

All American Boys



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JASON REYNOLDS

Brendan Kiely grew up in an Irish-American family in Boston, Massachusetts, and received a B.Phil from Miami University and an MFA in creative writing from the City College of New York. Alongside writing novels, he teaches at a private high school. He lives in Greenwich Village in New York City. Jason Reynolds, who is African-American, grew up in Oxon Hill, Maryland. As a teenager, he wrote poetry, and while attending the University of Maryland he worked at Karibu Books, a bookstore specializing in black American literature. After graduating from college, he moved to New York City, where he began publishing poetry and young adult fiction. He lived in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, for 13 years before moving back to DC in 2016. Both writers have won multiple prizes for their work, and *All-American Boys* was named a 2016 Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book and received the 2016 Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children's Literature in the Young Adult Category.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Kiely and Reynolds met on a book tour organized by the publisher Simon & Schuster in 2013. During the tour, George Zimmerman was found not guilty of the murder of Trayvon Martin, a black teenage boy he shot and killed in Florida in 2012. Martin's death—along with the police killing of another teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014—were two incidents that sparked the contemporary movement against anti-black racism and police brutality usually termed the Black Lives Matter movement. After Brown's death, Kiely felt the need to “do something” and suggested that he and Reynolds write the book together. Since 2014, police racism and brutality continues to be a major issue in the United States, and activism combatting these problems continues to grow. Social media has been a particularly important tool within the Black Lives Matter movement, which is likely what inspired Kiely and Reynolds to include the detail of the hashtag #RashadIsAbsentAgainToday within the novel.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Several contemporary young adult novels also address issues of racism and police violence. Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* explores the murder of a black teenager at the hands of the police alongside more mundane examples of racism in the context of a suburban, majority-white high school. Kekla Magoon's *How It Went Down* also centers around the shooting of a black teenager by a white person; both novels explore the

difficulty of knowing exactly what happened in these tragic incidents, while highlighting the way in which different people's opinions is influenced by their own racial bias. Wes Moore's *The Other Wes Moore* uses a similar dual narrative to *All-American Boys* in order to explore the different opportunities and challenges faced by boys raised in different socioeconomic backgrounds, and the books explore similar themes of stereotyping, respectability, and the pressures faced by teenagers to lay the groundwork for a successful future. *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez utilizes alternating perspectives in order to illuminate themes of racial difference, prejudice, and oppression, in this case in Texas in 1937. The story collection *One Death, Nine Stories* features nine perspectives on the same event, which—like *All-American Boys*—are written by different authors.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *All-American Boys*
- **When Written:** 2014-2015
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2015
- **Literary Period:** 21st Century American Young Adult Fiction
- **Genre:** Young Adult Realism
- **Setting:** Springfield, a city in an unnamed state
- **Climax:** The march protesting Rashad's arrest and police brutality
- **Antagonist:** Paul Galluzzo
- **Point of View:** Alternates between Quinn and Rashad

EXTRA CREDIT

Late bloomer. Despite always having an interest in poetry, Jason Reynolds was 17 when he first read a novel cover to cover: the book was *Black Boy* by Richard Wright.

Difficult issues. Tough themes occur in all of Kiely's books. His other novels have tackled sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, sexual harassment, and Alzheimer's.



PLOT SUMMARY

It is Friday, and Rashad is at ROTC drill practice. Rashad doesn't enjoy ROTC but does it because his dad believes the best thing for a black American boy to do is join the army. Rashad's father, David, used to be in the army, and then the police force, but now works an office job. Rashad's brother, Spoony, works for UPS and lives with his girlfriend, Berry, in their own apartment.

As soon as practice is over, Rashad runs to the bathroom to change out of his green **uniform**. There he sees English Jones, a green-eyed “pretty boy” who is spoiled by his parents. English is good at everything, beloved by everyone, and captain of the **basketball** team. Rashad and English have been friends since they were children; their group includes Shannon Pushcart and Carlos Greene, who are also standing in the bathroom. The boys discuss a **party** at Jill’s that night.

Like English, Carlos is a senior; he tries out for the basketball team every year and never makes it, but is a “pro” graffiti artist. Rashad hopes that at the party he will hook up with Tiffany Watts, who he thinks is “the baddest girl in the eleventh grade.” He heads to UPS so Spooky can lend him \$20, but first takes the bus to Jerry’s, a convenience store, to buy snacks. A lot of people steal from Jerry’s, but Rashad has never stolen anything from anywhere. Rashad goes to get his wallet from his bag, and as he does so a white lady behind him (Katie Lansing) knocks into him by accident. She drops the bottle of beer she was holding, which smashes, and apologizes to Rashad. However, the clerk and cop guarding the store come over and—before Katie can say anything—accuse Rashad of trying to steal the chips. The cop (Paul) body slams Rashad and handcuffs him, accusing him of trying to resist. Rashad is in intense pain and thinks: “Please don’t kill me.”

The next chapter is narrated by Quinn, who is also getting ready to go to the party but must first drop his youngest brother, Willy, at the house of their neighbors the Cambis. Quinn’s father was killed in Afghanistan, making him an instant hero in their town. Quinn feels pressure to live up to this reputation and be the perfect “All-American boy.” His mother, Ma, works 12-hour night shifts at the Uline Warehouse. Their neighborhood, the West Side, is poor and said to be “on the decline,” but Quinn loves it. After dropping Willy, Quinn meets his friends Dwyer and Guzzo. All three boys are on the basketball team, and this will be the last Friday night they can go out before practice starts again. Quinn has a crush on Jill, who is Guzzo’s cousin.

Quinn and his friends always get alcohol at Jerry’s, paying passersby a little extra to buy it for them. They have stolen from Jerry’s a couple of times too, although they don’t do this anymore. Approaching Jerry’s, Quinn sees Guzzo’s older brother, Paul, burst out of the store and slam someone to the ground, though he doesn’t recognize that it is Rashad. Quinn hears sirens, and runs back to tell Guzzo and Dwyer that they need to run. They go to get pizza at Mother’s. Quinn is haunted by the look on Paul’s face as he beat Rashad.

Rashad is in the hospital; his nose is broken. He is charged with several misdemeanors and will have to appear in court. Rashad explains what happened to his parents, who are skeptical, although when Spooky arrives he instantly believes Rashad’s story. Dr. Barnes tells the family that Rashad has had some internal bleeding and will need to stay in the hospital for a few

days in order to be monitored.

Meanwhile, Quinn, Dwyer, and Guzzo go to Jill’s party, but Quinn is distracted, doesn’t talk to Jill, and afterward sleeps badly. The next day, Ma discovers his flask, noticing that he has been taking her bourbon. She scolds him and tells him to go to Willy’s soccer game later that day, and Quinn obeys. Guzzo texts Quinn, inviting him to a barbeque at his family’s house the next day. After, Quinn takes Willy to Mother’s for pizza, where they run into Jill. The three eat together, before noticing a fight break out between four men standing in line. The police arrive, and Quinn tells Jill he will walk her home. Jill mentions the barbeque, and she and Quinn agree that there is something odd about it.

On Sunday, Rashad wakes up alone in his hospital room. His nurse, Clarissa, asks him to blow into an incentive spirometer to check his lungs. After, his parents arrive along with their pastor, Jerome Johnson. The pastor tells Rashad that God is always with him and that everything happens for a reason. The family prays, after which Spooky arrives and Pastor Johnson departs. Spooky turns on the TV to reveal a news item showing smartphone footage of Rashad’s arrest, with the newscaster pointing out that the footage suggests that Paul used unnecessary force. David is furious and leaves the room. Spooky reveals that he sent the network information about Rashad. Rashad charges his phone for the first time since the incident and, seeing a string of frantic texts from his friends, replies to tell them he is all right. David returns and a football game comes on; for a brief moment, the family relax and watch together. However, after the game the same news item about Rashad’s arrest is played again.

Quinn arrives at the Galluzos’ family barbeque and feels awkward. He talks to Jill, who reveals that the boy Paul injured was Rashad. Quinn admits that he witnessed the incident, but is hesitant to reveal the extent of what he saw. Paul serves up burgers, and the partygoers all watch the football game together. Quinn wanders away from the TV to find Jill and her mom having an argument. Suddenly, the news item about Paul and Rashad comes on the TV, and someone quickly switches it off. Paul tells everyone that he will need their support in the coming weeks; he then invites Quinn, Guzzo, and Dwyer to play two-on-two basketball in the yard. However, Quinn quickly becomes frustrated and leaves the party.

At school on Monday everyone is talking about Rashad and the video clip shown on the news. Quinn refuses to watch it, wishing he could erase the entire incident from his mind. He notices that English is avoiding him, but is pleased to see that Jill is waiting for him by his locker. They have lunch together, and while discussing Rashad, Quinn suddenly remembers that he’s seen Paul beat a boy before, Marc Blair. That time, Paul “kicked the shit out of” Marc for having bullied Quinn. Quinn feels guilty and begins thinking about how racism can take the form of an irrational fear of black people. In class, his teacher,

Ms. Webber, picks on another black student, EJ. EJ and a white student, Molly, begin repeating Rashad's name until Ms. Webber sends them out. After school, Quinn goes to basketball practice and tries to forget about Rashad and Paul.

Rashad, who has been into art since childhood, thinks about the work of the Harlem Renaissance painter Aaron Douglas. Lying in his hospital bed, he begins drawing the scene at Jerry's. Clarissa enters and compliments **the drawing**. After talking with her, Rashad goes down to the hospital gift shop, where he strikes up a conversation with an elderly black lady named Shirley Fitzgerald, who volunteers there. Later that afternoon, Carlos, English, and Shannon visit the hospital. At first the boys joke around, but then English explains that Paul is Guzzo's older brother. Rashad explains exactly what happened, and Carlos promises to "do something," though Rashad and the others encourage him not to. After they leave, Rashad unplugs the TV in a sudden fit of rage.

On Tuesday morning, students arrive at Springfield High to see "**RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY**" spray-painted on the sidewalk in front of the school. At lunch, only white students are sitting inside the cafeteria; Jill and Quinn consider sitting outside, but ultimately sit with Guzzo and Dwyer. Guzzo is angry, yelling at Quinn for leaving the barbeque early and at Jill for bringing up Rashad. Dwyer urges Quinn not to mention Rashad and Paul, reminding Quinn that Coach Carney told them to put it out of their minds. At practice, Quinn gets into an argument with English, followed by another one with Guzzo. At home that evening, Quinn reflects on his own racial privilege, and decides to watch the video. He calls Jill and they discuss racism. After hanging up, Quinn resolves not to "walk away" from the problem anymore.

Rashad, meanwhile, wakes up, plugs the TV back in, and listens to different Springfield residents discuss their opinions about his case. Some are sympathetic, while others are not. Rashad's mother, Jessica, comes to visit. When Rashad shows her his drawing she gets tearful, then angry. Spoony and Berry arrive, and show Rashad a picture of the graffiti outside Springfield High. Spoony explains that the slogan **#RashadIsAbsentAgainToday** has become a hashtag, and that there is going to be a protest. Rashad's friends arrive, and the group discuss instances when they've been subject to police racism. Rashad vows to "stand with" those protesting, as he feels that this is now a movement bigger than him.

On Wednesday, while taking Willy to school, Quinn runs into Paul on the street. Quinn tries to get away, but Paul doesn't let him. He says he knows that Quinn was at Jerry's when he arrested Rashad, and insists that Rashad was stealing and that Paul was only trying to protect the other woman in the store. At school, kids are handing out flyers about the protest. Quinn's English teacher, Mrs. Tracey, who has assigned Ralph Ellison's story "Battle Royale," starts crying during class. Without being asked, the students in the class take turns reading Ellison's

story aloud. At practice, a fight breaks out and Coach reminds the boys that they need to focus on their futures and think of themselves as a team.

Chief Killabrew has sent Rashad a card and enclosed the ROTC creed. Rashad has a nightmare about the incident at Jerry's. In the morning, David arrives, and tells Rashad that when he was serving in the police force, he shot a young black man, Darnell Shackelford, who had been beating a white man. He explains that while he thought Darnell was reaching for a gun, he was actually reaching for his inhaler, and that the white man had been robbing *him*, not the other way around. Darnell wasn't killed, but was paralyzed from the waist down. David tells Rashad that Jessica wants to press charges, and Rashad says that he wants to go to the protest, asking his father to join.

Rashad goes down to see Mrs. Fitzgerald, and arrives to find her accompanied by another woman, who introduces herself as Katie Lansing--the woman from Jerry's. Katie apologizes and offers to testify. After Katie leaves, Mrs. Fitzgerald shares her memories of the civil rights era, admitting that she did not get involved at the time because she was scared. She tells Rashad to go to the protest.

On Thursday, Quinn wakes early, unable to sleep. After considerable reflection, he grabs a white t-shirt and on the front writes "I'M MARCHING" and on the back "ARE YOU?". The t-shirt receives mixed reactions at school. At practice, Guzzo elbows Quinn in the face, but loudly claims it was an accident. After, Guzzo punches him in the chest and face. That night at dinner, Ma forbids Quinn from going to the march. They fight, but eventually reconcile with a hug.

On Wednesday evening Jessica had brought a lawyer, Maya Whitmeyer, to talk to Rashad at the hospital. The next morning, Dr. Barnes tells Rashad he is being discharged. English texts him that "school is intense" and "everyone's picked a side." Back at home, Rashad googles **#RashadIsAbsentAgainToday**, and finds countless pictures of himself along with debates about the case online. That evening, Jessica orders Mother's pizza and Rashad's friends come over, along with Spoony. Jessica says she and Pastor Johnson will come to the protest, and Spoony suggests doing a die-in.

On Friday morning, Quinn calls the police and insists on giving a statement about Rashad's case. Later, he sees para-military units descending on Springfield High. Quinn is terrified, but after an encouraging speech from Jill, he reaffirms his commitment to the protest. After school, they march together, and when the die-in takes place, Quinn joins in. He listens to someone read out the names of black people who have been killed by the police, and thanks God that Rashad wasn't one of them.

Rashad gets no sleep the night before the protest. In the morning, Jessica tells him that in the night, she awoke to find David out of bed and staring into Rashad's room. Before leaving

the house, Rashad removes the bandages from his nose so everyone can see what Paul did to him. At the protest, Rashad is stunned to see so many people he knows: his friends, Tiffany, Mr. Fisher, Mrs. Tracey, his ROTC comrades, Pastor Johnson, Katie Lansing, and Clarissa. Even more surprising, however, his seeing his father show up. During the die-in, while Berry shouts out a list of names of black people killed by the police, tears stream from Rashad's eyes.

The final chapter is narrated by Quinn and Rashad, who lock eyes. Quinn wants Rashad to know that he sees him, and Rashad wants the world to know that he is "present."



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Rashad Butler – Rashad is one of the two central characters in the book. He is a 17-year-old African-American junior at Springfield Central High. Under pressure from his father, David, he participates in ROTC, although he does not particularly enjoy it. He loves art, hanging out with his best friends English, Shannon, and Carlos, and dancing at parties. He has a crush on Tiffany Watts, and hopes to hook up with her at **Jill's party**. He is on his way to Jill's when he is falsely accused of stealing from Jerry's Corner Mart and is brutally beaten and arrested by Officer Paul Galluzzo. Recovering in the hospital from a broken nose and ribs, Rashad feels embarrassed by the attention being drawn to his case in the media. However, under the influence of his brother, Spoony, and after conversations about the Civil Rights movement with Shirley Fitzgerald, he becomes more passionate about standing up for justice. At the end of the novel, he is proud to fight against police brutality on behalf of all black people—especially those who were killed by the police.

Quinn Collins – Quinn is the other main character in the novel. He is white and a senior at Springfield Central High. His father was a soldier who was killed in Afghanistan, and throughout the novel Quinn struggles with the responsibilities his father's absence creates and the challenge of living up to his legacy. He is a dutiful son to Ma and older brother to Willy, but sometimes still gets into trouble, for example for stealing his mother's bourbon. Quinn accidentally witnesses Rashad's violent arrest at Jerry's, and is left feeling confused and troubled by what he saw. His discomfort is magnified by the fact that Paul Galluzzo has served as a father figure to him ever since Quinn's real father died. Over the course of the novel Quinn struggles to define his own beliefs about race and racism, at times attempting to erase the incident at Jerry's from his mind. However, by the end of the novel he has come to fervently believe in the importance of fighting for racial justice.

Paul Galluzzo – Paul is Guzzo's older brother. Like Guzzo, he is an "enormous," powerfully-built white man. After Quinn's

father's death, he promised to support Quinn and has acted as a father figure to him. Inspired by Quinn's dad, he decides to be a police officer in order to make a difference. However, rather than having a positive impact on the world, he violently beats Rashad while arresting him for a crime he didn't commit. After the incident, Paul refuses to admit any wrongdoing and demands loyalty from those around him.

David Butler – David is Rashad and Spoony's father and Jessica's husband. He has traditional, conservative ideas about discipline, duty, and success, and tends towards "respectability politics" on racial issues. He served in the military and the police force before taking an office job, and always encourages Rashad to join the military because he thinks this is the best thing a black man can do in America. David has a difficult relationship with Spoony, whose political beliefs and other choices he vocally disapproves of. Toward the end of the novel, David admits to Rashad that while working as a police officer, he shot an unarmed black man, Darnell Shackelford, leaving him paralyzed. For most of his life, David has not been able to reckon with his own wrongdoing. However, toward the end of the novel he embraces the importance of protesting police brutality, and in doing so acknowledges his complicity in this issue.

