

by Dr. King. From a political and legal perspective, his optimism was sustained by the passage of landmark civil rights legislation during the Johnson administration and the continuing vigilance of the federal courts in their determination to eradicate constitutionally the vestiges of segregation.

Upon his graduation from Morehouse University, a historically black college in Atlanta, Roundtree found employment in a black-owned print shop in Jackson Falls, a racially diverse city of half a million in the heart of the Deep South. But despite the demands of earning a livelihood and attending to the needs of his family, Roundtree continued his commitment to the ongoing struggle for racial equality through his participation in the NAACP and support for African-American legislative candidates. His print shop responsibilities were not intellectually challenging, and the young civil rights activist applied for and was hired as a reporter for the *Jackson Falls Gazette*, whose progressive-minded publisher was eager to have minority representation in his newsroom. At a time when most newspapers in the South were neglecting their black audiences owing to, in part, their lack of commercial appeal to advertisers, the *Gazette's* publisher was determined that the problems of the African-American community would have a forum in the pages of his newspaper. And Washington Roundtree would be his representative in the economically impoverished and socially volatile black enclaves of Jackson Falls.

For ten years Roundtree chronicled both the struggles and the triumphs of the black residents of Jackson Falls, but despite his publisher's alleged commitment to racial equality, the activist-turned-journalist was disappointed in the rather modest amount of space accorded his stories by the *Gazette's* editorial staff. "You're doing a great job, and we feel the black community is fairly represented in our paper. But we also have to sell papers, and our advertisers aren't interested in targeting audiences with no purchasing power," became an increasingly frequent rejoinder when Roundtree challenged his editors' decision to cut or eliminate one of his stories.

With this journalistic seasoning and a low interest loan, Roundtree founded the *Freedom Fighter*, a paper that would service exclusively Jackson Falls'

► CASE 12-4

The African-American Publisher and Divided Loyalties

Washington Roundtree's credentials as a longtime crusader for civil rights were unimpeachable. As a young college student in the early 1960s, he had marched with Dr. Martin Luther King in Alabama and had participated in the black voter registration drives in Mississippi. He had challenged the segregated lunch counters in Montgomery and had been arrested in Birmingham for taking part in a peaceful demonstration to protest segregation in the city's public transportation system. For this act of civil disobedience, Roundtree had spent three nights in jail. He had emerged from these experiences convinced that African Americans were on the precipice of a new era of social justice in which these descendants of slaves would finally share in the economic opportunities and social parity that had symbolized the white middle class. On a philosophical level, his emotional spark had been stoked by the doctrine of nonviolence embraced

African-American citizens, while it continued his campaign for social justice and cultivated the growing black middle class. From his perch as publisher and editor of the *Freedom Fighter*, Roundtree was an unapologetic advocate for compensatory justice. He editorially promoted affirmative action initiatives, government antipoverty programs, and busing as a means of achieving school desegregation. And as the corridors of political power became increasingly accessible to African Americans, Roundtree had enthusiastically endorsed black candidates for local office, the state house, and Congress. He was particularly pleased when, in 1986, the legislature, under pressure from members of the influential black caucus, had redrawn his Tenth Congressional District to ensure a majority black voter representation. Black legislators referred to this as social justice; their opponents called it racial gerrymandering. Nevertheless, the move had ensured the election of an African-American representative, as conservative white politicians abandoned the Tenth District race as a lost cause, politically speaking.

But in 1994 an increasingly conservative Supreme Court had ruled that the Tenth District had been unconstitutionally redrawn specifically for the purpose of ensuring black congressional representation, and within a few months the legislature complied with the Court's edict as it revisited the Tenth District's geographic configuration. Thus, Roundtree's residence once again became an attractive plum for the white political establishment.

Elections normally did not pose a moral dilemma for the *Freedom Fighter's* publisher-editor. In the past he had simply endorsed and actively supported African-American candidates in their races against white opponents, reasoning that a commitment to racial justice could easily compensate for political inexperience. In the past two contests in the Tenth District, in which no white candidates ran, he had supported the incumbents because of their proven track record. But the upcoming congressional race—the first since the legislature's most recent redesign—challenged Roundtree's racial loyalty.

Thomas Whatley, the white candidate in the race, had survived the Democratic primary by virtue of a formidable coalition of white progres-

sive, pro-choice female and black middle-class voters. Whatley depicted himself as a political moderate, but his liberal record on civil rights, government assistance for the disadvantaged, and a woman's right to choose an abortion were undeniable. The Democratic entry was also politically experienced, having served two terms as a city councilman and two terms as a state senator. Whatley's black Republican opponent, on the other hand, was a political neophyte, but it was not his political inexperience that concerned Roundtree. Brewster Fields was the product of a black middle-class environment, undoubtedly a significant factor in what Washington perceived to be an opportunistic endorsement of Republican conservatism. Fields had not publicly repudiated affirmative action—a move that would be political suicide in a district in which African-American voters were still influential—but in interviews with the media he consistently preached the gospel of individual initiative and self-help, not "paternalistic indulgences," as the keys to economic prosperity. Fields professed his support for civil rights but did not apparently share Roundtree's commitment to compensatory justice in a society that appeared to be less racially tolerant today than at any time since the struggles for racial equality in the 1960s.

As the election neared, Roundtree was confronted with the nagging uneasiness of his competing loyalties as he considered his editorial posture on the congressional race. If he broke with tradition and supported the white candidate, his constituency might accuse him of abandoning them in their continuing efforts to maintain black political representation. Fields might be conservative, but he *was* an African American and could probably be educated as to the viability of affirmative action. Fields was also politically inexperienced, but Roundtree had never considered that to be a litmus test for public office, especially when blacks were trying to gain access to the corridors of political power. In addition, Fields's election would ensure that the Tenth Congressional seat would remain in the hands of an African American. This would at least preserve the visible trappings of social justice if not ensure its ideological progression.

On the other hand, Whatley's liberal credentials appealed to Roundtree's sense of social justice. His

civil rights record was undeniable, and this made him, in Roundtree's judgment, the better qualified of the two candidates. If he publicly supported the Democratic candidate, he could explain his reasons in his editorial endorsement, and his black readers might forgive his political transgression. He could, of course, refuse to endorse either candidate as being unworthy of his blessing, but this position carried the same risk as not supporting Brewster Fields.

As a respected publisher and editor of a newspaper devoted to the cause of racial justice, Roundtree wondered, where should his allegiances lie in this election: race or affirmative action? During his more activist days in the service of Dr. King, the now middle-aged journalist never dreamed that his dual commitments to his race and the greater cause of social justice might be politically incompatible. Which candidate, he wondered, would better serve the cause of racial justice, and what role should the *Freedom Fighter* play in bringing about that candidate's election?

Washington Roundtree would better serve his own view of social justice.

THE CASE STUDY

During his professional career as a publisher and editor, Washington Roundtree has, without exception, supported African-American candidates for public office on the grounds that racial progress can best be achieved through those who truly understand the black experience. Thus, in Roundtree's view the notion of race and his own vision of social justice for African Americans are inevitably linked. But Brewster Fields, a conservative Republican black candidate, doesn't share Roundtree's vision. In fact, Fields's white opponent appears to be more firmly committed to Roundtree's views on civil rights than Fields himself. And this has posed a dilemma for the publisher-editor of the *Freedom Fighter*. He must choose between his loyalty to race or loyalty to a particular vision of racial justice (that is, compensatory justice) that is in this case more closely aligned with that of a white candidate.

For the purpose of analyzing this ethical dilemma, apply the SAD Formula for moral reasoning, and decide which course of action available to