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As a black boy growing up in America in the early 1900s, Richard Wright knew well the meaning of racial prejudice. He was not allowed to play in a park or borrow books from a library. While working as an office boy in a bank, though, he found a way into the library and discovered the power of the written word. In the following story, Richard Wright tells us how his thirst for books grew with each passing day and what changes took place in him as he did more and more reading.

THE LIBRARY CARD
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Richard Wright
One morning I arrived early at work and went into the bank lobby where the Negro porter was mopping. I stood at a counter and picked up the Memphis Commercial Appeal and began my free reading of the press. I came finally to the editorial page and saw an article dealing with one H. L. Mencken. I knew by hearsay that he was the editor of the American Mercury, but aside from that I knew nothing about him. The article was a furious denunciation of Mencken, concluding with one, hot, short sentence: Mencken is a fool. I wondered what on earth this Mencken had done to call down upon him the scorn of the South. The only people I had ever heard denounced in the South were Negroes, and this man was not a Negro. Then what ideas did Mencken hold that made a newspaper like the Commercial Appeal castigate him publicly? Undoubtedly he must be advocating ideas that the South did not like. Now, how could I find out about this

Mencken? There was a huge library near the riverfront, but I knew that Negroes were not allowed to patronize its shelves any more than they were the parks and playgrounds of the city. I had gone into the library several times to get books for the white men on the job. Which of them would now help me to get books? I weighed the personalities of the men on the job. There was Don, a Jew. but I distrusted him. His position was not much better than mine and I knew that he was uneasy and insecure. he had always treated me in an offhand, bantering way that barely concealed his contempt. I was afraid to ask him to help me to get books. his frantic desire to demonstrate a racial solidarity with the whites against Negroes might make him betray me. Then how about the boss? No, he was a Baptist and I had the suspicion that he would not be quite able to comprehend why a black boy would want to read Mencken. There were other white men on the job whose attitudes showed clearly that they were Kluxers or sympathizers, and they were out of the question. There remained only one man whose attitude did not fit into an anti-Negro category, for I had heard the white men refer to him as "Pope lover". He was an Irish Catholic and was hated by the white Southerners. I knew that he read books, because I had got him volumes from the library several times. Since he, too, was an object of hatred, I felt that he might refuse me but would hardly betray me. I hesitated, weighing and balancing the imponderable realities. One morning I paused before the Catholic fellows desk. "I want to ask you a favor," I whispered to him. "What is it?"来源

: www.examda.com "I want to read. I cant get books from the

library. I wonder if you'd let me use your card?" He looked at me suspiciously. "My card is full most of the time," he said. "I see," I said and waited, posing my question silently. "You're not trying to get me into trouble, are you, boy?" he asked, staring at me. "Oh, no, sir."来源 : www.examda.com "What book do you want?" "A book by H. L. Mencken." "Which one?" "I don't know. Has he written more than one?" "He has written several." "I didn't know that." "What makes you want to read Mencken?" "Oh, I just saw his name in the newspaper," I said. "It's good of you to want to read," he said. "But you ought to read the right things." I said nothing. Would he want to supervise my reading? "Let me think," he said. "I'll figure out something." I turned from him and he called me back. He stared at me quizzically. "Richard, don't mention his to the other white men," he said. "I understand," I said. "I won't say a word." A few days later he called me to him. "I've got a card in my wife's name," he said. "Here's mine." "Thank you, sir."来源 : www.examda.com "Do you think you can manage it?" 100Test 下载频道开通 , 各类考试题目 直接下载。 详细请访问 www.100test.com