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THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

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C.L. Dellums: The Brotherhood, Labor, and the Fight for Racial Justice (working title), by Robert L. Allen

1925-1978

Rev 5/31/10

Chapter 1: Introduction

Our reason for [the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union (BSCP)] going in the AF of L was because as a labor union we belonged inside. We believed then and still believe that the Negro will never really be a first-class citizen until he is in the mainstream and all of its tributaries of American life. Organized labor is one of the mainstreams of American life. . . . We belonged in the mainstream of the labor movement and the mission was to drive the official discrimination out. We didn't stop the fight until the color bar was removed from every union's constitution or ritual. So officially there was no discrimination left in the trade union movement. But obviously there was discrimination left because it is run by American white people. I haven't found anything yet they run without discrimination -- including the church. So the national mission is still here. It will not be solved in my lifetime. But I still hope to make some contribution to it.

--- C.L. Dellums, 1971

For five decades Cottrell Laurence Dellums, or "C.L." as he was known to friends and co-workers, was a member of the national leadership team of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union (BSCP) and the leader of its West Coast division. During that period he helped to build the BSCP into the most powerful African American labor union in the nation. He accomplished much more than merely making "some" contribution to the struggle against discrimination in the labor movement. He was also a key leader in the struggle to advance civil rights and social justice generally in California and

the nation. His work as chairman of the West Coast Region of the National Association for the Advancement of Color People and his determined leadership of a 14-year long and ultimately successful struggle to get a Fair Employment Practice law passed in California placed him in the forefront of civil rights leaders.

✓ In comparing A. Philip Randolph, the Brotherhood's president, with Dellums, Randolph's biographer, Jervis Anderson wrote that Dellums was "a battler from a different mold." Unlike Randolph, Dellums' style "was not to resist with quiet and indomitable will, but to blast away at his enemies; not to cling to principle with an unbreakable grip, but to flail away in defense of it, with his fists if necessary – like the 'roughneck' he like to call himself. Light-skinned and powerfully built, Dellums had a large, shiny, and formidable head, flashing eyes, a toothbrush mustache, and a severe unsmiling face that could look – when he wanted – as truculent as a clenched fist. Unlike Randolph, say, he was not spun from gossamer, but cut from the rough canvas of men like Ashley Totten and Milton Webster [national officers of the BSCP]" (Anderson, 212). Dellums never shied away from a fight, and his in-your-face attitude combined with debating skills he learned in high school made him a formidable asset in the confrontation with the Pullman Company.

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Dellums' success as a civil rights leader stemmed from his ability to use his base in the BSCP as a foundation for launching other campaigns. In effect, he leveraged his BSCP position into other arenas of struggle. This was a choice he made to move into the broader struggle of civil rights struggles. But among BSCP leaders he was not alone in making this choice. Most notably, Randolph himself was known for his involvement in multiple civil rights struggles, from the March on Washington Movement in 1941 to the March on Washington in 1963. In Montgomery Alabama in the 1955, BSCP leader E.D. Nixon would play a critical role in organizing the Montgomery bus boycott. ^{Final} OTHER EXAMPLES?

Legacy
In this book we will examine C.L. Dellums' life in the context of the work he did with the BSCP and in the civil rights movement. Several themes will be advanced with regard to the importance of the BSCP and Dellums.

These are:

FIRST SUCCESSFUL, NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN LABOR UNION

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union (BSCP) was the first successful effort to organize a national labor union of black workers. It was

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the first (and only?) black union to successfully confront a major U.S. corporation (Pullman) and win the right of collective bargaining, as a result gaining major improvements in wages and working conditions for porters. Further the BSCP was the first independent African American union admitted, albeit in a second-class status, into the American Federation of Labor. Over a span of more than half a century the BSCP was the largest, longest lived, and most influential African American labor union in U.S. history. Dellums played a critical role in building the Brotherhood into a major organization.

NEW MILITANT LEADERSHIP

C.L. Dellums and the BSCP organizers forged a new secular leadership comprised of middle class activist intellectuals and working class intellectual activists who were independent of the black church, while being economically independently sustained in part by BSCP, and open to radical ideas and militant, confrontational organizing. This leadership developed a strategic plan of engagement on two fronts: (1) The BSCP led a determined struggle from within against racial discrimination in the AFL; (2) as a matter of principle the BSCP leadership was committed not only to labor organizing but also established the BSCP as an independent base from which to build a

general movement for racial justice. The leadership actively sought to infuse a more militant attitude and mass-based practice in the civil rights movement. Dellums was a major force for injecting militancy into the struggle for racial justice in California

NEW JOBS, NEW COMMUNITIES, NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

The confrontation in 1941 between A. Philip Randolph, national leader of the BSCP, and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt over Randolph's planned March on Washington was of historic consequence, precipitating a sea change in American life. The initial outcome was Roosevelt's issuance of Executive Order 8802 ordering the ending of racial discrimination in defense industries and the federal government. A temporary Fair Employment Practices Committee was also set up to oversee compliance. (Jervis Anderson, 255-61) These actions set in motion unplanned major social transformations, including (1) the opening up of tens of thousands of defense and government jobs to black workers; (2) large-scale migration of black workers in search of jobs from the rural areas and towns of the South to growing urban communities in the South and North, and especially to the West Coast where defense industries and shipyards produced a new black proletariat (Parallel Communities, 108) in Oakland, San Francisco, Vallejo,

Richmond, Los Angeles, etc., dramatically changing the racial composition of urban California and the nation; (3) a new spirit of militancy and resistance to discrimination was awakened in black communities, expressed in the 1941 March on Washington Movement, in 1942 in the famous "Double V" campaign, and in 1943 in rebellions against racism in Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York. The new spirit grew stronger in 1948 when Randolph mounted a successful campaign to pressure President Harry Truman to issue an executive order banning discrimination and segregation in the military. This new militant spirit among black Americans along with demographic changes and growth of new communities created a new political consciousness and social base for the militant civil rights campaigns of the 1950s and the later emergence of radical groups like the Black Panther Party.

DIALECTICS OF SEGREGATION. . . .

