

**THE QUEST FOR "DAD" MOORE:
THEME, PLACE, AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

One of the core themes of the Cypress I-880 Replacement Project is the confrontation between labor and capital in the railroad yards of West Oakland. There, between 1920 and 1930, an African-American named Morris "Dad" Moore, born in slavery, became the first known figure west of the Rockies to organize his fellow workers in their historic fight against the powerful Pullman Corporation. Under the influence of A. Philip Randolph, and inspired by the socialism of the Harlem Renaissance a continent away, Dad Moore joined the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and became the Organizer of its Western Division. Fired from the Southern Pacific railroad yards, Moore set up his own offices, organized in person, and maintained a strategic correspondence with his friend Milton Webster at the Brotherhood's headquarters in Chicago. This paper, based on vital records and on primary document sources, presents new data on Moore's life history and summarizes his efforts and his influence on national affairs. In light of these investigations it is clear that Moore, a patriarch of the African-American labor movement, personifies much that is central to the interpretation of historical archaeology in West Oakland.

This paper introduces the life and work of Morris "Dad" Moore, an African-American worker and labor leader who lived in West Oakland from 1919 to 1930. Moore was born to Lewis Moore and Mildred Turner on March 15, 1854 somewhere in Virginia. At some point before the turn of the century, he moved to Chicago and found work as a sleeping car porter for the Pullman Palace Car Company. By the time that his life ended (in poverty, on January 20, 1930) Moore was a symbol to thousands of African-American workers in the most influential minority labor movement in the United States. Cultural resources are often evaluated in terms of typicality and uniqueness, and if these criteria may be brought to bear upon an individual I hope to show that Dad Moore was in a very important sense both typical and unique.

The other papers on this panel have made clear that the contexts for historical archaeology in West Oakland include both the centrality of labor and transportation to the project area and the local expression of far-reaching reform movements. One of these movements, a transportation workers' campaign, led to the first contract awarded by management to a minority-led trade union. This issue, the national and historic confrontation between African-American sleeping car porters and the Chicago-based Pullman Palace Car Company, was strongly contested in Oakland. From the initial stages of research, the struggle of the Oakland Division of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) has been recognized as one of the core themes of the Cypress I-880 Replacement Project.

The history of the Oakland Division's role in the BSCP had not received the treatment which it seemed to merit until CALTRANS' sponsorship of research for the Cypress rebuild made this report possible. Fortunately, much of Oakland's

role in the BSCP's fight for economic and social justice is recorded in a rich array of primary and secondary documents. Among the sources being consulted are the BSCP files at the Chicago Historical Society, the records of the Pullman Corporation held by the Newberry Library, and the papers of Cottrell Lawrence Dellums at the African-American Museum and Library at Oakland, the files of *The Messenger* and *The Black Worker* along with city directories, cemetery records, county recorder's statistics, and newspaper files (including the Black Newspaper Index at the Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Room).

Before turning to Dad Moore it is necessary to mention two men, George Pullman and Asa Philip Randolph, who shaped the course of Moore's life. From the turn of the century until the onset of World War II, no American economic figure cast a longer shadow over West Oakland than George M. Pullman (1831-1897) who founded the Pullman Palace Car Company in 1867. By the turn of the century his initial investment of \$1,000,000 was worth \$37,000,000 and his Palace Cars ran on three quarters of the American railroad system. Andrew Carnegie said of him, "Pullman monopolized everything. It was well that it should be so. The man had arisen who could manage, and the tools belonged to him" (Carnegie in Buder 1967:15).

Pullman's influence went well beyond mere financial success:

[His] name entered several languages as a near synonym for luxury and comfort. Both here and abroad it became a byword for American business genius. His work was successfully identified with science and social progress. The beauty and elegance of the sleeping

car became a visible symbol of the material promise of American industry and ingenuity (Buder 1967:xi).

After Pullman's death, the company interests were looked after by a board that included R. K. Mellon, Harold S. Vanderbilt, and J. P. Morgan.

