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Interview

of: Troy Brown [State Sen.]

by: Geneva Carter

date: 1986 July 2

Q What year were you born?

A I was born in ah,... 1922.

Q Were you born in or out of state?

A Out of state.

Q What state was that?

A South Carolina, a little town called Lynchburg, South Carolina.

Q Did you attend school?

A In South Carolina, some in North Carolina.

Q What was the name of the school in South Carolina?

A Well, I went to Lynchburg High School and I went to Harris City Country Town. We could only go as high as the ninth grade when I was a student there. My mother also taught at school and my father was a blacksmith. In addition to that in order to make a living in a poor county down in South Carolina, we were sharecroppers.

There were 7 children in the family, And my father had to take on sharecropping to help support the family.

Q When you were in school, what trade did you take up?

A Well, I really didn't take up a trade, I did print very well, printing, that was a gift. I could do the shadow printing and all and I just forget. My mother was also a teacher, you know, in the school, but she never taught me, and I'm glad of it, because she was tough. She always said if I ever teach you, you're not going to make me ashamed. So, I'm glad she never taught me. And my father was also a blacksmith and he had to take on sharecropping because of the small amount of money my mother was making as a teacher and he as a blacksmith.

Q Did you attend college?

A After I came to Baltimore, I finished high school and I also took a course in labor and industry at New York University.

Q And after college what was your first job?

A Well, when I first came to Baltimore my first job was shining shoes and, of course, I got job at the sugar refinery and I was too young, and they wouldn't — they fired me. And then I started to do other jobs, like waiting tables, dry cleaner, things like that. I went down to Pennsylvania Railroad Station one day and I saw the Pullman porters coming through and they were standing out on the platform receiving passengers and it seemed like they didn't have much work to do, not that I didn't work, but I just decided I wanted a porter's job.

Q	What year did you start working for Pullman porters?
A	I started work with the Pullman porters in 1941, although I had to put my age up because I was supposed to be 25; I started at 18. Of course, they caught up with me a little later on, they found my age out, but they didn't fire me. But they did catch up with me and I had to send back to my home state for my birth certificate, and they found out that I had told a lie. The superintendent said it was just a little white lie, so he didn't fire me. And I stayed with the Pullman Company.
Q	What are some of your hobbies?
A	Well, I have very many. Baseball, football, working with athletes, working with many of the athletes in Baltimore when they first started getting blacks in football and baseball. I worked with them in places around the state. I sort of took over between they got the agents, I would talk to the manager and the owners. I was sort of an in-between person. So I, because my hobby was baseball, well, I did the same thing with baseball and football. And I get to know all of the baseball players, both locally and nationally. That was my main hobby, and I always like to talk to and help young people out. I have always tried to stick up, hold up for young people. I have faith in them. I have two children of my own and they have done very well and I believe that most young people will do the same thing if they really buckle up their seat belt, they'll do all right. Just know that you have to do it.
Q	How long did you work as a porter?
A	Fifteen years.
Q	What was the name of the company?
A	Pullman Company. Now the Pullman Company is a separate company from the railroads. You see, the railroads just buy the Pullman cars, you know, hooked onto the trains. But the Pullman Company was a separate company all together from the railroad company. So, the Pullman Company they built their own cars, they operated, they hired the Pullman porters, and it had nothing to do with the railroads, only we they were just rented out to the railroads and the railroad just pulled the cars. We were not working for the railroad, we were working for the Pullman Company.
Q	What was the name of the railroad that was pulling these cars?
A	Well, all of the railroad companies, there are many railroads... the Pennsylvania, the B&O, the C&O. the Southern, the Union Pacific, Northern Pacific, Great Northern. All the railroads. I just sort of jumped around the southern seaboard. All those railroads are Amtrak now, and the Pullman just were carried on those particular trains.
Q	What were some of your duties as a porter?