Jessica Butler – Jessica is Rashad and Spoony's mother. She is a kind, caring person who Rashad describes as a peacekeeper within the family, always trying to settle disputes between others and keep everyone happy. She is religious and perhaps a little conservative—Rashad is shocked to hear her use the word "asshole" to describe Paul Galluzzo. Although she is initially nervous about participating in the protest, in the end she does so with pride.

Spoony Butler – Spoony is Rashad's older brother. He works for UPS and lives with his girlfriend, Berry, in their own apartment. Rebellious against his father's wishes, he wears his hair in dreadlocks and dresses in a style that David insists makes him look like a "criminal." In reality, Spoony is passionate and dedicated to fighting for racial justice, and he is instrumental in highlighting Paul's attack on Rashad as part of a larger social and political issue. He is a role model to Rashad.

Ma – Ma is Quinn and Willy's mom (we never learn her first name). She works long night shifts at a warehouse, and struggles with the burdens of being a widow and a single mother raising her children on a low income. She is loving but can be strict with Quinn, often reminding him of the importance of living up to his father's legacy. Although she at first opposes Quinn's participation in the protest, he is able to persuade her that his father would have supported Quinn standing up for his principles.

Quinn's Father – Quinn's father was a soldier who died in Afghanistan. We never learn his first name, though people in the town often refer to him by his nickname, "Saint Springfield." Quinn's father was by all accounts a heroic figure who, when he

was not on duty, spent his free time volunteering at a soup kitchen.

Jill – Jill is Paul and Guzzo’s cousin. She attends Springfield Central High, and is known for throwing great parties. Quinn has a crush on her. Jill is independent and strong-minded; despite growing up in the close-knit Galluzzo family, she refuses to support Paul after Rashad’s arrest and becomes one of the key organizers of the protest. She and Quinn develop a close friendship over the course of the novel, and she inspires him to let go of his fears about participating in activism.

Guzzo – Guzzo is one of Quinn’s best friends. He is white and, according to Quinn, “enormous.” He is Paul’s younger brother, and after the incident at Jerry’s remains fiercely defensive of Paul. He insists that political correctness has gone “too far” and that accusations of racism are getting out of hand. After Quinn comes to school wearing a t-shirt that reads: “I’m MARCHING... ARE YOU?” Guzzo “accidentally” elbows Quinn during **basketball** practice, and after practice punches him in the face.

English Jones – English is one of Rashad’s best friends. He is extremely handsome, kind, and captain of the **basketball** team. English is at first concerned when tensions over Rashad’s arrest threaten appear to threaten the basketball season, but eventually insists on the importance of protest and, with Quinn, decides to name a new play after Rashad.

Carlos Greene – Carlos is the third of Rashad’s best friends. Every year he auditions for the **basketball** team, and every year he is unsuccessful, something that his friends tease him about. Carlos is a graffiti artist whose tag is LOS(T). After Rashad’s arrest he spray-paints the words RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY in front of Springfield Central High, thereby instigating the hashtag **#RashadIsAbsentAgainToday**.

Katie Lansing – Katie is a white woman who is buying beer at Jerry’s when she mistakenly trips over Rashad. This accident provokes Paul and the cashier to accuse Rashad of stealing, thereby leading to his violent arrest. Katie comes to the hospital to offer to testify that Rashad was innocent, and joins the protest at the end of the novel.

Shirley Fitzgerald – Shirley Fitzgerald is an elderly black widow who volunteers at the gift shop in the hospital where Rashad is recovering from his wounds. She is kind to Rashad, and they strike up a friendship. She tells him about her memories of the Civil Rights movement, admitting Rashad that at the time she was too scared to join in with the action, and that she regrets it now.

Darnell Shackelford – Darnell Shackelford is a young black man who was being robbed by a white man when David (then working as a cop) was called to assist. Mistaking Darnell for the mugger, David shot him, assuming that the inhaler he was pulling from his bag was a gun. Darnell was left paralyzed from the waist down.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Shannon Pushcart – Shannon is another of Rashad’s best friends.

Tiffany Watts – Tiffany is a student at Springfield Central High who Rashad has a crush on. He describes her as “the baddest girl in the eleventh grade.”

Will (“Willy”) Collins – Will is Quinn’s 12-year-old brother. He plays soccer and loves video games, and feels a lot of admiration and loyalty toward Quinn.

Mrs. Cambi – Mrs. Cambi is Quinn’s neighbor, who often looks after Willy on weekend nights while Ma is at work.

Dwyer – Dwyer is one of Quinn’s best friends. He is white, plays on the basketball team, and expresses anxieties about how the protest will impact the team. Ultimately, he chooses to remain loyal to Paul and Guzzo during the tensions over Rashad’s arrest.

Clarissa – Clarissa is the nurse who treats Rashad while he is in the hospital. She is kind and friendly, compliments Rashad on his **drawing**, and attends the protest.

Dr. Barnes – Dr. Barnes is the doctor who treats Rashad in hospital.

Berry Jones – Berry is Spooky’s girlfriend and English’s older sister. She is smart, attends law school, and, like Spooky, is passionately involved in anti-racist activism. Rashad describes her as beautiful and “everybody’s first crush.”

Coach Carney – Coach Carney is the coach of the **basketball** team. After the incident at Jerry’s, he encourages members of the basketball team to focus on the scouts who will be attending the upcoming season’s games and forbids them from attending the protest.

Pastor Jerome Johnson – Pastor Johnson is the Butler family’s pastor. He comes to visit Rashad in hospital and tells him that everything happens for a reason, which annoys Rashad. However, Rashad is happy when Pastor Johnson comes to the protest, bringing a large group of people with him.

Mr. Galluzzo – Mr. Galluzzo is Paul and Guzzo’s father.

Mrs. Galluzzo – Mrs. Galluzzo is Paul and Guzzo’s mother. She chastises Jill, her niece, when Jill fails to express sufficient loyalty to Paul.

Jill’s Mom – Jill’s mom, whose name we do not learn, also scolds Jill for not showing enough support for Paul.

Nam – Nam is a student at Springfield Central High and the point guard on the **basketball** team.

Marc Blair – Marc Blair is a teenager who once bullied Quinn. In defense of Quinn, Paul beat him up. Although it isn’t listed explicitly, there is an implication that Marc is black.

Ms. Webber – is one of Quinn’s teachers. She refuses to talk directly about Rashad’s arrest and appears to unjustly pick on a

black student, EJ. She sends EJ and Molly out when they protest this unfair treatment.

Molly – Molly is a white student at Springfield Central High. Along with EJ, she objects to Ms. Webber’s apparent racism and is sent out.

E.J. – EJ is a black student at Springfield Central High who is unfairly picked on by Ms. Webber. When he protests, he is sent out.

Ms. Tracey – Ms. Tracey is Quinn’s English teacher. Following Rashad’s arrest, she assigns the first chapter of Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man*, “Battle Royale,” which depicts a disturbing scene of racist violence. She sobs in class thinking about Rashad, and attends the protest at the end of the novel.

Mr. Fisher – Mr. Fisher is a history teacher at Springfield Central High. He encourages the students to organize the protest, telling them that they are living in a “historical moment.” He attends the protest along with Ms. Tracey.

Claudia James – Claudia James is a woman who filmed Rashad’s arrest on her phone and distributes the video through social media. She supports Rashad, affirming that he was a victim of police brutality.

Chief Killabrew – Chief Killabrew is Rashad’s ROTC leader. He sends Rashad a message of support while he is in the hospital, and attends the protest.

Tooms – Tooms is a black student at Springfield Central High and a member of the **basketball** team. Along with Quinn, he reads passages from Ralph Ellison’s “Battle Royale” aloud in Ms. Tracey’s English class, dedicating it to Rashad.

Mrs. Erlich – Mrs. Erlich is Quinn’s trigonometry teacher. During class, she writes statistics about police brutality on the white board, telling her students that “the numbers don’t lie.”

movement indicate that police racism and brutality are not recent problems, but rather a long-lasting, substantial part of American history. For several of the characters, and particularly Quinn, the incident at Jerry’s serves as a wake-up call to the reality of racism in America. Crucially, this extends beyond the particular issue of police brutality and into less severe manifestations of racism, such as the differential treatment of black students versus white students at Springfield High.

Not only does the novel depict the different ways in which racism manifests itself in everyday life, it also explores the fundamental reasons that racism exists, showing how it can be perpetuated even by those who do not mean to cause harm. The novel indicates that police brutality is based on the psychological foundation of stereotypes, hypocrisy, and fear, which are exacerbated by the abuse of power and excessive authority. Quinn realizes that he harbors an irrational fear of black people based on the stereotypes that black people are tough, violent “thugs.” Although he does not consciously harbor racist beliefs, his subconscious fear causes him to behave in a way that perpetuates racism.

The novel also emphasizes that while white people may be more susceptible to believing such negative stereotypes, these stereotypes can also affect black people too. Toward the end of the narrative, Rashad’s father, David, reveals that while he was working as a cop he shot a black man, Darnell Shackelford, whom he believed was the perpetrator of a crime. In fact, it was David’s own unconscious bias which led him to believe this; in reality, Darnell was being attacked by a white man and was simply trying to pull out his inhaler, not a gun. This incident suggests that the animosity between black people and the police is bigger than individuals—rather than being grounded in the race or beliefs of a given police officer, it is a *structural* issue. David’s conscious and subconscious biases, along with his role as a police officer, compel him to shoot someone who looks like his own son. This demonstrates the insidious power of racism and suggests that it is perhaps unrealistic to imagine that anyone—even black people themselves—can erase racist stereotypes from their thinking on their own. Instead, these stereotypes must be tackled collectively (as the students and teachers at Springfield Central High attempt through their organization of the protest) in order to create lasting change.

Racism and stereotypes do not just impact the way the black characters in the novel interact with the police. Rather, racism affects many aspects of the black characters’ lives. For example, David disapproves of Spooky’s clothes and dreadlocks, and when Rashad tells his father the story of what happened at Jerry’s, one of the first questions David asks is if Rashad was wearing baggy pants. The reasoning behind this is that black hairstyles and clothing associated with black culture (particularly poorer black communities) are associated with negative stereotypes about black people.

David believes that black people should strive to defy such



THEMES

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RACISM, STEREOTYPING, AND POLICE BRUTALITY

All American Boys is centered around an incident of police brutality: Paul Galluzzo’s violent arrest of Rashad at Jerry’s convenience store. The novel shows how the attack shocks and disturbs the town of Springfield, while also emphasizing that this incident is representative of a broader problem of racist police violence that affects the entire country. Meanwhile, Mrs. Fitzgerald’s stories about the civil rights

stereotypes, which is part of the reason why he embraces police and military **uniforms** as a standard of discipline, responsibility, and assimilation to white, “American” culture. Thinking like this is often called “respectability politics,” a phrase that refers to the pressure for minorities to conform to a (conservative) idea of respectability as a way of protecting oneself from racism. David’s actions prove that both black and white people can be guilty of inflicting respectability politics on black people. As the novel shows, the problem with respectability politics is that it places the blame and responsibility of repelling racism onto black people. This logic is backwards, because it is black people who are the *victims* of racism; regardless of how they dress and behave, they cannot exempt themselves from racism, and should not be forced to take on that responsibility.

Another important aspect of the novel’s portrayal of racism lies in the issue of stereotypes and hypocrisy. As a young black man, Rashad is subject to the racist assumptions that he is violent, steals, and uses drugs. In reality, he does none of these things; he specifically mentions that he has never stolen anything and, later in the novel, English points out that Rashad has also never used drugs. Quinn, meanwhile, who is celebrated as an “all-American boy” whose father is a town hero, admits to having stolen alcohol from Jerry’s and smoked marijuana. While the novel doesn’t suggest that either of these acts is particularly unforgivable, it does show that Quinn’s white privilege allows him to escape from such misdemeanors without consequences, whereas Rashad is punished simply for the *assumption* that he steals. Racial stereotyping is thus revealed to be self-perpetuating, creating a vicious cycle of negative expectations, stereotypes, and brutality.

The novel was written in response to the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown, two black teenagers shot and killed by white people who were not convicted of the murders. Martin was 17 (a year older than Rashad) and only carrying a bag of skittles when George Zimmerman shot him; the detail that Rashad is holding a bag of chips when he is arrested and beaten by Paul recalls Martin and the skittles. Mike Brown, meanwhile, was killed by a police officer while his hands were in the air. Again, this is linked to the brutality with which Paul treats Rashad even though he is unarmed and innocent. The killings of Martin and Brown helped spark the Black Lives Matter movement, which tackles the issues of anti-black racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration. *All-American Boys* contributes to the ongoing conversation around these issues and highlights the way in which young people are often at the forefront of anti-racist activism in the contemporary moment.



AMERICAN CULTURE, VALUES, AND PATRIOTISM

The title *All-American Boys* indicates from the outset that the novel is concerned with American

culture and values. The novel is set in Springfield, a seemingly average town in an unnamed state in the US. Like the rest of the country, Springfield has become increasingly diverse in recent years; at one point, Quinn mentions Paul telling him that the white population of Springfield has fallen from 85% to 37%. In the midst of these demographic changes, the town remains committed to prioritizing American values and patriotism, and many of the characters seek to live up to an American ideal. The military is revered by most characters in the novel, with Quinn’s father being celebrated as a hero after being killed in Afghanistan. Both Rashad’s family and the Galluzzo family watch football as a way of coming together and momentarily putting aside the conflict in their lives. Indeed, throughout the novel different sports are framed as embodying the American values of healthy competition, aspiration, and achievement. More generally, the novel’s emphasis on family, community, loyalty, and ambition can be traced to the aim of living up to an American ideal.

Both Quinn and Rashad embody American values and live up to the title “All-American boys” in different ways. Quinn is the son of a soldier killed in Afghanistan who is so idolized by the people in their town that he is nicknamed “Saint Springfield.” Quinn plays on the **basketball** team and is a dutiful son and brother to Ma and Willy, living up to the values of strength, loyalty, and service that his father embodied. Crucially, Quinn is also white, which the novel suggests makes it easier for people to acknowledge him as an “All-American boy.” Rashad is also the son of an ex-serviceman—his father, David, was in both the army and the police force—and is even an ROTC cadet. Like Quinn, he is a loyal son and brother. However, the main incident of the novel revolves around the fact that Rashad is not *recognized* as an “All-American boy.” Instead, he is seen as a criminal and “thug.” Rather than being a reflection of Rashad’s actual qualities, this is purely based on his race. As a result, the novel suggests that black people are sometimes excluded from the idea of “Americanness” that exists in the popular imagination, despite being just as American as white people.

There is also another significant way in which the novel suggests that sometimes it is necessary to be critical of American culture and patriotism. While the institutions of the police and military theoretically embody American values of justice and freedom, they are also shown to be a source of prejudice and brutality. This tension emerges in Quinn and Rashad’s reflections about the police. Quinn comes to acknowledge the irony of the fact that his father served in Afghanistan in order to fight for freedom, yet at home in the US the freedom and wellbeing of black people are regularly threatened by the police. Rashad, meanwhile, is deeply disturbed by the revelation that his father shot an innocent, unarmed black man, Darnell Shackelford, while working as a police officer. While serving in the police is widely thought to indicate positive American values and patriotic loyalty, this is

not always the case. Rather, the police force often inflicts harm on black Americans rather than protecting and serving them.



FATHERS AND SONS

Both Quinn and Rashad have significant, but troubled, relationships with their fathers, and both suffer under their fathers' expectations for them.

Quinn's dad was, by all accounts, an ideal father, dedicated to his family and community. At the same time, he was absent during Quinn's childhood, at first temporarily while he was serving in the military, and then permanently after he was killed in Afghanistan. This is painful on a personal level for Quinn, and it also leaves his family struggling as a low-income, single-parent household. At a young age, Quinn is forced to assume a significant level of responsibility in order to help Ma and serve as a caregiver and role model to his younger brother, Willy. On top of this, he must live up to the expectations created by his father's legacy. Particularly after death, Quinn's father becomes an untouchable, "saint"-like figure to the Springfield community. As a result, there is no hope of Quinn filling his shoes—yet he worries that everyone expects him to. This leads him to feel resentful of his father, despite his great love for him.

The void left by Quinn's father also makes it difficult for Quinn to condemn the actions of Paul. Quinn explains that after his father died, Paul assumed the role of an older brother/father figure to Quinn, teaching him **basketball** techniques, looking out for him, and accepting him as an honorary member of the Galluzzo family. In the same way that sons feel pressure to honor and obey their fathers, Quinn feels grateful and indebted to Paul and doesn't want to betray him. On the other hand, not only is Paul not Quinn's real father, but he also embodies values that Quinn disagrees with. Ultimately, Quinn must struggle to reconcile his father's legacy, Paul's actions, and his own beliefs in order to decide how to behave. The conclusion of this struggle emerges when Ma asks Quinn what his father would think of him going to the protest, and Quinn replies: "I don't know... but I know he stood up for what he believed in." This moment represents Quinn's ability to honor his father's legacy while not being constrained by it. At this point, he becomes his own man.

