Just Mercy

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BRYAN STEVENSON

Stevenson grew up in a rural community in Delaware. His grandmother, with whom he was very close, was the daughter of slaves in Virginia. Stevenson's father worked in a processing plant and his mother worked a civilian job at an air force base. His family were members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, where he sang and played piano and his mother directed the choir. Stevenson majored in philosophy at Eastern University and he went onto study at Harvard Law in a joint program with the Kennedy School of Public Policy. While interning one summer at the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee (Now the Southern Center for Human Rights) he developed a passion for prison justice and for fighting against the death penalty. In 1985, he moved to Atlanta to work for the SPDC. To meet growing demand for legal aid to death row inmates in Alabama, Stevenson and his friend Eva Ansley moved to Montgomery to start the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in 1989. For decades, EJI has defended inmates on death row, challenged inhumane prison conditions, and fought for improvement of the juvenile justice system. Stevenson has argued before the Supreme Court in several cases, including in the high profile 2012 case *Miller vs. Alabama*, in which the Court banned life sentences for juvenile offenders. With the support of EJI, Stevenson has blocked the executions of over 100 death row inmates. He has traveled throughout the country and around the world to speak about the American criminal justice system, prison justice, the death penalty, and racial and economic equality.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In *Just Mercy*, Stevenson describes several periods in American history in order to show the relationship between those periods and the modern penal system. For example, Stevenson recounts in detail the political and social situation during the Reconstruction era and how progress toward justice for African-Americans was reversed during the post-Reconstruction era. He describes the evolution of Jim Crow laws and their legacy up through the Civil Rights movement, and he references the array of civil action, brutality, and legal battles that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. Stevenson points to the reinstitution of the death penalty in 1975 as an important turning point, and he describes how the changing political and social climates of the 1980's, 90's, and 2000's impacted trends in media coverage, social views, and the legal and criminal justice system. Throughout the book, he zooms in on specific historical periods related to featured legal cases.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Just Mercy is one of many books published in recent years that explore the social and historical roots of mass incarceration. The most popular and widely discussed of these is Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. Like Stevenson, Alexander argues that oppressive structures of the past, such as slavery and Jim Crow laws, have transformed into the mass incarceration of black men. Another book on this subject is Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag*, which discusses the problem of mass incarceration in California, and Angela Davis argues for the abolition of the prison system in *Are Prisons Obsolete*? Within *Just Mercy*, Stevenson references the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois, the African-American writer and activist. Du Bois was one of many early twentieth century African-American writers who exposed the reality of racial oppression through literature: others include Booker T. Washington, Langston Hughes, and Marcus Garvey. Stevenson also frequently references *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee's novel about a rape accusation against an innocent black man. In a sense, *Just Mercy* is related to the modern genre of legal nonfiction, which focuses on the exoneration of the innocent. An example of a work of legal nonfiction is John Grisham's *The Innocent Man*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption
- **When Written:** 2014
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** United States
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary nonfiction; 21st century African-American criticism
- **Genre:** Sociopolitical Nonfiction; Legal Nonfiction
- **Setting:** Monroeville, AL; Montgomery, AL; Atlanta, GA, and several other cities throughout the United States
- **Climax:** The climax occurs in Chapter 15, on the night of Jimmy Dill's execution. Dill's petition for clemency is denied within an hour of his scheduled execution, which is a devastating loss for Stevenson. In addition, Walter's dementia is causing his decline, and EJI has an almost unmanageable docket of people needing relief. After his heartbreaking phone call with Dill moments before his death, Stevenson feels the weight of all the tragedy and injustice that he has witnessed over the years. He suffers a crisis of faith and considers quitting.
- **Antagonist:** The Criminal Justice/ Prison System

- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Viral Justice Bryan Stevenson's 2012 TED Talk entitled "We Need to Talk About Injustice" was posted on YouTube and went viral on the Internet.

Literary Laurels *Just Mercy* was listed in Time Magazine's top 10 nonfiction books of the year. It won the 2015 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, the 2015 Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and the 2015 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in Nonfiction.

PLOT SUMMARY

Just Mercy is Bryan Stevenson's account of his decades-long career as a legal advocate for marginalized people who have been either falsely convicted or harshly sentenced. Though the book contains profiles of many different people, the central storyline is that of the relationship between Stevenson, the organization he founded (the Equal Justice Initiative, or EJI), and Walter McMillian, a black man wrongfully accused of murder and sentenced to death in Alabama in the late 1980's. Throughout the book, Stevenson provides historical context, as well as his own moral and philosophical reflections on the American criminal justice and prison systems. He ultimately argues that society should choose empathy and mercy over condemnation and punishment.

Born to a poor black family in rural Delaware, Stevenson grew up questioning the racial and economic inequality that he witnessed in his community. The story of Stevenson's career begins when, while attending Harvard Law School, he interns with the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee (SPDC). After meeting and befriending Henry, a death row inmate, Stevenson recognizes his passion for prison justice and for fighting against the death penalty. He moves to Atlanta to work for the SPDC, and he eventually relocates to Montgomery, Alabama to found EJI.

In Alabama, Stevenson represents many death row inmates, though the book focuses on the case of Walter McMillian. A successful black businessman from a poor community in Monroeville, Walter lost his reputation after his affair with Karen Kelly, a white woman. At the same time, the murder of a beloved local white woman, Ronda Morrison, rattled the town. Ralph Myers, a mentally unstable white man involved in criminal activity with Karen Kelly, arbitrarily accused "Karen's black boyfriend" of murdering Ronda. The openly racist local sheriff, with the help of the District Attorney and several investigators, pursued Walter's conviction. Together, they suppressed evidence, bribed witnesses into false testimony, and forced Myers to testify even after he tried to recant. Walter was convicted of murder by Judge Robert E. Lee Key and sentenced to death, which left his wife Minnie and his five children on their own.

While on death row, Walter becomes connected with EJI and Stevenson decides to take on the case. Over the course of a few years, Stevenson and his associates pursue a retrial, a direct appeal, and a postconviction appeal on Walter's behalf. Walter's family and the rural black community in Monroeville actively support him and collectively feel the suffering of his wrongful conviction and sentence. As Stevenson gets to know the community and uncovers new evidence in Walter's case, he uncovers a web of racial discrimination, political corruption, and a long history of suffering.

Eventually, a remorseful and reformed Myers contacts EJI and recants his testimony. EJI discovers proof of the bribery and illegal activity used by the State to secure Walter's conviction. The deeper EJI gets, the angrier powerful officials and the white community become. EJI receives several bomb threats, but they persist.

Following national media coverage of the case, new District Attorney Tom Chapman begins to doubt the integrity of the State's conviction and he launches his own investigation. The new state investigation confirms EJI's claims that Walter is innocent. EJI ultimately motions for the state to drop all charges against Walter. The motion is approved and Walter is released after six years on death row.

EJI helps Walter to reenter society. Despite his optimism, Walter isn't the same. He and his wife get separated, and he eventually develops anxiety and dementia related to trauma he experienced on death row. Walter and Stevenson remain friends until Walter's death. At his funeral, Stevenson gives a speech about all the lessons Walter taught him about resilience, hope, dignity and forgiveness.

Interspersed between segments of Walter's story, Stevenson also tells the stories of many other individuals treated unfairly by the criminal justice system. EJI takes on the cases of several juveniles sentenced to life in prison for homicide and non-homicide crimes, including Trina Garrett, Antonio Núñez, Ian Manuel, Joe Sullivan, Evan Miller and Ashley Jones. Stevenson describes how each of these children suffered different forms of trauma, abuse, or neglect prior to their crimes. He also illustrates how easily juvenile offenders are abused within the prison system. He makes the case that juvenile offenders deserve special mercy and compassion given their backgrounds (which are often troubled), immature brain development, and capacity for change and redemption. EJI ultimately wins two landmark Supreme Court cases banning life sentences for juvenile offenders.

Stevenson writes that EJI has represented low-income mothers falsely accused of murdering their children, such as Marsha Colbey. He illustrates how media sensationalism

around "killer moms" has influenced the unreasonable criminalization of poor, drug-addicted and mentally ill mothers. He also argues that the criminal justice system is unfair toward the mentally ill and disabled. He illustrates his argument with the stories of Herbert Richardson and Jimmy Dill, two mentally ill men that EJI unsuccessfully represented during late stages of their cases. Stevenson tells the stories of both men's executions and the profound, heartbreaking impact that their deaths had on him.

Throughout the book, Stevenson writes about the histories of different marginalized groups. He describes the racial history of the United States, from slavery through Reconstruction, post-Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the modern era. He argues that efforts to oppress and dominate black people have not ended, but have endured through new institutions and social practices. He argues that mass incarceration, which disproportionately affects poor people and minorities, is the latest incarnation of systemic racial and economic violence.

Throughout the book, Stevenson describes his own journey by showing how the relationships he has built and cases he has fought have altered his understanding of kindness, hope, justice and mercy. The climax of the story occurs shortly after Walter is diagnosed with advancing dementia, on the night that Jimmy Dill is executed. Completely emotionally exhausted and overwhelmed by the persistence of suffering and injustice, Stevenson considers quitting. He remembers the words of Rosa Parks and Johnnie Carr, two veterans of civil rights who'd befriended and encouraged him years ago. Rosa Parks told him his work would make him "tired, tired, tired" and Johnnie Carr explained that was why he had to be "brave, brave, brave." Stevenson goes home that night, determined to continue his work.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bryan Stevenson – Stevenson is the author, narrator, and protagonist of the book. He was born in a poor African American community in rural Delaware, attended Harvard Law School, and founded (with his friend Eva Ansley) the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama. For several decades, he has worked as an activist and lawyer representing wrongfully accused or harshly sentenced men, women and children. Stevenson has made and maintained many close relationships with his co-workers and clients in the course of his work, and he tells their stories throughout the book. Though he often struggles with remaining optimistic in the face of injustice and loss, he is committed to remaining hopeful and resilient in order to help others.

Walter McMillian – Walter's legal case serves as the central storyline of the book. Born to a poor black family outside of Monroeville, Alabama, Walter became a successful small businessman as an adult. He had a large, tight-knit family and several children with his wife Minnie, but, following an affair with a white woman, Walter was falsely accused and convicted of murdering a different white woman. The book revolves around Stevenson's efforts to get Walter's conviction reversed, thereby saving him from the death penalty. Walter is described as being good-humored, forgiving, and gentle. Stevenson's close friendship with Walter is the central relationship in the book.

Ralph Myers – Ralph Myers is the man whose false accusation sends Walter to death row. Born to a poor, white, Southern family, Myers suffers from trauma-related psychological issues. Considered a low-life in Monroeville, Myers uses fantastical stories to get attention. He abuses drugs with his friend, Karen Kelly, and is convicted for involvement in the murder of Vickie Pittman. After his accusation against Walter, Myers tries repeatedly to recant his false testimony. Despite threats from the State, he eventually succeeds in recanting the testimony with help from EJI. Though he continues to have mental health issues, Myers ultimately tries to resolve his trauma and make amends for his mistakes.

Steve Bright – Steven Bright is the director of the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee, an advocacy organization where Stevenson has an internship during law school and then works following his graduation. Steve is a mentor and inspiration to Stevenson—it is through working for Steve that Stevenson finds his passion for advocacy work. Steve is described as being energetic, passionate, and determined.

Henry – Henry is the very first inmate Stevenson meets on death row, and their encounter is transformative for Stevenson. Henry is a young black man, about Stevenson's age, who has a wife and kids. Henry treats Stevenson with warmth and kindness when they meet, and the two become friends over the course of Bryan's summer law internship at the SPDC.

Stevenson's grandmother – As a child, Stevenson is especially close with his grandmother, who powerfully influenced his views toward the world and people. In particular, his grandmother is the source of the important advice that, in order to understand something, "you have to get close" to it. She was the daughter of slaves from Virginia, and she is described as being very cautious, loving and affectionate.

Judge Robert E. Lee Key – Judge Key presides over Walter's original trial. He does not intervene in the State's efforts to select an all-white jury and he collaborates with other state officials to secure Walter's conviction. He calls Stevenson early in the book to discourage his participation in Walter's appeal. He is distrusting of black people and outsiders.

Harper Lee – Harper Lee is the author of **To Kill A Mockingbird**. She was born in Monroe County (where Walter

is from and was tried), and the county continues to proudly associate itself with her fame. Throughout Walter's ordeal, Stevenson is disturbed by the parallels between Walter's case and Lee's famous novel.

Minnie McMillian Minnie is Walter McMillian's wife. Like Walter, she is from the poor black community just outside of Monroeville. She is resilient, patient, intelligent and hospitable. She supports and cares for her five children during Walter's incarceration. They separate after Walter's release, but she remains involved in his life and in his care during his long-term illness.

Karen Kelly – Karen Kelly is the younger white woman from Monroeville who has an affair with Walter prior to his conviction. The public scandal of their interracial affair defames Walter and infuriates some white residents of Monroeville. Stevenson implies that this anger, at least in part, leads to Walter's false arrest. Karen is married with children, but after her affair and divorce she develops a drug addiction and gets involved in criminal activity with Ralph Myers. She is charged for involvement in the Vickie Pittman murder and serves ten years in prison. She later seeks rehabilitation and sorrowfully tries to make amends with Walter.

Ronda Morrison – Ronda Morrison was the young adult daughter of an influential local white family in Monroeville. On November 1st, 1986, Ronda was found murdered at her workplace, Monroe Cleaners. The white community is baffled by the mysterious murder of a beloved young woman. With no other suspects, Walter is falsely indicted for Ronda's murder. Years later, Stevenson discovers reports of a white man who may have been stalking Ronda prior to her death. At the time of the book's publication, the real murder still hasn't been found.

Sheriff Tom Tate –Tate is the sheriff of Monroeville at the time of Ronda's murder. He is the most active participant in police and State efforts to suppress evidence in order to illegally convict Walter. Tate is openly racist toward Walter. He coerces Myers to proceed with his testimony by illegal sending him to death row. At the time of the book's publication, Tate is still the Monroeville Sheriff.

Vickie Pittman – Vickie Pittman was the woman murdered in Escambia County near the time of Ronda Morrison's murder. Born to a poor, white, rural family, Vickie was beloved by her aunts, Onzelle and Mozelle. Due to her background, Vickie's murder received less attention that Ronda's. Ralph Myers and Karen Kelly were both arrested and imprisoned for involvement in Vickie's murder. However, during Stevenson's investigations, he came to suspect local law enforcement and Vickie's father, Vic Pittman. Within the book, the truth of her murder is never uncovered.

The older man in the wheelchair – After Stevenson's experience of racial profiling, he gives a speech in a rural Alabama church. The older man in the wheelchair advises him to "keep beating the drum for justice." The old man is a veteran of violent civil rights battles, and he has many scars from police violence that he considers his "medals of honor." He is one of many wise older black people in the book who share with Stevenson their own experiences fighting for civil rights.

Simon Benson – Benson is the ABI Investigator on Walter's case. He works with Sherriff Tate and Larry Ikner to coerce Ralph Myers' testimony and suppress evidence to secure Walter's conviction. When the State finally launches a new investigation into Walter's conviction, Benson is replaced by new ABI investigators who uncover the truth of Walter's innocence.

J.L. Chestnut and Bruce Boynton – Chestnut and Boynton are the attorneys who are hired by Walter's family to defend him during his original trials. Though they have a history of civil rights litigation, they fail to effectively investigate State and law enforcement corruption or to present sufficient evidence supporting Walter's alibi. Years later, they testify on Walter's behalf that they would have pursued evidence that was suppressed by the State.

District Attorney Ted Pearson – Pearson is the state prosecutor at the time of Walter's indictment. He cooperates with police to suppress evidence and works with the courts to secure an all-white jury in Walter's case. Stevenson speculates that Pearson, who is soon to retire, wants to end his career with a successful prosecution in a high profile murder.

Michael Lindsey – Lindsey is one of the first men Stevenson represents after founding EJI. Lindsey was given a life sentence by the jury, but it was overridden by a judge who insisted on a death sentence. EJI fails to seek relief for Lindsey, and Alabama Governor Guy Hunt denies him clemency. He is executed in May of 1989.

Herbert Richardson – The first execution that Stevenson witnesses is that of Herbert Richardson. Herbert is war veteran with a history of trauma and psychological health problems. He was charged with capital murder and sentenced to death after he unintentionally killed the niece of his ex-girlfriend in a delusional effort to win his ex-girlfriend back. During his years in prison, he seeks redemption. He becomes engaged to a new woman with whom he has taken up correspondence, and he becomes close to her family. He becomes Stevenson's client shortly before his scheduled execution. EJI is unable to seek relief for Herbert.

District Attorney Tom Chapman – Chapman replaces Ted Pearson as the District Attorney for Monroe County. Unlike Pearson, he has a history of working as a public defender. He initially defends the State's conviction of Walter McMillian and opposes EJI's efforts. He eventually pursues his own investigation into Walter's case and, following the results, switches his position to support Walter.

Charlie – Charlie is the smart and well-behaved fourteen-year-

old boy convicted of murdering his mother's abusive boyfriend, George. He is sent to an adult jail, where he is repeatedly raped by other inmates. When Stevenson discovers Charlie's situation, he agrees to represent him. He succeeds in having Charlie's case moved to a juvenile court. Charlie is released years later as a young man.

Ian Manuel – Manuel is a young man from Florida who is convicted of assault and sentenced as a juvenile to life in prison. Because of his age, he is kept in solitary confinement. He develops psychological health issues related to his time in solitary. He forms a friendship with his victim, Ms. Baigre, who becomes his advocate. EJI represents Ian as part of an effort to reform laws giving life sentences to juvenile offenders. Stevenson describes Ian as intelligent, well read, creative, and thoughtful.

Antonio Núñez – Antonio is a young man in California who was sentenced to life in prison as a teenager for a non-homicide crime in which nobody was injured. Antonio's history involves family and neighborhood violence, including the shooting death of his older brother. EJI represents Antonio as part of an effort to reform laws that require life sentences for juvenile offenders. Stevenson describes Antonio as reflective and eager to learn.

Trina Garrett – Trina was a homeless teenage girl in the 1970's when she was convicted of murder. She unintentionally set her friend's house on fire after breaking and entering, and two people died in the fire. Trina came from a household in which her father brutally beat and raped her, her mother, and her siblings. In prison, she was raped by an officer and gave birth to a son, and then became severely emotionally and physically ill with multiple sclerosis. With EJI's support, she later reconnected to estranged family members, including her child, which helped her mental health. At the time of the book's publication, she was still serving a life sentence, despite a recent Supreme Court ruling banning life sentences for juvenile crimes.

George Stinney – George Stinney was a fourteen-year-old African American boy executed in South Carolina in the 1930's. George helped a search party look for two missing white girls and was later falsely arrested for their murders. Decades after George's death, an important white man in the community admitted to killing the girls.

Mrs. Williams – Ms. Williams is a respected elderly woman from the black community in Monroeville. Her presence at Walter's Rule 32 hearing is significant because of her long history of involvement with civil rights battles. Having experienced brutality from police and police dogs while fighting for civil rights, she struggles to overcome her terror at the police dog that is brought into Walter's hearing. Stevenson describes her as being graceful and dignified.

George Daniel – George is a man who suffered debilitating brain injuries related to a car accident. He is convicted of murder after an altercation with police that led to the death of an officer. George's trial lawyers fail to offer any defense. A charlatan psychiatrist testifies that George has no mental impairment, and George is sentenced to death. EJI later wins relief for George after proving that the "psychiatrist" wasn't a real doctor.

"The white guard" – This is an unnamed guard at the prison where Avery Jenkins is held on death row. Initially, he tries to intimidate Stevenson by drawing attention to the Confederate symbols on his truck and by forcing Stevenson into an unnecessary strip search. As a child of the foster care system, he later identifies with Stevenson's arguments about how Avery's traumatic past impacted him. The guard reforms his behavior, shows kindness to Avery, and quits the prison.

Marsha Colbey – Marsha is the poor white Alabama woman convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison after giving birth to a stillborn baby. The hard-working mother of six other children, Marsha was unable to afford prenatal care. Marsha becomes an advocate for other women at Tutwiler prison. With EJI's help, she is ultimately released.

Joe Sullivan – Joe Sullivan was a thirteen-year-old convicted of rape and sentenced to life in an adult prison in Florida. Joe maintained that he had robbed but not raped his victim. Joe, who had suffered childhood abuse, was raped repeatedly in prison, attempted suicide several times, and developed multiple sclerosis. EJI represents Joe in a case that reaches the Supreme Court. They win the case, which opens the opportunity for Joe's release. Joe becomes attached to Stevenson and often writes him heartfelt letters in a "childlike" tone, suggesting that his trauma has caused intellectual and emotional delays.

Anthony Ray Hinton – Mr. Hinton was convicted of murder and sentenced to death in the 1980's. He served over 30 years in solitary confinement. Stevenson describes him as "clearly innocent" due to his alibi and the lack of sufficient evidence against him. EJI eventually secures release for Mr. Hinton after representing him for 15 years.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Eva Ansley – Eva Ansley is Stevenson's friend and the Operations Director at the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). She helps him to found EJI in 1989, despite struggles with securing space and funding. From EJI's beginning, she manages many financial and logistical setbacks. She is creative and persistent.

Russell Charley – Russell Charley was a black man and friend of Walter's family. He was lynched in a community near Monroeville following suspicions of an interracial romance. Walter was a child when Russell was killed, and his death had a strong impact on Walter.

Charlie Bliss – Charlie Bliss is one of Stevenson's friends from

Harvard Law School. Described as a "white kid from North Carolina," Charlie is supportive of Stevenson and shares Stevenson's indignation at the injustices in the world. They become roommates in Atlanta before Stevenson moves to Montgomery.

Larry Ikner – Ikner is the District Attorney Investigator on Walter's case. He works with Sherriff Tate and Simon Benson to force Ralph Myers to testify against Walter. Along with Tate and Benson, he plays a crucial role in suppressing evidence and using bribery to secure Walter's conviction.

Bill Hooks – Hooks is a black man who is bribed to corroborate Myers' testimony against Walter. Sherriff Tate offers to arrange an early release for Hooks if he can testify that he saw Walter's truck at Monroe Cleaners at the time of Ronda's death. Hooks later recants his false testimony.

Ernest Welch – Welch is a furniture salesman in Monroeville and Ronda Morrison's uncle. He visits Walter's house on business on the morning of Ronda's Morrison's death. However, during Walter's trial, Ernest claims that he visited Walter's home on a different day.

Russ Canan – Canan is the SPDC lawyer who represented John Evans, a man executed at Holman Prison shortly before Walter's arrival on Holman's death row.

John Evans – John Evans is the man executed at Holman Prison shortly before Walter's arrival on death row. Due to a malfunctioning electric chair, it takes three attempts for officials to finally kill Evans, resulting in a long, painful death.

Wayne Ritter – Ritter is a man who is executed on Holman's death row during Myers' and Walter's time there. Ritter's execution has a profound effect on Myers's unstable mental health. After Ritter's execution, Myers gives into pressure from the state to testify against Walter in exchange for release from death row.

Joe Hightower – Hightower is a white man who is bribed to testify against Walter by corroborating Bill Hook's testimony that Walter's truck was outside Monroe Cleaners on the day of Ronda's death. Prior to the trial, Walter had never seen or met Hightower. Years later, Hightower recants his false testimony.

David Bagwell – Bagwell is the volunteer lawyer for Wayne Ritter, the man executed at Holman. After Ritter's death, Bagwell publishes a widely-circulated article discouraging attorneys from representing death row inmates and declaring his own support for the death penalty. After Bagwell's article, death row inmates have more trouble securing legal aid.

Horace Dunkins – Dunkins is another one of the men Stevenson represents soon after founding EJI. Despite being mentally retarded, Dunkins is denied his late-stage appeals. After his botched execution, his body is autopsied despite protests from his religious family.

Governor Guy Hunt – Hunt was the governor of Alabama from 1987 to 1993. In the book, Hunt denies to stay several executions of EJI clients.

Herbert's wife – Herbert Richardson forms a correspondence with a woman during his time on death row, and they get married shortly before his execution. She and her family visit him before his death, and she refuses to let go of him.

Doris – Doris was the receptionist at EJI during the late 1980's. She is mentioned for her help in the case of Herbert Richardson.

Armelia – Armelia is the sister of Walter McMillian. She and Walter are close, and she fights alongside the rest of Walter's family to seek his release.

Jackie McMillian – Jackie is the daughter of Walter and Minnie McMillian. Her parents, who work to support her through college, are deeply proud of her accomplishments.

W.E.B. Du Bois – Du Bois was a famous African-American writer and activist who portrayed the realities of black communities from the post-Reconstruction period through the early Civil Rights era.

John – John is the protagonist in the W.E.B. Du Bois short story "Of The Coming of John."

Sam Crook – Crook is an eccentric, outspoken member of the local white community. He is a self-proclaimed son of Confederates who offers his support for EJI's efforts to exonerate Walter.

Darnell Houston – Darnell was a co-worker of Bill Hooks. He contacts Stevenson with information that disproves Hook's testimony against Walter. Shortly after, the new District Attorney Tom Chapman retaliates against Darnell by charging him with perjury.

Charlie's Grandmother – Charlie's grandmother contacts EJI, begging them to help her fourteen-year-old grandson, Charlie.

Charlie's Mother – Charlie's mother is abused by her boyfriend, George. She is very close to her son, who is, in turn, very protective of her. George almost beats Charlie's mother to death on the night that Charlie kills him.

George – George is the abusive boyfriend of Charlie's mother. He is a police officer who frequently abuses alcohol. Charlie kills him.

Mr. and Mrs. Jennings – The Jenningses are a rural white couple who lost their only grandchild to suicide. They reach out to Charlie after hearing his story from Stevenson. They befriend Charlie and his family and offer to give Charlie the money they had saved for their late grandson's college education.

Chief Judge John Patterson – Patterson is the former KKK-backed governor of Alabama, famous for actively opposing the Civil Rights Movement and resisting de-segregation. He serves as Chief Judge of the Appellate Court at the time when

Stevenson files a direct appeal on Walter's behalf.

Michael O'Connor – Michael is Stevenson's first co-counselor in Walter's case. The son of Irish immigrants, he has a rough background and is a recovering heroin addict. Stevenson sees Michael's background as an asset in their work. Michael is humble and shares Stevenson's passion for justice.

Mozelle and Onzelle – Vickie Pittman's twin aunts, Mozelle and Onzelle are described as outspoken, straightforward rural white women. They were very close to their niece and angered by her murder. They are very hospitable toward Stevenson.

Vic Pittman – The father of Vickie Pittman, Vic is suspected of involvement in his daughter's murder.

Debbie Baigre – Ms. Baigre is the woman injured by Ian Manuel's crime. While robbing her at gunpoint, Ian pulled a gun and shot Ms. Baigre, damaging her jaw. She later accepted his apology and became his friend and advocate.

Assistant Attorney General Don Valeska – Valeska is known for being tough on crime and harsh on supposed criminals. District Attorney Tom Chapman brings Valeska in to help defend the State's position during Walter's Rule 32 hearing.

Judge Thomas B. Norton Jr. – Judge Norton presides over Walter's Rule 32 hearing.

Brenda Lewis – Lewis is an African American former police officer who comes to work as EJI's paralegal around the time of Walter's Rule 32 hearing.

Clay Kast – Clay Kast is Walter's white mechanic. He becomes crucial in Walter's case when he comes forward with records and statements that contradict the testimonies of Bill Hooks and Joe Hightower.

Avery Jenkins – Jenkins is an intellectually disabled man who is convicted of murder and sentenced to death. As a child, Jenkins was severely physically abused while moving between several foster homes. **EJI** wins relief for Jenkins, who is transferred to a mental health facility.

