The Economic Entrapment of African-Americans:

A Study of Discrimination in the Workplace Using *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and Economic Theory



Senior Comprehensive Project

Submitted to the Department of English and Economics

By Leanne Balster

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree

Allegheny College

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Professor Ben Slote _____

Professor Stephanie Martin _____

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the college community as a whole.

_____

Leanne Balster

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Introduction

Academic discourse is generally segregated along disciplinary divides. Despite shared topics of analysis, conversations remain separate, never joined. For example, economics studies a particular topic within its limited disciplinary scope ignoring similar conversations in different fields, with the same exclusion practiced by its peers. The accepted distance between disciplinary conversations is justified by a superficial argument that the varying approaches are too disparate to successfully collaborate within the same discussion. But in actuality, disciplinary differences are exaggerated. Academic discourse, even across the seemingly impassable field differentiations, is more alike than different.

In any conversation there are varying perspectives stemming from different sources. If academia can be construed as one large conversation, then each of its disciplines is simply a unique source for a particular perspective. There seems to be an accepted assumption that a successful discussion relies upon a certain unanimity between its participants, that views which are too contrasting inhibits a beneficial conversation on any topic. Yet variety can also supply an enhanced learning experience by providing multiple interpretations on the same phenomenon. By pursuing their own research into shared topics, disciplines have been unintentionally participating in this grander academic conversation.

Given this construction of academic fields as participants in a larger conversation, the separate disciplinary perspectives can be construed as varying interpretations. Joan Scott's conceptualizing of all historical writing as the interpretation of experience establishes a link for all academic texts as an author's response to observations. By this disassembling of the theoretical and disciplinary constructs that create barriers, an examination of academics can be leveled on the same plane as writer responses to their environment. Each authorial attempt to capture their image of the truth, according to Scott, is really "subjective witness" (20). The

subjectivity she described manifests in two forms: the freedom of interpretation one has in processing observation, and "experience's" ability to mold a person or subject. Experience, for Scott, is not so much the action or event taking place but the processing and transcription which occurs afterwards. Therefore experience is deeply rooted in unique reactions conscious and unconscious, logical and emotional, and the translations of these via the written word. Analysis of experience is more concerned with the participating individual. Given this interpretation, Scott's argument suggests that any text describing experience, whether it take the form of fiction or not, is essentially its author's particular point of view.

This construction of all writing as inherently subjective, linked to the bias of personal interpretation, can result in a restrictive force barring historians (in Scott's case), and academic literature in general, from accurately chronicling events. So the compilation of literature on any subject, as well as the theoretical evolution of that literature over time, cannot be precisely interpreted as a progressive journey toward "truth," but an amalgamation of points of view on the same topic. Therefore new insights cannot necessarily be considered superior to previous analysis. As Scott says, what is believed to be the discovery of truth is often the "substitution of one interpretation for another" (35). In other words, a comparison of analytic literature regarding the same topic does not reveal that successive insights are more truthful than their predecessors; instead they are simply a new approach. So within the forum of interdisciplinary discussion, each field provides the possibility of an equally accurate and beneficial interpretation.

Given the construction of academic writing as its author's perspective, the analysis of writing on any topic can be considered a study of point of view. Since writing is the story of its author's experience with a subject, a connection can be made to narrative. Hayden White argues for the connection between historiography and narrative, and perhaps the connection between

any discourse and narrative, in his article “Interpretation in History.” Here White suggests that historical writing is always narrative because the author decides not only the relevant incidents to include on the page, but also fills in informational gaps with personal interpretation (281). Therefore even writers driven by the highest interest in maintaining objectivity must make literary-like decisions regarding what to include and how to present it. In that way, all writing is narrative. Each publication is simply a personalized interpretation of their subject matter, perhaps with increased differentiation by the lens of a particular discipline.

According to some narratives, the experience of the American citizen is one of equality, opportunity, and success as a result of hard work. The country self-identifies as “the great American melting pot” in an attempt to create an image of peaceful diversity where the American Dream is always an achievable goal. As Theresa McGinnis asserts, the rags to riches stores of people like Andrew Carnegie “[suggest] we live in an egalitarian society and [promote] the idea that those who are strong in the face of adversity and who work hard will succeed” (62). Within this interpretation, economic success is readily available with equal opportunities provided to all. Yet this is only one perspective on the subject. While an ideal, it does not necessarily represent the truth. The United States may self-identify as “the great American melting pot,” but there is a history of interracial conflict equally intrinsic to the nation’s character. Racial friction maintains a history similar in breadth and depth to the meritocratic version of America as an intercultural haven. Beginning with the introduction of slavery, racially discriminatory behavior has maintained an unwavering presence in American culture and continues to permeate today’s societal landscape.

Academic literature is rife with texts presenting, evaluating, and explaining racially discriminatory behavior. Each author and discipline brings their own unique interpretation and

approach to the issue, creating a diverse composite. If racial discrimination can be viewed as a shared experience these authors are depicting, then the compilation of literature on the subject falls under the same categorization created in Joan Scott's article. Each author, whether an economist, historian, sociologist, or novelist, provides their own narration to the story that is discrimination in the United States. Despite the fact that these numerous fields of study are contemplating the inciting mechanisms of discriminatory behavior as well as its effects, they remain separate discussions divided by discipline.

Given the conceptualization of academic literature as a discussion from different points of view, an improvement in the truthful depiction of discrimination may require input from multiple sources. An overarching analysis utilizing multiple theoretical concepts may succeed where more limited evaluations could not. An interdisciplinary approach to the concept of discrimination can utilize the applicability of each theoretical analysis and combine the individual successes to reconfigure a more accurate representation of the "experience" of racial discrimination in the United States. It is capable of combining the preferred focus of each author and discipline into a more comprehensive approach. In this sense, racial discrimination can be studied from an emotional, scientific, historical, and political point of view within a single work. Therefore the multidimensionality of discrimination can truly be captured within a written format.

Because of the projected benefits of an interdisciplinary approach, this project aims to utilize both fictional literature and economic theory to analyze the motivating factors, manifestations, and effects of racial discrimination in the workplace. Necessary to this analysis is an examination of the authors of each work in addition to their writing, since personal bias and interest leave an inescapable mark on any writing. Therefore while acknowledging the

differences and unique strengths of the two seemingly polar opposite formats, this project aims to also combine both disciplines into a relatively more comprehensive study of discrimination.

The literary perspective will focus on the text *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, a novel written by Chester Himes and published in 1945. This novel concentrates on the downward spiral of protagonist Bob Jones precipitated by his struggle to maneuver within the constraints created by a racially cognizant society. Given the semi-autobiographical relationship between the novel and its author, analysis will examine the validity provided by the fictionalized account of real-world experience including whether Himes's especially emotional connection to the text positively or negatively contributes to his conception and representation of race relations in the United States. In addition, the analysis will include an examination of the overall presentation of interracial relations during the World War Two era, examining the overwhelmingly competitive and quarrelsome climate created for protagonist Bob Jones. The novel will be critiqued in its ability to present a believable portrait of experience with racial discrimination.

To continue the discussion of the varying representations of discrimination in academic literature, Gary Becker's economic theory of taste-based discrimination, an analysis constructed within the umbrella of Neoclassical Economics, will be presented, analyzed, and compared to the format of similar situations in Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Like the examination of the novel, the analysis will factor in the authorship of the text, analyzing whether the discipline of economics as well as Gary Becker as an individual, affect the perspective and presentation of discrimination. Given the more historical and societal conception of discrimination in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, the individualistic and immediate focus of taste-based discrimination will be compared to Himes's depiction of race relations.

Lastly, the economic theory of Political Economy, a more socialist and Marxist consideration of discrimination, will be described in its own ability to capture the motivations and results of discriminatory behavior. The point of view of the theory as a part of the discipline of economics as well as its particular authorship will be included in an attempt to explain the varying presentation of experiences resulting from discrimination. The holistic and structured conceptualization of discrimination utilized by the Political Economic focus flourishes when used in conjunction with Himes's depictions in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Yet it can benefit from a macrocosmic viewpoint, such as that made available via taste-based discrimination.

