Killers of the Flower Moon

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID GRANN

The son of the first woman CEO of a major publishing firm and the director of the Bennett Cancer Center in Connecticut, David Grann grew up hoping to become a novelist. After being hired as a copy editor at *The Hill*, a Washington, D.C. political paper, however, Grann began utilizing his journalistic skills, and quickly advanced to become its executive editor. Grann would later move on to *The New Yorker*, where his articles and essays received critical acclaim and earned him a 2009 George Polk Award, as well as spots on the shortlists for the Samuel Johnson Prize and the National Magazine Award. Grann's two most prominent books, *The Lost City of Z* and *Killers of the Flower Moon*, have been adapted for the screen, nominated for numerous awards, and served as a showcase for Grann's singular and poetic blend of fact and fiction. His books are intimately-detailed, meticulously-researched, and provide a way for the plain facts of history to dovetail seamlessly with Grann's sensitive, empathetic musings on human nature, cultural collision, greed, ambition, and obsession.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Grann's text holistically contextualizes the history which preceded the Osage Reign of Terror—and the fallout of that grisly decade, which reverberates up to the present day. Driven off their ancestral lands, the Osage were, in the 1870s, forced onto a parcel of hilly, rocky land in the new territory of Oklahoma—in other words, forcibly relocated and then handed a scrap of land that no one else wanted. When oil was discovered there, however, the land became a hot commodity—and angry whites, jealous of the Osage's good fortune and once again feeling entitled to Native lands (which they themselves assigned the tribe) sought to get at the oil money by any means necessary. The violence, trauma, and paranoia of the period has seeped through history and now continues to haunt the present-day members of the Osage tribe, many of whose grandparents, great-aunts, and great-uncles were victims of killings orchestrated by William K. Hale himself or other white men and women whose anonymity history has, unfortunately, protected—making the securing of any sense of closure or justice impossible for uncountable members of the tribe.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Killers of the Flower Moon joins a rich tradition of texts which blend official historical record with an interrogation of the facts, embellishment of the atmosphere and time period, and dismantling of preconceived notions of the past popularized in collective American memory. David Grann's previous book, *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon* established the structure that Grann would use in the composition of *Killers of the Flower Moon*. A large part of the book consists of reportage on archaeological excavations in the Amazon that may or may not unearth a long-rumored lost city of riches, while also drawing on historical accounts of a 1911 journey into the region in search of that mystical city; the narrative also encompasses Grann's own journey to the Amazon to supplement his more hands-off research. Hampton Sides's 2007 book *Blood and Thunder: The Epic Story of Kit Carson and the Conquest of the American West* also reanimates the historical record in order to tell the story of the decimation of another tribe of Native Americans—the Navajo—in pursuit of American westward expansion. Contemporary books by Native writers, such as Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem* and Tommy Orange's *There, There* feature characters reckoning with the past traumas of their families and their tribes, while simultaneously interrogate why Native writers are so often pigeonholed into composing endless ruminations on those traumas.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Killers of the Flower Moon*
- **When Written:** 2012-2015
- **Where Written:** New York City, NY
- **When Published:** April 18, 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, true-crime
- **Setting:** Osage County, Oklahoma
- **Climax:** William K. Hale, the mastermind behind several murders of members the Osage tribe, is convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for his crimes—despite federal agent Tom White's fears that Hale would be able to bribe his way out of facing justice.
- **Antagonist:** William K. Hale, Ernest Burkhart, J. Edgar Hoover
- **Point of View:** Third person, first person

EXTRA CREDIT

The Bureau on the Big Screen. In the late 1950s, *The FBI Story* starring James Stewart came to the screen and featured a small segment on Osage murders. Hoover made a cameo appearance in the film—which, according to Grann, "further enshrined him in the popular imagination."

PLOT SUMMARY

In *Killers of the Flower Moon*, writer and journalist David Grann offers an intimately detailed account of a little-known but devastating chapter in American history: the Osage Reign of Terror, officially recognized as a period of five years from 1921 to 1926 during which upwards of twenty Osage Indians were murdered in cold blood for access to their valuable shares of oil money. The Osage, whose reservation just outside of Pawhuska, Oklahoma, once sat atop one of the largest oil deposits in the country, and whose legal protection under tribal law gave each member of the tribe a headright (a share of the mineral trust), were the wealthiest group of people in the country per capita by the early 1920s. In most cases, though, the Osage were deemed "incompetent" by the government and forced to enter into guardianships, in which their own funds were beyond their control, and their white neighbors were placed in control of the overflowing accounts. As white Americans began hearing sensationalized tales of the Osage's wealth, many became indignant—and those living in the towns on and around the Osage reservation sought to dispatch members of the tribe through cruelty, trickery, and downright evil in order to inherit their fortunes.

Grann divides his tale into three parts. The first part of the book, set in the early 1920s, focuses on the world of the Osage Nation and focuses particularly on one family of Osage Indians. Mollie Burkhart, a full-blooded Osage woman, is married to a white man named Ernest Burkhart. Her sisters Rita and Anna also married white men, and her sister Minnie has passed away recently due to a "peculiar wasting illness." When Anna is found dead in a ravine—shot in the back of the head—shortly after another Osage man, Charles Whitehorn, is found murdered execution-style in the same valley, Mollie begins to believe her family is being targeted for their headrights. Then, just months later, when Mollie's mother Lizzie dies of the same "wasting illness" as Minnie and when Rita and her husband Bill Smith are killed in an explosion which reduces their house to rubble, Mollie knows for sure—her family is being picked off, one by one, and she is next.

In the second part of the book, Grann turns his attention to the federal investigators who arrive in Osage County to look into the string of murders, which stretch well beyond Mollie's family and also involve two white men—an oilman and a lawyer who took it upon themselves to try and solve the murders on their own. The bureau of investigation—not yet known under its eventual moniker, the FBI—has just come under the control of a young, peculiar, fastidious man named J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover sends the imposing Tom White, a former Texas Ranger, out to Oklahoma to investigate. White and his team arrive undercover in town, knowing that Hoover hopes to use this case to establish a name for the bureau and strengthen the power of federal investigators. As White and his agents work to solve the crimes, they enlist outlaw informants—bootleggers, moonshiners, cattle rustlers, and worse—to aid in the investigation, and meanwhile get to know the bustling but deeply corrupt world of the Osage reservation boomtowns. Ernest Burkhart's uncle, William K. Hale, is a former cattle rancher who has risen to prominence and now works as deputy sheriff. Hale seems to control everyone and everything—including the fortunes of several Osage. As White and his investigators become more and more enmeshed within the community, they come to realize that Hale has orchestrated a vast plot to pick off Mollie's family members one by one—and then murder Mollie with the help of the duplicitous town doctors, the Shoun brothers, in order to amass the entire family's fortune. Most torturously of all, Mollie's husband Ernest, Hale's nephew, has been in on the plot all along. After securing a statement from the contrite Burkhart, White and his team confront Hale with the evidence, but the collected and calm Hale gleefully states that he will fight the allegations tooth and nail. As the trials begin, Burkhart flips back and forth between testifying against Hale and on his behalf. Eventually, the pain wears on him, and he testifies against Hale. Still, White worries that Hale has the judge and jury in his pocket, renowned as he is throughout the town. Hale is convicted, though, and sentenced to life imprisonment for his crimes, in a stunning turn of events. White, having done right by Hoover and given his boss the ammunition and legitimacy needed to create the Federal Bureau of Investigation, retires from the bureau and takes a job as the warden at the notoriously rough Leavenworth prison—where Hale is his prisoner.

In the third part of the book, David Grann makes a series of several trips to the Osage Reservation between 2012 and 2015. He is conducting research for the book, and, as he digs tirelessly through the U.S. national archives and conducts interviews with Burkhart descendants and many other Osage families affected by the Reign of Terror, comes to see that the bureau actually failed to solve the majority of the Osage murders—and covered up the fact that hundreds of Osage Indians, not just twenty or thirty, were murdered during a span of nearly two decades—not the taut five-year period "officially" deemed the Reign of Terror. Grann laments that the Osage tribe's terrible past has mostly been lost to history—their story is not taught in schools, and because of the FBI's failure to secure justice for the Osage people, it has largely been swept under the rug. Though history is often a "merciless judge," Grann knows that, sometimes, justice can never be obtained—and yet, as one of his contacts on the reservation states, quoting from the Bible, "the blood cries out from the ground."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

David Grann – The author and narrator of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, David Grann is a journalist who finds himself transfixed by the story of the Osage Reign of Terror and by the fact that—despite its brutality, its integral role in the formation of the FBI, and its lessons about the forces of entitlement, greed, and corruption which have governed the fraught and imbalanced relationship between Native Americans and whites since settlers first arrived in the new world—many people living in America today have never even heard of what happened in Osage County between 1918 and the mid-1930s. Grann explores themes of racism and greed, family, legacy, and trauma as he delves deeper into the story of the Reign of Terror and reconstructs through a combination of imagination and historical record the lives, thoughts, hopes, and fears of Tom White, Mollie Burkhart, J. Edgar Hoover, William K. Hale, and more. He also explores the fight against the warped annals of history for the truth—all the while coming to terms with the profound and upsetting discovery that the FBI and others actually attempted to cover up and lesson the devastating effects of the Osage murders, shortening the timeline of the Reign of Terror and leaving unsolved hundreds of suspicious Osage deaths.

Tom White – Tom White, an imposing former Texas Ranger, is in 1925 sent by J. Edgar Hoover's bureau of investigation to look into the Osage murders and hopefully unearth the perpetrator—or perpetrators. Throughout the text, Grann highlights White's lawfulness, decency, and steadfast pursuit of the truth in contrast to the deep, pervasive greed and corruption which have taken hold of Osage County. Ultimately, though White succeeds in securing the conviction of William K. Hale, the mastermind behind many Osage murders, White finds that the corruption which has spread through Osage County precludes him from solving many other murders—and prevents him from stopping those still to come.

Mollie Burkhart – One of the text's three major protagonists, Mollie is an Osage woman who soon becomes a "marked woman"—the final intended victim in a vast and evil conspiracy to consolidate and strip away her oil-rich family's vast wealth. Mollie's struggles to honor the traditions of her tribe's past while conforming to the more-or-less forced assimilation policies which consumed her and her sisters' childhoods forms the emotional crux of a large part of the book's first third. Grann uses Mollie's mounting sense of dread as her family members are picked off one by one to heighten the sense of injustice and horror which characterized the Osage Reign of Terror.

William K. Hale – A well-loved figure in Osage County who is even known by the moniker "King of the Osage Hills." A former cattleman who has risen to prominence over the years and become a deputy sheriff and a respected man about town, William K. Hale is eventually revealed to be the cruel mastermind behind several murders of members of the Osage tribe—namely those of Henry Roan, Anna Brown, Rita Smith, and Bill Smith, along with the ordered killings of several of his own hired "guns" including Asa Kirby and Henry Grammer. Hale's power, influence, and ability to incite feelings of greed and entitlement maneuvered many prominent lawyers, bankers, doctors, and lawmen into his service—he even roped Ernest and Bryan Burkhart into his evil schemes. As Tom White begins to uncover the depths of his power, he worries that Hale is invincible and will never be brought to justice. Hale is ultimately convicted alongside his co-conspirator John Ramsey in the murder of Henry Roan—though as both Tom White and David Grann come to realize, Hale was responsible for the deaths of countless Osage for which he was never brought to justice.

Anna Brown – Mollie's older sister Anna, the eldest of their siblings, is a fun-loving, fast-drinking divorcee when she is murdered in cold blood in May of 1921. Her death becomes one of the first officially-recognized murders of the Osage Reign of Terror, and one of the reasons that federal investigators come to Oklahoma to look into the series of morbid and violent crimes.

Rita Smith – Mollie's sister, a woman so "blind[ly]" in love with her violent husband Bill that she stands by him and refuses to leave him even when he physically assaults her. Many suspect that Bill has married Rita for "sordid [financial] gain," but when the two of them are murdered in their bed in March of 1923, they both become victims of the Reign of Terror.

Bill Smith – Mollie's sister Rita Smith's husband, and an occasionally violent man. He was previously married to Minnie, but when she died of a mysterious wasting illness in 1917, he remarried Rita. Bill and Rita are murdered in their bed when an explosive device goes off beneath their house in the early morning hours of March 10, 1923.

Scott Mathis – The proprietor of a large general store, the Big Hill Trading Company—and the guardian of Anna and Lizzie's financial affairs. He is eventually revealed to be "a crook and evidently in the power of Hale," and Grann learns that out of the nine Osage wards whose affairs Mathis "guarded," seven turned up dead—and at least two were known to have been murdered.

James and David Shoun – A pair of brothers who work as doctors in Osage county. They are trusted members of the community, and are instrumental in conducting autopsies, administering treatments (one of their patients is the diabetic Mollie Burkhart), and weighing in on important matters—but are eventually revealed to be lackeys of Hale's who have been obstructing justice and actually committing poisonings for years.

J. Edgar Hoover – The new director of the bureau of intelligence in 1925, a particular and imposing man whose short stature, paranoia, and germaphobia make him a

contradictory but singular figure. Hoover, desperate to maintain control over and fully restructure the bureau in a consolidation of federal power, assigns Tom White to the Osage murders and urges him to produce positive results—not out of a desire for justice, but because of Hoover's own interests in proving to his superiors that he deserves even more power over the fledgling organization.

Kelsie Morrison – A notorious bootlegger who agrees to work as a bureau informant—but ultimately double-crosses them by working as a double agent for Hale. It is eventually revealed that not only did Morrison kill Anna Brown, but was also once married to an Osage woman—William Stepson's widow—who, just like her former husband, died of a suspected poisoning. Morrison admitted, later, to killing his wife for her headright—and once imprisoned for his crimes, sought to extort money from Tillie's children from a previous marriage.

Blackie Thompson – A notorious outlaw who is released from prison in order to go undercover and aid the bureau in gathering evidence on the Osage killings. Blackie abuses his freedom, though, and robs a bank, kills a police officer, and escapes into the Osage hills before he is at last apprehended again and returned to prison. Blackie is eventually instrumental in revealing that Burkhart and Hale were the orchestrators, together, of the plot to murder Bill and Rita Smith.

Asa Kirby – An outlaw and explosives expert. An associate of Henry Grammer, Kirby designed the bomb used in the demolition of Bill and Rita Smith's house—but was dead before he could testify his involvement, seemingly in a plot concocted by Hale to bump off any witnesses who might reveal his involvement in the murders.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ernest Burkhart – Mollie's husband Ernest, who seems at first a loving and supportive partner, is eventually revealed to be working with his uncle, the villainous William K. Hale, in a plot to consolidate and overtake Mollie's family's oil fortune.

Bryan Burkhart – Ernest's brother Bryan is the last person to see Anna Brown alive, and is eventually revealed to have played a role in her murder.

Lizzie – Mollie, Rita, Anna, and the late Minnie's mother, who dies from a suspected long-term poisoning just months after Anna's murder.

Oda Brown – Anna Brown's former husband.

Charles Whitehorn – An Osage man who is found murdered by gunshot in the middle of May of 1921, just days before Anna Brown's body is discovered. His murderer is never found, and his case is never closed.

Harve M. Freas – The sheriff of Osage County during the Reign of Terror.

John Burger – An agent who works with Tom White on the investigation of the Osage murders.

Frank Smith – An imposing, rugged Texan man and a federal agent whom Tom White enlists to aid in the investigation of the Osage murders.

John Wren – A federal agent, former spy, and "rarity" in the bureau of intelligence due to his American Indian heritage.

James Bigheart – An Osage chief who worked to secure fairer terms of allotment for his tribe in the early 1900s.

George Bigheart – A nephew of the "legendary" James Bigheart who becomes a victim of murder by poisoning as part of a conspiracy between William Hale and H.G. Burt to steal a large sum of money from his estate.

Rose Osage – An Osage woman who claims, falsely, to have murdered Anna Brown.

William Stepson – An Osage Indian who is poisoned to death in February of 1922.

Henry Roan – An Osage Indian who is found dead in his car in February of 1923. Hale had, through a series of complicated and suspect maneuvers, made himself the beneficiary of Roan's generous life insurance policy after claiming that Roan owed him a large sum of money.

Barney McBride – A wealthy oilman who is stabbed, stripped, and left for dead while travelling to Washington D.C. to urge federal authorities to investigate the Osage murders.

W.W. Vaughan – A Pawhuska attorney and former prosecutor who was working to solve the Osage murder cases when he himself was killed in June of 1923—after he supposedly got too close to solving part of the killings.

Henry Grammer – An ex-rodeo star and current moonshine distributor and outlaw. Tom White and his agents long to question Grammer about William Hale but find that Grammer has died—under suspicious circumstances—by the time they track him down.

John Ramsey – An outlaw who is recruited by Hale to perform—and who is ultimately convicted alongside him in—the murder of Henry Roan.

Dick Gregg – A "dreaded" outlaw serving a ten-year sentence in a Kansas penitentiary. He meets with Tom White's agents and reveals that in 1922, Hale attempted to hire Gregg and the other members of his gang to "bump off" Bill and Rita Smith. Gregg and his gang refused the job.

Burt Lawson – An outlaw who gives erroneous information about the killings of Bill and Rita Smith to Tom White in pursuit of securing leniency for his own sentence.

Pike – A corrupt private eye "hired" by Hale in 1921 to look into the Osage murders.

H.G. Burt – A corrupt banker suspected of murdering W.W. Vaughan, Burt was the "guardian" of several Osage, and may have murdered—hired someone else to murder—at least one of

his wards.

Margie Burkhart – The granddaughter of Mollie Burkhart and the daughter of James "Cowboy" Burkhart, Margie is an Osage woman living in present-day Oklahoma who, when returning to visit the Osage reservation, must confront the pain, trauma, and loss which have come to define her family.

Kathryn Red Corn – The director of the Osage Nation Museum who shows Grann photographs and artifacts from the Reign of Terror and tells him stories passed down from the period that don't exist in the historical records.

Mary Jo Webb – A retired teacher and Osage tribe member whom Grann meets with during his sojourn to Osage County.

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.

RACISM AND EXPLOITATION

Killers of the Flower Moon describes the Osage Reign of Terror—a period that stretched from the early 1920s to the 1930s, in which uncountable numbers of the oil-rich Osage Indian tribe were murdered in a mad grab for valuable shares of the tribe's mineral trust. At the center of this tragedy was a deep, permeating racism that not only sought to diminish the Osage, but in many cases denied them their humanity entirely. Through a complicated but essentially state-sanctioned campaign of exploitation, American society at the time—from the federal government all the way down to the racist and greedy white Americans who lived alongside the tribe in supposed harmony—systematically and brutally dispatched the Osage. In relaying the Osages' story, David Grann argues that longstanding, deeply-ingrained racism towards Native Americans and the resulting sense of indignity when the Osage tribe came into good fortune was responsible for the exploitation, cruelty, and murder that came to define a significant chapter of the tribe's history.

Grann demonstrates throughout the text the ways in which deeply racist attitudes towards Native Americans—and the wealthy Osage in particular—informed societal treatment of the tribe. After being pushed off of their ancestral lands by the uncaring American government for centuries, the Osage were, in the early 1870s, forced onto a rocky, relatively infertile slab of hilly land in what would soon become the state of Oklahoma. The Osage, realizing that oil deposits existed beneath the land, secured a guarantee from the government that not only would their reservation encompass the land they'd been given, but whatever minerals lay beneath it as well. Thus, when white Americans discovered the oil and began drilling, they had to obtain permission from the tribe and pay for use of the land rightfully belonged to the Osage.

As the oil boom intensified, the Osage's wealth expanded, and soon they were considered "the wealthiest people per capita in the world." Grann paints a vivid portrait of the lifestyles that the Osage Indians were enjoying in the early days of the twentieth century: they possessed fancy cars and private chauffeurs, fine **clothing and jewelry**, and often lived in sprawling homes. The American public became "transfixed by the tribe's prosperity"—and indeed threatened, "alarm[ed]," and "outrage[d]" by it. Because most white Americans were disdainful of the culture and customs of the various Native American tribes throughout the land, they did not understand that much of the Osage's spending "reflected ancestral customs that linked grand displays of generosity with tribal culture." Instead, many saw the Osage's wealth as a "gaudy spree"—even as the multimillionaire oil barons who profited off their land built mansions, flouted their egregious profits, and drove themselves back into poverty due to opulence and overspending.

Racism towards the Osage was intimately tied with white Americans' desire to subjugate and dominate Native Americans, keeping them confined to roles as second-class citizens whose lands and livelihoods were controlled by the government. This attitude is reflected in the racist and offensive policies installed by the federal government in an attempt to control the Osage's wealth. By assigning guardians to the "incompetent" members of the tribe and refusing them access to their own bank accounts, white officials in power sought to exploit the Osage and deny them sovereignty over their own lives.

The racism towards and exploitation of the Osage and Native Americans more widely is reflected in Grann's detailing of the fight for justice against William K. Hale—the mastermind behind several deaths during the reign of terror, including those of Osage woman Mollie Burkhart's sisters, mother, and brother-in-law, with the help of Mollie's own husband Ernest. As federal investigator Tom White brings the case to trial, he worries that Hale will escape justice due to his influence in Oklahoma—and his whiteness. Others shared White's apprehension; one reporter at the time noted that the "attitude of a pioneer cattleman [Hale's former profession] toward the full-blood Indian [...] is fairly well recognized," and a prominent member of the Osage tribe declared that the jury in Hale's case would be charged with deciding "whether a white man killing an Osage is murder—or merely cruelty to animals." One of the men charged with a role in the plot, the outlaw John Ramsey, went so far as to admit in his confession that "white people in Oklahoma [think] no more of killing an Indian than they did in 1724." In presenting the blatantly racist attitudes that kept even the Osage—some of the wealthiest citizens in America at

the time—subject to financial guardianships, theft, murder, and other cruel humiliations, Grann shows how dangerous but commonly-accepted denials of Native American humanity fueled the exploitation and murder of countless members of the Osage tribe.

Grann's explosive book is about many things—family, greed, history, legacy, and the eternal battle between the truth and deception—but at its very core is an infuriating and, unfortunately, all-too-relevant tale of how dangerous racism truly is. Everyday racism motivated the killings of countless Osage, and institutional racism all but sanctioned it, making it possible for a Reign of Terror to take hold of an entire community and leave in its wake an atmosphere of dread, paranoia, and mistrust that pervades to this day.

AMERICAN ENTITLEMENT, GREED, AND CORRUPTION

Though the events it portrays took place nearly a century ago, *Killers of the Flower Moon* is very much a book for the modern era. Through his investigation into the Osage Reign of Terror and the reverberations the grisly ordeal has had throughout American history, David Grann paints a far-reaching and yet intimate portrait of how greed, entitlement, and corruption have defined American history, American society, and American institutions. Grann shows how entitlement turns into greed and how greed becomes corruption, arguing that a toxic combination of these three forces both made America—and broke it.

Grann uses a parable from nature in the book's opening to depict these choking, obliterating forces, describing a phenomenon that occurs each spring on the prairies of Oklahoma: millions of tiny flowers bloom, spreading across the hills. As summer descends, larger, taller flowers and invasive weeds "creep over the tinier blooms, stealing their light and water" until the smaller flowers' petals flutter away and they are buried underground. This time of year, referred to as the "flower-killing moon" by the Osage tribe, is a potent metaphor for what American greed has done to the tribe's culture, wealth, and agency.

