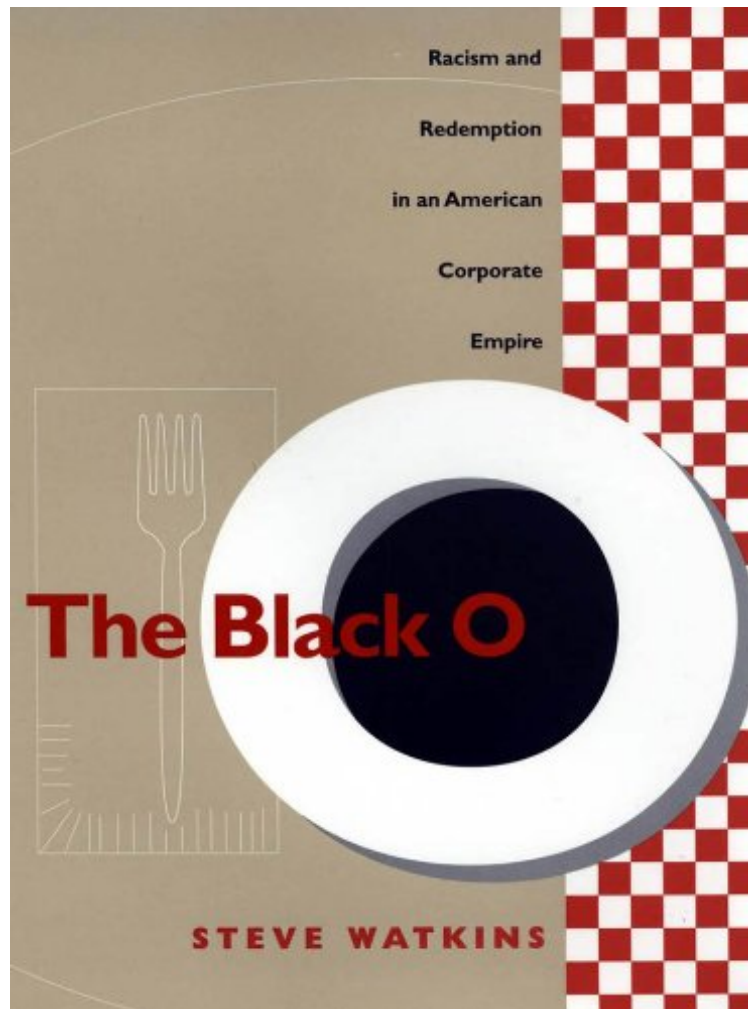


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The Black O

Steve Watkins

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Steve Watkins : The Black O before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Black O:

In 1988 several white managers of the Shoney's restaurant chain protested against the company's discriminatory hiring practices, including an order to blacken the "O" on minorities' job applications so that the marked forms could be discarded. When the managers refused to comply, they lost their jobs but not their resolve—they sued the company. Their case grew into the largest racial job discrimination class action lawsuit of its time. Shoney's eventually offered to settle out of court, and the nearly 21,000 claimants divided a \$132.5 million settlement, bringing to an abrupt end a landmark case that changed corporate attitudes nationwide. The Black O is a fascinating, behind-the-scenes story populated with many

unforgettable characters, including civil rights lawyer Tommy Warren, the former college football star and convicted felon who took the case; Ray Danner, the ironfisted former CEO who developed the Shoney's concept; and Justice Clarence Thomas, former head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which sat idly by for years while complaints mounted against Shoney's. The Black O speaks to an issue that continues to have great urgency, serving as a stark refutation that the civil rights movement eliminated systemic discrimination from the workplace.

A meticulously documented account. (New York Times Book)Anyone who thinks blacks are too paranoid about racism should read The Black O. (St. Petersburg Times)A startling journalistic effort . . . An unsettling, fascinating revelation of a truly wretched corporate environment and a rare triumph for the underdog. (Kirkus s)Watkins brings to our attention an important component in the ongoing civic debate concerning the meaning of race in contemporary American life. (In These Times)A fast-paced, riveting, and fascinating investigative narrative. (Black Book)A fascinating account of discriminatory corporate employment practices. (Library Journal)Although it is actually a painstakingly researched account of the largest private civil-rights case in U.S. history, at times it reads like an old-fashioned detective story. (Washington Monthly)An interesting, at times fascinating, account . . . of one of the largest racial discrimination class-action lawsuits in U.S. history. (Washington Post)From the Back CoverIn 1988 several white managers of the Shoney's restaurant chain protested against the company's discriminatory hiring practices, including an order at some restaurants to blacken the "O" in "Shoney's" on minorities' job applications so that the marked forms could then be ignored or discarded. When the managers refused to comply, they lost their jobs but not their resolve - they sued the company, and their case grew to become one of the largest racial job discrimination class action lawsuits and settlements in American history. The Black O is a fascinating, behind-the-scenes detective story about how the case evolved. The saga is populated with many unforgettable characters, including civil rights lawyer Tommy Warren, the former college football star and convicted felon who took the case; Ray Danner, the ironfisted former CEO who developed the Shoney's concept on a national level; and Justice Clarence Thomas, former head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which sat idly by for years while discrimination complaints mounted against the Shoney's empire. Five years after the lawsuit was filed, Shoney's offered to settle the case before it went to trial. The lawsuit was dropped, and the nearly 21,000 claimants divided a \$132.5 million settlement, bringing to an abrupt end a landmark case that changed corporate attitudes nationwide. Once shamed, Shoney's is now an industry leader in minority employment. Although David was victorious over Goliath in this case, The Black O speaks to an issue that continues to have great urgency in contemporary American society. In light of the recent Texaco, Publix, Denny's, and Cracker Barrel lawsuits, this case serves as a stark refutation of the belief that the civil rights movement and legislation have eliminated systemic discrimination from the American workplace. About the AuthorSteve Watkins is a professor of English at the University of Mary Washington. He is the author of a collection of stories, "My Chaos Theory," and two young adult novels, "Down Sand Mountain" and "What Comes After." Watkins is also an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in publications including "LA Weekly," "Poets and Writers," and the "Nation."