Taken together, the three academic discourses can assess whether an interdisciplinary method is a beneficial approach for examining racial discrimination. In addition to providing a new point of view regarding discrimination, the analysis will incorporate diverse interpretations of discriminatory practices as well as its various incarnations within different societal realms. Within economic analysis this can take the form of limited social mobility and opportunity while the literature can concentrate on the feelings of exclusion and disempowerment experienced by its victims. Examining the merits of particular points of view and combining those with others will provide a new interpretation not limited by previous discussions, hopefully supplying a new understanding of racial discrimination in the United States.

Chapter One

Chester Bomar Himes was a unique author with a particularly visceral, physical style. His novels are full of graphic violence which springs upon characters suddenly, rendering them powerless. Perhaps Himes greatest success within his image-conscious writing is his ability to truly realize literary scenes for his readers (Sallis 2). This effective utilization of description to realistically capture imagery for the reader can be attributed to Himes's autobiographical connection to events within his novels. Having lived the action Himes does not have to depend upon imagination to create his characters' environments. He has experienced similar settings, emotions, or frustrations and therefore can easily capture them in print. Chester Himes's 1945 novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is no exception. As Lynn Itagaki asserts, Bob Jones is a "semi-autobiographical main character" (65). These kernels of autobiography underlying Himes's fictional text provide a real-world benchmark for his fiction.

According to biographer James Sallis, "Himes's life and fiction seem uniquely linked" (3). The plot of *If He Hollers Let Him Go,* where an African-American man flounders within the racially divisive climate of World War Two Los Angeles, mirrors Himes own experiences after moving to the city. Himes participated in the migratory wave of American citizens during the Great Depression, moving to California and settling in Los Angeles when he was 32 (Sallis 72). His inability to find consistent employment mirrored Bob Jones's issues negotiating the racially discriminatory labor market. Himes worked in 23 different positions during his three year stint in Los Angeles. In many cases his high turnover was assisted by terminations based on race with a specific occurrence where his dismissal as a reader at Warner Brothers was based solely upon his identification as a black man (76). The continuous frustration and derogatory treatment left Himes with a bitter perspective on American society. According to Himes, Los Angeles was the

city where he believed racism became a part of his life, “contaminat[ing] everything” he saw; alerting him to its existence and allowing him to identify it in everyday interactions (77).

In his review of Eliseo Vivas’s *Creation and Discovery: Essays in Criticism and Aesthetics*, Irving Singer describes how Vivas conceptualized truth in literature as a combination of real world discovery and fictional creation (143). For the story of *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Himes’s time spent in Los Angeles is his period of “discovery” of racism in the United States. It was a discovery initiated by personal experiences further facilitated by Himes’s growing political involvement and relationship with activist groups (Sallis 77). Through his relationships and experiences, Himes’s perspective benefitted from an education on the subject. Following his deepening consciousness and understanding, racism became a primary concern. *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is the resulting fictional creation.

Singer describes this process as the literary version of scientific research. Where science is limited in its presentation to “exhibits and proofs,” literature expands beyond these to create a story that is “drawn from life” (146). Life equates to these “exhibits and proofs” catalyzing the creation of stories as a form of analysis. Therefore literature’s story and science’s scrutiny are one in the same. Singer brings literature to the scientific discussion in the same manner that Joan Scott brings science to narrative. Both novels and science are contributing to a practical, critical discussion on discrimination. As Singer said, “*within its framework as a novel* [literature] gives us profound insights about the world, just as a psychological or sociological description might.” Literature does not deviate from scientific research through its interpretation of reality (146).

The story of discrimination from Himes’s perspective, as communicated by *If He Hollers Let Him Go,* is a criticism of a society with racial division at its heart. Himes negative analysis of discrimination manifests as a fictional novel focusing on the struggle of protagonist Bob Jones to

maneuver within the barriers constructed within a tense, racially segregated society. The fictional medium provides Himes the ability to control the story and setting he is writing, creating an environment which coincides with his interpretation in every conceivable way. Therefore Himes has the ability to exclude elements which might appear in real-world society that would complicate or contradict his own version of events. This approach facilitates his argument by creating a more cohesive image to readers. Again, it is the characteristic of narrative that Himes can "exhibit" his experiences through a story heavily influenced by life but not trapped by reality's limitations.

By utilizing first person narration, and therefore supplying the reader with Bob Jones's every thought and fear, Chester Himes is presenting an emotional argument. This in depth portrayal encourages his reader to connect with his protagonist and be empathetic to Bob's struggles. While this point of view humanizes the issue of racism and discrimination by showing the personal responses and injury it causes, it forces Himes to stray away from objective, observational proof supporting his claims and teeters on the edge of becoming a work of fiction without a substantial link to the real world. Himes intended to create a work that uses satire and hyperbole to truly highlight the evils inflicted on African-Americans in the U.S. during World War Two, but the text sometimes threatens to lose these tethers and become clouded by emotion. Bob's assessment of himself is applicable to Himes in this instance, Himes skirts with the danger of "being penned in by [his] own emotions; of getting out of [his] own grasp; of not being able to control [his] actions" (93). Therefore the work is simultaneously real and unreal, a true representation of a man's reaction to his own experiences yet through an evidently fictional, hyperbolic, and perhaps even paranoid medium.

Himes's emotional tie to his work makes one question whether Bob Jones's character has one or two purposes: to represent the victimization Himes felt at the hands of Caucasian Americans or to be an "everyman," depicting the plight of all African-Americans for the nation to see. Given the real-life inspiration behind this piece of fiction and the bitterness of the text's tone, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* can be read as a personal vendetta against the society its author perceived as treating him unjustly. If so, the interpretation of the novel as a social representation must be taken with a grain of salt, since Himes's emotion, a tool which provides a measure of validation, can also call into question the clarity of his perceptions. Yet a less cynical approach could alternately interpret Himes as a passionate, vocal leader fighting for the equality of his race. In this view, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* can be seen as a text that transcends simply a chronicle of its society's flaws from the perspective of one of its victims, as it threatens to be, to become an instructional text highlighting the areas American society must improve upon in order to create a more equitable world.

The complications between Himes's version of racism and its real-life manifestations stem from the occasionally racially paranoid narration of Bob Jones. This paranoia results from the insecurity Bob, and perhaps Himes, felt as a consequence of the racially charged climate of 1940's United States exacerbated by the Japanese Internment. The meticulous and legalized segregation and jailing of an entire race, based purely on this characteristic and regardless of actions, could understandably put a member of any other minority on edge. For Bob, the Japanese Internment instilled a fear of helplessness in the face of his own country's government and justice system: "It was taking a man up by the roots and locking him up without a chance" (3). In addition to describing Bob's reaction to the current situation, this sentence reiterates the problematic history of African-Americans in the United States. It recalls the events during times

of slavery when Africans were kidnapped from their homes, imprisoned on ships, and forced into another country as a means of free labor. Therefore the socio-political climate helps partially to explain the touchy narrations by providing evidence of current and historical events which support racially based fears.

Regardless of whether Bob Jones's reaction is logical or not, it can be explained and can serve as a model of a minority member's feelings during such a precarious time. This primal fear of helplessness in the face of the powerful classes hovers behind scenes throughout the novel as a force contaminating Bob's view of his surroundings. It creates a state of mind where Bob interprets every interaction as racially charged. The ubiquitous nature of racial tension in Bob's life is evident in his daily drive to work. Bob's car, a Buick Roadmaster, reminds him of the societal barriers and racially limiting expectations attempting to block him from achieving a certain affluence characteristic of his Caucasian peers. In this case, the tensions stem from both the perceived efforts of Bob's white counterparts and from his own reactions. Bob is responding by using his car as a status symbol, showing his ability to achieve a level of material success he believes he is intentionally excluded from. Once out on the road, even the mad scramble to work becomes a racially charged situation. In one instance, Bob interprets white pedestrians crossing in front of his car as purposely moving slowly with the intent of barring his passage forward.

