dellums, Webster and Randolph.<sup>71</sup> This is another way the Brotherhood fully supported the movement – they donated their own money to pay officials and workers for the MOWM. McLaurin additionally acted as the chairman for the conference along with Randolph, they both ensured the business of the

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<sup>66</sup> Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, 210.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Pauline Meyers, July 20, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conferences 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>68</sup> Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 164-165.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from A. Philip Randolph to C.L. Dellums, December 30, 1942, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Dellums, C.L. 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from A. Philip Randolph to E.J. Bradley, January 23, 1943, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Bradley, E.J. 1941-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from A. Philip Randolph December 30, 1942, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Bradley, EJ 1941-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

meeting was carried out.<sup>72</sup> The Brotherhood recruited African Americans to come to these conferences, and provided money for travel expenses to get to them there. In another example of paying for other BSCP members to come, the Brotherhood paid E.J. Bradley's expenses which totaled \$52.90.<sup>73</sup> The BSCP furthermore donated money for pamphlets in order to recruit people to the conferences. For the Chicago conference they paid \$112.00 to the Schoen Printing Company for pamphlets.<sup>74</sup> After 1937 the porters wage was between \$80-100 per month. When the BSCP first started the porters only earned \$60 per month.<sup>75</sup> The Brotherhood handled much of the financial and organizational measures for the March on Washington Movement.

The conference was set up to gather support for the FEPC and come up with ideas to give it more power, the theme of the conference was entitled "We Are Americans Too."<sup>76</sup> A. Philip Randolph made the keynote address at the Chicago Conference, and Milton P. Webster and T. D. McNeal spoke on the FEPC.<sup>77</sup> Mr. McNeal was the international vice president of the BSCP and headed the St. Louis division of the Brotherhood.<sup>78</sup> Randolph, Webster, and McNeal were not the only Brotherhood members who spoke at the engagement. B.F. McLaurin and Ashley L. Totten

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<sup>72</sup> Program, July 1, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conferences 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Ashley L. Totten to A. Philip Randolph, July 3, 1944, Box 10, Folder Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Correspondence Totten, Ashley 1942-1963, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Ashley L. Totten to A. Philip Randolph, June 23, 1943, Box 10, Folder Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Correspondence Totten, Ashley 1942-1963, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>75</sup> Brazeal, *Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, 212-214.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Pauline Myers to Local Units of the MOWM, July 20, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Conference 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>77</sup> Tentative Program, June 30, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conference 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from J.H. Phillips to T.D. McNeal, Box 19, Folder Correspondence McNeal, T.D., The Records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

additionally played an intricate role in the conference in Chicago. McLaurin, who, at this point was the International Field Organizer of the BSCP was the chairman for the conference.<sup>79</sup> As stated above, he helped plan the proceedings with Pauline Myers. Totten spoke on “Mapping a Broad National Program In the Interest of Abolishing Jim Crow in America.” One way to do this was giving African Americans economic advances, and promoting social change. He advocated for mass demonstration and mass pressure. This was in effort to combat the racism African Americans faced across the country, and the work with the FEPC and MOWM aided in ending this practice by white America. The other panels included discussing the outlook of the FEPC, the appointments made to the FEPC, the aims of the MOWM, appoints made for the national committee, and the constitution of the movement.<sup>80</sup>

At the conference there were seven open meetings. These included discussing why the supporters assembled and the role of race in the United States, the outlook of the FEPC and its future, a program on how to combat Jim Crow, African Americans in postwar reconstruction, a call for abolishment of Jim Crow practices in the military, a war memorial for blacks, and the last a mass meeting in which Randolph addressed the principle and policies of the MOWM.<sup>81</sup> All of these topics were discussed in panels and Brotherhood members played key roles as presenters and attendees. The committee adopted a formal constitution in Chicago. The three main policies were that the movement be restricted only to African Americans, that the money for the MOWM only

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<sup>79</sup> Program for Thursday July 1, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conference 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Pauline Myers to Local Units of the MOWM, July 20, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Conference 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

come from blacks (including a \$16,000.00 a year budget and membership dues at \$1.00), and that the MOWM be used as protest against discrimination in the workforce and the Jim Crowism which plagued America.<sup>82</sup> These three policies directly relate to BSCP actions during the movement: they raised money, joined the movement, and fought for African American jobs in the war industry. The conference voted in a national committee. The seven committees were Non-Violent Goodwill Direct Action, Advisory Committee on FEPC, Finance Committee, Western Hemispheric Conference of Free Negroes, and National March on Washington, Winfred Lynn Case, and Non-Partisan Political Action.<sup>83</sup> These committees show the movement was concerned with the status of the FEPC, promoting a non-violence campaign, racism and discrimination in the military and political action with no bias. These concerns focus on winning African American jobs and combatting racism. In total over 20,000 African Americans participated in the Chicago conference.<sup>84</sup> Reaffirmed at this conference was that the MOWM would be an all black movement, and was voted 102 to 3.<sup>85</sup> BSCP members served on these committees and volunteered at local MOWM chapters throughout the country. Brotherhood members donated money to the MOWM, C.L. Dellums proposed \$25.00 dollars a month from BSCP chapters, and the leaders of the Brotherhood additionally gave \$10.00 a month of their own salaries.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Post "Why Should We March," Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Circulars 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>85</sup> "March on D.C. Move Will Bar White Members: Actual Plans in Hands of Committee, *Atlanta Daily World*, July 9, 1943.1

<sup>86</sup> Letter from C.L. Dellums to A. Philip Randolph February 5, 1943, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Dellums, C.L. 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

## 1.5. The Brotherhood and the March on Washington Movement

The March on Washington Movement conjointly held two more meetings of mass protest. The two cities in which they were held in were Detroit and St. Louis. These cities had become backbones for the BSCP, and both had strong affiliations with the organization.<sup>87</sup> During the battle with the Pullman Company St. Louis had the most porters outside of New York and Chicago, and claimed to represent the ideology of all porters.<sup>88</sup> This allowed the MOWM to work directly with the BSCP chapter in St. Louis. The St. Louis meeting was held on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1943.<sup>89</sup> This laid out the nation-wide program and the method of procedures for the national organization. Randolph and Bradley spoke at this event; Bradley was in charge of the St. Louis chapter of the BSCP and additionally worked with the MOWM chapter in the city.<sup>90</sup> At the St. Louis meeting over 15,000 African Americans attended.<sup>91</sup> The Brotherhood supplied all of the funds for this meeting, recruited people to attend, spoke at the meeting, and continued to work with the FEPC to provide African Americans jobs in the war industry in St. Louis along with other cities.

The St. Louis chapter of the MOWM was one of the hardest working chapters throughout its duration. They had secured over 5,000 jobs for African Americans in the military industry by 1944. They did this by holding demonstrations against segregation,

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<sup>87</sup> Kersten, A. *Philip Randolph*, 34-35.

<sup>88</sup> Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, 99.

<sup>89</sup> Letter from A. Philip Randolph to E.J. Bradley April 6, 1943, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Bradley, E.J. 1941-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from E.J. Bradley to A. Philip Randolph April 17, 1943, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Bradley, E.J. 1941-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>91</sup> Poster "Why Should We March?", Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Circulars 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

boycotts, and picket lines of businesses that discriminated in hiring African Americans.<sup>92</sup>

The correlation can be directed towards the strong Brotherhood presence in the city.

Bradley worked with the MOWM chapter and the rest of the members in the BSCP chipped in. In a letter to Randolph, Bradley wrote, “We are 100% behind the March Movement...we are urging all Pullman porters to become very active and attend the meetings of the March on Washington regularly.”<sup>93</sup> Bradley furthermore discussed financial options for the MOWM. He along with other officers of the BSCP pledged to donate at least \$5.00 a month and promised to raise more through the rank-and-file members of the Brotherhood.<sup>94</sup> Bradley believed that the “March on Washington is our child.”<sup>95</sup> He and other BSCP officials worked with the MOWM and the FEPC to secure jobs for African Americans in St. Louis.

The MOWM set up chapters in Los Angeles and Oakland as well.<sup>96</sup> These chapters were run by Dellums and L.B. Thompson. Thompson worked with the FEPC chapter in Los Angeles and became the Secretary-Treasurer of the BSCP after Totten passed away.<sup>97</sup> This demonstrates the nation-wide work the Brotherhood did with the MOWM. BSCP members pushed for more African Americans to join the movement and to open up local chapters in their cities. McLaurin sent out a newsletter to the officers and members in the movement saying,

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<sup>92</sup> Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 83.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from E.J. Bradley to A. Philip Randolph April 17, 1943, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Bradley, E.J. 1941-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. (Referring to the Brotherhood as a whole).

<sup>96</sup> Letter Randolph to Dellums September 8, 1943, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Dellums, C.L. 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Thompson to Randolph, Box 10, Folder Correspondence Thompson, L.B., A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

You know the fight of the March on Washington Movement to secure Executive Order 8802 and the stormy plight of the present FEPC...This is our hour. The call to action is now. You have the call. Enclosed please find the credentials for your delegates. Get busy, select your delegates and send their names and registration fees to me immediately...Don't fail us, we must have representation from every state in the union.<sup>98</sup>

McLaurin lobbied for support throughout the FEPC's duration. He encouraged mass action and demonstration in order to help African Americans socially and economically. BSCP members staged smaller rallies and picket lines throughout the country protesting discrimination of African Americans in the war industry. Theodore Brown and C.L. Dellums helped orchestrate protests in Chicago, New York, and Washington D.C.<sup>99</sup> Members of the Brotherhood, along with Randolph worked tirelessly for the March on Washington Movement. They took what they learned from their victory over the Pullman Company, and used these strategies in the Civil Rights Movement.

The work of the BSCP and MOWM additionally worked towards ending racism in the military. One example is a case which occurred at Camp Stewart, Georgia. A black soldier wrote, "I have witnessed a white officer kicking colored soldiers' .....colored officers are segregated in mess , and quarters, and social functions The colored soldier donning the uniform of the United States Army, representing 48 states and its possessions as has been their tradition and that of their forefathers to sacrifice their lives for the cause of so-called Democracy being in the state of Georgia they are confronted with the uncensored posting of signs reminding them that they are

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<sup>98</sup> Newsletter, June 1, 1944, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Circulars 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>99</sup> Letter April 11, 1942, Box 7, Folder Correspondence Dellums, C.L. 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

colored, and should stay in the places designated for colored.”<sup>100</sup> African Americans soldiers felt they were serving their country and dying to combat fascism, but they did not enjoy equal rights in the United States. Although the Executive Order did help African Americans enter the war-related industry, black soldiers still faced racism by whites. It did not desegregate the military. The movement fought to combat these cases of racism, segregation, and violence against black soldiers. Cases similar to these were shared with the Brotherhood and MOWM chapters around the country. Another case was at Camp Livingston, Louisiana. Lieutenant Preston C. Lloyd was disbarred from all military activity for sitting in the wrong section of a performance for the soldiers.<sup>101</sup> Lloyd sat in an officer section for the performance, but was instructed to move when there were not enough seats for white officers. Although this section was reserved for officers, which Lloyd was, he was targeted because of his color. This case was sent to BSCP and MOWM officials for further action. The military ruled against Lloyd and barred him from all military activity. These cases were handled by Brotherhood members working for the March on Washington Movement. Although the Executive Order 8802 did not state any actions against military segregation and racism the organization still fought for these soldiers.

A Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters worked tirelessly for the March on Washington, and the ensuing March on Washington Movement. The Porters carried the message of the march throughout the rails recruiting members and

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<sup>100</sup> Letter from Camp Stewart, Georgia to Alexander Crawford, April 29, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement “C of D” 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>101</sup> Desegregation and Humiliation of Negro Officer, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement “C of D” 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

gathering money. The BSCP used the power of the masses to win the Executive Order 8802 and the FEPC. After the legislation went into effect the members did not stop there. BSCP members throughout the country set up MOWM chapters and helped the FEPC win jobs for African Americans. Milton P. Webster won a seat on the FEPC because of his strong ties to the BSCP and the labor movement. Randolph, McLaurin, Totten and other members help fund conferences to support and save the FEPC. E.J. Bradley, C.L. Dellums, Theodore Brown, T.D. McNeal and the rank-and-file members of the BSCP was the backbone of the threat to March on Washington and the MOWM. They collected money, gathered support, worked with local MOWM, and worked with the FEPC. The BSCP are credited with the threat to March on Washington in 1941, resulting in the Executive Order 8802 and the creation of the FEPC.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Fair Employment Practices Committee**

The BSCP continued to aid the FEPC through aiding the MOWM and receiving claims of discrimination in an attempt to gain support and jobs for African Americans. Milton P. Webster was named to the original FEPC committee and remained on the committee during its entirety. The newly formed MOWM worked with BSCP and NAACP chapters throughout the country to assist the FEPC. When the MOWM dissolved, Randolph and BSCP members created the National Council for a Permanent FEPC. Randolph, McLaurin, Webster and Thompson worked with the council. They worked towards a permanent FEPC and to sustain the current committee. The chapters took complaints from workers and contacted the FEPC. This was also done by MOWM, BSCP and NAACP chapters. Theodore Brown worked as an agent of the FEPC and assisted E.J. Bradley and Bennie Smith in the St. Louis chapter. C.L. Dellums worked with the Oakland chapter of the BSCP and NAACP. He contacted FEPC officials and worked with the BSCP to help eliminate discrimination in the western shipyards. The BSCP operated alongside the FEPC through its local chapters, MOWM chapters, and national council chapters. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was largely

responsible for the creation of the FEPC, and its members did a considerable amount of work to fight for the committee and black jobs after its creation.

The Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) was the result of President Roosevelt signing Executive Order 8802. The FEPC consisted of a chairperson and six members appointed directly by the President.<sup>1</sup> Executive Order 8802 established that no worker based on race, color, religion, ancestry, or national origin could be discriminated against in the hiring process of war related industries, the committee was put in place to ensure companies and the government did not discriminate against workers being hired.<sup>2</sup> The order was signed on June 25, 1941 after the threat to March on Washington was made by A. Philip Randolph President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. While the FEPC did not become a permanent entity, it did have success during its tenure and influenced the Civil Rights Movement the years following. The members of the BSCP gave money, worked to win jobs for African Americans, petitioned for a permanent FEPC, and worked directly with the FEPC across the United States. The BSCP did this work through local March on Washington Movement (MOWM) chapters, Brotherhood chapters, and while working with the National Council for a Permanent FEPC, created by Randolph. Milton P. Webster the international vice president of the BSCP served on the committee throughout its lifetime. The FEPC only operated nationally from 1941-1946, but during its short life it did win African American jobs, brought publicity to the discrimination in America's labor force, and was the first major

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Order 8802, Box 22, Folder FEPC Executive Orders Draft 1941-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

response from the federal government on the plight of African Americans since the Reconstruction era.

## **2.1. Creation of the FEPC**

The first FEPC did not receive much power, but used publicity and pressure to help win African Americans jobs. The committee members of the FEPC were all suggested by Randolph and Walter White.<sup>3</sup> Mark Ethridge, the editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, chaired the committee, and was joined by David Sarnoff, a Jewish American, Philip Murray of the CIO, William Green of the AFL, Earl Dickerson a lawyer from Chicago, and Milton P. Webster of the BSCP. The first official Press Release of the FEPC occurred on July 23, 1941 and included a copy of the new executive order.<sup>4</sup> The order included the steps for workers who faced discrimination in the hiring process and the workplace. The workers were to contact the FEPC with all grievances and, if grievances were found to be warranted, the FEPC would initiate an investigation of the company. The committee was allowed to partake in interviews and recommend what steps should be taken to stop discriminatory practices against minority workers.<sup>5</sup> In the first year of inception the FEPC was only given \$300,000 for its budget, the smallest of any federal government agency.<sup>6</sup> While the committee did not have the power to force companies to comply with its recommendations, members held public hearings which put pressure of these companies to hire and promote minority workers.

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<sup>3</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 83-84.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from the Department of Industrial Relations July 23, 1941, Box 23, Folder FEPC Press Releases 1941-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 113.

The FEPC was not alone in their work. It received assistance from civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, MOWM chapters, and BSCP chapters. Black workers were additionally encouraged to present cases of discrimination to local BSCP chapters when no FEPC existed, the Brotherhood members' contacted FEPC officials about the complaints.<sup>7</sup> The BSCP utilized mass direct action, mass protest, and mass demonstration to win jobs for African Americans. These same strategies were used in the fight against the Pullman Company.<sup>8</sup> Without the work done by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters the executive order and the FEPC would not have been created. Historian Joseph F. Wilson asserts that the "FEPC is a product of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters."<sup>9</sup> The Brotherhood not only spearheaded the creation of the FEPC but opened up defense jobs which were not offered to African Americans before the legislation was passed.<sup>10</sup> The BSCP fought to ensure the Order was carried out. The FEPC went through changes in its short history, and in July 1942 the committee was transferred to the War Manpower Commissions.

## **2.2. The War Manpower Commission and McNutt**

In July 1942 the year old FEPC faced a stark change. President Roosevelt transferred the power of the committee to the War Manpower Commission (WMC) and gave control to Paul V. McNutt the head of the WMC.<sup>11</sup> The President did this to take

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<sup>7</sup> Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013), 44.

<sup>8</sup> Bynum, A. *Philip Randolph*, 174.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph F. Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar: A Documentary History and Analysis of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 126.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathon Birnbaum and Clarence Taylor, *Civil Rights since 1787: A Reader on the Black Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 221.

<sup>11</sup> Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War: The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-1946* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 38.

what little power away the FEPC had, and to ease racial tension throughout the country. Whites throughout the country went on “hate strikes” whenever African Americans were hired. Southern voters began to complain about the publicity the FEPC was gathering. Roosevelt needed these votes to win the election and moving the FEPC to the WMC reduced the power of the FEPC and appeased the white voters. Randolph called the move, “a complete surrender to Ku Klux spirit.”<sup>12</sup> Milton P. Webster who served on the committee said of the move, “it is just going to be a stooge committee.”<sup>13</sup> This change for the FEPC was seen by most as an effort to appease southern voters. McNutt repeatedly delayed hearings to settle complaints behind closed doors and put a stop to the publicity campaign in order to pressure employers to hire minority workers. In one example McNutt halted all railroad hearings of the FEPC on employee discrimination.<sup>14</sup>

During this time the Brotherhood and the MOWM sought to save the FEPC by holding rallies in support and to promote change to what the committee had become. The two main rallies were in New York and Chicago. These demonstrations were to “save the FEPC” and they continued to hold rallies in the Midwest and eventually Washington D.C.<sup>15</sup> This mass demonstration and mass protests again pressured President Roosevelt into action, forcing him to create Executive Order 9346, making the committee an independent organization again. These demonstrations brought media attention to Civil Rights in the country, while the United States was fighting fascism abroad. The newly created National Council for a Permanent FEPC aided in the new Executive Order being passed. Randolph created this organization after the MOWM declined in 1943. This new

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>13</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 117.

<sup>14</sup> “3,000 Hear Webster Protest FEPC Curb,” *Afro-American*, 30 January, 1943.

<sup>15</sup> Kersten, A. *Philip Randolph*, 64.

organization allowed any person to join, not just blacks. MOWM chapters still existed and helped the FEPC from its local chapters.<sup>16</sup> The new executive order reaffirmed the first order and made the FEPC an independent agency and additionally gave more authority and money.<sup>17</sup>

### **2.3. FEPC after Executive Order 9346**

In May 1943 Roosevelt signed the Executive Order 9346, disbanding the first FEPC and creating a second. With the new FEPC the six members were now full-time and it was an independent agency under the Office for Emergency Management. Other differences were that it was policy to conduct fact finding missions and hold hearings, and the chairman had power to set up facilities throughout the United States. By September 1943 twelve new regional offices had been created.<sup>18</sup> The new FEPC additionally received new committee members, the chair being taken over by Monsignor Francis J. Haas, who worked with labor relations in his career.<sup>19</sup> The other five on the committee were Sara E. Southall who worked with Hull House and the Chicago Urban League, Plummer Bernard Young, Samuel Zemurray, Boris Shiskin, and Milton Webster and John Brophy from the previous FEPC.<sup>20</sup> Each member was chosen because of their backgrounds in labor, civil rights, law and religion. An additional reason Roosevelt created the second FEPC was that he needed the votes of liberal groups who supported

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<sup>16</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, "The FEPC and the Legacy of the Labor-based Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s," *Labor History* 49 (2008): 78.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>18</sup> Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 41-42.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 43.

Order, and he wanted their votes for the 1944 election.<sup>21</sup> The President took advice from Attorney General Francis Biddle and Harold Smith. Both Biddle and Smith argued that the FEPC needed to be an independent committee and given authority to follow through on finders of discrimination.<sup>22</sup> The FEPC secured a budget of \$500,000 in 1943, \$200,000 more than its first year.<sup>23</sup> With the new Executive Order in place and more money the committee again started holding interviews and public hearings against companies who practiced discrimination.

## **2.4. End of FEPC and Success**

The FEPC did not enjoy a long lifespan, operating from 1941-1946. Before the war the 1940 census showed that African Americans with a high school education made \$775 versus \$1,074 earned by whites, and college educated blacks earned \$1,074 versus \$2,046 by whites.<sup>24</sup> The wage disparities did not change during the war years. The final report of the FEPC in 1946 stated that African American workers experienced more unemployment than their white counterpart in six of the seven war centers.<sup>25</sup> While African Americans were discriminated against in the labor industry, the FEPC did have some success during its tenure. In Atlanta the FEPC worked with BSCP members to secure African Americans jobs. At Bell Aircraft in Marietta the company only hired blacks as laborers and gave them no opportunity to work skilled jobs.<sup>26</sup> The FEPC found

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<sup>21</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, "The FEPC and the legacy of the labor-based Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s," *Labor History* 49, no. 1 (2008): 76.

<sup>22</sup> James A. Nuechterlien, "The Politics of Civil Rights: The FEPC, 1941-46," *Prologue: the Journal of the National Archives* 10, no. 3 (1978): 179.

<sup>23</sup> Jennifer L. Fraire, "The Fair Employment Practices Committee in Atlanta: Southern," *Journal of the Georgia Association of Historians* 16 (1995): 178.

