

first and foremost being company policy. An ordinary white worker might think that God had made the blast furnace men Black and the repair men white. But Jimmy, being an active union steward, very much aware of what was going on all around him, knew that it was not God, but the Bethlehem Steel Company that was the creator of the situation.

But that didn't mean he thought he could change it very easily.

He also knew the repair gang guys pretty well. And although they didn't make racist cracks in front of him and especially not in front of the Black guys themselves, he knew they were cliquish and racist, too. They never used a bad word about Black people while they were at work, it seemed. But that was partly because so much of their work was done near the Black workers. Many of them laughed and joked with the furnace men, but they felt they were one kind and the furnace guys were another.

About half of them had been brought up in Lackawanna and they might easily have been part of the white gangs that used to go across the tracks to the end of town on Saturday nights and pick fights with the Black kids. Most of the Black kids in those earlier days had come up from the South, and they were underfed and rickety with toothpick legs. They had the disadvantage of being strangers and outsiders—and looking it.

But anyway, out came Jimmy's grievance pad. At that time the stewards all carried their pads and made out grievances in duplicate, giving one to the boss and filing the other at the union hall. As Jimmy wrote this particular grievance up, he was wondering if he would ever win it. And as Willie signed it, he was telling himself that he *would* win, no matter what.

Now you have to know a little about Jimmy Burns. Not that Jimmy was so different from anybody else. Everybody in the blast furnace department was pretty much like everybody else. That is, the Black workers were pretty much like the other Black workers and the white workers were pretty much like the other white workers. And both Black and white were more like each other than they knew.

But Jimmy had been brought up in nearby Buffalo, rather than in Lackawanna. And while Buffalo might just seem like a glorified Lackawanna to a person in a really big city, it did have a little more possibility for you to learn about the world and its problems. Jimmy had learned a little there. Besides that, he had

hitch-hiked around the country. He had seen places where Black people were treated better than in Lackawanna; he had met some Black professionals who were smarter than most whites in the steel plant; and he had seen some young Black leaders in the restaurant union when he washed dishes for a while in New York City. He had also been to some places where Black people were treated even worse than they were in Lackawanna. That made him think about the idea that *everybody* should be equal. On top of all that, he read books about labor history and he got radical ideas about the future of humanity.

With all that, you'd think he would be very different from the rest of the repair gang. And if you looked closely, he was. But from a distance—like the distance from which the furnace men were looking—Jimmy didn't look so different from the others.

And that was about right. The truth was that if all the other guys had done the same things and been in the same places he had, why, they would probably have felt about the same way he felt.