



Pullman Porters

Grade 6 and up

Curriculum Connections: African American history, Great Migration, Progressive Era/Labor Movement

Pullman advertisement from National Geographic, 1948 (Bill Howes Collection) From *Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class* by Larry Tye (2004).



How many people make a good night's sleep?

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1. Your host, the friendly Pullman Conductor, supervises the other members of the Pullman crew and his greatest concern is a good night's sleep for you. (That's 1.)
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2. Then there's the attentive Pullman Porter who's proud of his art in serving you. He prepares your bed, makes sure you have everything you need, and sees that you're "up" at the time you want to be wakened. (That's 2.)
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3. Before you get on the train, a Pullman Car Cleaner goes over your accommodations "with a fine-tooth comb." She dusts and cleans everything in (and out of) sight—so that you can sleep in pure comfort. (That's 3.)
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4. When you slip between the crisp, clean sheets of that big soft bed, you can thank the Pullman Launderess for those spotless pillow cases and fresh blankets, too. (That's 4.)
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5. The Pullman Repairman also sees to it that you sleep well. He makes sure that all the mechanical parts of your car are working perfectly. (That's 5.)
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6. Finally there's the alert Pullman Inspector who checks every detail before he okays your car. He's the one who's responsible for that wonderful feeling of security you have when you're drifting off to dreamland. (That's 6.)

These are the six people directly responsible for the good night's sleep you get when you "go Pullman." Behind them are office workers, superintendents, electricians, car suppliers, and executives. In all, nearly 30,000 Pullman employees help make sure that some 60,000 Pullman passengers sleep well each night.

And here's a *fact* that helps you sleep. When you "go Pullman" you know you'll arrive, on dependable railroad schedules, right in town, convenient to everything!

Go Pullman
THE SAFEST, MOST COMFORTABLE
WAY TO GET THERE!

© 1948 THE PULLMAN COMPANY



How many people make a good night's sleep?



1. Your host, the friendly Pullman *Conductor*, supervises the other members of the Pullman crew and his greatest concern is a good night's sleep for you. (That's 1.)



2. Then there's the attentive Pullman *Porter* who's proud of his art in serving you. He prepares your bed, makes sure you have everything you need, and sees that you're "up" at the time you want to be wakened. (That's 2.)



3. Before you get on the train, a Pullman *Car Cleaner* goes over your accommodations "with a fine-tooth comb." She dusts and

cleans everything in (and out of) sight—so that you can sleep in *pure* comfort. (That's 3.)



4. When you slip between the crisp, clean sheets of that big soft bed, you can thank the Pullman *Laundress* for those spotless pillow cases and fresh blankets, too. (That's 4.)



5. The Pullman *Repairman* also sees to it that you sleep well. He makes sure that all the mechanical parts of your car are working perfectly. (That's 5.)



6. Finally there's the alert Pullman *Inspector* who checks every detail before he okays your car. He's the one who's responsible for that wonderful feeling of security you have when you're drifting off to dreamland. (That's 6.)

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Go Pullman

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WAY TO GET THERE!**

© 1948 THE PULLMAN COMPANY

Advertisement close up.

Source 3

Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters

The International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids was the first African American labor union chartered by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Pullman porters, dissatisfied with their treatment by the Chicago-based Pullman Company, sought the assistance of A. Philip Randolph and others in organizing their own union, founded in New York in 1925. The new union assigned Milton P. Webster to direct its organizing in Chicago, home to the largest number of Pullman's 15,000 porters.

For African Americans, porter and maid jobs, when supplemented with tips, paid better than many other opportunities open to them, yet less than those jobs on Pullman cars denied to them by their race. Porter and maid jobs also retained African Americans in servile relations to white passengers. Moreover, segregation persisted even in the North, where blacks were limited in where they could spend their stopovers while on the job.

In addition to the often overlooked maids who organized for the union, the wives of porters also assumed an important role in the decade-long struggle for union recognition. Their auxiliary functions and support were significant contributions to the union's efforts. More than half of Chicago's "Inside Committee" were women.

As a black organization, not just a union, the Brotherhood was an important early component of the civil rights movement. Porters distributed the *Chicago Defender* after that black newspaper was banned from mail distribution in many southern states. The Pullman Company's recognition of the union in 1937 and the expansion of Brotherhood membership and activities slowly fractured segregation within the AFL.

In 1978, the decline of the railroad industry led the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters to merge with the much larger Brotherhood of Railway, Airline, Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express, and Station Employees.

[–Eric R. Smith, *Encyclopedia of Chicago*](#)