Dear Martin

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NIC STONE

Nic Stone grew up in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia in 1985. She attended Spelman College, earning a degree in psychology. During a self-professed "identity crisis" when she was 23, she took a trip to Israel, where she met soldiers, militants, refugees, and families from both Palestinian and Israeli cultures. On this trip, she realized she wanted to be a writer, since she was so compelled by the stories she heard. As a result, she began writing Young Adult fiction, especially focusing on narratives that address identity and belonging, issues she herself struggled with as one of the only African American girls in her high school's accelerated programs. Her debut novel, *Dear Martin*, was published in 2017 and became a New York Times Bestseller. In the following two years, she published *Odd One Out* and *Jackpot*, and has continued to publish essays and short stories.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dear Martin is based in part on the death of Jordan Davis, a seventeen-year-old black boy who was shot and killed by a white man in Jacksonville, Florida in 2012. Davis and his friends were listening to loud hip-hop at a gas station when an armed white man parked next to them and instructed them to turn down the music. One of Davis's friends listened to the man, but Davis asked that the music be turned back up, at which point the man was heard saying, "You aren't going to talk to me like that." He then took out a pistol and started shooting at Davis and his friends, killing Davis. The shooter was found guilty on three counts of attempted murder, but not on murder in the first degree. The judge declared a mistrial regarding this final count, and the shooter was finally found guilty of first-degree murder in his retrial, where he earned a life sentence in prison without parole, in addition to another 90 years. It's also worth mentioning that Nic Stone was moved to write *Dear Martin* as a reaction to a number of other instances of racist police brutality, including the shooting of Michael Brown, Jr. in 2014.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Dear Martin is similar to Angie Thomas's novel *The Hate U Give*, which is also about a black teenager from an impoverished neighborhood attending a prestigious and mostly white private high school. Like Justyce, the protagonist of *The Hate U Give* witnesses a white police officer shoot and kill her best friend. Similarly, Jason Reynold and Brendan Kiely's co-authored novel, *All American Boys*, explores racism, police brutality, and stereotyping. In addition to these titles, *Dear Martin* is related to a number of other Young Adult novels inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, including Kekla Magoon's *How It Went Down* and Jay Coles's *Tyler Johnson Was Here*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Dear Martin
- **When Published:** October 17, 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Contemporary Fiction, Epistolary Novel, Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** The suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia
- **Climax:** An off-duty police officer shoots Manny and Justyce after they refuse to turn down their music, killing Manny and injuring Justyce.
- **Antagonist:** Officer Castillo and Officer Tison
- **Point of View:** The novel alternates between third-person and first-person narration.

EXTRA CREDIT

Sequel. A follow-up to *Dear Martin* is coming out in 2020. The novel is called *Dear Justyce* and will follow Quan Banks, another character from the original story.

Father. Nic Stone's father was a police officer. She has said that she always saw the police as "heroes," which is why she was especially unsettled by the deaths of people like Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, Jr., both of whom were unarmed when they were shot and killed by police officers.

PLOT SUMMARY

Seventeen-year-old Justyce McAllister walks through a wealthy neighborhood outside Atlanta, Georgia one night. He's wearing a hooded sweatshirt and is on his way to find Melo, his ex-girlfriend. He knows Melo is drunk and wants to make sure she won't drive, but she tells him to go away when he finds her. Still, he takes her keys and maneuvers her into the backseat. Just then, a police car drives up and a white officer named Tommy Castillo jumps out and grabs Justyce, handcuffing him and slamming his head against the car. Justyce tries to explain that he was only helping Melo, but Castillo punches him in the face and tells him not to "say shit," calling him a "punk ass" who "couldn't resist the pretty white girl who'd locked her keys in her car."

Transitioning from the scene of Justyce's arrest, Nic Stone

gives readers a glimpse of Justyce's diary, in which he writes a letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., explaining that he admires the way Dr. King lived his life. Justyce introduces himself to Dr. King, saying that he's a scholarship student at Braselton Preparatory Academy, is ranked fourth in his class, is captain of the debate team, has high test scores, and believes he has a bright future "despite growing up in a 'bad' area." Unfortunately, though, "none of that mattered" the night before, when Officer Castillo arrested him. The officer was eventually let go, but Justyce now feels unsettled, since he never thought he'd find himself in "this kind of situation." In his diary, he writes about a young black boy named Shemar Carson, who was shot by a white police officer in Nevada even though he was unarmed.

Justyce returns to school the next week. A grand jury has recently failed to indict the officer who killed Shemar Carson, and Justyce can't stop thinking about how his own run-in with the police could have easily been fatal, like Shemar's. What's more, Justyce learns that his best friend Manny's cousin, Quan Banks, shot and killed Officer Castillo the other night and is now awaiting trial in juvenile detention.

In his Societal Evolution class, Justyce's favorite teacher, Doc, asks the class if they think the United States has achieved racial equality. The only black people in the room are Doc, Justyce, Manny, who's also close friends with an overly-confident white boy named Jared. Answering Doc's question, Jared says that the United States *has* reached racial equality, claiming that people who complain about racism are "just being divisive." Sarah-Jane (or SJ, a white girl who is Justyce's partner on the debate team) takes issue with this statement, trying to show Jared that he only thinks racism is a thing of the past because he himself has never experienced it. Jared refutes this point, but SJ presses on, saying that ignoring inequality won't make it go away.

After class, Justyce overhears Jared talking with Manny and their friends Blake, Tyler, and Kyle (who are white). Jared expresses his anger that Doc would even suggest the continued existence of racial inequality. He then waxes poetic about how he and his friends live in a "color-blind society," and though Manny is hesitant to agree, the four white boys convince him to chant, "Equality!" with them. Hearing this enrages Justyce, who resents Manny for going along with Jared's casual racism.

Jared later suggests that he and his friends should dress up as various stereotypes for Halloween. Although Justyce is skeptical, he decides to go along with the idea, agreeing to dress like a "thug" while Manny goes as the "token black guy." Jared himself dresses as a "Yuppie/Politician." What really bothers Justyce, though, is that Blake wears a seemingly authentic Ku Klux Klan outfit. Not wanting the others to call him overly "sensitive," Justyce doesn't say anything, so the group makes its way to a party. However, they encounter trouble when they run into a group of guys from Justyce's neighborhood. These young men belong to a gang called the Black Jihad, and they take offense at Blake's racist costume, immediately punching him in the face. A gang member named Trey then recognizes Justyce and disparages him for leaving the neighborhood to associate with people like Blake.

In the aftermath of the Halloween party, Justyce talks to SJ on the phone. They've always been close friends, but recently he has begun to develop stronger feelings for her, though he doesn't know what to do with these feelings because he and Melo have an on-again-off-again relationship. Plus, he knows his mother would never approve of him dating a white girl. Still, he takes comfort in talking to her, especially because she seems to be one of the few people willing to recognize the subtle but significant racism swirling around him at Braselton Prep. When he learns several days after Halloween that he's been accepted to Yale during the "early action" period, she's the first person he calls.

The day after Justyce gets into Yale, Jared is clearly angry in Societal Evolution. Raising his hand, he asks Doc if they can talk about affirmative action, setting forth the argument that such practices "discriminate against members of the majority." He then goes on to say that Justyce only got into Yale because he's black, pointing out that he himself was deferred during "early action" even though he has better test scores. When Justyce asks how he knows he has better scores, it becomes clear that Jared has simply assumed this, so the two boys compare results and discover that they received more or less the same marks. Frustrated, Jared suggests that Justyce only got into Yale because Yale has to fill a "quota" of black students.

In the coming weeks, Justyce focuses on the upcoming debate tournament, spending the majority of his time with SJ. When Manny tries to convince him to date SJ, he refuses, insisting that his mother wouldn't approve. However, he can't conceal his feelings any longer when he and SJ triumphantly win the tournament. Backstage, he leans in to kiss her, but she backs away and leaves, avoiding him for the rest of the day and for the following weeks. During this time, yet another unarmed black teenager is shot and killed by a white police officer. Justyce is quite upset—so upset that he drinks heavily on the way to a party at Blake's house that night. Manny tries to get him to pace himself, but he doesn't listen. When they arrive at the party, Justyce notices that Blake's family has minstrel decorations and other racist paraphernalia. Worse, Blake approaches Manny and Justyce and makes racist comments and slurs. When Justyce challenges him on this, he acts like it isn't a big deal. At this point, Jared enters the conversation and jokingly warns Blake to watch out because Justyce is "from the hood." Hearing this, Justyce hits him and starts a fight, dragging Manny into the skirmish. When Manny criticizes him for starting a fight, the two boys have an argument, and Justyce yells at him for always letting his white friends off the hook.

Several days later, both Manny and Jared are mysteriously absent from school. When Justyce returns to his dorm room,

he finds Manny, and the two boys make up. Manny then tells him that he went to quit the basketball team the other day because he has never really liked basketball. The only reason he was on the team, he says, is because he thought everyone expected him to play, since he's "the tall black kid at school." When he went to the coach's office, Jared was there, and he made a joke about how Manny couldn't quit until "*Massah* set [him] free." Losing his rage, Manny punched him.

The next weekend, Manny picks Justyce up from school to go hiking. However, Manny is in a bad mood because he's just learned that Jared's family is pressing charges against him for hitting Jared. Consequently, he doesn't want to go hiking, so the two friends simply ride around in Manny's Range Rover listening to hip-hop. At a traffic light, Justyce sees an angry white man glaring at them from an adjacent car. Nervous, Justyce turns down the music, but Manny turns it back up when the light changes. At the next stop, the man drives beside them and tells them to turn down the music. Instead, Manny turns it up, at which point the man calls them the n-word. "Hey, fuck you, man!" Manny shouts, and then the man pulls out a gun and fires shots into the cabin, killing Manny and injuring Justyce. It later emerges that the shooter's name is Garrett Tison, an off-duty police officer.

After Manny's funeral, his parents invite Justyce to the house and tell him that their nephew, Quan (who killed Officer Castillo), wants to see him. Quan grew up in the same neighborhood as Justyce, so Justyce agrees to see him. When he visits, Quan tells him that Garrett Tison was Officer Castillo's partner. He also tells Justyce to join the Black Jihad because the leader, Martel, will give him guidance. "You need to get you a crew to roll with," he says, giving Justyce Martel's number.

In the coming days, Justyce tries to put the idea of calling Martel out of his mind. However, SJ is still ignoring him, and he has nobody to turn to, so he takes the bus to Martel's house, where he meets with members of the Black Jihad before listening to Martel talk about the plight of black people in the United States. Everything Martel says makes sense, but then Justyce sees a sawed-off shotgun and remembers that joining the Black Jihad would mean entering a life of violence. At this moment, other members of the gang rush in and show Justyce a video clip of Blake talking about him on the news. Apparently, Blake has come forward to tell the nation that Justyce attacked him at his party, ultimately throwing his moral character into question and stoking the debate that is already raging across all media platforms about whether or not Justyce and Manny did something to provoke Officer Tison. Mortified, Justyce quickly leaves Martel's house and goes straight to SJ's home. Once they're alone in her room, he tells her that he almost joined a gang, and she lets him weep on her shoulder. Finally, he tells her he has romantic feelings for her, and she confirms that she feels the same way. It's the first time he's felt happy or hopeful in a long time.

Meanwhile, the media continues to make absurd speculations about Justyce and Manny, calling them "thugs." Around this time, members of the Black Jihad burn down Garrett Tison's house, and several of them implicate Justyce as an accomplice, though investigators luckily don't believe them. Shortly thereafter, Justyce has to testify against Tison in court. Tison's attorney destabilizes him by bringing up the fact that he got drunk and hit Jared and Blake at Blake's party. She also mentions that Justyce met with the Black Jihad, ending her questioning abruptly in a moment that makes Justyce look very bad. As a result, Tison is only found guilty of three of the four charges against him, leaving out the most serious: a felony murder charge. Several days after the trial, though, a group of prisoners murders Tison in jail.

Later that month, Justyce goes to Yale and is disappointed to be paired with a pretentious and subtly racist roommate. He and SJ are still dating, though SJ goes to Columbia. Jared is also at Yale, but Justyce never sees him. When he comes home for Christmas, though, he encounters Jared at Manny's grave, and the two boys reconcile their differences. Jared expresses how badly he misses Manny, and he tells Justyce that he's decided to become a civil rights lawyer. This pleases and impresses Justyce, who turns to his former foe and suggests that they hang out back at Yale.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Justyce McAllister – Justyce McAllister is a seventeen-year-old African American boy from a "bad area" in Atlanta, Georgia. A hardworking and intelligent young man, Justyce is a scholarship student at a prestigious boarding school called Braselton Preparatory Academy. When he hears one night that his on-again-off-again girlfriend, Melo Taylor, has gotten too drunk to drive and is ignoring her friends' calls, he sets out to find her. Wearing a hooded sweatshirt, he ventures into a wealthy neighborhood, where he eventually comes upon her near her car. He takes her keys from her, but she resents receiving help when she's drunk, so she slaps him and tells him to go away before suddenly vomiting on his sweatshirt. He then gently places her in the backseat, at which point a white police officer named Tommy Castillo pulls up and unjustly arrests him. Apparently, Castillo followed him from a distance when he saw him walking with his hood up. He punches Justyce in the face and accuses him of trying to take advantage of Melo. This instance of racial profiling rattles Justyce, even after his friend's mother, Mrs. Friedman, uses her legal expertise to have him released. In the aftermath of this event, Justyce decides to write diary entries addressed to Martin Luther King, Jr. This is partly because he has very few people to commiserate with at

school. Although his best friend Manny is black, Manny constantly defers to racist white kids like Jared Christiansen, which upsets Justyce. Luckily, Justyce can confide in his favorite teacher, Doc, and Sarah-Jane Friedman. However, when Castillo's partner, Officer Tison, later shoots and kills Manny, Justyce feels especially alone in a racist world. Consequently, he considers joining a gang called the Black Jihad. Instead, though, he starts dating Sarah-Jane and focuses on his future, going on to attend Yale in the fall.

Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers – Manny is Justyce's best friend, and one of the only black students at Braselton Preparatory Academy. Manny comes from a very wealthy and successful family and, unlike Justyce, has grown up around privileged white people. As a result, he counts people like Jared Christiansen amongst his best friends, choosing to ignore their racist comments and jokes when they arise, which happens quite frequently. Justyce is uncomfortable with this, but Manny is committed to maintaining his status as an easygoing and well-liked basketball star and ladies' man. When Jared uses him as an example in class to argue that racial inequality no longer exists in the United States, Manny simply tells him to leave him out of the discussion. Later, though, even he can't deny that his white friends are quite insensitive, especially after Blake uses the n-word to refer to him and Justyce. The day after Justyce punches both Jared and Blake for being racist, Manny spends some time thinking and realizes that Justyce is right to be upset. That week, he visits the basketball coach to tell him he wants to quit the team. He admits that he never actually liked basketball and is only playing because everyone expected him to be on the team since he's tall and black. Jared happens to be in the office when Manny quits the team, and he jokes that Manny can't quit until "*Massah* set[s] [him] free." Hearing this, Manny attacks him. Shortly thereafter, Jared's family presses charges against him. Enraged, Manny drives around that weekend with Justyce in his Land Rover, listening to loud hip-hop. At a stoplight, an off-duty white police officer named Garrett Tison screams at the boys to turn down their music, and when Manny turns it up instead, Tison shoots at them, killing Manny.

Jared Christensen – Jared is a conceited white boy who attends Braselton Preparatory Academy with Justyce. Jared is one of Manny's closest friends, despite the fact that he often expresses racially-charged ideas and casually cracks bigoted jokes. In his Societal Evolution class one day, he argues that racial inequality no longer exists in the United States, refusing to hear SJ's argument that he's only able to say this because he's fortunate enough to have never experienced discrimination. To prove that equality is alive and well, Jared persuades his friends—including Manny and Justyce—to dress up as "stereotypes" for Halloween. Jared himself goes as a "Yuppie/Politician," while Justyce dresses as a "thug" and Manny puts together a "token black guy" costume. However, even Jared seems uncomfortable when he sees that Blake has decided to wear a Ku Klux Klan outfit, though he doesn't say anything—another indication that he's unwilling to fully admit the prevalence of racism. In yet another argument in Societal Evolution, he angrily upholds that Justyce has only been admitted to Yale during the "early action" period because he's black, claiming that Yale has to meet a "quota" of black students. Jared himself has been deferred, which is why he's so upset about Justyce's success. Later still, Jared gets into a fight with Manny after making a racist joke, and his parents decide to press charges against Manny for hitting their son. This lawsuit never comes to fruition, though, since Manny is shot and killed by Officer Tison. This deeply upsets Jared, who eventually does go to Yale. When he's home for Christmas the following year, he bumps into Justyce at Manny's grave, and he tells him that he has decided to become a civil rights lawyer. Standing over Manny's grave, the two boys decide to be friends.

Sarah-Jane (SJ) Friedman – SJ is a Jewish girl at Braselton Preparatory Academy and is Justyce's partner on the debate team. SJ and Justyce have always gotten along, and SJ is quick to speak up as an ally when people like Jared say racist things in class. In particular, SJ challenges Jared's notion that racism no longer exists in the United States, trying to make him see that he only thinks this because he himself has never truly had to think about the color of his skin. This exchange is perhaps especially heated because everyone knows that Jared still has feelings for SJ, since they dated in the eighth grade. To add to this, it's also common knowledge that SJ is especially fond of Justyce. However, their close relationship has never gone beyond friendship, though it almost does when Justyce tries to kiss SJ after they win their debate tournament. Surprised, SJ turns away from him and gives him the "cold shoulder" for several weeks. When he appears at her house and cries in her arms after almost joining a gang, though, she embraces him, and they decide to date. After high school, she attends Columbia University while maintaining a long-distance relationship with Justyce.

Blake Benson – Blake is a white student at Braselton Preparatory Academy, and one of Jared and Manny's good friends. Unlike Jared, whose racism is often subtle (even if still hurtful), Blake takes things extremely far, as evidenced by the fact that he wears a Ku Klux Klan outfit as a Halloween costume. This makes both Justyce and Manny uncomfortable, but neither of them speak up because they don't want to be accused of being too "sensitive." When Blake gets to the Halloween party, though, he encounters members of a local gang called the Black Jihad, who punch him in the face. Nonetheless, he doesn't seem to learn his lesson from this encounter, as made painfully clear when he throws a party later in the year and asks Justyce and Manny to help him have sex with a certain black girl, telling them he thinks he would have a chance with her if she saw that he's friends with two black guys.

Worse, he calls them the n-word, and when Justyce calls him out on this, he acts like it's no big deal, trying to make it seem like Justyce is overreacting. This upsets Justyce so much that he attacks Blake. In the aftermath of Manny's death, Blake tells the media that Justyce attacked him, thereby presenting an unfavorable image of Justyce that aligns with Officer Tison's untrue claim that he shot Justyce and Manny because they were threatening him.

Mrs. McCallister / Justyce's Mother – Mrs. McCallister is Justyce's mother. A loving parent, she focuses on motivating Justyce to attain upward mobility and works hard throughout her life to make sure he has continued access to a good education. Because of this, she urges him not to dwell on the fact that he feels out of place amongst his insensitive white peers at Braselton Preparatory Academy. Although this advice helps Justyce remember the importance of succeeding in academia, it doesn't do much to soothe him in an emotional sense, which is partially why he ends up toying with the idea of joining a gang, feeling as if nobody else in his life understands what he's going through. In addition, Mrs. McCallister is strongly against the idea of Justyce dating a white girl, which is why he avoids telling SJ how he feels for so long.

Officer Tommy Castillo – Officer Tommy Castillo is a white police officer who brutally assaults and arrests Justyce without reasonable cause. After seeing Justyce walking on the street at night with a hood on, Castillo follows him, assuming he's a dangerous criminal. When Justyce comes upon his drunk ex-girlfriend Melo Taylor and tries to make sure she doesn't drive, Castillo swoops in and wrenches his hands behind his back. Justyce tries to explain that he's only trying to help Melo, but Castillo punches him in the face and tells him to be quiet, saying that he thinks Justyce was looking for "pretty white girls" to antagonize (though Melo actually isn't even white). When Melo's father comes to the scene, Castillo still refuses to uncuff Justyce, so Mr. Taylor calls Mrs. Friedman, an attorney who comes and finally convinces Castillo to release Justyce. Several days later, Quan Banks—who happens to be Manny's cousin—murders Castillo and is sent to juvenile detention. When Justyce visits Quan after Manny is killed by Officer Garrett Tison, Quan tells him that Castillo was Tison's partner.

Officer Garrett Tison – Officer Garrett Tison is a white police officer who shoots and kills Manny. Tison is off-duty when he drives up next to Manny and Justyce at a stoplight. Manny is driving his Range Rover and playing loud hip-hop, and Tison starts looking angrily at the two boys. Afraid because of his recent experience with racial profiling, Justyce turns down the music, but Manny turns it back up when the light changes. At the next light, Tison tells them to turn it down, but Manny refuses, at which point Tison calls the boys the n-word and screams at them. Responding to this, Manny says, "Hey, fuck you, man!" Incensed and out of control, Tison takes out a gun and fires shots into the Range Rover, injuring Justyce and killing Manny. In the aftermath of this gruesome event, Justyce learns from Quan that Tison was Tommy Castillo's partner and that he was there when Quan murdered Castillo. Trying to clear his name, Tison claims that Justyce and Manny provoked him, and though there's no evidence of this, his lawyer manages to convince a jury to only convict him of two misdemeanors and one felony, choosing not to find him guilty of murder. Shortly before the court reaches this decision, a group of gang members burns down his house. After Tison is cleared of murder, though, his fellow prisoners kill him in jail.

Dr. Jarius Dray ("Doc") – Doc teaches Societal Evolution at Braselton Preparatory Academy and is the leader of the school's debate team. As an educated black man, Doc is one of Justyce's only positive male role models. However, he often lets students like Jared express flawed and racist opinions in class, ultimately wanting to let the class engage in dynamic discourses and work to conclusions on their own. Justyce finds it quite discouraging to hear such inconsiderate and insensitive opinions. When Manny and Justyce have a falling out at Blake's party, Manny calls Doc and asks him to check on Justyce the next morning. As a result, Doc visits Justyce in is dorm room, and though he knows Justyce has been drinking, he doesn't scold him. Instead, he tries to lend a sympathetic ear. Unfortunately, though, this kind of support apparently isn't enough to keep Justyce from exploring the possibility of joining a gang in the aftermath of Manny's death, though he ultimately doesn't go through with this plan.

Melo Taylor – Melo is Justyce's ex-girlfriend and also attends Braselton Preparatory Academy. Melo is widely considered the most attractive girl in Justyce's class, which is partially why he finds it so difficult to break up with her once and for all. Accordingly, they have an on-again-off-again relationship, and though Justyce is relatively smitten with her, Manny doesn't think she's a good match for him. This is why he criticizes Justyce for going to help Melo one night when a mutual friend calls to tell him that Melo is drunk and not answering her phone. Venturing out, Justyce finds Melo leaning drunkenly against her car, and when he tries to help her into the backseat (to ensure that she won't try to drive), Officer Castillo appears and violently arrests him, claiming that Justyce is harassing a "pretty white girl," though Melo's father—a former professional football player—is actually black. Still, Justyce is the one who gets in trouble (despite Melo committing the crime of underage drinking), even though he was only trying to help Melo.

Shemar Carson – Shemar Carson is a seventeen-year-old black boy from Nevada who is shot and killed by a white police officer. This takes place shortly before the beginning of the novel, but the story of Shemar's death sustains itself throughout the narrative, as Justyce considers how easily he could have wound up like Shemar during his interaction with Officer Castillo. Like Justyce, Shemar was unarmed during his altercation with the police, though the officer who murdered

him claims he was reaching for his gun. Despite the fact that there's no evidence to prove this, the courts fail to indict the officer. The similarities between Shemar's story and his own weigh on Justyce, causing him to rethink the way people see him. Before his encounter with Officer Castillo, he assumed that what happened to Shemar would never happen to him because, unlike Shemar, he doesn't have a "thuggish appearance." Now, though, he sees that the color of his skin is enough to put him in grave danger when dealing with police officers.

Quan Banks – Quan Banks is Manny's cousin, and a member of the local Black Jihad gang. From the same neighborhood as Justyce, Quan follows orders when the Black Jihad instructs him to murder Officer Castillo. After Manny's death, Quan asks Mr. and Mrs. Rivers to tell Justyce that he wants to see him, so Justyce visits him in juvenile detention. During their conversation, Quan reveals that Officer Garret Tison (the man who killed Manny) was Officer Castillo's partner. He also urges Justyce to join the Black Jihad, insisting that the gang will give him the support he needs. To that end, he gives Justyce the gang leader's phone number and encourages him to call.

