

over a lot of blacks because I did a good job. But there are some blacks, I swear to God, I don't care what you did, it made no difference. All they saw was black. It's damaging to themselves. What more can a boss wish for?—divide and conquer!

When the government came down with a consent decree, Inland Steel ignored it. Every other company—LTV, Bethlehem, USX—paid minorities monies—two, three thousand dollars apiece—on the basis of years of discrimination at work. Inland Steel paid not a penny. They had a sharp lawyer who said, "Look, people are tired of civil rights, of marches, of busing, of affirmative action. The mood of the country is changing. Let's fight it." The government didn't follow through, and they didn't pay a penny. It's the Reagan years, and Bush is going even further.

I don't think the company is racist. That's too simple. It's the bottom line, the dollar. They don't care about you, no matter what your color is. You're nothing to them. If you're black or Latin or white, if they can set you up against the other workers, they're going to use you. They don't give a damn what color you are. It's the profit.

We have to keep on working together, and when we hear the word nigger or spic—or cracker—stand up and say, "I don't appreciate that. Enough of this bullshit!"

## FRANK LUMPKIN

*He had worked at Wisconsin Steel "for thirty years and one week," until the gates were shut on March 28, 1980. Long before, he had worked the mills in Buffalo and had sailed merchant ships during World War II.*

*After the shutdown, "I started this Save Our Jobs Committee. I'm still puttin' in six days a week, sometimes more. [Laughs.] We started in with this surplus food. We'd pass it out once or twice to workers and their families. We give out five pounds of cheese and some butter. We get some rice and honey and make them a bag and these steelworkers come around and pick it up for their families. Five hundred bags run out, just like that."*

*He and his wife live in a one-family dwelling on the South Side of Chicago. It is a street not much different from one in any solid working-class community in the city. "It's a neighborhood where peoples care about their property." Though predominantly black, there are white neighbors. "Next door is white, and two doors is white, and across the street is a Chinese lady. They're old-timers. They just didn't go when they had the flight."*

When things is good, it's not so critical. But when things get bad, like now, like the depression startin' in, the advantage of color really amounts to something. They got white, black, both hungry. If both of them is full, everything seem to be working all right.

This whole business of affirmative action was no problem at all till the jobs run out. It's no big thing when you're on the job. But when it comes to the point where giving you your equal rights would be a real hardship for me, it's why should I do this? I saw this affirmative action coming at the beginning of the cutback on jobs.

If the lion and the deer is both full, nobody attacks. It's only when the lion gets hungry he really fights for the thing. This is the way that life is.

It ain't easy for a man to give in if it hurts his family, for equality or for what's right.

When I come north to Buffalo, I come from where you pick oranges. In the South, a black boy could run the tractors, the heavy work, and the plows. When I got north, it was all white running the big things. Because of the union scale, the pay was higher. It wasn't according to how much work you done, it was according to how much pay it was on the job. So blacks was eliminated from truckdrivers, crane operators, because they were big-paying jobs.

Race is only used when it's to somebody's advantage, and I don't mean the workingman's advantage. It's never to our advantage. It's always an advantage to the man that's making the money, who's using these guys, to use this thing to divide them. It's not an advantage to the white *or* the black in the final analysis. During the war, when we had to do it, we did it together. The sea and everything else. Critical times, man forgets color.

I remember Trumbull Park, near our steel plant. Roughly, '53. This black family movin' in. Gangs come by and break windows. Black and white protected the family. They would break glasses of black workers' cars when they was comin' in. The gang boys told the white guys to put white handkerchiefs on their car and they wouldn't hit it. But whenever a black worker seen the white worker car with a hanky on it, he'd say, "What the hell are you doing?" They stopped doing this kind of thing because they seen that it was self-serving.

There was a black guy got off the bus with his lunch bucket in his hand, he started comin' to the mill, and a mob got in behind him. They start running him. And the white guys in the plant saw this and they says, "Son-of-a-bitch, do you see them runnin' that guy? We gotta stop this." And we did, never mind the politicians and the police. The guys who work together know each other and that's what it's all about. It's no problem

walking through Trumbull Park now. It's integrated to a great degree. They got a project in there now that's white and black.

My observation is that racism is dying. But as things die, sometimes they intensify. It's like clinging on to whatever it can grab. It don't mean it's not dangerous, it's intensified. You do everything you can to try to stop the changes with everything you got. But it don't mean, like in Trumbull Park, peoples is automatically opposed to anybody that comes there. While all this racism was going on, they never attacked the mailman and he was black. They never attacked the black crossing guard. They just didn't attack black per se.

If you worked at a steel mill at one time or another, you may have saved your fellow worker's life, leg, or arm. We had to support each other in that mill, otherwise—I remember one white guy arguing with another white guy when he called another guy "black bastard." He said, "You-son-of-a-bitch, if he hadn't of pulled you out from in that hole, you'd have been dead, gassed to death." One looked out for the other, had to.

