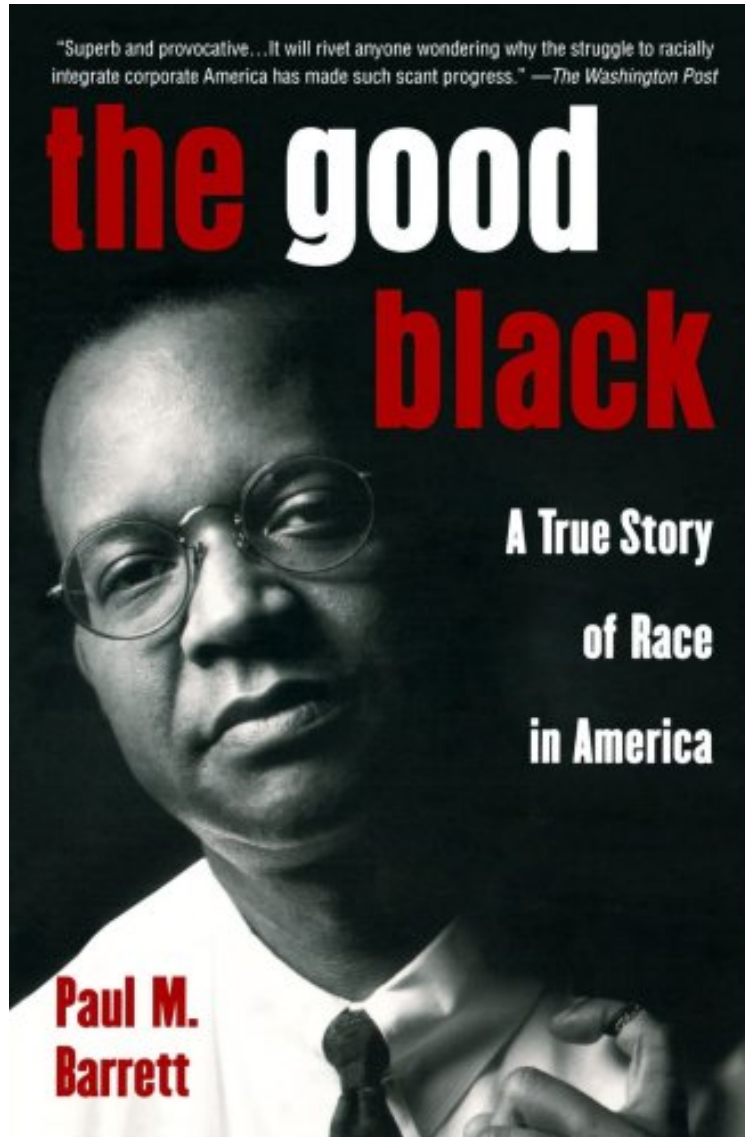


(Ebook free) The Good Black: A True Story of Race in America

## The Good Black: A True Story of Race in America

*Paul M. Barrett*

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**Paul M. Barrett : The Good Black: A True Story of Race in America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Good Black: A True Story of Race in America:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Told WellBy sayockI think Paul Barrett does a brilliant job telling the story, particularly in the way he presents every single issue and weakness, not just Mungin's issues or the firm's weaknesses. He does not clearly take Mungin's side throughout the whole book, even in the conclusion. Some might disagree, but the conclusion appears to me as Barrett giving his analysis of Mungin's situation with the firm from the