When racist white Americans witnessed the rapid influx of wealth into the Osage community in the midst of the oil boom, they became indignant—and their sense of entitlement to that wealth grew. Many were angry at the sight of "rich redskin[s]" and their white servants, and nervous that the reversal of the status quo when it came to race and societal position in Osage territory would soon spread to the country as a whole. As reporters seized upon and embellished images from the reservation boomtowns, American entitlement turned to greed. While those around the nation reading of the Osages' wealth in newspapers could only be "transfixed" by the spectacle of it, those living amongst the Osage had the chance to exploit them. Greedy and desperate for a piece of the Osage fortune, local business owners regularly price-gouged their Osage neighbors—one undertaker regularly charged Osage Indians the equivalent of $80,000 in modern currency for a simple burial.

These greedy practices soon slid into outright violence as the Osage's white neighbors desperately yearned for an even bigger cut of the tribe's wealth. Serious, wide-ranging forms of corruption overtook the Osage territory, including exploitation of the role of financial guardian, blackmail and extortion, sham marriages, and, ultimately, murder. White Americans living in other parts of the country wrote to the tribe begging to arrange marriages; financial guardians of the Osage tribe members, appointed due to the government's perception of Native Americans' "incompetence" in handling their own finances, regularly stole money from their wards' accounts; poisonings, shootings, and even bombings were rampant on the reservation as corrupt individuals like William K. Hale and H.G. Burt crafted vast conspiracies to get rich off of their neighbors' inheritances.

After establishing these patterns—and how they ravaged Oklahoma during the Reign of Terror and beyond—Grann examines how entitlement, greed, and corruption shaped America before, during, and after the fraught time period. In looking back at how the Osage came to occupy their oil-rich land in the first place, Grann reveals that the tribe was pushed and pulled around the American West by government edicts that deprived them of their ancestral lands, forcing them to adapt to new, strange territories and systematically decimating the bison population so as to further limit the physical and cultural growth of the tribes they'd sequestered. When the government realized that the rocky, hilly outcrop deeded to the Osage in the late 1870s was valuable, they took pains to try and keep the Osage from actually seeing the profits they made from it. Essentially, the government felt entitled to the Osage's ancestral land, seized it in a fit of greed, and then desperately tried to backpedal by instituting even further methods of control and corruption when they realized that they had essentially handed the tribe the keys to the greatest wealth in the nation.

Grann explores, too, how American institutions like the FBI are often founded upon corruption. The Osage Reign of Terror—and the investigation thereof—is tied inextricably with the formation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and, throughout the text, Grann explores the roles that greed, entitlement, and corruption played in the making of the Bureau. The young and fastidious J. Edgar Hoover, who became deputy director of the fledgling bureau in 1924, realized that in order to consolidate power and ensure that he would be able to retain his newfound authority, he needed to prove his worth. Hoover seized upon the Osage murders as a way to demonstrate the effectiveness of the bureau and, in turn,

pursue his own security and power. The fact that, in spite of Hoover's use of the case to advance his own interests, hundreds of the Osage murders were never solved or even fully investigated demonstrates the corruption that pervades institutions founded upon a web of greed and lies.

As Grann comes to understand that the Reign of Terror spanned a larger period of time and encompassed more deaths than the FBI—or any American organization—has ever fully or officially recognized, he impresses upon his readers the notion that Hoover's own sense of entitlement to power over the bureau and lust for power directly prevented the murders committed during the Reign of Terror from ever being fully excavated, mourned, or solved; the FBI's investigation, though not quite a sham, was certainly mishandled, and its many failures and shortcomings were covered up in the name of celebrating the Bureau's success rather than confronting its limitations and its disregard for actually uncovering the whole truth.

In examining the corrupt foundations not just of American institutions, but of American culture at large, Grann provides a context for the vitriol many Americans felt towards the Osage once their tribe came into a great deal of wealth. Entitlement to Native lands, greed for the Osage's tribal wealth, and institutional corruption that allowed for the annihilation of a culture that had flourished in spite of centuries of oppression are, according to Grann, ugly truths with which America must reckon if the country is ever to repair the evils of its still-broken societal structures and legal institutions.

FAMILY, LEGACY, AND TRAUMA

Though the Osage Reign of Terror spanned over ten years and claimed the lives of hundreds, the murders at the core of Grann's text largely befall one family: that of Mollie Burkhart, an Osage Indian who is forced to reckon with her husband Ernest's betrayal—and her county's racism, greed, and corruption—after her mother and three sisters perish over the course of just a couple years. Later in the book, as Grann follows Mollie's family through to the present day, he uses her descendants' stories to argue that legacies of pain and trauma are passed down through families, leaving younger generations vulnerable to the feelings of ostracism, anger, and distress visited upon their ancestors.

During the first two-thirds of the book, Grann focuses on Mollie Burkhart and her family in order to demonstrate how Mollie's generation—and that of her parents—were already under siege at the start of the Reign of Terror, still wrestling with the fallout of the racism, extermination, and forced relocation of earlier Osage generations. Throughout her childhood, Mollie was forced to assimilate into white American culture only to find that as an adult, despite all she had given up in the name of being accepted by white society, she was still shunned, subject to racism, and barred from exercising any agency over her own life or finances. The anxiety Mollie feels about her identity as a member of the Osage tribe reflects the changing times and priorities of many Osage men and women.

As children, people of Mollie's generation had been forced to adopt white names, practice Catholicism, abandon their native tongue, and dress in **Americanized garb** rather than their **traditional tribal garments**—all, Grann suggests, in name of an unspoken promise that assimilation would make life easier and less rife with persecution. Mollie and her sisters grew up to find, though, that their inherited wealth rendered them outcasts in their community anyway due to their white neighbors' jealousy. Ultimately, in the face of all they'd compromised, they were still treated as pariahs in their own land and would have to make further compromises—including entering into marriages with white men in hopes of gaining some measure of control over their own estates—just to survive.

Grann examines Mollie's parents' stories, too, as he explores the role of trauma in family legacy. Over the course of her own lifetime, Mollie's mother Lizzie's generation became "dramatically unmoored" from their traditions, and with "nothing familiar to clutch and stay afloat in the world of white man's wealth." Whereas Mollie and her sisters Rita, Anna, and Minnie barely knew life before the oil boom, Lizzie, her husband, and their contemporaries saw the oil as a "cursed blessing," and looked forward to the day when it dried up. Lizzie grew up helping her family with their harvest on their old reservation in Kansas, dressing in traditional clothing each day, and hunting buffalo twice a year—she was subjected to the forced migration of the early 1870s, and witnessed the dwindling of her tribe as disease, famine, and lack of resources (namely bison) winnowed their numbers. Through Lizzie's story, Grann shows that the backwards trail of trauma is often without end—the traumas Lizzie faced in her lifetime were severe and alienating but were also a continuation of her own parents' and ancestors' sufferings. Though she tried to hold onto her tribal culture and traditions, Lizzie could not prepare her own daughters for the unique challenges their generation would face, as they bore the burden of Lizzie's generation's suffering in addition to the unpredictable, horrific crimes yet to be perpetrated against their people.

In the book's final section, set between 2012 and 2015, Grann visits Oklahoma several times to complete additional research for his book, and winds up connecting with the descendants of many of the people whose lives and traumas he spent its earlier pages writing about. As he grows to know these individuals, he comes to recognize the toll their ancestors' suffering has taken on their present lives, and paints a startling portrait of the dark side of family legacy. When Grann visits the Osage Nation and connects with several members of the tribe, he is shocked to make the acquaintance of Margie Burkhart—Mollie's granddaughter. As Margie shows Grann around town, pointing

out spots important not just to her family's history but to the history of the region, each place seems marked by pain, sorrow, and death. Grann comes to see that Margie must live each day under the compounded injustices enacted not only against her father, but her grandparents, her great-grandparents, and ancestors stretching back countless generations.

Grann meets with others who are descended from victims of the Reign of Terror. A great-grandson of Henry Roan attests that, for present-day members of the tribe, the violence their parents' generations (and so many generations that came before) suffered is always "in the back of [their] minds," and prevents many of them from being able to "trust anybody." Mary Jo Webb, a retired teacher whose grandfather's murder didn't even show up in FBI files—and whose perpetrators were never identified or apprehended—begs Grann to do some more research about her grandfather's death, and Grann realizes that the wounds of the past have still not healed for Mary Jo and her contemporaries.

As Grann investigates the history the Osage murders, he finds that the suffering of the victims of the Reign of Terror cannot be confined to that small window of time. Grann's research takes him deeper and deeper through the history of the tribe, while also connecting him to its present—a present in which the descendants of victims and survivors of the period are still forced to reckon with the physical and psychological wounds that are their families' unhappy legacies.

HISTORY, TRUTH, AND LIES

David Grann chooses to close out *Killers of the Flower Moon* with a pained look at the ways in which history often obscures the truth, as much of it is based on a foundation of lies and fabrications. Grann uses the story of the Osage tribe and the Reign of Terror to argue that even though the truth is necessary, healing, and transformative, history—written by the "victors"—often perpetuates harmful and frustrating lies when it ought to liberate, rather than further obscure, the truth.

Killers of the Flower Moon is carefully-reported, chock-full of facts, dates, and names, and is written in such intimate detail as Grann reconstructs events and individuals from the past that it seems, impossibly, as if he were there during the Reign of Terror. Grann's allegiance to reconstructing history is, in the book's third and final section, revealed to be not just his duty to his job as a writer and reporter, but in many ways a personal lament about the unfairness of the fact that so much of the truth about the Osage murders has disappeared, lost forever to history and usurped by half-truths and outright lies. "So much is gone now," Grann writes upon arriving in Osage County for the first time in 2012. He is shocked by how devastated and abandoned the physical landscape is, but soon realizes that this physical desolation metaphorically reflects the ways in which history, records, and collective cultural memory have forgotten the Reign of Terror.

As he connects with modern-day members of the Osage tribe and listens to their stories, he comes to understand just how deeply history has failed them, their ancestors, and even the non-Native victims of the Reign of Terror. A blend of coercion, manipulation, incompetency, and apathy are revealed to be the culprits behind the lack of information available about many of the unsolved murders. When meeting with the granddaughter of W.W. Vaughan—a lawyer killed in the mid-twenties while trying to investigate, on his own, several Osage murders—Grann learns that for many years, members of her family were terrified of investigating the murder further due to the threats they'd received on the occasions they'd tried to obtain more information. Grann takes it upon himself to investigate, on behalf of the members of Vaughan's family who never felt they could, and ultimately solves the case. When he presents his findings to Vaughan's granddaughter, he warns her that because of how much time his passed—and how much information remains unavailable—the whole truth may never be discovered, but the woman is so grateful for even a portion of the facts that she breaks down in tears.

Despite its grim nature, Grann comes to understand that his research is a noble and necessary undertaking once he sees how many gaps there are in the historical record. He learns that the fledgling FBI and a slew of private investigators left a trail of spotty records, unsolved case files, and even unprosecuted suspects in their wake. In many cases, investigators would gather enough evidence to indict and even convict someone of murder, but for reasons unknown (Grann suspects bribery, racism, or simple apathy) would refuse to take conclusive action, resulting in the truth—and justice—being lost to history. Grann takes it upon himself to personally investigate as many of these murders as he can, securing at least some measure of truth for the desperate descendants of Osage victims. As the cold case files mount, however, he recognizes that hundreds of murders ranging from 1918 to the mid 1930s will, lamentably, never be solved.

In the end, though Grann is just one man and as such is unable to fully contend with the vast spate of cover-ups, lies, unsolved files, and other half and un-truths left behind by history. As he considers the painful fact that not only has so much related to the Reign of Terror been covered up and swept under the rug, but that, as a result, most Americans aren't ever taught about the murders, their role in the formation of the FBI, or their present-day consequences, Grann feels overwhelmed and "lost in the mist." When Mary Jo Webb, a teacher and descendent of a murdered Osage man, reminds Grann of a quote from the Bible—"The blood cries out from the ground," words God spoke to Cain after Cain killed Abel—Grann is left with the knowledge that though history should be a "merciless" force that lays bare humanity's "tragic blunders," sometimes even history does not remain unscathed by people's cruelty, corruption, and greed.

SYMBOLS

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

CLOTHING

Throughout *Killers of the Flower Moon*, one potent symbol recurs: clothing. Clothing functions as a method of self-expression and self-identification for the real-life "characters" Grann reanimates through a combination of historical record and imagination, and additionally symbolizes, for many characters, the struggle to preserve one's identity in the face of oppression and intimidation.

For Mollie Burkhart—an Osage woman who has, throughout her life, struggled with the humiliations of assimilation (and the greater humiliations of refusing to assimilate), clothing becomes a way for her to remain somewhat attached to her culture and her heritage despite her family's having become "unmoored" from many of their tribal traditions. Mollie is frequently dressed in a traditional Indian blanket—as is her sister Anna, before her death. As Grann reveals that in the Catholic school the girls attended, they were forbidden from dressing in tribal clothing or speaking their native tongue, it becomes clear that Mollie and her sisters use their Indian blankets in conjunction with more Americanized dress in order to preserve a piece of their culture and assert to their family, to their neighbors, and to themselves that their past will not be so easily erased.

Clothing is also a symbol identity preservation for former Texas Ranger turned federal agent Tom White and J. Edgar Hoover, his boss at the bureau of investigation (soon to become the FBI). White is a "cowboy" of a man—imposingly tall and large, he was the son of a hangman in Texas and more or less grew up on the grounds of a jail. His rough-and-tumble past working with the Rangers has instilled in him a frontiersman's disposition—one that is threatened by increasingly constricting rules about dress code and manner at the bureau. The vain and controlling Hoover—insecure about his short stature and fearful of having any of his subordinate agents exude more power than him—looks down on lawmen like White who proudly wear large cowboy hats and shirk a demure, East-coast, "college-boy" look. The sartorial struggle between Hoover and White is representative of the larger power struggle between the men; as Hoover seeks to mold the fledgling bureau to his standards, White and many men like him are in danger of being pushed out for their untraditional backgrounds, tactics, and indeed appearances.

The final character to whom clothes are an important symbol is the evil William K. Hale—a former cattle rancher who, by the 1920s, had risen to prominence in Osage county and was commonly known as the "King of the Osage Hills." Hale was in favor with nearly everybody—his jaunty, generous disposition and congeniality, however, masked a much darker reality. The scheming Hale was covetous of the Osage tribe's wealth, and through a complicated network of bribery, corruption, and general lawlessness (which involved store proprietors, doctors, policemen, bankers, and even outlaws hiding in the hills) had backed or even orchestrated several plots to poison, shoot, and otherwise dispatch prominent Osage tribe members to obtain their headrights. Hale is depicted both in photographs and in Grann's descriptions as always finely dressed, often in a "dandy" three-piece suit and bowtie, along with fine fedoras and pert round glasses. In Hale's case, he uses his outward appearance—once which effects wealth, propriety, and order—to mask the dark, chaotic, and evil force within him that drives him to commit egregious and notorious crimes.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Killers of the Flower Moon* published in 2018.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ The public had become transfixed by the tribe's prosperity, which belied the images of American Indians that could be traced back to the brutal first contact with whites—the original sin from which the country was born. Reporters tantalized their readers with stories about the "plutocratic Osage" and the "red millionaires," with their brick-and-terra-cotta mansions and chandeliers, with their diamond rings and fur coats and chauffeured cars. One writer marveled at Osage girls who attended the best boarding schools and wore sumptuous French clothing, as if "*une tres jolie demoiselle* of the Paris boulevards had inadvertently strayed into this little reservation town."

At the same time, reporters seized upon any signs of the traditional Osage way of life, which seemed to stir in the public's mind visions of "wild" Indians. One article noted a "circle of expensive automobiles surrounding an open campfire, where the bronzed and brightly blanketed owners are cooking meat in the primitive style." Another documented a party of Osage arriving at a ceremony for their dances in a private airplane—a scene that "outrivals the ability of the fictionist to portray." Summing up the public's attitude toward the Osage, the *Washington Star* said, "That lament, 'Lo the poor Indian,' might appropriately be revised to, 'Ho, the rich redskin."'

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, taken from the book's first chapter, David Grann sets the scene and outlines some of the tensions, prejudices, and resentments between whites and Native Americans in the 1920s. The Osage had been pushed by the government off of their ancestral homelands and onto a hilly, rocky patch of land in Oklahoma—a patch of land which was soon realized to have enormous wealth, as it was sitting on top of one of the largest oil deposits in the country. As the Osage began benefiting from their newfound mineral wealth, the American public grew outraged at the idea of "rich redskin[s]," and feelings of entitlement and greed soon led to a surge of corruption, violence, and evil in Osage County as white people sought to steal away the Osage tribe's newfound riches.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Lizzie relied on Mollie to deal with the authorities. During Lizzie's lifetime, the Osage had become dramatically unmoored from their traditions. Louis F. Burns, an Osage historian, wrote that after oil was discovered, the tribe had been "set adrift in a strange world," adding, "There was nothing familiar to clutch and stay afloat in the world of white man's wealth." In the old days, an Osage clan, which included a group known as the Travelers in the Mist, would take the lead whenever the tribe was undergoing sudden changes or venturing into unfamiliar realms. Mollie, though she often felt bewildered by the upheaval around her took the lead for her family—a modern traveler in the mist. She spoke English and was married to a white man, and she had not succumbed to the temptations that had hurt many young members of the tribe, including Anna. To some Osage, especially elders like Lizzie, oil was a cursed blessing. "Some day this oil will go and there will be no more fat checks every few months from the Great White Father," a chief of the Osage said in 1928. "There'll be no fine motorcars and new clothes. Then I know my people will be happier."

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), Anna Brown, Mollie Burkhart, Lizzie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 27-28

Explanation and Analysis

Here, David Grann presents another facet of the Osage oil boom: members of the tribe who, uprooted and unmoored from the lives they once knew, actually resented the wealth that came from the oil—understanding how it would impact their tribal traditions and make them targets for jealous, greedy, and entitled white Americans. Mollie, Rita, and Anna's mother Lizzie had, throughout her youth, already endured disenfranchisement, starvation, misery, and cultural impoverishment as her and her tribe's way of life was systemically attacked and decimated. Now, watching white Americans come up with even more ammunition to justify their malevolent actions against the Osage, Lizzie and many others of her generation find themselves simply wishing that such vast mineral and material wealth had never come to their people in the first place.

Chapter 4 Quotes

The Osage had been assured by the U.S. government that their Kansas territory would remain their home forever but before long they were under siege from settlers. Among them was the family of Laura Ingalls Wilder, who later wrote *Little House on the Prairie* based on her experiences. "Why don't you like Indians, Ma?" Laura asks her mother in one scene.

"I just don't like them; and don't lick your fingers, Laura."

"This is Indian country, isn't it?" Laura said. "What did we come to their country for, if you don't like them?"

One evening, Laura's father explains to her that the government will soon make the Osage move away: "That's why we're here, Laura. White people are going to settle all this country, and we get the best land because we get here first and take our pick."

Though, in the book, the Ingallses leave the reservation under threat of being removed by soldiers, many squatters began to take the land by force. In 1870, the Osage-expelled from their lodges, their graves plundered-agreed to sell their Kansas lands to settlers for $1.25 an acre. Nevertheless, impatient settlers massacred several of the Osage, mutilating their bodies and scalping them. An Indian Affairs agent said, "The question will suggest itself, which of these people are the savages?"

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, in which David Grann invokes a quotation from Laura Ingalls Wilder's popular *Little House on the Prairie*, speaks volumes about the racism, greed, and entitlement many white Americans felt when it came to their Native American neighbors. Laura's mother doesn't give a reason for her dislike of the Indians—she simply doesn't like them. Her casual, banal racism belies a sense of entitlement to the "best land," and she and her husband justify their backwards thinking by asserting that they and their fellow white settlers have gotten somewhere "first"—disregarding the fact that Native tribes had lived across America for literal millennia. The real-life slaughter of Natives because of this sense of entitlement—and deeply-ingrained racism—was violent, barbaric, and vengeful. As the Osage murders begin in the 1920s, that same sense of entitlement turned to violent outrage recurs.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The accounts rarely, if ever, mentioned that numerous Osage had skillfully invested their money or that some of the spending by the Osage might have reflected ancestral customs that linked grand displays of generosity with tribal stature. Certainly during the Roaring Twenties, a time marked by what F. Scott Fitzgerald called "the greatest, gaudiest spree in history," the Osage were not alone in their profligacy. [An] oil baron [named Marlan] who found the Burbank field had built a twenty-two-room mansion in Ponca City, then abandoned it for an even bigger one. With an interior modeled after the fourteenth-century Palazzo Davanzati in Florence, the house had fifty-five rooms (including a ballroom with a gold-leaf ceiling and Waterford crystal chandeliers), twelve bathrooms, seven fireplaces, three kitchens, and an elevator lined with buffalo skin. The grounds contained a swimming pool and polo fields and a golf course and five lakes with islands. When questioned about this excess, Marland was unapologetic.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83-84

Explanation and Analysis

Deepening his early exploration of the ways in which the white American imagination conceived of the Osage's sudden wealth, Grann, in this passage, contrasts the perceived extravagance of Osage lives in the 1920s with gaudy, grand displays of wealth by white Americans in the same time period. White Americans such as Marland felt entitled not just to the concept of wealth, but to the freedom to use their funds and assets however they pleased—but when the Osage, whose tribal traditions prize generosity and whose spending was nowhere near as frivolous as that of their white neighbors, made any displays of wealth at all, those displays were seen as direct attacks on and threats to white supremacy.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ When Hoover met with White, his grip on power remained tenuous, and he was suddenly confronting the one thing that he'd done everything to avoid since becoming director: a scandal. The situation in Oklahoma, Hoover believed, was "acute and delicate." Even a whiff of misconduct coming so soon after Teapot Dome could end his career. Only weeks earlier, he'd sent a "confidential" memo to White and other special agents, stating, "This Bureau cannot afford to have a public scandal visited upon it."

As White listened to Hoover, it became evident why he'd been summoned. Hoover needed White—one of his few experienced agents, one of the Cowboys—to resolve the case of the Osage murders and thereby protect Hoover's job. "I want you," Hoover said, to "direct the investigation."

Related Characters: J. Edgar Hoover, David Grann (speaker), Tom White

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, J. Edgar Hoover—who has recently taken over the scandal-plagued bureau of investigation and is desperate to remake it into a respectable institution—tells investigator Tom White that he wants him to spearhead the investigation of the Osage murders. White knows what is on the line—Hoover, a fastidious and peculiar man, is obsessed with appearances and control, and wants for the investigation in Oklahoma to be smooth and swift. This passage sets up the fact that for the fledgling FBI, the solving of the Osage murder cases was little more than a PR campaign—Hoover did not care nearly so much about the lives already lost, or those that could still be spared, as he did about securing his own stronghold on the institution.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ This so-called Indian business, as White discovered, was an elaborate criminal operation, in which various sectors of society were complicit. The crooked guardians and administrators of Osage estates were typically among the most prominent white citizens: businessmen and ranchers and lawyers and politicians. So were the lawmen and prosecutors and judges who facilitated and concealed the swindling (and, sometimes, acted as guardians and administrators themselves). In 1924, the Indian Rights Association, which defended the interests of indigenous communities, conducted an investigation into what it described as "an orgy of graft and exploitation." The group documented how rich Indians in Oklahoma were being "shamelessly and openly robbed in a scientific and ruthless manner" and how guardianships were "the plums to be distributed to the faithful friends of the judges as a reward for their support at the polls." [...] An Osage, speaking to a reporter about the guardians, stated, "Your money draws 'em and you're absolutely helpless. They have all the law and all the machinery on their side. Tell everybody, when you write your story, that they're scalping our souls out here."