Julian Rivers – Julian Rivers is Manny's father. A successful man who has worked his way to the top of a well-respected company, Julian Rivers wants his son to understand that adversity doesn't simply go away for black people once they secure well-paying jobs. To illustrate this, he sits down one afternoon with Manny and Justyce and tells them that one of his employees called him a racial slur earlier that day. When Manny and Justyce express their astonishment, he calmly tells them that this is something he deals with on a regular basis—a fact that depresses Justyce, who suddenly sees that even powerful black men like Julian often face "disrespect."

Dr. Rivers – Dr. Rivers is Manny's mother, and a psychologist. When Manny dies, she and her husband Julian invite Justyce to dinner and give him a **wristwatch** they planned to give Manny on his eighteenth birthday. They also tell him that their nephew, Quan Banks (who is in juvenile detention for murdering Officer Castillo), would like to speak to him.

Mr. Taylor – Mr. Taylor is a former professional football player, and Melo's father. When Justyce gets arrested while trying to stop Melo from driving drunk, Mr. Taylor comes to the scene and tries to convince Officer Castillo to release him. This fails, so Mr. Taylor calls Mrs. Friedman, who uses her expertise as an attorney to get Justyce out of handcuffs.

Martel Montgomery – Martel Montgomery is the leader of the Black Jihad, a gang from Justyce's mother's neighborhood. Justyce has heard about Martel for years but has always made sure to avoid him, knowing that he runs a violent posse. After Manny's death, though, Justyce decides to pay Martel a visit, following Quan's advice that he needs to find a group of friends to support and protect him from racists. When he encounters Martel, he's surprised to find that he's quite intelligent and soothing, speaking at length about the rights of black people. Justyce is impressed by the many African art on Martel's walls, and he finds comfort in listening to him speak. However, he eventually sees a sawed-off shotgun in Martel's living room and remembers that the Black Jihad are a violent gang, so he decides not to associate with them after all.

Trey – Trey is a member of the Black Jihad, a gang from Justyce's mother's neighborhood. When Justyce and Manny go to a Halloween party dressed as stereotypes with Jared, Blake, Tyler, and Kyle, Trey criticizes them for associating with insensitive white kids. In keeping with this, he and his fellow gang members attack Blake, punching him in the nose for wearing a Ku Klux Klan outfit. When Justyce goes to leave, Trey calls after him, insisting that Justyce will someday see that his white friends don't really care about him.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Friedman – Mrs. Friedman is SJ's mother. A skilled lawyer, she's the one who finally manages to convince Officer Castillo to release Justyce after he's wrongfully arrested for trying to help Melo.

Kyle Berkeley – Kyle is one of Jared and Manny's white friends at Braselton Preparatory Academy. Like Blake and Jared, Kyle frequently goes along with racist jokes and ideas, agreeing with Jared that inequality no longer exists in the United States.

Tyler Clepp – Tyler is one of Jared and Manny's white friends at Braselton Preparatory Academy. Like Blake and Jared, Tyler frequently goes along with racist jokes and ideas, agreeing with Jared that inequality no longer exists in the United States.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – Martin Luther King, Jr. was a prominent activist and preacher during the Civil Rights Movement. In the aftermath of his violent encounter with Officer Castillo, Justyce decides to write epistolary diary entries to Dr. King, constantly asking himself what the reverend would do in his position.

Tavarrius Jenkins – Tavarrius Jenkins is a sixteen-year-old black boy who is shot and killed by a police officer after trying to help an elderly white woman. The news of this incident reaches Justyce and causes him to reflect upon how badly his interaction with Officer Castillo could have gone.

Tison's Attorney – Garrett Tison's attorney is the woman who represents him in court. She cross-examines Justyce, asking him quick questions and purposefully disorienting him to craft the narrative that he is a person who makes rash, violent decisions.

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.

PRIVILEGE, ENTITLEMENT, AND IMPLICIT BIAS

One of Nic Stone's strongest messages in *Dear Martin* is that white people in positions of power ought to recognize the socioeconomic factors that have contributed to their success. Because Justyce is one of only several black students at his prep school, he's mostly surrounded by wealthy white teenagers who have never had to think seriously about race. This, in turn, gives the majority of Justyce's white peers the false impression that racial inequality is a thing of the past, something that no longer keeps African Americans from succeeding. As Justyce's friends adopt this viewpoint, they give themselves permission to underhandedly perpetuate casual racism, which rattles Justyce and makes him feel out of place in his own school. By outlining this insensitive and destructive dynamic, Stone suggests that white people with privilege should acknowledge their own implicit biases (prejudices they don't even know they hold) and advantages, since pretending that racism no longer exists only makes it harder to address inequality when it inevitably rears its head.

The unacknowledged racism that runs throughout Justyce's prep school is most apparent in his Societal Evolution class, in which he and his peers discuss whether or not the United States has achieved racial equality. "There are people who claim certain 'injustices' are race-related, but if you ask me, they're just being divisive," a wealthy and confident white student named Jared maintains. "America's a pretty color-blind place now," he adds. It's worth keeping in mind that Jared himself has never had to confront discrimination based on the color of his skin. Sarah-Jane (otherwise known as SJ, another white student) tries to help him see this, but Jared remains unwilling to admit that the nation's embattled history surrounding race makes it generally easier for hardworking white people to succeed over hardworking black people. Arguing that race doesn't matter anymore, he points out that his classmate Manny (who is black) drives an expensive Range Rover and comes from a wealthy family. When he says this, he fails to see that a single example doesn't prove that all white and black people have access to the same opportunities.

"I know you'd prefer to ignore this stuff because you benefit from it, but walking around pretending inequality doesn't exist won't make it disappear," SJ tells Jared, pointing out that he and Manny could commit the exact same crime but receive different punishments. "It's almost guaranteed that [Manny] would receive a harsher punishment than you," she says. In this exchange, SJ expertly explains why it's important to acknowledge inequality. Economic comparisons aside, she invites Jared to consider the fact that many police officers harbor implicit biases against black people—biases that lead to "harsher punishment" and, in some cases, violence. By drawing attention to this unfortunate reality, SJ refutes the claim that racism no longer brings itself to bear on black people in significant ways.

Despite SJ's strong arguments, Jared still has a hard time acknowledging that white people on the whole have more privilege than black people. After class, he complains about the fact that Doc, the teacher of Societal Evolution, instigated a conversation about racial inequality. "Can you believe that asshole?" he asks his friends. "What kind of teacher has the nerve to suggest there's racial inequality to a classroom full of millennials?" Jared is apparently uncomfortable with the very idea of discussing racial disparity, as he assumes it is a thing of the past and so not appropriate for "millennials." This indicates just how unwilling he is to challenge his belief that the United States is now completely void of racism. This mindset enables him and his friend group to act insensitively when it comes to race and discrimination, doing and saying whatever they want because they don't think racism exists anymore.

In keeping with this, Jared proposes that he and his friends dress up as "stereotypes" for Halloween, an idea that inspires a white boy named Blake to wear a Ku Klux Klan outfit. This puts Justyce and Manny in an extremely uncomfortable position, since neither of them want to criticize Blake's costume, fearing that their friends will accuse them of being unnecessarily "sensitive." Accordingly, they're forced to swallow their reservations and pretend to accept this blatantly hurtful and problematic costume.

What Jared and his white friends don't seem to understand is that they only feel comfortable dismissing the prevalence of racism because they themselves enjoy so much privilege in society. Their unquestioned comfort in their own skin makes them feel entitled to dismiss the entire possibility of racism in the United States. This, in turn, gives them the undeserved confidence to make light of very serious matters. In doing so, they simply perpetuate the very racism they claim doesn't exist. This is perhaps most evident when Blake uses the n-word in conversation with Justyce and Manny. When Justyce criticizes him for "tossing the n-word around like [he] own[s] it," Blake disregards the significance of what he's said, eventually saying, "What is it with you people and the goddamn race card, huh?" When he says this, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that he feels entitled to say whatever he wants, refusing to recognize his own entrenched bigotry. Furthermore, he undermines Justyce's right to speak out against racism, ultimately framing the entire matter as a joke. In reality, though, it is this kind of casual racism that feeds into larger, more systemic forms of discrimination.

Given that Manny is later killed by an off-duty white police officer simply for playing loud music in his car, it's easy to see

that Jared and Blake are wrong to believe racism no longer exists in the United States. While they might think they can jokingly use racial slurs, the truth is that these microaggressions only make bigotry even more commonplace. For this reason, Stone intimates, it is imperative that everyone remain attentive to the ways racial biases perpetuate themselves in all contexts. This, in turn, means that white people in positions of power or privilege will have to recognize that bigotry is still very much alive in the United States.

APPEARANCES AND ASSUMPTIONS

In *Dear Martin*, a novel about racial profiling in the United States, Nic Stone demonstrates that skin color has no bearing on an individual's personality or moral character. The fact that Justyce, the novel's protagonist, faces police brutality despite his credentials as a model student and upstanding citizen suggests that young black people are in danger of discrimination regardless of who they are. When Officer Castillo violently arrests Justyce without cause, readers see that he's jumping to unfair conclusions. If he were to take stock of the situation, he would learn that Justyce is only trying to keep his drunk ex-girlfriend, Melo, from driving. Instead, though, Castillo judges Justyce for being a young black man in a **hooded sweatshirt**, using these insignificant aesthetic details to justify a violent response. According to Castillo, Justyce's looks overshadow his character or accomplishments, and it is because of this unjust outlook that Stone calls attention to the ways in which racists make superficial generalizations about black people. These are the kind of unfair generalizations, Stone argues, that enable bigots to weaponize unimportant characteristics that have no true bearing on who a person truly is.

In the novel's opening scene, seventeen-year-old Justyce McAllister becomes the target of racial profiling. A white police officer named Tommy Castillo sees him walking at night and follows him simply because he's a young black man wearing a "hoodie." When Justyce comes upon his ex-girlfriend Melo and tries to stop her from driving because she's been drinking, Castillo descends upon him, assuming that Justyce is antagonizing Melo. "Don't you say shit to me, you son of a bitch," Castillo says, punching Justyce in the face when he tries to explain what's going on. "I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on." It's worth stopping to consider this sentiment, since Castillo has just admitted that he formed an unfavorable assessment of Justyce's entire moral character based on his clothing. According to Castillo, any black person walking at night in a hooded sweatshirt is a dangerous "punk" who's "up to no good." And if it's not already obvious that Justyce's race is a factor in this moment, Castillo makes this clear when he says, "I know your kind: punks like you wander the streets of nice neighborhoods searching for prey. Just couldn't resist the pretty white girl who'd locked her keys in her car, could ya?" If Justyce were white himself, Castillo wouldn't reference Melo's light skin. But because he is black, Castillo casts judgment on his clothing, assuming the worst of him without bothering to accurately evaluate the situation.

Justyce's encounter with Castillo takes him by surprise, since it's the first time he's experienced such blatant discrimination. Considering his respectable personality and values, he finds it bewildering that someone would see him as a threat. After all, he has worked hard to *avoid* a life of crime and violence, dedicating himself to securing a solid education at a prestigious prep school, which has protected him from having to associate with gangs. Now, though, nothing about him seems to matter except the color of his skin and his choice of clothing. "I apparently looked so menacing in my prep school hoodie, the cop who cuffed me called for backup," Justyce writes in his diary. In response to this unanticipated encounter, Justyce finds himself reexamining the way other people see him. Before coming into contact with Castillo's unfair assumptions, he didn't feel the need to scrutinize his appearance. Now, though, he realizes the only thing that "matter[s]" to bigoted people like Officer Castillo is what he looks like.

The most upsetting consequence of Justyce's encounter with Officer Castillo is that it destabilizes his own sense of self. Reflecting upon the incident, he thinks about Shemar Carson, a young black man whose name has made the national news because he was recently gunned down by a white police officer. Shemar was 17, unarmed, and a good student, but the officer claims to have caught him stealing a car. "I dunno," Justyce writes in his diary. "I've seen some pictures of Shemar Carson, and he did have kind of a thuggish appearance. In a way, I guess I thought I didn't really need to concern myself with this type of thing because compared to him, I don't come across as 'threatening,' you know?" In this moment, Justyce considers what it means to be "threatening." He goes on to note that he doesn't "sag [his] pants" or "wear [his] clothes super big." As he makes these observations about himself, readers see that his experience with racial profiling has forced him to turn a critical eye on himself. What's more, he has evidently internalized the racist stereotypes that people like Castillo use to mistreat African Americans, referencing "thuggish appearance[s]" as if the way people dress has anything to do with their morality and character. Of course, this isn't the case, but Justyce's encounter with Castillo shows him that appearances are the only thing that racists take into account—a depressing fact that devalues Justyce's accomplishments and admirable qualities. By spotlighting the superficial aspects of racism, then, Stone urges readers to consider how unfair it is to reduce a person to nothing more than clothing and skin color, neither of which indicate anything substantial about a person's character.

SUPPORT, ACCEPTANCE, AND BELONGING

In *Dear Martin*, Nic Stone demonstrates how beneficial it is for people facing discrimination to have supportive relationships. Searching for guidance, Justyce addresses his diary entries to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wanting to fortify himself against the hatred and insensitivity all around him by emulating Dr. King. Unfortunately, though, this proves quite difficult, since the deceased Dr. King can't respond to his entries. As a result, Justyce seeks out real-life allies like his Societal Evolution teacher, Doc, and his debate partner, SJ. However, their support doesn't always suffice, most likely because he has trouble fully relating to them, since Doc is a middle-aged man with a PhD and SJ is white. Feeling like he has nobody to commiserate with, then, Justyce flirts with the idea of joining the Black Jihad, a gang he's avoided all his life. And though he ultimately decides not to go through with this plan, the mere fact that he's drawn to the Black Jihad in the first place indicates just how badly he aches for a sense of camaraderie and mutual understanding. This desire for support, Stone suggests, is the primary reason teenagers end up joining gangs, as these groups build strong communities, even if they also enact violence and commit crimes. In this way, Stone shows readers the appeal of gang life and, in turn, just how much young people facing racism and social isolation yearn for a sense of belonging and acceptance.

It becomes quite evident early in *Dear Martin* that Justyce feels out of place at his wealthy prep school. One of the only black students, he finds it especially difficult to deal with the entrenched racism of his classmates after having been racially profiled, beaten, and unfairly arrested by Officer Castillo. Hoping to remove himself from the unsympathetic world of Braselton Prep, he takes the bus to his mother's house with the intention of never returning. That he makes this decision emphasizes how unsupported and misunderstood he feels. When he tells his mother about a racist in-class discussion he was forced to sit through that day, she says, "Hard being a black man, ain't it?" Agreeing, he says, "All I know is I can't seem to find where I fit. Especially at that school." He goes on to say that he "still feel[s] like an outsider," despite the fact that he's attended Braselton Prep for all four years of high school.

His mother, for her part, listens to his complaints but doesn't allow him to simply "run away" from everything he's worked toward. This kind of tough love and encouragement is a vital form of parental support, one that motivates Justyce to courageously face what he cannot change and return to school. At the same time, his mother's guidance does very little to help him on an emotional level, and though her pep talk shows him that he has to "make a place for [himself] in the world," it doesn't necessarily give him the kind of acceptance and sense of belonging he wants so badly.

Justyce's sense of isolation and lack of emotional support only intensifies after his only black friend, Manny, is killed by a white off-duty police officer named Garrett Tison. Justyce himself is in the car when Manny dies, and he sustains injuries of his own. Shortly after he leaves the hospital, the media slanders him, portraying him as a "thug" who provoked Officer Tison. To add to this, he continues to exist amidst the casual racism of Braselton Prep. For this reason, he suddenly finds the idea of joining the Black Jihad rather appealing. Although he's spent his entire life trying to avoid gangs, he now sees the Black Jihad as a potential means of emotional and communal support.

When he visits Manny's cousin Quan in juvenile detention, Quan insists that joining the Black Jihad will solve all of Justyce's problems. "You need to get you a crew to roll with," he says, urging Justyce to call Martel, the gang's leader. "He's like a big brother to a lot of us," Quan says. He also acknowledges that life is "hard out there by yourself," a sentiment Justyce can certainly identify with, as a young black man who has become the target not only of racial profiling by the police, but also of his white peers' insensitivity. The more the Black Jihad appeals to Justyce, the easier it is to see why gangs attract struggling teenagers in the first place: they can provide a form of guidance, mentorship, and community.

It's worth noting the tragic irony of the fact that Justyce's run-ins with the police are largely what drive him toward gang life. Although the police are theoretically supposed to protect teenagers from gangs, in this case they have given Justyce the impression that joining a gang is the only way to find acceptance and safety. On his way to Martel's house, he thinks about how angry his mother would be if she knew he were considering joining a gang. "But frankly, she hasn't been any help lately either," he thinks, confirming that his mother's tough-love encouragement hasn't provided him with the emotional support he needs. Because of this, he focuses on the fact that Martel will understand what it's like to be a young black man in the United States. "That's really why he's on this bus [to Martel's house] right now: he's sick of feeling alone," Stone writes.

Thankfully, though, Justyce eventually finds a different way of feeling less "alone," ultimately investing himself in his romantic relationship with SJ instead of joining the Black Jihad. After realizing that joining the gang would mean embracing violence, Justyce runs out of Martel's house and goes to SJ, finally telling her how he feels. As he does so, he reveals to her that he almost joined the Black Jihad, and he breaks down crying. SJ wraps him in a hug and simply lets him weep, and it is this action—this form of acceptance—that finally makes him feel less alone. From this point on, he and SJ start dating, and though their relationship doesn't magically solve his problems, SJ's emotional support lends him the strength necessary to navigate the difficulties of being a young black man in a racist society. In turn, readers see that loving encouragement can help a person secure a sense of belonging even in trying times.

OPPORTUNITY AND UPWARD MOBILITY

Nic Stone makes it clear in *Dear Martin* that—generally speaking—the average black person has to work harder than the average white person to attain upward mobility in the U.S. Furthermore, she examines how difficult it is for black Americans to *continue* on an upward trajectory, illustrating that even the most successful people still face adversity despite their accomplishments. For instance, it's quite impressive that Justyce attends Braselton Prep, since he wouldn't be able to go to such a competitive private school if he hadn't earned a full scholarship. And yet, he feels as if his efforts have all been in vain when he realizes that people like Officer Castillo will eagerly beat and arrest him regardless of his innocence and commendable background. In addition, his white peers at Braselton Prep are hesitant to recognize his hard work, as is evident when Jared claims that Justyce was admitted to Yale simply because Yale needs to meet a "quota" of black students. As if this isn't enough to discourage Justyce from continuing on his path toward upward mobility, he also feels judged by his former community members, who criticize him for leaving his neighborhood behind to pursue an education. Outlining all the obstacles Justyce faces, Stone highlights how challenging it can be for young black Americans to succeed, and though this is a rather depressing message, she intimates that disenfranchised young people simply have to do their best despite such adversity.

When Justyce introduces himself to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his diary, he outlines his commendable achievements, saying, "I'm ranked fourth in my graduating class of 83, I'm the captain of the debate team, I scored a 1560 and a 34 on my SATs and ACTs respectively, and despite growing up in a 'bad' area […] I have a future ahead of me that will likely include an Ivy League education, an eventual degree, and a career in public policy." It's clear that he's proud of his accomplishments, especially when he says that he has achieved all of this "despite growing up in a 'bad' area." It's also apparent that Justyce fully intends to continue on an upward trajectory. However, this hopefulness all but vanishes in the aftermath of his brutal encounter with Officer Castillo, in which he gets punched in the face and arrested for trying to help his ex-girlfriend. "Sadly, during the wee hours of this morning, literally none of [my accomplishments] mattered," he tells Dr. King in his diary the next day. In this moment, readers witness just how disheartened Justyce is to have his entire life and personality undercut by racism. Indeed, this is perhaps the first time Justyce has realized that hard work and determination won't necessarily protect him from racism.

Justyce's encounters with racist police officers aren't the only experiences that discourage him. He also finds himself disheartened during school hours, when insensitive white students like Jared diminish his hard work because of his race. For example, when Justyce gets into Yale, Jared claims that it's only because of the university's affirmative action policies. "I'm ranked number two in our class," Jared says, "I'm captain of the baseball team, I do community service on weekends, and I got higher test scores than Justyce…yet he got into Yale early action, and I didn't. I know for a fact it's because I'm white and he's black." In reality, Justyce and Jared's test scores are more or less the same, but Jared is upset that he didn't get into Yale during the "early action" period, so he belittles Justyce, adding, "He took a spot *I* didn't get because Yale has to fill a quota." When nobody agrees, he finally says, "Whatever. All I know is that no matter what college I end up at, when I see a minority, I'm gonna wonder if they're qualified to be there." This statement blatantly reveals Jared's prejudiced ideas about minorities, but it also unearths the demoralizing notion that—if this is how certain white people think—even attending one of the country's most prestigious universities won't help Justyce escape bigotry.

Justyce also runs into criticism and doubt from other black people, especially people who grew up in his neighborhood. When he sees members of a local gang at a party, they disparage him for devoting himself to a life surrounded by white people. One of the gang members even tells him that the gang will "see [him] soon," since he's confident that Justyce will fail to succeed in the predominantly white world of academia. This only further depresses Justyce, who reflects upon his situation in his diary, writing, "It's like I'm trying to climb a mountain, but I've got one fool trying to shove me down so I won't be on his level, and another fool tugging at my leg, trying to pull me to the ground he refuses to leave." This analogy captures how hard it is for Justyce to find success, as he's forced to confront doubt and judgment from seemingly all angles.

Although *Dear Martin* isn't intended to depress readers by suggesting that upward mobility is impossible for minorities, Stone avoids offering unrealistically uplifting messages about success. Rather than assuring readers that it's possible for people like Justyce to avoid discrimination and prejudice, she underscores the importance of recognizing adversity and working hard in *spite* of it. This idea arises when Manny's father has a frank discussion with Justyce and Manny about everyday racism, telling them that—despite his powerful position at a well-respected company—he still encounters bigotry on a regular basis. Sitting next to the two boys, he tells them that he heard an employee call him a racial slur that day. When they express their shock, he says, "My point is the world is full of guys like Jared and that employee, and most of them will never change. So it's up to you fellas to push through it." In this scene, Justyce is reminded once again that he can't necessarily change the fact that racism runs throughout the United States. He can, however, decide to do his best to "push through it." Of course, this is hardly a comforting idea, but Stone puts this emphasis on hard work because she believes it's the only productive way to

respond to racism and discouragement.

THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

In *Dear Martin*, Nic Stone portrays the media as something that has a tremendous amount of influence over the way people talk and think about current events. Because Justyce's encounters with violent police officers are related in a third-person narrative voice, readers know exactly what has happened—in both cases, Stone makes it clear that Justyce has done nothing to deserve the violent treatment he receives from the police. This makes it all the more startling when news programs suggest that he is a dangerous young man with gang affiliations who provoked the officers that attacked him. What's more, Stone exposes a connection between the media's dissemination of doubt or misinformation and the ways in which society responds to otherwise clear-cut instances of racism and discrimination. In turn, she showcases the contemporary media's disconcerting power to affect public discourse, even when news outlets aren't setting forth accurate accounts of reality.

At the climax of *Dear Martin*, Nic Stone uses a third-person point-of-view to narrate what happens when Manny and Justyce drive down the street listening to loud rap. As Manny pulls the Range Rover up to a stoplight, Justyce notices from the passenger seat that a white man in a nearby car is looking angrily at them, so he turns the music down. When the light changes, though, Manny turns the volume back up. At the next light, the man drives up to them and tells them to turn the music down, and when Manny refuses, the man calls them the n-word. "Hey, fuck you, man!" Manny yells, refusing to change the volume. Just then, the man pulls out a gun and fires shots into the Range Rover, killing Manny and wounding Justyce.

The fact that this entire encounter is narrated in third-person is noteworthy because it removes all uncertainty from the situation. Without a shadow of a doubt, readers know that Manny and Justyce did not pose a threat to the other driver, and yet he still shot them. However, Stone reveals several pages later that the media has been circulating "speculation[s]" that Manny threatened the shooter (Garrett Tison, an off-duty police officer). Theories have also been floated that Justyce had a gun and that he and Manny threw an object into Tison's car. These accounts are quite obviously distortions of reality, but there's little Justyce can do to disprove them, since he doesn't have access to an attentive audience. In this way, Stone stresses the fact that the media can be quite influential, even—or perhaps especially—when spreading misinformation.