<sup>24</sup> Birnbaum and Taylor, *Civil Rights since 1787*, 392.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>26</sup> Fraire, "The Fair Employment Practices Committee," 180.

that in Atlanta most companies were discriminating against blacks. Unfortunately like many cities in the South, Atlanta did not see many gains. The FEPC hearings publicized the discrimination in the military industry, a first step towards ending employment discrimination in Atlanta.<sup>27</sup> Hearings and investigations were headed up by FEPC officials and supported by the BSCP.<sup>28</sup>

Another city where discrimination was common was Detroit. The FEPC reported a modest gain for blacks in the war industry. In Detroit over 95 percent of African Americans held jobs which were low-paying and unskilled.<sup>29</sup> While the city discriminated against minorities in the workforce the FEPC and other groups helped improve these numbers. By the end of 1945 African Americans held 95,000 jobs in the wartime industry in Detroit, 21 percent of the total. This number had been doubled since 1940, and “more than three times as many blacks had defense jobs on V-J day as on the eve of Pearl Harbor.”<sup>30</sup> This demonstrates the success the FEPC had with little funding and little authority. Although they did not eliminate discriminatory practices in Detroit they did help win African Americans jobs during World War II.

Another example of success the FEPC had was in New York City. In New York the committee enjoyed working directly with the governor’s office to combat discrimination in the workforce. On March 29, 1941 the governor’s office of New York created the Governor’s Committee on Discrimination in Employment, which included

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar*, 152.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew E. Kersten, “Jobs and Justice: Detroit, Fair Employment, and Federal Activism During the Second World War,” *Michigan Historical Review* 25, no. 1 (1999): 81.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 99.

Randolph and local Brotherhood members.<sup>31</sup> The committee distributed educational material to companies, newspapers, churches, schools, news outlets, labor unions, and defense employers in order to educate them on how to avoid discrimination. The governor's committee additionally pushed for civil rights and anti-discrimination laws. The laws included non-discrimination in defense hiring and gave legal power to correct these cases.<sup>32</sup> In order to do this they held public hearings and used public appeal to stop discrimination. The work done by the governor's office, the FEPC, and the BSCP gained employment for African Americans in New York. From 1941-1943 black jobs increased by 366 percent, increasing from 3,754 jobs to 19,125.<sup>33</sup> The work of the New York FEPC with the governor's committee promoted and achieved success with hiring African Americans in the wartime workforce.

The FEPC faced problems of discrimination in the southern and western shipyards in the United States during the war. In New Orleans the Delta shipyard only had 3,000 men working, when they needed 5,000; this was because they refused to hire or train skilled black workers.<sup>34</sup> The problem of hiring African Americans throughout the South was prevalent. New Orleans was an area where Brotherhood officials focused their campaign for a permanent FEPC. Randolph and Webster both spoke at a mass rally in the city March 25, 1945.<sup>35</sup> Another company guilty of discrimination was the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company of Mobile. The company employed over 4,000 blacks but kept them in menial jobs. The FEPC charged the company with

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<sup>31</sup> Dominic J. Capeci, "Wartime Fair Employment Practice Committees: The Governor's Committee and the First FEPC in New York City, 1941-1943," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 9, no. 2 (1985): 46.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Reed, "The FEPC," 452.

<sup>35</sup> "Randolph, Webster Visit New Orleans for FEUPC," *Afro-American*, March 24, 1945.

discrimination and pressured them to upgrade black workers. In 1943 the company upgraded many African American workers to shippers and caulkers.<sup>36</sup> After these men were promoted turmoil ensued, as white workers began rioting, and company guards reportedly beat African American workers.<sup>37</sup> The company then worked with the FEPC and instructed white workers that the African Americans would stay in their new positions. The difference in pay was substantial, black workers enjoyed raises from 63 cents an hour to 92 cents doing rigging and \$1.20 for welding. While the FEPC did not enjoy much success in the South, the shipyards in Mobile were an astounding victory. Another example of success from shipyards came out of Oakland with the Kaiser Shipyards. The Brotherhood played an important role in the breaking down of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers union which controlled the hiring of shipyards. The FEPC eventually earned a court case victory over the union which used discriminatory practices.

The FEPC additionally achieved success in St. Louis. During the FEPC work in the city along with Brotherhood aid they secured 15,000 jobs for African Americans.<sup>38</sup> T.D. McNeal, EJ Bradley, Milton P. Webster, and Theodore Brown, all BSCP members, worked along-side the FEPC to win these jobs. Although the March on Washington Movement had begun to decline at the start of 1943, St Louis's chapter was still alive and working to combat discrimination and racism in the military industry. The MOWM even held a rally to support the FEPC in St. Louis. The FEPC again held hearings in the city to publicize the discrimination companies practiced against minority groups. One of the

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<sup>36</sup> Reed, "The FEPC," 454.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 455.

<sup>38</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 102.

companies on which the FEPC and BSCP focused was the U.S. Cartridge Company. The company only employed 600 African Americans out of a 21,000 workforce. After mass pressure and demonstrations the company promised and subsequently put black workers on the lines of the company.<sup>39</sup> While discrimination was not brought to a halt in St. Louis, the BSCP and FEPC made great strides for the employment of African Americans.

The FEPC targeted and did work in Midwestern cities. In Cincinnati, Ohio over 46 percent of the city's businesses and companies did not actively hire black workers.<sup>40</sup> The committee did not have overwhelming success in Cincinnati. They were able to open up some companies to hiring African Americans but its work helped in the future. The work done by the FEPC gave people confidence and methods to attack discriminatory practices, public appeal and pressure. After the committee was disbanded in 1946 Cincinnati representatives pushed for FEPC legislation and finally in 1959 passed FEPC into law.<sup>41</sup> The first city the FEPC turned its attentions to was Chicago. Webster and Dickerson were from Chicago and had connections with the local BSCP and NAACP. In Chicago the first hearings were held and the blueprint to promote public hearings, mass demonstration, and mass pressure formed.<sup>42</sup> The hearings in Chicago were a success for the FEPC on a national level. The publicity campaign sparked controversy, and brought attention to the new Executive Order and the discrimination and plight of minority workers.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew E. Kersten, "Publicly Exposing Discrimination," 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>42</sup> Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 35-36.

Although the FEPC did not have success everywhere throughout the country it did accelerate economic advances for those African Americans who were able to get jobs in the defense industry. Those who stayed in the military industry until 1950 earned over a 14 percent increase in their salary.<sup>43</sup> Other ways the FEPC did this was providing advice on integration, giving managers ready excuse for white workers, threatening to bring powerful government agencies into the fold, and publicly embarrassing of companies who refused to hire blacks. The FEPC, MOWM, and the BSCP utilized forms of mass demonstration, mass pressure, and publicity. The BSCP strategies had a lasting impression on the Civil Rights Movement.

## **2.5. Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the FEPC**

One of the ways the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters worked with the FEPC was an independent investigation of the railroads for discriminatory practices. Milton P. Webster who served on the FEPC was put in charge of discrimination on the railroads by the committee. The investigation was brought on by the displacement of black firemen by white firemen who did not have the seniority ratings the black trainmen had.<sup>44</sup> The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen had clauses “that no worker shall become a fireman who is not also eligible to be engineer on the railroad.”<sup>45</sup> The railways which used this discrimination practice were in the South and Midwest. The investigation was for “negro railroad workers including firemen, hostlers, brakemen, switchmen, shop crafts, and other railway vocations.”<sup>46</sup> The railroad companies kept

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<sup>43</sup> William J. Collins, "Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets," *American Economic Review* 91, no. 1 (2001): 272.

<sup>44</sup> "Webster Pushes Firemen's Case; Plan FEPC Hearings," *Afro-American*, August 8, 1942.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "Webster to Probe Railroads for FEPC," *The Chicago Defender*, September 5, 1942.

black firemen out of work and did not allow them to be promoted to engineer of the train. Before the FEPC was created, the BSCP organized the Colored Locomotive Firemen, and fought against blacks being deprived of seniority rights and promotions.<sup>47</sup> To help influence the railroads Randolph persuaded Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia of New York to be the chairman and persuaded Eleanor Roosevelt to be the honorary chair.<sup>48</sup>

While Webster headed the probe for the FEPC, the BSCP got involved with the investigation. When Webster and the FEPC had announced the investigation of the railroads, Randolph, at Webster's request, formed an independent Brotherhood investigation headed by B.F. McLaurin.<sup>49</sup> McLaurin did work with the MOWM, the BSCP, and the National Council for a Permanent FEPC. Ashley Totten and T.D. McNeal additionally aided the railroad probe; they met with employers of the railroad to discuss discrimination at their companies.<sup>50</sup> After the investigation and the creation of the second committee of the FEPC, Webster and the Brotherhood exposed the rampant discrimination. Using testimony from black firemen the committee got the railroads to admit guilt. The hearing ended with the Union Pacific railroad agreeing to fix its discriminatory practices and the New York Central line agreeing to meet and come up with a solution.<sup>51</sup> Outside of the FEPC hearings the Brotherhood and the Provisional Committee of the Colored Locomotive Firemen won legal cases against the company's policy to not promote black firemen to engineer. The Supreme Court outlawed the anti-black deal with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and the railroads, and the union

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<sup>47</sup> Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics for FEPC* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 140.

<sup>48</sup> Pfeffer, A. *Philip Randolph*, 94.

<sup>49</sup> "FEPC Subcommittee to Study R.R. Men's Problems," *Afro-American*, 5 September, 1942.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from A. Philip Randolph to Milton P. Webster January 3, 1944, Box 10, Folder Correspondence Webster, Milton P. January 1943-1944, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>51</sup> "Railroads Admit Guilt as FEPC Exposes Bias," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 25 September, 1943.

was forced to pay lawsuits to the black workers.<sup>52</sup> The support of Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in the FEPC railroad investigation shows how the BSCP worked with the FEPC to fight for fair employment for African Americans in the United States.

The BSCP worked alongside the FEPC in Oakland, shipyards. C. L. Dellums who took over for A. Philip Randolph as the BSCP President was in charge of the Oakland branch of the Brotherhood. Dellums noticed there were not any identifiable blacks working in the shipyards, including Richmond where the Kaiser Shipbuilding Company alone had four in the area. He telephoned Webster and suggested sending Clarence Johnson and himself to bring the FEPC out to address the problem.<sup>53</sup> The Kaiser Shipyards spread up and down the West Coast from San Francisco to Portland, and Vancouver.<sup>54</sup> While the shipyards employed some African Americans, many were discriminated against by the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB), who had a monopoly on Kaiser Shipyards and had 500,000 members as of 1944.<sup>55</sup> Edgar Kaiser himself did not have a problem hiring and promoting black workers publicly but the IBB repeatedly used discrimination to keep blacks from moving up and forcing them out of the shipyards. There were rumors that he made back room deals with IBB members to exclude blacks.<sup>56</sup> The union forced black workers to join their union in auxiliaries. These black lodges were considered second class to white lodges, charged more money for insurance, denied entrance into apprentice programs, and dismissed from the union

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<sup>52</sup> Pfeffer, A. *Philip Randolph*, 94.