Whether truly realistic or slightly paranoid, the results of an overarching, omni-present racial tension exist in the fictional world Himes created for Bob Jones as an aura of conflict and competition. The division segregating races creates distinct lines leading to an "us vs. them" mentality which sustains the constant tension. The image of conflict is supported by the recurring motif of men "getting on their muscle" in racially tense situations. By introducing a physical

element, Himes transforms the situation from one of awkward social interactions or insults to bodily violence.

Imagery of conflict such as this, in addition to the hovering presence of World War Two in the background, creates a parallel of two wars being fought by the United States: one against the Axis powers, intending to overthrow a vicious dictator who is cruelly enacting genocide against an entire race, and another over similarly racial issues raging at home. The mirroring of racial conflict in two wars invites a comparison of the United State's stance on interracial interaction. The protection of an oppressed group against their tormenters abroad despite a simultaneous participation in the degradation of another suggests hypocrisy. America as a country fights to correct flaws elsewhere that it has not yet solved within its own borders. Through the shared topic of racial oppression the two wars are equated. A connection through similar roots causing the conflicts creates the assumption that both wars will render similar results. If racism and prejudice in Germany could produce horrific acts of genocide and worldwide violence, so too can the discrimination in America lead to terrible circumstances. This parallel allows the text to argue not only that discrimination is morally inexcusable through the inclusion of the Holocaust in Germany, but also that it is equally harmful to the victimized group. Also it includes the veiled threat that if not addressed racism in the United States can lead to similar evils.

Himes continues the conflict-ridden conception of racial discrimination by creating a link between racism, trouble and death. After a violent altercation with Johnny Stoddart, a white coworker who believed he was cheated while gambling, Bob articulates this connection: "If I could just stop thinking; every time I thought of trouble I thought of death" (34). In this circumstance, Bob and Himes are referring to the historical injuries African-Americans faced at

the hand of whites as a result of conflict most commonly embodied as lynching. Here Bob is scared of "what might happen to [him] afterward," referring to this exact possibility (34). In this sense, "death" literally means his own demise, or physical harm. From Himes's perspective as a critical analyst of society, death might also symbolize a change in Bob's current social identity. If the result of racial conflict is violence, as Himes suggests with his brutal imagery and Bob's constant fear of physical harm, then death may refer to a declared racial war where people will suffer and die. As Sallis indicates, Himes believed that "nothing short of programmed violence could erase [racism]" (80). This war would also mean the "death" of society as Bob and Chester Himes currently experience it. But while this may be a beneficial change, it cannot come without casualties.

While the literal interpretation suggests that negative interactions with white peers result in actual death for the individual or individuals, Himes also equates discriminatory behavior with figuratively killing African-Americans. For example, the "death" Bob mentions can be the paralyzing effect of discriminatory behavior trapping African-Americans into certain segments of society without opportunity for social mobility. In this sense, they are denied the chance to live the life they envision. Racism here equates to the cage that African-American workers must escape before living economically and socially free lives. Essentially, individuals living with the hardships of racism are not truly living, and therefore the result is a type of "death."

Race as a barrier creating conflict and constricting personal agency takes two different forms in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. First is the representation of race as an actual physical obstruction, meaning that the observable differences between people are a sort of physical handicap which limits one's activity. For example, it bars access to certain businesses or neighborhoods. Given that the root conflict of the text is the struggle between people who look

differently, being black and white, one could assume that the physical characteristics of race catalyze the issue. Yet the characters in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* are less perturbed by the physical differences and instead concentrate on what these differences suggest. In other words, the bodily dissimilarity becomes almost meaningless in the face of the philosophy that explains why it is significant. Therefore racial differences are an ideological construct rather than a meaningful physical differentiation.

Himes names the justification and interpretation hidden behind racial discrimination as a "notion." Although incredibly hampered by and a partial believer in the "notion" of race, Bob appears to question its legitimacy. While attempting to understand the type of power Madge, his white co-worker, has over him, Bob says, "A black son of a bitch destroying himself because of a no-good white slut from Texas. It was so funny because it didn't make sense. It was just the notion. If you could just get over the notion you could laugh yourself silly" (126). Bob attempts to rationalize the beliefs held by his society in the differences between its white and black citizens, trying to observe some proof that they are based in factual evidence. Yet this passage concludes that the dividing factor between African-Americans and Caucasians is not their skin tone, but the assumptions about what this skin tone represents, the "notion" that white skin means one kind of person and black skin means another. Here Bob concludes that while a powerful influence on his behavior and a belief that strongly inhibits his interactions with others, the "notion" of race is a lie. All people are the same no matter their skin color and thinking anything else is "silly."

Supporting his argument that racial division does not stem from any inherent differences, Himes's text comes to characterize "whiteness" not as a physical attribute but as a form of adopted behavior. Also, like the combative nature of the environment described earlier,

"whiteness" is described as a form of weapon or armor put on by Caucasian characters in the face of their African-American counterparts. It is very much something presented rather than an intrinsic characteristic. Himes interprets this performative behavior as having malicious intent whether to victimize the African-Americans or maintain the current, unequal status quo. Yet Himes does acknowledge that "whiteness" in this sense is not shared by the entire Caucasian community, and that it is a learned behavior:

> I got a funny feeling then; I began wondering when white people started getting white- or rather, when they started losing it. And how it was you could take two white guys from the same place- one would carry his whiteness like a loaded stick, ready to bop everybody else in the head with it; and the other would just simply be white as if he didn't have anything to do with it and let it go at that (41).

Here Himes acknowledges that this version of "whiteness" is not universal; instead it is a title bestowed upon those who exacerbate the racially tense climate by utilizing their status to push down others as a means of bolstering themselves. He is describing those that hold onto their race and its purported superiority as a necessary part of the construction of their own self-esteem and therefore cling to the supposed supremacy of their racial identity as a way to assert themselves.

Although admittedly not a universal factor, the presentation of "whiteness" as a weapon used against African-Americans in an effort to maintain the status quo coincides with the construction Himes calls in the novel the "colors of America." In this structure, racism is an intrinsic cornerstone of the United States built upon false presumptions about race. Bob realizes the racial undercurrents contributing to the immediate guilty verdict following Madge's false accusation of rape while waking up after the beating:

> But now I was scared in a different way. Not of violence. Not of the mob. But of America, of American justice…The whole structure of American thought was against me; American tradition had convicted me a hundred years before. And standing there in an American courtroom, through all the phony formality of an American trial, having to take it, knowing that I was innocent and that I didn't have a chance (187).

This quotation extends the personal prejudices based upon questionable interpretations of the implications of race discussed previously from an individual issue to one permeating the society as a whole. It is not only the accepted practice of the American public to judge their peers based upon their racial identification but this quote identifies how the societal mentality supported by racist institutions backs up these beliefs. As the quote shows, "justice" in America is represented as a perverted form which makes rulings based upon race rather than guilt. Himes's image of American justice is evident in the harsh treatment Bob receives, but his experiences are eerily reminiscent of the Japanese Internment. Therefore Himes's image of a corrupted justice system has real life applications and contributions.

The quotation is equally worrisome because of the clear connection between American society and racism. Himes presents the two as being closely linked, where American society is almost built on the idea of racial segregation more than any other belief. With "the structure of American thought," Himes claims that not only are the American people at fault for acting in a hostile and prejudiced manner, but the society they have built reinforces this so that the American mentality is discriminatory. This conception of America itself as an inherently prejudiced society recalls the literary philosophy associated with Himes's contemporary, Richard Wright, called naturalism. Because of the constant presence of discrimination, Bob's experiences

in the novel truly embody the concept of one's environment dictating and controlling one's actions. Bob is accused of rape, convicted, and subsequently drafted into the Army without any personal agency. He is completely helpless in the face of first the false assumption that black men seek to rape white women, and then the refusal to accept that a white woman was lying while a black man told the truth. Because of the beliefs upheld by other members of society, Bob is not given a chance to defend himself since he is already considered guilty. Therefore the overarching beliefs of the people who make up Bob's environment usurp his ability to decide his own fate.

