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THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

C.L. Dellums, The Brotherhood of  
Sleeping Car Porters, and The  
Seedbed of the African American  
Civil Rights Movement in  
Oakland, California

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"Brought some rabble-rousing on it":  
C. L. Dellums, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters,  
and the Seedbed of the African American Civil Rights Movement  
in Oakland, California

Molly Hudgens  
History H195  
Professor Waldo Martin  
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"It was a town not so much of dollars but of pennies. . . . Oakland has always lacked the showy amenities of a big city. It has also lacked the pretensions that strain San Francisco and drive it to extremes. Oakland could bear its ugly sister status with quiet pride because of its one great secret: it has always done the dirty work that keeps San Francisco young and beautiful."<sup>1</sup> Oakland has continually dwelt in the shadow of its "beautiful sister," as John Krich observed, particularly in terms of economy, physical condition, and urban vigor. Inarguably, Oakland has been less frequently the focus of academic inquiry, the destination of tourists, or the subject of popular song lyrics. Contrast Tony Bennett's San Francisco, "where little cable cars climb halfway to the stars," with Gertrude Stein's Oakland, in which "there is no 'there' there." Nonetheless, contradicting Stein's characterization, Oakland managed to sprout a vibrant community and culture in the first third of the twentieth century—particularly among its small but growing African American enclaves.

Despite the general trend toward an eclipsing of Oakland by San Francisco, the community has recently been the focus of several academic studies. Marilyn Johnson's *Second Gold Rush* (1993), Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo's *Abiding Courage* (1996), and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore's *To Place Our Deeds* (2000) examine aspects of the boom in the East Bay triggered by the entry of the United States into World War II.<sup>2</sup> The economic, demographic, and cultural transformations catalyzed by the war are extremely significant; however, fascination with this period must not be allowed to obscure the importance of its precursors.

The Great Depression and the New Deal era of the 1930s was a critical period of American political transformation, particularly in the chronology of rights movements and

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<sup>1</sup> John Krich, *Bump City: Winners and Losers in Oakland* (Berkeley: City Miners Books, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the*



protest organizations. Few studies examine prewar Oakland or the East Bay, beyond situating this period as background to and a springboard for an examination of the Bay Area during the war boom. However, the East Bay of the thirties, especially for its African American residents, shaped many of the most prominent actors in struggles for rights that would ensue during and after the war. One such resident was C. L. Dellums, a labor leader in Oakland in the 1920s and 1930s, whose labor agitation as a leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) intersected with and served as the groundwork for the struggle of African Americans to gain access to economic and social freedom that accelerated in but had begun long before the 1940s.

Several books written about the BSCP, the first union founded and led by African Americans to be recognized by a major American corporation, have marked the significance of the Brotherhood in the labor movement and in African American communities. However, the perspectives of these studies emanate almost exclusively from the eastern and midwestern leadership out of New York and Chicago, shrouding the role of the BSCP in the lives of western African American workers. Moreover, most of the examinations of the BSCP focus on the national politics of the organization and the almost mythical battle of the union with the Pullman Company, neglecting the involvement of women and families in the union as well as the actual day-to-day functioning of the BSCP locals in their respective communities. Within the context of national labor and leftist politics, this essay will use C. L. Dellums—his politics, perspectives, and activism—as a West Coast window into the “forgotten era” of the civil rights movement of the 1930s and its relevance for the decades to follow.

Oakland’s African American community is often depicted as springing into existence virtually overnight with the advent of World War II. However, thousands of residents, as well as

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*East Bay Community* (1996). Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).



grassroots networks and organizational mechanisms, were firmly rooted in the community by the 1930s. The BSCP—largely through the organizing work of C. L. Dellums—helped promote in the African American community of Oakland a cooperative spirit of mutual aid, a shared aim of “economic emancipation” and “manhood rights,” and a resilient community network that would survive the politically and socially divisive period of depression and war. A critical examination of this “seedbed” period is essential to a comprehensive examination of the wartime Bay Area and of its burgeoning protest organizations and African American rights activism.

The African American community of Oakland did not emerge overnight, but rather was growing steadily during the Great Migration period. California cities may not have been deluged by African Americans fleeing the South to the same degree as New York, Detroit, or Chicago, but they nevertheless experienced growth during the first decades of the twentieth century. The rate of growth for black urban communities on the Pacific coast, though slower than that of Northern cities prior to World War II, had consistently gained momentum: between 1900 and 1930 the black population of the East Bay (specifically Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond) grew to over 10,000, more than quadrupling, after already doubling between 1890 and 1900.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the allure San Francisco held, looming to the west, Oakland’s African American population increased steadily (see Appendix A).

In fact, it may have been because—rather than in spite—of Oakland’s “ugly sister status” that the city was able to thrive amidst competing urban centers. Oakland’s location positioned the city as a prime terminus of the Southern Pacific Railroad. By 1921 Oakland was the largest freight terminal west of Chicago—creating a substantial number of jobs, particularly for porters, waiters, and freight workers. Oakland was particularly attractive for African Americans, who



often found that the city was "more progressive" than San Francisco and provided a "more hospitable" environment for black workers seeking employment. Some observers have even suggested that the decline in San Francisco's black population in the early twentieth century stemmed from individuals seeking industrial employment in Oakland. By 1930 Oakland's African American population was twice that of San Francisco.<sup>4</sup>

The dominance of Oakland's African American community among its Bay Area counterparts in the first decades of the twentieth century is also illuminated by the preeminence of Oakland leaders and Oakland-specific issues in the Northern California branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1913 the NAACP bypassed San Francisco to make Oakland the location of its Northern California office. Within four years of its formation, the Northern California branch comprised over one thousand members, even though the middle-class, professional East Bay leadership "did not feel compelled to organize large numbers of grassroots supporters as long as they knew they represented a collective community sentiment."<sup>5</sup> The initial middle-class, professional character of the organization paralleled the national leadership, which at first was dominated by white professionals, the only black officer being W. E. B. Du Bois. With the onset of the Great Depression and World War II, however, the Oakland NAACP leadership was infused with more ardent champions of the working classes, such as BSCP union leader C. L. Dellums, who would become the first West Coast Regional Director of the NAACP in 1948.

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence P. Crouchett, Lonnie G. Bunch, III, and Martha Kendall Winacker, *Visions Toward Tomorrow: The History of the East Bay Afro-American Community, 1852-1977* (Oakland: Northern California Center for Afro-American History and Life, 1989), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), pp. 21-22. Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 52. Daniels also suggests that the 1906 earthquake spurred African Americans to move to Oakland, though this pattern was already evident by 1900.

<sup>5</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, pp. 31-32.



The ascendance of Oakland leadership in the Northern California NAACP eventually induced a schism between the Oakland and San Francisco NAACP memberships. San Francisco members felt that issues particular to the East Bay dominated the organization's efforts. Edward D. Mabson, president of the Negro Equity League, a San Francisco-based protest organization that led, among other struggles, the fight against local screenings of *Birth of a Nation*, agitated for a separate San Francisco NAACP branch. In 1923 Mabson complained to the national director of the NAACP that the Northern California branch "had its hands full in Oakland, and does not function in San Francisco."<sup>6</sup> The perceived neglect of San Francisco's black community as a result of Oakland's dominance in the leadership of the Northern California NAACP ultimately spurred the creation of an autonomous San Francisco branch, which secured a charter from the national organization in 1923. Twenty years later, during the war, Richmond would also establish its own NAACP branch in the Harbor Gate housing project.<sup>7</sup>

Along with Oakland's NAACP office, other institutions, organizations, and clubs flourished in Oakland's African American community in the late twenties and into the thirties. By 1930 dozens of African American clubs and social organizations were thriving, as well as over 100 black-owned businesses. These businesses and organizations included: 25 churches, 33 lodges, 27 art, business, and social clubs, 2 homes for the elderly, 16 real estate brokers, 16 barber shops, 15 restaurants and cafes, 13 beauty parlors, 11 billiard and pool parlors, 8 dressmakers, 8 tailoring shops, 5 printers, 5 furniture stores, 4 candy shops, 3 garages, 2 jewelers, 2 undertakers, 2 insurance companies, a pharmacy, and an amusement park.<sup>8</sup> One successful real estate man, E. A. Daly, who had moved to Oakland after "experiencing

<sup>6</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, pp. 82-85.

<sup>7</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, pp. 31-32. Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds*, p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> "Summary of Statistics of Colored Population of the East Bay Cities," *Oakland Independent*, 14 December 1929, p. 2; Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, p. 18.



considerable difficulty earning a livelihood in San Francisco," utilized his earnings to purchase the black weekly *Oakland Voice*, and later *Western Outlook*, *New Day Informer*, and *Western Appeal*, which he consolidated into the *California Voice* in the early 1930s. Oakland's virtual monopoly of the African American press rendered San Francisco dependent on the East Bay for information concerning black political activity until World War II.<sup>9</sup>

That is not to say, however, that entrepreneurs and the middle class dominated the process of community development prior to World War II. While middle-class individuals such as E. A. Daly, clubwoman and writer Delilah Beasley, and Pastor Allen Newman may have been influential, they were certainly not the majority of Oakland's black population. Most black wage earners were categorized as "unskilled" laborers, and in 1929 fully one-third of all the black wage earners in Oakland were employed as railroad workers.<sup>10</sup> As the country slid into depression, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) proved itself a potent force of unionism, and Oakland's BSCP local and its leadership, particularly C. L. Dellums, emerged as powerful agents of political change and community cohesion among in African Americans in Oakland.