perspective of one with a law degree. To be honest with you, I think Barrett should have represented Mungin--Barrett has a right-on understanding of the case and the situation and makes several points that Mungin's lawyer should have made. As a law student, I had been reading the chapters detailing the courtroom experience, wondering why Mungin's lawyer Hairston was not bottom-lining the situation by saying that Mungin was enthusiastically hired to be a token, not to do work of substance for Katten Muchin. In the end, Barrett hit that point on the head--Mungin was simply a token to Katten Muchin. They brought him in, paid him to do next to nothing and then didn't want to let him go even though there was next to no work for him to do, while they let other whites go...because they knew they would be losing a token and losing in the minority retention game. Mungin's lawyer acted like she couldn't figure any of this out, among other questions she should have been able to answer during the trials, or answered but could have answered better. She had to know that she was going to be questioned about why Katten Muchin would hire Mungin because of race and then discriminate against him. She is part of the reason why he lost one of the two trials surrounding this case, the other parts being there was no in-your-face racism and the judges being conservatives hell-bent against finding racism in the situation. In the other trial, which Mungin did win, it was not at all because his lawyer was so good...it had more to do with the defense lawyer being awful and the jury being black, except for one person. I'll leave those who haven't read the book yet to read it and find out which trial he won and which one he lost. The problem with proving racism in this situation is not so much that the racism is so subtle as it is that the situation was so complex. It was a huge mess. And Katten Muchin was not the only one making mistakes that added to the complexity, their biggest being letting Dombroff have his way all the time, particularly with starting a bankruptcy department when there is little bankruptcy work in DC...Mungin made TONS of mistakes and, in my opinion, added to his own pain and suffering. He didn't even have to take a job with Katten Muchin, for starters, and there were tons of warning signals that he **SHOULDN'T** take a job with Katten Muchin. He dismissed every signal, as noted by Barrett. Mungin is someone, as shown throughout the entire book in several different instances, who is too headstrong for his own good and who has awful judgment, from picking law firms to work for right down to picking law firms to take his case. Mungin is described several times by several people, including the author, as arrogant, and that arrogance was a huge part of his downfall. Even Mungin himself knew he was an arrogant son-of-a-gun heading for a fall--he wrote his own autobiography for his eyes only long before the lawsuit saying so. Katten Muchin in DC was a firm with no blacks--he knew this. Katten Muchin in general had issues with retention of minorities, a racial discrimination lawsuit going on in Chicago, a history of sexual harassment complaints. Had he done some research, he would have learned some of these things. It was a firm that was not on his--or many other people's--radar when it was suggested to him. He had other firms wanting to hire him at the time and bring him in as partner, whereas Katten Muchin merely made a vague promise to consider him for partner after one year. Others more in the know about Katten Muchin knew they were having issues, including possible finance or management problems and problems with a jerk DC partner, Dombroff. But Mungin just does not listen. I believe that no one intentionally discriminated against Mungin, and that's one of the reasons the four lawyers in Katten Muchin he originally singled out in his lawsuit were dismissed. I want to mention here that I am black. I read the situation as unconscious or subconscious discrimination, which is quite possibly the reason why the lawyers at Katten Muchin originally singled out firmly believed they had done nothing wrong and why the white conservative judges in one of Mungin's lawsuits could not see any wrongdoing that was racially related. The kind of discrimination Mungin experienced is the kind of discrimination blacks experience all the time in various situations and in law firms across the country, not just Katten Muchin. More or less, Mungin was overlooked at the law firm, or, as it was put several times, he "fell through the cracks." Well, white people routinely overlook black people, without even thinking about it or meaning to (I go through this on a daily basis, particularly when I am in school). The majority of whites (and even other non-blacks) in the US just **LOOK...RIGHT...THROUGH...BLACKS**. And they can't see that they do this or that another white person has done it because it is such a way of life to white people, so ingrained, that they don't realize they do this. That's what Mungin experienced, and his experience was a similar kind of unconscious or subconscious racism as how every day blacks attend schools with whites and yet relatively few whites will speak to them, become friends with them, date them, choose to work with them on assignments or projects, join them at the lunch table, etc...and think nothing of it or see nothing wrong with their actions, or lack of actions. Similarly, Mungin was never invited to meetings. Seemingly, not many people within Katten Muchin knew why he worked there or what he did there. The ones who did, did not seem very interested in helping him out and ultimately decided not to--or "forgot" to--consider him for partner or evaluate his work. Their explanation for not living up to promises to help Mungin was that Mungin was supposed to help himself by bringing in work himself. Hairston never argued this, which she should have, but that was not the point--the point was they **PROMISED** to and just did not do it. Sure, he should have been out there hustling for work, but these people said they would steer work his way. Instead, they gave DC work to whites in Chicago to do when black Mungin in DC could have done it--**AFTER** being promised he would get work such as that given to whites all the way in Chicago. Like I said before, they simply did not want Mungin to work, probably did not trust Mungin to work, on complex assignments...though they never said as much because Mungin had never actually screwed up any assignments he'd done, so they wouldn't have a legitimate reason to say it. They couldn't say, "Oh, he's merely our token, so we can