Overall Himes manages to create a physical, powerful illustration of a destructive American society harming itself and its public via its prejudicial beliefs. While one must take into account the fictional nature of the novel, and therefore Himes's ability to control its presentation, the image, while hyperbolic, does have roots in Himes's biographic evidence. Given the history of racism and the more recent Japanese Internment, the book builds on those events to create a society truly divided by race. Not only are groups separated based upon their racial identity, but Himes takes the issues one step further to present a form of friction between groups. There is a sense of conflict which sits quietly behind every interracial interaction. While these factors influence behavior on an individual level, Himes expands racist conduct to a societal level with the inclusion of the biased justice system. Here discrimination becomes an imbedded part of the United States society, a flaw that Himes believes will lead to detrimental effects both for individuals, as represented by Bob Jones, and for the social construction as a whole.

Chapter Two

For Chester Himes his autobiographical connection to the otherwise fictional events in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* provided validity for his presentation of racial discrimination in America. Due to its roots in real-life events, the story achieves a certain amount of observable truth. The discriminatory behaviors experienced by Himes were real during his tenure in Los Angeles. Therefore the incorporation of these events in the construction of discrimination and racism in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* makes them mirror reality. His experiences are validation. This highly personal approach first identifies its truth in the effect on Himes: his emotional interpretations of the racial climate in Los Angeles. For him, the sentiments equate to reality because they are byproducts of real circumstances. So *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, as a literary product of his reactions, is a verifiable representation. Emotional reaction is the catalyzing factor contributing to the novel, simply supported by more concrete influences via connections to personal experiences.

Himes utilized experience as supporting evidence for his depiction of the world. His conclusions were not the direct result of evidence, instead evidence was found to support his conclusions. He justified his reactions and feelings regarding discrimination in Los Angeles by identifying events which, in retrospect, he believed catalyzed his emotional response. Neoclassical Economics shares this interest in emotions and the mental processes behind behavior but it utilizes a more scientific approach for the conception of discrimination. Gary Becker's taste-based discrimination, a study within the umbrella of Neoclassical Economics, is rooted in a dependence upon the rationality of individuals. The theory explains discrimination within the model of individual behavior. Understanding is found through identifying the

motivations inciting particular actions. By rationalizing the factors behind individual discriminatory behavior Becker implies that its cause and effects can be better understood.

Given Himes emotional investment in the effect of discriminatory behavior upon his protagonist, Bob's, self-image and agency, the novel primarily ignores the rationale behind this behavior. Instead it focuses upon Bob's reactions and the manners in which it complicates his life. Discriminatory people are simply classified as bad, and subject to no deeper analysis. Neoclassical Economics can build off of the foundational information provided by Himes's novel, to incorporate the factors influencing the choice to discriminate made by these discriminatory people. It can examine the motivations behind these characters, and the real-life behaviors they represent, to understand how they come about.

Historically, the Neoclassical embrace of rational individual agency stems from the reaction of European economists to World War 2 (McCarty 18). After witnessing the detrimental effects of a controlling government regime, such as that in Germany under Hitler, economists turned to the polar alternative of limited government involvement. European economists idealized market interactions free from governmental control (18). After dismissing a controlling authority as the mechanism stabilizing markets, individual self-satisfying behavior became the replacement tool. Economists turned to the market and the individual behaviors within it for answers. Adam Smith's "invisible hand," the conceptualization of personal self-satisfying behavior across markets contributing to an overall efficient equilibrium, embodied the evolving beliefs. A market, wholly independent of governmental control, achieved beneficial results simply through the uninhibited, selfish behavior of individuals.

For Neoclassical economists the source of understanding economic phenomena such as discrimination is the individual psyche, especially personal motivations and their subsequent

actions. Given their assumption of personal agency and an individual's freedom to pursue any particular avenue, all explanations stem from a logical decision not reactions to particular barriers. Therefore any societal constructs or norms are traced to the psychological motivations inciting particular individual behaviors. Expanding these behaviors to incorporate larger numbers captures market-wide and then economy-wide phenomena.

The Neoclassical conception of modeling markets parallels literature's microcosmic symbolism. Here a smaller, controlled entity is used to represent events on a larger scale. For example, the island in *Lord of the Flies* is a microcosm for society in general. Likewise, in Neoclassical Economics, the behaviors of an individual indicate that of their entire society. Since all individuals are assumed to be rational self-satisfiers, they are expected to behave in the same manner. Therefore, with their interest in achieving and protecting their desires as a root connecting quality, all people are different manifestations of the same basic behaviors. Then these behaviors are simply multiplied to capture a wider, economic scope. Stemming from these ideological interests, Gary Becker's taste-based discrimination is an effort to apply "economic theory to all sorts of human behavior, even sorts of behavior not typically regarded as economic" (McCarty 23).

The story of racial discrimination from a Neoclassical perspective is one with a first-person narration. It is very involved in the mental processes preceding economic behavior: getting inside the head of the discriminator. In comparison, Himes's story, although also a first person narration from Bob Jones's point of view, is concerned with the aftermath and repercussions of discriminatory actions. It is full of anger, powerlessness, and division – a violent story where characters act with violent intentions. Neoclassical Economics zeroes in on the root causes behind this conflict-ridden atmosphere full of harmful behavior. It instead

positions discrimination, not as a behavior intended to harm others, but as a result of selfish actions. These utility maximizers are not trying to harm others but instead to improve their own lot.

In Neoclassical Economics, an individual discriminates to fulfill personal prejudices. These individuals have a taste for discrimination which is defined by Albelda et al. in *Unlevel Playing Fields* as "a 'willingness to pay' to avoid connections with members of a particular group" (80). This means that a person with a taste for discrimination against someone of another race is willing to manipulate their surroundings, perhaps for the worse, in order to escape interacting with that one individual. Their taste for discrimination against members of a particular race supersedes other interests such as wages or work environment.

By acknowledging and exercising their taste for discrimination an individual is participating in utility maximizing behavior. Economists define utility as a measure of "the individual's level of satisfaction or happiness" (Borjas 27). Therefore, maximizing one's utility can be construed as an individual's pursuit of happiness, or self-satisfying behavior. From the perspective of marginalism, a person's decision to participate in a particular action is dependent upon the additional utility they will receive by completing that action one additional unit. Since individuals with a taste for discrimination are willing to pay for that behavior, it must bring them high returns in regards to happiness. So, one additional unit of discriminatory behavior provides more happiness than a drop in wages or other costs decreases utility. Since choosing to discriminate brings high returns, or conversely interacting with a disliked group substantially harms one's utility, discriminatory behavior will be a high priority when maximizing utility.

To continue the conversation of discrimination as a first person narrative from the point of view of the discriminator, Neoclassical Economics classifies discrimination into three

different subsections: consumer, employer, and employee. Each title refers to the individual perpetrating the discriminatory behavior, signifying Neoclassical Economics' interest in their motivations. While a single instance of discrimination in any of the three forms can be psychologically harmful to its specific victim, in order to be a factor influencing societal functions it must be widespread across numerous market interactions. Without the assumption that this behavior is popular, the predictions regarding its effects cannot be explained. Therefore in order to be entirely accurate, each of the three forms, on its own, must reoccur frequently throughout the economy.

Discrimination is expected to immediately result in detrimental effects for both parties involved. In the Neoclassical world decisions are influenced by the ability to compete and by rational utility maximization. Discrimination hinders relative competitive strengths since demanding preferences for one's economic environment limit available tools, labor, eligible partnerships, and work spaces. A consumer will have to be more careful about the firms they frequent in order to ensure that they do not interact with group members they dislike, consequently limiting their selection and perhaps the quality of that selection. Similarly, a discriminatory employer may lose out on hiring workers with superior productivity by refusing to interact with certain applicants. Lastly, a discriminatory employee may appear abrasive and expensive if they are particular about their work environment or demand a compensatory wage in order to work with individuals they dislike. Therefore while the individual's happiness may be increase, their economic well-being is hindered by discrimination. Likewise individuals who are discriminated against cannot pursue particular employment avenues because of these tastes in their peers. Overall, discrimination is considered harmful to everyone's capabilities and should eventually, according to Neoclassical Economics, be competed away.