As the novel progresses after Manny's death, Stone continues to showcase the power of the media to slowly but surely change the narrative surrounding such stories. It becomes quite apparent that the "speculations" about Manny and Justyce provoking Officer Tison have worked their way into the public discourse, inviting people to make unfair claims about the boys without actually supporting their statements. The media, it seems, have given these people a platform to express uninformed opinions, which is what happens when a newspaper prints a quote from Tison's neighbor, who says, "The man was defending himself from thugs. I've known Garrett for twenty-five years. If he says those boys had a gun, they had a gun."

In keeping with this, a news station gets hold of a picture of Justyce dressed up as a "thug" for Halloween, and though the costume was meant as a joke, the reporters take it at face value. Worse, the station invites an "anti-gang violence pundit" to analyze the picture. "I mean it's obvious the kid was leading a double life," the pundit says, referring to the supposed discrepancy between Justyce's grades and the picture of him from Halloween. "You know what they say, Steven: you can remove the kid from the thug life…But ya can't remove the thug life from the kid." The conclusions this pundit so confidently draws are obviously unfounded and unfair, but this doesn't stop him from spreading this message to anyone who's watching—a fact that once again underlines the notion that Justyce is at the mercy of the media and the narrative slant it sets forth.

The events in *Dear Martin* are set against a backdrop of fictional events that mirror actual instances of racial profiling and police brutality. Shortly before the novel begins, an unarmed young black man named Shemar Carson is shot and killed by a white police officer, and though the officer claims that Shemar was reaching for his gun, there's absolutely no evidence to suggest that this is true. Still, though, the media makes speculations that shroud the entire event in uncertainty and confusion. As a result, people like Jared unabashedly support the idea that the officer who killed Shemar is innocent. "Not every white person who kills a black person is guilty of a crime," Jared says in class, defending Shemar's killer. Frustrated, SJ criticizes Jared for getting all of his news from social media, but he remains unwilling to reconsider his opinion—a point that's worth noting, since it indicates just how thoroughly media of all kinds can determine what people think.

Consequently, readers see why it's such a big deal that the media uses an out-of-context picture of Justyce to portray him as somebody he's not. "If there's one thing Jus knows from the Shemar Carson […] case, it really doesn't take more than a photo to sway mass opinion," Stone writes, outlining the frightening idea that the media can manipulate the way the public thinks simply by presenting carefully selected photographs. This makes it even harder than it already is for disadvantaged young black men like Justyce to prove their innocence. Accordingly, Stone warns against the dangers of inaccurate and irresponsible reporting, which have the power to further disenfranchise targeted populations.

SYMBOLS

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

THE HOODIE

The hooded sweatshirt Justyce wears in the first scene of *Dear Martin* comes to represent the fact that some police officers jump to conclusions about young black men based on their appearances. Shortly after Officer Castillo violently throws Justyce to the ground, he says, "I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on." This illustrates the extent to which Castillo has imbued Justyce's hoodie with meaning, referencing it as a sign that Justyce is "up to no good." Of course, the sweatshirt itself is from Justyce's prestigious preparatory school and thus marks him not as a troubled criminal, but as high-achieving young man. Nevertheless, Castillo assumes that any young black man wearing a hoodie at night is a "punk," so he doesn't even stop to entertain the idea that Justyce is innocent. In this way, the hoodie stands for the biases and assumptions Justyce has to deal with simply because of the way he looks.

MANNY'S WRISTWATCH

Manny's wristwatch, which his parents give to Justyce in the aftermath of their son's death, embodies the ways in which friendship and support can help a person navigate adversity. It is no coincidence that the only thing Justyce has left of his best friend is something that he wears around his wrist, which was once gouged by the handcuffs Officer Castillo forced upon him. Throughout the novel, Justyce is hyperaware of his wrists, remembering what it felt like to have the cold metal of the handcuffs digging into his skin. At the end of the book, he stands with Jared at Manny's grave and thinks he can feel Manny's initials on the underside of the watch as they press gently and reassuringly into his skin. This image of Manny's initials covering Justyce's formerly wounded wrist suggests that Stone sees friendship as something that can protect a person from pain. In turn, the wristwatch symbolizes the power of human relationships to lend people a sense of resilience and strength.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Radom House edition of *Dear Martin* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Justyce can hear the approaching footsteps, but he stays focused on getting Melo strapped in. He wants it to be clear to the cop that she wasn't gonna drive so she won't be in even worse trouble.

Before he can get his head out of the car, he feels a tug on his shirt and is yanked backward. His head smacks the doorframe just before a hand clamps down on the back of his neck. His upper body slams onto the trunk with so much force, he bites the inside of his cheek, and his mouth fills with blood.

Related Characters: Officer Tommy Castillo, Melo Taylor, Justyce McAllister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Justyce is busy helping his ex-girlfriend Melo when Officer Castillo approaches him from behind and applies physical force before doing or saying anything else. What's most notable is that Justyce focuses on Melo, not himself. Rather than worrying what Officer Castillo will do to him, he concentrates on putting on Melo's seatbelt in the backseat of her car, since she's drunk and he wants to send a clear message to Castillo that she wasn't about to drive. He does this because he cares about her, but his conscientiousness unfortunately costs him, allowing Castillo to descend upon him while his back is turned. The fact that he devotes himself to helping Melo indicates that it hasn't yet occurred to him that a police officer would think he's a dangerous person. After all, he's simply helping a friend. As a result, it's an especially harsh surprise when Castillo violently pulls him from Melo's car and slams him onto the hood of the vehicle, causing him to bleed. This moment serves as one of the novel's defining scenes, since it is what forces Justyce to acknowledge that people like Castillo are willing to judge him based on nothing but his skin color. The incident also demonstrates how quickly some police officers resort to violence—an important point, given that Justyce's best friend is later shot and killed by a police officer simply for refusing to turn down his music.

"Officer, this is a big misundersta—" he starts to say, but he doesn't get to finish because the officer hits him in the face.

"Don't you say shit to me, you son of a bitch. I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on."

So the hood was a bad idea. Earbuds too. Probably would've noticed he was being trailed without them. "But, Officer, I—"

"You keep your mouth shut." The cop squats and gets right in Justyce's face. "I know your kind; punks like you wander the streets of nice neighborhoods searching for prey. Just couldn't resist the pretty white girl who'd locked her keys in her car, could ya?"

Related Characters: Officer Tommy Castillo, Justyce McAllister (speaker), Melo Taylor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

This is a conversation between Justyce and Officer Castillo that takes place shortly after Castillo pulls Justyce from Melo's car. Justyce knows that he has to remain calm, so he tries to explain what was going on, since Castillo stormed in without bothering to take stock of the situation. If Castillo *had* stopped to consider what was happening between Justyce and Melo, he would have learned that Justyce was helping Melo by making sure that she wouldn't drive drunk. Despite his levelheaded desire to explain this to the officer, though, Justyce finds himself unable to deliver the details of his interaction with Melo, since Castillo cuts him off by hitting him in the face. This is an extraordinarily aggressive response, especially considering that Justyce has physically complied with everything Castillo has forced him to do. It's clear that Justyce is not a threat, since he has been so cooperative. This, in turn, means that Castillo's violent response is unwarranted. When he says that he thinks Justyce is a "punk" because he's wearing a hood, it becomes clear that Castillo's physical aggression isn't based on anything Justyce has actually done. Rather, it's based on an unfair generalization Castillo has made about young black men wearing hoodies at night. This is made even more apparent when he claims that he knows Justyce's "kind"—a phrase that emphasizes the fact that he has lumped Justyce into a stereotype rather than stopping to assess him as an individual.

August 25 Quotes

I'm a 17-year-old high school senior and full-scholarship student at Braselton Preparatory Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm ranked fourth in my graduating class of 83, I'm the captain of the debate team, I scored a 1560 and a 34 on my SATs and ACTs respectively, and despite growing up in a "bad" area (not too far from your old stomping grounds), I have a future ahead of me that will likely include an Ivy League education, an eventual law degree, and a career in public policy.

Sadly, during the wee hours of this morning, literally none of that mattered.

Related Characters: Justyce McAllister (speaker), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Officer Tommy Castillo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Justyce writes these words in a letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which he records in his diary. Introducing himself, he lists a number of impressive accomplishments, beginning with his academic achievements. When he says that he's from a "bad" area, readers should be able to infer that he has had to work especially hard to attain success. After all, he is a "full-scholarship student" at a prestigious private school. The underlying implication here is that he most likely wouldn't be able to attend Braselton Preparatory Academy if he didn't have incredibly good grades, since he likely depends on the institution's financial help. When he says that he has a "future" that will likely continue to take him on an upward trajectory, readers see that he is hopeful about what's to come. His interaction with Castillo, however, has challenged this optimism. This is because Justyce has suddenly realized that none of his accomplishments "mattered" to Castillo the night before, when the officer violently threw him against the hood of a car and arrested him. If Castillo had discharged his weapon, Justyce's entire life could have boiled down to a single moment of racial profiling. Consequently, he now has trouble reconciling who he is with the way others see him, coming to the unfortunate realization that some people will negatively judge him regardless of what he does.

I dunno. I've seen some pictures of Shemar Carson, and he did have kind of a thuggish appearance. In a way, I guess I thought I didn't really need to concern myself with this type of thing because compared to him, I don't come across as "threatening," you know? I don't sag my pants or wear my clothes super big. I go to a good school, and have goals and vision and "a great head on my shoulders," as Mama likes to say.

Related Characters: Justyce McAllister (speaker), Mrs. McCallister / Justyce's Mother, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Officer Tommy Castillo, Shemar Carson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Justyce writes these words in his epistolary diary entry to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In this entry, he considers the tragic death of Shemar Carson, a black teenager from Nevada who was shot and killed by a white police officer even though he was unarmed. Justyce knows that Carson didn't deserve what happened to him, and recognizes that the boy's death was the result of racism. At the same time, though, Justyce has never considered the fact that a similar thing could ever happen to him, even though he too is a young black man and, as such, the possible target of racial profiling. "He did have kind of a thuggish appearance," Justyce says about Carson, trying to make a distinction between himself and the unfortunate young man (and using the same stereotyping language that the media normalizes in the process). Going on, Justyce says that he himself doesn't "come across as 'threatening,'" since he doesn't wear oversized clothes. Plus, he attends a prestigious school and has "goals and vision." As he has previously mentioned, though, none of this matters to somebody like Officer Castillo, who was all too willing to make an uninformed judgment about Justyce the night before. As a result, Justyce now finds himself scrutinizing the way he presents himself, ultimately realizing that his skin color is apparently all that matters to police officers with racist tendencies.

Last night changed me. I don't wanna walk around all pissed off and looking for problems, but I know I can't continue to pretend nothing's wrong. Yeah, there are no more "colored" water fountains, and it's supposed to be illegal to discriminate, but if I can be forced to sit on the concrete in too-tight cuffs when I've done nothing wrong, it's clear there's an issue. That things aren't as equal as folks say they are.

Related Characters: Justyce McAllister (speaker), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Officer Tommy Castillo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Justyce writes this passage in his epistolary diary entry to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As he processes his encounter with Officer Castillo, readers see that the entire ordeal has caused him to reevaluate the way he moves through the world. Before the incident, he was generally able to focus on his schoolwork, his friendships, and his goals. In other words, he was more or less able to lead the life of a normal teenager (even if he still had to deal with the casual racism of his white peers). Now, though, he "can't continue to pretend nothing's wrong" with the way American society perpetuates racial inequality. He acknowledges that there aren't overt manifestations of racism in everyday life anymore, at least insofar as there aren't segregated drinking fountains anymore. This doesn't mean that racism is dead, however, something Justyce learned the hard way when he was unfairly forced into handcuffs and ordered to sit on the ground for hours, all because he was trying to help a friend. Thinking this way, he struggles with the idea that racism is much more prevalent in his life than he previously thought.

Chapter 3 Quotes

SJ: Sorry. It's just—you're completely oblivious to the struggles of anyone outside your little social group.

Jared: Whatever, SJ.

SJ: I'm serious. What about the economic disparities? What about the fact that proportionally speaking, there are more people of color living in poverty than white people? Have you even thought about that?

Jared: Dude, Manny drives a Range Rover.

Manny: What does that have to do with anything?

Jared: No beef, dude. I'm just saying your folks make way more money than mine.

Manny: Okay. They worked really hard to get to where they are, so—

Jared: I'm not saying they didn't, dude. You just proved my point. Black people have the same opportunities as white people in this country if they're willing to work hard enough. Manny's parents are a perfect example.

Related Characters: Jared Christensen, Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers , Sarah-Jane (SJ) Friedman (speaker), Dr. Jarius Dray ("Doc")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between SJ, Jared, and Manny during Societal Evolution class. Doc has just asked the class if the United States has actually managed to achieve racial equality, and Jared has unequivocally stated that it has. This sets off an argument between him and SJ, in which SJ urges him to examine the "economic disparities" between white people and minorities. In response, Jared attempts to dismiss this blatant sign of inequality by referring to the wealth of Manny's family, pointing out that Manny drives an expensive car. When Manny asks how this is relevant, Jared says, "I'm just saying your folks make way more money than mine." This doesn't prove that inequality no longer exists in the United States, since Jared has only provided one example of African American economic success. Nonetheless, he claims that Manny's family "prove[s]" his point. "Black people have the same opportunities as white people in this country if they're willing to work hard enough," he says. What this fails to recognize is that many white people don't have to work *at all* to enjoy the opportunities that are available to them. Although it's true that many black people can certainly attain upward mobility, it's generally the case that they will face obstacles white people will never encounter.

SJ: My point is I've seen you commit the same crime Shemar Carson had on the "criminal record" you mentioned.

Jared: Whatever, SJ.

SJ: I know you'd prefer to ignore this stuff because you benefit from it, but walking around pretending inequality doesn't exist won't make it disappear, Jared. You and Manny, who are equal in pretty much every way apart from race, could commit the same crime, but it's almost guaranteed that he would receive a harsher punishment than you.

Related Characters: Jared Christensen, Sarah-Jane (SJ) Friedman (speaker), Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers , Shemar Carson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, SJ and Jared continue their argument about racial inequality. Jared has just suggested that Shemar Carson—an unarmed black boy who was recently shot and killed by a white police officer—was a "criminal," ultimately trying to prove that he was a threat to the officer who murdered him. In response, SJ points out that the only offense on Carson's criminal record is for marijuana possession—and she recently saw Jared buy an ounce of marijuana. "Whatever, SJ," Jared says, eager to dismiss the fact that both he and Shemar Carson have the same "criminal record" (although Jared wasn't arrested for his crime), since this conflicts with his argument that Carson was an untrustworthy, dangerous person. However, SJ doesn't let him off the hook, instead suggesting that the only reason he wants to "ignore" these facts is because he "benefit[s]" from his privilege. Simply put, Jared doesn't have to worry about the same things as a black person in his situation would have to worry about. Indeed, he thinks it's not a big deal for him to buy marijuana, but then he criticizes a black person for doing the very same thing. Because of this, SJ wants him to recognize that "pretending inequality doesn't exist won't make it disappear." After all, it's clear that Jared is perpetuating racist stereotypes without fully examining the implications of his claims. If he simply says that inequality doesn't exist, though, he makes it nearly impossible for disenfranchised people to object to his entrenched prejudices.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Jared: Can you believe that asshole? What kind of teacher has the nerve to suggest there's racial inequality to a classroom full of millennials?

Kyle: Seriously, bro? He said that shit?

Jared: I kid you not, bro. The dean should fire his ass. I seriously might have my dad give the school a call.

Related Characters: Jared Christensen, Kyle Berkeley (speaker), Justyce McAllister, Dr. Jarius Dray ("Doc")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

This is a conversation that Justyce over hears in the "senior lounge." Sitting undetected in the back of the room, he

listens to Jared complain about the conversation Doc brought up in his Societal Evolution class. What's most interesting about Jared's anger is that it doesn't center around the actual argument he had with SJ. Rather, he takes issue with the mere idea of having *any* conversation about racial inequality. "What kind of teacher has the nerve to suggest there's racial inequality to a classroom full of millennials?" he asks his friends, acting as if millennials should for some reason be exempt from having to engage in an open dialogue about race and equality (presumably because he sees racism as a thing of the past, something millennials no longer have to deal with). This reaction suggests that Jared dislikes having his ideas challenged, and feels entitled to avoid conversations that will force him to reexamine his viewpoints. Of course, it's relatively easy for him to avoid thinking about race, since he himself has never had to confront discrimination. As a result, he's not used to challenging his own assumptions, which is why he considers having his father call the school to reprimand Doc. Having never been in a position in which he truly needs to think about race as anything other than a thought experiment, he suddenly wants to use whatever power is available to him to continue to ignore the widespread existence of racial inequality.

September 18 Quotes

"[…] We had this discussion in class today, and…I don't know, Ma. Everything I'm doing right now feels like a losing battle."

She nodded. "Hard being a black man, ain't it?"

I shrugged. "Guess that's one way to put it. All I know is I can't seem to find where I fit. Especially at that school."

"Hmm."

[…]

She crossed her arms and lifted her chin, and that's when I knew there'd be no sympathy. "So watchu gon' do? Run away?"

I sighed. "I don't know, Mama."

"You think coming back here will solve your problem?"

"At least I'd be around people who know the struggle."

She snorted. "Boy, you betta get your behind on up that school."

Related Characters: Mrs. McCallister / Justyce's Mother, Justyce McAllister (speaker), Jared Christensen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place between Justyce and his mother. Justyce has had a rough day at school, having sat through a frustrating conversation in Societal Evolution, one in which Jared argued that there is no more racial inequality in the United States. Given that Justyce has recently been wrongfully arrested, hit in the face, and handcuffed by a white police officer simply for being a young black man, it's not terribly surprising that he would find Jared's beliefs disheartening. "All I know is I can't seem to find where I fit in," he tells his mother after coming home with the intention of never returning to Braselton Preparatory Academy. None of his peers understand what it's like to experience racial profiling, so he fantasizes about leaving school so that he can come home and be with people who "know the struggle." However, his mother doesn't let him do this, making it clear to him that she doesn't approve of his desire to "run away" from his problems. This is because he has worked hard to get to Braselton Prep in the first place, so she doesn't want him to throw away a chance to attain upward mobility. In keeping with this, she tells him to return to school, and though this encouragement doesn't necessarily make him feel any better, it emphasizes the fact that the best thing he can do to fight racism (for now) is to continue to work hard in the face of adversity.

November 1 Quotes

Me: Well, either way it went, I was sayin somethin', you know? Staying woulda been a statement of solidarity with these guys I grew up with—and who look like me. Leaving was a different statement, and the fact that I chose to do it with a white guy who was dressed as a Klansman…well…

Related Characters: Justyce McAllister (speaker), Blake Benson, Trey, Sarah-Jane (SJ) Friedman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Justyce and SJ talk on the phone about the Halloween party Justyce attended that night. He explains that Blake dressed up as a member of the Ku Klux Klan, since Jared suggested that he and his group of friends go to the party dressed as "stereotypes." At the party, Justyce and the others ran into members of the Black Jihad, a gang from the neighborhood in which Justyce grew up. One of the gang members punched Blake in the face and threatened

the boys with a pistol. Now, Justyce admits to SJ that he felt paralyzed, not knowing whether he should leave with Blake and the others or stay with the members of the Black Jihad. "Well, either way it went, I was sayin somethin'," he says, pointing out that staying at the party with the Black Jihad members would have sent a certain message to his current friends, since he ultimately would have been associating with gang members. On the other hand, leaving with his white friends (which is what he did) sent a different message—namely, that he tacitly condones Blake's racist behavior. This, in turn, illustrates how difficult it is to exist in between two different cultures, since Justyce is forced to navigate the complex intersection of his upbringing and his current reality.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Let's observe, shall we? I'm ranked number two in our class, I'm captain of the baseball team, I do community service on weekends, and I got higher test scores than Justyce . . . yet he got into Yale early action, and I didn't. I know for a fact it's because I'm white and he's black.

Related Characters: Jared Christensen (speaker), Dr. Jarius Dray ("Doc"), Sarah-Jane (SJ) Friedman, Justyce McAllister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Jared says this during Doc's Societal Evolution class, trying to support his claim that "affirmative action discriminates against members of the majority." When SJ challenges him on this, he lists his academic achievements and speaks confidently about his overall strength as an applicant to Yale. This, after all, is why he's so upset: he's angry that Justyce got into Yale during the university's "early action" period, since he himself did not. It's worth noting that Jared says he "got higher test scores than Justyce," a fact that Justyce later refutes, ultimately leading to a conversation in which the boys learn that they received comparable marks. The fact that Jared would simply assume that he scored higher than Justyce on standardized tests is yet another indication of his entrenched bias against black people, as he doesn't stop to even consider the possibility that Justyce—who is himself a standout student—would be able to compete with him when it comes to his intelligence. By claiming that Justyce only got into Yale because he's black, Jared ultimately devalues Justyce's hard work, refusing to admit that Justyce *deserves* to go to Yale because of his determination and intelligence.

❝ Now say you have a black guy—not Justyce, but someone else—whose single parent's income falls beneath the poverty line. He lives in a really crummy area and goes to a public school that has fifteen-year-old textbooks and no computers. Most of the teachers are fresh out of college and leave after a year. Some psychological testing has been done at this school, and the majority of students there, this guy included, are found to suffer from low self-esteem and struggle with standardized testing because of stereotype threat—basically, the guy knows people expect him to underperform, which triggers severe test anxiety that causes him to underperform.

[...]

Now erase the two backgrounds. We'll keep it simple and say GPA-wise, you have a four-point-oh and he has a three-point-six. Test scores, you got a fifteen-eighty, right? Well, this guy got an eleven-twenty. Based on GPA and scores only, which one of you is more likely to get into a good college?

Related Characters: Sarah-Jane (SJ) Friedman (speaker), Jared Christensen, Dr. Jarius Dray ("Doc"), Justyce McAllister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, SJ addresses Jared, outlining a hypothetical scenario in which he's competing with a black student for a spot at a "good college." She goes through this example as a way of challenging Jared's assertion that affirmative action "discriminates against members of the majority." In the scenario she lays out, the hypothetical black student has grown up in poverty and hasn't had access to high-quality education, meaning that he isn't as prepared to take standardized tests as Jared is. To add to this, SJ says, this student is also subconsciously aware that people "expect him to underperform," and this knowledge acts as a "stereotype threat" that makes him *actually* underperform (a statistically verified phenomenon). As a result, he doesn't do as well as somebody like Jared, who has had access to fantastic educational resources (and no negative stereotyping regarding academic success) for his entire life.

"Based on GPA and scores only, which one of you is more

likely to get into a good college?" SJ asks Jared. The obvious answer is that Jared is more likely than this made-up black student to be let into a competitive school. This, however, isn't necessarily fair, because even though Jared's scores are higher than the black student's, he has had to work significantly *less* hard. Furthermore, his high test scores don't prove that he's more intelligent or more diligent than the black student. Rather, they simply prove that he is a smart person who has responded well to the many opportunities he's been granted. By breaking this down for Jared, SJ tries to get him to see that affirmative action policies aren't unfair, since they are simply leveling the playing field to account for the disadvantages that students like Justyce have had to overcome just to reach the same level as students like Jared.

December 13 Quotes

❝ It's like I'm trying to climb a mountain, but I've got one fool trying to shove me down so I won't be on his level, and another fool tugging at my leg, trying to pull me to the ground he refuses to leave. Jared and Trey are only two people, but after today, I know that when I head to Yale next fall (because I AM going there), I'm gonna be paranoid about people looking at me and wondering if *I'm* qualified to be there.

Related Characters: Justyce McAllister (speaker), Jared Christensen, Trey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Justyce writes this in his diary as he struggles with the idea that seemingly everyone wants him to fail. In one context, he's forced to deal with people like Jared, who want to "shove" him down so he won't be on the same "level" as they are. This is made evident by Jared's eagerness to suggest that Justyce only got into Yale because he's black, an idea that completely undermines all of Justyce's hard work and discipline. In another context, Justyce faces resentment from people like Trey, who insist that he's going to find it impossible to succeed in the predominantly white environment of a place like Yale. Caught between these two extremes, Justyce feels as if he's being pushed down by people like Jared while people like Trey are also trying to keep him from rising. This, in turn, influences the way he thinks about his future, since he's now worried that people are going to question whether or not he's truly "qualified" to attend Yale. By putting this dynamic on display, Stone spotlights just how difficult it is to attain upward mobility when people don't feel supported by their peers.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "So check this out," she said, rotating the screen so he could see it. "The Myth of the Superpredator" was the title of the article. "The gist of this: back in the nineties, some big-shot researchers predicted that the number of violent crimes committed by African American teen males would skyrocket in the years to follow. The 'leading authority' on the matter dubbed these potential criminals superpredators."