claim he's a partner in our DC bankruptcy office when he really isn't and never will be...we just want to look like we have blacks and black partners."The way law firms work is if a partner likes you enough, they will help you in any way they can--they will give you more work than other associates at the firm. Nobody liked Mungin enough to keep promises made to him. They gave assignments to white males in Chicago because they liked the white males in Chicago. Now, he could very well have been overlooked, not because of race, but because he was in a practice that was absolutely nothing to Katten Muchin. Or, as the firm argued, it might have been because they simply mistreated everyone (though not anyone quite the same way as Mungin), particularly in the DC office where Dombroff harmed many a career, including Mungin's at least to a certain degree if not entirely. Law firms across the board mistreat associates in one way or the other. There's no telling--read and decide for yourself.I would say it's hard to come away from this book feeling sorry for Mungin because of the brilliant way Barrett lays everything out on the line. Aside from being arrogant and hardheaded, Mungin very much bordered on being the kind of black who just didn't want to be black. He didn't want to be associated with other blacks, not even blacks coming into the law firm. He always seemed ashamed of his background, with the exception of his stint in the Navy and degrees from Harvard. I don't think he dated black females, and it seems as if most of his friends throughout his life were white. He seemed to be of the mindset that if he set himself away from blacks and did things that, in his mind, were respected by whites, whites would accept him and he would have a great career making a lot of money. He was very self-centered and money-hungry and had a lot of characteristics typical of a white male, particularly a white male professional. The book is called "The Good Black" for that reason--he was always desperate to prove to whites that he was a "good black," but I think he did not only look down on dangerous or more negatively stereotypical blacks...as hinted at by the fact that he wanted little or nothing to do with blacks coming in behind him, even as a mentor. He ignored race at all costs, which built up rage inside of him, and this continued at Katten Muchin. He screwed up by letting the white people run over him there, simply because he did not want to be thought of as a "problem black" or confirm that he fits white stereotypes of blacks...for all the good that did. Eventually, his letting the whites run over him hurt him in several ways, from the trial (i.e. why didn't you tell anyone about XY treatment) to his sense of identity. I think the situation with Katten Muchin was exactly what Mungin needed as a wake-up call and to discover who he really is--these kinds of things always happen to the most naive black people, because they are the ones who need these things to happen.In that sense, I would say the book, while not providing any sort of answer for how we can make race relations better in this country (or, for that matter, make law firms better), does have a happy ending. In the end, he told Barrett something to the effect of, "Don't be surprised if you visit me and I have a wife and kids." He came to know what was really important--not partnership in a law firm, acceptance by whites, looking out for #1 and money...but family and support, self-assurance and true happiness.2 of 5 people found the following review helpful. If Only Life Were FairBy Charles M. WyzanskiAfter graduating from Harvard College, Mungin was determined to gain admission to Harvard Law School and to achieve status and wealth by gaining partnership in a big city law firm. Unfortunately, he never made it. Barrett, his Harvard Law School roommate, tells Mungin's story with remarkable insight and sympathy. In truth, Mungin was a less than distinguished law student, a less than enthusiastic lawyer, and a less than happily adjusted person. Yet given his abilities and credentials, it is hard to believe that Mungin would not have made partner at one of the four firms he tried, had he not been black. That is what an entirely black jury in the District of Columbia concluded in awarding him 2.5 million dollars. And yet the racism at Mungin's last firm was subtle and unintended. Mungin should have further persisted if the brass ring was all that counted. Are we as a society to award compensation to everyone who fails to reach their highest ambition when--as JFK found it so easy to say--"life is not fair?" The court of appeals decided otherwise. To my mind, Barrett has, perhaps unintentionally, very powerfully illustrated why.1 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Doesn't make it's caseBy CustomerIt's obvious that Larry Mungin was treated wrong at his law firm. The book details every humiliation that was dished out to him but was it old fashioned racism or was it simply rude and rough lawyer culture? The book is very well written but it never delivers the slam dunk. At the end you still have the question: Racism or hubris?

Larry Mungin spent his life preparing to succeed in the white world. He looked away from racial inequality and hostility, believing he'd make it if he worked hard and played by the rules. He rose from a Queens housing project to Harvard Law School, and went on to practice law at major corporate firms. But just at the point when he thought he'd make it, when he should have been considered for partnership, he sued his employer for racial discrimination. The firm claimed it went out of its way to help Larry because of his race, while Larry thought he'd been treated unfairly. Was Larry a victim of racial discrimination, or just another victim of the typical dog-eat-dog corporate law culture? A thought-provoking courtroom drama with the fast pace of a commercial novel, *The Good Black* asks readers to rethink their ideas about race and is a fascinating look at the inner workings of the legal profession.