C. L. Dellums was born in Corsicana, Texas, on 3 January 1900. At age 23 he moved to San Francisco, but quickly discovered what many before him had: economic opportunities, though still limited, were substantially greater on the East side of the San Francisco Bay. As Dellums recalled, "It was a common saying around the billiard parlors of West Oakland that the ways a Negro could make a living in the Bay District then were very limited. One was to go down to the sea in ships and the second was to work on the railroads or for the railroads down the yards and thirdly, [by behaving] illegally. . . . Negroes couldn't get much city work." Denied

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<sup>9</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>10</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, p. 37.



“city work” in San Francisco, Dellums took the advice of more established Bay Area residents and looked to the railroad, whose hub was in Oakland, for employment. In January 1924 Dellums began working out of Oakland as a Pullman porter.<sup>11</sup>

In order to grasp the significance of the accomplishments of C. L. Dellums and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) in Oakland, it is necessary to understand the work that porters did and the relationship between the porters and the Pullman Company. First, the so-called “Negro monopoly” in the porter vocation put pressure on porters to tolerate poor working conditions and forego unionization in order to protect their livelihoods. When George Pullman attempted to realize luxurious long-distance railway travel after the Civil War (an effort which had previously failed), founding the Pullman Palace Car Company in 1867, he envisioned his employees as “personal servants” who would cater to all of the needs of passengers during their journeys. All of the men whom he hired in the first years of his company were black men, many of them former slaves. As this practice continued into the twentieth century, “the word porter became synonymous with black.”<sup>12</sup> Although the Pullman Company, which had become the largest employer of African Americans in the United States in the late nineteenth century, claimed to hire African Americans as porters out of concern for their welfare, it was obvious to many that the company was merely exploiting the vestiges of labor relations and social hierarchy imposed by the only-recently-defunct institution of slavery.

More consequential, however, than the racially imposed “social distance” between porters and passengers or the exploitive wages offered by the Company, were the obstacles to organization—both among porters and between the porters and other (mostly white) railway

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<sup>11</sup> C. L. (Cottrell Laurence) Dellums (interviewee), *International President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Civil Rights Leader: oral history transcript*. Interview conducted by Joyce Henderson in 1970-1971. Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1973, pp. 1-8.



workers. Certainly the Pullman Company, which A. Philip Randolph—a New York socialist and the chosen leader of the BSCP—accused of conspiring to “keep porters shrouded in slavery-imposed ignorance of their rights as workers,” could not have failed to notice the benefits of maintaining their employees’ inexperience in and general exclusion from unionization.<sup>13</sup>

Not only did each of the “Big Four Brotherhoods” of railway workers bar African Americans workers from membership, but the Pullman Company also refused to recognize any organization representing the porters other than “Employment Representation Plans,” which were nothing more than “company unions” organized and run by the management. Despite the obstacles hindering the unionization of Pullman porters, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was founded in 1925 in Harlem, launched by the leadership of New York porters Ashley L. Totten, Roy Lancaster, and William H. Des Verney. They selected A. Philip Randolph, who himself had never worked as a porter, as BSCP’s president. Randolph fashioned his magazine, the *Messenger* (and later the *Black Worker*), into the union’s organ. Other early organizers, such as Milton Webster and C. L. Dellums, also played prominent roles in organizing thousands of porters across the country. Still, however, it would take over a decade for the Pullman Company to recognize the BSCP as a legitimate bargaining agent.<sup>14</sup>

While the Pullman Company resisted recognizing the BSCP, influential leaders of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) courted Randolph and the Brotherhood. Prior to his involvement with the porters in 1925, Randolph had severely criticized the AFL. The AFL’s craft unionism was antithetical to Randolph’s socialistic vision of industrial unionism and a powerful, all-inclusive labor party. By the mid-twenties Randolph began to recognize that

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<sup>12</sup> William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925-1937* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



industrial unionism was not imminent. Moreover, he observed that most unions outside the AFL attempting to realize this ideology were generally short-lived and ineffectual. In spite of the craft union structure of the AFL and the racial restrictions of many of its member unions, Randolph "became convinced that somehow Negroes would have to enter the American Federation of Labor if they were to be in the American labor movement."<sup>15</sup>

Many fellow socialists and radicals were dubious about this shift in Randolph's strategy for organizing the BSCP in light of the AFL's history of discrimination. When the AFL replaced the moribund Knights of Labor at the close of the nineteenth century, the AFL's elitist dogma of skill-based organizational methods obliterated the Knights' dream of industrial unionism—that is, organizing all of the workers of an industry into a single union. The AFL craft unionists, who "fancied themselves as labor's aristocracy,"<sup>16</sup> ignored the needs of (and possible power in organizing) their unskilled co-workers. The AFL's stance toward unskilled labor—which often comprised recent European immigrants and, increasingly with the Great Migration, southern African Americans—inflamed racial and ethnic tensions among workers. These tensions were regularly exploited by management to thwart the efforts of organized labor, with the result that none of labor's factions was advancing.

Nonetheless, as early as 1927 the BSCP applied for an international charter from the AFL. The Brotherhood's insistence on an independent charter met resistance from the International Bartenders and Beverage Dispensers of America, which claimed jurisdiction over the organization of porters (though it is unlikely that they intended to integrate porters into their organization, if they planned to associate with them at all). Although William Green—president

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<sup>14</sup> Brailsford R. Brazeal, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: Its Origin and Development* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), p. 16-17. Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, pp. 26-29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.



of the AFL and confidante to Randolph since the formation of the BSCP—attempted to stifle the waiters' opposition, his efforts failed. Instead of an international charter, Green offered the BSCP affiliation with the AFL through the Jim Crow auxiliary Bartenders' League, an arrangement the BSCP leaders adamantly refused. In 1929 the AFL granted the Brotherhood "federal union status," giving charters to BSCP locals in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Kansas City, St. Paul, Oakland, Washington, D. C., New Orleans, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Denver, and Fort Worth. Granting federal union charters to locals rather than an international charter to the BSCP compromised the position of the Brotherhood: the BSCP would gain a measure of permanence and legitimization through AFL affiliation, but this was not "full recognition." Federal status, under which the BSCP operated from 1929 until 1936, meant disproportionately low representation in the AFL (one vote as opposed to representation by size of membership), higher dues (35 cents per month per member versus one cent), and acquiescence to AFL Jim-Crowism. Finally in 1936, amidst continuing jurisdictional disputes among already-chartered unions and persistent entreaties from the BSCP, AFL President William Green presented the Brotherhood with an international charter.<sup>17</sup>

The BSCP's attainment of an international AFL charter coincided with other circumstances that would swiftly impel the Pullman Company to concede. The first was a Supreme Court decision regarding the Amended Railway Act of 1934. The amended law significantly altered the provisions of the Railway Act of 1926, which had explicitly excluded porters from railway worker status. Porters were not excluded under the new law. Additionally, the amended law set forth that "any union which represented a majority of a class of workers had the right to bargain for all laborers in that line of work," effectively outlawing the "Employee

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<sup>16</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 26.



Representation Plans" that the Pullman Company had claimed adequately represented porters. The Pullman Company predicted that the courts would strike down the Amended Railway Act. They miscalculated: in 1937 the Supreme Court upheld the act.<sup>18</sup>

The second blow to the Pullman Company was the birth of the CIO in 1935. John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers (UMW) and vice-president of the AFL in the early 1930s, saw the urgent need to organize the growing body of industrial workers. When the 1935 convention of the AFL voted against re-organizing along industrial rather than craft lines, Lewis formed the Committee of Industrial Organization. Established on 9 November 1935 by Lewis, David Dubinsky of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), and Sidney Hill of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW), the CIO was initially to remain a peripheral committee in the AFL. However, when Lewis resigned from his post as AFL vice-president exactly two weeks after the formation of the CIO, it was clear that the two organizations would not collaborate. By August 1937 the CIO (which changed its name from Committee of Industrial Organization to Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1938) claimed to have over 3.4 million workers, a figure which eclipsed the membership of the AFL.<sup>19</sup>

The CIO, which incorporated racial equality as a tenet of its industrial unionism, targeted African American workers for organization (though often with very limited success). While the AFL allowed its unions to keep bylaws and constitutions that barred black workers and itself only allowed segregated black "auxiliary" unions to join its ranks, the CIO espoused racial equality and integration as pivotal to the success of the trade union movement. In its

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<sup>17</sup> Brazeal, *Brotherhood*, pp. 126-150. Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, pp. 159-163.

<sup>18</sup> Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, pp. 189-216.

