

## Chapter 1

### Could This Boy Be the One?

W elcome to the Apex Museum of African American History,” Dan Moore addressed a room full of students taking their seats in the museum. A female student commented as she talked to her friend beside her, “Every time I come to a museum like this, it makes me sad. Then it makes me mad. And then, when I leave, all I want to do is smack the first white person I see.”

Her friend laughed as the rest of the students took their seats in the interactive theater. Dan pointed at a book on a stand beside him in the museum titled *Forgotten Heroes of the American Revolution, America’s Missing Bond*. “We have a new section this season,” Dan looked at the girl whose comment he had overheard just now. “It will still take you on a roller coaster ride of emotions. However, pride will be one of the emotions this time. After the presentation, we will be open for discussion.”

The students put on their headsets while waiting for the story to begin, wondering what could possibly be new about Black American History. The sun shone brightly in the sky as the high school students walked out of their classes on a Tuesday afternoon. While some students horsed around, others walked out of the school reserved. The end of classes was usually this busy as all the students would run to their homes. Along the parking lot, there stood a man dressed sharply in a business suit. This man was a professor named Sharp, who had been on a recruiting assignment in the NYC tri-state area. With his tour, he aimed to introduce Freeman Teachers College to African American students in the North since he was the chairman of the History Department at Freeman Teachers College. Professor Sharp was looking for a student whom he believed would be able to pick up the torch and carry on his life’s work.

Born in Colleton County, South Carolina, on July 5, 1913, this college professor had a Miles Davis persona. Max had always been a reader, mostly because of his mother’s efforts, who had dedicated herself to the education of her only son. His mother, Eloise Sharp, was a graduate of Hampton Institute. She ran the local Black elementary and Sunday school program out of an old barn on the Sharp property. It had turned him into a man who eventually became a teacher with all the knowledge he gained over the years with his reading habit. And undoubtedly, he was one of the best teachers at FTC. While he did help his father around at the Charleston Docks — where

his father worked as a crop delivery guy for a wealthy white family — he would still find time to read a book in one of his designated corners.

One day, when Max was ten, he accompanied his father to the Charleston docks for delivery. While there, they encountered a drunk British sea merchant. The sea merchant claimed to be a United Kingdom Army veteran of the Scottish Black Watch Regiment, one of the Crown's most prestigious military units and a unit assigned to the American Colonies during the American Revolution. He began scolding Hervis, calling him a free slave, half-breed, and other names. Hervis wished his son wouldn't have heard.

The Sea Merchant stated, "Black people would be living a very different life if they only had listened to the British during the American Revolution and joined the British forces. And that all Black people were stupid not to have done so, and those who did are now living a good life in the Caribbean." This conversation sent Max straight on a journey to learn as much as he could about Black people's participation during the American Revolution. Max was determined to learn the difference between his story and real American history, making it his life's mission to accomplish it. His lecture mainly focused on the American history of the Black community as he wished to impart that knowledge to the young Black community. It was crucial for him to let the students learn their real history, and for that, he needed to distribute as many flyers as possible. The two men dressed in dark slacks with white shirts passed the flyers to as many Black students as they could.

While this continued, a student caught Professor Sharp's attention. As soon as the kid walked out of the school building, he was greeted every other minute by the rest of the students as he walked toward the NYC transit bus stop.

"Goodbye, Wes," someone called out from behind. Professor Sharp saw and learned that the tall, skinny Black student with books overflowing from his hands was Wes. He seemed to be walking toward the bus stop as the professor noticed he hadn't gotten a flyer for the lecture.

Professor eyed him fascinatingly, but as he hurried toward the bus stop, some of his books fell to the ground. Professor Sharp walked over to him, helped him pick up the books, and took his chance to slip a flyer into one of his books; then, he met eyes with the kid and smiled at him. As he left, Wes grunted at the sight of the bus leaving that he was trying to catch. "Oh well," he sighed. His eyes fell down on a paper coming out of one of his books. He pulled it out, saw that it was a flyer, and read out loud, "You've already heard his story. Before you can know your true future, you must first know your true past. Learn your true history. Lecture by Professor Max Sharp at Convent Street Church on Saturday, September 12, 1970, at 11 am sharp. Doors will be

closed at 11:01 am.” Wes looked around and noticed two men passing out flyers to other Black students.

