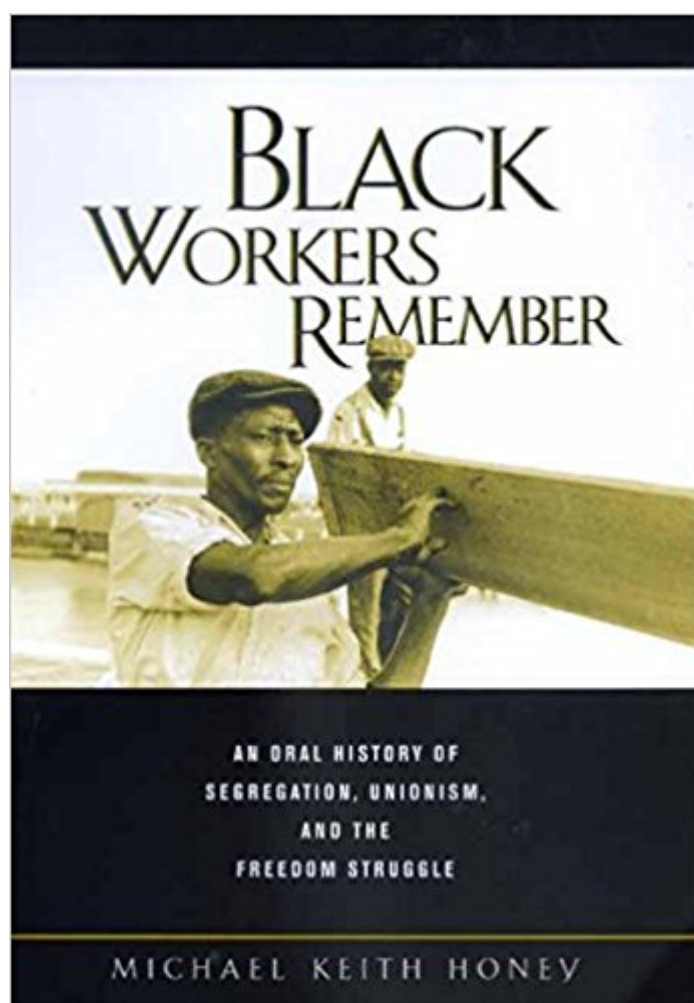


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# Black Workers Remember: An Oral History Of Segregation, Unionism, And The Freedom Struggle



## Synopsis

The labor of black workers has been crucial to economic development in the United States. Yet because of racism and segregation, their contribution remains largely unknown. Spanning the 1930s to the present, *Black Workers Remember* tells the hidden history of African American workers in their own words. It provides striking firsthand accounts of the experiences of black southerners living under segregation in Memphis, Tennessee. Eloquent and personal, these oral histories comprise a unique primary source and provide a new way of understanding the black labor experience during the industrial era. Together, the stories demonstrate how black workers resisted racial apartheid in American industry and underscore the active role of black working people in history. The individual stories are arranged thematically in chapters on labor organizing, Jim Crow in the workplace, police brutality, white union racism, and civil rights struggles. Taken together, the stories ask us to rethink the conventional understanding of the civil rights movement as one led by young people and preachers in the 1950s and 1960s. Instead, we see the freedom struggle as the product of generations of people, including workers who organized unions, resisted Jim Crow at work, and built up their families, churches, and communities. The collection also reveals the devastating impact that a globalizing capitalist economy has had on black communities and the importance of organizing the labor movement as an antidote to poverty. Michael Honey gathered these oral histories for more than fifteen years. He weaves them together here into a rich collection reflecting many tragic dimensions of America's racial history while drawing new attention to the role of workers and poor people in African American and American history.

## Book Information

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"Honey serves as a symphony conductor, skillfully blending the voices into a powerful choir singing a song of freedom." -- Dallas Morning News  
"Honey serves as a symphony conductor, skillfully blending the voices of . . . laborers into a . . . choir singing a song of freedom." -- Dallas Morning News  
"It's a gifted storyteller who can capture a reader's heart and mind with fiction." -- Tacoma News-Tribune  
"It's a gifted storyteller who can capture a reader's heart and mind with fiction . . . greater . . . who can . . . with nonfiction." -- Tacoma News-Tribune  
"Poignant reading, Honey's interviews reflect his clear sympathy and admiration for his subjects and their achievements." -- Gerald Friedman, *Journal of Economic History*  
"[T]he workers interviewed . . . give voice to the . . . ideal of a living wage as a right, not . . . a privilege." -- American Prospect

Michael Keith Honey is Harry Bridges Chair of Labor Studies and Professor of African-American, Ethnic and Labor Studies, and American History at the University of Washington, Tacoma. He is the author of the prize-winning *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (1993).

The Murray Morgan Prize is awarded annually by the Tacoma Public Library to an outstanding Washington author in recognition of a work published during the previous year that is of high literary quality and wide interest. The work must exemplify the principles of narrative excellence and high standards of research as demonstrated in the distinguished career of author, historian, journalist and educator Murray Morgan. "Black Workers Remember expands what we know of the Civil Rights Movement," explained Jack Bregger, a member of the Murray Morgan Prize Selection Committee. "Through the voices and stories of the African American men and women who worked in Memphis, Tennessee's factories, Honey tells of a struggle for freedom that spans the 20th century -- a story which until now was all but invisible. Michael Honey effectively places these moving personal accounts in the more powerful context of social upheaval and, in a sense, cultural revolution. It insists, as Honey writes in the book's Preface, that we think 'about what it means to be poor, black, and working class, and to recognize the unfinished character of the struggle for racial and economic justice in our own time'. The ultimate success of this extraordinary book can be found in its intimacy and immediacy. The book shook me right down to my very core, and I know it did the same to other committee members."

Michael Keith Honey's *Black Workers Remember* expands what we know of as the Civil Rights Movement. Through the voices and stories of the black men and women who worked in Memphis, Tennessee's factories, Honey reveals a struggle for freedom that spans the 20th century. It shows the conditions that blacks faced in the 30's as they moved from farm work to factory work and their struggles to challenge Jim Crow in the factories, in unions, and in the community. This book is being honored by the Lillian Smith Book Award, the oldest literary award in the American South, and it offers a great deal to the current scholarship on Southern struggles for civil and human rights.

As a black female, I was excited to finally read Michael Honey's book. However, it turned out to be a major disappointment. Honey's extremely slanted view skews history to the extent that most readers will be turned off by this work. Honey totally discounts the importance unions had in achieving equality for blacks, a major blunder according to any historian. While Honey has a great grasp of the English language, his book should not be counted on for accuracy. Readers will find, after researching other literature, Honey's arguments should not be repeated. Save yourself some time and pass on this book.

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