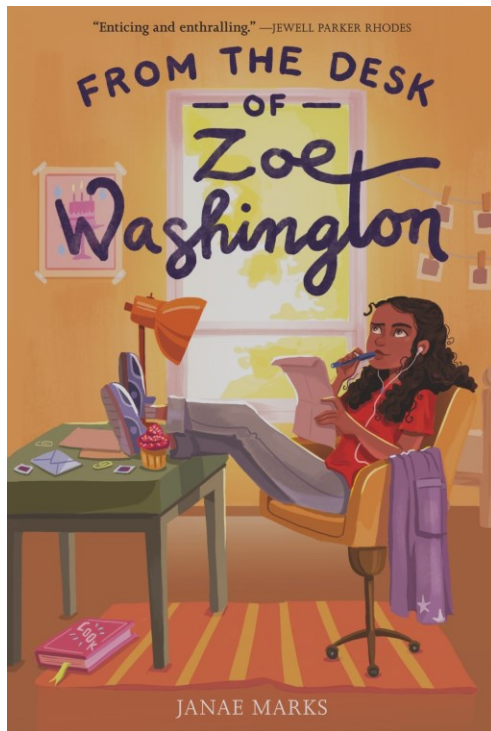


# FROM THE DESK OF ZOE WASHINGTON



*Juvenile*

**By Janae Marks**

ISBN: 978-0-06-287588-4

## **Book Summary:**

A twelve-year old girl receives letters from her incarcerated father and begins to conclude he was innocent of the crime for which he was convicted.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains references to hate involving racial discrimination; and controversial racial and social commentary.

**1**  
/5

**Child Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
27	I'm not sure what to call you. I can't call you Dad because Mom's husband, Paul, is my dad.
43	<p>"Because he's my dad. I mean, you know. My birth dad."</p> <p>"He may have had something to do with your birth, but that's it." Mom's voice hardened.</p> <p>"He's never even seen you."</p>
46	Dad and I got "the look" again on our way to my first day at Ari's Cakes. The look we got sometimes when we were out together, just the two of us. Dad parked the car a block away from the bakery. As we were getting out, an older white lady walked by and stared at us a little too long, her face twisting into a confused and judgmental glare. I knew exactly what that look meant. She was wondering why a Black girl was getting out of a white man's car. What we were doing together.
100	<p>But finally, at the end of the row, one book's title caught my eye. It was called <i>The Wrongfully Convicted</i>. The cover had a grid of square photos, like an online photo album, but each picture showed a different person's face looking at the camera. They were all men, and most of them were Black. Like Marcus.</p> <p>...If that kind of organization existed, then innocent people must go to prison.</p>
102	<p>There was a page in the book with graphs and numbers. It showed how many people the Innocence Project helped get out of prison, which was in the hundreds. I couldn't believe that many innocent people were convicted. I stared at another chart that showed the different races of the people the Innocence Project helped. Most of them were Black. Of course. I knew about the Black Lives Matter movement, how Black people all over the country were getting shot by police for no good reason. If those police officers weren't going to jail, then it made sense that the whole prison system was messed up. I never thought about whether prisons had the wrong people before. I assumed that if you committed a crime, you got the punishment you deserved, and innocent people would always be proven innocent. Apparently not.</p>
107	<p>I nodded and put my hand on the book. "Then I found this—it has all these stories about innocent people who went to prison. I didn't think that happened."</p> <p>"I guess I knew that," Trevor said. "My parents have all of these talks with me—like, because I'm Black, I have to be extra careful around the police. Stuff like that."</p> <p>"My mom had that talk with me, too," I said. "I hadn't made the connection."</p> <p>...What was the point of a legal system if it didn't work a lot of the time?</p>
129	<p>"She could've really helped Marcus's case. But, you know, he didn't have the money to pay for a big-shot lawyer after he was arrested. He had to use the defense lawyer assigned to him for free. And this lawyer . . ." She shook her head. "To me, it was like he didn't care one bit about what happened to Marcus."</p> <p>"Why not?" I asked. "Didn't he want to win the case?"</p> <p>Grandma exhaled. "He got paid either way, so I'm not sure it mattered. He seemed completely biased against Marcus. He wanted him to plead guilty, and take a deal, but Marcus refused."</p> <p>"What do you mean by 'biased'?" I asked.</p> <p>"I think he saw a Black man being charged with murder, and saw no reason to believe he was actually innocent," Grandma explained.</p>
131	<p>"There was one time when Marcus was a senior. He got into a fistfight with another player at a basketball game."</p> <p>"What happened?" I asked.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>“The other player provoked Marcus—got him mad enough to fight. Your granddad wasn’t too happy when he heard about this, so the next time he saw Marcus, he asked him for an explanation. Marcus said that the other player, who was white, called him the N-word while they were playing. Under his breath, when nobody else could hear him.”</p> <p>I knew exactly what word she meant. Mom and Grandma had talked to me about it. Racist people used it. And sometimes other Black people called each other that, which wasn’t racist but wasn’t great. My parents had told me that I should never use that word, and to tell them if anyone ever called me that. I’d never heard anyone say it about me.</p> <p>“When the white kid called Marcus that,” Grandma said, “Marcus got really mad. Of course he did. So that’s what started the fight. A lot of people were at the game, and they all saw it. The white kid, he was the star player of the other team, so a lot of people took his side. With all the racism around Boston, people weren’t about to take a Black kid’s word over a white kid’s.”</p> <p>Every once in a while, I’d overhear my parents talk about how racist Boston was. I noticed it myself, too. Like all the times people gave Dad and me “the look.” Once, I went to a fancy clothing store on Newbury Street with Mom, and a saleslady started following us around the store, looking at us like she didn’t trust us with the merchandise. As soon as Mom noticed what was going on, she pulled me out of the store. “I’m not giving them my business,” she’d told me.</p> <p>I had no idea where the idea of Black people as thieves came from, but it wasn’t the first time something like that had happened. In fourth grade, a girl told me that I wasn’t invited to her birthday party because her parents said Black people steal. I’d said her parents didn’t know what they were talking about. After I told my mom, she stopped herself from cursing out loud, and said she didn’t want me going to that racist family’s house anyway.</p>
133	<p>“And the other kid called him the N-word!”</p> <p>...“People look at someone like Marcus—a tall, strong, dark-skinned boy—and they make assumptions about him. Even if it isn’t right. The jury, the judge, the public, even his own lawyer—they all assumed Marcus must be guilty because he’s Black. It’s all part of systemic racism.”</p>
137	<p>One article said that thousands of innocent people were convicted of crimes each year. I couldn’t believe the number was that high.</p> <p>Another article said Black people were more likely to be wrongfully convicted of murder. If this was known, then why wasn’t more being done to fix it? Probably because not enough people cared, like Grandma said.</p>