[...]

"Fortunately, the prediction was incorrect," she went on. "Crime rates among youth plummeted."

He smiled. "Okay . . ."

"Unfortunately, it seems the fear of young black guys created by this research is alive and well."

Related Characters: Justyce McAllister, Sarah-Jane (SJ) Friedman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

As SJ and Justyce prepare for the state-wide debate tournament, they try to think of a compelling topic to present to the judges. SJ suggests that they focus on racial profiling, using "The Myth of the Superpredator" as their starting point. As she outlines her idea, she explains that researchers "predicted that the number of violent crimes committed by African American teen males would skyrocket in" the late nineties. However, these researchers were wrong, and crime actually "plummeted." Nonetheless, the mere suggestion of this idea of young black men as "superpredators" has lived on, implying that something doesn't always have to be true to make an impact on society. This is an important point, since it illustrates just how volatile the narrative surrounding race is in the United States. In fact, it seems that many Americans aren't as interested in statistics as they are in vague ideas, especially ones that align with their own biases. Given that the media later presents Justyce as a "thug," this idea is worth keeping in mind as the novel progresses, since it illustrates the explosive influence of certain narratives regarding race.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"You coming over here asking us to help you use a black girl IS a big deal, Blake. That's not to mention you tossin' the n-word around like you own it."

Blake: You don't own it any more than I do, bro. Nobody owns words. I'd think you'd know that as someone "smart enough" to get into Yale.

Manny: All right, y'all, let's calm down before this gets outta hand.

Justyce: It's already outta hand, Manny. Your boy Blake is a racist.

Blake: What is it with you people and the goddamn race card, huh?

Justyce: We people. You realize Manny is one of us people too, right?

Blake: Except Manny's got some sense and doesn't make everything about race. Why don't you loosen the hell up?

Related Characters: Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers , Blake Benson, Justyce McAllister (speaker), Jared Christensen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

This argument takes place at Blake's birthday party. Blake has just asked Justyce and Manny to talk to a black girl for him, saying that he thinks he will have a chance of having sex with her if she sees that he's friends with black people. In expressing this crass idea, he uses the n-word to refer to Justyce and Manny, and when Justyce takes offense, he insists that what he's said isn't a "big deal." In response, Justyce tries to show him that it *is* a "big deal," since Blake essentially wants them to help him "use a black girl." Furthermore, he calls Blake out for using the n-word, saying that he acts like he "own[s]" it. "You don't own it any more than I do, bro. Nobody owns words," Blake says, adding that Justyce should know this, since he's "smart enough" to attend Yale. The fact that Blake is sarcastic when he says that Justyce is "smart enough" to go to Yale is worth noting, since his tone implies that he doesn't really believe Justyce deserves to go to such a good school. Taken with his other racist comments, this is an incredibly insensitive thing to say. Worse, he denies Justyce's right to criticize him for using the n-word, acting like Justyce is only overreacting. This, in turn, makes it even more difficult than it already is for Justyce to stand up for himself. By telling Justyce to "loosen the hell up," he dismisses the significance of his own racism, unfairly framing Justyce as the one who is being unreasonable.

Chapter 11 Quotes

"That's what it was like for me at the new school. Everybody saw me as black, even with the light skin and green eyes. The black kids expected me to know all the cultural references and slang, and the white kids expected me to 'act' black. It was a rude awakening for me. When you spend your whole life being 'accepted' by white people, it's easy to ignore history and hard to face stuff that's still problematic, you feel me?"

"I guess."

"And as for you, the only way you're gonna thrive is if you're okay with yourself, man. People are gonna disrespect you, but so what? Guys like Jared don't have any bearing on how far you get in life. If you know the stuff they're saying isn't true, why let it bother you?"

Related Characters: Dr. Jarius Dray ("Doc"), Justyce McAllister (speaker), Jared Christensen, Blake Benson, Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between Doc and Justyce the morning after Justyce gets drunk and fights Blake and Jared. Manny has asked Doc to check on Justyce, which is why he's now sitting in Justyce's dorm room and offering him advice. Trying to help Justyce understand why Manny doesn't stand up to people like Blake and Jared, Doc says that he too grew up in a predominantly white and wealthy community. However, he eventually transferred to a school with other black students, where he immediately realized that he'd gotten used to being around white people all the time. "When you spend your whole life being 'accepted' by white people, it's easy to ignore history and hard to face stuff that's still problematic," he says, suggesting that Manny has most likely become accustomed to his peers' everyday racism. In the face of this, he suggests that Justyce focus on trying to "thrive" as an individual. Although Manny might not help him counteract Blake and Jared's bigotry, he urges Justyce to not let other people's actions "bother" him. The only thing Justyce can control, Doc intimates, is the way he moves through the world. Consequently, he underlines the importance of making peace with himself and ignoring adversity—advice that is no doubt difficult to swallow, since it does little to soothe Justyce's anger and disenchantment.

January 23 Quotes

❝ "[…] My point is the world is full of guys like Jared and that employee, and most of them will never change. So it's up to *you* fellas to push through it. Probably best not to talk with your fists in the future…" He nudged Manny. "But at least you have an idea of what you're up against. Try not to let it stop you from doing your best, all right?"

He rubbed both of our heads and got up to leave.

I haven't been able to stop thinking about it, Martin. Frankly, it's pretty discouraging. To think Mr. Julian has all that authority and *still* gets disrespected? Hearing it made me realize I still had hope that once I *really* achieve some things, I won't have to deal with racist BS anymore.

That's obviously not the case, though, is it?

Related Characters: Justyce McAllister, Julian Rivers (speaker), Jared Christensen, Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Mr. Rivers comes into the basement of his house, where Manny and Justyce are playing videogames. Sitting between them, he tells them that he overheard an employee call him a racial slur that day at work. Manny and Justyce are shocked, but Mr. Rivers says that he's used to this kind of treatment. He expresses regret that he hasn't been more straightforward with Manny about the prevalence of racism, since he believes that it's helpful to acknowledge adversity. He then tells Manny and Justyce that "the world is full of" racist people who will most likely "never change." Because of this, he counsels, Manny and Justyce have to "push through" discrimination and prejudice, refusing to let it stop them from "doing [their] best" in life. Justyce finds this idea utterly depressing, especially since he hears it from Mr. Rivers, an incredibly successful man. Before this conversation, he "still had hope" that upward mobility can help black people escape racism. Now, though, he knows this isn't true. Consequently, he's forced to face the idea that there's nothing he can do to avoid mistreatment. This is an important moment to keep in mind as the novel progresses, since it is evidence of Justyce's gradual disillusionment, which eventually leads him to seek out the camaraderie and support of the Black Jihad.

Tison Indictment Step Forward for Justice or Grand Jury Blunder? Quotes

❝ "The man was defending himself from thugs," said Tison's neighbor […]. "I've known Garrett for twenty-five years. If he says those boys had a gun, they had a gun." A fellow police officer, who asked to remain anonymous, claims the indictment is nothing more than a publicity stunt at Tison's expense. "They're out to make an example of him. Prosecutor pulled the race card, and the grand jury bought it hook, line, and sinker."

Related Characters: Officer Garrett Tison, Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers , Justyce McAllister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

This is an excerpt from a newspaper article that appears after Officer Garrett Tison gets indicted. In the aftermath of this indictment, the media begins to give people a platform to voice their opinions about the case, ultimately allowing biased commentators like Tison's neighbor and colleague to spread their own ideas about what happened—ideas that aren't based on evidence or factual information. For instance, Tison's neighbor confidently asserts that Tison was "defending himself from thugs." Of course, she wasn't there to witness what happened, but she still makes this strong statement, merely adding that she's known Tison for a long time and, as a result, trusts him. Similarly, Tison's "fellow police officer" speaks disparagingly about the prosecutor who argued for Tison's indictment, trying to frame the entire process as an unfair attempt to slander Tison. As people like Tison's neighbor and coworker advocate for him, it's worth remembering what SJ has already said about "The Myth of the Superpredator"—namely, that the mere suggestion that young black men are inherently dangerous ultimately made its way into the public discourse, despite the fact that this theory was thoroughly debunked. Keeping this in mind, it's easy to see that the media is spreading opinions that will lead to nothing but misinformation, since readers know that Tison did in fact kill Manny without just cause. By giving such biased and uninformed people a platform to voice their opinions, articles like this one run the risk of altering the public discourse, directing it away from reality.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Aiight, listen up: where I come from, resistance is existence, homie. Every day I woke up in my hood coulda been my last. You wanna survive? Get wit some niggas who won't turn on you, and y'all do whatever it takes to stay at the top, you feel me? My dudes . . . they're like family to me. They've got my back as long as I have theirs.

Related Characters: Quan Banks (speaker), Martel Montgomery, Justyce McAllister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

Quan says this to Justyce when Justyce visits him in juvenile detention. Quan is in detention because he shot and killed Officer Castillo. When Justyce had dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Rivers in the aftermath of Manny's death, they told him that Quan wanted to speak to him, so he agreed to pay him a visit. Now, Quan tells him that he should find a group of people who will support him. Speaking fondly of his affiliation with the Black Jihad, he explains that the other gang members are "like family" to him. "They've got my back as long as I have theirs," he says. Although Justyce wouldn't normally be interested in joining a gang, Quan's message must surely appeal to him, since he himself has been feeling so isolated lately. Especially now that Manny is dead, he has very few people to turn to, or at least this is what he feels. As a result, what Quan says in this moment speaks directly to his feelings of isolation, and this is what eventually encourages him to visit Martel Montgomery's house to talk about joining the Black Jihad.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ "[...] Look, Jus, people need the craziness in the world to make some sort of sense to them. That idiot 'pundit' would rather believe you and Manny were thugs than believe a twenty-year veteran cop made a snap judgment based on skin color. He identifies with the cop. If the cop is capable of murder, it means he's capable of the same. He can't accept that."

Related Characters: Dr. Jarius Dray ("Doc") (speaker), Officer Garrett Tison, Emmanuel (Manny) Rivers , Justyce McAllister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Doc explains to Justyce why an "anti-gang violence pundit" on the news has presented him as a "thug." Justyce and Doc have just found out that a picture of Justyce dressed up for Halloween has surfaced, and the media has started using this picture to suggest that he has gang affiliations. This all takes place shortly after Manny's death, which means that Officer Tison's supporters are quick to suggest that Justyce and Manny were dangerous "thugs" who presented a true threat to Tison. Doc, however, makes it clear that the "pundit" slandering Justyce on television only does so because "he identifies with" Tison. "If the cop is capable of murder, it means [the pundit is] capable of the same," he says. Consequently, the pundit does what he can to convince himself—and the nation—that Manny and Justyce *deserved* to be shot at, since this will help him ignore the fact that "a twenty-year veteran cop made a snap judgment based on skin color," a thought that would ultimately force him to more closely examine his own biases. By urging Justyce to consider this, Doc shows him how helpful it can be to look at all of the factors that that contribute to a person's bigotry. After all, if people like this pundit aren't going to examine their own biases, then Justyce ought to recognize them for himself, since understanding such problems will at least potentially help him in the future.

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

Justyce McAllister sees Melo Taylor drunkenly hunched over on the other side of the street. Melo is Justyce's ex-girlfriend, and she's currently "slumped" next to her car in the parking lot of a grocery store. When he crosses the street, she looks up and asks him why he's there, but he ignores her, saying, "Damn, Melo, are you okay?" Shrinking away, she asks why he cares how she is—a question that hurts him, since he cares quite a bit about her. After all, he walked an entire mile to make sure she was all right, leaving his best friend Manny's house even though Manny criticized him for always bending over backwards for Melo. All of this was to "keep his drunken disaster of an ex from driving," and now she doesn't even want to see him.

Justyce's impulse to help his ex-girlfriend despite the complicated nature of their relationship shows that he is a supportive young man, the kind of person who wants to help people when he can. This is an important quality to keep in mind as Dear Martin *progresses, since Nic Stone is interested in examining what happens when a bright black teenager like Justyce is unable to find the kind of support that he himself is so willing to give others.*

Justyce explains to Melo that one of their mutual friends called to tell him that she got drunk and might need help. Apparently, Melo said she would call the police if anyone tried to stop her from driving herself. This, Justyce knows, is because Melo becomes quite dramatic when she's drunk. Looking at her on the ground, he can't help but find her pretty, even if she looks disheveled. In fact, he thinks she's the "finest girl he's ever laid eyes" on. Feeling affectionate, he brushes her hair out of her face, but she rears back, spilling the contents of her purse all over the ground. "Ugh, where are my keeeeeeeys?" she says, but before she can find them, Justyce picks them up and tells her that he won't let her drive.

Dear Martin *is a book about race and discrimination, but it's also a coming-of-age story. Accordingly, Stone showcases Justyce's attraction to Melo, demonstrating just how much he's drawn to her even though she clearly doesn't feel the same way about him. These romantic impulses signal Justyce's willingness to support the people he cares about, even if they don't necessarily return that support.*

Unlocking Melo's car, Justyce tries to pick her up and put her in the backseat. As he does so, she throws up on his sweatshirt, a "**hoodie**" he borrowed from Manny that is branded with the name of their prestigious prep school. After taking off the sweatshirt, Justyce tries again to pick Melo up, but she slaps in the face and tells him to leave her alone. Still, he tells her he's not going to let her drive home, and he picks her up while she hits his back. Just when he finally gets her into the backseat and she falls asleep, a police siren sounds behind him. Justyce can hear the police officer approaching him, but he focuses on clipping Melo's seatbelt so that it's obvious to the officer that she isn't about to drive.

In this moment, readers see that Justyce isn't particularly worried about interacting with police officers. After all, he attends a well-respected private school and is completely sober, so he should have nothing to worry about. However, he fails to consider the unfortunate fact that a police officer might judge him based on an entirely different set of characteristics, ones over which he has no control, like the color of his skin. For the moment, he simply focuses on helping Melo, unworried that he himself is in danger.

Justyce doesn't even have time to stand up before the white police officer wrenches him backward, causing his head to hit the doorframe. Once he's pulled from the car, he finds himself slammed face-down onto the hood while the officer handcuffs him. "It hits him: Melo's drunk beyond belief in the backseat of a car she fully intended to drive, yet *Jus* is the one in handcuffs," Stone writes. The officer—whose name is Castillo—forces Justyce to the ground. As Justyce tries to explain the situation, Castillo punches him in the face and says, "Don't you say shit to me, you son of a bitch. I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn **hood** on."

When Officer Castillo says that he "knew" Justyce was "up to no good" when he saw him walking with his hood on, it becomes clear that he is racist. After all, Justyce is only trying to help Melo, but Castillo has judged him based on nothing other than what he's wearing. It doesn't matter to Castillo that Justyce attends a prestigious school or that he wants to keep Melo from driving drunk. All that matters to the officer is that Justyce is a black man wearing a hood. Consequently, it's evident that Castillo is making unfair assumptions about Justyce's moral character—assumptions that lead him to act with excessive violence without even letting Justyce explain what he's doing.

"I know your kind: punks like you wander the streets of nice neighborhoods searching for prey," Castillo says to Justyce. "Just couldn't resist the pretty white girl who'd locked her keys in her car, could ya?" Justyce thinks about how nonsensical this is. After all, if Melo had locked her keys in the car, how would he have been able to put her in the backseat? Furthermore, Melo is actually half black, though it's true that she presents as white. But instead of correcting Officer Castillo, Justyce tries to levelheadedly reason with him, knowing that it's imperative that he keep his anger "in check" and be "respectful." Still, when he politely addresses Castillo, the enraged officer tells him to "shut the fuck up." Consequently, Justyce sits in silence on the hard ground of the parking lot, scared and staring up at the glowing sign of the grocery store.

Castillo's assertion that he "know[s]" Justyce's "kind" is yet another indication that he's racist, since he's grouping Justyce into an entire category of people without even knowing anything about him. It's worth noting that Justyce has done nothing to threaten Castillo, but Castillo acts as if Justyce is an incredibly dangerous person. In this way, readers see that Castillo is subjecting Justyce to racial profiling, jumping to unfair conclusions about him based on nothing but the fact that he's black.

AUGUST 25

"Dear Martin," Justyce begins, addressing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his diary. He tells the deceased civil rights activist that he doesn't mean to "disrespect" him by calling him Martin—it's just that he studied him as a sophomore and now feels like it's "most natural" to address him "as a homie." Going on, he introduces himself, explaining that he's a seventeen-year-old full-scholarship student at Braselton Preparatory Academy, which is in Atlanta, Georgia. He's ranked fourth in his class, has high SAT and ACT test scores, and is the captain of the debate team. Furthermore, he feels destined for a bright future, "despite growing up in a 'bad' area." However, he writes, "literally none of that mattered" the night before, when he was violently arrested by Officer Castillo.

When Justyce introduces himself, his impressive accomplishments confirm that Officer Castillo jumped to unwarranted conclusions about him the night before. Just because Justyce was a black man walking at night with a hoodie doesn't mean he was about to commit a crime, nor does it mean that he's a "punk." In fact, Justyce is a high-achieving young man with the test scores and accolades to prove his intelligence and discipline. The fact that "literally none of that mattered" when Castillo descended upon him, though, is a dispiriting idea, one that makes Justyce feel like his hard work and determination are all for nothing.

Justyce tells Martin Luther King, Jr. that he was only trying to "do a good deed" by helping Melo. However, Officer Castillo thought he looked "menacing" in his **sweatshirt**, so he arrested him. When Mr. Taylor—Melo's father, who's a black man and a former professional football player—arrived, Justyce thought Castillo would release him, but Mr. Taylor was unable to convince him to do so. Because of this, Mr. Taylor called Mrs. Friedman, who is a white lawyer and also happens to be the mother of Justyce's friend and debate team partner, SJ. After a long time, Mrs. Friedman managed to convince Castillo to free Justyce, and now Justyce isn't sure "what to feel."

Mr. Taylor's inability to convince Castillo to release Justyce is yet another disheartening element related to this entire incident. After all, Justyce clearly feels disillusioned by the idea that Castillo assumed the worst about him because of his race. Now, the fact that Castillo won't listen to Mr. Taylor—a clearly respectable man—only emphasizes the notion that he distrusts black people. Indeed, it takes SJ's white mother, Mrs. Friedman, to finally convince Castillo that Justyce should be set free. Because of this, it's hard not to wonder what would have happened to Justyce if no white people were there to stand up for him.

Justyce tells Martin Luther King, Jr. about a recent incident in Nevada involving an unarmed black teenager named Shemar Carson. "The details are hazy," he admits, "since there weren't any witnesses." That said, Justyce explains that it's quite clear that a white police officer shot and killed Shemar without just cause. "[…] This cop shot an unarmed kid," Justyce writes. "Four times. Even fishier, according to the medical examiners, there was a two-hour gap between the estimated time of death and when the cop called it in." Justyce notes that he didn't pay much attention to this story before his run-in with Castillo. Now, though, he can't stop thinking about it. Shemar was apparently a good student and overall respected young man, but the police officer insists that he found Shemar stealing a car and that, when he tried to stop him, Shemar reached for his gun.

Nic Stone presents the story of Shemar Carson's death as a way of illustrating that such cases are often playing out in the United States. She implies that it's all too easy for people to ignore these incidents, which is exactly what Justyce has done until he found himself in a similar situation. Suddenly, he's capable of relating to what happened to Shemar. Like him, Shemar was a good student, but this didn't help save his life in a moment of unexpected violence.

Justyce mentions in his diary that he has seen pictures of Shemar Carson. He admits that he never thought he himself would have to worry about police brutality, noting that Shemar "did have kind of a thuggish appearance." Justyce, on the other hand, doesn't "come across as 'threatening.'" To illustrate his point, he says that he doesn't wear baggy or oversized clothes. He also goes to a prestigious prep school, so it never occurred to him that someone might see him as a threatening criminal.

Justyce's consideration of his own clothing suggests that he has already given some thought to the fact that police officers sometimes jump to hasty conclusions about black people who dress in certain ways. What's most unfortunate about this, though, is that he seems to have internalized the idea that a person's "appearance" matters when it comes to policing. Rather than reminding himself that it's unfair for police to assume the worst about anyone—regardless of the way they present themselves—he acknowledges that Shemar looked "thuggish," as if this could possibly justify the boy's death. In turn, he inadvertently participates in the same kind of stereotyping that leads to racial profiling in the first place.

Justyce writes in his diary that his encounter with Castillo has altered the way he sees the world. "I need to pay more attention, Martin," he writes. "Start really seeing stuff and writing it down. Figure out what to do with it. That's why I'm writing to you." Going on, he points out that Dr. King went through all kinds of discrimination but still remained hopeful and strong. This, Justyce says, is the kind of strength and patience he himself wants to embody. "I wanna try to live like you," he writes. "Do what you would do." Signing off, he explains that his wrists are hurting him because of how tightly Castillo fastened his handcuffs the night before.

In this section, Justyce clarifies why he's writing to Dr. King. The fact that he is composing letters to Martin Luther King, Jr. despite the fact that the reverend is dead suggests that he is looking for ways to navigate an unjust world. Having just come face to face with the fact that there are people who will gladly subjugate him based on the color of his skin, he wants to learn how to "live like" Dr. King, who was famous for his resilience and strength, in addition to his peacefulness.

"Dear Martin," Justyce writes in his diary. "Welp, I'm here. The illustrious Yale University." He explains that he and SJ have driven all the way to Yale together. SJ has been helping him get settled, and when they finish they're planning to drive her to Columbia, where she's going to be starting school. Justyce says he's been rereading his past "Dear Martin" letters and wondering what, exactly, he was trying to "accomplish." Sitting in his dorm room, he can't help but feel "crazy outta place" at Yale. His roommate, unfortunately, is a pompous white guy who is rather cold when interacting with Justyce, clearly uncomfortable with the idea of rooming with a black person. "Martin, I just—It never ends, does it?" Justyce writes. "No matter what I do, for the rest of my life I'm gonna find myself in situations like this, aren't I?"

Yet again, Justyce grapples with the idea of withstanding racism everywhere he goes. No matter how hard he works, he will seemingly always face adversity and doubt because of the color of his skin. This, it seems, is why Mr. Rivers and Doc have encouraged him to focus on what he can control—namely, the type of person he chooses to be.

Thinking once more about what he wanted to get from his "Be Like Martin" experiment, Justyce wonders if he was trying to "get more respect" or be "more acceptable" or find a way to avoid "trouble." These days, he thinks a lot about something Doc asked him: "If nothing ever changes, what type of man am I gonna be?" Now, Justyce thinks that his "experiment failed" because he was asking himself what Dr. King would do, when in truth he should have been spending his time trying to figure out who he is and what he believes in. Despite the fact that he doesn't know the answer to these questions yet, Justyce is vaguely hopeful, because he realizes that he still has time to figure out how to navigate an unjust world.

As Dear Martin *draws to a close, it's useful to keep in mind that it is a coming-of-age novel. In keeping with this, Justyce makes peace with the fact that he doesn't have everything figured out yet. He doesn't know exactly who he wants to be, but he recognizes that he has time to come to such conclusions. By allowing himself the patience it takes to grow into oneself, he increases the likelihood that he'll be able to become the sort of person who does well in the face of adversity.*

CHAPTER 2

At Manny's house one day shortly after his encounter with Officer Castillo, Justyce finds himself unable to deal with the violent video game flashing on the screen before him. "Sorry," he says to Manny, asking him to turn it off. "Can't really handle the gunshots and stuff right now." Manny tells him it's not a problem, adding that he's willing to talk about what happened the other night if Justyce needs to. Justyce thanks him but declines his offer, instead rubbing his sore wrists and telling him that Melo gave him an ointment for the pain. He also mentions that he and she got back together. Hearing this, Manny expresses his disbelief. "That ho is the reason you sat in handcuffs for *three hours*," he says, going on to remind Justyce that he once caught Melo cheating on him. Nonetheless, Justyce tells his friend to "let it go."

It's worth noting that Manny tells Justyce he's willing to talk about what happened. This is the kind of support Justyce needs in the aftermath of his upsetting encounter with Castillo, even if he doesn't feel like talking about it at the moment. Whether or not he says anything at this particular time, he knows that he has Manny to talk to if ever he feels like it. Given that the novel later explores what it's like to deal with hardship without this kind of camaraderie, the fact that Manny is so willing to support Justyce becomes an important element of their relationship.