Rashad also has a difficult relationship with his father, whose legacy he struggles to live up to. David is a strict disciplinarian, with uncompromising ideas about the right way to be a good, responsible man. He all but forces Rashad to participate in ROTC, even though Rashad has little interest in the army. Even more challenging, after the incident at Jerry's, David is suspicious of Rashad's version of events and suggests that Rashad may be partially responsible for what happened. This causes tension and conflict in the family, and raises a difficult question: why is David so harsh to his son, especially when Jessica and Spoony behave in a much more loving, understanding manner? On one level, the novel suggests that

this may simply be the nature of many father/son relationships. The young male characters constantly face pressure not only from their actual fathers, but also from father figures, such as Paul and Coach Carney. At times, it seems almost impossible to live up to the expectations set by these older male figures.

On the other hand, the novel also explores specific reasons why David behaves in such a severe manner toward his son. For example, David notes that after Spoony did not listen to his advice about joining ROTC, it became more difficult for him to get a job. David clearly feels guilt over shooting Darnell, and his upset stomach during Rashad's week in the hospital suggests that even as he projects a tough, uncompromising persona, in reality he is tormented and terrified by what has happened to his son. Finally, when Jessica tells Rashad about his father looking in on him while he was asleep, it becomes indisputable that David's harsh actions partially come from his own fears for Rashad. Given that David himself shot an unarmed black man, how can he expect his sons to be spared such treatment? David turns to extreme discipline as a way of allaying these fears and asserting a sense of control in the face of his own powerlessness to change the racist society in which he lives.

In the end, however, David's feelings of powerlessness are challenged by the actions of his own sons. While at first David is resistant to the prospect of coming to the protest, the fact that he eventually decides to join shows that he is following his sons' lead and allowing them to teach him something. Just as Quinn becomes his own man toward the end of the narrative, Rashad and Spoony assert their independence through their involvement in the protest, and in doing so serve as a source of strength and inspiration to their father.



MATURITY, DISCIPLINE, AND RESPONSIBILITY

In many ways, *All-American Boys* is a book about the challenges faced by teenagers who are emerging from the innocence of childhood and must learn to face the harsh realities of the adult world with maturity and responsibility. As teenage boys go, both Quinn and Rashad are already fairly responsible, due to the fact that they both face rather significant challenges—Rashad as a young black man, and Quinn as the child of a single parent who lost his father under tragic circumstances. Both boys are also fairly capable of self-discipline. Rashad gets good grades and faithfully shows up to ROTC each week; Quinn is also a dedicated student and member of the **basketball** team, and a responsible older brother to Willy. Furthermore, the alternating first-person narrative shows that both boys are conscientious, taking time to think about people other than themselves and to figure out the confusing and often disturbing world in which they live.

At the same time, Quinn and Rashad are also normal teenage boys, and much of the novel highlights their oscillation between

maturity and immaturity. While on the one hand they are focused on schoolwork and family duties, Quinn and Rashad are also preoccupied with partying, drinking, and girls. Quinn especially engages in minor disobedient behavior, such as stealing Ma's bourbon, paying adults to buy him alcohol from Jerry's, and occasionally smoking marijuana. The excitement over **Jill's party** encapsulates the more fun-loving, less responsible aspect of the boys' personalities. Both Quinn and Rashad look forward to getting drunk and hitting on the girls they have crushes on, Jill and Tiffany. Although they acknowledge that parties like these often get broken up by the cops, prior to Rashad's arrest at Jerry's neither of them takes the imposition of the law particularly seriously. While not reckless, both boys are happy to put aside their responsibilities at times in order to have fun.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that it is important to balance this carefree way of being with the maturity, discipline, and responsibility that comes with being an adult. Although adolescence inevitably involves facing the difficult realities of the world—such as racism, corruption, brutality, and inequality—it is also unfair that young people like Rashad are forced to confront these injustices in such a violent, personal manner.

In many ways, Rashad's brutal arrest recalls the deadly shooting of Trayvon Martin, who was fatally shot by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch coordinator, in Florida. Both Rashad and Trayvon were teenaged black men carrying nothing but snacks; where Rashad is holding a bag of chips he is about to purchase from Jerry's, Trayvon was famously carrying a bag of skittles. The snacks point to the innocence of the two boys. While adults around them perceive them to be older and more threatening than they actually are, in reality both are still children and pose no harm to anyone. Thus, while the book suggests that becoming more mature and responsible is an important part of being a teenager, it is also unfair that certain teenagers—especially black teenagers—are forced to grow up too soon and are perceived as being older than they really are.



HEROES VS. VILLAINS

Many people in Springfield have a rather simplistic understanding of what it means to be a hero versus a villain, but the novel challenges this simplistic view, suggesting that such an easy division is not always possible. Several characters are framed as heroes, most notably Quinn's father (who is nicknamed "Saint Springfield") and Paul Galluzzo. Rashad's father David is also something of a hero figure, in that he is presented as a model of discipline and service. Crucially, these three figures are all connected by their involvement in the police and/or military, which relates to the theme of patriotism, as servicemen are commonly framed as American heroes who dedicate their lives to their countries and communities.

The events of the narrative, however, complicate the idea that servicemen are necessarily "heroes" in a straightforward sense. Both Paul and David are revealed to have wrongfully assaulted/shot young, unarmed black men. Crucially, it is not just these acts themselves that sully the impression of these men as heroes, but also the way that both men react to the wrongs they have committed. Paul refuses to acknowledge any guilt about his brutal attack on Rashad, and he demands loyalty from those around him. He expects this loyalty to trump people's individual reasoning about whether he was in the right, even given the fact that there is a video recording showing his unnecessary force, and some characters witnessed it first-hand. This expectation of loyalty indicates a negative side to the phenomenon of celebrating certain individuals as heroes. Calling someone a hero can sometimes mean that this person is taken to be infallible, when in reality, everyone makes mistakes and should be held accountable when they do. Furthermore, Paul's status as a hero obscures the power he wields over others, particularly Rashad. He may ostensibly serve the community through his work in the police force, but he also abuses the power and authority bestowed on him.

David's secrecy about the time when he shot Darnell suggests a similar abuse of power. Rather than holding himself accountable and admitting his mistake to Rashad, David keeps the incident a secret from his son for most of his life. This indicates that David wants to continue to be a hero in the eyes of Rashad, but this actually stops him from behaving in an honest, responsible, morally upstanding manner. The knowledge that his father shot an unarmed black man, while painful, helps Rashad to deepen his understanding of the issue of police racism and brutality. Even though this revelation compromises David's image as a hero in some ways, it is also a heroic act in others, as it involves David putting aside his own ego and shame in order to tell his son the truth.

In addition to complicating the nature of heroism and heroes, the novel also resists portraying any character as a villain in a straightforward sense. While Paul emerges as the antagonist, Quinn's narration emphasizes that Paul is not all bad. Indeed, much of Quinn's difficulty in coming to terms with what happened to Rashad revolves around his inability to reconcile the two sides of Paul that he has seen. On the one hand, ever since the death of Quinn's father, Paul has looked out for Quinn, selflessly mentoring and protecting him. Quinn struggles to understand how the Paul he knows as a kind older brother figure can be the same Paul who brutally harmed Rashad, and this confusion is represented through Quinn's fixation on the look on Paul's face while he slammed Rashad to the ground. The novel ultimately does not exonerate Paul, but neither does it suggest that he is "only" a villain with no redeeming qualities. Rather, it shows that classifying people into heroes and villains obscures the more complicated reality that people can be kind and selfless in some instances while

being cruel in others, while also emphasizing the role of racism in this inconsistency. Indeed, Paul's racism is the main reason why he emerges as more of a villain than a hero, even as this binary ultimately proves to be too simplistic to represent the reality of life.



SYMBOLS

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



UNIFORMS

In the novel, uniforms are at times presented as a symbol of discipline, respectability, and belonging—and at other times as a sign of excessive authority and danger. As someone who served in ROTC, the military, and the police force, David is the character most closely associated with uniforms and is the one who most strongly believes in the value of having a uniform. He sees wearing a uniform as a source of pride and a sign that someone is part of something bigger than themselves, that they are disciplined, and that they serve others. Rashad, however, feels more ambivalent about uniforms. He wears his ROTC uniform reluctantly, finding it somewhat embarrassing to have attention drawn to the fact that he is a cadet. He also notices a discrepancy in the feelings his father has about uniforms. While David praises people who wear a police or military uniform, he is disdainful of Spoony's "brown uniform"—the uniform of UPS workers. This difference highlights David's attachment to a very narrow and perhaps mistaken understanding of discipline, morality, and achievement.



BASKETBALL

Many of the main characters in the novel are on the Springfield Central High basketball team, including Quinn, English, Guzzo, and Shannon. The characters take basketball very seriously, largely because it represents their chance to secure a full ride to college. Furthermore, basketball is also shown to be significant as a way of putting aside one's personal issues in order to work together as a team. Coach Carney emphasizes the importance of leaving the outside world at the door, putting aside differences in order to function as one unit. At first, Quinn is convinced by Coach's advice and wants the team to act as a "colorblind" whole, where racial difference doesn't matter. However, after Coach bans members of the basketball team from attending the protest, Quinn becomes more suspicious of the demand that the team forget about the outside world. He comes to believe that basketball is *not* separate from the issues of the outside world, and in order to be a good team it is necessary to confront these

issues, rather than ignoring them.



JILL'S PARTY

Jill's party takes place on the day the novel begins. Although Quinn and Rashad hardly know each other, they are united by their excitement to attend the party and their hopes of hooking up with one of the girls there (Jill and Tiffany, respectively). The party thus represents the normal, frivolous matters that occupy the minds of teenagers. Of course, Rashad is unable to actually attend Jill's party due to his violent arrest. Quinn's ability to attend the party—and the fact that Jill hosts the party in the first place while only getting into very minor trouble with the cops—highlights Quinn and Jill's white privilege. Racism prevents Rashad from acting like a normal teenager, focused on girls, drinking, and partying. It forces him to grow up more quickly and confront the most difficult, painful issues of life at a time when he should be able to just have fun with his friends. Jill's party thus symbolizes the fact that although Rashad and Quinn are residents of the same town, in many ways they live in separate worlds.



RASHAD'S DRAWING

Rashad has been into art since he was a child, when he was inspired by newspaper comics to start drawing. As he's gotten older, he has developed more sophisticated sources of inspiration, such as the Harlem Renaissance painter Aaron Douglas. While he is in the hospital, Rashad creates a drawing of the incident at Jerry's. The drawing impresses the adults around him, such as Clarissa and Jessica. They are impressed not only by Rashad's technical skill, but also by his creative response to the incident. Rashad's drawing is thus a sign of the maturity Rashad is forced to develop as a young black man confronting the harsh realities of racism and violence. At the same time, it also indicates Rashad's ability to take control of the narrative surrounding his arrest. While he spends much of the novel being taunted by endless news items in which commentators and community members speculate on what happened to him, in his drawing Rashad is able to assert himself and present his own interpretation of what took place at Jerry's.



#RASHADISABSENTAGAIN TODAY

After Carlos spray-paints the words RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY outside Springfield Central High, many of the students take pictures of it and begin discussing Rashad's arrest online with the hashtag #RashadIsAbsentAgainToday. The choice of words in this phrase recalls slogans from the Black Lives Matter movement—such as "Say Her Name"—which draw attention the absence of black people harmed and killed by the police and

aim to reverse the erasure of these people from public memory. The slogan is also a reminder that Rashad's arrest has interrupted his education, highlighting the issue of how racism makes it more difficult for black people to access educational opportunities and success. The fact that it is turned into a hashtag also reflects the Black Lives Matter movement, which utilizes online organizing and social media in order to spread its message and gather support. Because online activism and social media are disproportionately associated with young people, #RashadIsAbsentToday also serves as a reminder that young people are powerful and have the ability to positively affect the world around them.

point to the connection between the military and law enforcement as a reason why black people might be wary of the army, rather than seeing it as a good opportunity. On a simpler level, the fact that Rashad doesn't enjoy ROTC and doesn't "need" it perhaps indicates that it is not necessarily such a great idea for him personally to be participating in it.

2. Friday: Quinn Quotes

☞ I wasn't a stand-in for Dad. Nobody could be that. When the IED got him in Afghanistan, he became an instant saint in Springfield. I wasn't him. I'd never be him. But I was still supposed to try. That was my role: the dutiful son, the All-American boy with an All-American fifteen-foot deadeye jump shot and an All-American 3.5 GPA.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Quinn's Father

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Quinn is taking his younger brother, Willy, over to their neighbor's house before going to Jill's party. Quinn explains that ever since his father died, each member of his family has had a different "role" to play. Quinn's role is that of All-American boy: the "dutiful son" who succeeds at school and on the basketball court, thereby living up to his father's heroic legacy. We might assume that Quinn would take pride in these achievements, but there is an undeniable hint of bitterness lurking beneath his words here. The fact that Quinn's father became an "instant saint" in Springfield suggests that Quinn struggles to live under the burden of his father's legacy. Perhaps the fact that his father has become a symbol makes it more difficult for Quinn to process his personal grief after the loss of his dad.

Furthermore, Quinn also feels pressured by the demand to resemble his father, an impossible task given that he is seen less as a real person and more as a "saint" or superhero. Quinn feels resentful that even though he can never live up to his father's mythical status, he is "still supposed to try." This passage thus indicates the negative side of "All-American" ideals and the pressure they impose. Although "All-American" values may be positive, they can become difficult burdens for those who are expected to always live up to them.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Atheneum edition of *All American Boys* published in 2015.

1. Friday: Rashad Quotes

☞ I didn't need ROTC. But I did it, and I did it good, because my dad was pretty much making me. He's one of those dudes who feels like there's no better

opportunity for a black boy in this country than to join the army. That's literally how he always put it. Word for word.

Related Characters: Rashad Butler (speaker), David Butler

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Rashad has just finished Friday afternoon ROTC practice and is looking forward to partying later that evening. He doesn't hate ROTC but doesn't particularly like it either, and in this passage explains that he participates because his dad wants him to. Rashad's words convey his father's rather narrow-minded, judgmental nature. David generally believes that there is only one right way of doing things--his way. David himself was in the army, and because he felt it was a good experience he now believes that there is "no better opportunity for a black boy in this country."

Although there are objective benefits to military service--such as discipline, travel, physical training, free college, and healthcare--there are many people who would disagree with the argument that joining the military is the best thing black American men could do. Some might argue that black people do not have a duty to serve a country that has historically oppressed them, and--as the novel will show--continues to do so in the present. Others might

4. Saturday: Quinn Quotes

☝☝ I begin almost every day the same way: Ma's voice in my head, telling me what I needed to do, what I needed to think about, how I needed to act. But on mornings like this one--or if Coach Carney was making us do suicides up and down the court for fifteen minutes, or when Dwyer dropped another five-pounder on either side of the bar on my last rep in the weight room--it was Dad's voice in my head, or at least what I thought was his voice. I hadn't heard it in so long, I couldn't even tell if it was his or if I was making it up. Whatever it was, it got me to where I needed to get.

PUSH! If you don't, someone else will. LIFT! If you don't, someone else will. Faster faster, faster, faster FASTER!

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Quinn's Father, Dwyer, Coach Carney, Ma

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Quinn has explained that after seeing what happened to Rashad at Jerry's, he wasn't able to enjoy Jill's party, and was instead haunted by the memory of Paul beating Rashad. He sleeps badly on Friday night, and the next morning wakes up with his dad's voice in his head. Once again, Quinn is shown to be facing enormous pressure. Crucially, this passage indicates that Quinn has internalized the pressure other people put on him, such that he now puts it on himself without anybody else's participation. This is revealed by his statement that he "couldn't even tell" if it is indeed his dad's voice or if he is "making it up." Because his father is dead, Quinn has no way of knowing if his dad would actually be pushing him as hard as he pushes himself--so he remains haunted by a harsh, unrelenting version of his father's legacy.

5. Sunday: Rashad Quotes

☝☝ Honestly, I just wanted to take it easy for the rest of the day. I didn't want to hear Spooky preach about how hard it is to be black, or my father preach about how young people lack pride and integrity, making us easy targets. I didn't even want to think about the preacher preaching about how God is in control of it all, or my mother, my sweet, sweet mother caught in the middle of it all. The referee who blows the whistle but is way too nice to call foul on anyone. That's her. She just wants me to be okay. That's it and that's all. So if football was going to be the thing that took our minds off the mess for at least a few hours, then fine with me.

Related Characters: Rashad Butler (speaker), Jessica Butler, Pastor Jerome Johnson, David Butler, Spooky Butler

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Rashad's family has been with him in the hospital, and earlier in the day their pastor, Jerome Johnson, paid a visit. Although Rashad appreciates that his family cares about him, he becomes stressed over the conflict that emerges between the different visitors. It is a relief, therefore, when a football game comes on TV and Rashad is finally able to relax. This passage explores Rashad's mixed feelings about becoming a symbol, a figure at the center of the debate around police brutality. Everyone around Rashad has a different interpretation about what happened to him and its broader meaning. In the midst of these different interpretations, Rashad as a person gets lost.

Meanwhile, all Rashad wants is to have a moment of peace and harmony. He is less focused on the broader and longer-term repercussions of the incident at Jerry's than on the immediate moment. This is unsurprising, considering that Rashad is injured and overwhelmed by everything that has happened in the past forty-eight hours. On the other hand, his ability to stay calm and prioritize the present is also a sign of maturity; rather than getting caught up in his own head, Rashad focuses on creating the possibility of a few hours of peace.