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), Tom White

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165-167

Explanation and Analysis

When Tom White arrives in Osage County and begins unfurling in earnest the crimes against the Osage people, he discovers a vast and criminal infrastructure of corruption and conspiracy in which the taking of Native lives in pursuit of cash is a veritable "business" involving all levels of society. White is shocked, but for the Osage, this exceedingly racist, violent, and dehumanizing treatment is nothing new—they simply have not been able to get anyone else to pay attention to their plight or come to their aid, incapable of getting through the web of lies, coverups, and complicity which threaten their lives daily. The "shameless" cruelty and corruption—and the white residents of the county's sense of entitlement in carrying out robberies and murders—is a symptom of white anxiety regarding loss of social power in the face of rapidly-expanding Osage wealth.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ White and his men felt a growing sense of progress. A Justice Department prosecutor sent Hoover a note, saying that in the few months since White had assumed command of the investigation, "many new angles of these cases were successfully developed" and a "new and enthusiastic spirit seemed to pervade the hearts of all of us."

Still, White faced the same problem with the investigation of Mollie Burkhart's murdered family that he did with his inquiry into Roan's death. There was no physical evidence or witnesses to prove that Hale had carried out or ordered any of the killings. And without an airtight case White knew that he'd never be able to bring down this man [Hale] who hid behind layers of respectability—who called himself the Reverend—and who used a network of patronage to influence the sheriff's office, prosecutors, judges, and some of the highest state officials.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), William K. Hale, Mollie Burkhart, Tom White

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

As Tom White continues his investigation, he comes to realize that William K. Hale—the widely-beloved "King of the Osage Hills"—is the mastermind behind a vast conspiracy to systematically pick off, one by one, members of Mollie Burkhart's family in order to consolidate their wealth in Mollie's name before finally dispatching her and inheriting, through her husband Ernest, her great fortune. Because of Hale's influence, though, White fears that he will never be able to make a strong enough case against Hale. As a respected white man, Hale is afforded a level of protection by racist American society that makes it even more difficult to obtain justice. Nevertheless, White publicly puts on a front of confidence and "enthusias[m]," knowing though he does how difficult it will be to dismantle the racist and corrupt institutions and individuals which run Osage County.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ White was feeling pressure not just from Hoover. In the short time that White had been on the case, he had seen the lights burning each night around the homes of the Osage, and seen that members of the community wouldn't let their children go into town alone, and seen more and more residents selling their homes and moving to distant states or even other countries like Mexico and Canada. (Later one Osage called it a "diaspora.") The desperation of the Osage was unmistakable, as was their skepticism toward the investigation. What had the U.S. government done for them? Why did they, unlike other Americans, have to use their own money to fund a Justice Department investigation? Why had nobody been arrested? An Osage chief said, "I made peace with the white man and lay down my arms never to take them up again and now I and my fellow tribesmen must suffer."

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), William K. Hale, J. Edgar Hoover, Tom White

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

As White continues gathering evidence against Hale, he feels a tremendous amount of pressure—not just professional pressure, but moral pressure as well. Tom White is one of the few people who has ever attempted to dismantle—let alone even questione—the complicated network of corruption and vast infrastructure of white supremacy that rules Osage County. He is also keenly aware of how deeply the Osage people are suffering. He also knows that they have lost their faith entirely in the systems of justice meant to protect them—and have begun to give up on the idea that true justice will ever be served. White is determined to change all of this, and to secure real change for the Osage people—but he is fighting an uphill battle and has a whole lot to lose.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ According to his sworn statement and other testimony, sometime in early 1923 Grammer told Ramsey that Hale had "a little job he wanted done." When Ramsey asked what it was, Grammer said that Hale needed an Indian knocked off. Ramsey, who referred to the plot as "the state of the game," eventually agreed, and he lured Roan down into the canyon, promising him whiskey. "We sat on the running board of his car and drank," Ramsey recounted. "The Indian then got in his car to leave, and I then shot him in the back of the head. I suppose I was within a foot or two of him when I shot him. I then went back to my car and drove to Fairfax."

White observed the way Ramsey kept saying "the Indian," rather than Roan's name. As if to justify his crime, Ramsey said that even now "white people in Oklahoma thought no more of killing an Indian than they did in 1724."

Related Characters: John Ramsey, Henry Grammer, David Grann (speaker), Henry Roan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Grann (via Tom White) carefully examines one of the murderer's testimonies as he admits to the killing of Henry Roan. White realizes that this man did not—and still does not—even see his victim as human; the barbaric cruelties, systemic murders, and dehumanizing racism that defined the relations (if they could be called relations) between whites and Natives two centuries ago have not disappeared in Osage County. Native lives meant and still mean nothing to many whites, and as Tom White realizes how pervasive, malignant, and seemingly immovable racism against the Osage is, his confidence in his ability to convict the perpetrators of these heinous crimes wanes.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ Despite the brutality of the crimes, many whites did not mask their enthusiasm for the lurid story. OSAGE INDIAN KILLING CONSPIRACY THRILLS, declared the *Reno Evening Gazette*. Under the headline OLD WILD WEST STILL LIVES IN LAND OF OSAGE MURDERS, a wire service sent out a nationwide bulletin that the story, "however depressing, is nevertheless blown through with a breath of the romantic, devil-may-care frontier west that we thought was gone. And it is an amazing story, too. So amazing that at first you wonder if it can possibly have happened in modern, twentieth-century America." A newsreel about the murders, titled "The Tragedy of the Osage Hills," was shown at cinemas. "The true history of the most baffling series of murders in the annals of crime," a handbill for the show said.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

This passage highlights another way in which the white American public dehumanized—even from afar—the members of the Osage tribe and their unique, terrifying plight. Just as reports of the Osage's wealth and prosperity were sensationalized and disseminated across the country, so too were the reports of the terrorism and cruelty they were living under every day. This phenomenon underscores a different kind of corruption and a different kind of racism—not as harmful or violent as the corruption and racism contributing to the death toll in Osage county, but nonetheless a dangerous way of distancing the Osage's plight, thus dehumanizing them, devaluing their pain, and neglecting white America's larger responsibility for creating the structures of racism, entitlement, and cruelty that allowed the Osage to suffer so profoundly in the first place.

❝ Many people in the gallery gossiped about an Osage woman who was sitting on one of the benches, quiet and alone. It was Mollie Burkhart, cast out from the two worlds that she'd always straddled: whites, loyal to Hale, shunned her, while many Osage ostracized her for bringing the killers among them and for remaining loyal to Ernest. Reporters portrayed her as an "ignorant squaw." The press hounded her for a statement, but she refused to give one. Later, a reporter snapped her picture, her face defiantly composed, and a "new and exclusive picture of Mollie Burkhart" was transmitted around the world.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), Ernest Burkhart, Mollie Burkhart

Related Themes:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

During her husband's trial, Mollie Burkhart sat quietly in the gallery, ignoring the gossip and vitriol being thrown her way by the members of the press and her neighbors alike. Mollie had long had to straddle two words—the world of her people, and the world of assimilated American culture. Despite her efforts, Mollie was never fully accepted in the world of white America—and was even, some might say, punished for her attempts to assimilate even though assimilation was all but forced upon her in her youth. Now, as her world crumbles around her, Mollie—who narrowly escaped death by poisoning at the hands of her own husband and uncle-in-law's lackeys—must once again submit herself to the judgements of two very different worlds and face ostracizing and loneliness even in her darkest moment.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ There was one question that the judge and the prosecutors and the defense never asked the jurors but that was central to the proceedings: Would a jury of twelve white men ever punish another white man for killing an American Indian? One skeptical reporter noted, "The attitude of a pioneer cattleman toward the full-blood Indian... is fairly well recognized." A prominent member of the Osage tribe put the matter more bluntly: "It is a question in my mind whether this jury is considering a murder case or not. The question for them to decide is whether a white man killing an Osage is murder—or merely cruelty to animals."

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

Even as Hale's trial proceeds, Tom White and many others worry that he will never be brought to justice because of the systems of racism and corruption which have supported him and masked his wrongdoing for years. Hale's trial is vital for no one more than it is for the Osage—who will learn

through whatever verdict is decided upon whether their white neighbors Osage their lives of enough value to put away one of their own, or whether Native lives are expendable and unworthy of protection. Deeply-ingrained racism and a sense of greed, jealousy, and entitlement is something the Osage's white neighbors have espoused for years, but especially since the beginning of the Osage oil boom, these feeling have intensified—and the Osage are about to learn whether their white neighbors' hatred of their success will allow them to excuse cruel, vicious, cold-blooded murders.

For Hoover, the Osage murder investigation became a showcase for the modern bureau. As he had hoped, the case demonstrated to many around the country the need for a national, more professional, scientifically skilled force. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* wrote of the murders, "Sheriffs investigated and did nothing. State's Attorneys investigated and did nothing. The Attorney General investigated and did nothing. It was only when the Government sent Department of Justice agents into the Osage country that law became a thing of majesty."

Hoover was careful not to disclose the bureau's earlier bungling. He did not reveal that Blackie Thompson had escaped under the bureau's watch and killed a policeman, or that because of so many false starts in the probe other murders had occurred. Instead, Hoover created a pristine origin story, a founding mythology in which the bureau, under his direction, had emerged from lawlessness and overcome the last wild American frontier.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), Blackie Thompson, J. Edgar Hoover

Related Themes:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

In the wake of Burkhart, Hale, and Ramsey's convictions, Hoover is relieved to have something to show to his superiors as evidence of his methods' success. Hoover carefully skirts around the bureau's "earlier bungling," and glosses over any parts of the tale which do not reflect a "pristine origin story." Hoover knows that in order to gain—and secure—the kind of power he wants, he needs to have a bargaining chip and a way of proving his own superiority: the "success" of the bureau's investigation of the Osage murders, despite all the loose ends left untied and the traumas left unresolved, is the perfect "founding mythology" for Hoover, and he milks it for all its worth even as he ignores the gaping holes left in the investigation.

Chapter 21 Quotes

There was another dramatic change in Mollie's life. She and the Osage had fought to end the corrupt system of guardianships, and on April 21, 1931, a court ruled that Mollie was no longer a ward of the state: "IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED BY THE COURT, that the said Mollie Burkhart, Osage Allottee No. 285, ... is hereby restored to competency, and the order heretofore made adjudging her to be an incompetent person is hereby vacated." At forty-four, Mollie could finally spend her money as she pleased, and was recognized as a full-fledged American citizen.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), Mollie Burkhart

Related Themes:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mollie Burkhart is at last "restored to competency" and given control over her own estate and finances. Grann includes this passage to show that in order for the U.S. government to recognize the agency and competency of an entire group of Native peoples, those people had to first suffer brutal, systemic violence in order to prove their humanity. The racist corruption that prevented Mollie and the rest of her tribe from controlling their own fortunes allowed white Americans to prosper, and this continued for decades without any questioning of the policy. Only when upwards of twenty-five Osage were murdered did the government even consider paying attention and restoring to the beleaguered Osage people their fundamental rights.

Hoover ensured that the identity of the bureau was indistinguishable from his own. And while presidents came and went, this bureaucrat, now thick around the waist and with jowls like a bulldog, remained. "I looked up and there was J. Edgar Hoover on his balcony, high and distant and quiet, watching with his misty kingdom behind him, going on from President to President and decade to decade," a reporter for *Life* magazine wrote. The many details of Hoover's abuses of power would not be made public until after his death, in 1972, and despite White's perceptiveness, he was blind to the boss man's megalomania, his politicization of the bureau, and his paranoid plots against an ever-growing list of perceived enemies, among them American Indian activists.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), J. Edgar Hoover

Related Themes:

Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

In the wake of Hoover's so-called "victory" in the conviction of William K. Hale, he used the clout and power the "win" provided for him in order to seize control of the bureau and manipulate it throughout the years. Hoover felt a sense of entitlement to the bureau from the beginning of his tenure there, and as his greed for power grew, so too did his corrupt methods and "paranoid plots." Grann uses this passage—an indictment of Hoover's corruption—to show that the Osage murders were nothing more than a tool for Hoover to secure power and influence. Hoover never cared about solving the crimes for any reason other than as a means to the consolidation of his own power—the Osage's lives, and the lives of Native Americans more widely, were disposable to him throughout his life, even as the power he amassed through their suffering continued to grow.

Chapter 22 Quotes

The most dramatic photograph in the museum spanned an entire side of the room. Taken at a ceremony in 1924, it was a panoramic view of members of the tribe alongside prominent local white businessmen and leaders. As I scanned the picture, I noticed that a section was missing, as if someone had taken a scissors to it. I asked Red Corn what happened to that part of the photograph. "It's too painful to show," she said.

When I asked why, she pointed to the blank space and said, "The devil was standing right there."

She disappeared for a moment, then returned with a small, slightly blurred print of the missing panel: it showed William K. Hale, staring coldly at the camera. The Osage had removed his image, not to forget the murders, as most Americans had, but because they cannot forget.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), William K. Hale, Kathryn Red Corn

Related Themes:

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David Grann visits the Osage Nation Museum in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, and is given a tour by its director, Kathryn Red Corn. When she shows Grann a panoramic photograph of the tribe alongside their white neighbors taken in 1924—a photograph from which William K. Hale, the "devil"'s, cold visage has been cropped—he realizes that though history might have forgotten the pain, trauma, and injustice of the Reign of Terror, the Osage people never have had that luxury. They have had to live with the pain and betrayal of what their white neighbors did to them every day—and the trauma of that has trickled down throughout the generations to affect even the modern-day members of the tribe.

By the time Margie drove on, the prairie was shrouded in the dark of night. Only the beams from the headlights illuminated the dusty road. Margie said that her parents first told her what Ernest and Hale had done when she was a child. "I used to worry whenever I did something naughty, 'What if I'm the bad seed?'" Margie recalled. She said that occasionally *The FBI Story* would air on local television, and she and her family would watch it and cry.

As she spoke, I realized that the Reign of Terror had ravaged—still ravaged—

generations. A great-grandson of Henry Roan's once spoke of the legacy of the murders: "I think somewhere it is in the back of our minds. We may not realize it, but it is there, especially if it was a family member that was killed. You just have it in the back of your head that you don't trust anybody."

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), Henry Roan, William K. Hale, Ernest Burkhart, Margie Burkhart

Related Themes:

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Grann—meeting with several real-life descendants of the victims of the Reign of Terror—examines the destabilizing, disorienting effects of generational trauma up close. Through his conversations with Margie Burkhart, Henry Roan's descendants, and many more, he realizes that the victimization of the Osage tribe didn't end when the Reign of Terror did. The tribe has had to reckon with the trauma of what befell their people during that period—not to mention the cruelty, racism, and mass-murder that took place in the centuries before it—every day for the better part of the century. It has been unable to move on from the feelings of mistrust, suspicion, and fear that being targeted, manipulated, and picked off created in their own ancestors.

Chapter 26 Quotes

Though the bureau estimated that there were twenty-four Osage murders, the real number was undoubtedly higher. The bureau closed its investigation after catching Hale and his henchmen. But at least some at the bureau knew that there were many more homicides that had been systematically covered up, evading their efforts of detection. An agent described, in a report, just one of the ways the killers did this: "In connection with the mysterious deaths of a large number of Indians, the perpetrators of the crime would get an Indian intoxicated, have a doctor examine him and pronounce him intoxicated, following which a morphine hypodermic would be injected into the Indian, and after the doctor's departure the [killers] would inject an enormous amount of morphine under the armpit of the drunken Indian, which would result in his death. The doctor's certificate would subsequently read 'death from alcoholic poison.'" Other observers in Osage County noted that suspicious deaths were routinely, and falsely, attributed to "consumption," "wasting illness," or "causes unknown." Scholars and investigators who have since looked into the murders believe that the Osage death toll was in the scores, if not the hundreds.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker), William K. Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David Grann—staggered by the wealth of unsolved crimes and unindicted suspects his own research uncovers—examines how patchy and insufficient the FBI's investigation of the Osage murders was, despite the good intentions and hard work of Tom White and his team. After Hale's arrest, the bureau knew there was more work to be done—but because Hoover had gotten what he wanted out of the case, he refused to put any more effort into finding out the full truth about the reign of terror and stopped altogether the FBI presence in Osage County. Because of this, history has shrouded in mystery—likely forever—the true death toll, the guilty perpetrators, and, above all, the hope of justice and closure for the families and descendants of those affected.

> In cases where perpetrators of crimes against humanity elude justice in their time, history can often provide at least some final accounting, forensically documenting the murders and exposing the transgressors. Yet so many of the murders of the Osage were so well concealed that such an outcome is no longer possible. In most cases, the families of the victims have no sense of resolution. Many descendants carry out their own private investigations, which have no end. They live with doubts, suspecting dead relatives or old family friends or guardians—some of whom might be guilty and some of whom might be innocent.

Related Characters: David Grann (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 310-311

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David Grann, who has travelled to Osage County in 2012 to further investigate the Reign of Terror, reports on the continued pain, trauma, and paranoia that plague the members of the Osage tribe even in the present day, nearly a century removed from the Reign itself. Grann attempts to describe the pain of not knowing the truth, and how it can reverberate through generations. Due to the botched state and local investigations—and the incomplete FBI investigation which left many murders unsolved and many criminals free—the truth is now, for the Osage tribe, all but impossible to uncover. The full truth of what befell their own ancestors will never be known—and as Grann reports on how many modern-day Osage are reckoning with this fact, he zeroes in on paranoia, mistrust, and lack of closure as a triad of plagues that will not leave the Osage alone, no matter how far they have come.

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: THE VANISHING

David Grann begins *Killers of the Flower Moon* with a metaphor which explains its title. Every April, along the vast prairies in the Osage territory of Oklahoma, millions of tiny flowers pop up and bloom, signaling the start of spring. As spring morphs into summer and taller flowers begin to sprout, the larger plants "creep over the tinier blooms, stealing their light and water." Because of this phenomenon, the Osage Indians refer to the month of May as "the time of the flower-killing moon."

This metaphor, in which taller choking plants strangle the newly-blossoming spring blooms, serves as a metaphor for how the Osages' white neighbors will attempt to strangle and decimate the tribe's newfound financial success.

On May 24, 1921, Mollie Burkhart—an Osage Indian and a resident of the Osage settlement town of Gray Horse, Oklahoma, becomes fearful that something terrible has befallen one of her three sisters, Anna Brown. Anna, at thirty-four, is barely a year older than Mollie—she often goes off on "sprees," spending long nights out drinking and dancing, but now that Mollie hasn't seen Anna in three days, she is beginning to worry. Mollie has recently lost another sister—less than three years ago, Mollie's younger sister Minnie had died of a "peculiar wasting illness."

Right off the bat, Grann establishes an atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue. Minnie's death was already deemed "peculiar," and now Anna's sudden disappearance heightens the stakes.

Mollie and her sisters—and their parents, too—have their names inscribed on the Osage Roll: they are registered members of the Osage tribe. This means that their family possesses a "fortune." After being driven, in the 1870s, off of their ancestral lands in Kansas onto a rocky, barren, "presumably worthless" spit of land in northeastern Oklahoma, some of the largest oil deposits in the whole of the United States were discovered right beneath the Osage tribe's new reservation. As such, in the early 20th century, each member of the tribe began receiving a quarterly check—as the years went by, the dividends grew and grew until the tribe had collectively accumulated millions of dollars. Grann writes that in 1923 alone, the tribe took in over $30 million—the equivalent of that amount today would be more than $400 million.

Grann briefly outlines the Osage tribe's recent history. They were given a parcel of land which the U.S. government assumed was worthless—only to find that it was worth hundreds of millions. The racist U.S. government can't be all too happy about the Osage's discovery—and as suspicious happenings start taking place in Osage County, it seems as if a grab at the Osage fortune is at the root of the crimes.

The Osage were considered the wealthiest people per capita in the world, and the public had become "transfixed" by their tribe's prosperity. Reporters, seeking to sensationalize the Osage's wealth, "seized upon any signs of the traditional Osage way of life," contrasting the vast wealth the tribe had come into with their "wild" tribal customs.

To compound matters, the Osages' wealth was visible on the world stage—and the world was jealous of what they saw. That the reporters latch onto "wild" tribal customs reflects racist prejudice against the Osage Indians.

Mollie doesn't spend as lavishly as some of her neighbors, but still lives a life of luxury. She lives in a beautiful, "rambling" house, owns several cars, and has a staff of servants. Though many of the Osage tribe's servants are black or Mexican, "even whites," according to observers' reports from the time, "perform [...] 'all the menial tasks about the house to which no Osage will stoop.'"

It seems as if what is really outraging the public is not so much that the Osage have money—but that their wealth is allowing them to begin to subvert the social order which has kept white Americans at the top, so to speak, of the food chain.


Mollie was one of the last people to see Anna before she disappeared. On that day—May 21, 1921—Mollie woke early, a habit from childhood ingrained from when her father woke each morning to pray to the sun. Mollie, unlike many of her friends, still dressed in traditional Osage **clothing**, and that morning wrapped herself in an Indian blanket and let her long black hair flow loose down her back.

This passage shows that despite having assimilated into white society and come into a great deal of wealth, Mollie is still a woman tied to her cultural heritage and many tribal traditions.

Mollie's husband, Ernest Burkhart, woke with her. A twenty-eight-year-old white man, Ernest was born in Texas, the son of a poor cotton farmer, but moved to Oklahoma at nineteen to live with his uncle, a domineering cattleman named William K. Hale. Ernest ran errands for Hale and worked as a livery driver—he met Mollie while chauffeuring her around town. Mollie and Ernest were married quickly, though Ernest's friends looked down on him for marrying an Indian woman and becoming a "squaw man." Mollie, too, had concerns about marrying Ernest—she suffered from diabetes, spoke English as a second language, and, moreover, all three of her sisters had married white men. Mollie felt that she should carry on the tradition of an arranged Osage marriage. Nevertheless, in 1917, she married Ernest, and by 1921, they had two children—Elizabeth and James, who was nicknamed Cowboy.

Mollie and Ernest's relationship is rife with power imbalances owing to the Osage's sudden good fortune. Ernest and Mollie met when he was in service to her, and though his marriage to her further demoted and emasculated him in the eyes of his white friends, he nonetheless pursued her.

On May 21, Mollie hosted a small luncheon. The house bustled with preparations while Mollie tended to her sick mother, Lizzie. Mollie asked Ernest to call Anna and ask her to come over to assist with preparations, and Anna soon arrived dressed to the nines in **flashy red shoes, an alligator purse, and a traditional Indian blanket**. Despite her grand appearance, Molly noticed something about Anna: she was already drunk.

