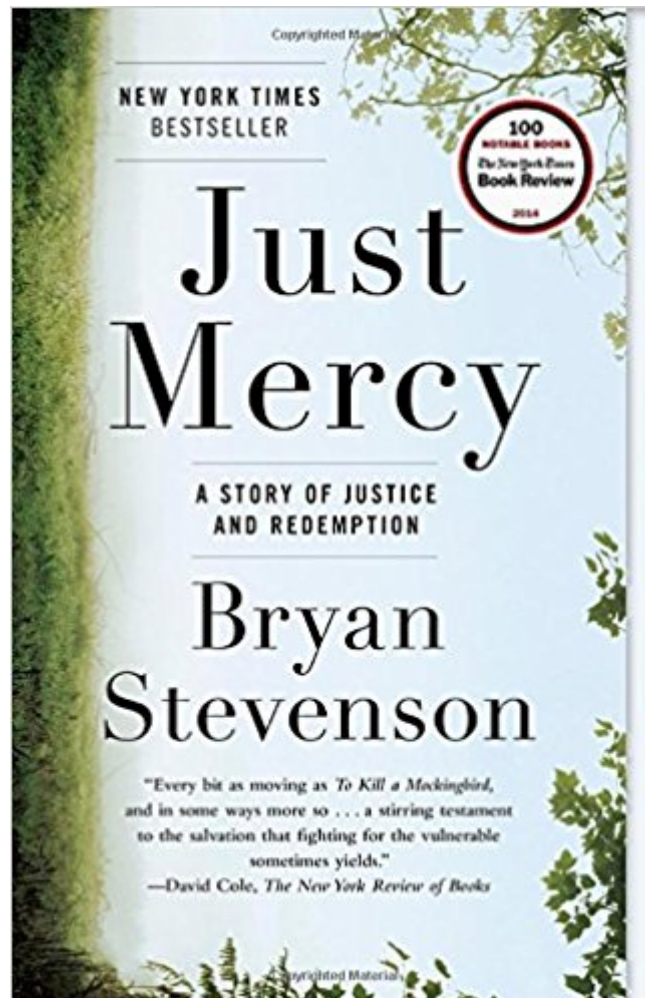




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# Just Mercy: A Story Of Justice And Redemption



## Synopsis

#1 *A New York Times Bestseller* | Named one of the Best Books of the Year by The New York Times *–* *The Washington Post* *–* *The Boston Globe* *–* *The Seattle Times* *–* *Esquire* *–* *Time* *–* Winner of the Carnegie Medal for Nonfiction | *A 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. *A 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. *A Praise for Just Mercy* *–* "Every bit as moving as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and in some ways more so . . . a searing indictment of American criminal justice and a stirring testament to the salvation that fighting for the vulnerable sometimes yields." *–* David Cole, *The New York Review of Books* *–* "Searing, moving . . . Bryan Stevenson may, indeed, be America's Mandela." *–* Nicholas Kristof, *The New York Times* *–* "You don't have to read too long to start cheering for this man. . . . The message of this book . . . is that evil can be overcome, a difference can be made. *Just Mercy* will make you upset and it will make you hopeful." *–* Ted Conover, *The New York Times Book Review* *–* "Inspiring . . . a work of style, substance and clarity . . . Stevenson is not only a great lawyer, he's also a gifted writer and storyteller." *–* *The Washington Post* *–* "As deeply moving, poignant and powerful a book as has been, and maybe ever can be, written about the death penalty." *–* *The Financial Times* *–* "Brilliant." *–* *The Philadelphia Inquirer* *–* "Not since Atticus Finch has a fearless and committed lawyer made such a difference in the American South. Though larger than life, Atticus exists only in fiction. Bryan Stevenson, however, is very much alive and doing God's work fighting for the poor, the oppressed, the voiceless, the vulnerable, the outcast,

and those with no hope. Just Mercy is his inspiring and powerful story. — John Grisham — “Bryan Stevenson is one of my personal heroes, perhaps the most inspiring and influential crusader for justice alive today, and Just Mercy is extraordinary. The stories told within these pages hold the potential to transform what we think we mean when we talk about justice.” — Michelle Alexander, author of The New Jim Crow