6. Sunday: Quinn Quotes

☝ I felt like such an ass. I'd quickly convinced myself I had no idea who that kid with Paul was that night. And yeah, there were like a thousand kids in each grade at school, or whatever, but I did know him. Or know of him, really. I'd seen him--Rashad--in that uniform, and it'd made me think of my dad wearing his own at college. How my dad had looked proud in all those pictures.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Quinn's Father, Paul Galluzzo, Rashad Butler

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

At the Galluzzo's family barbecue, Quinn and Jill quietly discuss the incident at Jerry's. Quinn confesses that he witnessed the incident first-hand, and Jill tells him that the boy who was beaten was Rashad, a kid at their school. Quinn is shocked, and his memories of seeing Rashad in his ROTC uniform make him think about his own dad. This train of thought shows how we empathize with others through finding connections and similarities between our lives. Quinn imagines that Rashad must be similar to his dad in some way because of their shared connection to the military. This increases Quinn's empathy for Rashad and makes him feel guilty for having dismissed him as a random stranger. It reminds Quinn that Rashad is a full person with his own life, family, accomplishments, and feelings, and thereby heightens his awareness of the injustice of Paul's actions.

7. Monday: Quinn Quotes

☝ "I mean, it's Paul. This is the same guy I've seen carrying my mom up the front steps, for God's sake." I was thinking about that time Ma got trashed because it was her first wedding anniversary without Dad. Paul had been so gentle. He'd taken the frigging day off just so she didn't have to spend it alone. "She was tanked," I said to Jill. "And he helped her home. I remember him putting her down on the couch and pulling the afghan over her."

"Paulie's always been the good guy."

"That's what I want to think."

Related Characters: Jill, Quinn Collins (speaker), Quinn's

Father, Ma, Paul Galluzzo

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

At school on Monday, Quinn and Jill eat lunch together and discuss the incident at Jerry's. Quinn suddenly recalls a time when Paul beat up another kid called Marc Blair--that time on Quinn's behalf. He struggles to reconcile this memory and his memory of the incident at Jerry's with his impression of Paul as a "good guy," a father figure, and a hero. How can it be that these two different sides of Paul add up to the same person?

Jill and Quinn realize that they have both trusted Paul as a "good" man and have assumed that they can rely on their own instincts about him. Note that the memory Quinn recalls here of Paul taking care of his mother on her first wedding anniversary without her husband undeniably shows Paul in a positive light. Clearly, he is capable of acting in a selfless, nurturing, even heroic way. Yet this does not erase the reality of what he did to Rashad. Quinn and Jill must now reckon with the fact that Paul may act like a hero to the other white people who make up his friends and family, while also being a racist who brutally mistreats black people like Marc and Rashad.

9. Tuesday: Quinn Quotes

☝ "Why does it automatically gotta be Rashad's fault? Why do people think he was on drugs? That dude doesn't do drugs. He's ROTC, man. His dad would kick his ass. You do drugs, asshole."

"Just a puff here and there, man, come on. I don't do drugs."

"I've seen you smoking a blunt. Metcalf sold you that shit. Metcalf--a white dude, by the way. Man, that shit could have been laced with crack, or fucking Drano. You don't know what you talkin' 'bout."

Related Characters: Quinn Collins, English Jones (speaker), Rashad Butler

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

On Tuesday, Quinn arrives at school to find the words "RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY" spray-painted in

front of the school building. At practice, he asks English if he knows who did it, and English gets angry. English becomes especially furious after Quinn implies that Rashad might have been on drugs at Jerry's. As English's words indicate, Quinn's thinking is based in negative stereotypes about black people, which associates them--and young black men especially--with drugs and criminality. It is especially ironic that Quinn makes this suggestion given that, as English points out, Quinn himself smokes marijuana whereas Rashad doesn't. The power of stereotypes is so strong that it overrides common sense. Their exchange also shows that Quinn gets away with engaging in minor criminal activity, whereas Rashad is assumed to commit crimes even though he is actually innocent. Quinn has never been accused of theft or taking drugs, even though he has committed both these acts. Rashad hasn't, but racist stereotypes lead other people to assume he has.

Now I was thinking about how, if I wanted to, I could walk away and not think about Rashad, in a way that English or Shannon or Tooms or any of the guys at school who were not white could not. Even if they didn't know Rashad, even if for some reason, they hated Rashad, they couldn't just ignore what happened to him; they couldn't walk away. They were probably afraid, too. Afraid of people like Paul. Afraid of cops in general. Hell, they were probably afraid of people like me. I didn't blame them. I'd be afraid too, even if I was a frigging house like Tooms. But I didn't have to be because my shield was that I was white. It didn't matter that I knew Paul. I could be all the way across the country in California and I'd still be white, cops and everyone else would still see me as just a "regular kid," an "All-American" boy. "Regular." "All American." White. Fuck.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Paul Galluzzo, Tooms, Shannon Pushcart, English Jones, Rashad Butler

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

After a heated exchange with English, Quinn has become aware of the way in which his whiteness has shielded him from the reality of racism and police violence. Ever since Rashad's arrest, he has been desperate to "forget" about the whole thing; however, he has now realized that it would be wrong to try and forget what happened. He is beginning to understand that dismissing issues of race is not an adequate

response to racism. Rather than helping smooth things over, this dismissal actually perpetuates the harm of racism.

This passage also reveals the evolution of Quinn's thought as he begins to understand his own white privilege and grow suspicious of ideas that he has always considered positive or neutral, such as "regular" or "All-American." There might not be anything inherently wrong with these concepts, but they have negative connotations because, as Quinn realizes, they do not apply to everyone equally. They bestow benefits on Quinn that he has not earned, and make life difficult for Rashad and other black people for no good reason.

10. Tuesday: Rashad Quotes

There was a cabbie who straight up said he wouldn't pick me up if he saw me at night. That really pissed me off. I mean, I had heard Spooky talk about that

for years. I never took cabs (the bus was cheaper), but he was always going on and on about how he could never catch a cab because of the way he looked. But I didn't look nothing like Spooky. Nothing. I mean, I wear jeans and T-shirts, and he wears jeans and T-shirts, so we look alike in that way, but who doesn't wear jeans and T-shirts? Every kid in my school does. And sneakers. And sweatshirts. And jackets. So what exactly does a kid who "looks like me" look like? Seriously, what the hell?

Related Characters: Rashad Butler (speaker), Spooky Butler

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

On Tuesday, Rashad wakes up and watches yet another news item about his arrest. Although there is an interview in which the woman who shot the video of the incident, Claudia James, defends Rashad, other interviewees express support for Paul. Rashad is horrified to hear a cab driver openly expressing the view that he would not pick up Rashad simply because he is black. Although the cab driver does not phrase his thoughts so explicitly, Rashad's reaction shows that this is what he implies. There is nothing about Rashad that looks different or suspicious--except, in the eyes of certain people, the color of his skin.

While Quinn is undergoing a major transformation from ignorance to maturity about racial issues, this passage suggests that a linked evolution may be happening for

Rashad. Although as a black person Rashad has never had the luxury of being ignorant about racism, he still has not yet confronted the brutal depth of racist thinking. Ever since the incident at Jerry's, the full extent of racism has become suddenly clear, and Rashad is now forced to reckon with the distorted, unfair image of himself that lives in the eyes of racist people.

11. Wednesday: Quinn Quotes

☝ If I didn't want the violence to remain, I had to do a hell of a lot more than just say the right things and not say the wrong things.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

In Ms. Tracey's English class, the students are reading "Battle Royale," the first chapter of Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. Quinn and Tooms have decided to read the text aloud and dedicate it to Rashad. Quinn is horrified by the racist violence featured in the chapter and at first tries to persuade himself that such violence is confined to the past. However, with dread he realizes that such assurances are completely false. Racist violence persists in the present, and by not actively taking a stand against racism Quinn has been complicit in its existence. Once again, it is clear that Quinn is experiencing an evolution in his thinking. Whereas before he thought it was sufficient to keep his head down, stay neutral, and ignore acts of injustice, he now realizes that this is deeply inadequate. He must take action.

12. Wednesday: Rashad Quotes

☝ My dad, *my dad*, had paralyzed an unarmed kid, a black kid, and I had had no

idea. My dad shot a kid. I mean, to me, my father was the model of discipline and courage. Sure, he was stern, and sometimes judgmental, but I always felt like he meant well. But to that kid--and now my head was reeling--to that kid, my dad was no different than Officer Galluzzo. Another trigger-happy cop who was quick to assume and even quicker to shoot.

Related Characters: Rashad Butler (speaker), Paul Galluzzo, Darnell Shackelford, David Butler

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

David has come to visit Rashad in hospital before work and revealed that while he was working as a cop, he shot an unarmed black man named Darnell Shackelford who he assumed was committing a robbery and reaching for a gun. However, Darnell was actually *being* robbed and was only reaching for an inhaler. After being shot, he became paralyzed from the waist down. After David leaves, Rashad is left reeling by this new information.

Although Rashad and David have their disagreements, Rashad's words make clear that he always trusted his father as a role model and example of morality, "discipline and courage." In one moment, this image of his father has immediately unraveled. Not only did internalized racist thinking and abuse of power cause David to shoot an unarmed black man, but he kept this story a secret from Rashad, leading Rashad with an impression of his father that was divorced from reality.

☝ My brother took the bus trip down to Selma. He begged me to go. Begged me. But I told him it didn't matter. I told him that he was going to get himself killed, and that that wasn't bravery, it was stupidity. So he went without

me. I watched the clips on the news. I saw him being beaten with everyone else, and realized that my brother, in fact, was the most courageous man I knew, because Selma had nothing to do with him. Well, one could argue that it did, a little bit. But he was doing it for *us*. All of us.

Related Characters: Shirley Fitzgerald (speaker), Rashad Butler

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

Katie Lansing and Shirley Fitzgerald both separately come to visit Rashad in his hospital room. After Katie leaves, Shirley reveals that she always knew Rashad was a victim of police brutality and that he hadn't simply been in a car accident (as he'd told her). She tells him that she was alive during the Civil Rights movement and that, although her brother asked her to participate in the protests, she refused because she was too scared.

In this passage, Mrs. Fitzgerald expresses her regret and her belated realization that her brother was not “stupid” (as she’d claimed at the time) but in fact brave and selfless. Her words emphasize that when black people participate in anti-racist protest, it is not a selfish action but a deeply selfless one. After all, engaging in anti-racist activism involves putting oneself on the line on behalf of all black people, both present and future. This point is especially important given Rashad’s reluctance about being in the spotlight. He may feel uncomfortable about marching on his own behalf, but as Mrs. Fitzgerald argues, he would not really be marching for himself, but rather for millions of others as well.

13. Thursday: Quinn Quotes

☝ Well, where was I when Rashad was lying in the street? Where was I the year all these black American boys were lying in the streets? Thinking about scouts? Keeping my head down like Coach said? That was walking away. It was running away, for God's sake.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Coach Carney, Rashad Butler

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

On Thursday morning, Quinn wakes up early and stares across the road at the Galluzzo’s house. He recalls the time at his father’s funeral when Paul told him to come to him if he ever needed anything. Then, at this moment, Quinn realizes how self-centered he has been for most of his life. He has assumed that the most important thing to do is focus on his future and be successful. This myopic focus left him oblivious to the injustice that was occurring all around him. Quinn now realizes that ignoring injustice amounts to the same thing as “running away” from it. Crucially, Quinn reframes ignoring racist violence from a passive act to an active one, and in doing so realizes that in actively choosing not to take a stand against racism, he has perpetuated racism.

☝ I did not want to be a hero. I did not want to make any of what had happened in the last week about me. There was a guy who'd just spent six days in the hospital because the guy who'd been *my* personal hero for four years had put him there.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Paul Galluzzo, Rashad Butler

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 266

Explanation and Analysis

Quinn has recalled the moment at which Paul told him he wanted to become a cop. Paul explained that he’d been inspired by Quinn’s dad and that he also wanted to be a hero who made a difference to other people. In this passage, Quinn rejects the idea of wanting to be a hero. He realizes that such a desire is not really about wanting to help other people, but instead wanting to be seen as a hero by others, and is thus deeply selfish. Furthermore, the status of “hero” can make people seem infallible—yet, as Quinn points out in this passage, his own personal hero has shown himself to be deeply fallible. It would be wrong for Quinn to cling to the idea that Paul is innocent just because he has committed heroic acts in the past. He must view Paul through the sum of all his actions, not just those from which he has personally benefited.

☝ I'd been thinking about that all day, but I didn't have the words for it until Ma brought up Dad. Everybody wanted me to be loyal. Ma wanted me to be loyal. Guzzo wanted me to be loyal. Paul wanted me to be loyal. Your dad was loyal to the end, they'd all tell me. Loyal to his country, loyal to his family, they meant. But it wasn't about loyalty. It was about him standing up for what he believed in. And I wanted to be my dad's son. Someone who believed a better world was possible—someone who stood up for it.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Paul Galluzzo, Guzzo, Quinn’s Father, Ma

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

After Coach Carney calls Ma to tell her about Quinn’s plan to go to the march, Ma sternly tells Quinn not to participate. Unusually for her, she invokes Quinn’s dad in order to warn him about protesting. However, Quinn has turned this

around, pointing out that while he can't know what his dad would have thought about the incident at Jerry's, he knows that his dad was committed to standing up for what he believed in. This is a turning point for Quinn, during which he realizes that standing up for one's principles is far more important than ideas of loyalty, duty, and service. Indeed, these ideas can be distorted in order to *prevent* people from standing up for their principles, as has happened when various people have tried to discourage Quinn from protesting on account of loyalty to Paul.

For the first time, Quinn does not resent his father's legacy but admits: "I wanted to be my dad's son." He is able to make this admission because he has realized that being his father's son does not mean copying everything his dad did or subscribing to belief systems with which he does not personally agree. Rather, it involves being inspired by his father's willingness to stand up for justice. Quinn is thus able to continue his father's legacy while becoming his own man.

14. Thursday: Rashad Quotes

☝ Pictures of me throwing up the peace sign, some--the ones Spooky feared--of me flipping off the camera. Carlos and the fellas had been cropped out. These images would have nasty comments under them from people saying stuff like, *Looks like he'd rob a store*, and *If he'd pull his pants up, maybe he would've gotten away with the crime! Lol*, and *Is that a gang sign?* Other pictures were of me in my ROTC uniform. Of course, those had loads of comments like, *Does this look like a thug?* and *If he were white with this uniform on, would you still question him?*

Related Characters: Rashad Butler (speaker), Carlos Greene, Spooky Butler

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

After being released from hospital, Rashad goes home and searches the hashtag #RashadIsAbsentAgainToday. He is stunned by the number of posts the hashtag returns, some of which are supportive and others of which are "nasty" and critical. Just as Spooky warned, certain people have used pictures of Rashad "flipping off the camera" in order to create (or reinforce) an impression of him as a "thug." Rashad realizes that it is easy for people to manipulate

evidence to suit their existing worldview. While there are many pictures in which Rashad resembles an upstanding, "All-American" kid in the traditional sense, people holding racist views simply choose to ignore these pictures and focus on ones that reinforce their own beliefs.

At the same time, even the people who support Rashad manipulate evidence to their own ends. The question "Does this look like a thug?" implies that one can know a "thug" simply by their appearance. In reality, the novel shows that anyone is capable of committing acts of cruelty, violence, and injustice--including people wearing police uniforms. The truth is that Rashad is simply an ordinary kid and no picture of him would prove that he is innocent or guilty. Moreover, no picture can justify the brutal treatment he endured at the hands of Paul.

15. Friday: Quinn Quotes

☝ What about Dad? Talk about a man who died for his convictions. How many times did he re-up after 9/11? Three. I was old enough now to know he wasn't fearless. He'd probably been scared shitless every time he went back. He wasn't strong because he wasn't afraid. No, he was strong because he kept doing it even though he was afraid.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker), Quinn's Father

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

On Friday, Quinn admits that he is terrified about the protest. His fear grows even deeper when he sees tanks and cops in paramilitary gear outside school. He confesses his fears to Jill, but as he does so he realizes that just because he is afraid, doesn't mean he shouldn't participate. Rather than being a problem or a sign of weakness, fear is perfectly natural. Indeed, some of the most important and courageous acts will inevitably be accompanied by a sense of fear, as Quinn realizes while he thinks about his dad. This passage highlights Quinn's ongoing evolution in maturity. He has developed a rather simplistic view of masculinity, heroism, and courage--which does not include fear or vulnerability--into a much more sophisticated understanding.

●● I wondered if anybody thought what we were doing was unpatriotic. It was weird. Thinking that to protest was somehow un-American. That was bullshit.

This was very American, goddamn *All-American*.

Related Characters: Quinn Collins (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

As Quinn is marching, he thinks about people watching the march on TV at home, and considers that some of them will be accusing the marchers of being “unpatriotic.” The notion that protest is unpatriotic links to ideas about loyalty that Quinn discussed earlier. Some people believe that protesting the police is unpatriotic because it is a form of disloyalty to law enforcement, authority, and—in a broader sense—America. However, as Quinn reminds himself here, protest is an important part of American culture; after all, the presence of protest is a sign of freedom and justice. Blind allegiance to authority is perhaps what should truly be considered un-American.

