

Middle-class Person

YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF “MIDDLE-CLASS”—maybe upper-middle-class. You manage a small variety “five and dime” store; your father was a clerk for a large machine shop in town. The changes going on in Central City make you nervous—not so much for yourself, but for your children. When you were young, the common wisdom was that if you went to high school and you graduated, you were guaranteed a good, solid middle-class or business job. You might become a clerk or a factory superintendent, or go on to college to become a lawyer or a doctor. The ticket was high school graduation, and for the most part only the upper and middle classes went to high school.

But now everything is changing. In the last 20 years or so, the population of Central City has tripled. Quite a number of people are coming into town off the farms, but most of the newcomers are immigrants from overseas. These people, many of whom can’t even speak English, think that in America the streets are lined with gold. The problem is that the immigrants think that the way to get some of that good American gold is to send their kids to high school. Why is this a problem? Because there aren’t enough good jobs to go around. A university did a survey recently. They asked high school kids what they wanted to

be when they grew up. Just over 90 percent wanted to be some kind of professional person, clerk, or business person; only 4 percent wanted to work in a factory. But in the real world, only about 18 percent of the jobs are those kind of decent middle-class jobs. Over 60 percent are factory jobs or farmwork of some kind.

You hate to think of yourself as selfish, but these statistics mean that there are going to be lots of people competing for the jobs that should belong to your children. You know that in a fair competition, your child would succeed. But what is happening now is that all these immigrant kids and farm kids who can barely read or write are crowding into the same classes. Soon, a high school diploma won’t be worth anything. You want your child to read classic literature, take mathematics, write essays and research papers, learn the history of this great country, and master the workings of our form of government. But all these slow learners are going to hold everyone back. And they are also disruptive, many of them juvenile delinquents. The world is a different place. Today, good jobs require more education. You might even have to send your children to college. But what if they’ve had an inferior high school education because of all these rowdy newcomers?