Anna's appearance symbolizes who she is: still tied to her tribe in small ways, Anna has more or less embraced white fashions and the gaudy, flashy sensibility of the roaring twenties.

As the guests began to arrive—including Ernest's brothers Bryan and Horace—Anna became drunker and drunker, sipping from a hip flash of bootleg whiskey. Anna, who had recently divorced her husband Oda Brown, had been troubled of late, and had begun spending time in many of the reservation's "tumultuous boomtowns," drinking and gambling. Anna began flirting, over the course of the party, with Ernest's younger brother Bryan—and also began fighting with Mollie and her mother.

Though the circumstances of Anna's disappearance are suspicious, this passage shows that Anna had been in trouble lately—complicating the mystery surrounding her being missing.


As the party drew to a close and Ernest took some guests to the next town over, Fairfax, to see a musical, Bryan offered to drop the intoxicated Anna at home. Mollie, who was planning on staying home with her mother Lizzie, helped sober Anna up and then sent her on her way. That was the last time Mollie saw Anna before her mysterious disappearance.

This passage makes it clear that Mollie and Anna, despite their differences, have a close relationship and strong familial ties.

Now that Anna has been missing for days, Mollie has grown more and more anxious. Bryan has insisted that that night, he took Anna straight home and dropped her off, so Mollie sends Ernest over to Anna's house to check on her. The house, though, is dark and deserted, and her servant, who lives in a small residence on the property, says she hasn't seen Anna in days.

As the family grows more and more concerned about Anna's whereabouts, the mystery deepens—and the stakes grow even higher when it becomes clear that Anna is truly nowhere to be found.

News of Anna's disappearance begins spreading throughout the reservation's boomtowns. The "unease" throughout the reservation is compounded by the fact that another Osage, Charles Whitehorn, disappeared just a week before Anna. The thirty-year-old Whitehorn, married to a woman who is part white and part Cheyenne, is popular in town, and went missing on May 14. Despite knowing of Whitehorn's disappearance, Mollie tries to keep calm, telling herself that Anna is simply off on one of her binges, dancing in a jazz club in Oklahoma City or Kansas City. Ernest, too, reassures Mollie that Anna will soon be home.

Anna's disappearance in and of itself is mysterious and suspicious—but coming so soon after another member of the tribe's disappearance makes it seem downright sinister.

A week after Anna's disappearance, an oil worker is on a hill a mile north of downtown Pawhuska when he notices a rotting corpse poking out from the brush near the base of an oil rig—the victim has been shot, execution-style, twice between the eyes. The oil worker calls others over to take a look, but the body is so badly-decomposed that it is impossible to identify. One pocket of the corpse's trousers contains a letter—addressed to Charlies Whitehorn.

The discovery of Charles Whitehorn's murdered, decomposing body makes it clear that something evil is afoot in Osage County—and that Anna is truly in danger.

Several miles away, near Fairfax, a man and his teenage son are squirrel hunting. When the boy chases a squirrel down into a ravine, he spots a dead body at the edge of the creek: again, the body is badly-decomposed, but appears to be that of an American Indian woman. The man and his son rush back into town and alert the proprietor of the Big Hill Trading Company, Scott Mathis, of what they've found. Mathis alerts his undertaker, and several men return to the creek, where they drag the body from the ravine and begin examining it. The body is in such bad shape, though, that none of them can make an identification.

As a corpse that may or may not be Anna's turns up, it seems as if the whole town is concerned, and a group of people rush to the ravine to try and confirm whether Anna has truly been found.

Mathis contacts Mollie, and she, her sister Rita, Rita's husband Bill Smith, Ernest, and Bryan make their way out to the creek. As Mollie and Rita approach the stinking, blackened, bloated body, they immediately recognize Anna's **Indian blanket and flashy clothing**. When Rita's husband, Bill, pries the corpse's mouth open with a stick, Anna's sisters recognize her gold fillings, and begin to weep.

Anna's family recognizing her by her clothes is symbolic of the importance and ubiquity of tribal tradition in this place—even though Osage culture is changing, it still binds the members of the tribe together.

CHAPTER 2: AN ACT OF GOD OR MAN?

A coroner's inquest is "hastily convened" at the ravine. Though by the 1920s, citizens no longer assume the burdens of investigating crimes and maintaining order as they once did throughout the United States before the advent of police departments, in areas such as Pawhuska—areas on the edge of civilization—vestiges of these old systems remain.

Grann establishes the status quo in terms of policework during the time of Anna's death—because there is no standard and few officials out in Pawhuska, there is the potential for corruption and botched protocol.

A justice of the peace and a group of jurors—selected from the white men who have gathered at the ravine—try to determine whether Anna has died by an act of God or man. Two doctors who often care for Mollie's family—a pair of brothers named James and David Shoun—begin to perform an autopsy using primitive instruments and a makeshift table. They determine that Anna has been deceased for between five and seven days, and soon notice a perfectly round hole in the back of her skull—about the size of a .32-caliber bullet. The men realize that Anna's death was an act of "cold-blooded murder."

As Anna's autopsy begins, everyone seems concerned and everything seems to be above-board, even though there are a great number of people present at the contaminated crime scene. This moment confirms that Anna's death was indeed murder, increasing story's sense of dread and tension.

In the 1920s—and especially in places like Pawhuska—"lawmen were then still largely amateurs," David Grann writes. At the time of Anna's murder, the Osage County sheriff was a "fifty-eight-year-old, three-hundred-pound frontiersman" named Harve M. Freas, who, according to rumor, was "cozy with criminal elements." Freas allegedly granted not just leniency but "free reign" to gamblers and bootleggers in the area—men like Kelsie Morrison and Henry Grammer, notorious moonshine runners.

Grann establishes that in spite of the fact that Anna has been murdered in cold blood, securing justice for her posthumously is going to be difficult due to the rampant corruption and racism in the area.

When Freas hears word about Anna's murder, he is already preoccupied with the Whitehorn murder, and sends a deputy to the ravine to collect evidence. The Shouns—the doctors—cannot not, however, find a bullet lodged in Anna's brain, despite the absence of an exit wound. The only evidence the deputy is able to collect is a bottle of moonshine, which is assumed to be Anna's. No one takes fingerprints, casts impressions of tire marks in the road nearby, checks Anna's body for gunpowder residue, or even photographs the crime scene.

Grann uses the details he has gathered through his research to show that officials deeply mishandled the beginnings of the investigation into Anna's murder—though lack of protocol could be to blame, corruption and the attempt to obscure the truth may also be the culprit behind such blatant bungling.

When Lizzie hears that her oldest daughter is dead, she plunges into a deep grief—she had already descended into poor health, and her fraught condition begins to worsen. Mollie throws herself into organizing Anna's funeral, an exorbitantly expensive affair—undertakers at the time frequently charged the Osage unbelievable rates, gouging them and forcing them to pay sums which translate to nearly $80,000 in contemporary currency.

Grann adds in even more suspicion when he reveals that Mollie and her family were, in a time of grief, pain, and confusion, essentially extorted by the only people in town who could bury Anna. Racism and corruption abounded in Osage County, and this passage makes it clear just how insidious, ubiquitous, and accepted these forces were.

Anna's funeral reflects a combination of Osage and Catholic traditions, yet due to the seriously compromised state of Anna's corpse, certain rituals—such as face-painting and ornamentation—cannot be completed. As Anna's coffin is lowered into the ground, her family recites Osage prayer-songs dedicated to Wah'Kon-Tah—the mysterious life force "around which the Osage [...] structured their lives."

Anna's funeral pays homage to her tribal heritage, and her family prays to the life-force which structured their lives—even as their lives are descending into misery, chaos, and confusion.

CHAPTER 3: KING OF THE OSAGE HILLS

The killings of both Anna Brown and Charles Whitehorn are quickly sensationalized in the local newspapers. Because both were killed by gunshots from a .32-caliber pistol—and both were wealthy Osage Indians in their thirties—the murders are thought to be the work of a repeat killer.

The deaths of Anna and Charles are too similar and too quick in succession to be a coincidence, and as news spreads, people begin to wonder what is happening on the Osage reservation.

Lizzie relies on Mollie to deal with the authorities—during her lifetime, the older woman has been "unmoored" from the way of life she once knew and has "nothing familiar to clutch and stay afloat in the world of white man's wealth." Mollie has taken the lead for her family—as a speaker of English married to a white man, she has ventured into realms once unfamiliar to her people, but has not been tempted or hurt by the ways of life that have compromised some younger members of the tribe—like Anna. An Osage chief said, in 1928, that he feared his tribe would not know peace and happiness until the "fat checks [...] and fine motorcars and **new clothes**" that had come to characterize their lives had evaporated.

As Mollie and her family's lives begin spinning out of control, the maelstrom of grief and trauma they must face is compounded by the fact that the Osage are loathed and envied in their own community due to their vast wealth. Separated from tribal customs and old ways by years of forced assimilation—and the advent of such marvelous wealth—many Osage are overwhelmed by the changes and seek the relative simplicity they once lived in.

The racist authorities have little concern for a "dead Injun," and so Mollie turns to Ernest's uncle, William Hale, a "powerful local advocate for law and order." Hale, once a scrappy cattleman, has worked his way up from nothing to become a distinguished man of good repute and a reserve deputy sheriff in Fairfax. He is so wealthy and powerful that local politicians court his support, and Mollie is among many members of her tribe who consider him Osage County's greatest benefactor—Hale himself once stated that he was, and would always be, "the Osages true Friend." At Mollie's behest, Hale vows to obtain justice for Anna.

Mollie and her family fear that they will never be able to obtain justice for Anna—but William K. Hale, the "king of the Osage hills," vows to see that justice is done. Mollie and her family feel that Hale's benevolence is a blessing, and are grateful for his wealth, power, and influence in such a trying time.

Mollie, Bryan, and Ernest are all questioned about the last time they saw Anna. As Bryan was the last person to see her before her death, he and Ernest are detained and questioned further, but soon turned loose. Ernest's testimony states that he knows of no "enemies she had or anyone that disliked [Anna.]"

Everyone in Mollie's family offers their help to the investigation—or at least they seem to.

Officials theorize that Anna's killer, whoever he was, came from outside the reservation. Organized crime and lawlessness are rampant throughout Osage County, where the prospect of striking it rich in oil has "drawn every breed of miscreant from across the country." Outlaws and fugitives hide out in the Osage Hills—such as the dangerous Blackie Thompson and the notorious Al Spencer (leader of a gang of outlaws.)

Local officials recognize the atmosphere of chaos, lawlessness, and greed which pervade their community. A combination of racist opportunism and general wild-West anarchy have become normalized and ubiquitous.

Another theory about Anna's death is that someone on the reservation committed the crime and is "living among them in sheep's clothing." Mollie begins to suspect Anna's ex-husband, Oda Brown, a no-good carouser, who was shut out of a chance at Anna's inheritance after the divorce. Brown has, since Anna's death, hired a lawyer to try to contest her will.

More frightening than the idea of an outsider infiltrating the reservation is the thought that someone Mollie and her family know well could be responsible for such heinous, personal violence.

Several weeks after Anna's funeral, Frea receives a letter from a man who has been arrested in Kansas for check forgery—the letter states that Brown paid him $8,000 to murder Anna and describes the specifics of the murder. A posse of lawmen arrest Oda Brown, but within days, authorities have debunked the claims presented in the forger's letter and released Brown.

Because policing protocol and law and order are so backwards in the vestigial areas of the wild West, false claims and wild accusations—often made in the name of a reward or in exchange for leniency—are tough to distinguish from honest confessions.

Hale, who has close ties with the county prosecutor (after effectively securing the election for the man,) confers with him and other local officials about Anna's murder. The county prosecutor, wanting to search again for the bullet, obtains an order to disinter Anna, but even after digging up her grave and having the Shoun brothers search again for the bullet—cutting up Anna's head with a meat cleaver—nothing can be found.

The fact that though Anna was definitively shot with a .32-caliber weapon—but no bullet is found in her skull despite lack of an exit wound—increases suspicion when the Shoun brothers, twice, can't turn up a bullet.

By July of 1921, the justice of the peace has closed his inquiries and declared Anna's death a mystery—just as he did with Whitehorn's. Lizzie, meanwhile, has grown sicker and sicker, and despite Mollie seeking the help of Osage medicine men, Lizzie dies in July, just two months after Anna's murder.

This passage makes it clear that local officials don't care about the deaths of the members of the Osage tribe. They fail to solve Anna's murder, and, even more worryingly, a third member of Mollie's family dies suddenly.

Mollie's brother-in-law Bill Smith—a "bruising bulldog of a man"—expresses his deep frustration over the authorities' investigation, wondering whether there is something "curious" about Lizzie's death. He begins taking matters into his own hands, and soon comes to believe that Lizzie died of poisoning. Bill is certain that all three deaths—Lizzie's, Anna's, and Whitehorn's—are all connected to "the Osage's subterranean reservoir of black gold."

Though it seems fairly obvious, Bill Smith is the first person to vocalize what perhaps everyone in the family might have been thinking—that there is an active, methodical campaign of violence against them in an attempt to steal their fortunes.

CHAPTER 4: UNDERGROUND RESERVATION

Mollie was ten years old when the oil was first discovered, but the "tangled history" of how the Osage came to live on their oil-rich land goes back hundreds of years. In the seventeenth century, the Osage had laid claim to a large part of the central United States—a territory stretching from what is now Missouri and Kansas to Oklahoma, and beyond, out as far west as the Rockies. In 1803, Thomas Jefferson, in the Louisiana Purchase, obtained lands dominated by the Osage, and in 1804, Jefferson met with the Osage chiefs and compelled them to relinquish much of their territories—threatening them with being seen as "enemies of the United States" if they did not comply.

As Grann reaches back into history, he shows how the Osage people—and Native Americans more largely—have always been beholden to the wills and whims of the U.S. government, and have been unfairly exploited, threatened, and dehumanized for centuries.

The Osage were forced to cede nearly a hundred million acres of ancestral land, and then made their way to a 50-by-125-mile area in southeastern Kansas. Mollie's mother and father came of age in this place, in the mid-1840s; they grew up steeped in tribal traditions, and most of the tribe refused to adopt "the white man's ways." The Osage were promised that the Kansas territory would be theirs forever—but soon they were again under siege by settlers, and in 1870, the Osage were again forced to sell off their land for $1.25 an acre. Impatient settlers mutilated and massacred the Osage, and the ensuing violence led an Indian Affairs agent to ask, "Which of these people are the savages?"

Even when complying forthright with the government's demands, the Osage—and, once again, all Native Americans—have been subjected to cruelty, brutality, and indeed the very thing they themselves have been unfairly and inaccurately accused of since white settlers arrived in the new world: savagery.

The Osage purchased 1.5 million acres in a region south of Kansas, and because the territory was so hilly, many Osage believed that the government would not force them to move again. They set up camp, establishing their largest base in Pawhuska. Lizzie and her husband, who went by his Osage name of Ne-kah-e-se-y, settled there in 1874. Their tribe's numbers had dwindled to a third of what they were at the turn of the century, and the American buffalo population—which the Osage hunted and used for food, clothing, bowstrings, and more—had been virtually eradicated in a systemic plot by settlers who knew that "every buffalo dead is an Indian gone."

Once again, Grann shows how even when the Osage complied with the government's demands, subjected themselves to emotional and financial extortion, and took from the bottom of the barrel, they were still subjected to inhumane campaigns of systemic decimation

As settlers strove to assimilate and indoctrinate the Osage tribe, Mollie's parents struggled to hold onto their customs. When Mollie and her sisters were born in the 1880s, they were all given traditional Osage names. Settlers in Pawhuska, Gray Horse, and the surrounding areas refused to recognize these names, however, and soon everyone in Mollie's family had an English name. In 1894, Mollie and her sisters enrolled in a Catholic school which was a two days' journey by wagon from their home, their parents worried that if they didn't comply with edicts compelling Osage to send their children to such schools, the government would withhold the annuity payments on the Kansas land.

The government and general populace continue to make dehumanizing, cruel demands of the Osage, and, having stripped them of their lands, traditions, and food sources, now begin to strip them of their attachment to their culture in a calculated campaign to obscure from the Osage tribe their very own history.

At school, Mollie was forced to remove her traditional **tribal clothing**—including her Indian blanket—and dress in a plain frock. She was forbidden from speaking Osage and forced to learn English as her education began—an education meant to "transform her into what the authorities conceived of as the ideal woman." Mollie submitted to her training in the "domestic arts," and as the years went on, Mollie—and her fellow students—exchanged their traditional clothing and customs for assimilated "white" clothing and behaviors.

Mollie and her siblings were part of the first generation forced to assimilate in an organized, structured way—Mollie was taught, as a young girl, that she would be seen more favorably in white society if she strove to make herself a member of it, unable to see the ways in which her white neighbors would never truly accept her and her people.

By the late 1890s, the government's assimilation campaign was still not over—the Osage reservation was about to be divided up into 160-acre parcels, with each tribal member receiving one allotment, while the rest of the territory was opened to settlers. The Osage knew—from the division and allotment of a Cherokee territory not far away—that things could get dangerous. When the Cherokee land was parceled up in September of 1893, a land rush began, and tens and thousands of white settlers arrived to claim their parcels of land in a violent, chaotic maelstrom.

The division of Cherokee land served as an example of how greedy white Americans would stop at nothing to secure Native resources for themselves. Knowing what happened to the Cherokee's land, the Osage are frightened by what the allotment of their own land will do to their already-diminished tribe.

The Osage chief, James Bigheart, worked tirelessly to forestall the process of allotment, but by 1904, the government was planning on breaking up Indian Territory and making it a part of a new state, Oklahoma. The Osage were able to convince the government to allot each tribal member a larger parcel of land, thus reducing the chance of a "mad dash" on their territory, and also slipped "what seemed, at the time, like a curious provision" into the agreement: that the oil, gas, coal, and other minerals beneath the land itself would be "reserved" for the Osage themselves.

This time, the Osage fought back against the government's racist, exploitative policies—and actually were able to make some headway in protecting their tribe's rights. The "curious provision" is a smart move that will prevent the government from denying the tribe's later wealth, as the oil is discovered under their government-allotted land.

The tribe was aware of oil deposits on their reservation and wanted to ensure that their interests were protected. Under the terms of their Allotment Act, each member of the Osage tribe was given a headright—a share in the tribe's mineral trust. When members of the tribe sold their land once Oklahoma entered the Union, they could make money off of the surface land—but retain the mineral trust. No headrights could be bought or sold—they had to be inherited.

The government—either unaware entirely of the oil deposits beneath the Osage's new, barren-seeming land, or unaware of how much oil existed—agreed to allow the Osage exclusive ownership of the subterranean minerals there.

The tribe soon began leasing areas to white prospectors for exploration. The young Jean Paul Getty—who would one day found the Getty Oil Company—went there as a boy, with his father, on a quest for oil. One spring day in 1917, a rig hit a large deposit, and oil blasted up from the earth in a huge dark column. By 1920, Burbank, one of the highest-producing oil fields in the country was tapped—its well generated 680 barrels in its first twenty-four hours of operation.

The Osage allowed white people to take control of their land—knowing that it would result in a way for them to make money, leverage their own rights against those who would seek to oppress them, and secure a better future for the entire tribe.

CHAPTER 5: THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLES

As apathetic investigators in Osage County fail to look into Lizzie's suspicious death—and make no headway in either Anna Brown or Charles Whitehorn's murder investigations—both families turn to the only means at their disposal: money. Mollie offers up a $2,000 cash reward for any information leading to the arrest of those responsible for Anna's death, and the Whitehorn family offers $2,500. William Hale promises his own reward as well. When Sheriff Freas is charged with willfully "failing to enforce the law" by the Oklahoma attorney general (for his permission of bootlegging and gambling), Hale decides to take things into his own hands and hires a private eye.

Despite the suspicious nature and sinister implications of Anna and Charles Whitehorn's deaths, the local powers that be do almost nothing to find answers for their families. The Osage, as always, have to take responsibility for their own people, unable to rely on the white authorities which are supposed to guard them.

Hale recruits a "brooding" detective from Kansas City who goes by the name of Pike. Anna's estate, meanwhile, is being administered by Scott Mathis, owner of the Big Hill Trading Company. The U.S. government, believing that most Osage are incapable of handling their own money, has, over the years, required the Office of Indian Affairs to determine which members of the tribe are capable of handling their own trust funds and assign local white guardians to the remaining members. Mathis, on behalf of Anna's family, hires his own team of private eyes, as does Whitehorn's guardian. William J. Burns, a former Secret Service agent referred to by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself as the "American Sherlock Holmes," takes the case.

The Osages' white neighbors show interest in the case and begin trying to help out both the Burkhart family and the Whitehorse family—but knowing about the racism, prejudice, and corruption in town, even their help seems suspect.

Over the summer of 1921, the investigators hired by Mathis descend upon Osage County. They begin questioning Anna's servants as well as Bryan Burkhart, and looking into Anna's phone records from the night of her disappearance. One of the investigators remains suspicious of Oda Brown, but when operatives go searching for him throughout Oklahoma, they struggle to track him down. When one investigator finally finds Brown and attempts to talk to him without revealing his identity as a private eye, Brown reveals that he was having a relationship with another woman and was not even in the area at the time of Anna's death.

The investigators begin doing their jobs as thoroughly as they can, but have difficulty finding any leads that lead to any real answers. The attention the cases are starting to receive, however, foreshadows the later involvement of the FBI.

Back in Osage County, a woman named Rose Osage admits to killing Anna after Anna tried to seduce her boyfriend, Joe Allen. The operatives follow the lead, but are unable to corroborate her story, and believe she is simply lying to get the reward. Sheriff Freas urges the private eyes to investigate "two hard-boiled characters from the oil camps."

Even members of the Osage tribe seem to have fallen victim to greediness and corruption as the investigation continues.

The private detectives share their information with Bill Smith, who is married to Mollie's sister Rita and is conducting his own investigation. Before "attaching himself to an Osage fortune," Smith was a horse thief. He married Mollie's sister Minnie first, but when she died of a "wasting illness" in 1918, he remarried—to Rita. Bill often hits Rita, and Mollie has long suspected him of having been responsible in some way for Minnie's death. Hale does not trust Bill either, and even tells one attorney that he believes Bill is using marriages to Osage women for financial gain.

Everyone is a suspect—and the closer a white person is to a member of the Osage tribe, the more likely it seems that they are using their relationship with that person for some kind of corrupt personal gain.

Bill takes a private detective to talk to a tailor who is rumored to have some information about Anna's death—the tailor is still spreading the rumor about Rose Osage. The private detectives install a listening device to eavesdrop on Rose and her boyfriend but are unable to hear anything incriminating or even useful. Meanwhile, detectives make another important discovery: Anna, at the time of her death, had confided in several people the news that she was pregnant, but no one knows who the father was.

Investigators vacillate between breakthroughs and stall-outs, unable to make heads or tails of much of the information they're receiving about Anna Brown. The news that she was pregnant adds yet more tragedy and intrigue to her murder.

