

# **All God's Children Study Guide**

**All God's Children by Fox Butterfield**

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## Plot Summary

All God's Children is author Fox Butterfield's book-length case study of Willie Bosket, one of the most violent criminals in the history of the New York State Correctional System. Butterfield's study is far from ordinary, however, as he traces the roots of Bosket's behavior five generations back in time to the general culture of violence present in Edgefield County, South Carolina, where Bosket's great-great grandfather was a slave. Along with telling Bosket's story, Butterfield sets out an implicit theory of the causes of violence that extends throughout the five generations discussed in the book. The book therefore not only chronicles the Bosket family but partly serves as a theoretical inquiry into the nature of violence in the United States and the African-American community.

Butterfield begins his story in Edgefield County, South Carolina, where he marshals compelling evidence that Edgefield has always been an unusually violent region of an unusually violent state. Butterfield notes that Edgefield bucks the trend of steadily declining violence in Western European cultures that started in the sixteenth century. Instead, the Scotch-Irish culture of honor, where honor and respect are the most prized personal goods, was imported to the South. Honor cultures perpetuate violence all over the world, in Butterfield's view, because they place heavy emphasis on responding to insults and preserving reputations. The honor culture, Butterfield argues, was internalized by African slaves in South Carolina and exacerbated by the fact that violence was used to keep slaves obedient. Further, since slaves had no material possessions, sometimes honor and respect was all they had.

The culture of violence extends deep into the lives of the Bosket family from Aaron and Pud Bosket down to James, Butch and Willie. Their lives were a constant cycle of absent fathers, abusive mothers, general alienation from a loving community and a sense of terror and fear of losing respect and being unloved. Each generation seems the almost inevitable product of the previous one, despite the fact that Butterfield nowhere appeals to genetic explanations of their behavior.

All God's Children is divided into sixteen chapters divided into five parts. Part I opens the story of the Bosket family in Edgefield and outlines its history. It also introduces Aaron and Pud, the first two members of the five generations of Bosket men. Part II introduces James and Butch, the next two Bosket men, and covers Butch's childhood in Chapter 5. The next two chapters show Butch growing up and how he eventually landed in prison. Part III covers Willie's early life leading up to his first murder. Part IV somewhat merges Butch and Willie's stories, outlining some of Butch and Willie's successes, particularly Butch's shocking and admirable achievement of a college degree in prison. Part V, shows their seemingly inevitable downfall, with Butch destroying his own hard-won freedom and Willie effectively getting himself locked away in prison for life.



# Part I, Chapter 1, Bloody Edgefield

## Part I, Chapter 1, Bloody Edgefield Summary and Analysis

Edgefield County was for many years the most violent country in the United States and well-known violent events have occurred there. Many slaves had been kept for over a century on Mount Willing in Edgefield before they were identified by name. In 1868, the name of Willie Bosket's great-great-grandfather, Aaron Bosket, appeared on the voter registration rolls for the Mount Willing precinct in Edgefield country, in the first election where former slaves could vote. The former slaves are an integral part of Edgefield's history.

The constant fighting in Edgefield left people numbed toward violence from the 1760s to the 1780s. It soon gained a reputation as "Bloody Edgefield" due to its high number of murders. Author Fox Butterfield quickly recounts some of the crimes in antebellum South Carolina; its rural, agrarian territory seems to have had four times the murder rate of Massachusetts, the most urban area in the country. The statistical difference persisted for decades, even into the 1930s.

The Scotch-Irish settlers of the region had often suffered violent conditions and operated according to a warrior ethic that demanded vengeance. They often engaged in a form of wrestling known as "wrasling", or the "knock down and drag out" fight. This form of violence had its roots in the blood feuds between families and clans in the Middle Ages. Honor was everything. Everyone in the area seems to have been influenced by the code from slaveholding gentry to former slaves. Honor became a passion and the duel continued in the area for some time. The common Southern proclivity for drinking and firearms helped create a climate of general violence.

Edgefield was known even among South Carolinians as unusually violent. Its history helped to set it apart. It had many famous characters, including the eldest son of Captain Butler who chased down a Major Cunningham in a horse race through the forest. This story became one of many legends that created Edgefield's reputation.



# Part I, Chapter 2, Masters and Slaves

## Part I, Chapter 2, Masters and Slaves Summary and Analysis

Sometime in the spring of 1834, South Carolina Planter, Thomas Bauskett, bought a young negro slave for his son, John Bauskett. The boy was named Ruben. The elder Bauskett owned 221 African-Americans. Ruben would later take the Bauskett name because Bauskett was the first master he could remember. In the early twentieth century the name became Bosket.

Slavery only added to the culture of violence since violence was needed to enforce bondage; it arguably brutalized both slaves and masters. No state was more involved in slavery than South Carolina, as it had slaves present from its founding. Due to the slave trade, South Carolina's whites became the richest people in North America, if not the world. But the large numbers of slaves raised the threat of rebellion. Despite the violence of the 1760 to 1785 period, the cotton gin and revolution in British textile manufacturing, South Carolina quickly recovered and expanded and the farmers who aided this expansion included Thomas Bauskett. His son John was to be groomed for future leadership. John became a lawyer and was a member of the state legislature, as well as being an early Southern industrialist and banker. Ruben was only one of his acquisitions. Eventually, in 1852, he decided to sell his slaves and plantations.

Ruben was sold again, to another Edgefield resident named Francis Pickens, a fairly wealthy planter and a member of the South Carolina gentry. Pickens strongly defended slavery and associated it with chivalry; he also fought for states' rights and the view that South Carolina had the power to nullify federal law. In 1833 Pickens was elected to Congress. Pickens was one of the greatest slaveholders in the South, owning 563 slaves when he bought Ruben. He believed himself to be a beneficent master and treated his slaves relatively well.

In the late 1840s, Ruben was in his early twenties and married Carolina Vaughn, another slave on the plantation. Their first daughter, Rosa, was born in 1848. Aaron came next, Willie Bosket's great-great-grandfather. However, Pickens became President Buchanan's minister to St. Petersburg and fell into debt due to his second wife, Lucy Holcomb. He then sold his slaves to Alfred Dearing. Aaron and Rosa Bosket were sent with Dearing in 1858; Aaron was only ten years old and would never see his father or mother again. His new master also lived in Edgefield at the time. Life at the his Cane Break plantation was much harsher. Sometimes slaves were whipped to death.

At the time, few whites were punished for "accidentally" killing slaves on plantations, but slave crime was punished incredibly harshly as it was taken to threaten the fabric of social life. This double standard persists into the present day, adding to the code of honor and violence in the area. The honor code started to breed violence among

African-Americans; all they had was honor, as they had no possessions. Slaves often fought one another brutally and harbored deep anger towards their masters.