To return to the three categories, consumer discrimination is defined as “when those making purchases refuse to buy goods or services made or sold by members of certain groups” (Albelda et al. 80). The applicability of consumer-based discrimination is hampered by the necessary knowledge needed for a customer to refuse their patronage. A discriminatory consumer must be aware of all those involved in the manufacture and presentation of the product in order to successfully limit their purchases. Since minorities, normally the recipients of discriminatory behavior, are relegated to jobs out of the public eye, it is very difficult for consumers to be effectively selective in their purchases. Therefore while consumer discrimination can be applied as a useful tool to understanding an observed interaction, it is limited by the necessity of detailed information and widespread popularity for its successful utilization as an explanatory model of discrimination.

Employer discrimination is defined as “when employers refuse to hire, or will only pay lower wages to, members of certain groups” (Albelda et al. 81). The result is a hostile labor force where the division along racial lines is transformed into a hierarchy. Since wage is used as an indicator of worker productivity and worth, it signals an inequality between members of a lower paid group and those who are not. Discrimination in this form may satisfy the employer’s tastes but it can alienate qualified applicants and hinder employee productivity by limiting the applicant pool and obstructing cooperation. By refusing or alienating members of a particular group, employers risk the possibility of rejecting the more qualified applicants due to their membership in a discriminated group. Again, while employer discrimination is a useful tool in interpreting certain observed interpersonal interactions it cannot be depended on for accurate predictions or insights into economy-wide phenomena. Its reliance upon a uniform mentality and popularity across the labor market hinders its validity.

In the case of Chester Himes's Los Angeles and his depiction of racial relations therein, employer discrimination can be applied to Bob Jones's experiences with his superiors at the shipyard. Atlas Shipyard is clearly a discriminatory firm. The evidence of employer discrimination in the novel includes segregation within the workforce, the delegation of inferior/disliked tasks to African-American workers, withholding of resources, and limitations on agency and voice within the workforce. Conway, a co-worker of Bob's, attests to the inequitable treatment with the complaint, "'I been working in this yard two years…and all I done yet is the jobs don't nobody else wanta do'" (Himes 12). He perceives himself as a victim of his white peers and supervisors, since he is relegated to inferior tasks. Overall the environment at the shipyard is filled with tense animosity: a hostile, divisive atmosphere where there is very little amiable or constructive interaction between white and black employees.

Kelly, Bob's direct supervisor, is the face put to many of the discriminatory practices. As a supervisor and white figure of authority, he represents the beliefs of the shipyard as a whole. His character is defined by blatant derogatory and prejudicial behaviors. Within the workplace and job-related interactions, Kelly's negative opinion of his black co-workers is somewhat limited to his estimation of their productivity. His first real appearance is in a charged conversation with Bob regarding his "gang" where Kelly's exhibits both patriarchal and derogatory treatment by speaking condescendingly: "'You coloured boys make good workers when you learn how'" (Himes 17). Yet this shallow assertion of his support for his African-American peers is short-lived. When Kelly discovers that one of Bob's gang has made a mistake, he explodes: "'Jesus Christ, can't you coloured boys do anything right'" (Himes 22). This quote betrays the underlying "us vs. them" mentality Kelly has with respect to the black workers at this shipyard which extends to stereotyping them as incompetent and unproductive.

While the novel is very clear regarding its disgust for Kelly's character, it does not attempt to understand his motivations. Instead its focus on him is superficial, using Kelly as a figure for the discriminatory behavior Bob Jones suffers on a daily basis. Himes's interest lies in the barriers Kelly puts up to inhibit Bob's agency and mobility instead of the reasons for their construction. Neoclassical Economics reconfigures Kelly as a real person and its emphasis on rationality and utility maximization can provide insight into his character. According to Neoclassical beliefs, Kelly must be acting in a utility-maximizing manner. Therefore his racially discriminatory behavior must provide him some sort of return in regards to his happiness. From a hierarchical perspective regarding the relative social positions of Caucasians and African-Americans, discriminatory behavior keeps racial divisions in place. Socially, this division frees Kelly from increased interaction with black co-workers. This interest in distancing oneself from a disliked group is a direct assessment from Neoclassical conceptions of discrimination. As suggested in Himes's novel, by putting down African-Americans and refusing resources, Kelly maintains the unbalanced hierarchy, protecting his power and position as a white male. From a more personal and emotional stand-point, Kelly can simply be expressing his dislike of African-Americans in general. This is consistent with taste-based discrimination. Kelly simply treats his black employees badly because doing so makes him happy. This conception is more consistent with Himes's villainous characterization where Kelly is solely interested in harming the opportunities of others. Overall, whether the actions provide Kelly with happiness in reference to emotional or societal returns, he is clearly exhibiting self-satisfying behavior, simultaneously protecting his position and satisfying his wants.

Returning to the Neoclassical classifications of discrimination, the third is employee discrimination. Albelda et al. define this particular manifestation as "when skilled employees of

one type prevent people of another type from obtaining skills and jobs in those fields" (81). Like employer discrimination this can take two different forms when discriminatory individuals are placed alongside their disliked peers. Either the individual can refuse to work with a member of the other group, or they can request a higher wage to compensate for the unsatisfactory workplace conditions that individual creates for them. Neoclassical Economics predicts that this form of discrimination will result in a segregation of the labor force where whites will work at one firm and blacks at a competitor's. While this is an efficient solution, since everyone works and firms have labor, it cannot be guaranteed as an equitable division. Perhaps one firm provides lower wages or has an inferior workplace climate. While segregation is not this drastic in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, the gangs within the shipyard fall under Jim Crow and are divided along racial lines. So while at the firm level workforces are integrated, at the lower levels segregation remains.

For Himes segregation does not appear to be an amenable solution because of the depicted inequality along the societal divisions within the novel. Yet his book is evidence that as of its publication, U.S. citizens were not capable of harmonious cooperation across racial divides within the workplace. The character of Madge Perkins contributes to the discussion regarding the failure of an integrated workforce and prevailing discriminatory beliefs. When not downright refusing to assist her black co-workers, Madge puts on a performance to escape interactions as well as to show her scorn: "…then she deliberately put on a frightened wide-eyed look and backed away from me as if she was scared stiff, as if she was a naked virgin and I was King Kong" (Himes 19). Following the analogy of King Kong and his victim, Madge's reaction to Bob symbolizes the threat African-American success had on white co-workers. Madge's relatively senior position as a white woman, who although beneath white men in the social

hierarchy, sat above black men, is threatened by Bob's ability to interact with her as an equal. Therefore Madge must manipulate exchanges with him to protect her social position. Similarly, the "act" symbolizes a perceived degradation Madge feels as a result of working with Bob.

Therefore, like Kelly, Madge is acting in a utility-maximizing manner when discriminating against her co-workers. As mentioned previously, Madge can utilize her race consciousness as an excuse for not doing jobs she is uninterested in. She relies upon the stereotypes of black men as sexual predators and the protective behaviors of white men against this behavior as a means of escaping responsibilities she does not wish to fulfill. Yet her happiness can also be bolstered by the power she has over her black co-workers. By manipulating those around her, Madge is able to place herself into a relatively powerful position. This maneuvering provides her with a group of people to look down on and helps her gain the semblance of an elevated social status. Lastly, in line with Himes's representation of her character as a spiteful, prejudicial woman, Madge is able to get revenge upon Bob for what she perceived as insults. Since Bob rejected her sexually, Madge was able to protect her conception of herself as his superior by hurting him. Then not only was she able to harm Bob, but she also rediscovered her social superiority. This vindictiveness is the focus of Himes characterization, evidenced by her confession when framing Bob for rape, "'I'm gonna get you lynched, you nigger bastard'" (Himes 181). For Madge, discrimination was a means of rebuilding and supporting her pride as a white woman against the threat she saw in Bob Jones.