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

What is the one commonality of people on death row? If the victim is white, the perpetrator is 11 times more likely to be condemned to die than if the victim is black. When Stevenson was a 23-year-old Harvard law student, he started an internship in Georgia where his first assignment was to deliver a message to a man living on death row. This assignment became his calling: representing the innocent, the inadequately defended, the children, the domestic abuse survivors, the mentally ill — the imprisoned. This fast-paced book reads like a John Grisham novel. One of those profiled, Walter, was at a barbecue with over 100 people at the time of the murder he was accused of, and spent more than six years on death row. The stories include those of children, teens, and adults who have been in the system since they were teens. This is a title for the many young adults who have a parent or loved one in the prison system and the many others who are interested in social justice, the law, and the death penalty. A standout choice. — Amy Cheney, Alameda County Library, Juvenile Hall, CA --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Just Mercy is every bit as moving as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and in some ways more so. . . . [It] demonstrates, as powerfully as any book on criminal justice that I’ve ever read, the extent to which brutality, unfairness, and racial bias continue to infect criminal law in the United States. But at the same time that [Bryan] Stevenson tells an utterly damning story of deep-seated and widespread injustice, he also recounts instances of human compassion, understanding, mercy, and justice that offer hope. . . . Just Mercy is a remarkable amalgam, at once a searing indictment of American criminal justice and a stirring testament to the salvation that fighting for the vulnerable sometimes yields.”

•David Cole, *The New York Review of Books* “A searing, moving and infuriating memoir . . . Bryan Stevenson may, indeed, be America’s Mandela. For decades he has fought judges, prosecutors and police on behalf of those who are impoverished, black or both. . . . Injustice is easy not to notice when it affects people different from ourselves; that helps explain the obliviousness of our own generation to inequity today. We need to wake up. And that is why we need a Mandela in this country.”

•Nicholas Kristof, *The New York Times* “Unfairness in the justice system is a major theme of our age. . . . This book brings new life to the story by placing it in two affecting contexts: [Bryan] Stevenson’s life work and the deep strain of racial injustice in American life. . . . You don’t have to read too long to start cheering for this man. Against tremendous odds, Stevenson has worked to free scores of people from wrongful or excessive punishment, arguing five times before the Supreme Court. . . . The book extols not his nobility but that of the cause, and reads like a call to action for all that remains to be done. . . . The message of the book, hammered home by dramatic examples of one man’s refusal to sit quietly and countenance horror, is that evil can be overcome, a difference can be made.”

Just Mercy will make you upset and it will make you hopeful. . . . Stevenson has been angry about [the criminal justice system] for years, and we are all the better for it.”

•Ted Conover, *The New York Times Book Review* “Inspiring . . . a work of style, substance and clarity . . . Stevenson is not only a great lawyer, he’s also a gifted writer and storyteller.”

•The Washington Post “As deeply moving, poignant and powerful a book as has been, and maybe ever can be, written about the death penalty.”

•The Financial Times “Brilliant.”

•The Philadelphia Inquirer “Not since Atticus Finch has a fearless and committed lawyer made such a difference in the American South. Though larger than life, Atticus exists only in fiction. Bryan Stevenson, however, is very much alive and doing God’s work fighting for the poor, the oppressed, the voiceless, the vulnerable, the outcast, and those with no hope.”

Just Mercy is his inspiring and powerful story.”

•John Grisham “Bryan Stevenson is

one of my personal heroes, perhaps the most inspiring and influential crusader for justice alive today, and *Just Mercy* is extraordinary. The stories told within these pages hold the potential to transform what we think we mean when we talk about justice.

•Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow* “A distinguished NYU law professor and MacArthur grant recipient offers the compelling story of the legal practice he founded to protect the rights of people on the margins of American society. . . . Emotionally profound, necessary reading.”

•Kirkus Reviews (starred review, Kirkus Prize Finalist) “A passionate account of the ways our nation thwarts justice and inhumanely punishes the poor and disadvantaged.”

•Booklist (starred review) “From the frontlines of social justice comes one of the most urgent voices of our era. Bryan Stevenson is a real-life, modern-day Atticus Finch who, through his work in redeeming innocent people condemned to death, has sought to redeem the country itself. This is a book of great power and courage. It is inspiring and suspenseful—a revelation.”

•Isabel Wilkerson, author of *The Warmth of Other Suns* “Words such as important and compelling may have lost their force through overuse, but reading this book will restore their meaning, along with one’s hopes for humanity.”

•Tracy Kidder, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Mountains Beyond Mountains* “Bryan Stevenson is America’s young Nelson Mandela, a brilliant lawyer fighting with courage and conviction to guarantee justice for all. *Just Mercy* should be read by people of conscience in every civilized country in the world to discover what happens when revenge and retribution replace justice and mercy. It is as gripping to read as any legal thriller, and what hangs in the balance is nothing less than the soul of a great nation.”

•Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

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.

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.

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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