<sup>53</sup> "C.L. Dellums Interview by Joyce Henderson," Earl Warren Oral History Project, University of California/Berkeley, 97.

<sup>54</sup> Merl E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 270.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-269.

<sup>56</sup> Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, 277.

for reasons that did not apply to white workers.<sup>57</sup> After contacting Webster and Randolph, Dellums used his NAACP and BSCP connections to aid the FEPC in the battle against the IBB.

Once the FEPC was involved the IBB denied the auxiliary system for black workers was discriminatory. The complaint by the workers was addressed by the local BSCP and the IBB. The IBB representative agreed with the BSCP that the auxiliary union be given full self-governing powers. The union did not follow through with this promise. In 1943, out of the 45,000 workers at the Kaiser shipyards only 1,449 were African American.<sup>58</sup> The IBB routinely made their members take a secret oath to not “recommend or vote for anyone but a white person to become a member of the union.”<sup>59</sup> Dellums, Webster, and Johnson all did work with the IBB and the Kaiser Shipyard. Through meetings they discovered the Kaiser Company played a hand in the discrimination of blacks, not just the IBB.<sup>60</sup> After the investigation and hearings the FEPC finally ruled in 1945, “that upon the basis of the foregoing considerations, the committee concludes that its summary, findings and directives shall be, and the same are, hereby affirmed,” and the committee order Kaiser to take steps to rid the company and IBB of there discriminatory practices.<sup>61</sup> After this ruling the IBB and Kaiser slowly started to change throughout the United States, in 1945 the IBB altered their laws to eliminate FEPC objections.<sup>62</sup> This victory over the Kaiser Company and the IBB was

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>58</sup> James S. Rush Jr., “The Fair Employment Practice Committee and the Shipyard Hearings of 1943-1944,” *Prologue* 29, no. 4 (1997): 282.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>60</sup> “C.L. Dellums Interview by Joyce Henderson,” Earl Warren Oral History Project, University of California/Berkeley, 98.

<sup>61</sup> Rush Jr., “The Fair Employment Practice Committee,” 287.

<sup>62</sup> Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, 311.

accomplished by the FEPC, the BSCP, and the NAACP. The work of Dellums, Randolph, Webster, and local Brotherhood members was instrumental in breaking down the racial barriers and discrimination in the Kaiser Company and the IBB throughout the West Coast. After the settlement Dellums recalls, “it was estimated there were about 10,000 Negroes working in the shipyards by then.”<sup>63</sup>

The FEPC experienced success in St. Louis with help of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. T.D. McNeal, Theodore Brown, E.J. Bradley, and B.F. McLaurin worked with the FEPC through the local BSCP to secure jobs for African Americans in the city. The March on Washington Movement aided the FEPC in St. Louis, EJ Bradley and B.F. McLaurin are the two BSCP members who worked directly with the committee. McLaurin planned the conference to “Save the FEPC” and Bradley spoke at the meeting. Bradley worked directly with the March on Washington Movement and the FEPC to secure jobs for African Americans. During the FEPC’s time in St. Louis, Bradley worked towards desegregating companies and won 5,000 jobs for black workers.<sup>64</sup> The St. Louis conference was held after the FEPC was transferred to the War Manpower Commissions under McNutt. Randolph and White campaigned at the meeting for President Roosevelt to make the FEPC an independent agency again, and called the act a surrender and a “scathingly” attack on Jim Crow, segregation and discrimination in the workplace. Their complaints were answered when Roosevelt enacted Executive Order

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<sup>63</sup> “C.L. Dellums Interview by Joyce Henderson,” Earl Warren Oral History Project, University of California/Berkeley, 99. The year was 1947, two years after the IBB and Kaiser started allowing African Americans to work at the shipyards.

<sup>64</sup> Pfeffer, A. *Philip Randolph*, 83.

9346. This conference was planned and put on by McLaurin, Randolph, Bradley, and the local BSCP chapter.<sup>65</sup>

One of the ways the BSCP supported the FEPC was by picketing companies who actively used discrimination in their hiring practices. The St. Louis chapter of the BSCP led by McNeal picketed large companies in an effort to persuade them and gain publicity.<sup>66</sup> The FEPC additionally sent Theodore Brown of the BSCP to investigate cases of discrimination.<sup>67</sup> Brown worked directly with McNeal and the BSCP and MOWM in St. Louis. They went to defense plants to collect complaints from African American workers. Webster even spoke about the actions of the St. Louis BSCP and the work McNeal did.<sup>68</sup> Bradley and McNeal and the St. Louis MOWM helped at U.S. Cartridge. The workers were segregated to one building but had no black foremen. With the help of the MOWM and BSCP all thirty-six hundred walked out and only returned after the company promised to train black foremen.<sup>69</sup> Most of the work done in St. Louis was by T.D. McNeal. In 1942 McNeal led a silent march of 500 around the U.S. Cartridge Company for discriminating against black workers.<sup>70</sup> After this demonstration the company announced the next day plans to employ African Americans, raised wages, and hired seventy-two black women for the first time. McNeal used the techniques he learned when the BSCP fought the Pullman Company, by using mass demonstration and protest he was able to secure jobs for African Americans in a company who did not employ many blacks before this time. A few weeks later McNeal again led protestors to

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<sup>65</sup> Jones, *March on Washington*, 53.

<sup>66</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 101.

<sup>67</sup> Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 121.

<sup>68</sup> Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar*, 275. This was at a BSCP National Convention in St. Louis in 1956.

<sup>69</sup> Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 119-120.

<sup>70</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 101.

the Carter Carburetor Corporation. The company did not employ a single black out of their 2,700 workforce.<sup>71</sup> McNeal worked towards employing African Americans during the war. By the wars end his chapter alone produced 15,000 jobs for blacks.<sup>72</sup> The BSCP was instrumental in aiding the FEPC in St. Louis. The work done by McNeal, McLaurin, and Brown cannot be overlooked in the history of the committee.

Another city which the BSCP had an influence over with the FEPC was Chicago. From the beginning of the FEPC its employees Milton P. Webster and Dickerson focused on the city. Both of them were from Chicago and made connections in the city. On December 17, 1941 Webster and the FEPC opened a Chicago branch to combat the discrimination employers utilized against minority workers.<sup>73</sup> The branch opened and immediately started investigating cases of discrimination in Chicago. Both Webster and Dickerson fought to make the city a focal point for the FEPC's publicity campaign.<sup>74</sup> Both men were able to persuade civil rights organizations to assist the committee. The hearings held in Chicago set the bar for the FEPC. Webster interviewed companies who discriminated against minorities. This was the first time the FEPC brought publicity onto the subject of discrimination. Webster and the BSCP additionally held a mass demonstration in Chicago in order to "Save the FEPC" and remove it from the war manpower commissions.<sup>75</sup> McLaurin helped plan the conference and presided over the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> "Announcement at Leading Churches," *St. Louis American*, January 20, 1944.

<sup>73</sup> President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice 17 December, 1941, Box 23, Folder Press Releases 1941-1951, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>74</sup> Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 20.

<sup>75</sup> Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 41.

meeting.<sup>76</sup> Ashley Totten additionally spoke at conference on abolishing Jim Crow in America.<sup>77</sup>

In Chicago the FEPC handled over 500 cases of discrimination. This amount made Chicago the third most active FEPC chapter nationally, behind Philadelphia and New York.<sup>78</sup> The Chicago branch of the FEPC and BSCP additionally raised almost \$4,000 to lobby for a permanent FEPC.<sup>79</sup> This work was done mostly by Dickerson and Webster; they utilized the BSCP, Chicago Urban League, and other Civil Rights organizations. The committee settled almost 60 percent of the cases. From 1943-1944 the percentage of African American in the war industry went from 8.6 to 13.1.<sup>80</sup> The work done by the FEPC and local organizations laid the groundwork for success across the United States. The FEPC utilized public hearings and mass demonstrations throughout the country during its lifespan.

B.F. McLaurin worked with the MOWM and the FEPC after its creation. He helped win African Americans jobs, worked towards a permanent FEPC, gathered support for the committee, and worked with BSCP member and FEPC chapters to ensure Executive Order 8802 and 9346 were carried out. McLaurin utilized the MOWM to recruit people to assist the FEPC. He wrote to officers and members of the movement encouraging them to open MOWM chapters that would work with the FEPC.<sup>81</sup> As the

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<sup>76</sup> Thursday, July 1, 1943, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conferences 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>77</sup> Thursday, July 1, 1943 Metropolitan Community Church, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Conferences 1941-1943, A. Philip Randolph Paper, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>81</sup> Letter, June 1, 1944, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement Circulars 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

national secretary of the movement he had access to people throughout the country and used this as a means to recruit to fight for both executive orders. Additionally he encouraged members to set up chapters for a permanent FEPC.<sup>82</sup> McLaurin worked with local chapters around the country.<sup>83</sup> He spoke to officials of the MOWM and FEPC, instructing mass pressure tactics and publicity to try and force employers into hiring and promoting African Americans.

McLaurin raised funds in an effort to lobby for a permanent FEPC, the FEPC, and contributed BSCP to the committee and MOWM. He along with the other leaders of the BSCP pledged to raise a minimum of \$5,000 a year for the FEPC.<sup>84</sup> The BSCP members made significant financial contributions to the FEPC. When McLaurin spoke about the Fair Employment Practices Committee he said, “we spent a small fortune...it’s the porters’ gift.”<sup>85</sup> McLaurin attempted to raise funds and spend the word in different ways. He went to the postmaster and requested a sticker to support a permanent FEPC with proceeds going to the committee. When the stamps were banned by the post master general, McLaurin fought against the ruling and allowed the stamps to continue being used.<sup>86</sup> A member from the Postmaster General personally contacted him, calling his organization first class and thanking them for the cooperation.<sup>87</sup> McLaurin went through the postmaster and fought to lift the stamp ban, using his BSCP resources he was able to persuade the Postmaster General to allow the sale of the stamps. McLaurin additionally

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Pfeiffer, A. *Philip Randolph*, 100.

<sup>84</sup> Pledge, Box 26, Folder FEPC Financial Papers 1944-1950, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>85</sup> Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, 221.