Pullman's opposite number was Asa Philip Randolph, the Florida-born son of a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. At the age of 22, Randolph arrived in Harlem in 1911, and attended New York City College (NYCC). During his student years, he heard William D. "Big Bill" Haywood, Elizabeth "Rebel Girl" Gurley Flynn of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and Eugene Debs, who had served a prison term for his opposition to the Pullman Company. Under their influence, and under the teaching of CCNY professors Morris R. Cohen and J. Salwyn Shapiro, Randolph became a Socialist, supporting candidates for office and speaking on street corners in Harlem (Anderson 1972:61). In 1917, with a colleague, Chandler Owen, Randolph became the editor and publisher of *The Messenger*, "The Only Magazine of Scientific Radicalism in the World Published by Negroes."

While *The Messenger* featured theater reviews, poetry, critiques of the educational system, and articles on international (especially African) events, Randolph used his editorials to develop and express his own concept of scientific radicalism. He was an atheist, a Socialist, and made enemies easily. He called the N.A.A.C.P. "the national association for the advancement of certain people," was careful to distance himself from the American Communist Party and its African-American affiliate, the American Negro Labor Conference, and excoriated Samuel Gompers "...and the American Federation for the Perpetuation of Race Prejudice," as he called the A.F. of L. For a time, Randolph made common cause with the Industrial Workers of the World, stating that, "Negroes and the IWW have interests not only in common, but interests that are identical" (*Messenger* October 1919:3). There were no takers on either side. Searching for a winning cause, Randolph looked into the cases of court-martialed African-American soldiers, and wrote an article called "Negroes, Leave the South" in which he exhorted southern readers to, "Come into the land of at least incipient civilization!" (*Messenger* March 1920:2).

In May 1924, the Pullman Palace Car Company's official organ, the *Pullman News* carried the following announcement:

After 23 years of prompt and efficient service, Morris Moore, commonly known as "Dad" was pensioned and placed on the retired list on March 16. He was employed in the Chicago Western district on Dec. 23, 1901 and operated out of that district until April 3, 1919, when he was transferred to San Francisco to take charge of the porters quarters in Oakland, where he remained until his retirement. He should be an example to his fellow porters, as he prides himself on his service record and also that he "laid some aside" for the future and is now able to enjoy his retirement (*Pullman News* May 1924:28).

This may be the first published mention of Dad Moore, who indeed planned to be an example to his fellow porters—though scarcely in a way that the Pullman Company could have foreseen or wished. We do not know when Moore became aware of Randolph or *The Messenger*, but by 1925 sleeping car porters were becoming increasingly militant. Sensing this, Randolph published a manifesto, "The Case of The Pullman Porter" in July of that year and was approached by a group of porters including Ashley Totten and Milton Webster. The immediate result was a meeting in Harlem on August 25 in an auditorium hired from the Imperial Lodge of Elks. Hundreds of porters attended; the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was born that night in Harlem, and two hundred porters joined at *The Messenger* offices the next day.

Along Oakland's Seventh Street, at the end of the transcontinental lines, it was the policy of the Pullman Company to provide sleeping quarters for porters who were required to remain on call. Dad Moore was in charge of these arrangements, housing the porters in two converted sleeping cars in the Southern Pacific yards. A porter described the scene to Randolph's biographer, Jervis Anderson:

Dad Moore didn't have nothing but a pint of moonshine. He was in retirement. They gave him the job of taking care of two old sleeping cars where the porters stayed. He took care of those cars, woke the men up, and saw that they got on the job.... He preached Brotherhood to every man he saw coming in and out of the railroad yard in Oakland. He and the boys would share a bottle of moonshine and he would preach Brotherhood. If you wasn't a Brotherhood man you had a hard time getting in and out of his quarters. He worshiped Randolph (Anderson 1972:176).