16. Friday: Rashad Quotes

●● Me, Spooky, Carlos, English, Berry, and Shannon were in the front of the crowd, and all of a sudden, our arms locked and we were leading the way like—the image came to me of raging water crashing against the walls of a police dam. Marching. But it wasn’t like I was used to. It wasn’t military style. *Your left! Your left! Your left-right-left!* It wasn’t like that at all. It was an uncounted step, yet we were all in sync. We were on a mission.

Related Characters: Rashad Butler (speaker), Shannon Pushcart, Berry Jones, English Jones, Carlos Greene, Spooky Butler

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

At the protest, Rashad is stunned by the number of people who have shown up, including many people he knows. Without aiming to, he finds himself, his friends, and his family at the front of the march with their arms locked. Although Rashad has shied away from the spotlight throughout the book, he is happy to be leading the march now—in part because he is walking as a unit with those closest to him. This sense of unity reminds Rashad of ROTC, which also involves putting aside individualism in order to act as one.

However, as Rashad’s words show, his participation in the march is also not like ROTC “at all.” Unlike ROTC, there is no one imposing discipline on the marchers. Instead, they are “in sync” because they all share the same “mission”: the pursuit of justice. This passage thus suggests that what Rashad has learned in ROTC is relevant to a part of his life that is in many ways the polar opposite of military service. Just as Quinn has learned to become his own man inspired by his father’s legacy, Rashad uses the principles his father passed down to him through ROTC in order to make his own decisions and become his own, independent person.



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.

1. FRIDAY: RASHAD

On Friday afternoon, Rashad finishes ROTC practice and eagerly changes out of his **uniform**, excited to party. Rashad is not particularly enthusiastic about ROTC, and explains that his father, David, makes him do it. David believes that being in the military is the best thing a black man can do in America, and hopes that ROTC will lead Rashad into a military career. David himself was in the military for four years, followed by another four years as a police officer. These days, however, he works an office job. David points out that the military provides discipline, free education, and the opportunities to travel the world and serve one's country. He begged Rashad's older brother, Spoony, to consider a military career; Spoony refused, and now works at UPS.

In the school bathroom, Rashad sees his friend English Jones, a "stereotypical green-eyed pretty boy" who is loved by everyone and is the captain of the **basketball** team. English and Rashad have been friends since they were children, along with Shannon Pushcart and Carlos Greene, who are also in the bathroom. The boys discuss the **party at Jill's** that night, and Rashad teases Carlos for not making the basketball team. Carlos is into graffiti, and his tag--"LOS(T)"--can be seen all over town. Rashad helps him come up with ideas for what to tag, but never joins in himself, worried about getting in trouble with David.

Out of his **uniform** and back in his normal clothes, Rashad feels "ready for whatever Friday had in store for me." He hopes that at the party he will hook up with Tiffany Watts, who in Rashad's opinion is "the baddest girl in the eleventh grade." Before he gets to **Jill's party**, he wants to buy some chips and a pack of gum, and to borrow \$20 from Spoony so he doesn't show up to the party empty-handed. Rashad gets the bus to Jerry's Corner Mart, and as he walks through the door says "wassup" to the cashier, who in turn regards him with suspicion. Rashad notices that there is a cop guarding the store, which makes sense considering that a lot of people steal from Jerry's. Rashad himself has never stolen anything from anywhere.

The beginning of the novel emphasizes that Rashad's father David has very enthusiastic, rigid ideas about what counts as responsibility, courage, and success. He clearly has great respect for institutions like the police and military and the discipline they impose. Although Spoony has not failed in life or committed any wrongdoing, his decision to reject the military and work for UPS is perceived as a failure in David's eyes.



Rashad and his friends are normal teenagers. They play sports, tease each other, crush on girls, go to parties, and commit minor acts of rebellion, such as graffiti. In fact, Rashad appears to be one of the least rebellious members of the group because his dad is so strict. This will become important soon. For now, simply note that Rashad and his friends are presented as being like any other bunch of adolescent boys.



Already, we get a glimpse into the subtle forms of discrimination Rashad faces as a black teenager. As readers, we know that Rashad is responsible, disciplined, and conscientious. However, the cashier at Jerry's perceives Rashad only as a threat. The presence of the cop in the store is theoretically to keep the store safe. However, in light of the charged relationship between black people and the police--as well as the cashier's suspicious gaze--the cop is more likely to make Rashad feel unsafe.



As Rashad browses the chips, a white lady (Katie Lansing) peruses the beer aisle beside him. Rashad chooses barbecue flavor and goes to text Spooky before realizing that he left his cell phone inside his ROTC **uniform**. He squats down to retrieve it, and just at that moment Katie trips backward over him, letting her beer bottle drop and shatter on the floor. Katie exclaims an apology, while the cashier and cop shout accusations at Rashad. The cashier shouts that Rashad was trying to steal the chips, and Rashad immediately denies it, putting his hands in the air.

The cop shoves Rashad into a submission pose, smashing his face on the ground. Rashad hears the crunch of his own bones. Rashad is in so much pain that he cannot help but wriggle, which in turn makes the cop beat him and suppress him more forcefully. The cop taunts Rashad, saying that he will “teach” him to respect authority. Rashad feels blood in his mouth, and inside his mind he begs: “Please don’t kill me.”

2. FRIDAY: QUINN

On Friday nights all Quinn cares about is partying, but before he can go out tonight he needs to take his younger brother, Willy, over to the house of their neighbors, the Cambis. Quinn’s father was a soldier who was killed in Afghanistan, and ever since his death Quinn feels under pressure to live up to his father’s legacy. While Willy is packing his overnight bag, Quinn takes a flaskful of his mother’s bourbon. Quinn’s mother, who he calls Ma, works 12-hour night shifts at a warehouse. As Quinn and Willy walk over to the Cambis’ house, Quinn puts his arm around Willy, thinking that he loves being a big brother.

People say that Quinn’s neighborhood, the West Side, is “going to shit.” Everyone in the West Side lives in multifamily apartment buildings, and the police patrol the area more often than they used to. Quinn loves the West Side and rejects the belief that the neighborhood is “on the decline.” When Quinn drops Willy at the Cambis’, he notices Mrs. Cambi giving him a kind, pitiful look, which Quinn is used to getting as the son of “Saint Springfield.” Quinn’s father was a “model man” who volunteered at the soup kitchen when he was off-duty and died fighting for his country. However, Quinn finds his father’s story more “shitty” than inspirational.

This passage shows how a perfectly innocent, mundane situation can escalate in a matter of seconds due to the prejudice and fear that circulate around issues of race, criminality, and authority. There is irony in the fact that Rashad originally bent down to retrieve his phone from his ROTC uniform—a symbol of responsibility and discipline—yet is perceived as a criminal.



The end of this chapter poses the question of why the cop reacts in such an extreme, brutal manner—especially considering Rashad didn’t do anything. The cop clearly perceives Rashad as a threat, even though this is totally inaccurate. In reality, Rashad is merely an unarmed teenager; it is the cop who is capable of serious violence.



The introduction to Quinn’s life establishes a connection between him and Rashad. Both boys must balance responsibility and duties to their family with their ordinary desires to party and have fun. Both boys have one brother, and both have a father who served in the military. Of course, a significant difference is that Quinn’s father is dead. However, Quinn still feels pressure from his father’s legacy, just like Rashad.



Springfield is a typical American city, and one way in which this is explored is through the economic and demographic changes taking place in Quinn’s neighborhood. Like many parts of the US, Quinn’s neighborhood appears to be suffering from increased economic hardship as well as social changes, represented by the fact that the police are more present than they used to be. Quinn doesn’t mention race, but it seems possible that it is also a factor in these changes.



Quinn's friends Dwyer and Guzzo are waiting for him in the alley by Jerry's. When Quinn meets them, Guzzo points out that it is their last night out before **basketball** season begins again, meaning they will have practice every Friday and Saturday night. Quinn insists that they will make tonight "worth it," and Guzzo announces that he plans to shotgun ten beers. Quinn has a crush on Jill, who is Guzzo's cousin, and who is known for throwing "mad parties." Guzzo has an "army of cousins" who live all over the city, and anyone who is friends with Guzzo is automatically looked out for by the rest of Guzzo's family.

Quinn and his friends always buy beer from Jerry's. They used to shoplift from there, but don't anymore. Instead, they pay nearby adults a little extra to buy beer for them. Quinn works during the summers, which gives him enough money to last through the year; he mostly spends it on beer and slices at Mother's Pizza. Quinn approaches a guy who's bought them beer before, but then he suddenly sees the door of Jerry's fly open, and a cop push a young black man onto the ground.

Quinn sees that the guy on the ground is only a teenager and that he looks familiar; he wonders if he also attends Springfield Central High. Quinn then notices that the cop is Guzzo's older brother, Paul. Quinn stares, frozen in shock. He hears sirens approaching and runs back to Guzzo and Dwyer, telling them they need to get out of there. He explains that Paul just "beat the piss out of some kid." Dwyer suggests that they all go and calm down over a slice of Mother's pizza. However, once they are there, Quinn is unable to stop thinking about what happened. Ever since Quinn's father's death, Paul has been a father figure to Quinn, and he is haunted by the look he saw on Paul's face.

3. SATURDAY: RASHAD

As Rashad drifts into consciousness, he keeps hearing the word "custody" repeated over and over. His nose is broken and will never look the same, and the nurses have been applying ice packs to his ribs. Last night, a police officer stood outside his hospital room to make sure he didn't run away. The officer told Rashad's parents that he was caught stealing and that he could be charged with theft, resisting arrest, and causing a public nuisance. Rashad could hardly breathe and was thus in no position to try and explain the truth.

The closeness and loyalty of Guzzo's enormous family at first appears to be a positive thing. However, note the word choice in Quinn's description of Guzzo's "army" of cousins. The use of this metaphor evokes both the positive sides of the military--such as loyalty, cooperation, and service--but also the negative sides. "Army" of cousins implies an element of aggression and conflict.



Although Quinn is responsible in many ways--taking care of his brother and working during the summers in order to save money--he also engages in minor acts of rebellion that Rashad doesn't. For example, he steals Ma's bourbon, pays adults to buy him beer, and used to shoplift.



As this passage makes clear, Quinn's witnessing of Paul beating up Rashad is disturbing not only in itself, but also because of Quinn's relationship to Paul. Paul is a father figure, and as such also a kind of hero to Quinn, particularly considering that Quinn's actual father was considered to be a hero across Springfield. As such, this passage raises the question: is it possible that a person can be a hero to some and a villain to others?



Because of his race, the police do not perceive Rashad as innocent. Instead, they insist that he committed criminal activity, even though the only evidence for this are the assumptions made by Paul and the cashier. Rashad's inability to breathe properly and explain the situation symbolizes a broader way in which black people are suffocated and suppressed by racism.



In the morning, Rashad wakes up to see his mother, Jessica, sitting at his bedside. He feels terrible, but is grateful to at least be alive. David enters, and Jessica asks Rashad to tell them, honestly, what happened. Rashad tries to explain that he didn't steal anything and doesn't know why he was falsely accused, but he suddenly feels overwhelmed with tiredness. David remains suspicious. A nurse, Clarissa, brings in Rashad's breakfast. Rashad manages to tell the story of what happened in detail, but his father is still skeptical. He asks if Rashad's pants were sagging, but Jessica interrupts to point out that Rashad has never been in trouble for anything.

David mentions that the police said Rashad resisted arrest, adding that he always told his sons to "just do what they ask you to do, and you'll be fine." Rashad explains that he tried to do that, but that it didn't make a difference. David looks disappointed, as if he remains convinced that the incident was indeed Rashad's fault. Soon after, Rashad's brother Spoony arrives. Spoony and David do not get along well. Spoony wears his hair in dreadlocks, which David argues will make people think he does drugs. When Rashad tells Spoony the story of what happened, Spoony explodes in anger, saying: "I'm so sick of them treating us like we animals."

Jessica tells Spoony to calm down, but this only angers him further. He recites statistics about police racism, which frustrates David, who Rashad notes always calls Spoony "a rebel without a cause." Dr. Barnes enters, and tells the family that Rashad's nose and ribs are healing well, but that he has had internal bleeding and thus needs to stay in the hospital to be monitored. There is a chance that Rashad will need surgery, which frightens him and his family.

Berry, who is Spoony's girlfriend and English's older sister, is at the hospital too. Rashad drifts in and out of sleep, watching TV when he wakes up. In the evening, Rashad wakes to find his parents asleep. He talks to Spoony, who tells him that Berry has been waiting to see if anything has been posted on the internet about the incident at Jerry's--so far, nothing. Rashad is hesitant about the idea of being in the spotlight as a victim of police brutality, but knows there is no point in telling Spoony to let it go. Spoony is determined to fight back.

This passage emphasizes that racism and stereotypes do not only affect the way that white people view the world. Black people like David can also internalize racist ideas and come to focus on respectability so much that they lose sight of the true nature of injustice. It is particularly striking that David thinks this way given that it was his own son who was beaten by the police. As Jessica reminds her husband, Rashad has never been in trouble, so why is David so quick to assume it was his fault?



David and Spoony represent two polar opposite reactions to the issues of police brutality and racism. David insists that it is the responsibility of black people to comply with the police and make themselves seem non-threatening, for example by dressing in a certain way. Spoony, meanwhile, places the responsibility on those who commit acts of racism--those who treat black people "like animals" and assume them to always be guilty of something.



Along with a frightening medical diagnosis, Rashad must also deal with his family fighting over what happened to him and how to approach it. Considering he is only 16, it is deeply unjust that Rashad must deal with these issues, particularly considering that he never even did anything wrong in the first place.



In many ways, Spoony is more supportive of Rashad than David. On the other hand, in his enthusiasm to secure justice for his brother, Spoony does not check how Rashad is feeling about the attention he will receive as a public victim of police brutality. Rashad is left in the middle of several different disputes, with everyone seemingly forgetting that Rashad is actually a person with his own feelings.



4. SATURDAY: QUINN

Quinn explains that fights are pretty common in Springfield, and that he tried to convince himself that what happened at Jerry's was "no big deal." However, he couldn't bring himself to enjoy **Jill's party**. He is haunted by the image of Paul beating Rashad; in this moment, Paul was unrecognizable, like an entirely different person. Quinn sleeps badly and wakes up on Saturday with his father's voice in his head, urging him to push himself. Quinn does so many push-ups and sit-ups that he almost makes himself pass out.

Ma asks what's wrong, and Quinn tells her it's nothing. He explains that he needs to head to the **basketball** court because Coach Carney is picking starters this week. Quinn gets in the shower and thinks about the scouts coming from colleges. His father was given a full ride through ROTC, and Quinn feels that he needs to do even better by getting a full ride at an excellent school through basketball.

Quinn gets out of the shower and runs straight into Ma, who demands to know "the truth." For the first time, Ma has found out about Quinn stealing her bourbon. She reminds him that alcohol can kill him and that he is breaking the law. Quinn blames Guzzo, which further infuriates Ma. She tells him that "it's about how the world looks at you" and that, as a senior, he must decide "what kind of man you want to become." Ma tells Quinn to go to Willy's soccer game that day and to take him out to pizza after. Quinn agrees.

Willy is unenthused by soccer, but at the game Quinn shouts encouragement. Guzzo texts to say he has a terrible hangover. He adds that Paul is home and that what happened at Jerry's is "a big deal." Guzzo's family are having a barbecue tomorrow and "everybody" is coming. Quinn finds this strange, as the Galluzzos have never hosted a gathering before. He feels nervous about the prospect of seeing Paul. Back at the soccer game, Will unexpectedly lands a "sweet tackle" and is "the momentary hero" of the match. Quinn gives him a high five and thinks that "it's actually pretty cool having a little brother." Quinn sees himself in Will, which helps him understand himself better.

Quinn is deeply disturbed by what he witnessed at Jerry's, but at this stage he does not necessarily even consider it a situation of injustice—certainly not racial injustice. Rather, he is confused by seeing a side of Paul that he didn't know existed, and that contrasts with his existing impression of him.



Here we learn of another way in which Quinn struggles to live up to the legacy of his father. Quinn does not have the luxury of knowing that his family and community will be proud of him no matter what. Instead, he feels he needs to exceed the standard set by his dad.



Ma is justifiably angry about Quinn's theft of her alcohol, as well as his deflection of blame. On the other hand, she seems to be more concerned with what other people will think of Quinn than what he is actually doing. Perhaps Ma, too, struggles with living up to the legacy of Quinn's father. After his death, the Collins family are left under constant scrutiny within Springfield, and each of them struggles as a result.



Ma's insistence that Quinn take Willy to his soccer game turns out to have been wise. Quinn finds a sense of responsibility and fulfillment through his role as Willy's older brother. Whereas Quinn finds it difficult to be identified as the son of "Saint Springfield," as Willy's older brother he sees an opportunity to set a good example in his own right and figure out the sort of man he wants to be.



Mother's Pizza is packed. On the wall there is a photo of Quinn's father at the St. Mary's soup kitchen, and Quinn always tries to avoid sitting near it. As Quinn is about to order, Jill approaches and asks him to grab an extra slice for her. Quinn shyly agrees; as the son of "Saint Springfield" he always gets a discount, and thus picks up three Cokes as well. The three eat together and Jill accidentally mentions that Quinn must be hungover, which Quinn makes Willy swear to keep a secret. Quinn tries to figure out if Jill and English hooked up, without asking directly. Quinn worries that Jill thinks of him as "more of a brother."