<sup>86</sup> Ban on FEPC Stamp Removed, January 20, 1945, Box 23, Folder FEPC Press Releases 1941-1951, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to B.F. McLaurin from Ramsey S. Black, January 13, 1945, Box 26, Folder March on Washington Movement “C of D” 1941-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

sought and secured support from other organizations outside of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

The two organizations from which McLaurin secured the most support from were the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) and the Liberal Party. He was Vice-President of the ADA and on the National Board for the Liberal Party.<sup>88</sup> Both of these organizations fought for federal actions in an effort for equality. To recruit support from members of the ADA McLaurin wrote press releases and spoke at national conferences and meetings. At the first convention he aided the board in drafting suggestions for the President's Civil Rights legislative programs. These programs included support for a permanent FEPC, abolition of poll taxes, and outlawing lynching.<sup>89</sup> Through press releases McLaurin talked about the injustices committed against African Americans in the United States. He implored the ADA and Liberal Party members to support the FEPC in an attempt to secure human rights, not just civil rights for all blacks in America. The speeches included education about mass demonstration and mass pressure tactics which should be used by African Americans in order to secure a permanent FEPC.<sup>90</sup> The ADA worked with the CIO and from 1945 to 1950 major cities such as Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia enacted FEPC laws.<sup>91</sup> For the Liberal Party McLaurin utilized the *New Amsterdam News*, in his press releases to the party he talked about the success the FEPC had around the country and with claimed that it could grow with

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<sup>88</sup> Biography of B.F. McLaurin, Box 106, Folder B.F. McLaurin Miscellaneous, Records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>89</sup> Press Release, March 5, 1946, Box 106, Folder B.F. McLaurin Miscellaneous, Records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Birnbaum and Taylor, *Civil Rights since 1787*, 373.

support. He additionally sought out whites to join the cause, unlike Randolph.<sup>92</sup>

McLaurin deviated from Randolph's thoughts on keeping the movement an all-black movement, in order to receive enough funds. He thought reaching out to every person to support the cause would garner more money and support. McLaurin was able to succeed in gaining support from the Liberal Party in efforts to secure a permanent FEPC.<sup>93</sup>

BSCP members Milton P. Webster, A. Philip Randolph, B.F. McLaurin, L.B. Thompson, and the rank-and-file members created the National Council for a Permanent FEPC (NCPFEP) out of the MOWM. This shift occurred after the summer of 1942.<sup>94</sup> The movement lost steam at the end of 1943 and BSCP members created a new organization to fight for a permanent FEPC and to support the Executive Order. The National Council was chaired by A. Philip Randolph and B.F. McLaurin was a member of the Executive Board.<sup>95</sup> Both men were named to the committee because they started the MOWM which became the National Council, and both men worked tirelessly for the Executive Order and to assure it was carried out. Milton P. Webster was additionally a member of the National Council.<sup>96</sup> The council was set up to aid existing MOWM chapters, the FEPC, and local organizational chapters, such as the BSCP. Randolph and McLaurin worked with the executive committee to determine where their presence was most needed, this information was given to them by local MOWM, NAACP, and BSCP chapters.

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<sup>92</sup> The Negro Voter and the Liberal Party, Box 106, Folder B.F. McLaurin Miscellaneous, Records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 173.

<sup>95</sup> Executive Committee of the National Council for A Permanent FEPC, Box 23, Folder FEPC Membership 1943-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>96</sup> National Committee, Box 23, Folder FEPC Membership 1943-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

McLaurin and Randolph sent out press releases in New York, Washington D.C., and other cities. They urged for a mobilization of the masses across all religions, races, and ethnic backgrounds, including and black, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Japanese, Mexicans, and Chinese supporters.<sup>97</sup> Randolph learned from the MOWM, that an all-black movement was not able to gather enough funds to keep an organization going nationally. With the National Council he, McLaurin, and the executive board agreed to expand the plea for support and money. The decision was made based on economic need. The leaders felt that the movement needed to include all people, in order to secure enough funds and support to continue functioning. McLaurin worked with the New York chapter of the Japanese America Citizens' League and helped put on a rally at the American Common for a permanent FEPC.<sup>98</sup> After the national council was set up local chapters began to be created throughout the United States. In Los Angeles a chapter was founded and L.B. Thompson a member of the BSCP was named to the executive committee as its treasurer.<sup>99</sup> Thompson distributed money on the west coast to combat discrimination in shipyards and other wartime industry companies. Los Angeles additionally had FEPC hearings on discrimination. The BSCP networked for the National Council the same way it had done for the MOWM.<sup>100</sup> The BSCP aided in setting up local NCPFEPC chapters across the country. The National Council was established and kept going through the contributions of the BSCP.<sup>101</sup> The work done by the FEPC, BSCP, National Council for a Permanent FEPC, the MOWM, and other

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<sup>97</sup> News Release, August 18, 1945, Box 23, Folder FEPC Membership 1943-1945, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>98</sup> "Support Rally for FEPC," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 22, 1945.

<sup>99</sup> Greater Los Angeles Chapter of National Council for a Permanent FEPC, Box 10, Folder Correspondence Thompson, L.B., A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>100</sup> Garfinkel, *When Negroes March*, 151.

<sup>101</sup> Welky, *Marching Across the Color Line*, 163.

organizations helped win over 300,000 jobs for African Americans during World War II.<sup>102</sup>

The FEPC did not have a long lifespan, lasting only from 1941-1946. While the FEPC did not receive adequate funding it was able to gain jobs for African Americans. The BSCP worked tirelessly for the FEPC through the MOWM. The MOWM chapters were established in cities where local Brotherhood chapters existed. The Brotherhood members worked directly with the FEPC to provide support, funds, and apply pressure on companies to hire blacks. The BSCP put on conferences, recruited members to the movement, raised money, and worked with FEPC chapters to collect complaints of discrimination. Without the BSCP the FEPC would not have enjoyed as much success gaining African Americans jobs in the military industry.

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<sup>102</sup> Fact Sheet for June 25, 1951, Box 25, Folder FEPC History 1951, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Montgomery Bus Boycott**

The Montgomery Bus Boycott began on December 5, 1955 and ended on December 20, 1956, lasting 381 days. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) formed after a group of ministers and Civil Rights activists met and decided to boycott the busses in Montgomery. Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955 and this event sparked a city wide demonstration. The African Americans in Montgomery utilized, the transportation system, fundraising, effective sharing of information, and mass protest against segregation. E.D. Nixon, a Pullman Porter utilized his training in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the NAACP, and his work at the Highlander School enabled him to organize the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Along with many other members, Edward Daniel Nixon was instrumental in planning, organizing, and starting the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Nixon helped organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters with Randolph and formed the Montgomery chapter of the BSCP. He was born in 1899 in Montgomery and was a tenant farmer.

Nixon only received education through the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade,<sup>1</sup> yet even with this small amount of education he was able to become a leader in the labor movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Nixon got involved in the movement after joining the BSCP and becoming a protégé of A. Philip Randolph, and credited the BSCP and Randolph for teaching him strategies such as mass demonstration, mass pressure, and mass protest as a way to achieve rights for African Americans.<sup>2</sup> Nixon served as President of the Montgomery Chapter of the NAACP. He fought for African American voting rights, worked cases on police brutality, rape, and lynching, and other court cases involving blacks.<sup>3</sup> Nixon was the one who went and bailed Rosa Parks out of jail with Clifford Durr, a white attorney who worked with Nixon and hired Parks as a seamstress.<sup>4</sup> Fred Gray, a young black lawyer who worked for the NAACP in Montgomery, formulated the civil suit *Browder v. Gayle* which effectively ended bus segregation.<sup>5</sup> E.D. Nixon is forgotten in the history of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but the BSCP member was a large reason for the success of the Boycott and ending of bus segregation.

During his work in the Brotherhood, Nixon handled cases of discrimination by the railways. He boasted that he was “very happy to say out of the number of cases I’ve handled there never was a man fired whom I represented during that period.”<sup>6</sup> Nixon worked hard for the BSCP and without the lessons he learned in the union there might not

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Ward and Tony Badger, *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 46.

<sup>2</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 54-55.

<sup>5</sup> Milton Viorst, *Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 46-47.

<sup>6</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

have been a bus boycott. He credits the BSCP for the Montgomery Bus Boycott.<sup>7</sup> He also knew the way to combat racism and segregation was to cripple whites financially, which worked when the boycott proved 99 percent effective. E.D. Nixon took what he learned in the BSCP and applied it to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He laid the groundwork for the movement with his twenty-five year career as a Civil Rights leader in Montgomery.<sup>8</sup> The BSCP additionally helped provide financial support and transportation, while the labor connections Nixon made with the BSCP were vital in the boycott.

### **3.1. Legal Cases Before Rosa Parks**

Rosa Parks was not the first woman arrested for violating the bus segregation laws in Alabama. During World War II Birmingham went through turbulent times with segregation laws on the buses. African American men and women fought against bus segregation and were met with fierce violence by the bus drivers, who beat them with guns and black jacks, and sometimes even shot them.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Montgomery, Birmingham blacks were involved in violence and fought back. According to Section 10 of the Montgomery City Code, the bus lines were supposed to offer separate but equal seating for whites and blacks. This ordinance was enforced by the driver of the vehicle. Section 11 gave him the power of a policeman to ensure segregated areas on the busses.<sup>10</sup> The three cases before Parks were Mrs. Waynesfield, Claudette Colvin, and Mary Louise Smith. All three of these young women's cases were turned down by Nixon, Durr, Gray,

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<sup>7</sup> "This is Montgomery: Not Hat in Hand," *Afro-American*, August 25, 1956.

<sup>8</sup> "Cite Founder of Boycott Group," *The Chicago Defender*, September 28, 1957.

<sup>9</sup> Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels, Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 58-59.

<sup>10</sup> Montgomery City Code, Alabama Department of Archives and History, December 10, 2013.

Jo Ann Robison, and others. Nixon argued the three cases would not hold up in court or be able to generate a boycott, based on his experiences in the BSCP and NAACP. They did not choose these young women because of their personal and home lives. Nixon argued if any one of these three were chosen a lawyer would be able to turn these flaws against them, and he wanted to choose a case they could win.<sup>11</sup> He learned these lessons through his work with the BSCP and NAACP. When discussing the reasoning for turning these cases down Nixon said,

All right, you people sitting here today along with a whole lot of other people would think any case along with the person that was mistreated on the bus would have made a good litigant. Most of you would think that. Well, my experience with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the NAACP....have taught me a whole lot different. I had to be sure that I had somebody that I could win with. And either of these other three I couldn't have had won.<sup>12</sup>

Colvin was pregnant and unwed and Smith was from a poor family with an alcoholic father.<sup>13</sup> These women were arrested for breaking the segregation laws on the busses, but were not chosen because they had little training in Civil Rights and their personal issues made them seem lacking in respectability to the city's black middle class. However, these two women were included in a later lawsuit, *Browder v. Gayle*.<sup>14</sup> They were added to a lawsuit which was already on the Alabama Docket for the Supreme Court. This court case ended segregation on busses, and worked because whites were focused on Parks.

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<sup>11</sup> Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Interview for *Eyes on the Prize*, Henry Hampton Collection 1979, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Digital Gateway.

<sup>13</sup> Montgomery Bus Boycott, Henry Hampton Collection 1979, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Digital Gateway.

<sup>14</sup> David J. Garrow, *The Walking City: the Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-1956* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Pub., 1989), 261-262.

Rosa Parks worked with the NAACP and as E.D. Nixon's branch secretary for twelve years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott.<sup>15</sup> During her work with the Nixon and her training at the Highlander school, she learned strategies for the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>16</sup> Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955 for refusing to give up her seat for a white man. Parks and three other African American were ordered to move for whites. Mrs. Parks simply refused to give up her seat and argued with the driver that if she paid her fare just like any other person she should not have to relinquish her seat, the other three blacks moved for the white driver.<sup>17</sup> Nixon knew Parks was the right individual to rally a movement around. She did not have any secrets the media or the whites of Montgomery could use against her. Parks was a married woman, who worked closely with the NAACP, had academic training, and did not have a police record of any kind.<sup>18</sup> She additionally had helped Nixon run the Montgomery chapter of the BSCP during her twelve year tenure as his secretary.<sup>19</sup>

When Parks was arrested she contacted E.D. Nixon and Fred Gray. Gray was out of town and Nixon heard the news from his wife that Parks was arrested for violating the bus segregation laws.<sup>20</sup> Nixon immediately contacted Clifford Durr, he and his wife Virginia Durr and Nixon went down to the court house and Nixon paid the bond of a hundred dollars himself.<sup>21</sup> Once they bailed Parks out of jail, Nixon immediately asked her if they could use her case to break down segregation in Montgomery. He felt this was

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<sup>15</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>16</sup> Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 71-72.