By the late 1850s, South Carolinians saw themselves as under threat from abolitionists, seeing their slave society as teetering on the brink of extinction. The honor code made things worse as the threat threatened the honor of South Carolina white men. Pickens returned to South Carolina in that time and his speeches made him very popular. On December 12th, 1860, he was elected governor of South Carolina and passed the ordinance of secession eight days later.



# Part I, Chapter 3, Aaron

## Part I, Chapter 3, Aaron Summary and Analysis

Edgefield was conquered by the Union Army on June 21st, 1865. Whites were mortified and African-Americans were overjoyed, including Aaron Bosket. However, Aaron had to sign a sharecropping labor contract with a white planter in the Mount Willing area to get a job. The sharecropper system effectively reduced African-Americans to peons. But in March 1867, Southern states were forced to give blacks the right to vote. African-Americans outnumbered whites in Edgefield and voted for Republicans, one white and four black.

Many whites were enraged by black assertions of equality and feared that there was no mechanism to control them. White supremacy had to be reestablished. This attitude brought on a guerrilla war of terrorism against blacks. Gangs of whites started to attack blacks and white Republicans. Much violence was promoted by disputes between white planters and black tenants over land and labor. Post-Civil War violence grew much worse in the state and federal elections of 1868.

In some ways, the freedmen made great progress; in 1872, blacks took four of eight statewide elective offices and 106 out of 156 seats in the legislature, along with four of South Carolina's five congressional seats. But many whites would not stand for this and started an "Edgefield plan" to intimidate Negroes out of voting, which culminated in the Hamburg Massacre. In the election of 1876, whites used force to prevent blacks from voting and a Democrat was elected. Aaron Bosket's right to vote and serve on a jury was denied to him for the rest of his life.

Bosket slowly built a new life for himself. Around 1880, he married Angeline. As the years passed, Aaron continued to be oppressed by social controls meant to reestablish white supremacy. He never owned any land but remained a man of upright character, becoming a deacon of his church, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, what would become among the more important institutions in his community. Blacks could go few places but church. Aaron advised his family to simply endure white supremacy and live "lowly and humble."

Aaron and Angeline eventually separated. He next married Tilda Mobley Pou, a fellow congregation member who, at thirty-four, had six children with two fathers. Aaron was a forty-year-old impoverished sharecropper. They had a dilapidated slave cabin but they still had another child, named Clifton, though everyone called him Pud. He was Willie Bosket's great-grandfather. Unlike his father, Pud would not be humble; his goal of self-respect would lead him to violence.



# Part I, Chapter 4, Pud, Don't Step on My Reputation

## Part I, Chapter 4, Pud, Don't Step on My Reputation Summary and Analysis

On November 27th, 1908, a poor black sharecropper, William Herrin, an in-law of the Boskets, was hanged. He and Pud were members of a new generation of "trouble-making" blacks the whites called "the New Negro," as they were born after slavery. The whites were horrified that they were not deferential to them. Herrin was hanged because he killed his boss for cheating him out of his wages and disrespecting him.

Herrin's hanging was a sign of crisis in the 1890s and early 1900s, when Pud grew up. It was caused by a severe economic recession when South Carolina joined the economy and farm prices fell fast. Race relations completely deteriorated; whites started to disenfranchise the few remaining black voters and created the Jim Crow laws and started lynching. The murder rate skyrocketed and the author discusses a few of the incidents. Race had been introduced into the mix of honor, guns and whiskey. Lynching was invented in this time. In 1898, seventeen African-Americans were lynched.

In 1910, Pud was twenty-one. He had a way with people and was not at all cautious like his father, being bold and tough and assertive. One day, while sharecropping, a white farmer threatened to whip him and Pud pulled the whip out of his hand and walked off. The incident gained Pud a name for himself. He hated sharecropping and so robbed two stores in Saluda on the evening of April 22nd, 1910. Pud was arrested ten days later but he did not submit easily. Pud's trial was in a "white folks' court." He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to hard labor for one year, which made him part of the chain gang. The work was brutal. As the system was abused, blacks stopped paying much attention to the difference between law and lawlessness. W.E.B. Du Bois acknowledged that crime increased in 1903, but it was the result of whites developing a police system to deal with blacks alone and generated a double system of justice that was not legitimate in the eyes of blacks.

After release, Pud became a hero among local young black men. He was a "bad man", a criminal to whites but a more ambiguous term for blacks. Bad could also mean good. Pud had a code that was well known. He didn't initiate violence, but if someone bothered him, he would fight back. Pud never backed down. The violence was not mere pathology but grew out of the old white Southern code of honor. But blacks started to speak of "respect" rather than "honor." As life worsened for blacks, many black men became like Pud. The ideal of a "bad black man" arose. Many, though not all, saw them as folk heroes. Pud became more violent over time, almost killing a man with his knife in 1916. He was convicted of assault and battery and sentenced to three months.





In 1913, Pud married Frances Smith; they had their first child, William, one year later. Two more boys were born: Freddie Lee in 1918 and James in 1922. James was Willie Bosket's grandfather.

In 1924, after work, Pud went on a car ride with a white man named H. M. Nimmons, who was teaching Pud how to drive. They crashed and died before anyone reached them. From then on, the men in the Bosket family would try to live up to his standard of behavior.



## Part II, Chapter 5, James and Butch, Coming Up in the Terry

### Part II, Chapter 5, James and Butch, Coming Up in the Terry Summary and Analysis

Frances Bosket moved to Augusta, Georgia to search for work six years after Pud was killed. Pud left her no money and she had three boys to support—Willie, Fred and James. Willie got a job as a day laborer in 1932 and Fred became a delivery man. James also labored, despite being eleven.

James reminded people of his father and, like Pud, people liked him but said he had the devil in him. When James was in Saluda and people heard he was a Bosket, they backed away from him. He liked the feeling of power and wanted to be a "bad man" like his father and started carrying a knife.

In 1940, Frances and James moved into a little wooden house close to a nearby eatery, where James became enamored with a beautiful young waitress, Marie Hickson. They fell in love and eloped; Marie and James were fifteen and eighteen years old respectively. Later Marie moved in with James and his family, but Frances and Marie did not get along and James beat Marie. On March 6th, 1941, they had a son, Willie James Bosket, called Butch, Willie Bosket's father. Eventually Marie asked the local court to extract financial support from James, but he saw the white man's court interfering with his private life.

While James returned to Saluda, Marie left the Boskets. She left the baby with Frances and went to Chicago for several years. Butch grew up with his grandmother; he was often alone. He enrolled in school when he was six but the school was terribly understaffed and Butch started playing hooky. He started to enjoy breaking the rules by stealing.

