



In Greed I Trust

Think about greed and racial discrimination. In 1947, when the Brooklyn Dodgers hired Jackie Robinson, why did racial discrimination by major league teams begin to drop like a hot potato? It wasn't feelings of guilt by white owners, affirmative action, or anti-discrimination laws. It turned out that there was a huge pool of black baseball talent in the Negro leagues. It became too costly for teams to allow the Dodgers to gain a monopoly on this talent. Black players won the National League's Most Valuable Player award for seven consecutive seasons. Had other teams not stepped in to hire black players, allowing the Dodgers to hire them, it might have given the Dodgers a virtual monopoly on world championships.



During South Africa's apartheid era, whites were in control, both economically and politically, and enacted some of the harshest racially discriminatory employment laws. There were job reservation laws that reserved certain jobs for whites only. Many white employers went to considerable lengths to contravene and violate those laws. White building trade unions complained to the South African government that laws reserving skilled jobs for whites had broken down.

What was happening? White contractors found out that often they could earn greater profits by hiring a black worker to do the job of a white worker for only a fraction of the wage. That raised the cost of discriminating against black workers. Racist white workers did what any good liberal or labor union supporter would do; they got behind support for minimum wage laws and what produces the same effect, equal-pay-for-equal-work laws. South Africa's Wage Board said, "The method would be to fix a minimum rate for an occupation or craft so high that no Native would likely be employed." "Equal pay for equal work" became the rallying slogan of the South African white labor movement. They knew that if employers were forced to pay black workers the same wages as white workers, there'd be reduced incentive to hire blacks.

Unionists in the U.S. also wanted to suppress employer quests for greater profits. After a bitter 1909 strike by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, an arbitration board decreed that blacks and whites were to be paid equal wages. Union members expressed their delight, saying, "If this course of action is followed by the company and the incentive for employing the Negro thus removed, the strike will not have been in vain."

The Davis-Bacon Act sets minimum wages on federally financed or assisted construction projects. It was racially motivated in 1931, and it's still on the books. During congressional debate leading to its passage, Rep. John Cochran of Missouri said he had "received numerous complaints in recent months about Southern contractors employing low-paid colored mechanics getting work and bringing the employees from the South." Rep. Miles Allgood of Alabama complained: "Reference has been made to a



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contractor from Alabama who went to New York with bootleg labor. This is a fact. That contractor has cheap colored labor that he transports, and he puts them in cabins, and it is labor of that sort that is in competition with white labor throughout the country." Rep. William Upshaw of Georgia complained of the "superabundance or large aggregation of Negro labor," which, to him, was a real problem. American Federation of Labor President William Green made clear his union's interests, saying, "Colored labor is being sought to demoralize wage rates."

There are many examples from around the world of how people have used legal and extralegal means to thwart people trying to get more for themselves, or what I like to call greed. The suppression of these motives has always worked against the best interest of discriminated-against people.

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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