Refusing to drop the issue, Manny points out that Melo sat idly by while Castillo mistreated Justyce. All the same, Justyce refuses to listen to Manny criticize his girlfriend. Eventually, their conversation gets interrupted by Manny's mother, Dr. Rivers, who comes in to ask what the boys would like for dinner. While she's doing so, she receives a troubling call. Upon hanging up, she looks at Manny and tells him that his cousin, Quan, has been arrested and charged with murder. "They say he killed a police officer," she says.

Manny wants to support Justyce in multiple ways. Not only does he want to talk about what happened with Officer Castillo (if that is indeed what Justyce wants), he also wants to help his friend see that Melo selfishly put him in a dangerous situation and that she doesn't have his best interests in mind. Once again, then, he demonstrates his willingness to be there for his friend, even if Justyce doesn't necessarily like what he's saying.

CHAPTER 3

On Tuesday, Justyce attends his Societal Evolution class. He's distracted when he enters the room, since a grand jury in Nevada failed to indict the police officer who murdered Shemar Carson. In addition, he discovered yesterday that the police officer that Manny's cousin killed was Officer Castillo. "What Jus can't get over is that he *knows* Manny's cousin," Stone writes. Quan grew up in his mother's neighborhood and is only one year younger than Justyce. They even used to spend time together as young boys, though Quan eventually "started running with a not-so-great crowd," while Justyce went on to attend Braselton Prep. Now, Justyce can't stop fixating on the fact that Quan murdered Castillo. "Yeah, Castillo was an asshole, but did he really deserve to die?" he wonders. Along with this thought, he has another unsettling idea: if Castillo had killed him, "would he have even been indicted"?

Justyce has a lot on his mind when he enters class on Tuesday. This is noteworthy because it reminds readers that he's dealing with more stress and emotional turmoil than the average student, who can simply focus on getting good grades. Now that Justyce has experienced racial profiling, though, it's impossible for him to pretend that the many injustices surrounding him in the world simply don't exist. As a result, he finds it difficult to stop thinking about the Shemar Carson case and the way it relates to his own encounter with the police.

Before Justyce takes his seat in Societal Evolution, his teacher, Doc, calls him over. Doc runs the debate team and is Justyce's favorite teacher. "He's the only (half) black guy Jus knows with a PhD, and Jus really looks up to him," Stone notes. Before the other students filter in, Doc warns Justyce that the conversation taking place in class that day might "hit a nerve." "Feel free to sit it out," he says. "You can leave the room if need be."

Although Doc hasn't yet revealed what the class will be talking about, it's rather apparent that the topic will most likely have to do with racial inequality, and Doc's sensitivity to Justyce's emotional wellbeing is an indication that he wants to do what he can to protect him from further turmoil. In turn, readers see that Doc is another person (along with Manny) who wants to support Justyce.

After Justyce's quick talk with Doc, Manny enters the class with his good friend Jared Christiansen. Justyce doesn't particularly like Jared or really any of Manny's friends, a group of often insensitive white boys. As Jared struts in, he says, "What's up, Doc?" Forever annoyed by him, Justyce's friend SJ says, "Oh god, Jared. Sit *down* somewhere." SJ is Justyce's debate partner, the captain of the lacrosse team, and an incredible student. When Doc begins class, he poses a frank question about the United States constitution, asking his students to discuss the idea that "all men are created equal." More specifically, he asks, "Do you guys feel we've achieved full 'equality' with regard to race?" A tense silence follows this question, but then Jared speaks up, stating unequivocally that the country *has* "reached full equality when it comes to race."

It's easy to see that Jared's confident answer might rankle Justyce, who was recently punched in the face and placed in handcuffs simply because Officer Castillo made an assumption about him based on his race. This, of course, doesn't support the idea that the United States has reached "full equality when it comes to race." And yet, Jared offers up this answer without much hesitation, as if he can't fathom the idea that racism still exists.

"There are people who claim certain 'injustices' are race-related, but if you ask me, they're just being divisive," Jared says. SJ cuts in at this point, calling Jared "entitled" and trying to explain that he's "oblivious to the struggles of anyone outside [his] little social group." She then asks him to consider "economic disparities" and the fact that "there are more people of color living in poverty than white people." In response, Jared says, "Dude, Manny drives a Range Rover." Not wanting to get involved, Manny asks why this is relevant, and Jared points out that Manny's parents are wealthier than his. Hearing this, Manny says that his parents have worked hard, but Jared says that this is his point, claiming it proves that black people have "the same opportunities as white people."

Jared has never had to think very hard about inequality because he himself has never experienced discrimination. Consequently, it's easy for him to claim that people who think racism still exists are only "being divisive." In keeping with his apparent tendency to make broad generalizations, he says that Manny's wealthy parents are proof that white and black people have "the same opportunities." Uninterested in examining the matter more critically, he allows himself to make sweeping arguments about entire groups of people simply based on his limited perspective as a fortunate white person.

SJ tells Jared that he hasn't succeeded in proving his point. "You really think one example proves things are equal?" she asks. "What about Justyce? His mom works sixty hours a week, but she doesn't make a *tenth* of what your dad ma—" Hearing this, Justyce cuts her off, telling her to "chill." She apologizes and then reiterates her point, which is that one exception to an overall trend doesn't mean much. She then says that African Americans are still "getting a raw deal," even all these years after slavery. "Coulda fooled me," Jared replies, to which SJ says, "Do you watch the news at *all?* The name Shemar Carson ring a bell, maybe?" In turn, Jared says that "not every white person who kills a black person is guilty of a crime," positing that "the courts proved that" by not indicting Shemar Carson's killer.

When Jared suggests that the success of Manny's family proves the United States has reached complete racial equality, he chooses to ignore the bigger picture. While it's true that it's possible for some black families to achieve success and upward mobility, it's also true that it's harder on the whole for black people to access the same opportunities as white people. This is what SJ tries to help him see when she references "economic disparities," wanting Jared to understand that not all white and black people are on an even playing field. When this doesn't work, she emphasizes the systemic nature of racial inequality, referencing the Nevada jury's failure to indict Shemar Carson's killer. However, this doesn't help her convince Jared, since he's unwilling to consider the idea that the jury itself might be biased and instead assumes that the court system always delivers unbiased justice.

When SJ refutes the idea that the courts "proved" the officer who killed Shemar isn't guilty of a crime, Jared says, "Dude, the kid attacked the cop and tried to take his gun. *And* he had a criminal record." This enrages SJ, who accuses Jared of only getting his news from social media. She then reminds him that Shemar's criminal record only included a single misdemeanor for possession of marijuana. "So? Do the crime, do the time," Jared says. "Jared," replies SJ, "you bought an *ounce* of weed two days ago." Doc intervenes at this point, telling SJ to calm down, and then Jared tells her that how he spends his money isn't her business. Wrapping up her argument, then, SJ says, "I know you'd prefer to ignore this stuff because you *benefit* from it, but walking around pretending inequality doesn't exist won't make it disappear, Jared."

Perhaps the most important thing SJ says in this argument is that Jared "benefit[s]" from his own privileged position in society. The fact that he can commit the same crime as Shemar Carson but then point to that crime as evidence of Shemar's lack of morality is a perfect example of what it means to perpetuate implicit bias. Jared has purchased marijuana himself, but he doesn't think this says anything about the kind of person he is. But because Shemar Carson is a young black man, buying marijuana suddenly becomes—in Jared's mind—proof that Shemar is a dangerous criminal. In other words, Jared isn't applying the same rules to Shemar and himself. Instead, he makes certain assumptions about Shemar and then refuses to acknowledge that these assumptions are based on nothing but race.

Jared reminds SJ that she, too, is white, but this doesn't faze her. "Yeah, and I recognize that and how it benefits me," she says. In response, Jared accuses her of "jumping on the White Is Wrong bandwagon." Hearing this, SJ says that nobody will ever assume that either she or Jared are criminals before they even consider them as people. After a long pause, Justyce gets up and leaves, saying he has to go to the bathroom.

Again, SJ tries to help Jared see that he—as a white person—has certain advantages that black people don't necessarily have. He suggests that this outlook is a critique of being white, but she refutes this point by saying that all she's doing is acknowledging the ways in which her whiteness "benefits" her. After all, inequality can't be addressed if people don't recognize its existence. To hear this debate about racism is apparently too much for Justyce to handle, though, which is why he exits, most likely feeling uncomfortable about sitting by while his white peers somewhat casually debate a matter that has recently become so viscerally real for him.

CHAPTER 4

After class, Jared, Manny, and their white friends Blake, Kyle, and Tyler enter the "senior lounge." Justyce is also present, but nobody sees him because he's sitting in a booth in the back of the room. As he sits there, he listens to Jared complain about the conversation in Societal Evolution. "Can you believe that asshole?" he says about Doc. "What kind of teacher has the nerve to suggest there's racial inequality to a classroom full of millennials?" Since Blake, Kyle, and Tyler weren't there, he explains what happened, saying that he might even have his father call the school to complain. "And of course SJ jumped right on it," he says. " I think the fact that her mom has to constantly defend all those thugs is starting to screw with her head." Blake, Kyle, and Tyler laugh, and Manny joins in after a brief pause.

During this conversation, it becomes clear that Jared is upset by the mere fact that Doc staged a conversation about inequality in school. When he says, "What kind of teacher has the nerve to suggest that there's racial inequality to a classroom full of millennials?", he acts as if racism is a thing of the past—a problem for earlier generations. Jared is again unwilling to examine his own prejudices, and so is frustrated that someone like SJ might force him to more closely evaluate his attitude regarding race.

Still talking about SJ, Jared says, "If you ask me, she wants Justyce to pop her little cherry." In response, Kyle references the fact that Jared himself never had sex with SJ when they used to date, but Jared just says, "Shut up. We were in eighth grade." Still, his friends continue to give him a hard time, saying that he clearly still likes her. "Too late, though…if Justyce is your competition you're screwed, dog," Kyle says. "'Once you go black,' right, Manny?" Once again, Manny offers weak laughter. Changing the subject, Jared says he's "sick of people suggesting African Americans still have it *so hard* these days." He then says that Manny's parents are "proof that things are equal now," and Blake immediately agrees. All of the white boys then agree that "things really are equal nowadays" and that they live in a "color-blind society."

It's easy for Manny's white friends to believe that they live in an equal, "color-blind" society. After all, they've never had to come face to face with discrimination because of their race. What they fail to recognize, though, is that their limited experiences aren't representative of the entire nation, especially since they are wealthy young people attending a prestigious preparatory school. Nonetheless, their relatively unchallenged outlook makes them confident that it's all right to make sweeping claims about equality, failing to see that they're leaving very little room for Manny to disagree.

Turning to Manny, Kyle enthusiastically informs him that he doesn't even see him has black. Manny laughs awkwardly at this, but Justyce—who is still listening undetected—knows his friend is just pretending. "The statement just makes Justyce think about those handcuffs…these fools might not 'see' Manny 'as black,' but Justyce knows damn well the police would," Stone notes. However, Jared, Kyle, Blake, and Tyler don't pick up on Manny's discomfort. Instead, Jared tells them to "raise [their] Perrier bottles to EQUALITY!" All of them do this except Manny, prompting Jared to turn to him and say, "Manny? You with us, bro?" After a brief pause, Manny says, "Course I am, bro. Equality!"

The idea of a "color-blind" society is rather fraught, since it ultimately promotes the erasure of racial and cultural identities, which isn't actually what it means to live under equality. Instead of ignoring a person's blackness, the goal of equality is to recognize race without letting this recognition lead to discrimination or prejudice. Because Manny's white friends don't see the need to examine their own biases and tendencies toward casual racism, though, they feel unjustifiably comfortable telling him that they don't see him as black. When Justyce notes that the police would certainly see Manny as black, he astutely pinpoints why it's problematic to pretend race doesn't exist, especially in a world in which so many injustices are based on the color of a person's skin.

SEPTEMBER 18

"Dear Martin," Justyce writes in his diary, explaining that he has decided to go home after his rough day at school. Tired of dealing with his classmates' insensitivity, he makes the decision to never return to Braselton Prep. When he gets to his mother's house and sees her reading, though, he's reminded of the fact that she worked extremely hard to teach *him* to read. Thinking about this, he suddenly knows that he'll be headed back to Braselton before nightfall. Nevertheless, he advances into the room, and his mother asks why he's there. When he struggles to answer, she guesses that he's upset about the Shemar Carson case. Admitting that this is true, he says it feels like everything he's doing in life is a "losing battle."

The attitude Justyce's mother adopts regarding his education exemplifies what SJ tried to get Jared to understand in class. The fact that she had to work extra hard to make sure he would have a solid education is significant, since a family like Jared's could most likely assume that he would receive a good education regardless of what they did. Indeed, Justyce's mother sees his schooling as a fantastic opportunity, one he can use to create a good life for himself. However, this kind of encouragement doesn't necessarily help him process things like the Shemar Carson case, especially in the aftermath of his encounter with Officer Castillo. Once again, readers see that Justyce is processing a great deal more than the majority of his peers, as he tries to focus on school while also contending with racism and a society that projects prejudiced messages.

"Hard being a black man, ain't it?" Justyce's mother asks. He admits that it is, and when he tries to explain why, he says that he can't figure out where he "fit[s]" at Braselton Prep. "I've been there my whole high school career," he says, "and I still feel like an outsider, you know?" As he complains, his mother crosses her arms, eventually saying, "So watchu gon' do? Run away?" Going on, she tells him that coming home won't make his problems go away. "At least I'd be around people who know the struggle," he says, but she laughs at this, simply telling him to go back to school. "Goodbye, Justyce. I didn't raise you to punk out when the going gets rough. Get on outta here," she says. On the bus ride back, he realizes that his mother's right: there's nothing he can possibly do but "keep going."

Justyce feels out of place at Braselton Prep precisely because of the outlook people like Jared exhibit, ignoring the reality of racial inequality in the United States. Justyce himself has recently experienced racism firsthand, but his peers have no idea what it's like to undergo such an encounter. As a result, Justyce has trouble feeling like he belongs at school. His mother, however, is focused on pushing him forward, concentrating solely on helping him attain upward mobility. And while she is certainly a positive influence, she doesn't manage in this moment to support him in any kind of emotional sense. At this point, this lack of emotional support isn't particularly detrimental to Justyce's wellbeing, but it's worth noting that he might someday yearn for a more wholistic kind of guidance instead of the straightforward encouragement and motivation his mother gives him here.

CHAPTER 5

It's Halloween, and Justyce is at Manny's house getting ready for a party with Jared, Kyle, Tyler, and Blake. Jared has convinced them all to dress as various stereotypes for the party, claiming it will be a "massive political statement about racial equality and broken barriers and shit." Although he was hesitant to join in on this idea, Justyce allowed Manny to convince him, which is why he now finds himself dressed as a "thug." Manny, for his part, is dressed as "the Token Black Guy," wearing "khakis, loafers, and polo with a cable-knit sweater." Jared is a "Yuppie/Politician," Tyler is a "Surfer Dude," and Kyle is a "Redneck" in a trucker hat with a Confederate flag on it. Worst of all, though, is Blake's costume—he has chosen to dress as a member of the Ku Klux Klan, and his outfit is disconcertingly authentic.

Once again, Manny's white friends trivialize the idea of inequality by acting like they can do whatever they want. Believing that racism no longer exists, they think they can make a parody of bigotry and prejudice. In reality, costumes like Blake's play on a history of violence and hatred, but he ignores these implications. Of course, he's only able to ignore such problematic ideas in the first place because he himself has never experienced discrimination and, thus, feels entitled to treat it as nonexistent. Meanwhile, his behavior makes Justyce and Manny uncomfortable.

Even Jared seems uncomfortable about Blake's costume. He and Manny go into a different room to discuss it, leaving Justyce with Blake. After a moment, Jared comes out and tells Justyce that Manny wants to talk to him. As he walks to the other room, all of the white boys follow him with their eyes. Once inside, he asks Manny what he wants to talk about, and Manny says, "So Blake's costume is…Well, you saw it." He then gives Justyce a chance to back out of the idea, but Justyce tells him they should just go through with the plan. This is because he's recently read that Martin Luther King, Jr. defined integration as "intergroup and interpersonal living." Wanting to adopt this mindset, he decides not to say anything to Blake about the costume.

That Justyce decides not to say anything about Blake's costume illustrates why Blake's actions are so insensitive and unfair. Acting like racism is a thing of the past, he goes ahead and perpetuates a rather extreme form of racism, making it difficult for Manny and Justyce to speak out against his decision, since he would only claim that inequality no longer exists. In this moment, then, readers see that ignoring the existence of inequality actually enables people to continue *to be racist.*

When the group of friends gets into Manny's car, Blake puts on his hood and does a Nazi salute. Suddenly, Justyce knows this plan isn't going to end well. His prediction is correct—Blake gets punched in the face five minutes after they get to the party. At that moment, Justyce's group is surrounded by a number of "*genuinely* thugged-out black dudes." As Justyce looks at them, he realizes he knows each and every person bearing down on his prep school friends. These young men belong to the same gang that Quan—Manny's cousin—belongs to, a group named the Black Jihad, which is run by a "crazy older dude," Martel Montgomery. "That's a real funny costume, Justyce," a guy named Trey says. He then asks why Justyce and Manny are hanging out with people like Blake. "Just gon' letcha boy disrespect our people like that?" he asks.

Justyce finds himself torn between two groups when he gets to the party: his prep school friends and the people he's known all his life. This is yet another illustration of why he doesn't feel like he "fits" in, since he has chosen to associate with people like Blake but obviously doesn't truly feel a kinship with them. At the same time, he doesn't want to associate with members of the Black Jihad, either, which leaves him feeling socially isolated.

Jared jumps into the conversation with the Black Jihad members, insisting that he and his friends don't mean any "disrespect." Manny cuts him off, telling him to be quiet, and Trey advises him to follow Manny's advice. "Trey, he didn't mean anything by it, dawg," Justyce says. "We were doing this satire thing with stereotypes, and it went too far." Trey disparages Justyce for being so intellectual about everything, and then he addresses both him and Manny, saying, "Don't get it twisted, my dawgs. These white boys might be standing here next to y'all, but y'all still ain't nothin' but niggas to them, ya heard me? Ain't no amount of money nor intelligence can change that shit." Jared begins to protest this, but his friends tell him to be quiet.

What Trey says to Justyce and Manny about how their white friends see them is especially troubling because it challenges Justyce's sense of belonging, which is already rather fraught. Readers are aware that Justyce feels out of place at Braselton Prep, so it's easy to see that Trey's comments in this moment would cut to his core, unsettling him and exacerbating what he already feels about social isolation and acceptance.

Jared insists that Trey can't tell him and his friends to leave the party, at which point one of the gang members pulls up his shirt to reveal a gun in his waistband. As Jared, Justyce, and the others begin to retreat, the guy with the gun tells Manny and Justyce that they're welcome to stay, but Trey sarcastically says that the two boys don't want to hang out with Black Jihad members because they're "goin places." "Gotta stay connected to the white man for the ride to the top…," he says as Justyce and the rest of the boys file out of the party.

Justyce doesn't feel a sense of belonging amongst his white peers at Braselton Prep, but in this moment it becomes clear that he would also have a very hard time feeling connected to Trey and his crew. After all, Justyce isn't the type of teenager who wants to associate with people who carry pistols around and threaten others at parties. In turn, readers see that he's caught between two unappealing poles—the Black Jihad is criticizing him for associating with insensitive white boys, but they don't offer an attractive alternative.

NOVEMBER 1

"Dear Martin," Justyce writes, explaining that he's just gotten off the phone with SJ, whom he talked to for hours. He rehashes what they said to each other, telling Dr. King that he filled SJ in on what happened at the party. At a certain point in the conversation, she admits that she spent the night thinking about Justyce, and this infuses the conversation with a certain awkwardness, though they quickly get over this. Justyce then tells SJ that he feels slightly bad about having left the party. "Either way it went," he says, "I was sayin somethin', you know? Staying woulda been a statement of solidarity with these guys I grew up with—and who look like me. Leaving was a different statement, and the fact that I chose to do it with a white guy who was dressed as a Klansman…well…"

When Justyce speaks on the phone to SJ, he reveals his discomfort regarding the fact that he chose to continue associating with people like Blake even after Trey and the others called him out on it. It makes sense that he would feel guilty in this moment, as if he has betrayed the people he grew up with just to save face with his apathetic and insensitive white friends. This unfortunate dilemma once again reminds readers that Justyce is forced to navigate complex social dynamics as a result of being one of the only people of color in his immediate community.

Justyce admits to SJ that his encounter with the Black Jihad at the party made him have an "ugly thought"—namely, that it's "assholes like Trey and his boys that have cops thinking all black dudes are up to no good." At the same time, he feels like Trey made some good points at the party. "He said me and Manny were chillin' with Jared and them because we 'need the white man for the ride to the top,'" Justyce explains. "And while I could debate that till I'm blue in the face, didn't we prove it by leaving with Jared and them?" He then wonders if Trey is correct when he says that white people will only ever see him as "an 'n-word,'" no matter what he does. Going on, he points out that there's no denying that he does on some level need white people to "get ahead."

In this conversation, Justyce grapples with the troubling idea that he needs to associate with problematic and insensitive white people in order to attain upward mobility. This bothers him, since he'd like to condemn the behavior of people like Jared and Blake, but can't because doing so would ostracize him in the very community (Braselton Prep) that will give him a chance to work his way toward success. Most frustrating of all, though, is the idea that even his extreme patience and tolerance might never protect him from bigotry. No matter how much work he puts in, he fears, people like Jared will continue to mistreat him.

When Justyce realizes how long he's been talking to SJ, he quickly says he has to go, surprised at how easy it is to relate to her. Just before they hang up, she apologizes for speaking on his behalf in class when Jared was voicing racist sentiments. "Hearing her apologize after Blake didn't?" Justyce writes in his diary. "It got me, Martin. Now I can't get her out of my head." This, he says, makes him somewhat uncomfortable, because although he thinks SJ is "great" and attractive, he knows that his mother would be incensed if he dated a white girl.

When SJ apologizes for speaking on Justyce's behalf in class, she demonstrates an understanding of the complex nature of discussing race. Rather than saying anything she wants with unearned confidence (like Jared does), she's carefully attuned to the nuances of such conversations, never wanting to overstep. In this way, she is a helpful and positive white ally, someone who can advocate for Justyce and use her own privilege to help other white people challenge their biases and assumptions. By apologizing to Justyce for speaking on his behalf, she shows him that she doesn't value her viewpoint or voice over his, making it clear that she wants to do what she can to support him without making him uncomfortable.

CHAPTER 6

Not long after the Halloween incident, Justyce gets into Yale during the school's "early action" period. The first thing he does when he gets this news is call SJ, who's ecstatic for him. He then realizes that he hasn't even told his mother, and he starts to feel guilty. Still, he loves that SJ is so happy for him, and when he tells her this, she says, "How could I not be?" After hanging up, he calls his mother, but she doesn't answer and he doesn't want to leave it as a message, so he waits to tell her.

By this point, it's rather obvious that Justyce has strong feelings for SJ. However, he doesn't feel like he can act on them, since his mother is uncomfortable with the idea of him dating a white person. Nonetheless, he turns to SJ because she offers him her support and encouragement—a vital thing, especially since there aren't that many people at Braselton Prep who make Justyce feel accepted and important.

The next day, SJ sees Justyce in the dining hall. She jumps into his arms and wraps her legs around him, at which point he reminds her that she's in a skirt. Mortified, she jumps off and apologizes, but he only smiles and tells her it was the best hug he's ever received. Just then, Melo approaches, having seen this embrace. Justyce and Melo have recently broken up again, but their relationship is—as always—in flux. After a moment, SJ excuses herself, and Melo says, "So I hear you got into Yale." Justyce explains that this is why SJ was so excited, adding that SJ herself is going to Columbia. When Melo asks if Justyce and SJ are a "thing," he says no. "Good," she says, telling him she wants to hang out soon and then kissing his neck before walking away.

Again, the attraction running between SJ and Justyce is palpable, especially in the way that SJ so joyously celebrates him. This is an unabashed form of emotional support, which Justyce doesn't necessarily receive from other people at Braselton Prep. However, their relationship is complicated because of Justyce's mother and because of his on-again-off-again relationship with Melo.