<sup>19</sup> The CIO was expelled from the AFL in March 1937, and the CIO held its first constitutional convention in November 1938; the two did not merge again until 1955. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 26-27, 298-305; Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* (New York: International Publishers, 1974) pp. 227-228.



constitution, the CIO spelled out its explicit aims "to organize all workers, Negro or white, skilled or unskilled, men or women, American or foreign-born."<sup>20</sup>

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had not  
materialized CIO

Although the BSCP was officially affiliated with the AFL, it supported and cooperated with the CIO. In April 1937, as the Pullman Company was reeling from the blow of the Supreme Court, the rumor of a porter strike began to circulate. Unlike the "nonchalant and daring attitude" that the Pullman Company had maintained when the porters threatened to strike in 1928, the Company took the 1937 threat seriously. The difference was that the BSCP had bypassed the AFL and negotiated for strike support with the more militant CIO, which had already gained a reputation for fearlessness in its practice of direct action. Support from the CIO added weight to the BSCP's threat of work stoppage. The Pullman Company preferred to recognize a content union affiliated with the AFL than reckon with disgruntled workers who were vulnerable to the influence of the more combative CIO. On 25 August 1937, only months after the Supreme Court decision and the negotiations between the BSCP and the CIO, the Pullman Company agreed to recognize the BSCP.<sup>21</sup>

The desire of the BSCP to affiliate with the AFL seems almost paradoxical in observing the AFL's seemingly race intolerant, craft elitist history. It would have been logical for the BSCP to align themselves with the more race-conscious, all-inclusive politics of the CIO. However, while the threat of cooperation with the CIO was advantageous and could be successfully utilized as a bargaining chip, BSCP leaders did not perceive a complete alliance with the CIO as desirable. The antagonistic CIO could not provide the BSCP with one crucial requirement: acceptance into the "mainstream" of American life.

<sup>20</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor*, p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, p. 214-215.



The resistance with which the CIO's brand of industrial unionism was met testified to the contentiousness of the organization's inclusive convictions. Individuals and groups intolerant of the CIO's stance against discrimination ranged from conservative craft unionists to the Ku Klux Klan. AFL craft unionists exploited the reputation of the CIO, presenting itself to employers as a "safer bet" than the "radical-infested" CIO. As one AFL official stated, "Every CIO representative is looked upon as a walking strike." This image inspired repulsion in many managers and workers alike. In the South CIO organizers were victims of Klan violence: they were attacked, and some even "disappeared" during organizing campaigns; one organizer who was working with African Americans in Florida died after being flogged, castrated, tarred, and burned by being dipped into boiling tar. Despite the terror, the CIO organized thousands of black workers in the South.<sup>22</sup>

The CIO also met resistance—though not the terrorist sort—from African American leaders who were weary of organized labor, and rightfully so. The history of antagonism between trade unions and black labor was not to be dissolved overnight. The NAACP and the Urban League admonished African American workers to be circumspect and wait for the CIO to prove its earnestness. Many church leaders promoted the notion that white capitalists had been, and would continue to be, more reliable allies to black workers than organized labor. Although several national organizations—including the NAACP and the Urban League—eventually enthusiastically endorsed the CIO and encouraged black workers to join, many local leaders of these organizations had allied themselves with business and consequently discouraged African American laborers from joining any union.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor*, p. 230; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, p. 316.

<sup>23</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor*, p. 217.



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The BSCP applauded the efforts of the CIO. At the opening session of the National Negro Congress—a coalition running the gamut of black leadership, from conservative Republicans to Communists, which was founded at the same time as the CIO—A. Philip Randolph, the BSCP president who would also be elected president of the Congress, extolled the virtue of the new industrial union movement. Referring to his own experiences with the AFL, Randolph stated that “the craft union invariably has a color bar against the Negro worker, but the industrial union in structure renders race discrimination less possible, since it embraces all workers included in the industry, regardless of race, creed, color or craft, skilled or unskilled.” Nonetheless, Randolph refused to join the CIO, opting instead to fight for the black worker from within the AFL.<sup>24</sup>

C. L. Dellums approved of both Randolph’s support of the CIO and his unwillingness to join the organization. In a March 1937 letter to Los Angeles BSCP official Charles Upton, Dellums wrote: “First, while we were delayed, the workers of this entire nation were aroused by John Lewis and the C. I. O. and now Labor is on the march. Workers in every industry are organizing and demanding a fairer share of the proceeds of their labor. . . . Hats off to the C. I. O. for bringing about this national drive for the benefit of all workers, regardless of race, creed or color.”<sup>25</sup> The CIO was making inroads into several Bay Area unions, most notably the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA). Harry Bridges, who rose to prominence during the 1934 general strike when he was elected president of the West Coast longshoremen, led his local out of the AFL’s ILA and into the CIO’s International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU).

CIO

Upton

<sup>24</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>25</sup> Dellums to Upton, 9 March 1937 (carton 10), C. L. Dellums Papers [c. 1920-1972], Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.



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Even amidst the particularly strong current of CIO organizing in the Bay Area, including the pro-CIO sentiments among BSCP members, Dellums remained staunchly opposed to official BSCP affiliation with the CIO. This stance often clashed with rank-and-file preferences. In a 1937 letter to Los Angeles BSCP President W. B. Holland, Dellums complained that the "Brotherhood leans toward the CIO and that keeps us in an embarrassing spot."<sup>26</sup> The BSCP leadership resisted the popular sentiment of its membership, resolutely clinging to its tenuous position within the mainstream of the American labor movement.

Holland

That is not to say, however, that the BSCP passively accepted the status quo of the AFL. During the early thirties, as the BSCP leadership remained steadfast in its dedication to the AFL, it also strove to transform it. The BSCP organized pickets of AFL conventions and attempted every year (unsuccessfully) to pass an anti-discrimination clause to the AFL's constitution (known as the "Randolph Resolution"). In defense of their commitment to the AFL, Dellums and other BSCP leaders argued that since the AFL was a "federation" consisting of *autonomous* unions, it could not be considered a singularly racist organization.<sup>27</sup> Dellums explained:

Our reason for 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 into the mainstream and all of its tributaries 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 clause 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.<sup>28</sup>

The discrimination faced by Dellums in his attempts to organize African American workers was layered: the BSCP encountered obstacles put into place by the Pullman Company, other trade unions, and the AFL. At an individual level, the BSCP had to contend with the racism of the people involved in these already structurally-discriminatory organizations. Regardless of the

<sup>26</sup> Dellums to Holland, 10 October 1937 (carton 10), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Dellums, *International President*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.



obstacles, Dellums and other leaders of the BSCP envisioned fighting discrimination and achieving economic emancipation by "burrowing from within."

However, the "burrowing" was not the immediate task; breaking into and remaining within the "mainstream" were more pressing issues. Although the CIO may have been more ideologically appealing to the BSCP, the leadership felt it could not afford to be associated with an organization whose officials were imagined to be "walking strikes." The CIO's militancy was to an extent imagined. Though more "radical" in its methods than the AFL, the CIO essentially remained within the bounds of reformism: its call for industrial unionism was not, unlike the goals of the Communist Party, a cry for a revolution of the proletariat. However, the number of Communist Party members among the ranks of CIO leadership did cast the organization as "revolutionary." Dellums and other leaders of the BSCP had determined that entry into the "mainstream of American life," which included the conservative AFL and excluded any association with revolutionary motives, was the most effective way to "drive discrimination out." Less tangible political longings for social change were martyred for the more realizable cause of union efficacy.

The BSCP's strategy was indeed successful. The Pullman Company's concession was a major victory for the Brotherhood. Company recognition not only gave the BSCP and the African American worker unprecedented bargaining power, it also gave the BSCP leaders enormous prestige as victors against white capitalists. As C. L. Dellums reminisced:

The Brotherhood was the first international union ever organized and led by a Negro, and the only one that succeeded over the opposition of the employer. When the Pullman Company signed that first agreement in 1937, it was the first and only case in the history of this nation where Negroes showed a powerful white corporation where to sign—and they signed against their will!<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dellums, *International President*, pp. 45-46.



Melinda Chateauvert points out that the David-versus-Goliath tale of the BSCP's fight to gain recognition from the Pullman Company almost instantly became folkloric among union members—a mythology utilized by leaders to cultivate union loyalty. "The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters began crafting its history right after its founding. . . . Learning the history instilled in members respect for union leaders and for the power of organized labor. The story drew on familiar themes from the Bible and African American folklore, cultural symbols with which members could easily identify."<sup>30</sup>

The mythology of the BSCP was potent; national union leaders in many instances were perceived as virtually god-like. This was especially the case for A. Philip Randolph, who himself had never worked as a porter, yet was practically worshipped by porters as their union leader. C. L. Dellums described the power Randolph wielded: "We had no hesitancy in him having all the power. We knew he would not abuse it, would do nothing wrong. Nobody could have made anyone in the Brotherhood believe that he wasn't the purest man that ever lived. He was the same as the second coming of Jesus Christ to us."<sup>31</sup> The men who led the battle against the leviathan Pullman Company were revered in their communities—and in communities across the nation—even before the BSCP won recognition in 1937. When the Pullman Company was finally defeated, the leaders' ability to overcome the seemingly insuperable obstacle of gaining union recognition was projected onto possibilities of other rights advancements for African Americans.