He adjusted his books while he thought about his schedule to see if he could attend the lecture or not. Wes Williams was a 16-year-old African American boy, born on 09-05-1954 in Bronx, New York. He was a junior at Roosevelt High School in the Bronx. An avid reader with a sponge-like brain, Wes could read a twenty-page instruction manual once and then follow the instructions *flawlessly*. He is the eldest of three sons of Moses Williams, an NYC Department of Sanitation Supervisor. Moses came to NYC from South Carolina when he was 21, hoping to find gainful employment and start a family. Moses was determined to forget his Southern roots and never have his children working in the Southern fields. Wes’ mother, Miriam Williams, wanted to be like her grandmother and her mother — a housewife from Mamaroneck, New York. Miriam was also a Graduate of the Swiss Secretarial School. Miriam met Moses while working as a typist at Alexander’s Department store in the Bronx.

When Moses proposed to Miriam, he said, “Marry me, raise my children, and you will never have to work another day in your life.”

Miriam would often tell her three boys, “Be like your daddy; he’s a man of his word.”

The Williams’ family was far from wealthy; Moses could not provide them with everything they wanted. However, Moses did provide them with everything they needed. Wes was content with the idea of getting a good NYC job and supporting his family as his father did until he met Professor Sharp.

It was September 12, thirty past ten in the morning, when Wes showed up at the Convent Street church. He stood a few feet from the gate and looked at some of the Black students from his high school walking into the church. He recognized a few from his own class. Wes had the flyer in his hands. He switched his eyes between the flyer and the church gate and thought to himself, “Well, let’s see what this has to offer.” He walked over to the church and stepped inside. Soft music played in the background while about fifteen students remained seated, having reached earlier than the allotted time.

Others looked at the paintings on the easels from the late 1700s while some chatted among themselves. Wes noticed one of the men attending one of the paintings on an easel, and a bunch of students gathered around him to see what he was doing. Walking along the church aisle, Wes recognized the man who handed him the flyer that day. He was wearing dark sunglasses, tailored pants, a long-sleeved white shirt, a black tie, and a short-sleeved red, black, and green dashiki.

Wes guessed how he must be in his late 50s. He looked up to him as a cool, mature professional man with Afro-centric qualities.

It was evident that this event was about Black pride because all he could see were paintings of elegant Black people and African Americans in attendance. He then noticed a table with a stack of books about Black men, given that all of the covers featured them. One of the books had a Black man holding the American flag with 13 stars. Negroes in the American Revolution, and America's Hidden History. There were Black men dressed in fine colonial attire and Continental Army Uniforms. Black men were holding Muskets, and the children in the picture had surprised looks on their faces. Wes was mesmerized at the sight of celebrating Black people. Since he was one of them and even the professor, he was up for an interesting conversation today.

Professor Sharp checked his pocket watch when the clock struck 10:55. There was still time for the lecture to begin, so he stayed where he was, pacing along the podium for the time to pass. His assistants were busy with the arrangements for the day and asked everyone to get seated before the lecture began. When the clock turned 11:01, the sanctuary gates were closed by one of the assistants. Professor Sharp went up to the podium, and the children took a seat in the pews. The second assistant was still attending to the painting, covering it with a canvas sheet at this point. Wes had begun to anticipate the lecture so much that he kept checking his wristwatch. This was when he heard the professor talking from the podium, "I'm Professor Max Sharp, a history professor at Freeman Teachers College in Fayetteville, North Carolina."

Wes looked up and found the professor smiling and taking a step back from the podium. Everyone in the church diverted their attention toward the podium and started listening intently. There was silence all around them. "Before we get started, does anyone in here have a hero, you know, someone you're really proud of?"

The students nodded their heads, and most of them chanted, "Yes."