CHAPTER 7

In Societal Evolution class that day, Jared raises his hand and says, "I'd like to discuss how affirmative action discriminates against members of the majority." Going on, he says, "Let's observe, shall we? I'm ranked number two in our class, I'm captain of the baseball team, I do community service on the weekends, and I got higher test scores than Justyce…yet he got into Yale early action, and I didn't. I know for a fact it's because I'm white and he's black." Jumping in, Justyce asks why Jared has assumed that he received better test scores than him. The two boys then compare their scores and discover that they're more or less the same. "It just doesn't make sense," Jared says, and when Justyce asks why this is the case, SJ says, "Because it negates his assumption that because he's white and you're black, he's more intelligent than you are."

Jared and Justyce's conversation about affirmative action clarifies the entrenched assumptions Jared has about black people. Rather than stopping to consider that Justyce actually deserves to get into Yale, Jared makes the unfounded and unfair assumption that he got in because of his race. In reality, Justyce is a well-rounded student with high grades and test scores. And although neither Justyce nor SJ mention this, it's worth noting that college applications take more into account than test scores and class rank. The way students present themselves in their personal essays also matters a great deal, and it's entirely possible that Justyce's essay was significantly better than Jared's. Despite this possibility, Jared chooses to attack the entire selection process, acting as if it's absurd to think that Justyce is more qualified than him.

It soon emerges that Jared's application to Yale was deferred, making it likely that he *will* get in during the regular admissions period. Still, he says that his father was upset at him for not getting in during early action, and when Manny asks what this has to do with Justyce, he says, "He took a spot *I* didn't get because Yale has to fill a quota." He also says that even if Justyce did deserve to get into Yale, affirmative action "gives an unfair advantage to minorities." Going on, he says that, though he and Justyce might be "equals," "there are other minorities without the qualifications" he has who will also get in before him.

Jared's primary concern in this moment is that minorities have an "unfair advantage" over him. This is a flawed argument, though, because being a minority in the United States unfortunately means overcoming a great deal more than the average white person. This is why affirmative action exists, so that admissions offices can even the playing field and take into account the fact that certain people have started at a disadvantage. After all, a person who has had to overcome adversity and bigotry but has still managed to put together a good application is especially impressive, which is why schools like Yale take such factors into account. However, Jared ignores these elements of the application process, instead committing himself to the idea that he has been treated unfairly.

Tired of listening to Jared, SJ reminds him that he goes to an expensive and elite school. She then points out that somebody like Justyce from a family living below the poverty line has to work much harder to get the same opportunity as him. She also points out that people from more difficult socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to do well on standardized tests because everyone expects them to "underperform," and this "triggers severe test anxiety." Given that this is the case, she asks Jared if he really thinks it's fair to judge people solely on their test scores. "You've had access to WAY more than [Justyce] has…would it be fair for a college to consider only GPA and test scores in determining who deserves to get in?" she asks.

SJ tries to help Jared see the many factors that go into the decision-making process at a place like Yale. She argues that it's especially unfair to judge students based on GPA and test scores alone, since this doesn't accurately reflect how hard a person has had to work or even what a person is fully capable of achieving under the right circumstances. Jared, she points out, has had to do much less than Justyce just to attend Braselton Prep. And yet, he believes that he's more qualified than Justyce, which is another indication that he chooses to ignore his own fortunate circumstances, turning a blind eye to the ways in which he has benefited from his privileged station in life.

Unable to argue against SJ's point, Jared says, "Whatever. All I know is that no matter what college I end up at, when I see a minority, I'm gonna wonder if they're qualified to be there." In response, the entire class goes quiet until Justyce says, "Damn, it's like that, Jared?" "I mean…" Jared stammers, "wait, that didn't come out right."

When Jared says that he's going to "wonder" if minorities are "qualified" to be at whatever college he attends, he inadvertently reveals the biased thinking at the core of his argument. Unwilling to admit that minorities often have to work much harder than white people to attain an equivalent amount of success, he unfairly decides to judge any person of color who is at a prestigious university. This is a glaringly insensitive and bigoted way of looking at the world, which is why he immediately tries to take back what he's said, suddenly realizing that he has accidentally proved his own biases.

DECEMBER 13

"Dear Martin," Justyce begins, asking why it seems like he must constantly face people who want to "keep [him] down." On his way home from telling his mother about Yale, he explains, he encountered Trey and a group of Black Jihad members. Trey asked him why he was so happy, and he told him about getting into Yale. "You'll be back, smart guy," Trey says. "Once you see them white folks don't want yo black ass at they table. They not down with you bein' their equal, dawg. We'll see you soon." Justyce tells Dr. King in his diary that he wouldn't be so upset about this encounter if it hadn't happened on the same day that Jared also tried to undercut his Yale acceptance. "All this talk about how 'equal' things are, yet [Jared] assumed I didn't do as well as he did?" he writes.

Once again, Justyce finds himself torn between two populations, neither of which seem to want him to succeed. Facing Trey and the other Black Jihad members, he encounters resentment and scorn for his ambition. Then, when he tries to commit himself to attaining upward mobility, he has to endure the entitlement and casual racism of people like Jared, who also resent him, but for different reasons. Consequently, he's left without a sense of true belonging, stranded between two communities.

Continuing his epistolary diary entry to Martin Luther King, Jr., Justyce writes, "It's like I'm trying to climb a mountain, but I've got one fool trying to shove me down and another fool tugging at my leg, trying to pull me to the ground he refuses to leave." He acknowledges that Jared and Trey are "only two people," but he can't shake the idea that people like Jared are going to question his qualifications once he arrives at Yale. "How do I work against this, Martin?" he asks, admitting that he feels "defeated." In a post-script to his entry, he also asks Dr. King how he should navigate "love triangles," since it's clear that both SJ and Melo like him.

In this section, readers witness Justyce's search for guidance and support. He wants to know how someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. would navigate the resentment he's forced to face from both of the communities to which he belongs. He also wonders how he should deal with his love life. However, he's only asking these questions in a diary entry, meaning he won't actually receive any kind of response—he has nobody to guide him.

CHAPTER 8

At Manny's house one day, Manny asks Justyce if he and SJ are together. Justyce avoids answering the question for as long as possible, but then insists that he and SJ are only friends. Manny dislikes this response, urging Justyce to date SJ, since she's perfect for him. However, Justyce tells him that his mother wouldn't approve, and though Manny understands that this is the case, he suggests that Justyce should date SJ anyway.

The fact that Justyce's mother wouldn't approve of him dating SJ illustrates the extent to which he has trouble making his current life at Braselton Prep compatible with his upbringing. In the same way that people like Jared don't mesh well with the people Justyce grew up with, his affinity for SJ is at odds with his mother's expectations, since she only wants him to date black women. Once again, then, he's torn between his two communities.

Manny admits that he has "the opposite problem" as Justyce, saying that he's "afraid" of black girls because he rarely has the chance to interact with other people of color. "You're my *only* black friend, dawg. I'm supposed to go from this all-white world to an all-black one overnight?" he says, worrying about the fact that he'll soon be going to Morehouse College, a historically black school. Returning to the topic of SJ, Manny says he thinks it's stupid for Justyce to deprive himself of happiness just to please his mother. "If you're doing this Be Like Martin thing, do it for real," he says. "Refusing to date a girl because she's white is probably *not* the Kingly way, bruh."

Manny's anxiety about interacting with black girls provides an interesting contrast to Justyce's hesitancy to date a white person. Unlike Justyce, Manny has spent his entire life in the wealthy world of people like Jared, which is why he doesn't necessarily feel the same kind of social isolation as Justyce at Braselton Prep. As a result, the idea of going to a historically black college is intimidating to him, since suddenly existing in a predominantly black context would be the first time he might feel out of place (though he most likely wouldn't have to put up with as much casual and entrenched racism, which he has apparently become accustomed to in his current environment).

CHAPTER 9

For the next few weeks, Justyce focuses on an upcoming debate tournament. He spends his time over winter break preparing arguments with SJ. It takes them a long time to come up with a topic for their argument, since they've decided to skip the actual debate "rounds" and "focus solely on advanced pairs argumentation," which means they only have "one shot" to persuade the judges. After hours of spending time together trying to think of a topic, SJ suggests that they present an argument about racial profiling. She explains that researchers in the 1990s predicted "that the number of violent crimes committed by African American teen males would skyrocket in the years to follow," calling such criminals "superpredators." Although this prediction was disproven, "the fear of young black guys created by [the] research is alive and well." Consequently, SJ proposes that they use this as their topic.

The fact that the myth of the "superpredator" has lived on even though the research was disproven demonstrates how influential certain narratives are when it comes to race. The idea of dangerous black men seeped into the public discourse even though the notion of a "superpredator" was faulty, suggesting that people can manipulate what others think simply by planting provocative suggestions that play on biases and irrational fears. This is an important idea to keep in mind as the novel progresses, as Stone continues to explore the ways in which so-called experts in the media shape the national conversation surrounding race.

Justyce is hesitant to embrace SJ's idea to present a debate topic about racial profiling. This is because he doesn't want to "be the black guy accused of 'playing the race card' at the state tournament." SJ understands this, but says, "I didn't sleep for a week after what happened to you, Jus. I know we might be throwing away our chance at a win, but if we can get some facts out there, maybe make people *think* a little bit, it'll be worth it, right?" Hearing this, Justyce agrees to go along with the idea.

Justyce's concern about "playing the race card" is a perfect example of how conversations with people like Jared have made him feel like he can't talk about the racism and discrimination he experiences on an everyday basis. Although Jared thinks such conversations are harmless, it becomes clear in this moment that they have the potential to curtail what his black peers feel safe talking about.

During the debate tournament, Justyce realizes that SJ was right to propose this topic. As he delivers his arguments, he realizes that he "*needed* to talk about this in a public forum," regardless of whether or not he wins the tournament. After they finish, they go backstage and see Doc, who's so proud of them that his eyes are wet. When they're called back out, they listen to the results while holding hands, and they keep holding each other like this even after the judges call their names for first place.

Although he was hesitant to talk about racial profiling in such a public manner, Justyce is relieved to do so. All he needed, it seems, was the encouragement SJ gave him to address this problem, which is already quite important to him. In turn, readers see how valuable it is for him to have someone like SJ to support him.

JANUARY 13

"Martin, I think I'm losing it," Justyce writes in his diary. He goes on to explain a confusing interaction he had with SJ right after they won the debate tournament. When they went backstage, he leaned in to kiss her. "AND SHE TURNED AWAY!" Justyce writes. Pretending to look for Doc, SJ asked if Justyce had seen him, clearly wanting to pretend like nothing happened. In the ensuing hours, she completely avoided Justyce, and she has continued to ignore him ever since. Now he doesn't know what to do, and he keeps reviewing the situation over and over in his head. No matter how much he thinks about it, though, he can't figure out why she turned away from him.

Although his relationship with SJ has given him the confidence to talk openly about racism, the support she gives him in this regard is undermined by their complicated relational dynamic. Confused about why she snubbed him, Justyce most likely feels like he can't actually rely on her in any significant way, since their relationship is no doubt going to be awkward in the aftermath of this strange encounter. As a result, he's once again left feeling relatively alone and misunderstood.

CHAPTER 10

In addition to his confusing encounter with SJ, Justyce has a lot on his mind, since "he and the rest of the nation" have just learned that Tavarrius Jenkins, yet another unarmed black teenager, was shot and killed by a police officer simply for trying to help an elderly white woman. Wanting somebody to talk to, Justyce visits Doc's classroom, only to find that SJ is already there crying. Seeing him, she gets up and leaves, and when Doc asks Justyce what's going on, Justyce says he was hoping Doc might be able to tell *him*.

Justyce seemingly can't escape the ever-present terror of racial violence. Just when it seems he might be able to focus on other things (like the debate tournament), another unarmed black teenager is gunned down by the police. To make matters worse, Justyce can't even confide in SJ like he normally does. In turn, he's left to sort through his complicated emotions on his own.

Back in his dorm room, Justyce takes a nap until Manny enters. Manny has just come from basketball practice and reeks of body odor, but he successfully convinces Justyce to go out that night, despite the fact that Justyce is depressed and doesn't feel like doing anything. "Being alone in your current state isn't good for your mental health, man. Blake's birthday party is tonight, and you're coming with me," Manny says. Shortly thereafter, Justyce drinks alcohol before the party while Manny gets ready. He "isn't in the best headspace" to be drinking, but does so anyway, eventually starting to cry. When Manny sees him, he asks if Justyce is upset about SJ, revealing that he's heard about what happened after the debate tournament. Justyce is incredulous, but Manny only shrugs, saying, "Small school. People talk."

Manny is one of the only people in Justyce's life right now who's in a position to support him. And he does support him, in a way, trying to improve his "mental health" by getting him to go to Blake's party. Unfortunately, though, the fact that he himself tends to ignore his peers' casual racism doesn't help him relate to Justyce's anger regarding Tavarrius Jenkins's death. Because of this, he isn't able to fully give Justyce the kind of camaraderie he needs in this moment, though his friendly concern is certainly better than nothing.

Justyce tells Manny that he's not just crying about SJ, but about Tavarrius Jenkins, too. He can't stop thinking about the fact that his own run-in with the police could have ended just as badly. Seeing the effect that alcohol is having on his friend, Manny tells him to slow down and to focus on the party, wanting him to stop thinking about Tavarrius Jenkins. This frustrates Justyce, who wonders why Manny cares more about "some stupid white-boy party" than "the unjust death of a guy who looks like him," but he decides not to say anything.

Justyce isn't in a position to simply stop thinking about Tavarrius Jenkins—he feels a direct connection to what happened, since he himself experienced a very similar scenario. Manny, on the other hand, feels as if he can put the event out of his mind. This frustrates Justyce, who wants to process the upsetting story with his friend.

Justyce continues to drink while Manny drives them to Blake's party. It is perhaps because he's so drunk, then, that he finds it especially hard to manage his anger upon seeing a collection of racist ornaments strewn across Blake's yard, "wooden lawn jockeys with black skin and big red lips standing guard at the bottom of [the] porch steps." He's also disconcerted by the vintage minstrel posters he sees in the basement. As he and Manny venture into the party, Blake comes up to them and thanks them for coming, then says, "Yo, listen. There's this *fine*-ass black girl here from Decatur Prep, and I was thinking you guys could wingman it up for me and shit. Homegirl's got the fattest ass I've ever *seen*, and I think if she meets my niggas, I'll have a good chance of getting her upstairs. You feel me, dogs?"

Blake's blatant racism in this moment is overwhelming, as he not only makes it clear that he wants to use Justyce and Manny to manipulate and objectify a young black woman, but also freely uses the n-word, as if there's nothing wrong with a white man calling his two black acquaintances the most charged and hateful racial slur that exists. Once again, then, readers see how hurtful and destructive it is for people like Blake and Jared to claim that inequality no longer exists, since they themselves continue to behave in racist ways. By insisting that racism is dead, they enable themselves to keep it alive while simultaneously making it harder for anyone to critique them.

As soon as Blake finishes speaking, Manny's smile fades, as if he knows Justyce won't be able to ignore what Blake has just said. "Is this fool serious right now?" Justyce asks. When Manny tells him to "chill," he adds, "Hell nah, I'm not 'bouta *chill*. Ya boy's got racist lawn gnomes and white people in blackface hanging on the walls, now he pulls this shit, and you want me to *chill*?" Blake immediately rolls his eyes, insisting that none of the decorations are his and saying that his great-great-uncle used to be a minstrel performer. "No big deal," he says, but Justyce refutes this, saying, "You coming over here asking us to help you *use* a black girl IS a big deal, Blake. That's not to mention you tossin' the n-word around like you own it." Hearing this, Blake says, "You don't own it any more than I do, bro. Nobody *owns* words."

Blake's unwillingness to admit that what he said was racist makes it even harder for Justyce to challenge him. When Justyce points out the obvious problem with Blake using the n-word, Blake hardheadedly insists that "nobody owns words," a rather irrelevant idea that misses the point, which is that Blake has made use of a word that is fraught with an entire history of hatred. Now, though, he won't even recognize the fact that the word is especially off-limits to white people, since it has been used for centuries to denigrate black people.

Continuing his defense of himself, Blake says that Justyce should know that "nobody owns words." "I'd think you'd know that as someone 'smart enough' to get into Yale." Intervening, Manny urges his friends to take it down a notch, but Justyce says that it's too late, calling Blake a racist. "What is it with you people and the goddamn race card, huh?" Blake asks. When Justyce reminds Blake that Manny is considered "one of us people," too, Blake says, "Except Manny's got some sense and doesn't make everything about race. Why don't you loosen the hell up?"

Once again, Blake tries to frame his racism as a joke, making it especially difficult for Justyce to call him out for it. What's more, it's clear that Blake actually does *have a number of bigoted assumptions about black people, as evidenced by the fact that he suggests that Justyce isn't "smart enough" to get into Yale. Nonetheless, Blake acts like his bigotry is just a joke, thereby suggesting that Justyce is simply too sensitive and lacks a sense of humor.*

At this point, Jared and Tyler approach Manny, Justyce, and Blake. "Homies!" Jared says. When he sees how angry Justyce is, though, he disparagingly asks what "crawled up [his] ass." "Fuck you, Jared," Justyce says, to which Blake says, "Dude, don't disrespect my bros at *my* party." Manny says he and Justyce should leave, but Justyce points at Blake and tells him to watch out. "Wait, are you *threatening* me?" Blake asks. Laughing, Jared chimes in, saying, "Better watch out, B. You know Justyce grew up in the hood. He's gonna call up his gangsta homies to ride through on your ass and bust some ca—" Before he can finish, Justyce charges him, though Justyce himself sees nothing but red. When he starts seeing clearly again, Jared is "scrambling up from the floor with a split lip and a swelling eye," and Blake is bleeding out of his nose.

Finally, Justyce finds himself unable to contain his anger. Since his encounter with Officer Castillo, he has had to patiently sit through casual racism and insensitivity, unable to find an outlet for his feelings. Tonight, however, is different, since he has been drinking. Everything has been building up, and in this moment he feels incapable of holding back his frustrations. Nic Stone isn't condoning violence in this scene, but it's clear that she wants readers to understand how hard it would be for Justyce to keep holding onto his rage, since Blake and Jared are expressing such callous and problematic sentiments.

Manny is also bleeding out of his lip, but he's too busy restraining Justyce. "What the hell is your problem, Justyce?" Manny says. Angry that Manny isn't taking his side, Justyce tells him that he's "just as bad as" Jared and Blake. Going on, he says, "These dudes disrespect you—disrespect *us*—all the time, and you never say anything about it. You just go along with whatever they say." In response, Manny says that this is because Jared and the rest of him are his friends. "You're way too sensitive, man," he says to Justyce. "Lemme guess: that's what they said when you took offense at some racist joke, right?" Justyce replies. He then tells Manny that he's a "sellout" before pushing his way through the party and leaving, making his way to the main road and—he hopes—back to school.

The conversation Justyce has with Manny in this moment illustrates just how much Manny has internalized the casual racism of his peers. Rather than acknowledging the many ways in which people like Blake and Jared perpetuate bigotry, Manny chooses to ignore the uncomfortable things they say, fearing that he might be seen as "too sensitive." Because of this outlook, he himself accuses Justyce of taking offense too easily.

Justyce walks through rich neighborhoods for a while before Manny catches up to him in his Range Rover. Opening the door, he tells Justyce to get in, telling him that it's cold and that he's going the wrong way. "Dawg, if you care *anything* about this friendship, you will get your punk ass in the car right now," he says, but Justyce only turns around and walks the other way.

Despite his unwillingness to stand with Justyce at the party, Manny clearly still cares about his friend and wants to support him, worrying that Justyce will get himself into trouble if he continues to drunkenly wander through a predominantly white neighborhood. However, Justyce feels as if Manny has already betrayed him, so he rejects his friend's help.

JANUARY 19

"Dear Martin," Justyce writes. "You know, I don't get how you did it. Just being straight up. Every day I walk through the halls of that elitist-ass school, I feel like I don't belong there, and every time Jared or one of them opens their damn mouth, I'm reminded they agree." He also notes how difficult it is for him to turn on the television and see that another young black man has been shot, a constant reminder that "people look at [him] and see a threat instead of a human being." He tells Dr. King that he recently saw a white man on television arguing that cases like Tavarrius Jenkins's and Shemar Carson's "deflect from the issue of black-on-black crime." "How are black people supposed to know how to treat each other with respect when since we were brought over here, we've been told we're not respectable?" Justyce wonders.

After his fight with Blake and Jared at the party, it's evident that Justyce is more discouraged than ever. Moreover, his sense of social isolation has grown, which is why he reflects upon the fact that he doesn't fit in at Braselton Prep. This feeling of ostracization is only made worse by the way the media talks about young black men, framing the entire country's population of black teenagers as dangerous. No matter where he looks, then, Justyce has to confront unfair assumptions and biases.

Justyce asks Dr. King what he's "supposed to do." He doesn't want to act like Manny and pretend there's "nothing wrong with a white dude" using the n-word and asking his black friends to "help him exploit a black girl," he says. At the same time, though, he also doesn't want to be accused of being too "sensitive." "What do I do when my very identity is being mocked by people who refuse to admit there's a problem?" he asks.

The question Justyce poses to Dr. King in this diary entry speaks directly to the nature of his dilemma—namely, that he can't call people out on their racism when they refuse to admit the existence of racism in the first place. In this way, readers see how difficult it is to confront bigotry in a context that actively discourages open dialogue.

CHAPTER 11

The next morning, Doc comes to Justyce's dorm room. Justyce tells him to enter, but then he realizes that he's lying on the floor with his pants around his ankles. He fell asleep like this the night before, after coming home from the party and writing a diary entry. Now he's dreadfully hungover, and Doc is suddenly before him, giving him a Gatorade and telling him to sit in the desk chair, though Justyce rushes to the bathroom and throws up before reentering the room and asking why, exactly, Doc is there. Doc explains that Manny called him and asked him to check on Justyce. "He's really worried about you," Doc says. Although Justyce thinks he's in trouble and that Manny tattled on him, Doc dispels this idea, making it clear that he's not going to punish Justyce for drinking.

Justyce feels as if he has very few people willing or able to support him. However, this isn't entirely the case, as evidenced by the fact that Doc and Manny have worked together to make sure that he's all right. Doc's fatherly presence doesn't necessarily change anything that has happened, but it's worth noting that Justyce isn't completely on his own, though he most likely doesn't feel fully connected to Doc, who is much older, is half white, and has a PhD—all factors that set him apart from Justyce.

Letting his guard down, Justyce admits that he "messed up" the night before. When Doc asks what happened, Justyce says, "Manny really didn't tell you anything?" To prove this, Doc takes out his phone and plays the message Manny left him, in which he merely says that Justyce is "going through some things" and isn't answering his phone. "If you could just pop by there and make sure he's all right, I'd really appreciate it," Manny says on the voicemail. Launching into the story, Justyce explains that he has been on "high alert" ever since his encounter with Officer Castillo. "Noticing stuff I would've glossed over or tried to ignore before," he says. He then tells Doc about his "Dear Martin" project, saying that he's been trying to live like Dr. King.

That Justyce has been on "high alert" since his experience with Officer Castillo suggests that he was previously capable of ignoring the casual instances of racism that surround him at Braselton Prep. In fact, he even says that he used to be able to "gloss over" certain microaggressions, willing himself not to pay attention to them. This, it seems, is exactly what Manny does. In the aftermath of having experienced racial profiling, though, Justyce finds it impossible to ignore even subtle manifestations of prejudice, since he knows that these smaller instances ultimately normalize racism and thereby make it possible for people like Officer Castillo to perpetuate bigotry on a larger scale.

Justyce tells Doc that his "Dear Martin" project was going all right until last night. He tells him that his father—who died when he was eleven—had PTSD from being in the military. He was an alcoholic, Justyce explains, and used to get drunk, fly into "rages," and hit Justyce's mother. One time, Justyce says, he "caught a glimpse of his eyes," and he saw that there was "nothing in them," as if his entire body was on "autopilot." "I think something like that happened last night," Justyce says. He adds that he doesn't want to be like his father, who died in a "fiery car crash with a blood-alcohol level of point two five." Still, though, he can't help but get angry when he thinks about Manny letting Jared and Blake say such racist things.

Justyce tells Doc intimate details about his life. In doing so, he turns to Doc for support, perhaps even seeing him as a stand-in father in certain ways, since his own father is dead and was such a problematic figure in his life. This, it seems, is what Justyce needs in order to face the complicated emotions he's been having recently. His mother focuses on encouraging him but not on giving him emotional guidance, so he turns to Doc in this moment. However, Doc is only his teacher and so not as accessible to him as a true guardian might otherwise be.