The BSCP provides of powerful example of a dialectical process by which racial segregation produces the conditions for its own destruction. By concentrating black people in separate, cohesive communities (and jobs) segregation facilitates the emergence of independent racially-based organizations capable of successfully opposing racial segregation and discrimination. This process was seen in southern cities such as

Montgomery, where segregated black communities mobilized their collective social and economic power to wrest concessions from the white elites.

. . . AND SELF-DETERMINATION

The BSCP constituted a significant site for the construction and exercise of self-determination. Born of necessity, this self-organized site enabled other possibilities to develop. To begin with, organizing the union could not have happened without a leadership that was independent of and not susceptible to manipulation or removal by the Pullman Co. Previous organizing efforts by porters were foiled by firing the organizers. Secondly, as the BSCP grew and was able to depend on members' support and dues to sustain the organization, the space for self-determination was extended beyond the union. Having an independent base the leadership was able to work with a wide range of civil rights and other groups to organize anti-discrimination campaigns. Through the union the "humble" Pullman porters, often stereotyped as Uncle Toms, created a powerful oppositional site supporting challenges to segregation and discrimination throughout U.S. society. Because he was leader of the Brotherhood Randolph could believably confront Roosevelt with the threat – and potential reality -- of a massive,

possibly disruptive, black march on Washington. Because he was local organizer of the Brotherhood E.D. Nixon was positioned to play a critical role in organizing an effective bus boycott campaign in Montgomery. Because he built a strong regional Brotherhood organization C.L. Dellums could become NAACP West Coast regional chairman and chief organizer of a long and ultimately successful campaign for a Fair Employment Practice law in California. Ironically, black porters, who in the 1920s feared for the loss of their jobs, were the foundation of an organization that in subsequent decades provided critical leadership in mobilizing powerful interventions for jobs, fair treatment, and full civil rights for all.

THESES REGARDING DEVELOPMENT & SIGNIFICANCE OF BCSP

R. Allen 11/25/06

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Narrative

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8/2/07

By Robert L. Allen
African American
University of Calif

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Intro to
A Legacy
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President Brown

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Fundamental issues of unfair employment practices, racial discrimination, and civil rights were confronted in new ways by new forces and with consequences not just for the African American community but for the entire nation.

For the first time in U.S. history a black labor organization played a central role in shaping labor and civil rights policy.

Born in Texas, C.L. Dellums came to Oakland in 1923 as a young man and took a job as a porter with the Pullman

C.L. Dellums and the Struggle for Racial & Social Justice

8/2/07

By Robert L. Allen, Ph.D.
African American & Ethnic Studies Departments
University of California, Berkeley

President Brown, honored guests, sisters and brothers. It is indeed a pleasure and an honor for me to be with you at this tribute to C.L. Dellums and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union. I also bring greetings from Local 1474 of the AFT. How great it is to have this gathering in a public building named for an African American labor leader. (Personal story)

C.L. Dellums and the Brotherhood, under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph, helped to bring about a sea change in labor and race relations in California and the nation. Fundamental issues of unfair employment practices, racial discrimination, and civil rights were confronted in new ways by new forces and with consequences not just for the African American community but for the entire nation. For the first time in U.S. history a black labor organization played a central role in shaping labor and civil rights policy.

Born in Texas, C.L. Dellums came to Oakland in 1923 as a young man and took a job as a porter with the Pullman

company. He immediately encountered the low pay, oppressive working conditions, and racial discrimination faced by the Pullman porters, all of whom were black. At that time the Pullman company was the largest employer of black labor in the country with some 10,000 porters. With Randolph, Dellums helped to organize the Brotherhood as the first national (and international) union of black workers. C.L. Dellums became the West Coast organizer, and he was elected a vice president of the Brotherhood in 1929. After a hard, twelve-year struggle, in 1937 the Brotherhood made history when it compelled one of the most powerful U.S. corporations - the Pullman Company - to recognize and negotiate a contract with a black workers' union. This was unprecedented and almost inconceivable in the context of prior U.S. history.

In 1941, at the beginning of World War II, with the backing^{of} Dellums and the Brotherhood and the support of Walter White of the NAACP, A. Philip Randolph confronted U.S. President ^{Franklin} Roosevelt and pushed him to issue Executive Order 8802 requiring the ending of discrimination in defense industries. Tens of thousands of black men and women were hired to work alongside whites in wartime plants across the nation. California, especially, was

completely transformed by the dramatic growth of defense industries and with them the formation of new, vibrant African American communities in cities such as San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, Vallejo, and Los Angeles -- communities that would have enormous and enduring impact on the economic, social and political fabric of the region.

CL Dellums was not only a labor leader. From the 1920s he worked closely with the NAACP and in 1948 he was elected the first West Coast Regional Director of the civil rights organization. Beginning in 1946 Dellums mobilized labor and community support for what would become a 14-year campaign to get the state of California to pass a fair employment practice law, which was finally passed in 1959. The law established a fair employment practice commission to monitor the implementation of anti-discrimination measures. Dellums was appointed chairman of the commission and served on it for more than two decades. The successful struggle for the FEPC was part of the emerging era of civil rights activism and legislative initiatives in California and elsewhere.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Brotherhood and its leadership to the emergence of the

modern civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s. Local leaders of the Brotherhood, such as Dellums in California and E.D. Nixon in Montgomery, brought their organizing skills, learned in the Brotherhood, to the emerging struggles of the civil rights movement, giving that movement the benefit of years of experience in confronting entrenched power. E.D. Nixon, for example, was chief organizer of the successful Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. Indeed, the Brotherhood played a major role in organizing the 1963 March on Washington that would help secure passage of the historic 1964 Civil Rights Act. Dellums, Nixon, Randolph, and other Brotherhood leaders understood that the success of the civil rights movement depended on an alliance of labor, civil rights, and other progressive forces. The Brotherhood was at the center of this alliance-building process, and C.L. Dellums was at the center of the Brotherhood. In 1968, when Randolph retired, Dellums became president of the union.