C. L. Dellums, who quickly gained a "rabble-rousing" reputation as a union leader, shared the omnipotent luster radiated by Randolph and other national leaders. Dellums became a local official in the BSCP when the Oakland local was established in 1926, and vice-president of

<sup>30</sup> Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

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the Pacific Coast Zone (the union membership was divided into 7 zones in all) when the first Brotherhood convention was held in Chicago in September 1929. Dellums was able to attend only because he had been fired the previous year—undoubtedly as a result of his effective agitation among the workers. At the time of the convention, the Pullman Company still did not recognize the union and a porter would have been discharged for merely attending.<sup>32</sup> By 1929 Dellums was both writing and being featured in articles appearing in Oakland's African American newspapers. As early as 1928, Dellums contributed a full-length article to the *Western American* outlining the injustices faced by porters at the hands of the Pullman Company and inviting the community to attend an upcoming dance.<sup>33</sup> In December 1929, Dellums was featured in the *Oakland Independent* as one of the select "Public Spirited Figures in East Bay Community Life," a feature which included an article about his work in the Brotherhood as well as a photograph of Dellums.<sup>34</sup> Dellums, who "inspired confidence in his fellow porters and anxiety in those he confronted," was gaining prominence within and beyond the BSCP. Under his leadership, the Oakland BSCP local "became a powerful force in the community" during the thirties.<sup>35</sup>

In the first decades of the twentieth century, West Oakland emerged as the locus of the African American community in the East Bay. By 1900 West Oakland, with its proximity to the docks and the railroad, was already an established working-class neighborhood, comprising primarily Mexicans, Italians, Portuguese, Eastern Europeans, and a steadily increasing number of

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<sup>31</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> None of the delegates, Dellums recalled, could be an active Pullman porter because the Company still did not recognize the union and a porter would have been discharged for merely attending. Dellums, *International President*, pp. 37-38, 40-41.

<sup>33</sup> C. L. Dellums, "Pullman's Dance," *Western American*, 14 September 1928, p.5. For the full text of this article, which illuminates Dellums's unapologetic stance toward the Pullman company, as well as reveals the unabashed combining of education and fundraising in his organizing, see Appendix B.

<sup>34</sup> "Public Spirited Figures in East Bay Community Life," *Oakland Independent*, 14 December 1929, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, p. 37.



African Americans.<sup>36</sup> As travel by rail eclipsed travel by sea, the railroad terminal in West Oakland became an increasingly lively social center. As Douglas Henry Daniels observed, "Blacks worked as redcaps, cooks, waiters, and porters, while others became newspaper vendors, bootblacks, and lodging-house operators. They congregated . . . on Seventh Street and near the Oakland Mole, where trains crossed the bay to San Francisco."<sup>37</sup> C. L. Dellums's office, which since 1934 was located above a pool hall at 1716 Seventh Street in West Oakland, was in the thick of this budding African American community. Dellums's billiard parlor served as a meeting place for porters and other community members, further magnifying the role of Dellums and the BSCP in the community of Oakland.

The potency of Dellums and other BSCP leaders in their communities was solidified by the Great Depression. In the oft-quoted words of Langston Hughes, "The depression brought everybody down a peg or two. And the Negroes had but few pegs to fall."<sup>38</sup> Among the thirteen million workers who were unemployed at the height of the Depression in 1933—approximately 25 percent of the workforce, according to government data—African Americans were disproportionately represented. The jobless rate was even higher in the San Francisco Bay Area, according the State Unemployment Commission, topping 30 percent at the peak of unemployment. Moreover, the East Bay, which was still primarily a transportation and distribution center despite recent industrial growth, felt an even greater impact because of its reliance on these particularly hard-hit activities. Pullman porters, as C. L. Dellums recalled, bore the weight of the economic crash: "The Depression had come on, and the Pullman Company had heat on us. They had discharged a lot of men, including me. They'd frightened the men away. We were having a hard time maintaining an organization." Thousands of workers in the East

<sup>36</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, p. 39; Johnson, *Second Gold Rush*, p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites*, pp. 78.

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Bay involved in waterfront and railroad operations—with African Americans receiving the customary “last hired, first fired” treatment—were laid off. While difficulty paying dues threatened the economic health of the BSCP, the stability of the union as a source of support and information for downcast workers augmented the BSCP’s influence and extended its mythical reputation.<sup>39</sup>

The Great Depression sparked the most widespread mood of social discontent in American history, manifesting in heightened labor and political radicalism, and an upsurge in labor organization—particularly among the industrial, agricultural, and other “unskilled” workers who had gained the attention of the growing CIO. Unfortunately for Herbert Hoover, depression-spawned discontent spawned a strong left-leaning coalition encompassing labor, agriculture, and progressive interests who elected Democrat Franklin Roosevelt president in 1932, ushering in the far-reaching economic policies and programs of the New Deal. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, which (among other things) guaranteed labor’s right to collectively bargain, and the Wagner National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which legally prohibited “unfair labor practices,” guaranteed workers’ rights to organize, and established the National Labor Relations Board to mediate labor disputes, provided additional boosts to trade unions.<sup>40</sup>

California was particularly rife with radicalism, both in the realm of conventional politics and in the arena of labor. In 1934 the socialist novelist Upton Sinclair won the Democratic gubernatorial nomination on a radical platform to “End Poverty in California,” which included a plan to form self-sufficient, self-contained land colonies throughout the state. Sinclair’s weekly

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<sup>38</sup> From Hughes’s autobiography, *The Big Sea* (1967), cited in Foner, *Organized Labor*, p. 188, among others.

<sup>39</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 42; Johnson, *Second Gold Rush*, p. 20; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 163-167.

<sup>40</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 289-292.



(though somewhat sporadic) *EPIC News* was published primarily in Oakland and Los Angeles. Additionally, the Washington Commonwealth Federation—a left-wing coalition of the unemployed, organized labor, and liberals urging production for use instead of for profit—dominated the Democratic Party in California for a time during the mid-1930s.<sup>41</sup> Unemployment and labor politics were at the fore of political debate, thus endowing organized labor with an increasingly important and vociferous role in public affairs.

Along with the growing prominence of organized labor and swelling political debate over the remedies for unemployment were several momentous strikes, placing unions and labor issues even more squarely in the spotlight. In 1934 over 1.5 million workers in different industries all over the country—notably longshoremen in San Francisco, Teamsters in Minneapolis, and textile workers in the South—went on strike.<sup>42</sup> California had its share of labor strife. The 1932-34 strike of the newly organized Cannery and Agricultural Workers Union and the 1934 strike of San Francisco waterfront workers, which culminated in a four-day general strike, are the foci of many thorough examinations. These actions are also important confrontations to note in an analysis of the BSCP and the African American community in Oakland during the Depression. First, the revolt of agricultural workers reveals the climate of radicalism and the success of growing campaigns (often by Communists) to organize “unskilled” (and in the case of California agricultural workers, primarily Mexican immigrant) workers. This was a victory which surely did not go unnoticed by African American workers and particularly porters, also considered “unskilled” and facing many similar obstacles. Second, the short yet extremely successful

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<sup>41</sup> Michael P. Malone and Richard W. Etulain, *The American West: A Twentieth-Century History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 104. Upton Sinclair's *EPIC News*, March 1934 (vol. 1, no. 3), p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States, 1492-Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), pp. 386-390.



general strike in San Francisco had far-reaching ramifications in the East Bay and depended heavily on the support of African American workers.

During the 83-day strike of longshoremen and other maritime workers, which began in May 1934 and was led by Harry Bridges, Oakland and Alameda workers supported the strike by picketing the docks (though the police escorted strikebreakers to their jobs). On 23 May 1934—before the infamous “Bloody Thursday” tragedy in San Francisco, when two strikers were killed by police—two workers who were protesting strikebreaking were wounded by police in Oakland. In response to the violence wrought on strikers by police, members of more than seventy East Bay locals joined the 100,000 Bay Area workers who participated in the four-day general strike.<sup>43</sup>

C. L. Dellums was a staunch supporter of labor causes. His support of the 1934 waterfront strike reveals his unfaltering pro-labor stance, regardless of AFL- or CIO- affiliation, or of race. As Dellums recalled:

I was an advocate for the rights of labor period! It didn't make any difference to me. In 1934, during that first big strike, there were only two Negro crews on the whole waterfront—two Jim Crow Negro crews, all Negroes, on the whole waterfront and they worked, as I recall, on the Grace Line and the Luckenbach docks. And no other place. Of course I had a double interest in that. I was interested in them having a real union again because all the workers needed a union. Of course I was interested in breaking up the segregation on the waterfront and breaking up the shape-up system and providing for Negroes to be allowed to work on there, because they were human beings and had a right to work—and should work without discrimination. But I would fight for an all-white union in trouble as quick as I'd fight for an all-black union. I fight for the rights of the working man, the rights of the poor.<sup>44</sup>

Along with the dilemma of supporting Jim Crow workplaces and unions, which relegated African Americans to auxiliary unions (if they had a chance to organize at all), Dellums and African American workers in the East Bay were often targeted by employers who exploited the tenuous relationship between white organized labor and African American workers. Employers tried to capitalize on this strained relationship, as well as on the desire of many African

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<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *Second Gold Rush*, pp. 21-22.