A	<p>Well, my duties, your main duties were you took care of the passengers. First of all, Pullman was the first class section of the trains. Pullmans were the part of the train where the big shots rolled. We could, it was nothing to see a president of a company like I had some movie stars on the train one time, and at one time, many times, Mrs. Ford, the younger Fords' mother, and Harvard Firestone and alot of people just to mention a few.</p> <p>So then, my job was to go down in the afternoon, we had like you call a reporting time. In advance of the time the trains were to leave the station. And we would go down and get the car ready and be ready to what we called receive passengers when we got down to the station. The passengers come up and you had a number on your card in the window, car 96, car 97. And when the passengers ordered a ticket, it had the car number on it. So they would know when they got down to car 97, this was the car, berth two or berth three. So all of that information was on the ticket when they came down. They would say, "porter, I am in car 79, and I have berth so and so, I have berth so and so," So I would just take the bag and they would follow me and I would show them the space. And then in many cases, the train leaving out early - in fact we used to leave Detroit at 6 o'clock, they would just see their space and would go back to the dining car, the club car. You wouldn't see them anymore until it was time to go to bed. So that's what I did.</p>
Q	What was your reactions when you had stars on the train?
A	<p>Well, it was no reaction because it was something of a common thing, because we had everybody on the train. Sometimes we had what we call a real bigshot, they would send you a telegram, to say so and so is riding such and such a space, so they would say look out for so and so. A big time movie star or somebody. They would send you information in advance and say Mrs. Ford will be in bedroom so and so. You would know that it was Mrs. Ford, and there would be special service, although I would say all of our service was special.</p>
Q	How much did you earn?
A	<p>Well, when I went on the railroad in 1941, my salary was \$135 a month. Now, prior to that, and prior to the brotherhood, that was the brotherhood of sleeping car porters organization, organized in the '40's, so they could get decent wages and working conditions. So, prior to that the porters were making like \$55 a month. And they had to work as much as 400 hours a month for \$65 prior to.</p>
Q	How did you. how did being a porter help you in life?
A	<p>Well, it helped a great deal because it is a great experience. You get a chance to meet people. You get a chance, like when you are running what we call "extra" and especially during World War II, we hauled a lot of troops and you would travel all over the country. You had a chance to go to, as a matter of fact, I've been in every state of the union and almost every large city. So, when you would get in in the morning, we would check in with the superintendent and he would tell you to report back maybe late that afternoon. So you had a chance.</p>

	<p>I remember the first time I went to Hollywood and Los Angeles. And Hollywood is right outside of Los Angeles. That was in 1941. We got in there 8:00 o'clock in the morning. I checked in and the superintendent told me to be back at 6:00 o'clock. So I had all day. The first thing I did, I caught a bus and went to Hollywood. I had one of the tours and then I walked around and went to Beverly Hills and just ran into movie stars all over the street.</p>
Q	<p>Who was your superintendent, what was his name?</p>
A	<p>Well, our superintendent here was named, the first one was named Dudley. And of course he retired and up until they abolished the office, there was Francis.</p>
Q	<p>How did you feel about having to sneak around, holding union meetings when you were on the job? And did you organize at these meetings that were not supposed to even be held?</p>
A	<p>Well, first of all, the Pullman porters, as far as back in 1909, the conditions were so bad on the railroad, they were trying to get somebody, find somebody to organize them into a union. So they. . .</p> <p>N. Randolph was born in Florida and ah, Crescent City, Florida, and his father was a Methodist minister. At the age of 18, he migrated to New York and he opened a business up there because a lot of blacks migrated to New York at that time and with no skills, or anything so he opened something like "Blue Chip—In" back then, but these were grown people who came up from the South. They had no skills, of any kind. So he and another fellow by the name of Chandler Owens opened up this training center for blacks in Harlem.</p> <p>And of course he, Chandler Owens and Nathan Randolph, started a magazine called the <i>Messenger</i>. It was sort of a radical magazine. The Pullman porters read the magazine and they heard about Randolph. There were other fellows that came in, organizing, but they sold them out. So they asked Mr. Randolph to come over and organize. Things were so tough then, the Pullman Company was so great in Chicago until then, they tried to, as a matter of fact, back up a little. When Mr. Randolph decided that he was going to take this on, the first meeting he had, that was in August 1925. He held it in the Elks Hall. He came in and the place was packed and jammed.</p> <p>First of all, when the Pullman Company found out that Mr. Randolph had started this union, then they started what they call a company union. That was a union to keep them from joining the brotherhood and that was controlled by the company. Of course, they didn't better the conditions. You know, loyalty to the company. So when they started to organize the fellows who belonged to the company union, they were what we would call today stool pigeons. You have heard that phrase. Alright. So, they would take names of the porters who were signing up at this, what they call the Randolph movement. And they would turn the names into the Pullman Company. And they would be fired. So, when Mr. Randolph called that first meeting he said, now, I'm going to come in and I'm going to call this meeting and I don't want a porter to speak, ask a question, or say anything. So he came in, the hall was packed and he sang the opening hymn, Union Men be Strong. He spoke, I mean he gave the invocation after he sang this song. And then he spoke and he sang the closing hymn and he gave the benediction. No one spoke in that meeting.</p>

