

Black Activist

YOU ARE A BLACK ACTIVIST in Central City. Over the years you've worked with a number of organizations to promote civil rights and independence for black people. Sometimes you've worked with groups that make alliances with whites, other times you've worked with black-only organizations. You join with whomever you see as capable of effectively fighting racism in Central City and the country as a whole. For years there weren't many black people in Central City. Most blacks came north during World War I. Conditions were horrible in Mississippi. Your family worked as sharecroppers there, growing cotton and a few vegetables. It seemed like you were always in debt to the white landlord. Everything you had to buy was expensive; but they paid you next to nothing for the crops you raised. Anyone who protested would be beaten or even killed. Blacks were denied the right to vote and the kids went to crummy schools.

When people heard there were jobs up north, practically your whole county emptied out overnight. But conditions in Central City have become increasingly difficult since the war. Perhaps the biggest problem is job discrimination. Employers hire blacks in only the most dangerous, worst-paid and dead-end jobs. Even when you have the skills and education that qualify you for good jobs, the jobs still go to white people. The Ku Klux Klan is strong in Central City. They want to make sure that blacks stay poor and powerless and don't get too "uppity" and start demanding good jobs, better housing, and decent schools. You are especially concerned about the education of black children. While schools are not formally

segregated in Central City, you know that black children are discriminated against. One recent study found that 50 percent of black girls in Central City schools were classified as "retarded" and put in "special classes," whereas only 4 percent of native-born whites were classified this way. For this you blame racist administrators and teachers.

Many school officials say that they want to teach children the skills they will need in "real life." They assume blacks will continue to be janitors and maids and so want to teach you to be good—and happy—janitors and maids. But you want your children to get a good academic education so they can become anything they set their minds to.

However, some people complain that this kind of education will only make black children resentful. As one judge warned recently, education should not put "fool ideas of rising and equality into [black] folks' heads, and [make] them discontent and unhappy." In your view, in an unjust society, education *should* make young people discontented. It should fill their heads with dreams of equality and give them the tools—reading, writing, knowledge of their history—that will allow them to make their dreams real. You hope that the more education children have, the unhappier they will be with the racism in Central City and the larger society. A good education should help give children the skills to organize for a better, more just, society. What you want from the superintendent of schools in Central City, and the school system as a whole, is a commitment to fight racism.