"Well, my hero is a Bad Cat. My grandmother calls him Father. I never met him, but I'm told he's one bad dude. Like no man's woman was safe around him; they all loved him."

The guys in Church gave a light laugh; a couple of girls started looking uncomfortable with puzzled smiles on their faces.

"They all waited for him to make his point because the conversation could get troubling real soon," Wes thought.

“Once, I was told this young couple came to the hood with no bread and crashed in an empty crib. Father crept in and got the young woman pregnant in one try. Her husband knew that The Father knocked up his wife, but he still raised that child as his own son.”

The students shared glances at this remark, and whispers began to spread. People looked confused as to what kind of misogynistic story he was telling in such a sacred place. While some got agitated, others knew that he might be getting somewhere. Wes was one of the latter types, too. He was waiting for the professor to continue when a young lady, an African American in her late teens, stood up and began to walk toward the door. Professor Sharp stopped talking as everyone’s attention, including his, shifted toward her. He called on the girl and asked. “I’m sorry, miss? Do you have somewhere to be?” upon hearing this, the girl got triggered and spoke abruptly, “I came here to learn about our history, not your womanizing great-grandfather.”

Professor Sharp grinned slightly, trying to suppress his excitement. He scanned the audience to see their expressions and inquired, “Is there anyone else who would like to leave?”

Ten more teens stood up.

Professor Sharp looked at Wes, who was still sitting calmly, and smiled. “What about you, young blood?” he addressed Wes.

“I think I’ll stay,” Wes replied, his arms crossed in a calm posture.

Professor Sharp smiled at his reaction and nodded his head out of contentment, “And why is that?”

Wes had a plain blank answer. He had thought about it and wasn’t ready to leave yet. His reply was confident and almost as if he knew what this was all about, “That story sounds very familiar. I don’t think you’re telling the true story, at least not the whole story.”

Upon hearing this, the teens began to sit back down. All the attention went to Wes and the professor, whose attention was directed only toward Wes.

“Who do you think my story is about?” Sharp inquired.

“I think the person your grandmother calls Father is God, and the couple is Mary and Joseph. And the child is Jesus.”

“Well done, young blood. Not many people can read between the lines that quickly. How did you know?”

“Because you said your grandmother calls him Father, not that he was her father, and you referred to the one that got her pregnant as The Father, like in The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost.”

Professor Sharp wondered if he could be the one after thirty years of trying to find the right student to carry on his work. The teen who left her seat to leave returned to her place. She apologized to the professor and began to hear the lecture again.

“Young lady, it’s very easy to assume the worst when you are not given the full story,” he said while stepping back behind the podium.

Starting the lecture again, he asked the audience, “How many of you have heard of Crispus Attucks? Please raise your hands.”

Almost all the hands rose up.

“Okay. What was he known for? Any idea?”

The same girl who stood up to leave earlier spoke rather anxiously, “The first man to die for America’s liberty?”

“Well, how did he die?” the professor asked.

“British soldiers shot him at the Boston Massacre,” Wes replied this time.

“And why did the British soldiers shoot him first?”

And as a scene in the class when the teacher asked a question you didn’t know the answer to, all the students lost eye contact with the professor. Some shrugged, confidently agreeing that they didn’t know the answer, while others looked at the floor so he wouldn’t ask them to answer. Silence fell across the church. The professor asked everyone in the crowd to guess, “Don’t be embarrassed. You were not taught the whole story... intentionally. It’s not your fault that you are unaware of the answer.”

The same girl attempted to answer, “Was he protecting his Master?”

“Unfortunately, that’s exactly what you were expected to think,” Professor walked over to the podium and placed his hands on the top. He then walked away from the podium, thinking of what to tell next. Or so it appeared. Wes was listening attentively because even he didn’t know the right answer.

“At that time, Crispus Attucks was shot and killed at the Boston Massacre; he was a Black man no one wanted to mess with. He was a man among men and a leader of men...” he paused.

The crowd went silent.

“Before you could know who Crispus Attucks was, you need to know some history you weren’t taught.”