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Book Review - Working for Equality: The Narrative of Harry Hudson

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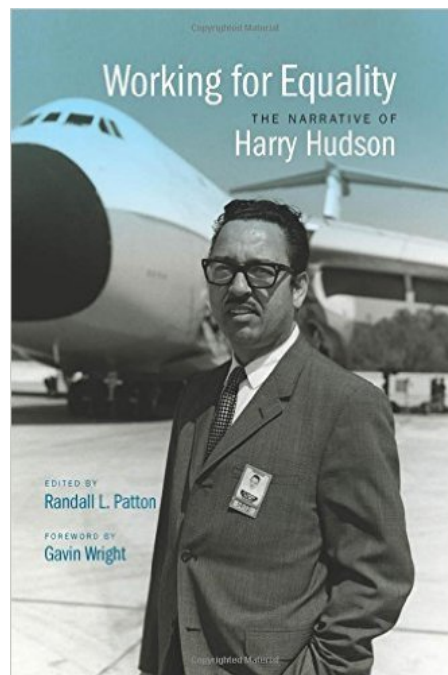
Off the SHELF

Working for Equality: The Narrative of Harry Hudson edited by Randall L. Patton, foreword by Gavin Wright (The University of Georgia Press, 2015: ISBN 978-0-8203-4800-1, \$44.95)

Working for Equality is the memoir of Harry Hudson, the first African American supervisor of Lockheed Aircraft's Georgia division. Harry Hudson walks readers through his career beginning in 1952, "drilling holes and shooting rivets in airplanes." Hudson was one of ten "super Negroes" originally recruited to appease the government and the NAACP during the civil rights movement. Hudson rose in the ranks from laborer to supervisor of an integrated African American crew and later to purchasing agent for the company. Due to his light skin color, Hudson faced discrimination from both white and black colleagues while at Lockheed. Hudson kept an amazing account of his years at Lockheed, starting with handwritten memos, and through the rise of technology, cassette tapes and later computers. Every few years, Hudson would organize his records and tapes until he eventually began writing a book of his time at Lockheed. His work is written candidly and is full of the emotion one expects to find from an African American during the civil rights movement.

The memoir describes the working life of Harry Hudson throughout his career at Lockheed Aircraft's Georgia division. Hudson began his career quite accidentally in 1952. At the time, Hudson and his father owned a gas station in

Atlanta and received a visit from Bobby Kennon, Lockheed's recruiter of "good African American applicants." The interest in recruiting African American applicants stemmed from Lockheed's desire to receive federal defense contracts due to the rise of the Korean War. The contracts would not be awarded to companies that did not hire African Americans.



From the beginning, Hudson chronicles the day-to-day struggles of an African American man working his way into a previously all-white corporation. Hudson's three-week long training program readied him for the work that he did but not for the racist atmosphere and actions of his supervisors. When drilling holes on the assembly line, Hudson and his crew were consistently marked with the "red grease pencil," a pencil used to determine if the size of the hole is the correct size, as incorrect. This made it appear that Hudson and his crew did not drill according to the way

they were instructed to. Two weeks into his new job, Hudson's supervisor told him that he was instructed to sabotage their work to make it look like Hudson and the other African Americans could not work in the industry.

As Hudson rose up through the ranks of Lockheed, racial incidents continued to occur with frequency. After eight years in management, Hudson was given a lateral move from a management position to a salaried position. In his words, "How one can call a move from management to a salaried position a lateral move was a little much for me to

comprehend, having been in management for eight years. Is every one supposed to be dumb and stupid?" Regardless of the situation, Hudson made the most of it and continued to rise up the ranks at Lockheed.

Hudson tells it exactly as he saw it in a fascinating display of thought-provoking penmanship as well as a frank writing style using "aircrafters' language" that draws the reader into the book. Hudson's writing is a firsthand account of the prejudice that existed during his time at Lockheed and how he and the other African Americans made it through day after day. Hudson retired in December 1987, and "all of the ladies in the material division (it seemed) and some of the gents cooked and made salads, cold cut spreads, ham, all types of bread, finger sandwiches, soft drinks, and really

made up a table of food as if the CEO were coming or leaving." In the end, Hudson expresses only one regret during his time at Lockheed: that he was not promoted based on his skill and work ethic but rather to appease the government and civil rights advocates instead. In conclusion, Harry Hudson hopes that "if you read between the lines you will understand the subtle evolution of the American original philosophy of the melting pot of different cultures and so-called races becoming one as the true American, as spelled out in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution."

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