Butch's life got worse; at eight, he would disappear for days at a time and became part of a local gang. Butch also learned to fight before he was nine, again fighting for respect, a manifestation of the old white Southern code of honor combined with the city street. The law was not trusted; honor was the rule.

In 1943, James Bosket came back from Washington but was drafted into the army. He went AWOL and tried to stay with his mother and son but kept drinking and beat Butch. At age eight, Butch was arrested for robbery, but before he could be sentenced, Cora Mae Jones, his other grandmother, took him to New York, to his mother's apartment.



## **Part II, Chapter 6, Butch, The Promised Land, Chapter 7, Butch, The Pawnshop**

### **Part II, Chapter 6, Butch, The Promised Land, Chapter 7, Butch, The Pawnshop Summary and Analysis**

Marie didn't much care for Butch. She had four other children now with another alcoholic, Arthur Jackson, who beat her. She enrolled him in school but he misbehaved; one day she gave him a quarter and told him to never come back. The police found Butch and took him and Marie to children's court where she said she didn't have time to take care of him. The court sent Butch to the Children's Center in Harlem, which began his life of being committed to institutions.

The Harlem Children's Center was full of violent and truant boys. Butch quickly established himself as the most violent boy at the Center, building a psychological shell around himself to shield his vulnerabilities and control his rage at the family who abandoned him. But his behavior was out of control, sometimes manifesting itself in the homosexual rape of other boys. While Butch was intellectual gifted, he also seemed to have a mental disorder, sometimes hallucinating and becoming uncontrollably paranoid. Eventually he was sent to a special school for troubled youth called Wiltwyck, where a Viennese art teacher, Miss Kramer, broke through his anger and taught him to paint. He eventually learned to concentrate and calm down over the course of three years, until, at age fourteen, his father James was released from prison and took him out of the school.

Life was immediately terrible again. James was always drunk and beat Butch horribly. Butch started playing hooky and then robbed a man and turned himself into police; after evaluation he was sent to Bellevue Hospital for psychiatric evaluation and was eventually diagnosed as schizophrenic. But after subsequent evaluation, particularly after seeing him calm down and display a remarkable understanding of his condition, the staff diagnosed him with anti-social personality disorder. Though his condition improved, in 1956 he was released and sent back to James.

The downward spiral repeated, and now that Butch was older, they fought like men. One day neighbors found them with a gun and reported them; they were both arrested. James claimed psychological problems but was not taken seriously (though he should have been). Butch, however, sent him to Rockland. They were not happy to see him, as he was larger than before and had the same problems.

Butch escaped and went back to Harlem, returning as a hero. He quickly became a pimp and fought with his mother and grandmother Frances, who had recently moved there. In 1957, Butch decided to rob a liquor store but was arrested and sentenced to five years. He scored 130 on an IQ test there but was still diagnosed as a psychopath. After three months, he was sent to the Great Meadow Correctional Institution where he



tried to prove the worst things said about him true. In prison, the street code he learned was extended.

In 1961, Butch was placed on parole. He started spending a lot of his time with Laura Roan, a short, and outgoing twenty-year-old. She thought he was smart, manly, nice and respectful. Butch proposed to her a few weeks after they met, and they were married on October 24th, 1961. Things looked good for Butch; he was married and worked as a lab technician at Evans Color Lab in Long Island City. Early in June 1962, Laura became pregnant. In December, she gave birth to Willie Bosket.

Butch took his pregnant wife Laura to Milwaukee. He had escaped his parole officer and stolen some pornographic pictures from the photo lab to sell to make enough money to get food for his family. He quickly found a buyer and pawnshop owner named David Hurwitz. Hurwitz said he'd give him fifty dollars if he left the pictures with him. The next day, Hurwitz pretended he didn't know Butch and insulted him. Butch, enraged, took his knife and stabbed and killed Hurwitz and then killed a man who was trying to stop him from behind, William Locke. A witness, Wenzel Stenowski, saw him leave the store. Louis Jankowitz, an employee at the pawnshop, found the bodies. Butch immediately packed Laura up and got a cab back to the east coast after taking fifty dollars from the dead men's wallets. But Detectives Dewey Russ and Leroy Jones (both black) quickly tracked him down.

The morality of honor that was pounded into Butch his whole life led to his downfall; it had been disappearing among whites for generations and in Wisconsin it was being replaced by a morality of dignity. When blacks started to leave the South in the twenties in droves and then more so after World War II, they were shut out of the local urban economies. As a result, many black men were never acclimated to the morality of dignity and spread the morality of honor into the cities, which became a new spawning ground for violence, exacerbated by poverty and racism.

Butch had taken Laura from New York because he had cheated on Laura with some of the prostitutes he pimped for to make it up to her. When the FBI tracked Butch down, they flew him back to Milwaukee. He quickly confessed. The trial began on February 26th, 1963. Butch was convicted of first-degree murder despite the fact that he arguably committed second-degree murder. The judge was not sympathetic and the jury gave him life in prison.



## **Part III, Chapter 8, Willie, Bad Little Booby, Chapter 9, Willie, Little Man**

### **Part III, Chapter 8, Willie, Bad Little Booby, Chapter 9, Willie, Little Man Summary and Analysis**

When Laura was a child, she had high hopes for her future but got pregnant early in life. She grew up with no men around and always believed that men came around to have sex and leave. After Butch's imprisonment, she sank into deep depression, becoming a more reserved woman. Willie James Bosket was born on December 9th, 1962. As a child he was active and mischievous, earning him the name "Booby," like a booby trap. He could make people laugh, though he preferred to be alone. Willie grew up in a tough neighborhood and learned the street code at a young age, much like his father. He was smart and motivated but channeled his energy into extreme acts of violence and petty crime. His family didn't know the reasons he acted that way.

Willie increasingly seemed like his father. Laura always told Willie that his father was in the army but he eventually found out that his father was in prison and murder. Willie was furious that Laura had lied to him. In fact, the author notes, Laura treated Willie badly, despite loving him. She projected her rage at Butch onto Willie. When Willie entered first grade, he found school a nightmare. He was smart but couldn't focus and started playing hooky. His bad behavior escalated and Willie was expelled from school. Laura took him to Bellevue Hospital, right where his father had been, in early 1971. Willie's psychiatrist was a woman named Dr. Mahin Hassibi, who decided he had an attention deficit due to stress and was inclined to depression.

But after a month, Willie left. His school wouldn't take him back and so he spent his time outside of school. James took Willie in for a while and Willie worried about his drinking and epileptic seizures. James sexually abused Willie as well. Laura eventually had him committed to a child care facility and regretted that he was so much like his father.