.com Here is the quintessential American success story: a young African American boy from an inner-city neighborhood makes good and goes to Harvard Law School, then on to a promising career in a prestigious law firm. In Paul M. Barrett's unsettling *The Good Black*, however, the rags-to-riches formula goes terribly awry. Barrett's subject

is his former college roommate, Lawrence Mungin. As a child in the all-black Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, Mungin had learned at his mother's knee that he was "a human being first, an American second, and a black third." Hard work and good grades got him into Harvard. After several years as an associate at law firms in Atlanta and Houston, Mungin signed on with the Washington, D.C., firm of Katten Muchin Zavis, hoping at last to achieve his dream of full partnership. What he got instead was the end of his career. The facts of what happened to Lawrence Mungin are indisputable: demeaning work, insulting treatment, zero advancement; what is in question is why he was treated in such a way. When Mungin took his complaint to court, he claimed racial discrimination; Katten Muchin Zavis didn't deny their mistreatment but insisted that, far from being racially motivated, it was simply the way the firm treated all its employees. Barrett, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, chronicles Mungin's life, his lawsuit, and the bitter aftermath of the trial in a book that raises more questions than it answers--questions about the American way of doing business that should trouble every American, white or black. From Publishers Weekly

In a crackling courtroom drama that illustrates just how ambiguous issues of race can be, Wall Street Journal deputy legal editor Barrett examines the case of Larry Mungin, his roommate at Harvard Law School. Mungin sued his Chicago-based law firm, Katten Muchin Zavis, charging racial discrimination. The sole African-American lawyer in KMZ's Washington, D.C., office, Mungin was awarded \$2.5 million in 1996 by a jury of seven blacks and one white; but on appeal, two white judges prevailed over the black chief judge and reversed the jury ruling. Was Mungin the victim of racial bias? There is no easy answer, as Barrett readily acknowledges. Mungin claimed that KMZ failed to consider him for partnership, paid him less than white associates and assigned him low-level tasks far below his abilities. But the firm retorted that the bankruptcy work for which Mungin was hired dried up, that his starting salary was set by the marketplace and that he was the only associate offered a transfer to another office. While Barrett admits "there wasn't any direct evidence" that Mungin was treated differently because of his race, he nevertheless believes that race probably was an important factor in the firm's "callous" marginalization of Mungin. Therefore, concludes Barrett, the appeals court should have let the jury's verdict stand. Readers' opinions will be sharply divided. Because the case involved not egregious racist acts but rather more subtle forms of alleged discrimination, law firms (and many other employers) will want to scrutinize Barrett's painstaking analysis. Agent, Julian Bach. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sA

fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpse of race and character in a court discrimination case. Lawrence Mungin, who holds two degrees from Harvard, is a black attorney from the projects in Queens, New York, whos all too anxious to leave behind his racial baggage. Perhaps unwittingly, Mungin appears to distance himself from so much that ultimately he comes across as wooden, sterile, and not so much black as opaque. But thats precisely how he seems to want it. Young, reasonably attractive, well dress edbetter still, well spokenhe chooses Martin Luther King Jr. as his hero over Malcolm X, and debate over basketball as his chosen calling: Polite, polished, he is the good black. Thus, in joining the Washington, D.C., law firm of Katten Muchin and Zavis t o practice bankruptcy law, he expects to make partner in a couple of years. But he finds himself relegated to paper-pushing, and he eventually sues his employer. This is no typical racial discrimination suit in which the employer is caught conspiring agai nst black employees, leading to a court award of millions. Rather, its a study in the moral ambiguities of race in America. The law firm apparently mistreated all of its employees, and Mungin, as the lone black, was no exception. Moreover, though at first he seemed to eschew all ties to racial matters, when the circumstances warrant, he willingly manipulates race. Barrett, a Wall Street Journal legal affairs writer who coincidentally was Mungins friend at Harvard Law School, manages to keep a discreet dis tance from his subject while also enjoying access to him and other parties of the court case. Suspenseful, highly entertaining courtroom drama. (Author tour) -- Copyright 1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.