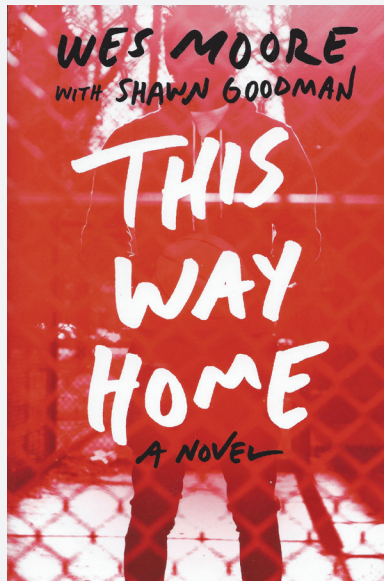


First Opinion: Every Choice Has Consequences

Moore, Wes, and Shawn Goodman. *This Way Home*.
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E. Sybil Durand



“Trouble had found him at last, even though he’d maintained a 3.8 GPA and didn’t get drunk, smoke weed, or fight” (77). For seventeen-year-old Elijah Thomas, living on the edge of a rough suburban neighborhood in Baltimore is all it takes to derail his plans to go to college on a basketball scholarship. Elijah, the only son of a hard-working, single black mother, is a promising basketball player who does his best to stay out of trouble. In the summer between his junior and senior year, all Elijah wants to do is play basketball with his best friends since kindergarten—Dylan and Michael—win the local basketball tournament, and catch the attention of college scouts. He dreams that his talent will draw the father he has never met to one of his games. But on the day Ray Shiver, another “good kid” who gets straight As and plays in the jazz band, is shot in the back on the “right” side of the neighborhood (10), Elijah knows that the home he thought was safe and good now stands between him and his dreams.

Days later, trouble reaches Elijah in the most ordinary way. His friend Michael declares that he found a sponsor for their basketball team and hands them brand-new, expensive basketball shoes. Although Elijah is suspicious about the sponsor, he finds it hard not to accept shoes he never dreamed he would own. Before long, a member of the local gang, Blood Street Nation,

approaches Elijah and quietly threatens to harm his mother if he refuses to represent the gang at the tournament, which is televised. At first, Elijah sees no way out; he spends his days playing basketball and doing yardwork for his new neighbor, Mr. Banks, an army veteran. When his mother learns that the patch on his new jersey is the gang's insignia, she enlists Dylan's and Michael's mothers to push the boys to take a stand against the gang. Elijah and his friends decide not to wear the athletic gear that represents the gang at the basketball tournament's final game. Their decision unsurprisingly leads to tragic consequences, however, and Elijah has to decide whether to flee to another city with his mother or to continue to stand his ground against the gang.

This collaboration between authors Wes Moore (*The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* and *Discovering Wes Moore*) and Shawn Goodman (*Something Like Hope* and *Kindness for Weakness*) explores the conditions that set young people up for very different paths in life. There are too few options for young men like Elijah and his friends: join a gang, enlist in the military like Mr. Banks, or go away to college on an athletic or academic scholarship. Elijah's story implies that getting good grades, having talent, and staying out of trouble might not be enough to escape the insidious crime and gang activity creeping their way into suburban neighborhoods. The narrative offers another option, albeit one that is certainly dangerous: to transform the neighborhood by standing up to and getting rid of gangs. In addition, the authors suggest that having strong adult role models, especially fathers or father figures, might make all the difference in transforming a community. Elijah's mother and Mr. Banks work hard to be successful, and they expect Elijah to do the same. The rest may be up to chance, but readers will appreciate how every choice these young men make lead them down a particular path with life-altering consequences.

Works Cited

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About the Author

E. Sybil Durand is an assistant professor in English education in the department of English at Arizona State University. Her scholarship is grounded in postcolonial and curriculum theories, which situate literature and education at the intersections of sociocultural, historical, political, and national contexts. Durand's research examines representations of youth of color in young adult literature, including multicultural and global young adult texts, and explores the possibilities and challenges of using these books in teacher education courses and with teachers and students in secondary education settings.