In my view C.L. Dellums epitomizes the leadership genius of the Brotherhood. Dellums and Randolph developed and honed a leadership philosophy and strategy that was powerful and effective. The union was deeply embedded in the community. The Brotherhood leadership regarded the union's concerns as community concerns, and, vice

versa, community issues were seen as union issues, especially issues of racial discrimination. The Brotherhood was part and parcel of the African American community. Therein lay the strength of the union and the high regard for its leadership in the African American community. But the Brotherhood was embedded not only in the black community in Oakland, it was organically connected through its leadership and members with the civil rights community, the labor movement, the progressive community and progressive leaders in churches and synagogues, civil liberties groups, and political parties. Dellums was thereby able to mobilize community resources for the long and hard struggle with the Pullman Company, and the protracted struggle to get a fair employment practices law passed.

All of us owe a debt of gratitude to C.L. Dellums, A. Philip Randolph and the Pullman porters union. Without them we might not have state and federal laws requiring fair employment practices. The civil rights movement would have been seriously weakened by a lack of leaders experienced in organizing and confrontations with powerful opponents. The emergence of large urban African American communities, especially on the West Coast, and the progressive political leadership they

supported, might not have come into existence. (In this regard, I must note that C.L. Dellums was a role model and mentor for his nephew, civil rights activist and former Congressman Ronald V. Dellums, who is now, of course, the Mayor of Oakland. As you know, Mayor Dellums recently successfully settled a big fight with a multinational corporation that was determined to literally trash Oakland, and ^{and sought to} punish union sanitation workers, many of whom are black and people of color. I think C.L. Dellums would have been pleased with how his nephew handled that dispute.)

To be sure, with the gains there have been setbacks, and the struggle is far from finished, but we are the beneficiaries of the vision and leadership of C.L. Dellums, A. Philip Randolph, and the Brotherhood. I believe the best way we can honor that legacy is to rededicate ourselves to the global fight for social and economic justice, as well as workers rights and human rights. As C.L. Dellums said when he was organizing the porters for a strike against the Pullman company: "What have you got to lose? You've only got four things anyway: a hard job, low pay, long hours, and a mean bossman." The choice, he said, is to fight or be pushed back into slavery. We must fight or be slaves!

For several years my Mother used to come from Sacramento on the Amtrak train when she visited Oakland. I would meet her at this station. When they installed the statue of C.L. Dellums in 1999, I was immediately intrigued. That statue was one of the things that inspired by interest in researching Dellums and the Brotherhood. I wanted to know, who was this man named C.L. Dellums? I'm still finding out.

DELLUMS BOOK PREFACE draft 6/23/11 JP

By Robert L Allen

On the plaza in front of the Amtrak Railway Station in Oakland, California, stands a bronze statue of Cottrell Laurence Dellums , "CL" as he was known to his contemporaries. The larger than life-size statue has Dellums standing erect, dressed in his customary three-piece suit, his large left hand reaching out in a gesture of welcome to travelers. Behind the statue sits the modern, glass train station that is named in his honor. It is adjacent to Jack London Square, Oakland's not well known answer to San Francisco's famous Fishermans Wharf across the Bay. The station was built in ---- and the statue erected in --- to commemorate ----

Aug
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A few years after the station and statue were built I was invited to speak before a gathering of several hundred mostly African American labor activists who were members of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, named for the founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union, of which Dellums was a vice president and West Coast organizer. Standing in the plaza near Dellums' statue I told the assembled group how important it was to have this physical symbol to remember and honor of a black labor leader, a man who devoted his life to the struggle for African American railway workers' rights and civil rights generally. Of course, there are other statues of African American leaders. One of the most famous is the statue of Booker T. Washington lifting a symbolic veil of ignorance from the head of a former slave. That statue stands in front of the high school of the same name that I attended in Atlanta, Georgia. When I was in school unkind critics of Washington said that it wasn't clear whether Washington was lifting the veil or lowering it. There was never such ambivalence about C.L. Dellums.

The railway station and statue are located only a short distance from where I live in Oakland, near Lake Merritt. When I ride my

bike or take walks I often visit the statue. I developed the habit of talking to the statue and asking Dellums for guidance in writing this book, which has taken much longer to do than I anticipated. During that time many things have changed, including the area around the statue. When it was built the statue faced a ground-level parking lot where train travelers parked their cars and exited from buses that brought them to the station. Dellums' statue greeted thousands of travelers and welcomed them as they walked to the station. But as so often happens, that open parking lot was replaced by a multilevel, enclosed parking structure, a questionable symbol of growth and progress -- with its towering wall only a few feet from the face of Dellums' statue. In fact when construction began on the parking structure I feared that damage might be done to the statue. Fortunately, someone in authority apparently also worried about this, and so a wooden box was built to encase the statue and protect it. It saddened me to visit the statue in those days, and see the statue in its crypt-like box. Talking to the statue was no longer possible; I was not even certain that it was still there. It reminded me of what happened to the Seventh Street neighborhood in West Oakland where from the 1920s into the 1960s Dellums presided at the Brotherhood office. The Seventh Street area was a lively and vital business and residential community where many porters, including Dellums, bought and built homes and lived with their families when they were not on the road. By the time Dellums statue was erected Seventh Street had become a dilapidated shadow of its former self, a victim of urban renewal, boxed in by overhead BART tracks and a looming, monstrous regional Post Office structure -- earlier questionable signs of growth and progress.

When the parking structure was completed Dellums' statue was exhumed from its wooden box --- only to face a blank, looming concrete wall. Travelers exiting and entering the structure could easily pass without noticing Dellums' memorial.

From time to time I continue to visit the statue, and report my slow progress in writing the book. I fret about how it has been marginalized with its back to the passing people. If I can't turn the statue around to face the station and the travelers, I hope this book will at least encourage some travelers to notice it and walk to it and read the inscription at its base, and recognize that the growth and progress we seek is in human relations, not just the physical structures that we can build.

38th Annual A. Philip Randolph Institute Educational Conference Event

APRI CONFERENCE RECEPTION

WHEN

Thursday, August 2, 2007 • 5:30 – 7:30 pm

WHERE

C.L. Dellums Amtrak Station Pavilion • 245 - 2nd Street, Oakland

FREE ADMISSION



Take a step back in time to a train station of old — at this very special reception honoring C.L. Dellums, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters following the retirement of Mr. Randolph.

Music, exhibits, train memorabilia, entertainment, food and much more.

Transportation for Delegates from the Oakland Marriott will be provided.

