



George Canada Oral History Interview, August 19, 1983

Title

“George Canada Oral History Interview”

Date

August 19, 1983

Location

Location Unknown.

Summary

George Canada worked on the railroad for 41 years. In this brief interview he describes the differences between waiters, cooks, and porters and says the work was enjoyable and he was treated fairly.

Interviewee

George Canada

Interviewer**Website**

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh29/canada/>

Transcript

Interviewer: Could you answer Mr. Brown's question again about the difference between the waiters and the cook and then the porters? Was there a difference in the way that you guys treated one another or in how the railroad treated you?

George Canada: Well the cooks and waiters, they worked for the railroad company; I worked for the Pullman Company, and the railroad company provided quarters for the cooks and waiters to stay in, and of course the cooks and waiters got their meals free. We had to pay for our meals and we had to provide our own quarters to stay in, in most places.

Interviewer: Talking about the difference in the way that various—how you treated each other, the Pullman porters and the waiters and the cooks, and other than provide—or sleeping in different quarters—were there any other differences or...

GC: No, we were all friends.

Interviewer: I remember one gentleman telling me that—and I don't mean to be offensive at all—but that certain light-skinned blacks were assigned to certain duties regardless of the seniority and who would do a better job. Did you notice any of those things?

GC: No. I think that mostly existed between the waiters that worked on club cars and them that worked on diners. You see, they had certain club cars where you served drinks, and they did accuse the company of picking bright waiters to work on those club cars, but that wasn't even so. They had a few black ones, I know [laughs].

Interviewer: Well, back during 1929 in Portland, did they have a bit of that black society or blue vein club where if you can see the veins in your arms you were a member? Do you remember any of those that happened?

GC: No, I don't.

Interviewer: Other than, again, other than your promotion, what other experiences that you saw and had during your tenure on the railroad? What are some of the other experiences that you had that stand out in your mind? Forty-one years, I mean quite a lot of experiences.

GC: Well I don't know of any. See, there's just a enjoyable work, so far as I was concerned.

Interviewer: Is there anything you'd like to conclude with as we talk about the railroad?

GC: No.

Mr. Brown: It sounds like the, like the railroads though, treated you pretty fair.

GC: Real fair. Yeah.

Mr. Brown: Why do you think there was such a difference between the thing that—the documentary they did in Washington and your actual job? Why do you think there was such a disparity in what they showed and what you know porters as doing?

GC: I don't know, I couldn't answer that. See, when we would try to tell, white people do what they do [laughs]. That's a problem.

[end of interview 00:04:12:13]