The Neoclassical analysis of the motivating pursuit of happiness behind discriminatory behaviors enriches Chester Himes's depictions of Kelly and Madge in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. By rationalizing their treatment of African-Americans as a product of self-satisfying behavior, it legitimizes the fictional representations as something rooted in actuality. The provision of

understandable, legitimate motivations for Kelly and Madge's behavior makes their actions in the novel appear realistic since they stem from understandable roots. Kelly and Madge, as Himes's tools for acknowledging human duplicity and bad intentions, could become grotesques, characters ruled by the evil quality Himes imbued in them. Instead, with realistic reasoning the characters become authentic and add legitimacy to Himes's fiction as a representation of real life. Neoclassical Economics makes their actions believable.

Although Neoclassical Economics has succeeded within a small scope of justifying individual behavior, its predictions regarding societal influences leave something to be desired. As mentioned previously, Neoclassic Economics maintains that discrimination is harmful to all parties involved by impairing their ability to compete. Because of the detrimental effects it has on both the discriminator and the discriminated against, it should be competed away. Yet the analysis of utility gained by both Madge and Kelly highlights some benefits that justify their behavior. Madge and Kelly maintain, and perhaps even gain, social power through discrimination as evidenced by Madge's revenge on Bob and Kelly's continued oppression of his black coworkers. This interest in societal hierarchies extends the competition outside of Neoclassical Economics' scope of the economy to society as a whole. The continuance of discrimination becomes justified as a means of jockeying for social position. Therefore while Neoclassical Economics can link these concerns to utility maximization, the interest in social position expands beyond its constraints and introduces concepts covered by Political Economy. Therefore while Neoclassical Economics helps to realize discriminatory behavior for a one-on-one basis, such as that exemplified by Madge and Kelly, it fails to realize discrimination on a societal landscape.

Chapter Three

The original extension of economic analysis outside of the Neoclassical focus of supply and demand factors interacting within a market appeared in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. Here the basic tenants of Political Economic thought were born with the identification of class conflict, wealth production, and human needs as forces shaping the economy. It expanded beyond the constrained theoretical construction of market interaction indcpendent of grater society. This initiated the movement toward an economics where "the approach to studying societies emphasizes unequal economic power" and a changed perspective where society was the explanatory variable for economic interactions (Albelda et al. 108). This birth of Political Economy identifies one of the most central beliefs of the theory: that supply and demand cannot fully capture all interactions. This original deviation has evolved into a theory arguing that a complete picture of social occurrences requires a broader approach incorporating institutions and cultural conventions as mechanisms molding a society divided by class, race, and gender.

Interestingly, the same work which began the movement away from the Neoclassical dependence upon individual rationality and perfect competition began within the same text as Neoclassical Economics, since Adam Smith's book is considered the originator of both. Its argument that market economies are self-regulating speaks directly to the conception of individual utility-maximizers coordinating to create an efficient economy. The shared history of both theories stemming from a single source can be interpreted as two different reactions to the same text. These two deviating perspectives, separated by the preceding proclivities of Smith's audience members, is reminiscent of the literary concept of "interpretive communities" introduced by Stanley Fish in his article "Interpreting the 'Variorium.'" Originally intended for

literary criticism, an interpretive community is presented as a like-minded group of individuals who share interpretive strategies resulting in mutual conclusions regarding a text's properties and its author's intentions (483). Within Fish's conception, these strategies appear prior to opening the text, so that what is read is shaped by the preconceived notions and interests of the reader. For Political Economy and Neoclassical Economics, each is the ideological interpretation of a "text," which over time has been expanded into two conflicting models of economic behavior. Therefore each theory is formed by its own "interpretive community" which either believes the economy it an entity independent of society or a byproduct of that society. Yet the source of the two varying constructs is not *The Wealth of Nations,* instead it is the economy and discrimination which replace "literature" as the material studied. Neoclassical Economics is rooted in the market, utilizing the supply and demand forces to model independent, rational behavior as a microcosm for economy-wide behavior. Conversely, Political Economy believes society is the product of historically manufactured cultural norms and institutions which perpetuate the unequal distribution of power resulting in competition and conflict. Each is observing the same phenomena: economic interactions and racial discrimination, yet the interpretations vary and have created theoretical divisions along the way.

According the Stanley Fish's argument, there is no "true text" because meaning is created by the reader's experience not the words on the page (484). This focus on the effect of interpretive communities on the reading of literature parallels the differing approaches to economic phenomena. Where a literary critic is influenced by a particular brand of criticism such as post-modernism or formalism, economists follow their particular school of thought such as Neoclassical Economics or Political Economy. Therefore an economist's approach to discrimination and other studied forces cannot be considered objective since they are influenced

both by the researcher's disciplinary leanings, theory within that discipline, and individual application of that theory. Therefore true unbiased objectivity is a myth. Whether the interpretive communities be Economics and English or Neoclassical Economics and Political Economy, these influences color the approach to and transcription of any analysis undertaken. Therefore it is important to understand the motivations and theoretical foundation coloring an examination of any particular issue before critiquing the actual analysis. The identification can not only assist the evaluation of a particular conceptualization, but also facilitate the comparison of analyses across disciplines by identifying shared stimuli and results.

An examination of the evolution and history of Political Economy can identify the theory's driving factors. Although Political Economy originated in conjunction with Neoclassical Economics via Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations,* its theoretical evolution has included a combination of four unique forces and individuals which have shaped its current outlook. The list begins with Karl Marx whose own observations during the rapid expansion of the Industrial Revolution caused him to become disenchanted with free markets and capitalism. Marx provided two main contributions to the development of Political Economy. One is the identification of the domination of the capitalist class fueled by the subordination of all other societal aspects, including the working class. The second is the admission that economic predictions rely on the evaluation of the relative strength and strategy of involved groups since all change is spurred by the clash of human efforts to mold their environment (Albelda 126). Therefore an inherent spirit of competition and conflict arise within a market economy, manufactured by the unequal class struggle and self-satisfying efforts of individuals to achieve maximum welfare.

Second is the anthropological approach of examining the role customs and institutions have in shaping a community (Albelda 126). Culture as a determination of the "norm" becomes a

means of explaining social, political, and economic climates. This conceptualization inspired the introduction of institutionalist economic thought, which examined the effect of status differentiation upon economic exchanges, meaning that connection with a certain class or social group translates to a particular amount of social power. A status distinction can cause an inequality by creating a hierarchy, leading to unequal economic meetings between members of particular groups such as blacks and whites (127). This conceptualization embodies a perceptible deviation from Neoclassical thought where individual accomplishments are based purely upon productivity. Instead it is not only one's capabilities that determine an individual's success but their membership in a particular group and that group's placement within the societal hierarchy. Individual agency is no longer a given or the sole contributing factor to economic success.

Following the pattern of distancing Political Economic thought from that of Neoclassical Economics is John Maynard Keynes's analysis of the behavior of a market. He proposed two characteristics which directly contrast with Neoclassical beliefs. First is that one market cannot be expanded to explain an entire economy. Since Neoclassical Economics relies on the expansion of individual behaviors to the society as a whole, disproving the applicability of this microcosmic form of analysis questions the individual's ability to truly model behavior on a larger level. Second is the conclusion that an unregulated market can create inefficient results such as stagnation. Therefore the concept of the "invisible hand and dependence upon individual utility maximization as the cause of an efficient market cannot be trusted. The self-regulated economy which produces efficient outcomes for all is not reliable (128).

Lastly, as an indication of Political Economy's liberal leanings as well as its belief in collective action creating change, is the effect of protest movements on the theoretical evolution. Feminism and the Civil Rights movements publicized the inequality and conflict present in

American culture. Both movements called attention to the distinct divisions between members of certain groups as a result and causation of the emergence of inequalities. This publication solidified the beliefs of institutionalists that personal achievement is hampered or helped by group membership. Social distinction does have a direct influence on economic success as evidenced by Jim Crow laws (128). Together these four forces shaped a Political Economic theory motivated by an interest in differentiating itself from the perceived flaws of Neoclassical Economics. While Neoclassical Economics forms a defense of the American economy by highlighting the returns to individual development and productivity within a setting where competition is fair and results are efficient, Political Economy is a critical theory which identifies and explicates the errors built into capitalist societal and economic functions.