Information: Linda Joseph, 510-465-0120

Draft 7/67

INTRODUCTION

“Our reason for [the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union (BSCP)] going in the AF of L was because as a labor union we belonged inside. We believed then and still believe that the Negro will never really be a first-class citizen until he is in the mainstream and all of its tributaries of American life. Organized labor is one of the mainstreams of American life. . . . We belonged in the mainstream of the labor movement and the mission was to drive the official discrimination out. We didn't stop the fight until the color bar was removed from every union's constitution or ritual. So officially there was no discrimination left in the trade union movement. But obviously there was discrimination left because it is run by American white people. I haven't found anything yet they run without discrimination -- including the church. So the national mission is still here. It will not be solved in my lifetime. But I still hope to make some contribution to it.”

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the Advancement of Color People and his determined leadership of a 14-year long and ultimately successful struggle to get a Fair Employment Practice law passed in California placed him in the forefront of civil rights leaders.

SEE BIRTH CERTIFICATE MARVA HAS

Dellums was always well dressed, often wearing a three-piece suit and tie. He was a member of that group of labor leaders who believed that personal and organizational success was facilitated by personal appearance and demeanor. Dellums thought that a well-groomed successful-looking leader who carried himself with dignity and spoke with confidence would have a leg up in confronting employers who sought to intimidate workers with the trappings of bourgeois respectability. He played the game well and never let the bosses get the upper hand in that public arena of contestation that sociologist Erving Goffman referred to as the "presentation of self in everyday life." At the same time, Dellums could be tough and swear like a sailor when that served his purpose

Dellums' success as a civil rights leader stemmed from his ability to use his base in the BSCP as a foundation for launching other

campaigns. In effect, he leveraged his BSCP position into other arenas of struggle. This was a choice he made to move into the broader struggle of civil rights struggles. But among BSCP leaders he was not alone in making this choice. Most notably, Randolph himself was known for his involvement in multiple struggles from XXXX to XXX (EXAMPLES). In Montgomery Alabama in the 1955, BSCP leader E.D. Nixon would play a critical role in organizing the Montgomery bus boycott. OTHER EXAMPLES?

C.L. Dellums was born on January 3, 1900, in Corsicana, Texas, a town in the north central part of the state about 60 miles south of Dallas and the locale of the first Texas oil boom. The discovery of oil in 1894 had made the town prosperous and its population had almost doubled from five thousand in 1885 to over nine thousand inhabitants. The town had a substantial African American population, large enough even in 1885 to support three black churches (SEE TOWN WEBSITE)) Young Dellums' father was William Henry Dellums. Of Native American and Caucasian ancestry, William supported his family through various jobs including insurance salesman and barber. William's father, a man remembered in the family only by the name was Fortson, was part Indian. William's

mother, remembered as Kitty, was also part Indian. William was actually raised by step-parents and he took their last name, Dellums. William Dellums was an industrious man who at one time owned a small barbershop. In African American communities the barbershop is a center for the exchange of news, political discussion, and male comraderie. In his father's barbershop young Dellums would have been exposed to a world in which black men spoke freely and knowingly about issues of the day, their encounters with white society, and their aspirations for themselves and their families. It was a world in which black men saw themselves as agents, not simply victims or pawns. Young Dellums would have been welcome in this world, and it would give him an ease and familiarity with black language and culture. This familiarity would have been enhanced later when as a young man in Corsicana Dellums followed in his father's footsteps and joined the all-black Prince Hall Masons.

Dellums' mother, Emma, was of African American, Indian and Irish ancestry. (ANY MORE INFO ON EMMA'S BACKGROUND?) (Dellums identified strongly as an African American and although he never sought any color privilege as some light-skinned blacks did, he was proud of his uniquely American multiracial heritage. Once when he was asked for details about his ethnic background he replied, "Well what I can say for certain is that I am an American!")

Emma had her hands full with children. She gave birth to a total of fourteen children, although most of them, including a couple of multiple siblings, didn't survive beyond birth or early childhood. The only children to reach adulthood were Dellums' younger brother Verney, and two older brothers, Burnette and Jim. (Marva interview, p. 2) With little formal education but literate and highly intelligent, Emma would play a central role the formation of young Dellums' character. She loved to read, and she had a natural speaking ability, perhaps ^{learned +} honed in the Colored Methodist Episcopal church (VERIFY) that she attended. She coached her sons in public speaking with such success that young Dellums and his older brothers won several debating awards in high school. (Marva, p. 8) Debating taught Dellums the art of verbal confrontation and it gave him self confidence in challenging opponents. It also gave him an early insight into the power of language to inspire, motivate and change human consciousness. It was his mother whom he had to thank for these verbal skills and confidence in the face of opposition. Dellums' speaking ability and sonorous voice would serve him well when he began his organizing career.

Dellums attended the segregated public schools in Corsicana (GET SCHOOL NAMES, RECORDS) He liked to read and he had hopes of going on to college. While in high school Dellums had a

confrontation with the local draft board when they tried to pressure him into going into the Student Army Training Corps. He knew of the racial discrimination in the Army and that the only jobs open to blacks were as truck drivers and other service positions so he did not wish to go into the military. Displaying the keen, practical intelligence that would be his hallmark as a labor leader, he obtained a copy of the Selective Service Act and discovered that so long as there were sufficient numbers of volunteers, which there was, the draft board could not compel him to join the training program. So he refused to go. Instead he said he wanted to join the Air Corps, knowing full well that no Negroes were being accepted into the Air Corps. His tactic kept him out of the military and provided a valuable early lesson in how to successfully maneuver against a powerful opponent in a bureaucratic system.

Dellums worked for a time as a waiter at a hotel in Dallas, but he was dissatisfied. Aside from agricultural work and menial service jobs there was little work for an ambitious young black man in Texas. Finding his opportunities limited he decided to try his luck in California, taking a train to San Francisco in 1923. He had hopes of attending the University of California and becoming a lawyer. But first he had to find work. A porter on the train told him that jobs for blacks were also limited in San Francisco and he would do better to

look for work in Oakland. Dellums found work for a short time as a room steward with the Pacific Steamship Company, but the pay was poor and the working conditions terrible. Dellums went to the railroad yard in Oakland to try getting work as a waiter on a dining car. No waiters were being hired, but as luck would have it, the Pullman company was hiring porters for its sleeping cars.