One day, A.W. Comstock—a local attorney and the guardian of several Osage Indians' fortunes—shows up to offer his assistance to the investigation. Because the man has numerous contacts among the Osage, the private eyes accept his offer. Comstock tells investigators that he has heard "chatter" about the fact that Whitehorn's widow, Hattie, had coveted her husband's money—and was jealous of his relationship with another woman. Wondering if Whitehorn could have been the father of Anna's child, investigators begin tailing Hattie—but encounter no new developments.

Again, even those who have intimate relationships with the murdered parties are suspected of being false, corrupt, and only in it for the money.

By February of 1922, the investigations of both cases seem to have stalled—Pike, the eye hired by Hale, has moved on, and Freas has been expelled from office. One night that month, however, a twenty-nine-year-old Osage, William Stepson, receives a call at his house in Fairfax and goes out. When he returns home to his wife and children, he is visibly ill, and dies within hours. Authorities believe that Stepson has been poisoned, though no coroner is trained in forensics. A month later, another Osage woman dies of a suspected poisoning, and then, in July, yet another Osage man dies after drinking poisoned whiskey.

The investigations seem to come to an unsatisfying halt even as the danger on the reservation continues to increase, and more and more Osage Indians are murdered. It becomes clear that the authorities cannot be trusted—they have no interest in solving these crimes, or are being bought off, or are responsible themselves for the violence. This new string of poisonings also suggests that Lizzie indeed had been poisoned earlier as well.

In August of 1922, as the suspicious deaths have mounted, the tribe begs Barney McBride, a wealthy white oilman, to go to Washington, D.C. and plead with the federal authorities to investigate. McBride was once married to a Creek woman and is a trusted ally of the Osage. When McBride checks into his rooming house in the capital, he finds a telegram waiting for him—it warns him to be careful. That evening, after playing billiards at the Elks Club, he is kidnapped; the following morning, his body is found in Maryland, stripped naked and stabbed upwards of twenty times.

Even white friends and neighbors who attempt to shed light on the Osage murders are killed—it becomes clear that whoever is behind these killings is not done yet and is desperate to make sure no one stands in the way of their continued assault of the Osage.

News of McBride's murder quickly makes its way back to Oklahoma, and his death is recognized not as just a murder but rather a "warning." The *Washington Post* reports on the incident under the headline "CONSPIRACY BELIEVED TO KILL RICH INDIANS."

At last, what is happening on the Osage reservation is called by its true name: a conscious, orchestrated conspiracy.

CHAPTER 6: MILLION DOLLAR ELM

In spite of the spate of murders, oil barons continue coming in droves to Osage County. Four times a year, the Department of the Interior oversees the auction of Osage leases, and some 160-acre tracts are auctioned off for as much as $14 million. As news of the auctions makes its way across the country, anxiety spreads—one *Harper's Monthly Magazine* reporter wrote, "The Osage Indians are becoming so rich that something will have to be done about it."

The idea that something has "to be done" about the Osage's steadily-increasing wealth demonstrates that no one really cares what happens to the tribe—people all around the country wish ill on the "rich redskin[s]."

A growing number of Americans become alarmed and outraged by reports of the Osage tribe's wealth. Journalists wildly embellish stories of Osage extravagance, and public sentiment turns against the tribe: many Americans believe that the "typical Osage" is a "good-for-nothing" who does not deserve their wealth—for many Americans, seen as an "unfortunate" coincidence.

Even though the Osage tribe is under siege, the press turns against them, villainizing them for their wealth and only increasing the chances that no one with the power to stop the murders will pay attention to the tribe. This again points to the widespread societal racism against Native Americans.

At the height of the roaring twenties, however, the Osage are hardly going on "the greatest, gaudiest spree[s]"—tribal stature, in Osage custom, is directly linked with displays of "generosity," whereas many millionaire Americans are blowing through their cash building sprawling mansions and ending up destitute.

Even though there are other Americans—white Americans—who are behaving more frivolously and indeed dangerously with their wealth, the Osage come under fire for living lives of luxury because their doing so upsets the social order that white America wants.

Unlike other wealthy Americans, many Osage cannot even spend their money as they please, due to the federally-imposed system of financial guardianship. Many Osages' financial guardians see them as "children" and deem them "incompetent." The system of oversight is deeply racist, and many times, full-blooded Osage are appointed a guardian while "mixed-blood" Osage are allowed to manage their own finances.

The deeply racist U.S. government policies prevent full-blooded tribe members from handling their own finances in an attempt to keep Natives in the place in the social order white America desires: the bottom.

In 1921, the government implements even more "draconian" legislation, and decides that even those Osages with guardians will be "restricted," unable to withdraw more than a few thousand dollars annually from their trust funds. The government is not the only entity trying to meddle in the tribe's financial affairs, either. Local merchants price-gouge members of the tribe, while "unscrupulous" accountants and lawyers seek to exploit their bank accounts. Mollie, as a full-blooded Osage, is made to have a guardian oversee her finances; she chooses her husband Ernest, so that at least her family is somewhat in control of their funds.

The government essentially aids corrupt white neighbors of the Osage in gouging and stealing money from the members of the tribe they are charged with helping and protecting. The government's cruel policies are also petty and aimed only at keeping the Osage subjugated even as their wealth expands.

At one congressional hearing, an Osage chief named Bacon Rind complains that white America "bunched" the Osage down to a "pile of rocks" in the roughest part of the country—now that the pile of rocks is valuable, "everybody wants to get in here and get some of this money."

Bacon Rind calls out the government on their hypocrisy—they wanted the Osage to have the worst of the country, and now that they have the best of it, the government is incensed, and is doing everything in its power to keep the tribe down.

CHAPTER 7: THIS THING OF DARKNESS

In February of 1923, two men are out hunting just north of Fairfax when they spot a car at the bottom of a rocky hill. They return to Fairfax and inform the authorities. Later, when a deputy sheriff and the town marshal go out to investigate, they approach the car and see a man slumped behind the steering wheel—when they open the driver's door, they find that the man inside is covered in blood and has been shot in the back of the head. Nearly six months have passed since the brutal slaying of Barney McBride, but the lawmen's discovery informs them that the killing hasn't stopped after all.

As the killing continues into the new year, locals—whites and Osage alike—realize that the killings aren't over, and perhaps have only just begun.

The latest victim is Henry Roan, a forty-year-old Osage Indian who is married with two children. He is easily identified, as the cold temperatures preserved his body. The lawmen return to town, notify the justice of the peace, and inform Hale of the murder—Roan considered Hale his best friend, and, because Roan's access to his finances had been curtailed under the unfair guardianship legislation, Hale often lent the man money. In fact, Hale lent Roan so much money so often that Roan had listed Hale as the beneficiary of his $25,000 life insurance policy after discovering that his own wife was having an affair with another man.

As the information that connects Roan and Hale comes to light, Hale comes under suspicion. Even if the two men were close friends and business partners, Roan's death—which grants Hale an exorbitant sum of money—was certainly foul play seemingly aimed at securing his fortune.

The deputy and the marshal—along with Hale and the Shoun brothers—return to the scene of the crime (which is, incidentally, the same ravine where Anna was murdered) and begin a coroner's inquest. They determine that Roan was murdered about ten days earlier and find tread marks in the frozen mud from another car. On Roan's person are twenty dollars in cash and a gold watch.

Despite Hale's suspicious connection to Roan's fortune, he is allowed to visit the scene of the crime. Hale is so powerful in the community that he can flout protocol and evade suspicion even when he seems directly implicated.

As the news reaches town, Mollie is "jolted" by Roan's death. In 1902—more than a decade before meeting Ernest—she and Roan were briefly (and secretly) married in what was likely a traditional Osage arranged marriage. After Roan's funeral, as the authorities begin looking into his death, Mollie becomes uneasy, afraid that details of her first marriage will emerge—and anger Ernest, her "instinctively jealous" second husband.

Mollie has secrets, too, and as news of Henry Roan's death reaches her, she feels herself torn between her two worlds and her two lives—the world of her family and her tribe, and the white world she has been conditioned to assimilate into.

After Roan's death, members of the Osage tribe begin taking precautions, placing electric lightbulbs over the doors to their homes despite the fact that outsiders see doing so as "an ostentatious display of oil wealth." The "perennial question in the Osage land" becomes "who will be next," and a "climate of terror" descends over the community.

The Osage know that they are being targeted for their headrights—every moment is filled with fear, and restlessness and upset pervade the community.

Paranoia takes over Mollie's family, too, and soon Rita and her husband Bill Smith, after hearing "jostling" outside their home in the middle of the night, move into an elegant two-story house at the center of Fairfax. Soon after the move, in early March, neighborhood dogs in Fairfax begin to die, and Bill believes that the watchdogs are being poisoned. Bill confides in a friend that he does not "expect to live very long."

The atmosphere of terror on the Osage reservations deepens as death, cruelty, and paranoia continue to abound.

On March 9, Bill and a friend drive out to the bootlegger Henry Grammer's ranch—Bill has told his friend that he is in need of a drink. Grammer is a "notorious character" who lives in and controls an unseen world. Roan himself got whisky from Grammer's ranch shortly before his death—and Anna most often got her whisky there, too. Grammer's rap sheet is long and varied, and his bootlegging empire now holds sway over an army of bandits, including Asa Kirby and John Ramsey.

Bill, seeking comfort, turns to contraband liquor. His journey to the bootlegger's shows that the "underworld" of Osage County is easily accessible and commonly known.

When Bill and his friend arrive at the ranch, Grammer isn't there. Bill purchases some whisky anyway, and then he and his friend return to Fairfax. Bill drops his friend off, heads home, and goes to bed with Rita. Around three in the morning, a blast beneath their house is heard, far and wide, by neighbors and other witnesses. Mollie and Ernest, home in bed, feel the explosion, too. Ernest, in his slippers and pajamas, runs out to see what the commotion is; realizing that Bill and Rita's house has exploded, he runs towards the rubble.

Bill and Rita become the latest victims of the Osage murders—and their deaths are, quite literally, the most explosive so far. The violence befalling the Osage tribe is escalating in a show of force and dominance.

The house has been reduced to ash, and as dawn arrives, the justice of the peace, Mathis, and the Shoun brothers search alongside neighbors of the Smiths for bodies. Bill is found alive—but with his legs "seared beyond recognition," and the rest of his body covered in terrible burns. Rita's body is found, but the body of their white servant, Nettie, has been "blown to pieces," and there are barely any remains of her body left. The doctors load Bill into an ambulance, where they begin giving him morphine—before he can be questioned, he loses consciousness. He awakes and submits to questioning, but his answers are mumbled and disjointed, and four days after the bombing he succumbs to his injuries and dies.

The scene at Bill and Rita's is the most grisly yet. This is also the first murder to seek to claim multiple victims at once—additionally, the Smiths' servant, Nettie, is the second white person to be murdered during this spate of horrific killings.

Sadness, pain, and outrage over the attack spread through Fairfax and beyond. In April of 1923, the governor of Oklahoma dispatches his top state investigator to Osage County. Many Osage are relieved—they have started to believe that local officials are in cahoots with the killer or killers, whoever they may be, and that only an outside force like the investigator will be able to cut through the corruption. Within days, though, the investigator is found taking bribes from notorious local crooks, and in June is taken off the case and sent to prison.

Even when help in the form of an outsider seems to arrive at last, it soon comes to light that he, too, is a victim of the seemingly inescapable corruption which has seized, evidently, not just Osage County, but the larger state of Oklahoma.

W.W. Vaughan, an attorney living in Pawhuska who has been working closely with the private investigators attempting to solve the murders, receives an urgent call from a friend of George Bigheart, the nephew of James Bigheart, on a June day in 1923. The call informs Vaughan that George has been a victim of a suspected poisoning and has been rushed to an Oklahoma City hospital. Before hurrying to the hospital, Vaughan tells his wife about a hiding spot where he has stashed information and evidence he's been gathering and tells her to turn it over to the authorities should anything happen to him.

W.W. Vaughan is possibly the only person so far who has been seriously investigating the truth about the murders—and he knows just what is at stake if the wrong people decide to come for him.

Vaughan arrives at the hospital and talks privately with Bigheart—but within hours, Bigheart is pronounced dead. Vaughan telephones the new Osage County sheriff to inform him that he is on his way back with new information—Vaughan says he knows everything, including who killed Bigheart. On the train home, however, Vaughan "vanishes" from his cabin. After a thirty-six-hour search, his mangled body is found by the railroad tracks just north of Oklahoma City; like McBride, he has been stripped naked and left for dead.

Vaughan, in pursuit of justice and truth, has gotten too close to solving the murders—and he is made to pay for getting near to securing justice for the Osage people.

The death toll of the Osage tribe has climbed to twenty-four, and the period becomes known as "the Osage Reign of Terror." Two more men who have tried to assist the investigation turn up dead, and the press alights on the "bloodiest chapter in American crime history" with sensationalized fervor. Even the justice of the peace, assailed by threats, refuses to convene inquests into the latest murders.

As the death toll rises and even an increasing number of white Americans are implicated in the "Reign of Terror," it seems that whoever is behind the murders is unassailable and invincible, so profound is the atmosphere of corruption at every level of Oklahoma society.

By the end of 1923, the Osage tribe begin urging the federal government to send officials who have no ties to the state, and while the tribe waits for the federal government to respond, Mollie lives in fear and dread, knowing she is the "likely next target in the apparent plot to eliminate her family." William Hale—having returned from Texas after the news of the bombing—assures Mollie that he will avenge her family, but after Hale helps authorities capture Asa Kirby in a jewel heist, Hale's own pastures are set on fire, and his cattle are killed.

Even William Hale, the most prominent member of Osage County society, is threatened by the Reign of Terror—but whether the threat against him is real or manufactured to make him appear innocent remains to be seen.

Seeing that even Hale is vulnerable, Mollie retreats into her house—she no longer entertains neighbors and friends or attends church, and rumors spread that not only has her mind begun to unravel, but her diabetes is beginning to worsen; the Shoun brothers, who come and go from the house to inject her with insulin, are some of her only visitors. No historical records exist which provide a glimpse of Mollie's life for several years. In late 1925, however, Mollie writes a letter to a local priest, claiming that her life is in danger: she isn't dying of diabetes, she says, but is being poisoned.

Mollie is getting sicker—and the fact that the Shoun brothers are administering her "insulin" injections and the only people with access to her home spells suspicion for the pair.

CHAPTER 8: DEPARTMENT OF EASY VIRTUE

One day in the summer of 1925, Tom White—the special agent in charge of the Bureau of Investigation's field office in Houston—receives an urgent summons from headquarters in Washington, D.C. J. Edgar Hoover, the new man in charge of the bureau, orders White to come to Washington to meet in person. Hoover demands a certain level of hegemony and professionalism from the agents who work under him, and White, bidding farewell to his wife and children, packs his things and heads out on his way quickly.

The narrative switches focus to tell the story of how Tom White is assigned to take charge of the Osage "Reign of Terror." Grann will use this section of the book to show how the Osage murders were directly connected to the formation of the FBI as we know it today—and responsible for the way the American public sees, or rather doesn't see, the incident presently.

White, an "old-style" lawman and a former Texas Ranger, stands six-foot-four and is often **dressed like a cowboy**. He joined the Bureau of Investigation in 1917, after being barred from fighting in World War I due to a recent surgery. Now, not yet forty, White is part of a "tribe of old frontier lawmen"—a tribe which is vanishing, leaving White in danger of "becoming a relic in a Wild West traveling show."

Though wild-West lawlessness still reigns in Oklahoma, out East, things are changing—and the way policework and federal investigations happen is making men like Tom White into "relic[s]" of a bygone era of grit and gunslinging.

White, primarily a fact-gatherer, has no formal training as a law-enforcement officer, and little experience with cutting-edge scientific methods such as fingerprinting. Nonetheless, White has made a good lawman due to his measured temper and morals—he believes there is a thin line between a good man and a bad one.

White is a complicated character. Though part of the old guard of the West, he has a strict moral code and a past which has made him predisposed to chasing justice at any cost.

In 1924, the attorney general of the United States selected J. Edgar Hoover, the twenty-nine-year-old deputy director of the bureau, to serve as acting director amidst a climate of scandal and disgrace. Hoover had no experience as a detective—he had never been in a shoot-out or made an arrest—and was more a "creature of the bureaucracy" who dealt in gossip, "unspoken deals," and "bloodless but vicious territorial wars." Hoover set to work making the bureau into a modern force, booting out incompetent or crooked agents and requiring new agents to have legal and accounting training. By the end of the year, Hoover was given the position permanently—during his five-year tenure, he would go on to form the bureau into a "monolithic force" that would both combat crime and "commit egregious abuses of power" as it attempted to cover up the scandals of its past, present, and future.

The bureau's fledgling years have been spent mired in scandal—and Hoover is determined to quell and quiet things by any means necessary. This passage makes it clear that Hoover is looking for someone who can do a job and do it well—so that Hoover can sit back, relax, and take credit as the agents he has hired rehabilitate the bureau's image from the ground up.

As White arrives at headquarters, he takes note of the new "breed" of agents—college boys who "type faster than they [shoot]" and are mocked, by old-timers, as "Boy Scouts." Upon entering Hoover's office, White looms over the director—a man of "modest stature," so insecure about his height that he rarely promoted any tall agents to headquarters—and listens as Hoover describes the "sensational case" of the Osage murders.

White seems like a fish out of water in Hoover's bureau—the place is changing, and is starting to reflect a different kind of masculinity (and a different kind of protocol) than White is used to.

In the spring of 1923, the bureau's former director dispatched an agent to Osage County to investigate—after being there a few weeks, the agent concluded in his report that "any continued investigation [would be] useless." The bureau sent more agents, but none were able to make any headway. After a disastrous snafu in which the notorious outlaw Blackie Thompson was released to work undercover for the bureau's investigation—and subsequently escaped into the Osage Hills, robbed a bank, and killed a police officer—Hoover is now desperate to quell rumors of the bureau's role in the Thompson affair, and exonerate the bureau from being blamed for the failure of the larger investigation, or for internal corruption.

There is even more at stake in the Osage case than there seemed to be—Hoover has already had to contain several small fires, and now needs someone solid and measured like White to take control, restore order, and swiftly, quietly bring the case to a close. This pattern of the bureau seeking to cover up its mistakes will have devastating implications as Grann's book, and his own investigations of the fledgling FBI's practices, continue to unfold.

Hoover asks White—a veritable "cowboy" familiar with the wild ways of the west—to direct the investigation of the Osage murders. White agrees. Hoover orders White to set out for Oklahoma City and take command of the field office there. White knows the stakes—if he fails, he will certainly be banished to a distant outpost or edged out of the bureau entirely, and, what's more, several men who have tried to catch the killers have themselves been killed—but nonetheless agrees to undertake the job.

There is a lot on the line as White considers whether he should take the job—and yet he agrees to it, knowing that there is more to gain than there is to lose.

CHAPTER 9: THE UNDERCOVER COWBOYS

In July of 1925, Tom White arrives in the Oklahoma City field office and gets to work poring over the voluminous files on the Osage murders. He scours the random bits of data and information for some kind of pattern or design, struggling to find links between the murders. A few things become evident: rich Osage Indians are being targeted, and three of the victims—Anna, Rita, and Lizzie—were related. The files hold little information about Mollie, the last surviving member of her family, and White wonders why nobody has interviewed her.

As White and his team arrive on the scene, they begin finding holes in the previous investigation and start to understand that though a lot of things about the murders are crystal-clear, no one has taken any action to follow up on painfully obvious leads and lines of inquiry.

Another thing White notices about the files is that there is no "signature" to the killings—the murders have run the gamut from poisonings to point-blank shootings to bombings. The killer is not impulsive, White realizes, but rather a "connoisseur of plots," calculating and patient enough to "carry out his diabolical vision over years."

The killings are more sinister than White thought—whoever is behind them is enacting a carefully-calculated campaign of physical and psychological violence against the Osage, meant to decimate their community, their resources, and their sense of agency.

The files are so confusing that White believes the widespread corruption throughout Osage County has led to an intentional spread of disinformation, meant to conceal the truth from investigators. He sets to work separating hearsay from facts and building an "indubitable narrative" using as much evidence as he can gather.

White realizes what he is up against: not just a murderer, and not just an atmosphere of systemic racism, but a place in which corruption is so rampant that past investigators have all either been bribed away or scared off. White, though, wants the truth.

White sets to work assembling a team. He recruits a former New Mexico sheriff, a former fellow Texas Ranger, and an experienced deep-cover operative. He retains John Burger from the previous investigation, realizing how valuable Burger's comprehensive knowledge of the case is. White also brings aboard a rough-and-tumble Texan, Frank Smith, and, finally, John Wren, an American Indian hailing from the Ute tribe and a former spy for revolutionary leaders in Mexico. White realizes that many of the previous agents on the case have been racist and cruel and have compromised the investigation—having Wren on the team, White knows, will bring a delicate hand and an empathetic perspective to the investigation going forward.

White's team is varied, competent, and trustworthy. He knows that there is racism, greed, and corruption at every level of society in Osage County—and so seeks to have his team infiltrate every part of town in order to quickly and efficiently learn the truth of what's happening to the Osage.

CHAPTER 10: ELIMINATING THE IMPOSSIBLE

White's team slips into Osage County one by one—all undercover. The former sheriff and the former Ranger, acting as cattlemen, soon ingratiate themselves with William Hale, while another agent, under the guise of an insurance salesman, visits the houses of several suspects. Agent Wren, claiming to be a medicine man searching for long-lost relatives, attends tribal gatherings and makes inroads with members of the Osage tribe.

White and his team design to be as calculating and deliberate as the murderer himself as they infiltrate Osage County in search of the truth.

White is unsure of where to begin the investigation. Many records have mysteriously vanished, and virtually no evidence has been preserved from any of the crime scenes. The undertaker, however, saved Anna's skull after she was disinterred, and allows White to examine it. He confirms that she was shot with a .32 or .38-caliber pistol, and that there was no exit wound. Because the bullet was never turned up during an autopsy—but should have been impossible to miss—White concludes that a conspirator on the scene, or even the killer himself, must have swiped it.

White is overwhelmed by the corruption and simple incompetency that have characterized the investigation thus far. Still, the evidence gleaned from Anna's skull gives him a place to begin—even if that, too, is murky and shrouded in mishandling and mystery.

White questions David and James Shoun, who both insist that they searched diligently for the bullet. Because there were so many people present for the autopsy, including the local lawmen, the undertaker, and Mathis, it is impossible to say who among them altered the crime scene.

White knows that something went awry at the crime scene—but because so many people were present, he has his work cut out for him in determining who did what there, and why.

White begins the process of methodically corroborating each suspect's alibi—David Grann quotes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, who famously stated, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbably, must be the truth." White quickly rules out many suspects, including Anna's ex-husband, Oda Brown, and Rose Osage. The woman to whom Rose allegedly confessed now comes forward to claim that a strange white man came to her house, wrote up a statement, and forced her to sign it. White realizes that the conspirators are not just erasing evidence but manufacturing it as well.

White's realization that someone—or perhaps multiple people—are actively working to incriminate innocent people and throw investigators off the trail shows that there is a vast and insidious conspiracy at work. The calculation and "diabolical" planning of whoever the mastermind behind the murders is shown to have new, unforeseen depths.