While Dad Moore worshiped Randolph, (and it seems no exaggeration to say that he did), the Pullman Company viewed the BSCP as a radical menace. Within a few months of the Harlem meeting, Moore had been put out of his sleeping cars. He responded by opening up his own operation, to provide housing for porters and secure a base of operations for the BSCP. He was able to rely on the porters who had already identified themselves with the Brotherhood, and especially on his friendship with the BSCP Vice-President Milton Webster in Chicago. It has been asserted that the Pullman corporation revoked Moore's \$15 monthly pension, although the company records indicate that it was paid until his death. In any case, Moore's independent rooming house and office on Wood Street became the Oakland base for the BSCP. On February 15, 1926, the 72-year-old African-American labor organizer wrote a letter from his office in West Oakland to his headquarters in Chicago:

Mr M P Webster

Sir I am glad to here what a big jumb the Brotherhood is making. I am Doing all I can for the cause. I would like you to send me some Aplacion Blanks as I has only one left be Shure to Send them soon as you get this leter.

Hoping to here from you as Soon as you get this and let me no When mr Randolph will be here.

from your true friend an Brother Dad Moore

519 Wood Street
Oakland, Cal

[BSCP Papers, Part One, Reel One. Note: Moore's original spelling and capitalization are used throughout this paper.]

This letter is the beginning of Moore's correspondence with Vice-President Webster, a series of reports and replies written between February, 1926 and June, 1928. This exchange of letters forms the most complete picture we have of Moore's work for the BSCP. Although these letters, 28 from Moore in all, cannot be quoted extensively here, they are being transcribed and annotated as a block for part of the project work. They present a unique picture of early labor history in the western United States. Time and again, Moore writes of his efforts to keep the signed membership active and up to date with their dues. At times his tone is full of battle rhetoric, at times he complains of being deserted by the porters. There are frequent and desperate appeals for funds. When the Brotherhood was on the point of being evicted from its offices, Webster took Moore's case directly to Randolph, who supplied funds and wrote to reassure Moore personally.

Moore's most important work during the years 1926-1928 was to dissuade the Oakland porters, BSCP members or not, from voting for the proposals put forward by the Pullman Company for a so-called "Employee Representation Plan," under the auspices of the company-line Pullman Porter's Benevolent Association. Rejection of this plan was a crucial first step in the BSCP's efforts to be recognized as the legitimate bargaining agent for all porters. Moore argued against the plan tirelessly. The issue had national importance, and adherents of the Pullman plan were branded as "yellow dogs." Moore's letters to Webster, and reports which he sent to be published in *The Messenger* stress his opposition and his pride in the Oakland men's solidarity. Moore knew well that the issue could become violent. The Pullman Company knew it also. Company files of "BSCP Propaganda" include this from 1926:

Read this paper. We are no longer slaves. Our union is backed up by the U.S. Gov. Board and we will make you pay us mo money. We will throw inspec-tor Rorrison off the train some night. Also Pig Bacon. I write as all powters feel. A Powter NY Dist."

Other letters of intimidation threatened death to "yellow dog" porters and were signed "The Black Klan."

In 1926 Randolph arrived in Oakland during a national organizing tour and met Moore, probably for the first time. He described the meeting 25 years later:

[We] were met by that Grand Old Man, Old Dad Moore, a tall, raw-bony, plain, blunt, hulk of a man, far past three-score years and ten, with his stern eyes flashing the fires of revenge, much in the mold of the old prophet Elijah, whose high mission was to direct

the Israelites to the path of Yaweh...and to revenge their oppressors. In his rough and homely fashion he hurled curses upon the heads of the Pullman oppressors and literally embraced the Brotherhood leaders who came preaching a strange doctrine of the unity of the porters and equality of black men (BSCP 25th anniversary pamphlet).

By the time of this meeting, Moore signed up a young porter named C.L. Dellums. Dellums, who was to succeed Moore in Oakland, met Randolph privately and became very active nationally with BSCP affairs. Dellums became Moore's "Field Agent" and was soon fired along with 45 other porters. Together, Moore and Dellums ran the Oakland office. They were constantly watched and sometimes infiltrated by "stool pigeons." For example, one of Randolph's confidential telegrams to Moore found its way promptly into Pullman Company files, where it still remains.