C.L. Dellums got his job as a porter just over a year and a half before the formation of the great black labor union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, that would be at the center of his life. The organization of the Brotherhood marked a turning point in the long history of African American workers in the railway industry. It brought a group of black railway workers into a union that they initiated and controlled, an organization that would not only transform the consciousness of the porters and bring them important improvements in wages and working conditions, but it would have impact far beyond the labor movement. The Brotherhood in fact became a training ground for activists and leaders in the black civil rights movement, of which Dellums would be one example. E.D. Nixon, who played a critical role in organizing the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott is another example. Through the

national political interventions of its president, A Philip Randolph, whose influence stemmed from the power of the union, the Brotherhood also contributed to the racial desegregation of U.S. industry (and the military) and the transformation of black industrial labor from a peripheral to a central position in the U.S. economy. By opening jobs it also paved the way for the westward movement of tens of thousands of black workers during World War II and the growth of major urban centers of the African American population on the West Coast. Out of these urban centers would emerge a new black militancy as expressed, for example, in the Watts Rebellion, the formation of the Black Panther Party, and the rise of a new generation of political leaders such as Ronald Dellums, Maxine Waters and Barbara Lee. That a relatively small African American labor union was able to leverage such major social changes is truly astonishing. C.L. Dellums was among a core group of leaders who were at the heart of these historic developments.

*and one night
of 1963
March in
Washington*

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the rise of the railroad as a major means of transportation and a huge industry created new opportunities for employment for freedmen following the Civil War. In particular, the completion in 1869 of the transcontinental railroad, with its terminus in Oakland, and the general growth of long distance railway travel spurred the development of the sleeping

car, on which various arrangements could be made for passengers to sleep on something other than a chair on a days-long railroad trip. One of the pioneers in designing and building the new sleeping cars was George M. Pullman. Pullman realized there was a potentially huge market for a sleeping car designed to offer first-rate comfort to ordinary travellers. His breakthrough design, aptly named the Pioneer, was a kind of luxury hotel on wheels. The Pioneer immediately garnered public attention in 1865 when it was used in the funeral train that carried Abraham Lincoln's body from Washington, D.C. to Springfield, Ohio. (Perata, Pullman Blues, p.xvi) With the addition of dining cars and club cars it was possible to travel the length and breadth of the country in pampered ease and comfort.

The job of pampering customers and assuring their comfort, Pullman decided, could best be performed by black people. (Brazeal, p. 1-2) Drawing on paternalistic ^{slave-}plantation traditions that had stereotyped black domestic workers as servile, pleasant, and uncomplaining, Pullman hired ^{thousands} ~~large numbers~~ of black men as porters -- and fewer black women as maids -- to serve the needs of whites travelling on his sleeping cars. By 1926 the Pullman Company was the largest single employer of African American workers, with

over ten thousand porters and two hundred maids.(Perata, xvi-xix; Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, 20-23)

For the black men and women working for Pullman, wages were low and working hours long. In 1925 the basic pay for a porter was sixty dollars a month and fifty dollars for a maid. Out of this they were expected to pay for uniforms and other expenses, including meals and lodging while on the road. They might work up to 400 hours a month without any overtime pay. And their time on the clock started only when the train pulled out of the station. Time spent in preparing a car for a trip and cleaning it after one did not count. While these wages were better than those for black agricultural and domestic workers, they still fell far below what the U.S. Department of Labor considered a decent wage for a family at that time (\$2,000 a year) (Randolph, "Case of Pullman Porter," *Messenger*, July, 1925, p. 254; Perata, xxvii; Chateauvert, 27) Of course, porters were expected to make up the difference from passengers' tips. The practice of relying on tipping further demeaned the porters' and maids' status. The need to solicit tips sometimes pushed porters into the degrading role of grinning, kowtowing "Uncle Toms." White passengers routinely referred to all porters as "George," as though they were all George Pullman's "boys." This was a continuation of the dehumanizing plantation

practice of calling a slave by his master's name. Porters countered by posting their names, with ~~first~~ first initials and last name, at the front of each car. (Chateauvert, 28-29) It was the custom of the Pullman Company to reward porters for years of service by allowing them to wear a stripe on their right sleeve for every five years of employment. But the porters wanted more than stripes. "Rights which the company is bound to respect are more important than stripes which only represent an empty honor," Randolph wrote in an article in 1925 as the organizing drive was about to begin. (Brazeal, fn, p. 15, Randolph, *ibid*, p. 255)

Efforts to organize the Pullman porters began as early as 1909. (Brazeal, p. 6) With a general upsurge in labor and civil rights organizing (the NAACP began forming in 1909) porters were less willing to passively accept continued low wages, long hours, and demeaning treatment. These initial efforts were largely unsuccessful, but they prompted the Pullman Company to try to head off organizing by setting up a company union called the Employee Representation Plan. The company also formed a Pullman Porters Benefit Association "to mutually improve and uplift the moral and financial conditions of its members." (Brazeal, 12) Such financial aid that the PPBA offered was paid for by the Porters' dues, not the company, but the social activities it organized served to distract

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porters attention away from their working conditions. (Perata, xxix) Porters who sought to continue independent organizing efforts were fired or subject to other reprisals.

By 1925 some of the militant porters, including Ashley Totten in New York, decided that the only way the porters could organize was to find a leader for the effort who was not a Pullman employee and therefore not subject to company pressure. Totten and some other porters presented their problem to A. Philip Randolph. (Randolph bio, Jervis Anderson, 153-5) Randolph, as he himself later noted, seemed an ideal candidate for the organizing job because he had long been an advocate of organized labor, he was not employed by Pullman, and he had his own magazine, the *Messenger*, which could help publicize the conditions of the porters. (Randolph, "The Truth about the BSCP," *Messenger*, February, 1926, p. 37)

The son of an African Methodist Episcopal minister, Randolph was born in Crescent City, Florida on April 15, 1889. Two years later the family moved to Jacksonville where Randolph spent his childhood. From his parents young Randolph learned to be proud of his black heritage, the importance of education and clear speech, and the necessity of joining with others to resist racist injustice and violence. (Jervis Anderson, p 32-43) In 1911, at 22 years of age, Randolph left home and went to New York City, supposedly for the

summer, but he would end up staying there. He attended the City College of New York and the Rand School of Economics where he encountered socialist ideas and the works of Karl Marx. (Harris, 28-9) He met and married Lucille Green, a widow who ^{was self-employed} worked as a beauty shop operator and who would provide much of the financial support for the two of them as Randolph pursued a growing interest in radical activism, labor organizing, and journalism. His partner in many of these activities was Chandler Owen, who had been a student of political science and sociology at Columbia University. Randolph and Owen founded the *Messenger* in 1917 as an independent magazine of radical economic and political thought. Unlike many of their other ventures, the *Messenger* was relatively successful. (Harris, 28-35) Randolph became known not only for his radical ideas and militant writing but also for his cultured speaking style.