Suddenly, a fight breaks out nearby. This is not unusual, considering that Mother's lies at the border between neighborhoods. People of every race go to eat there, but Quinn notices that the four men being arrested now are white. Quinn suggests they get out of there and walk Jill home. On the way, Jill mentions the barbecue at Guzzo's house the next day. She also thinks it is strange that they are hosting a "sudden party." Quinn and Jill agree that they both think they know why the party is happening, but Quinn resists spelling it out explicitly, even in his own mind.

5. SUNDAY: RASHAD

On Sunday, Rashad is happy to wake up to a quiet, peaceful room. He thinks about the fact that he was supposed to be at **Jill's party**, impressing everyone with his dance moves. Instead, he ended up with a broken nose and broken ribs. Clarissa enters, tells Rashad to breathe into a spirometer, and checks his blood pressure. After, Rashad's family enters along with their pastor, Jerome Johnson. Rashad feels irritated. He believes in God, but wonders "where God was when I was being mopped by that cop." He finds it difficult to reconcile this reality with Pastor Johnson's message that God is always present.

Pastor Johnson tells Rashad that "everything happens for a reason," which annoys Rashad further. The group prays together, with Pastor Johnson reciting Biblical figures who were subjected to oppression, persecution, and suffering. Spooky arrives and Pastor Johnson observes that he hasn't seen him at church; Spooky responds sarcastically. Pastor Johnson promises to keep Rashad lifted up in prayer and leaves. Immediately, Spooky switches on the TV to a news item about the incident at Jerry's.

This passage shows that the kindness people show to Quinn can actually be somewhat suffocating. Of course, the photo of his father and discount he gets at Mother's are well-intentioned, but in fact they leave Quinn feeling self-conscious. Like most teenagers, Quinn seems to want to be "normal" rather than the son of a hero.



Quinn is still in a state of confusion and denial about the incident at Jerry's and its consequences. He doesn't want to believe that Paul committed an act of police brutality, and certainly doesn't want to think that this might have been motivated by racism. Although he seems to intuit that there are ulterior motives behind the barbecue, he worries about what would happen if he admitted this to himself.



Once again, Rashad is caught in the middle of competing beliefs, messages, and desires. His parents turn to religion as a way of dealing with difficult issues. However, Rashad does not find much comfort in religion in this moment. He feels that there is a level of hypocrisy and dishonesty in Pastor Johnson's insistence that God is always present. Rather than turning to faith, Rashad wants truth and justice from humanity.



Spoony represents a younger generation of black people who have a different approach to life than their parents. Whereas David and Jessica place more emphasis on individual responsibility, discipline, and faith, Spooky refuses to find comfort in religion and instead focuses on fighting back against oppression.



The news channel plays a clip of Rashad being beaten, noting that the victim has been identified as “sixteen-year-old Rashad Butler of West Springfield.” Spooky explains that he and Berry sent Rashad’s information to the news. David explodes with anger, saying Rashad “doesn’t need all this craziness.” Spooky responds that police brutality is the real craziness, while emphasizing that his father “of all people should know that.” Rashad doesn’t fully understand what is going on; he watches his father furiously leave the room.

A photo of Rashad in his ROTC **uniform** appears on the news, and Spooky explains that he supplied the photo in order to control “the narrative.” Rashad is embarrassed and insists on turning the TV off, but he also understands Spooky’s reasoning. Jessica gives Rashad some belongings he requested from home: his duffel bag containing his ROTC uniform and phone, along with his sketchbook and pencils.

Rashad charges his phone and it immediately blows up with text messages. In the first texts, his friends are confused about where he is and why he hasn’t shown up to **Jill’s party**. Eventually, more texts show up about Rashad being on the news. Rashad responds with a group text to Carlos, Shannon, and English explaining what happened and assuring them that he’s okay. Rashad’s family members remain tense, but relax after a football game comes on the TV. After the football game, the family leaves, and Rashad is grateful for the peace and quiet. Then the news comes back on, however, with another picture of Rashad’s face, along with the face and name of the officer who arrested him: Paul Galluzzo.

6. SUNDAY: QUINN

On Saturday night, Quinn had stayed in watching a movie and playing video games with Willy. On Sunday, he, Ma, and Willy head over to the Galluzzos’ barbecue. When Ma announces the arrival of her marshmallow pie, everyone cheers. However, as soon as Quinn sees Paul he feels tense. Paul and Guzzo are standing side by side, and Quinn is struck by how enormous they both are. Jill approaches Quinn and strikes up a conversation about the upcoming **basketball** season. She asks if Coach Carney is putting pressure on Quinn, and he lies in response, telling her it’s “not too bad.”

Spoony’s decision to actively draw further attention to Rashad’s case causes conflict, but overall this seems like a more reasonable approach to the situation than that taken by David. It is undeniably true, after all, that police brutality is the real craziness. David seems to want to avoid confronting the real issues, which might mean “peace” in the short term but will not solve anything.



Rashad’s acceptance of Spooky’s decisions despite his own embarrassment indicates that Spooky is something of a hero to Rashad. Where Rashad has views that strongly conflict with his father, he respects Spooky’s thinking and trusts that his choices are wise.



Rashad’s family is also a version of the model American family, as is made clear by the fact that they embrace many the typical elements of American culture, such as the military, Christianity, and watching football games on TV. At the same time, they also have to deal with issues that are not generally considered ordinary within the ideal of American life. In this sense, Rashad’s family are excluded from being considered a “normal” American family.



All of a sudden, Quinn sees Paul and Guzzo through new eyes. Whereas before he saw them as kind, supportive friends who were like family to him, after the incident at Jerry’s he sees how the two brothers could be perceived as intimidating and scary, particularly to those who are on the outside of the “army” of their family.



Jill confesses that when the cops came to shut down her party, one of them told her: “Don’t fuck this up for your family.” She explains that she didn’t get into major trouble, but that it was still “weird.” The conversation is then interrupted by Mr. Galluzzo, announcing that it is almost halftime and the burgers will need to be ready soon. Quinn quietly admits to Jill that he witnessed the incident at Jerry’s first-hand. Jill tells Quinn that the boy who got beaten was Rashad, and Quinn immediately feels shocked and guilty. Quinn admits that although he doesn’t know what Rashad did, the whole incident was “ugly” and Paul “kicked the shit out of him.”

Jill says she heard that Rashad resisted arrest, and asks if Paul saw Quinn at the time. Before Quinn can answer, Paul yells at Quinn to stop “hitting on” Jill and come help with the burgers. Jill barks back, but Quinn feels nervous as he approaches Paul and Guzzo. He notices that Paul is nursing his right hand, which is covered in cuts, in an ice bucket. Quinn and Guzzo have a tense exchange before Paul asks what’s the matter, and emphasizes that any conflict between them will jeopardize the **basketball** team. He adds that he will soon have a few days off, and offers to help Quinn practice his footwork.

Although Paul is acting friendly, he is also suspicious of Quinn and comments that he seems “uptight.” Quinn brushes this off and takes the burgers into the living room. He joins in watching the game in order to avoid talking to anyone else; however, he isn’t as distracted by it as he hopes. He then overhears Jill’s mom yelling at her about the party. When Jill makes a subtle allusion to the incident at Jerry’s, Mrs. Galluzzo interrupts, saying: “You watch what you say next,” and tells her to show some respect. Jill’s mom forces her to apologize, and Mrs. Galluzzo softens, saying that Paul’s job is difficult, and she just wants Jill to respect that.

Paul says, “Thanks, Ma,” revealing that he has been listening to the whole conversation. Suddenly, the news comes on, with the item about Rashad and Jerry’s. Someone quickly mutes it, but Quinn has already flushed bright red. Mr. Galluzzo suggests they might need more burgers, but Paul dismisses him. He explains to everyone that there will be a lot of press and “it’s going to look ugly,” but promises that everything will be okay in the end. He declares that he will need his family, and everyone immediately expresses their support. Paul then singles out Quinn, saying he “needs” him to come out and play two-on-two **basketball**.

The police officers’ intimidation of Jill is strikingly different to the kind of brutal aggression Paul showed to Rashad. The officers who came to her party clearly saw Jill as being on “their side” and as a representative of her family. Even though she was actually breaking the law, they were able to be sympathetic to a degree and let her off with only a warning—a stark contrast to the violence immediately inflicted upon Rashad, who hadn’t actually done anything wrong.



Quinn’s exchange with Paul and Guzzo is charged with passive aggression and unspoken conflict. This is manifested not only in the tense words they exchange with one another, but also by Paul’s hand in the ice bucket. The barbecue is supposed to be light-hearted and fun, but Paul’s injured hand is a reminder of the act of violence haunting the entire family.



It is striking that the adults at the Galluzzo barbecue subtly choose to bully both Quinn and Jill for not showing enough loyalty to Paul and the family. In particular, Mrs. Galluzzo’s demand for Jill to show respect echoes the words Paul hissed to Rashad during the arrest. While there may be inherent value in discipline and loyalty, what about when these come at the expense of standing up for justice?



So far, the people at the barbecue have avoided discussing the elephant in the room—the incident at Jerry’s—and have instead dealt with it in a passive aggressive, indirect way. However, in this moment Paul confronts the issue head-on, thereby articulating the real reason why the barbecue has been held. It is an event at which the attendees are expected to (indirectly) pledge their support for Paul.



The teams are Paul and Guzzo against Quinn and Dwyer. While they play, Paul becomes increasingly aggressive with Quinn, while claiming: "I'm just trying to help you." Eventually, Quinn grows frustrated and goes back inside, saying quick goodbyes to Mrs. Galluzzo and Ma before heading home.

Quinn's decision to leave the basketball game indicates that he is tired of playing along with other people's expectations and is beginning to assert himself as a man in his own right.



7. MONDAY: QUINN

Quinn arrives at school to find everyone discussing Rashad. Quinn has received texts from Dwyer and other boys on the **basketball** team, but doesn't check them and instead turns his phone on mute. He refuses to watch the video of Rashad's arrest. As Quinn is walking up the stairs, the team's point guard, Nam, catches up to him and immediately starts talking about Rashad. He asks why Paul did what he did, and Quinn replies that he was "just doing his job," before admitting that he hasn't watched the video. In class, Quinn feels like everyone is looking at him, and it suddenly occurs to him that he might appear in the video.

Although to some extent Quinn seems to be beginning to confront the brutal reality of what happened at Jerry's, he is still largely burying his head in the sand. He ignores his friends' texts and refuses to watch the video, indicating that he is trying to simply ignore the issue in the hope of that it will go away. At the same time, he is haunted by the incident and a paranoid feeling that he is personally implicated.



At lunch, Jill asks to sit with Quinn. Jill asks if Quinn has seen Guzzo; although he doesn't tell Jill this, Quinn has been avoiding him. Jill says that Mrs. Galluzzo's defense of Paul "bugged the hell out of me." Jill tells Quinn he should watch the video, but he responds that he was there and doesn't need to see it again.

Quinn and Jill are largely on the same page, but Jill seems to be approaching the issue with more strength of mind and maturity. She knows that it is unsustainable and irresponsible for Quinn to ignore the video.



Suddenly, Quinn remembers a time when, years ago, Paul had "kicked the shit out of" a kid called Marc Blair. However, that time Paul had done it on Quinn's behalf. Quinn and Jill reflect that they have always thought of Paul as a "good guy," and it's therefore difficult to understand how this could have happened. Quinn asks if he can be seen in the video, and Jill chastises him for being self-centered. At the end of lunch, Quinn confesses that he feels Jill is the only person he can talk to about Rashad, and they briefly hold hands.

Quinn is slowly coming to a better understanding of what happened, as well as the surrounding issues of prejudice and police violence. However, both he and Jill still struggle with a simplistic view of whether people are "good" or not. They do not consider that it may be possible that Paul is a "good guy" to them because they are white and part of his (extended) family.



After lunch, Quinn thinks about when Paul beat up Marc. Marc was an older kid who bullied Quinn; he once pressed Quinn's face against a chain-link fence until he vomited. Suddenly, another memory occurs to Quinn, of a time when he saw an older black student wearing a Public Enemy t-shirt that read "Fear of a Black Planet." He reflects on his own subconscious fears about black people. After Paul beat up Marc, he called him a "thug." Quinn feels guilty about the role he played in this incident.

As a white person, part of Quinn's journey toward fighting racism is acknowledging the ways in which racism affects his own thinking. Although Quinn might not be actively racist, he harbors semi-conscious and subconscious prejudices against black people. His realization of this makes him understand that he is complicit in racist incidents such as Rashad's arrest.



In Quinn's next class, Ms. Webber announces that there has been a change of plan for that day's lesson: they will work "quietly" on a practice test. During class, a white girl called Molly asks a black guy called EJ a question, and Ms. Webber scolds EJ. EJ responds: "Guilty until proven innocent... just like Rashad." Ms. Webber, flustered, says she knows there's "a student" in hospital but that they have to focus on the test. Molly responds by saying Rashad's name. EJ joins in. Ms. Webber sends them both out, but Quinn can hear them shouting "Rashad, Rashad" out in the hallway.

Someone else in class says "Paul Galluzzo." Quinn is angry; he thinks that talking about Rashad's arrest just makes it worse. At **basketball** practice, Quinn feels disproportionately aware of Shannon and English, because he knows they are close friends of Rashad. Coach Carney gives a speech about not getting too distracted by the scouts. He tells the team to leave all their other thoughts and problems at the door. Quinn wishes this were possible, and decides to try and follow Coach's advice. He wants to forget about race and act as one "color-blind," unified team. At the same time, he can't help but feel that he is implicated in the "problem" of what happened to Rashad.

8. MONDAY: RASHAD

Rashad thinks about Aaron Douglas, a painter who was part of the Harlem Renaissance. Rashad has been into art since he was a young child. Every Sunday after church, his family used to go to a diner downtown and David would give Rashad the comics section of the newspaper. Rashad's favorite was a strip called *The Family Circus*, which he tore out and saved each week. Eventually, Rashad started drawing his own cartons featuring his family, and which also were influenced by the work of Aaron Douglas.

Without thinking about it, Rashad begins to draw a picture of what happened to him at Jerry's. While he is drawing, Clarissa enters with his food. She says she could tell he was an artist, and asks to see the **drawing**. Although Rashad has only just started it, Clarissa announces that "it's gonna be good." She tells Rashad that what happened to him is "bullshit." Rashad shows her other drawings from his sketchbook and she is impressed. Clarissa leaves, promising to come back and check on him later.

The students at Springfield Central High are coming to terms with the way Rashad's arrest was not an isolated, freak incident but rather connected to many other aspects of their day-to-day lives. Although Ms. Webber's singling out of EJ is not nearly as severe as Paul's beating of Rashad, they are all part of the same system of prejudice, oppression, and injustice.



Quinn is understandably disturbed by the incident at Jerry's and the tensions it has brought to the surface. However, his solution of trying to ignore the incident and pretend to be "color-blind" is misguided. Problems do not cease to exist simply because people ignore them. At the same time, Quinn's thoughts are not simply an example of youthful naiveté. They are also held by Coach Carney, who believes it is possible (and desirable) for the team to forget about the outside world during practice.



Rashad's love of art and the happy memories of visiting the diner after church give a glimpse of his life outside of racism and violence. Whereas people like Paul perceive Rashad as a criminal and a thug, in reality he is a creative, sensitive person.



Rashad has found little comfort in the attention his case has been getting or in the visit from Pastor Johnson. He is, however, cheered by the support he receives from strangers such as Clarissa. While it can seem as if many people in Springfield support Paul, plenty more take Rashad's side.



As soon as Clarissa is gone, Rashad decides he needs to leave his room. He goes down to the first floor of the hospital to the gift shop. As he looks around the items for sale, he is careful not to make any sudden moves. Eventually, the woman behind the counter asks if he needs any help, and tells him to relax, because she knows he is not stealing. She introduces herself as Shirley Fitzgerald, and the two get into a conversation, during which Rashad lies and pretends to be in the hospital because of a car accident. Mrs. Fitzgerald explains that she started volunteering at the gift shop after her husband died and her children and grandchildren grew up. She tells Rashad to come back and visit her again.

In the afternoon, Carlos, Shannon, and English arrive at the hospital to visit Rashad. As the boys catch up, Carlos pretends he hooked up with Tiffany, before revealing that he is just joking. Shannon mentions that Tiffany asked about Rashad today, and that a bunch of kids at school are thinking of coming to visit Rashad. Rashad asks his friends to tell everyone he's fine, but that he doesn't want any visitors. The boys joke around until Rashad makes a joke about what happened to him, which is met with awkward silence. English has so far remained silent, and when Rashad asks if he's okay, he responds by mentioning how strange it is that the cop who beat up Rashad is Guzzo's older brother.

Shannon asks Rashad to tell his version of what happened at Jerry's. The boys are shocked by the story, and English in particular is launched into a daze. Suddenly English says it's time for them to leave, as they have practice. However, Carlos insists that "somebody gotta do something" about what happened to Rashad. English is hesitant; Rashad knows that both he and Shannon are reluctant to break any rules. After they leave, Rashad sees his face on TV again. He tries to turn it off, but the remote doesn't work. He grows increasingly frustrated, finally ripping the TV cord from its socket.

9. TUESDAY: QUINN

On Tuesday morning, Quinn arrives at school to find the words "RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY" spray-painted on the pavement in front of Springfield Central High. Students gather to stare and take photos. The teachers deliberately avoid talking about it. At lunch, most students take their trays and sit outside by the graffiti. The only members of the **basketball** team who remain inside are the four other white boys, including Guzzo and Dwyer. Guzzo beckons Quinn over, which irritates Quinn. Quinn remembers Paul telling him that Springfield used to be 85% white, but that it is now only 37% white. Standing inside the cafeteria, Quinn feels painfully aware that he is part of "the white half."

Rashad's caution inside the gift shop highlights the lasting impacts that racism can have on the lives of black people. Even the ordinary act of looking around a store is no longer simple for Rashad; instead, it is now charged and traumatic. Rashad's trauma is further accentuated by his decision to lie about what put him in hospital. Even though he did nothing wrong, he still seems somewhat ashamed of what happened to him.



Unsurprisingly, Rashad's friends bring him more comfort than anyone else in the novel so far. Whereas other characters fixate on what happened to him, treating him either with suspicion or as a kind of martyr, Rashad's friends just act normal around him, which makes him feel better. The exception to this is English, who seems more troubled by the incident than the others and more unsure of how to act in its wake.



The joy Rashad receives from seeing his friends is, sadly, rather short-lived. Although his friends are well-intentioned, they are just as confused as Rashad about how to react to the incident at Jerry's. Rashad seems to suppress his own feelings of powerlessness until he is alone. In a bout of frustration, he takes them out on the TV.



This passage makes explicit the way in which the incident at Jerry's is connected to broader demographic and cultural changes taking place in Springfield. The decrease in the white population and increase in people of color has clearly left some people, like Paul, feeling threatened and resentful. However, others, like Quinn, do not wish to overinvest in their own whiteness and remain loyal to other white people. When he is compelled to do this, Quinn feels uncomfortable.



Jill asks Quinn where he's going to sit, and tells him she wants to sit outside. Quinn agrees, but after Guzzo calls out to them they go and sit down at Guzzo's table. During lunch, Jill reveals that Quinn told her he witnessed Rashad's arrest. Guzzo is furious, and tells Quinn not to tell anyone else. Jill implores Guzzo to think about Rashad and his family, but Guzzo remains aggressively defensive of Paul, and reminds Quinn of all the things Paul has done for him. Guzzo leaves, and Dwyer tells Quinn they need to "get the team straight"—their futures depend on it. Quinn has been thinking this too, and notices the fear in Dwyer's voice.

At practice, Coach Carney pushes the team extra hard. While they are on the leg machines, Quinn asks English if he knows who did the graffiti. English is standoffish, and tells Quinn: "Rashad didn't do shit." He becomes increasingly angry, especially after Quinn suggests Rashad might have been on drugs. English points out that Quinn smokes weed, whereas Rashad doesn't do drugs at all. English emphasizes that Quinn is clueless and remarks: "I had no idea you were such a dick." After English walks away, Guzzo thanks Quinn for supporting Paul. However, when Guzzo tries to joke about the graffiti, Quinn grows annoyed, which angers Guzzo in turn. Quinn apologizes to English, who is unmoved.

When the team starts to play, Quinn keeps messing up. He admits to Coach that his head is "up my ass" and Coach gives him two "suicides" (a sprinting drill) as punishment. Quinn realizes that he wants his life to go back to the way it was before Rashad's arrest. That evening, he messes up a meal he has made countless times before. He can't stop thinking about the fact that he can choose to forget or "walk away from" the incident at Jerry's simply because he is white. He is "sick of being a dick," and decides to watch the video.

After watching, Quinn texts Jill to say he's seen the video and then calls her, confessing his feelings of confusion and guilt. They discuss the role of racism in the incident at Jerry's, and how race affects their town. Jill says that Mr. Fisher spent their whole history lesson talking about what happened to Rashad. She and Quinn agree that they want to do something, and decide to see what others are doing the next day. After hanging up, Quinn resolves not to "walk away anymore."

Guzzo refuses to think beyond his loyalty to his own family; when Jill begs him to think about Rashad and his family, Guzzo refuses. Guzzo's allegiance to Paul is thus a failure of emotional imagination and empathy. He has a simplistic, "us vs. them" attitude which not only informs his own behavior, but makes him police the behavior of Quinn and Jill, too.



At this point in the story, Quinn is caught between two opposing sides. He angers Guzzo for not being sufficiently loyal to Paul, but is naïve and offensive when he attempts to reach out to English. Quinn is left feeling isolated, but this is perhaps not as bad a thing as it might appear. Quinn is undergoing a personal journey to make sense of difficult issues. Although the opinions of other people affect him, it is a journey he must ultimately complete by himself.



While English's words may have appeared harsh, they actually have a transformative impact on Quinn. By being called a "dick," Quinn realizes that trying to remain neutral and brush things under the carpet actually makes him part of the problem. Having made this realization, he can take responsibility and begin behaving in a more constructive manner.



As white people, Jill and Quinn have been shielded from racism and all the ways in which race helps structure the world. Confronting this reality is difficult and even painful, but they find strength in their friendship. This in turn allows them to refuse to be bystanders and to take an active role in attempting to make society more fair and equal.



10. TUESDAY: RASHAD

The chapter begins with a long quotation from a newscast about Rashad's arrest. There is an interview with Claudia James, the woman who shot the video. She says that Rashad was "manhandled" and that he couldn't have been resisting arrest, considering that he was handcuffed. This is followed by another interview with a man who claims that Paul was right to do what he did. Rashad is dismayed by the second interviewee's views, particularly his comments about Rashad's appearance. Rashad mutes the TV and gets back to work on his **drawing**. Clarissa comes in, and Rashad thanks her for all her kindness. On TV, the police chief expresses support for Paul, and Clarissa tells Rashad: "Don't let the bastards get you down."

Jessica enters Rashad's room, and says that David couldn't make it, as he has an upset stomach. She gives Rashad an envelope from Chief Killabrew, and asks what he's drawing. When Rashad shows her his **drawing**, she starts to cry. She reminds Rashad that he is not a criminal, and Rashad can sense her anger. She repeats: "This is *not* okay." Paul Galluzzo is shown on the TV, and Jessica calls him an "asshole," which shocks Rashad, as his mother never curses. She apologizes; Rashad holds her, and they cry together.

Later, Jessica and Rashad are watching *Family Feud* when Spooky and Berry arrive. Berry is in law school, which pleases David. She is also beautiful; Rashad describes her as "everybody's first crush." However, after she and Spooky started dating, Rashad and his friends stopped joking about their attraction to her out of respect for Spooky. Spooky shows Rashad a picture of the graffiti outside school. Berry explains that the graffiti has inspired a hashtag, **#RashadIsAbsentAgainToday**, and that there is going to be a protest. Jessica is nervous about this and tentatively suggests that not all cops are bad, adding that she married a good one. Spooky quickly disagrees. Rashad asks if protests actually work, and Spooky and Berry insist that they do.

Soon after, English, Shannon, and Carlos arrive; they, too, immediately begin talking about the protest. English explains that Mr. Fisher is helping them plan it. Jessica remains hesitant. The boys share stories of times they've been treated with aggression and suspicion by the police. After hearing these stories, Rashad announces that he is "down with the protest," even though part of him remains nervous.

The novel jumps back and forth between oppositional opinions on Rashad's arrest, highlighting the level of conflict surrounding the issues of racism and police violence in America. The town of Springfield appears to be completely divided. Those on Paul's side care more about loyalty and respect for authority than they do about what actually took place. They seem to be more guided by stereotypes and prejudice than those who support Rashad.



Jessica's breakdown shows that what happened to Rashad is too much for her to handle. She is ordinarily a calm and forgiving woman, but the level of injustice taking place around her--and the fact that her son is at the center of it--is too much for her to bear.



Unlike Spooky, both Rashad and Jessica seem to be relatively unfamiliar with politics and activism. As a 16-year-old boy, Rashad has perhaps not yet developed as strong convictions as his brother, and is uncertain about the practical aspects of protest. Jessica, meanwhile, is cautious about what protesting police violence signifies. She is reluctant to admit that police brutality is a structural problem, because in her mind this implies that all cops are bad. However, protesting the police as a whole is a way of showing that individual cops are not the problem.



Rashad is hesitant about protesting on his own behalf, but when he is reminded of the ways police violence affects all black people--including his friends and family--he suddenly feels determined to take part, knowing that the issue is far bigger than him.



11. WEDNESDAY: QUINN

On Wednesday, Quinn still feels like he is in a “daze.” While taking Willy to school, he bumps into Paul Galluzzo, who looks exhausted. Quinn is alarmed by his instinctive feelings of sympathy for Paul. Paul asks why Quinn hasn’t taken up his offer to practice footwork, and when Quinn responds that he’s been busy, Paul says: “Don’t bullshit me.” Paul explains that he’s heard about what’s been happening at school, before launching into a defense of his actions. Quinn pretends to sympathize, but is unconvincing, and when they part ways Paul is clearly furious.

Outside school, students—including Jill and Tiffany—are handing out flyers advertising the protest on Friday. Someone asks if Rashad will be there, but nobody knows the answer. In English class, Ms. Tracey distributes copies of the first chapter of Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man*, entitled “Battle Royale.” Quinn is horrified by the story, which depicts old white men making young black men fight each other for entertainment. He tries to tell himself that white people were crazy “back then,” but realizes with dread that the present might not actually be so different after all.

Ms. Tracey usually sits on top of her desk, but today she is sitting behind it. Suddenly, she starts to cry. She says that her head of department has advised her not to assign “Battle Royale.” Quinn writes a note to Tooms, suggesting that Rashad is the “invisible man” at Springfield High, and saying they should do something. Tooms mouths a request for backup before standing up and reading the story aloud, dedicating it to Rashad. Tooms, who would never normally volunteer to do such a thing, finishes reading, and Quinn takes over. Once Quinn is done, others follow suit. Some of the students avoid saying the racial slurs in the text, but Quinn still feels their presence, and realizes he needs to take a more active role in stopping racial violence.

At practice, Quinn is able to focus on **basketball** for the first time since Rashad’s arrest, and he does well. He and English get into an impressive rhythm together, and Quinn wishes the scouts were already there, watching. However, just before practice ends a fight breaks out between Guzzo and Tooms. Guzzo claims that “everyone has it in for me.” Coach makes the team promise to work together and think of the scouts, but Quinn is suddenly suspicious of his demand to leave the outside world at the door. Instead, he thinks that the focus should be on how the team works together *in* the outside world.

Quinn is becoming increasingly unable (or unwilling) to appease Paul and pretend that he is on his side. Paul senses this, and as a result becomes more aggressive, cussing at Quinn in front of Willy. Meanwhile, Quinn’s improved understanding of the situation is revealed by his guilt at his own instinctive sense of sympathy for Paul. For the first time, he is critical about why he has such an instinct.



Quinn keeps trying to reassure himself that racism is not as bad as it seems, but is increasingly less able to do so. This confrontation with the truth is difficult; however, it is of course far more difficult for all the black people who have been forced to discover it at a much younger age and in a much more personal, painful manner.



Much of the action the students take in order to protest what happened to Rashad resolves around saying Rashad’s name and drawing attention to his absence. This is a technique used within the Black Lives Matter movement, for example under the slogan “Say Her Name,” which reminds people of the black women killed by the police. Responding to the fact that male victims of police racism often receive more attention, Say Her Name draws attention to the absence of the black women who have also been victims of violence, thereby giving their absence a powerful kind of presence.



Quinn’s realization that leaving issues at the door will actually make the team worse, not better, is significant. Although sports are often presented as a form of escape in the novel, this scene reminds us that they cannot be divorced from the issues of the real world. It is no coincidence that when Quinn begins to stand up to racism and injustice, he finds himself playing better.



After practice, Guzzo once again defends Paul to Quinn, saying he was “just doing his job.” He asks Quinn what he would say if he was called as a witness, and when Quinn doesn’t reply, Guzzo pushes him away, saying “Fuck you.” Guzzo says that claims of racism are getting out of control, but Quinn reminds him that he and Paul are not the real victims. Coach brings the team together again and makes them promise not to attend the protest: “No parties, and no protests.” The team agrees, some very reluctantly. Quinn feels suspicious of the pressure to act together as a team.

Coach’s demand that the team act as one seems harmless enough, until we remember that this involves Rashad’s friends being forced to collaborate with Guzzo and others who are defending Paul. Such an alliance is unjust, and will likely not create a successful team dynamic. Coach’s ban on attending the protest is also unfair, as it forces the team (especially the black members) to put basketball over their allegiance to their friends, families, and to justice.



12. WEDNESDAY: RASHAD

Chief Killabrew’s card says that he was planning to visit Rashad before he heard that he didn’t want visitors. He wishes Rashad well, and encloses the ROTC creed. Rashad wonders if the creed is supposed to make him feel guilty for his supposed wrongdoing, or if it is supposed to make him feel better. He feels uncomfortable about the link between ROTC, the military, and law enforcement. On Tuesday night, Rashad had a nightmare about what happened at Jerry’s. In the morning, David comes to visit him before work at 7am.

Rashad’s relationship to the military is clearly very different from the one his father had. Whereas David found meaning and purpose in the military, Rashad feels vaguely threatened by it. After suffering police violence, he cannot pretend that the connection between the police and military is nonexistent or meaningless.



Hesitantly, David begins to tell Rashad a story from when he was a cop. To Rashad’s surprise, it is a story he has never heard before. One night, David got a noise complaint and drove over to the East Side, where he found a white kid and a black kid (Darnell Shackelford) in a fight. He notes that Darnell was dressed like Spooky, with dreads, a hoodie, and sagging pants. David immediately grabbed Darnell, who tried to run away, shouting that he didn’t do anything. Darnell reached into his backpack and David told him to put his hands up; when he didn’t, David shot him.

Again, David serves as an example of the ways black people can internalize racist prejudice and inflict it on others. On one level, this arguably indicates a weakness in David. However, it is also possible to see this anecdote as evidence of just how powerful racism is—so powerful that it can overwhelm a person’s own beliefs and cause them to act in a way that they would never choose of their own accord.



Rashad is in shock. He has only ever heard stories of heroic acts David committed as a cop. David explains that it turns out Darnell was the one being robbed, and that he had been trying to reach for his inhaler because he was having an asthma attack. He adds that he didn’t kill him, but did paralyze him from the waist down. David explains that at the time, Rashad was too young to understand, but that Spooky remembers everything that happened in the aftermath: “The news. The drama.” David admits that he is haunted by the incident and believes Spooky is too. He emphasizes that being a cop is “a really hard job,” which every day carries the risk of death.

Like Paul, David has tried to avoid taking fully responsibility for the act of violence he committed. Up until this point, he has only told Rashad stories that made him look like a hero. However, at this moment David finally chooses another path. Revealing this story to Rashad while Rashad himself is recovering from an incident of police brutality is difficult, and a sign that David may be developing a more mature, nuanced understanding of these issues.



Rashad asks why David wanted to be a cop, and he says he wanted to do good. After the incident with Darnell, he quit the force. He emphasizes that most cops are actually good. Rashad adds that most guys who look like Spoony aren't criminals, but David warns that he doesn't know everything. David then explains that Jessica wants to press charges. As David goes to leave, Rashad says that he's going to try to go to the protest on Friday if he's well enough. David says nothing, and exits.

After drawing for an hour or two, Rashad goes for another walk, taking a lap around the hospital floor. He returns to find two women in his room: Mrs. Fitzgerald and a white woman who introduces herself as Katie Lansing, the woman who was in Jerry's just before Rashad's arrest. They explain that they have both come up, separately, to visit Rashad. Rashad feels dizzy, but Mrs. Fitzgerald is protective of him. Katie apologizes, becoming tearful as she remembers what happened at Jerry's. She gives Rashad her business card and offers to testify. This is the first time that Rashad has thought about actually going to court, and he feels terrified.

Mrs. Fitzgerald reminds Rashad that he told her he'd been in a car accident. She then admits that she already knew who he was when he first came into the gift shop, but that she knew it would make him feel better if she just treated him like a normal person. Mrs. Fitzgerald observes that Rashad is scared to participate in the process, and tells him she was alive during the Civil Rights Movement. She remembers what it was like before, when segregation and violence restricted black people's existence at every turn. Yet she admits that she didn't participate in any Civil Rights activism, even when her brother begged her to. She was too scared.

Mrs. Fitzgerald says that she's not telling him what to do, but she wanted to share her story. She then pulls some chips out of her bag, telling him she got every flavor except plain. After Mrs. Fitzgerald leaves, Rashad reflects on how terrifying it must have been to protest during the Civil Rights Movement. He resolves to attend the protest despite his own fear. In a flurry of energy, he returns to his **drawing**, and for the first time includes facial features in the figures he draws.

Although the novel is mostly concerned with the way teenagers gradually develop an understanding of racism and injustice, it also shows that this is a lifelong process, rather than one that ends in adulthood. In this scene, David is just as confused and conflicted as Quinn, if not more so.



While David may still be too conflicted to offer Rashad the support he needs, Rashad is able to find support in other people—many of whom are relative strangers. By apologizing and offering to testify, Katie models a kind of behavior that uses white privilege in order to actively counter racism. In this sense, she serves as a positive example of the role white people can play in tackling racism and police brutality.



This passage shows that all people have weaknesses, and that sometimes the most courageous thing to do is own up to one's own failings. Mrs. Fitzgerald forgives Rashad for lying to her because she can understand why he did it. She then makes a confession of her own, revealing her own failings and vulnerabilities. Rather than damaging her relationship with Rashad, this strengthens it, as Rashad is also scared and thus this brings them together.



Rashad's conversation with Mrs. Fitzgerald is a turning point, after which he is determined to assert himself and act on his principles. While Rashad retains plenty of respect for Mrs. Fitzgerald, he does not want to be left with the same regret she has about not participating in activism. He learns from her wisdom, and in doing so becomes more mature himself.



13. THURSDAY: QUINN

On Thursday, Quinn wakes early, his thoughts “racing.” He looks out the window at the Galluzzos’ house, and remembers the day he stood there during his father’s funeral. Paul had told him that if he ever needed anything at all, he should come to him. Quinn had felt so relieved. Until Rashad’s arrest, everyone had only been thinking about the **basketball** scouts, but now Quinn feels like he is in the midst of something much bigger: a historical moment. He curses himself for previously running away from the reality of racism.

Quinn goes into his room and grabs a plain white t-shirt. On the front, he writes: “I’M MARCHING,” and on the back, “ARE YOU?” At school, some kids react to the shirt with disdain, while others smile and give Quinn high-fives. Dwyer grabs Quinn and asks, “What the hell, man?” and reminds him that Coach banned them all from going to the protest. When Quinn insists that the march is “important,” Dwyer calls him “wack.” In Mrs. Erlich’s trigonometry class, she writes statistics about police violence on the white board, telling the class: “The numbers don’t lie.”

Guzzo avoids Quinn all day, and at **basketball** practice refuses to look Quinn in the eye. As English acs a new play for the third time in a row, he raises a fist in the air and says: “Rashad.” After, Quinn and Guzzo end up colliding and wrestling each other on the floor. Minutes later, Guzzo whacks Quinn in the face with his elbow. Guzzo apologizes, claiming it was an accident, but Quinn thinks no one probably believes him. In the locker room, Quinn suggests that they call the new play the Rashad, and English happily agrees.

Once Quinn gets changed back into his normal clothes, Coach Carney points to his shirt and says, “This bullshit... has to stop.” He threatens to call Ma, which terrifies Quinn. Quinn leaves the locker room and runs into Guzzo, who immediately punches him in the face. He tells Quinn that he never wants to see him in his house or talk to him ever again. Quinn rushes to the bathroom so no one sees his bleeding nose. It strikes him that within a week, both he and Rashad have been beaten up by members of the same family. At the same time, he knows there is “no comparison” between the two incidents.

Quinn is able to see that before the event with Paul and Rashad, his thoughts tended to be rather self-centered, focused on his own choices and future. Now he is not only participating in a historical moment, but one that is not about him. This gives him a greater sense of meaning and purpose, and arguably enables him to let go of some of the anxieties that come with being his father’s son.



As the march nears, the conflict between those who support it and those who oppose it becomes increasingly intense, heightened by the usual passions and dramatics of any high school. Quinn is not the only person who realizes that it is not possible or desirable to remain neutral or silent about racism. Mrs. Erlich’s actions show that even something as seemingly neutral as math can be linked to the issues of racism and police brutality.



Quinn may have damaged his friendship with Guzzo beyond repair, but as a result he has found a new friend in English. Whereas before Quinn felt somewhat isolated by his discomfort with Guzzo’s reaction to Rashad’s arrest, he now feels comforted by the fact that there are many other students who are choosing to stand up for justice.



Quinn cannot help but still center himself to some degree, even though he is clearly not victimized by racism. At the same time, it is significant that by taking a stand against racism, Quinn alienates himself from certain other white people. The novel suggests that one of the reasons why white people end up staying silent about racism is due to the social punishment they face from other white people if they do so.



That night, Ma freaks out at Quinn’s busted-up face and asks what he did. Willy points out that it was Guzzo who beat Quinn, but Ma does not care. She says that after Coach Carney called her, she called Mrs. Galluzzo. She urges Quinn to think of the Galluzzos, and forbids him from going to the protest. Quinn asks if Ma has seen the video; she hasn’t, and claims that the video has been released to make Paul look like a “fool.” She asks what Quinn’s father would think, and Quinn replies that he doesn’t know, but that he thinks he would have stood up for his beliefs. Quinn and Ma hug.

Paul had announced that he was going to become a cop when Quinn was in ninth grade. He claimed to have been inspired by the example set by Quinn’s father, and wanted to be “a hero” and “somebody who makes a difference.” Quinn had told him that he already made a difference. Now when Quinn thinks about that moment, he feels conflicted. The person who had been his hero has put a kid in hospital. Everyone keeps telling Quinn to be “loyal,” on the basis that his father was “loyal to the end.” However, now Quinn realizes that his father wasn’t loyal—he was principled; someone who believed in fighting for “a better world.”

14. THURSDAY: RASHAD

On Wednesday evening, Jessica brought a lawyer, Maya Whitmeyer, to the hospital. Rashad was exhausted, but still managed to tell “every detail” of what happened to him at Jerry’s. Maya was confident that it would be an “open-and-shut” case, but Rashad found that difficult to believe. Rashad told Maya and Jessica that Katie Lansing visited and offered to testify, which pleased Maya. On Thursday morning Rashad wakes up to the news that he is okay to leave the hospital, and he is thrilled. However, he soon realizes that the only clothes he has are the ones he was wearing on Friday, which are smeared with dirt and his blood.

Clarissa enters and checks Rashad’s vitals one last time. She is happy to hear that he is going home. She asks if he ever finished his **drawing**, and is extremely impressed by the final product. Clarissa comments on the fact that Rashad gave the figure being beaten a face, and Rashad replies: “He deserves a face.” Rashad texts his friends, who tell him about Quinn and Guzzo’s fight at basketball practice. English says: “School is intense. Everybody’s picked a side.”

Ma may behave in a strict manner with Quinn, but this passage reveals the extent of her vulnerability. As a single parent struggling to support her sons on a low income, Ma faces many practical issues as well as more emotional ones. Without Quinn’s father around, she must make all the decisions about how to raise the boys and what advice to give them by herself. This leaves her feeling conflicted and uncertain.



This is a key moment in the novel. It is the point at which Quinn realizes he can honor his father’s legacy without doing everything his father did, and without conforming to the expectations of other people. He understands that the most significant example his father set was the importance of being a moral person and standing up for his own beliefs. Quinn does not need to share the exact same principles as his father in order to continue this legacy.



Rashad’s dirt- and blood-smeared clothes symbolize the fact that what happened to him at Jerry’s will continue to haunt him for the rest of his life. Although he can now leave hospital and return to a sense of normality, he will never be able to undo or forget what happened—it will be part of him forever.



There is a notable difference in the way Rashad processes the incident at Jerry’s versus what has been happening in school. Whereas school is divided, with everyone taking a side, Rashad’s reaction is far more calm and reflective.



Rashad is sad not to see Mrs. Fitzgerald again before leaving the hospital, but he is also desperate to leave. As Rashad and his parents drive home, there is a tense silence in the car. At home, Rashad searches **#RashadIsAbsentAgainToday** and is shocked by the volume of posts it returns. He sees videos of people defending him, and a picture of an unknown person wearing a t-shirt that says "I'M MARCHING... ARE YOU?" He also sees hundreds of pictures of himself, some in his normal clothes and some in his ROTC **uniform**. In the comments, people debate whether or not he looks like someone who would rob a store.

After seeing a comment about David's shooting of Darnell Shackelford, Rashad decides to look up Darnell. Seeing pictures of Darnell in his wheelchair, he realizes that he is marching for Darnell as much as himself. Later that night, English, Shannon, Carlos, and Spoony come over, and Jessica orders Mother's Pizza. The boys explain what has been happening at school in Rashad's absence. English tells Rashad about the argument he had with Quinn at **basketball** practice, and then explains how he and Quinn decided to name their new play after Rashad.

Rashad tells Carlos that he knows it was him who did the graffiti outside school. Carlos denies it with a smile. Spoony begins discussing the protest; when Rashad expresses concern about his friends missing **basketball** practice, they respond that it's unimportant. English notes that the protest has spread far beyond Springfield Central High, and Jessica adds that Pastor Johnson will be coming with a group of people. Rashad wonders if David will come. Spoony suggested doing a die-in at the march, explaining that this involves lying down on the ground as form of protest. This makes both Rashad and Jessica nervous. Spoony then reveals a plan to read out a list of black people killed by the police.

15. FRIDAY: QUINN

Quinn admits that he is terrified on Friday. He begins the day by calling the police and telling them he wants to make a statement about the incident at Jerry's. The officer sounds bored, telling Quinn that they already have a lot of statements, but Quinn insists. Outside school, Quinn is shocked to see an "enormous black vehicle" that resembles a tank, along with police in paramilitary **uniforms**. He is so frightened that he begins to shake. Other students shout: "This is what a police state looks like!" and "Serving and protecting who?"

Against his will, Rashad has become not only a public figure, but a symbol. People in Springfield and beyond look to his case as an incident that proves their existing views to be correct--whatever those views may be. To some people, Rashad is a "thug," while to others he is an upstanding, ideal young man, and to others he is simply a normal, innocent boy caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.



Rashad may be right in the spotlight, but instead of becoming self-centered or egotistical, he is more determined than ever to think of others. He is painfully aware that he is not the only victim of racist police brutality, and thus vows to fight on behalf of all black people--and particularly the man who was shot by his own father.



Although there is a sense of excitement surrounding the protest, this is undercut with anxiety, particularly for Rashad and Jessica. All forms of activism carry some level of risk, and for black people, the risks associated with protesting are particularly severe. Marches are always accompanied by a heavy police presence, and it thus takes a significant amount of courage for Rashad to participate, given what happened to him so recently at Jerry's.



Again, the novel emphasizes that one does not have to be fearless to stand up for justice. Rather, most of the characters work through their own fears while choosing to take a stand. Quinn may feel terrified by the protest, but he is guided by his own sense of determination and by the actions of the other students around him.



Quinn sees Jill, who explains that the police are preparing for “major riots.” Quinn expresses his fears, but thinks about his father, who “died for his convictions.” He thinks about how frightened his dad must have been every time he was deployed, and that his strength lay in his determination to act despite that fear. Jill points out that black people have to live in fear of the police every day, and that for just one day she is going to share that fear. She notes that Paul, Guzzo, and her mom all “hate” her, but that she is determined to be on the right side of history. Quinn looks out at the large, racially diverse group of students preparing to march, and thinks about his dad again. He tells Jill that he is going to march.

During the school day, everyone is distracted. After the final bell rings, Quinn sees Dwyer headed to **basketball** practice. He knows that there will be consequences for him missing practice, but believes that he is taking “responsibility” by going to the march. He reflects that he is marching because he is white, and he feels a responsibility to take a stand against racism. He thinks about a sign he saw at school that reads “OUR SILENCE IS ANOTHER KIND OF VIOLENCE.”

As Quinn joins the march, he films the protesters and cops around him. He then points the camera at himself and addresses Will, saying that Ma is always telling them to “take responsibility,” but that doesn’t just mean getting good grades and living life to the fullest. It also means standing up for “freedom and justice.” Jill tells Quinn she thinks she can see Rashad at the front of the march. Quinn reflects that while some people will probably call the protest unpatriotic, protesting is in fact an “All-American” thing to do. He cranes his neck, trying to see Rashad.

The die-in takes place, and Quinn listens with horror as someone recites the many names of black people killed by the police in the past year. He stares up at the sky and wonders if, after the protest is over and the incident at Jerry’s fades from people’s memories, he will still feel the same passion for justice that he does now. He worries about becoming numb to the racist violence that black people experience. However, he finds consolation in the knowledge that Rashad survived, and once again searches for him in the crowd.

Jill has sacrificed even more than Guzzo through her participation in the march. Because her family is so strict in their demands of loyalty, Jill now feels that they “hate” her. However, whereas Quinn has struggled and wavered in his convictions, Jill remains committed to her principles to an inspiring degree. The implication is that if Jill is prepared to lose her family over this issue, then Quinn should be able to face his fears and participate as well.



Quinn knows that there are big risks associated with marching, particularly considering that basketball is his pathway to college. On the other hand, he also now knows that these consequences are not enough to justify not participating in the protest. Trying to maintain neutrality is not an option—there is no such thing as a neutral position in an unjust situation.



In this passage, Quinn explicitly draws together the theme of maturity and responsibility with the theme of American values. The novel has shown that American values of loyalty, family, and discipline can have a dark side, while also emphasizing that racism is a significant part of American culture. Here Quinn suggests that protest and activism are equally important American traditions.



The end of this chapter emphasizes that fighting against racism and injustice is a lifelong battle. Just because Quinn has experienced several breakthroughs and a sharp increase in maturity in the novel doesn’t mean that his journey is over. Rather, he will have to keep working at undoing his own internal prejudice and reminding himself of the importance of taking a stand.



16. FRIDAY: RASHAD

The night before the protest, Rashad was unable to sleep. In the morning, he feels nauseous and has diarrhea. When Jessica notices him clutching his stomach, she points out that he feels his nerves in his stomach, just like David. Rashad is intrigued, as he has never known his father to show fear. He thinks back to earlier in the week, when David couldn't come to the hospital because he was feeling unwell.

Rashad and Jessica watch the news, which shows images of the cops in paramilitary gear preparing for the protest. Rashad thinks about Spooky's stories of marching in different cities, and the pain of being tear-gassed. Rashad asks if David is coming to the march, and Jessica replies that she doesn't know. She says that in the night, she woke up to find David out of bed, staring into Rashad's bedroom. Rashad said that he'd been awake, and that he wished his father had knocked and come in.

Rashad goes into his bedroom and retrieves his old clippings of *The Family Circus*. He thinks about how innocent he was as a child. Spooky comes in, wearing all black. Rashad dresses in all black too, and goes down to meet Spooky, Jessica, and Berry in the kitchen. Before leaving, Rashad goes into the bathroom and peels the tape off his nose. Although he is embarrassed by the lump, he wants people to see what Paul did to him and know that he will be "different, forever."

Rashad is stunned by the amount of people who have gathered for the protest, most of them strangers. As he moves through the crowd, people part ways to make space for him. Rashad spots Carlos, English, and Shannon, holding a sign that says, "RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY." Rashad spots Mr. Fisher, Ms. Tracey, Tiffany, his ROTC comrades in their uniforms, **basketball** players, football players, and Pastor Johnson. Pastor Johnson's sign reads: "RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY, BUT GOD IS NEVER ABSENT." Rashad sees Katie Lansing and Clarissa, and feels moved by everyone's support.

David seems to think that it is better to always put on a brave face and portray himself as a strong, disciplined hero in the eyes of his son. However, this passage suggests that it can be more powerful for fathers to show their son their vulnerabilities as well as their strength.



The image of David standing at Rashad's door, unaware that Rashad is awake and would like to talk to him, is symbolically resonant. David has resisted expressing his vulnerabilities and fears to his son, and this has inhibited their connection. Rashad is more eager than his father to express his anxieties, and in this sense has a greater level of maturity.



The shame Rashad felt when he first saw himself all over the news has changed into something different. Although he is still self-conscious, he now understands that this self-consciousness is not his fault. Furthermore, he knows that there is no shame in what happened to him, and that it is important for other people to see.



Each person at the protest has a slightly different reason for being there and a slightly different message. This is because, as the novel has shown, every person is personally implicated in the issue of racism in a different manner. However, despite these differences, the solidarity the protestors show is extremely powerful. It does not matter that they all have different reasons for coming, because once there, they stand together.



The crowd chants. Rashad locks arms with Spoony, Carlos, English, Berry, and Shannon, and the group of them end up at the very front, leading the crowd. Outside the police station, Rashad suddenly sees David. Both he and Spoony are in shock, and grin in unison. Jessica begins to cry. David joins them, locking arms as they keep walking and chanting. The die-in begins, and they all lie together on the ground. Berry shouts through the megaphone, reminding the crowd that they are there not just for Rashad, but for “all of us.” She reads out the names of black people killed by the police, adding, after each one: “Absent again today!” Rashad listens to the names and weeps.

The events of the novel have been a learning experience for all the characters, not just Rashad and Quinn. Indeed, David is probably the character who has been most changed by what happened to his son. The end of the novel is sobering, reminding us that although Rashad was the victim of injustice and brutality, he is lucky in comparison to the many black people who do not survive their encounters with the police.



17. FRIDAY: QUINN AND RASHAD

The final chapter alternates between Quinn and Rashad as they catch one another’s eyes during the die-in. Rashad can tell that Quinn is thinking about the people whose names are being read aloud. Quinn wanted to see Rashad because only a week ago, he had refused to see him. Rashad feels sad, angry, and proud. He feels connected to all black people--those who are able to be at the protest as well as those who can’t--and is determined to fight for them. He is “Rashad Butler. Present.”

Consider the significance of the fact that Quinn and Rashad never actually meet in the book. Their only interaction is an exchange of eye contact, yet this fleeting moment is charged with significance. They have both undergone an intense process of transformation, and--although they come from very different backgrounds--are now united in their fight for justice.





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