CHAPTER 11: THE THIRD MAN

Hoover is anxious about growing criticism pertaining to the case and dissatisfied with White's infrequent updates. Hoover begins studying reports about the Osage murders from his office in Washington and comes to believe that Necia Kenny, a white woman married to an Osage man, is a part of the conspiracy. Kenny, however, has a history of mental instability, and so Hoover himself has her interviewed in Washington. He realizes that despite her paranoia, she may be helpful in furnishing leads.

Hoover, due to his germophobia and meticulous personality, is not a field man, but because of his desire for control over the investigation he begins insinuating himself into White's work even from afar.

By the end of July 1925, White has turned his "full attention" to Bryan Burkhart, Mollie's brother-in-law—the last of the listed suspects in Anna Brown's murder. Bryan's alibi seems airtight, and yet when White sends his agents to corroborate it by interviewing Bryan's uncle and aunt—who went with him to the musical on the night of Anna's death—the couple seem nervous, and quickly state that Bryan was with them before ordering the agents out.

As White attempts to corroborate Bryan's alibi, he runs into some people who seem irritated and even angered by the fact that someone is looking into Bryan at all.

In August of 1925, White sends his undercover operatives to the town of Ralston to follow up a lead: on the night Anna Brown disappeared, she might have been spotted in a car by a group of men sitting in front of a hotel on Ralston's main street. These witnesses' valuable testimony was discarded by previous investigators, and White believes they have been paid by suspects to stay away.

White has begun to understand just how corrupt a place he's been assigned to, and is now questioning everything as he moves forward, leaving no stone unturned and no suspicion uninvestigated.

One of the witnesses—and his wife—agree to talk to the investigators, despite knowing how dangerous it is to be associated with the case. They confirm that Anna and Bryan Burkhart were together in a car in Ralston on the night of Anna's murder. Bryan's alibi has been cracked, and one of the agents reports back to White that Bryan has "perjured himself when he swore before the coroner's inquest […] that he had left Anna safely at her home […] between 4:30 and 5 p.m."

As White blows a hole in Bryan's alibi, he comes to realize that Bryan did indeed have a role in Anna Brown's murder—despite being a member of her extended family.

White is now tasked with establishing where Anna and Bryan went after leaving Ralston. He makes a timeline: Bryan and Anna stopped at a series of speakeasies between Ralston and Fairfax and stayed out drinking until 1:00 a.m. Though witnesses' testimony grows murky beyond that point, several report having seen Bryan and Anna with a "third man" that evening. The last sighting of them was at about 3:00 a.m., when a witness who knew them both heard a car stop near her house and heard Bryan shouting at Anna to "stop [her] foolishness." After that, Anna disappears from the timeline—but Bryan's neighbor spotted him returning home at sunrise, and Bryan gave the man money to "keep quiet" about having seen him. White wonders why Bryan would have killed Anna, whether he is involved in the other murders, and who exactly the "third man" could be.

As White continues investigating and building a timeline, the things he unearths make Bryan look guiltier and guiltier. White knew there was corruption afoot on the Osage reservation—but now must confront that family members are, perhaps, killing family members in a desperate grab for riches. Nothing here is sacred other than money.

CHAPTER 12: A WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

By the end of the summer of 1925, White begins to suspect that there is a mole inside of the investigation. Two private eyes expose and apprehend one of the operation's informants, Kelsie Morrison, and it becomes clear that agents' reports are leaking and being stolen. White takes to meeting with his men under cover of darkness and urging them to carry weapons to defend themselves.

White realizes that his investigation is under siege and seeks to protect it—and his men—any way that he can.

The private eye called Pike—who was hired by William Hale back in 1921 to solve the murders but abandoned the case after failing to make progress—arouses the most suspicion out of anyone. When an intermediary for Pike approaches Agent Burger and alleges that Pike knows who "the third man" is—and will reveal his identity in exchange for a "king's ransom"—agents demand that Pike himself come forward. When he refuses, agents launch a manhunt for Pike, and find him in Tulsa.

It is clear that the private eye named Pike is up to no good—and is attempting to extort money from the investigation. White will not stand for such treatment and brings the full force of his powers down on Pike.

As the agents "work" on Pike, he reveals a hidden dimension to the case—he was never really hired to solve the murder of Anna Brown, but was instead hired to conceal Bryan's whereabouts on the night of the crime and help him "shape an alibi." His orders, Pike reveals, came directly from William Hale. White realizes that if Pike is telling the truth, it means that Hale—the "King of the Osage Hills"—has been lying for years, and is possibly part of an "intricate, nefarious design." Pike also reveals that when he met with Hale and Bryan, one more person was often present: Ernest Burkhart, who was careful never to discuss the case in the presence of his wife Mollie.

When Pike reveals that he was hired by Hale to conceal the truth rather than ascertain it, White is faced with a terrible possibility—that, ostensibly, the most "upstanding" and well-loved citizens of Osage County are the ones who have plunged it into this corrupt and racist reign of terror.

CHAPTER 13: A HANGMAN'S SON

Tom White is a sheriff's son—his father Emmett was in charge of the county jail in Austin, and White grew up in a building adjacent to the jail. He saw many bloody and disturbing sights as a child as a result of his father's profession, and yet learned from his father—an even-tempered man dedicated to pure justice and equality for all prisoners—an even-headed disposition and a burning desire to know why his father's prisoners did what they did.

Tom White has, since childhood, been veritably obsessed with truth, justice, and the fractures, impulses, and desires which comprise human nature.

The young Tom White knew how dangerous his father's profession was, and often feared that his father would lose his life to senseless violence. Tom once saw his father get stabbed, and also witnessed his father carry out a hanging of the first time in 1894, when Tom was a boy of just eleven—the man his father hanged was a nineteen-year-old African-American who was, in all likelihood, wrongly convicted. As a result of the painful things he saw in his childhood, Tom grew up to oppose "judicial homicide," and came to see the law "as a struggle to subdue the violent passions not only in others but also in oneself."

Even though as a youngster Tom White was exposed to violence, cruelty, and danger, he did not shy away from it as he came of age—rather, he sought to follow in his father's footsteps, honoring his legacy but improving upon the ways in which justice was served.

White joined the Texas Rangers in 1905 at the age of twenty-four. He worked for a meager salary but felt a sense of camaraderie and brotherhood on the force. He learned the ins and outs of what it meant to be a lawman from older Ranger and developed a knack for dealing with rascals in particular: cow rustlers, horse thieves, stagecoach robbers, and other desperadoes of the Wild West. Texas Rangers were, for all their bravado, not very skilled investigators, and often worked without evidence or facts.

Though White was a member of a force not necessarily renowned for its investigative skilled, he learned a lot of other things on the ground—and secured a wealth of experience that now serves him well as he shakes down the baddest of the bad.

In 1909, after the death of a fellow Ranger, Tom White settled down, married, and left the force for good. He worked as a railroad detective, finding the work less dangerous but also much less fulfilling, and in 1917, he took the oath to become a special agent of the Bureau of Investigation. In 1918, Tom's brother Dudley—also a Texas Ranger—was killed in a shootout. Tom returned home to Texas to bury his brother, but quickly returned to the Bureau.

White narrowly escaped a dangerous life and perhaps even a tragic fate—but the desire to uphold the law, bring truth to light, and make criminals face justice pushed him back into the business despite the risks.

CHAPTER 14: DYING WORDS

In September of 1925, Tom White begins to wonder whether the slain Bill Smith, Mollie's brother-in-law, had begun to unravel the truth behind the murders—and whether a larger conspiracy connected to the family's oil wealth was indeed behind them—just before his death.

White knows that anyone who got too close to solving the case—like Vaughan and McBride—has turned up dead, and wonders if Bill is yet another who began closing in on the truth.

White meets with the nurse who had been on duty when Bill was in the hospital in the days after the explosion, and she reveals that shortly before Bill died, he met with his lawyer and his doctors—James and David Shoun. The doctors had asked the nurse to leave the room during their conversation. White then questions the doctors, who state that they called the lawyer because they believed Bill might say something about who was responsible for the explosion, but actually never talked about "who blew him up" in front of them. When White questions Smith's lawyer, however, his lawyer reveals that, lying in the hospital, Bill stated that he only had two enemies in the world—William K. Hale, and his nephew Ernest Burkhart.

The fact that Bill, right before his death, named Hale and Burkhart—his own in-laws—his greatest "enemies" in the world shows White that not everyone in town is, perhaps, quite what they seem to be. White senses that some sort of foul play and trickery has gone on, but he can't quite get to the root of it—what is clear is that the Shoun brothers are lying.

White begins to speculate that the Shouns orchestrated the meeting with Bill Smith not for his testimony, but for another motive entirely: during the meeting, James Shoun was named the administrator of Rita Smith's estate and was allowed to execute her will—a position which "paid unconscionably high fees and provided ample opportunities for graft." It becomes clear that the doctors summoned the lawyer to Bill's bedside so that they could all but force him to sign the necessary paperwork before he died.

The Shoun brothers—already shady figures in White's book—are now proven to be co-conspirators in a ploy to secure part of Bill Smith's estate, a fortune which Bill only amassed through his marriage to Rita.

White begins unraveling the flow of oil money from Osage headrights, and discovers "layer upon layer of corruption," and evidence of multiple white guardians and administrators using the system to swindle and cheat the very people they were supposed to be protecting. One Osage chief, referring to guardianship over Osage estates, referred to the practice as "the blackest chapter in the history of [Oklahoma]" and estimated that millions of dollars were stolen and spent by guardians of Osage estates.

The government policy of assigning guardians to the wealthy Osage is a strategy for keeping the Osage down—and for excusing the federal government's turning of a blind eye when it comes to the abuses of the policy committed by the very guardians assigned to "protect" the Osage.

White discovers that "this so-called Indian business" is an elaborate criminal operation which pervades many sectors of society. The guardians and administrators are often wealthy, prominent businessmen, ranchers, lawyers, and politicians, while lawmen, prosecutors, and judges cover up and sometimes even facilitate the swindling for bribe money. These powerful men all have "understanding[s]" with one another and select certain wealthy Indians as their prey. The depraved schemes often deprive Osage Indians not just of surplus wealth, but go so far as to leave many in abject poverty. The Osage are aware of the multileveled campaign against them—but powerless to stop it.

White comes to understand just how racist, corrupt, and almost sociopathically uninterested in recognizing the Osage tribe's humanity the entirety of white Oklahoma society is. The vast network of conspiracies, heists, and knock-off jobs involves men and women of all stations, and it seems that these people will stop at nothing to take as much as they can from the Osage Indians—who, without any friends or sympathizers around, cannot make anyone pay attention to their plight.

CHAPTER 15: THE HIDDEN FACE

In September of 1926, one of White's operatives learns from a Fairfax woman that William Hale "control[s] everything in these parts"—and that he once torched his own land for insurance money. White looks into more suspicious matters having to do with Hale—namely, how he became the beneficiary of Henry Roan's $25,000 life insurance policy, and why, despite having the most obvious motive for wanting Roan dead, he was never questioned throughout the murder investigation.

It is becoming clearer and clearer to White and his team that William Hale benefits from the protection his well-established reputation affords him—so much so that he has avoided even routine questioning, a fact which heightens White's suspicion even further.

White talks to the salesman who sold Roan the insurance policy back in 1921 and discovers that Hale—claiming that Roan owed him a sum between ten and twenty thousand dollars—pushed for Roan to take the expensive policy and make him the beneficiary. The salesman, close with Hale, demanded no proof of the debt, simply wanting to make the sale. A doctor who examined Roan ahead of securing the policy was similarly someone recruited by Hale.

Hale has seemingly organized a grand scheme to secure access to Henry Roan's life insurance policy through a coordinated network of tightly-controlled lackeys.

White discovers that when the first insurance company rejected Roan's application, Hale went to another company—and this time, produced a trumped-up creditor's note to prove that Roan owed him money. (White's analysists would later find that the note was, though signed by Roan, altered to make Hale's claim look more legitimate.) When Hale took Roan back to the doctor to pass yet another exam, the doctor jokingly asked whether Bill was planning to "kill this Indian"—Hale reportedly answered, while laughing, "Hell, yes."

Hale's methods of securing access to Roan's funds are shown here to be positively labyrinthine—he has involved so many different people and abused his power in so many different ways that it is very hard to trace the origins of his deception. Yet White manages to uncover seriously incriminating evidence and testimony which points to Hale having a much darker side.

White learns that local lawmen actively tried to build a case against Roy Bunch, the man who had been having an affair with Roan's wife, rather than even look for a moment at Hale as a suspect. Hale even approached Bunch and warned him to get out of town as many thought he was guilty, offering him money for his journey. Bunch's friends, however, advised him not to take it, as it would make him look guilty. As White continues to investigate the claims against Bunch, he comes to believe that they were false and ungrounded.

Hale has been the one manufacturing evidence against various individuals throughout the reservation—both white and Native—in order to throw lawmen off the trail and keep his name out of the investigation.

White has gathered circumstantial evidence that implicates Hale in the murder of Henry Roan, but has no concrete proof in the form of fingerprints or eyewitnesses. As White continues to study the case, looking for something to clinch it, he finds a strange detail: before obtaining the life-insurance policy on Roan, Hale sought to purchase Roan's headright—his share in the tribe's mineral trust. When he was barred legally from doing so, White comes to believe, he turned to the life-insurance murder plot.

Hale has been wily, but not wily enough—he has left a trail, albeit a hard-to-find one, of his previous maneuvers and attempts at securing various Osages' fortunes.

There is one legal way, White knows, that a person who is not a member of the Osage tribe can obtain a headright: inheritance. As White examines the murder victims' records, he notices that more and more headrights are being passed down to one person: Mollie Burkhart, who is married to Hale's nephew Ernest—and who, one of White' agents writes, is "absolutely controlled by Hale."

White realizes, when he follows the money, that everything ends with Ernest—he comes to realizes that Ernest and Hale must be in on the plot together, conspiring to profit off Mollie's family's demise.

White sees now that the chronology of the murder is part of a ruthless plan to leave Mollie as the sole inheritor of a large group of headrights—so that when she is at last offed, all of her family's wealth will be up for grabs. Anna Brown—divorced and without children—bequeathed all her wealth to her mother, Lizzie, whereas Lizzie willed her headrights to her surviving daughters, Mollie and Rita. Rita was the third target, along with Bill, because their wills stipulated that if they died at the same time, their headrights would be passed on to Mollie (however, because Bill survived the blast and willed most of his headright to his own family, this one part of the plot failed). Still, the bulk of the family's headrights now rest with Mollie—whose wealth is controlled by Ernest, who is allegedly under his uncle Hale's control.

As White uncovers the chain of events Hale designed in order to secure the largest amount of money in the fewest possible steps, he sees that Hale relied on his invincibility within the town to get away with a series of murders so obviously orchestrated that anyone could see the plot, if only they took time to look. This means that Hale is completely confident in his ability to pull the scheme off—which worries White, who knows what is coming next.

What White can't figure out is whether Ernest's marriage to Mollie, four years before Anna's murder, was part of the plot all along—or whether Hale, at some point, "prevailed upon" Ernest to betray her.

Not being sure of whether Ernest is a good man turned bad or a bad man through and through symbolizes White's larger confusion about how corruption, racism, and greed take hold of a person.

CHAPTER 16: FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE BUREAU

Though White and his men are making progress, they still have no physical evidence or credible witnesses to use in their case against Hale. Without an airtight case, White knows he'll never be able to bring down a man who is hiding behind such a veneer of respectability, and who holds such great influence over Osage County. White and his agents compile a list of all those under White's control, and it includes Scott Mathis—the Big Hill Trading Company owner—along with several members of the police force, the mayor of Fairfax, and several local and federal officials. White knows that the struggle to obtain justice is just beginning—but is also aware that back in Washington, Hoover is growing impatient.

As White considers what it would mean to actually try to take Hale down, he comes to realize just how vast the man's network of influence it is. It seems that he has everybody in his pocket—and White, as an outsider, is worried that he doesn't stand a chance against such a stacked deck.

Hoover wants White's investigation to be "a showcase" for the new, restructured bureau. Hoover, too, longs to cast himself as "a crusader for the modern scientific age," ushering in an era of science and protocol as opposed to the old days of sleuths and cowboys. Hoover "radically streamline[s]" the bureau, purging from it any agents who do not meet his high standards. Hoover overhauls the bureau's policies on how agents gather and process information, and, through his reforms, agents become "interchangeable cogs," a significant departure from traditional policing, "where lawmen [are] typically products of their own communities." This change helps insulate agents from local corruption but ignores—and underprepares agents to handle—regional differences.

While White is toiling in Oklahoma, Hoover is clipping and pruning here and there throughout the bureau in order to tailor things to his own liking. White knows that his job and reputation are on the line, and that if he does not give Hoover the positive "showcase" he so desperately wants, there will be consequences.

Agents are trained in "scientific policing," such as fingerprint and ballistics techniques, and are taught formal rules of evidence-gathering. Many agents "despise" these new edicts and vast changes, and White, too, "chafe[s]" at many of the reforms—yet he adheres Hoover's new protocols, replaces his **cowboy hat with a fedora**, and toes the line.

White doesn't agree with all of Hoover's changes, but does his best to stay in line—and even begins compromising parts of his identity in order to better serve the new bureau.

CHAPTER 17: THE QUICK-DRAW ARTIST, THE YEGG, AND THE SOUP MAN

During the fall of 1925, White feels the pressure to solve the case continuing to mount—both from Hoover and from his own knowledge of the Osage tribe's fear, desperation, and feelings of injustice.

White has his own career in mind but is still perhaps the only person to care genuinely for the Osage and to want to relieve their suffering.

White knows that many prejudiced and corrupt citizens will not implicate one of their own in the Osage killings—so White decides to change his strategy and find someone who is just as desperate as he himself is: an outlaw with information on Hale. White turns to Dick Gregg, a twenty-three-year-old "stickup man" who is in a Kansas prison, serving a ten-year sentence for robbery. Gregg once told Agent Burger something about the murders, but was coy, and would not reveal any really necessary information.

Pressed up against a wall and unable to make any headway by turning to the Osages' white neighbors, White and his men decide to try a different tack and seek out men who have nothing to lose—and everything to gain by coming forward with information about the killings.

White meets with Gregg personally, but finds the young man reluctant to cross Hale for fear of losing his own life. When White offers Gregg the chance to shave time off his sentence, Gregg folds, and tells White and his agents that in the summer of 1922, Hale met with Gregg's gang and told the leader that he'd pay them all $2,000 to "bump off" Bill Smith and his wife. The leader of the gang, Al Spencer, told Hale he wouldn't, and Hale tried to recruit Gregg personally to the task, but Gregg too refused. White is grateful for Gregg's testimony—even though he knows it is of limited legal value as it comes from an incarcerated crook. Gregg urges White to seek out another outlaw, but White finds out that the man is dead.

Surprisingly, an incarcerated outlaw whose reputation is questionable to say the least gives White the first big break he's had so far—and implicates Hale to boot. As White begins following up on Gregg's leads, however, he is about to find that Hale has already taken measures—extreme measures—to secure his own safety.

White's continues desperately searching for a witness, and soon alights upon Henry Grammer—the rodeo star and bootlegger—who has known Hale for years and years, and who allegedly was overheard talking to Grammer before the murders, murmuring something about "that Indian deal." Grammer, however, is dead, too—and has been since June of 1923, three months after the demolition of the Smiths' house.

Anyone who seems to have anything on Hale turns up dead—making clear that Hale is systematically dispatching anyone who might implicate him in the murders.

Finally, a yegg—slang for a safecracker—gives White and his team the name of another witness to the bombing plot: Asa Kirby, an associate of Grammer's. Kirby, according to the yegg, is a "soup man"—an expert in explosives. White is beyond frustrated to learn that Kirby, too, is dead after a shootout during a botched robbery—a botched robbery which authorities were tipped off about by none other than William K. Hale. Another outlaw White interviews tells him that Hale allegedly set up the robbery, creating a plot within a plot to bump off anyone who might have information about him—not only that, but Hale is also suspected of being behind the deaths of the other outlaws, and has been "taking care" of people who have information about him left and right.

White and his men have suspected what Hale is doing, but when Kirby turns up dead—and Hale is supposedly behind the job that did him in—White knows for certain that Hale is guilty and doing everything in his (admittedly vast) powers to keep his reputation and freedom intact.

Another informant, Kelsie Morrison, warns White and his agents that Hale knows they are onto him—sure enough, Hale has been more committed than ever to make himself seem like an upstanding citizen and generous patron within his community, giving out loans and presents around town. Anytime White spots Hale around town in Osage County, he notes that the man looks "like he own[s] the world."

White becomes frustrated and angry as he watches Hale, a guilty mastermind and murderer, strut about town like the "king" many still believe him to be.

CHAPTER 18: THE STATE OF THE GAME

In late October of 1925, Tom White receives a tip out of the blue. While meeting with the governor of Oklahoma, he hears that a prisoner at the state penitentiary named Burt Lawson is claiming to know "a great deal" about the Osage murders. White and one of his agents, Frank Smith, desperate for a new lead, rush out to the prison to interview Lawson.

White and his agents have come up against wall after wall and are desperate for something that will help them undermine the corruption which is so rampant in Osage county.

Lawson tells White that in 1918 he worked as a ranch hand for Bill Smith, and also got to know William Hale and his nephews Ernest and Bryan. Lawson claims that in 1921, he discovered "an intimacy" between his wife and Bill Smith and left his employment. More than a year later, Ernest told Lawson he had a job for him—blowing up Bill and Rita. Lawson was hesitant, and even when Hale came to him and offered him $5,000, he refused the job. After an arrest, Hale visited Lawson in prison and convinced Lawson at last to take the job. Lawson then describes to White how Hale snuck him out of prison in the middle of the night in order to do the job, and White excitedly writes to Hoover with news of the confession. White and his men begin working to corroborate Lawson's statement.

Lawson begins spinning a story about his long, complicated history as an acquaintance of both William Hale and the Burkharts. White and his agents know how much corruption pervades the area, and yet are so desperate for a lead that they agree to trust an outlaw to give them the dirt they need to nab Hale.

Meanwhile White continues worrying about Mollie—he has suspicions about her complications from "diabetes," and worries that she will soon be killed so that her inheritance falls to Ernest—and, by proxy, to Hale. When one of White's agents John Wren hears from Mollie's priest that Mollie believes someone is trying to poison her—perhaps through her insulin injections, which the Shoun brothers are administering—White becomes even more desperate to get Hale off the streets.

The pressure White is facing continues to mount. Not only does he suspect that the murderers are running free, but he obtains direct confirmation that Mollie's life is in danger—if he isn't able to beat the system and act fast, yet another Osage life may soon be lost.

On January 4, 1926—despite not having finished confirming many details of Lawson's statement—White issues arrest warrants for William Hale and Ernest Burkhart for the murders of Bill and Rita Smith and their servant Nettie. Burkhart is taken in easily, but Hale is nowhere to be found—until he strolls into the sheriff's office one day and turns himself in, dressed in a **dandy suit** with a relaxed, even amused expression on his face. Noting how confident Hale seems, White and his agents decide that the nervous-seeming Burkhart is "the one to break."