Another struggle I was in was in Buffalo when they had racism on a boat that goes from Buffalo to Canada. They wouldn't let black guys on, only white. I organized a protest. They got mad and the police grabbed this guy and they was twistin' his arms. I grabbed the cop to try to tell him not to hurt this young guy. And he cracked me across and busted my hat. They got me for interfering with an arrest by an officer.

They had a trial and the jury was stacked with white tavern owners. They got a black prosecutor. You could look at the jury and you said: Son-of-a-gun, you's a dead duck. I expected a write-up in the papers, convicted by an all-white jury. The jury come back: Not guilty. Everybody in the courtroom jumped up and started clapping. Unbelievable.

It tells me simply that racism is not an automatic thing. It's an organized prejudice against people. Racism, you just don't come out and be this way. It's got to be some motivation behind it, by telling peoples they're gonna lose the value of their house or this or that. I'm saying racism is unnatural.

In the South where I come up, I used to play with two guys, Paul and Frank Harvey, white boys. We made boats, we made everything together. Only when it was time to go to school, we had to part company. Slowly but surely, this thing grew out of the system in the South.

When I come up from Georgia and got off the bus in Washington, D.C., they said you're going into God's country now. I thought I was going to be equal. I'm still looking for that equality. Actually, it isn't a simple thing that equality will come automatically. It's a system. In some coun-

tries, it's religion. It's anything that causes one man to feel superior to another.

Racism is a business. When they was organizing the packinghouses, they brought in these black guys in from the South on boats to break the strikes. What happens? Some of these black guys become the main organizers of the union. The backbone. It's black and white.

I can see the light even though it's still dark around you. I don't think nothing can stop it. I'm talkin' about integration.

I see black nationalism as a dangerous thing. My son is a doctor and he was investigating these homes where they keep peoples at state expense. Nursing homes. This home was really bad and it was black-owned. When he talked about improvement, they gets a lawyer and he says, "How come you bother about a black home?" He says, "This home is not suitable for poor black peoples and I'm gonna fight it, lock 'em up." He says, "I'm not doing this because it's black, I'm doing it because of what you're doing to black people. They're not being served. I don't care if it's run by black or white, it's wrong and I'm going to fight it."

He lost the case because the big town people said: You ain't gonna shut down a black home. This is part of the whole segregation that's got to be analyzed.

I am open-minded about a lot of this thing. We had one of the peoples come to see me, and he's a good friend. I had a picture of Christ. He had a cup of coffee and he looked at the wall and say, "You mean to tell me you got a blond-head, blue-eyed Christ on your wall?" By ding, I thought, You so-and-so. Honest to goodness, I said, "I very seldom do this, but it's a good idea if you get out of my house. I don't mind you being critical, but don't come in and tell me what I got to put over my walls."

There is a gap between the Latinos and the blacks. It's what happened in our shop in the seventies when the affirmative-action program started. They had to make some changes for the blacks in all departments. They had to have black foremen, black superintendants—everything but owners. [Laughs.] This went right down the mill. They got a black and a white.

The Latinos said, look, if you're gonna get a black, you gotta get a Latino. So they *centered* not on the white, but on the weakest link in the chain: "If the blacks gonna get up, We wanna get up." I says, "Look, they got twenty white foremen and only one black foreman, and you arguing about the one black that come up." It's not that they're fighting the black, they're fighting for the *just end*, but it seems that we're fighting against each other. I'm watching the schools and it could easily turn out that the Latino principal is going to fight the black principal.

When I set up our Save Our Jobs Committee, I put two white, two blacks, and two Latinos in leadership. I did it purposely because I know working people. They want representation. When we go into the room to discuss anything, all the nationalities discuss it. The only strength we got is integrated strength.

I know one thing, there is good peoples behind all colors of skin. If I don't find it in this white guy, I'll find it in that white guy. It's there. I'm one hundred percent sure of that. It's good guys in the white group, it's good guys in the black group, it's good guys in the Latino group. What we have to do is search and find them. When you're in a struggle, you can't leave a part of society out. Nobody wants to be *told* the story. They want to see it, they want to feel it, they want to be there.

There's something inside a man that can make him become extra. When you read John Brown, when you read the lives of great mens, who went beyond the norm, it was something that was behind them. Something that propelled them into these things. I don't know where it comes from, but it's just something that won't let you run away from a fight. If you walk away, you walk right back and say, "Wait a minute, I'll never be right if I walk away from this fight." You walk back and get involved, and when it's over, you're glad you did it. You hope that you'll be able to do it again.

But you have to generate this kind of *better living*. When you walk in a picket line or walk by the police and then look back and see the multitudes, the people behind you, you begin to feel high. No drug comes close to it.