	<p>He took 12 years to organize the Pullman porters. From 1925 to 1937. And you ask whether the porters were afraid. Well, during that 12 year period with the so called stool pigeons turning people's names in, 500 porters lost their jobs. 500 lost their jobs in that 12 year period. So finally Mr. Randolph got, they had this meeting and when the Pullman Company found out he had enough votes. they sent him a blank check in 1937 and said put any amount up to \$1,000,000 on this check to call your men off and not organize this union. He didn't put anything on it. Should he have put anything on it? To sell his porters out? So, what he did, he took a photograph copy of this check and sent it back to the Pullman Company. And he said negro pride is not for sale. And he sent the check back and he exposed Pullman Company. So this fellow that had voted for the brotherhood, he was fired immediately. So, that's how the brotherhood came about. And it was great intimidation of the fellows, and we did lose 500 over that period.</p>
Q	<p>Senator Burley has a picture that he might want to ask you about. Now, you haven't had questions on that picture, and I'm kind of going to put you on the spot. Why don't you let her ask a question about that picture and see what you can do?</p>
Q	<p>Which one of these are you?</p>
A	<p>That's my younger days.</p>
Q	<p>This is in 1945?</p>
A	<p>That's right.</p>
Q	<p>Who are the rest of them?</p>
A	<p>That's Mr. Randolph, that's A. Phillip Randolph right there in 1945. That was taken in a house over on Edmondson Avenue. When I was elected president of the brotherhood, I was the youngest president in the nation. We represented in the whole set up of the brotherhood, we represented people all over the United States, Canada and Mexico. So, I was the youngest president in the whole outfit. And ah, this fellow here was what they call the Eastern Zone supervisor.</p>
Q	<p>What's his name?</p>
A	<p>His name is B. F. McLaren. He would travel with Mr. Randolph from Boston to Miami and that was the Eastern zone. As a matter of fact, I saw him last week in New York. He is 80 years old. Mr. Randolph was 97 when he died in 1979. Our headquarters was in New York. This fellow was my secretary/treasurer. His name is John Merritt. He just retired about three years from the railroad there. You see, the railroads could pull the Pullman Company. Prior to that Mr. Randolph could see that some day the railroads would take over the Pullman Company, so he negotiated what they call the Randolph/Wolf agreement and that was with the railroads. That the railroads should take the sleeping cars, the Pullman cars over. That these fellows like John Merritt would be kept their jobs hold. You know what kept hold means? That you keep all of your benefits and just like if you are not going over. You don't get that particular work in industry and other places. A new company comes in and takes over, this particular company, then you have to start off as a brand new employee. Let's say if you had 20 years service, and another company comes in and takes over, then you start off brand new. Like, just</p>