<sup>17</sup> Raines, *My Soul is Rested*, 40-41.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>20</sup> Interview for *Eyes on the Prize*, Henry Hampton Collection 1979, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Digital Gateway.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the case because the city charged her with violation of segregation law, not public nuisance.<sup>22</sup> After explaining to Parks that her case could change segregation laws, she agreed. Mrs. Parks agreed to let them use her case, the relationship with Nixon her work at the Highlander School and the NAACP helped with her decision.

### **3.2. Bringing the Masses Together**

While Nixon was talking to Parks about using her case, Jo Ann Robinson had already began to print off flyers calling for a one day boycott of the city busses of Montgomery on December 5, 1955.<sup>23</sup> The WPC had wanted to boycott the busses going back to 1950. Robinson argued to use Claudette Colvin's case before Parks. They were well organized and were the ones who spread the word about the one day boycott to African Americans throughout Montgomery. Robinson worked for Alabama State College as an English Professor and gained access to machines which they copied the leaflets. After creating the leaflets Robinson contacted Nixon to tell him about the planned boycott and he agreed they should use this opportunity.<sup>24</sup>

Robinson was a member of King's church and was the president of the WPC.<sup>25</sup> Robinson and Nixon believed they had to reach as many people as possible for the boycott to be a success. The leaflets asked supporters to abstain from riding the busses

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<sup>22</sup> *Rosa Parks v. City of Montgomery*, U.S. 4559 (1955).

<sup>23</sup> Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 45.

<sup>24</sup> McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 80-81.

<sup>25</sup> Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, *Let Nobody Turn us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 376.

on December 5, stressing that another black woman had been arrested and charged with breaking segregation laws, and also urged people to come to the mass meeting.<sup>26</sup>

The next morning E.D. Nixon began to call black civil rights leaders and black ministers from churches in Montgomery. Through his work with the BSCP Nixon knew mass demonstration and mass protest of the busses would help combat the segregation on the bus lines. The first person he called was Ralph D. Abernathy, a young black pastor at the largest church in the community, the Negro First Baptist Church.<sup>27</sup> He had a favorable reputation through his work with the NAACP.<sup>28</sup> The second person Nixon called was Reverend H. H. Hubbard. After hearing the story of Parks and the validity of the case he agreed to the meeting with other black leaders.<sup>29</sup> The third person he called was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Nixon called the rest of the people on the list totaling nineteen. King, after having concerns at first agreed to meet, and Nixon said he was glad because he had already planned the meeting on December 2, 1955 at three o'clock in his church.<sup>30</sup> Nixon sought out influential ministers in the Montgomery area. He believed they needed all the support of blacks in Montgomery. Nixon especially wanted King, who did not have many enemies as he was new in town, and actually endorsed him as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). Nixon took himself out

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<sup>26</sup> Joe Azbell, "5,000 at Meeting Outline Boycott; Bullet Clips Bus," *Montgomery Adviser*, December 5, 1955.

<sup>27</sup> Interview for *Eyes on the Prize*, Henry Hampton Collection 1979, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Digital Gateway.

<sup>28</sup> Garrow, *The Walking City*, 203.

<sup>29</sup> Interview for *Eyes on the Prize*, Henry Hampton Collection 1979, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Digital Gateway.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

of the running for president because of his commitments to the BSCP and because he would miss meetings when he was out on the rails.<sup>31</sup>

Joe Azbell was the editor for the *Montgomery Adviser*.<sup>32</sup> Nixon worked with Azbell and he was one of the only white reporters who treated African Americans fairly. When Nixon called him and discussed the plans for the mass meeting and the boycott, Azbell wrote up a two column story for the paper that was featured on the front page.<sup>33</sup> He included the leaflet that Robinson and the WPC put together. This gave the meeting mass media coverage. Nixon planned this as a way to promote the meeting to blacks and get the word out to the white people of Montgomery that blacks were going to boycott the busses until they received fair and equal treatment. Pressuring the mayor and bus company in an effort to stop segregation is one way the BSCP had historically fought against the Pullman Company. The members used the organ of the BSCP *The Black Worker*, leaflets, and mass meetings to put pressure on the company.

Nixon took these lessons he learned and applied them to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He was also active in the March on Washington in 1941, and utilized the mass pressure and mass media coverage as the BSCP applied to the movement.<sup>34</sup> Nixon was not at the first Montgomery meeting because of his duties with the BSCP, out of respect the leaders promised not to put anything in writing until December 5 at the Holt Street Baptist meeting.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, 200.

<sup>32</sup> Interview for *Eyes on the Prize*, Henry Hampton Collection 1979, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Digital Gateway.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Pfeffer, A. *Philip Randolph*, 88.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

### **3.3. December 5, 1955 the forming of the MIA**

After the Parks trial on December 5, local black leaders planned a mass meeting at Holt Baptist Church. Nixon, Abernathy, and Reverend French decided they needed to write a resolution and formulate a name to call the movement.<sup>36</sup> Edgar Nathaniel French was a pastor at the Hilliard Chapel AME Zion Church and a member of the NAACP.<sup>37</sup> The three men decided to name the movement the Montgomery Improvement Association. In the resolution they asked all people of Montgomery to boycott the busses regardless of race and gender, utilize the carpool system, and be prepared to send representation to the Montgomery Bus Company to discuss their grievances. They also asked companies located outside the city provide money for their employers to use the carpool.<sup>38</sup> They utilized these strategies as a way to reach the masses. If they could get all blacks to stay off the busses they could affect the city financially. The demands were for better treatment and ending violence against blacks; that the seating arrangement is on a first come, first serve basis; and that the bus lines hire African American drivers for lines serving black neighborhoods.<sup>39</sup> They did not initially seek full integration. The first come first serve basis was based on the black and white section. The goal was to be able to ride the busses without the fear of police brutality, unfair treatment, harassment, and embarrassment. The organizers agreed to carry on the boycott indefinitely until the conditions improved. Abernathy and French wrote the resolution after it was agreed

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<sup>36</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>37</sup> U.J. Fields, Minutes of Montgomery Improvement Association Founding Meeting, December 5, 1955, The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, Stanford, California.

<sup>38</sup> Resolution, December 5, 1955, The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, Stanford, California.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

upon by the three men.<sup>40</sup> King and the rest of those at the church supported the resolution and demands.<sup>41</sup>

While at the meeting Abernathy and French spoke to Nixon about being president of the MIA. Nixon replied, “naw, not unless’n you all don’t accept my man. . . . Martin Luther King.”<sup>42</sup> French and Abernathy agreed to go along with Nixon. Through his years working for Civil Rights in Montgomery, church leaders and Civil Rights leaders trusted him. Many of the ministers in the Holt Street Baptist church were uneasy about the movement and they suggested not telling whites about it. Nixon stood up and said,

You guys have went around here and lived off these poor washwomen all your lives and ain’t never done nothing for ‘em. And now you got a chance to do something for ‘em, you talkin’ about you don’t want the white folks to know it...the reason we don’t have a program is ‘cause you all are to scared...you oughta make up your mind right now that you gon’ either admit you are a grown man or concede to the fact that you are a bunch of scared boys.<sup>43</sup>

After this King stood up and said he was not a coward and the rest of the delegation fell in line. Nixon utilized these words to appeal to the ministers and black masses at the church and challenge them to come together for mass protest. He believed the only way to succeed is to have unity in their organization. Besides being new in the area, Nixon wanted King to be the president because he was educated, an elegant speaker, and ran the biggest church in Montgomery. When the officers were voted on King received the Presidency and Nixon was the treasurer.<sup>44</sup> The rest of the MIA was made up of the

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<sup>40</sup> Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Towards Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 55-56.

<sup>42</sup> Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>44</sup> King Jr., *Stride Towards Freedom*, 224-225.

negotiating committee, executive board, finance committee, program committee, and the transportation committee. Nixon served on the finance and negotiating committee.<sup>45</sup>

Over 5,000 people attended this meeting at the Holt Baptist Church and the first day of the boycott on December 5 was over 90 percent effective.<sup>46</sup> Intense negotiations went on between the MIA and the city of Montgomery but these negotiations never came to fruition.

The first negotiations between the MIA leadership and the city officials occurred on December 8, 1955. The boycott was only three days old, but city officials wanted to end it, as blacks had stopped riding the busses. The negotiating committee handled the negotiations and five MIA members, including Nixon, met with Mayor Gayle to submit their demands.<sup>47</sup> They hoped the pressure of blacks not riding the bus would force the officials to action. When presented with the demands, the mayor charged African Americans with being unruly on the busses, and claimed if they were to be courteous then the bus drivers would treat them with respect.<sup>48</sup> This was the officials' way around the demands to blame the black riders for the arrests. The MIA and African Americans knew the bus drivers treated them as second class citizens and did not give them courtesy on the busses. The leaders pointed out that Mobile had a first come, first served policy and they were owned by the same company as the one in Montgomery.<sup>49</sup> The mayor promised to form a citizens committee, including white and black citizens to solve the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Joe Azbell, "5,000 at Meeting Outline Boycott; Bullet Clips Bus," *Montgomery Adviser*, December 5, 1955.

<sup>47</sup> Garrow, *The Walking City*, 132-133.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

issue, but the leaders knew only mass pressure would change how whites acted towards blacks on the busses.

The next two sessions of negotiation were between the MIA and the newly formed Citizen's Committee. At the second meeting MIA members present included King, Abernathy, Charles Langford and Rufus Lewis. Lewis was a local NAACP member and ran the transportation committee for the MIA; Langford was the other black attorney besides Gray who worked for the MIA.<sup>50</sup> At the meeting the committee blamed blacks for the unruly behavior of the drivers. Mayor Gayle made a statement to this effect and the committee agreed with him. The committee then moved to suspend the boycott over the holidays as a sign of good faith from the MIA, and to change white people's view about the movement.<sup>51</sup> The members of the Mayor's committee wanted to stop the boycott and hoped with the suspension it would lose momentum. King and the MIA members stood firm on their stance and declared the boycott would continue unhindered.<sup>52</sup> The December 19 meeting went the same way, they could not reach a solution. At this meeting the MIA accused the mayor of assembling an "anti-negro" committee as some of the members were biased.<sup>53</sup> The committee members were known to be outspoken for segregation and prejudice against blacks. The MIA and Citizens Committee negotiated on and off until February 20, 1956. After this date there were no serious negotiations between the two sides until the end of the boycott.<sup>54</sup> Negotiations between the two sides did not produce any result; Gayle and the Citizens Committee

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<sup>50</sup> U.J. Fields, Minutes of Montgomery Improvement Association Founding Meeting, December 5, 1955, The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, Stanford, California.

