



Workers gather outside the Pullman Factory main gate.

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Pullman National Monument is the story of American opportunity. The diverse people whose stories intertwine here all sought opportunity. Some succeeded; others found opportunity limited by race, gender, economic status, or position.

Their stories came together in the town of Pullman, a planned community famed for its urban design and architecture.

It was designed as a utopia—a place to provide workers with a safe community, a better standard of living, and an environment free of social ills.



## George M. Pullman

A renowned industrialist, he received early training as a merchant and a carpenter growing up in New York.

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*“We decided to build...homes for working men of such character and surroundings as would prove so attractive as to cause the best class of mechanics to seek that place for employment...We also desired to... exclude all baneful influences.”*

George M. Pullman, Report on the Chicago Strike of June–July, 1894

## From Engineer to Industrialist

The man whose vision and ingenuity helped create those opportunities was George M. Pullman, a Chicago engineer and industrialist. Upon his arrival in Chicago in 1859, he gained fame by engineering an elaborate

system of jacks to help raise the level of the city’s buildings and make way for a new sewer system. At about the same time, Pullman began to revolutionize cross-country rail travel through his design of a series of sleeping cars.

## The Pullman Palace Car Company

After a poor night’s sleep sitting in a train car, Pullman conceived the idea of a sleeping car, enabling passengers to ride the railroads in style. In 1867, he founded the Pullman Palace Car Company. Pullman leased cars to the railroads and provided the employees necessary to serve the passengers. His early sleeping cars evolved into luxurious accommodations that featured carpeting, draperies, upholstered chairs, and an unparalleled level of customer service.

Pullman’s “palace” cars catered to the affluent, yet offered opportunities to those less advantaged. The company’s first porters and waiters were former house

slaves. Pullman was one of few businessmen who hired African Americans. While porters had generally low paying service jobs, their positions still held prestige within the African-American community.

Pullman sought skilled workers to build palace cars. He employed a mostly white workforce of cabinetmakers, upholsterers, and other laborers. With the onset of the industrial era, Pullman observed that many workers lived in slums with unsanitary conditions and many “social ills.” Determined to provide his workers an improved standard of living, Pullman built his factory along with a town where they could “work, live, and worship.”



Anyone who traveled in Pullman Palace Cars experienced luxurious interiors and ultimate customer service. African Americans found prestigious jobs as waiters and porters serving affluent travelers.

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# The Price of Utopia



Left: Pullman built houses to attract and retain loyal workers. Above: Arcade Park and the Greenstone Church integrated with employee housing demonstrated an architectural sophistication unprecedented at the time.

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## A "Model" Town

Pullman hired architect Solon Spencer Beman to design the new company town. Housing was simple yet elegant with utilities and indoor plumbing and a range of options depending on one's social and family status. A variety of shops and services, schools, and a church, along with beautifully landscaped streets, city parks, and a lake put Pullman's accommodations well above the standards of the day. Visitors marveled at the town—renowned for its architecture and urban planning—

a showplace during the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Yet utopia came at a price. Workers did not just live there for free—they paid high rents and utility costs. Ownership was not an option, although workers could locate outside of town. The town was ethnically diverse with a large immigrant population, but African Americans were excluded. Women lived and worked there, but only in jobs considered appropriate, such as sewing. To "exclude baneful influ-

ences," saloons and brothels were forbidden, but so were independent newspapers, public speeches, town meetings, and open discussions.

The opportunities that Pullman provided went beyond social uplift—they amounted to social control. A Chicago Tribune editorial stated that, "none of the...advantages of the model city will compensate for the restrictions on the freedom of the workmen..." Limitations on freedom sowed the seeds of social unrest.



The effects of the Pullman strike of 1894 were felt across the country when trains in Chicago came to a standstill. U.S. mail delivery came to a halt nationwide.

COURTESY/THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY

## A Strike, A Boycott, and Riots

Financial panic hit the country in 1893. Pullman's profits dropped. He reduced workers' salaries by about 25 percent, but not the cost of rent. Left destitute, a delegation of workers approached Pullman with a list of grievances. He refused to listen. This sparked the Pullman Strike of 1894. Frustrated employees walked off the job in May of that year. Striking workers appealed to the American Railway Union for support. Union president Eugene Debs viewed Pullman as a "rich plunderer" who treated his workers as "a slaveholder." Since this was one of the first national industrial unions, Debs used his influence to expand the strike into

a nationwide boycott affecting any train that moved a Pullman car.

Trains in Chicago came to a standstill. The boycott disrupted rail travel nationwide and interfered with U.S. mail delivery. This obstruction drew the ire of President Grover Cleveland, who vowed that, "if it takes the entire army and navy to deliver a postal card in Chicago, that card will be delivered." Acting with a federal court order, Cleveland sent in troops to disrupt the strike and get trains moving. Violence and rioting escalated. On July 7, national guardsmen fired into the crowds, killing up to 30 people.

By August, the strike had subsided. Workers returned to their jobs on condition that they would never again join a union. While the strike was unsuccessful in meeting the workers' demands, it did draw attention to their plight. In a conciliatory move, Congress designated Labor Day as a federal holiday just as the strike was escalating nationally. As for Pullman, he continued to run the town as he saw fit until his death in 1897. In 1898, the Illinois Supreme Court declared the company ownership of residences in the town of Pullman illegal. Within ten years all the houses were made available for private ownership.

## The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters

Throughout the twentieth century, the company's workers persisted in their quest for increased opportunities. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was founded as the first African-American union legally recognized by the American Federation of Labor. In 1937, under A. Philip Randolph's guidance, they gained official recognition from the Pullman company and success in meeting demands for workers' rights. This was an important step in the civil rights movement due in part to the leadership of Randolph, who later organized the March on Washington in 1963.

Today the history of Pullman is preserved by public agencies and private organizations who will partner with the National Park Service in preserving these resources. The stories of Pullman still resonate as workers and business people throughout the world continue to vie for opportunities for a better life.



The Pullman Factory Administration Building and Greenstone Church are icons of the corporate paternalism that built a company town.

The A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum resides in what was once workers' housing.

## Plan Your Visit

Pullman State Historic Site presents occasional tours of the Pullman Factory Complex at 610 E. 111th St. Historic Pullman Visitor Center, 112th and Cottage Ave., offers information, tours, and exhibits. The A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum, 10406 S. Maryland Ave., interprets African-American contributions to the American Labor Movement. Many of the houses in the Pullman company town remain in private ownership. Arcade Park and Pullman Park have delightful landscapes. For up-to-date information on the national monument and its partners, please visit the website at [www.nps.gov/pull](http://www.nps.gov/pull).

Pullman National Monument is one of more than 400 units in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our nation's heritage. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs, please visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

### More Information:

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