

Three Unsung Heroes of Banking EXCEPTS

“You go on and check out them two bank jobs and I lay you money, you’re gonna get one of ‘em” said Ellis.

“Look at them cats down there. Ain’t none of ‘em no smarter than the three of us. They come in those doors every morning....cleaner than the board of health and sit at their desks....lifting pens and pushing paper....from one side to the other, while we run around picking up mail and processing deposits. Down there is where the money is” said Dee.

“It’s so unusual to see colored people working in a bank....you know, other than as janitors” said Dr. Parilli. “I told Barbara, she’s my wife, just the other day....that Merchants has at least two or three young colored men working there” said Dr. Parilli. “It’s three of us” said Earnest, proudly.

“Well Charlie....they got Earnest” said Herb. “Who got him if I may ask” Charlie asked. “Uncle Sam....Earnest has been drafted” replied Herb.

Earnest returns from twenty-four months of military service.

“You’re kidding! I’m married Herb” said Earnest. “The way things are here, that’s the best I can do” he said. “For two long years I’ve protected you fat cats and all you can offer me is \$25.00 a month” said Earnest, angrily and loud.

“What can I do for you gentleman” Earnest asked. “The champ wants to cash this check” replied Mr. Flanagan, initialing the back of the check. Ali, a towing, wide figure of a man, steps up to the window.

“How would you like it, large bills or small bills” Earnest asked. “Twenties, tens, and fives if that’s okay” replied Ali. Earnest counted out, twenties, tens, and fives. “Make sure it’s all there” said Earnest. “It’s all here. You are pretty fast” said Ali, smiling. Muhammad Ali walked away, stopped, turned around and came back. He placed a five dollar bill on the marble top of the cage. “Your lunch is on me” he said, while walking away.

“I have an appointment with Mr. Jim Eng” said Earnest. “Oh yes, he’s expecting you. His desk is the second one on the left” said the guard after opening the door.

The Guard, Jim Claudy, is at the door as Earnest is about to leave Southeast Bank.

“How did things go for you young man? He asked, smiling. “I think they went well, thank you” Earnest replied. “Good. I want you to know that I’m pulling for you. God knows we need some color up in here” he said.

“And who do we have here....he-he....he-he....he-he? Who’s the lost young brother laboring on the other side of the fence?” “Lost....oh no. He’s by no means lost” said Earl, shaking his head. “He’s the new teller I told you about” said Henry. “Yeah....but you didn’t tell me he was a brother” said Ernie, the janitor.

“What are you reading?” Earnest asked. “BLACK MOSES....it’s the story of an economic genius and powerful brother in America named Marcus Gravey” said Ernie.

“Don’t tell me....you’re the teller....the brother they hired. Ernie told me all about it” said Ellis, smiling. “He told me about this book and where I could find it” said Earnest.

“Southeast is my bank. When are they going to bring you out on the floor?” he asked. “I don’t know” replied Earnest. “I’m going to make a few inquiries” said Ellis. “That will help” said Earnest. “You can’t mess this thing up now. You’ve got the weight of our race on your shoulders” said Ellis.

“Can you believe that....asking Earnest if he’s ready. Hell, he was ready the day they hired him. Otherwise he wouldn’t be here” said Henry, removing his cigar.

“You know something Henry....now this is for your ears too Earnest. I told Jim Eng the other day, that everybody the bank hires as a teller, has to go through brinks....and Earnest here is best I’ve ever seem” said Earl.

“All I can say is....come Thursday morning....our people are going to be in for a hell of a surprise” said Henry, sitting down puffing on a cigar.

“Oh sir....you don’t have to wait. There are other tellers open” said Gene, a guard, pointing. “No sir, I wouldn’t miss this for nothing in the world. I want him to autograph my receipt before he gives it back”

“This is ridiculous. All the other tellers are sitting on their butts and you’ve got customers almost to the other side of the bank” said Oscar.

“What a day. Did you balance?” Sandy asked, smiling. “Oh yes....right to the penny” replied Earnest, sipping on a coke. “I’m adding numbers. How much will you be shipping to the Fed this evening?” he asked. “54 thousand” replied Earnest. “Wow! On average on a good day, this cage normally ships 40 thousand” said Sandy.

“Earnest....do you know this fella?” Henry asked, smiling, holding onto his arm. “I’m not sure I do” replied Earnest, getting closer to the rear of his cage. “I do now. It’s number 9, Minnie Minoso. How are you sir?” Earnest asked, smiling. “I’m fine. It’s nice to meet you. One of us....right Henry” replied Minoso, in broken English.

“How do you feel about that Sandy?” Chet asked. “I’m fine with it, especially knowing I’m working with the best. Congratulations Ernie” replied Sandy. “Thanks Sandy” said Earnest.

“Ernie....this is Mr. Robinson of the Chicago White-Sox” said Oscar, approaching the teller’s window. “It’s a pleasure meeting you Mr. Robinson” said Earnest. “It’s nice meeting you” he said. “Floyd wanted to meet the teller that has such long lines at his window every time he comes in. Take care of him....will you” Oscar asked.

“What are you smiling about” Henry asked. “Ernie and Johnny are going to make history tomorrow” replied Jim. “What are you talking about” Henry asked. “They are working the drive-in tomorrow” replied Jim. “That’s right, Ernie and Johnny are on the Wednesday schedule” said Sandy. “The bank’s never had two of us working the drive-in together” said Henry. “Well....God willing....all that’s going to change tomorrow. The tellers and security will all be black” said Jim.

“Did you find out who that cat was” Johnny asked. “Yeah....the way I follow the Cubs, I should have known it was Ernie Banks. Yeah! Mr. Cub himself” replied Earnest.

The residual effects of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Montgomery Bus boycott opened the door for this story about three young African-American men breaking the color line in banking in the city of Chicago.