

# TRAINMEN SOCIAL CLUB

## The Mitchell "Mitch" White III Memorial Scholarship

### 2026 Winning Essay

#### A Granddaughter's Reflection on Railroad Legacy

**By Jaylin McCoy**

***Granddaughter of Retired Railroad Engineer De'Andryl "Dee" Danner***

Black railroad porters played a crucial role in shaping modern Black professional life. Through their work with the Pullman Company, they secured stable incomes during a time when few opportunities were available to Black men. Their earnings helped build the Black middle class, allowing families to purchase homes, educate their children, and create opportunities for future generations.

In 1925, the porters formed the **Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters**, led by **A. Philip Randolph**, establishing the first successful Black labor union in the United States. Their fight for fair wages, dignity, and equal treatment laid the foundation for modern labor rights and helped fuel the Civil Rights Movement.

Today, their legacy lives on through Black professionals who advocate for workplace equity, build generational wealth, and create opportunities for those who follow. Their contributions extended far beyond serving passengers on trains—they helped build economic stability, strengthen organized labor, and establish a blueprint for advancement that continues to influence professional life today.

My grandmother, who worked for the railroad for 37 years, built an extraordinary career as an African American woman in the industry. Throughout her career along the Northeast Corridor, she held numerous leadership positions and was among the first female Rules Instructors in Washington, D.C. In 2021, she retired as a **System General Trainmaster** in Wilmington, Delaware, where she oversaw the certification of locomotive engineers.

As her granddaughter, the railroad has always held a special place in my life. Every year, we traveled to Florida by train, creating memories that strengthened both our bond and my appreciation for rail travel. In 2019, we embarked on an unforgettable cross-country journey together, traveling from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, Memphis, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, and back home again. That experience became a living testament to the legacy she built through her career in rail transportation.

For me, this legacy is deeply personal. When I think about the Pullman porters, I don't simply see history—I see the foundation that made my grandmother's journey possible, and, in turn, my own. Their resilience lives in her story, and her story lives in me. I grew up watching her move with confidence in spaces where she may not always have been expected, yet she never allowed that to define her. She showed me what it means to lead with strength, grace, and quiet authority.

What stands out most to me is not only what she accomplished, but how she carried herself throughout her career. There is a quiet pride in knowing that her work mattered—that she helped shape an industry while opening doors for those who would come after her. Witnessing her example firsthand has influenced the way I view my own future. She taught me that success is measured not only by personal achievement, but by the opportunities we create for others and the legacy we choose to leave behind.

Traveling across the country with her in 2019 deepened that understanding. As we moved from city to city, I realized the railroad represented far more than transportation. It symbolizes connection,

history, opportunity, and progress. Sitting beside her throughout that journey, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride knowing she had contributed to something much greater than herself—and that I am directly connected to that legacy.

Because of her, I do not see limits—I see responsibility. I feel a responsibility to pursue my goals with purpose, to carry forward the values she demonstrated, and to honor the path created by those who came before me. Her journey reminds me that I am capable of more than I sometimes realize and that I have a duty to continue pushing forward—not only for myself, but for those whose sacrifices made my opportunities possible.

*"Bridging the Gap. Restoring the Legacy."*

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