Initially Willie was confined to the Spofford child care facility, but his out of control behavior was too much for them. So a judge sent him to Wiltwyck, where his father had gone. The author reviews the origins of the juvenile court that sent Willie to Wiltwyck; the entire system was based on the idea that boys could be reformed and that the court could function as a wise parent.

When Willie reached Wiltwyck, he quickly became friends with his child care worker, Arruth Artis, a middle-aged black woman. Upon arrival, some boys tried to "take buns" from Willie, that is, to initiate him into Wiltwyck by raping him. But Willie ran outside and put rocks in his socks and beat the boys over the head. This immediately earned him a reputation, though at the same time he grew close to Arruth, calling her Mom.



Willie also became fond of his teacher, Rose Niles, who was known for having a special way with boys like Willie. When the other boys would mess with her, Willie would protect her. Rose thought Willie was kind and precocious. And while he never got into a fight in her class, he was full of rage and continued to bully the other kids.

Laura rarely visited Willie; while he would sometimes run away to see her, she would always send him back, which only made Willie angrier. At Wiltwyck, he was becoming too much to handle. Wiltwyck's head psychiatrist, Dr. Katz, was committed to not kicking children out, believing that many of their patients' problems was due to rejection. He also resisted giving children drugs. But on February 25th, 1974, Katz changed his mind about Willie. Ritalin didn't work, so Katz placed Willie on increasing doses of Thorazine. Despite the medicine, one night Willie snuck out and stole a car. The staff sent him back to Bellevue. Willie felt that he had beaten the system.



# **Part III, Chapter 10, Willie, The Boy No One Could Help, Chapter 11, Willie, The Baby-Face Killer**

## **Part III, Chapter 10, Willie, The Boy No One Could Help, Chapter 11, Willie, The Baby-Face Killer Summary and Analysis**

At Bellevue, Willie was as bad as ever. The Bellevue staff believed he simply used violence to get his way and that he was beyond help. The Division of Youth in New York moved him to the Highland school for children. At Highland, his psychiatrist said that he had an extremely poor grasp of reality and that he could easily kill someone. The staff wanted to put him in a mental hospital but was not able; when Willie crashed a bus, he was transferred to Brookwood Center.

Brookwood was in turmoil at the time, changing staff and treatment strategies. Tom Pottenburgh, the new director, made changes that quickly led to a riot. The psychiatrists saw Willie constantly verbally and physically abuse of others; they could not stop him as he had committed no crime. Despite intense attempts at behavior modification, Pottenburgh eventually had to send Willie home. At home, Willie caused many problems. Laura insisted that he was simply a bad person.

After returning to Highland, he was quickly sent to Rockland, which recommended family therapy but could initiate it. Willie was next sent to the Tyron School for boys, but to no avail. After returning home, Willie and Laura had constant problems. Due to his intelligence, Willie led a gang of older boys to commit a series of petty crime. When he was caught, he assaulted a police officer and was finally arrested on a serious charge.

In February, 1977, Willie returned to Brookwood, but Pottenburgh did not want him back. Luckily, the staff got him involved with Jake Onufrychuk, a mechanic who helped Willie learn carpentry and electrical work. Willie loved the work and immediately calmed down, though he would on occasion act out. Brookwood staff disagreed as to whether Willie's behavioral changes were genuine. Eventually, Willie was allowed to live in a halfway house near his home; he held down a maintenance job. But once Willie left the halfway house, he started being violent again. Willie was placed in isolation and taken to Manhattan. The staff was convinced that one day he would kill someone.

Willie entered the Manhattan Youth Development Center; someone goofed and no one knew he was coming. Willie was no longer Brookwood's responsibility and the bureaucracy at his new institution didn't have the resources to control him, so he quickly left. When he arrived home, Laura was working as a security guard and dating Charles, the building superintendent. Charles kept guns for drug dealers and Willie was in awe of



him. When two boys, Richard and Leroy, were harassing Willie, Charles gave him a gun to scare them. They all ended up in a fight and Willie ended up kicking Richard into an airshaft, killing him. Soon thereafter his social worker, Ed Cruise, placed him with the Woullard family, who wanted to adopt him as a foster child.

Once Willie was released, he started committing robberies with his friend Herman. One day he encountered a Hispanic train passenger named Noel Perez, who he shot in the head for no apparent reason. No one caught him. Herman and Willie then started to commit violent robberies, and Willie killed another Hispanic man named Moises Perez (no relation). Willie felt no remorse and no one caught him.

Detectives Martin David and Nick Vazquez were assigned to Moises's case. They heard Willie and Herman were the neighborhood badboys and went after them. Martin and Vazquez arrested and questioned Herman. Because Herman was unaware of his rights, they quickly secured a confession and learned about Willie's gun. It was at Laura's house. After debating among themselves, the family gave it up. Willie was arrested, and after awhile he accidentally tied himself to the gun.

In the 1970s, teen crime was becoming a major social problem, so many states created a class of juvenile crime. Nonetheless, the prosecution in Willie's case worried that the evidence was circumstantial as they had no witnesses or confession. Willie plead not guilty, but after the prosecution cut Herman a deal, Herman was set to testify against him. Willie could not handle the uncertainty of trial and plead guilty to avoid Herman being labeled a snitch. He could receive no more than a five year sentence. At the same time, a governor's race was on in New York and the Democrat incumbent, Carey, was being attacked as soft on crime. To combat the charge, he made an example of Willie. This led to the passage of the first juvenile offender law where juveniles could be charged as adults. Willie made history.





# **Part IV, Chapter 12, Butch, The Prisoner and the Scholar, Chapter 13, Butch and Willie**

## **Part IV, Chapter 12, Butch, The Prisoner and the Scholar, Chapter 13, Butch and Willie Summary and Analysis**

Butch had been sentenced to Waupun maximum security prison. He acted hard and crazy and achieved a great reputation among inmates. One path out of that prison involved taking courses as a sanctioned form of rehabilitation. Butch did well and won a transfer to Wisconsin State Reformatory at Green Bay, where he became a full-time student. After receiving his high school diploma, he worked seven years to be transferred to Wisconsin Correctional Institution at Fox Lake. When he arrived in 1970, he met Michael Schoenfield, a sixties radical caught with marijuana when it was still a felony. Schoenfield was well-educated and felt lonely; he found a friend in Butch and shared his books with him. Butch read them all and they had deep conversations about class structure and the like and started calling each other brother. Butch's favorite book was *Steppenwolf*.

However, once Schoenfield left, Butch started getting in trouble again, though he may have been set up. He was sent back to Waupun in 1972 and placed in solitary. Butch became depressed and delusional but escaped from a prison hospital where he received treatment. He was caught twelve hours later and was declared not guilty by reason of insanity. At the prison mental hospital, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and placed on Thorazine. He calmed down enough to engage in unsupervised work, and in 1974 he escaped.

Butch showed up in New York and tried working but the money was bad. So he started robbing banks, convinced that because society rejected him for being too smart, he had to live by his own code. He started hanging around with two young sixteen-year-old runaways named Jimmy and Mary and started to think of them as family. After a robbery, the cops pulled over Jimmy and Mary who were so scared that they told the entire story. Butch was caught in his hotel room and felt that his family let him down. Back in prison, he slashed his wrists. Butch plead guilty to robbery in 1975 and received fifteen years in Leavenworth federal prison in Kansas.

Leavenworth had incredible educational opportunities. Butch joined a number of intelligent inmates and started writing computer programs with them for the federal government. Butch applied himself in his college courses, where professors actually taught in person. He had no discipline problems and decided to work within the machinery of legitimate social institutions. He continued to correspond with Schoenfield,



who he considered family. Butch majored in psychology and minored in computer science. He was a great student, despite remaining hard in his cell life. Nonetheless, he graduated summa cum laude; the professors organized and had him inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, the first inmate in history to do so. This brought him national coverage, though much was negative. The professors got him paroled on January 19th, 1982. He was still wanted in Wisconsin but thought his achievements would keep him safe.

When Willie read about Butch, he was excited and wrote him a letter. Butch had withdrawn from his family in 1962 and refused to accept letters from Laura and Willie. He was uncomfortable about Willie committing further crimes; plus, contact with Willie hurt his chances for parole. Butch's letters sought to help Willie out, to show him his path would lead him. Willie did not expect this, as he imagined his father was a great criminal. A Catholic chaplain encouraged Butch to call Willie, but their conversation was awkward. Butch sent Willie books but that wasn't what Willie wanted. Butch found the relationship painful, worrying that Willie had inherited what was bad in him.

At Goshen, Willie escaped during a riot just after he turned sixteen. Due to "his" law, he was tried as an adult and sentenced to four years in prison. Butch felt low and their relationship quickly worsened. In prison, Willie met some black Muslims who gave him an ideology of rage to go with his rage. He began to see his struggles as part of a centuries-old, white racist plot to enslave blacks. Willie read Malcolm X and Soledad Brothers and wrote Butch about them. Butch demurred; he was a loner and didn't care much for ideology. He encouraged Willie to learn how to survive before he became a revolutionary. He worried to friends that Willie had a pathology and that he would be killed by some policeman.

Willie was furious and disappointed with his father. Since Butch wasn't a grand criminal, Willie couldn't respect him and cut him off, calling his father a "house n-gger". They never corresponded again. In 1983, Willie was transferred back to the Division for Youth until he was twenty-one. But since New York governor Carey had sworn that Willie would never walk the streets again, the media made a big deal about his release. Carey had him sent back to Goshen and Willie was outraged. He then hatched a plan to get out through education. He enrolled in class, helped younger boys, ran their library and behaved. Eventually staff decided that he could perhaps be a productive member of society.



# Part IV, Chapter 14, Willie, Counsel for the Defense

## Part IV, Chapter 14, Willie, Counsel for the Defense Summary and Analysis

Willie was released on his twenty-first birthday on December 9th, 1983. He quickly met a girl, Sharon Hayward. They started to date and got along well. Sharon popped the question and Laura gave Willie a ring to give her. When they were married, Willie was happy; the doom in his life seemed to lift.

At that time, Laura stopped living with Charles as Charles had become interested in Willie's sister, Cheryl. One day Willie caught Charles beating Cheryl and secretly turned him in. A few weeks later, Willie was tricked into an arrest by the police due to a false charge by an elderly man living above Cheryl for attempted robbery.

Willie fared poorly. When the police messed with him due to his reputation, he resisted. They beat him and charged him with assault. A new judge presided over the assault hearing. The evidence for Willie's assault was weak, and while the jury did not find Willie guilty of all charges, it found him guilty of attempted assault; Willie got three and a half to seven years.

Willie felt like there was a social compact to keep him in jail. He had taken up his own defense and made wild accusations against witnesses and the prosecution. But the detective who pursued him, Patrick Dugan, revealed his criminal record.

Willie was depressed but enjoyed being a lawyer, so he decided to take up his own defense at the trial for his courtroom assault. He decided to make the case into a mockery and a circus. It turns out that the witnesses against him were bad. Willie was able to convince the jury to find him not guilty on all counts. Although he was going away for a few years, Willie felt like he had beaten the system.



## Part V, Chapter 15, Butch, Free at Last

### Part V, Chapter 15, Butch, Free at Last Summary and Analysis

Butch was surprised when Wisconsin had not heard of his reputation; when he returned they immediately placed him in Waupun. Butch felt there was a conspiracy against him, but Schoenfield organized a campaign to release him, which was joined by the NAACP. Slowly Butch was moved to increasingly lower security prisoners and went to the Baker House in Milwaukee on May 22nd, 1984. Butch held down a job and worked towards an MA in Urban Affairs in University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Butch was a great teacher, though keeping his schedule was very hard. In November, the parole board released Butch. At forty-three he was free after being in the system since he was nine.

Butch moved in with his new girlfriend, a white woman named Donna Bernhagen. However, he continued to believe in the street code, seeing man as essentially a savage, primitive beast. While Butch's life was going well, personally and professionally, he could not handle freedom. One night, he molested Donna's six-year-old daughter Kristin. Donna saw it all and refused to stop him. When Kristin told her grandmother, Butch's parole was revoked after only two months. Butch insisted he was innocent. And everyone, including Donna, was behind him.

Butch hatched a plan to get to a hospital by consuming enough salt to cough up blood. Donna would help him escape once he got there. She sold everything she had to get money together. The plan worked. In the hospital, Donna and Butch pulled off their escape plan though Butch did not get far before the police found him.

The police backed Butch into a corner, and he started a firefight as more officers arrived. After discussing it, Butch shot Donna in the head and then shot himself. In the end, the author notes, Butch could not escape the prison code inside of himself. He was free on the outside but trapped on the inside.



# Part V, Chapter 16, Willie, A Monster Created by the System, Epilogue

## Part V, Chapter 16, Willie, A Monster Created by the System, Epilogue Summary and Analysis

When Willie heard that his father died in a shootout with police, his respect for his father was restored. He became convinced he would never leave prison alive. A few days later he decided he was going to become a nightmare. Each assault he engaged in from there increased Willie's sense of power. He even liked solitary. Willie started to being transferred from prison to prison. But the repercussions for his were never serious. Eventually a guard videotaped Willie's behavior, which finally led him to be prosecuted.