Dad Moore relocated the BSCP office to 1716-18 Seventh Street, with sleeping quarters above a saloon and an office downstairs. While a Pullman official, O.W. Snoddy, kept tabs on the BSCP, Dellums took over more and more responsibility. Moore wrote increasingly urgent, sometimes desperate letters to Webster. The BSCP was under attack from the Pullman Company, from many less radical Black leaders, and especially from the American Negro Labor Conference. This group (since Randolph had made his peace with Gompers' successor, Samuel Green) missed no chance to characterize Randolph as a pawn of the A.F. of L.

One of Moore's final letters to Webster expresses the situation well:

oakland 6-22 1928

Mr Webster old pal I only an old man but I will Die before I will go against the Brother Hood an the [17 June?] I was in A meeting of the Cominist. the Speaker said that it was a clare Sell out to Mr Green. I listen to his talk then I got up and said that I was an old man 75 years old and I Daird eny one in the Sity of Oakland or the State of California to say my hands was tainted with a half peny and it went for Mr Randolph for I would stand by my leader it it cost my life I told them I would Die in the Streets before I would go against my leader not that I would wade in blood up to my nees and [...illegible] I told them I did not give a Dam [illegible] this was a late Day for Mr Randolph to Sell out for he could not get nothing now. I told Smith to tell you what my [illegible] said in the Barber Shop. I am working under hard [strides?] you all Dont know the State I am in I am in Hard suctionstants but I will Die before I would go back on the Brother Hood. I will tell you mor in my nex leter this man that is with me I told him to write to mr Randolph and I would [sine?] for both of us but he told me I will rite later for you he is fiting for him Self but I am fiting for all I want you to tell him that he is under me and to understand that he is not to run

this office by his Self for it will do him a lot of good [illegible] your old pal organizer Dad Moore.

There is no way to be certain, but it is probable that the reference to "this man that is with me" concerned Dellums. Moore and Dellums, very different men, may sometimes have clashed. Moore's health failed rapidly, but he was able to travel to Chicago for the first national BSCP convention in 1929. When the delegates sat for their group portrait, they gave Moore the obvious place of honor. Four months later he was dead of cancer.

Dellums was present on the historic day when the Brotherhood sat down with the Pullman Company to sign the strike settlement. Moore lived to see none of it. His old office on Wood Street is now a Postal Service parking lot, and the BSCP 7th Street office is a liquor store. Moore, after a battle with cancer, died on January 20, 1930 and was buried by the Brotherhood in Evergreen Cemetery. Today there is no headstone to mark his grave. Randolph wrote Moore's obituary in *The Black Worker*:

All Pullman Porters...will mourn the passing of Dad Moore.... He was relentless and determined in his advocacy of the rights of porters to organize a bonafide union.... Despite the fact that he received a pension from the Pullman Company he was fearless in his denunciation of the injustices and wrongs practiced by the company on the men.... When we first visited Oakland he exclaimed, "I will go down with the ship if necessary, I will fight on regardless of the cost and

as long as life lasts I will hold the banner of the Brotherhood high in the breeze. [He] was the noblest Roman of them all.... He has fought a good fight. He has kept the faith. He has never bowed to Baal.... (*Black Worker* February 1930).

Thus, we have seen various pictures of Dad Moore. He spurned the role of model Pullman Company retiree, one in which he could have been comfortable. Randolph cast him as a working class hero, and even though some of his remarks about him seem to make Moore what we would today call a "poster boy," he was aware and respectful of Moore's genuine standing. The American Negro Labor Conference saw him as a dupe of the American Federation of Labor. Some of his fellow porters probably saw him as a drunk, or as an anachronism. The dust having settled, Moore takes his place as a visionary and courageous American worker, whose life spanned the Civil War and World War I, and who emerges as a patriarch of African-American labor.

Note

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