<sup>51</sup> Garrow, *The Walking City*, 245.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 245-246.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 249.

stayed put on their segregationist stance and the MIA was determined to continue the boycott.

### **3.4. Car Pool System**

In order to make the boycott successful, the MIA provided a car pooling system to blacks throughout Montgomery. There were up to 300 cars running throughout the city, replacing the transportation African Americans lost by boycotting the busses. Blacks could meet at points for pick up and drop off throughout the city of Montgomery. They additionally used taxi cabs and people's personal cars to ensure everyone could get to work and other places they needed to go. The taxis utilized offered people ten cent rides from 4-9 AM and from 3-11 PM.<sup>55</sup> This gave African Americans a cheap way to get around when they could not find a carpool or someone to take them to work. The city fought against this and issued an ordinance that required all taxi companies to charge at least fifty cents a ride.<sup>56</sup> The transportation committee was prepared for this and by December 7 they hired twenty five permanent drivers. The drivers worked from 6AM to 6PM and were paid four dollars a day to take African Americans to and from work.<sup>57</sup> The committee recruited unemployed blacks, ministers, and retired persons. White men and women aided in transportation inadvertently. Over a thousand estimated white women picked up their domestic servants for work and dropped them off at home – mainly because the white women who employed African Americans did not want them late to work. The Montgomery Police aided the boycott. The mayor instructed them to protect African Americans who rode the bus, but when African Americans saw the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

officers they believed they were there to keep them off the busses. The mayor wanted to end the boycott as quickly as possible, but keep the busses segregated.

The transportation committee worked towards giving transportation to all blacks through the car pool. The chairman of the Committee was Rufus Lewis. Reverend R.J. Glasco was an officer for the committee. He attended the Tuskegee Institute and was a member of the NAACP.<sup>58</sup> Once vehicles and drivers were secured by the MIA, they chose a black owned parking lot in downtown Montgomery which they rented for thirty dollars a month.<sup>59</sup> This was used as a drop off point for people who worked in downtown, giving them the space to drop off passengers and not block sidewalks. The next action the committee took was to set up forty three “dispatch stations” throughout black areas of Montgomery.<sup>60</sup> They wanted to make sure they had ample stations to pick up blacks.

Additionally the MIA set up forty two stations in the white areas of town. These pick up locations were divided into nine divisions. The locations were chosen at street intersections where there were stores, businesses, churches, and schools that were familiar to African Americans.<sup>61</sup> The committee did not want black women to have to wait for cars in white neighborhoods they did not know, in order to cut down on the chance of violence towards blacks and the people of the movement feeling safe using the car pool system. The gas and oil was provided by the MIA. To do this drivers request a ticket at the headquarters. They calculated the amount of gas needed for the given day.

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<sup>58</sup> U.J. Fields, Minutes of Montgomery Improvement Association Founding Meeting, December 5, 1955, The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, Stanford, California.

<sup>59</sup> Garrow, *The Walking City*, 225.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

They utilized nine stations throughout Montgomery which had lists of MIA drivers and were all black owned.<sup>62</sup> All these actions were coordinated by the MIA and the churches of Montgomery. The churches were used for this, for mass meetings, and as ways to spread the message and updates of the boycott. By the end of the second month of protest the bus lines were hurting financially from African Americans staying off the busses. They increased their rates 50 percent, an adult fare from 10 to 15 cents, and children from 5 to 8 cents. They additionally started charging five cents for transfers which had not been done before. Overall the bus company was losing twenty cents a mile since the demonstration began.<sup>63</sup> The finance committee was tasked with supplying the funds for the car pool.

### **3.5. Finance Committee**

As a member of the finance committee E.D. Nixon utilized his connections with the BSCP, the NAACP, and the labor movement. The rest of the committee was compromised of members of the church in Montgomery and local Civil Rights advocates.<sup>64</sup> Nixon reported it cost \$3,500 a week to keep the carpools running efficiently.<sup>65</sup> To raise this amount of money and all other expenses such as gas, oil, and spaces rented the committee had to rely on donations from Montgomery and outside of the city. The money came from the BSCP, bake sales done by the WPC and women of Montgomery, the NAACP, UAW, churches, and other labor organizations. King, Nixon, and other MIA members spoke at labor conferences and labor meeting to raise money. The

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> "Negroes' Boycott Cripples Bus Line," *The New York Times*, January 8, 1956.

<sup>64</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Towards Freedom*, 225.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 54.

Chicago, Jacksonville, and New York BSCP chapters all gave Nixon \$100.<sup>66</sup> Other chapters throughout the country gave donations of \$25, \$50, and \$75. The Birmingham and Asheville chapters sent money and congratulations on the work Nixon was doing.<sup>67</sup> This demonstrates the prior work done by the rank-and-file members of the Brotherhood. They gave money and support to any Brotherhood members in need and worked with BSCP members to advance the rights of all black individuals.

Nixon raised money by travelling across the United States speaking at conferences using the network the BSCP set up and his job as a porter. In early March in 1956 Nixon traveled to Detroit to speak at a United Auto Workers (UAW) convention. He spoke to local union leaders of the UAW and got a \$35,000 dollar donation to the MIA.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the money the local presidents gave him five automobiles free to use in the car pool system.<sup>69</sup> Through his work with the BSCP, Nixon developed connections with other labor organizations. The UAW leadership supported Civil Rights, and much like they did in the MOWM pledged to give money and support to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This was despite the reluctance of the leaders of the UAW like Walter Reuther, who did not believe the movement would last.<sup>70</sup> The UAW differed on the boycott's decision not to centralize management. The UAW and Reuther did decide to support Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference after the success of the boycott.<sup>71</sup> Nixon travelled to Detroit, Chicago, and New York to speak

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Glenn Feldman, *Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 216.

<sup>68</sup> Garrow, *The Walking City*, 230.

<sup>69</sup> Viorst, *Fire in the Streets*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism 1945-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 121-122.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

at large conferences in an attempt to gather money. All of these cities had strong BSCP ties, which helped him raise funds.<sup>72</sup>

Nixon spoke at BSCP conventions in an effort to raise support and funds for the boycott. On March 28, 1956 Nixon addressed BSCP members in New York City, where B.F. McLaurin introduced him as the backbone of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.<sup>73</sup> McLaurin knew all the work Nixon did in Montgomery for the Civil Rights Movement and lent ideas, words of encouragement and financial support. At the conference Nixon described why the boycott occurred and the state of the movement. He also discussed the money used for the car pool system, in an effort to gain money from the Brotherhood, because they all related to Nixon and the struggle for equal rights. Nixon additionally paid tribute to the transportation committee. The car pool system was set up in three or four days, and in his opinion ran better than the bus lines had in Montgomery for twenty years.<sup>74</sup> Nixon additionally thanked the BSCP members for the money they had sent in from chapters all over the country.<sup>75</sup> Nixon was not the only BSCP member who attempted to raise money for the boycott. Randolph spoke after Nixon and encouraged porters and maids throughout the country to send money. While Randolph was not directly involved in this movement, he trained Nixon from the time he started in the BSCP. Nixon gave credit to the BSCP for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, because if he

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<sup>72</sup> Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 53.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar*, 237-240.

<sup>74</sup> Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar*, 243.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

was not a member of the union he would not know how to organize and develop strategies to combat the segregation on the busses.<sup>76</sup>

Nixon was invited to Madison Square Garden in May, 1956 by Randolph and Eleanor Roosevelt to speak about the situation in Montgomery.<sup>77</sup> Nixon developed a personal relationship with Mrs. Roosevelt years before when they met on a train and he had a personal conversation with her.<sup>78</sup> To open his speech, Nixon talked about Montgomery being the Cradle of the Confederacy, and that when Mrs. Parks was arrested over 50,000 people rose up and fought the Jim Crow practices that had gripped the city for over ninety-three years.<sup>79</sup> He utilized this speech to excite the crowd, to educate people about the movement and to gain support and funds. Other guests included Roy Wilkins secretary of the NAACP, actor Sammy Davis Jr., Congressman Adam Powell from Harlem, while Nixon and Parks were the guests of honor.<sup>80</sup> While travelling to New York, Detroit, and Chicago Nixon raised over \$97,000 for the MIA.<sup>81</sup> Nixon was able to gain support from blacks all over the country who supported the integration of African Americans.

Nixon was the treasurer of the MIA as well as serving on the finance committee; he was entrusted to keep the MIA's money safe. In order to do this Nixon utilized a strategy he had learned while working with the BSCP and the NAACP. Whenever he acquired large sums of money for the movement he spread the money around to different

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<sup>76</sup> Eliot Wigginton, *Refuse to Stand Silently By: An Oral History of Grass Roots Social Activism in America, 1921-1964* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 227.

<sup>77</sup> Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, 37.

<sup>78</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>79</sup> Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Viorst, *Fire in the Streets*, 44.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

banks in Atlanta, Raleigh, Richmond, Washington, Philadelphia, and New York.<sup>82</sup> The reason he spread the money out was out of fear that banks in Alabama would freeze the MIA accounts and leave them without funds in an effort to shut down the racial freedom movement. This was done to the BSCP in its early years and Randolph trained Nixon to avoid this disaster. Using his labor and NAACP contacts and speaking throughout the country E.D. Nixon generated over \$400,000 dollars for the Montgomery Bus Boycott.<sup>83</sup> Nixon was instrumental in raising funds for the MIA. The money brought in by Nixon helped sustain the carpool system, and kept the car pool running effectively.

### **3.6. Violence and Arrests**

Throughout the Montgomery Bus Boycott African Americans faced violence and were arrested in an effort to bring the protest to a halt. King, Nixon, and other leaders received on average thirty to forty threatening calls and letters a day in January of 1956.<sup>84</sup> These calls threatened to kill them and their loved ones, but the leaders took these threats and turned them into fuel for the movement. King said at one mass meeting, “If one day you find me sprawled out dead, I do not want you to retaliate with a single act of violence. I urge you to continue protesting with the same dignity and discipline you have shown so far.”<sup>85</sup> One February 2, 1956, E.D. Nixon’s home was bombed. He and his wife were unharmed and the violence only further strengthened his resolve for equality.<sup>86</sup> This shows the determination of the boycott leaders. They were not going to cave into

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>83</sup> Richard B. Dent, “The Father His Children Forgot,” *American History Illustrated* 20, no. 8 (1985): 17. Larry Tye, in *Rising from the Rails*, has the same figure for the amount of money Nixon raised.

<sup>84</sup> Montgomery Bus Boycott, Henry Hampton Collection 1979, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Washington University Digital Gateway.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> “The Fight for Racial Equity,” *Afro-American*, May 5, 1956.

white pressures to end the protest or commit violence against Montgomery whites. On the same day when King spoke at a mass meeting his home was bombed. His wife and ten month year old daughter were unharmed.<sup>87</sup> There were numerous bombings of leaders' houses throughout the boycott, but it did not produce any violence from African Americans. Black women were the primary bus riders and often faced threats and violence during the boycott. These women were targeted because they were seen most on the busses, were seen by white men as vulnerable to physical and sexual harassment.<sup>88</sup> When Nixon spoke at the first meeting of the MIA he warned that people might get hurt or even killed supporting the movement, but said that what they were fighting for was more important than individual lives.<sup>89</sup>

Another effort to stop the protest by whites in Montgomery was the arrest of leaders of the movement. At the end of January 1956, Gayle and a grand jury in Montgomery ordered the arrest of 115 members of the MIA. Among the names were King, Nixon, Abernathy, Robinson, and Fred Gray. The city filed the case under a 1920s anti strike law.<sup>90</sup> After the announcement of the arrests the leaders discussed the course of action and Reverend H.H. Hubbard suggested that the leaders all turn themselves in together. He suggested they put on their best clothes and go down to the court house together.<sup>91</sup> Nixon was the first to surrender, walking into the station and asking if they were looking for him.<sup>92</sup> The leaders decided on this action to show they were not hiding

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<sup>87</sup> Stewart Burns, *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 17.

