

# Education in the 1940's

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Having an education for the Black man of the 1940's was a blessing and a curse. It was very rare to hear of a Black person with an education because Black people were enslaved for so long that they never had a chance to learn how to read and write. These privileges were taken away from them for so long and now that slavery was now over, they were still being treated unfairly by the white man. Those Black men who learned how to read and write took full advantage of it and got their education and may have opened a few doors so that they could provide for their families

At that time in the 1940's the requirements for certain jobs for Black people would restrict them to only mediocre jobs like school teacher, maid, farmers etc. In the book " A Lesson Before Dying " Grant Wiggins was more educated than most people, Black or white, in his region and accorded high social status but in the book Reverend Ambrose told Grant otherwise. He said " When you act educated, I'll call you Grant. I'll even call you Mr. Grant, when you act like a man." What Reverend Ambrose is saying is that Grant isn't educated or a man. A college education does not make one man as smart as another. If he you knows what school taught you & not what society taught you then what do you really know.

For the Black men and women who were blessed enough to have and education took full advantage of it and it would open many doors for job and other means of providing for their families. Jefferson became a school teacher to educate the children in the quarter to become something more than a farmer where most of them are destined to go. Dr. Joseph, the school superintendent said to Grant " Higgins, I must compliment you. You have an excellent crop of students, an excellent crop, Higgins..." (p 56) In other

words, what Dr. Joseph is saying is that at the end of the day, the children be nothing more than farmers, excellent farmers at that. Grant's job is to make sure that doesn't happen but is he capable of such a task?

Having an education in the 1940's was needed to survive but it didn't always mean you would be able to provide for yourself or even stay alive for the most part. In the book *A Lesson Before Dying*, Grant talks about those who he went to school with who did not make it far. Some of them are either dead, in prison or dying slowly inside. Grant was told that most of them are going to die violently.

Being educated, Grant feels superior to the black community and tries to not to be "the nigger he was born to be" (p 79), which he finds humiliating. He tried to be different from everyone else & teach the children so that they won't end up on a farm like the majority of the quarter. Education is what was needed to survive back in the 1940's with the Jim Crow laws that were put in place to separate the Black people from the White people. It was hard to get a proper education in the 1940's but if anybody is lucky enough to receive it, then it was a blessing.