Political Economy is heavily motivated by a socialist interest in equality, where preferably no individual has the capability of oppressing another. While this remains an ideal, the current society is viewed as a site for competition which has deteriorated into one of conflict. The Neoclassical concept of individuals as self-satisfiers remains. The privileged classes such as owners and whites are presented as motivated by protecting their high position, utilizing whatever leverage possible to maintain that advantage. Likewise, the disadvantaged groups such as laborers and blacks retaliate against this institutionalized oppression through collective behavior. Within this context each group is automatically pitted against those with opposing interests, creating a conflict-ridden environment instead of perfectly equal competition. In this sense group identification, which is decided at birth based upon race, gender, and class, automatically designates allies and rivals that an individual must contend with. There is a web of particular “power” groups and another of “oppressed” groups whose efforts at self-satisfaction through economic channels cause friction. These groups, whose basic ideologies place them in

opposition, are categorized as counterpart groups and defined as “where the definition of one category implies, and is implied by, another” (Albelda 112). To explain: the moniker “white” would not make sense without its counterpart “black.” The two groups are defined by what they are not. Given their oppositional interests, change which benefits one group automatically harms the other. Therefore any sort of change or institution causes conflict: a more harmful form of competition where there are winners and losers competing on an unlevel playing field.

For Political Economy, the “truth” of discrimination lies in the historical foundation which supports current institutions and customs. In this sense discrimination is a societal creation which is simply mirrored by economic settings and the market. This phenomenon where an institution’s infrastructure copies that of its environment is labeled organization adaptation. Defined as “the tendency of firms to adopt the social conventions prevalent in society,” it means that if whites have more social capital outside of the firm, this same relationship occurs within it (Albelda et al. 167). For example, social segregation such as that within schools or any other public facilities would be translated into occupational segregation within the labor force. Likewise, since the white facilities were predominately superior to their counterparts, white positions within the labor force would be higher in the hierarchy and provide more benefits, security, and freedoms. In this sense, the social hierarchy of white citizens excluding and dominating their black counterparts within social settings is extended to all manifestations of interracial interactions.

Therefore discriminatory behavior is not necessarily the result of personal prejudices or preferences, instead an individual can unconsciously discriminate by operating within the societal norms. A firm may hire only white males to fill managerial positions simply because those are the candidates the firm has always searched for and feels comfortable filling that role.

So an individual does not need to intend to discriminate, societal institutions do it for them. This is categorized by Political Economy as institutional discrimination and defined as "adverse treatment of women and minorities because of the explicit and implicit rules that regulate society or institutions" (162). Similar to the Neoclassical concept of feedback effects where individuals react to the barriers deterring them by not investing in themselves and fulfilling societal stereotypes, institutional discrimination is self-perpetuating and based upon historical occurrences. Feedback effects still assume individual agency on the part of the discriminated victim, supposing that they choose not to better themselves because of observed failures and limited opportunities. With institutional discrimination though, the limitations on social mobility come not from the choice to abstain, but from the choice of those in power to not invite members of other groups to join them. In many circumstances it is simply discrimination by omission.

Discrimination is not only self-perpetuating because it falls within the constraints created by societal constructions and cultural institutions by not challenging the historical status quo, but also because it benefits members of the "power" groups. These groups, described as capitalists, whites, and men, embrace discrimination as a means of solidifying their position. For example, discriminatory behavior benefits the strong by removing social power from other groups. Therefore they are not capable of challenging the status quo and upsetting the precarious safeguards put in place. By excluding members of diverse groups from particular positions and opportunities, "power" groups manage to decrease the number of competitors for their positions, therefore creating job security. This not only protects their position against competition from women and blacks, but also allows them to maintain more unanimity within their own group. Without the pressure of outside forces challenging their jobs, white males can avoid competing against each other by protecting the preferred positions for themselves. There is always an

adequate supply of high level, administrative positions for white men that they are not forced to turn against each other to maximize their own welfare. It creates a tightly knit group which recognizes teamwork against outsiders as a means to success.

In this sense discrimination is not a tool meant to hurt members of a group that a particular individual dislikes. While that construction does parallel much of Neoclassical modeling of discrimination, in Political Economy the driving motivations are the maintenance of social position and efforts to increase power. There is no consideration of the effect on others. Therefore the self-satisfier model is fulfilled. The individual, as a part of their group, is interested in benefitting themselves and their group to maximize their social capital. Injuring anyone else in the process is simply a side-effect. When analyzed in reference to racial discrimination, there are two key observations which assist in the maintenance of unequal power divided along racial lines. First is exclusion which was mentioned earlier. Exclusion is defined as "limiting the location or opportunities of another group" (Albelda 112). This connects to the previous discussion of discrimination as a means of protecting groups in power by limiting the agency of potentially competitive groups. By suppressing the opportunities of African-Americans, their white counterparts protect their own positions in educated, high-paying, secure jobs. This exclusion from the upper echelons of economic opportunities creates a hierarchical segregation with Caucasians in administrative positions and African-Americans in more menial labor. Black workers are then trapped into what is called the "secondary sector of the labor force" (149). This sector of the labor force fills jobs that are considered to be highly responsive to the business cycle, rarely unionized, with high turnover and very little security. Additionally, there are very few returns to skill development and these jobs normally do not provide opportunities for promotion or upward mobility. Not only are African-Americans who enter this segment of the

labor force denied access to the upper level jobs, but they are given no hope of climbing up the economic ladder. Their work ethic is not determined by their connection to the job, but instead by a fear of job loss. Employment becomes simply a means of survival, a necessary task instead of a source of pride or accomplishment (149).

To conclude the description of Political Economy's opinion of labor discrimination as a societal hierarchy resulting from cultural norms and historical practices creates group divisions that appear inherent to the societal make-up so that discrimination appears to be a natural reaction. It is not the individual who discriminates against another, but the society that they belong to. Cultural rules and views shape the conception and valuation of other groups. These divisions and hierarchical opinions create a base for personal prejudices to form and thrive from angry, conflict-ridden bitterness. Discrimination is all about power. For those advantaged few, it is the maintenance and growth of individual power. But for those who belong to oppressed groups, it is about the loss of power and individual agency.

To return to the discussion from previous chapters regarding the similarities between Chester Himes's vision of discrimination in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and the models of economic theory, this powerlessness is evidenced by Bob Jones's experiences. The Californian society has created a place for him within its hierarchy that he cannot escape. Bob is trapped by cultural norms as evidenced by the expectations of employers to fill positions in particular industries: "When I got here [Los Angeles] practically the only job a Negro could get was service in the white folks' kitchens" (Himes 3). Then there are societal institutions holding him in place with the most painful depiction being Bob and Alice's date at a fine restaurant when they are placed at a back table and treated poorly because of their race. The couple is not refused service, instead they are simply made to feel extremely unwelcome, a signal that the finer things

in life, like upscale dining, is beyond them. Social manifestations of racially segregating behavior infect the workplace where Bob is punished for his promotion by his white peers who refuse him the tools for his success.

Madge Perkins's character comes to symbolize this lack of help. Literally Madge denies him the work she is supposed to do by not fulfilling her job as a tacker for his gang. But figuratively, Madge becomes much more than a person, embodying Bob's frustrations regarding the barriers to his success created by his white counterparts. In the novel, this normally takes the form of derogatory behavior and a refusal to facilitate his completion of any project. He gets superficial sympathy instead of equal treatment. Bob, and Himes, interpret this powerless and rejection of the tools needed for success as an assault on Bob's manhood. He is made less than a man by their behavior, and therefore is forced to pursue Madge to win his masculinity back.

No matter the particular interpretations of the results of discriminatory behavior, the novel and Political Economy theory mirror each other in their depiction of society as an all-encompassing constraint. For Political Economy this is given the moniker institutional discrimination, a behavior that is fed by the cultural and societal norms upholding it. But in literature, it becomes naturalism, or when the environment determines a character. In each instance, the basic conception is a setting where the surroundings render the individual defenseless. Without agency, they are forced to abide by the environment, reacting to the forces pushing them in one direction or another. In *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, this means to the Army and death since discrimination robs Bob of a free life. But in Political Economy's less hyperbolic conception, it means acquiescence to social expectations. A bending to the will of a society's people and filling the spot supplied.