	<p>like you were just starting. Let's say if you had worked up to 3 weeks vacation and as you started as a new employee with the salaries at minimum, and all of that happens when a new company comes in. So, having the Randolph/Wolf agreement. railroads took over, and they took them over as a hold over.</p> <p>This fellow was the chairman of our entertainment committee. His name was Guy Bailey. Now, this by the way, is Mr. Randolph right as he signed that agreement in 1937. See this picture, this is dated 1937. This was right after he signed the contract with the Pullman Company so the porters gave him a miniature Pullman car with his name on it. And that Pullman car hung in his office until he died. He kept that until he retired and he kept that in his office.</p> <p>Now this is what you call an agreement book that when you negotiate a contract, all the rules, these are the rules and regulations that you go by. Then after you decide by vote, the Pullman Company and Mr. Randolph, that covers all the agreements, all the porter agreements. If you violate from the rules, then you are suspended. Of course the Pullman Company had a book of rules, this is an agreement, but they had a book of rules. They had their own book of rules and they got penalized for their book of rules because they were contrary to the agreement. We had protection. But those other guys, the other fellows who fought against Mr. Randolph, they didn't have any agreement they didn't have any protection. They could be fired at will.</p>
Q	Senator Brown, what school did you attend?
A	Well, I stated earlier that I attended school in South Carolina and then I came to Baltimore and of course I could only go as high as 9th grade. I went to night school here and got my high school degree and then I went to New York University and got a degree in labor and industry.
Q	Could you tell me why only 9th grade?
A	Well, that's what it was, it was the highest we could go at that time.
Q	Was the quality of education there good?
A	Well, I would say yes. It was an all black school, segregated. Like it was here at one time.
Q	I understand that you were a Pullman porter? At that time, were you still in school?
A	No, I was out.
Q	Are you married?
A	Yes, sir. I have two children. My daughter is a teacher in Westchester County New York. My son is the Vice-Mayor of Annapolis.
Q	When you moved to Baltimore did you ever live around North Avenue?
A	Not when I first moved here, but I later moved up in this area and I know the area very well. As a matter of fact, I gave the first, held the first banquet over at Wilson's. When they turned the restaurant over, well they turned it over to blacks, you know, the whites just stopped going.

	<p>I had this banquet, I think it is '59, upstairs and the purpose of the banquet was as I said earlier, that I worked with the ballplayers, the baseball and football players. In 1959 when the Baltimore Colts won the championship, they had a big dinner downtown honoring the Colts and you know, the people uptown, in this area, the blacks, they didn't have money to go down there to this banquet. So I decided to have a banquet uptown. So I had the banquet over at Wilson's. I had quite a few players, Lenny Moore, and then I had some of the, Jim Parker and others, some white players, and officials, and Mayor D'Allesandro. And I had Lenny Johnson who pitched for the Orioles, and some more of the ballplayers there. Jackie Robinson came down and spoke for me that night, that first banquet that was held over there at Wilson's.</p>
Q	<p>(Cannot decipher)</p>
A	<p>Well, we had certain neighborhoods in 1959. Well, a little earlier than that they, when blacks first started moving out this way, they came up this way, but moving out, they couldn't go past North Avenue. It was great problems when they tried to move out. I'm just a little over the other side of North Avenue, I'm on Baker Street. I'm still in the ghetto. (Laughter).</p>
Q	<p>Where the results of the, ah, being a porter for the Pullman Company positive or negative.</p>
A	<p>It was very positive, as I said, I learned a lot of things. And went a lot of places. Every night, when I look at television, I see some City that I was, I mean some cities that you never think of, but I see some place that I, some particular place.</p>
Q	<p>Moving on into politics, what made you become interested in politics?</p>
A	<p>Well, this man here, A. Philip Randolph, urged me to run. Now I was working in politics and worked with Senator Verda Welcome and others, Victorine Adams. Our headquarters was over top of the Met Theatre. That's where our headquarters were at the time. And of course, when I was approached to run in 1962, I just didn't want to be a part of politics. So when I wouldn't run, the organization went looking for somebody with a name.</p> <p>First of all, I was very active in the civil rights movement. Through A. Philip Randolph, I worked with the NAACP. I was very well known, so I want to tell you the thing about getting into politics, you got to get out and do some volunteer work, got to get to be known, join up with groups, I mean good groups. You have to try to sort of pick your groups that you join, because some fellows and some groups, they talk bad and say a lot of things that mean nothing. So sort of pick your groups, your people. Do you go to church?</p>
Q	<p>Yes, sir, Sharon Baptist.</p>
A	<p>Sharon Baptist.</p>
Q	<p>On Stricker Street</p>
A	<p>You are going to have a new minister over there. So you had a very good church over there, so you could find out, talk to your pastor, talk with some people. Where do you live?</p>