At a mass meeting of 500 porters in New York City on August 25, 1925 Brother of Sleeping Car Porters was officially launched with Randolph as General Organizer. The next day another 200 sought membership (Jervis Anderson, 168-9; FIRST ORGANIZING DRIVE, Randolph, *Messenger*, 2/26, p. 37.) With the crucial help of a \$10,000 grant from the liberal Garland Fund, the Brotherhood was able to hire several organizers, set up a headquarters, and launch

an organizing drive. The grant also helped subsidize the *Messenger*, which became the voice of the new union. (brazeal, 19-20)

As the terminus of the transcontinental railroad and a place where many porters made their homes, Oakland was an important target for the BSCP organizing drive. A crusty old-timer, a retired porter in his late seventies named Morris Moore, volunteered to organize the Oakland division. Well known to all the porters as "Dad" Moore, he was unafraid of the company. When Randolph came to Oakland in early 1926 as part of the organizing drive, Moore welcomed him. At the first organizing meeting Randolph greatly impressed Moore and other porters including Dellums. In follow-up meetings many porters joined the BSCP, an organizing committee was formed, and a women's auxiliary was organized. Randolph was also invited to speak to students and faculty at the University of California. (jervis anderson, 176, *Messenger*, April, 1926, p. 122).

Although retired as a porter, Dad Moore was employed by the Pullman company as caretaker of the sleeping quarters the company maintained on two old sleeping cars for out-of-town porters on overnight stays. When Moore became a union organizer the company took away his job. However, Moore set up his own sleeping

quarters operation to support himself and compete with the company. Moore opened a BSCP office in the same building on Seventh Street near the railroad yard. Pullman retaliated by threatening to fire any porter who patronized Moore's rooming house. (anderson, 179-80) In 1927 Moore suffered a broken rib in an accident but that didn't deter his organizing efforts in the face of company efforts to force porters to join the company union. (Messenger, december, 1927, p. 359) This was a hard time for the BSCP, as the company tried to smash the union. Organizers were becoming demoralized and the number of dues-paying members was dropping. Dellums, who was deeply involved in the organizing effort, sought to rally the porters in Oakland. "As long as Randolph stays," he told the men, "I'll stay. And I expect you to stay. He's the brains and spirit. And if there's any way under the sun to win, he'll find it." (anderson, 192-3) Now going by the initials C.L., Dellums had favorably impressed Dad Moore and others with his speaking ability and wit. Though relatively young, he was gaining respect as an organizer.

As Dad Moore declined, Dellums took over more of the business of the Oakland-San Francisco division. By now Dellums, too, had been fired by Pullman - which enabled him to play a public role in the union. The year 1928 witnessed the rise and emergence of

See
C.L. from
the records
p. 138

Dellums as the de facto head of the division. Almost every issue of the *Messenger* carried an "Activities of the Month" column reporting on work going on in various districts of the union. At the beginning of 1928 Dellums was listed in the column as Local Field Agent with Dad Moore as Organizer. The column also reported that Dad Moore had recovered from a recent illness and was "back on the firing line." However, D.J. Jones, the local's Secretary-Treasurer was "somewhat indisposed" and Dellums was covering for him. The report a couple of months later mentioned that Dellums was presiding over the meetings and "always ready with a militant and constructive speech, which the men enjoy." By the May-June issue Dellums was listed as Secretary-Treasurer, and although Dad Moore was still listed as Organizer Dellums' name was at the top of the column. This issue reported that on March 29 a "monstrous mass meeting was held at Brotherhood Headquarters" attended by porters and the women of the Ladies Auxiliary. The union was calling for a strike vote and Dellums gave a rousing speech to rally support.

(messengers, 2/28, p 41; 4/28, p 89; 5-6/28, p 113)

The strike vote was a tactic in the union's struggle to show that the BSCP and not the company union, the Employee Representation Plan, was the legitimate representative of the porters. The matter was before a Board of Mediation that had been invoked in

accordance with the 1926 Railway Labor Act, a law that gave railroad workers the right to organize and bargain collectively. When the strike vote took place in April and the overwhelming majority of the porters voted in favor of a strike. The Mediation Board that the BSCP represented the majority of the porters but it refused to declare an emergency and intervene in the dispute. Although the BSCP had won the strike vote it was still relatively weak and did not have the financial and organizational resources to carry out a full-scale strike. Not being affiliated with the American Federation of Labor the BSCP could not expect help from the white labor movement. In the end the BSCP leadership, which now included Dellums as one of seven vice-presidents, decided to call off the strike set for June 8th. (brazeal, 77-84) Dellums assessment many years later was that while the BSCP might have shut down operations in Oakland and certain other cities, the strike would have failed in the rest of the country and threatened the existence of the union. (anderson, 201)

The calling off of the strike drew sharp criticism from the Left, especially the Communist Party and the American Negro Labor Congress. Randolph and the BSCP leadership were accused of caving in to the wishes of AFL President William Green, who advised against the strike. (brazeal, ibid; Spero & Harris, The Black Worker, 455)

Handwritten note: *1962*

Following the aborted strike Randolph and the BSCP leadership decided to push harder for AFL affiliation as a way to gain leverage for the BSCP both with Pullman and within the labor movement. However, certain white unions sought to keep the BSCP out of the AFL or to gain control of the porters themselves. William Green was supportive, but on condition that Randolph disavow any connections with Communists. (harris, 153-4 NOTE: Green also asked Randolph to explain charges that he had mismanaged the *Messenger*, which ceased publication in 1928. The BSCP launched a new publication, *The Black Worker*, in 1929 as the official journal of the union) Even with Green's support the BSCP could only be chartered as 13 separate federal locals, a second-class status used to keep organized black workers under the thumb of a union of white workers in the same occupation. Green promised to continue to help the union, and for the BSCP, at a low point nationally, admission under these terms got the union into the ^uHose of Labor, and since there was no other union of Pullman porters the BSCP could maintain its autonomy and use its position within the AFL to fight for change. (harris, p. 154-156). As Dellums would put it: "We belonged in the mainstream of the labor movement and the mission was to drive the official discrimination out."