Americans to break into often discriminatory job sectors, by recruiting African American workers as a potential source of scab labor during strikes.<sup>45</sup> In 1934 Dellums successfully thwarted an attempt to recruit African American workers to cross the picket lines:

In the 1934 strike I recall they were having a big meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> Street here—supposedly a quiet meeting of strikebreakers and the strikers found out about it and who was running it. So they came to me and asked me if I would go into that meeting and attempt to talk them out of strikebreaking. . . . I gave them first a good educational talk on labor and civil rights where we had so much in common. Then brought some rabble-rousing on it, too.<sup>46</sup>

Dellums's participation in meetings to support strikers continued in 1937, when maritime workers again brought the waterfront to a standstill. A mass meeting jointly sponsored by the Maritime Federation of the Pacific and Labor Bureau of the East Bay Council of the National Negro Congress was held to deter "Lee Holman's Scab-heralding Organization," which was "making special appeals to Negro Workers, telling them that his outfit is a bona fide trade Union."<sup>47</sup> Scheduled speakers at this meeting, which was held in Oakland, included C. L. Dellums, Revels Cayton (a prominent Oakland doctor), Ishmael Flory (Executive Secretary of the East Bay Council of the National Negro Congress, as well as a member of the Communist Party), Reverend A. W. Johnson (Pastor of Parks Chapel, AME Church), Henry Schmidt (ILA President, Local 38-79), and John Shoemaker (minister of the Calvary Church in Oakland).<sup>48</sup> The mass nature of these East Bay meetings illuminates the extent to which dueling white unions and employers attempted to exploit African American workers. Employers were indeed recruiting scabs from the African American labor force. In addition, white unions, who were unwilling to allow black workers in their ranks, nevertheless relied on the African American

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<sup>44</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 140.

<sup>45</sup> Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 128-146, devote an entire chapter of their study to "Strike Breaking and Race Consciousness."

<sup>46</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 138.

<sup>47</sup> Lee Holman, former president of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) before the union split from the AFL, formed a conservative rival union to Harry Bridge's International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) after the 1934 strike.



community to fortify their strike efforts. The individuals chosen to address the meeting reveal influential forces within the community: representatives from labor, religious institutions, the professional class, black protest organizations, and political radicals. "As the depression wore on and labor militancy became widespread," Crouchett (*et al.*) notes, "Dellums's stance, which included support for the 1934 General Strike on the San Francisco waterfront and active cooperation with CIO unions, became widely acceptable in the black community."<sup>49</sup> Dellums urged community support for various labor struggles and promoted widespread community education in labor issues—even reaching out to women, a group often overlooked by male-dominated organized labor.

African American women occupied strangely antagonistic roles in Oakland in the 1930s: they were at once not trusted in public and political affairs and yet relied upon to fuse the disparate elements of the community together in order to achieve commonly-held goals. Personal correspondences of C. L. Dellums and his union brothers during this period and Dellums's reminiscences reveal suspicions about women involved in the BSCP, either as wives of porters or as potential activists in the BSCP Ladies' Auxiliary (formed officially in 1938, though some "economic councils" had formed as early as 1929). Yet C. L. Dellums was also one of the strongest supporters of the Ladies' Auxiliary—investing much time organizing women all along the Pacific Coast—and always urged porters to bring their wives to BSCP meetings and rallies. The contested roles of women in the development of a cohesive African American community in Oakland, as well as in the BSCP-led fights for workers' and civil rights during the Depression, highlight complex relationships among women, male-dominated unions

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Joint Publicity Committee Maritime Federation of the Pacific to Dellums and the BSCP, 7 Jan 1937 (carton 2), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>49</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, p. 37.



(often comprising their husbands, fathers, and/or brothers), and marginalized communities struggling for economic and human rights in a time of widespread economic hardship.

In C. L. Dellums's correspondences and interviews, the "nagging porter's wife" anecdote, also a theme in the broader BSCP mythology, was a common trope. As Dellums recalled, "I've gone to homes where the wives wouldn't let me in the house. I've gone to homes where the wives opened the door and saw it was me and bawled me out and slammed the door in my face. They told me 'Leave my husband alone; don't come back here anymore. We won't have anything to do with you Negroes. You're going to get all the porters fired!'"<sup>50</sup> This description—which may or may not be dramatized—certainly reflected a legitimate concern on the part of porters' wives. Particularly before the BSCP gained official company recognition in 1937, any porter involved in the union was in danger of losing his job—Dellums himself was fired in 1928. Moreover, the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 so greatly imperiled economic stability for black workers and their families that it is not surprising that some women feared the ramifications that union radicalism may have had for their domestic lives.

In spite (or, perhaps, because) of this perceived threat of the decimation of the union at the hands of the porters' wives, C. L. Dellums urged porters to include their wives in union functions and meetings even prior to the establishment of the Ladies' Auxiliary. Dellums often attempted to generate the attendance of a greater number of porters' wives by selecting meeting times conducive to the women's schedules. He also encouraged other organizers in his zone to educate women in the affairs of the BSCP. In a 1935 letter to W. B. Holland, a local official of the Los Angeles BSCP, Dellums wrote: "At least I would hold two night meetings, in order to give the ladies an opportunity to attend. It might be best if they were all held at night, because we want the wives to understand the situation as well as the men. . . . Urge the men to bring their



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wives and attend these meetings, as it is the only way through which they can secure information correctly.”<sup>51</sup> The public mass meetings held by the BSCP—which welcomed virtually all African American working people, as well as porters’ wives and family members—served not only to protect its membership from company informants, but also, as Melinda Chateauvert has suggested, “provided labor education to the African American community at large.”<sup>52</sup> This education was particularly important to the BSCP in securing the support of community women, who many felt could make or break the union—a testament to the power these women exerted in their families and in their communities.

The power that African American women wielded in their communities in the 1930s is further illuminated by the debate among the leaders of the BSCP over the formation of an auxiliary to the union. C. L. Dellums, like A. Philip Randolph, advocated the formation of Women’s Economic Councils (later known as Ladies’ Auxiliaries) to cooperate with the BSCP. Dellums played crucial roles in the organization of several West Coast women’s groups, including the Los Angeles, Seattle, and Oakland BSCP Auxiliaries. As Dellums traveled to various cities in his zone—including Los Angeles and Seattle—to hold meetings concerning the formation of Ladies’ Auxiliaries, he received warnings from his male colleagues. For instance, Thomas Patterson, Vice President of the New York Division of BSCP, wrote to Dellums in April of 1939, “History was always depicted the action of men, as being based on a background where women played an important part, and no doubt with the women injected internationally in this movement, they are going to play an important part in this movement, either for good or otherwise. Undoubtedly, we have to be quite careful.”<sup>53</sup> The formation of the Ladies’ Auxiliary

<sup>50</sup> Dellums, *International President*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>51</sup> Dellums to W. B. Holland, 8 October 1935 (carton 4), C. L. Dellums Papers. *found*

<sup>52</sup> Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Patterson to Dellums, 13 April 1939 (carton 2), C. L. Dellums Papers.



of the BSCP was not a cut-and-dried issue for all of the male union leaders: they knew the women would "play an important part" in the BSCP, but it was not clear exactly what that part would be.

For most of the men and women involved in the BSCP, one reality about the functions of the Ladies' Auxiliary was clear; the male and female BSCP members would have distinctly different roles. While "auxiliaries gave wives a collective voice in the labor movement and national politics," that voice would remain specifically domestic as they assisted their husbands' struggle for "manhood rights." Even though many porters' wives were themselves employed, they were first and foremost porters' wives. As Chateauvert argues: "Through the Ladies' Auxiliary, African American women constructed an organizational role for themselves in the labor movement, declaring domestic issues as their domain. They praised the Brotherhood because it brought economic security to their families; their husbands' union wages allowed them to become housewives."<sup>54</sup>

The belief that women's politics should remain domestic persisted outside of the Ladies' Auxiliary in the Oakland community. As Esther Jones Lee, honorary president of the California State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, stated in an article in the *Oakland Independent*, "The story of the Colored women in this great area, i[s] not leaving the home, but having a desire to make the home better through group development and contact, and safer through political and racial consciousness and understanding."<sup>55</sup> The role of women in the African American struggle for "manhood rights" was unequivocally to remain "within the home."

Even C. L. Dellums, an unwavering supporter of female involvement in the BSCP and the formation of the Ladies' Auxiliary, agreed with the strictly domestic grounding of female

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<sup>54</sup> Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, pp. 2-8.

<sup>55</sup> Esther Lee Jones, "Women's Clubs and their Doings," *Oakland Independent*, 14 December 1929.



involvement in public affairs. When Vivian Osborne Marsh, a Berkeley woman, was appointed the supervisor of the National Youth Administration's California office of the segregated Division of Negro affairs, Dellums protested. Although he disagreed with the "Republican dame's" politics and opposition to many New Deal programs, he also had an aversion to a woman holding the position. Dellums asserted that instead of Marsh, a "qualified and suitable young Negro man may be [of] better service than a woman."<sup>56</sup> Dellums wrote a number of letters protesting Marsh's appointment. His attempts to replace Marsh with an African American male were unsuccessful, but Dellums was eventually able to convince the NYA's state director, Robert Wayne Burns, to disband the Division of Negro Affairs in California.<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of Dellums's personal distaste for women exerting political power beyond the confines of the domestic, he wholeheartedly supported the economic agenda of the BSCP Ladies' Auxiliary. First called the "Colored Women's Economic Council," Dellums insisted that the women's organization be named the "Ladies' Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters," perhaps intending to connote a more intimate and direct relationship (and line of command) between the two organizations.<sup>58</sup> The agenda of economic advancement, which included cooperative food purchasing among BSCP wives, conformed to Dellums's notion of the proper roles for women to play in the labor movement. This ethos is revealed in the preamble of the by-laws of Ladies' Auxiliary:

<sup>56</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, pp. 123-127.