"Dr. Seger" – Seger is the man who poses as a psychiatrist in the trial of Avery Jenkins. For years, he works as a state psychiatrist, giving illegitimate testimonies regarding the mental condition of defendants like Avery Jenkins.

Bernard Harcourt – Bernard is an attorney who replaces Michael at EJI. He had originally planned for a "traditional legal career," but he became passionate about prison justice after interning with EJI one summer.

Tom Taylor and Greg Cole – Taylor and Cole are the new ABI investigators assigned by Chapman to reinvestigate Walter's case. Unlike their predecessors, they aren't affiliated with local law enforcement or state officials in Monroe County. They ultimately assert Walter's innocence and present their findings to the State.

Judge Pamela Baschab – Baschab is the judge who presides over the final hearing in Walter's case, in which EJI motions to have all of the charges against Walter dropped. She cheerfully grants EJI's motion and orders that Walter be released.

Andrea Yates – Yates is the Texas woman who famously drowned her five children in a bathtub in 2001 while suffering from postpartum psychosis.

Susan Smith – Smith is the South Carolina woman convicted of murdering her two young children in 1995 in a case that drew national media attention. Stevenson explains how her case led to media sensationalism around "killer moms."

Diane Jones – Diane Jones was a client of EJI who served at Tutwiler Women's prison and who often advocated for EJI to assist other women there, such as Marsha Colbey.

Charlotte Morrison – Charlotte is a senior attorney at EJI who represented Marsha Colbey.

Kristen Nelson – Kristen was a staff attorney at EJI who helped Charlotte Morrison to represent Marsha Colbey.

Roberta Flack – Roberta Flack is an American jazz/soul/folk singer who began her career in the late 1960's. She sings at an EJI annual benefit dinner where EJI recognizes Marsha Colbey.

Rob McDuff – McDuff is a friend of Stevenson's and the white litigator who helps EJI seek financial compensation from the State for Walter. He characterized by his "Southern charm."

Stevenson's mother – Stevenson's mother is described as a lifelong church musician. She dies just before Stevenson travels to Sweden to receive the Olof Palme International Human Rights Award.

Ashley Jones – Ashley is a young woman serving a juvenile life sentence for murdering her abusive relatives. She reaches out to EJI to express her support and curiosity about their work. EJI later takes on her case in an effort to help juveniles sentenced to life for homicide.

Evan Miller – Evan is another juvenile convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison. He was involved in the killing of a middle-aged neighbor who had given drugs to him and his teenaged friends. Stevenson describes Evan as contemplative, remorseful, and capable of change.

Stevenson's grandfather – At the age of eighty-six, Stevenson's grandfather was murdered by two teenaged boys who had come to rob him.

Terrance Graham – Graham is another young man who was sentenced to life in a Florida prison for violating the terms of his probation by attempting a robbery. EJI represents Graham along with Joe Sullivan before the Supreme Court.

Alan Simpson – Alan Simpson is a former Senator from Wyoming. A former juvenile felon himself, Simpson was among the many politicians who supported EJI in fighting against life sentences for non-homicide juvenile offenders.

Maria Morrison – Maria is the Senior Social Worker at EJI who

helps to arrange for Walter's care after his diagnosis of advancing dementia.

Randy Susskind – Susskind is the Deputy Director of EJI.

Jimmy Callahan, Danny Bradley, Max Payne, Jack Trawick, and Willie McNair – These are the men executed in Alabama in 2009, despite efforts from EJI to block their executions.

Jimmy Dill – Jimmy Dill is an intellectually disabled man convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Despite their efforts, EJI is unable to seek clemency for Dill. Stevenson's frustration and sadness over Dill's death leads to a crisis of faith for Stevenson that forms the climax of the book.

The little boy at church – As a child, Stevenson teased a little boy for his stutter, and Stevenson's mother made him apologize and hug the little boy. The little boy's kindness and forgiveness taught him about the power of undeserved mercy.

Rosa Parks – Stevenson meets Rosa Parks, the famous civil rights activist, toward the beginning of his career in Montgomery. She and her friends, Ms. Carr and Ms. Durr, encourage Stevenson to persist in his efforts.

Johnnie Carr and Virginia Durr – Ms. Carr and Ms. Durr are friends of Rosa Parks and veteran civil rights activists. They befriend Stevenson and offer him wisdom and support in his activism.

Kuntrell Jackson – Kuntrell is another juvenile offender sentenced to life in prison for homicide. EJI includes him with Evan Miller in their Supreme Court case against life sentences for juvenile homicide cases.

Joshua Carter and Robert Caston – Mr. Caston and Mr. Carter were both juveniles convicted of non-homicide crimes and sentenced to life in prison at Angola prison in Louisiana. As forced laborers, they both became disabled. They become the first people released from prison after EJI's Supreme Court victory over juvenile sentences for non-homicide cases.

The Old Woman (the "Stonecatcher") – The stonecatcher is a mysterious, charming older woman whom Stevenson meets outside the courtroom during the Carter and Caston hearings. She tells Stevenson that, like him, she is a "stonecatcher" who holds others' sadness and fights against injustice. She tells Stevenson he will sing sad songs, like her.

Woodrow Ikner A white police officer who testifies during Walter's trial that he was instructed to lie so as to bolster the prosecutions case.

TERMS

Southern Prisoners Defense Committee (SPDC) – The SPDC is an organization based in Atlanta, Georgia that is dedicated to providing legal aid to prison inmates throughout Southern states. They provide aid to individual inmates seeking help with appeals and sentencing, and they also work to improve prison conditions. They have a long history of fighting racial and prison injustice. Stevenson interns with the SPDC as a law student and then comes to work with them after graduation.

Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) – EJI is an organization founded by **Bryan Stevenson** with help from his friend **Eva Ansley** in Montgomery, Alabama. When they begin their project, they are focused primarily on providing free legal aid for death row inmates seeking relief. They later take on projects related to juvenile incarceration, improving prison conditions, and educating the public about racial and prison injustice. They take several landmark cases to the Supreme Court.

Jim Crow – Beginning in the post-Reconstruction era and continuing through the 1970's, Jim Crow laws were created throughout the South with the intent to restore the racial hierarchies and strict segregation that had been challenged by the abolition of slavery. Segregation, the repeal of voting rights, the exclusion of black people from juries and positions of power, lynching, wage slavery and the death penalty were among the practices common under Jim Crow.

Post-Reconstruction Era – The post-Reconstruction era began after the withdrawal of federal authorities from Confederate states following the period of Reconstruction. During the post-Reconstruction era, confederate authorities launched retaliatory efforts to recreate the conditions of slavery through Jim Crow laws.

Reconstruction Era – From the end of Civil War until the end of the 1870s, federal authorities occupied Confederate states. During this period, they established laws and structures to ensure civil rights for African Americans, such as voting and representation in positions of power.

Alabama Bureau of Investigations (ABI) – This is the agency that reviews high-level criminal cases in the state of Alabama. At the time of **Walter**'s original trial, the ABI fails to pursue a deeper investigation and cooperates with the State and local officials in securing his false conviction. Six years later, new investigators from the state who have no affiliations to local officials perform a new investigation into Walter's case and determine that he is innocent.

Attica Prison Riots – The Attica Prison Riots took place in Attica, New York in 1971. Responding to the use of dangerous physical punishments and degrading prison conditions, prisoners at Attica Correctional Facility organized riots and took control of the prison. The riots drew national interest in prison conditions. Following the riots, the Supreme Court passed a law securing some legal recourse for abused prison inmates.

The Old Rugged Cross – The Old Rugged Cross is a 1912 church hymn by George Bennard. In the song, the speaker considers the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and reconciles with his own "shame" and "suffering" as he prepares to die.

Confederates – The term "Confederates" refers historically to the confederation of the slaveholding Southern States that fought the North (the Union) during the Civil War. In modern times, Confederate symbols are usually associated with white supremacy. The term "Confederate," as used in the book, can also refer to pride in the white Southern identity.

Retrial – Accused individuals and their attorneys can request a retrial on the grounds that their original trials were legally flawed. If granted, the defendant is given an entirely new trial with a new jury, and the burden is, once again, on the State to prove the defendant's guilt. This differs from direct appeal and postconviction collateral appeal.

Direct Appeal – Following a criminal conviction, individuals are entitled to appeal the local court's decision in a higher court. This differs from retrial and postconviction collateral appeal.

Postconviction Collateral appeal – Following a criminal conviction and usually after attempting direct appeal, convicted individuals can request a postconviction collateral appeal if they have reason to argue that the original conviction was flawed or invalid.

Rule 32 Petition – In the state of Alabama, a Rule 32 Petition requires State and local officials to turn over any and all available records and forms of evidence connected to the case of a convicted individual as part of a postconviction collateral appeal.

Voting Rights Protests of 1965 (Selma-to-Montgomery Marches) – In 1965, civil rights activists including Martin Luther King, Jr. organized several protests to fight for the protection of voting rights for African-Americans, including a 54-mile march from Selma to Montgomery. The protests were met with extreme police violence. That year, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which banned practices and laws aimed at preventing African-Americans from voting.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RESISTANCE AND ADVOCACY

Just Mercy emphasizes the importance of active resistance to unfair institutions. Bryan Stevenson describes the racism, corruption, and cruelty that pervade American court systems and lead to the systematic abuse of marginalized communities. Despite the power and ubiquity of these problems, Stevenson remains steadfast in the power of resistance and advocacy to change conditions for individuals and for marginalized groups overall.

Both of the legal aid organizations that Stevenson has worked for, the Southern Prisoners Defense Fund (SPDC) and the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), have made concrete changes in the American legal landscape on behalf of those who have been sentenced unfairly or inhumanely. For example, Stevenson's representation of wrongfully-convicted people like Walter McMillian, mentally ill prisoners like George Daniel, or harshly-sentenced juveniles like Kuntrell Jackson leads, in each case, to the court overturning an unjust conviction. Over and over, Stevenson describes court cases in which the court-appointed lawyers of marginalized defendants have failed to present evidence, explore leads, or make appeals that could have freed their clients. Having an attorney like Stevenson who is willing to go to any lengths to help his clients—in other words, an advocate who is committed to reforming the justice system—can literally mean the difference between life and death for these individuals.

Stevenson goes on to describe how advocacy organizations can use legal avenues, such the Supreme Court, to seek broader reforms to the criminal justice system—reforms that can affect thousands of people at once rather than just one client at a time. The most powerful example of this in *Just Mercy* is EJI's successful appeal to the Supreme Court to ban mandatory sentences of life without parole for juveniles convicted of homicide. Not only did this victory free the clients on whose behalf EJI brought the case, but it opened new possibilities for future defendants and made release a possibility for some inmates who could not have hoped for this before.

While Stevenson and his colleagues have won significant victories, they also experience constant setbacks, frustration, and grief in the course of their advocacy work. Stevenson credits his mentors, clients, and community for giving him the strength and wisdom to continue his work in the face of tremendous difficulty. It was other activists, such as Steve Bright (the founder of the Southern Prisoners Defense Fund) and Rosa Parks, who first inspired Stevenson and taught him how to be an advocate. He also cites the importance of community to resisting oppression: being woven in to a network of passionate and dedicated friends and activists helped Stevenson stand up to the injustices he himself faced (like when Charlie Bliss encouraged Stevenson to report the officers who harassed him), not to mention that community has helped Stevenson effectively stand up to injustice on behalf of others. Stevenson writes that his clients—those who have been treated unfairly by the criminal justice system—have taught him the most. This comes at the level of policy and research (Diane Jones and Marsha Colby, for example, helped Stevenson to recognize the ways in which women are systematically mistreated and they assisted him in compiling evidence of abuse), and also in terms of personal values. Stevenson's clients

have experienced unimaginable suffering, injustice, and cruelty, and their hope, strength, and resilience set an example for Stevenson and inspire him to keep fighting. Stevenson suggests that by witnessing the examples of his clients and their supportive communities, he has learned that fighting to effect change is a slow process that requires optimism and personal resilience. Despite its difficulty, advocacy is an effective form of resistance against the entire system of inequalities and prejudices that leads to unfair treatment.

SYSTEMIC POWER, OPPRESSION, AND DEHUMANIZATION

Stevenson's stories detail how legal structures—which are meant to ensure that all Americans are treated fairly—can contribute to the systemic oppression of marginalized groups, such as African Americans, women, the poor, and the disabled. By favoring individuals and groups who have more power, the criminal justice system perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability, poverty, and racial inequality in the United States. Stevenson demonstrates this claim through historical research, personal anecdotes, and political analysis, and his moral reflections suggest that such abuses of the justice system dehumanize both the victims and the perpetrators of oppression.

While Stevenson discusses many of his clients' cases in order to demonstrate the failures of the justice system, his primary case study is that of Walter McMillian. McMillian, a black man who was wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to death, faced obstacles including incompetent court-appointed lawyers, political corruption, racial prejudice and profiling, and media sensationalism. His case is used in *Just Mercy* to demonstrate the myriad ways in which the legal system can deliberately betray those it is meant to protect, and the fact that justice is not immune from individual corruption and cruelty.

McMillian's case, like all the other case studies in the book, is meant to personalize the experience of discrimination and miscarriage of justice in order to help readers understand the tremendous individual suffering that results from abuses of power. Stevenson often refers to the "collateral consequences" of the penal system: McMillian not only lost years of his life from his false conviction, but he also lost his reputation, his mental and physical health, his business, and his family's limited financial resources. The case studies in the book are also meant to demonstrate the larger forces that structure the American justice system. McMillian's case, for example, illustrates the all-too-common phenomenon of an innocent black man being blamed for a crime against a white woman. Other case studies point out that the prisons are full of populations that American society would rather criminalize than provide resources for: the poor, the mentally ill, and victims of trauma, for example. Rather than committing collective resources to social problems or empathizing with people from marginalized groups, the justice system scapegoats people who are often victims themselves.

Furthermore, Stevenson demonstrates that this problem is not isolated to the present day. The systematic oppression enacted by the justice system has direct roots in inhumane institutions that date back to slavery. Like slavery, many legal and judicial structures have the direct or indirect result of limiting the power of African Americans and separating out poor and minority populations from whites. For example, poll taxes, which were used in the Jim Crow era to prevent African Americans from voting, have now been replaced by laws barring inmates and convicted felons (who are disproportionately black) from voting. Stevenson shows how seemingly-innocuous legal phenomena like preemptory strikes in jury selection, mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent crimes, or the overburdening of court-appointed attorneys results in a system of discrimination and oppression reminiscent of the slavery and Jim Crow eras. Slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration, Stevenson argues, are transhistorical manifestations of the same phenomenon: racism.

Above all, Stevenson wants readers to understand that the abuses of the criminal justice system aren't limited to racist judges, vindictive prosecutors, or incompetent police officers: the structure and trends of the American judicial system reflect American values and society overall, and thus all Americans are implicated in the problems that Stevenson describes in *Just Mercy*. When a society collectively dehumanizes certain groups and individuals, that society loses its own humanity. It's everybody's responsibility, whether or not they are directly involved with criminal justice, to educate themselves about the problems and work to change systemic abuses however they can.

EMPATHY, MERCY, AND HUMANIZATION

At the heart of Stevenson's book is the idea that everyone is capable of making mistakes, even terrible mistakes, and that, at one time or another, everyone will need to be granted mercy. Harsh punishments, in Stevenson's eyes, perpetuate violence rather than deter it: for Stevenson, giving and receiving unexpected and undeserved mercy is the only way to break the escalating cycles of violence, punishment, and hatred that characterize the criminal justice system.

Stevenson argues that achieving a more just society and fostering an ethic of mercy requires individuals from all sides to become more empathetic. Prejudice and injustice flourish when individuals can be condemned as "other" or "criminal," a designation that creates a gulf between "us" and "them." In order to bridge that gulf, Stevenson invites readers to hear and understand the personal stories of inmates. He contends that

looking at people's lives and experiences "up close" is a prerequisite for the kind of empathy that can lead to mercy.

Part of looking "up close" at people affected by the criminal justice system involves, for Stevenson, presenting a more holistic and humane story of their crimes, alleged or real. For example, Ashley Jones was sentenced to life without parole as a teenager for a murder that she did commit. However, the appropriateness of her sentence seems more ambiguous when her whole story is told: she murdered a relative while trying to escape from her abusive home. Stevenson uses several similar stories to illustrate that people who commit crimes often come from traumatic and violent backgrounds, and he believes that they deserve to have their actions understood through the lens of their formative experiences of suffering. Furthermore, Stevenson argues that time, reflection and new experiences can teach a person new views and habits, which can lead to rehabilitation. Many of the people Stevenson profiles, particularly those convicted as juveniles, have developed nuanced and positive views on violence and morality. By describing the kindness, wisdom, and achievement that he has witnessed in his clients, Stevenson makes the case that "criminals" should be given the opportunity to reform.

Central to the book is the idea (elaborated in the Systemic Power, Oppression, and Dehumanization theme) that all Americans—even those with no personal contact with crime or the judicial system—are implicated in abuses perpetrated by the justice system, because the justice system claims to operate in the name of protecting and preserving American society. Propping up such a system, actively or passively, is dehumanizing to the accused and the accusers, and Stevenson argues that one way to preserve humanity in the face of injustice is to extend forgiveness and mercy.

Stevenson makes the notion of mercy personal through a story from his own childhood. Once, Stevenson's mother overheard him mocking a boy with a speech impediment, and she forced Stevenson to apologize and tell the boy that he loved him. Stevenson did as he was told, and the boy hugged Stevenson and told him that he loved him, too. Stevenson was moved by this act of mercy because he knew he didn't deserve it, and it was the unexpected kindness of the boy's act that startled Stevenson into reforming his own cruel behavior, not his mother's scolding. Stevenson also writes about Ms. Baigre, the woman that fourteen-year-old Ian Manuel was in prison for injuring. Ian reached out to Ms. Baigre to apologize after he was incarcerated. She not only forgave him, but she also testified in support of his defense, remained his friend while he was in prison, and helped to reverse his life sentence. Through this and other stories of forgiveness, Stevenson praises those who forgive the accused instead of seeking harsher punishments for them.

In a church meeting, Stevenson once described his work and the work of others who help prisoners as "stonecatching." To explain this phrase, he recounted the bible passage in which Jesus stops an angry mob from stoning a woman to death for adultery by saying, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." For Stevenson, "stonecatching" means stopping people from condemning others by asking them to reconsider the complexity of their own humanity. Stevenson suggests that because everyone has hurt others and everyone has been hurt, there is nothing innate that sets "criminals" apart from the rest of society. The difference, Stevenson suggests, is that some people have to pay a greater price for their mistakes. Practicing empathy and mercy, then, is the way to break the cycles of cruelty, violence, and punishment that are ripping society apart.

MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

Just Mercy illustrates how the media influences the knowledge and views of its consumers, thereby shaping the public's opinion of criminal justice issues and cases. Stevenson suggests that, because of this power, the media can be used either to educate the public about the court system, thereby propelling justice, or to perpetuate injustice through sensationalism. His accounts demonstrate how a lack of access to historical context and accurate information normalizes prejudiced ideas and actions, and he further shows how public opinion, whether founded or unfounded, impacts the fate of individuals facing the criminal justice system. Stevenson ultimately indicates that justice requires the media to take responsibility for how they disseminate information.

Sensationalist media coverage operates in several parts of *Just Mercy* to shape popular opinion around criminal justice issues and individual cases, which influences the actions of law enforcement, judges, and juries. For example, Stevenson demonstrates how the local news in the communities around Monroeville declared, even before his trial, that Walter was guilty of murdering Ronda Morrison. This coverage influenced the jury, leading to an incorrect guilty verdict and a death penalty sentence. Through this and other individual cases, Stevenson demonstrates how coverage of criminal investigations and proceedings can have a severe impact on the fate of the accused.

Stevenson further shows how sensationalist media trends can influence law enforcement and courts. For example, Stevenson described the media obsession in the 1990s and 2000s with stories about tragic "killer moms." Because of this coverage, mothers who were considered to be suspects in child murder cases faced immediate public outrage, regardless of the strength or weakness of the evidence against them. Marsha Colbey, for example, was wrongfully convicted of murdering her stillborn child by jurors who admitted their own media-fueled bias against any mother accused of infanticide.

At the same time, Stevenson also shows how the media can advance the cause of justice by making the public aware of

political corruption, unfair or inhumane treatment, and miscarriages of justice. Stevenson describes how he and the EJI reached out to national media sources during Walter's retrial in order to publicize the political corruption and illegal state actions surrounding his conviction and sentencing. After *60 Minutes* and other influential national media outlets aired Walter's story, state officials were forced to finally pay attention to EJI's petitions on behalf of Walter because the state feared the effects of negative national publicity. By describing this and other instances of media sources revealing injustices, Stevenson conveys the role of the media in holding law enforcement and public officials accountable for their actions.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Throughout *Just Mercy*, Stevenson often references parallels between *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the famous 1960 book by Harper Lee, and the case of Walter McMillian. Lee's novel features a black man who is falsely accused of rape and the white lawyer who unsuccessfully defends him against an angry white community. Monroe County, the setting of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is also Walter's hometown and the location of his trial. When Stevenson visits Monroe County, he is surprised at how proudly the town capitalizes on its connection with Lee: buildings are named after her, playhouses put on frequent productions of her story, and many people brag about their town's famous association. Nonetheless, Stevenson is disgusted by the juxtaposition of the town's pride with their failure to learn Lee's messages about racial violence and presumptions of guilt. Reminders of Lee's novel in Monroeville and parallels with Walter's case come to represent hypocrisy, willful ignorance, and the persistence of racial violence over time.

SONGS/ HYMNS

Throughout the book, songs and church hymns often accompany heightened emotional scenes. In particular, hymns and songs are often sung by or for individuals whose situations are especially grim. Song gives comfort and a voice to individuals who are systemically denied agency, hope, or self-expression. In particular, song represents the suffering, resilience, and hope of oppressed individuals. This connects to the central role of music in historically African-American churches, and also it alludes to the role of spirituals during slavery.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Spiegel & Grau edition of *Just Mercy* published in 2015.

Introduction Quotes

Henry sang slowly and with great sincerity and conviction [...]
Lord lift me up, and let me stand
By faith on Heaven's tableland
A higher plane, that I have found
Lord, plant my feet on Higher Ground.
I sat down, completely stunned. Henry's voice was filled with desire. I experienced his song as a precious gift.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson, Henry (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Henry is the first death row inmate that Stevenson ever meets, and, on his first visit with Henry in prison, Stevenson is appalled by the rough manner in which the guard shackles Henry to lead him back to his cell. Stevenson tells the guard to stop, but Henry says not to worry and begins singing the hymn. Henry's song impacts Stevenson greatly. It symbolizes Henry's suffering, faith, kindness, and his desire for redemption.

Though Stevenson had been worried that he wouldn't be able to relate to Henry, Stevenson is surprised during their meeting by how much he identifies with Henry, who is a young black man near Stevenson's age. Henry's song, which Stevenson remembers from church growing up, further adds to Stevenson's sense of familiarity with and empathy for Henry. Most of all, Stevenson goes on to explain why Henry's song is a "gift": despite Henry's suffering and his precarious position on death row, his song is a deliberate attempt to comfort Stevenson, and it represents the warmth and kindness that Henry remains capable of showing. Stevenson is a young, inexperienced intern, who came to offer hope to Henry but finds himself filled with hope instead.

You can't understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close.

Related Characters: Stevenson's grandmother (speaker), Bryan Stevenson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

In explaining his own family background and how it influenced his path, Stevenson discusses his grandmother, a cautious, affectionate woman who was the daughter of slaves. He explains how she often told him to "keep close" to stay out of danger, something she learned from her parents. "Getting close" was also her way of explaining to Stevenson the importance of seeing things in a detailed, personal way before making judgments.

Influenced by the wisdom of his grandmother, Stevenson argues that what led him to fight on behalf of those condemned or marginalized by society was his realization that true understanding requires "getting close." Rather than judging and condemning people as "other" and looking at them from a distance, Stevenson advocates for getting to know the condemned as human beings by understanding their personal stories, their thoughts, and their capacity for change.

❝ Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the word "proximity" is used in connection with the concept of "getting close" enough to know the lives of those condemned by society and the criminal justice system. To Stevenson, "proximity" leads to empathy and humanization of those who have been dehumanized.

The message that "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done" is repeated again and again throughout the book. This central argument implies that individuals aren't defined by the worst of their actions: a person who commits a crime is much more than that one mistake. Stevenson suggests instead that a person's character should be understood as the sum of all of his or her actions, intentions, experiences, and hopes. In addition, a person's capacity to repent, grow, and change should be respected: we are more than the worst thing we've ever done because, if given the chance, we can redeem ourselves through our actions in the future.

❝ Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Stevenson challenges a fundamental premise of the prison system: that punishment is the primary mechanism by which justice should be recognized in a society. To Stevenson, consequences and punishment aren't the hallmarks of justice: instead, justice is connected to equality and to treating vulnerable people with dignity and respect.

In this passage, Stevenson lays out his philosophy regarding the social injustice that underlies the functions of the criminal justice system. The system, according to his arguments, disproportionately criminalizes marginalized communities and vulnerable populations while favoring powerful and privileged groups. Instead of understanding the United States to be a place of unrivaled opportunity (as it might be from the perspective of, say, a successful entrepreneur), Stevenson argues that a society should be judged by the way it treats the members it deems least valuable, such as prisoners. In a sense, then, the book's argument about the inhumane treatment of marginalized groups by the criminal justice system is an indictment of American society at large. Stevenson's message regarding society's treatment of the disfavored evokes the Christian saying derived from the words of Jesus: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (*Matthew 25:40, King James Version*)

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Sentimentality about Lee's story grew even as the harder truths of the book took no roots.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Harper Lee, Walter McMillian

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the book, Stevenson references Harper Lee's celebrated novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which has many parallels to Walter's trial and conviction. Like Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Walter is a black man falsely accused of a crime by an angry white community. Ironically, Harper Lee was from Monroe County, which is also Walter's hometown and the location of his arrest and trial. While the town of Monroeville celebrates its connection to Lee's novel with banners, performances, and events, the local community doesn't seem aware of the contradiction between their pride in Lee's fame and their failure to learn from her novel's warnings about racial prejudice, presumptions of guilt, and the importance of empathy.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ "You see this scar on the top of my head?" He tilted his head to show me. "I got that scar in Greene County, Alabama trying to register to vote in 1964. You see this scar on the side of my head? [...] I got that scar in Mississippi demanding civil rights. [...] These aren't my scars, cuts and bruises. These are my medals of honor."

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson, The older man in the wheelchair (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

After his own jarring experience with racial profiling, Stevenson begins giving speeches at black churches and community centers to educate the public about the importance of knowing their rights and demanding police accountability. At one such church, the old man in the wheelchair asks to speak with Stevenson after his speech.

The man tells Stevenson that he has to keep "beating the drum for justice," and he shows Stevenson the scars that he received at the hands of the police while trying to fight for civil rights.

The old man's words illustrate the personal risks that activists often take in fighting for justice, and the scars especially emphasize how African-Americans, already targets of police brutality and other forms of oppression, have often faced those risks to extreme degrees when fighting for equality. It's important that, in the face of this, the old man doesn't position himself as simply a victim. He doesn't lament his scars or curse the police who gave them to him: instead, the old man sees himself as a veteran of a heroic war. His scars are his medals of honor that prove his sacrifice and his dedication. The old man's optimism, bravery, and encouragement bolster Stevenson.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ We're going to keep all you niggers from running around with these white girls. I ought to take you off and hang you like we done that nigger in Mobile.