Doc tells Justyce that he "grew up like Manny." Until he was a sophomore in high school, he was the only person of color in school. In tenth grade, though, he transferred to a school in the city. "You remember how it felt to realize you only have so much control over how people see you?" Doc asks, and Justyce says he'd never be able to forget this. "That's what it was like for me at the new school," Doc says. "Everybody saw me as black, even with the light skin and green eyes. The black kids expected me to know all the cultural references and slang, and the white kids expected me to 'act' black. It was a rude awakening for me. When you spend your whole life being 'accepted' by white people, it's easy to ignore history and hard to face stuff that's still problematic, you feel me?"

When Doc tells Justyce what it's like to grow up amongst white people, he helps clarify what, exactly, is holding Manny back from standing up against racism. Justyce, on the other hand, has experienced overt racism and, as such, finds it easier to identify bigotry. But this, Doc suggests, isn't the case for Manny, who has grown accustomed to overlooking his peers' "problematic" views regarding race.

Doc tells Justyce that he will only "thrive" if he's at peace with himself. "People are gonna disrespect you, but so what?" he says. He insists that people like Jared have no "bearing" on whether or not Justyce will be successful. At the same time, though, Justyce points out that it's demoralizing to "work hard and earn your way" just to have "people suggest" that you're "not worthy." Still, though, Doc sticks to his point, telling Justyce that his doctoral advisor was extremely critical of his work because he used to wear cornrows. "Told me to my face I'd never succeed," Doc says. "Jus, if I'd listened to him, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you." With this, he gets up and leaves Justyce alone, telling him to get some sleep.

The message Doc delivers to Justyce in this scene is helpful but somewhat hard to swallow. Indeed, he essentially suggests that Justyce simply has to learn to succeed in the face of racism. This implies that he'll never manage to escape bigotry, which is a depressing notion. At the same time, though, Doc also emphasizes the fact that only Justyce can determine who he wants to be. If he values himself, then, he will succeed.

CHAPTER 12

On Tuesday of the following week, Justyce notices both Manny and Jared are absent. He sees Tyler, Kyle, and Blake grouped closely together and whispering, throwing him dirty looks. After school, he finally sees Jared in the parking lot. He's standing by his car with the rest of his friends, and he gives Justyce a ruthless look. Strangely enough, Jared's face is even more battered than Justyce would have expected. When he returns to his dorm room, he's surprised to find Manny lying on his bed and waiting for him. Immediately, Justyce begins to apologize, but Manny cuts him off, saying, "Save it. I know you didn't mean it." Pausing, Justyce admits that he *did* mean everything he said, but that he "didn't really consider the bigger picture." Manny accepts this and also admits that he didn't have Justyce's "best interests in mind," and the boys decide to "call it even."

It's clear that Justyce has heeded what Doc told him about what it's like to grow up as a black child amongst wealthy white families. Now that he has considered what it must have been like for Manny to spend his entire life surrounded by people like Jared and Blake, Justyce finds it easier to understand why he doesn't call out his friends' bigotry. However, this doesn't mean that Justyce agrees with this worldview. Rather, it simply means that he recognizes that Manny experiences racism in his own way, and though Justyce doesn't like how he responds to adversity, he has learned to accept that people process discrimination differently.

Justyce notices that Manny has a swollen lip, so he asks what happened. Manny explains that he went to a "festival" on Saturday night with Jared, Blake, and the others. He admits that what Justyce said about him being a "sellout" got him thinking, which made it hard to remain quiet every time Jared said something insensitive at the festival. Finally, Jared made a racist joke about a black woman walking nearby, and Manny "called him on it." Jared only rolled his eyes and told Manny to "stop being so fucking sensitive." Manny spent the entirety of the following day stewing over this incident, thinking about how Justyce was right all along.

In the same way that Justyce has come to see Manny's perspective about how to deal with racism, Manny has started considering Justyce's point of view. In fact, Justyce's anger has helped him recognize just how problematic his peers are when it comes to racism and bigotry. In this moment, then, readers see how helpful it is for Manny and Justyce to have each other, since they're otherwise surrounded by white people who don't spend time thinking about their own biases.

Continuing his story about his swollen lip, Manny says that he decided to quit the basketball team after realizing Justyce was right about his friends being racist. This shocks Justyce, but Manny admits that he actually hates basketball. "Only reason I started is cuz when you're the tall black kid at school, that's what people expect you to do." Resolved to quit the team, Manny went to the coach's office that morning to break the news. When he arrived, Jared was in the office, too. "When I said I was quitting, he made a 'joke' about how I couldn't until *Massah* set me free." Hearing this, Manny attacked him. Finishing this story, Manny thanks Justyce for helping him see the truth about his racist friends. He then embraces Justyce, enveloping him in a hearty hug.

The fact that Manny only played basketball because everyone expected him to is a perfect example of how the assumptions white people set forth about black people can actually enter into the way black people conceive of themselves. This demonstrates why it's dangerous to perpetuate certain narratives, even in jest, ultimately clarifying just how destructive it is for people like Jared to make racist jokes. Fortunately for Manny, he has Justyce's friendship to help him recognize how detrimental certain narratives are to his own sense of self.

JANUARY 23

"I've got a lot on my mind, Martin," Justyce writes in his diary. He explains a conversation he and Manny had with Manny's dad, Mr. Rivers, the night before. Narrating the story, he explains that Mr. Rivers comes into the basement, where Manny and Justyce are playing video games. He sits between them on the couch and tells them that he heard one of his employees call him a "racial slur" that day. "For real?" Justyce asks. "Yep," he replies. "White kid, few years post-undergrad. I hired him three months ago." Mr. Rivers says that this incident reminded him of Manny's recent trouble with Jared. "I spent the rest of the day wondering if you being in that situation was my fault," he says. When the boys express their confusion, Mr. Rivers says he hasn't spoken frankly with Manny about racism.

In this conversation, Mr. Rivers suggests that black parents ought to be forthright with their children about the existence and prevalence of racism. Despite having attained success and power, he still faces racism frequently. This is a disheartening fact, since it confirms Justyce's fear that he'll never be able to escape bigotry, regardless of what he does with his life. It also aligns with Doc's suggestion that Justyce focus on what he wants to make of himself, since he's going to have to face racism regardless.

Mr. Rivers tells Manny and Justyce that he wasn't surprised to hear his employee call him a racial slur. He knows that Manny would be surprised if he were in his shoes, but he himself has become used to such treatment. "Perhaps if I'd been more open with my own experiences, Jared's words wouldn't have been so astonishing to Manny," he says. He then says that he encounters racism on a regular basis, despite the fact that he's successful and powerful. "My point is the world is full of guys like Jared and that employee," he says, "and most of them will never change. So it's up to you fellas to push through it. Probably best not to talk with your fists in the future…But at least you have an idea of what you're up against. Try not to let it stop you from doing your best, all right?"

Again, Mr. Rivers's advice echoes Doc's sentiment, which suggests that young black men like Manny and Justyce ought to focus on themselves rather than on the racism they're sure to encounter. Rather than ignoring the existence of bigotry, though, Mr. Rivers urges Manny and Justyce to recognize its influence while at the same time resisting discouragement. "Try not to let it stop you from doing your best," he says, emphasizing the importance of striving for success in the face of adversity.

Hearing Mr. Rivers talk about racism discourages Justyce. He admits in his diary that hearing Manny's father talk about this despite his success is quite disheartening. "Hearing it made me realize I still had hope that once I *really* achieve some things, I won't have to deal with racist BS anymore," he writes. "That's obviously not the case, though, is it? What do I do with that?"

Although Mr. Rivers wants Manny and Justyce to focus on doing their "best," Justyce primarily fixates on the fact that racism will seemingly never vanish from his life, no matter how hard he works. Once again, then, he feels discouraged and hopeless.

CHAPTER 13-14

On Saturday morning, Manny picks Justyce up in his Range Rover. Their plan is to go hiking, but Manny is in a terrible mood because he has just learned that Jared's father is pressing charges against him for "assaulting" Jared. Because of this, he doesn't feel like hiking, so Justyce agrees to simply drive around with him. As they cruise through town, they listen to a new song by one of their favorite rappers. "Lace up them track spikes; get ready to run / Here comes the fun, wait for the sound of the gun," the rapper boasts in the chorus.

Readers should recall that Manny and Jared have been close friends for a long time—they grew up together. This doesn't stop Jared's father from pressing charges against Manny, though, despite the fact that this is the first time the two boys have ever gotten into a fight. It's hard to believe that Jared's father's decision to press charges isn't racially motivated, especially considering how much entrenched racism his son sets forth on a daily basis.

Justyce notices at a stoplight that a white man is giving him and Manny a furious look in the car next to them. "This dude is giving me the creeps," Justyce says over the loud music. Responding to the man's animosity, he reaches out and turns down the music. When the light changes, though, Manny turns it up again. "I bet he's totally profiling us right now," Manny says. "Probably thinks we're drug dealers or something." When he sees that this statement has unsettled Justyce, Manny apologizes, saying he forgot what happened to Justyce at the hands of Officer Castillo. "Will you assholes turn that goddamn racket down!" the man yells at the next stoplight. "What'd you say, sir? I couldn't hear you over the music!" Manny yells. "I SAID TURN THAT SHIT DOWN!" the man screams.

Again, the difference between Manny and Justyce's experience with racism comes to the forefront of the novel. In this scene, Justyce becomes quite nervous because he has experienced racial profiling firsthand. Manny, on the other hand, has only ever dealt with casual, everyday forms of racism, most often set forth by his friends. As a result, he isn't as scared as Justyce when he sees that the white driver next to them is so unnecessarily angry.

Justyce suggests that Manny should turn down the music, but Manny refuses, saying, "Man, please. This is *my* car. I'm done bending over backwards to appease white people." He then turns up the music, and the man next to them screams, "*YOU WORTHLESS NIGGER SONS OF BITCHES!*" This astounds Manny and Justyce. "Forget that guy, Manny. Let's just stay calm," Justyce says, but Manny refuses, leaning over Justyce, giving the other driver the middle finger, and saying, "Hey, fuck you, man!" Justyce tells Manny to calm down, and just as he's reaching to turn down the music, he hears Manny yell, "Oh *SHIT*!" and then three deafening *bangs* sound out from the other car.

The white driver's wildly disproportionate response to Manny and Justyce's loud music is yet another instance of racism. And though Manny doesn't necessarily see him as a serious threat, it quickly becomes clear that he is ready and willing to attack the two boys, simply because they are black.

TRANSCRIPT FROM EVENING NEWS, JANUARY 26

"Good evening, and welcome to the Channel 5 News at 5," a reporter reads on the evening news. The reporter explains that two "young men" were shot at a traffic light that afternoon. "According to the wife of the shooter—who was riding in the passenger seat—there was a brief dispute over loud music before shots were fired from one vehicle to the other." The reporter also says that one of the teenagers died on the way to the hospital. The other is in "critical condition." As for the shooter, he has been identified as Garrett Tison, an off-duty police officer.

That Manny and Justyce have been shot simply for playing loud music once again debunks Jared's out-of-touch argument that racism and inequality no longer exist in the United States. Within the course of a single year, Justyce has been the victim of two racially motivated acts of aggression. What's more, both of the men who antagonize him are police officers, the very people who are supposed to protect people like him. This suggests that bigotry is still deeply intertwined with the country's foundational modes of governance. It's also worth noting that, though this scenario might seem unlikely to some readers, Stone based this plot point on the 2012 shooting of a seventeen-year-old black boy named Jordan Davis, who was murdered by a white man after refusing to turn the music in his car down.


FEBRUARY 1

"Dear Martin," Justyce writes in his diary. "He's gone. Never did anything to anyone, and now Manny's gone. I can't do this anymore."

In this brief chapter, readers learn that Manny has died. It's important to note that Justyce goes out of his way to say that Manny "never did anything to anyone," ultimately emphasizing just how unfair it is that an innocent boy like Manny has been killed simply because of the color of his skin.

CHAPTER 15

Manny's parents wait 27 days to have Manny's funeral, giving Justyce enough time to recover so that he can attend. Sitting at the funeral, Justyce wishes they'd gone ahead and had it without him. Wanting to get up and leave, he realizes that he couldn't walk away even if he wanted to, since there "are media people everywhere outside." In the weeks after Manny's death, the media has begun to "speculat[e]" about what happened, suggesting that he "threatened Garret Tison," or that he and Justyce "threw something into Tison's Suburban," or that Justyce was carrying a gun.

The scene in which Tison shoots Manny and Justyce is narrated from a third-person point of view. This is significant, since Dear Martin *contains sections in which Justyce becomes the narrator, recording what has happened in his diary. Consequently, the fact that the shooting is rendered in the third-person erases any uncertainty regarding what happened—readers know for sure that Justyce and Manny did nothing violent or truly threatening that would justify Garrett Tison's use of a weapon. Readers thus see just how unfair it is that the media has begun to set forth unfounded speculations about the incident and to present Justyce and Manny in a negative light. This is how cultural biases spread, and Stone makes it clear that the narrative surrounding this shooting has already begun to spin out of Justyce's control.*

At the funeral, Justyce sees SJ and remembers that she came to visit him in the hospital. She stood next to his bed and held his hand, weeping the whole time. He also spots Jared and Manny's other white friends at the funeral, and he suddenly feels incensed when Jared turns around and looks him in the eyes. At the same time, though, he sees that Jared's eyes are "haunted," realizing that he's "feeling the same way" as him. This realization only makes him angrier.

It's apparent that SJ still cares for Justyce, but the awkwardness in their relationship unfortunately estranges her from him so that she can't give him the support he needs in this moment. Jared's sadness at Manny's funeral is worth keeping in mind as the novel progresses, since his friend's death ultimately changes the way he thinks about race relations in the United States.

After the funeral service, Justyce walks to the bathroom and encounters SJ. Just as they begin to talk, he tells her that he misses her, but then his mother appears. When he introduces SJ to her, she curtly says hello. Taking the hint, SJ leaves them alone, and Justyce's mother asks with a concerned look on her face how he knows her. "I saw how she was looking at you," she says, but Justyce asks her not to start this conversation at Manny's funeral. Still, she says, "Just sayin' watch yourself with that one." This makes him want to tell her that SJ has helped him "believe he was big while everyone else wanted to keep him small," but he doesn't say anything.

Justyce's relationship with SJ doesn't give him the support he needs because they haven't fully worked out what, exactly, they mean to one another. To make things even more complicated, his mother discourages him from dating her, effectively cutting him off from one of the only people who might lend him a sense of comfort and resilience in this time of hardship.

When Justyce and his mother leave the church, they find themselves flanked by reporters. "What's it like knowing it could've been YOU in that casket?" one asks. "Do YOU have to be such an asshole, man?" Justyce replies, but his mother tells him not to say anything else, informing the reporters that he has no further comments.

In his brief interaction with the reporters outside Manny's funeral, Justyce sees just how eager people in the media are to exploit his experience in order to get a compelling sound bite or story. It's clear from this reporter's insensitive question that Justyce's emotions don't factor into the media's treatment of what happened.

TISON INDICTMENT STEP FORWARD FOR JUSTICE OR GRAND JURY BLUNDER?

In an article printed by a local paper, a staff writer announces that a grand jury "returned a multiple-count indictment against former Atlanta police officer Garrett Tison in connection with a January shooting involving two teenaged boys." The writer notes that this indictment serves as a "glaring contrast" to Shemar Carson's and Tavarrius Jenkins's cases. "Two of the charges—aggravated assault and felony murder—have many members of the community in an uproar," the journalist writes. The writer then prints a quote by Tison's neighbor. "The man was defending himself from thugs," says the neighbor. "I've known Garrett for twenty-five years. If he says those boys had a gun, they had a gun." Furthermore, another police officer suggests that the courts are "out to make an example" of Tison. "Prosecutor pulled the race card, and the grand jury bought it hook, line, and sinker," the officer says.

Even the title of this article indicates that the media is already starting to inundate the public with unfounded speculations that will possibly sway mass opinion and obfuscate what really happened when Tison murdered Manny. Readers know that Tison deserves to be indicted, but an indictment is not a sentence, and if this article is any indication of how people will react to the story, it seems all too likely that the jury might assume the worst about Manny and Justyce in order to create a sympathetic view of Officer Tison.

CHAPTER 16

Six weeks after Manny's death, his parents invite Justyce over for dinner. They tell him they want to "commemorate" the indictment of Garrett Tison. Still, though, Justyce feels uncomfortable about going to his dead best friend's house. When he arrives, Mr. Rivers and Mrs. Rivers seat him at the table and serve his favorite meal. They ask him questions about how he's faring in the aftermath of the attack. Eventually, they tell him that their nephew, Quan Banks, heard what happened and wants to see him. Quan is in juvenile detention for killing Officer Castillo, and he has asked the Rivers to tell Justyce that he wants him to visit. Quan and Justyce went to elementary school together, but Justyce can't fathom why he would want to talk to him. Nonetheless, he agrees to visit.

Justyce was very close to Manny, meaning that he knew his parents rather well. However, the Rivers aren't necessarily in a position to give him the support he needs in this emotional time, since they are themselves dealing with an extraordinary amount of grief. As a result, Justyce's visit to their house is more of a favor to them than it is a chance to commiserate with adults who might give him guidance.

Before Justyce leaves, the Rivers give him a **watch** they were going to give to Manny on his eighteenth birthday. It's an expensive heirloom that used to belong to Manny's grandfather, and it has Manny's initials carved into the underside of the watch face. Justyce feels too overwhelmed to accept it, but he puts it on his wrist anyway.

It's noteworthy that Manny's parents give Justyce something to wear on his wrists, a place on his body that reminds him of Officer Castillo placing him in handcuffs. In a symbolic sense, then, the memory of Manny is inextricably associated with the memory of police brutality.

CHAPTER 17

Several days later, Justyce visits Quan. Sitting across a small table, Quan talks to Justyce about Manny's death. "Yo, when I saw that cop's face on the news—" he begins, but then he says, "Nah, never mind, never mind." Curious, Justyce urges him along, and Quan tells him that Garrett Tison was Officer Castillo's partner on the police force. "Tison was there the night I…uhh…," he says. "The night you shot Castillo," Justyce offers. "Allegedly," Quan replies. This information profoundly unsettles Justyce, who can't help but wonder if what Quan did made Tison more likely to kill Manny. "Who's to say Garrett Tison's quickness to pull the trigger wasn't caused by seeing his partner killed by a black kid?" Justyce wonders.

During this exchange, Justyce has to confront the uncomfortable fact that there are people—like Quan—whose behavior actively contributes to the racist stereotypes surrounding young black men. This makes him justifiably upset, since he feels as if he can see a direct link between Quan's violence and Officer Tison's racism. Of course, bigotry is very complicated, and it's unlikely that Tison was so hateful toward black people simply because of one incident. Nonetheless, Justyce grapples with this idea—an idea that makes it hard for him to resist resenting young men like Quan.

Justyce asks Quan why he killed Castillo. Quan is hesitant to answer, since he doesn't want to admit to having actually murdered Castillo. Still, he eventually says, "Aiight, listen up: where I come from, resistance is existence, homie. Every day I woke up in my hood coulda been my last. You wanna survive? Get wit some niggas who won't turn on you, and y'all do whatever it takes to stay at the top, you feel me? My dudes…they're like family to me. They've got my back as long as I have theirs. Somebody tells you to make a move, you make a move. No questions asked." Justyce disagrees with this sentiment, saying that he grew up in the same neighborhood as Quan but hasn't resorted to a life of violence. "Last I checked, *your* way got you capped and Manny killed," Quan replies.

Quan outlines why a young black man like himself would be compelled to join a gang in the first place. What he says most likely resonates with Justyce, even if he doesn't agree with the violent undertones of Quan's message. Justyce has been experiencing a sense of social and cultural isolation, so Quan's idea of joining a "family" likely makes sense to him. To add to this feeling, he can't deny that his "way" of handling racism has led to Manny's death, though it's worth acknowledging that the incident with Officer Tyson most likely would have happened even if Justyce were in a gang.

Quan urges Justyce to "face reality," saying that he wanted to talk to Justyce after what happened because he knew Justyce would understand what it's like to face racism. Quan has a counselor in juvenile detention, he says, but she's white, so he doesn't think she understands. "You know what, Quan? I feel you," Justyce says. Quan then tells a story about a white guy he met in juvenile detention. This boy woke up one night and stabbed his dad eight times. Because he had a good lawyer, though, he was only charged for assault and spent a mere 60 days at a "youth development campus" before being released. "Meanwhile, they locked my ass up for a year on a petty theft charge," Quan says. "I think that was prolly the moment I gave up. Why try to do right if people will always look at me and assume wrong?"

Slowly, Justyce begins to agree with Quan's ideas. In particular, he relates to the feeling of being misunderstood by white people. He also probably connects to what Quan says about privileged white people receiving special treatment. "Why try to do right if people will always look at me and assume wrong?" Quan asks, a sentiment that stands in stark opposition to Doc and Mr. Rivers's notion that young black people have to do their "best" in the face of adversity.

Quan tells Justyce that he needs "a crew to roll with." Telling him that there's "strength in numbers," he urges Justyce to call Martel Montgomery, the leader of the Black Jihad. Before Justyce leaves, Quan gives him Trey's number, saying Trey will put him in touch with Martel. And though Justyce says he doesn't want the number, he makes sure to remember it on his way out, and even enters it into his cellphone when he returns to his car after leaving the juvenile detention center.

Justyce knows he shouldn't join the Black Jihad, but he can't keep himself from flirting with the idea. After all, the notion of having a support network comprised of people who know what it's like to face discrimination appeals to him, especially since this is something he's craved ever since his encounter with Officer Castillo.

CHAPTER 18

Justyce has a harder time resisting the urge to call Trey than he anticipated. While he's spending the afternoon in Doc's classroom to keep himself from calling Trey, SJ bursts in and tells them to turn on the news. When they do, they see a picture of Justyce on the screen. It's from the Halloween party, when Jared, Manny, Justyce, and the others dressed as stereotypes. Except, everyone else has been cropped out of the photo, leaving Justyce alone in his "thug" costume. "We've heard about his grades, SAT scores, and admission to an Ivy League school," says a news anchor, "but a picture speaks a thousand words. This kid grew up in the same neighborhood as the young man accused of murdering Garret Tison's partner more or less on a whim."

When an anchor speculates about Justyce's moral character on television, readers see how willing the media is to publicly denigrate a person based on faulty information. This news anchor apparently has no qualms with showing an inaccurate presentation of Justyce. The fact that the other boys have been cropped out of the photograph is especially significant, since Blake was wearing a Ku Klux Klan outfit. Indeed, whoever decided to run this picture on television apparently thinks dressing like a "thug" is more troubling than dressing like a member of a hate group.

Justyce knows that many people believe in his innocence, since entire groups of people across the nation have started wearing "Justice for JAM" shirts ("JAM" stands for Justyce and Manny) and have been "riding with their music loud from 12:19 until 12:21 every Saturday afternoon to commemorate the time of the argument between them and Officer Tison. However, Justyce also knows from observing the Shemar Carson and Travarrius Jenkins court cases that "it really doesn't take more than a photo to sway mass opinion." In keeping with this, an "anti-gang violence pundit" on the news talks about Justyce's supposedly suspicious background, saying, "I mean it's obvious this kid was leading a double life. You know what they say, Steven: you can remove the kid from the thug life…But ya can't remove the thug life from the kid."

The "anti-gang violence pundit" on the television makes assumptions about Justyce's life and moral character based on very little, pointing to his clothing (which doesn't even accurately represent how he normally dresses) to draw grand conclusions about him. Furthermore, when Justyce acknowledges that "it really doesn't take more than a photo to sway mass opinion," Stone invites readers to consider the outsized influence the media has on the public discourse, especially when it comes to racial issues.

Justyce, SJ, and Doc are beside themselves as they watch the news. "It wouldn't surprise me if both [Justyce and Manny] had ties to [Quan] Banks," the pundit says. "Who's to say Officer Tison didn't see them on the scene the night his partner was murdered right before his eyes? You have to put the pieces together, Steven: Garrett Tison and Tommy Castillo respond to a complaint about loud music, there's a Range Rover parked in the driveway of the offending domicile, and some thug kid pops out of the backseat with a shotgun. Now that we're learning about all these connections, who's to say it wasn't the same Range Rover Emmanuel Rivers was driving?"

Again, the pundit feels free to make exaggerated speculations about what happened between Officer Tison, Justyce, and Manny. These speculations are irresponsible, since they will undoubtedly impact the broader discourse surrounding the case. And yet, this pundit doesn't seem to mind that most of these ideas are little more than conjecture.

