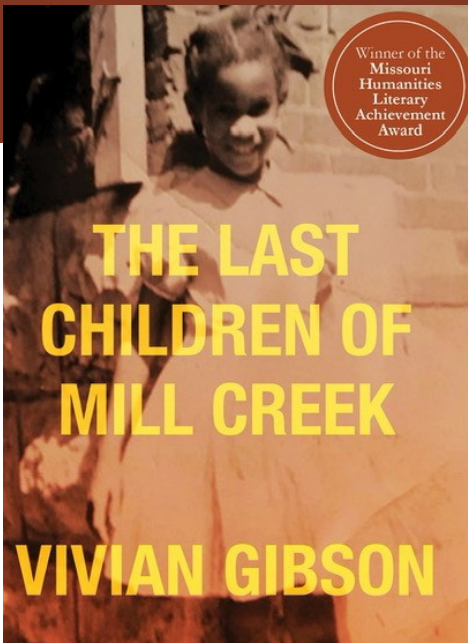


# Reading Guide

## THE LAST CHILDREN OF MILL CREEK



Gibson's memoir captures a portrait of the thriving community that was lost:

"This memoir is about survival, as told from the viewpoint of a watchful young girl--a collection of decidedly universal stories that chronicle the extraordinary lives of ordinary people. ... I'm convinced that my zeal for living a full and authentic life is a direct result of my scrappy early years as one of the last children living and learning in Mill Creek Valley."



[www.vivian-gibson.com](http://www.vivian-gibson.com)

Vivian Gibson writes her memoir through the eyes of her childhood self from age four to age ten, when she was growing up in Mill Creek Valley, a segregated community in the heart of downtown St. Louis. She sets her recollections of her happy childhood with her seven siblings and hardworking parents against the historical backdrop of urban renewal projects promoted to restore "blighted" downtown areas that destroyed and displaced large minority communities like Gibson's. Her story will resonate with thousands of Americans who experienced or are experiencing similar community traumas, while other readers will learn for the first time about how urban revitalization projects all over the United States impact the lives of families who are forced to leave their home and community.

### *Introduction*

-Prior to the publication of Gibson's book, if you had asked the average St. Louisan if they had heard of Mill Creek Valley, chances are their answer would have been no.

- What is significant about the history of Mill Creek Valley?
- What can be gained by reclaiming the histories of lost communities like St. Louis's Mill Creek Valley?
- How do you think the Mill Creek Story is applicable to Americans outside St. Louis?

### *Chapter One*

-In this chapter, Gibson introduces her parents, Frances and Randle Ross, and talks about their different backstories. How did Gibson's mother's upbringing differ from her father's?

### *Chapter Two*

-Why do you think Gibson emphasizes her mother's resourcefulness in this chapter? What are some examples of Frances Ross' industriousness?

-As Randle and Frances Ross both did, Gibson's grandmother, Stella Hodges worked hard. What strikes you about the nature of Stella Hodges' work life as recounted by her granddaughter?

-How does Gibson use her descriptions of the family's routines from doing hair to cooking to chopping wood to attending church each Sunday, help us get to know each family member as well as gain an understanding of the family's daily life in Mill Creek?

# Reading Guide Continued

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### Chapter Three

-Why are Daddy's accident and change in jobs so significant to Gibson's story that these recollections are given their own separate, short chapter?

### Chapter Four

-Who are the important female role models, caregivers, and mentors in young Vivian's life and what impact does each seem to have on her?  
-Gibson explains, "Grandmama and Daddy were the only two in our family who had daily contact with white people" (page 107). What impacts, positive and/or negative, did growing up in a segregated neighborhood have on Gibson?

### Chapter Five

-In Gibson's description of her father, what's the connection between her father's injury and their new neighborhood/home? Gibson writes, "Daddy walked up the steps to the front porch with the slight limp that rocked him heavily from side to side, a result of the accident that both crushed his left leg and bankrolled our improved living conditions" (page 134).  
-What was 8-year-old Gibson's confusion about the difference between her family's new home in Hamilton Heights and their old home in Mill Creek? What picture does Gibson paint of Hamilton Heights and the new Black residents there? What didn't she understand then that she came to understand as she grew older?  
-What details does Gibson include to depict the white flight that occurred in her family's new neighborhood, Hamilton Heights?

### Conclusion

-This section, a flashforward to Gibson's life in New York in her twenties, includes Gibson's recollections of her last visits with each of her parents. Why do you think she concludes this way?  
-The bond issue that passed in 1955 to authorize and fund the demolition of Mill Creek Valley was for "slum clearance" (page 15). How does Gibson's memoir help us re-evaluate Mill Creek Valley with more nuance than the term "slum" affords?  
-Gibson uses vivid sensory details to bring her anecdotes to life. What two or three vignettes stick with you especially as you reflect back on the memoir as a whole?

THE BOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FIVE CHAPTERS FRAMED BY AN INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION. EACH CHAPTER IS DIVIDED INTO SHORT STORIES, VIGNETTES MOSTLY 2 - 4 PAGES LONG, OF SPECIFIC RECOLLECTIONS. SCAN THE CODE TO VIEW THE ENHANCED TABLE OF CONTENTS AND SEE HOW EACH CHAPTER IS BROKEN INTO SHORTER VIGNETTES.



VISIT MISSOURI HUMANITIES YOUTUBE PLAYLIST TO WATCH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS READING VIGNETTES FROM GIBSON'S BOOK.

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