White acts hastily, so desperate is he to get Hale off the streets. When Hale turns himself in, his dandy clothing and spritely disposition symbolize his feelings of invincibility—Hale is so powerful that he believes that nothing and no one can touch him.

White and Smith begin questioning Burkhart, but the man denies any knowledge of Lawson. White and his agent Smith drill Ernest for hours in a hot, claustrophobic box of an interrogation room, but Burkhart refuses to budge. After midnight, White and Smith give up and return Burkhart to his cell. The next day presents even more trouble, as Hale announces that he can prove he was in Texas at the time of the explosion. White begins to realize that Lawson was lying all along—and White, in his desperation to get Hale, fell prey to the outlaw's story.

Things begin to look bad for White. He let desperation and haste get the better of him, and now must deal with the folly of his own mistakes—and the repercussions they may have as the investigation moves forward.

Desperate, White hunts down and questions the dangerous outlaw Blackie Thompson about Hale and Burkhart's role in the Osage murders. Blackie states that Ernest and Hale once approached him and an "old buddy" about killing Bill and Rita Smith, offering Blackie Ernest's car as payment. Blackie stole Ernest's car from his driveway one night but was soon arrested. White and his agent then bring Blackie to Burkhart—to show Ernest that they know "everything." Much later that night, Ernest tells one of White's agents that he is finally defeated, and ready to confess.

White's desperation continues—as does his use of less-than-savory characters to aid in his investigation. White has had to resort to strange tactics in order to fight for justice for the Osage, since the atmosphere of corruption and racism in Osage County is so corrupt.

Burkhart tells White that though he didn't kill Bill and Rita, he knows who did, and wants to tell his story. He reveals that Hale did indeed scheme to kill Rita and Bill; when Hale told Ernest of the plan, Ernest protested, but Hale reminded Ernest that he and Mollie stood to inherit all of the couple's money. Burkhart, who had long idolized his uncle, went along with the plan, and Hale began recruiting outlaws who might want to take on the job. Burkhart reveals that Lawson had nothing to do with the job—and that Hale went to Fort Worth during the bombing specifically so that he would have an alibi while Asa Kirby, the "soup man," carried out the job. Burkhart also reveals that Hale arranged the murder of Henry Roan for insurance money and identifies John Ramsey as the triggerman.

Burkhart's conscience has gotten to him—or perhaps it's just that circumstance has backed him into a corner. Either way, he reveals everything to White, and allows White to form charges against both Hale and Ramsey. At last, there is a break in the case that White can use—even if indicting Hale poses an enormous challenge.

With the case "broken wide open," White has his agents arrest John Ramsey and bring him in. Ramsey, too, confesses to his role in the plot—as he delivers his statement, he repeatedly refers to Henry Roan as "the Indian"—and attempts to justify his crime by stating plainly that even now, "white people in Oklahoma [think] no more of killing an Indian than they did in 1724."

Ramsey's statement shows just how racist society is against Native people—their lives are not worth anything to white Americans, even after all these years.

White goes back to Burkhart to question him about Anna's murder, and Burkhart reveals that Kelsie Morrison—the bootlegger and informant—was the one to put the bullet in Anna's head. The authorities set out to arrest Morrison, and White sends a doctor to check on Mollie. She seems near-death, and authorities, judging her symptoms, believe she is being poisoned. Mollie is taken to a hospital, where she immediately begins feeling better, and the Shoun brothers are brought in for questioning—they are evasive and deny any wrongdoing, and White is unable to implicate them in the poisoning.

In spite of clear-cut circumstantial evidence, the systems of power and protection in Osage County prevent White from holding a white person accountable for crimes against a Native person unless there is hard, tangible proof. No one but White is sticking up for the Osage people, or willing to put a white person behind bars for crimes against the tribe unless absolutely forced.

When Mollie is feeling well enough, she, too, submits to questioning. When faced with the truth, she refuses to believe that Ernest could have been involved in the plot against her family. She insists that she loves her husband, and that he would never hurt anyone else—especially not her.

The horror of realizing that her husband has, all along, been conspiring to secure her family's wreckage and her own demise is too much for Mollie to bear.

Armed with statements from Burkhart and Ramsey, White and Agent Smith confront Hale. White tells Hale, with no pretense, that he has enough evidence to convict Hale of the vast conspiracy. As White outlines the evidence, though, Hale remains "unperturbed." White attempts to persuade Hale to confess and avoid a bitter legal battle, but Hale almost "gleeful[ly]" replies that he plans to fight the allegations against him.

Even when confronted with a direct threat of indictment and conviction, Hale is so confident in his ability to control every level of society in his county that he almost welcomes the challenge White presents.

CHAPTER 19: A TRAITOR TO HIS BLOOD

As news of the arrests made in the Osage murder case gets out, the "horror of the crimes" holds the nation in its grip. The press seizes upon the story and sensationalizes it, spreading the "blood-curdling" details far and wide. Meanwhile, White remains consumed with the cases involving Roan and Mollie Burkhart's family—and with trying to connect Hale to even more of the twenty-four Osage murders, plus the deaths of the attorney Vaughan and the oilman McBride. Hale is implicated in at least two more crimes—the death of George Bigheart and the apparent poisoning of another Osage Indian, Joe Bates, in 1921, whose land Hale staked a claim on shortly after Bates's suspicious death.

As the press sensationalizes the stories of what's happening in Osage County, White remains steadfastly focused on justice. The American public becomes obsessed with the lurid tales of Osage suffering—but White knows that is role is to deliver justice and stays committed to his duty to the Osage people.

Though the crimes Hale is being charged with are increasingly soulless and brutal, many white people throughout the country don't even try to "mask their enthusiasm for the lurid story." As the newspapers print more and more eye-grabbing headlines and newsreels about the crime show in cinemas throughout the nation, it seems that Americans cannot get enough of the "amazing story."

The Osage people's suffering captures the American imagination. This is a different kind of greed and a different kind of corruption—it is greed for drama and corruption of the human capacity for empathy—but the drives remain the same as those that fueled the crimes themselves.

Meanwhile, in Osage County, the Osage tribe is fearful that Hale and his conspirators will find a way to "wriggle free" and avoid judgement. The Society of Oklahoma Indians issues a resolution on January 15, 1926, begging federal and state officials to "vigorously prosecute" the alleged perpetrators. White, too, is aware of the corruption in America's judicial systems, and is nervous that Hale and his flunkeys will get off easy.

Hale's power doesn't just frighten the Osage—it intimidates White as well, who is careful not to underestimate the powers of racism and corruption.

A federal prosecutor urges White to ensure that Hale is not tried at the state level, as his power and influence make it likely that he will be able to wheedle and bribe his way out of a fair trial—and yet because several of the murders took place on Indian territory, the question of which government entity has jurisdiction over them arises. When officials find that Henry Roan was killed on an Osage allotment under the control of the federal government, Hale and Ramsey are charged with Roan's murder in federal court—and face the death penalty.

The importance of a federal investigation is paramount in this instance if Hale is to be properly, fairly tried—otherwise, his connections and corrupt network may shield him from facing justice.

A formidable prosecution team is assembled while Hale secures his own array of lawyers. Ernest Burkhart tells White that he heard Hale assuring John Ramsey that he—Hale—has "everything fixed from the road-overseer to the Governor." As the trial date nears, Hale begins hiring assassins and private eyes to "take care of" potential witnesses for the prosecution—but the person White is most worried about is Burkhart, who confesses to White that he is afraid he will soon be "bumped off." White ensures Burkhart he will have government protection and enlists two members of his team to take Burkhart out of Oklahoma and keep him safe until the trial.

Hale is flaunting his invincibility and enacting a campaign of continued violence and corruption as he tries to assure that things will be "fixed" in his favor.

On March 1, 1926, a judge finds that the case cannot be adjudicated in federal court and must be tried at the state level. Hale and Ramsey are going to be released. The two men begin celebrating in the courtroom, but are then approached by Sheriff Freas, who arrests both men under state charges for the bombing murders. White is relieved that the men will not go free but daunted by the idea of trying the case in state court.

For every step forward, there are two steps back in this case. It is a delicate and volatile set of circumstances which will determine whether Hale sees justice—and White wants to do all he can to ensure that the alchemy of the situation is right.

At a preliminary hearing on March 12, the courtroom is packed with Osage men and women (many of them relatives of the victims of Hale's crimes,) journalists, cowboys, society men and women, and schoolchildren. One journalist present wrote that everyone had gathered to "catch the drama of blood and gold."

Once again, the public gathers to witness the "drama" of the Osage people's suffering and satisfy their corrupt desires for a grand spectacle.

On one of the benches, an Osage woman sits quiet and alone, away from all the madness—Mollie Burkhart. Ostracized by her white neighbors who are loyal to Hale and rejected by many Osage for her own continued loyalty to Ernest, Mollie sits silent and stoic throughout the proceedings, refusing to answer any of the press's many questions.

Mollie has been ostracized by everyone around her, and yet knows she must bear witness to what is happening to Ernest—she must see justice for her family all the way through.

The hearings begin and continue rather uneventfully into the afternoon—when Ernest Burkhart takes the stand. One of Hale's lawyers denounces Ernest as a "traitor to his own blood," and it becomes plain that Ernest is losing whatever strength he has mustered. When one of Hale's lawyers demands to speak privately with Burkhart, they leave the courtroom and enter private chambers for half an hour. When Burkhart emerges, his "new" lawyer announces that he has flipped for the defense. White tries to get Burkhart's attention, but he is swept away "by a mob of Hale's supporters."

When Hale's lawyer calls Ernest a "traitor to his own blood," he means that Ernest is a traitor to the white race if he testifies against Hale. The despicable irony is that Ernest is in fact a traitor to his own blood—he has turned against his family, all for money.

The next morning, Burkhart announces that he refuses to testify for the state and recants his confession, denying his involvement in or knowledge of the crimes in totality. White is devastated, knowing that he has lost one of the most important pillars of evidence against Hale.

Hale's influence is so powerful and profound that Burkhart flips sides and remains under his uncle's control.

In May, when Burkhart's trial begins, White faces an even greater crisis—Hale takes the stand and testifies that White and his agents "brutally coerce[d]" confessions from him and Burkhart, alleging that he, Burkhart, and John Ramsey were beaten and electrocuted during their interrogations.

Hale is trying to use his power and influence to invalidate White's case against him.

In early June, Hoover catches sight of a headline referring to White's alleged coercion tactics in a local newspaper. Hoover, fearing a scandal, writes to White and demands an explanation. White writes back denying the fabricated allegations and ensuring that things will soon get back on track.

Hoover doesn't seem very worried about White himself—only about the potential for scandal.

As the trial continues, the prosecutors call as a witness Kelsie Morrison, one of their former informants. Morrison testifies that Hale plotted to eliminate the members of Mollie's family so that "Ernest would get it all." Morrison confesses to murdering Anna Brown—at Hale's behest—and states that Bryan Burkhart acted as his accomplice.

At last, there seems to be some useful movement against Hale in the trial—something that might actually stand to topple his corrupt power.

On June 3, Mollie is called away from the trail—her youngest daughter with Ernest, Little Anna, has died at four years old. Doctors attribute her death to a serious illness, but for the Osage, "every apparent act of God [is] now in doubt." After burying her daughter, Mollie returns straight to the courthouse and takes back up her spot in the gallery, sitting silently through the proceeding as she has for months.

Mollie has become so used to death, grief, and loss that she seems disconnected and numb at the death even of her own child, instead focused only on securing justice.

On June 7, Ernest Burkhart arranges for the judge in the case to come see him in the county jail. Ernest, nervously pacing his cell, claims that he wants to be done lying, but cannot tell his lawyers that he wants to return to being a witness for the prosecution. The judge arranges for another attorney to take Ernest on, and on June 9, Ernest announces in court his decision to enter a plea of guilty. He admits that he is "sick and tired" of the lies and wants to admit what he did. He admits to his role in the murders of Bill and Rita, and the courtroom erupts.

Ernest flips once again, agreeing to stand up to his uncle—even though he knows the potential consequences. Ernest is sick of lying, possibly worn down by Mollie's continual appearances in court or by the trauma of losing a child.

White is relieved, and quickly sends a message to Hoover informing him of the news. Though he is, for the moment, off the hook, White knows he still has a huge amount of work ahead of him—he now has to successfully get Bryan Burkhart, John Ramsey, and, most improbably of all, William Hale, convicted. On June 21, 1926, Ernest Burkhart is sentenced to life imprisonment—as he is led away in irons, he smiles at Mollie, but her expression remains impassive.

The battle has been won, but the war is just beginning. White has only just started to unravel Hale's network of violence, greed, cruelty, and corruption, and has much more to do before he can truly get at Hale.

A small bit of good news comes through, to White's continued relief: the federal government has reassessed their previous ruling and agrees to try the case of Henry Roan's murder as a federal one.

This reversal of fortune continues to buoy White as he gears up to fight against Hale.

CHAPTER 20: SO HELP YOU GOD!

At the end of July 1926, as the summer heat climbs to "infernal" temperatures, the trial of Hale and Ramsey for the murder of Henry Roan begins. The press remains transfixed by the whole affair as the drama and violence continue to escalate. White is forced to station extra guards at the jail, after attempts are made to break out the outlaws who plan on testifying against Hale. Hale attempts to bribe Blackie Thompson into refusing to testify, offering to break him out of jail if he will take Ernest to Mexico and off him there. White fears that the jury, too, will be firmly under Hale's influence, and ensures that the judge probes prospective candidates as to whether they have been approached by anyone from Hale's team before confirming them.

As the forces of the law zero in on Hale, he does everything in his power to try and bribe his way out of facing the consequences of his actions. He is truly a corrupt man who will stop at nothing to get his way.

Another crucial but unspoken question looms over the proceedings: will a jury of twelve white men ever unanimously agree to punish another white man for killing an American Indian? Members of the press and of the Osage tribe alike publicly express their doubts that justice will ever truly be served.

Corruption is not the only problem White and the prosecution are up against—they must also contend with the deeply-ingrained, dehumanizing racism the Osage face.

As the proceedings begin, Hale and Ramsey seem relaxed and even bemused. On July 30, when Ernest Burkhart is called to the stand, many wonder whether he will fold again—but this time, Burkhart answers the prosecution's questions honestly, and his testimony at last makes public what many Osage have long known: members of their tribe have been systematically killed and poisoned.

Burkhart has already been convicted, and now has nothing left to lose: he stands strong against his uncle and testifies to Hale's guilt and his own.

On August 7, the prosecution rests—but not before begging the jury to understand that "the richest tribe of Indians on the globe has become the illegitimate prey of white men," and that they must "do [their] part" in securing justice for the Osage. On the 20, the jury begins its deliberations, but as the days go by, they remain deadlocked. The judge learns that more than one member of the jury has indeed been bribed by Hale's people, and orders them dismissed, and the defendants held for further trial. White is stunned and disappointed, and the Osage are outraged.

Even with all the precautions taken to safeguard against Hale's influence figuring in the case's outcome, corruption has won out, and a retrial is needed if justice is to truly be secured.

White begins investigating the corruption in the first trial and uncovers a series of bribes and threats. In early October, a grand jury tries to charge the defense attorney, Jim Springer, with "flagrant attempts to obstruct justice," but the man is never charged, even as several witnesses are indicted and convicted.

Corruption continues to permeate the trial even in the midst of uncovering and rooting out more corruption.

As the trial begins again, the defense attempts to implicate Ernest Burkhart—not Hale—in all of the killings, calling into question whether or not Burkhart could have been responsible for the death even of his own daughter, Little Anna. As the more streamlined trial comes to a close and the new jury plans to start deliberations, the judge orders them, once again, to do their jobs, warning them that the failure of justice in the courts is the failure of the entire country to thrive.

Hale's people are trying every trick in the book to get him off scott-free, but the judge in the case remains determined to see that justice is done and to stamp out the evils of corruption.

By the end of October, the jury delivers their verdict. They find John Ramsey and William K. Hale guilty of the murder of Henry Roan in the first degree. The jurors, however, have recommended a sentence of life imprisonment rather than death. Hale and Ramsey are taken away, and reporters fly out of the courtroom to file their stories.

Hardly anyone can believe it when Hale is at last convicted. In a case so plagued by corruption and misdeeds, it seemed that the forces of evil would win—and yet justice has at last been served.

A year later, Anna Brown's murder is prosecuted. Mollie attends the trial and sits and listens to the "gruesome details" of how Bryan Burkhart, her own brother-in-law, conspired to kill Anna. Bryan takes the stand and recalls returning to the scene of the crime a week after the shooting, with Mollie and her family, to identify the corpse. Morrison, the man who pulled the trigger and killed Anna, is convicted. After the trial, Mollie divorces Ernest, and for the rest of her life is seen to "recoil in horror" at the mere mention of her husband's name.

Mollie continues her pursuit of justice, emboldened by the toppling of Hale. She and the rest of the prosecution are determined to see justice done, once and for all, and to witness the truth as it is brought to light.

For Hoover, the Osage murder investigation becomes "a showcase for the modern bureau," and the press, reporting on the bureau's involvement, states that once Hoover's men got onto the scene the law "became a thing of majesty" in the face of corruption and failure. Hoover does not disclose the bureau's false starts with the case, and instead uses it to create "a pristine origin story" in which the bureau, under his direction, "emerged form lawlessness and [overcame] the last wild American frontier."

Hoover doesn't seem to really care so much about justice—he wanted to use this case to consolidate power at the federal level, and he did so in the end after all, constructing a "pristine" narrative which all but deifies him.

The press and radio praise Hoover and the bureau, dramatizing the Osage case for listeners around the country and spreading far and wide the news of the bureau's success. Hoover privately commends White and his men for their success—but in the public dissemination of information about the case, covers up their involvement, knowing that White and his men don't "quite fit the profile" of the college-educated recruits Hoover wants to be a part of his own mythology.

This passage shows how Hoover continues to manipulate information about the case in order to cast the image of the bureau he wants in the public imagination forever, and to secure his claims to power in so doing.

The Osage Tribal Council is the only governing body to single out and praise White and his men as they pressure Congress to pass a new law barring anyone who is not at least half Osage from inheriting headrights from a member of the tribe.

White's sacrifices and hard work on behalf of the Osage have not gone unnoticed—he has been instrumental in helping them secure justice and reform.

Shortly after Hale and Ramsey's conviction, White is offered a position as warden of Leavenworth prison in Kansas—the oldest federal penitentiary and one of the country's "most dreadful places to be incarcerated." There have been allegations of corruption there, and the assistant attorney general wants White to come in and help stamp it out. Hoover doesn't want White to leave the bureau, but White decides to take the new job and follow in his father's footsteps. Soon after White begins his tenure there, in November if 1926, Hale and Ramsey arrive at Leavenworth as prisoners.

White's decision to follow in his father's footsteps not just career-wise but in terms of his values shows one of the more positive aspects of the theme of family and legacy.

CHAPTER 21: THE HOT HOUSE

Though Leavenworth is a violent and difficult place which houses many ghosts of White's past—Hale and Ramsey, but also the men who murdered his brother Dudley and many other recognizable, notorious outlaws—White truly believes in improving conditions in the prison, treating all of his prisoners with fairness, and making serious efforts to rehabilitate incarcerated men.

White is a good man whose desire to see justice done isn't satisfied by one small victory.

Over the years, Hale never admits to orchestrating any of the murders. White orders a neurological and psychological examination of Hale which finds that he has "extremely vicious components in his make-up" but no psychosis. Over the years, Hale continues to try and bribe and scheme his way out of prison, confident that "through influence of friends" he will be able to walk free one day.

Even though Hale has been imprisoned for his crimes, he still refuses to own up to them, and attempts to both deny his involvement in the Reign of Terror and leverage his network of corrupt lackeys.

Mollie Burkhart, no longer suffering from medical maladies, returns to social life and church. She falls in love with a part Creek man named John Cobb, and, in 1928, marries him. In April of 1931, a court rules that Mollie is no longer a ward of the state—"restored to competency" at the age of 44, Mollie is at last able to spend her own money as she pleases.

Though this is something like a happy ending for Mollie, the fact remains that it took so much pain, trauma, and grief just for her to be recognized as a "competent" woman with agency.

On December 11, 1931, an attempted breakout by two members of the notorious Al Spencer Gang pulls Tom White into the crossfire. The two prisoners take him hostage as they make their escape from Leavenworth, and then attempt to take two more, a boy and a girl from the neighboring town. When White tries to stop the men, they shoot him in the arm, missing his torso and face, and leave him for dead.

White has always known that his profession was a dangerous one—now, he comes face to face with the kind of criminals he has spent his whole life trying to understand, reform, and show fairness to.

A decade later, in December of 1939, Tom White is working at La Tuna prison in El Paso Texas and is nearly sixty years old. He gives an interview to a newspaper reporter and details the shooting—none of the convicts, in the end, managed to get away. Desiring a more stable, less-dangerous environment, White transferred to La Tuna shortly after he was released from the hospital.

White's brush with death did not shake him from his desire to work in law enforcement and to continue seeking truth, justice, and reform.

A series of high-profile crimes in the 1930s which fall under the jurisdiction of Hoover's bureau further establish its legitimacy, and soon agents are empowered to make arrest and carry firearms. The bureau is renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and, over the years, as U.S. presidents come and go, Hoover remains firmly in charge of the institution he himself built up.

Hoover has succeeded in his goal of obtaining an almost unassailable kind of power. He remains in control even as the most powerful men in the country come and go, firmly in charge of the empire he has built.

By the late 1950s, the Osage case has all but faded from public memory, eclipsed by more high-profile crimes such as the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby and John Dillinger's bank robberies. In the late 1950s, White fears that the Osage's suffering—and his and his fellow agents' toil on their behalf—will be erased from history forever. White, with the help of a part-Osage Western writer named Fred Grove, begins writing his and his team's story, and, in the late fifties, contacts Hoover to ask him to write an introduction. Hoover, through the associate director of the bureau (and his rumored lover, Clyde Tolson) declines White's request. White continues working on the book with Grove even as his health fails him, but publishers find the account "less than captivating," and it is never published.

As White does all he can to tell the Osages' story to the world, Hoover actively tries to keep White's requests for help at bay. Meanwhile, publishers seek to do exactly what White's story warns against: profit off the Osage. When they decide that the story is not financially viable, they lose interest—showing how even artistic institutions are subject to the corruption and greed which White's very tale tries to indict.

In December of 1971, White dies, and his story and memory fade from history. It is not until years later, when the bureau releases several of its files on the Osage investigation, that another layer to the case is discovered—a "darker, even more terrifying conspiracy," which White himself had missed and the bureau had never before exposed.

White struggled to keep the truth alive, and to pass on his memories to a younger generation—but no one paid attention, and many were even in a hurry to forget the Reign of Terror and let history begin to wash it away.

CHAPTER 22: GHOSTLANDS

In 2012, David Grann travels to Pawhuska. Gone are many of the hallmarks of the old west: the "forests" of oil derricks, the railroads, the outlaws, and the boomtowns. Pawhuska now has a population of 3,600 people and serves as the capital of the Osage Nation. It has been nearly a century since the Osage murders—like most Americans, Grann never learned about the crimes in school, but has recently begun looking into them after stumbling upon some information about the Reign of Terror by chance. Grann has since become "consumed" by the desire to resolve lingering questions and fill in gaps in the FBI's investigation.