Q	1430 Presstman Street. Right across the Street from Sharon Baptist. In the same block.
A	<p>Well, you are in my district. You're in the 39th, which makes you in my district. Well, when I first started to run, I had a name and I was known. They wanted me to run and I wouldn't. I wouldn't run. So they picked a young man by the name of Clarence Mitchell. (Laughter) Because I wouldn't run, they used his family name, Mitchell, so they asked him to run and that was 1962. So then they came around again in 1966 and I sort of changed my mind and I ran in 1966. I wish I had brought this, I started to bring this brochure, the type of legislature and bills that I had passed. I passed a bill that senior citizens could ride the bus for half—fare.</p> <p>One of my bills. All of my passed legislation, I usually put in there consumer education sentence and all of the minimum wage laws for the State of Maryland I passed. That was my campaign promise in 1966 that I would introduce legislation to bring the minimum wage up to \$1.00. Minimum wage in Baltimore and the State of Maryland was \$.60 at the time. I enacted that bill and I had another bill dealing with State employees and I (can't decipher)...</p>
Q	Who were the political leaders that influenced you?
A	There were no political leaders particularly, I was a leader in the civil rights movement on my own. I worked with some very good black folks. As I stated Mr. Randolph encouraged me to go into politics because at one time he ran for Attorney General of New York State and he got over 200,000 votes, but he was not a real politician. He encouraged me to get into it. And I figured I could do more for people if I got involved.
Q	How long have you been a state senator?
A	This makes it 20 years, not a senator, not a senator. I've just been a senator for four years, but I was in the House for sixteen years.
Q	Who did you beat?
A	Well, I beat Senator Welcome. Well, how that came about, we were in the same organization. She told me that she was retiring and had told me to go ahead and get ready to run. See I could have run for the senate a long time before that. Because Senator Welcome and I sort of, we didn't see eye to eye on certain issues. I was more, consumer oriented than she was, so she told me to go ahead and get ready. And then after I filed, she decided not to run. So that was quite a treat to beat her, because she was there for 20 years.
Q	What is the average day like being a state senator?
A	As a state senator, I represent this total district which starts at Edmonclson Avenue and goes out Hilton Street and Wabash and winds around that way and then comes back in to Belvedere, so I take in Sinai Hospital and I come out to Provident Hospital and come down Greenspring Avenue and take in all of Druid Hill Park. As a matter of fact, I have 96,000 people in my district for whom I am responsible.
Q	Do they treat you any different there?

A	<p>No, the only difference is I have more responsibility. Because we have a state senator and three delegates in the same district. And by my being the senator, the delegates, of course, they work independently. But I am the senator and they are the delegates. One of the differences in the legislature, it' s just like the Washington senator and a congressman. All of the appointments that the governor makes we have to confirm appointments, and you don't do that in the House of Delegates, you don't do that.</p> <p>I enjoy it. I have always worked around politics, as a matter of fact it is a little ahead of your time. In 1963 when they had the march in Washington. I was chairman and organizer for the City of Baltimore. For the 1963 march. Of course all of that was Mr. Randolph, he prepared for all of that.</p> <p>Then of course earlier than that, 1958-'59, we had a youth march in Washington and I was chairman and organizer of that. Prior to that we had in '57 we had a prayer pilgrimage. What we did back in '57 was all religious program. We did talk about civil rights and so forth. We went over there and we had a big pray for the enactment of some civil rights bills. I will never forget we had the prayer pilgramage with Dr. Martin Luther King and other religious heroes and Mr. Randolph who was the head of all these programs, including the march on Washington. He started all of these programs and made his headquarters 217 West 125th Street. We had several on the platform, we had legislators and congressmen. Sammy Davis, Jr. came down there. He came down there on his own. He was not invited, not being slighted, but it was a religious program. He came down on his own to participate and Mr. Randolph told him he was sorry, that it was a religious program.</p>
Q	What was the name of the political party?
A	<p>Democrats. I believe in the two party system, but blacks don't get elected in the Republican party because there are not that may registered Republicans around.</p> <p>You only get to be a Republican when you get rich. Even blacks.</p>