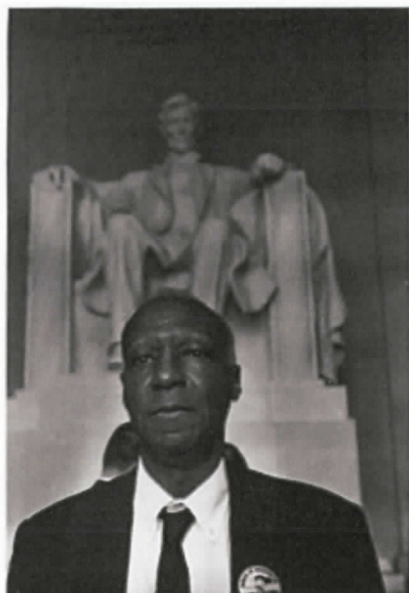


the subservient black man. Some historians have argued that the access to jobs as Pullman porters helped create the foundation for the black middle class, but for many workers at the time the work was degrading, required long hours, and paid far too little. In August 1925, five Pullman porters formed the BSCP in New York City. They were inspired by a growing labor-based black protest politics led by a “new crowd” of African American activists unsatisfied with the existing interracial, middle-class civil rights and social work groups. The porters called on New York socialist A. Philip Randolph (Figure 9) to lead their union drive. For twelve years, Randolph and the men and women organizing for the BSCP struggled to overcome resistance from the Pullman Company and skepticism toward unions in the black community. The Pullman Company bought support from black leaders, especially in its home city of Chicago, by donating money to local black organizations. The support worked, and the BSCP found that African Americans in Chicago not only distrusted unions because of their history of racial exclusions, but also saw labor protests as disreputable and perceived the Pullman Company to be the friend of the black community.<sup>23</sup>



[Click to view larger](#)

*Figure 9.* “Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. [A. Philip Randolph, Organizer of the Demonstration, Veteran Labor Leader who Helped to Found the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, American Federation of Labor (AFL), and a Former Vice President of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)].” U.S. Information Agency, August 28, 1963. Record Group 306, Still Picture Branch, U. S. National Archives (#542064).

The BSCP found the 1930s a much more productive period. Growing militancy of the labor and civil rights activism among the unemployed in the early 1930s, in the CIO’s interracial unions, and among black railroad dining car employees and “red caps” (luggage porters at train stations) all fostered a black working-class alignment with the labor movement. In addition, New Deal labor laws created opportunities to break down resistance from the AFL and the Pullman Company. The BSCP aligned with longstanding civil rights leaders in Chicago, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett,