The Sun Does Shine

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANTHONY RAY HINTON

Anthony Ray Hinton, who goes by the name Ray, was born in Praco, Alabama, in 1956 and was the youngest of 10 siblings. During Ray's childhood, his father received a severe head injury in a mining accident and was sent to live in an institution for the rest of his life, leaving Ray to be raised solely by his mother, Buhlar. Ray graduated high school and worked in the coal mines for several years before working for Manpower, a labor company in Birmingham, Alabama. When Ray was 29 years old, he was wrongfully convicted of two murders and sentenced to death by the state of Alabama, despite the fact that he had a strong alibi and little evidence connected him to the murders. He subsequently spent almost 30 years on death row fighting his conviction until he and his lawyer Bryan Stevenson brought an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court ruled that Ray had received a constitutionally deficient defense, and he was given a new trial to review the ballistics evidence. As a result, the state of Alabama dropped all charges against him and he was released in 2015. After being released, Ray published his memoir, *The Sun Does Shine*, in 2018, and he now advocates for the abolition of the death penalty.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two key contexts are important to understanding Ray's story: the history of discrimination in the criminal justice system and the history of the death penalty. Many of the policies enacted in the criminal justice system were extensions of Jim Crow Laws enacted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, designed to disenfranchise and remove political and economic gains made by Black people during the Reconstruction Era. Laws enacted during the War on Drugs of the early 1970s, which led to mass incarceration, similarly discriminate and disenfranchise Black people and particularly Black men. As for the death penalty, capital punishment was legal in the United States until 1972, when the United States Supreme Court struck down a series of death penalty cases (*Furman v. Georgia*) as unconstitutional, deeming the cases in violation of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments. As a result, all death sentences pending at the time were reduced to life imprisonment. Four years later, however, 37 states enacted new death penalty statutes that attended to address the concerns of the Supreme Court, and in *Gregg v. Georgia*, the Supreme Court upheld a new procedure for imposing the death penalty in court. As a result, the use of capital punishment in the United States soared. Further, in 1987, the Supreme Court ruled that statistical evidence of bias in the criminal justice system was not sufficient to overturn an individual's death penalty sentence, illustrating the court's acknowledgement that the system is biased, but also emphasizing the court's unwillingness to combat that bias in individual cases.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Books play a major role in *The Sun Does Shine*, as Ray starts a book club on death row. The books that the inmates read include Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Bebe Moore Campbell's *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These books grapple with similar themes as *The Sun Does Shine*—many of them deal with racism, the legacy of slavery, and injustice. Other contemporary books that deal with the systemic issues in the prison systems include Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag*, both of which discuss the problem of mass incarceration. Additionally, Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* argues for abolishing the prison system. Lastly, Bryan Stevenson, Ray's lawyer, has written his own memoir that discusses problems in the criminal justice system called *Just Mercy*—Ray features in this book as well.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Sun Does Shine
- **When Written:** 2015–2018
- **Where Written:** Alabama
- **When Published:** March 27, 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary, 21st-Century African American Criticism
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** Alabama, 1974-2015
- **Climax:** Ray is released from death row.
- **Antagonist:** The criminal justice system; the death penalty; Bob McGregor
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Cameo. Ray appears as a character in *Just Mercy*, a 2019 biographical legal drama based on Bryan Stevenson's book of the same name. In it, Ray is portrayed by O'Shea Jackson Jr.

Giving Back. Ray now works for the Equal Justice Initiative, Bryan Stevenson's foundation, which helped get him off of death row.

PLOT SUMMARY

Author Anthony Ray Hinton opens his memoir at his sentencing on December 15, 1986, at the Jefferson County Courthouse in Alabama. Ray is on trial for two murders, and even though all of the evidence points away from Ray, he is going to be convicted. His defense attorney, Sheldon Perhacs, put in little effort for his case, and Ray knows that the white judge, jury, and attorneys are all biased against him because he is Black. After Ray makes an impassioned speech explaining that they are convicting the wrong person, Judge Garrett sentences him to death.

Ray flashes back to his late teen years, providing some background on his life. His father sustains a head injury in the coal mines when Ray is young, so Ray's mom, Buhlar, raises him and his nine siblings alone. They are poor, but Ray has a happy childhood. He loves his mother more than anything and is very religious, going to church every Sunday. After high school, he works in the coal mines in Praco, Alabama, which he hates. The only way he tolerates the dark, suffocating space is by imagining that he is traveling across the country while he works.

Frustrated with the harsh conditions of the mine, Ray decides to quit. He then goes to a dealership and steals a car, knowing that having a car is the only way that he can travel to a higher-paying job. He keeps the car for two years before growing worried that the police might discover what he's done, so he returns the car and turns himself into the police. He spends a brief time in prison, and afterwards, he resolves that he never wants to go back to jail.

In 1985, there is a string of robberies and murders across the Birmingham, Alabama, area at various restaurants, and the police arrest Ray at his home in July for the crimes. While Ray protests his innocence, Lieutenant Acker openly says that it really doesn't matter if Ray did or didn't do it—one of his "brothers" did, and because Ray will have a white judge, jury, prosecutor, and defense attorney, he will likely be convicted. Ray's court-appointed lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs, grumbles that he is only being payed $1,000 for the case.

Ray also has an alibi for the night of the third incident—he was working a night shift at a warehouse with a guard at the entrance and timestamped paperwork—but the state simply argues that he snuck in and out of the facility. Meanwhile, the prosecutor gets a person who was injured in one of the incidents to say that Ray was the one who shot him. The state also refuses to allow a polygraph test that Ray takes, which proves that he is innocent and telling the truth. Lastly, the police declare that a gun that they found at Ray's mom's house was the murder weapon and matched the bullets in all three incidents, but Ray knows the gun hasn't been fired in years. Perhacs also only has $500 to pay a ballistics expert to testify on Ray's behalf, and the only one they can get, Andrew Payne, is blind in one eye and doesn't know how to use the testing equipment. Because the state discredits Payne's testimony so easily, the jury decides that Ray should be sentenced to death.

For the first three years on death row, Ray is despondent. His mom and his best friend, Lester, visit every week, but Ray doesn't speak to anyone else in the prison. Ray lives in a five-by-seven-foot cell with a bed, a toilet, and a sink. The food is terrible, the guards treat him like an animal, and all through the night the other men on death row scream and cry. Ray constantly worries that he might be executed, and he even contemplates killing himself, as many men do on the row.

Perhacs works on Ray's appeal, but he constantly laments that he doesn't have the money to put up a good case. When Perhacs asks if Ray's mom can mortgage her house to pay for his legal fees, Ray fires the lawyer. Soon after, a woman named Santha Sonenberg meets Ray in the jail and asks to represent him. She explains that she doesn't want money—Bryan Stevenson at the Equal Justice Initiative sent her to work on Ray's case. She also tells Ray that he cannot be executed while his appeals are ongoing, which is a huge relief for Ray.

One evening, Ray hears a man crying—an inmate's mother just passed away. Ray decides to offer sympathy; he talks to the man for two hours to comfort him, and other inmates do the same. Ray realizes in that moment that he has been choosing hate and fear over hope and love, and he makes a choice to improve his outlook. After this resolution, he gets to know the other inmates more, including a man named Henry Hays, whom Ray eventually realizes was a former member of the KKK who lynched a young black boy in 1981. When Ray confronts Henry about this, Henry acknowledges that everything he was taught about Black people was a lie. Ray recognizes Henry's genuine remorse, and he has compassion for the fact that Henry was taught to hate growing up.

Ray also spends more time in his mind, imagining as he did in the coal mines that he is in beautiful places, winning the World Series, and marrying famous actresses. He realizes the importance of having this kind of mental escape from his bleak reality, and he asks the warden if he can start a book club in the jail. The warden agrees, and the book club meets once a month to discuss **books** like *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Even outside of the book club meetings, the inmates discuss the books inside their cells, shouting to one another. Ray sees how liberating it is to be able to discuss politics, relationships, violence, and other important issues.

Over the next several years, Ray's appeals process is stuck in a variety of petitions, many of which the state of Alabama denies. Santha leaves for another job and Alan Black takes over Ray's case. Over the same years, several members of book club are executed, including Henry. In 1997, Alan finally brings good

news for Ray: he thinks he can get the State of Alabama to knock down Ray's sentencing to life without parole. But Ray wants to prove his innocence—he doesn't want to just lighten his sentence—so he fires Alan and writes to Bryan Stevenson, hoping that the man will represent Ray himself. After reviewing Ray's case and meeting with him, Bryan sees that Ray is innocent. They make a plan together as to how to appeal Ray's case, and they grow to be friends.

As Bryan works on Ray's case, Ray's mom's health worsens—she has cancer and hasn't visited Ray in a long time. In September 2002, she passes away, and Ray is devastated. He loses all hope and once again considers killing himself, but he hears his mom's voice in his mind telling him not to give up, and so he decides to keep fighting for his life.

Years pass, and Ray's case bounces around the Circuit Court, the State Supreme Court, and the Jefferson County Court, with little traction. Meanwhile, Bryan starts to put pressure on the courts with press. He writes op-eds about the injustice of the death penalty—explaining that one innocent person has been identified for every five executions in Alabama, and that the courts are full of injustice and bias.

In 2013, when the State Supreme Court of Alabama definitively denies Ray's appeal, Bryan has a final idea: to take the case to the Supreme Court and try to argue for Ray's innocence. In 2014, the justices unanimously decide that Perhacs rendered a constitutionally deficient defense for Ray, and therefore Ray must be granted a new trial. Soon after, the district attorney quietly decides to drop all charges against Ray—he will be released the same Friday, after nearly 30 years on death row. As Ray leaves prison, friends and family greet him and he weeps with joy.

In the aftermath of Ray's release, he tells his story to anyone who will listen, fighting to end the death penalty. He also carries the scars of his experience: he creates alibis for every day of his life in the case he's wrongly accused of something again, he has trouble adjusting to new technology, and he doesn't trust people easily. But, he says, he forgives the people who unjustly arrested and convicted him.

Ray concludes his book with the names of each person who remains on death row as of November 2018. He says that statistically, 1 in 10 of them are innocent, and he argues that until the criminal justice system can render a fair process for every person, the death penalty should be abolished.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Anthony Ray Hinton – Anthony Ray Hinton, who goes by Ray, is the author and protagonist of *The Sun Does Shine*. In Ray's early life, he lives in Praco, Alabama. He loves his mom, has a strong Christian faith, and wants to find a nice girl to settle down with and marry. But on July 31, 1985, 29-year-old Ray's life changes drastically when the police arrest him for a series of murders that Ray didn't commit. Ray has a strong alibi for one of the incidents, and the supposed murder weapon, Ray's mom's gun, hasn't been fired in years, but the authorities refuse to consider this. Over the course of the trial, Ray faces severe—and often overt—discrimination for being Black and poor. The police chief, Lietuenant Acker; Prosecutor Bob McGregor; and Ray's first lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs, all make openly racist comments to him, and Ray's poverty means that he has trouble paying for a proper defense. Because of the extremely racist treatment and poor defense he receives, Ray is sentenced to Alabama's death row. For his first three years there, Ray doesn't speak to anyone—he is consumed by despair, loses his belief in God, and even contemplates committing suicide. He feels helpless and tries to cope by daydreaming about traveling to interesting places and meeting interesting people. After three years, Ray realizes that he has been *choosing* to be angry and hateful, and that he should instead try to choose love and compassion by forming connections with the other inmates. He renews his faith in God and his hope that he will be able to get off death row—faith that is buoyed when Bryan Stevenson and other lawyers from the Equal Justice Initiative take over his case. After Ray spends 30 years on death row and makes an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, the State of Alabama finally drops the charges against him, illustrating the power of his optimism but also highlighting the injustice that he faced in the courts. After his release from prison, Ray acts as a voice for those still on death row, telling his story and advocating to abolish the death penalty.

Bryan Stevenson – Bryan Stevenson, a Black man, is Ray's last (and best) lawyer and the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). After Ray fires Perhacs, Bryan sends Santha and then Alan to help Ray with his case. Eventually, however, Bryan takes over Ray's case himself. He works tirelessly for Ray over the years, trying to find every avenue with which to appeal his case. Ray immediately recognizes Bryan's compassion, and the two become friends over the many visits that Bryan pays to Ray. Bryan also represents many of the other inmates on death row; he is adamant in his fight against discrimination in the criminal justice system. Like Ray, Bryan lays out arguments for why the death penalty should be abolished: primarily, that innocent people often land on death row because of the inadequate defense they receive in their initial trials. He also argues that every person is worthy of life, regardless of the crimes that they have committed. Bryan is a beacon of light for Ray, but Ray also acknowledges that Bryan's work weighs heavily on him, and Ray tries to support Bryan in return. Bryan works on Ray's case for 15 years, hiring new ballistics experts for Ray's case, filing numerous petitions and appeals, and ultimately taking it to the Supreme Court and winning, getting all charges dropped against Ray. When Ray is released from prison, Bryan is with him, and Ray pays back the support and kindness Bryan has

shown him by working at EJI several days a week and fighting against the death penalty alongside Bryan.

Buhlar Hinton/Ray's Mom – Ray's mom essentially raises Ray by herself after his father experiences a severe head injury in the coal mines. Ray is the youngest of 10 children, and Ray's mom instills in him many of his key qualities: faith, optimism, and perseverance. When he is young, she tells him to ignore others' racism, trust the police, have faith in God, and always do the right thing. When Ray is arrested, she does everything she can to help Ray, visiting him at Holman (where he's on death row) every week. She sends desperate letters to Perhacs begging for him to help Ray, along with $25 money orders. Over time, however, Ray's mom grows sick, and she stops coming to visit him because of the seven-hour car trip. Ray's mom dies from cancer on September 22, 2002, while Ray is in prison. Having lost such a key pillar of support and love, Ray contemplates killing himself, but he hears his mom's voice in his head telling him not to let the devil win and to instead fight tenaciously for his life and his freedom. In this way, Ray's mom is a key bastion of support for him even after death, and she also reminds him to maintain faith and optimism so that he can one day walk free. Without her voice in his head, Ray wouldn't have been able to survive.

Lester – Lester is Ray's best friend. Growing up, Lester and Ray do everything together: they walk home from school together, spend holidays together, and work in the mines together. When Ray is arrested, Lester remains one of Rays staunchest supporters. He visits Ray each week along with Ray's mom and sometimes even his own mom, Phoebe, making a seven-hour round trip every single Friday for 30 years. Lester sometimes feels guilty for being able to move on with his life—for example, marrying a girl named Sia—while Ray is stuck in prison. Still, Ray is exceptionally grateful towards Lester throughout his time at Holman (where he's on death row), particularly when Ray's mother dies, highlighting the importance of empathy and community support. After Ray gets out of prison, Lester takes him to his mom's grave, houses him until he can get back on his feet, and helps him get accustomed to the outside world after 30 years of being in jail. In turn, Ray takes Lester on many of his trips to speak out against the death penalty.

Henry Hays – Henry is an inmate on death row with Ray. After Henry and Ray become friends, Ray learns that Henry was a member of the KKK who is on death row for lynching a young Black man named Michael Donald. When Ray confronts Henry about this, Henry admits that everything his parents taught him about Black people was a lie. Ray recognizes Henry's true remorse, particularly when Henry introduces Ray to his father, Bennie—another KKK member—and proudly announces that Ray is his best friend. Henry also joins Ray for book club, and because they read **books** that deal with racism in the American South, Henry acknowledges the racism he was taught and is ashamed of the views that brought him to death row. Before Henry is executed on June 6, 1997, he admits that he thinks of Ray like a brother. Henry illustrates the importance of community and humanity on death row, and how the inmates' support for each other supersedes what they did in their pasts.

Sheldon Perhacs – Sheldon Perhacs is Ray's court-appointed lawyer who proves to be racist and incompetent. Throughout Ray's first trial and the beginning of his appeals process, Ray feels completely unsupported by Perhacs. Ineed, Perhacs often complains about the fact that he is only being paid $1,000 to represent Ray, and he puts in very little effort to try to prove Ray's innocence. He even makes veiled racist remarks about Black people, but Ray feels that he has to let this slide because he thinks Perhacs is his only chance to win the case. During the appeals process, Perhacs asks Ray for $15,000 to take the case to the Supreme Court, and Ray promptly fires him. At this point, Ray realizes that Perhacs has been trying to prolong the case and get more and more money out of Ray. Later, Ray learns that Perhacs and the deeply racist prosecutor, Bob McGregor, were good friends and possibly conspiring against Ray toogether. At the end of the book, the Supreme Court rules that Perhacs rendered a constitutionally deficient defense for Ray.

Prosecutor Bob McGregor – One of the antagonists of the book, Bob McGregor is the racist prosecutor for the state of Alabama in Ray's trial. McGregor states several times that he can tell Ray is guilty just from looking at him and that he an evil, cold-blooded killer. Throughout the trial, McGregor tries to manipulate evidence to show that Ray is guilty even though there's an overwhelming amount of evidence that points to Ray's innocence. For example, McGregor disallows a polygraph test that proves that Ray is innocent. Ray later learns that McGregor has a history of racial bias and that he's friends with Ray's defense lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs, raising the question of if the two men were conspiring together against Ray.

Lieutenant Acker – Lieutenant Acker is one of the officers who reads Ray his rights when he is arrested. In the van on the way to the Birmingham jail, Acker tells Ray that he believes that Ray didn't commit the crime, but that Ray's going to take the rap for something his "brothers" did anyway. Acker then openly declares Ray is going to be convicted because of the white jury, judge, and lawyers, demonstrating how racial bias works against Ray both in the courts and on the police force.

Sidney Smotherman – Smotherman is the assistant manager at a Quincy's Family Steak House. A robber shoots Smotherman in the head, but Smotherman survives his wounds and identifies Ray as the attempted murderer. Later, however, Ray learns that the Alabama police informed Smotherman of Ray's name *before* showing the man a lineup with Ray's initials under his picture—a clear manipulation of Smotherman's testimony.

Judge Garrett – Judge Garrett is the judge during Ray's trial in 1986 until the judge retires in 2003. While the judge doesn't show as much explicit bias as Prosecutor McGregor and

Lieutenant Acker, he willfully ignores much of the evidence that exonerates Ray and during the appeals process often wastes years of Ray's life in delaying his rulings.

Alan Black – Alan Black is a lawyer from EJI. After Santha Sonenberg gets a new job and stops representing Ray, Alan Black takes over. However, when Alan pursues a life in prison sentence for Ray rather than arguing Ray's innocence, and after asking Ray for $10,000, Ray promptly fires Alan and asks Bryan Stevenson to represent him instead.

Andrew Payne – Payne is Ray's ballistics expert in his first trial—he is the only person willing to testify for $500, which is all Ray can afford to pay. In the trial, the prosecution completely dismantles his testimony by demonstrating that Payne didn't know how to use the equipment to test the evidence, and he is legally blind in one eye.

Brian Baldwin – Brian is one of the other death-row inmates in the **book club** with Ray. He and Ed are sent to death row for a crime they committed together. However, Ed explains that he committed the crime alone, and policemen tortured Brian with a cattle prod until he confessed to the crime. Brian's presence on death row speaks to the book's overarching message that there are innocent people who are regularly and wrongly sentenced to death.

Ed Horsely – Ed is one of the other death-row inmates in the **book club** with Ray. He and Brian are sent to death row for a crime they committed together. However, Ed explains that he committed the crime alone, and policemen tortured Brian with a cattle prod until he confessed crime. With this, Ed gestures to the idea that some of the inmates on death row are, in fact, innocent—Ray's wrong conviction isn't all that uncommon.

Bennie Hays – Bennie is Henry Hays's father and a high-ranking official of the KKK in the 1980s and 1990s. Although Henry has had a major change of heart over the years and now rejects the racist ideologies that his parents instilled in him, Bennie is still deeply racist himself. When Henry proudly declares that Ray is his best friend, Bennie refuses to shake Ray's hand, clearly discriminating against Ray for being a Black man. On another day, while Bennie is visiting Henry in prison, he has a heart attack and dies.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Santha Sonenberg – Santha is a lawyer from EJI. After Ray fires his incompetent court-appointed lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs, Bryan Stevenson sends Santha to help with Ray's case. Ray appreciates Santha's compassion and her hard work on the case. After Santha leaves for a new job, Alan Black takes over Ray's case.

Reggie – Reggie is one of Ray's peers in the Praco mining community. Reggie falsely testifies against Ray during his trial for $5,000; he wanted get revenge on Ray for going out with a girl Reggie liked.

John Davidson – Davidson is the assistant manager of a Birmingham restaurant. He is the victim of the first murder-robbery for which Ray is wrongly convicted.

Thomas Wayne Vason – Vason is an employee of a Captain D's restaurant. He is the victim of the second murder-robbery for which Ray is wrongly convicted.

Sylvia – Sylvia is Ray's girlfriend. After Ray is arrested, he breaks things off with Sylvia because he doesn't know how long he might be caught up in his trial, though he misses her throughout the book.

Phoebe – Phoebe is Lester's mother and Buhlar's best friend. She frequently visits Ray with Lester and Buhlar.

Charlie Jones – Jones is the warden at Holman prison, where Ray stays on death row for almost 30 years.

Judge Laura Petro – Judge Petro takes over Ray's case from Judge Garrett after he retires.

Sia – Sia is Lester's wife. She frequently visits Ray with Lester.

Jesse Morrison – Jesse is one of the other death-row inmates in the **book club** with Ray.

Victor Kennedy – Victor is one of the other death-row inmates in the **book club** with Ray.

Larry Heath – Larry is one of the other death-row inmates in the **book club** with Ray.

Jimmy Dill – Jimmy is an inmate on death row with Ray.

TERMS

Rule 32 Hearing – In a Rule 32 hearing in Alabama, a defendant is entitled to review disputed or new evidence. In *The Sun Does Shine*, **Ray** and his lawyers petition for a Rule 32 hearing to review the ballistics evidence in his case.

Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) – The Equal Justice Initiative was founded in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1989 by lawyer and social activist **Bryan Stevenson**. Its goal is to provide free legal representation to people like **Ray** who have been wrongly convicted of crimes, or who have been denied a fair trial or representation. **Santha**, and **Alan**, and Bryan all represent Ray through EJI.

Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – The Ku Klux Klan is a white supremacist hate group that was first founded in 1865 and was responsible for lynchings, bombings, and other acts of violence against Black people. After becoming inactive in the 1870s, the Klan was revived in 1915 and again in 1946. **Henry** and his father, **Bennie Hays**, belonged to a sub-organization of the KKK, the United Klans of America, which was based in Alabama and which was the most violent Klan organization of its time.

THEMES

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

DISCRIMINATION AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Sun Does Shine, Anthony Ray Hinton's memoir, covers his 30 years in prison—28 of which were on Alabama's death row—for crimes he did not commit, before he was finally released from prison. One of Ray's primary aims in the book is to expose discrimination within America's criminal justice system: many of the people who are instrumental in Ray's arrest and trial are openly biased against him because he is Black, and his poverty also severely limits his ability to hire a good lawyer who can prove his innocence. While the criminal justice system claims to provide "equal and exact justice to all men of whatever state or persuasion"—words etched into the Jefferson County courthouse—Ray illustrates how the criminal justice system actually discriminates heavily against those who are not wealthy or white.

Because Ray is Black, the predominately white Jefferson County police force and court system are biased against him from the moment of his arrest. In 1985, Alabama policemen arrest Ray for three linked robbery-murders at separate restaurants. When he tells the police that he didn't commit the crime, the Lieutenant says, "You know, I don't care whether you did or didn't do it. In fact, I believe you didn't do it. But it doesn't matter. If you didn't do it, one of your brothers did. And you're going to take the rap." This horrific explanation illustrates clearly that the Lieutenant doesn't care about getting the right culprit. He simply cares about making sure that Ray or any one of his "brothers" (by this, the Lieutenant means any Black man) pays for the crime. The Lieutenant also lays out the reasons why Ray will be found guilty in his trial: because he's Black; because a white man is going to say that Ray shot him; and because he'll have a white district attorney, judge, and jury. With this, the Lieutenant explicitly points out how bias within the criminal justice system is going to work against Ray—due to his race, Ray has no hope of being acquitted despite the fact that he did not commit the crime.

Ray's prosecutor and defense attorney are then able to manipulate the trial based on their racial biases, ultimately sentencing him to death row. Throughout the trial, Ray notes that the prosecutor, Bob McGregor, looks at him with "hatred," suggesting that McGregor hates Ray and assumes that he's guilty based solely on his outward appearance—that is, his race. McGregor then agrees to let Ray take a polygraph test that either side could use in the trial—but when the polygraph results show that Ray is telling the truth about being innocent, McGregor refuses to allow the polygraph to be used as evidence. In this way, the prosecutor's discrimination against Ray leads him to manipulate the evidence allowed in the trial. Even Ray's own lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs, proves his own bias. Ray tries to argue his own case to Perhacs, explaining that he clocked into a night shift at his work at the time of the third robbery and that his mom's gun—which police believe is the murder weapon—hasn't been fired for years. But Perhacs simply asserts, "Listen, all y'all always doing something and saying you're innocent" ("all y'all" is implied to mean Black people). Perhacs then puts in virtually no effort to mount a defense, and Ray later discovers that he and McGregor are good friends. Thus, Perhacs's bias against Black people and personal relationship with McGregor also lead to a miscarriage of justice, because Ray doesn't get the adequate defense that U.S. law guarantees every person.

Racism isn't the only type of systemic discrimination in the justice system—Ray also faces obstacles because he is poor. The state pays Perhacs $1,000 to represent Ray because Ray cannot afford a lawyer, and Perhacs informs Ray disgruntledly that he "eat[s] $1000 for breakfast." Perhacs tells Ray that an adequate defense would cost $15,000, whereas Ray barely had $350 to take the polygraph test. This exposes the inequity in the system, whereby wealthy people are able to afford better lawyers (and/or more of their lawyer's time) to mount a defense. Furthermore, the state gives Perhacs a mere $500 to pay a ballistics expert to analyze firearm evidence from the robbery-murders; the only person they are able to get at that rate is a man named Andrew Payne, who has one eye and isn't able to use the machinery that matches the bullets with the gun. The prosecution quickly dismantles Payne's testimony, and because the ballistics evidence is the main link between Ray and the crimes, the jury finds him guilty. Again, Ray's poverty means that he cannot get proper justice. Ray also underscores how discrimination exists broadly even outside the criminal justice system, indicating that the system is also emblematic of societal issues more broadly. He describes experiencing racism in his school and on his baseball team, while he experiences classism in his work at the coal mine. Ray thinks at his trial, "Black, poor, without a father most of my life, one of ten children—it was actually pretty amazing I had made it to the age of twenty-nine without a noose around my neck." This description of a "noose around [his] neck" recalls the racist lynching of poor Black people in the American South in the 19th and early 20th centuries, suggesting that the racism and classism that Ray faces could easily kill him even outside of the criminal justice system.

In an article for the *Birmingham News*, Bryan Stevenson—the man who becomes Ray's lawyer while he is on death row—writes, "Alabama's death penalty is a lie. It is a perverse

monument to inequality, to how some lives matter and others do not. It is a violent example of how we protect and value the rich and abandon and devalue the poor." Stevenson acknowledges that the problem of discrimination in the justice system and beyond isn't isolated to a single case—Ray's story is one of many poignant and personal examples of how easily injustice can be carried against racial minorities and poor people.

OPTIMISM, FAITH, AND CHOICE

Most of Anthony Ray Hinton's life on death row is out of his control: what he eats, when he sleeps, and the timeline for his court appeals are all determined by other people. But he repeatedly emphasizes that one thing *is* within his control: his outlook. For his first three years in prison, Ray feels helpless and desolate because he was wrongly convicted—as a result, he doesn't engage with anyone, loses faith in God, and even contemplates suicide. Over time, however, he recognizes that maintaining optimism and faith is a choice he can make, even if it is sometimes hard to do so. While he acknowledges the obstacles in his path and at times gives into grief and despair, he nevertheless argues that in order to survive and to succeed, one must maintain hope and persevere.

When a judge sentences Ray to death row, he becomes pessimistic and even considers taking his own life, illustrating how a lack of hope and agency can literally be life-threatening. For the first three years in prison, Ray remains completely silent; he isolates himself out of anger and distress at the thought of being sent to the electric chair as an innocent man. He writes that the experience is "like being wrapped in a straightjacket all day every day. You can't make a choice about how to live." Ray doesn't yet appreciate that he *does* have a choice about how to live, so instead, he feels completely helpless and even physically incapacitated. Ray also loses his faith: though he was a devout Christian prior to his arrest, he throws his Bible underneath his bed when he arrives in prison, where it remains untouched for three years. When his mom later visits and says that God will fix what has happened, Ray thinks, "God didn't live in this place. If there was a God and he thought it was okay to send me to hell while I was still alive, well, then, he wasn't my God." The prison has left him without faith, so he doesn't share his mother's optimism that things might work out. Immersed in this despair, Ray considers committing suicide, as many inmates do on death row. In a way, killing himself is one of the only choices he could make: he thinks, "I wasn't going to survive here. I felt like eventually I would hollow out so completely, I would just disappear into a kind of nothingness. […] I had no other choice." Without optimism, Ray almost doesn't survive death row.

Three years into Ray's time in prison, however, he recognizes that he can choose to be optimistic about his situation; only by maintaining that hope is he able to regain his drive to live. Ray finally breaks his silence in prison when he connects with another inmate who learns his mother died. In being able to make the man laugh amid his grief, Ray recognizes that death row can't take away his humor and that he can choose to be more positive. Ray thinks, "I wasn't ready to die. I wasn't going to make it that easy on them. I was going to find another way to do my time. Whatever time I had left. Everything, I realized, is a choice." Understanding that his outlook is a conscious choice, Ray reclaims both agency and hope. When Ray and other inmates read James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* as a part of their **book club**, Ray identifies with the main character, John's, despair. Baldwin writes that in John's world, "the **sun** refused to shine" because of the oppression he faces from white people in the South in the early 1900s. But Ray counters John's perspective, explaining, "I know the sun will never refuse to shine. We may not see it, but I know it's there. I'm not going to have hate in my heart." With this statement, Ray shows that he has overcome his own hatred and despair by recognizing that "the sun will never refuse to shine"—that is, that there will always be things to hope for and anticipate.

Religion is another aspect of Ray's optimistic outlook, and regaining his faith in God buoys him through his years in prison. When Ray believes that the prison guards are coming to execute him one day, he thinks, "Why had I left God? Why had I turned my back on his comfort? I needed him now." In a difficult moment, Ray recognizes the importance of faith in his life to give him consolation and hope. Moreover, when Ray reaches out to the man on the row who just lost his mother, Ray tells him, "'God may sit high, but he looks low. He's looking down here in the pit. He's sitting high, but he's looking low. You've got to believe it.'" Ray then thinks, "I had to believe it too.'" Having faith that God is with him in the prison helps Ray believe that his life is not a lost cause. Ray's faith and hope are tested most intensely when his mother passes away in September 2002, 16 years into Ray's prison time. He once again contemplates killing himself, but he hears his mother's voice in his head saying, "You are the light. Don't you listen to that fool devil telling you to give up. I didn't raise no child of mine to give up when things get tough. Your life isn't your life to take. It belongs to God." With his mother's voice reminding him of both his faith and his capacity to persevere, Ray chooses to keep fighting for his life instead of taking it.

When Ray finally gets out of prison for his wrongful conviction after nearly 30 years, the first thing he says to reporters is, "the sun does shine," hearkening back to Baldwin's words in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Ray knows that the other inmates will be watching and listening to his words, and he is sending a signal to them that they should retain hope and persevere as he has. This is likely why he titled his memoir *The Sun Does Shine* as well—this simple phrase captures the idea that, without that hope, Ray would never have been vindicated and walked as a

free man.

THE DEATH PENALTY

Along with exposing bias in the criminal justice system, Anthony Ray Hinton also uses *The Sun Does Shine* to explore the issue of the death penalty, which was legal in 32 states as of the book's publication in 2018. Ray examines the death penalty from a moral perspective, illustrating how it is wrong to take a life for a life. Furthermore, he illustrates through his own wrongful conviction that the death penalty does not always carry out justice—and he also recognizes that even those who are guilty of the crimes for which they've been sentenced are still human beings who do not deserve to die. In examining the death penalty's flaws and its questionable morality, Ray explicitly argues that death penalty should be abolished.

Ray uses the fact that he could have been killed, despite being innocent, to illustrate the inherent flaws of the death penalty. Ray understands that the death penalty is a punishment for people guilty of the worst crimes. But he uses his own case—in which he was wrongfully convicted of two murder-robberies and another attempted murder—to prove that "the system didn't know who was guilty," and that the death penalty could easily be used to murder innocent men like him. Ray references arguments from his lawyer Bryan Stevenson, who writes that "With 34 executions and seven exonerations since 1975, one innocent person has been identified on Alabama's Death Row for every five executions. It's an astonishing rate of error." This statement argues that the death penalty's errors are high enough that the punishment is not worth preserving in the law. Ray concludes definitively, "Until we have a way of ensuring that innocent men are never executed—until we account for the racism in our courts, in our prisons, and in our sentencing—the death penalty should be abolished." In this way, Ray also ties the death penalty to the problem of the U.S.'s discriminatory criminal justice system. He makes the case that, until the court system can guard against discrimination, the death penalty should not be used, since the punishment can be doled out based on a biased system.

Ray also approaches the issue from a moral perspective, suggesting that the death penalty is just as immoral as any other kind of murder. Ray reasons that no killing is justified by the law—a statement that also applies to the death penalty. He explains, "Man didn't have the right to take a life. The State didn't have the right to take a life either." In suggesting that killing is wrong in all cases, Ray argues governments shouldn't be able to carry out that kind of punishment. Ray also uses his faith to argue against the morality of the death penalty. He asserts that "Life [is] a gift given by God. I believe[] it should and could only be taken by God as well." This statement alludes to one of the Bible's Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), implying that people should not kill others as Ray states. In alluding to the Bible, Ray uses Judeo-Christian morality to illustrate his stance that while God has the right to take lives, people and governments do not. In addition, Ray refutes the death penalty using other logical arguments. He writes that "When you took a life, it didn't bring back a life. It didn't undo what was done" and later, "death has never deterred death." In both cases, Ray undermines other common justifications for the death penalty by arguing that it neither remedies murders that have already been committed, nor does it prevent future murders from happening.

Lastly, Ray demonstrates that all lives are worthwhile, even the lives of those who are guilty on death row—and thus, no one should be put to death for their crimes. Ray recognizes that although he is innocent, not all of the men on death row are. However, he illustrates that they, too, can be redeemable. For instance, Ray (who's Black) befriends a man named Henry Hays, a former Ku Klux Klan member who lynched a young Black man in 1981. Ray explains that, despite Henry's crime, he carries no animosity toward Henry, who has since understood the racist hatred he was taught growing up. Ray notes, "No one is undeserving of their own life or their own potential to change," illustrating that even those whom the outside world considers horrific criminals have the capacity to show remorse and find redemption. Ray broadly applies this idea to all death row inmates, arguing that the inmates are "Not monsters. Not the worst thing we had ever done. We were so much more than what we had been reduced to." By using the word "we"—even though Ray himself has not committed a capital offense—he reminds the reader that the other inmates are human beings just like he is and are therefore worthy of life.

In the book's final pages, Ray lists each of the 2,813 names of the men and women who are on death row in the U.S. as of November 2018. He writes, "Statistically, one out of every ten people on this list is innocent," which amounts to 281 people. He argues that if one in 10 planes crashed, society would stop flights and reform the planes—and it must do so with the death penalty. Ending the book in this way highlights the scale and stakes of the issue, driving home Ray's belief that "it's time we put a stop to the death penalty."

SUFFERING, COMMUNITY, AND SUPPORT

Anthony Ray Hinton and the other death row inmates experience immense physical and mental suffering in Alabama's Holman State Prison. The inmates, who lose years of their lives in prison, frequently feel isolated and tormented as they dread their imminent executions and endure abuse from the guards. In the midst of this loneliness and suffering, Ray recognizes the value of community both within and outside of the prison. Ray relies on people in his life—like his mom and best friend Lester, a team of lawyers working to appeal his case, and even his fellow inmates—to provide him

with emotional support as he serves a decades-long prison sentence for crimes he didn't commit. With each of these groups, Ray highlights how close relationships and supportive communities can provide much-needed empathy and comfort in difficult times.

While many of Ray's family and friends abandon him, his best friend, Lester, and his mother lift his spirits as they support him no matter what. When Ray is going through his trial, he doesn't receive much support from his nine brothers and sisters, but his mom and Lester support him through the trial even when others believe he committed the murders. Ray writes, "The fact that these two people never doubted me for a second—well, let's just say I hung on to that like my life depended on it." Their support sustains him through his trial and provides him with critical comfort. After Ray's conviction, Ray's mom, Lester, and Lester's mom (Phoebe) visit him every week, without fail, for family visitation days. Ray explains that "the three of them were the only bit of light in the darkness," reinforcing how they provide a reassuring presence that mitigates the suffering of the jail.

Over the years, Ray's team of lawyers also becomes a kind of community for him, and he feels most assured when his lawyers believe in him and empathize with his horrific situation. Ray's wants to trust and have faith in his initial court-appointed lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs—but Perhacs is relatively indifferent to the fact that he holds Ray's life in his hands. He seems to believe that Ray actually committed the crimes he's been accused of, and at one point, he asks Ray to have his mother mortgage her house to pay him $15,000. His lack of empathy for Ray's financial and emotional situation only compounds Ray's feelings of mistreatment at being on trial for crimes he didn't commit. After Ray fires Perhacs, another lawyer named Santha Sonenberg arrives to represent him from the Equal Justice Initiative, a non-profit dedicated to providing legal representation to those who have been denied a fair trial. When Ray tells Santha that he is innocent, she says that she believes him, asks how he is doing, and informs him that he cannot be executed while his court appeal process is still going on—something he didn't know. Hearing this, Ray tears up in gratitude; these simple expressions of compassion and understanding mean a world of difference to his emotional state. Later, when Bryan Stevenson (the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative) takes over Ray's case, he works tirelessly to make sure that Ray can get out of prison. Ray writes, "Bryan cared about me so much that it moved me in a way that was beyond words." When Ray's conviction is reversed, he wonders how he could possibly thank Bryan: "He had been by my side for fifteen years and behind the scenes for longer than that." Bryan's support—and the community of lawyers that Bryan brings with him—literally give Ray the rest of his life back.

But Ray's fellow inmates are perhaps his most supportive community, because they are able to truly empathize with one another's situations and support one another through their most trying times. After Ray's first three years, during which he barely talks to other inmates, he realizes the value of extending empathy to others. He thinks, "I was born with the same gift from God we are all born with—the impulse to reach out and lessen the suffering of another human being." Ray does this by comforting another inmate (who's crying over his mother's death) when no one else does; the other men express their sympathy soon after. Even though each of them is dealing with their own sorrow, Ray's gesture initiates an environment of mutual support upon which others can build. From that point on, Ray begins to speak with other men in the prison about their convictions, gaining legal advice and having deep discussions about politics and relationships. Ray recognizes that "sometimes you have to make family where you find family, or you die in isolation." Connecting with the other men makes Ray feel as though he has gained the emotional support that a family might normally provide. Ray also notes that the inmates' support is most crucial when they know someone is being executed. When Ray's friend Henry goes to the electric chair—just down the hall—Ray and the other inmates bang on the bars and shout so that Henry can hear them as he dies. Ray writes, "I wanted Henry to hear me. I wanted him to know he wasn't alone." The inmates share Henry's acute fear of death and try to show their support in his final hour of need. Ray feels community in the prison most viscerally when his own mother dies: just as he had done for others, the men pass what little food they have in a chain to Ray's cell and shout words of sympathy. He thinks, "Sorrow shared is sorrow lessened." In Ray's deepest moments of despair and suffering, having a community is crucial to easing that pain.

THE POWER OF STORIES

Stories are a crucial aspect of Anthony Ray Hinton's life as a wrongfully convicted inmate on death row. In his mind, Ray travels to different places and fantasizes about various celebrities as a way to escape the grim environment of Alabama's Holman State Prison. He also begins a **book club** in the prison to help other inmates lose themselves in a story for a little while. And of course, in his memoir, Ray uses his own story as a powerful tool to expose the problems with the death penalty and the criminal justice system. Using these different avenues, Ray highlights the power of stories both as a means of escape and as a means of confronting harsh realities and philosophical ideas.

Ray plays out fantastical stories in his mind as a way of coping with difficult realities in his life. Even before Ray goes to Holman Prison, he uses his imagination to escape the coal mine in which he works. In his head, he drives through Texas and New Mexico, eats Maine lobster, or dances with beautiful women in Honduras and Panama. He writes, "In my mind, I would travel anywhere but into that black, dark pit," illustrating

how these imaginings enable him to avoid his reality. Ray revives his fantasies in prison: he imagines that he is traveling the world or marrying celebrities like Halle Berry and Sandra Bullock. He thinks, "Someday I was going to walk out of here, but until then, I was going to use my mind to travel the world. I had so many places to go, and people to see, and things to learn." Telling himself stories becomes a way to feel like he is living his life more fully, even while he is stuck in the monotony and torment of prison. Ray explicitly states that these fantasies help him cope with his harsh reality. One Wednesday, he meets with the Queen of England in his mind. When he shakes off this dream, he realizes that it is actually Friday—he has skipped over Thursday entirely. He realizes that his mind is a third way to escape the prison (in addition to dying or walking free), helping him pass the time and avoid dwelling on his difficult situation.

Ray starts a book club in prison precisely because he recognizes how valuable stories could be for other inmates as well—both as a means of escape and of helping people confront important issues in their lives and the world more broadly. Ray approaches the prison warden, Charlie Jones, and asks to hold a book club (books other than the Bible aren't allowed in the prison). He tells Jones that it will help keep peace in the prison, but in reality, Ray knows that "If the guys had books, they could travel the world. They would get smarter and freer." Thus, books would provide his friends with a respite from death row. Ray even likens the books to his own fantasies. When they start reading books, Ray explains, "We were transported, and just as I could travel the world and have tea with the Queen of England, I watched these men be transported in their minds for a small chunk of time." Just as it was invaluable for him, this transportation allows the men to have something to focus on other than their impending deaths. Even inmates outside of Ray's seven-person book club start to read the books that are passed around. They read books like *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—all of which deal with racism in the American South. Ray writes that guys would often just yell from cell to cell, discussing politics, violence, relationships. They appreciate "a chance to talk their way through the big ideas," illustrating that stories aren't just valued for their escapism but also as a way to affect people's ideas and initiate discussions about important problems.

Ray also recognizes the power of his own story in publishing *The Sun Does Shine*, knowing that his memoir can help inform people about the criminal justice system and the death penalty. During the book club, Ray promises the other men that when he gets out, he will talk about his time in prison. He assures them, "I'm going to tell my story, and I'm going to tell your story. Hell, maybe I will even write a book and tell it like that." Understanding how powerful the books in his book club are, Ray realizes that he can make that same kind of impact in telling his own story. After Ray gets out of prison, he does just that: he travels the country, telling his story to "anyone who will listen." He realizes that he is a voice for the men who still sit on death row. Stories were a powerful means of escape from death row for Ray and his fellow inmates—and now, he wants to use his own powerful story to help end the death penalty.

SYMBOLS

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

THE SUN

In *The Sun Does Shine*, the sun symbolizes Ray's persistent hope for a better life—a life where he is proven innocent and released from prison. Ray first introduces the sun when he and the other death-row inmates in his book club discuss *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. In a key passage, the main character of the book discusses how "the sun refused to shine" because of the oppression he faced from white people—an idea that Ray refutes. In maintaining that the sun will never refuse to shine for him, Ray implies that he will always keep up hope, even in his darkest days, because that hope is critical for his survival on death row. In other words, Ray *chooses* to see the sun shining. It is this sense of hope that prevents Ray from taking his own life while on death row (something many inmates end up doing), encourages him to find a better lawyer (Bryan Stevenson) who is committed to advocating for him, and leads him to form deep and satisfying friendships with the other inmates.

The sun's symbolic significance as a beacon of hope is particularly apt because Ray often cannot actually see the sun in his own life. For the first 2 years of his 30-year imprisonment, he is allowed to take a 15-minute walk around the prison yard (an opportunity he eagerly takes), but his next 28 years are spent on death row, where he is completely denied the opportunity to see the sun. Even though he may not be able to literally see the sun in prison, he holds out hope that he will be able to walk free one day and feel the sun on his skin once more. It's fitting that when Ray finally does get out of prison, his first words to the press are, "the sun does shine." Knowing that the men on death row will be watching the news of his release, Ray makes this statement as a way to encourage them to cultivate and nurture the same sense of hope that he felt. Only by keeping up hope—by believing that the sun does shine—is Ray able to literally and metaphorically see the sunshine again.

BOOKS AND STORIES

In *The Sun Does Shine*, books contain several layers of symbolic significance. Firstly, books and stories symbolize the power of escapism to ease one's suffering. During his 28 years on Holman's death row, Ray constantly

fantasizes about meeting the Queen of England or winning the World Series. Spinning these stories in his mind gives him a sense of freedom, allowing him to mentally escape the confines of his prison cell and the bleakness of his life. As time goes on, Ray becomes so invested in these mental stories that time begins to pass far more quickly and effortlessly—which is important for someone who's wrongly imprisoned on death row for nearly three decades. Besides helping the time pass, these stories also brighten Ray's mood. He soon decides to start a book club at Holman so that the men can experience their own sense of mental freedom, even if they don't have physical freedom.

Similarly, books also represent the idea that stories can be liberating for prisoners—and that prisoners deserve to have this kind of mental liberation. When Ray first arrives at Holman's death row, the only book allowed in the men's cells is the Bible. After Ray petitions for the men to be able to have a book club, the men are allowed to have two books each, and Ray observes how the books quickly open up a whole new world for the other inmates. When they read *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, for instance, they are immersed in Harlem in the early 1900s, which distracts them from their own harsh reality. But the books, many of which deal with racism in the American South, also enable them to discuss social and political issues, offering them a voice that they never had before. In this way, the books provide them with agency, education, and entertainment—liberating feelings for those who live in five-by-seven-foot cells.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the St. Martin's Press edition of *The Sun Does Shine* published in 2018.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Hell, as far as the police and the prosecutor and the judge and even my own defense attorney were concerned, I was born guilty. Black, poor, without a father most of my life, one of ten children—it was actually pretty amazing I had made it to the age of twenty-nine without a noose around my neck. But justice is a funny thing, and in Alabama, justice isn't blind. She knows the color of your skin, your education level, and how much money you have in the bank. I may not have had any money, but I had enough education to understand exactly how justice was working in this trial and exactly how it was going to turn out. The good old boys had traded in their white robes for black robes, but it was still a lynching.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Sheldon Perhacs, Prosecutor Bob McGregor, Judge Garrett

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

As Ray sits in the courtroom waiting to receive his sentence, he observes how so many of the participants in his trial are biased against him because of his race and socioeconomic status. The passage explores the deep discrimination underlying the criminal justice system in Alabama, from the police to the jury to the judge. Ray emphasizes how their judgment of him is not based on any facts in the trial—instead, Ray was "born guilty," implying that the circumstances of him being Black, poor, and growing up in a large family caused them to determine his guilt.

Ray then argues that this form of "justice" isn't justice at all. Writing that "justice isn't blind" harkens back to the popular maxim that justice *is* blind—an allusion to older statues or depictions of Justice with a blindfold on. This blindfolded figure implies that justice is impartial and doesn't care what a person looks like—that all people should receive equal protection under the law. And yet Ray argues that the opposite is true in practice, noting that his race and socioeconomic background have directly led him to receive inadequate justice.

Lastly, Ray links the discrimination within the criminal justice system to the discrimination that has existed outside of it for centuries. In noting that the "good old boys" have traded in white robes for black robes and referring to "lynching," he connects his trial back to the KKK, a white supremacist hate group. One of the KKK's hallmarks was wearing white robes as they enacted extreme vigilante violence, primarily against Black people. He implies here that Judge Garrett is doing the same thing—killing an innocent Black man for no reason—and suggests that the criminal justice system is still plagued by racism that has pervaded the American South for centuries.

Chapter 2 Quotes

I took a deep breath. I knew I had a choice. Looking up at that sky, I knew I could get angry or I could have some faith. It was always a choice. I could easily have been angry, and maybe I should have been angry. This was God's country, and I chose instead to love every single shade of blue that the sky wanted to show me. And when I turned my head to the right, I could see what looked like ten different shades of green. This was real and true, and it reminded me that even when you are flat on your back on the ground, there is beauty if you look for it.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Lester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

As Ray and his best friend, Lester, walk home from Ray's baseball game, they jump into a ditch anytime they see a car they don't recognize. Ray's reflection as he sits in the ditch encapsulates his outlook not only in high school, but eventually throughout his time in prison as well. Ray knows that he has a right to be angry that as a young Black man he could be targeted at any time, and for no reason. But at the same time, he understands that this only hurts him. Instead, it is important to him to have faith and hold out hope that things can change for the better, and to appreciate the beauty in the world even when life has left him in a ditch, both literally and metaphorically.

Even in this moment, Ray emphasizes how maintaining optimism is a choice—a choice that he will have to make during his time on death row at Holman as well. The shades of blue in the sky are a metaphor for the fact that life is filled with both joy and sadness, but Ray has to be able to appreciate life for all its moments. Ray draws on his Christian faith, establishing a very important part of his character. Appreciating the life that God has given him is another important way in which Ray maintains a sense of optimism, knowing that there is a higher being that doesn't make mistakes guiding him through life.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Some days, I would go up to Maine to eat lobster drenched in warm butter, and other days, I would go swimming in Key West, Florida. In my mind, I would travel anywhere but into that black, dark pit where every breath was full of float dust that brought coal and rock and dirt into your lungs where it settled in and took root as if to punish you for disturbing it in the first place.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

When Ray works in the coal mines in Praco, Alabama, he discovers a coping mechanism to deal with its harsh conditions: his imagination. In this passage, Ray establishes the power of stories, even ones that he makes up in his mind. Imagining that he can go to Maine and eat lobster or swim in Florida provides him with an escape mechanism so that he doesn't have to think about his current reality. This will become crucial during Ray's time at Holman, where he once again uses his skill to avoid thinking about his death sentence.

Here, Ray emphasizes how working in the coal mines is, in some ways, just as difficult as being in prison—using diction to convey the dark, dirty mines that are slowly degrading his health. The dust is even personified, suggesting that the conditions of the mines are so punishing as to seem to be actively attacking those who work in it. It makes sense, then, that Ray's examples of the places he wants to go are primarily sunny, open, and warm. This implicitly ties into the symbol of the sun, which represents hope to Ray. In imagining sunny places, Ray is able to press on and remain hopeful and optimistic, so that he doesn't have to focus on the darker and harsher realities.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ "You know, I don't care whether you did or didn't do it. In fact, I believe you didn't do it. But it doesn't matter. If you didn't do it, one of your brothers did. And you're going to take the rap. You want to know why?"

I just shook my head.

"I can give you five reasons why they are going to convict you. Do you want to know what they are?"

I shook my head, no, but he continued.

"Number one, you're black. Number two, a white man gonna say you shot him. Number three, you're gonna have a white district attorney. Number four, you're gonna have a white judge. And number five, you're gonna have an all-white jury."

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton, Lieutenant Acker (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

As Lieutenant Acker is driving Ray to the county jail, he openly lays out the different reasons why Ray will be convicted regardless of whether he is innocent. Acker's whole monologue is a chilling exposé of the racism in the

criminal justice system. Acker himself admits to his racism: he doesn't care about getting the right person for the crime. He only wants to make sure that Ray or any one of his "brothers"—implying any Black man—will be convicted for the crime. Acker even *believes* that Ray is innocent, and so his actions come down to more than just willful ignorance; he is actively subverting justice.

Lieutenant Acker then reveals the bias within the system as a whole, spelling out all of the reasons why Ray will be convicted. Due to his race, Ray will not get a fair trial. The white lawyers, judge, and jury will inherently discriminate against him because he is Black, and Acker actively acknowledges this.

As telling as Acker's words are, Ray's silence is equally telling. He has no response to what Acker is saying because he recognizes the truth in it. Acker is boldly telling Ray exactly how the courts will work against him, and as a Black man, Ray is powerless to fight that kind of systemic discrimination. Ray can't even expose what Acker has said, because the justice system inherently values Acker's voice over Ray's own.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"Would it make a difference if I told you I was innocent?"

"Listen, all y'all always doing something and saying you're innocent."

I dropped my hand. So that's how it was going to be. I was pretty sure that when he said "all y'all," he wasn't talking about ex-cons or former coal miners or Geminis or even those accused of capital murder.

I needed him, so I had no choice but to let it slide. I had to believe that he believed me.

Related Characters: Sheldon Perhacs, Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Lieutenant Acker

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

When Ray meets with his court-appointed lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs, for the first time, Perhacs reveals his own bias against Ray. While Ray maintains that he's innocent, Perhacs lumps him in with "all y'all"—as Ray notes, this implies that Perhacs believes all Black people commit crimes and say that they're innocent. Just like Lieutenant Acker in the previous chapter, Perhacs is biased from the moment that he sees Ray, and Ray understands that it will be difficult to get Perhacs to believe in him.

In this way, Ray shows how the bias in the criminal justice system not only affects those on the prosecution and the state's side, but even those who are supposed to champion their defendants. The Fourth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution represent the bedrock for presumption of innocence—the idea that everyone is innocent until proven guilty. But as Perhacs and Acker have shown, Ray is not given that benefit of the doubt.

In addition, Perhacs's lack of faith in his client chips away at Ray's hope. Unlike the lawyers that work for Ray later in the book, Perhacs' lack of empathy and support only compound Ray's feelings of being mistreated, and he gradually becomes more dejected as he recognizes that Perhacs doesn't believe in him.

"I've been reading the papers. You see that there's been other holdups? Other managers getting robbed at closing? I definitely can't be doing that when I'm locked in here."

"Yeah, I'll look into it. They're only paying me $1,000 for this, and hell, I eat $1,000 for breakfast." He laughed, but it wasn't funny.

Related Characters: Sheldon Perhacs, Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

When Ray and Perhacs meet after Ray takes his polygraph test, Ray tries to suggest different tacks that Perhacs can take to defend Ray in court. Perhacs's response, however, exposes yet another dimension of systemic discrimination within the criminal justice system. Perhacs is a court-appointed lawyer, meaning that the state pays for Ray's defense because Ray doesn't have the money to pay for his own lawyer. But as a result, Perhacs clearly puts in less effort—while he says that he'll look into it, it's clear from Perhacs's tone that he feels the money doesn't warrant the same kind of effort that he would expend for someone with more money. This exposes the inequity of the system, whereby wealthy people inherently get a better defense because they can pay for more of their lawyers' time.

Perhacs's statement that he "eats $1,000 for breakfast" also highlights Ray's feelings of being unsupported. Not only does Perhacs think Ray is guilty, but Perhacs also doesn't

empathize with Ray's financial situation at all, causing Ray to feel like he doesn't have someone truly championing his case.

Perhaps Ray's most striking point is that this discrimination and lack of support clearly hurts society as a whole. As Ray notes, there is likely a criminal who is still walking freely on the streets, but due to the state's bias, Ray is in jail instead. This adds to the argument for why it is important to eradicate this kind of systemic bias, because implementing proper justice will help everyone, not just those who are wrongfully convicted like Ray.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ I could do nothing but lay my head down in my arms and cry. I knew at that moment, I was going to be convicted of murder. I was innocent. And my one-eyed expert had just handed the prosecution a guilty verdict.

Nothing mattered anymore.

It took the jury two hours to find me guilty.

It took them forty-five minutes to determine my punishment.

Death.

In that moment, I felt my whole life shatter into a million jagged pieces around me. The world was fractured and broken, and everything good in me broke with it.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Sheldon Perhacs, Andrew Payne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Ray's trial, after the state completely discredits Ray's ballistics expert, the jury finds Ray guilty and sentences him to death. This exposes more of the bias in the criminal justice system: because Perhacs only had $500 to hire a ballistics expert, they could only find someone who was blind in one eye and who was unqualified to use the equipment. Even though the results of Payne's findings were correct, these facts caused the jury to mistrust him and therefore come to an incorrect verdict. In effect, because Ray can't afford a better expert, he doesn't receive a proper defense or proper justice.

The verdict is a major turning point for Ray. The short sentence structures imply Ray's disorientation and shock: he is only just beginning to reckon with the concept of death, even though the jury took a short time to come to the conclusion that he should lose his life. Up until this point, Ray has held onto hope and faith that the justice system wouldn't be able to convict an innocent man. But here, Ray's metaphor implies that his faith is completely shattered. Not only does he lose hope in the world and the justice system, but he also loses faith in himself. For the next three years, he plunges into despair, causing him almost to take his life, and this moment is the origin of that hopelessness.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "God will fix this," she kept saying. "God can do everything but fail, baby. God is going to fix this right up for you."

"Yes, Mama," I said, and I could see one of the guards look surprised at hearing me speak. I didn't have the heart to tell her that I was done with God. God didn't live in this place. If there was a God and he thought it was okay to send me to hell while I was still alive, well, then, he wasn't my God. Not anymore. Not ever again.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton, Buhlar Hinton/Ray's Mom (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

When Ray's mom visits him at Holman prison for the first time, she assures him that God is going to fix his unjust conviction. But Ray's response is telling, as it shows a major change in his outlook. Before, Ray's Christian faith was essential to his character—he went to church regularly and loved God. Back then, he would have agreed with his mother, believing that God is right and that he would correct what has happened. But after being convicted, Ray's worldview has changed completely. The justice system has rendered him completely without faith, and because of that, he doesn't share his mother's optimism that things will work out.

Not only does Ray feel that he can't share in that optimism in this moment, but he also believes that he will never be able to regain his religious faith. To him, it's not a temporary loss; he believes that he has been completely abandoned, and as a result, he completely isolates himself from others as well. The fact that the guard is shocked that Ray can speak is telling: it suggests that Ray has completely turned inward, focusing on his own despair and anger and refusing to connect with others. But this is what makes his ultimate

regaining of faith so extraordinary later on, as he realizes that his outlook is a choice—but in this moment, he is choosing to forgo his characteristic hope.

I didn't want to be known as inmate Z468. I was Anthony Ray Hinton. People called me Ray. I used to love to laugh. I had a name and a life and a home, and I wanted it so bad, the wanting had a taste. I wasn't going to survive here. I felt like eventually I would hollow out so completely, I would just disappear into a kind of nothingness. They were all trying to kill me, and I was going to escape. I had no other choice.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

As Ray becomes accustomed to life on death row, he grows more and more despondent. In this passage, Ray exposes how dehumanizing Holman is: death row reduces him to a number, robs him of joy, and makes him feel as though he is not alive, even before he is officially executed. His tense is important: saying that he "used to love to laugh" shows how he is now deprived of both laughter and love. Because all of these ideas were integral to his character, he feels that he is losing himself as a person—disappearing into "nothingness," as he writes.

In this chapter, Ray ponders the various ways that people kill themselves on death row—a relatively frequent occurrence—illustrating the very real possibility that Ray could make the same choice. As he highlights here, he feels completely without agency, and so in some ways, killing himself is one of the only ways that he feels he can make a choice in the prison. He can choose to commit suicide or to die in an escape attempt; for Ray, it's hard to keep up hope when the alternative is to be executed in the electric chair or to "hollow out completely." Ray doesn't feel the need to keep up his life, illustrating how succumbing to hopelessness is endangering Ray's survival on death row.

Chapter 10 Quotes

I didn't know Michael Lindsey, but I wanted him to know he wasn't alone. I wanted him to know that I saw him and knew him and his life meant something and so did his death. We yelled until the lights stopped flickering and the generator that powered the electric chair turned off. I banged on the bars until the smell of Michael Lindsey's death reached me, and then I got in my bunk and I pulled the blanket over my head and I wept. I cried for a man who had to die alone, and I cried for whoever was next to die.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Three years into Ray's time at Holman, the guards execute another prisoner named Michael Lindsey. This is one of the first executions that Ray experiences at the prison, and it has a profound effect on him. First, it adds to Ray's arguments against the death penalty, as he maintains in this passage that everyone's lives matter, even those who are guilty on death row. And in showing his own vulnerability in that moment, he communicates to readers his own fear of being killed as an innocent man and some of the pain of knowing that someone is being executed in the room next to him. Part of Ray's goal in the book is to remedy people's ignorance or complacency about the death penalty, and Ray tries to use what he has experienced to show the death penalty's horrors up close.

Ray also implicitly highlights the value of the community in the prison. Even though he has not yet connected with the other inmates, he understands Michael Lindsey's isolation and the power of the other inmates banging on the bars in solidarity. They are the only people who can truly empathize with each other's fear, and coming together in this moment is a crucial way of combatting their suffering.

Chapter 11 Quotes

I wondered why it is that the cries of another human being—whether it's a baby or a woman in grief or a man in pain—can touch us in ways we don't expect. I wasn't expecting to have my heart break that night. I wasn't expecting to end three years of silence. It was a revelation to realize that I wasn't the only man on death row. I was born with the same gift from God we are all born with—the impulse to reach out and lessen the suffering of another human being. It was a gift, and we each had a choice whether to use this gift or not.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Three years into Ray's time at Holman, he finally breaks his silence when he reaches out to another man who has just learned that his mother passed away. In this moment, Ray both starts to regain a sense of community and he also begins to recover hope. Not only does he represent community for this man, as he works to relieve the man's suffering, but he also recognizes how this extension of empathy eases his own suffering. In realizing that he isn't "the only man on death row," Ray acknowledges that the other men can empathize with him and support him as well, and he no longer feels alone.

Ray's empathy also helps build a community among the inmates. When Ray reaches out to this man, he sets off a cascade of sympathy from other inmates as well, as they also recognize their own capacity to empathize. This illustrates how even just one person reaching out can foster an environment of support. Ray and the other inmates understand what the man is going through in a way that no one else does.

In this moment, Ray also recovers some of the religious faith that he lost when arriving at the prison. He sees that in reaching out to others, he is using an ability that God gave him and actively choosing compassion rather than hatred and isolation. Regaining his faith is a key stepping stone to regaining hope for his future as well.

> It was silent for a few moments, and then the most amazing thing happened. On a dark night, in what must surely be the most desolate and dehumanizing place on earth, a man laughed. A real laugh. And with that laughter, I realized that the State of Alabama could steal my future and my freedom, but they couldn't steal my soul or my humanity. And they most certainly couldn't steal my sense of humor. I missed my family. I missed Lester. But sometimes you have to make family where you find family, or you die in isolation. I wasn't ready to die. I wasn't going to make it that easy on them. I was going to find another way to do my time. Whatever time I had left.
>
> Everything, I realized, is a choice.
>
> And spending your days waiting to die is no way to live.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Buhlar Hinton/Ray's Mom, Lester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

When Ray breaks his three years of silence on death row and comforts a man whose mother has just passed away, he reaches a turning point. While he lost faith and hope when he was convicted, here he regains some of his characteristic optimism. He recognizes that optimism, hope, religious faith, and humor are choices he can make, and thus far he has been choosing to focus on despair instead.

Choosing to be positive also makes Ray feel that he has regained some control over his life, whereas prior to this moment he has felt completely stripped of agency. The strong affirmative statements that close out the chapter suggest that Ray has a newfound conviction and a desire to persevere in the face of hardship. Ray knows that it would be easy to give up, and so in order to survive and succeed, he needs to maintain optimism.

Ray also recognizes the importance of community in the prison. He derives a great deal of comfort from Lester and his mom, but they aren't able to support him in the same way that the inmates can support each other. In saying that he has to make family where he finds family, Ray suggests that the inmates can provide him with the same comfort that his family can. The other men recognize and empathize with Ray's experiences, and that goes a long way to easing Ray's suffering on death row.

Chapter 12 Quotes

> Time was a funny and strange and fluid thing, and I was going to bend it and shape it so that it wasn't my enemy. Someday I was going to walk out of here, but until then, I was going to use my mind to travel the world. I had so many places to go, and people to see, and things to learn.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Santha Sonenberg

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

In 1990, as Santha works on Ray's appeal, Ray recalls his daydreams in the coal mines and starts to imagine fantasies like meeting the Queen of England while he is on death row.

When he shakes off this particular daydream and discovers that he has completely skipped over a day on death row, he recognizes the value of these fantasies once more. They provide him with a means of mental escape on death row, allowing him not only to turn away from the harsh reality of the prison, but also providing him with a sense that he is living his life more freely and fulfilling some of his dreams, even though he knows this isn't reality. Whereas before Ray believed he could only escape from his bleak circumstances by walking free or being executed, the stories provide him with a powerful alternative in the meantime.

The way that Ray describes time in this passage also illustrates how his imagination provides him with a newfound sense of agency. Before Ray considered time his "enemy," not only because the State stole his time from him, but also because the more time that passes, the closer he comes to his death. But now, his ability to "bend it and shape it" makes Ray in control of his circumstances, rather than feeling like a helpless victim.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ We weren't a collection of innocent victims. Many of the guys I laughed with had raped women and murdered children and sliced innocent people up for the fun of it or because they were high on drugs or desperate for money and never thought beyond the next moment. The outside world called them monsters. They called all of us monsters. But I didn't know any monsters on the row. I knew guys named Larry and Henry and Victor and Jesse. I knew Vernon and Willie and Jimmy. Not monsters. Guys with names who didn't have mothers who loved them or anyone who had ever shown them a kindness that was even close to love. Guys who were born broken or had been broken by life. Guys who had been abused as children and had their minds and their hearts warped by cruelty and violence and isolation long before they ever stood in front of a judge and a jury.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Jesse Morrison, Victor Kennedy, Larry Heath, Jimmy Dill, Henry Hays, Santha Sonenberg

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

After Ray becomes more connected to the other men on death row, he recognizes their humanity, and as such, realizes the extreme cruelty of the death penalty. In this passage, he crafts an argument for why it is wrong even to kill those who are found guilty. He doesn't try to obscure the fact that many of the men on death row have done horrible things. However, he reinforces the fact that these men still have their humanity, just as he has. In saying that the outside world calls all of the people on death row "monsters"—including him—Ray implies that he is often lumped in with the other men. But rather than label all of the men monsters, Ray argues that they are all simply human beings.

Ray also acknowledges some of the men's problems, like being broken by life or coming from hateful homes—not to abdicate them of responsibility or blame for their crimes, but to emphasize that they have had difficult circumstances that led to their mistakes. As such, they do not deserve to die for things that are out of their control.

Lastly, Ray circles back to the problems with discrimination in the criminal justice system and American society more broadly. In noting that some have had their hearts "warped by cruelty and violence and isolation long before they ever stood in front of a judge or jury," Ray also recalls the period when he felt like a monster while in jail. Even though Ray hadn't committed any of the crimes he was charged with, he nevertheless empathizes with the other inmates and acknowledges that when people face injustice, they can easily make mistakes or let hatred and anger fuel them.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ We were transported, and just as I could travel the world and have tea with the Queen of England, I watched these men be transported in their minds for a small chunk of time. It was a vacation from the row—and everyone was a part of book club, even before the seven of us had our first official meeting.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

When Ray starts his book club in prison, six inmates join him for the official meetings but everyone on death row starts to talk about the books. Here, Ray establishes the books as a symbol of freedom and empowerment: they represent a means of escape for the inmates, liberating their minds from the despair, anger, and boredom that they experience on the

row. Ray even connects the books to a vacation—a stark word for people who are trapped in five-by-seven-foot cells and awaiting the death penalty. But the books give them a feeling of liberation and even leisure that they don't otherwise get on death row.

Ray also relates the power of the books to the power of the stories that he tells himself on death row, connecting the books to his own fantasies about the Queen of England. The stories he tells himself in his mind represented a means of escape, and Ray is offering that same freedom to the other inmates. In this way, he illustrates how powerful stories can be, allowing them to live more fully and not focus so heavily on their impending deaths.

❝ "I'm going to tell the world about how there was men in here that mattered. That cared about each other and the world. That were learning how to look at things differently."

"You're going to tell it on the mountain, Ray?" Jesse asked. The other guys laughed.

"I'm going to tell it on every single mountain there is. I'm going to push that boulder right on up and over that giant, and I'm going to stand at the top of that hill, and on the top of every mountain I can find, and I'm going to tell it. I'm going to tell my story, and I'm going to tell your story. Hell, maybe I will even write a book and tell it like that."

Related Characters: Jesse Morrison, Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

At Ray's first book club meeting, he and the other inmates discuss James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, and at the meeting's conclusion, Ray assures them that one day he'll tell their story. Ray does this because he recognizes how impactful stories are, evidenced by how much he and the other inmates related to the book that they read. Baldwin's work *and The Sun Does Shine* shares many similar themes, including racism, faith, and injustice. Ray even refers to one of the passages from the book here—the main character, John, thinks that his life is like pushing a boulder to the top of a mountain and having a giant roll it back down, a reference to the Greek myth of Sisyphus. Ray recognizes that it is possible that the other inmates are fatigued by their personal struggles: they, too, roll the boulder up the hill every day, facing the monotony and hardship of life in prison. But here, Ray keeps faith that he will one day overcome the boulder and the laborious climb and reach the top of the mountain—a metaphor for Ray achieving freedom.

Playing with the title of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* as Jesse does is apt, as the title is a reference to a gospel song and implies that the Christian message should be spread far and wide. Ray similarly uses *The Sun Does Shine* to spread his own message of forgiveness, love, and the struggle for justice. He illustrates that he wants to use his own story to make an impact on readers and end the death penalty, just as they acknowledge that Baldwin's work has made a deep impact on their understanding of the world.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ Compassion doesn't know what color you are, and I think Henry felt more love from the black men on death row than he ever did at a KKK meeting or from his own father and mother.

We had met a few more times in book club and had read *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. All the books talked about race in the South, and Henry at first had shied away from the subject, almost pretending not to know how unfairly blacks were treated until we called him out on it. He was ashamed of how he had been brought up and ashamed of the beliefs that had brought him to the row. "You never knew what a person could grow up to become," he'd say.

Related Characters: Henry Hays, Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

In the months before Henry is executed, Ray's book club meets several times, and during book discussions, Henry becomes more open about his remorse. This quote touches on the power of stories, not only as a means of escape, as Ray has used them, but also as a way to discuss important issues and shape people's worldviews. Henry grows to understand more about racism and admits his own failures in adhering to racist ideology, in part because of the discussions of these books.

As Henry becomes more aware of his failures, it adds to Ray's point that even people who are guilty of murder do not deserve to die—that those who are willing to redeem

themselves are still worthy of living. Henry states that it's impossible to know what a person could grow up to become, referring to Michael Donald—the young Black man that he killed. But it's likely that Ray includes this statement because the same is true of Henry—Ray doesn't know how Henry could change either, and those who can change are worthy of redemption. As Ray notes elsewhere, taking a life for a life only leads to a cycle of violence, and he astutely connects Henry to his victim here to show that Henry has as much potential as anyone else to lead a moral life.

Lastly, Ray also emphasizes the importance of the community in the prison for Henry—that they show him much more compassion than his parents ever did. They help both lessen Henry's suffering in the jail and change Henry's worldview. Ray could easily bear hatred towards Henry for the things that he has done, but instead he chooses forgiveness because they all experience isolation and need each other for comfort and support.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Some days, I could see he was tired, and I wondered about the wear on a person when so many lives depend on what you do each day. He carried a big burden, and it wasn't just mine. He spoke of justice and of mercy and of a system that was so broken it locked up children and the mentally ill and the innocent. "No one is beyond redemption," he would say. No one is undeserving of their own life or their own potential to change. He had such compassion for victims and for perpetrators, and an intolerance and even anger for those in power who abused that power.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Henry Hays, Sheldon Perhacs, Bryan Stevenson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

After Bryan takes over Ray's case, he visits frequently and the two become friends. In this passage, Ray illustrates what makes Bryan an incredible lawyer. The fact that he carries a big burden shows how much he and the team of lawyers at the Equal Justice Initiative support the inmates on death row. He recognizes that people's lives literally rest in his hands, in a contrast from someone like Perhacs who seemed to care far more about money than about defending Ray's life.

Bryan's arguments also build on Ray's own arguments regarding the death penalty and criminal justice. Bryan recognizes the bias within the justice system from the outside as he actively tries to remedy it. At the same time, he aims to fight the death penalty because of its major flaws, noting how easy it is for the state of Alabama to get away with executing innocent people like Ray or the mentally ill like some of the other inmates on death row.

Bryan's statement that "No one is beyond redemption" also ties back to Ray's discussion of Henry Hays. Ray's acknowledgement that Henry has changed on death row adds to the argument that even the guilty people on death row, because they have the capacity for redemption, are worthy of life.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ When you took a life, it didn't bring back a life. It didn't undo what was done. It wasn't logical. We were just creating an endless chain of death and killing, every link connected to the next. It was barbaric. No baby is born a murderer. No toddler dreams of being on death row someday. Every killer on death row was taught to be a killer—by parents, by a system, by the brutality of another brutalized person—but no one was born a killer. My friend Henry wasn't born to hate. He was taught to hate, and to hate so much that killing was justified. No one was born to this one precious life to be locked in a cell and murdered. Not the innocent like me, but not the guilty either. Life was a gift given by God. I believed it should and could only be taken by God as well.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Henry Hays

Related Themes:

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

After Ray has spent 16 years in prison and has witnessed countless executions on death row, he spends some time thinking about the arguments for and against the death penalty. Part of Ray's project in the book is to illustrate some of the problems with the death penalty even beyond the very real possibility that innocent people like him could be executed. Here he examines it from a moral perspective, undermining common justifications for the death penalty. Later, Ray reads an article defending the death penalty using "an eye for an eye," (Exodus 21:23–25) as a justification, a reference to Old Testament laws. But here Ray shows that this kind of retributive justice doesn't

actually solve anything; it only creates a cycle of killing.

Moreover, Ray uses other faith-based arguments to show the problems with the death penalty. He argues that God is the only one who should be able to take human life away—not people or governments. This implicitly references one of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), which reinforces the idea that men do not have the right to kill others in any circumstance.

Lastly, Ray's reference to Henry shows that even those who are guilty of the crimes that they are committed do not deserve to die: they are the products of a society that taught them to hate, and therefore (like Henry) they can also be taught to change and be remorseful. As long as this is true, Ray argues, they are worthy of life.

❝ This isn't your time to die, son. It's not. You have work to do. You have to prove to them that my baby is no killer. You have to show them. You are a beacon. You are the light. Don't you listen to that fool devil telling you to give up. I didn't raise no child of mine to give up when things get tough. Your life isn't your life to take. It belongs to God. You have work to do. Hard work. I'm going to talk at you all night long if I have to and all day and all night again, and I will never stop until you know who you are. You were not born to die in this cell. God has a purpose for you. He has a purpose for all of us. I've served my purpose.

Related Characters: Buhlar Hinton/Ray's Mom (speaker), Anthony Ray Hinton

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

After Ray's mother passes away while he is in prison, Ray becomes distraught and contemplates different ways to kill himself—until he hears his mother's voice convincing him not to. Her statements, which seem to be manifestations of Ray's own thoughts, show the importance of optimism, faith, and community for Ray's survival. First, it shows how important community is for Ray even in moments when he is alone. His mother is dead, but knowing what she would say and how she would support him if she were there is enough to bolster his spirits.

In reminding him to choose optimism rather than listening to the devil, and in arguing that God has a purpose for him, Ray's mom also reinvigorates his faith—a key part of his hope. This helps Ray maintain his capacity to persevere in what becomes yet another turning point for him. He could easily have given up, believing that he had nothing to live for outside of the prison. Instead, by chooses to keep up hope, he is able to persevere. Ray's mom even reinforces the association of light and the sun with hope, in noting that Ray is "the light" and "a beacon." Only in maintaining that inner light, or nursing a sense of hope, is Ray able to be vindicated at the end of the book and live the rest of his life as a free man.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ Alabama's death penalty is a lie. It is a perverse monument to inequality, to how some lives matter and others do not. It is a violent example of how we protect and value the rich and abandon and devalue the poor. It is a grim, disturbing shadow cast by the legacy of racial apartheid used to condemn the disfavored among us. It's the symbol elected officials hold up to strengthen their tough-on-crime reputations while distracting us from the causes of violence. The death penalty is an enemy of grace, redemption and all who value life and recognize that each person is more than their worst act.

Related Characters: Bryan Stevenson (speaker), Judge Garrett, Anthony Ray Hinton

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 266

Explanation and Analysis

After Judge Garrett denies Ray's Rule 32 hearing in January 2005, Bryan writes an opinion piece in the *Birmingham News*, arguing against the death penalty. In this passage, he lays out some of the reasons why the death penalty is unjust, summarizing many of the factors that led to Ray's own conviction. Bryan's reference to how "some lives matter" implies that inequality exists within the system, as some lives matter while others do not. He notes that the courts are a legacy of racial apartheid, referring to the Jim Crow Laws and segregation that made society separate and unequal for Black people. Bryan also illustrates how socioeconomic discrimination exists within the system as well: as Ray's case shows, not having money for a lawyer can lead to a completely deficient defense.

Bryan then expands the argument from showing the problems with the criminal justice system and how they then pervade the death penalty. Because the criminal justice system is imbued with this discrimination, the death penalty then disproportionately affects those who have already

faced bias. Lastly, Bryan takes up many of the same positions on the death penalty as Ray, showing that the death penalty is used as a political tool and is too harsh a punishment even for people who are guilty of their crimes. Bryan argues, like Ray, that the death penalty is riddled with systemic issues and therefore should be abolished in its entirety.

Chapter 23 Quotes

I felt a flash of fear, and then I thought about the guys on the row. They would be watching the news. They would be seeing my release. [...]

I closed my eyes, and I lifted my face to the sky. I said a prayer for my mama. I thanked God. I opened my eyes, and I looked at the cameras. There had been so much darkness for so long. So many dark days and dark nights. But no more. I had lived in a place where the sun refused to shine. Not anymore. Not ever again.

"The sun does shine," I said, and then I looked at both Lester and Bryan—two men who had saved me—each in their own way. "The sun does shine," I said again.

And then the tears began to fall.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker), Buhlar Hinton/Ray's Mom, Bryan Stevenson, Lester

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 294-295

Explanation and Analysis

When Ray is finally released from prison after nearly 30 years, he greets his family and friends before facing the media. This passage is the culmination of all that Ray has faced over the previous 30 years. When Ray says, "The sun does shine," he is referring back to a discussion that he and the other inmates had in their book club. They discussed a passage from James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, in which they main characters talk about trying to make a place in white people's world until "the sun refused to shine." At the time, Ray affirmed that the sun would never refuse to shine—a metaphor for the idea that he would never give up hope. Here he contrasts that sunshine with the darkness of despair that he so often felt on death row but refused to give in to.

Thus, in making this statement to the press, knowing that the other death-row inmates would be watching, Ray is sending them a message that they should never give up hope, either. Without his optimism, perseverance, and faith, Ray would never have been able to leave death row, and therefore they have to choose to survive as well.

Additionally, Ray also affirms the value of community support in looking at the "two men who had saved" him—Bryan and Lester. At this culminating moment, Ray acknowledges that just as he needed hope and optimism to persevere, he also needed these men's support to ease the pain of being on death row for decades.

Afterword Quotes

Read the names out loud.
After every tenth name, say, "Innocent."
Add your son or your daughter's name to the list. Or your brother or your mother or your father's name to the list.
Add my name to the list.
Add your own.
The death penalty is broken, and you are either part of the death squad or you are banging on the bars.
Choose.

Related Characters: Anthony Ray Hinton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

In the book's Afterword, Ray lists the names of all 2,813 men and women who are on death row in the United States as of 2018. Before this list, he makes a final plea to readers to actively oppose the death penalty. First, he points out that 1 in 10 people on death row are innocent, as he was. This makes the scale and stakes of the death penalty extremely evident, because this amounts to 281 innocent people who are set to be executed.

In this way, Ray uses his own powerful story to help readers form their opinion on the death penalty. Ray is not the only person who has faced this harsh injustice, and it is likely that not everyone who is innocent on death row was able to get off death row as he was. He implies this by acknowledging that his name could still be on this list, if not for his perseverance, luck, and a strong team of lawyers working to combat injustice. He makes an even more personal plea in demonstrating that the reader could also wind up on death row as an innocent person, and in that scenario would likely be against the death penalty as well.

The final two sentences tie up the book in a powerful way.

Ray illustrates that those who are against the death penalty must be adamantly and actively against it, just as he and the other inmates were when they banged on the bars during the executions at Holman. If readers aren't vocal about fixing the problem and standing against injustice, they are essentially acting as the death squad, working to execute the people on death row. Lastly, the final word, "choose," harkens back to another theme of the book—that of choice. Choice is extremely important to Ray during his time in prison because he has so little control over his life. But now, outside of Holman, he and others have a great power, to choose to oppose an unjust system.

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.

CHAPTER 1

Ray isn't sure if his life changed forever the day he was arrested, or if the course of his life was determined from the first day he was born, being Black and poor and living in the South. Over his many years in prison, Ray has plenty of time to replay all of the moments of his life and wonder what might have been different. However, Ray believes that it's what you do after your life changes—like after a tragedy or an unjust situation—that matters the most.

From the outset of The Sun Does Shine, *author Anthony Ray Hinton (who goes by Ray) foreshadows how being Black and poor in the South had a massive effect on how the criminal justice system treated him. But in emphasizing that it's what a person does after their life changes that matters the most, Ray also hints at the value of optimism and how important it is to choose to persevere even in times of great struggle.*

In the Jefferson County Jail in December 1986, Ray and his mom sit on opposite sides of a glass wall. He has been in the prison for a year and a half. Three months earlier, Ray was found guilty of robbing and murdering two people, and the jury recommended sentencing him to death. They wanted to murder him because he murdered someone—except, he notes, they have the wrong man. At the time of a third attempted murder, Ray was working a night shift in a locked warehouse 15 miles away from the crime. He was mistakenly identified, and the police thought that an old pistol owned by his mother was the murder weapon, even though it hadn't been used in 28 years.

Ray lays out the facts that prove he is innocent of murder in order to establish how the criminal justice system has mistreated him: he couldn't have been at the scene of the crime, and the suspected murder weapon has not been fired in nearly 30 years. In setting out this logical argument, Ray calls the death penalty into question. In showing that the jury is sending an innocent man to his death, Ray forces readers to reconsider whether the death penalty always carries out justice.

Every week, Ray's mom and his best friend Lester visit him in jail. Ray is the youngest of 10 children and he is very close to his mom. He lives with her, goes to church with her, and eats with her every day. She knows that he is innocent—but even if he wasn't, she still would be there for him. At each visit, Ray's mother asks when he is coming home, and Ray assures his mother that he's trying to come home soon. That night, Ray prays to God, hoping that the truth will be revealed.

Ray illustrates how important community support is during this difficult time. To have people like his mom and Lester who never doubt him is invaluable, and it mitigates the suffering he is experiencing. In addition, Ray establishes how religion is an important part of his life, and that faith is crucial to helping him maintain hope about his situation.

Five days later, Ray is back in court. He is angry at his conviction, knowing that his only crime is being "born black in Alabama." The courtroom is filled with white faces, and he feels ashamed because they all think he's a murderer. The press judged him guilty from the second he was arrested, as did the police. Prosecutor Bob McGregor stares at Ray with hatred and would probably execute him at that moment. The judge, Judge Garrett, is less overtly biased but is only going through the motions of the trial. Ray calls the trial a "lynching."

So many of Ray's circumstances are stacked against him because of the discrimination in the police and court systems: he believes he was only identified as the murderer because he is Black, and so many of the people around him (the white prosecutor, judge, and jury) presumed that he was guilty even before his trial. His reference to lynching—which recalls the unjust vigilante murders of Black people, particularly in the American South—indicates Ray's belief that he didn't receive fair justice in the courts.

On the stand, a bailiff lies and says that Ray confessed to cheating on his polygraph test—a polygraph that the state wouldn't allow to be admitted into evidence because it proved he was innocent. After the bailiff's testimony, Ray's attorney, Sheldon Perhacs, asks if Ray wants to testify. Ray is furious—Perhacs hasn't called any witnesses for his defense, and Ray adamantly says he wants to testify. They have been working together for almost two years, but Perhacs doesn't seem to care that he holds Ray's life in his hands.

The people in Ray's trial continue to manipulate evidence against him: the bailiff lies about what Ray said, and the state won't allow a polygraph test into evidence because it proves his innocence. These people, the book suggests, are more concerned about getting a conviction than actually rendering justice. In addition, Ray hints at the fact that Perhacs has put up literally no defense, showing how he, too, has manipulated the criminal justice system so that Ray cannot get a fair trial. Perhacs' lack of empathy and support for Ray only compounds Ray's feelings of mistreatment.

On the stand, Ray tells the jury that he did not kill anyone: if the families want the victims' killer to be brought to justice, they should pray, because they haven't caught the right person. Ray explains he loves all people and has never been violent; he doesn't know anything about these murders. Ray knows that if he dies in the electric chair, he is going to heaven; he looks at McGregor, the bailiff, the district attorney, and the police, and asks where they're going when they die.

Ray's testimony on the stand emphasizes how alone and mistreated he feels. His attempts to appeal to the jury based on his character confirms the fact that Perhacs didn't get anyone to come to Ray's defense and stand up on his behalf, so Ray feels he must do it himself. And Ray once again stresses that he knows that justice isn't being served in the courtroom.

Ray goes on, explaining that several similar murders have been committed since he's been in jail, but the court is ignoring them because it doesn't want to find out the truth—all they want is a conviction. Ray acknowledges that he stole and wrote bad checks before, but he admitted it and paid for what he did. In this case, he shouldn't have to pay for something he didn't do, because the only crime he's guilty of is that he looks like someone else. In conclusion, Ray affirms that God will reopen his case someday. He says he's not worried about the death chair: the state can sentence him to death, but it can't take his soul away.

Ray provides more evidence for why he didn't commit the crime, pointing out the real murderer is probably still out in society, committing more crimes. In doing so, Ray again shows that the criminal justice system is more concerned about getting a conviction (even of an innocent man) than it is about actually serving justice to the person who committed the crimes. Additionally, Ray reaffirms his faith (his religious faith and his hope more broadly) that the court's decision will someday be overturned, demonstrating that even in this difficult time, Ray is able to keep some hope.

Perhacs makes one final attempt to argue that Ray is on trial for two capital offenses that were unrelated to him by any evidence. Due to similar circumstances between the cases, the state of Alabama was able to tie the cases together, relate them to a third, and in doing so, put the death penalty on the table. After Perhacs's conclusion, Judge Garrett rules that Ray is guilty of each capital offense in accordance with the jury's verdict and sentences Ray to death by electrocution.

Perhacs also demonstrates how the state has made a concerted effort to put the death penalty on the table when they do not have to. Ray is completely unconnected to the first two murders by any evidence, but they are actively and maliciously trying to manipulate the system so that Ray can be put to death.

There is one bright spot in Ray's sentence: by sentencing him to death, Judge Garrett gives him the best chance at regaining his life. Now that Ray has been sentenced to die, he will be guaranteed an appeal and representation by an attorney. If Ray were sentenced to life in prison, he would have to hire an attorney himself. As Ray is led away from the courtroom, he prays for the truth to be known, for God to protect his mom, and for God to have mercy on him.

Ray illustrates the irony and the cruelty of the justice system, in that it is actually luckier that Ray was sentenced to death because it gives him a better shot at someday reversing the decision. For those who are sentenced to life in prison and who are poor, the situation is much bleaker because they can't afford to hire a lawyer for an appeals process—another example of the discrimination within the justice system.

CHAPTER 2

The book jumps back to May 1974, when Ray is a senior in high school. He's playing in a baseball game against a predominantly white team, and he is up to bat. When the pitcher throws a clear ball, the umpire calls a strike, and the catcher laughs at the clear bias. Ray thinks that it's been this way since the schools integrated a few years earlier: people mutter racial slurs all the time when the Black students are around. Ray's mom warned him always to follow the rules and keep calm, and not to get involved with white girls.

In flashing back to Ray's high school baseball game, the book demonstrates how racism has always had a presence in Ray's life. In high school, he was always treated differently because of his race, suggesting that the discrimination in the criminal justice system is simply an extension of the racism that exists in the United States more broadly. Like the courts, the umpire simply manipulates existing rules to try to cheat Ray out of winning.

There's a rumor going around that there are college scouts at the game. Ray knows he's one of the top 10 baseball players in Alabama, but nobody in his family has gone to college. He's the youngest of 10 kids, all of whom left Alabama after graduating high school. Many went to Cleveland, Ohio, where they wouldn't have to deal with Black churches or neighborhoods being bombed as they did in Birmingham, Alabama.

The racism in Alabama is so prevalent—and even overtly violent—that Ray's siblings have all decided to flee the state rather than hope things will get better back home.

Everyone who lives in Ray's town of Praco works in the coal mines or for the mining company in some way. Ray's father worked in the coal mines until he suffered a head injury and had to live in an institution for the rest of his life, leaving Ray's mom to raise Ray alone. Ray's family is close, and the community is close as well, like an extension of a family.

Ray illustrates how important community is to him—not only his mother, who raised him essentially by herself—but also the broader community around him, which looks out for each other.

At the baseball game, Ray's mom cheers Ray on. He smiles at her support. He thinks that he'd like to go to college, but he wouldn't be able to do so unless he got a free ride, transportation, and someone else to look after his mother. The pitcher begins his wind-up again. Ray thinks that growing up playing street ball, if the pitch was anywhere close, he had to swing at it—he made the best of the pitch he was given. The pitcher throws, and it's a wild ball that grazes Ray's cheekbone. The umpire calls a ball as the catcher laughs again.

Ray's thoughts about college illustrate how poor students face higher economic barriers to attending, and how this doesn't just apply to tuition. Besides having no money for tuition, Ray also has a lot of other economic barriers keeping him from college, like not having a car to get there or needing to help his mom at home. Additionally, Ray's assertion that he has to swing at the pitch he's given is an apt metaphor for his optimism in life: that he can choose to try his best even when faced with a bad situation.

On the next pitch, Ray sends the ball soaring. He slows down as he runs the bases, appreciating the fact that there are a bunch of white people cheering for him. He remembers once in a basketball game, the opposing crows started cheering "Hinton! Hinton! Hinton!" But when Ray sat down, he realized they were actually shouting racial slurs. Over the next few innings, Ray hits a triple and another home run; his team wins 7-2. It turns out there *was* a scout at the game, but he doesn't talk to Ray.

Ray again emphasizes the discrimination that he faces nearly every day at school. He faces overt racism, like white people yelling racial slurs at the basketball game, but he also experiences more subtle forms of racism, too. This passage shows an instance of subtler discrimination that has broad consequences: the scout doesn't try to talk to Ray despite the fact that he is instrumental in winning the game and one of the top baseball players in the state. And since Ray knows he needs a scholarship to attend college, being overlooked like this doesn't bode well for his future.

Ray and Lester start to walk home together. When a car approaches that they don't recognize, they jump in a ditch off the side of the road to avoid trouble. Ray wishes he had a car so that he doesn't have to sit in the dirt every time he walks home. Ray looks at the sky, knowing that he could be angry at his situation, but instead, he chooses to be optimistic: he knows his mom is waiting for him at home, he just played a great baseball game, and he still has his best friend.

Having to jump into a ditch as he walks home is another aspect of the discrimination that Ray faces: because he is a young, poor Black man in the South, he's extremely vulnerable and thus can be attacked at any moment. Still, as Ray looks at the sky, he maintains his optimistic outlook on life and is grateful for the things that he does *have.*

Still, Ray is afraid: he wants to protect his family and his friends from fear. He knows the Alabama soil is full of sweat, blood, and tears of guys who were forced to the ground because of the color of their skin. After another car passes, Ray and Lester resume their trek home.

Ray's musings recall the enduring legacy of slavery in Alabama and the United States more broadly, and how, while progress has been made, he, his friends, and his family still face discrimination in 1974 that's born of slavery's legacy.

CHAPTER 3

The only place that Ray can get a decent job after college is the coal mines. The job is dangerous: like Ray's dad, a person can literally be knocked out at any time, or have their head sliced open by a piece of shale raining down. Ray hates the job: he doesn't like being in a small, dark space with little air to breathe.

Ray's description of the coal mine hints at descriptions of his prison cells, illustrating how the coal mines can be just as confining and oppressive. Even as a free man, Ray's life is devalued: he has to put his life at risk if he has any hope of making a decent living.

In the mines, Ray imagines that he's outdoors, taking long drives and going swimming in Florida, eating lobsters in Maine, or dancing with beautiful women in Central America—anything to avoid the reality of being in a dark, dusty pit that ruins a person's lungs. Ray doesn't want to die in the mine or permanently damage his body, but there are few other jobs, and the most dangerous jobs are also the highest paying ones.

Here, the book introduces the idea that Ray tells himself stories as a means of escaping a difficult reality. The coal mining companies also expose some of the systemic discrimination, in that poorer people are more likely to take dangerous jobs because they are the highest paying jobs available to them—they don't have the opportunity to find lower-risk jobs.

One day in the mine, a rock falls on Ray, nearly slicing his nose off and causing his face to gush blood. He's lucky that he has no permanent damage other than a large scar from the 22 stitches he gets. Even with the injury, Ray works in the mines for another five years. Then, when he's 24, he wakes up late, sees the beautiful **sun**, and decides that he just can't go down into the mine any longer and quits the job, though he knows that he'll be taking a pay cut.

Here, Ray shows how being poor actually puts him in life-threatening situations, because he feels it is the only job that will allow him to make adequate money, again emphasizing how society more broadly discriminates and takes advantage of poorer people. He contrasts the despair and harshness of the mines with the beauty of the sun, hinting at the sun's eventual symbolism of hope.

During the time that Ray is working in the mines, he dates two sisters on the sly—the older one in the open and the younger one in secret. This earns him the ire of another guy in town, Reggie, who wants to date the younger one. Reggie talks openly about taking Ray down, but Ray doesn't worry about it too much. The one obstacle in Ray's dating and working life is a car—particularly when he and his mom are forced to move out of Praco. This means that he doesn't have neighbors to get rides with anymore.

Ray again emphasizes how crucial community is to him, as without the community in Praco, Ray doesn't have as much support or opportunity. Additionally, Reggie's attitude towards Ray foreshadows his eventual betrayal of Ray during the trial.

Ray can't get a job without a car, and he can't get a car without a job, so he's stuck. One day, he puts on his best church clothes and gets a ride to a car lot a few towns over. He takes out a Cutlass Supreme for a test drive, wishing that he could buy the car for real. But when he turns to head back to Birmingham, he passes the freeway exit for the car dealership and instead heads home.

Here Ray additionally exposes the catch-22 of being poor in America. He would be able to afford a car if he had a better job, but he can't get a better job without having a car. In this way, Ray suggests that attaining more wealth often is only possible if one already has some baseline economic status.

Ray drives the stolen car for two years. He installs a stereo with the money he earns from his new job at a furniture store—which he can only get because he has a car. Ray keeps the car in pristine condition and never breaks traffic laws. Ray's mom loves the car, and she always smiles when Ray drives her around. Gradually, however, Ray starts to feel guilty about stealing the car, and he worries what might happen if the car broke down or he got pulled over.

Ray experiences the other side of the socioeconomic catch-22. Now that Ray has a car, he is able to get a better job, earn more money, and afford additional amenities like a car stereo. Ray also demonstrates here that he is a person of integrity—even though he stole the car, he begins to feel guilty about what he's done.

Eventually, Ray tells his mom that he never paid for the car. She tells him to go to the police and make it right, and he does so—relieved to confess what he's done. Ray spends a few months in a work release program and serves a brief stint in prison. Afterwards, Ray comes out knowing that being incarcerated was the best thing that could have happened to him, because he never wants to go back. No car, job, or woman is worth risking his freedom, he concludes. Ray also appreciates what matters most in his life: his mom, his freedom, and God. He resolves never to steal again.

Ray acknowledges his wrongdoing and pays his time for doing it. And in doing so, he is able to reevaluate what matters most to him: primarily his family and the community around him, his Christian faith, and his ability to live life as a free man. Yet this is what makes Ray's subsequent conviction so heartbreaking, because readers recognize Ray's remorse and understand how much the state of Alabama takes away from him when he is wrongfully convicted.

CHAPTER 4

On February 23, 1985, John Davidson, the assistant manager of Mrs. Winner's Chicken and Biscuits restaurant, is shot and killed in a robbery. The *Birmingham Post Herald* reports the story a few days later. Ray writes that he doesn't know where he was that night because he doesn't spend his days creating alibis for himself, but he has never eaten at that restaurant in Birmingham. There are no fingerprints or eyewitnesses at the scene—anyone could have done it. That person left with $2,200 and got away with murder.

Here, Ray sets up the crimes that will ultimately land him on death row. Because the book begins with Ray's conviction, Ray hints at the fact that the lack of evidence tying him to the crime will become irrelevant because of the bias against him. In noting that the murderer got away with the crime, Ray also emphasizes the potential cost of the kind of injustice that he's faced—the murderer continues to walk the streets, able to kill again.

In June, Ray turns 29 and he quits his job at the furniture store because he doesn't want to work Saturdays. He wants to be able to take the day to help out his church and spend time with his mom, so he gets a job with a company called Manpower, which provides temporary labor to businesses around Birmingham. All he wants is to make a living, buy a car, and find a nice woman to fall in love with and marry. He thinks that the job at Manpower will allow him to figure out something else he might want to do—he even considers opening a restaurant.

Ray's simple and universal desires—to be able to make a living, spend time with his family, and fall in love—show how important faith and community are to him. They also highlight the ultimate cost of his unjust conviction. In sentencing him to death row, the state of Alabama robs him of the ability to do all of these things.

On July 2, a gunman shoots and kills Thomas Wayne Vason in a robbery of a Captain D's restaurant in Woodlawn. The homicide investigator notes similarities between this case and Davidson's murder in February. Two days later, Ray celebrates the Fourth of July with his mom and Lester. He notes that the holiday is the biggest in Alabama, with parade floats, games, races, and strangers inviting each other in for food. Ray is happy—he has just started seeing a new girl named Sylvia—and he remarks to Lester that he feels like "anything is possible."

Jumping back and forth between the serial murders at fast food restaurants and Ray's carefree celebration creates a sense of foreboding in the narrative. Ray's statement that "anything is possible" again reinforces his optimistic outlook, but there is also dramatic irony in that readers know how the possibilities in Ray's life will be completely cut short by the outcome of the murder investigations.

On the night of July 25, Ray clocks into Bruno's warehouse at 11:57 p.m. Like all the temporary workers, Ray checks in through a guard shack outside. Ray drives the forklift for about 10 minutes, and then he cleans the bathroom. He finishes this task around 2:00 a.m. and then takes a break for 15 minutes. After that, he works outside separating broken pallets from good ones, has his lunch at 4:00 a.m., cleans under a dumpster, and clocks out around 6:00 a.m.

Though Ray doesn't remember where he was on the nights of the other robbery-murders, on this night he has a clear alibi. Going through each of the tasks he completed, and showing that he could not have gotten in and out of the place without checking in at the guard shack, provides a strong alibi for Ray.

That same evening, at a Quincy's Family Steak House in Bessemer, a gunman shoots the assistant manager Sidney Smotherman in the head. However, Smotherman survives his wounds and reports what happened to the police. He describes his assailant as Black, 5-foot-11, 190 pounds with a mustache. The homicide detective in the Captain D's case is working with the detective from Bessemer.

Even though the previous passage set up a rock solid alibi for Ray, Smotherman's description of the murder sets the stage for the bias against Ray. The primary identifying factor for the robber is that he is a large Black man, prompting the judgments and discrimination against any large Black man—like Ray.

On July 31, 1985, Ray is mowing the lawn in his front yard before church when two white policemen arrive on his back porch. Ray doesn't run or resist them as they pat him down and cuff him—he knows he hasn't done anything wrong. He quickly tells his mom that he's going to jail, but he assures her that he didn't do anything. The police then search his car and bedroom while Ray's mother starts crying. He assures her that everything is going to be okay.

Here, Ray establishes his initial faith in the system and his optimism that the policemen's mistakes will quickly be corrected. He knows that he hasn't done anything wrong, but he doesn't yet recognize the bias in the system that is causing him to be arrested, or the fact that that bias could lead to the conviction of an innocent man.

On August 2nd, an article appears in the *Birmingham Post Herald* describing how Ray has been charged in the Bessemer robbery and shooting. Smotherman identified Ray as the man who shot him, and police recovered a .38-caliber pistol from Ray's home that matched the bullets. The article reports that Ray has also been connected to the other two robbery-murders and that Ray has been transferred from the Bessemer City Jail to the Jefferson County Jail.

The bias in the press adds to the bias in the criminal justice system. Even before Ray is assigned a trial or a jury, the news is reporting biased information from the police, only cementing the idea that Ray committed the crimes for people who may very well become Ray's jurors.

CHAPTER 5

Ray arrives at the police station, where three officers read him his rights. One officer, Lieutenant Acker, then asks Ray to sign a piece of blank paper to affirm that they read him his rights. In that moment, Ray becomes afraid, wondering why they want him to sign a blank piece of paper—he refuses to sign it. The officers then ask Ray where he was on the nights of February 23, July 2, and July 25. Ray isn't sure about the first two dates, but he tells them that on July 25, he had dinner with his mom and then drove out to his job on the night shift at Bruno's warehouse, which he began at midnight and finished at 6:00 a.m.

Ray begins to understand the cruelty and manipulation of the criminal justice system here. If Ray didn't know not to sign a blank piece of paper, the police could easily take advantage of his trust and use it to prove that he confessed to a crime. Notably, they do this even before they have interrogated Ray about his whereabouts—suggesting that they care very little about Ray's innocence and have already decided that he is guilty.

Ray spends that night in a holding cell, and the next day Lieutenant Acker rides with him to the county jail in Birmingham. Ray asks the policeman why he's under arrest. When Acker tells him he's being charged with first-degree robbery and murder, Ray says that they have the wrong person. Acker says he doesn't care if Ray did or didn't do it—if he didn't do it, one of his "brothers" did and he'll take the rap for it.

Here the bias against Ray becomes more and more blatant. Noting that one of Ray's "brothers" did the crime—implying a Black man, or possibly a gang member—is not only racist but also illustrates how little Acker cares about bringing the right person to justice.

Acker goes on, explaining that Ray will be convicted because he's Black, because a white man is going to say that Ray shot him, and because there will be a white judge, a white district attorney, and an all-white jury. Ray goes ice cold—his mom always told him not to fear the police because they were there to help, but now Ray isn't so sure. Still, he hopes that this will all get sorted out and that the court wouldn't convict an innocent man.

Lieutenant Acker is literally walking Ray through all of the ways in which the criminal justice system is biased against him as a Black man. He highlights the fact that the people who will be involved in his court case will all be white as evidence that they won't take him at his word, and that they can manipulate the evidence presented at his trial to convict him no matter what.

The police process Ray in the Birmingham jail. They charge him with two murders, explaining that the gun they found at his house matched the bullets and that someone else saw him commit the crime, so he should confess—none of which makes sense to Ray. The police give Ray a prison uniform, mattress, razor, mug, toothbrush, and toilet paper, and he sets his stuff down in his cell. In the common area, one of the other inmates welcomes Ray to C block, where the capital murder prisoners stay.

Ray's confusion is well-founded, as he knows that there's no way the bullets at the crime scene can match his mother's gun, nor was he at any of the crime scenes. The state is making false claims and even fabricating evidence in order to get a conviction.

CHAPTER 6

Ray spends a few weeks on parole at Kilby prison and then returns to Jefferson County to wait for his trial. Over this time, Ray barely gets the chance to talk to Lester and his mom, as collect calls are expensive. A grand jury indicts Ray on November 8, 1985; his face is in all the papers, and he knows that people want him dead. Ray then meets with his court-appointed lawyer, Sheldon Perhacs. As they sit down together for the first time, Perhacs grumbles to himself about having to work for so little money. When Ray tells Perhacs that he's innocent, Perhacs says, "all y'all always doing something and saying you're innocent." Ray knows he needs Perhacs, so he lets the comment slide.

Perhacs's comments add another dimension to the discrimination that Ray faces in the criminal justice system. Perhacs displays his own racism in saying that "all y'all always doing something," implying Black people just as Lieutenant Acker does. In addition, Perhacs's annoyance about having to do work for so little money illustrates how the system is biased against people who are poorer, because Perhacs doesn't put in the same kind of time or effort for Ray as he would for someone who is able to pay more.

Ray asks Perhacs for a lie detector test—anything that will help prove Ray's innocence. Perhacs says that he will visit the jail again soon to talk about the case. Soon after, the judge sets a trial date of March 6, 1986. In preparation, Ray takes a polygraph test, in which the examiner asks him about his involvement with the three incidents at the restaurants. The examiner concludes that Ray told the truth and was not involved in the incidents.

Ray continues to have faith that he will be able to prove his innocence, and shows his drive to persevere in the face of the system's clear biases. The polygraph test illustrates plainly that Ray did not commit the murders, providing him with additional hope.

After taking the polygraph test, Ray goes to bed with newfound hope. He doesn't know how his mom came up with the $350 for the test, but he hopes this will vindicate him. Perhacs and Bob McGregor, the prosecutor, agreed that whatever happened with the polygraph, either side could use it to argue their case. But after the results come back, Perhacs visits Ray and tells him that McGregor went back on the deal and will no longer allow the polygraph test into evidence. Ray is horrified, wondering why McGregor wants to go to trial knowing that Ray didn't commit the crime.

This story demonstrates how the prosecutor's bias against Ray then enables him to manipulate Ray's trial even more. Realizing the results would hurt his case against Ray, McGregor refuses to admit the polygraph despite the fact that it clearly shows Ray is innocent. Again, their priority seems to be to get a conviction, even at the cost of targeting an innocent man.

Perhacs walks Ray through the rest of the evidence. First, the bullets from the three incidents all match his mom's gun. Ray knows this is false, because the gun hasn't been fired in 25 years. Second, Smotherman picked Ray out of a photo lineup and said Ray did it. Ray knows this is impossible, as he was at work when this incident happened and there was a guard checking him in and out of the warehouse. Perhacs says that they'll argue Ray snuck out of work, but Ray knows that it takes at least 25 minutes to get to Bessemer, and he would have arrived too late to commit the crime. He asks Perhacs to have someone drive the route, but Perhacs simply dismisses him.

Ray's arguments illustrate that the state has either purposely fabricated evidence or made egregious mistakes in their case—and again, they simply don't seem interested in looking for the person who actually committed the crime. Additionally, Ray becomes increasingly frustrated by Perhacs's lack of support and effort. Without Perhacs's empathy for his situation and his determination to prove Ray's innocence, Ray feels even more hopeless and mistreated.

Ray asks one final thing, noting that there have been other holdups with managers getting robbed since Ray has been in jail. Perhacs says he'll look into it, but that he's only being payed $1,000, and he "eat[s] $1,000 for breakfast." Perhacs asks if Ray has anyone who can pay $15,000 for the work, but no one in Ray's life has that kind of money. Ray also learns that Perhacs only has $500 to pay a ballistics expert, and no one wants to testify for so little money.

Ray exposes the economic discrimination in the criminal justice system as well as the racial bias. Without money, Ray doesn't get an adequate defense or a good ballistics expert that can help prove him innocent. In effect, being poor can leave a person defenseless against the state's power.

Ray calls his brother Willie and asks for money to help. Willie asks if Perhacs can guarantee that he will prove Ray's innocence. Ray can't help but think that if the situations were reversed, he would do anything for his brother. He wonders if Willie thinks that Ray actually committed the crime. He's frustrated that no one seems to believe him except Lester and his mom. Ray calls Perhacs periodically to tell him how much he appreciates the work he's doing, knowing that Perhacs is his only chance to show that he is not a cold-blooded killer.

These exchanges highlight how important community support is for Ray. While he values his mom and Lester, he contrasts his love for them with his disappointment in the lack of empathy and help from Perhacs and his brother Willie. Without their belief in him, Ray feels increasingly isolated and his suffering mounts.

CHAPTER 7

On September 12, 1986, Reggie takes the stand to testify against Ray. Ray is furious, knowing that Reggie is only testifying because he wants to get revenge for the incident with the sisters and because the state offered $5,000 to anyone who could help them catch the killer. Reggie, who works at the Quincy's where Smotherman was shot, testifies that Ray was the robber and says that Ray asked him two weeks prior what time the restaurant closed, and he even told Ray what kind of car Smotherman drove.

Reggie wants revenge for the time that Ray dated two sisters—the older one in public and the younger one in private—while Reggie was interested in one of them. On another note, the reward for information exposes another potential issue in the criminal justice system: it provides an incentive for poorer people with a vendetta, like Reggie, to provide false information and lie on the stand for gain. The state allows and supports this because it helps their own case, not because it renders justice.

Ray recognizes the logical fallacies in Reggie's testimony: if the restaurant closed at 11:00 p.m., it doesn't make sense that Ray would choose a night he had work, sneak out, rob and murder a man, and then sneak back. Perhacs questions Reggie's motivation, but Perhacs gets details about the incident with the sisters wrong and doesn't mention the reward money or call out any of Reggie's lies.

Again, the entire trial exposes how biased people can greatly affect the criminal justice system. Perhacs bias against Ray and the fact that he isn't making much money on the case directly translates to the poor defense he mounts: he doesn't follow up with Reggie on any of his clear lies or demonstrate his financial motivation.

When Ray returns to his cell each night of the trial, he plays the day's events over in his head. Any evidence that pointed to Ray not being a killer was left out or lied about. The police didn't mention the blank piece of paper they wanted him to sign or that Ray's mom's gun hasn't been fired in years. Ray realizes that his only hope is his ballistics expert.

As the trial goes on, Ray becomes increasingly aware of the bias within the system and how easy it is to manipulate. Both Perhacs and the state are completely ignoring or obscuring the truth about anything that might exonerate Ray.

Ray replays the day that the police arrested him. He wonders if he should have run but thinks that he likely just would have been shot and killed. He misses his mom and Lester. He broke up with Sylvia a year earlier, not knowing how long he would be wrapped up in the trial.

Ray acknowledges that he likely would have been killed if he had run from the police—a brief nod to anti-Black racism in police brutality in addition to that the anti-Black racism that abounds within the criminal justice system. He also reiterates how important the people closest to him are, and how he misses their comfort in this trying time.

On Wednesday, September 17, Andrew Payne testifies as Ray's ballistics expert. His findings prove that Ray is innocent, and he does a good job presenting his case. But when the state starts to cross-examine Payne, they reveal that Payne had never used their brand of comparison microscope to examine evidence before and didn't know how to operate it. They also note that Payne is blind in one eye.

Here Ray's lack of funding for his defense creates severe problems for him. Because Perhacs can only find a relatively unqualified man who is blind in one eye to testify on Ray's behalf, the state is easily able to convince the jury to completely discount his testimony.

The jury takes two hours to find Ray guilty, and another 45 minutes to determine his punishment: death. In December, before Judge Garrett reads the official death sentence, Ray tells them that God would reopen his case and that they can never take his soul away from him.

The problems with the criminal justice system are exposed in full here as Ray returns to the scene from the opening chapter. Despite the fact that Ray is an innocent man, his race and socioeconomic status meant that he received deeply inadequate defense and subsequently a death sentence.

CHAPTER 8

The next day, on December 17, 1986, the guards retrieve Ray from his cell. He notes that the wealthier men in C block come and go a lot faster than those who are poor. Guys with court-appointed lawyers constantly face delays, and hardly any of them are found innocent. Ray is still in shock from the verdict: he replays some of the other events in his mind. Perhacs told Judge Garrett that a man called him, confessing he was the real killer, but no one hunted the man down. McGregor told the jury that Ray was evil and a cold-blooded killer. Ray doesn't know why so many people were lying and trying to convict him when the evidence all pointed away from him.

Ray notes the systemic bias again here. Fom his perspective, the criminal justice system is designed to keep poorer people in the prisons and provide so many obstacles that it's nearly impossible to prove their innocence. Ray also notes that even with someone willing to take responsibility for the crimes, the state refuses to admit it made a mistake and is only concerned with getting a conviction rather than genuinely upholding justice.

Ray wonders who will take care of his mom now that he won't be around. He misses Sylvia, wishing that he could smell her skin one more time and feel the **sun** on his face. He wants his freedom, he wants justice, and he wants to kill McGregor. This knowledge hits him hard and scares him: he doesn't want to turn into the kind of person who could murder someone, but he imagines wringing McGregor's neck until he dies.

While the sun becomes a more important symbol later in the book, here Ray establishes its association with freedom and hope. Just to have the basic human experience of feeling the sun is being stripped away from him as a result of a biased criminal justice system, and despair and hatred replace his hope.

Ray moves to a holding cell, where guards strip-search him and wrap chains around his waist, wrists, and ankles. He feels like a slave as they lead him into the backseat of a van and drive for three hours. As he looks out at the grass and the trees, he wonders if he will ever go out into the countryside again. He feels that God has completely abandoned him.

Here, Ray again emphasizes the bias of the criminal justice system in comparing it to slavery, implying that it is likewise dehumanizing and racist. In addition, Ray emphasizes how the process has caused him to lose both hope and faith in God.

At Holman prison, Ray barely talks—he refuses to cooperate with the prison guards. He changes into a white prison jumpsuit and gets a medical check-up. When Ray walks down a hall with other inmates, the guards tell the others to turn and face the wall. Ray realizes that they're doing this because they're afraid of Ray—as a death row inmate, he's one of the scariest people in that prison.

Ray begins to cut himself off from others at Holman, where he will serve his time until he is executed. Feeling both without hope and without any support, he further isolates himself from any kind of community and succumbs to despair.

The guards lead Ray to a hall marked "Death Row"; they place him and his things in cell number eight. After the guards leave, Ray examines his cell: five feet by seven feet, with a toilet, a sink, and a bed. Ray pulls out his King James Bible and throws it under his bed, thinking that God has left him to die. Laying down on his bed and closing his eyes, Ray feels completely alone. When he wakes, he can hear other inmates screaming in the darkness.

Ray feels completely isolated and without hope, illustrating how the loss of community support can compound a person's suffering. By throwing his Bible underneath his bed, Ray is rejecting his Christian faith—another indication of his lack of optimism about his situation. The irony is that even though Ray is isolated, he is certainly not the only person on death row feeling hopeless—that outlook is clearly shared by many other inmates as they scream through the night.

CHAPTER 9

People sentenced to death row have the right to an appeal, but the state of Alabama doesn't provide any information about the process. The state also makes it as difficult as possible for evidence to be revisited in appeals. In addition, in Alabama, judges are often elected based on how many people they send to death row. Over the first several weeks at Holman, Ray tries to contact Perhacs, particularly because he keeps reading about robberies in Birmingham that are similar to the incidents for which he was convicted.

Ray exposes yet another bias in the criminal justice system: those without education or resources are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to the appeals process. Ray knows nothing about the deadlines or how the process might work, hindering his ability to prove his innocence and allowing for further miscarriages of justice.

Ray's mom visits after his 90-day probation period is over. She tells him that God will fix what has happened, but Ray no longer believes in God. Ray's mom also explains that she's been sending letters to Perhacs, asking the lawyer to protect Ray. She shows Ray letters from Perhacs: he writes that he will do everything he can to protect Ray but the appeals process will probably take a few years.

In addition to thinking that God has abandoned him, Ray now gives up his faith entirely. What was once a key tenet of Ray's worldview and a drive for his optimism has now fallen away thanks to the injustice he has experienced.

At the time, Ray doesn't know that his mom is also sending $25 with each letter, begging for Perhacs' help. Ray wonders in retrospect if Perhacs laughed at those money orders—Perhacs doesn't know what it means to be poor. After the first visit, Ray's mom returns every week along with Lester, making a seven hour round-trip drive each Friday.

Ray contrasts the support he feels from his mother and Lester with the lack of empathy he feels from Perhacs. His mother and Lester represent people who believe in him and buoy his spirits, while Perhacs doesn't even try to understand his situation or put effort into reversing it.

Ray is full of rage in the early months of his imprisonment, continuing to imagine how he would kill McGregor. He tries to figure out ways he might escape, and wonders if it would be better to be killed while trying to flee than in the electric chair. The only thing that stops Ray from doing this is that he still wants to prove his innocence. Still, he worries that he's becoming a monster.

This passage illustrates the severe effect that Ray's hopelessness is having on him. Not only does he think about putting himself in a situation that would cause his death, but he also starts to have violent thoughts, only corroborating the state's worst assumptions about him.

Every day, Ray eats breakfast at 3:00 a.m., lunch at 10:00 a.m., and dinner at 2:00 p.m. The food is terrible and every night he is hungry—not only physically hungry, but hungry for his dignity and freedom. He's Anthony Ray Hinton, not inmate Z468. He worries that he's not going to survive and becomes desperate to escape in some way.

Ray underscores how death row makes a person's life feel completely worthless. Not only has Ray lost his freedom, but he has also lost his humanity and dignity in being reduced to a number—which only adds to his hopelessness.

Perhacs files a motion for a new trial, but the motion is denied on July 31, 1987—two years to the day after Ray was arrested. Ray finds out the next steps for his appeal process by listening to other inmates talk about their own appeals. They constantly talk about a man named Bryan Stevenson, who sends lawyers to help many of the inmates, but Ray largely ignores their discussion because he already has a lawyer.

Here Ray hints at the benefit of the community on death row, as the other inmates' discussion helps Ray understand his own situation. He also foreshadows Bryan Stevenson's involvement in his own life, and the fact that Stevenson and his team of lawyers are a supportive community unto themselves.

The inmates shower every other day at random times. They have no privacy, with two guys showering at once and two guards watching. They have to shower in under two minutes—Ray feels like a farm animal being hosed off in a barn. And once a day, for 15 minutes, the inmates are allowed to walk around in the yard. Ray always takes this opportunity, especially because he is constantly looking for a way out. He notices rats and roaches crawling around and thinks that if they can get out, so can he.

Ray again illustrates how the dehumanization of the death penalty goes beyond his execution. Ray and the other inmates are also treated as though their lives don't matter in the prison, given no privacy or care whatsoever, and many—including Ray—are haunted by the knowledge that they are going to die.

Every night on death row, men scream and cry. Ray tries to block out the sound, but he has trouble sleeping. There are ghosts everywhere: both of people who died in the electric chair and people who chose to kill themselves. It is hard to hang yourself but easy to bash your head against the cement wall. Ray thinks that Holman is the real hell on earth.

Ray relays just how dire the inmates' hopelessness can become: in many cases, it causes them to take their own lives. Even though he doesn't choose to take this drastic action at this time, Ray clearly understands that it is a possibility for him.

In 1988, the Court of Criminal Appeals affirms Ray's conviction, disagreeing with Perhacs's assessment that the three cases shouldn't have been combined, that Ray was unconnected to the first two murders, and that they should have been allowed to submit the polygraph test. Perhacs sends Ray a letter in April 1989, explaining that he's appealing to the Alabama Supreme Court but that they will likely need a new ballistics expert. If that fails, they will take an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, but Ray would need to find someone to finance that appeal.

Perhacs continues to put up an inadequate defense for Ray—as Ray notes soon after, Perhacs doesn't mention that Ray is innocent in his appeal. Corruption could play a part in Perhacs's actions: if the state denies the appeal and it goes to the Supreme Court, Perhacs has a better chance of making more money, potentially exploiting Ray's defenselessness.

Ray hopes that the Alabama Supreme Court will order a new trial, because he has no money for an appeal to U.S. Supreme Court. He's also frustrated with Perhacs, annoyed that the appeal didn't say anything about the fact that Ray is innocent. He's desperate to find a way to escape, and he still isn't ready to take his own life.

Ray understands Perhacs's ineffectiveness, and the fact that Perhacs doesn't argue that Ray is innocent also makes him feel unsupported by the man. With this lack of empathy, Ray grows more and more desperate and distraught.

CHAPTER 10

On August 28, 1987, the guards execute Wayne Ritter. Ray hears the generator kicking on and the popping of electricity, and throughout the night he smells burned flesh. Ray wonders if he could be killed even though he is still on appeal, or if the state could kill him immediately if Perhacs failed. Imagining what being electrocuted feels like, the fear crushes Ray. Over the next few months, he starts to think about the death penalty, wondering if it is right to murder someone for murdering someone.

Here, Ray establishes the cruelty of the death penalty—how it can drive people mad with fear. In addition, Ray questions the morality of the death penalty for the first time, making the argument that murder should not be met with more murder.

The guards who carry out the executions—the "Death Squad," as the inmates call them—practice for a few months before each execution. The next to be executed is a young guy named Michael Lindsey, who cries every day in the month leading up to his execution and begs anyone near him to save him or help him. He cries as he watches the guards practice their ritual for killing him, marching in front of his cell, with one officer leading another to the death chamber, which is about 30 feet from Ray's cell.

Part of Ray's aim in The Sun Does Shine *is to humanize the people on death row. He talks about Lindsay's crying and begging as a way to show that he is still a human being with as much of a right to life as anyone else. He contrasts this with the cruelty and impersonality of the "Death Squad."*

Michael Lindsey is 28 years old and has been on death row for eight years—he was convicted of murdering a woman and stealing her Christmas presents. A jury recommended life in prison, but his judge overruled the recommendation and sentenced him to death. In May 1989, the Death Squad takes him to the chamber. He had no visitors in the days before his death. When the other inmates know that he's being strapped into the chair, they scream and bang on their bars, yelling "Murderers!" at the guards. They want Michael to know that he's not alone, that his life and death both mean something. After the generator powers on and off, Ray sits down on his bed and weeps.

Ray again shows how the criminal justice system can be easily manipulated: even though a jury wanted to sentence Lindsey to life in prison, a judge determined that he had the right to sentence him to the death penalty over their recommendation. This ties into Ray's earlier point that judges are often reelected based on how many people they send to death row, using these men's lives for political capital. Additionally, Ray emphasizes that even people who are guilty of murder on death row are worthy of life.

A few weeks after Lindsey's execution, another inmate named Dunkins gets his execution date in July 1989. Dunkins is also 28 and likely mentally disabled. Then another guy, Richardson, gets his execution date for August. Death row grows tense, particularly as the weather heats up in the summer.

Ray demonstrates another aspect of the criminal justice system's injustice: that it can put people to death even though they are mentally disabled and likely weren't fully aware of their actions.

One hot day, Ray gets a letter from Perhacs, who explains that their appeal to the Alabama Supreme Court was denied. Perhacs writes that he can handle the case to the U.S. Supreme Court for a fee of $15,000. Ray is stunned; he doesn't know what to do. He calls Perhacs's office, and the secretary explains that Perhacs thought Ray could ask his mom to mortgage her house. Hearing this, Ray fires Perhacs.

Again, Ray exposes the cruelty of the criminal justice system. Ray has no way of paying $15,000, which likely means that he will be put to death as an innocent man simply because he can't afford the legal fees to appeal his conviction with the U.S. Supreme Court.

When Ray's mom and Lester come at the end of the week, Ray pulls Lester aside to tell him what happened with Perhacs. Worried that he may soon be executed, Ray asks Lester to relay a message to Ray's mom when they give him an execution date: Ray loves her, he isn't scared, and God makes no mistakes. He asks Lester to promise him to look after her. Lester says that he's not going to let Ray die, and that he'll find someone else to help.

Even though Ray has lost all hope, particularly given the fact that he felt completely unsupported by his lawyer, he still tries to provide some comfort for his mother. This illustrates how Ray's community support can go both ways—he wants to support his friends and family through this hardship just as much as they support him.

The guards execute Dunkins on July 14; Ray once again bangs against the bars. The first time they turn on the generator, they hook up the cables wrong, so they have to electrocute him a second time. The next month, they execute Herbert Richardson, a Vietnam veteran. Ray finds out later that a young attorney named Bryan Stevenson sat with Herb all day and stayed with him through the end.

The fact that Dunkins had to be electrocuted twice reinforces the death penalty's cruelty as a punishment. In addition, Ray again hints at how Bryan will become a crucial beacon of support for Ray by showing how much comfort he provides for other inmates on death row.

One day, the guards open Ray's cell, startling him awake. Ray wonders if he's going to be electrocuted at that moment. Panicking, Ray thinks that he doesn't want to have his head shaved, or a bag placed over his head. In that moment, he wonders why he turned his back on God, when he needed him so much. Ray stands up, determined to fight—until they tell him that he has a legal visit.

This is one of Ray's darker moments, as he believes he is about to die. But it is notable that in this difficult moment, he recognizes the importance of faith in his life as a means of giving him comfort and hope.

Ray walks to the visiting area very confused. A young white woman smiles at him and shakes his hand. She introduces herself as Santha Sonenberg, explaining that she's a lawyer from D.C. and that she's going to file a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court. When Ray tries to protest that he doesn't have money, she says that she doesn't need any money. She explains that the Supreme Court will likely reject the petition and then she'll file a different Rule 32 petition in the Jefferson County circuit court.

Santha's initial statements contrast with everything that Perhacs has told Ray, illustrating his bias and manipulation of Ray's situation. Because Ray didn't have money to pay Perhacs, Perhacs didn't put up an adequate defense. But because Santha works for a company that is trying to alleviate discrimination and the economic inequality in the justice system (as readers will later learn), she puts up a much stronger defense for Ray.

Ray tells Santha that he's innocent, and she replies that she believes him. She tells him that they're going to investigate everything they can. She asks him if he's doing okay, and he asks in return if they can execute him while she's appealing. When Santha says no, Ray is relieved. Santha asks permission to represent him, and he eagerly agrees, smiling at her and asking her to call him Ray. He then asks who sent her, and she replies that it was Bryan Stevenson.

Santha (who is a part of Bryan Stevenson's team of lawyers) also provides Ray with much-needed empathy and support. In affirming that she believes Ray, asking him what he needs, and informing him that he can't be executed in the near future, Santha lifts a huge emotional burden off of Ray.

CHAPTER 11

The U.S. Supreme Court denies Ray's petition on November 13, 1989. Four days later, the Death Squad executes Arthur Julius, who was convicted of raping and murdering his cousin. Ray knows that not everyone on death row is innocent, but he also knows that not everyone is guilty. Even though Ray knows that he can't be executed yet, he is still anxious and rarely talks to anyone.

Ray's acknowledgement that not everyone on death row is guilty calls the death penalty's justice into question. It asks readers to interrogate whether the death penalty is worth it, knowing that innocent men like Ray can be killed for crimes they didn't commit.

One night, after midnight, a man starts crying in a cell very close to Ray. Ray tries to tune it out, thinking again about McGregor and Perhacs. He wishes that the state tried harder to find the guy who called Perhacs and said that he was the real killer. The man also called Ray's mom, but no one did a thing about trying to track him down.

In this moment, Ray demonstrates how he is choosing to focus on despair and anger rather than hope. He is also actively cutting himself off from a man in need because he is so wrapped up in his own misery.


Ray snaps out of his thoughts when he hears the crying man say that he can't take it anymore. Again Ray tries to convince himself that it's not his problem, that it's every man for himself. He distracts himself by thinking about his mom—he called her earlier that day and she told him that Lester is getting married. Ray is hurt that Lester didn't say so himself, but Ray realizes that Lester feels guilty about moving on with his life when Ray is stuck on death row.

As Ray watches his friend move on with his life, he starts to understand the true cost of a biased criminal justice system. While Lester can get married and build a life for himself, the state of Alabama has taken all opportunity away from Ray. He doesn't get the same chance, despite the fact that he hasn't done anything wrong.

Ray explains that no one understands what freedom means until they don't have it—it's like being "wrapped in a straightjacket all day every day." He wishes that he could make any choice about how to live, yearning to get married, have a son, and play baseball with him.

Ray's metaphor that being on death row is like being wrapped in a straitjacket emphasizes how being on death row is both physically and mentally suffocating. He also emphasizes how little choice he has and suggests that this lack of agency contributes to his lack of hope about getting his life back.

The man continues to cry, and suddenly Ray fills with emotion and sympathy for the man. Ray sits there and listens until the man stops crying, but when the silence rings out, Ray worries that the man might kill himself. Ray realizes that he has made a choice the last three years to dwell on despair, hatred, and anger rather than hope, faith, and compassion.

In recognizing that it is a choice to dwell on negative emotions, Ray regains a sense of agency. He can actively choose to be more positive and reach out to others, particularly because he knows that instilling hope in others can help them survive death row just as it helps him.

Ray calls out to the man, asking if he's okay. The man responds that the guards told him his mother passed away. Ray's heart breaks, and he says that he's sorry for the man's loss. Suddenly, other men start to express their sympathies as well. Ray realizes in that moment that he has a choice to reach out to all of these men. Pulling out his Bible from under his bed, Ray tells the man that God and the man's mother are both looking down on him. Ray asks the man to tell him about his mom, and he listens for two hours.

Ray reaches a crucial turning point here. In pulling out the Bible that he'd once tossed under the bed in an angry rejection of God, Ray is able to regain his faith and take on a more hopeful outlook. In addition, Ray is actively trying to ease this man's suffering, illustrating the importance of community and empathy in difficult times.

As Ray and the man talk, Ray remembers that he was born with a gift from God: the ability to lessen the suffering of another human being. Ray tells the man that at least he has his mom in heaven to argue his case before God. The man laughs—one of the first times Ray has heard laughter on the row. Ray realizes in that moment that he isn't ready to die, and he doesn't want to spend his time waiting to die. He wants to reach out and connect with others, make a family on death row, and choose to be more positive.

Reaching out to this man and providing some levity in the situation not only eases the man's suffering, but it also mitigates some of Ray's hardships as well. In describing those on death row as a family, Ray suggests that they can provide him with the same comfort and hope that someone like his mom can provide, particularly because they can empathize with his situation in a way that no one else can.

CHAPTER 12

Every night, Ray prays for the truth to come out. He refers back to John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." He receives a few letters from Santha, who apologizes for not being able to visit again—she is busy preparing a petition for relief from a death sentence. Holman allows prisoners to visit the law library once a week for an hour. For the previous three years Ray refused his time, but now he goes every week. He learns that even if a jury says life in prison, a judge in Alabama can override that ruling and still sentence a person to death.

Ray exposes another possible source of corruption and bias in the criminal justice system. Earlier, Ray noted that judges are elected based on how many people they send to death row. The fact that they have the power to overrule a jury only encourages these harsh punishments. They do not hand down these sentences out of justice, but rather in order to bolster their political support at the expense of people's lives.


Back in his cell, Ray shouts to the other men about judicial override, and they agree that it's unfair—one man is even on death row because of it. He says that the police lied and said he took a dollar from the man he killed, which is how he got a capital case. Ray asks the man's name; when the man hesitates, Ray starts talking about the pies his mother used to make. The man says his mother makes a pretty good pie herself, and he says his name is Henry. Ray apologizes for what happened in Henry's case.

Ray's connection with Henry again illustrates the importance of community on death row. Because Ray is able to empathize with Henry and relate to him by talking about his mom's pies, they are able to support one another and forge a new friendship.

Two weeks later, on July 13, 1990, the guards execute Wallace Thomas, and the inmates bang on the bars so that he knows that his life matters. A few weeks after his death, Santha writes a handwritten note to Ray, explaining that she's halfway done with his petition. She's sorry not to be able to visit, and she'll send the petition when she's done. She also writes her home phone number on the bottom of the letter. Ray reads it over and over again—he's happy to have something to read to occupy his mind, as they can't have **books**.

Both of these episodes separately reinforce the value of community and support. Ray and the other inmates want to make sure that Wallace Thomas doesn't feel alone; likewise, Santha tries to ensure that Ray feels supported as she works hard on his case, even providing him with a way to contact her directly if he needs her. Ray also foreshadows the value that books will bring into his life as a means of escape.


Ray recalls his time in the coal mine, when he would travel in his mind. He imagines visiting the Queen of England in Buckingham palace and having tea with her. The Queen asks to help Ray in any way she can, and he says that he'll find a way to get home. Ray is happy to be treated with respect as she gives him a tour of the palace and they play croquet for hours.

Ray reintroduces stories into his life as he imagines meeting the Queen of England. These fantasies allow him to help him escape the despair of death row, just as he was able to escape the suffocation of the mines earlier in the book.

The guards rouse Ray from his daydreams with a start, telling him that he has visitors. Ray is confused: it's only Wednesday, and visiting days are Friday. But when Ray sees his mom, Lester, Lester's mom Phoebe, and Lester's new wife Sia, Ray realizes that it is Friday, and he completely skipped over Thursday. Ray realizes that he has found a third way to leave death row—not by being released, or carried out in a body bag, but by escaping in his mind. After the visit, Ray returns to his cell and imagines arriving back at his mom's house and greeting her as a free man.

Here Ray underscores the true power of stories in his life. Not only do they allow him a respite from the difficult realities of death row—helping him pass the time so that he doesn't go crazy due to the monotony—but they also provide him with a greater sense of freedom, as he can imagine leaving death row and spending time with his mother.

CHAPTER 13

Santha sends a copy of her petition to Ray, listing 31 reasons why he should be granted a new trial: they include prosecutor misconduct, racial discrimination, ineffective counsel, and new evidence. Reading the petition, Ray feels a new spark of hope. He passes around the petition and the other inmates are impressed—they, too, realize that Ray is probably innocent.

Santha's petition reinforces Ray's belief that he faced discrimination during his trial. Her hard work and support of Ray also contrasts with Perhacs's lack of effort, and as a result of this support, Ray feels much more hopeful that his appeals process is turning around.

Meanwhile, Ray continues to leave the row every day in his mind; any time he can get away is a respite. He thinks that humans are not meant to be locked in a cage—it's a cruel punishment. He knows that most of the other men aren't innocent, as he is. Many raped women and murdered children. But in the prison, he doesn't know any monsters. He knows guys with names, many of whom had been abused as children or broken by life.

Ray continues to call into question the morality of the death penalty. While he concedes that not everyone on death row is innocent like him, he also recognizes that many times, the people who wind up on death row are also victims of difficult circumstances and are still worthy of their lives.

The state denies Ray's petition and everything that Santha claimed in it. Henry explains to Ray that if Perhacs could have raised something during his trial and appeal but didn't, the state won't allow it as a reason for a new trial. Ray concludes that if you couldn't afford a good defense at your trial or appeal, you could never prove your innocence. Ray does get a new hearing set for April 23, 1991, but soon after the state postpones the hearing. In addition, Santha says she can't represent Ray anymore because of a new job, but Bryan Stevenson will send another lawyer.

Ray again notes how systemic discrimination affects not only a person's first trial, but then also makes it even more difficult to point out that discrimination in subsequent trials and appeals because so much of the evidence cannot be reconsidered. Thus, someone who is at an economic disadvantage in their first trial is even more disadvantaged in subsequent trials.

Since Ray passed around his petition, other men on the row have started to have legal debates. Ray says that his petition states that "the kind of justice a criminal defense has cannot depend on how much money he has." The men debate this all day. That night, Ray showers next to a guy named Jimmy Dill; Jimmy says that Henry Hays has money from the KKK, so he'll probably get out. Ray walks back to his cell in shock—his friend Henry is Henry Hays, the man who lynched a black boy named Michael Donald in Mobile in 1981.

Ray's petition demands a kind of equality under the law that Ray never received. As the quote implies, Ray did not receive the same kind of justice because he had so little money. But Ray—and all of the lawyers with whom Santha and Bryan work—fight so that people with little money do *receive the same justice.*

That night, Ray calls out to Henry, saying that he just figured out who Henry is. Henry is silent for a while before saying that everything his parents taught him about Black people was a lie. Ray says that his mom always taught him to have compassion and forgiveness, and he is sorry that Henry's parents didn't teach him the same. Henry says that Ray was really lucky. Ray realizes that in that moment, all of the inmates are a family. They aren't monsters, and they have more in common than not—they shouldn't be reduced to the worst thing they have ever done.

Even though Ray is shocked and disgusted at Henry's actions and ties to the KKK, he still recognizes that Henry is a human being who has since recognized his mistakes. Ray is able to extend empathy to Henry, and their friendship lessens both of their suffering. Ray also emphasizes that Henry isn't a monster—no one on death row is—and therefore they shouldn't be put to death because they are human beings like everyone else.

The next day, at visiting day, Henry gestures Ray over to meet his parents. Ray holds out his hand, but Henry's father Bennie doesn't shake it. Henry announces that Ray is his best friend, and then a guard yells at Ray to sit down. As Ray sits, he tells Lester that they just made some wild progress on death row. Ray realizes how much it took for Henry to stand up to his dad and introduce a large Black man as his best friend.

Henry has been so indoctrinated with hate by his parents, as his father's actions in this passage show. But the fact that Henry can change his mind illustrates that no one is beyond redemption, and that even people whom the outside world views as evil can improve their lives and make different choices. Ray uses this point to question the death penalty, as he argues that everyone's life is worthwhile if they can find redemption.

A few months later, Ray's new attorney, Alan Black, visits from Boston. They go over the case together, and Alan says that they need to get a new ballistics expert. Ray suggests that he get someone from the South to testify, because judges don't like guys from out of town. That night, Ray tells Henry that he can get over Henry being in the KKK, but not that his life is in the hands of a Red Sox fan.

Even though Ray isn't sure about Alan Black, Alan, too, is part of the community of lawyers that is working to help Ray. Unlike Perhacs, he is listening to Ray's suggestions and working with Ray to put on the best defense possible—something that reassures Ray.

As Ray talks to the guys through the bars, he realizes how much he wants to talk face to face with other people. He yells out that he's going to start a book club and get real **books** in the jail. He wants to show the other men that they can escape the row in their mind, too.

Here Ray introduces the idea that stories can help not only him escape death row, but that with books, he can help the other men on death row take their mind off of their fates as well.

CHAPTER 14

Alan Black asks Judge Garrett for money for new ballistics experts to investigate Ray's case, which the judge grants. Ray wonders why the judge is giving them money now when he didn't give it in the actual trial. Ray thinks that if he had money, the whole trial might have turned out differently.

Ray reinforces how his lack of money led to his conviction in the trial. The judge's reversal in this decision also foreshadows Ray's reason for eventual release, because Ray had the right to more money for a better expert and was denied it.

Legal filings are the only mail the guards can't open. They read everything else because they don't want the inmates complaining about how they're being treated at Holman—particularly the lack of ventilation in the hot prison. One day, Ray jokes with one of the guards, asking if he can borrow his truck to go to the local swimming pool. The guard laughs, and Ray asks if he can get a message to the warden. Ray is trying to work within the system, as his mom always taught him. He's trying to make the prison better for everyone on death row.

Ray's friendly exchange here reinforces his complete change in outlook. Rather than remain surly and cut off, now he is trying to use humor and empathy to connect with others and improve the lives of the whole inmate community at Holman.

Ray meets with Charlie Jones, the prison warden. Jones greets Ray and asks why he didn't want to talk on camera when Geraldo Rivera—a national reporter—was there for the night to experience what it was like on death row. Ray and the other inmates noticed that when they handed Rivera his food, the guards gave him a tray on top like a lid, and that made all the difference: Rivera was just playing at being there for a night.

The incident with Rivera reinforces how the inmates are treated as though their lives are worth less than others—he is given a lid on his food, while the other inmates don't get that simple extra gesture. This counters Ray's assertion that all of their lives are worthwhile.

Ray asks Jones if he can start a book club that would meet once a month in the library. Ray explains that it will help keep the peace in the prison, but inwardly he admits that with **books**, the men can feel smarter and freer. Jones agrees, saying that they can have six guys in the club, but that they'll have to pay for the books themselves.

Ray wants to start a book club as a way of improving the lives of the whole community on death row. Books are a symbol of both hope and freedom, as the stories allow for a powerful means of escape and distract inmates from the despair of their situation.

Jones then asks if there's anything else he needs to know about in the prison. Ray says that the guys noticed that Geraldo Rivera got a lid on his food. He comments that it was a great idea, and wonders if they can do the same for all of the inmates. Jones agrees and says he'll let the kitchen know.

Connecting with his fellow inmates—and with the warden and other guards—is crucial for Ray's survival on the row, because it allows him to advocate for them and improve all of their lives.

The next visiting day, Lester and Sia come alone—Ray's mom isn't feeling well enough to visit. Ray tells them that he's starting a book club, and Sia gets excited, suggesting a bunch of different **books** that they can read like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Ray asks if they can send him copies of the books, and they agree.

The books that Sia suggests are particularly apt, as they deal with racism and touch on the criminal justice system and the legacy of slavery in the laws. Her suggestions hint at the fact that the books will not only provide an escape for the inmates, but they will also become powerful tools to consider many of the issues that the inmates face.

Suddenly, there's yelling at another visiting table. Sirens go off and the guards escort the visitors out, while inmates have to go back to their cells. Henry tells Ray that his dad, Bennie, fell over like he had a heart attack—he has a trial coming up that he's concerned about. That night, a guard tells Henry that his father died. Ray prays for Bennie to know more in death than he did in life. After the guard leaves, the inmates all start to pass food and candy to Henry's cell in sympathy. No one interrupts the chain—they all know grief and isolation, and they want to help in whatever way they can. Even the guards, whose job is both to take care of the inmates and to execute them, help pass the food.

Ray continues to build a community in the prison. Just as he values having people around him to support him, he tries to extend that same empathy to others. In doing so, he fosters compassion throughout the prison, setting off a chain of support represented by the food and candy that they pass to Henry. With this community, they both empathize with and help alleviate each other's suffering.

CHAPTER 15

Only six guys can join Ray in the book club, but every inmate is now allowed to have two **books** besides the Bible in his cell. Ray describes it as a whole new world opening up. The first book club meeting consists of Jesse Morrison, Victor Kennedy, Larry Heath, Brian Baldwin, Ed Horsely, Henry, and Ray—five Black guys and two white guys. They use the law library but they all have to sit at different tables, tossing the book to each other to read passages.

Ray's assessment of the book club as opening up a whole new world reinforces the power of stories, because it provides all the inmates (not just the seven people in the book club) the opportunity to engage with something other than their despair, anger, or boredom in the prison.

The book club's first **book** is James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, and some of the other inmates who aren't in the club ask their families to send them a copy as well. Soon, everybody is talking about the book in their cells. They are transported to Harlem instead of death row, just as Ray could travel the world and have tea with the Queen of England.

Ray directly compares the freedom that books can offer to the escape that his own imaginings can offer—both illustrate the power of stories because they distract from harsh realities.

At the first official book club meeting, the guys are uneasy at the change in their routine. They look at Ray for guidance, and he asks them what they liked about the **book** and what made an impression on them. Henry says he likes the idea that a person's soul can be reborn, no matter what they've done.

In their first book club meeting, Ray discovers that the stories also enable the men to talk about important philosophical and social issues. Henry's point is very similar to points that Ray makes throughout the book: that every person is capable of change and redemption, and therefore worthy of life.


Two of the guys in the **book club**, Baldwin and Horsely, are on death row for a crime they were accused of committing together. Horsely told officers that he did it alone, but this didn't matter. Baldwin was shocked with a cattle prod until he confessed to the crime. Again, Ray thinks that some of the men on death row are guilty, but some are not. In Holman, it doesn't really matter. They are just guys talking about a **book**.

This is yet another dimension of injustice in the criminal justice system. Rather than seeking out evidence to prove whether Baldwin was involved, the authorities tortured him into a confession, and that confession was used to sentence him to death. This is another argument against the death penalty—Ray illustrates that he isn't the only innocent man on death row, illustrating that executing innocent men is more than just a one-time mistake.


Baldwin points to a passage in which the main character, John, is cleaning his house. John describes this as a lifelong task, like the man "whose curse it was to push a boulder up a steep hill, only to have the giant who guarded the hill roll the boulder down again." Baldwin says all the inmates are pushing a boulder as well, until the giant either crushes them to death with the boulder or someone gives them a hand. Ray knows just what he means, relating to Baldwin's feelings of helplessness and futility.

The passage Baldwin cites is from Part 1 of Go Tell It on the Mountain, and it alludes to the myth of Sisyphus, who was punished for deceitfulness by being forced to perpetually roll a boulder up a mountain. The myth relates back to Ray and the other inmates' feelings of hopelessness, as they often feel like fighting their sentences and continuing to survive on death row is both a monotonous and futile process.


Horsely says that he likes how the characters' backstories shed light on their problems. He says it's like the inmates: everybody has a story that led them to their mistakes. Agreeing, Ray sees how the **books** are making everyone think and open their minds, as well as transport them away from death row for a while.

Horsely's point adds to Ray's argument that no one should be reduced to the worst thing that they have ever done, and that even people who have made mistakes or done horrific things are still worthy of life. And Ray again reinforces the importance of books for the men, not only in taking their mind off of their executions but also to help them talk about important issues.

Ray points to a passage that Henry says he also liked and copied down on a piece of paper. In it, John's father says that all white people are wicked because they imprison Black men, beat them, and kill them for things they have not done. John can try to change the world until "the **sun** refused to shine," but white people will never let him enter their world. Ray knows that Henry picked this passage because Henry was taught the exact opposite: that all Black people are wicked.

Go Tell It on the Mountain *has many thematic ties to* The Sun Does Shine. *Written in 1953 and set in the early 1900s Harlem, Baldwin highlights the discrimination that many Black people faced in their everyday lives, just as Ray does. Baldwin even highlights the problems in the criminal justice system—the passage ties into Ray's argument that white men are still killing Black men for crimes that they have not committed.*

Ray disagrees with the passage: he says that the world belongs to everyone, and he knows the **sun** will never refuse to shine. As Ray sees the guard returning to tell them that their hour is up, Ray says that one day, when he gets out of Holman, he's going to tell the world about how there are men on death row who mattered—maybe he'll even write a book about it. A few months later, on March 20, 1992, Larry becomes the first member of the **book club** to die. At the next meeting, they leave his chair empty.

Ray uses the metaphor of the sun to illustrate that he has not given up hope: he vows to regain sunlight in his life and walk free. Additionally, he acknowledges the impact of stories and recognizes the power in his own. This statement is only made more impactful because the reader knows that Ray was able to escape and tell his story in The Sun Does Shine.

CHAPTER 16

Ray continues to daydream, imagining an elaborate wedding between him and actress Halle Berry. Just as he goes to kiss her, four unfamiliar guards rush into Ray's cell; they push him up against the wall and throw his things around. The guards order Ray to strip, instructing him to lift up his testicles and spread his buttocks so that they can see if he's hiding anything—though Ray knows that they're only doing this to humiliate him. They explain that they're there for 12 hours, while the regular Holman staff is over at the prison that these guards normally supervise. After this shakedown, the guards leave Ray to clean up the mess.

While Ray's daydreaming provides him some refuge, nothing can protect him from the guards' treatment. This is another example of how on death row, the inmates are severely disrespected treated like their lives are worthless. Like the other aspects of the prison system, they do these things under the guise of making sure that justice is carried out, though really Ray knows that they are simply taking advantage of the powerless inmates.

Year pass: in 1994, Alan Black files an amended Rule 32 petition for Ray. In May of 1997, Henry learns that he's going to be executed on June 6. The guys try to assure him that the governor could grant him a stay: the Black men on death row show Henry more compassion than his parents or the KKK ever did.

Ray again emphasizes how critical the community is within the prison—the inmates try to ease Henry's suffering and show him the compassion he has lacked his entire life.

The book club has now met a few more times, discussing **books** like *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—all books that deal with race in the American South. In the discussions, Henry admits that he is ashamed of how he was brought up. Henry wonders what kind of person Michael Donald might have grown up to be if he had not killed the boy. Ray knows that Henry's death is important to people: he is the first white man to be put to death for killing a Black man in almost 85 years. His death is making a point about racism and fairness—but to the other inmates, it is like a family member dying.

The other books that the book club reads add to Ray's assessment that books can be powerful tools to open discussions about big issues. Not only do these books deal with race in the South, but several (like To Kill a Mockingbird) also deal with racism in the criminal justice system, illustrating the deep roots of this problem and how literature can help to expose it. Ray also emphasizes that while the outside world treats Henry's death as symbolic, inside death row the other inmates value him like a family member.

Before Henry moves to the death room to await his execution, he and Ray talk one last time. Henry cries, saying he's sorry for what he did. He tells Ray that he has a brother named Ray, and that he thinks of both of them the same way. Ray's heart breaks—what the inmates have done in the past doesn't matter on death row. All they can do is try to survive and show each other compassion. On the night of Henry's execution, Ray starts banging on the bars and screaming so that Henry knows his life means something and that he's not alone.

This exchange illustrates how Ray's support is crucial to Henry, as Henry thinks of him like a brother. This shows immense growth on Henry's part as well, because in the earlier part of his life, Henry would have automatically hated Ray for his Blackness. This possibility for love and redemption even for a racist killer like Henry implies that everyone's life is worthwhile and has the capacity for something better, and the fact that Ray and the other inmates bang on the bars shows that they believe people can change and have worthwhile lives as well.

Soon after, Alan Black brings Ray good news: he thinks he can get the state to consider life without parole. Ray protests, however, saying that he doesn't want life without parole because he's innocent. Alan explains that this is a better option, because the state isn't going to let them appeal on anything that they could have appealed on before, like the ballistics evidence. Alan also mentions that he needs $10,000 to pursue the life without parole option. At this, Ray thanks Alan and fires him—Ray would rather die for the truth than have life without parole and not be able to prove his innocence.

This exchange with Alan proves just how much Ray wants to expose the injustice in the criminal justice system and the death penalty. He is willing to die for the opportunity to prove his innocence, rather than live a long life in jail and let the state of Alabama get away with their unjust treatment. Additionally, Ray again shows how important community support is to him, even among his lawyers. As soon as Ray realizes that Alan doesn't appreciate his financial situation, he knows that Alan doesn't truly support him.

CHAPTER 17

After Ray fires Alan, he feels alone once again and fears getting an execution date without representation. Ray decides to write a letter to Bryan Stevenson, thanking him for sending Alan but asking if Bryan could be his lawyer instead. He asks that Bryan read his transcript, and if Bryan can find one thing that points to Ray's guilt, Bryan shouldn't be his lawyer.

Ray underscores how integral community support is for him, even among his lawyers. Without Alan—or particularly a lawyer like Santha who truly tries to support him—Ray feels alone and vulnerable once more.

Ray decides to call Bryan's foundation—the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). Bryan answers, and Ray informs Bryan that he fired Alan. Ray asks Bryan to read the letter he just sent, and Bryan agrees. A few months later, Bryan visits the prison. Bryan is Black, bald, and slightly younger than Ray; Ray observes that the man's face is full of compassion and thinks that he has been sent by God.

Bryan provides a major contrast with Alan. The compassion that Bryan has instantly mitigates Ray's fear and loneliness. In addition, the support that Ray immediately feels from Bryan is akin to giving Ray hope and faith, as Ray writes that Bryan was sent by God.

Bryan apologizes that Alan asked Ray for money, and he asks Ray to tell him his story. Ray explains his whole story, saying that he's innocent, that the state has been lying about his case for years, and that he's been on death row for 12 years and it's been hell. Ray can tell as he speaks that Bryan understands: Bryan has worked with many death row inmates and he's been to executions. They talk for two hours, and Ray thinks how nice it is for someone simply to listen to him and believe him.

Bryan not only contrasts with Alan, but he contrasts even more with Sheldon Perhacs. Unlike Perhacs, Bryan immediately believes in Ray and listens to him. He is empathetic about the fact that Ray is losing valuable years of his life, and that empathy is crucial for Ray's mental well-being.

Bryan also tells Ray that they are a team, and he wants to hear any ideas Ray has about the case. Ray says that Bryan needs to get the best ballistics expert he can find—preferably an honest, white, Southern man who believes in the death penalty, and so would be trusted by the court. Bryan agrees that that's a good idea—he'll review Ray's file and the reports from the previous experts, and they say goodbye. When Ray returns to his cell, he falls to his knees and thanks God for sending Bryan. He then spends the next two hours sobbing.

Ray notes another difference between Bryan and Perhacs: Bryan supports Ray by allowing him to help on the case and by listening to his ideas. Additionally, Ray's ideas about the case again reinforce the racism inherent in the criminal justice system. That he knows he needs to get a white, Southern ballistics expert so that the judge and prosecutor will trust what he says speaks to their own biases.

CHAPTER 18

Ray talks to his mom about Bryan, explaining that the lawyer is going to come see her. Ray's mom wants him to come home now, and he grows upset—she hasn't come to see him in a long time because the seven-hour drive is too difficult. Ray knows his mother is sick, but no one tells him anything specific about her condition because they don't want to worry him, and Ray can't face this reality knowing that he can't do anything for his mom.

Ray highlights the deep cost of the biased criminal justice system on his life. His conviction has not only stripped him of his ability to live his own life, but it has also prevented him from spending time with his mother as her condition worsens.

After Bryan starts the case summary, he returns to Holman on a regular basis. He and Ray become friends, talking about things like football and family. Ray observes that Bryan's work really wears on him—he carries a big burden. During Bryan's visits, he talks about justice and mercy, explaining that he believes no one is beyond redemption or undeserving of life. Ray is grateful for Bryan's drive, compassion, and friendship.

Bryan's support for Ray is invaluable, as he not only represents Ray as a lawyer but also becomes a friend to him. Bryan's discussions of the death penalty and justice also introduce his arguments for why the death penalty should be abolished: no one is undeserving of redemption. This implicitly ties back to Ray's relationship with Henry, as Ray noted how Henry showed his true remorse on death row.

The case summary that Bryan prepares is almost 200 pages long, and Ray is glad that Bryan wants him to review it—he feels like he has a voice in his own defense. In a letter, Bryan explains that the supervisor and two other workers at Manpower can back up Ray's alibi. Bryan is also talking to Ray's mom and others who can verify that Ray was at church that night before going to work. They expect a hearing between August and October of that year—1999.

Bryan's care for Ray's opinion provides another sharp contrast with Perhacs. Ray truly feels that Bryan is on his side because he listens to Ray's ideas, and he also puts in as much work as possible for Ray's trial. It is notable that Perhacs didn't find anyone to back up Ray's alibi in the initial trial or appeal. All of these facts collectively make Ray feel that Bryan genuinely supports him, and he starts to feel more positive about his appeals process again.

Bryan finds two ballistics experts from Texas and another from the FBI—three unimpeachable white men who say that none of the bullets from any of the three robberies match Ray's mom's gun. They also find that the state's paperwork around the ballistics evidence is very spotty. On the phone, Bryan says that they can likely prove that the only evidence against Ray is false. Ray starts to choke up, saying how grateful he is. Bryan promises to get Ray home.

That Bryan's immense effort on Ray's case causes Ray to choke up illustrates how much Ray feels supported by Bryan. Bryan's promise to bring Ray home also highlights his commitment to find justice and his belief in Ray's innocence after so much bias against him.

Three years later, in February 2002, Bryan sends another letter to Ray explaining that the chief deputy district attorney in Jefferson County knows that there is a problem with Ray's case, and Bryan is hoping that they will concede that Ray is innocent because of the mistaken ballistics evidence. Judge Garrett schedules the hearing for March 11–13, 2002. Bryan is optimistic that things are going well for the case and tells Ray to keep his head up.

Bryan continues to support Ray, not only in working hard on Ray's case but also in emotionally buoying him. The fact that Bryan is hopeful about the case also helps Ray stay positive about the hearing's outcome.

Bryan also sends his memo for the hearing to Ray, in which he presents the evidence of bias in the trial: for example, the police gave Ray's name to Smotherman *before* showing Smotherman a lineup that had Ray's initials on his picture. Bryan also tells Ray that Perhacs and McGregor were friends, and that McGregor has a history of racial bias. Ray can feel his anger bubbling again, knowing that the state of Alabama has now stolen 16 years of his life, but instead he chooses to pray and try to forgive. He has to believe that God is on the side of justice. Sometimes at night, Ray dreams that his time on death row isn't real, and one day he will wake up in July 1985 at 29 years old, and his mom will comfort him.

The evidence that Bryan brings up here is even further confirmation of the bias that Ray experienced. The police and the court system purposefully manipulated Ray's case—literally biasing Smotherman into confirming that Ray was the person who shot him, or knowing that Perhacs and McGregor may have been conspiring against him. Ray also emphasizes the cost of this discrimination: a valuable 16 years of his life so far. At the same time, Ray illustrates how far he has come since his first few years on death row, because he makes an effort to forgive and be positive rather than to hate.

CHAPTER 19

In March 2002, the state's Attorney General Office files a writ to force the court to dismiss Ray's petition because it would "waste three days or two days of taxpayer money." Ray is hurt that the 16 years he spent in prison is less important than the two or three days of the attorney general's time. After this statement, Bryan writes to Ray, assuring him that Judge Garrett is very suspicious that the state seems so desperate not to look at new evidence. They are filing a response in the next two weeks, and Bryan tells Ray to stay hopeful and that the hearing will likely be rescheduled in the next few months.

Ray again points out the state's injustice—that his life isn't worth anything to the attorney general. Even though they have made a mistake and wrongfully imprisoned a man for 16 years, they are doing everything they can not to take the time to make sure that Ray gets a fair appeals process. Even the judge, who was himself quite biased during Ray's trial, recognizes the state's unfairness.

Ray then thinks about the death penalty in general, wondering how any killing can be justified. If men don't have the right to take a life, neither does the state. Even if a person is guilty, taking their life doesn't bring back a life—it just creates an endless cycle of murder. He also knows that no one is born a murderer, and that every killer is taught to be one by parents, or a system, or brutality. He also thinks that life is a gift given by God, and therefore it can only be taken away by God as well.

In this section, Ray lays out various arguments against the death penalty, which is one of his major aims in the book. Here he comes at the death penalty from a logical angle, arguing that if people don't have the right to murder, then neither do governments. He also examines it from a religious angle, implicitly referencing one of the Ten Commandments "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), implying that people should not take each other's lives—only God can do so.

Ray tries to choose hope and love on death row, but sometimes it becomes overwhelming and he leaves in his mind again. He dreams about divorcing Halle Berry for Sandra Bullock, but he never dreams about having children, however, as he doesn't want to bear the thought of being separated from them. The guys on the row who have children bear a pain that is too much to witness. One of the guys on death row, George Sibley, is on death row along with his wife, Lynda. They had a nine-year-old son with them when they killed a police officer in 1993.

Ray continues to try and maintain hope and faith on death row, but when he is unable to, he returns to the stories that he can create in his mind. However, his thoughts about children remind readers of one of the costs of the corrupt justice system on Ray's life: they have robbed him of the ability to get married and have kids, as any innocent person should be able to do. And in George and Lynda's case, the state is making an orphan out of their son.

Ray gets his Rule 32 hearing in June 2002. Perhacs testifies that he didn't have enough money to mount a defense and that Payne was unqualified. The three experts then testify that there is no proof the bullets at the crime scene matched Ray's mom's gun. Ray is glad to see his mom, Lester, and Phoebe. Perhacs barely acknowledges Ray, and McGregor isn't at the hearing. Judge Garrett never looks at Ray.

Even Perhacs now acknowledges, 16 years later, that he didn't have the money to mount a proper defense or pay a qualified expert. At the same time, the prosecution and Judge Garrett don't acknowledge any mistake whatsoever, reinforcing how difficult it is to get people to correct their mistakes in the justice system.

Judge Garrett notes that the experts' testimony might just be a difference of opinion, but Bryan argues that these experts are unimpeachable. The Assistant Attorney General then claims that Payne was a competent expert, despite the fact that the state criticized Payne as incompetent during the first trial. Emphasizing that no one from the state can now prove what they proved in 1985, Bryan argues that Ray is innocent: the state made a mistake, and they're essentially saying they don't care about Ray's innocence or evidence. The state continues to argue that Bryan simply shouldn't be allowed to present new evidence.

Ray points out the state's hypocrisy and how they continue to use faulty reasoning for their case. Whereas in the initial trial, they argued that Payne was incompetent in order to win their case, now they are trying to argue that Payne was an expert so that Bryan and Ray aren't able to introduce new evidence into the trial. They are being willfully ignorant simply to keep Ray in jail.

After the hearing, Ray returns to Holman. He knows the evidence is compelling, but he doesn't have a lot of faith in the system to do the right thing. He prays and goes to bed. When Ray wakes up, he hears a book club discussion going on, which makes him sad. All of the men in the original book club have been executed except for him, and book club stopped. There are no more meetings in the library, but guys still talk about the **books** in their cells. They talk about relationships, politics, violence—valuing the opportunity to have their opinions heard.

Even though Ray has essentially stopped the book club, this anecdote demonstrates how important the books still are to the inmates. Having access to books, thanks to Ray, allows them to discuss important issues and take their mind off of the harsh conditions of the prison, just as the books did for the men in book club.

Through the summer of 2002, Ray and Bryan wait for a ruling from Judge Garrett. When Lester visits one day, Ray is confident that he'll be getting out. He says that God isn't going to fail: "What things so ever you desire when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them." Lester thinks that Ray should have been a lawyer; Ray says maybe he'll become one and put an end to the death penalty, or maybe he'll open a restaurant. He asks Lester to ask his mom for his birth certificate so that he can leave the prison, and Lester says he'll ask Ray's sister.

Here, Ray cites Mark 11:24, illustrating once again how his renewed faith in God provides him with the optimism necessary to survive his time in prison—and even dream of what he might do when he gets out. Ray hints at how he wants to make a difference for the people on death row and fight to end the death penalty when he is released from Holman.

On September 22, 2002, the captain of the guards comes to Ray's cell and informs him that his mom passed away. Ray begins to sob and shake; he feels nauseous and guilty that she died and he wasn't there. He couldn't tell her he loved her or say goodbye. Then, Ray hears an inner voice, telling him that the only person who believed he was innocent is gone. The voice says that there is nothing to live for anymore, and Ray starts to consider different ways to kill himself. He feels completely hopeless.

While Ray has chosen to be optimistic over his last decade in the prison, his faith and hope are tested most severely here. Ray's mom's death exposes the deep costs of his imprisonment as he wasn't able to be with her as she died. Moreover, because she represented a beacon of continuous support for him, losing that support also increases his despair and suffering.

Suddenly, Ray hears his mom's voice in his head, telling him that he has to keep fighting. She says that he is a light and that he can't listen to the devil telling him to give up. His life isn't for him to take—it's for God to take. He has work to do and God has a purpose for him; he is not going to die in his cell. Ray's mom concludes that he needs to stop crying and that he should tell the devil to go to hell where he belongs. Ray chuckles, and he soon falls asleep.

With Ray's mother's voice reminding him to maintain his faith in God, and telling him that he has the capacity to persevere, Ray is then able to keep fighting for his life rather than thinking about taking it. Even though her voice seems to be a manifestation of his own thoughts, feeling her support even from beyond the grave helps to ease his suffering.

After Ray wakes up, coffee, chocolate, cards, **books**, and candy arrive in his cell. The men give Ray their condolences and sympathy, and Ray thinks that "sorrow shared is sorrow lessened." Suddenly, Jimmy Dill asks a question about a quote from *To Kill A Mockingbird*, "They've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it—seems that only children weep." He asks Ray what this means. Ray replies that only children cry when an innocent man is convicted. Jimmy says that he thinks that's right, but just because it happened before and will happen again doesn't mean you shouldn't stop fighting it.

The other inmates' compassionate response to Ray's mother's passing also highlights the impact of community. Feeling their support, Ray explicitly notes that they have eased his sorrow. In addition, Jimmy's discussion of this quote from To Kill a Mockingbird—which happens after Tom Robinson's unjust conviction—again highlights the power of these stories in Ray's life. They inspire Ray and the other inmates to keep fighting for their survival, even in the face of racism and injustice.

CHAPTER 20

Phoebe and Lester visit Ray after his mom dies, and the guards turn a blind eye when Phoebe hugs Ray and comforts him. She assures Ray that she and Lester will always be there for him. When Phoebe passes away a couple years later, Lester and Ray cry together, but they also laugh about how God is in trouble, because both Ray's mom and Phoebe will constantly be arguing Ray's case with God.

Even with Ray's mother gone, he still recognizes that Phoebe and especially Lester support him deeply. They are there for him throughout his decades on death row to ease these particularly difficult times, using shared humor just as Ray does as a source of comfort.

About a year after Ray's mom's death in 2002, Ray receives a letter from Bryan. Bryan explains that Judge Garrett is going to retire, but the judge intends to keep Ray's case. Bryan is talking to *The New York Times* and *60 Minutes* to put pressure on Garrett to rule on a hearing. Another nine months pass, and there's still no answer on Ray's hearing. In September 2004, with still no word, Bryan writes to Garrett asking about the ruling.

Bryan starts to use the press to pressure Judge Garrett and the other people involved in Ray's trial to do the right thing. Bryan recognizes that Ray's story is a powerful tool that can be used to convince others of the problems in the criminal justice system.

In January 2005, two and a half years after the Rule 32 hearing, Judge Garrett issues a ruling in favor of the state. In fact, he simply signed the state's order (though he changed the margins), wasting two and a half years of Ray's life for no reason. Bryan writes that he will file a motion objecting to the ruling, and then after 10 days they'll file another notice of appeal. Ray can tell that Bryan is livid, but Ray isn't surprised that the state is doing everything they can to keep from admitting that they were wrong. Bryan files the appeal and the Court of Criminal Appeals schedules another hearing.

Judge Garrett's actions prove how even those who don't show direct bias can still uphold a system of discrimination. In delaying the ruling for so long and then simply copying the state's order, he is depriving Ray of the ability to move forward with his appeals process and thus taking away even more years of his life. Even though Judge Garrett may not actively discriminate against Ray, he is still upholding an unjust system that is robbing Ray of his ability to prove his innocence.

In November 2005, *The Birmingham News* publishes a series of articles on the death penalty, with opinion pieces for and against. Bryan writes the piece against the death penalty. He partly tells Ray's story, being on death row for nearly 20 years for a crime that he didn't commit. He writes that Ray is on death row because he is poor—like 70% of those on Alabama's death row, his lawyer only had $1,000 to prepare his case. Ray had only $500 for a ballistics expert, and the only one they could find was legally blind in one eye and didn't have the experience to use the equipment for testing the evidence.

Here, Bryan sums up some of the injustice that Ray faced. He points out the fact that Ray's lack of money led him to an inadequate defense. Bryan's opinion piece sets the stage for Ray's own book, as it acknowledges the power of his story and how it can be used to convince readers of issues with both the criminal justice system and the death penalty.

Bryan writes that as a nameless Black man, Ray was presumed guilty before his trial, and he's not the only innocent person who's been sent to Alabama's death row. There have been 34 executions and seven exonerations since 1975, meaning there is at least one innocent person for every five executions, but Alabama refuses to examine and reform their death penalty systems. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that executing the mentally disabled is unconstitutional, but Alabama refuses to enact laws to enforce this. Alabama is the only state that lets judges overrule jury verdicts of life imprisonment, and 25% of all death sentences have been imposed through judicial override. Bryan concludes that the criminal justice system in Alabama is biased and therefore does not deserve to kill people.

Bryan illustrates not only the problems in the criminal justice system, but also how that directly contributes to the issues with the death penalty. The racism that Ray faced means that he is facing execution as an innocent man, and Bryan proves that this is not an isolated case but a pattern, particularly in Alabama's death penalty. Bryan also demonstrates how Alabama's death penalty is unjust because it does not adhere to laws set in place by the Supreme Court, and judges use it as a brutal tool to pad their records for reelection.

Ray also reads the opposing article from attorney general Troy King, who argues "an eye for an eye." Ray understands this, as it derives from the Bible. But, he argues, the system doesn't know who is guilty and the death penalty doesn't deter murder. Ray thinks that until Alabama can account for racism in its courts and prisons—until it can ensure innocent people are never executed—the death penalty should be abolished.

Ray recognizes the opposing arguments—that the guilty deserve to be punished in proportion to their crime—particularly because "an eye for an eye" is based on the Bible (Exodus 21:23-25). At the same time, Ray points out that this kind of retribution only works when the state can identify the people who are guilty of their crimes, and therefore he argues that until the system can do so, the death penalty should not exist.

On the day of Ray's new hearing, which takes place in November 2005, an article comes out quoting both Ray and McGregor. McGregor states that he'd be standing outside the prison with a gun if Ray were released. After the hearing (which Ray isn't allowed to attend), Bryan writes to Ray to explain that the newspaper articles and subsequent letters people are sending have pressured the state into discussing the evidence in Ray's case. Bryan writes that he hopes Ray has spent his last Thanksgiving on death row.

McGregor makes it abundantly clear that he has no desire to uphold a just system, as he states in a newspaper article that if Ray were to be found innocent and released from prison, he would essentially seek vigilante justice and try and kill Ray himself. Separately, Bryan recognizes how Ray's story has become a powerful tool to help the state acknowledge its mistakes.

In June 2006, Bryan informs Ray that the Court of Criminal Appeals denied their appeal, and now they're going back to the Alabama Supreme Court. The other men on death row are just as disheartened as Ray—his freedom is something they all want to fight for. However, Ray is hopeful that the ruling in his case was 3–2, meaning two judges believe in his innocence for the first time.

Ray continues to find hope even as his appeal is denied. For the first time, he feels supported by people within the criminal justice system. Even if they are not the majority, the two dissenting judges provide him with a degree of optimism that others might see the light.

CHAPTER 21

The Alabama Supreme Court sends Ray's case down to Jefferson County—they want the lower courts to rule on whether Payne was a competent expert. Since Judge Garrett has fully retired, a new judge, Laura Petro, is now deciding the case. It takes until March 2009 for Judge Petro to rule—her order concludes that Judge Garrett thought Payne was competent, but she doesn't give her own opinion. Bryan says this is better than her agreeing with the state and independently finding Payne competent.

Ray's case continues to highlight the complicated machinations of the court system. It takes another three years for Petro to agree with the ruling that Judge Garrett made, which ultimately changes nothing about his case—and all this time, Ray is still housed in a cell on death row. This continues to expose how the courts seem more interested in upholding their initial ruling than actually investigating his innocence, while they take years of his life away.

Ray is growing pessimistic. Since the day that Bryan hoped Ray would spend his last Thanksgiving on death row, 37 men have been executed. There are no more **book club** discussions. Relations between the guards and the inmates grow tense. The guards assure Ray that they would never kill him, but Ray knows this isn't true.

As Ray's appeal case drags on over decades, he becomes more aware of the stakes of his failure. While he wants to remain optimistic about his survival, watching others die around him makes him less sure that he will gain freedom.

Ray's case goes back to the Court of Criminal Appeals, then to Judge Petro again because she didn't rule on whether Payne was a qualified expert herself. In September 2010, Judge Petro rules that Payne was an expert because he had a knowledge of firearms identification beyond that of a normal witness, which is like Ray saying he is qualified as a heart surgeon because he once had an EKG. The case then bounces around the various courts again. Bryan never gives up, but Ray can tell that the work weighs heavily on him.

Like Judge Garrett, Judge Petro manipulates the law to uphold the initial ruling. Even if she is not actively discriminating against Ray, she is blatantly using the state's biased reasoning in order to uphold the ruling, rather than recognizing Payne's incompetence and investigating Ray's innocence.

In 2013, the Alabama Supreme Court finally denies Ray's appeal. When Bryan calls to tell Ray about the ruling, Bryan worries that he didn't do enough. Ray stops Bryan and tells him to take the weekend off from worrying. Bryan thanks Ray, and when they hang up Ray is amazed at how much Bryan cares about him.

Even when Ray's case hits roadblocks, he appreciates Bryan's immense effort and care. In turn, Ray tries to support Bryan and lessen the burden that he feels to save his clients' lives.

When Lester visits Ray next, they talk about where Ray would go if he ever got out of prison. Soon, Ray will be on death row longer than he was a free man, and he's not sure if he's ever going to get out of prison. Lester assures him that he can't stop fighting. He reminds Ray of when they would walk home from baseball games and hide in ditches, afraid to face what was coming at them. He says that they can't hide—they have to keep fighting, no matter what happens.

Lester ties Ray's actions back to their childhood, when they would hide in the ditches to avoid running into people who may want to hurt them for being Black. Whereas before, they would run from their fears, Lester argues that Ray has to maintain his perseverance in the face of challenges—he has to hold out hope that he can survive.

The next time Bryan visits, he presents Ray with their options. They can build a case based on Ray's innocence with the Supreme Court, but if their petition is denied with the Supreme Court, it could also speed up the process for Ray's execution. Otherwise, they can continue to appeal through the lower courts but not argue innocence. Hearing all of the options, Ray says that he wants to go to the Supreme Court. He doesn't want to spend another 10 years bouncing around the lower courts. And he wants his innocence to matter.

While Ray values his life, he also knows that he can't hold out hope with the lower courts for many more years. Instead, he chooses to fight for justice in trying to prove his innocence and bringing his case to the Supreme Court. In this way, Ray puts exposing problems with the criminal justice system and the death penalty above his life.

CHAPTER 22

Over the next six months, while Bryan is preparing Ray's petition to the U.S. Supreme Court, Ray reflects on the good moments in his life, like playing baseball and warm summer nights. Ray sometimes thinks about what might have happened if he stayed in Praco and worked in the mines—how his life might have turned out differently. The good moments are more difficult to think of after death row, but Ray still helped other people get through long, dark nights. He also takes time to remember the 54 people who were executed during his time on death row.

Even as Ray has a difficult time reckoning with the years that he has lost, he also appreciates the good things about his time there. He and the other inmates built a strong community together, and if he gets out, he can become a voice for the people who lost their lives on death row and who would remain there after he gets out.

Bryan files Ray's petition in October 2013, and in February 2014, Ray and Bryan speak on the phone. Bryan tells Ray that the Supreme Court didn't just review his case, they *ruled* on it. In a unanimous decision, they found that Perhacs rendered a constitutionally deficient performance because he didn't ask for additional funds for an expert, and that the case must be returned to the lower courts for further proceedings. They ruled in his favor. Ray drops the phone and weeps. For the first time in 29 years, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Here, Ray's case finally turns around as the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledges the issues with Ray's initial trial. In finding that Perhacs did not render an adequate defense for Ray, they acknowledge the discrimination Ray faced in not being granted funds to hire a competent expert. It also shows that Ray's optimism is starting to pay off—his perseverance means that he may have the opportunity to walk free.

The case returns to the circuit court, and on September 24, 2014, the circuit court finds that Perhacs was ineffective, granting and Ray's Rule 32 petition. Ray isn't free yet, but he's going to have a new trial with Bryan and the three ballistics experts. In the meantime, Ray will be moved out of Holman and into the county jail.

After almost 30 years, Ray's perseverance is starting to pay off as the courts acknowledge the inadequacy of Ray's trial. He will finally be able to walk out of death row thanks to the optimism he has maintained.

As 2015 begins, Ray starts to give away his possessions, telling the other inmates that he's likely to be getting out soon. Before he leaves, he assures them to always keep hope. The guys begin to cheer and laugh and chant Ray's name. When Ray walks out of death row and into the van to the county jail, he keeps his head held high and thinks "free at last." He's not home yet, but he's one step closer.

Ray tries to bolster the spirits of the other men on death row, knowing that he is only able to walk out of Holman prison because he held onto hope. As he leaves, his thoughts of "Free at last" refer to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, connecting Ray's journey on death row to the racism and discrimination that King and many other Black people face in and outside of the criminal justice system.

CHAPTER 23

On Wednesday, April 1, 2015, while Ray is meeting with one of Bryan's staff attorneys, the attorney gets a call from Bryan and says that Ray has to call Bryan as soon as he can. Ray wonders what it could be—the date for his trial hasn't been set yet because the district attorney's office couldn't find the bullets or the gun from his case. The state accused Bryan of stealing them, until a clerk found a box with the evidence in a storage facility. They are now waiting for the prosecutors to run new tests.

Even after nearly three decades, the state continues to resort to corruption and manipulation in order to avoid reversing Ray's conviction. This illustrates that it is not just the state from 30 years ago that discriminates against Ray: this is still an issue in the book's present day.

When Ray gets Bryan on the phone, Bryan excitedly tells him that the district attorney filed a document without telling anyone. The state dropped all charges against Ray—he's going home. Ray crouches down; he can hardly breathe. Bryan says Ray can get out on Friday morning, and Bryan will be there to walk him out of the jail. Ray laughs and says that he needs to bring Ray something to wear to walk out in.

This is the final testament to the power of faith and optimism. Only through Ray's incredible perseverance and Bryan's efforts was Ray able to withstand everything the state could throw at him and earn his freedom back. Without that hope and support, he would never have been able to survive.

Ray then grows quiet; he doesn't know how to thank Bryan for all he's done. Bryan has been by Ray's side for 15 years and behind the scenes for even longer—Ray doesn't know how he can repay him. "God bless you," Ray says, and Bryan chokes back a teary "Thank you, Ray." When Ray hangs up, he sobs.

Ray's heartfelt thank you, and Bryan's grateful response, underscores the power of community support. Without Bryan's empathy and his hard work, Ray would never have gotten out of jail. Likewise, without Ray's perseverance, Bryan could never have gotten him off of death row.

On Friday morning, Ray changes into a suit that Bryan brings him. Before Ray walks out to meet his friends and family, Bryan says that Ray can say whatever he wants to the press that is also waiting. Ray is nervous, but he thinks about the guys on death row who will watch his release on the news. Then, after nearly 30 years in jail, he walks out of the building. Ray's family and Lester greet him tearfully, praising God. After they settle down, everyone gets silent, waiting for Ray to speak. "The **sun** does shine," he says. He looks at Lester and Bryan, the two men who saved him, and he begins to cry.

Ray's statement to the press calls back to his and the other inmates' discussion of Go Tell It on the Mountain and Ray's assertion that the sun would never refuse to shine. With this statement, Ray is sending a signal to the other men about the importance of maintaining hope even in the face of insurmountable odds and despair: it is the only way that Ray has been able to walk free.

Ray climbs into Lester's car—the first time he's ridden in the front seat in 30 years. Before they go to Lester's house, Ray asks Lester to go to his mom's grave. Ray is startled by the voice of the GPS—he thinks a white woman is in the car with them—until Lester explains what it is, and Ray realizes he has a lot to learn about the world.

Much of the rest of the chapter illustrates the toll that the biased criminal justice system has taken on Ray's life and the far-reaching consequences that it has even when he gets out of jail. Ray now has to face a completely different world in 2015 than the one he left in 1985. He is also suspicious of white people because of his experience at his trial.

When Ray visits his mom's grave, he cries and tells her that he said he'd be home. As he grieves, Ray grows uneasy to be outside without any guards or fences. Lester then takes Ray to a buffet, where Ray is nervous that Lester didn't pay for the food until Lester assures him that he paid with a credit card. Ray also hasn't used a fork in 30 years, so he fumbles with it. He worries that people around him are looking at him as a guy who got away with murder. Lester tries to reassure Ray that everything's going to be okay.

Ray presents further examples of how much his experience in jail has cost him in his life. He worries about other people's biases, he is afraid of being arrested again, and he has forgotten common experiences like using a fork. But through all of it, Lester is there to support him just as he has been during Ray's time in jail.

When Ray gets to Lester's house, he feels the anxiety lift a little. He, Lester, and Sia stay up laughing and talking until 2:00 a.m., and then Ray goes to lay down in the guest bedroom. He knows that the guys on the row will soon be getting up for breakfast. Lying in a bed is so strange to Ray that he starts to get anxious again and worries he's going to have a heart attack. Ray gets out of the bed and goes to the bathroom, which is almost exactly the same size as his cell. He lies on the floor and sleeps, thinking that this feels more like home.

Ray concludes his first day of freedom by illustrating that he still doesn't—and may never—feel truly free, the deeper cost of the havoc wreaked on his life by the criminal justice system. After being on death row for 30 years, he has become so accustomed to a lower quality of life that a bathroom floor feels more comfortable to him than a bed.

CHAPTER 24

After Ray's release, he starts to travel and talk about his experience. He even goes to Richard Branson's private island with Lester and plays basketball with George Clooney. He tells his story to anyone who will listen: groups of celebrities, people who are working to end the death penalty, churches, colleges, and small meeting rooms. He knows he's a voice for everyone on death row.

Ray dedicates his life after death row to supporting the men who still remain there. While telling himself stories about celebrities was a powerful way to help Ray escape the confines of death row, now he is using his own story to convince those with influence to end the death penalty.

Ray fixes up his mom's house and now lives there by himself. The first time he feels rain on his skin, he weeps. He walks every morning because he can. People ask him how he lives in Alabama, but he says it's the only place he's called home. Even though he hates the state of Alabama for what they did to him—no one has apologized for his conviction—he forgives them. If he were to hold onto hate, he wouldn't be able to appreciate the rest of his life.

From Ray's his experience on death row, he knows that being filled with hatred and anger will only cause him to lose the rest of his life. Instead, he recognizes the need to maintain a positive outlook. Still, he fully appreciates the harm that the state of Alabama caused him.

Ray has a hard time adjusting to life outside the row, though. He's still up at 3:00 a.m., ready for breakfast; he only sleeps on one corner of his bed; he walks in front of security cameras on purpose; he doesn't stay home alone without calling someone to tell them what he's doing; and he doesn't trust anyone except Lester and Bryan.

Even though Ray is still very positive, the fact that he worries that he could return to death row, or that other people might try to frame him once again, illustrates his knowledge that the bias in the system has not been eradicated whatsoever.

A few days a week, Ray works with Bryan at EJI, and he travels around and tells his story. He doesn't have any retirement savings, and he wouldn't retire if he could. He's grateful to be alive and free. He also wants to advocate to end the death penalty and make sure that what happened to him never happens again. He keeps busy, and he's been lucky to do things like travel the world—even visiting Buckingham palace on a private tour—but he would trade it all to get 30 years back, or one more minute with his mom.

Ray tries to stay positive by acknowledging that his story can make an impact, and by appreciating the opportunities that his experience has afforded him. At the same time, he makes it clear how much the experience has cost him and how he would trade in some of the luxuries he now has to get his 30 years and time with his mother back.

Ray tries not to think, "Why me?" Instead he thinks, "Why anyone?" He says that no one is less worthy of justice than anyone else. But still, he forgives the people who found him guilty. He knows that they were taught to be racist, just as someone taught Henry Hays to be. He tries to look for meaning in his life—a reason for why things turned out the way they did. He knows that he has to find a way to recover after bad things happen—to choose love instead of choosing hate.

Ray concludes by acknowledging that no one deserves to have the experience that he has—and thus, the criminal justice system needs to be reformed to eradicate the bias against people who are not white and wealthy. And he argues once more for the importance of maintaining love and optimism in the face of difficult circumstances.

AFTERWORD

In the Afterword, Ray lists the name of every single person on death row in the United States as of November 2018, which is 2,813 names in total. On the list, 1 out of every 10 people is innocent. He asks if we can judge who deserves to live and who deserves to die: if 1 out of every 10 planes crashed, we would stop all flights and fix the planes. The justice system is equally broken. He tells readers to read the names out loud, and after every 10th name, say, "Innocent." The death penalty is broken, he writes, and we have to take a stand against that injustice. You're either part of the death squad or you're banging on the bars.

The Afterword is Ray's powerful plea to end the death penalty. He not only uses his own story to show how the criminal justice system can be biased, but he then extrapolates using statistics to show the scale and the stakes of errors like the ones made in his case. His final line is an appeal to people to acknowledge the problems with the death penalty and actively stand against it.

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