Willie faced his third felony, which could get him put away for life. He plead not guilty. Willie again acted as his own lawyer and impressed the judge. The jurors were torn but found him not guilty on all counts save the obvious and compelling count of arson and two assault charges. These were all felonies. Willie did not take his sentencing lightly. He reported that the Black Liberation Army was going to free him. This led the police, the FBI and a SWAT team to show up. In court, Willie argued that he was not the same person who committed his first two felonies. The judge, who had come to admire Willie, permitted it. Willie called up many witnesses, all of whom claimed he was Butch Smith. Despite calling thirty-two witnesses, the judge was forced to give Willie twenty-five years. Before he was sentenced, Willie explained that he felt trapped because he was a monster created by the system.

Willie started to believe that his destiny was in prison, to expose the system for what it was. He made a shank and decided to kill a guard, Earl Porter, driving the shank all the way into his chest. Porter barely survived. At trial, Willie again served as his own lawyer and quickly admitted his crime. He decided to put the prison system on trial, and deliberately exposed all his internal motivations to the media, the politicians and the police. He noted that the system was creating more men like him. He recommended putting together a panel to do a psychiatric study of him to help identify other boys like himself before it was too late.

Several of the jurors had sleepless nights; they felt awful for Willie, as he had been imprisoned since he was nine. They did not believe he wanted to kill Porter. Nonetheless, Willie was sentenced to another twenty-five years, which meant effectively life in prison.

In the epilogue, the author develops the lessons of the Bosket family history. More prisons are not enough; they have little deterrent effect for those who come from poor, crime-ridden neighborhoods. Prisons are expensive and there are better ways to handle the problem. The reason that crime declined for centuries and only reversed in the sixties was that the evolving culture of self-control was reversed. Self-control was



mocked; exalting the individual became the norm. Fewer people went to church and people were less public-spirited. Americans continue to pay the price for the legacy of slavery and racism, which shows how they think about crime. Most whites see violence and crime as a black problem.

But most offenders begin young, like Butch and Willie Bosket. They are not hard to identify. There are positive alternatives to writing them off; early intervention is crucial. But parenting is collapsing as divorce increases. Parenting classes may help. Americans must also face their tradition of violence. The culture of honor remains strong among America's poor and marginalized. Americans should replace the morality of honor with the morality of dignity and encourage everyone to find value in themselves, not from fighting and violence. Violence must become less glamorous, as should drug use.

Willie will be in prison until he dies and continues to act up. His sister Sharon wanders the street and his mother Laura works as a security guard. But his sister Cheryl met a good man and is raising six children with him. They go to church together. Cheryl and Willie exchange cards; she has learned that violence is not inevitable and that salvation begins when one rejects the street code. The family, in Cheryl's view, can be rebuilt.



# Characters

## Butch Bosket

Born in 1941, Butch Bosket is the father of Willie Bosket. Both men had similar lives, abandoned by their fathers, raised in part by their grandmother's and grew up on the street, turning to crime and violence at extremely early ages, starting in earnest at nine years old. Their stories diverge, however, as Butch was both less violent, more focused and more intellectual than his son. Butch grew up moving between parts of the juvenile justice system. He early on exhibited symptoms of schizophrenia and a high IQ of at least 130 despite many staff of juvenile institutions thinking he was mentally handicapped.

Butch was placed in prison for murdering two men in a pawnshop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, while trying to get enough money to support his wife, Laura, and his son, Willie. The murders were gruesome and led Butch to years in prison. However, while in prison, Butch met a Jewish political activist, who was in an adjacent cell and who gave him books, which he read. He started education courses in prison, working his way through high school and college with incredibly high grades. Becoming an erudite writer and an excellent and thoughtful student and computer programmer, Butch eventually went Phi Beta Kappa, the first prisoner in history to do so. On the recommendation of his professors, Butch was given parole after working his way to increasingly lower security prisons. However, Butch could not avoid the violence and rage within him, ultimately dating a woman named Donna, molesting her young daughter and then dying in a firefight with police, after an agreement with Donna, shot her and shot himself. While his son Willie initially had little respect for his father going straight, he was impressed when Butch died in a fight with police.

## Willie Bosket

All God's Children is a profile and history of Willie Bosket, who the author argues is the most violent criminal in the history of the New York Correctional System (though this may be an exaggeration). Like his father, Willie grew up without a present father but he also grew up with a verbally and emotionally abusive mother. Willie starting being violent at age nine and learned, like his father, that all he had was honor and respect and the only way to maintain it was to be more dangerous, violent and crazy than anyone else. Willie had been imprisoned for age nine for crime after crime and was shuttled from juvenile center to juvenile system until he was released around age fifteen. Willie's supervisors were convinced that he would kill someone and he eventually killed two men, Noel Perez and Moises Perez (no relation) on two separate occasions, along with committing hundreds of robberies. By the present day, Willie committed over two thousand crimes.



Due to Willie's violent acts, Democratic governor Carey of New York had a juvenile offender act passed which allowed juveniles to be tried as adults, which was used against him to imprison him before age twenty-one. Once he was released, Willie tried to go straight, got married and held down a job. He had had contact with his father, Butch, through letters, but did not respect him as he was still violent at the time. He also became interesting in Black Muslim theology, which led him to intellectualize his natural rage and become convinced that he was a victim of racist white America. In prison as an adult, Willie three times defended himself in court and acted increasingly crazy, earning him extended time in solitary confinement and an effective lifetime imprisonment.

## **Laura Bosket**

Butch's wife and Willie's mother who resented Butch for leaving her and treating Willie abusively as a result. Laura decided that Willie was naturally evil at an early age and gave him up to the juvenile justice system at an early age.

## **James Bosket**

Butch's father and Willie's grandfather who also engaged in a life of crime and whose mind arguably deteriorated probably as a result of contracting syphilis. He also molested Willie and beat his wife Frances.

## **Pud Bosket**

James's father who died in a car wreck at an early age and was also known for being very violent and a "bad man" generally.

## **Aaron Bosket**

Pud's father, who was a slave and the first figure in the Bosket family that the author tracks though Aaron took his name from his first slave masters.

## **Frances Bosket**

Pud Bosket's wife who helped raise Butch Bosket.

## **Marie Bosket**

Butch's mother who initially had promise but who later became a prostitute and alternatively humiliated and abandoned her son.





## **Michael Schoenfield**

A Jewish political activist in the sixties who befriended Butch Bosket and helped jumpstart his education. After Michael's release, Butch communicated with him regularly. Michael was one person who advocated for Butch's parole.

## **Psychiatrists**

Butch and Willie interacted with a number of psychiatrists from the book. Both were diagnosed initially with anti-social personality disorder but it became clear that they were both delusional over time. Butch was diagnosed as schizophrenic.