Related Characters: Sheriff Tom Tate (speaker), Walter McMillian

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Sheriff Tate makes this threat to Walter while interrogating him about the murder of Ronda Morrison. That Tate makes these statements during an official interrogation demonstrates the racism that underlies the State's treatment of Walter and it strongly suggests that Tate is framing Walter for murder because he is black. Tate's use of the word "we" when referencing a recent lynching also suggests his involvement with the KKK.

Tate views Walter's interracial romance with Karen Kelly as a social transgression, and it's this, in particular, that has inspired such hatred and fear of Walter in Tate. This relates to the South's long history of anti-miscegenation laws aimed at criminalizing interracial romance and, in particular, at punishing black men for their involvement with white women.

Even though Tate is a leader of local law enforcement, he still sees illegal mob violence as a reasonable punishment for a social transgression. This rationale suggests the resilient legacy of Jim Crow laws in Monroeville even after

many of these laws have been struck down.

Chapter 4 Quotes

It was sad like few other hymns I'd heard. I don't know why exactly, but I started to hum it as I saw more uniformed officers entering the vestibule outside the visitation room. It seemed like something that might help [...] After a few minutes, the family joined me. I went over to Herbert's wife as she held him tightly, sobbing softly. I whispered to her, "We have to let him go." Herbert saw the officers lining up outside, and he pulled away from her slowly and told me to take her out of the room.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Herbert's wife, Herbert Richardson

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Stevenson describes the moments before Herbert Richardson's family leaves the visitor center on the night of Herbert's execution. After many failed attempts to seek legal recourse for Herbert, Stevenson has come to be with Herbert and his family for his death. Herbert had asked in advance for the church hymn "The Old Rugged Cross" to be played during his execution. Now, unable to get Herbert's wife and family to say their goodbyes, Stevenson hopes that humming the song will help to ease their pain.

The hymn, which describes a man's faith and repentance as he speaks to Jesus before his death, reflects Herbert's attempt to make peace with his own death. Throughout the book, songs and hymns represent the suffering, loss, and hope of individuals in grim situations. This scene of Stevenson and Herbert's family humming the sorrowful song as they pry Herbert's wife away from him brings the reality and tragedy of execution to life. In this scene, Stevenson illustrates the humanity of Herbert and his family, and the reality of their loss.

The next day there were articles in the press about the execution. Some state officials expressed happiness and excitement that an execution had taken place, but I knew that none of them had actually dealt with the details of killing Herbert.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Herbert Richardson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

While witnessing Herbert's execution, Stevenson describes how the officers involved in Herbert's death seemed heavy-hearted and shameful. He argues here that politicians, judges, and others in positions of power are able to pass harsh laws and sentences because they, unlike those working at the prison, don't have to see the "details" of the killing. Stevenson suggests that proximity to an execution is much darker and more emotional than imagining an execution from afar. This is implicitly an argument for the importance of seeing the reality of the death penalty up close in order to understand its complexity and feel its emotional and moral weight. Stevenson also argues that participating in taking another person's life damages a person's humanity and pains his or her conscience. Though the officers aren't personally responsible for Herbert's death sentence, they are implicated in the cruelty of it, and it cannot help but affect them.

Chapter 5 Quotes

I feel like they done put me on death row, too. What do we tell these children about how to stay out of harm's way when you can be at your own house, minding your own business, surrounded by your entire family, and they still put some murder on you that you ain't do and send you to death row?

Related Characters: Armelia (speaker), Bryan Stevenson, Walter McMillian

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

In a meeting with Stevenson at Walter's family's house, Walter's sister Armelia speaks before a crowd of relatives and community members. Armelia, along with many of those present, were with Walter on the day of Ronda Morrison's murder. Yet, the state has completely discounted the alibis they have given for Walter and disregarded their testimony.

Because her reality and her memory have been disregarded, and because an important person in her life

has been unlawfully taken away, Armelia feels like she, too, has been condemned. Her comments show how the family members and others connected to the condemned also become victimized by abuses of the criminal justice system. Armelia also suggests that nobody in their community is safe if the State can arbitrarily convict any of them of a crime and send them to death row. This illustrates Stevenson's argument that failures of the justice system impose "collateral consequences" on the families and communities of those incarcerated.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ We've been through a lot, Bryan, all of us. I know that some have been through more than others. But if we don't expect more from each other, hope better for one another, and recover from the hurt we experience, we are surely doomed.

Related Characters: Mr. and Mrs. Jennings (speaker), Bryan Stevenson, Charlie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. and Mrs. Jennings are the rural white couple who befriend and support Charlie, a young black teenager who was incarcerated after killing his mother's abusive boyfriend. Charlie had to spend his teenage years in jail while recovering from the trauma of domestic violence, the residual anguish from his crime, and the sexual abuse he experienced in jail. The Jenningses offered to support Charlie through college, and Stevenson worries that, after all of Charlie's suffering, they may be asking him to achieve too much.

Mrs. Jennings' reply to Stevenson demonstrates her commitment to overcoming her own loss and pain from her grandchild's suicide years before. Instead of allowing their pain to conquer them, Mr. and Mrs. Jennings used their pain to develop their empathy and become advocates for other struggling youth. Mrs. Jennings's words speak to one of the larger messages of Stevenson's book: condemned individuals are capable of change and reform, as is society overall. In order to achieve this, we must all believe that it is possible and demand more from one another.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ You know they'll try to kill you if you actually get to the bottom of everything.

Related Characters: Ralph Myers (speaker), Walter McMillian, Michael O'Connor, Bryan Stevenson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

After reaching out to EJI for help in recanting his false testimony, Myers warns Stevenson and Michael that their lives might be in danger because of their involvement in Walter's case. The "they" to which Myers refers is the State and local law enforcement in Monroeville. Myers is speaking from experience here: he has faced intimidation and cruelty at the hands of law enforcement officials who aimed to keep Myers from recanting his testimony. While Myers' words demonstrate his own capacity for dramatic storytelling (confirming Stevenson's depiction of his character), this statement also speaks to the growing hatred in the community of Monroeville toward anyone trying to defend or exonerate Walter or expose the corruption of local officials. This should evoke the specter of the Jim Crow era when force, manipulation, and even lethal violence were used to keep marginalized groups from gaining power. Myers' prediction later proves somewhat true: EJI begins receiving bomb threats for its efforts to shed light on the truth of Walter's conviction.

❝ They treated us like we were low-class white trash. They could not have cared less about us. […] I thought they treated victims better. I thought we had some say.

Related Characters: Mozelle and Onzelle (speaker), Vickie Pittman, Michael O'Connor, Bryan Stevenson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

After hearing Myers' theories about police involvement in the murder of Vickie Pittman, Stevenson and Michael decide to investigate further into Pittman's death. They arrange to meet Vickie's aunts, Onzelle and Mozelle, two strong-minded rural white women who were very close to their niece and very angry about her murder.

Mozelle and Onzelle express their disappointment in the state and local law enforcement for failing to listen to them and to take into consideration their thoughts and needs, especially since they are the family members of the victim. Their experience illustrates Stevenson's overall argument that the State is often too preoccupied with winning high-profile convictions and maintaining the public appearance of being tough on crime to consider the actual wellbeing and perspective of the victim's family. This statement also supports Stevenson's argument that economic privilege is a major factor in criminal justice. Upper-class victims like Ronda Morrison are given more respect and attention than lower-class victims like Vickie Pittman, and Pittman's family members, who are also lower-class, have trouble making their voices heard because their concerns are not considered to be important.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Imagine teardrops left uncried
From pain trapped inside
Waiting to escape
Through the windows of your eyes

"Why won't you let us out?"
The tears question the conscience
"Relinquish your fears and doubts
and heal yourself in the process."

The conscience told the tears
"I knew you really wanted me to cry
but if I release you from bondage
In gaining your freedom, you die."

The tears gave it some though
Before giving the conscience an answer
"If crying brings you to triumph
Then dying's not such a disaster."

Related Characters: Ian Manuel (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147-148

Explanation and Analysis

"Uncried Tears" is a poem by Ian Manuel, a young man who was sentenced to life in prison for a non-homicide juvenile offense. To protect Ian from predatory adult inmates, the prison kept him in solitary confinement. At the time of the book's publication, he had spent around twenty years in solitary confinement.

The poem personifies Ian's conscience and emotions, and, significantly, it places his conscience and emotions in opposition to one another. The "conscience" appears to represent his sense of guilt and shame, while the tears that are held in "uncried" represent his own suffering. He illustrates how the two are at odds with each other and need to be reconciled. Reconciling his conflict through releasing his emotions is symbolized by crying.

However, the tears seem to have life and energy only when they are held in. In Ian's life, which is marked by minimal human contact and minimal opportunity for growth or achievements, his emotions are one of the few things he has to hold on to. His poem suggests that his inner conflicts animate his experience, and that he has become attached to them. Yet, he recognizes that he needs to relieve his conscience in order to move on. To do so, he must reconcile his shame with his suffering.

Stevenson's inclusion of the poem at the beginning of Chapter 8 speaks to the often unseen and unheard suffering of incarcerated children, as well as to their capacity for reflection, growth, and redemption.

❝ But to be real, I want to show the world I'm alive! I want to look at those photos and feel alive! It would really help with my pain. I felt joyful today during the photo shoot. I wanted it to never end. Every time you all visit and leave, I feel saddened. But I capture and cherish those moments in time, replaying them in my mind's eye, feeling grateful for human interaction and contact. But today, just the simple handshakes we shared was a welcome addition to my sensory deprived life.

Related Characters: Ian Manuel (speaker), Bryan Stevenson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt is taken from a letter than Ian wrote to Stevenson. Stevenson had arranged a photo shoot with Ian as part of a national report on individuals incarcerated as juveniles. Ian later writes to Stevenson, expressing with kindness and desperation his earnest desire to have copies of the photos that were taken of him.

The photos, a simple thing to most people, take on special significance to Ian. They are evidence of his existence, and

they will "show the world" that he is alive. His time in solitary confinement has not only created his sense of isolation but also a feeling of invisibility. Ian doesn't see others on the outside, and they don't see him. He demonstrates how precious any human contact has become to him by expressing his intense gratitude for Stevenson's visits and by explaining how much something so simple as a handshake means to him.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ In that moment, I felt something peculiar. A deep sense of recognition. I smiled now, because I knew she was saying to the room, "I may be old, I may be poor, I may be black, but I'm here. I'm here because I've got this vision of justice that compels me to be a witness. I'm here because I'm supposed to be here. I'm here because you can't keep me away."

Related Characters: Mrs. Williams, Bryan Stevenson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes during Stevenson's reflections on the last day of Walter's Rule 32 hearing. After EJI's success of their first day, the State retaliated by implementing advanced security measures to deter the black community from attending the hearing—measures that included a metal detector and a police dog. Ms. Williams, a respected elderly woman in Walter's community, became paralyzed with fear when she saw the dogs. Ms. Williams had been injured by police dogs years before during the Voting Rights protests. That night, she prayed for the strength needed to overcome her fear. The next day, she made her way past the dogs with great effort. When she arrived, she announced, "I'm Here!"

It takes Stevenson a moment to realize what Ms. Williams means by her proclamation. She's reacting to a specific historical moment (her experiences as a protestor in the Civil Rights Movement) in order to demonstrate her ability to overcome obstacles and show up despite efforts to intimidate her and keep her away. By showing up and refusing to be intimidated, Ms. Williams reasserts her right to be there, inspires Stevenson and others to keep fighting, and demonstrates her commitment—despite physical risk—to representing her community in their fight for justice.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ I argued to the judge that not taking Avery's mental health issues into consideration at trial was as cruel as saying to someone who has lost his legs, "You must climb these stairs with no assistance, and if you don't your just lazy." Or to say to someone who was blind, "You should get across this busy interstate highway, unaided, or you're just cowardly."

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Avery Jenkins

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Stevenson argues before the court during his appeal of Avery Jenkins' death sentence. Avery Jenkins is an intellectually disabled man whose condition was exacerbated by extreme neglect and abuse while being shuffled between foster care homes as a child.

Stevenson argues that for mentally ill and disabled individuals like Avery, equal treatment means taking into consideration the needs created by their disabilities. To Stevenson, holding Avery accountable for actions related to his disabilities is the same as holding physically disabled people accountable for achieving the same feats as non-disabled individuals. Through his argument, Stevenson attempts to challenge the way the courts conceive of disabilities and reveal how this unfair conception impacts punishments assigned to disabled individuals. Stevenson's argument also demonstrates, once again, his commitment to finding empathy and common humanity in order to grant mercy to people who have erred.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Walter's sense of humor hadn't failed him despite his six years on death row. And this case had given him lots of fodder. We would often talk about situations and people connected to the case that, for all the damage they had caused, had still made us laugh at their absurdity. But the laughter today felt very different. It was the laughter of liberation.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Walter McMillian

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Walter has just been released from death row. On the day of his release, he cheerfully greets his friends and family and drives around with Stevenson arranging some of his affairs.

The strong friendship that has grown between Walter and Stevenson is depicted through Stevenson's observations about Walter's sense of humor and his reflections on the many times they've laughed together. Through his description of Walter's sense of humor, Stevenson shows Walter's character to be not only good-natured, but also optimistic and resilient. This passage also suggests that laughter has provided an effective coping mechanism for both Walter and Stevenson during their long, frustrating ordeal. This was not a coping mechanism that allowed them not to face reality: it seems that the ability to laugh at the difficulties they faced gave them the strength to continue to fight, which is a powerful argument for optimism in the face of impossible odds.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Knitted together as they were, a horrible day for one woman would inevitably become a horrible day for everyone. The only consolation in such an arrangement was that joys were shared as well. A grant of parole, the arrival of a hoped-for letter, a visit from a long absent family member would lift everyone's spirits.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Marsha Colbey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Marsha Colbey is the poor white woman from Alabama who was sentenced to life in prison for allegedly murdering her child, though, in fact, the child was stillborn. Stevenson describes how Marsha became involved with the community of female inmates at Tutwiler, and how she observed the way that the women's lives and experiences became intertwined. Prior to this passage, Stevenson spoke of the special interest Marsha took in helping women who were in more vulnerable or unfortunate situations than hers.

In this passage, Stevenson illustrates how prisons aren't just warehouses for accused individuals: they become communities. The women at Tutwiler, like some male prisoners described on death row, form close relationships. Through this depiction, Stevenson shows the continued humanity and empathy of incarcerated women, which is particularly evident in their ability to deeply feel one another's joys and sorrows despite the difficulty of their own individual situations. The fact that this profound empathy has led Marsha to become an advocate for incarcerated women is another piece of evidence that seeing a problem up close and humanizing those affected by it can lead to the ability to give mercy to others and the desire to do advocacy work.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ His story was a counter narrative to the rhetoric of fairness and reliability offered by politicians and law enforcement officials who wanted more and faster executions. Walter's case complicated the debate in very graphic ways.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Walter McMillian

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

After Walter's release, he accompanies Stevenson to conferences and events throughout the country, sharing his experience and participating in the national discourse around the death penalty. Walter's case receives media coverage to a degree that exceeds other previous stories of death row exonerations.

Here, Stevenson describes how Walter's case challenged national political debates about the death penalty. The details of Walter's case showed the public how false witnesses, bribery, threats, and corruption led to his conviction and sentence. The clear corruption and life-and-death stakes of the case captivated the public and enabled people to begin to question whether the death penalty was ever appropriate, given the flawed nature of the criminal justice system. Walter's case also shows how media sensationalism can affect policy: the case gained so much attention because its particulars were so outrageous and unsavory. Many exonerated felons do not have stories that can captured the public imagination, even though they face similar suffering to Walter.

He became uncharacteristically emotional. "They put me on death row for six years! They threatened me for six years. They tortured me with the promise of execution for six years. I lost my job. I lost my life. I lost my reputation. I lost my – I lost my dignity."

Related Characters: Walter McMillian, Bryan Stevenson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

While staying in Sweden to receive a human rights award, Stevenson sees a story broadcast by a Swedish TV station about his work at EJI. The film crew had come to the United States and interviewed several of EJI's clients, including Walter. Walter had given his interview without Stevenson present, so Stevenson sees Walter's interview for the first time on TV in Sweden.

Walter's expressions of distress during his interview are indications of his trouble coping with the emotional and psychological aftermath of his time on death row. This scene supports Stevenson's arguments regarding the lasting and damaging impact of failures of the criminal justice system. Stevenson speaks of these issues as being the "collateral" or secondary "consequences" of incarceration: even though EJI won the legal battle on Walter's behalf, nothing can reverse the lasting effects the experience had on him. This passage also begins to hint at Walter's psychological decline. Stevenson is somewhat surprised by Walter's comportment on TV, which suggests an ominous distance growing between them.

Chapter 14 Quotes

When he talked about his own act of violence, he seemed deeply confused about how it was possible he could have done something so destructive. Most of the juvenile lifer cases we handled involved clients who shared Evan's confusion about their adolescent behavior. Many had matured into adults who were much more thoughtful and reflective; they were now capable of making responsible and appropriate decisions.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Evan Miller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 266

Explanation and Analysis

As part of an effort to reform laws requiring harsh sentencing for juvenile offenders, EJI represents Evan Miller. Evan is a teenager who was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison after participating in the killing of a middle-aged neighbor who'd served drugs to him and his friends. Stevenson describes how, during his incarceration, Evan became disheartened by the violence he saw around him and remorseful for his own past actions.

Through Evan's example, Stevenson shows how juvenile offenders are especially capable of growing and learning from their mistakes. They can become insightful, responsible adults, which makes the legal barriers to their release especially tragic. This passage deepens Stevenson's argument against life sentences for juvenile offenders on the grounds that they are impressionable and capable of reform.

When these basic deficits that burden all children are combined with the environments that some poor children experience—environments marked by abuse, violence, dysfunction, neglect and the absence of loving caretaker—adolescence can leave kids vulnerable to the sort of extremely poor decision making that results in tragic violence.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Evan Miller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

The "deficits" mentioned in this section are the neurological, emotional, and psychological features that are present in normal adults but have not yet formed in adolescent brains. When Stevenson argues before the Supreme Court against the use of life sentences for juvenile offenders, he presents scientific research showing that adolescents are in a critical period of development that affects their judgment and risk-taking impulses. In a sense, Stevenson argues that all adolescents should be considered to be cognitively impaired when compared to adults, particularly in terms of their abilities to think through the consequences of their actions and to assess risk.

In his Supreme Court arguments as summarized here,

Stevenson contends that these normal developmental stages are especially dangerous periods for low-income children and other children experiencing environmentally unsafe situations. Rather than receiving the guidance and care needed to develop their judgment faculties and coping mechanisms, they are left alone to navigate their own particularly difficult experiences. Stevenson argues that this combination of youth and environment is especially conducive to mistakes that lead to "tragic violence." This argument is an example of Stevenson's commitment to empathizing with people who make mistakes. By trying to contextualize acts of violence rather than condemning people who commit them without understanding their stories, Stevenson is able to make a reasoned and compassionate case for offering mercy.

❝ I watched Joe, who laughed like a little boy, but I saw the lines in his face and even the emergence of a few prematurely grey hairs on his head. I realized even while I laughed, that his unhappy childhood had been followed by unhappy, imprisoned teenage years followed by unhappy incarceration through young adulthood. All of the sudden, it occurred to me what a miracle it was that he could still laugh.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Joe Sullivan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

Joe Sullivan, a young man sentenced to life in prison as a child, becomes deeply attached to Stevenson. Joe is an emotionally and physically disabled victim of prison sexual abuse who has spent years in prison for a non-homicide crime that Stevenson suggests he didn't commit. After arguing before the Supreme Court against juvenile life sentences, Stevenson goes to visit Joe in prison. This moment takes place just after Joe reads a heartfelt but somewhat disjointed poem to Stevenson.

In this passage, Stevenson illustrates how incarceration can freeze a person's development in time. In Joe's case, this was exacerbated by existing emotional problems and the trauma and violence he experienced in prison. On the one hand, Joe's story is an example of the ways in which prison makes already-vulnerable people even more vulnerable, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence instead of preventing violence. On the other hand, though, Stevenson's portrayal of Joe serves as a testimony to human resilience and, in particular, how laughter reflects and preserves strength.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ We are all broken by something. We have all hurt someone and have been hurt. We all share the condition of brokenness, even if our brokenness is not equivalent [...] Our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion. We have a choice. We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken natures and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, foreswear compassion, and, as a result, deny our own humanity.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), The little boy at church, Walter McMillian, Jimmy Dill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

Just after the execution of Jimmy Dill, Stevenson faces a crisis of faith. With Walter dying from advancing dementia, Stevenson is especially tired and sad, and, despite his best efforts, Stevenson was unable to secure a motion to stay Jimmy's execution. On the phone with Jimmy moments before his execution, Stevenson weeps. As Jimmy's works hard to overcome his stutter so he can express his gratitude, Stevenson is reminded of a little boy he once met at church who also had a stutter. After they hang up, Stevenson is heartbroken, emotionally exhausted, and overwhelmed by the persistence of injustice. For the first time, he considers the thought of quitting.

His realization that he has been "broken" by the injustices and cruelty he has witnessed, however, creates in him a new understanding of his work. His thought that everyone is "broken" relates to his earlier argument that everyone will, at some point, need mercy from others. Only those who deny their own shame and pain are able to continue inflicting pain on others; seeing one's own pain and shame makes it much harder to pass the cycle of pain onto other people. This suggests that, in addition to empathy for others, self-reflection and admitting personal vulnerability can help to stop cycles of violence.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ "I've been singing sad songs my whole life. Had to. When you catch stones, even happy songs can make you sad." She paused and grew silent. I heard her chuckle before she continued. "But you keep singing. Your songs will make you strong. They might even make you happy."

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), The Old Woman (the "Stonecatcher")

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 309-310

Explanation and Analysis

After his successful defense in the Carter and Caston hearings, Stevenson meets a mysterious and charming older woman outside the courtroom. She tells Stevenson that she is a "stonecatcher" just like he is: someone who holds others' sadness and who fights against injustice by defending those who are blamed and condemned. She argues in favor of mercy and compassion, and she offers to let Stevenson "lean on" her, because she knows his work can be tiring and painful.

The phrase "stonecatcher" references a Biblical story in which Jesus prevents a group of people from stoning a woman for committing adultery. He tells them that the person in the group who is without sin should cast the first stone, but, since nobody is without sin, no stones are thrown. By "catching stones," the old woman means trying to stop cycles of violence.

The old woman also evokes the literary figure of the Wise Old Woman as presented by Carl Jung in that she gives Stevenson wisdom and encouragement to help him move forward. She describes song as both an expression of suffering and a way of coping and remaining hopeful. As it does elsewhere in the book, song symbolizes the full spectrum of emotion felt by marginalized individuals in their struggle to remain hopeful despite oppression, loss, and suffering.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION: HIGHER GROUND

The book begins with Bryan Stevenson's first-person account of a moment in the summer of 1983 when he was a third-year Harvard law student interning in Georgia. During his drive to a rural prison to meet a death-row inmate for the first time, Stevenson feels anxious because he has little knowledge of death penalty litigation and he is unsure of how to speak to a death row inmate.

Stevenson's choice to open by zooming in on the anxious moments before his first interaction with a death row inmate grounds the book's focus on advocacy as a journey. It also foreshadows the importance of learning through experience and direct human interaction.

Stevenson rewinds, describing his journey to this moment. He majors in philosophy and applies to a joint law school and public policy program, despite that he has no background in law, because he wants to fight economic and racial injustice. At Harvard, he finds the atmosphere too competitive and the academics too abstract, but when he takes a class on race and poverty litigation, "everything [comes] into focus." The next summer, he goes to Georgia to intern for the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee (SPDC). On the plane, he meets the impassioned director, Steve Bright. At the SPDC, Stevenson finds an atmosphere of dedication and mutual support. After years of being outlawed, the death penalty has just been reinstated. The office receives calls daily from inmates scheduled to die without legal counsel. Stevenson is assigned to make a visit to one of these inmates to reassure him he won't die in the next year.

Stevenson's description of his path to finding purpose in the law emphasizes the importance he places on the practical application of knowledge. For Stevenson, real-life stories of the poor and of racial minorities (and later the real-life stories of death row inmates) make the law feel relevant to him. This underscores the significance Stevenson places on humanizing and understanding the people and groups impacted by the law. The contrast between how he describes the atmospheres of Harvard and of the SPDC illustrates the role of atmosphere and community in the book. Communities create and reinforce values and they impact the emotional states and goals of their members.

At Jackson prison in Georgia, a hostile guard meets Stevenson. In the visitor center, the guards bring out Henry, a young black man with his hands and ankles shackled. Henry reminds Stevenson of his friends and relatives from home. Stevenson begins with several apologies until he stammers out the message that Henry won't be executed in the next year. Henry takes Stevenson's hand and expresses deep relief. They spend three hours talking and sharing life stories. The guard enters and warns Stevenson he has overstayed. The guard shackles Henry tightly and ignores Stevenson's request to loosen the cuffs. Henry tells Stevenson not to worry, but to remember to visit again. Henry starts singing a beautiful church hymn that Stevenson recognizes: "Lord, plant my feet on higher ground." Stevenson leaves feeling deeply moved by Henry's kindness, and overwhelmed with a new understanding of the meaning of hope and the human capacity for redemption.

Immediately, Stevenson is struck with a sense of connection to Henry: Henry looks like the other young black men from Stevenson's personal life. Rather than distancing himself from Henry and viewing Henry as the "other," Stevenson's sense of identification with the man on death row fills him with an attitude of empathy and openness. Through their conversations, the wall between client and lawyer dissolves, and Bryan relates to Henry on the level of friendship. This makes it even harder to watch Henry be shackled again. Rather than seeing himself as a savior, Stevenson feels gratitude for Henry's grace and warmth.

After his summer at the SPDC, Stevenson returns to his last year at Harvard with a new sense of purpose. He studies everything he can about the death penalty and the relationship between the law and systems of power, poverty and racial inequality. He rewinds to describe his upbringing in a rural, racially segregated town in Delaware. There, the history of slavery asserted itself through the presence of white supremacist symbols and ideology. His parents both worked in low-paying jobs and they always struggled financially. Stevenson's grandmother was the daughter of slaves in Virginia, and she learned their sense of fear and caution. When Stevenson was a child, his grandmother often hugged him and said, "You can't understand most of the important things from a distance. You have to get close." Stevenson reflects that, while law school alienated him at first, "proximity to the condemned, to people unfairly judged" returned him to a sense of home.

Even though Stevenson has not been incarcerated, he relates to the "condemned" because he sees them as victims of unfairness, and unfairness is a theme he sees in his own family's history. By focusing on the impact of slavery and segregation on his family in order to understand himself, Stevenson implicitly argues for the importance of studying historical forces when trying to make sense of modern events and issues. Stevenson's goal of "getting close" to the condemned runs counter to one of the most surface-level goals of the criminal justice system, which is to keep the condemned away from the rest of society.

Stevenson explains that the book's purpose is to "get closer" to the issue of incarceration in the US. He describes the changes since the 1980's that have resulted in an unjust and punitive criminal justice system. He cites the growing incarceration rate (which is disproportionately high for black males), the death penalty, harsh sentences for juvenile offenders and nonviolent crimes, and the criminalization of poverty, mental illness and drug addiction. He writes that the system fails at rehabilitation and instead uses labels like "felon" to permanently dehumanize the condemned. He describes the "collateral consequences" of incarceration on perpetuating inequality, such as the prevalence of false convictions and the huge increase in prison spending at the expense of other public social services.

