

TEACHER'S GUIDE
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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

The NAACP Challenges Social Security

President Roosevelt sent his Social Security bill, named the "Economic Security Act," to Congress in January 1935. Congress held committee hearings on the bill. Here, a representative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a group dedicated to advancing the rights of African Americans, testifies before Congress about how the bill excludes African Americans.

Mr. Houston:The point that I am making is that in order to qualify for the old-age annuity there is a provision that taxes must be paid on behalf of this person prior to the day when he reaches 60 years. Now, for the benefit of Negroes, I want to inquire who would be benefited or excluded by that provision? First, and very serious, Negro share croppers and cash tenants would be excluded. I take it that I do not need to argue to this committee the fact that of the Negro population and of the population of the country generally, your Negro share cropper and your Negro cash farm tenant are just about at the bottom of the economic scale. He is not employed. There is no relation necessarily of master and servant by which he gets wages on which a tax could be levied. Therefore this population is excluded from the entire benefits of the old-age annuity, and that represents approximately, according to the 1930 census, 490,000 Negroes. Next: Domestic servants are ... excluded from the act ... because the system of employing domestic servants is so loose.... In addition to that, from the standpoint of present persons unemployed ... this old-age annuity does not provide for these ... I do not need to argue to the committee that Negroes have suffered from unemployment more than any other class of the community.

Source: "The Statement of Charles H. Houston, representing the NAACP, to the House Ways and Means Committee on the Economic Security bill," February 1, 1935. Washington, D.C. Excerpt from *Historical Thinking Matters*,
<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/socialsecurity/0/inquiry/main/resources/34/>