## **Fellow Prisoners**

Butch and Willie earned great reputations with their fellow prisoners for their violence and crimes. Maintaining their reputations was of high value not only because they enjoyed it and felt powerful but because it protected them.

## **Helpful Teachers**

Many teachers throughout Butch and Willie's lives took an interest in their development and helped them develop their natural intelligence.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Edgefield County**

The South Carolina County with an unusually violent history and where Aaron Bosket was a slave.

### **Augusta, Georgia**

Frances Bosket took the Bosket's to Augusta, Georgia after Pud died.

### **Harlem**

Butch and his family moved to Harlem in the 1950s, assuming it would bring the same promise to the Boskets that it brought to other blacks in the 1920s. They were disappointed. The Boskets have mostly lived in Harlem since then.

### **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

The city where Butch killed two men in a pawnshop.

### **Waupun**

The maximum security prison where Butch was initially imprisoned before he went straight.

### **Wiltwyck**

The juvenile detention facility where both Willie and Butch spent a portion of their childhood and where they both showed their most promise.

### **The Street Code/The Honor Culture**

The code of honor that encourage men to act violently to maintain honor that was imported into South Carolina early in its history and was doubly internalized by black slaves and their descendants. The author sees this code as acutely manifested in the lives of the Bosket men.



## **Bosket Knives**

Many of the Bosket men carried knives.

## **Phi Beta Kappa**

The academic society into which Butch was inducted. He was the first prisoner in history to do so.

## **Physical Abuse**

Nearly all of the Bosket men were both physically abused and physically abused others themselves.

## **Sexual Abuse**

Many of the Bosket men were sexually abused as well as the women. Both James and Butch molested children. James molested Willie and Butch molested his girlfriend Donna's five-year-old daughter Kristin.

## **Rage and Terror**

The combination of rage and terror were the emotional sources of the violence of the Boskets.

## **The Cycle of Violence**

Fox Butterfield documents the extraordinary cycle of violence that existed over generations of Boskets.

## **Crime**

Butch and Willie committed many crimes. Willie may indeed have committed hundreds and perhaps even thousands of crimes.

# Themes

## The Morality of Honor and the Morality of Respect

While *All God's Children* is the story of the Bosket family, and Butch and Willie Bosket in particular, it also advances a fairly novel criminological thesis about the causes of violent crime. The author, Fox Butterfield, deliberately declines to give a purely "liberal" or "conservative" explanation of crime as involving largely situational and environmental causes or as largely cultural, familial and vice-related causes. Instead, he thinks there is a complex interaction between the two that begins with the internalization the morality of honor. The morality of honor is common among primitive societies and many societies prior to the modern period. It focuses, particularly for men, on maintaining reputation and being willing to commit violent acts when one's reputation is slighted. Such a code often takes hold among the poor who have little to their name but their reputation. It often takes hold among the oppressed as well, as they too have little other than honor to hold onto.

The white, Scotch-Irish settlers of South Carolina, Butterfield argues, brought a particularly strong version of honor morality to the region, despite the gradual replacement of honor morality with what Butterfield calls the morality of dignity which prizes treating others with dignity, being kind, abiding by agreements and the like. Due to slavery and the violent enforcement of slavery, blacks internalized honor codes and due to pervasive racism and economic discrimination, the honor code continued to lead blacks, particularly black men, into lives of violence which often split homes, isolated family members and led children to grow up in unstable environments which in turn led to yet another generation internalizing honor morality.

## Reinforcing Social Cycles

The major sociological phenomenon that Butterfield seeks to explain in *All God's Children* is not merely the fact that some black men are violent, but why the violence seems cyclical. The Bosket family is a particularly striking example of reinforcing social cycles. A black father absorbs the honor morality which leads him to engage in reckless behavior. He either dies, runs away from his family or goes to prison, leaving black mothers to raise their children fatherless. As a result of a lack of authority, children have to learn the street code as they have no protector and no male model. Their mothers often project their resentment of their fathers onto them and in many cases are emotionally overbearing and verbally and emotionally abusive, further isolating the child. The experience of an absent father and an abusive mother along produces an internal rage that, when combined with the street code, leads to further violent behavior.

Aaron Bosket was the first free Bosket and despite his best efforts, his family lived in poverty and he died early. His son, Pud, gained a high reputation for being a "bad man" and standing up to white oppression by defying the expectations of blacks being



subordinate. Pud died early, in turn pushing James, his son, into the same cycle, which rebounded down with increasingly violent behavior to Butch and then to Willie, the apotheosis of the reinforcing social cycle.

## Nature and Nurture

As stated in the first theme, author Fox Butterfield deliberately tries to carve a middle ground between conservative and liberal approaches to crime, which, to speak generally, track the nature (conservative) and nurture (liberal) positions. Liberals tend to emphasize the role of poverty and racism in the creation of violence. Conservatives sometimes emphasize genetics, sin and individual responsibility, though they typically also emphasize the importance of culture, religion and tightly knit family structures. Butterfield discounts none of these explanations.

Further, Butterfield also tries to carve out a middle ground between the "tough on crime" position of conservatives and the pure rehabilitation approaches of liberals. While he somewhat skews left, given his hostility to prison life, he thinks that preserving family life is extremely important to stopping the cycle of violence. Butterfield, for instance, recommends family therapy, as group therapy is essential to stopping cycles of dysfunction. He also believes that Cheryl Bosket's hard work with her husband and children may help to stop the cycles. Butterfield does not speculate on genetics. Instead, he thinks moral norms become deeply embedded within cultures and thereby dramatically increase the likelihood that certain individuals will become violent. Other factors, religious, cultural, familial, political and the like can either reinforce or undermine this particular code. Butterfield is impressed that despite the general decline in violence across Western Europe and the United States, honor subcultures continue to maintain a high degree of violence.



# Style

## Perspective

Fox Butterfield, born in 1939, was a journalist who worked at the New York Times for thirty years and has worked on the history of criminal violence. Perhaps his greatest study in to the nature of violent crime is *All God's Children*. As seen in the themes, Butterfield sets out to make particular points about the nature of crime as illustrated by the life of the Bosket family. *All God's children* not only tells a story but makes an explicit, extended argument throughout the book.

Butterfield's primary bias is that he opposed the common American practice of treating criminal violence only in accord with an imprisonment model. On Butterfield's view, prison only hardens criminals and further internalized the honor code that leads to so much violence in the first place. Prison also splits families, leaving children alone with mothers working constantly that pushes children into the street gangs for family structure and again reinforces the code of violence. However, while environmental factors play a role in crime, the major factor in producing criminal violence is familial dysfunction.