<sup>88</sup> McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 98-99.

<sup>89</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>90</sup> Jones, *The March on Washington*, 101.

<sup>91</sup> Garrow, *The Walking City*, 484.

<sup>92</sup> Burns, *Daybreak of Freedom*, 165.

from the arrest warrants. This turned the arrest from a negative into a positive. They encouraged any African Americans available to join the leaders as they turned themselves in at the courthouse. The arrest of leaders and bombings were some of the ways whites fought against the protest. The police stopped cars in the pool system and harassed people who used the transportation system. Through all the pressure the movement relied on mass protest and mass demonstration to achieve their goals.

### **3.7. *Browder v. Gayle***

Fred Gray submitted the Supreme Court Case *Browder v. Gayle* at the end of January in 1956, which would effectively end bus segregation in Alabama. This was done once the MIA discussed and directed Gray to try the case. The five women involved in the civil case were Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, Jeanetta Reese, Claudette Colvin, and Mary Louise Smith.<sup>93</sup> One of the women dropped out due to intimidation. Each of these women was arrested for violating segregation laws in Alabama. The women were chosen because most of the violence and racism on the busses were directed at women. Nixon was one of the men who came up with the idea and found the women for the case. After discussing the case with Clifford Durr, Nixon talked to Abernathy and King about the new strategy. He said,

I called Reverend King and Reverend Abernathy, and I told them, I got news for you boys...you all think we goin' to the Supreme Court in Mrs. Parks's case. The city father knows we feels that the only outlet we got is that case, and they goin' to freeze us out. I told them what we would have to do.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ward and Badger, *The Making of Martin Luther King*, 51.

<sup>94</sup> Ward and Badger, *The Making of Martin Luther King*, 52.

Nixon and Durr believed the whites in Montgomery would not allow the Parks case to reach the Supreme Court. His work with Durr, Gray, and the women was instrumental in putting the women together for the civil case.<sup>95</sup> The case in question had been on the Alabama court docket since the 1940s.<sup>96</sup> This was a way to get around the legal problems of getting Mrs. Parks case to the Supreme court and they decided to find other women who had been arrested for segregation violation and added it to the Browder case. On February 1, 1956 attorneys Fred Gray and Charles Langford filed a petition to add four female plaintiffs in an attempt to find the state bus segregation laws unconstitutional.<sup>97</sup> This attempt worked for the MIA. On June 5, 1956 judges Richard Rives and Frank Johnson Jr. ruled the segregation laws on Alabama busses were unconstitutional.<sup>98</sup>

The court decision went through an appeals process and the white leaders of Montgomery fought until all of their options were exhausted. On November 13, 1956 Nixon, Abernathy, King, and Coretta King read the decision of the Supreme Court declaring the bus segregation laws unconstitutional.<sup>99</sup> On this same day the car pool was ended. Although the bus boycott itself did not stop the end of segregation on busses the work done by the MIA propelled the court case *Browder v. Gayle*. E.D. Nixon was the one who suggested trying another case in order to make it to the Supreme Court and his idea paid off. The MIA ended the boycott on December 20, 1956. Martin Luther King, Edward Nixon, Ralph Abernathy, and Glenn Smiley all boarded a bus together at 5:45

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<sup>95</sup> Interview of E.D. Nixon, Box 139, Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>96</sup> Garrow, *The Walking City*, 261.

<sup>97</sup> Burns, *Daybreak of Freedom*, 43.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>99</sup> King Jr., *Stride Towards Freedom*, 160.

AM, making them the first African Americans to ride Montgomery Busses without segregation laws.<sup>100</sup>

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters did contribute to the Montgomery Bus Boycott outside of the efforts of E.D. Nixon. The BSCP sent money from local chapters; helped recruit boycotters, and gave moral support to Nixon throughout the boycott. Nixon's work done in the Brotherhood helped to give him the tools and strategies to succeed in the movement. He credited his success to the training he received from Randolph and McLaurin, both BSCP members.<sup>101</sup> Randolph additionally sent seasoned civil rights activist Bayard Rustin down to the MIA to help with non-violence workshops. (WHEN) Randolph contacted Nixon before he sent Rustin down.<sup>102</sup> The work done by Edward Daniel Nixon cannot be overlooked when discussing the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Nixon and Robison started the movement when Rosa Parks was arrested; raised money to support the movement and MIA, recruited boycotters, and worked with the legal team and came up with the idea for *Browder v. Gayle*, which effectively ended segregation on busses in Alabama.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 172-173.

<sup>101</sup> Wigginton, *Refuse to Stand Silently By*, 219.

<sup>102</sup> Jones, *The March on Washington*, 104.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conclusion**

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was instrumental in the threat to march on Washington in 1941, the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, and the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The work done by the BSCP was instrumental and these events would not have enjoyed as much success without the Brotherhood. The BSCP members took what they learned in their battle against the Pullman Company and applied these experiences to the Civil Rights Movement. The members utilized mass protest, mass demonstration, mass pressure, and public appeal to advance African Americans socially and economically. A. Philip Randolph organized the BSCP in 1925, and through hard work secured a charter for it in the AFL and defeated the Pullman Company to win a collective bargaining agreement in 1937. Without the formation of the BSCP these events in Civil Rights history would not have occurred.

The idea to March on Washington in 1941 was hatched by A. Philip Randolph and Milton P. Webster of the BSCP. McLaurin, Dellums, Totten, Bradley, and Brown lent financial support, recruited African Americans for the march, and spread the word

about the proposed demonstration throughout the country by utilizing the railroads. The threat to march on the capital forced President Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 8802, which barred discrimination of African Americans in the defense industry and created the FEPC. The BSCP effectively pressured the president into passing legislation which benefitted African Americans economically; the same way they enhanced members of the Brotherhood in their battle against the Pullman Company.

Once Executive Order 8802 was passed, Randolph and other members of the BSCP turned their attention to ensuring the order was carried out by forming the March on Washington Movement. The MOWM spread throughout the country and chapters were established in cities with local BSCP chapters. The MOWM worked directly with the FEPC, aiding the committee in winning jobs for African Americans. The movement deployed the same tactics as the FEPC: they pressured companies who practiced discrimination, publicly embarrassed them, and held public hearings. The MOWM additionally set up conferences to educate the black masses on how they could aid the FEPC. BSCP members organized these conferences; they recruited people, raised funds, and put together the featured programs. Brotherhood members additionally served on committees at these conferences and spoke on the work done for the FEPC and ways to work towards a permanent FEPC. Without the BSCP the FEPC would not have enjoyed as much success in gaining African Americans jobs in the defense industry.

The Fair Employment Practices Committee resulted from Executive Order 8802. The committee was put in place to monitor and report on discriminatory practices utilized by companies in the defense industry. The BSCP worked directly with the FEPC through MOWM chapters and local Brotherhood chapters. Milton P. Webster was appointed to

the committee by President Roosevelt and worked with BSCP members throughout the country. Other members who worked with the FEPC were Randolph, McLaurin, Dellums, Bradley, Brown, Smith, Thompson, and the rank-and-file membership. All of the members utilized the connections and railroad network the BSCP had put in place.

The BSCP aided the FEPC throughout the country. The BSCP raised money for the FEPC and MOWM. Webster worked towards ending discrimination and was head of a subcommittee to investigate the railroad industry. Randolph and McLaurin formed an independent investigation to aid Webster. The Brotherhood additionally did work in New York City, Oakland, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Los Angeles and Chicago. They worked to win African Americans jobs in the shipping industry, ammunition factories, steel, and aircraft manufactures, and welding. The BSCP, FEPC, and MOWM utilized mass pressure, mass demonstration, and publicity in an effort to break down the discriminatory practices used by the defense industry.

The MOWM started to decline in the summer of 1943. Randolph, McLaurin and other BSCP members did not let the organization die and changed its name to the National Council for a Permanent FEPC. The National Council was created to do the same job as the MOWM had done, and worked towards ensuring a permanent FEPC. McLaurin and Randolph served on the committee, and BSCP members raised funds and gathered support for the new organization. BSCP members additionally recruited support from outside organizations such as the Americans for Democratic Action and the Liberal Party. Without the work done by the BSCP the FEPC would not have been able to win over 300,000 jobs for African Americans in the defense industry.

E.D. Nixon, the president of the Montgomery chapter of the BSCP, was one of the main organizers for the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Nixon was the person who bailed Rosa Parks out of jail and decided her case would be ideal to challenge the segregation laws on the busses in Montgomery. Nixon recruited ministers and Civil Rights leaders to meet and discuss the options of protest, and when the MIA was formed served as its secretary. Nixon along with Abernathy and French constructed the demands the movement were centered around. During his work with the MIA he additionally served on the negotiating and finance committee, and generated over \$400,000 dollars through speeches and his labor connections. Nixon's contributions have been overlooked and forgotten in the history of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The BSCP helped give Nixon important skills and experience to orchestrate and help lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters started the modern Civil Rights Movement in 1925 with the creation of the union. Historians have in recent decades debated when exactly the modern civil rights movement began, with many arguing this came during World War II or in the preceding decade.<sup>103</sup> My contention is that the actual genesis came even earlier. Soon after its creation in 1925, the BSCP pioneered in using the modern tactics that would ultimately prove crucial in forcing the Federal Government to act: direct action, mass pressure, the media, and mass demonstrations. These strategies were utilized throughout the entire racial freedoms-Struggle. The BSCP originated the idea to March on Washington, and the union helped force the President into signing

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<sup>103</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1235.

Executive Order 8802 and creating the FEPC. Without the work done by the BSCP with the FEPC, the committee would not have enjoyed as much success. The BSCP was influential in winning African Americans jobs in the war industry. They worked with the FEPC and the MOWM chapters, a skill they learned when the porters and maids organized against the Pullman Company. The porters and maids knew the only way to achieve advancements for African Americans was to force whites to act. E.D. Nixon who help start the Montgomery Bus Boycott and was crucial to its success was a BSCP member. Nixon took what Randolph, McLaurin, and the BSCP taught him and enabled him to organize the people of Montgomery to combat segregation on the busses.

The BSCP played an intricate role in the March on Washington, the FEPC, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The members worked for Civil Rights legislation, raised funds, and helped organize the events, worked towards winning African American jobs, served on committees, set up conferences, and brought ideologies utilized in each of the Civil Rights demonstrations. The BSCP advanced blacks economically and socially, using forms of mass protest, mass demonstration, mass pressure, and media coverage. Without the work and contributions by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and its member these three Civil Rights events would not have occurred.

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