<sup>57</sup> It is interesting in this regard to note some of Dellums's personal correspondences. It appears that Dellums and Los Angeles BSCP local president Charles Upton had an ongoing banter regarding Dellums and his relationships (or lack of relationships) with women. In a January 1937 letter, Dellums wrote to Upton: "I was just wondering why you tell me of this very beautiful young lady who attended your social affair. Of course, as you know, women mean absolutely nothing in my life. However, thanks for the information that the said young lady was looking very beautiful." Despite Dellums's assertion that women meant "absolutely nothing" in his life, for years to follow Upton was "still kidding [him] about the ladies." Dellums to Charles Upton, 23 January and 21 December 1937. See, also, May 1935-December 1937 (carton 5), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>58</sup> In a draft of the "Program for the Colored Women's Economic Council" in Dellums's papers, he had crossed out "Colored Women's Economic Council" and replace it, in his own hand, with "Ladies' Auxiliary" Ladies' Auxiliary folder (carton 10), C. L. Dellums Papers.



PREAMBLE: It shall be the object of this Council to advance, protect and conserve the interests, economic, social, moral and intellectual of its members; to foster, develop and maintain a constructive interest in the economic status and future of the race, to seek wider economic opportunities for our Negro youth; to increase and capitalize the purchasing power of our group income; to investigate and study all problems and conditions that affect the economical well being of the Negro youth; to stimulate, encourage and develop cooperative societies, labor unions and all constructive enterprises that promise and make for our group development; to emphasize the necessity, value and power of economic organization, education and agitation; to foster the spirit of cooperation in all field of Negro endeavor, and to combine with various agencies, social, civic, political, educational and religious for the improvement of the conditions of Negro life in the various communities in the country; to cooperate with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to serve as its auxiliary, the vanguard of the Negro's economic emancipation.<sup>59</sup>

The "economic emancipation" sought by BSCP women—that is, for "the Negro," generally, through betterment of the wages and conditions of their husbands' employment rather than improvement of their own—was clearly within the confines of domesticity. It is important to note, however, that the BSCP was originally the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters *and Maids*. Although "Pullman maids and other female union members claim the union too," they "were told to join the Auxiliary." As Chateauvert articulates, "Diverted into the Auxiliary with a complimentary membership, and too few in number to win elective offices in the union, BSCP officials often treated their concerns as working women casually, while Auxiliary leaders ignored them. The Brotherhood and the Auxiliary agreed, woman's 'place' was in the home."<sup>60</sup> Surely Dellums's BSCP office in Oakland, which was located above a pool and billiard hall (owned by Dellums, and a central recreational and meeting place of BSCP members), was probably an intimidating and inappropriate venue for female members.

Along with the Ladies' Auxiliary's duties to promote "economic emancipation" among the African American community came the responsibility to serve as a community watchdog. The program for the Auxiliary encouraged the establishment of "Economic Vigilance Committees," which would be organized in order to

<sup>59</sup> "By-laws governing the Colored Women's Economic Council (Ladies Auxiliary of the BSCP)" (carton 10), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, p. 3.



watch out for all forms of economic discriminations against the Negro, such as the replacing of Negro workers by white workers, the paying of Negro workers less than white workers, the barring of Negro workers from certain fields of industry. It should keep strict watch over the merchants of the city in order intelligently to oppose the policy of any shop keeper which discriminates against the Negro patrons, either with respect to price of goods sold them or the manner of service given.<sup>61</sup>

The proposed role of the BSCP Ladies' Auxiliary as a guardian of African American economic rights—particularly consumer rights—was well-suited to the BSCP gender cause. Women as “domestic scientists” and housewives were likely to be familiar with local merchants and their policies toward “Negro patrons.” Moreover, in a community in which the African American population was substantially smaller than the white population, a factor that would increase the necessity for black consumers to patronize white-owned businesses, the importance of the watchdog function of the Ladies' Auxiliary increased significantly. This was certainly true for Oakland in the 1930s, as evidenced by several successful “Don't buy where you can't work” boycotts of East Bay businesses which discriminated against blacks.<sup>62</sup>

The women of the BSCP, even prior to the official establishment of a Ladies' Auxiliary, also participated in the planning of union-sponsored social functions. As Broussard observes of pre-war black San Francisco, “Dancing was popular among all classes of blacks and a part of many social functions. . . . Lodges, community centers, social clubs, and churches probably spent more time and energy organizing dances than any other activity.” However, he also suggests that “the lower-class black's social activities were loosely structured,” as he was “Less of a ‘joiner’ than the middle-class black.” Broussard included in the designation of “lower-class,” “the majority of unskilled laborers, janitors, porters, female domestic workers, and personal

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<sup>61</sup> “Program for Colored Women's Economic Council” (carton 10), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Several of these boycotts included participants from the student body of the University of California, Berkeley. A particularly successful boycott in 1940 was backed by the ASUC's Student Relations Committee. Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, pp. 40-41.



servants," whose social activities consisted mostly of "church activities, informal gatherings, San Francisco's vibrant night life, and athletic contests."<sup>63</sup>

While this may have been true for "unskilled" laborers in San Francisco, the BSCP in Oakland orchestrated elaborate dances and social functions that were well-attended by porters and other members of the African American community. As Dellums recalled, "The Brotherhood had good prestige and we always got a good crowd for a public dance."<sup>64</sup> Much of the energy of the BSCP local, like the churches and social clubs that Broussard observes in San Francisco, was spent organizing these fundraising functions. Part of the Ladies' Auxiliary's immediate program, when it was formed in 1938, was to take over the duties of organizing social functions. The plan for the Auxiliary stipulated that the organization "should plan an entertainment committee whose purpose it should be the giving of various affairs such as dances, parties, concerts, etc, with a view of raising revenue for the organization."<sup>65</sup> Additionally, much of C. L. Dellums's correspondences with leaders of other locals consists of advice and instructions as to organizing and advertising BSCP social functions. In fact, Dellums even spent an entire letter chastising a Los Angeles BSCP official for putting "Pullman Porters" instead of "Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters" on a flyer advertising a fundraising dance.<sup>66</sup> Unlike Broussard's depiction of "lower-class" black San Francisco, the social activities of BSCP members in Oakland seem to have been less "loosely structured."

Oakland's seemingly different class characteristics were not due to a greater lack of class distinction. While employment as a porter was perhaps the most lucrative and prestigious of the "blue-collar" professions, porters were not necessarily "middle class." Unlike prewar Rich and,

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<sup>63</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, pp. 69, 72.

<sup>64</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> "Program for Colored Women's Economic Council" (carton 10), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>66</sup> Dellums to W. B. Holland, 4 October 1935 (carton 5), C. L. Dellums Papers.



which Shirley Ann Wilson Moore argues lacked “intraracial class stratification” as a result of the “uniformity of the African American experience” in the community, but instead manifested hierarchy based on length of residence, Oakland indeed experienced intraracial class tensions.<sup>67</sup> These tensions were particularly poignant between middle-class, professional African Americans and the leadership of the BSCP.

C. L. Dellums often complained about the “respectable Negroes” and their efforts to aid the Pullman Company in discouraging porter unionization, especially playing on community fears that porters might lose the “only job Negroes had a monopoly on in the nation” by “fooling around with Randolph and Dellums.” Dellums recalled,

It's amazing who some of the Negroes were who attempted to use that to influence porters to desert the Brotherhood! They used it among what I dubbed 'the parlor stool pigeons,' professional Negroes—doctors, dentists, lawyers, schoolteachers, whatever they were—all kinds of schemes to get those people to talk to the porters and to the porters' wives. . . . A Negro physician was the leader of the 'parlor stool pigeon brigade,' as I dubbed them, here in Oakland. With a Negro realtor who had a brother who was a porter, he had attempted to organize the few professionals here to turn Negro sentiment against the porters joining or remaining in the Brotherhood through their wives in order to break up the Brotherhood. But they didn't succeed. We finally won the fight and got a contract signed.<sup>68</sup>

It was not an uncommon stance in the late 1920s and 1930s—especially among professionals, church leaders, and fraternal organizations—to condemn the relationship of African American workers to organized labor in favor of an alliance with white capitalists.<sup>69</sup> This attitude—which was fueled, in some, by a fear of “white backlash” against black labor militancy—persisted in Oakland throughout the 1930s, posing obstacles to the efforts of Dellums and the BSCP to augment membership and secure rights and recognition from the Pullman Company.

