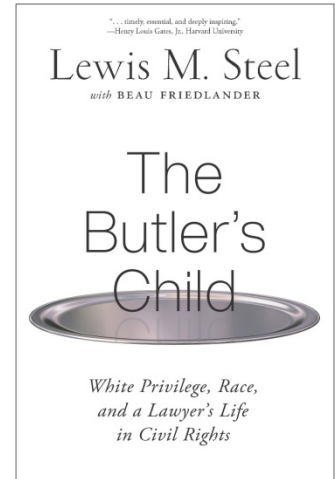


## Reader's Group Guide

### *The Butler's Child* *White Privilege, Race, and a Lawyer's Life in Civil Rights* By Lewis M. Steel with Beau Friedlander

1. Bill Rutherford is a central figure of this narrative, and yet his presence is sidelined by Lewis's confessed ignorance of Bill's personal life. How does Lewis's misunderstanding drive him toward a greater understanding of racial injustice?
2. During his time at Culver, Lewis recounts feeling a deep sense of injustice when noticing the black teenagers who worked in the dining hall. Imagine reading a memoir from the perspective of one of these boys—employed at an elite military school you are barred from attending, waiting on white boys your own age. How does the idea of injustice (especially the adolescent imagining of it) change through centering the people experiencing it?
3. Lewis recounts feeling pulled in two directions by his civil rights work and his comfortable home life. Most notably, this dissonance is felt in his parenting. Even though he was well-versed on the impact of unintentional segregation, he still allowed his children to attend a mostly segregated elite school. What did you think of Kitty's insistence that their children attend private school? What did you think of Lewis's acquiescence?
4. Discuss the function of memoir. Is Lewis's story objectively true? Is there such a thing as objective truth in narrative? Do you ever notice bias or opinion creeping into his voice? What characters do you wish could speak for themselves outside of Lewis's memory of them?
5. What do you think of Bob Carter's approach to NAACP cases (focusing on the negative mental effects of segregation on black children rather than trying to prove intentional malice in school districts)? Did his approach change Lewis's ideas about the concept of "winning" and "progress"?
6. While the memoir focuses primarily on race and tangentially on class, very little is said about the power dynamics of gender. How does Lewis's voice make room for or shut out his wife Kitty's experience?



What did you think of Kitty's role in the narrative? Did she deserve more from Lewis as a husband? Do you think she was fulfilled by her life? What choices and actions were afforded to Lewis that she couldn't have considered for herself?

7. Read this quote out loud: "White privilege doesn't mean your life isn't hard. It means your skin color isn't one of the things making it harder." How does Lewis grapple with his white privilege? What does white privilege mean to you? Has this reading changed or informed the way you think about white privilege?
8. Where does Lewis ultimately land, in your opinion, on the topic of white allyship? Should antiracist white people center themselves in the fight for justice, in hopes that other white people will listen, or should they take a supporting role?
9. Discuss how the legal system has affected your personal life. Do you trust lawyers? Judges? Juries? If you stood in front of a "jury of your peers," what would they think of you? Do you think that, in America today, fair and just due process can exist without bias?
10. How did Lewis's fears and feelings about visiting the South as a Jewish civil rights lawyer in the 1960s affect you? Do you agree with his conclusion that the South and the North are equally racist against black residents in different ways?
11. Discuss John Artis, co-defendant in the Robin "Hurricane" Carter case. What feelings did John's presence provoke in Lewis? When is it worth it to choose freedom over conventionality? What did you think of John's last act (paying Lewis back the money he had borrowed)?
12. How did the epilogue make you feel? Was it jarring to reach the end of this narrative without definitive victory? Do you find the idea of "passing the torch" to younger civil rights lawyers who will continue the fight enough optimism, or do you think the slow crawl of progress over decades of hard work is naturally pessimistic?
13. After reading *The Butler's Child*, do you view the struggle for racial equality as an issue for the Black community, or as national problem? When white people join the fight for racial equality, how does it affect the potential for progress in the United States? Do you think equality can be achieved without white people taking an active role?