Stevenson paints a picture of the criminal justice system that emphasizes its failure to address underlying social problems and its tendency to instead aggravate these problems, creating a continuous cycle of poverty, violence, and incarceration. By arguing that the system is failing at rehabilitation and by citing facts about the heavy cost of the prison system at the expense of other public services, Stevenson implies that the criminal justice system disproportionately allocates resources toward punishment over preventative measures.

Stevenson explains that he will focus on the story of Walter McMillian to illustrate the justice system's tendency to tolerate unfairness and to "victimize" the condemned. He argues that, "each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done," and that by granting mercy, we can stop perpetuating the cycle of violence. He writes that we all need mercy because "we are all implicated when we allow others to be mistreated."

Stevenson's argument that mistreatment of the condemned implicates everyone suggests that by dehumanizing others, people dehumanize themselves. Here, he clarifies the central storyline of the book and the central message: instead of punishment, society should focus on mercy and compassion.

CHAPTER 1: MOCKINGBIRD PLAYERS

It has been four years since Stevenson graduated from law school and began working at the SPDC. One day, he receives a phone call from Judge Robert. E Lee Key. On hearing that the judge is named after the Confederate general, Stevenson is amused. Judge Key warns Stevenson not to take on the case of Walter McMillian, who Key claims is "one of the biggest drug dealers in all of South Alabama" and a member of the "Dixie Mafia." Judge Key says he won't work with a lawyer who isn't a member of the Alabama Bar Association, and Stevenson assures the judge that he is a member. The judge brings up several unrelated reasons to persuade Stevenson to drop the case. When Stevenson calmly refutes each one, the judge abruptly hangs up.

By choosing to begin with this specific moment and fixate on the judge's name, Stevenson emphasizes the history of racism in the South and the continued biases of the court system. Stevenson draws attention to the fact that he is receiving a call from a judge named after a confederate general, who is calling to tell him not to represent a black man on death row who has no state-appointed defense. The judge's insistence on dissuading Bryan reveals his intent to deny Walter any legal representation.

It's 1988, and Alabama has the country's fastest-growing prison population, including almost 100 death-row inmates, to whom the state offers no public defense. Because of this, Georgia-based SPDC is barraged with death row cases from Alabama. Stevenson is spending a lot of time in Alabama helping his friend Eva Ansley to found a legal aid project for the growing number of unrepresented death row inmates. One of the many Alabama cases assigned to him is that of Walter McMillian. During their first meeting, Walter stands out to Stevenson because of his insistence that he is innocent of the alleged murder that had placed him on death row. Stevenson writes that he developed the philosophy of believing clients until "the facts suggest something else."

By placing the facts about Alabama's fast-growing incarceration rate and high number of death row inmates next to the state's failure to provide a public defender system, Stevenson portrays a harsh state that renders judgment without acknowledging the rights of those who are judged. This lack of mercy is contrasted with the mercy shown by the SPDC, Eva Ansley and Stevenson through their activism. Stevenson's philosophy about believing clients further highlights the difference between the views of the state and the views of the activists.

As Stevenson leads into the story of Walter's life and trial, he begins by discussing Walter's hometown of Monroeville, Alabama. Monroeville was also the birthplace of Harper Lee, the author of **To Kill a Mockingbird**, the famous novel that features a black man who is falsely accused of rape and the white lawyer who unsuccessfully defends him against an angry white community. Stevenson writes that the town proudly touts Lee's fame, with local destinations, events, and a theater group named after her. Yet, Stevenson writes that the "harder truths" of racism, white violence, and innocence that are explored in the famous novel "took no root" in Monroeville.

Stevenson highlights the irony of Monroeville as both the setting for Walter's wrongful conviction and the birthplace of Harper Lee. The similarities between the novel's plot and the circumstances facing Walter seem glaring. Yet, the town's resistance toward what Stevenson calls the "harder truths" of the novel demonstrates the deeply ingrained nature of racist attitudes. It also speaks to the need for communities to reflect critically on their own institutions in order to overcome systemic racism.

Monroeville's economy was built through slave labor on cotton plantations before the Civil War. During the Jim Crow era, white landowners relied on underpaid black sharecroppers. Eventually, as the cotton industry declined, the state subsidized the paper mill industry in its place. The shift largely benefited white landowners and left most blacks unemployed. Walter McMillian grew up picking cotton, just like most of the other children in the poor black settlements bordering Monroeville. Walter saw the industry shift and he borrowed money to buy his own logging and paper mill equipment. As a moderately successful businessman, Walter earned a higher social status, as well as some suspicion and jealousy among the white community in Monroeville.

In summarizing the history of racial injustice in Monroeville from an economic perspective, Stevenson highlights the connection between past historical wrongs and modern economic inequality. This provides not only a context for Walter's life story, but also a context for understanding the racial hierarchy that underlies the events and attitudes surrounding his trial and conviction. By portraying the white community's suspicions toward Walter's success, Stevenson alludes to possible motives they may have for targeting Walter later on.

Walter had a history of cheating on his wife, Minnie, with whom he had five children. In 1986, at 43, Walter was involved with a 25-year-old married white woman, Karen Kelly. Even though Karen was already getting a divorce, her relationship with a black man became a public scandal leading to a child custody battle. Walter testified in court, admitting their affair. Having an interracial affair ruined Walter's good reputation. Stevenson describes the South's history of hatred toward black men involved with white women. During the post-Reconstruction era, Jim Crow laws outlawed interracial relationships. Even after the U.S. nullified such "anti-miscegenation" laws in the 1967 Loving vs. Virginia case, many states, including Alabama, continued outlawing interracial relationships well into the 1980's. The community's response to Walter's affair terrified him, especially given Monroe County's lynching history. Walter had been twelve when an acquaintance of his family, Russell Charley, was hanged following suspicions of interracial romance.

Walter's good reputation with the white community had been dependent on his compliance with racial segregation and hierarchy. Even though Walter and Karen were equal parties in their affair, they faced different consequences based on the public's attitude toward their race and gender. Karen was at risk of losing her children, meaning that her judgment and morality were called into question. The possible consequences for Walter, however, involved violence and death. The black man is vilified, while the sanity or wholesomeness of the white woman is questioned. The history of lynch mobs betrays not only the historical hatred toward black men, but also the sense of ownership and control over white women.

A few weeks after Walter testifies at Karen Kelly's custody hearing, the body of Ronda Morrison is found on the floor of Monroe Cleaners. Rhonda was a young white woman from a respected family who was beloved by the local community. Murder is very rare in Monroeville, and the community is shocked. Police track two Latino men who had been traveling through town, but the police realize that these men couldn't have done it. The community is getting anxious to solve the crime, putting newly elected Sheriff Tom Tate under pressure to find a suspect.

Stevenson sets the tone for the events surrounding the Morrison investigation by portraying the police's immediate impulse to target racial minorities as suspects. By describing the status of Rhonda Morrison, as well as the pressure on Sherriff Tate to solve the crime, Stevenson shows how the community "needs" a conviction in order to feel closure.

At the same time, Walter is trying to break up with Karen, who has started abusing drugs with her new friend, Ralph Myers. Ralph and Karen are now suspects in the murder of another woman from Escambia County, Vickie Pittman. Stephenson describes Myers as a psychologically troubled, attention-seeking white man with a criminal record who grew up in foster care. Myers initially denies any involvement in the murder, but then gives a series of contradictory statements that accuse different people, including a random black man. When police start to lose interest, Myers offers a confession. He states that he, Karen, and her "black boyfriend" collaborated, not only in killing Vickie Pittman, but that he and Walter also murdered Ronda Morrison. When Myers is unable to identify Walter out of several black men in a grocery store, Alabama Bureau of Investigation (ABI) officials and Sherriff Tate are left with no evidence to support Myer's statements.

By describing Myers' desperate attention-seeking tactics, Stevenson depicts him as a compulsive liar. This lays the groundwork for his accusations to be perceived by the reader as false. At the same time, by describing Myers' personality from the perspective of trauma and mental illness, the author allows some room for empathy for his character. By referring to Walter as Karen's "black boyfriend," Myers takes advantage of the police's inclination toward racial bias. Stevenson creates suspense by ending the chapter with investigators failing to find any evidence implicating Walter, because at this point the reader already knows that Walter is in prison for murder.

CHAPTER 2: STAND

Stevenson goes back in time to his second year in at SPDC. He had spent his first year and a half living on Steve Bright's couch. When Stevenson's friend Charlie Bliss comes to work for a legal aid group in Atlanta, the two move in together. Charlie, "a white kid from North Carolina," had been Stevenson's friend at Harvard, where they had "tried to make sense of things" together. A series of rent increases forces them to move several times, and they eventually move to a nice neighborhood.

Stevenson's relationships with Steve Bright (the SPDC director) and Charlie Bliss demonstrate the spirit of support and community among his circle of activist friends. This passage shows the importance of friendships amongst activists and the role that these friendships have in cultivating idealism and making advocacy sustainable.

At this time, Stevenson begins taking on death row cases in Alabama, while also filing prison condition cases in several states. He references the 1970's Attica Prison Riots, which created national awareness of Attica prison's use of cruel and dangerous physical punishments. Following the riots, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of "basic due process protections for imprisoned people." While some states began reforming prisons, the SPDC continued receiving letters describing abuses. One of Stevenson's cases in Gadsden, Alabama, involves the death of a 39-year-old black man who was jailed for a traffic violation, beaten by police and guards, and then denied his asthma inhaler. Stevenson begins receiving many abuse complaints in Gadsden, and he takes on another case there involving the death of black teenager who was pulled over for a traffic violation. When the teenager reached for his driver license, police assumed he had a gun and shot him. They explained that he looked "menacing,"

The example of Attica Prison shows the dehumanization of inmates that can occur when violence against prisoners is systematically applied. Prior to the Supreme Court case, it appears that a lack of legal accountability allowed these abuses to occur. This conveys the idea that legal structures are necessary in order to define and protect the human rights of individuals, and that without access to legal resources, institutional and individual power has no clear limits. The statement from the Gadsden police betrays the racial biases that influence their use of violence. Stevenson highlights the absurdity and danger of racial profiling by describing two cases in which police killed black men following traffic violations.

One night, Stevenson is coming home after a long day when his car's broken radio begins working. "Stand," one of his favorite Sly and the Family Stone songs is playing, so he parks outside of his apartment to listen. Soon, an Atlanta Police SWAT car appears and parks nearby. When Stevenson gets out, an officer approaches with his gun pointed at Stevenson, telling him to put his hands up. Stevenson says, "It's okay," and that he lives there. A second officer pins him against his car. They run his driver's license and illegally search his car. Neighbors came out, and a few ladies tell police to "ask him" about missing belongings. Police find nothing, but Stevenson demands an explanation. An officer replies that someone had reported a possible burglar, and the officer tells Stevenson: "We're going to let you go. You should be happy."

Stevenson draws the reader into seeing his perspective by describing the small details leading up to the encounter, such as the broken radio working for once. The band Sly and the Family Stone was comprised of mostly black members, and the song "Stand" is about standing up in the face of oppression. By choosing the song as the chapter title, Stevenson emphasizes the necessity of continuing to fight even after he has been personally affected by racial injustice. The officer's comments betray an effort to maintain power and inspire fear in Stevenson.

Returning home, Stevenson tells Charlie, who shares his outrage. The next day, Steve Bright urges Stevenson to file a police complaint. In his complaint, Stevenson omits the fact that he is a lawyer because he doesn't think it should matter, even though he knows his language might reveal him. He remembers the urge to run when the police approached, and he thinks about other black men in that situation. He reflects that they might not have known to stay calm, to stay put, and to say things like, "it's okay." His feeling of helplessness in the face of racial profiling makes him doubt his ability to fight for civil rights. His complaints to the Atlanta police are dismissed with letters stating the officers had "done nothing wrong and that police work is very difficult." Stevenson eventually meets with a law enforcement official, who tells him that the officers will receive "extra homework on community relations."

Stevenson believes that his privileged status as a lawyer shouldn't matter because his complaint against the police is from his experience as a civilian. By refusing to use his credentials to give him legitimacy, he shows his disagreement with preferential treatment toward the educated and privileged within the criminal justice system. Even though he is a powerful person, the psychological effects of racial oppression still impact him and cause him to doubt himself. The response of the police department illustrates their lack of concern for the experiences of the black community with law enforcement.

Still outraged over his experience, Stevenson begins giving talks at churches, organizations and youth centers to educate black communities about racial profiling and how to advocate for police reform and accountability. In one such speech in a rural Alabama church, his voice begins to quaver when he shares his own experience. After the speech, an older man in a wheelchair approaches with a young boy. The man baffles Stevenson by asking sternly if Stevenson knows what he is doing. Then the man tells Stevenson: "I'll tell you what you're doing. You're beating the drum for justice." He admonishes Stevenson to keep going, and he shows Stevenson his various scars, all earned while fighting for civil rights during the 60's. He tells Stevenson that the scars are his "medals of honor." Stevenson decides that he is ready to open his own office in Alabama.

By sharing his experience and encouraging members of various black communities to act on their concerns, Stevenson legitimizes the experiences of people whose experiences have been de-legitimized by existing power structures. The old man's words serve to counter the thoughts of self-doubt that Bryan felt after his own police encounter. The old man frames his injuries not as evidence of his victimization, but as evidence of his power and bravery.

CHAPTER 3: TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Returning to the events leading up to Walter's conviction, Stevenson describes the investigators' next move after Myers failed to identify Walter. Stevenson remarks that public pressure was continuing to build on Sherriff Tate, District Attorney Investigator Larry Ikner, and ABI Investigator Simon Benson. Following an officer's prompting, Myers claimed that Walter had raped him. The police arrested and jailed Walter in June of 1987 on sodomy charges (under anti-homosexuality laws) and questioned him about the murder of Ronda Morrison. In response to Walter's bewilderment, Tate repeatedly called him a "nigger" and threatened to "hang you like we done that nigger in Mobile." This is a reference to the murder by the KKK of a black man in Mobile that occurred after a local jury declared a mistrial in the case of another black man accused of shooting a white policeman.

Even though investigators already know that Myers can't identify Walter, their urgency to appease the public motivates them to go along with any leads that Myers can provide, no matter how arbitrary or unlikely. Not only do Tate's threats express his animosity toward Walter because of his race, but Tate also implies that he may be a member of a white supremacist group: by saying he would hang Walter like "we done" to Michael Donald in Mobile, he associates himself with the KKK. From the beginning, the scene is set for racial prejudice and hatred to affect the outcome of Walter's experience.

Stevenson recounts the story that Ralph Myers gave to police. According to Myers, Walter kidnapped him at a gas station at gunpoint. Walter forced Myers to drive his truck to the Monroe Cleaners because Walter's arm hurt. At the cleaners, Walter went in and told Myers to wait. Myers went to buy cigarettes and then came back. Walter returned, stating he had killed Ronda Morrison. He dropped Myers back off at the gas station, threatening to kill him if he snitched. With Walter still in jail on sodomy charges and facing public disgust, investigators offered an early release to Bill Hooks, a jailed black man known as a "jailhouse snitch" if he could corroborate Myer's story by placing Walter's truck at the cleaners. He accepted and testified that he had seen the truck at the cleaners on the day Ronda was murdered.

Myers' testimony, in addition to coming from someone Stevenson has depicted as an unreliable source, lacks several key details, including a motive for the murder. Based on available information, it appears that the investigators' pursue Bill Hooks, not because of any connection to Myers or Walter, but because they know he is a "snitch" who will give them what they need in exchange for a bribe. At this point, all evidence suggests that the investigators know that they are framing an innocent man.

The police indict Walter for the murder of Ronda Morrison to the "joy and relief" of the white community. Sherriff Tate still hasn't investigated Walter's background or whereabouts at the time of Ronda's murder. Black residents are outraged, and several relatives, neighbors and others report that on the day of the murder they saw Walter at his home where he and his family were putting on a fish fry to raise money for the church where his sister is minister. Among Walter's alibis are Ronda's uncle, Ernest Welch, a furniture salesman, and a policeman who wrote in his log that he'd purchased lunch from Walter. The police decide to continue their indictment anyway. Myers realizes the gravity of what he has done and tries to rescind his testimony. In response, Tate has Myers and Walter held on death row. Stevenson writes that holding "pretrial detainees" on death row is illegal.

The fact that Sherriff Tate indicts Walter before finding out his alibi implies that Tate doesn't care whether Walter is truly the murderer or not. Tate's move to illegally hold the men on death row is an expression of power and intimidation. His use of bribery and punishment to force Myers to testify further supports the idea that Tate is not interested in the truth and cares only about appeasing the public by closing the case. Tate's prejudice against black people, as previously expressed in his comments to Walter, likely allowed him to dehumanize Walter. Tate's prejudice likely made it possible to indict Walter on faulty grounds without feeling any pangs of conscience.

Stevenson describes Alabama's death row at Holman Prison. Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1975, the majority of Alabama death row inmates have been black, although when Walter arrived 40% were white. Inmates are held for 23 hours a day in a minimal 5-by-8 cell with a metal door. Nearby is the electric chair, which was painted yellow by inmates in the 1930s and called the "Yellow Mama." The details of recent executions occupy the conversations of death row inmates. Stevenson includes notes from Russ Canan, an SPDC lawyer whose client, John Evans, had just been executed at Holman. Canan describes Evans' painful death: he was electrocuted three times before the old, malfunctioning machine finally killed him.

The dismal setting of the death row cells, the nearness of the electric chair, and the detailed knowledge about the deaths of fellow inmates all serve to create an atmosphere of fear and hopelessness for death row inmates. This unhealthy setting shows how the wellbeing of inmates is disregarded, as if they are no longer considered to be among the living. Stevenson's description of the racial disparity on death row highlights the book's emphasis on considering how racial inequality affects every stage of the criminal justice system.

Walter believes that soon investigators will realize their mistake and let him go. As time passes, however, he becomes increasingly terrified, anxious, and distressed by his confinement. His family raises money and refinances their possessions to pay for two Selma civil rights attorneys, J.L Chestnut and Bruce Boynton. Monroeville officials disapprove of Walter hiring out-of-county defense, and they consider it evidence that Walter has drug money. The new attorneys fail to get Walter out of Holman. Other death row inmates offer support to Walter and explain to him the rules about pre-trial detention. They encourage him to file his own complaint, but Walter doesn't because he barely knows how to read and write.

Walter's efforts to maintain hope and his denial of the gravity of the situation evokes the familiar experience of a bad situation from which one hopes to wake up, as if from a nightmare. These descriptions of Walter's emotional stages serve to personalize Walter and evoke a sense of empathy. The failure of Walter's lawyers to have his illegal detention on death row reversed shows either their incompetence or lack of effort, which contrasts with the knowledge and support offered by his fellow inmates.

In another section of Holman death row, Ralph Myers has a psychological breakdown on the night that inmate Wayne Ritter is executed. Myers is overwhelmed by sound of inmates clanging their cups against the walls in protest, as well as the stench of burning flesh, which reminds Myers of his own childhood burning incident. The next day he calls Sheriff Tate, offering to move ahead with his testimony. Tate personally moves Myers to another prison on the same day, filing no paperwork with the prison. District Attorney Ted Pearson is soon to retire, and Stevenson speculates that Pearson sees Walter's upcoming prosecution as the chance to "leave office with a victory."

Despite the damage that Myers has caused Walter, Stevenson humanizes Myers by describing the psychological distress he endures. Tate's actions of personally moving Myers to and from death row without filing any paperwork illustrate the unchecked power he has in the local criminal justice system. The local system's lack of accountability allows Tate to wield his power arbitrarily. Stevenson implies that Pearson's actions will be personally and politically motivated.

Stevenson recounts the long history of southern courts deliberately excluding black jurors from serving, despite several federal laws that prevent racially-based exclusion. After the Supreme Court held underrepresentation of minorities on juries to be unconstitutional in the 1970's, minority exclusion persisted through a system of using preemptory strikes in jury selection. Although the prejudiced use of preemptory strikes is illegal, it is difficult to prove that the practice is occurring. When Chestnut and Boynton filed the standard motion to have Walter's case moved to avoid local bias, they were surprised when Ted Pearson supported their request and even more surprised when Judge Key approved it. Key moved Walter's case to Baldwin County, the only nearby county with a majority white population. Stevenson contends that Pearson and Key had likely collaborated to send Walter's case to Baldwin in order to secure an all-white jury. Even though Walter had heard from other inmates about the racial biases of all-white juries, he tried not to despair.

Despite the passage of laws to prevent racially discriminatory jury exclusion, Stevenson shows how the practice has nevertheless been normalized. The accepted local use of legal loopholes demonstrates the importance of community norms and belief systems in determining how federal laws are applied on a local level. Pearson and Judge Key both seem aware that they are more likely to win a guilty conviction for Walter with an all-white jury. Within the norms of their local circle, they find it morally acceptable to manipulate the racial makeup of the jury. This suggests that they haven't internalized the anti-racist values behind federal laws and instead they persist in holding their own racist views..

Walter's February trial is postponed until August after the key witness, Myers, again refuses to testify. Tate transfers Myers back to death row, where his mental health issues resurface. He is sent to a state mental hospital for a month and then returned back to death row. Stevenson writes that the state hospital had almost never found any patients psychologically unfit to testify, despite this being a key part of their institutional responsibility. Stevenson writes that Myers sees no other way out of the "situation he has created," and he agrees to testify against Walter.

Stevenson shows the effectiveness of Tate's efforts to psychologically manipulate Myers. By describing the failure of the state mental hospital to realize Myers' unfitness to testify and showing the abuses Sherriff Tate uses in forcing Myers' testimony, Stevenson prevents Myers from becoming the villain and instead draws attention to the corruption and inadequacy of the state.

At Walter's trial, Ted Pearson uses preemptory strikes to eliminate all but one of the black jurors. Myers gives his testimony. He adds that he went into Monroeville Cleaners and saw Walter standing over Ronda's body, and that an unnamed gray-haired man organized the murder and ordered Walter to shoot Myers, but that he had no more bullets. Bill Hooks testifies that he saw Walter's modified "low-rider" truck at the Cleaners. Walter whispers to his lawyers that his truck wasn't modified until months after, but they don't pursue that detail. Walter senses that everyone is in a hurry. A white man Walter has never met, Joe Hightower, also testifies that he saw Walter's truck. The defense calls only three witnesses from the many people present at the fish fry. Ronda's uncle Ernest Welch, the "furniture man" testifies that the fish fry was on a different day because he wouldn't have come by on the day his niece died. The jury pronounces Walter guilty. Walter returns to death row, hopeless and shocked that they believed Myers' story.

Stevenson's previous statements about the use of legal loopholes to exclude black jurors proves to be applicable in Walter's case, where Pearson does everything possible to secure a nearly all-white jury. Myer's testimony now includes even more contradictions, such as the detail about having gone into the cleaners. Neither Walter's defense lawyers not the judge pursue the identity of the missing crime organizer. This important omission supports Walter's sense that everyone is in a hurry to finish the trial. The fact that the defense lawyers also choose not to pursue Walter's information about the truck or to call more witnesses to the stand demonstrates their failure to match the effort and willpower of the prosecution.

CHAPTER 4: THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

In the summer 1989, despite a series of setbacks with obtaining space and securing funding, Stevenson and his friend Eva Ansley finally open the Equal justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama. Even as they struggle with fundraising and hiring, they are immediately bombarded with death row cases. EJI clients begin pleading for them to make last-stage appeals for fellow inmates. Stevenson remarks that counsel in such cases was becoming even harder to secure since the publication of an article by David Bagwell, the volunteer lawyer who represented the recently executed Wayne Ritter. In the article, Bagwell expressed his disillusionment, encouraged lawyers not to defend death row cases, and expressed his support for the death penalty, saying "mad dogs ought to die." Bagwell's article was passed around among inmates, who developed a greater distrust of lawyers.

Stevenson and Ansley's determination to serve the death-row population in Alabama is evident from their persistence in forming the EJI and immediately taking on cases despite understaffing and financial instability. Their need to take care of logistical details conflicts with the urgency of pleas from death row, highlighting the importance of resources to facilitate effective advocacy. Bagwell's public airing of his disillusionment and his personal lack of concern for death row inmates contrasts with the willingness of Stevenson and Ansley to inconvenience themselves for their cause.

Two of the inmates Stevenson and Ansley's clients beg them to assist are Michael Lindsey and Horace Dunkins. Stevenson and Ansley appeal Lindsey's sentence on the grounds that the judge had converted the jury's verdict of a life sentence to the death penalty. Stevenson writes that while Alabama's judicial power *could* be used to convert a death penalty into a life sentence, 91% of the time when it is used, Alabama judges use it to convert from life sentences to the death. Stevenson comments that due to a lack of public education and competitive election cycles, Alabama judges often apply the harshest available punishment in order to appear tough on crime. The governor of Alabama, Guy Hunt, denies EJI's request for clemency for Michael Lindsey, who is executed in May of 1989.

The pleas from death row inmates on behalf of their fellow prisoners demonstrate their capacity for selflessness and empathy despite their own dire circumstances. Stevenson demonstrates the problem of political motivation in the court system, and illustrates the importance of public education by showing the connections between public education, public views, election cycles and court rulings. Stevenson holds public education responsible for instilling compassion and he suggests that education can mean the difference between life or death.

EJI makes another last-stage appeal for Horace Dunkins, a mentally retarded man, but their appeal is denied. Stevenson writes that at the time of Dunkins' execution, the Supreme Court allowed executions of the intellectually disabled, and it wasn't until 13 years later in the Atkins vs. Virginia ruling that the practice was banned. Horace's botched execution prolongs his death, and, against the family's religious requests, an autopsy is performed. The family tries to sue the prison because, on top the system taking their son's life, they feel that the autopsy was wrong because the prison "had no right to mess with his body and soul, too."

Stevenson illustrates the fluidity of moral arguments surrounding the death penalty by showing the differences in Supreme Court rulings over time. The capacity for the Supreme Court to change its position on the death penalty conflicts with the irreversibility of the death penalty itself; the Court found that executing the mentally disabled was unconstitutional, but this decision can't retroactively impact the fate of Dunkins.

After the executions of Lindsey and Dunkins, Stevenson and Ansley are still struggling to set up and staff their office due to their limited budgets and difficult work conditions. One day, a death row inmate and Vietnam veteran, Herbert Richardson, calls EJI pleading for help. His execution date is 30 days away. Stevenson tries to delicately explain his limited resources, but Herbert persists, telling Stevenson that all he wants is some sign of hope. Stevenson is haunted by Richardson's desperation and, feeling that he "can't say no," Stevenson takes on the case.

The personal sacrifices that Stevenson and Ansley face are apparent, in part, because of their difficulty in finding other lawyers willing to work under the same conditions. Stevenson feels the tension between logistical limitations and Herbert's life-or-death circumstances. Stevenson's awareness of Herbert's humanity makes him feel that it would be impossible to say no, despite his lack of resources.

Stevenson explains that Herbert's traumas of childhood abuse and his mother's death were exacerbated by wartime violence. While in a New York veteran's hospital for his mental health problems, Herbert began dating a nurse and found a new sense of love and hope. When his attachment became unhealthy, the nurse left him. She moved home to Alabama, but he followed her. He placed a bomb on her porch, hoping that when it exploded she would run back to him for "protection." Stevenson writes that Herbert was deluded but intended no harm. When the blast killed the woman's niece, Herbert was arrested for murder. His lawyer was paid the standard court-issued $1,000 and didn't bring up Herbert's mental health, military service, or background. Without evidence, the prosecution told the all-white jury that Herbert was a "Black Muslim." When he was sentenced to death, Herbert's lawyer ignored his request for appeal. Eleven years later his execution date has arrived.

