

they kept it working in the blast furnace department:

You came into the labor gang on your first day of work. You might shovel spills off the railroad tracks the first few days, or help to dig a ditch, or clean up an overflow of hot cinder (slag). But as soon as there was an opening on the furnaces, even a temporary one-day opening, you would get your chance to move up. That is, if you were *Black*, you'd move up to the furnaces; if you were *white*, you'd move up to the repair gang.

After you moved up to the furnaces and you had felt the teeth of the hot blast, you usually felt like going back down to the labor gang—even though you'd lose money to do it.



Willie Brainard, like almost everybody else on the furnaces, had stuck it out. But after five years he decided he would get into the repair gang. And he knew as well as anybody else that that wouldn't be easy.

It so happened that he changed clothes in the north welfare building. For some reason the company called the locker room-shower-equipped glorified brick-sheds in the blast furnace department "welfare buildings." There were three of them. Covered with ore dust and furnace grime on the outside, but kept as clean as shaky old crippled ex-furnace men could keep them on the inside, they served the purpose. And we did succeed in scraping off the dirt in them.

Quite a few repair gang guys changed in the north welfare building along with twenty or thirty furnace men. The jimcrow line did not extend to the bath house.

One day Willie Brainard said to Jimmy Burns, who had a locker right across the aisle from him, "Say Jimmy, I notice a new guy was just hired off the street for your gang."

"That's nothing new," said Jimmy. "You mean that skinny kid with the glasses?"

"Yeah," said Willie. "How about putting in a grievance for me to get that job? I got five years' seniority."

"A grievance? Why not?" answered Jimmy.

Now, as you might guess, Jimmy Burns was white. And Jimmy, like Willie, could think of a dozen reasons "why not,"