

Primary Source

Richard Wright, *Black Boy*, 1945



To what extent did Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice become a reality for African Americans during the civil rights movement?

- ☐ I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice in the civil rights movement
- ☐ I can explain how laws and policy, courts, and individuals and groups contributed to or pushed back against the quest for liberty, equality, and justice for African Americans.
- ☐ I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
- ☐ I can analyze issues in history to help find solutions to present-day challenges.

Building Context

Richard Wright was a Black writer who wrote the seminal novel *Native Son* (1940), and then an autobiography, *Black Boy* (1945), among other important works. In his writings, Wright directly confronts the racial prejudice and violence of the Jim Crow South. He details how he experienced poverty and a constant state of fear as a young Black in the segregated South. He gradually became aware of the injustice and inequality Blacks suffered and formulated ideas about how he would respond.

Richard Wright, *Black Boy*, 1945

All right, I was colored. It was fine. I did not know enough to be afraid or to anticipate in a concrete manner. True, I had heard that colored people were killed and beaten, but so far it all had seemed remote. There was, of course, a vague uneasiness about it all, but I would be able to handle that when I came to it. It would be simple.	Notes
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... The hostility of the whites had become so deeply implanted in my mind and feelings that it had lost direct connection with the daily environment in which I lived; and my reactions to this hostility fed upon itself, grew or diminished according to the news that reached me about the whites, according to what I aspired or hoped for. Tension would set in at the mere mention of whites and a vast complex of emotions, involving the whole of my personality, would be aroused. It was as though I was continuously reacting to the threat of some natural force whose hostile behavior could not be predicted. I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become as conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings.

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. How does Wright describe the emotions he feels when white people are mentioned?

2. Why does Wright have this reaction?