By describing Herbert's history of loss, abuse and violence, Stevenson attempts to show Herbert's humanity and explain the events that affected his mental health. By contrasting the pain of Herbert's past with the sense of hope he associated with his girlfriend, Stevenson gives context for Herbert's unhealthy obsession. Stevenson implies that Herbert's lawyer felt no investment in his client's fate because the court underpaid him. The lawyer's failure to bring up his client's past contrasts with Stevenson's detailed account of Herbert's life. The prosecution's unfounded claim that Herbert was a "Black Muslim" served to capitalize on the fears and racial biases of the all-white jury.

Stevenson files several stay motions at the state level on behalf of Herbert, though he has little hope. In the late 1980's, the Supreme Court began turning death penalty appeals back to state courts. He writes that the Supreme Court had become more concerned with "finality" over "fairness" and they upheld several harsh practices, including the execution of minors. Stevenson finally gets a hearing for Herbert, during which an expert provides evidence that Herbert's bomb wasn't intended to kill on contact. The judge rules that the information isn't evidence and it is too late to be considered. Stevenson is disturbed by the conflict between technicalities and Herbert's desire to live. At the courthouse, the victim's family tells Stevenson that they "don't believe in killing people," and they ask for help receiving the settlements they were promised. Stevenson reflects on the court's determination to kill Herbert without concern for the victim's family.

By providing historical context about the Supreme Court in the late 1980s, Stevenson allows Herbert's experience to illustrate overall political trends. Stevenson keeps the theme of political power and power structures at the forefront of Herbert's story. The judge uses legal technicalities to refuse the petition, while failing to consider the implications of the evidence. Stevenson's interaction with the victim's family suggests that the local system is too focused on punishment to consider the actual needs and wishes of a victim's family, which shows an underlying hypocrisy. The family's forgiveness contrasts with the court's lack of mercy.

Stevenson explains that over the years Herbert had corresponded with a woman and they fell in love. They marry a week before the execution, and Herbert becomes focused on ensuring that his new wife will receive the flag issued to the families of veterans when they die. Together, Stevenson, Ansley and their receptionist, Doris, put together last-minute petitions for a stay of execution with the governor and the Supreme Court. Herbert's wife and her family spend Herbert's last day visiting with him in the prison. Stevenson receives a call from the Supreme Court at 7pm that their petition has been denied. The court official offers to fax over the decision, and Stevenson marvels at the irrelevance of paperwork when a man is about to die. He rushes to the courthouse to be with Herbert for his death.

Though little information is given about Herbert's new wife, it is noteworthy that she develops a relationship with a man she knows is destined to die. Marriage, which would normally be considered the beginning of a life together, takes on a very different meaning in this context. Herbert's new love symbolizes the new beginning he isn't permitted to have, and it explains the fervor of his last-minute efforts to dispute his sentence. Stevenson continues to focus on the absurdity of bureaucracy and technicalities in light of the gravity of Herbert's death.

At the prison, Stevenson finds Herbert joking around and trying to stay positive in the presence of his wife and family. When the clock nears 10pm, the visitation officer, an older white woman, comes in to ask the family to start saying their goodbyes. Herbert's wife clings to him, and the officer leaves, clearly troubled. When she returns, she is emotional and she asks Stevenson for his help in removing the family. Stevenson recounts that a week beforehand he had requested on Herbert's behalf that the church **hymn** "The Old Rugged Cross" be played during his execution. To his surprise, the officers had agreed. Stevenson now begins humming the song, and Herbert's family hums along too. Herbert places his wife in Stevenson's arms, and she cries as the guards take Herbert away. Stevenson waits while Herbert is taken to have his body shaved for a "cleaner" execution.

Herbert's mood contrasts with the sobriety of the situation. Despite the intensity of his earlier efforts to fight the courts, it appears that he has now decided to make the best of his last moments. Stevenson demystifies and personalizes the death penalty by describing Herbert's time with his family in the hour before his death. The intimate scenes with Herbert's wife and the image of Herbert's family pulling away as they hum the church hymn further humanizes the moment and evokes a sense tragedy. Stevenson humanizes the officer and reveals her inner conflict by describing her emotional reaction and her reluctance about making the family leave.

Stevenson realizes he isn't prepared to see Herbert die. Herbert is given a moment with Stevenson. The two men pray together. Herbert tells Stevenson about the strangeness of knowing that he is about to die, and about how considerate and helpful all of the officers have been all day. Stevenson wonders how Herbert's fate may have differed if people had offered such compassion when he needed it earlier in life or during his trial. Stevenson gives Herbert a long hug before he is taken away. The officers put on a record of the **hymn** "The Old Rugged Cross." As he watches Herbert die, Stevenson notices a "cloud of regret and remorse" affecting all of the officers involved. He reflects that individuals who have no direct role in execution debate capital punishment in the abstract, not realizing that it is impossible to kill another human being without "implicating our own humanity."

Even though Stevenson has been working on death penalty cases for a few years, personally witnessing an execution brings him even closer to it. By describing how he prayed with Herbert, hugged him, and shared in his last reflections, Stevenson shows how he developed a personal friendship with Herbert and how this made witnessing his death more painful. Stevenson's arguments suggest that those in powerful positions are able to perpetuate the death penalty because they never see it up close. In contrast, those who participate directly feel the reality of killing another person, even if they feel powerless to stop it.

CHAPTER 5: OF THE COMING OF JOHN

Shortly after Herbert's execution, Stevenson visits death row to catch up with several new clients, including Walter. Afterward, he travels to Monroeville to meet Walter's large extended family. Gathered together in a small trailer, they passionately explain to Stevenson their indignation at Walter's conviction, particularly when they were all with him at the time of the murder. Stevenson writes that the family's hums of agreement were the kind of "wordless testimony of struggle and anguish" he heard "all the time growing up in a rural black church." Walter's sister Armelia expresses that the court's dismissal of Walter's alibi makes her feel that she has been "convicted too." A debate arises about whether or not Walter, whom they call "Johnny D", even needed an alibi, given his upstanding character.

The response of Walter's family illustrates that wrongs within the criminal justice system impact not only the condemned but also their families. This is an example of the phenomenon Stevenson earlier referred to as "collateral consequences." Armelia's statement about feeling "convicted too" reveals the message that the courts have (perhaps involuntarily) conveyed to Walter's family: by refusing to take the family's word that Walter was with them when the murder happened, the court denied the importance of their voices and experiences and held other voices and experiences as being more valid.

Stevenson rewinds to his arrival at Walter's home. He first notices the home's disrepair and the familiar signs of poverty. Walter's wife Minnie warmly greets Stevenson and she offers him something to eat. She discusses her difficult 12-hour shifts at "the plant" and her employer's indifference to her health. She strikes Stevenson as "strong and patient." Minnie is determined to continue supporting their daughter Jackie, who, they often proudly repeat, is in college. Stevenson thinks about the publicity surrounding Walter's affairs and the pain this must cause her. Stevenson is still reviewing Walter's records, yet he already suspects local law enforcement of illegal maneuvers. He echoes Minnie and Jackie's anger, although he is "wary of expressing such strong opinions" just yet. He feels outraged by the case, especially by the "hopelessness" it has caused the local black community. Minnie surprises Stevenson with news that their extended family is waiting to meet him nearby.

Stevenson's depiction of Walter's home coupled with Minnie's struggle to support their family serve to counter the state's image of Walter as a wealthy drug dealer. By portraying Minnie's hard work, her "strength and patience," and her dedication to her family, Stevenson shows how women step up to take on the roles of both mother and father when fathers are incarcerated. Walter and Minnie's pride in Jackie suggests not only the sacrifices they have made to send her to college, but also the hope she symbolizes to them for the future. Stevenson's choice to speak more freely with Walter's family illustrates that he is growing more personally affected by the case.

Stevenson, Minnie and Jackie travel down a long, isolated road, until they reach "an entire community hidden away in the woods." When Stevenson first enters the trailer of Walter's relatives, everyone stares at him for a moment before breaking out into applause. He expresses his gratitude and relays messages of love and appreciation from Walter. They apologize that they have no money and they offer to give Stevenson whatever they have, but Stevenson explains that EJI is a nonprofit. Despite their kindness, he senses their anxiety. He explains the appeals process to the family and the other community members who have come, and this offers them some hope. They talk until midnight, discussing the case and "jok[ing] some," and Stevenson feels "embraced in a way that energized" him.

Stevenson's description of Walter's family as living in an "entire community hidden away in the woods" represents the marginalization of the black community in Monroeville. Even though his interactions illustrate the vibrancy of the community, he also shows how they are "hidden away," or made less visible both through geographic segregation and political repression. Stevenson's portrayal of his visit with Walter's family illustrates his own need for a sense of community. In this way, he demonstrates that the exchange isn't one-sided.

On the drive back to Montgomery, Stevenson thinks of a story he read in college from the 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W.E.B. Du Bois. In "Of the Coming of John," a black community in Georgia pools their resources to send young John to a teaching college. John returns and starts a school for the community's children, where he emphasizes "freedom and racial equality." The white community feels threatened, and a judge terminates the school. John finds the judge's son attacking his sister, and he knocks the judge's son down. The judge organizes a lynch mob and they kill John. Stevenson writes that as the first in his own family to attend college, he has always related to John's position as the "hope of an entire community." Stevenson ponders the meaning of John's murder to the community who had invested their hopes in him, and he sees a parallel in the anguish felt by Walter's community.

Like John in the story, Stevenson and Walter have both had important roles in their communities and their respective fates have had a strong impact on their communities. Stevenson illustrates the strength of marginalized communities and the sacrifice and collaboration that goes into creating a better future for future generations. Through the story by Du Bois, Stevenson nods to the history of resistance from white communities when black communities find ways to defeat established structures of power in order to seek equality. This passage conveys Stevenson's growing awareness of the "collateral consequences" of miscarriages of justice.

Stevenson describes his growing familiarity with Walter. He writes of the many local white people who defend Walter's character, including Sam Crook, a self-proclaimed son of Confederates who worked with Walter. Crook calls Stevenson to offer his help, saying he and his friends won't let them "string [Walter] up." Stevenson learns that Walter is curious and thoughtful about the motivations and suffering of others, even the guards. One day, Walter expresses his concern for Stevenson's heavy workload, advising him not to "kill himself" trying to "help everybody." Walter is forthcoming about his mistakes, particularly his infidelities. Stevenson writes that his caseload at the time made it difficult for him to have a social life, and that many of his clients became his friends, especially Walter. He argues that, while this made him more emotionally invested, it also fostered the trust that was necessary for Stevenson to learn more intimate background information that could help the client's case.

The example of Sam Crook not only supports Stevenson's points about Walter's character, but it further suggests Stevenson's interest in the contradictions of human character. Sam may be proud to descend from Confederates, who fought to keep black people enslaved, but unlike many other white men in Monroeville, he would rather use his power to protect rather than harm Walter. Stevenson depicts the extent of Walter's empathy by writing about Walter's concern for Stevenson's wellbeing and his thoughtfulness toward the guards. Rather than accepting traditional professional boundaries. Stevenson sees his friendships with his clients as an asset.

A man named Darnell Houston contacts Stevenson saying he can disprove the testimony of Bill Hooks because they were working together on the morning of Ronda's death. Darnell explains that after Walter's conviction, he had informed Chestnut and Boynton, but Judge Key had denied their motion for a new trial. Stevenson files a motion for the judge to reconsider. Before he gets a response, the police indict Darnell for perjuring his testimony to Walter's lawyers the year before. Word has gotten out that Darnell was speaking with EJI, and Stevenson suspects that the state is retaliating. Stevenson writes that it is illegal to indict a witness for perjury without evidence, which the state doesn't offer. He arranges to meet with the state's new District Attorney, Tom Chapman. Unlike former District Attorney Ted Pearson, Chapman has a history in defense, so Stevenson is optimistic.

The timing of the state's move to indict Darnell for a statement he made a year before, coupled with the state's lack of evidence to support the perjury claim, work to support Stevenson's suspicion that officials have discovered Darnell's talks with EJI and are trying to prevent him from moving forward with his testimony. Darnell's indictment and the judge's previous denial of the motion to consider new evidence suggest that officials may know that Darnell's testimony would dismantle Walter's conviction. These facts further imply that the state may know that their case against Walter is unfounded.

During their meeting at the Monroe County Courthouse, Stevenson's hopes fade as Chapman expresses his unquestioning belief in Walter's guilt, based mostly on the intensity of the local community's anger. Stevenson argues that if the evidence in Walter's conviction was faulty, it is the state's duty to search for the truth, but Chapman evades Stevenson's arguments. Stevenson finds it difficult to stay calm as he accuses the state of trying to "intimidate" people to suppress evidence, since there is no proof to support a perjury charge against Darnell. Chapman says he will drop the perjury charges, informing Stevenson that Judge Key denied Stevenson's motion for retrial anyway. Stevenson is outraged by Chapman's disregard for upholding the law and the state's "abuse of power." Leaving the courthouse, he is aggravated to see "yet another flyer about the next production of **To Kill a Mockingbird**."

While Chapman's background suggests that he might bring change to the local justice system, his interaction with Stevenson suggests that there will be more of the same in Monroeville. Chapman dismisses Stevenson's arguments without addressing the legal basis of Stevenson's claims, and instead Chapman bases his rebuttals only on public sentiment. This, along with Chapman's willingness to drop the charges if there is no retrial, support Stevenson's suggestion that Chapman's loyalties are to politics rather than to the law. The flyer for To Kill a Mockingbird symbolizes the resilience of willful ignorance that Stevenson perceives in Monroe County.

Stevenson tells Darnell about his meeting with Tom Chapman. Darnell is relieved that the charges are being dropped, but he is shaken and disheartened by the experience. He tells Stevenson, "All I wanted to do is tell the truth." Now that the retrial has been denied, Stevenson's next step in Walter's case is to request a direct appeal. If that fails, Stevenson will have to put together a postconviction petition, which would require the court to admit new witnesses and new evidence. Stevenson worries that the state will continue to retaliate against those who challenge their conviction, and he fears that this could prevent witnesses like Darnell from testifying. As he drives home, Stevenson imagines the scenery decades before during the time of cotton plantations. He reflects that little has changed since then, considering the helplessness of Darnell, a black man, in the face of the state's unchecked power and shameless abuse.

Stevenson explains the series of legal petitions available that might get Walter off of death row, and the order in which they can be submitted. The first step was the reconsideration for retrial motion. The second will be direct appeal. If that fails, the third will be a postconviction petition. Until this point, Stevenson has only read about the political corruption that surrounded Walter's case. Now, he is experiencing it first hand. Through his reflections, Stevenson places the racial dynamics of Walter's conviction in the context of historical oppression and danger to black people under white-dominated power structures.

CHAPTER 6: SURELY DOOMED

Stevenson receives a call from the grandmother of a fourteen-year-old boy named Charlie who has been in an Alabama jail for two nights. The grandmother is sick and lives in Virginia, but she begs Stevenson to help. Stevenson's death row caseload is full and he knows that Charlie isn't at risk for the death penalty. He explains that even though Alabama then held the world's highest per-capita rate of juvenile death sentences, the Supreme Court had recently banned execution for crimes committed by children under 15. When Stevenson says he can't take the case, Charlie's grandmother begins to pray on the phone, asking God to guide him. Stevenson lets her finish and then offers to help Charlie find legal assistance elsewhere. When he reads Charlie's file, Stevenson learns that he is a physically small boy who had a positive academic and behavioral record right up until he confessed to killing "a man named George."

The statistics Stevenson cites here and in previous chapters regarding Alabama's high death penalty rate help to explain why his caseload at this time is so full that he must begin turning down cases where the client's life isn't in danger. Stevenson tries to explain to Charlie's grandmother that he can't help, but he appears moved by the desperation and boldness she expresses by praying aloud while still on the phone. This vulnerable act conveys her attitude that Stevenson is accountable to God. Her prayer may resonate with Stevenson because of his own religious upbringing.

Stevenson writes that George, the boyfriend of Charlie's mother, often came home drunk. George beat Charlie's mother on several occasions to the point of needing emergency medical help. One night, George went out drinking against the pleas of Charlie's mother. Charlie and his mom had dinner and were playing cards together when George returned, drunk. Charlie's mom looked at George contemptuously, and he punched her. She fell, striking her head on the countertop. As she lay bleeding and unconscious, George went to bed. Panicking, Charlie tried to stop the bleeding with kitchen towels. She wouldn't wake up, and Charlie worried that she was dead. Though timid and terrified of George, Charlie tip-toed into the bedroom to call 911. Seeing George asleep, Charlie was filled with rage. Reaching for the phone, he found himself instead getting George's gun from the nightstand. He shot George in the head. His mother awoke, and Charlie called 911.

The circumstances of Charlie's crime allow for deeper contemplation about the goals and moral values of the criminal justice system. While the aim of the justice system is ostensibly to punish wrongdoers and protect the innocent, the system fails to do either in the case of George and Charlie. As a small boy, Charlie can't physically stop George from abusing his mother. He may not know how to report domestic abuse, or he may fear that George would get away with it and retaliate against Charlie for exposing him. Left vulnerable and fearing he had lost his mother, Charlie took justice and protection into his own hands.

Reading further into his case, Stevenson learns that George was a highly esteemed police officer and that the prosecutor had convinced the judge to try Charlie as a dangerous adult and send him to an adult jail. Stevenson goes to the jail to meet Charlie. Charlie is tiny—less than 100 pounds—and appears frightened. Stevenson tries to talk to Charlie, but the boy stares at the wall. Stevenson grows concerned and moves to sit next to him, explaining that he can't help unless they can talk. Stevenson tries chatting about silly, random subjects, just hoping to get a response. Eventually, Charlie starts leaning on Stevenson, who responds by cautiously putting his arm around Charlie. Charlie immediately breaks down in tears. In between sobs, Charlie says that he has been violently raped by several male inmates. Stevenson lets Charlie cry for a long time. Charlie begs him not to leave, but Stevenson promises to come right back.

Stevenson shows how George's status as a police officer allowed him to be held to a different standard with regard to domestic violence. Rather than considering the impact of George's abuse, as evident by the mother's injuries, the prosecution places all of the blame and focus on Charlie. Further, they send Charlie to a place where he is vulnerable to predatory adults. Stevenson's diligent efforts to connect with Charlie display a protective, fatherly kind of concern that Charlie appears to need. Stevenson contrasts with the various exploitative adults who have collectively contributed to Charlie's suffering.

Deeply angry with everyone who "allowed" it to happen, Stevenson informs a jail officer that Charlie has been raped. The officer shows little concern until Stevenson informs him of his plans to tell the judge, and then the officer agrees to keep Charlie away from other inmates for the day. Stevenson demands a same-day meeting with the judge and prosecutor and informs them that Charlie has been raped in the jail. They agree to move him to a protected single cell. Stevenson decides to take on the case and succeeds in having Charlie tried as a juvenile and transferred to a juvenile detention center. He regularly visits Charlie over the years, and describes the boy's long struggle for recovery and self-forgiveness.

Stevenson's anger at those who "allowed" Charlie's rape to occur suggests that he holds responsible not only the assailants who attacked him, but anyone else who failed to prevent it by leaving Charlie in a vulnerable situation. Stevenson's sense of personal responsibility and duty to protect Charlie cause him to reverse his earlier decision not to take the case. The judge and prosecution's compliance with Stevenson's request suggest that they may know they have made a mistake.

After telling Charlie's story at a church meeting, Stevenson is approached by a middle-aged white couple from the country who offer their help. Mr. and Mrs. Jennings lost their only grandchild to suicide, and they write to Charlie offering to give to him the college money they'd saved for their grandson. Charlie's grandmother has died and his mother is struggling, and the Jennings come to love and treasure Charlie like family. When Stevenson cautions Mrs. Jennings not to put overly high hopes on Charlie after all of his trauma, Mrs. Jennings tells Stevenson that "if we don't expect more from each other, hope better for one another, and recover from the hurt we experience, we are surely doomed." Charlie's mother and the Jennings are all there when Charlie is released a few years later, and the Jennings keep their word to help him through college.

The story of the Jennings' friendship with Charlie demonstrates the book's emphasis on redemption, hope in the face of suffering, and the importance of community. The Jenningses don't have any prior connection with Charlie, but the loss of their grandson and Charlie's need for support creates a situation of mutual love. They can't re-write their grandson's tragic story, but by helping a traumatized young man to achieve a different outcome, they may themselves seek healing and redemption. Mrs. Jennings' words to Stevenson articulate the importance of "expecting more" from humanity.

CHAPTER 7: JUSTICE DENIED

Stevenson requests a direct appeal of Walter's conviction. In his written brief, he notes several flaws in Walter's case, including faulty witness testimonies, State misconduct, racial bias in jury selection, and an unnecessary judge override of the jury's life sentence. At the appeals court in Montgomery, Stevenson appears before Chief Judge John Patterson, the KKK-backed former Alabama governor notorious for resisting de-segregation and refusing to allow law enforcement to protect the Freedom Riders from violent mobs. At the end of Stevenson's oral argument, Judge Patterson responds by asking Stevenson where he is from. Stevenson, caught off guard, responds that he "lives in Montgomery." Stevenson regrets dissuading Walter's family from requesting time off to travel to Montgomery, now wondering if their supportive presence would have helped distinguish Walter's case. The State's lawyer defends Walter's conviction as "routine" and his sentence as "appropriately imposed." Judge Patterson denies the appeal.

Judge Patterson's background illustrates the entrenched culture that makes it difficult to secure justice for Walter. By resisting de-segregation, which was a federally issued mandate, Patterson demonstrated his willingness to break the law in order to preserve the practice of discriminating against black people. Stevenson's arguments, which claim that Walter's conviction was faulty because of racial bias and illegal proceedings, likely seem irrelevant to Patterson, who has demonstrated his loyalty to racist traditions over the law. Patterson isn't the first person in the book to question where Stevenson is from: this illustrates the importance that Stevenson places on the anti-outsider mentality he encountered in Southern courts.

Stevenson encourages Walter to remain hopeful because they have new evidence and several remaining options, including a reconsideration of the direct appeal decision. Stevenson recently hired Michael O'Connor, a son of Irish immigrants and recovered heroin addict originally from a rough neighborhood. Though Michael regards his history of addiction with regret, Stevenson sees his background as an asset to their work. Stevenson and his colleagues have discovered records showing that county officials paid Bill Hooks and "somehow" had his city criminal charges dropped, which is information that the State should legally have disclosed pre-trial. They also found flyers advertising the fish fry held at Walter's house, which confirmed it was held the day of the murder. They contacted Walter's mechanic, who discredited Bill Hook's testimony by confirming that the mechanic modified Walter's truck six months after Ronda's murder. Finally, a clerk at the store where Myers was asked to identify Walter confirms that Myers had to ask which black man was Walter.

Stevenson's determination to pursue all available recourses for Walter demonstrates his perseverance and commitment to this case. Stevenson's positive reaction to Michael's story of addiction serves to reinforce the book's emphasis on the importance of redemption. By framing Michael's past mistakes as assets, Stevenson implies that he values having staff members who can identify with the population they serve. Michael's past allows him to see clients as more fully human, and enables clients to trust Michael more easily. Stevenson implies that county officials conducted illegal activity, which they intentionally hid. Further, he implies that the corruption included collaboration with city officials.

EJI receives a surprising call from Myers. Although wary of his intentions, they know the case rests on his testimony. When he and Michael meet him at St. Clair prison, Stevenson (who had developed a "larger-than-life image" of Myers) is surprised by Myers' fragility. Myers immediately declares that, "everything [he] said at McMillian's trial was a lie." Myers agrees to recant in court, explaining that he attends a therapy group that encourages self-reflection. Promising that his wrongs could "top" them all, he had told the group about his false testimony and they encouraged him to "make it right." Myers explains his role in Vickie Pittman's murder, his forced testimony against Walter and his placement on death row as retaliation by the state. He says he had come clean to several officials, including Ted Pearson. Stevenson considers the immense implications of this corruption. Myers dramatically warns: "they'll try to kill you if you actually get to the bottom of everything."

Stevenson's previous conceptions of Myers illustrate the role of the imagination in forming an image of someone, a concept often elaborated on in the book. Myer's need to "top" the others in therapy supports Stevenson's depiction of Myers as dramatic and attention seeking. The prison therapy group exposes Myers to a new set of values and offers him the attention and support that he had sought through more destructive means. This positive depiction of mental health services demonstrates that rehabilitation can take precedent over punishment. Myers' example also places an emphasis on communities as powerful in forming collective values.

Going home, Stevenson and Michael discuss the corruption Myers described, including his accusation that a local sheriff organized the Pittman murder in reaction to "drug debts and threats she had made to expose corruption." They decide to get more information from Karen Kelly, who is serving 10 years at the Tutwiler Women's Prison for the Pittman murder. Karen confirms that Myers never met Walter, and informs them that during her own criminal investigations, Sherriff Tate had taunted her for "sleep[ing] with niggers." She expresses her regrets that her drug abuse and associations led to such severe consequences for Walter, and asks them to send him her apologies and concern.

If Myers' statements are true, the EJI is uncovering information that goes beyond Walter's case and implicates the entire local law enforcement system as abusive, corrupt, and possibly murderous. Sherriff Tate's comments to Karen imply that he was been particularly fixated on her relationship with a black man, even prior to Myers accusations against Walter. This supports Stevenson's suspicion that racial hatred played into Tate's indictment of Walter.

To learn more about the Pittman murder, Stevenson and Michael arrange to meet with Vickie Pittman's twin aunts, Onzelle and Mozelle. The two independent, gun-owning women, who "present themselves as fearless [and] relentless," are hospitable and direct during their visit. They agree that they too suspected police involvement and Vickie's father, Vic Pittman. They explain that they have felt dismissed by local officials and the State's victims rights group, saying that everyone has "treated [them] like [they] were low-class white trash."

Stevenson's vibrant description of Mozelle and Onzelle serves to humanize them and show their strength, which contrasts with their position as victims and their statements about not being taken seriously by officials. Their claim that they've been treated like "white trash" serves as an example of systematic class discrimination, adding to the book's portrayal of systematic injustices and discrimination.

Stevenson writes that in previous decades, the State considered crimes against one person to be crimes against the community. In the 1980's, prosecutors began focusing more on the stories of individual victims to "personalize" the suffering the crime had caused. Victims became more involved in sentencing and parole boards. He argues that for poor and minority victims, this created a hierarchy among victims based on race, status and background. He writes that crimes against black and poor victims have received much more lenient sentences and less support from police and officials, and he argues that this discrimination contributed to the disrespect felt by families like Mozelle and Onzelle. They tell Stevenson that he is the first person to visit them to discuss Vickie's murder, and Stevenson assures them he will do his best to uncover more information.

Stevenson's historical account of victims' rights illustrates the cultural change from a collective to a more individualistic society. While he argues that the new focus on individual victims enabled discrimination, he also shows that the practice was first aimed at humanizing the suffering of victims. Elsewhere in the book, Stevenson argues for the importance of seeing the condemned as real people. This apparent contradiction suggests that Stevenson isn't so much arguing against seeing victims as full people, so much as against the social hierarchy that uses the individualization of victims to discriminate against the disadvantaged.

With Walter's direct appeal pending, Stevenson and Michael file a Rule 32 petition, which would allow them to move directly to a postconviction collateral appeal. At this point, they determine they need access to all of the police, prosecution, prison and ABI files associated with Walter's case, and the Rule 32 petition would require officials to release them. Unexpectedly, the Alabama Supreme Court approves the petition, indicating they too see something "unusual" about Walter's case. In a meeting at District Attorney Tom Chapman's office, Stevenson meets Sherriff Tate and Investigator Larry Ikner for the first time. At this point, it is publicly known that EJI is accusing Tate and Ikner of illegal activity. They hand over all of their files, "remain[ing] civil" except for calling Michael a "Yankee". Stevenson has them sign off on the files' contents, despite Chapman's insistence that he should trust them as fellow "men of the court".

