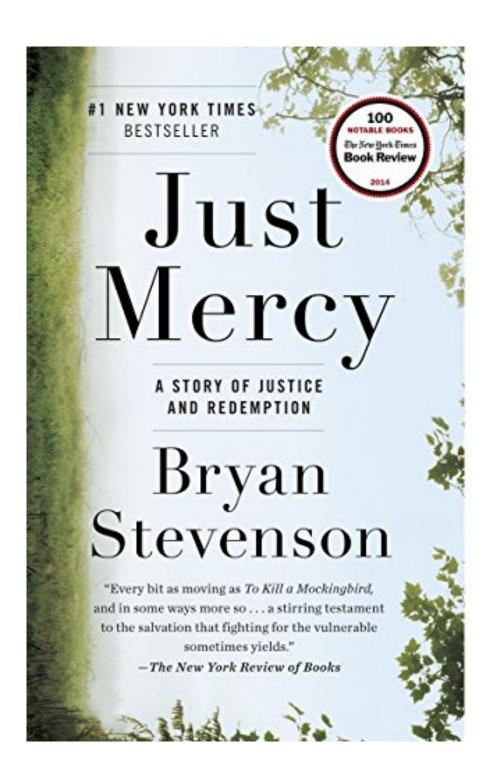


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Winner of the Carnegie Medal for Nonfiction | Winner of the NAACP Image Award for Nonfiction | Winner of a Books for a Better Life Award | Finalist for the Los Angeles Book Prize | Finalist for the Kirkus Reviews Prize | An American Library Association Notable Book

A powerful true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to fix our broken system of justice—from one of the most brilliant and influential lawyers of our time

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The case drew Bryan into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinksmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever.

Just Mercy is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer's coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

Praise for Just Mercy

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Historical, Sociological and Spiritual Tour de Force

By g3 from the UP

I have a new hero . . . Bryan Stevenson. He joins my other hero lawyer, Morris Dees, in my personal pantheon of those who fight for social justice.

Bryan Stevenson is the self-effacing author of this terrific book about the legal war he has waged against cruel, unjust sentencing practices in this country for over three decades now. His history of founding and working for the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, is told through real case histories of real people who were subjected to degradation and inhumane treatment that will shock you, anger you, and bring you to tears.

I spent a 25+ year career as a federal prosecutor, in the rarefied world of the federal courts, and am ashamed to say that I had no idea that such horrendous things were happening simultaneously in the state courts of our country. How Stevenson managed to stay on task for decades, to spend so much time simply connecting with his clients as human beings, and to accomplish such extraordinary results is amazing. I learned a lot, and the teachings of The New Jim Crow, by Michelle Alexander [another excellent book on the prison industrial complex in this country] were reinforced.

Perhaps my favorite chapter, for what it said about humanity, is entitled Mitigation. I will be using the facts from that chapter in a future talk at my Unitarian Universalist church. "Each of us is more than the worst thing we have ever done." This phrase echoes throughout this work, which, while fact filled, also has a strong spiritual component to it.

This is a great book. Please read it, and do as I did upon completion. Find the Equal Justice Initiative and give them some financial support. They work on a shoestring, and take care of some of the most helpless and needy among us.

237 of 247 people found the following review helpful.

Powerful, important book -- does the American justice system fail the disenfranchised?

By Kathy Cunningham

At its core, Bryan Stevenson's JUST MERCY is about the inherent inhumanity of the American justice system. As Stevenson puts it, "Presumptions of guilt, poverty, racial bias, and a host of other social, structural, and political dynamics have created a system that is defined by error, a system in which thousands of innocent people now suffer in prison." This is a system that condemns children to life imprisonment without parole, that makes petty theft a crime as serious as murder, and that has declared war on hundreds of thousands of people with substance abuse problems by imprisoning them and denying them help. Stevenson is an attorney with the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, an organization that offers free legal services to the poor and disenfranchised. His book is a sobering look at criminal justice from the perspective of those least likely to be treated fairly.

JUST MERCY explores a number of devastating cases, including children as young as fourteen facing life imprisonment, and scores of people on death row - mostly poor, and mostly black - who have been unfairly

convicted. But the central focus is on Walter McMillan, a black man sentenced to death for the murder of a prominent young white woman. McMillan claimed he did not commit this crime, and he had a score of alibi witnesses, but he was quickly railroaded into both a conviction and a death sentence. Stevenson spent years working to get McMillan a new trial, and the two men remained connected throughout the remainder of McMillan's life. It's a fascinating case, one that involves perjury, police corruption, a racist judge, and prosecutors more intent on protecting their political positions than finding justice.

Stevenson's thesis is that justice itself is denied for the millions of Americans who are poor, non-white, mentally ill, or otherwise disenfranchised. Ours is no longer a country that sees compassion as a virtue; instead, we write harsher and harsher laws that demand longer and longer sentences for those we consider undesirables. "The true measure of our character," Stevenson writes, "is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned." And by the final page of JUST MERCY, it is quite clear that we, as Americans, have fallen short.

It's rare these days to meet someone who truly dedicates himself to those least able to help themselves, especially someone who isn't after media attention or self-promotion. Stevenson's tireless efforts to give solace to the many men and women on death row are both inspirational and affirming. He isn't successful in freeing all of his clients - more than a few are executed in spite of his pleas - but what he offers them is more than just legal support. He listens to them, takes them seriously, investigates in ways the police failed to do, and gives them a voice they had otherwise been denied. In the end, Stevenson writes, "we have to reform a system of criminal justice that continues to treat people better if they are rich and guilty than if they are poor and innocent." That's a tough lesson for a world too often motivated by money, power, and political position. The people Bryan Stevenson works for have no money, no power, and no political position, but they are human beings deserving of compassion and mercy. "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done," Stevenson writes, adding, "the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice." As Americans, we can't be proud of our justice system until it offers justice to all of our people, and not only those with money and influence. It's a hard sell in today's mercenary, "me first" environment. But Stevenson's voice is one we all need to hear. JUST MERCY is a powerful and eye-opening book. I recommend it highly.

33 of 34 people found the following review helpful.

Justice, Mercy, and Redemption

By Gary

When I first started reading this book I really had no idea what to expect or why I should even take the time to read it. My tendency is to put things into "liberal" and "conservative" buckets and this one seemingly fit into the liberal bucket and I am a professed conservative. I still am but I have to say that I was moved by this story beyond my expectations. There is indeed so much injustice in this world and there is plenty of opportunity for mercy; even mercy extended in unexpected places. The plight of the poor and downtrodden is overwhelming to consider and this book provided a reason to view people's circumstances before providing condemnation. I would wholeheartedly recommend reading it.

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