While Dellums was countering the efforts of some members of the middle-class, professional African American community of Oakland by organizing as many porters and porters' wives as possible during the Depression, he was also resisting the attempts of others to

<sup>67</sup> Moore, *To Place Our Deeds*, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 26.



ally themselves with the BSCP—namely, Communists. Since nearly the instant the Depression began to take hold, the Communist Party, often in concert with efforts of the CIO, undertook organizing the unemployed. In October 1930, the Communist Party adopted a resolution, “The Communist Party on the Negro Question,” which articulated black self-determination and defined African Americans as a “subject nation.” The Communist Party staged demonstrations, organized Unemployment Councils, and attempted to unionize as many workers as possible. As Philip Foner and Herbert Shapiro assert, the Communist Party “took up the question of Black liberation with boldness, vigor, and skill. Within a short time, the Party’s activity produced a sharp increase in Black membership.”<sup>70</sup> The International Labor Defense, the legal arm of the Party, gained publicity in their defense of the “Scottsboro Boys,” a widely publicized case in which a group of nine black men were accused of raping a white woman, and enjoyed moderate success in winning the support of the African American community. Furthermore, many of the leaders of the CIO, which actively promoted an “inclusionary policy” of unionism and strove for racial equality, were known (or thought) to be members of the Communist Party.<sup>71</sup>

The Communist Party’s vociferous struggle against racial inequality posited the organization as an attractive alternative to moderate liberalism and socialism—captivating African Americans from the working class to intellectual circles. In the 1930s many Bay Area Communists were active in local politics. The growing importance of the Party in the African American community in the East Bay is revealed in a 1937 housing discrimination suit brought by two black university students against a Berkeley landlord, in which the students were represented not by the NAACP, but by the Communist Party’s International Labor Defense. One

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<sup>69</sup> Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, pp. 20-23.

<sup>70</sup> Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro (eds), *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1930-1934* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. xv-xvii.

<sup>71</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 222-223, 307, 317.



Richmond woman recalled that “ ‘quite a few’ blacks that she knew ‘joined the Communist Party for freedom’ during the Depression.”<sup>72</sup> An article in the *Oakland Independent* corroborated this sentiment, arguing that the Communist Party, which had done more for African Americans “in the past year than the Socialist Party ever did in 25 years of activity,” had even “Change[d] Ku Kluxers in Dixie into ‘Comrades’ Pledged to a Square Deal for the Negro.”<sup>73</sup> In the year following the stock market crash, the Communist Party recruited over 1,300 African American members, a number that continued to multiply during the heated legal and labor struggles of the thirties.<sup>74</sup>

The Communist Party’s lure of unapologetic radicalism in the realm of social justice did not entice every African American or every organization fighting against racial discrimination. As Crouchett (*et al.*) observes, “The participation of Communists, both black and white, in civil rights actions led white conservatives to attack the entire civil rights struggle as subversive and caused such organizations as the NAACP to exclude individuals and groups with Communist affiliations and radical reputations.”<sup>75</sup> Many BSCP officials—including Randolph, who was a socialist—rejected Communist Party tactics and attempted to avoid such affiliations. C. L. Dellums was rumored by some to be a Communist in the twenties, though he heavy-handedly policed the associations BSCP leaders in his zone had with Communists in the thirties. The rumor of Dellums’s Communist affiliations was probably a result of an attempt in 1928 to mobilize a strike in the Oakland area, during which he became more “entangled with Communist organizers” than Randolph deemed appropriate. Randolph excused Dellums’s alliances “on

<sup>72</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, p. 41.

<sup>73</sup> “Red Movement Succeeding as Socialists Fail,” *Oakland Independent*, 15 March 1930.

<sup>74</sup> Foner, *American Communism*, p. xv.

<sup>75</sup> Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow*, p. 41.



grounds of political naivete" when Dellums "recognized his mistake and pledged continued loyalty to the union and its work."<sup>76</sup>

In the years following this confrontation with Randolph, Dellums's *official* stance toward the Communist Party appears to have become more hard line, though he continued to forge informal working alliances with individual Communists. For instance, in 1936 Dellums took on the role of BSCP guardian of anti-Communist virtue when Charles Upton, president of the Los Angeles BSCP local, endorsed Grove Johnson, a Communist Party candidate. In a letter to Upton, Dellums wrote:

I must say that it is most unfortunate that you publicly indorsed a Communist. Even though our sympathy may be with various peoples and organizations, we cannot publicly indorse or subscribe to everything with which we sympathize. You have never heard of a labor leader indorsing Communist candidates. If one does, he doesn't remain a Labor leader long. . . . I am afraid that some of us don't realize the position that the Brotherhood is now holding. The world to-day has more admiration and respect for the Brotherhood than for any other Negro organization in existence. That naturally has placed its leaders in an enviable position. Whether they know it or not, they are now outstanding men in various communities. They should, therefore, guard their every action and move because they are at all times closely watched.<sup>77</sup>

Dellums was very self-consciously a labor leader in what he perceived to be one of the most respected and admired "Negro organizations." As such, Dellums was willing to put the good of the organization ahead of his own sympathies, and he expected others to do the same.

The conflict between personal sympathies for Communist Party endeavors and the integrity of the BSCP as a non-Communist organization is again revealed in C. L. Dellums's correspondences with Ishmael Flory. In a June 1938 letter to Dellums, Flory stated:

Have you joined the Party yet? All progressives are joining these days and I place you in the forefront of the truly courageous, active, clear thinking progressives. I think that you will subscribe to the thesis that our Party is rapidly becoming a mature political force with clarity, determination, and tactical and strategic leadership. I hardly need to say to you that our Party is not something apart from the progressives, apart from the masses, or apart from the general stream of social currents fighting the forces that day to day threaten the security of the masses and the Negro people.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Harris, *Keeping the Faith*, p. 115.

<sup>77</sup> Dellums to Upton, 5 August 1936 (carton 5), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>78</sup> Flory to Dellums, 18 June 1938 (carton 1), C. L. Dellums Papers.



The Communist Party was particularly attractive to many African American labor leaders—Ishmael Flory, at this time, was an official in the Dining Car Employees' Union—and it was often put forth to potential Party members as a “progressive” force, rather than a revolutionary one. Flory went on to describe the cooperation between black and white Party members:

The recent Convention of our Party, incidentally, indicated something rather interesting. This was the growth of our Party in the south. You would have been impressed to see Negro and white delegates from states like Alabama, Oklahoma, Texas [sic], and Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas and so forth. Browder, National Secretary, emphasized the importance and significance of this event. . . . He emphasized that the struggle for Negro liberation had moved and would continue to move on a higher political plane as a result of that growth.

While the potential of an integrated political “struggle for Negro liberation” appealed to many African Americans during the 1930s, Dellums disregarded Flory's advice. That is not to say that Dellums did not support fellow activists who chose to affiliate with Communists (unless they were BSCP members in his zone); he corresponded and worked closely with Flory, even jointly submitting a resolution to the Central Labor Council of Alameda County to end discrimination in the trade union movement.<sup>79</sup> Dellums also attended lectures given by Communists. He recalled a specific speech given by Gitlow, the Communist candidate for vice president in 1934, who spoke at Tech High School in Oakland. Dellums “love[d] to hear those kind of people talk,” as they were “generally able people; they make good rabble-rousing speech.”<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, Dellums—who was known to cooperate with the CIO-affiliated groups in the Bay Area—was aware that he was working with Communists, but did not let that get in the way

<sup>79</sup> The resolution, “Discrimination Among Workers,” was submitted in February 1938, concluding: “WHEREAS, The recent industrial upheaval in America show the desire of Negro workers to be organized and to fight side by side with their white brothers, and also the disposition and desire of the employing class to utilized Negro workers as a reserve force to hold back the rising tide of a militant labor movement, seeking to establish industrial democracy as we now have political democracy . . . That the Central Labor Council of Alameda County call upon its affiliated Locals that bar Negroes from membership in any way or discriminate against them, to take up the Negro question in their locals for the purpose of harmonizing constitutions, rules and practices to conform with the oft-repeated declarations of the AF of L conventions on equality of treatment of all races within the Trade Union Movement.” Dellums would, however, irritate Flory by putting the word comrade in quotes in his letters. Flory to Dellums, 21 January 1938 (carton 2), C. L. Dellums Papers.

<sup>80</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 30.

Alameda  
County  
Central  
Labor  
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of his main objectives, i.e., doing what was optimal for the BSCP. Dellums stated, "We know that [Communists] played a major role in the sit-in strikes and in helping the CIO get developed. . . . We not only had the handicap that all workers had in the twenties in trying to organize a union, but we had the additional handicap of being Negroes. Therefore, I would accept help from anybody. I knew Commies were helping us at various times, that is, people I believed were Communists."<sup>81</sup> Dellums's pragmatic approach to balancing the efficacy of the union and efforts from left-wing radicals to involve themselves in union organizing echoed the union's official stance as well as Dellum's personal attitude toward the nuances between cooperating and affiliating with the CIO and AFL.