Stevenson's assertion that the Court must also see something "unusual" about Walter's case serves to reinforce Stevenson's suspicions regarding corruption. Given the discoveries that Ikner and Tate know Stevenson and Michael have made about them, their interactions seem all the more loaded with unspoken contempt. Their only insult, calling Michael a "Yankee", reinforces their pride in their confederate history and their contempt for the involvement of outsiders. Chapman treats Stevenson's request for signatures as a sign of distrust, suggesting that among themselves they routinely skip legalities that would hold each other accountable.

At home, Stevenson and Michael now read through all of the documents they've collected from different sources, including from the mental institution where Myers was admitted, the ABI, and the Pittman murder files from Escambia County. Seeing repeated mentions of the same officials connected to the Pittman murder, they begin to agree with the accusations made by Myers, Mozelle and Onzelle. Stevenson writes: "It wasn't long after that when the bomb threats started."

By choosing to write about the bomb threats just after he describes his growing suspicion about the Pittman murder, Stevenson implies that the threats may be coming from officials who wish to deter him from finding out the truth. Despite Myers dramatic way of speaking, his warning that "they" would try to kill Stevenson now seem much more reasonable.

CHAPTER 8: ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

The chapter begins with a poem by Ian Manuel, one of the inmates Stevenson features in this chapter who was incarcerated as a juvenile. The poem, "Uncried Tears," describes the conflict between repressed tears and the conscience. The tears beg the conscience to be let free, telling the conscience, "Relinquish your fears and doubts, / And heal yourself in the process." The conscience warns the tears that if they are freed, they will die. The tears respond: "If crying brings you to triumph/ Then dying's not such a disaster."

Stevenson's choice to begin the chapter with Ian's poem provides a space for the first-person voices and experiences of incarcerated juveniles. Ian's poem personifies and separates his conscience from his emotions, suggesting that his guilt and his own pain are at odds with each other and need to be reconciled through the release and acceptance of his repressed feelings.

Stevenson tells the story of Trina Garrett in Pennsylvania. The last of 12 children, many born from rape, Trina grew up in extreme poverty. She regularly witnessed her father brutally humiliate and beat her mother and siblings. Trina was nine when her mother died. When her father began sexually abusing her and her sisters, they ran away. Together, they moved between relatives, each time fleeing violence or sexual abuse, and always ending up homeless. Trina was often hospitalized for psychiatric problems, but she had no money to pay for long-term care.

Through the story of Trina's family, Stevenson illustrates the themes of male violence and of generational cycles of physical and sexual abuse. He further suggests the relationship between poverty and trauma through the examples of Trina, her sisters, and their mother, all of whom were left especially vulnerable by poverty and then given no protection by the justice or social welfare systems.

In 1976, fourteen-year-old Trina and her friend broke into the house of two friends whose mother had prohibited Trina from visiting. Trina lit her way with matches and accidentally caught the house on fire. The boys died. In court, the boys' mother and the prosecutor insisted that Trina had murderous intent. Trina's lawyer filed no paperwork to prove Trina's psychological incompetence or to move her case to juvenile court. Trina was convicted as an adult of second-degree murder, and, despite the judge's remorse and belief that Trina had no murderous intentions, he was required to impose a mandatory life sentence. At an adult women's prison, a guard raped and impregnated Trina. She gave birth in shackles and her son was put into foster care. The guard was fired but not indicted, and the state offered Trina no compensation or support services. She won a civil suit against the guard, but he won an appeal on the grounds that Trina's conviction hadn't been disclosed. She developed several mental and physical illnesses, including multiple sclerosis, and she became bound to a wheelchair.

Through Trina's experience, Stevenson illustrates several systemic failures. Local officials could have been notified of Trina's situation when she was hospitalized for psychiatric problems, but the system's failure to intervene left a mentally ill homeless child unattended, posing a threat to public safety. Trina's court-appointed lawyer failed to advocate effectively on her behalf, leaving Trina to be given the harshest available sentence. Mandatory sentencing gives the judge no room for showing mercy, forcing him to act against his conscience. Stevenson illustrates the inequity of the justice system by juxtaposing Trina's life sentence for an unintended crime with the immunity the local justice system gives to the guard who raped her.

In Florida in 1990, thirteen-year-old Ian Manuel, a homeless boy abandoned by his family, went with two older boys to rob a couple at gunpoint. When Debbie Baigre fought back, Ian shot her, severely injuring her jaw. His lawyer failed to educate himself about sentencing laws and mistakenly told Ian to plead guilty to attempted homicide. Ian was given a life sentence. Aware of the risk of rape for juveniles in adult prisons, prison officials put Ian in solitary confinement. Stevenson describes the conditions of solitary confinement, which include very minimal exercise and human contact. Ian developed severe emotional problems and the habit of cutting himself. He was consequently kept in solitary confinement for eighteen years. With no family, Ian reached out to Ms. Baigre. She accepted his profuse apologies and became his friend and advocate. Nevertheless, the State refused her well-publicized pleas to soften Ian's sentence.

Stevenson again illustrates that child poverty and homelessness are connected to an increased risk of juvenile crimes. In addition, the failures of the attorneys representing Trina and Ian suggest the consequences for poor clients who can't afford to pay for better counsel. This seems to imply a responsibility on the part of court-appointed attorneys, one that is often betrayed. Ian's mental health issues appear related to his confinement, yet rather than treat his issues or remove him from confinement, the prison's only recourse is to perpetuate his issues by keeping him in solitary. The State's unwillingness to reconsider contrasts with Ms. Baigre's forgiveness, which is especially striking given her status as the victim.

Antonio Nuñez grew up in Los Angeles with a physically abusive and neglectful father. As a child, he was put on probation for nonviolent offences. Stevenson writes that due to police profiling, poor and minority youth often develop criminal records for "behavior that more affluent children engage in with impunity." In 1999, a drive-by shooter injured Antonio and killed Antonio's older brother. Antonio went to live with relatives in a safer community in Nevada, where his grades and behavior improved. His probation officer ordered him back to California, where his wellbeing and behavior suffered. He befriended older men who pressured him to join a fake kidnapping scheme. When undercover police started chasing their van, Antonio's friends made him shoot at them. Antonio was charged with aggravated kidnapping and attempted murder of police. The judge argued that Antonio was a violent, irredeemable gang member, and sentenced him to life in prison.

Stevenson again demonstrates the connection between childhood abuse and neglect and early criminal activity, this time including the impact of neighborhood and community conditions. The judge's perception of Antonio as hopeless indicates that he considers Antonio to be innately bad. The judge fails to see Antonio as a youth who is still developing. In contrast, Stevenson demonstrates the connection between changes in Antonio's environment and changes in his behavior, suggesting this should have been considered. Stevenson's argument regarding police profiling further supports the book's arguments about discrimination in the criminal justice system against minorities and the poor

Stevenson writes that the criminalization of youth was more rare in the past, with the exception of black youth. In South Carolina in 1944, George Stinney, a black fourteen-year-old, helped locals search for two missing white girls. George told the search party that he'd seen the girls earlier looking for a place to pick flowers. When they were found dead in a ditch the following day, George was arrested for murder because he was the last person to see them. Word got out, and a lynch mob chased George's family out of town. The sheriff claimed that George confessed to the murder. In a courtroom where no other black people were allowed, George's lawyer offered no defense. When George was executed, he was so small he had to sit on the Bible he'd carried with him in order to reach the electrodes. Years later, an affluent local white man confessed to the murder.

George's example supports Stevenson's arguments about the history of racial disparity in the criminal justice system. George's attempts to help find the girls backfired on him, and he was effectively punished for his honesty, for being black, and for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. His story illustrates the vulnerability of black individuals when white communities look for a scapegoat, a situation that parallels Walter's story. Stevenson's depiction of George sitting on his bible as he is killed draws attention to his helplessness as a child and paints an image of mercilessness and tragedy.

Stevenson writes that in the 1980's and 90's, social and political scientists publically forecasted increased rates of juvenile crimes from "super-predators," youth who were hardened, toughened, and capable of adult-sized crimes with no shame. This image was especially applied to minority children. In response, courts around the country began trying more children as adults and sending them to adult prisons. Mandatory laws were established in some states that forced relocation of children already serving time in juvenile detention to adult prisons. Years later, experts discovered a proportionate decrease in juvenile crime during the 1990's and determined there had been no basis for the "super-predator theory". Stevenson writes: "This admission came too late for kids like Trina, Ian and Antonio."

Stevenson illustrates the power of scientists to influence public opinion, policy, and the criminal justice system. This emphasizes the role of researchers and the media in perpetuating the beliefs that will have real-life consequences for individuals. Stevenson demonstrates how the practice of trying children as adults relies on the perception that some children are irredeemably dangerous. This perception ignores the complexities of childhood development and the effects of a child's environment on his or her behavior.

EJI began representing Ian, Trina, and Antonio years after their convictions, and the organization decided to fight laws allowing "death-in-prison" sentences for juveniles. EJI helped Trina reconnect with her sisters and son, which Stevenson writes "strengthened her in ways I wouldn't have thought possible." Despite his learning disability, Antonio asked Stevenson to send him books that would help him "better understand those around him." Ian had used his time in solitary to become an avid reader and writer of short stories and poetry. Stevenson arranged for a photographer to take Ian's picture for a report about juveniles serving life sentences. Ian wrote Stevenson a heartfelt letter saying he "cherish[ed]" his visits, as he does any human interaction. Ian politely offered to send Stevenson one dollar from his small commissary in exchange for copies of the photos, saying they would mean almost as much to him as his freedom.

EJI's efforts on behalf of Trina, Ian and Antonio go beyond legal advocacy and include efforts to improve their quality of life. This supports the importance of improving prison conditions and of supporting emotional and mental health for inmates. Trina's improvement after making contact with her family suggests that her emotional health problems were connected to her loneliness and lack of support. Ian's reading and writing show his determination to survive emotionally. The spirit of his letter shows his self-awareness and shows how much small things mean to him after a life of deprivation and isolation.

CHAPTER 9: I'M HERE

Stevenson describes the situation preceding Walter's Rule 32 hearing. Stevenson suggests that District Attorney Tom Chapman seriously reconsider his position before the trial. Chapman instead moves forward with hiring Assistant Attorney General Don Valeska, a man known for being tough on "bad guys," to argue in defense of Walter's conviction. Stevenson writes that the presiding judge, Thomas B. Norton, Jr., quickly tired of the conflicts between EJI and the State during pretrial hearings. EJI had insisted that the State check several times that they'd provided all available files. Stevenson asked the judge to reserve a week for the hearing. The judges argued that the original trial had last only a day and a half, and settled on reserving three days. EJI has a new paralegal, Brenda Lewis, an African-American former police officer who resigned after seeing countless "abuses of power." Brenda prepares and "calm[s]" all of the witnesses for Walter's case.

Stevenson's offer to Chapman suggests that he believes Chapman is capable of changing his mind, given enough evidence, and that he sees him as less personally or politically tied to the original conviction. Chapman's selection of Don Valeska to defend the State implies that he still accepts the popular view of Walter as a "bad guy" and that he is influenced by the political importance of appearing tough on crime. EJI's repeated requests for all the state files, their request for as much time as possible in court, and their involvement of so many staff members suggest their intent to reclaim for Walter the resources and time he was denied during his trial.

Before the hearing, Stevenson and Michael spend days planning how they will present all the evidence in the allotted time. Ralph has begun calling EJI regularly with long tales of police and State corruption, and Michael is especially concerned about his tendency toward elaborate stories. Michael reminds Ralph several times of the importance of telling the truth in court. The morning of the trial, they walk into the Baldwin County courtroom wearing their best suits. Stevenson writes that, as a "bearded black man," he takes special care with his appearance for the "sake" of his clients. Stevenson is surprised to find the courtroom full of familiar faces from Walter's family and community. He notices that Chapman and Valeska appear disgruntled by their presence.

Ralph's frequent calls to EJI to talk about corruption suggest his need to maintain their attention by continuing to provide them the kind of information that they have given him attention for in the past. Stevenson's description of the time he and Michael spent preparing and their efforts to dress their best serve to highlight the climactic nature of this moment for them. Stevenson references his own experience of racial bias by describing his need to dress well because he is a "bearded black man."

The hearing begins. Stevenson recounts the story Myers gave during Walter's trial. He highlights that the State never searched for the white man Myers described as the crime organizer. Stevenson claims the State knows the man isn't real. He calls Myers to the stand and asks if his testimony against Walter was true. Stevenson holds his breath. Ralph replies: "Not at all." Stevenson rephrases the question several times and then takes Myers through each of his original statements. With "absolute sincerity," Myers states that his accusations were all lies and that he was forced to testify. Judge Norton, who'd appeared bored during the opening statements, is now paying close attention. Walter's eyes begin to tear up. Myers maintains his resolution during the cross-examination, resentfully refuting Valeska's suggestion that he is now being coerced. The courtroom hums with excitement. As Myers exits, Stevenson sees him "look apologetically at Walter."

Stevenson suggests his own anxiety by writing that he held his breath after he asked Myers his first question. Stevenson builds the suspense and climax of this scene by carefully narrating his own opening statements and each question and answer he posed to Walter. He adds to this by portraying the emotions of everyone in the room: his own anxiety, the judge's change from boredom to keen interest, Myer's coolness and resolution, Walter's tears, and the excitement of the courtroom. Myers' reaction to the prosecution's suggestions of coercion reinforce the idea that Myers sees this as a moment of redemption and that he won't let anyone take that away from him.

Stevenson next calls to the stand Clay Kast, Walter's white mechanic. Kast states that he has records to prove that Walter's truck was modified to be a "low-rider" six months after Ronda's murder, calling into question the original testimonies of Bill Hooks and Joe Hightower against Walter. A white Monroeville police officer, Woodrow Ikner, testifies next. He states that he was asked by the trial prosecutor to lie about where he found Morrison's body in the Cleaner's in order to corroborate Myer's testimony. Stevenson keeps an eye on Judge Norton, who appears anxious and attentive, particularly during Ikner's testimony, Stevenson speculates that Norton may not have expected all of the witnesses to be white and have no "loyalties" to Walter. That night, Michael and Stevenson consider whether Chapman will switch sides given how well the hearing is going for Walter.

Stevenson emphasizes the importance that race plays in the court's perception of witness credibility. It appears that EJI may have strategically chosen to begin their trial with white witnesses who had no intimate connection to Walter in order to appeal to the court's bias toward taking white voices more seriously. Further, their choice to call to the stand a law enforcement officer established their credibility with the local community. This choice allowed them to begin the trial with a clear suggestion of political corruption on the part of the State, while also appearing to have some of law enforcement on their side

The next morning, Stevenson finds Walter's supporters waiting outside of the courtroom because they aren't being allowed in. A deputy sheriff tries to block Stevenson, too. When he tells him he is the defense lawyer, the deputy "checks" before letting him pass. Inside, the courtroom is now armed with a metal detector, police dogs, and is already half full of white people. Stevenson complains to Judge Norton, who says that Walter's supporters should have arrived earlier. The judge dismisses Stevenson's claim that the supporters arrived on time. Stevenson informs Walter's community that the courtroom will now open to them, but there isn't enough room for everyone. Two black ministers calmly organize to prioritize entry for Walter's family and important community members, including Mrs. Williams, a dignified and elegant older woman. She reminds Stevenson of women in his life who were graceful and dedicated despite hardship. Mrs. Williams leaves the courtroom in tears when she sees the police dogs.

The racial difference between the white people who were allowed in and the black people, including Stevenson, who were blocked from entering, suggests that the court intentionally discriminated on the basis of race. The police dogs and the metal detector further suggest efforts to intimidate black community members, who are more likely to have negative associations with law enforcement. Norton's insinuation that Walter's supporters didn't arrive on time illustrates how intentional discrimination can be cloaked in blame for individual mistakes or behavior. Mrs. Williams represents grace in the face of oppression, something Stevenson has seen in other black women during his life.

Stevenson writes that the second day of proceedings go well, even after the morning's ominous beginning. He calls on several state doctors who saw Myers for psychiatric care at the state hospital. They all testify that Myers repeatedly told them that he was being held on death row as punishment for refusing to continue his testimony against Walter. Stevenson comments that the hospital's records of Myer's recantation of his statement should have been given to Walter's lawyers before the trial in keeping with a Supreme Court ruling regarding disclosure of helpful evidence. Stevenson writes that the State's supporters and the Morrison family, who had spent so long blaming Walter, now appeared uncertain. As the day passed, these supporters began to leave and Walter's supporters filed in. In the parking lot, Stevenson hugs Mrs. Williams, who explains that she was beat by police and attacked by police dogs during the Voting Rights protests of 1965 in Selma.

Stevenson continues to focus on witnesses who can undermine the original testimonies presented against Walter, with a particular focus on showing how information was withheld and manipulated in order to secure Walter's prosecution. Stevenson demonstrates an understanding of the emotions of the Morrison family, who Stevenson suggests found some comfort in the closure offered by Walter's conviction. Mrs. Williams reveals her personal experience of racial violence, illustrating the insidious symbolic meaning of police dogs: their presence is a display of power on the part of the State and law enforcement against the black community.

On the third morning of the hearing, Stevenson sees Mrs. William's daughter in the courtroom. She tells him that Mrs. Williams stayed up in her room all night praying, and that in the morning she called the minister to let him know she was ready. They see Mrs. Williams entering, dressed impeccably. She "sways" through the metal detector and past the dog, repeating: "I ain't afraid of no dog." When she sits, she proclaims, "I'm here!" Stevenson greets her, but she repeats it again. Judge Norton enters. After he sits, Stevenson notices everyone grows quiet and looks behind him. He turns around and sees Mrs. Williams still standing. With her chin up, she says yet again, loudly: "I'm here!" and then sits. Stevenson realizes her meaning: that despite the efforts of oppressors, and despite being old, poor and black, she is there because she has a "vision of justice" that calls her to be there.

Stevenson illustrates the importance of black visibility in spaces where intentional efforts have been made to keep black people out. For Mrs. Williams, even though she isn't a key witness, Stevenson suggests that her presence carries symbolic meaning. The eagerness of Walter's supporters to get Mrs. Williams into the courtroom shows that Mrs. Williams is an important elder in the community. Mrs. Williams' dignity and resilience despite her experiences of violence symbolize the perseverance of the local black community despite continued oppression.

During the final day of the hearing, Stevenson calls on several witnesses who had been incarcerated with Myers who testify that Myers told them that his accusations were false. EJI "save[s] the most powerful evidence for last": the police tapes they obtained through their Rule 32 petition. The tapes reveal Myers' repeated attempts to recant his testimony while Ikner, Tate and Benson coerce him to continue. Stevenson finishes by calling on Walter's trial lawyers, Boynton and Chestnut. Surprisingly, the prosecution offers no rebuttal. They must now await the judge's ruling. Tired but hopeful, Stevenson and Michael say their goodbyes. On their way home, they stop at a familiar beach. Despite the beauty of the warmth, Stevenson can't shake the feeling that there are sharks in the water. He and Michael discuss the constant opposition they have faced throughout Walter's trial, including threats on their lives, and they express their inability to believe that their opponents will finally rest.

EJI's discovery of the police tapes, which they were only able to obtain through their Rule 32 petition after completing several other judicial proceedings, illustrates the effectiveness of their continued advocacy. This suggests the importance of resistance and perseverance. It also further reinforces Stevenson's argument that the State hid important evidence. The prosecution's inability to form a rebuttal suggests the compelling nature of the evidence EJI presented. Stevenson's feeling that there are "sharks in the water" represents his and Michael's sense that opposing forces haven't given up and may still surprise them with further resistance or danger.

CHAPTER 10: MITIGATION

Stevenson writes about the history of the mentally ill and disabled in in the American prison system. Up to the nineteenth century, mentally ill individuals often ended up incarcerated. In the late 1900's, activist efforts helped to move the mentally ill population from prisons to state and private hospitals. However, mass institutionalization became problematic because of forced hospitalization, mistreatment, over-drugging, and hospitalization of "socially deviant" individuals such as homosexuals. In the middle of the twentieth century, activist efforts again worked to establish rights for the mentally ill and move from hospitalization to community programs. However, mass incarceration, poverty, and drug epidemics, along with lack of access to treatment, again led to mass incarceration and criminalization of the mentally ill. Stevenson writes that prisons are often unprepared to treat and deal with mentally ill people, and so they end up punishing the mentally ill for behavior related to their illness, which worsens their condition.

Through the story of how different activist efforts have shaped America's solutions for the mentally ill, Stevenson suggests that social problems and their solutions require continued reevaluation and new efforts over time. He illustrates not only the unintended consequences of previous solutions, but also the way that new social, legal, and economic conditions can intersect to create new problems for disadvantaged populations. He further reinforces his argument that increasing harshness in the criminal justice system has a more dramatic impact on populations that are already the most vulnerable. He argues that criminalization of the mentally ill is illogical and cruel.

George Daniel was a man who developed hallucinations and nonsensical speech after incurring brain damage during a car accident. Before his family could get him medical help, George left town on a bus. He was kicked off for making strange noises, and he entered strangers' homes until police were called. An officer pulled his gun, and in the ensuing scuffle George shot him. The state psychiatrist, Dr. Seger, reported that George was "faking" psychosis. George's lawyers were busy fighting over the limited compensation offered to them by the court. When George's mother asked the lawyers to collect George's paycheck (hoping the fact that a poor man hadn't picked up his money could serve as evidence of his condition), the lawyers instead cashed it for themselves. George was sentenced to death. EJI got involved years later, and got George's conviction overturned after discovering that "Dr. Seger" was a charlatan. Stevenson remarks on the many others evaluated by Seger whose convictions hadn't been reconsidered.

Through the story of George Daniel, Stevenson demonstrates how incompetent, selfish, or dishonest members of the criminal justice system can misuse and abuse their positions. This can have a fatal impact on the accused. Though there are provisions that are meant to provide justice for the poor, such as court-appointed lawyers, and for the mentally ill, such as psychiatric evaluations, Stevenson illustrates how these provisions can fail and become corrupt, with dramatic consequences for vulnerable individuals. Through this story, Stevenson offers evidence for the need for accountability measures for the criminal justice system.

A man on death row, Avery Jenkins, reaches out to EJI. Stevenson writes that the inscrutable letters Avery sent him suggested serious mental illness. Stevenson finds out that Avery was convicted for killing an older man through repeated stabbing. Stevenson goes to visit Avery. In the prison parking lot, he sees a truck decorated with Confederate symbols and threatening racist bumper stickers. He explains how, since the post-Reconstruction era, confederate pride has been inseparably linked with violence toward and subordination of black people. He writes that every small victory for the rights of African Americans is met with an angry response of increased political oppression and sometimes violence, all accompanied by confederate symbols. Inside, the tall white guard forces Stevenson into a strip search, which is never required for attorneys. Afterward, the guard tells Stevenson that he "want[s him] to know" the truck outside is his.

By interrupting his story to explain the historical link between confederate symbols and racial violence and oppression, Stevenson intensifies the meaning of his experience with the prison guard. The fact that the guard tells Stevenson that he "wants him to know" that the truck is his ties together the image as a scene of racial aggression and humiliation. The guard attempts to derail and dehumanize Stevenson, a black man that the guard doesn't even know. Stevenson's argument that any progress for black people is met with an angry white response suggests that the guard's actions are a reaction to seeing a black man in a position of power, particularly since Stevenson fights for justice on behalf of other vulnerable people.

Avery is very happy to meet Stevenson, and Avery unexpectedly asks if Stevenson brought him a chocolate milkshake. Stevenson goes on with discussing Avery's case, but after a while he realizes that Avery is still thinking about the milkshake. Stevenson pauses to tell Avery that he didn't know Avery was hoping for a milkshake, and that next time he will try to bring him one. Research into Avery's past reveals that he grew up in foster homes. He suffered abuse and neglect, including from a foster mother who tied him to a tree and left him there. The abuse exacerbated his existing intellectual and emotional disabilities. As a teenager, he became homeless, abused substances, and had symptoms of psychosis. He was charged with murder after killing an elderly man he believed was a demon. His lawyers offered no evidence regarding Avery's past or mental state, and he was sentenced to death.

Stevenson's interaction with Avery, as well as his background and the circumstances of his crime, suggest that his mental illness and disabilities should have been more obvious to his lawyers. It seems that Avery's lawyers, like George Daniel's lawyers, were either uninterested in the outcome of the case or incompetent. Through Avery's story, Stevenson demonstrates how failures of the child welfare system can lead to homelessness, exacerbated mental illness, and threats to public safety, thereby suggesting the need for improvement in social programs.

The guards refuse to let Stevenson bring Avery a milkshake, though Avery continues to ask for one during each visit. EJI arranges a postconviction hearing for Avery. In the courtroom at the hearing, Stevenson sees the guard who had strip-searched him. During the hearing, EJI calls on mental health experts to testify regarding Avery's condition. They present evidence that several of Avery's former foster parents have since faced allegations of sexual and physical abuse, and they interview other former foster parents who confirm Avery's history of mental and emotional illness. Avery is disturbed to see them and to hear about his past trauma. Stevenson argues that the physically disabled are usually treated with compassion, and that they aren't expected to navigate impossible physical tasks without help. He argues that mental illness deserves the same understanding and that, while communities deserve protection from those who are dangerous, sentencing should be empathetic.

EJI makes an effort to find proof of Avery's illness, argue the importance of considering his disabilities, and present evidence regarding his past trauma. Their efforts contrast with the lack of effort on the part of Avery's trial lawyers. This contrast serves to reinforce the importance of dedicated advocacy in order to achieve justice. Stevenson's speech before the court supports the book's attitude of empathy for the circumstances, disadvantages, and humanity of the accused. Stevenson attempts to show the disparity between visible and less visible disabilities and the importance of balancing compassionate treatment with public safety.

After the hearing, Stevenson visits Avery out of concern for how the hearing affected him. In the parking lot, Stevenson again sees the truck with the Confederate symbols. Inside, the same white guard is now exceptionally kind, which takes Stevenson by surprise. The guard tells Stevenson that, like Avery, he grew up in several foster care homes. The guard was moved by Stevenson's arguments in court and by the realization that others shared his experience. He explains how his past made him angry and how he has never addressed that hurt. Stevenson thanks the guard for speaking with him and he reminds the guard that, "we all need mitigation at some point." The guard tells Stevenson that while driving back from court, he bought Avery a chocolate milkshake. Stevenson writes that Avery never mentioned the milkshake again. The guard resigned very shortly after, and EJI eventually succeeded in having Avery moved to a mental health facility.

The transformation of the guard's attitude strongly supports the book's message of redemption. Stevenson suggests that those who hurt others may be paying forward their own unmanaged hurt. The guard's example illustrates that those who abuse power are capable of change if they are willing to identify shared emotional experiences and recognize the humanity of others. "Mitigation" refers to reducing painful circumstances, and the use of the word as the chapter title suggests the importance of easing suffering. This connects to Stevenson's advocacy and relates to the repeated symbol of the milkshake, which represents a small way of soothing Avery.

CHAPTER 11: I'LL FLY AWAY

After Walter's hearing, EJI continues to receive bomb threats. Their staff is growing, and now includes summer interns, whom Stevenson writes "didn't sign up" for this kind of danger. A series of murders in nearby cities targeting people involved in civil rights efforts compels EJI to take the threats seriously. EJI's white receptionist "scolds" one of the threatening callers. Some callers mention Walter, which convinces the organization that the threats are related to Walter's case. One caller tells Stevenson he was offered money to kill Stevenson but he refused. Despite the threats, they continue because they have "work to do."