In August, 1929 the ^BCSCP held its first national convention in Chicago and held its first election of officers. C.L. Dellums was formally elected as the seventh of seven vice presidents. He was twenty-nine years old. A few months later, in January, 1930, Dad Moore died following an illness. Dellums, who was already the de facto leader, now formally became the head the Oakland division. And as vice president he was responsible for the Pacific Zone, which included Oakland, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle. His responsibilities included working with and counseling the women's auxiliaries as well. In the coming yeas he would spend a great deal of time on the road driving up and down the West Coast in his tin lizzie known affectionately as the "Bug." Along the way he would meet hundreds of porters, as well as civil right activists, labor leaders, religious leaders, and politicians of all stripes. He would develop a huge network of individuals and organizations that could be mobilized on behalf of causes and campaigns that Dellums deemed important to the struggle for social justice.

SITUATION IN OAKLAND, ~~"Dad " Moore and C.L., porters being fired, Perata, xxxii~~

~~CL becomes Oakland chief and a vice pres.~~

Struggle to force recognition from Pullman and get first contract.

CL and organizing drives (see his corres)

March on Washington Movement, Executive order, impact of.

Role of Frances Albrier at Kaiser Richmond, etc. See Visions Toward Tomorrow, her oral history , and Chateauvert

*Impact
of KSCV
on
credit
CWL*

NEXT SECTION

CL's family life: marriage to Walter, her background, role in union, women' auxiliary. (Chateauvert, 45, 95) birth of Marva, her relationship with CL

NEXT SECTION

CL gets involved with NAACP, sample cases

NEXT SECTION

CL and Alameda county labor council

NEXT CL and FEP campaign, CL as FEP commissioner

LAST CHAPTER NOTES

PASSING OF C.L.

By 1968, when Randolph stepped down and Dellums was elected president of the Brotherhood, the growth of air travel and the building of interstate highways were causing a huge drop off in railroad passenger travel. The loss of railroad passengers led to the inevitable decline of the Brotherhood. Dellums became the custodian of a dying organization. With the huge blows of the death of his wife in 1974 due to cancer and the death of 90-year-old Randolph in 1979, C.L. decided it was time to step down. In 1978, The BSCP merged with the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks (CHECK NAME). Dellums stayed on for a year as a consultant during the transition period. Marva recalls that he was deeply saddened by the passing of Walter and the loss of Randolph and the Brotherhood. C.L. was still doing FEPC work, which gave him a lot of satisfaction, and which he continued until 1986. He also found comfort in his grandchildren. Marva had married at age 16 and had six children by then. Dellums loved his grandchildren. He especially enjoyed telling them stories that always held their rapt attention. In the absence of Walter, Marva and her father became even closer as friends. She remembered that they would sometimes talk for hours on end; he could easily spend hours with the children as well.

Dellums never gave up the fight. And he fought for everyone. Marva recalls his staunch support for Cesar Chavez and the struggling farmworkers union. "Till the day of his death," she said, "he wouldn't buy grapes." He expected that same commitment to the cause from his grandchildren. During a strike by Safeway workers he queried his grandchildren, by then teenagers, to make sure they hadn't crossed the picket line.

Although his spirit remained strong his health was failing. Over the years he had suffered five heart attacks – the first at age 33 -- and he had to accept the necessity of slowing down. He once told Marva, “I just don’t have the strength to get out there and fight anymore. Oh, I wish I had the strength to fight.” That was his only complaint, that he regretted not being able to do more for the struggle. (Marva2, 28) C.L. never lost his sense of humor, which Marva employed to cheer him up. She recalled when her father was hospitalized after a heart attack and all sorts of tubes and wires were attached to his body to monitor his vital signs. “The only way to really make an impression on my father when he’s not feeling good is to make him laugh,” Marva recounted. So I walked into the hospital room and saw all this stuff attached to him, and I said, ‘Dad, if there was a fire in here, you’d have a helluva time getting outta here,’ and he just started laughing!” The nurse came running in because his heart monitor was going wacky. She says, ‘Are you all right?’ He’s still laughing with tears running down his face, and he said ‘They didn’t ask me whether I wanted to die or not. I’m not going anywhere.’ He had this attitude that he could overcome anything. And I think he did.” (2, p. 30)

Only one obstacle could he not overcome. C.L. Dellums died on December 6, 1989, at the age of 89 at his home in Oakland, after suffering heart and pulmonary failure.

When asked how she would describe her father’s legacy, Marva Dellums replied: “I would say it is the ability to make a choice, which we didn’t have before. We can go where we want to go. We can enter any college we want to enter. He gave these generations the ability to choose which path they want to take, and not be limited by what they are given. Of course, sometimes you have to push through, but we should never hold ourselves back. Never say, ‘I