The most noteworthy and innovative feature of Butterfield's perspective is that he sees criminal violence as a long, intergenerational series of causes. He also points to the evolution and internalization of moral norms that began with the importation of such norms from the Scotch-Irish culture of white Southern immigrants which were, in turn, doubly internalized into South Carolinian blacks. Due to racism and economic exclusion and the destruction of black families under slavery, the cycle of violence continues and in the case of the Bosket family, escalates with each passing generation.

For Butterfield, prisoners should have the opportunity for family therapy and the net causes of crime should include a pluralistic account of the causes of crime that avoid the abuses of the monolithic perspectives of both conservatives and liberals.

## Tone

The tone of *All God's Children* alternates between the tone of a general, historical narrative and a tone more emotionally involved in the characters of the book. The narrative tone is most prevalent in the beginning of the book, particularly in the first chapter where Butterfield outlines the history of violence in Edgefield County and reviews the nature of the slave trade and the culture of honor prevalent among all races and social classes in Edgefield. But as Butterfield introduces the Bosket family, his tone becomes increasingly personal.

Each generation of Boskets brings more primary information about their family. Thus, not much is known about Aaron Bosket, so the tone in this part of the book still includes significant elements of the historical narrative tone. By the time the reader reaches the



history of Pud Bosket's life, the tone of emotional connection arises. Butterfield intends to inspire both horror and sympathy with the Bosket men, looking at how abused and abandoned they were in the childhoods and how errors in the justice system exacerbated the failures of families.

Butterfield also tells stories about how the Bosket men went through stable, productive periods in their lives and how they ultimately either had these periods and achievements taken away or how they themselves destroyed these opportunities. The emotional tone contains elements of triumph but is tragic in the main due to the fates of the Bosket families and the Bosket men in particular. However, Butterfield ends on a note of hope that the cycle of violence among the Boskets can be broken.

## **Structure**

All God's Children is structured as a chronological narrative, with few exceptions. The book is divided into sixteen chapters divided in five parts. Part I explains the history and culture of Edgefield County and discusses the lives of Aaron and Pud Bosket, the first two of the five generations of Boskets discussed in the book. Chapter one covers the history of Edgefield County while chapter two covers how the master-slave relationship in Edgefield exacerbated the problem. Chapter three covers the life of Aaron Bosket, whereas chapter four covers the life of Pud Bosket.

Part Two focuses largely on Butch. Chapter five discusses the life of James Bosket, the birth of Butch Bosket and Butch's early life before James left. Chapters six and seven shows Butch growing up and his early family life before his long-term imprisonment. Part Four is all about Willie Bosket, from his birth to his first murder when he was fifteen. Chapter eight covers Willie's early childhood, while chapter nine follows him up to just before his teenage years. Chapter ten continues to bring how his criminal proclivity seemed to place him beyond help, whereas chapter eleven takes Willie into his murders.

Part Five focuses on the potential redemption and development of Willie and Butch, and their ultimate downfalls. Chapter fifteen focuses on the tragic events of Butch's life after his escape, whereas Chapter sixteen covers Willie's tragic path towards life imprisonment. The epilogue follows which reviews Butterfield's recommendations and discusses the trials and hopes for the Bosket family.



## Quotes

"Aaron, born into hard servitude, had a phrase for it that he took from an old spiritual: 'We are all God's children.'"

Chap. 1, p. 6

"The constant fighting, looting, and killing left many people with a numbed, often casual attitude toward violence. Soon, the country acquired a reputation as 'Bloody Edgefield' because of its high number of murders."

Chap. 1, p. 7

"It seems to be a law of nature that slavery is equally destructive to the master and the slave. For, whilst it stupefies the latter with fear, and reduces him below the condition of man, it brutalizes the former, by the practice of continual tyranny; and makes him the prey of all the vices which render human nature loathsome."

Chap. 2, p. 22

"For Aaron Bosket, it was the long-awaited day of Jubilee."

Chap. 3, p. 35

"It is almost a daily occurrence for black men to be hunted down with dogs and shot like wild beasts."

Chap. 3, p. 38

"The white man had the law, the white man was the law."

Chap. 4, p. 48

"Don't step on my reputation. My name is all I got, so I got to keep it. I'm a man of respect."

Chap. 4, p. 63

"When I grow up, I'm going to be a bad man, just like my father."

Chap. 5, p. 75

"I trust three people: I, myself, and me."

Chap. 6, p. 96

"For me, that meant back to a home that was not a home, and streets where the first law is survival."

Chap. 6, p. 98

"The wildness is all gone."

Chap. 6, p. 109

"Murder is a hard pillow to sleep on."

Chap. 7, p. 110





"He lived in American but he was not part of it."

Chap. 7, p. 124

"Bad little Booby. One of these days all this stuff going to come back to haunt you."

Chap. 8, p. 138

"Don't be bullied. Hit back. To get respect, you've got to be the toughest."

Chap. 9, p. 164

"He became the boy no one could help."

Chap. 10, p. 179

"Willie had made history."

Chap. 11, p. 227

"Butch is dead. I do not miss him at all."

Chap. 12, p. 245

"I want freedom. I've earned it."

Chap. 12, p. 250

"The warrior in you, is in me."

Chap. 13, p. 258

"The defendant is the most violent youth that the criminal justice system has ever encountered."

Chap. 14, p. 276

"At his moment of triumph, Butch looked back on a lifetime of incarceration. He was now forty-three. He had been locked up in one institution or another since he was nine."

Chap. 15, p. 288

"In the end, Butch had found freedom the only way he could. He had finally gotten out of prison, but he couldn't get prison out of himself."

Chap. 15, p. 301

"Why am I so angry toward the system? Well, the reason is because I'm only a monster that the system created—a monster that's come back to haunt the system's ass. And I'll dog this system until it's in its grave, because it's a wrong system."

Chap. 16, p. 316

"It was too late for Willie to redeem himself. He could only live out the fatal tradition of violence that had made its way from rural South Carolina to the poor streets of the city. Willie was the last car on a long runaway freight train that had jumped the tracks. He had all that dread momentum."

Chap. 16, p. 324

"She also knows a wonderful truth, she tells herself. The family can be rebuilt."  
Epilogue, p. 331



## Topics for Discussion

In author Fox Butterfield's view, where did the "street code" of honor and violence originate?

How did slavery exacerbate the culture of violence in Edgefield?

How did the absent father phenomenon present throughout the generations of Bosket men contribute to their violence?

Describe Butch's worst and best moments. Why weren't there more of the latter and less of the former?

Why did Butch kill himself?

Why did Willie end his correspondence with his father?

Why did Willie hate the system?

What made Butch and Willie so angry, in Butterfield's opinion?

Were Butch and Willie sociopaths? Why or why not?

What is Butterfield's explanation of America's culture of violence? How is his thesis illustrated in his exploration of the Bosket family history? Do you find his view plausible? Why or why not?