Just as Stevenson and Michael suspected, the threats only intensify. Stevenson illustrates not only the intense personal risk and danger that EJI faced at this time, but also their commitment to continuing their work despite those risks. The threats show the intense feelings in local communities regarding Walter's case. This shows the powerful public opinions of fear and hatred that were stirred toward Walter.

Stevenson receives Judge Norton's decision. In The judge's written response, Norton addresses only Myers' recantation of his testimony. Norton writes that Myers was either lying during the trial or lying at the hearing. He states (without offering proof) that Myers was likely coerced to recant his testimony, and concludes that there is no reason to believe Myers perjured his original testimony. Stevenson remarks that Norton cited no laws and addressed none of the other witness testimonies. He writes that Norton was uninterested in the subject of Walter's guilt because the judge was "locked into a maintenance role [...] a custodian for the system." Stevenson reassures Walter that his best chance will be the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals. Between 1990 and 1992, EJI secured several death penalty reversals through the Court of Appeals, despite political resistance. Stevenson is sure that the suppressed "exculpatory evidence" during Walter's trial will ensure that he gets an appeal.

Stevenson's metaphor of Norton as a "custodian for the system" likens him to a janitor, whose job is to maintain a status quo of cleanliness and appearances. This image portrays Norton as ineffective and disempowered. Norton appeared very interested during the hearing, yet he doesn't seem to consider it his job to find out the truth. Instead, he acts to protect the State. Norton's conclusion that Myers was either lying in the beginning or lying at the hearing willfully ignores the evidence of State involvement, illegal maneuvers, coercion, and the testimonies of others confirming Myers' recantation. This reinforces Stevenson's assertion of the corruption of the State in criminal proceedings.

Michael moves to San Diego to work as a public defender. While Michael will miss EJI, Stevenson describes him as being "less conflicted about leaving Alabama." Michael is replaced by Bernard Harcourt. Stevenson writes that Bernard had planned for a "traditional legal career," but had become passionate about the work of EJI after interning one summer. After Walter's hearing, many more in Monroeville come forward with leads and stories of corruption.

Michael's personal attachment to EJI and Bernard's choice to return supports the image of EJI as a place that attracts dedicated individuals and that fosters close personal connections. Walter's hearing inspires others in the community to speak out, which shows that knowing they will be heard brings marginalized groups out of silence.

Stevenson realizes the need to change Walter's public image to make his return safer should EJI secure his release. Stevenson is wary because, he writes, media coverage of civil right cases often creates a "backlash" that worsens life for oppressed people. Judge Patterson, the chief judge of the Court of Appeals, had once, as governor, sued the *New York Times* for defamation following coverage during the civil rights movement. In Sullivan vs. New York Times, the Supreme Court ruled that defamation lawsuits required evidence of intent. The ruling was a "victory for freedom of the press," but it created further contempt for national media in the South. Stevenson writes that he usually avoids national coverage of death penalty cases because it can lead to faster execution dates. Nevertheless, local media continues to depict Walter as an incredibly dangerous and predatory criminal, and Stevenson fears that Walter's appeal will also be influenced if they aren't able to reverse his image.

The risk that Stevenson takes in moving forward with seeking national media coverage of Walter's case is magnified by the fact that the chief judge is the same person who once waged a high-profile battle with a national media outlet for their coverage of Southern affairs. Stevenson illustrates the surprisingly complex relationship between the media and justice, illustrating how the well-intended efforts of the media to shed light on injustice can have unintended consequences on a local level. This suggests that activists like Stevenson need to carefully weigh the unique circumstances and range of possible consequences before moving forward with talking to the media.

Stevenson agrees to work with the CBS program *60 Minutes* to produce a story about Walter's case. Their reporters come to Monroeville and interview Walter, Myers, Chapman, and everyone involved in the case. Even before the story airs, the local newspapers release several articles condemning "big time reporters" for what they consider to be biased and condescending investigation of the case. Despite the disapproving views of local media and officials, most of the community watches and respects *60 Minutes*. When the story airs, many begin to question Walter's guilt. The black community is relieved to finally see coverage of Walter's side of the story. Though Chapman defends Walter's conviction in the CBS story, he has, unbeknownst to Stevenson, launched his own investigation into Walter's guilt though the ABI. Stevenson writes that Chapman had begun to reconsider putting his career at risk for a conviction he was beginning to suspect was wrongful.

The history of animosity between local media in Monroeville and national media runs so deep that, even before the story airs, local media outlets are prepared to oppose CBS. This example provides another instance of a small town's distrust of outside voices and the sense that things that happen in their community aren't the business of outsiders. In this segment, Stevenson shows the positive power of media to shed light on injustice and to challenge and shape public opinion. Stevenson's portrayal of Chapman as politically influenced but capable of considering truth is affirmed when Chapman begins to question if he is going to be on the wrong side of history.

New ABI investigators Tom Taylor and Greg Cole contact Stevenson, asking for files from Walter's case. Stevenson writes that the investigators weren't "connected to any of the players in South Alabama." Six months after EJI files Walter's appeal, ABI informs Stevenson that they have determined that Walter isn't guilty. They also report that Bill Hooks and Joe Hightower have retracted their testimonies. They say that the public is more likely to accept Walter's innocence if another suspect is found, which EJI has already considered. Stevenson writes that EJI had received frequent calls from a man inquiring about the case and offering bogus leads. After some investigation into their caller, EJI determined he was the most likely suspect. EJI discovered that, before her death, Ronda Morrison may have been stalked by a white man and that a white man was also seen at the Cleaners on the day of the murder. Stevenson agrees to give information about his suspect to ABI.

By pointing out that Taylor and Cole were new investigators who didn't have connections to any of the "players" in South Alabama, Stevenson reinforces the image of local law enforcement as corrupt and loyal to each other over the law or the truth. The findings of the ABI mark a significant turn in Walter's case, because, for the first time, a state agency is independently asserting Walter's innocence. The fact that obvious leads (regarding Ronda's stalker and the white man seen at the Cleaners) hadn't been investigated by the State affirms the power of racial profiling and suggests local officials' lack of interest in finding the actual killer.

The ABI encourages Stevenson to pause further action until they can arrest another suspect. Stevenson feels that it is ridiculous and cruel to keep an innocent man in prison until the real murderer is found. Stevenson tries to hasten Walter's appeal, but State officials ask him for "patience." Stevenson is furious when the State requests a stay motion on Walter's appeal pending their recovery of evidence that will exonerate him. Stevenson speaks regularly with Walter's family. Knowing everything that has gone wrong in Walter's case, Stevenson is wary of encouraging Walter's family to be hopeful, but he encourages them regardless. He quotes the Czech leader Václav Havel, who wrote that what those oppressed under Soviet rule needed most was "hope." Stevenson summarizes Havel by writing that what people needed was "the kind of hope that creates a willingness to position oneself in a hopeless place and be a witness [...] even in the face of abusive power."

Notwithstanding the ABI's efforts to discover and report the truth about Walter's conviction and Ronda's murder, this conflict highlights the difference between the ABI's priorities and Stevenson's. The ABI officials want to produce a clean outcome that will be well received; in contrast, Stevenson remains concerned primarily about what is fair and just for Walter. This helps to distinguish what is unique about advocacy in the legal system. The quote from Havel underscores one of the central messages of the book, which is the importance of hope despite powerful opposing forces. This suggests that hope rests on faith rather than evidence.

Six weeks after EJI files the appeal, Stevenson receives notice that the judge has issued a ruling. He rushes to the courthouse to pick up the 35-page ruling in which the judge nullifies Walter's sentence and conviction and mandates a new trial. Stevenson drives to death row to tell Walter. He explains that they must wait for the new trial, but that he would be very surprised if Walter were convicted a second time. Walter's astonishment and relief quickly gives way to sadness. Walter tells Stevenson that he has spent so long fearing for his life that he hasn't stopped to consider how many years he has lost. They switch to joking around and talking about things Walter looks forward to after release. Stevenson remarks that, throughout everything, Walter never lost his sense of humor. The two have often laughed together, except now it is "the laughter of liberation."

Walter's path to freedom has included several failed attempts and small victories, a testament to the complicated routes of the legal system and the importance of persistent advocacy. This process has kept Walter in survival mode, focused only on securing his release, and unable to stop and fully feel sadness and anger at what he has been subjected to. Stevenson illustrates the warmth and resilience of Walter's character and their strong personal friendship by describing Walter's sense of humor despite his circumstances. As this example shows, they use humor to ease their anxieties and cope with extreme circumstances.

Before a new trial can be scheduled, Stevenson files a motion to have all of Walter's charges dropped. The State decides to join rather than oppose the motion. Before the hearing, Stevenson visits Minnie to pick up a suit for Walter. Minnie asks Stevenson to talk to Walter about leaving Monroeville for his safety after he has a chance to celebrate with his friends and family. She says that Stevenson must prepare Walter for the fact that he can't "go back to the way things were." Stevenson writes: "For the first time, I fully reckoned with the truth that the [...] devastation of this miscarriage of justice had created permanent injuries."

Like Walter, Minnie reacts with complicated emotions and concerns. Stevenson's realization is further evidence of the vast and often unseen collateral damage caused by failures of the criminal justice system. Her relationship with Walter is one of the many parts of their lives that has been irreversibly altered, perhaps from their suffering, their time apart, and the publicity of his past affairs.

The morning of the hearing, Stevenson tells Walter about his conversation with Minnie. Walter seems sad, but he tells Stevenson: "nothing can really spoil getting your freedom back." At the courthouse, Tom Chapman tells Stevenson that he has learned things that he didn't realize he "had to learn." The new judge, Pamela Baschab, quickly grants the motion to drop the charges after Stevenson presents his brief. Stevenson realizes that everyone is unusually kind because they don't want any "grudges." He considers the many others wrongfully executed without legal aid, and he feels a "simmering anger." In his closing statements, Stevenson warns the court that it was "too easy" for Walter to be wrongfully sentenced to death and "too difficult to win his freedom," and that there is still "work" to do. Between cheering crowds and news cameras, Walter embraces his friends and family. He tells Stevenson that he "feels like a bird."

There is a lot of work for Walter to do to put his life back together. Yet, his response to Stevenson suggests that incarceration and the threat of death have taught him about the preciousness of life and freedom. The mood of this scene is primarily one of relief, celebration, and attempts at atonement. Yet, Stevenson's statements reveal that he sees underneath the humility and kindness of the court and the State. To him, the underlying structural injustices of the criminal justice system haven't been addressed. On the contrary, he suggests that the court's kindness is hypocritical because it isn't applied broadly to serve justice for those who have no counsel.

CHAPTER 12: MOTHER, MOTHER

Stevenson introduces Marsha Colbey, a poor white woman from Alabama. He opens with Marsha marveling at her freedom as she prepares to speak before a crowd in New York City, three months after her release from prison. He rewinds to explain that when Hurricane Ivan hit in 2004, 43-year-old Marsha and her husband Glen were left broke and out of work, struggling to care for their six children. They received a FEMA camper, but then Marsha became pregnant. Stevenson describes her as a loving, dedicated mother, who had no money to seek prenatal care. She gave birth in a bathtub to a stillborn baby, Timothy, whom they buried in their yard. A "nosy" neighbor became suspicious and called the police to investigate the "absent" baby. The baby's body was exhumed, and a forensic pathologist who had a history of unsupported declarations of homicide declared the baby was murdered.

By narrating the series of setbacks Marsha faces before her imprisonment, Stevenson illustrates how women can be disproportionately affected by unfortunate circumstances like poverty, lack of access to medical care, and natural disasters. By beginning the chapter with Marsha considering her freedom after her release, Stevenson provides the "ending" to Marsha's story first, which generates interest in how Marsha ended up in prison. At the same time, this image displays Marsha's resilience. Stevenson shows how Marsha's suffering is compounded by the suspicion and mercilessness of the community and police.

Marsha was charged with capital murder. At Marsha's trial, medical experts testified that there was no evidence of murder and that stillbirth was likely due to Marsha's age and her high-risk pregnancy. Although their forensic evidence was debunked, the prosecution presented Marsha's living conditions, past drug addiction, and lack of prenatal care as evidence of parental neglect.

In Marsha's case, the prosecution focuses on using Marsha's poverty and past mistakes to create an image of her as a bad mother, which is then conflated with murdering her son. Like Walter, Marsha is subjected to discrimination and character defamation in the absence of scientific or logical evidence.

Stevenson writes that by the 2000's, media sensationalism about homicidal moms like Andrea Yates and Susan Smith motivated police and juries to criminalize mothers for child deaths without evidence. He writes that insufficient medical care positioned poor women as easy targets. He describes other cases of women convicted of murder after a stillbirth or even false pregnancies. Stevenson describes how mothers have often been charged with child endangerment because they live in dangerous, impoverished neighborhoods or can't afford medical care for themselves and their children. He also describes women being jailed for drug use during pregnancy. Several of Marsha's jurors admitted that they were too bothered by the idea of a homicidal mom to render a fair verdict, but the judge didn't dismiss them. Marsha was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

Stevenson demonstrates the powerful role of the media in creating trends in criminal justice. He illustrates how media sensationalism kindles fear, anger, and suspicions, which then alter public perception of certain groups – in this case, of mothers whose children die. As these examples illustrate, the public then sees false parallels and draws simplistic conclusions, leading to rampant but unfounded criminalization. Police and courts are also affected by public beliefs. Similar to black men being condemned for their race, poor women are condemned for circumstances related to their gender and disadvantage.

Stevenson writes about the conditions at Tutwiler Women's Prison, where Marsha was incarcerated. As the only women's prison in the state, it was incredibly overcrowded. Another problem at Tutwiler was rampant sexual abuse of female inmates and the prison's unwillingness to address the issue. Stevenson writes that from the 1980's to the 2000's, the number of incarcerated women increased dramatically in the United States. This was partly due to increased incarceration for drug and poverty-related crimes like theft. Stevenson argues that the criminalization of poor women creates "collateral consequences": it leaves children poor, unstable and vulnerable. Women with criminal records are often barred from social services, which further impacts their children. Stevenson writes that Marsha found women at Tutwiler to be very affected by each other's struggles and moments of hope. EJI learns about Marsha from Diane Jones, a client who often advocates for EJI to help other women at Tutwiler.

Through his description of the particular problems facing incarcerated women, such as sexual abuse, Stevenson illustrates how incarcerated women are vulnerable to different kinds of mistreatment and injustices under the criminal justice system. He also illustrates how the criminalization of poverty and drug addiction through harsh sentencing of nonviolent crimes disproportionately affects poor women and children. He suggests that this intensifies rather than addresses the underlying social problems. Stevenson demonstrates the humanity and empathy that many of the inmates display toward one another, which contrasts with the lack of empathy that those in power display toward them.

EJI senior attorney Charlotte Morrison and attorney Kristen Nelson take on Marsha's case. Each time they meet, Marsha informs them of the needs of women at Tutwiler. She brings to their attention the extent of sexual violence. Many of these rapes result in pregnancies, and even when DNA proves the officers' culpability, the prison fails to respond. EJI complains to the Department of Justice and publishes national reports about the abuse. Eventually the prison is forced to reform its policies and hire a new warden. After three years of difficult appeals and petitions, EJI succeeds in securing Marsha's release. At EJI's annual benefit dinner in New York, they honor Marsha. Roberta Flack opens with the song "Isn't It a Pity." Stevenson tells the audience how Marsha's twelve-year-old daughter proved the "kind of mother" Marsha was by "refusing to let go" of her on the day of her release. In Marsha's speech, she cries about the women she left behind at Tutwiler.

EJI's choice to assign female attorneys to Marsha's case suggests the importance of legal counsel with an understanding of and a stake in the client's circumstances. EJI's move to draw national attention to the conditions at Tutwiler again illustrates the power of the media and the potential for the media to serve as a voice for vulnerable populations. It also shows how media can force powerful institutions to be held accountable. By honoring their clients, EJI draws attention to the power of underprivileged individuals to advocate for themselves and others and the importance of seeing the strength and resilience demonstrated by their struggles. Marsha's speech further reinforces her role as an advocate.

CHAPTER 13: RECOVERY

Stevenson describes Walter's life after his release. Media attention about his case intensifies, and Walter's story is featured in the book *Circumstantial Evidence*. Stevenson remarks that during the 1990's, the increasing pace and rate of executions intensified public debate about the death penalty and concern about the possibility of wrongful convictions. Stevenson and Walter travel the country meeting officials and talking about the death penalty. Stevenson describes himself as frequently passionate during these events, but he remarks that Walter's calm, good-humored way of telling his story was "effective" in winning audience sympathy and indignation about his experiences. Walter and Minnie peacefully separate, and Walter stays a while with his sister in Florida. Walter thinks often about his time and friends on death row, and he can't understand why, now that his ordeal is over, he is so stricken with horrific memories of death row, particularly of the execution of fellow inmates.

Stevenson again shows the interdependent relationship between media, public opinion, and changes in the criminal justice system. This time, he illustrates how the public is capable of responding to trends in criminal justice with skepticism, thereby holding the system accountable. The concerns of the public then shape media coverage, which in turn further affects public opinion. Stevenson suggests that people are more responsive to issues when they have the chance to meet and see the humanity in those personally affected. Walter's horrific memories of death row suggest that he was deeply traumatized. This reinforces the book's argument that incarceration, on death row in particular, affects the mental health of inmates.

EJI pursues financial compensation for Walter. They seek help from Stevenson's friend Rob McDuff, a "charming" white southern litigator who'd been effective in other racially charged cases. Stevenson writes that, at the time, few states offered compensation for wrongful imprisonment. Today, only some states offer such provisions. Then, as now, there are restrictions on eligibility and compensation amounts. Stevenson provides examples of how the Supreme Court has upheld laws granting immunity to law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges, even in cases of wrongful imprisonment and suppressed evidence. EJI succeeds in securing a few hundred thousand dollars from each agency responsible for Walter's conviction. They struggle the most to sue Sherriff Tate, to whom Stevenson refers as the most active and clearly racially-biased contributor. Their lawsuit goes to the Supreme Court, which upholds Tate's immunity on a technicality. Stevenson writes that Tate remained the Sherriff at the time of the book's publication.

Stevenson's choice to highlight McDuff as a "charming" white Southerner who is persuasive in racially charged cases suggests the added credibility the white-dominated courts may assign to white Southern attorneys,, particularly in cases involving existing racial tensions. By highlighting cases in which immunity laws have protected officials who suppressed evidence, Stevenson suggests an explanation for why the officials in Walter's case acted without fear of consequences. Sherriff Tate, the man who threatened Myers in order to coerce his testimony, is ironically the person held least accountable by the law. His immunity, and the fact that he remains in office, suggests the failure of the system to address the underlying problems that led to Walter's conviction.

Walter returns to Monroeville and starts a logging business. The familiar outdoor work gives him a sense of freedom. A logging accident forces Walter to spend months staying with Stevenson and recovering. Walter remains optimistic, and he decides to start a junkyard business so he can still work outside. In 1998, Stevenson and Walter attend a conference in Chicago of former death row inmates. Stevenson writes that, at that time, DNA evidence and the growing abolition movement were generating opposition against the death penalty. Each year, Stevenson brings Walter to the NYU Law School to speak to his students. He writes that the students are always deeply moved to hear Walter's firsthand account. One year, Walter gets disoriented on his way to NYU and he doesn't arrive. Walter explains to Stevenson afterwards that things aren't going well for his business, and they agree to travel together next time.

Stevenson depicts Walter's efforts to continue trying to build something new out of his life after his release. He highlights Walter's desire to work outside, suggesting that his years of extreme confinement have altered his emotional relationship to space and have created in him a need to feel physically free. The law students' reactions to meeting Walter and to hearing his story relate back to Stevenson's own experience as a law student and his eagerness to see and feel the real-life relevance and power of the law. Stevenson's account about Walter getting lost and struggling with his business imply that Walter's ability to cope may be declining.

In 1994, when Republicans took control of Congress, funds supporting death row inmates were cut. Many other legal aid groups in the country shut down, but EJI intensified fundraising among private donors. Stevenson writes that, despite the financial and workload stress, he was excited for EJI to have a growing, dedicated staff that was fighting larger issues like child imprisonment and discrimination against the poor, disabled, and minorities. That year, Sweden awarded EJI the Olof Palme International Human Rights Award. Stevenson was excited because of Sweden's progressive, rehabilitation-focused criminal justice system. A camera crew came to the U.S. to interview EJI and people they'd represented, including Walter. Discussing the interview over the phone, Walter told Stevenson that he wanted Stevenson to come "hang out" sometime, an unusual request despite how much time they'd spent together.

Stevenson shows the relationship between national election cycles and real-life effects on organizations that work with marginalized groups. The polarizing quality of the death penalty debate likely makes EJI and similar organizations especially vulnerable to shifts in national political power. Stevenson's depiction of his phone call with Walter suggests that Walter may be lonely and struggling. This sense is further conveyed by the detail that Walter rarely asked explicitly to hang out. Sweden's recognition of EJI is meaningful to Stevenson given the country's progressive prison policies.

Stevenson flies out to Sweden to receive the award. He writes about a previous visit to Brazil, where he'd lectured about "unjust treatment of disfavored people." He writes that, unlike the Brazilians, the Swedish hadn't seen that kind of discrimination and abuse in their country, so their enthusiastic responses seemed to be motivated by empathy. Stevenson speaks at a Swedish high school. He marvels at how much the students seem to care about injustices against strangers so far away. The students sing a sorrowful **song** that Stevenson describes as "dissonant" and "transcendent." He fights tears when he thinks of his mother, a lifelong church musician who has just died months before. At his hotel, he turns on the Swedish news and he sees the report about EJI for the first time. In front of the camera, Walter breaks down in tears as he describes how he "lost everything." Stevenson is worried and feels it's time to go home.

Stevenson is moved by the interest and empathetic response of Swedish audiences, especially because they have no cultural frame of reference for these problems. Their recognition of EJI's work and their interest comes from another perspective on justice that falls outside the local and national political contexts that Stevenson has primarily worked with. The symbol of music reappears in the scene at the high school, reinforcing the power of music to stir emotions and communicate truths about the human condition, suffering, and hope. Seeing Walter on TV, Stevenson is brought back to the reality about the work that remains to be done back home.

CHAPTER 14: CRUEL AND UNUSUAL

In 1989 in Pensacola, Florida, thirteen-year-old Joe Sullivan went with two older teenagers to rob an elderly woman's house. Later that day, a group broke into the woman's house and raped her. Police suspected Joe and his friends, who were found nearby with the woman's jewelry. The boys told police that Joe had raped her. Joe admitted the robbery, but denied sexual assault. Police destroyed DNA samples taken after the rape. The woman could only remember that her attacker was black. Joe had been physically abused, neglected, and he had an intellectual disability. At twelve he had faced nonviolent charges, and his probation officer described him as impressionable and capable of reform. At Joe's trial for the alleged rape, his lawyers offered little defense. The judge declared that Joe had proven irredeemable. Stevenson comments that Joe hadn't had any real chances. Joe was convicted and sentenced to life in an adult prison.

Stevenson's description of Joe's disability, past trauma, and neglect suggests that Joe's involvement with criminal activity and with the older boys was motivated by his unstable home life, cognitive delay, and lack of direction. Stevenson reinforces the probation officer's view of Joe as young and impressionable, and therefore in need of guidance and support. In contrast, the judge's ruling and sentencing fails to see Joe as a child or to take into consideration his impaired developmental stage. The fact that police destroyed DNA evidence suggests that, like the police in Walter's case, they were more concerned with securing a conviction than finding the truth.

Joe's lawyers withdrew from his case, making no attempt to appeal. In prison, Joe was raped repeatedly and he attempted suicide. He developed multiple sclerosis, which medical experts later determined might have been caused by trauma.

While Joe's imprisonment was framed as keeping a violent sex offender off the streets, the court, in fact, put a child within the grasp of violent sex offenders.

An inmate incarcerated with Joe writes to EJI About Joe's abuse and his disability. Joe writes to Stevenson asking if Stevenson can "come get" him. At this point, Joe has spent 18 years in prison with no legal help. EJI files a motion for DNA testing, but their motion is denied because the evidence was destroyed. Their next plan is to "challenge Joe's death-in-prison sentence as cruel and unusual punishment." Stevenson drives to Florida to visit Joe. He writes that the Santa Rosa prison was one of many built during the 1990's when the rapidly expanding "prison-industrial complex" allowed prison to "[become] the answer to everything," including childhood emotional disturbance, mental illness, addiction, and poverty.

The severity of Joe's situation is demonstrated by the fact that another inmate takes it upon himself to contact EJI asking for them to help Joe. Like the female inmates described in Chapter 12, this illustrates the empathy and concern that inmates can have for each other's needs and situations. Without any legal help, Joe has been especially vulnerable to different kinds of abuse. By writing that prison, "became the answer" to social problems, Stevenson suggests that prison replaced preventative and positive social measures.

In the visitation room, Joe waits in a wheelchair in a small locked metal cage. When Stevenson arrives, the officers struggles for a long time to get the wheelchair out of the cage. They explain that the cage is used for moving all "lifers." Stevenson hears Joe crying. Eventually, the officers manage to lift Joe's wheelchair out. The officers high-five each other, but Joe stares somberly at his feet. When Joe sees Stevenson, he grins and starts clapping, saying, "Mr. Bryan!" During their visit, Stevenson feels like he is "talking to a young child." Joe interviews Stevenson using questions he has written down, such as "What is your favorite color?" He tells Stevenson that he wants to be a reporter if he is ever released.

The image of a disabled man in a wheelchair crying while locked in a small steel cage serves to reinforce Stevenson's argument about "cruel and unusual" punishment. The contrast between the officers' and Joe's points of view is highlighted by the juxtaposed images of the officers high-fiving each other while Joe looks down sadly. Stevenson conveys that Joe is like a lonely, hopeful child by writing about Joe's choice of childlike interview questions and his dream of becoming a reporter.

Joe regularly writes to Stevenson, often sharing details of his day and asking childlike questions. EJI petitions Joe's life sentence "as unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment." Stevenson writes that the death penalty was outlawed for juveniles in 2005 with support from the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. EJI uses eighth amendment arguments to fight juvenile life sentences in several states. They reach out to help Ashley Jones, a teenager sentenced to life for murdering her relatives while escaping her abusive home. Stevenson writes that, for a while, Ashley had been writing to EJI expressing curiosity about the law, but without ever asking for help. Another individual they represent is Evan Miller, a teenager involved in the murder of a middle-aged neighbor who'd invited him over and served him drugs. Stevenson describes Evan, like other clients sentenced as children, as distinctly remorseful, contemplative, critical of their own and others' actions, and capable of reform.

Through his description of Joe's letters, Stevenson shows how much Joe values their communication. This underscores the importance of human interaction and relationships as a basic human need. The story of Ashley's crime supports the book's argument that past trauma can lead to crimes, in particular for juveniles. The circumstances around Ashley and Evan's crimes suggest that adults were responsible for creating the conditions that led Ashley and Evan to commit crimes. Stevenson's comments regarding Evan's capacity for reflection and reform directly relates to the book's message about the human capacity for redemption and the need for mercy.

Stevenson writes that his involvement in the cases of youth guilty of violent crimes is "ironic." He tells the story of his grandfather, who, at the age of 86, was murdered by two teenaged boys who were robbing his house. Stevenson's family, including relatives who were police officers, were baffled that the teenagers had done something so "pointlessly destructive" as killing an elderly man who was in no condition to stop the robbery or fight back. After years of working as a lawyer in similar cases, Stevenson came to the conclusion that understanding these crimes required understanding the history of the young people involved.