Political Economy conceptualizes labor market discrimination as a societal byproduct. Social divisions separated along the lines of class, race, and sex lead to particular perceptions of and expectations for each group. These expectations, and conformity to them, result in the development of institutions which uphold and facilitate the distinct trajectories of each group. In this sense, discrimination is both a mentality and a structure. It is the deep seated belief that physical differences require specific life paths as well as the longstanding structures which legitimize these beliefs as social norms instead of discrimination. In Political Economy, discrimination masquerades as everyday behavior and in this manner, is so intrinsic that it interferes with most interactions. This same overwhelming sense of societal division, especially along racial lines corresponds to *If He Hollers Let Him Go*'s setting. Himes, through Jones, discusses the omni-present racial tension. While the divisions within Political Economy are not as close to the surface, the same undercurrent influences the entire social make-up. According to both, racism sits at the heart of American society.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the previous discussion, discrimination is a societal issue frustrating both in its resilience and ambiguity. Although Oxford English Dictionary provides a definition of "unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person or group, [especially] on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation," the innumerable possible demonstrations of this mindset cause a certain enigma to form. Discrimination as an abstract, theoretical concept, as shown by the definition, is relatively simple to comprehend. Yet the manner in which these prejudices transform into actions is still incomprehensible to many. The academic reaction has been the compilation of a plethora of research and literature depicting and analyzing the phenomena. Discrimination has been presented, explained, and evaluated by multiple schools of thought ranging from those in the social sciences to the humanities. Each author and discipline supplies their own personal interpretations and approaches to the issue, creating a diverse composite.

The greater discussion of discrimination stretches across disciplinary divides. With each field researching and examining discrimination from the perspective of their particular area, the academic community's conceptualization of discrimination is surprisingly heterogeneous. Analysis remains segregated by each academic field, with limited communication across disciplines. As Stanley Fish's term "interpretive communities" implies, members or each disciplinary background approach the subject of discrimination with a bias tinged by their own field of study (Tyson 171). Although each subject creates its own community for discussion, discrimination can become the unifying link, creating one broad conversation across all previously separate discourses. Academic authors, through their study and composition, are transcribing their "experience" with discrimination. The manner of this "experience" is solidified by the overarching concerns of each author's disciplines.

While these various approaches and interpretations can perhaps stall a comprehensive communication, different perspectives can also provide a more complete, detailed examination. An integrated analysis can draw on the strengths of each included discipline to better capture discriminatory behavior. Therefore an analysis pulling from Economics and English benefits from a study of the human, emotional response via literature and the more scientific examination of its causes and effects through Economics. By removing the binaries of science verses humanities and microcosmic verses macrocosmic, we can develop a fuller understanding of discrimination. It is no longer limited by academic exclusivity or narrow foci.

The discussion began with Chester Himes's 1945 novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. The text provides a dual insight into discrimination both as an autobiographic work and a fictional story. The autobiographic detail gives observable evidence of discriminatory practices in the United States which cannot be misconstrued as an author's imagination. In Himes's experience this included mainly occupational segregation. He used Bob as his mouthpiece to describe the limited options available to African-American men and the narrow fields of employment available to them: "…the only job a Negro could get was service in the white folks' kitchens" (Himes 3). It is the more conventionally scientific aspect of the novel, where real life is depicted with a critical analysis. Yet the book expands upon the one-dimensional evidence of discrimination with a story that embodies the emotional response of its author. Because of his conflicted economic interactions with white men and women, Himes came to believe that race colored all aspects of society. It created an "us vs. them" mentality in him that he applied to every character in his novel. For Himes, racial discrimination meant a struggle for power, a constant conflict between races where whites had the upper hand. Therefore this conflict came to

rule Bob Jones's world in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Race functions in the novel as an overwhelming presence forcing individuals into constant conflict.

Both he and Bob experienced a distancing at their workplace from their Caucasian peers. For Himes this meant the repeated refusal of position on the grounds of his race, but for Bob, it came to be the tense interactions at the shipyard. The interracial relations created an environment feeding off an "us vs. them" mentality which both physically and ideologically segregated the two races. African-American workers felt threatened by what seemed like an economic trap, forcing them into the least desired positions with limited trust and respect from their supervisors, a position which left little hope for a chance at upward mobility. And Caucasian employees feared the entrance of African-Americans into a shared labor force as a threat to the security of their position both as employees and members of the community.

For Chester Himes discrimination in the United States was an ideological construct lying at the heart of the nation's belief system. Racial division was as American as apple pie and baseball. The novel's setting mirrors this conceptualization of racial discrimination as a universal belief. Himes's opinion of the "colors of America," with its segregated system responding to deep seated dislikes and differences, takes the shape of a conflict-ridden society and individual friction. The societal and institutional effects include the racial separation by gang at the shipyard and the prejudiced restaurant. Yet there are also particular individuals who, more than others, really embrace the "colors of America." These include individuals such as Kelly and Madge who use their race as a weapon protecting their social position and harming those who threaten it.

Within the two-pronged representation of discrimination as both societal and individual, Neoclassical Economics relates to the one-on-one conceptualization of racism. According to the

theory, a person chooses to discriminate in an effort to maximize their utility or happiness. Therefore they gain happiness from either avoiding or harming members of a group that they do not like. This depiction of discrimination as a personal decision resulting from individual interests echoes Himes image of Kelly and Madge. Both discriminate against Bob and his fellow African-American co-workers as a means of benefitting themselves. By behaving derogatorily Madge and Kelly can receive happiness because it protects their preferred social position or because their behavior hurts their peers. Either way, both characters' interest in discrimination comes from a selfish source; it is clearly a personal decision which the two choose to fulfill because of their own wants and needs.

Contrary to the Neoclassical interest in individual motivations and decisions, Political Economy parallels Himes's conceptualization of discrimination as a societal construct. Here discriminatory behavior does not have to be intentional or conscious; instead it occurs as the effect of following cultural norms. Power hierarchies which have remained in place through history have led to the manufacture of institutions that support their maintenance. In *If He Hollers Let Him Go* this takes the shape of the racial designations between administrative and entry level positions as well as the societal exclusions from certain amenities like fine dining establishments and branches out from these economic settings to everyday occurrences like pedestrian traffic. While these instances of discriminatory behavior may have prejudicial preferences at their roots, they do not reflect a personal vendetta against any particular group.

Regardless of the disciplinary form which it takes, evidence and interpretation of discrimination, as shown by the overlapping qualities of Neoclassical Economics, Political Economy, and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* can combine within a grander conversation. Each medium succeeds in capturing a particular element of discrimination. For *If He Hollers Let Him*

Go that is the overwhelming feeling of discriminatory behaviors on a recipient, Neoclassical Economics captures the motivating ideology behind discriminators, and Political Economy models discrimination from a societal perspective. Together each text helps to fill in the gaps left by their companions by contribute to the same discussion regarding discrimination in the United States' economy. Given this shared topic, the three articulate unique experiences with discrimination. Their particular interpretation of the motivations causing it and results stemming from it transform this text and these theories into members of their own interpretive communities. As discussed earlier, the shared quality of discrimination as a subject connects these dissimilar perspectives and manners of analysis within the same discussion and therefore facilitates a comparison. Himes perceives racial discrimination as a particularly harmful force which emasculates and renders powerless black men as a result of a prejudicial society and its individuals. Neoclassical Economics agrees with the conception of discrimination as personal prejudice, modeling it as a taste-based decision where individuals avoid those who belong to a group they dislike. Lastly, Political Economy envisions discrimination as a societal construct which is woven into the very fabric of capitalist civilizations. Together these three interpretations present a complex picture of what is a multi-dimensional concept, perhaps clarifying somewhat the enigma that is racial discrimination.

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