

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
ATK-09-009

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February 10, 2009

Amtrak Celebrates Black History Month with Special Ceremony Honoring Pullman Porters

Amtrak Employees Recognize Those Who Served Before Them

OAKLAND, CA - Amtrak, in celebration of Black History Month, partnered with the A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum to host a ceremony celebrating the contributions of the legendary Pullman Porters and African-American railroad workers at the Oakland Amtrak Station on Tuesday, February 10, 2009 at 11 am.

Amtrak officials and local dignitaries will gather to honor five porters and dining car waiters who proudly served as far back as the mid-1940s. Honored are Lee Gibson, 98, of Los Angeles, James Smith, 83, of Simi Valley, Samuel Coleman, 80, of Las Vegas, and Troy Walker, 90, and Thomas Gray, 71, of Seattle (biographical information below).

"The celebration is an opportunity for Amtrak's current employees to express their gratitude and recognize the dedication and service of their forebears, the Pullman Porters," said Joseph H. Boardman, Amtrak's President and CEO. "The service of the Pullman Porters often goes under-reported as a part of American history. We celebrate their courageous journey, victorious struggle for equality and contributions to passenger rail travel."

The event will begin at 11 am in the Amtrak Station at Jack London Square, 245 2nd St, Oakland, preceded that morning by a private reception with Amtrak employees. In 2008, Amtrak hosted Pullman Porter Tributes in Washington, D.C. and Chicago.

"It's significant when an organization like Amtrak takes the time to honor those who contributed directly to its own history," said Lyn Hughes, founder of the Chicago-based A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum. "It's also very appropriate as it's the culmination of the effort to create the Pullman Porter Registry. We started the Registry with Amtrak and now we're coming full circle with its completion and the honoring of these great African American men." Ms. Hughes is also author of *An Anthology of Respect: The Pullman Porter National Historic Registry of African American Railroad Employees*.

The Pullman Company, founded by George Pullman, manufactured railroad cars from the mid-1800s into the 20th Century and developed sleeping cars that bore the company's name, Pullman cars. The Pullman Company hired African-Americans to work as porters on board their trains, and these porters became renowned for their outstanding service. Pullman Porters, as they came to be known, were organized into the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph in 1925. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was the first labor union led by African-Americans to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor.

About Amtrak

Amtrak has posted six consecutive years of growth in ridership and revenue, carrying more than 28.7 million passengers in the last fiscal year. Amtrak provides intercity passenger rail service to more than 500 destinations in 46 states on a 21,000-mile route system. For schedules, fares and information, passengers may call 800-USA-RAIL or visit Amtrak.com.

About the A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum

The mission of the A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum is to promote, honor, and celebrate his legacy and contributions made by African-Americans to America's labor history. At our facility, this celebration begins with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, as we educate the public about their legacy and contributions. All activities, past, present and future, are for the purpose of objectives that are inexorably intertwined - the study, preservation, interpretation, and enjoyment of African-American history and culture. The permanent collection displays exhibits which are pertinent to the study of Chicago's Pullman Historic District, the Great Migration, American Labor History, A. Philip Randolph, the Pullman Porters, and the American Civil Rights Movement. For more information, visit aphiliprandolphmuseum.com.

Porter/Dining Car Waiter Biographical Information

Lee Gibson (98-Los Angeles, CA)

According to Lee Gibson, he had no problem in his 38 years of working for both the Union Pacific Railroad and the Pullman Company. For 37 years he served as a chair car porter aboard Union Pacific trains along the West Coast of the United States. During his last year of employment with Union Pacific in 1973, he was afforded the opportunity to be a Pullman Porter until 1974. Along the way he met a smattering of characters including singer and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Kate Smith. Mr. Gibson loved working on the railroad because it allowed him to see the country while affording a better life for him and his family. He moved on to serve aboard Amtrak in its early days and retired shortly thereafter. He became an income tax preparer, but retired from that in 1995.

James Smith (83-Simi Valley, CA)

When he was 18, James Smith became a dining car waiter with the Southern Pacific Railroad and for the next 11 years he served most of Hollywood aboard his train. He and his fellow waiters served with professionalism and courtesy even though they faced hostile racism. Mr. Smith started as a cook and dishwasher, but soon rose through the ranks to become a waiter helping to feed more than 1,000 per day while working the *Daylight* which ran between Los Angeles and San Francisco. He also worked one of the world's finest overnight trains called the *Lark*. Throughout his travels west of the Mississippi River, Mr. Smith met many famous people including John Ireland, Jack Benny, Jack Dempsey and A. Phillip Randolph to name a few. Mr. Smith also served on military trains during World War II which he says was "interesting time." He too served in the Army from 1944 to 1946, stationed on the West Coast. Mr. Smith ended his career with the railroad in 1952 when he began working for Douglas Aircraft.

Samuel Coleman (80-Las Vegas, NV)

Samuel Coleman wasn't a Pullman Porter per say, but had a hand in forming the union between the Pullman Porters in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) and the dining car waiters of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (CBQ) Railroad. For 25 years Mr. Coleman served as a dining car waiter on the CBQ Railroad. In the late 1950s, Mr. Coleman and others sought to gain recognition under the BSCP in order to gain better wages and treatment. They were successful in their efforts. The BSCP then included sleeping car porters and dining car waiters. Today, that union is known as the Transportation Communications International Union which includes most railroad workers. Mr. Coleman is proud that he contributed to advancing workers' and civil rights while serving passengers with excellence.

Troy Walker (90-Seattle, WA)

Troy Walker spent most of his career working the Atchison & Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad as a dining car waiter. From 1944-1971 he served some of the finest meals aboard trains. His more than 30 years of service saw him promoted to dining car supervisor when Amtrak took over passenger railroad operations in the 1970s. He continued to supervise excellent service until his retirement in 1982. Mr. Walker fondly remembers his time of working the railroads. He also remembers serving with Mr. Thomas Jefferson Gray, the father of fellow honoree Thomas Henry Gray.

Thomas Henry Gray (71-Seattle, WA)

A third-generation passenger railroad "Porter," Thomas Henry Gray served as a chair car attendant on the Santa Fe Railroad from 1955-1959. He worked summers as a college student, but it was also a time to join his father and grandfather as they worked the railroads. Mr. Henry's father was a Pullman Porter, while his grandfather was a Train Porter/Brakeman, but they were both members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. He remembers many times of waving to his father and grandfather as their trains passed one another across the Northwest and Southwest. Mr. Gray's father, Thomas Jefferson Gray, worked for the Pullman Company from its Chicago base. Mr. Gray's grandfather, Henry Jones, worked for the Santa Fe Railroad- New Mexico Division from Albuquerque, NM to La Junta, CO. After his service to the Santa Fe Railroad and college, Mr. Gray started working for Boeing in 1961 where he remained for 32 years.