Until this point, the individuals Stevenson has discussed identifying or empathizing with have been those accused and condemned within the criminal justice system. This new information suggests that he also identifies with the suffering felt by victims and their families. His personal experience adds weight to his argument regarding the need for mercy. In this passage, he emphasizes the confusion his family felt regarding the "pointless" crime.

Stevenson explains how the 2005 ban on juvenile death penalties was influenced by recent scientific discoveries. He describes neuroscience and developmental research that indicates that adolescents are still developing regions of the brain linked to judgment, impulse control, and emotional maturity. This coincides with biological changes linked to increased risk-taking. Stevenson reasons that this developmental period, combined with trauma, neglect and other environmental problems, makes some youth susceptible to horrible lapses in judgment. Stevenson explains that the Eighth Amendment requires proof that punishment is "unusual." To meet the standard for "unusual" punishment, EJI first challenged juvenile life sentences involving non-homicidal crimes like those of Joe Sullivan. In Joe's case, they argued that youth are "human works in progress" and that it is a cruel and unreasonable consequence to condemn them to "death-in-prison." Every Florida court denied Joe's petition, and EJI took his case to the Supreme Court.

In previous chapters, Stevenson has focused on the philosophical reasons that the justice system should be more compassionate and less punitive. In this passage, Stevenson introduces the element of scientific research. EJI's arguments indicate that they consider science to be relevant to determining the culpability and the potential for rehabilitation of young people. Stevenson combines biological development with childhood trauma to suggest that a healthy environment is needed in order for youth to make healthy choices. Stevenson's use of the phrase "death-in-prison," rather than "life sentence," is significant because it calls into question the common terminology and attempts to expose what a life sentence really means in plainer terms.

The Supreme Court agrees to review Joe's case and the case of another Florida teenager, Terrance Graham, who was sentenced to life for violating his probation by attempting robbery. Ahead of the Supreme Court case, EJI receives support from countless nonprofits and child welfare groups, scientific and medical associations, and politicians. The conservative Wyoming senator Alan Simpson, a former violent juvenile felon, publically tells his story and extends support for EJI. The case provokes media frenzy and national interest. EJI presents their scientific, constitutional, and moral arguments before the Supreme Court, and they also argue that there is a racial disparity in the application of juvenile life sentences. They await the Supreme Court verdict.

By detailing the diverse groups and individuals that backed EJI, Stevenson demonstrates how widespread bi-partisan made this case different from others. These supporters of reform may have been moved by the idea of giving wayward young people another chance at life rather than allowing them to die in prison. The example of Alan Simpson is especially powerful in conveying the widespread appeal and the capacity of troubled and even violent youth to reform and become integral parts of society.

Stevenson visits Joe in prison. The national media attention generated by the Supreme Court case has led to guards taunting Joe, which has been very troubling for him. Stevenson remarks that Joe appears more preoccupied with reciting a poem that he has written than with hearing about what happened in Washington. In the poem, Joe describes in simple language his desire to leave prison and live happily with Stevenson, whom he considers to be like a father. The poem ends with "they will see" and then the phrase "I'm a good person" repeated several times. Stevenson can't help but laugh despite his better judgment, and Joe starts laughing with him. They laugh hysterically together, and Stevenson considers that, after everything Joe has suffered and lost, it is "a miracle […] that he could still laugh".

Joe's susceptibility to internalizing the guards' taunts demonstrates his vulnerability. Stevenson creates an emotionally stirring scene by highlighting Joe's boyish excitement over sharing his poem. The simple, open language of the poem illustrates Joe's immense need for love and protection and his childlike thought processes. The repetition of the phrase "I'm a good person" at the end of the poem emphasizes the shame he has felt and his need to prove to others and himself that he is worthy and redeemable.

CHAPTER 15: BROKEN

Stevenson describes the "decline" of Walter's emotional and mental state. Walter develops memory problems and has difficulty running his business. He begins drinking alcohol to manage anxiety. Walter's doctor diagnoses him with advancing dementia related to trauma, and the doctor tells Stevenson that he expects Walter will soon be "incapacitated." With Stevenson's help, Walter's family decides to put him in long-term care. EJI's new social worker Maria Morrison tries to get Walter into a nursing home, but many facilities refuse him for his felony record, refusing to hear any reasoning about his reversed conviction. EJI eventually succeeds in getting Walter into a temporary nursing home. At the time, EJI was awaiting the Supreme Court's decision on Joe Sullivan's case and faced financial uncertainty and an incredibly large death row docket with impending execution dates. Stevenson writes that the combination of stresses and his sadness over Walter's condition made him "deeply distressed."

Stevenson illustrates the connection between Walter's trauma and his declining health. This shows how Walter's conviction and his time on death row created loss that far exceeded just the years he spent in prison; Walter's experience damaged his emotional and mental health to such a severe extent that it induced incapacitating dementia, which took even more of his time and life from him and his family. This is an example of the "collateral consequences" of failures of the justice system. Stevenson's involvement in Walter's care shows the depth of their friendship and Stevenson's sense of responsibility for Walter. He treats Walter like they are family.

Stevenson visits Walter's temporary nursing home in Montgomery. He is distraught to find Walter disoriented and unkempt when he arrives. Walter becomes cheerful when he sees Stevenson, whom he recognizes even though he has begun struggling with recognizing relatives. Walter begins talking cheerfully about his "cars." He then becomes anxious as he talks about being back on death row. Stevenson tries to explain that is in a hospital, not prison. Walter breaks down crying, begging Stevenson to help him get off "the row" again. Stevenson helps Walter fall asleep and then talks to a nurse, who confirms Walter's frequent anxiety about death row. The nurse explains that when the staff researched his past, some became afraid of Walter. Stevenson assures her that Walter was proven innocent. The nurse expresses her own understanding and compassion, yet explains that others believe that prison makes people "dangerous" regardless. Stevenson isn't able to "muster" a counterargument.

Stevenson's distress about Walter's condition is loaded with his investment in Walter's wellbeing and the frustration that comes from his understanding of how Walter's condition was caused. Stevenson has fought years of legal battles on Walter's behalf, but he now finds himself powerless to defeat the effects of prison on Walter's mind. Walter's delusional belief that he is back on death row proves his enduring trauma. The nurse's comments suggest the permanent condemnation applied to felons, even if there is documented evidence of their innocence. Stevenson's inability to respond shows his own sense of emotional exhaustion.

Just after Stevenson's visit with Walter, he finds out that another execution is scheduled. He calls EJI deputy director Randy Susskind, who has been managing efforts to block impending executions. He tells Susskind about his difficult visit with Walter and they are "silent on the phone for a while." Stevenson describes Alabama's "increasing rate of executions," which contrasts with the overall national decline in executions due to activism and changing views, even in other conservative states like Texas. Stevenson names the men executed in Alabama in 2009, despite EJI efforts: Jimmy Callahan, Danny Bradley, Max Payne, Jack Trawick, and Willie McNair.

The silence between Stevenson and Susskind on the phone shows that they have an emotionally close friendship. Considering Stevenson's many other friendships at EJI, it appears that Stevenson's work and life are tightly woven together, likely due to the consuming and emotional nature of his work. By mentioning all the executed men by name, Stevenson conveys the sense that their individual identities should be remembered.

Stevenson writes that by the late 2000's lethal injection had replaced other forms of execution. While it was intended to cause less painful deaths, Stevenson describes the medical complications and pain associated with lethal injection. A European euthanasia drug, banned for animal use due to painful effects, was imported until Europeans discovered its use in U.S. executions and stopped exporting it. The Supreme Court reviewed but failed to outlaw the use of illegally obtained euthanasia in executions. Stevenson describes the stress on EJI due to the challenge of keeping up with the increasing execution rate and the organization's efforts to challenge life sentences for non-homicide juvenile cases throughout the country. Stevenson continues to struggle with finding appropriate care for Walter and coping with his decline.

The fact that the European euthanasia drug was banned for animal use but considered to be suitable for human executions conveys the idea that humans sentenced to death are regarded as less worthy of care and consideration than animals. The fact that the Europeans stopped shipping the drug when they discovered how it was being used serves as a reminder of the difference between American and European views on criminal justice and the death penalty. By listing in a consecutive series the stressful circumstances facing EJI, Stevenson conjures his feeling of anxiety at the time.

EJI takes on the case of Jimmy Dill, an intellectually disabled man scheduled to die in 30 days. Jimmy had been physically and sexually abused as a child. As an adult, he severely injured another man during a drug-related fight. The man died nine months later, after his wife left him without a caregiver. The state prosecutors then made an "unusual" move to change Jimmy's charges from assault to capital murder. Jimmy's lawyers failed to inform Jimmy of a plea offer made by the state or to present evidence regarding Jimmy's mental condition and the victim's actual cause of death. Jimmy was sentenced to death and he couldn't afford legal counsel. Despite a recent law banning the death penalty for the mentally retarded, EJI is unable to find a judge willing to review Jimmy's case so close to his execution. EJI files a stay motion with the Supreme Court, which is denied.

Stevenson describes yet another account of a man on death row whose life has shown a pattern of unfortunate circumstances and grave mistakes. Like many others in the book, Jimmy was abused as a child, suffered from his harsh environment, and lacked the education, effective counsel, and financial resources needed to seek a different judicial outcome. This illustrates how certain environmental and biological disadvantages predispose individuals to dangerous and/or violent choices and also lead them to face harsher consequences than their more privileged counterparts for the same kinds of mistakes.

Within an hour of his execution, Stevenson calls Jimmy to inform him of the Supreme Court's decision. Jimmy, who suffers from a severe speech impediment that is worsened by anxiety, tries to calm his panic and disappointment so he can thank Stevenson for all of his efforts. Stevenson begins to cry. He suddenly remembers when, as child at church with his mother, he met another little boy with a stutter. Out of ignorance, he laughed at the boy's speech. Deeply disappointed, his mother instructed Stevenson to apologize, hug the boy, and say that he loved him. Reluctantly, Stevenson did just as his mother said. To his surprise, the boy hugged him back and said: "I love you, too," causing Stevenson to cry. Stevenson feels shaken by Jimmy's kindness and the injustice of his death, which could have prevented if he'd been able to afford a better lawyer.

Like the story of Herbert Richardson's death in Chapter 4, Stevenson's account of Jimmy Dill brings to life the emotional reality of execution. Stevenson's "brokenhearted" feeling is conveyed by the images of Jimmy waiting for a phone call that could halt his imminent death and then trying to stay calm and overcome his stutter so that he can use his last moments to express gratitude. Stevenson's detailed memory of the little boy who has the same disability and capacity for unexpected kindness as Jimmy evokes the cruelty, sadness, and grace that characterize the situation.

After getting off the phone with Jimmy Dill, Stevenson feels heavy hearted and defeated. He feels overwhelmed by years of witnessing tragedy, abuse, and injustice. He asks himself why he can't just quit. In considering this question, he realizes that, like his clients, he has been "broken" by the desperation, death, and cruelty he has fought against and witnessed. He argues that everyone is broken by some harm they've caused or experienced. He thinks of the officers carrying out Jimmy's execution, and how they are broken by their involvement. He defines "brokenness" as humanity's shared guilt, pain, and imperfection, and he reasons that this common condition gives every human the need for mercy and compassion. He argues that if individuals accept their own "brokenness", they will be more merciful and compassionate toward other "broken people" instead of seeking harsh punishment for the "most vulnerable": traumatized children, the mentally ill, the disabled, and the poor.

Stevenson's concept of "brokenness" connects to the arguments laid out in the introduction and illustrated throughout the book regarding the reciprocal need for mercy on the part of everyone involved in hurt and suffering. What is different is that now he extends his argument beyond just those implicated in the criminal justice system. Now, his message comes into focus: rather than being a social ill that only afflicts certain groups, the ability to feel and impose pain is an inescapable part of the human condition. What is preventable, however, is the escalating cycle that is caused when humans fail to learn from hurt, admit fault or vulnerability, seek reconciliation, and learn from their experiences of culpability and victimhood.

Stevenson rewinds in time to when he met Rosa Parks shortly after moving to Montgomery. He'd become friends with a friend of hers, a "spirited" lady and Civil Rights veteran named Johnnie Carr. Ms. Carr often ordered him to come "speak" or "listen" at various meetings, and he always obeyed respectfully. One day, Ms. Carr invited him over to "listen" at the home of Virginia Durr, another woman who had worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. Stevenson describes how the women laughed and told stories. When Rosa Parks asked Stevenson about his work, he described in detail all of the efforts of EJI to fight racism, injustice and poverty. Rosa Parks laughed and said: "Ooh, honey, all that's going to make you tired, tired, tired." Ms. Carr got close to him, like his grandmother often had, and added: "That's why you've got to be brave, brave, brave."

The memory of Stevenson's meeting with Rosa Parks is carefully placed at this point in the book to provide a frame of reference for struggle and hope. At a point when Stevenson feels exhausted and defeated, the memory of Rosa Parks evokes the long history of tired, relentless people before him who fought for civil rights despite powerful forces. His focus on Ms. Carr's use of the word "listen" suggests his awareness of the many lessons he has to learn from her and other wise, longtime activists. Rosa Parks and Johnnie Carr gave him the answer to his current problem: the more tired he feels, the braver he must be.

Returning to the night of Jimmy Dill's death, Stevenson realizes that it is "time to stop all this foolishness about quitting." He reads an email from a high school in a poor neighborhood, inviting him to come speak about "remaining hopeful." He considers the struggles the school's children will face in their futures, and he responds that he will come. Driving home, he hears a minister on the radio quoting scripture about the strength of weakness caused by carrying many burdens. Stevenson thinks of the young boy with the stutter who hugged him, and he reflects that he didn't "deserve" the boy's mercy. Nevertheless, he considers it an act of "reconciliation: it was all the more important because it wasn't deserved. Stevenson writes that unexpected mercy is "strong enough to break the cycle" of injury and suffering and lead to real healing. Despite his heartbreak, he resolves to continue his work.

By writing that it was "time to stop all this foolishness about quitting" right after describing his meeting with Rosa Parks, Stevenson suggests that he regained his strength and focus by reflecting on the wisdom, support, and resilience of various teachers in his life. The email from the high school reminds Stevenson that, regardless of his own grief, there are still other young people whose paths can be altered by Stevenson's wisdom and support. In this way, he shows how each generation can prepare the next for the struggles they will face. Remembering a moment when he received undeserved mercy reminds Stevenson that reconciliation is an integral and achievable part of justice.

CHAPTER 16: THE STONECATCHER'S SONG OF SORROW

In 2010, the Supreme Court bans sentences of life without parole in non-homicide juvenile cases, ruling that it violates the eighth amendment as "cruel and unusual punishment." Two years later, EJI fights on behalf of Evan Miller and Kuntrell Jackson before the Supreme Court, seeking a ban on mandatory life without parole sentences for juvenile homicide cases. They win the case, bringing hope for the possibility of release to over 2,000 people, including Trina Garrett and Ashley Jones. EJI wins a reduced sentence in the case of several young people whose convictions involved illegal jury selection, jury manipulation, inadmissible evidence, and failure to allow evidence of pertinent experiences, such as child abuse. EJI moves to tackle any incarceration of juveniles in adult facilities and the practice of prosecuting young children in adult courts. Stevenson argues that young children aren't equipped to handle the procedures of adult court.

The last chapter begins with a series of legal victories and a tone of hope for future progress. This stabilization of tone and events creates a decline in suspense and anxiety, and it indicates that Stevenson's darkest moments of exhaustion and hopelessness in the previous chapter signified the book's climax. The Supreme Court cases regarding child incarceration represent a significant victory in EJI's long fight against injustice. This experience of successfully fighting such a large issue not only gives Stevenson and his organization a sense of hope, but it also proves their efficacy.

By the early 2010's, EJI achieves success in dramatically slowing the execution rate in Alabama. The number of death sentences successfully reversed by EJI reaches 100. By 2013, Alabama reaches its lowest number of new death sentences since the reinstitution of the death penalty in the 1970's. Still, individual cases of injustice remain. EJI is unable to secure relief for Anthony Ray Hinton, a "clearly innocent" man who had been on Alabama's death row for nearly 30 years. Stevenson describes how Mr. Hinton's underfunded lawyer failed to provide sufficient evidence and didn't present the countless witnesses to Hinton's alibi. The media "cit[es] innocence fatigue" and refuses to cover Hinton's story. Stevenson describes the comfort he takes in overall progress against mass incarceration throughout the United States. In 2012, the number of incarcerated people declined for the first time "in decades." California also ended the "three strikes" law that mandated long sentences for multiple petty crimes, and the state nearly banned the death penalty.

In this segment, Stevenson depicts overall state and national progress toward systemic justice, as well as the individual cases where injustice persists. By showing this contrast, Stevenson points to the disparity between individual and collective realities. He demonstrates the piecemeal nature of progress by showing how progress is unable to provide a solution for everyone all at once. He also suggests that his own outlook is shaped by his sense of overall improvement, and he shows how this is a coping mechanism against sadness over individual losses. The media's claim of "innocence fatigue" highlights that the media prioritizes attracting consumers over holding the powerful accountable.

EJI finally launches a long-hoped-for "race and poverty" project. The project is focused on educating the public about the American history of racial injustice and its connection to modern societal problems. They talk to families in poor communities, host educational programming for high school students, and create and circulate reports and educational materials to "deepen the national conversation" about America's racial history.

After years of fighting injustice in the legal sphere, EJI now moves to address some of the main underlying causes of injustice in the court and prison systems: racial inequality, poverty, and lack of public education. This project underscores the need to connect history to the present in order to gain perspective on current issues.

Stevenson describes four periods of America's racial history and he explains how these periods are often misrepresented to the public as being isolated incidents in the larger historical narrative of progress. The first period is slavery. The second is the post-Reconstruction era, a period of organized violence against black people that is omitted from modern discussions of "terrorism." Stevenson considers the death penalty to be a modern continuation of lynching. He describes how violence created an "enforced racial hierarchy" and how the law re-enslaved black people for petty crimes through "convict leasing." Next, Stevenson describes how Jim Crow laws perpetuated "racial segregation, racial subordination, and marginalization." Stevenson describes modern oppression through "innocent mistakes" against people of color, citing an occasion when a white judge assumed Stevenson was the defendant because he is black. The fourth stage, Stevenson writes, is mass incarceration of poor, black, and undocumented people, and the consequences this has on perpetuating inequality.

Throughout the book, Stevenson has connected modern legal cases to related historical injustices. Here, he ties these references together by outlining a clear progression of historical stages. Stevenson's account challenges common historical narratives, which he argues are misrepresentative. In Stevenson's account, events aren't isolated or finite, but they are part of a continuous chain of cause and effect, progress and reactive oppression. His account frames hatred and the drive for white domination as constant forces that transform over time but are never obliterated. He shows how past institutions and violence that are now usually condemned, like slavery and lynching, were the precursors to modern mass incarceration of people of color and the death penalty.

EJI's Supreme Court victories mean a much bigger caseload. As they now pursue hundreds of individual sentences throughout the country, they encounter resistance from local courts. For example, a California judge commutes Antonio Núñez's life sentence to 175 years. With persistence, EJI gets reasonable release dates secured for Antonio, Joe Sullivan, and Ian Manuel. They develop a re-entry program, which will help persuade the courts to change sentences. EJI prioritizes cases in Louisiana, where many "old-timers" have served decades for juvenile offenses. Many of these are at Angola prison, a former slavery-era cotton plantation where modern inmates were forced into dangerous labor and regularly punished with expanded sentences for petty violations. New programs rewarding good behavior, however, allow some of these lifers to become recognized mentors. EJI begins with the cases of Joshua Carter and Robert Caston, two men serving life at Angola for non-homicide crimes committed as children in the 1960's.

The difficulty EJI faces in keeping up with promising cases and the continued resistance they face from local courts shows how their work is never finished, even after a victory. This suggests that, in advocacy work, the goal isn't to finish but to continue. The judge's commutation of Antonio's sentence provides an example of legal manipulation in order to get around the intent of the law. This suggests the room for abuse of power within legal institutions and the importance of advocacy and accountability measures to counteract abuse. The example of Angola's slavery-era history and modern forced labor highlights Stevenson's earlier arguments regarding the connection between previous oppressive structures and the modern prison system.

Mr. Carter and Mr. Caston, now in their sixties, were both forced laborers at Angola who became disabled from labor-related injuries and medical neglect. Mr. Carter's mother, now in her 90's, "vowed [...] she wouldn't die until he came home from prison." EJI schedules several hearings on their behalf. Each time they come to the New Orleans courtroom, the judge is too busy reviewing a long line of cases all scheduled for the same time. Eventually, EJI and the local counselor succeed in getting their hearings. The judge grants their motion for Mr. Caston's release and gives a speech about the years he lost in prison. Suddenly, the busy courtroom, full of other lawyers and their clients, becomes silent. When she finishes, everyone starts clapping. Their motion for Mr. Carter is also approved, and the two men become the first juvenile lifers released following the Supreme Court's ruling.

Stevenson's use of "Mr." when describing Carter and Caston, like his use "Ms." when talking about Rosa Parks and other older women in the books, is distinguished from his use of first or last names to refer to other characters. This distinction suggests the special importance he places on respectfully addressing his elders. Stevenson's depiction of Carter and Caston's advanced age and disabilities caused by prison labor help to explain why these "old-timers" were prioritized in EJI's docket. The judge's speech and the courtroom's applause create a vibrant, cinematic scene that illustrates the potential for human mercy and compassion.

After the hearings, Stevenson meets an old woman outside the courtroom. She hugs him and tells him to sit down. She isn't connected to any of the cases, she explains, but years before, her beloved grandson was killed by two other boys. When they were sentenced to life, her pain only intensified. A stranger saw her crying and comforted her. Soon after, she began coming to the courtroom to offer families of victims and the accused someone to "lean on." She calls herself a "stonecatcher," referencing Stevenson's church speech in Monroeville years before. Stevenson had quoted Jesus' words to a mob eager to kill an adulteress: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." Stevenson had implored the congregation not to throw stones at Walter, but to be "stonecatchers." The old woman warns Stevenson that stonecatching will make him sing "some sad songs," but that those songs will keep him hopeful. She gives him a peppermint candy, a gesture he finds strangely comforting.

The appearance of the old woman, who is unconnected to any case but who immediately embraces and offers wisdom to Stevenson, evokes the literary archetype of the "wise old woman" as depicted by Carl Jung. Her allusions to Stevenson's past words and her predictions about his future sadness serve to reinforce this image, suggesting her air of omniscience and clairvoyance. Stevenson's biblical argument about throwing and catching stones suggests the Christian foundations for his philosophies on redemption and mercy. The woman's words about singing sad songs connect to the book's many instances of song during hopeless situations.

EPILOGUE

The epilogue begins: "Walter died on September 11, 2013." Stevenson describes Walter's kindness despite his disorientation during his last two years. His dementia weakened his health, and he died one night in his family's home. Stevenson returns to the church in Monroeville where he'd given his speech about "stonecatching" twenty years before. He considers the "mostly poor, rural black" crowd and remembers how the "ungrieved suffering" he'd witnessed during Walter's case still continues to plague them. A screen projects pictures of Walter, many from the day he was released. Stevenson marvels at "how happy" he and Walter "both seemed." Stevenson remembers Walter asking him once about his own views of death. Walter reflected that "dying on some court schedule" was unnatural, and he explained: "People are supposed to die on God's schedule."

By beginning with plainly announcing Walter's death, Stevenson makes it clear that the Epilogue is about losing Walter. Stevenson's reflections on the crowd speak to the book's focus on the oppression of an entire community. The images of Walter's release stir Stevenson because they reflect only part of their stories. Stevenson's memory adds ambiguous meaning to Walter's death, which is both "on God's schedule" and not, because it was caused by complications from his time on death row.

In his funeral speech, Stevenson explains that "Walter had become like a brother" to him. He remarks on how Walter "came out with dignity" despite the suffering and injustice he faced. Walter's struggle and resilience paved the way for justice for everyone, he says, and constituted a "triumph worth celebrating, an accomplishment to be remembered." Stevenson describes the lessons he learned from Walter about the need to continue fighting against unjust and unequal systems. Above all, Walter's willingness to forgive "the people who had judged him unworthy of mercy" and to move on and find joy in life taught Stevenson the power of mercy toward people who don't deserve it. After the service, Stevenson gives his number to several people requesting legal help. While he isn't sure he'll be able to help most of them, he writes: "it made the journey home less sad to hope that maybe we could."

Stevenson's choice to dedicate the Epilogue to Walter's funeral and to the lessons he learned from him re-establishes Walter's story as the central plot of the book. By emphasizing how Walter's forgiveness taught Stevenson about mercy, he reiterates one of the book's central concepts: true justice isn't about due punishment, but about undue compassion. The last line about how the "hope" of helping more people makes the "journey home less sad" is a metaphor for how helping others has made Stevenson's own life journey easier.

POSTSCRIPT

Stevenson returns to Anthony Ray Hinton in Alabama. For fifteen years, the State denied EJI's requests to reconsider his case following new evidence. EJI eventually won a Supreme Court case on Hinton's behalf. After thirty years in solitary confinement, Mr. Hinton was released. He was, Stevenson writes, "the 152nd person in America exonerated [...] after having been wrongly convicted and sentenced to death." Stevenson then describes EJI's continued efforts on behalf of juvenile lifers. Ian Manuel and Antonio Núñez "have a chance to be released." Despite noncompliance from the state of Pennsylvania, EJI continues (at the time of the book's publication) to fight on Trina Garrett's behalf. In 2014, she was in a music video featuring Muncy Prison entitled "This is Not My Home." Stevenson writes that Charlie and Marsha Colby are "doing well," and Henry is no longer facing the death penalty. Stevenson ends the postscript: "The work continues."

Stevenson finishes the book with updates on several cases, which underscores the importance of each individual case. This also draws attention to the continuity of the character's lives, a factor that distinguishes nonfiction from fiction. Anthony's release is featured as an example of the continued resistance of the State and the importance of relentless advocacy, and as a remarkable story of release after decades in solitary confinement. EJI's continued efforts for Trina and her involvement in the music video convey her continued connection to the outside world and a sense of hope for her case.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In his acknowledgements, Stevenson begins by thanking the individuals featured in the book and the many other "accused, convicted, and imprisoned" people who had "taught [him] so much about hope, justice, and mercy." He writes that some names in the book were changed for privacy reasons. He thanks his agent, the editor, members of the publishing company, research assistants, and staff of EJI, many by name.

By first thanking the clients he has served and mentioned in the book, Stevenson indicates that their presence in his life has been of utmost importance. This suggests Stevenson's desire not to be seen as the hero of the book: highlighting his clients' experiences, efforts and wisdom gives them agency that has often been taken away or rendered invisible by their experiences.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the author's note, Stevenson writes that there are still two million people incarcerated on the U.S., six million on parole, and sixty-eight million dealing with the consequences of criminal records. He directly invites the reader to contact EJI if they are interested in volunteering or supporting their efforts, and he provides their contact information and website: www.eji.org

The author's note draws attention to the book, not only as a literary work, but as part of a larger activist effort to educate the public about social problems related to mass incarceration. The note breaks the boundary between the author and reader by inviting direct, real-life participation.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Ballinger-Dix, Elizabeth. "*Just Mercy*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 21 Jun 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Ballinger-Dix, Elizabeth. "*Just Mercy*." LitCharts LLC, June 21, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/just-mercy.

To cite any of the quotes from *Just Mercy* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Stevenson, Bryan. Just Mercy. Spiegel & Grau. 2015.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Stevenson, Bryan. Just Mercy. New York: Spiegel & Grau. 2015.