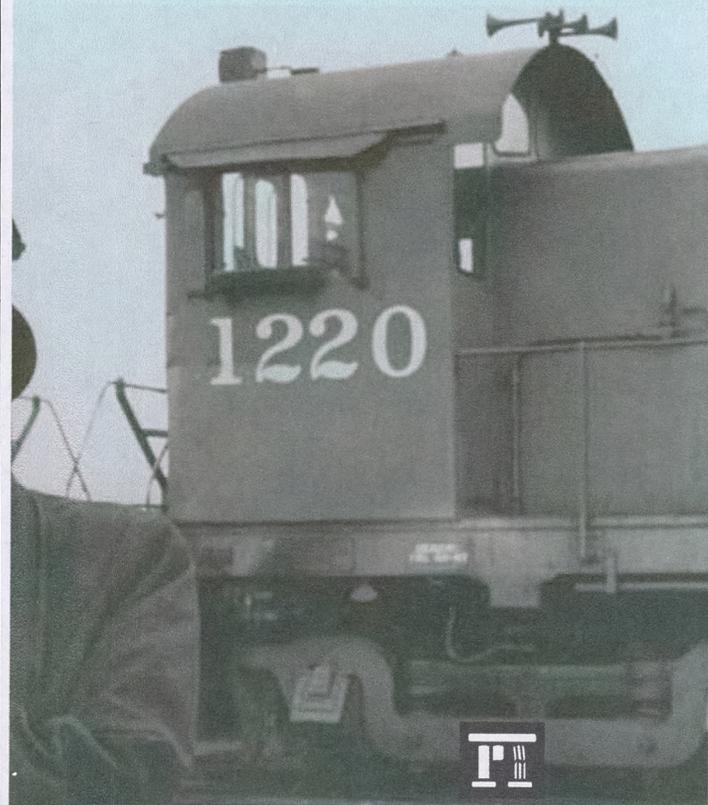
can't do that.' My Dad told me,. 'Do not have that word in your vocabulary. I don't ever want to hear you say 'can't.' There's nothing g on this earth you can't do. You might not be the best at it, but you can do it.' "

"I'm passing this on to my grandchildren." (2, 38-40)

THE HERHOOD LEEPING PORTERS

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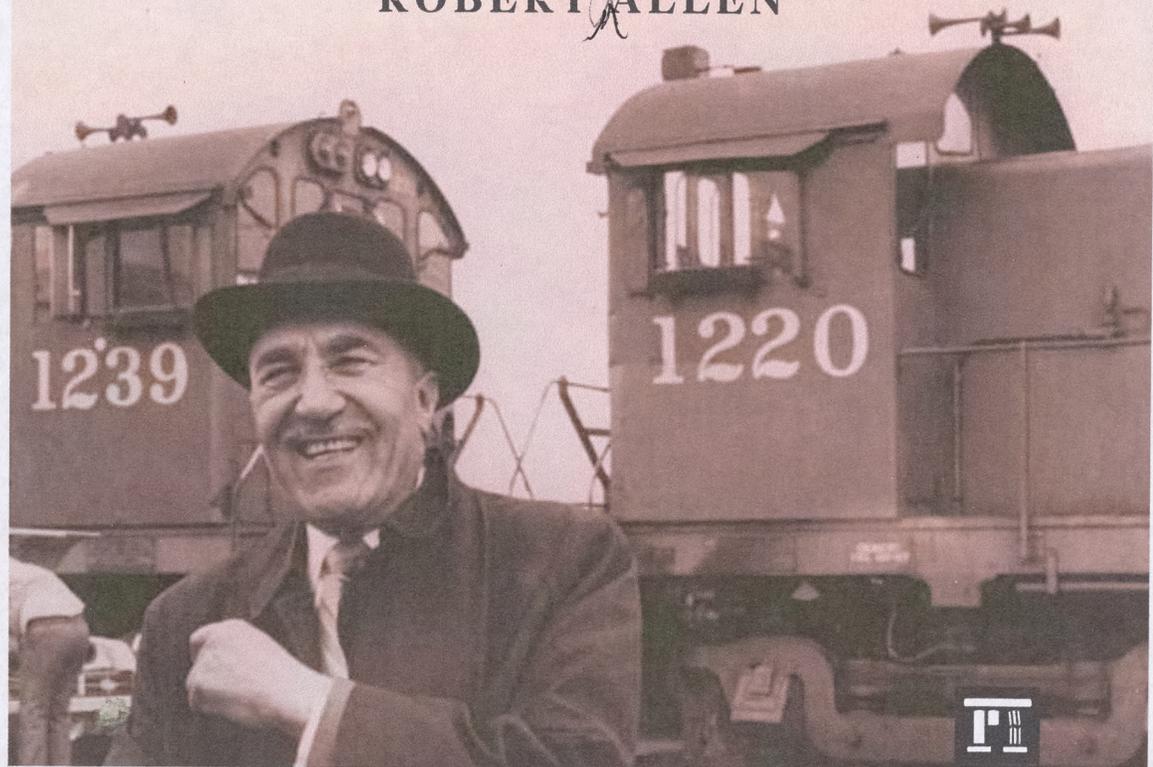
ROBERT ALLEN



THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

*C. L. Dellums and the Fight
for Fair Treatment and Civil Rights*

ROBERT ALLEN



DIES / SOCIOLOGY

SLEEPING CAR PORTERS
AND FAIR TREATMENT AND CIVIL RIGHTS

ood of Sleeping Car Porters helped to precipitate a sea-
tions in California and the nation. Fundamental issues
discrimination, and segregation were confronted in
r all Americans. For the first time in US history, a black
e in shaping labor and civil rights policy.

l research, this new book tells the story of Dellums,
roundbreaking work.

on of black workers, was founded in 1925. C. L.
r in Oakland, became the West Coast organizer
n 1929. He held that position until 1968, when he
s president. In 1937, the BSCP made history when it
corporations—the Pullman Company—to recognize
black workers' union. This was unprecedented and
text of prior US history.

rld War II, the leadership of the BSCP, with the
ushed US president Roosevelt to issue Executive
f racial discrimination in defense industries. Tens
women would be hired to work alongside whites in
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oor leader. In 1948, he was chosen to be the first
the NAACP. He also led the long struggle to get a fair
d in California. The successful struggle contributed
activism nationally and to equal treatment legislative
where.

essor, author, and editor. He recently retired as
merican Studies and Ethnic Studies at the University
e author of, among other books, *Black Awakening in
The Odyssey of Black Men in America*, and *The Port
decades*, Allen was an editor of *The Black Scholar*, an
udies and research.



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ALLEN THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

Oral history

Robert Allen

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

C. L. Dellums and the Fight for Fair Treatment and Civil Rights



Based on a previous oral history
archival recording and ~~use~~
from interviews

Robert Allen

THE BROOKLYNHOOD OF STEEBLYING
CAR BOLLERS
OF STEEBLYING
THE
BROOKLYNHOOD