As the narrative jumps forward in time, Grann shows just how startled he himself has been to learn about the crimes against the Osage—and how outraged he is that not only do so few Americans know their story, but also that the full truth of what happened during the Reign of Terror is, too, largely unknown.

In Pawhuska, at the Osage Nation Museum, Grann meets with its longtime director, Kathryn Red Corn. She shows him some old photographs of the tribe, one of which was taken at a ceremony in 1924. It is a panoramic view of members of the tribe alongside prominent local white businessmen and leaders. Grann notices that a section of the picture is missing. When he asks Red Corn why, she says that the "devil" was cut out, because it was "too painful" to look at him. She leaves for a moment and then returns with a print of the missing panel: it shows William K. Hale "staring coldly at the camera." Grann notes that the Osage removed Hale from the photograph not to forget, like most Americans have, but rather because they cannot forget the pain, loss, and sorrow he caused.

As Grann meets with the director of the Osage Nation Museum and looks through documents, photographs, and ephemera from the past, he realizes that while most of America has forgotten the story of the Osage people, the Osage themselves are so profoundly pained by the terror that befell their tribe that they have resorted to desperate measures in order to quell the constant pain.

Before Grann leaves the museum, Red Corn gives him the name of several Osage who might have information about the murders but warns him that it is still extremely difficult for many members of the tribe to talk about what happened during the Reign of Terror—the pain of the ordeal has never gone away.

Red Corn wants to help Grann learn more and educate Americans about the truth—but also knows that even though his research is done in the name of justice and honor for the tribe, the wounds of the past have created an atmosphere of suspicion and jadedness in the Osage community.

During a later visit to Oklahoma one June, Grann attends a festival of ceremonial Osage dance—I'n-Lon-Schka. The dances take place over the month of June in the towns of Hominy, Pawhuska, and Gray Horse, and bring Osage from all over the area together to preserve fading traditions and see old family and friends.

Grann doesn't just want to learn about the Osage tribe's past—he wants to bear witness to its present, as well, and learn how its members' painful pasts have influenced tribal culture and tradition today.

Grann arrives on a Saturday to find a pavilion constructed for the dances crowded with Osage people dressed in **bright traditional clothing** singing, dancing, and drumming. Before long, a stylishly-dressed Osage woman in her fifties approaches Grann and introduces herself as Margie Burkhart—she is Mollie's granddaughter, and her father was James "Cowboy" Burkhart, Mollie and Ernest's son.

Meeting Margie Burkhart makes both David Grann—and his readers—acutely aware of how fresh the wounds caused by the Reign of Terror are for the Osage people—it was barely two generations ago that extreme, systemic violence was still being enacted upon their tribe.

Grann, Margie, and her husband sit together and talk about Margie's family, who have been haunted for generations by the knowledge of what Ernest Burkhart did. Ernest was paroled in 1937, the year of Mollie's death. Shortly after Ernest got out, he robbed an Osage home and was sent back to prison. In 1947, while Ernest was still incarcerated, Hale was released for good behavior after twenty years at Leavenworth. Though he was forbidden from returning to Oklahoma, he came back to visit relatives anyway, and according to them once said that "If that damn Ernest had kept his mouth shut we'd be rich today."

This quote from Hale reveals that he never cared about being a "friend" to the Osage tribe—he hated them, and only ever wanted their money. Even after serving two decades for his crimes against the Osage, Hale was—according to his own family—as ruthless, cruel, and calculating as ever. Prison had dropped his mask, and his true desires—being "rich" above all else—were revealed.

Margie has never met Hale, who died in 1962 in an Arizona nursing home. She saw Ernest once after he got out of prison again. In 1966, Ernest, hoping to return to Oklahoma, applied for a pardon, and was granted one. He returned to Osage County, where he stayed with his brother Bryan. Margie, who had just become a teenager, met Ernest then and was surprised by how kind and grandfatherly he appeared. She was unable to fathom how the stooped man before her had committed such horrible deeds.

Margie's reminiscences of her meeting Ernest Burkhart—the man who betrayed her family and caused them so much pain and suffering—reveal how hard it has been for her and her family to accept the truth of the violence that was enacted upon them.

Margie tells Grann that her father and her aunt, Liz, were ostracized by the tribe throughout their lives, when what they needed was family and support. She states that her aunt was a paranoid woman, always changing her address and phone number as she moved from place to place, while her father "longed" for Ernest's affections even after all the evil he'd perpetrated, and visited him frequently at his mouse-infested trailer just outside Osage County. When Ernest died, he was cremated, but rather than spread the ashes, Cowboy "took the box and just chucked it over a bridge."

From Margie's memories of her father and her aunt, Grann learns that the two of them were profoundly affected every day of their lives by the enormous, almost indigestible truth of their father's cruelty. Though Cowboy clearly longed for a relationship with the man, he appears to have reached something of a breaking point after his death, and at last was able to divorce himself from his father and his legacy of deception and cruelty.

Margie offers to show Grann around the town of Gray Horse. He gets into her car with her and her husband and the three begin driving around. Margie points out the house where she grew up—a small, spare wooden home. Maggie explains that the Great Depression wiped out many Osage fortunes, and Mollie's was no exception. The price of a barrel of oil plummeted in 1931, and annual headright payments fell to less than $800. The boomtowns began to die off over the next several decades, and when an auction for Osage oil leases was held in Tulsa in 2012, three leases sold for less than $15,000 total. Margie receives a check each year for a few thousand dollars—a nice cushion, but certainly not enough to live on, and nowhere near the fortune of days gone by.

The Osage tribe's wealth—which was such a liability to them for so long—has at last all but dried up. The day the tribal elders of Lizzie's generation once longed for has arrived—but with it has come an atmosphere of pain, trauma, and resentment.

The Osage have found new sources of revenue, building casinos and generating millions of dollars for the tribe. The Osage were also able to receive a portion of the oil funds that were mismanaged for decades by the U.S. government, and after an eleven-year-long legal battle, were awarded a government settlement of $380 million in 2011.

The Osage have continued to fight for the wealth that is rightfully theirs, unwilling to withstand any more mistreatment from the governmental bodies which were charged with protecting them—and failed to do so.

After stopping at a cemetery to visit the graves of Mollie, Anna, Rita, Minnie, Lizzie, Bill Smith, and other victims of the Reign of Terror, Margie takes Grann over to the ravine where Anna was shot. As the sun sets on the prairie, Margie continues driving and talking about her childhood, growing up in the shadow of Ernest's horrible deeds. As she speaks, Grann realizes that the Reign of Terror continues to ravage the lives of the Osage people generations later.

Though many Americans don't even know what befell the Osage during the Reign of Terror, for those who still live on and around the reservation, there are persistent, inescapable daily reminders of the cruelty their tribe was made to suffer.

Margie takes Grann to one last stop—the place where Bill and Rita's house once stood. Another house has since been built on the lot, and as Grann and Margie look at it, Margie tells him something that no FBI record held. Her father once told her that on the night of the explosion, he, his sister, and Mollie had been planning to spend the night at Bill and Rita's. They only stayed home because Cowboy had an earache—Ernest had not tried to persuade them to stay or warned them in any way. Margie states that her father had to live his whole life knowing that his own father had tried to kill him. Margie sits quietly in the dark car for a moment before shifting it into gear and brightly suggesting they all return to the dance.

Margie's devastating revelation that Ernest tried to kill his own wife and children to hasten the process of securing Mollie's fortune shows just how corrupt, depraved, and desperately greedy Burkhart truly was. Margie's chipper suggestion that they all return to the festival just moments after such a revelation shows that she—and her people more largely—have had to learn how to compartmentalize their grief just in order to survive.

CHAPTER 23: A CASE NOT CLOSED

History, Grann writes, is a "merciless judge" which "lays bare […] tragic blunders and foolish missteps and exposes our most intimate secrets." As he combs through the FBI files, he begins to see many holes in the bureau's investigation.

Grann comes to see how profoundly history has failed the Osage—and how even the passage of time has not hastened the healing of many unresolved wounds.

The authorities insisted that once Hale and his conspirators were convicted, the guilty parties had been found. The cases were closed "with great triumph," even though Hale had not been connected to all twenty-four Osage murders, and many were left unsolved. Grann now wonders who was responsible for the grisly deaths of the oilman McBride and the lawyer W.W. Vaughan.

Hoover and the FBI, desperate to declare a successful investigation, left many murders unsolved—and many families without hope of justice for their lost loved ones. Grann now wants to work to right that wrong.

Grann has trouble turning up any leads on McBride but is able to get in touch with a granddaughter of Vaughan's who lives in Oklahoma. He arranges to meet with her at a historic hotel in Oklahoma City, and when he arrives he sees that she has brought her cousin along—he has two huge binders filled with research related to the murder that their family has been collected "obsessively" over the decades.

Vaughan's family has been "obsessively" trying to find answers to his death for decades. This shows that not only the Osage have been affected by the FBI's failure—there are many people whose lives and legacies have been forever changed by the Reign of Terror.

Though many members of Vaughan's family assume Hale wanted him silenced, they also suspect there is more to the murder. First, the inquest made into his death was clearly a sham, with the cause of death listed as "unknown" and no investigative follow-through completed. Secondly, because Vaughan was a large, strong man, he must have been killed by someone working with an accomplice. Third, after Hale went to jail, a relative tried to continue investigating the case, but soon received an anonymous threat stating that if the family pressed the matter any further they'd all end up dead.

Vaughan's descendants know that his death was remained unsolved due to layers upon layers of corruption and mismanagement, but because so many years have passed, history has largely obscured the truth—and made them fear that they will never be able to learn what really happened.

Vaughan's granddaughter recalls that there was a man who had embezzled money from Vaughan's estate after he died, and tells Grann that his name was H.G. Burt. Grann takes the name down in his notebook and promises to see what he can find out but is afraid of giving Vaughan's family any false hope.

For many people—not just the Osage—someone as impassioned as Grann represents the first measure of hope they've had for truth and justice in a long time.

Grann visits the southwest branch of the U.S. National Archives in Fort Worth, Texas, and looks into files detailing the lawsuit that Vaughan's widow Rosa filed against H.G. Burt. The 1923 dispute seems, at first glance, mundane, but as Grann delves deeper, he finds that the $10,000 Burt allegedly owed Vaughan is connected to another victim of the Reign of Terror—George Bigheart. Vaughan had been Bigheart's attorney and had helped Bigheart file a certificate of competency before his death. Bigheart had planned to pay Vaughan $10,000—the equivalent of $140,000 today—for his legal services, but somehow Burt collected the money, and, days later, Bigheart and Vaughan were both dead.

As Grann delves into the annals of history, he is disturbed by what he finds. Vaughan's death—just like the deaths of the Osage—was motivated by entitlement, greed, and corruption. Grann sees once again just how low people will stoop for money.

Grann digs deeper into information about Burt, who moved to Pawhuska around 1910 and later became president of a bank. Much of the man's wealth flowed from the swindling of millionaire Osage—he ran a loan business targeting the tribe, and would charge them "astronomical" interests rates, between 10 and 50 percent. Grann also learns from one report that Burt and Hale were associates, and that the two had "split on the boodle," or divided evenly, the money obtained from Bigheart. In another report, Grann sees Burt referred to as a "murderer" by agents of the bureau.

As Grann delves deeper and seeks out more information about Burt, he learns that the man was just as evil, corrupt, and conniving as Hale—but was never, it seems, brought to justice for any of his flagrant and egregious crimes against the Osage.

For days, Grann returns to the archives again and again to try to find a financial motive for the killing of Bigheart. There is no evidence that Burt or Hale inherited Bigheart's fortune, which was passed down to his wife and daughter. Grann finds, though, that Bigheart's daughter had a guardian—H.G. Burt. He continues piecing circumstantial evidence together until he finds another huge piece of information: Burt was on the train journey with his "friend" Vaughan when Vaughan disappeared, and was the first person to report Vaughan's disappearance.

Grann realizes that Burt's crimes went beyond the killing of the Osage—he was so determined to keep his operation under wraps that he even killed a man who was, supposedly, one of his friends.

Grann calls Vaughan's granddaughter with his findings but is sure to remind her that there are limitations, due to how much time has passed, as to what anyone can know for sure. Still, she begins crying, and expresses relief at having solved a mystery that has been in her family for so long. Not long after their phone conversation, Grann learns that Vaughan's granddaughter has died from her heartbroken cousin who laments their family having lost yet another "link to the past."

This passage shows that "link[s] to the past" are constantly being lost, and that history often obscures the things it should judge and lay bare. With each member of an older generation who dies, or forgets, it becomes harder and harder to access the truth.

CHAPTER 24: STANDING IN TWO WORLDS

In May of 2013, Grann arrives at the Constantine Theater in Pawhuska to view a video recording of a performance of the Osage ballet *Wahzhazhe*, which chronicles the history of the Osage—including the Reign of Terror. A statement projected before the start of the showing states that today, members of the Osage tribe feel their hearts "divided between two worlds," and are still learning how to walk through both. The ballet itself evokes this tension, and Grann finds himself moved. Afterwards, in the lobby, Grann runs into Kathryn Red Corn, who asks how his research is going. When he mentions looking into H.G. Burt, Red Corn urges Grann to come see her at the museum in the morning.

Despite the trauma their tribe has faced, the Osage people have found ways to reconcile their difficult past with their hopeful present and acknowledge the burden of assimilation as well as the importance of honoring tribal culture. For the Osage, the past is fraught territory: to return to it is to return to unimaginable pain and loss, but to forget it is to dishonor the suffering of those who have been lost.

When Grann arrives, she shows him a letter signed "W.K. Hale." It is a letter Hale sent from prison to a member of the tribe, and a descendant of its recipient has just donated it. The letter is "buoyant," and, in it, Hale writes that he hopes to return to the reservation when he gets out of jail. He insists in the letter that he will "always be the Osages true Friend." Red Corn and Grann are stunned by the letter's hypocrisy. Red Corn then tells Grann a story about her own grandfather, who was slowly poisoned by his second wife—a white woman—back in 1931. Red Corn asks Grann to investigate her father's death and tells him that there were a lot more murders during the Reign of Terror than anyone realizes.

With each visit to Oklahoma, Grann encounters more and more suffering and deeper, more painful truths about the Osage's past. Many people have come to rely on Grann, grateful for his commitment to revealing a truth that so many have tried to obscure.

Grann's office back in New York City has become a "grim repository" for thousands of pages related to the Reign of Terror, but despite the darkness of the material, each new discovery he makes gives him hope that he can bear witness to—and perhaps even solve—the deaths of many members of the Osage tribe that were cruelly swept under the rug.

Grann has shouldered the burden of bringing to light the full truth—or at least as close as he can get to the full truth—of the Reign of Terror, knowing that his work has value and can really bring change to people's lives.

Grann decides to look into the murder of Charles Whitehorn more closely. The murder, to Grann, bears all the markings of a "Hale-orchestrated hit," but despite his extensive research he hasn't found any evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, tying Hale to Whitehorn's death. The reports written by private eyes assigned to the case are "bracing in their clarity," and reveal a "crystalline theory" which points to Whitehorn's widow as the culprit—she wanted his headright and fortune.

Grann, now suspicious of all official reports, tries to see past the truth that has been constructed for him—and for others—and get at the heart of what really happened to Charles Whitehorn.

However, after Hattie secured the inheritance, her second husband stole a chunk of it and ran off to Mexico, while a third man named Faulkner insinuated his way into Hattie's life and began blackmailing her with information she'd revealed to him about her role in the murder. Hattie then became sick with a peculiar illness—when she went to the hospital, away from Faulkner's influence, she recovered almost miraculously quickly.

Hattie may have had a role in Whitehorn's death—but got a taste of her own medicine if she did, and became the intended victim of a mad, greedy grab at her husband's fortune even if she didn't.

Grann writes that the bureau "all but dropped" the Whitehorn case—it did not fit in with their dramatic theory that a lone mastermind was behind all the killings. Grann asserts, though, that the Whitehorn case reveals something even more sinister—it revealed that the evil of Hale was not an anomaly.

Grann begins to understand that the FBI manipulated case files in order to maintain a "neat" narrative which would point to their victory, rather than placing the truth above all else, as their job supposedly demands.

CHAPTER 25: THE LOST MANUSCRIPT

In June of 2015, David Grann visits the Osage Nation again, and is shocked to see that out on the prairie, 400-foot-tall windmills have been erected over more than eight thousand acres—the wind farm is expected to supply power to forty-five thousand homes in Oklahoma soon. The members of the Osage tribe Grann knows, including Kathryn Red Corn, see the windmills as a threat—the company has put them up without securing permission from the Osage Nation. The federal government has filed a lawsuit on the tribe's behalf, citing—under the terms of the 1906 Allotment Act—that because the company disturbed limestone and other minerals building the foundation for the farm, they must secure permission from the tribe before going any farther with it.

Grann and Red Corn are indignant but unsurprised when people and corporations continue to feel entitled to Osage lands, and, nearly a century since the start of the Reign of Terror, exhibit the same greed and corruption which characterized that time.

Grann is in Pawhuska to continue his research but is having more and more trouble finding relevant files. One day, at the public library, he notices a printed, spiral-bound manuscript entitled "The Murder of Mary DeNoya-Bellieu-Lewis." Written in 1998, it was compiled by the great-great-grandniece of Mary, and tells the story of how Mary Lewis, an allotted member of the tribe, disappeared in her mid-fifties while on a 1918 trip to Texas with her adopted daughter and two white men—a close friend by the name of Middleton and one of his companions. After her disappearance, Middleton pretended to be Lewis's adopted son in order to cash several of her checks. In 1919, Lewis's body was found, and Middleton and his companion at last admitted to having conspired to murder her for her headright. Middleton was sentenced to life imprisonment but served just six years before being released.

As Grann discovers this account—written, printed, and bound by a descendant of the woman it happened to—he understands that the desire for the truth above all else is so potent that people will do anything to obtain it, even if it is just for themselves, and never makes a larger impact on the world.

Grann, finishing the manuscript, realizes that though the Reign of Terror—according to most historical accounts—spans from Anna Brown's murder in 1921 to January of 1926, when Hale was arrested—Lewis's murder in 1918 and Red Corn's grandfather's poisoning in 1931 show that the killings began much earlier and ended much later than most realize—and that many were never even given the dignity of an investigation.

Grann is disheartened but again unsurprised to realize that the corruption and coldness which characterized the Reign of Terror was also espoused by the very institutions tasked with stamping it out and solving it once and for all.

CHAPTER 26: BLOOD CRIES OUT

Grann returns to the archives at Fort Worth, where he finds a logbook from the Office of Indian Affairs cataloging the names of guardians during the reign of terror. Next to H.G. Burt's name, the log shows that he was the guardian of Bigheart's daughter and four other Osage—beside the name of one of these wards is the word "dead." He then looks up the name of Scott Mathis, owner of the Big Hill Trading Company—out of the nine Osage he served as guardian four, seven had died, and at least two of the deaths (Anna Brown and Lizzie) had been confirmed as murders.

Grann encounters a truth which was obvious, but painful to see in such stark light: many "guardians" blatantly betrayed the responsibility inherent in their title and preyed upon their own wards, murdering them for financial gain despite having been sworn to protect and guide them.

Grann scours the logs and is appalled by what he finds. One guardian had eleven wards, eight of whom died; another had thirteen, more than half of whom were listed as deceased. The numbers are staggering and clearly do not reflect a natural death rate. Most of these crimes, Grann notes, have never been investigated. Even cases Grann is able to locate in the FBI's investigation records are often clearly suspected to be murders—but are never classified outright as homicides. Some deaths which are attributed to alcoholism or tuberculosis, upon further prodding, come up as suspicious—and Grann realizes that just because a ward in the guardianship log isn't listed as deceased doesn't mean they weren't targeted.

Though the FBI celebrated their victory in Osage County and claimed credit for bringing the Reign of Terror to a close, their shoddy work and enormous pile of loose ends points to the fact that they, like so much of America, did not really care about what happened to the Osage before they intervened, or what befell them after they pulled out of Oklahoma.

Grann confirms what he has long suspected: the number of Osage murders was undoubtedly higher than the twenty-four estimated by the fledgling FBI. Scholars and investigators, he writes, who now look back on the Reign of Terror estimate that the true number is perhaps in the hundreds. The Osage tribe had an annual death rate of about 19 per 1000 from 1907-1923—the national death rate is now 8.5 per 1000. At the height of their wealth, the Osage's death rate was more than double what it is today, pointing to a staggering level of foul play and evil.

Grann is faced with the realization that he cannot solve all of the murders—they are countless and have in many cases been so completely obscured by history that there is no hope of bringing the truth to light no matter how much digging he does.

Even cases known to the bureau, Grann writes, had hidden dimensions. When he meets with Marvin Stepson, the grandson of William Stepson, who died of a suspected poisoning in 1922, Grann listens to Marvin's story—a tale in which Kelsie Morrison, the man who murdered Anna Brown, enacted a years-long campaign of violence and theft not just against Stepson's widow Tillie, who also died of suspected poisoning, but against her young children as well, writing letters from prison (on the charges from the Brown murder) fantasizing about kidnapping the children and inheriting their wealth.

Grann is sickened by the ever-increasing levels of greed, corruption, entitlement, and indeed evil he encounters as he delves deeper and deeper into history in search of as much information as he can find about the victims and perpetrators of the Reign of Terror.

Grann laments that though history can often expose hidden transgressors, many of the Osage murders were so well concealed that such an outcome is no longer possible—countless Osage families have absolutely no sense of closure or resolution. To this day, these families live in doubt and fear, uncertain of who among their family trees might have been suspect.

Though he has worked hard to help try to achieve some measure of closure for many people, here Grann comes to terms with the fact that the conspiracy behind the Reign of Terror was so vast that many will never receive any sense of justice at all.

Before leaving Osage County to return home, Grann stops off at the home of Mary Jo Webb, a retired teacher who has spent decades investigating the suspicious death of her grandfather, Paul Peace, during the Reign of Terror. Going over old documents with Webb, Grann realizes that he was likely poisoned by the Shoun brothers, the same men who botched Anna's autopsy, covered for Hale, took hold of Rita's estate, and injected Mollie with poison. Grann realizes that the success of many Osage murder plots rested on the Shoun brothers' involvement through their willingness to falsify death certificates and autopsies, expedite burials, and even administer poison. Grann realizes that "virtually every element of society was complicit in the murderous system" which stole the lives of countless Osage Indians.

Grann's sense of helplessness and sadness mounts as he realizes what he had, it is implied, long suspected: that the Reign of Terror was facilitated and condoned by more people than ever imaginable, and by many whose jobs it supposedly was to defend the very people they were targeting.

As Grann prepares to leave Webb's house, she asks him to continue looking into her grandfather's death while she walks him out onto the porch. As the two of them consider the vast sky and the ground of the prairie, Webb states that the land is "saturated with blood," before repeating some from the Bible, the words God spoke to Cain after he killed Abel: "The blood cries out from the ground."

Even though Webb, and many other members of her tribe, are unable to secure any real measure of justice for their murdered ancestors, they know the truth in their hearts—and believe that one day, the "blood" will be able to tell its story.

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