Ultimately, the BSCP was fundamentally different than any white, or even any industrial, union, and Dellums was not solely a "labor leader." The 1930s were a time of coalitions among African American leaders and organizations: the National Negro Congress, the Urban League, and the NAACP often shared leaders. A. Phillip Randolph was president of both the BSCP and the National Negro Congress. Dellums, along with his post as vice-president of the BSCP and BSCP Pacific Zone Supervisor, was vice-president of the Northern California NAACP. Dellums himself stated that the Brotherhood was "more racial than a trade union."<sup>82</sup> In other words, while the BSCP's structure was that of a trade union, its aims were not necessarily those of trade unionists. The union was a vehicle through which African Americans could at once achieve better working conditions and assert the broader "manhood rights" of African Americans and struggle to realize those rights. The BSCP's trade unionism both shaped and was shaped by its struggle against broader racial discrimination. The result was a movement amalgam: a protest

<sup>81</sup> Dellums, *International President*, p. 60.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

BSCP  
+  
Civil Rights



organization grounded in “bread-and-butter” labor issues and a union with a vision of social and economic justice beyond the scope of better hours and higher wages.

The community of Oakland and the leadership of Dellums differed from their northeastern, midwestern, and southern counterparts. In a West Coast city with a relatively small African American population, Oakland leaders faced distinct challenges in labor organization and community development. The conditions of black laborers in Oakland would spawn a different brand of labor leader—one whose lack of a large population base would fuel a political pragmatism that often overlooked personal views and group affiliations to build coalitions for the benefit of the working class.

Unlike many African American leaders during the 1930s, Dellums’s roots were firmly in the working class. He never attended college, was not an ideologue (outside of his stalwart devotion to the cause of labor), and, although he ran a fairly successful pool hall, he did not undercut the aims of labor for the benefit of business or the sensibilities of the middle class (the “parlor stool pigeon brigade,” as he called them). Dellums’s organizational techniques and aims fostered a more tight-knit community, in which entire families were involved in the affairs of the union and everyone was urged to learn about labor issues. Apparently, however, the irony of relegating female Pullman employees to auxiliaries—an eerily similar tactic to the isolation of African American workers into Jim Crow auxiliaries in the AFL—was, at the time, lost on the membership, male and female alike, and auxiliary status upheld prevalent notions of proper female space. Nonetheless, the BSCP did value and benefit from the participation of women, within traditional patriarchal boundaries, which ultimately bonded the community together and gave increased political and social efficacy to the women involved.



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Dellums's insistence on broad community involvement in the BSCP and his political pragmatism during the thirties produced results. During and after World War II, Dellums's community leadership would continue to mature, eventually overshadowing his official role as a labor leader. He would inevitably be more often referred to as a "civil rights" leader. Dellums utilized his prominence as a leader and the trust he had developed within the ranks of the BSCP to reach a wider audience and attain the broader goals that were the enduring substructure of the Brotherhood's unionism. As Dellums recalled, "I knew that in the labor movement I could get an audience." He would later use the platform he gained from the labor movement to agitate for issues not directly linked to labor issues, such as low-cost housing. Dellums would figure prominently in the struggles of war workers and West Oakland residents for affordable housing; he registered African American voters through the Democratic Seventeenth District Citizens' League; and because he "represented a broad network of black interests in Oakland," he became an effective force in city politics.

Dellums's ability to build coalitions in the city of Oakland, as well as the state of California, was perhaps his most potent tool. Dellums's daughter, Marva, aptly observed that his "greatest gift" was an "ability to pull people together. Not only was he able to get the porters who belonged to different organizations to work together for labor rights, but he was able to get the Brotherhood, the Urban League and the NAACP to work together." After the war, Dellums would use his ability to "pull people together" to secure the passage of the California Fair Employment Practices Act, the first such law passed in the country, which created the Fair Employment and Housing Commission. Dellums served on the commission for over twenty-five years, from 1959 to 1985.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Nicole Atkinson, "C. L. Dellums: A Legacy Remembered," *From the Archives*, Northern California Center for Afro-American History and Life (vol. 4, no. 1, Winter 1993).



The work of C. L. Dellums, as well as other East Bay African American leaders who laid their activist foundations during the Depression years, sparked the fuse of protest that would fully ignite after World War II. While many African American leaders bickered over and wavered as to the means and ends of eliminating black subjugation, Dellums remained steadfast: the means were labor unions; the end was economic emancipation. Dellums's willingness and success in cooperating with—and yet remaining independent from—local religious leaders, Communists, and the CIO, “laid the foundation for the civil rights activities that would blossom in the postwar era.”<sup>84</sup> Dellums's pragmatic attention to the needs of labor and his call for the economic emancipation of black workers and their families solidified the African American working-class community of Oakland. This solidarity would serve as the bedrock to the intensifying call for rights—“manhood,” and eventually “civil.”

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<sup>84</sup> Johnson, *Second Gold Rush*, pp. 191, 195-196.



## Appendix A: Black Population Growth in Oakland and Other U. S. Cities.

**Table 1:**

**Black Population in Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, 1900-1945** (Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *Population, 1900-1940: Special Census of San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles*, United States Bureau of the Census, 1945 and 1946).\*

Year	Oakland	San Francisco	Los Angeles
1900	1,026	1,654	2,131
1910	3,055	1,642	7,599
1920	5,489	2,414	15,579
1930	7,503	3,803	38,894
1940	8,462	4,806	63,774
1945	37,327	32,001	133,082

\*Table adapted from Albert Broussard's *Black San Francisco* (1993), Table 1.1, p. 24.

**Table 2:**

**Growth of U. S. Cities and Their Black Populations, 1900-1940** (Source: U. S. Census).\*

City	Total Population		Black Population	
	1900	1940	1900	1940
New York City	3,437,202	7,454,995	60,666	458,444
Chicago	1,698,575	3,396,808	30,150	277,731
Detroit	285,704	1,623,452	4,111	149,119
Seattle	80,671	368,302	406	3,789
Oakland	66,960	302,163	1,026	8,462
San Francisco	342,782	634,536	1,654	4,846

\*Table adapted from Douglas Henry Daniels's *Pioneer Urbanites* (1990), Table 4, p. 18.



## Appendix B: Article by C. L. Dellums in the *Western American*, 14 September 1928.

### Pullman's Dance

A FEW WORDS, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THE DANCE AT MAGNOLIA HALL, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27.

In the last three years A. Philip Randolph, general organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, has addressed some 50 or more big colleges and universities throughout the country. In every instance, according to reliable reports, he has received a most cordial welcome and general approbation among the students and professors as a result of his presentation of the case of the Pullman porter for the right to organize, a living wage, and better working conditions.

Hundreds of labor unions comprising millions of white workers, together with white forums, churches and student conferences, have viewed the fight of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters with great interest and concern. Their questions have indicated their utter surprise and amazement at the apparent ability of Negroes to organize a labor union. Professor Madison Grant in "The Passing of the Great White Race" has attempted to give a color of scientific warrant to the claim that Negroes are incapable of developing trade unions, because they are highly emotional and cannot carry through a struggle which requires sustained application over a period of time. This is pure super[stition]. The Negro is capable of sustained application. But Negrophobists such as Lathrop Stoddard and the above named anti-Negro anthropologist, can be most effectively convinced of the ability of the Negro for organized action when the Negro actually executes and organizes a labor struggle, such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car porters. It is apparent to any one who has viewed the problem even casually that a concrete, tangible, visible, realistic, demonstration of ability for labor organization, such as the porters' union in the face of the most powerful opposition a group of workers, regardless of race, color, creed, has encountered in America, is more convincing than tons of propaganda, when no such actual case of labor organization on a broad scale exists.

Moreover, neither white nor black America ever dreamed that a group of Negro workers had the courage to challenge a corporation as powerful as the Pullman company, which commands hundreds of millions of dollars, and which is directed by the house of J. P. Morgan. This magnificent courage on the part of the porters has placed them in the front rank among the most advanced and enlightened American workers. Negroes everywhere will inevitably receive a greater measure of respect because of the recognized manhood of the Pullman porter.

Besides their courage, they have shown a stick-to-it-iveness, and unshakable will, and bulldog tenacity, in holding fast, that has won admiration of both friend and foe for themselves in particular, and the race in general. The struggle of the porters is eminently significant to students and thinkers on social and racial problems because it stands out as the first all-absorbing and all-encompassing moral struggle members of the Negro race have participated in. A great moral principle, namely: the right of working men to organize, to receive a living wage for a fair day's work, to be relieved of the necessity of begging the public for charity, is here involved.

The porters' fight is a definite and unmistakable challenge to every Negro with any pride of race. It should be the occasion of demonstrating to the world the possibility of all sections of the race uniting on one thing and for one time. It will serve as a warning to those who would seek to divide the race in the future upon a great moral issue or economic question, which is vital to its well-being.

The dance being given Thursday evening, September 27, 1928, at Magnolia Hall, for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, is national in its reaches, and significance. Pullman Porters in every hamlet from California to Florida will be the beneficiaries of the revenue secured from this benefit.

It will help the porters' union to cope with the Pullman company, which has vast financial power as the result of paying the porters starvation wages and working them inhumanely long hours. The porters' wage of \$72.50 a month is ridiculously low, and 400 hours of work a month is outrageous.

It ought to be of interest to the public to know that the leaders of the Pullman Porters' Union are making a definite sacrifice in behalf of the cause.

Most all will be amazed to know that the general organizer, Mr. Randolph, receives no more in pay than any of the other organizers, and that his pay is only \$150 per month. This is a new record of movement of our race so far as the sacrifices of the leaders are concerned in the interest of the rank and file.



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Ladies Auxiliary history  
Also class issues  
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CL Dellums (underlined paper)  
by Molly Hudspet