Just then, Jared calls SJ. She begrudgingly answers, stepping out into the hall as Justyce confides in Doc, telling him how discouraged he is about everything. He says that he has stopped writing to Dr. King, feeling like his "experiment" to live like the reverend "obviously didn't work." Hearing this, Doc tells him that people are only slandering his name because they feel uncomfortable with the truth. "That idiot 'pundit' would rather believe you and Manny were thugs than believe a twenty-year veteran cop made a snap judgment based on skin color," he says. "He identifies with the cop. If the cop is capable of murder, it means he's capable of the same." When Justyce says that this shouldn't be *his* problem, Doc agrees, but he also says that Justyce has to face it regardless.

Doc has a good point when he says that people like the pundit avoid the truth about Officer Tison because they identify with him. It's easier for the pundit to make unfair and negative assumptions about Justyce and Manny than it is for him to entertain the idea that the very people he looks up to (namely, veteran police officers) are flawed. Of course, this way of looking at the situation doesn't necessarily help Justyce, but acknowledging the biases running throughout society might at least help him remember that there's nothing wrong with himself.

Justyce asks Doc how his advice could possibly help him. "So why even try to be 'good'?" he asks. In response, Doc says, "You can't change how other people think and act, but you're in full control of *you*. When it comes down to it, the only question that matters is this: If nothing in the world ever changes, what type of man are *you* gonna be?" When SJ comes back, she tells Doc and Justyce that Jared apologized, saying that what's happening on the news is his fault. This frustrates Justyce, who accuses Jared of suddenly wanting to be some kind of white savior, but Doc interrupts and says, "Correct me if I'm wrong, but Manny and Jared were good friends, right?" He then tells SJ and Justyce to go easy on Jared, since "he's grieving too."

After everything that has happened to him, Justyce is beginning to lose hope. To be fair, there's very little reason for him to be optimistic about anything, though it's worth noting that Jared seems to have undergone some kind of change. This doesn't mean that anything else in Justyce's life is about to change, however, and though he recognizes that Jared might be feeling some of the same emotions that he himself is working through, it's clear that he now feels more alone than ever.

Doc excuses himself from the room, leaving Justyce alone with SJ, who immediately apologizes for "bailing" on him after the debate tournament. When he asks her why she did that, she says that she "panicked," saying, "Well, there was Melo…and I didn't know where you stood with her or how I fit? Anyway. Point is, it won't happen again."

Justyce feels isolated and hopeless, but he can at least take some comfort in the fact that SJ has stopped avoiding him. However, his mother still disapproves of him dating a white person, and this continues to stand in the way of his relationship with SJ. In turn, SJ's apology doesn't do much to alleviate Justyce's feelings of loneliness.

VP RELEASED FOR RABBLE-ROUSING!

A newspaper article explains that Julian Rivers has "stepped down" from his position as executive vice president of Davidson Wells Financial Corporation. "According to CEO Chuck Wallace, photographs of Mr. Rivers on the front lines of an Atlanta march that shut down traffic for hours last week triggered the loss of several high-profile clients and approximately $80 million in revenue for the asset management firm," the article reads. A quote from the CEO claims that the company and Mr. Rivers have "mutually agreed to part ways."

Considering that his son was killed by a racist white police officer, it makes sense that Mr. Rivers would be involved with groups protesting police brutality. And yet, his company doesn't seem to care about this, prioritizing their "high-profile clients" (i.e., rich white people) over keeping him as an employee—a response that underlines the ways in which racism is intertwined with many powerful institutions.

CHAPTER 19

Justyce takes a bus from Braselton Prep to Martel Montgomery's house. He wouldn't be on his way to this house if he hadn't read the article about Mr. Rivers, which depressed him greatly. In the aftermath of Mr. Rivers's resignation, Manny's parent have decided to move. They had Justyce over again and told him that the company presented Manny's father with an "ultimatum" to either "sever all ties with" the Justice for JAM movement or to resign. Given that the Rivers "more or less sponsored the Atlanta chapter of the Justice for JAM movement," Mr. Rivers was not going to disassociate from the organization. Consequently, he packed his things and left the company.

Justyce finds himself surrounded by stories of discrimination and bigotry, realizing that even Manny's powerful parents have to deal with the many racist sentiments that have arisen since their son's death. To ask a father to cut ties with an organization created to commemorate the life of his son is an undeniably coldhearted thing to do, but it perfectly illustrates the fact that society is—on the whole—willing to ignore its biases. Disheartened by this, Justyce has decided to seek out people who understand what it feels like to face discrimination and ostracization.

Justyce is going to Martel Montgomery's house because he "has no idea where else to go or who else to turn to." He values SJ's camaraderie, but doesn't feel she can help truly help him navigate racial injustice. He knows he could talk to Doc about what he's feeling, but he's tired of Doc's advice to "stay good even though the world craps on you." One of the only people he thinks actually understands what he's feeling is Deuce Diggs, the rapper he and Manny were listening to when Officer Tison shot them. "But of course Jus doesn't have access to Deuce Diggs," Stone writes. As a result, he's been thinking about what Quan said—namely, that the Black Jihad is "like family." "That's really why he's on this bus right now: he's sick of feeling alone," Stone notes.

"Sick of feeling alone," Justyce finally succumbs to his desire to reach out to the Black Jihad. This is a last resort, an idea that is made especially clear by the fact that he considers both Doc and SJ while riding the bus to Martel's. As he thinks about them, readers might get the sense that he feels guilty for not turning to them instead of the Black Jihad. Nevertheless, it makes a certain kind of sense that he wants to associate with people like Trey and Quan, since they grew up in the same neighborhood as him and know what it's like to face constant adversity. This doesn't mean what he's doing is a good idea, but Nic Stone goes out of her way to illustrate why young men like Justyce are often drawn to gangs, which provide them with a sense of "family."

Justyce gets off the bus and makes his way to Martel's house, finding Trey and a number of other gang members on the porch. They laugh, calling him "Smarty-Pants," but then they tell him to go inside to find Martel. Justyce has heard about Martel for his entire life, but he's never seen him. Now, he's surprised to discover that the inside of the infamous gang leader's house is beautifully decorated with African tribal masks, hieroglyphics, and paintings. Martel welcomes him into the living room, and Justyce notices that he has a tracking device on his ankle. He's also wearing a "dashiki shirt and kufi hat," and he thanks Justyce for noticing the art on his walls. "I like to surround myself with reminders of ancient Kemet so the boys and I never forget our imperial roots," he says.

In contrast to the predominantly white environment of Braselton Prep, Justyce has now entered a context in which blackness is a thing to be celebrated. Martel tells him that he likes to "surround" himself with "reminders" of a time when Egypt was untouched by Europeans—or, in other words, reminders of an all-black culture, one uninfluenced by white people. In turn, Justyce no longer has to think about standing out because of his race.

Martel tells Justyce that there is "royal blood flowing through [his] veins." "Never forget," he says, "your ancestors survived a transatlantic journey, built this nation from the ground up, and maintained a semblance of humanity, even when the very conditions of their existence suggested they were less than human. 'Jihad' is the act of striving, persevering." As he listens, Justyce feels soothed by Martel's voice, noting that Quan was right when he said that he would feel "welcomed." When Martel asks why he's come, Justyce explains everything that has happened in the past few months. By the time he's finished, he's lying on Martel's Egyptian rug and feeling relieved about having finally found somebody to talk to about such difficult topics.

For the first time, Justyce feels like he belongs. He even feels comfortable talking about Manny's death and his encounter with Officer Castillo—subjects that would be difficult to discuss with other people in his life. By coming to Martel's house, then, Justyce feels as if he's found a way to process all of the hatred he has encountered in the last several months.

Martel gets up to get Justyce a glass of alcohol. While he's gone, Justyce looks around and sees a **sawed-off shotgun** beneath the coffee table. He suddenly realizes that he shouldn't be in this house, regardless of how "chill Martel seems." Just then, though, Martel returns and gives him the alcohol, saying, "So, the illusion wore off, huh? Seeing some truth now? You ready to strike back?" Before he can answer, Trey runs into the living room with several other gang members. "Yo, check this out," he says, giving his phone to Martel. When Martel gives the phone to Justyce, Justyce see a picture of Blake below a headline that reads, "*JUSTYCE McALLISTER'S VIOLENT PAST: A FORMER VICTIM SPEAKS OUT*." The article, Justyce learns, is about how Blake has told the press that Justyce attacked him at his birthday party.

Justyce's comfort suddenly disappears when he sees the shotgun, which reminds him that—no matter how much he might relate to the Black Jihad—he is not a violent person. Just when he realizes that joining the Black Jihad isn't a productive way to deal with his anger and loneliness, he sees that the media has once again taken something out of context to make him look bad.

"Hell yeah, bruh!" says one of the gang members. "You scrap like this dude say you do, you can roll with us anytime." "For real," says another member. "You more like us than I realized!" This is too much for Justyce, who suddenly jumps up from the rug and runs out of the house.

Rather than joining the Black Jihad, Justyce flees. Hearing what Blake has told the media doesn't encourage him to join the gang—instead, the shock of finding this out helps drive him away, perhaps because he realizes that associating with gang members would only align with the inaccurate way the media wants to portray him. In defiance of this representation, then, he leaves Martel and the other gang members.

CHAPTER 20

Justyce goes straight to SJ's house. Mrs. Friedman greets him at the door with surprising warmth, ushering him inside and saying that she and her husband have missed him, since he hasn't been coming over to spend time with SJ recently. Justyce is touched and surprised by how much SJ's parents care about him. After a few moments of conversation, he finally makes his way to SJ's room. She's surprised to see him, but invites him in, embarrassedly apologizing for her parents, since she can guess that they gushed over him. "You're literally *all* they talk about these days," she says.

Justyce's discovery that SJ's parents care so much about him comes at a good time, since he's searching for acceptance and support. Although he may not be able to identify with them as white people, he can still feel supported by them as long as they treat him with respect. In this moment, he learns that they do indeed have quite a lot of respect for him, and this helps reassure him that his decision to leave Martel's house was a good one.

SJ asks Justyce why he's come to see her. He tries to answer but can't find the right words. "Everything okay, Jus?" she asks, touching his wrist, where the handcuffs gouged into his skin on the night Castillo arrested him. Looking for a moment at his wrists, he "feels a weight slip off his shoulders," so he stands and pulls her to her feet, "wrap[ping] her in a hug that lifts her off her feet." With his face buried in her hair, he says, "I almost joined a gang today." He then explains what happened at Martel's house and about the visit he paid to Quan in juvenile detention. As he does so, he begins to cry, and though he'd normally be mortified by this, he's not embarrassed at all, since this is "the best he's felt since…well, since before he can remember."

No longer letting his mother's disapproval interfere with his feelings, Justyce embraces SJ. Although he has known all along that she is there for him, the undefined nature of their relationship has ultimately stood in the way of her ability to fully support him in these difficult times. Now, though, they stop holding back from one another, and it becomes clear that their relationship will help Justyce continue to resist the pull of the Black Jihad.

As he stands there hugging SJ, Justyce imagines Manny watching him and saying, "*Took you long enough, fool.*" "Justyce, do you like me?" SJ asks. "Like…I know you're going through a lot right now…" She then says that she can't keep trying to figure out how he feels about her. She has liked him since tenth grade, she says, but she doesn't know how to "read" him. Because of this, she simply asks him if he likes her, and though he hesitates at first (unsure of what exactly to say), he finally replies by saying, "S, I like you." "Why do I feel like there's a 'but'?" she asks. He says that he's been afraid to tell her that he likes her because his mother wouldn't approve of him dating a white person. "But I don't care anymore," he says. They then agree to date each other.

During this exchange, readers see why SJ has been unable to fully support Justyce in the aftermath of Manny's death. Although she cares deeply about him, she has been trying to protect her own feelings. Now that they've both expressed that they like each other, though, there's nothing standing between them.

TRANSCRIPT FROM NIGHTLY NEWS, MAY 21

A news anchor reports that a fire broke out at Garrett Tison's house. This fire, the anchor says, was "deliberately set." Going on, the anchor adds that the police have "apprehended three teenage boys who were seen in the area on the night of the incident." "Tison's trial in connection with the January shooting that left one teenager dead and another wounded is set to begin approximately five weeks from today," the anchors says.

Despite Justyce and SJ's newfound happiness, things continue to get worse surrounding Officer Tison's trial. Although the burning of Tison's house won't necessarily hurt the jury's chances of finding him guilty, it does play into the narrative that he is the victim of dangerous young black men, not the other way around. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that the jury will go easy on him.

CHAPTER 21

Justyce is at his school's commencement ceremony when two police officers approach him and his mother. He isn't surprised to see them, since he's been waiting to be accused of something ever since Blake claimed publicly that he assaulted him (this "fell flat," apparently, since "even the pundits were smart enough to ignore a kid photographed in a KKK robe"). "Justyce McAllister?" one of the officers says. Justyce's mother interrupts before the officers can ask him any questions, but Justyce tells her to calm down. Still, she presses on, shaming the officers for approaching her son and explaining the turmoil he's been through. Once again, though, Justyce urges his mother to be quiet, agreeing to cooperate. When the officers ask him what he knows about Garrett Tison's house burning down, he says, "Only what I've seen on the news."

This is the third interaction that Justyce has had with police officers within the last year. Because his first two encounters were violent, he is perhaps especially willing to cooperate. This willingness might also be an indication that he has decided to follow Doc's advice, which emphasizes that Justyce is only in control of how he *behaves. Consequently, he calmly interacts with the officers, presenting himself as the respectable, polite, and unthreatening young man that he is.*

The police officers turn around to consult one another. As they do so, Justyce's mother scolds him for disobeying her by talking to the police. In response, he points out that "refusing to talk" would make it look like he has "something to hide." "You can't protect me forever," he adds. When the officers return, they tell him that they've arrested three people in connection with the fire. Two of them—including Trey—have named Justyce as an accomplice. "I promise I had nothing to do with it, Detective," Justyce says, and the police officer nods. "Well, we're hesitant to believe these guys," the officer says. "For one, they've both tried to implicate innocent parties before. For two, the third young man did *not* mention you, which, considering the circumstances, is a little odd."

The fact that Trey lied and said that Justyce helped him burn down Tison's house is another sign that Justyce made the right choice by not joining the Black Jihad. After all, he was only drawn to them because he wanted to secure a sense of camaraderie and support. Now, though, he sees once and for all that the members of the Black Jihad don't truly care about him, since they're willing to drag him down with them.

The officers ask Justyce yes-or-no questions. One question pertains to whether or not he has had contact with people like Trey, and Justyce answers honestly, saying, "Yes." "I went to meet someone, and they were there," he says. His mother is beside herself upon hearing this, but the officers remain calm, continuing their questions. "Who were you meeting?" one of them asks, but Justyce's mother interjects, saying, "If they're not connected to the arson, does it matter?" The officers look annoyed, but Justyce is "relieved" his mother asked this. When they ask if Justyce had contact with the Black Jihad on the night of May 20th, he says no. "Haven't seen or spoken to [them] since April twentieth." He then tells them that he was with his girlfriend on May 20th. As his mother stares at him, he calls over SJ and Mrs. Friedman, who confirm his story.

In this moment, Justyce benefits from the support of his mother, SJ, and Mrs. Friedman. First, his mother helps him navigate a difficult question, proving that she's on his side even after learning that he recently met up with the Black Jihad (a group she has always warned him to avoid). Next, SJ and Mrs. Friedman confirm his alibi. In turn, readers see that he isn't actually on his own, despite what he may have felt in the aftermath of Manny's death. Notably, this is also the moment that Justyce's mother learns that her son is dating a white girl, as Justyce uses SJ as his alibi.

On the ride home from graduation, Justyce's mother doesn't speak to him. It isn't until he locks the door when they get home that she finally criticizes him for keeping so much from her. She goes on to scold him for dating a white girl, claiming that there are "plenty of brilliant black women" who would be just as good for him as SJ. "So what you're saying is after a lifetime of getting picked apart because of my skin color, I should dismiss the girl I love because of hers?" Justyce says. Still, his mother doesn't change her mind, saying that she won't give him her "blessing." "I know you grown and you gonna do what you want, but you on your own here baby," she says, adding, "As you made clear earlier, I can't protect you forever, right?"

Nic Stone doesn't present readers with a tidy resolution regarding Justyce's disagreement with his mother. Mrs. McAllister doesn't relent and give her son her "blessing" to date a white girl. What's important, though, is that Justyce is no longer willing to let this stop him from dating SJ. Tired of keeping himself from happiness, he acknowledges that his mother's viewpoint is narrowminded, and this enables him to finally do what he wants.

CHAPTER 22

Justyce is on the witness stand at Garrett Tison's hearing. He has just delivered his testimony and thinks that everything has gone well. However, Tison's attorney has just taken the floor to subject him to a cross-examination, and he can immediately tell that she's "out for blood." To begin, she gets him to admit that he and Manny were driving around instead of going on a hike, which is what they had originally planned to do. This, Justyce is forced to explain, is because Manny was upset after having heard that Jared's parents were going to press charges against him for assaulting Jared. When Justyce is forced to say that Manny told him he hit Jared for making "an inappropriate joke," the attorney says, "Hmm. Sounds like a fairly *familiar* set of circumstances, doesn't it, Mr. McAllister?"

From the very beginning of Justyce's cross-examination, it's clear that Tison's attorney wants to portray him and Manny as young men who respond to insults with violence. This will later help her insinuate that he and Manny actually were *threatening Garrett Tison, prompting him to discharge his weapon.*

Tison's attorney continues with her cross-examination, bringing up the fact that Justyce assaulted Blake and Jared at Blake's birthday party. "It wasn't unprovoked," Justyce clarified. As he tries to explain the circumstances surrounding his fight with Blake and Jared on that night, the attorney asks a number of confusing questions. When she asks him to explain what happened more clearly, he says that he can't remember everything in very vivid detail. She then suggests that this is because he'd been drinking, and he's forced to admit that this is true. "Mr. McAllister," the attorney says, "now that we've established that both you *and* Mr. Rivers had a history of responding violently to perceived verbal slights, let's return to January twenty-sixth of this year."

Again, Tison's attorney goes out of her way to suggest that Manny and Justyce tend to respond "violently to perceived verbal slights." In doing so, she frames them as rash and angry individuals who would pose a threat to someone like Garrett Tison.

At this point, Tison's attorney asks Justyce to read a clause from the City of Atlanta Code of Ordinances—a clause that prohibits excessive noise in public spaces. Once Justyce reads this aloud, the attorney says that Justyce and Manny were "in violation of the law" because they "refus[ed] to lower the volume of [their] music." Going on, the attorney says, "Did the music you were listening to contain the line *Here comes the fun…wait for the sound of the gun?*" Justyce points out that this lyric has been taken out of context, but the attorney ignores him, adding that Manny swore at Tison and made "an obscene gesture" that could have been "perceived as a threat."

In the same way that the media took the picture of Justyce dressed as a "thug" out of context, Tison's lawyer now presents one of many lyrics in the song Manny and Justyce were listening to at the time of the incident, ultimately suggesting that the music itself was threatening. Furthermore, she upholds that Manny's "obscene gesture" could have been "perceived as a threat." What she fails to mention is that Garrett Tison was screaming insults and slurs at Manny and Justyce, blatantly displaying his anger in a way that was much more threatening than anything the boys themselves were doing.

"Are you aware that my client witnessed the shooting death of his partner by a young man physically similar to yourself?" Tison's attorney asks Justyce. She then lets the court know that Justyce spoke to Quan, who "connected" him to "a group of young men with extensive criminal records and known gang affiliations." She also gets Justyce to admit that he met with these "young men shortly before they deliberately" set Tison's house on fire. As Justyce tries to clarify the conditions surrounding this visit, the attorney cuts him off, saying, "No further questions, Your Honor."

It's notable that Tison's attorney says that Quan is "physically similar" to Justyce. Throughout the entire novel, Stone never mentions that Justyce and Quan look alike. Even if this were true, though, it would have little relevance—after all, Tison knew at the time of his interaction with Justyce and Manny that Quan was in jail. Consequently, he wouldn't have needed to worry that he was facing the same person who killed his partner. Because of this, the attorney's implication in this moment is quite racist, as she effectively suggests that Tison had the right to discriminate against Justyce simply because he was a black man who vaguely resembled a completely different person.

GARRET TISON: MURDERER?

In an article with the subtitle, "The Jury Is Still Out," a journalist reports that the jury found Tison guilty on three of his four charges. "After 27 hours of deliberation, Tison was convicted of two misdemeanors—disorderly conduct and discharge of a pistol near a public highway—and aggravated assault, the less severe of the two felonies," the journalist writes. "The jury was unable to reach a consensus regarding the felony murder charge, and a mistrial was declared on that count." The article then suggests that Justyce's possible "connection to known gang members" "cast a considerable pall over the proceedings in court." In conclusion, the writer notes that "Mr. Tison will be retried on the murder count and sentenced on all convictions at a later date."

Although the jury finds Tison guilty on three of his four accusations, it fails to convict him of murder, which is the only charge that truly matters. After all, two of the charges are only misdemeanors, and the "aggravated assault" charge hardly captures the severity of his crime. Given these results, it seems likely that the jury was influenced by Tison's attorney, who manipulated the facts surrounding Manny's death by taking certain details out of context and using them to portray both him and Justyce as "thugs."

CHAPTER 23

Two days after Tison's trial, Justyce is spending time at SJ's house. They're watching a documentary on the National Geographic channel, but he can't focus on anything other than the fact that the jury was "unable to reach a verdict" regarding Tison's murder charge. As he and SJ lie there together, Mrs. Friedman receives a call. When she gets off the phone, she tells SJ and Justyce that there isn't going to be a second trial for Garrett Tison because he has died.

Garrett Tison's sudden death cuts off any possibility of bringing him to justice. And though his death might seem like retribution in a certain way, it fails to send a positive message to the public. After cases like Shemar Carson's and Travarrius Jenkins's, convicting Tison of murder would have reassured people like Justyce that the courts are capable of holding police officers accountable for their actions. Now, that will never happen.

TRANSCRIPT FROM MORNING NEWS, AUGUST 9

In the "top story" on Atlanta's local news station, an anchor explains that Garrett Tison was killed by fellow inmates just two days after his trial. "Three men have been implicated in the matter," the anchor says, "two of whom were already awaiting trial on murder charges."

This brief news clipping clarifies the details surrounding Tison's death, suggesting that his fellow prisoners were angry that he wasn't convicted of murder. This recalls Quan's story about the white teenager he met in juvenile detention, the one who murdered his father but only spent 60 days in a "youth development campus." The jury's unwillingness to convict Tison of murder aligns with the narrative that white people get off more easily than black people, even after committing heinous crimes.

FOUR MONTHS LATER

It's Christmas day, and Justyce has come to the cemetery to visit Manny's grave. As he approaches, he sees that Jared has done the same thing. The two boys greet each other and wish one another merry Christmas. "I still miss him *so* much, dude," Jared says after a moment, tears filling his eyes. He starts to talk about how he feels, but then apologizes, guessing aloud that Justyce doesn't want to hear him say such things. "Nah, it's cool," Justyce says, starting to cry himself. "I understand man, I really do." Jared and Justyce start reminiscing about Manny, and then Jared tells Justyce that it's good to see him.

After all of their disagreements, Justyce and Jared come together in this moment, united by their loss of a mutual friend. In many ways, their sadness is something that transcends their differences. Rather than focusing on the things that have always driven them apart, they're able to relate to one another and—in that way—accept each other.

Jared goes to Yale, too, but he hardly sees Justyce, who asks if he's chosen a major. Jared tells him that he has decided to go into "civil rights law instead of business." This surprises Justyce, but Jared continues, saying, "Yeah. My dad just about shit himself when I told him. Anyway, I took an intro to African American Studies course, and it really blew me away, dude. I'm thinking about minoring in it." The boys continue to talk, and Jared asks about SJ. Justyce explains that they're still together. The wind picks up for a moment, and "it's like Jus can feel [Manny's initials] on his **watchband** pressing into the skin of his once-swollen wrist." Turning to Jared, he says they should hang out at Yale, suggesting that they visit SJ in New York sometime. "I'd really like that, Justyce," Jared replies. "Me too, Jared," says Justyce. "Me too."

In this scene, Justyce learns that Jared has changed, since he's now interested in thinking about civil rights—a topic he would have been utterly uninterested in just one year ago, when he still believed that racial inequality no longer existed in the United States. As the two boys realize that they have something in common, Justyce senses their mutual friend's presence, suddenly feeling as if it's not impossible after all to find common ground with people who come from completely different backgrounds.

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