



The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas

By Anand Giridharadas

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Winner of the 2015 NYPL Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism.

"Remarkable...a richly detailed, affecting account...Giridharadas seeks less to uplift than illuminate...Which of these men is the "'true American'" of the title? That there is no simple answer to that question is Giridharadas's finest accomplishment." ?Ayad Akhtar, *New York Times Book Review*

The True American tells the story of Raisuddin Bhuiyan, a Bangladesh Air Force officer who dreams of immigrating to America and working in technology. But days after 9/11, an avowed "American terrorist" named Mark Stroman, seeking revenge, walks into the Dallas minimart where Bhuiyan has found temporary work and shoots him, maiming and nearly killing him. Two other victims, at other gas stations, aren't so lucky, dying at once.

The True American traces the making of these two men, Stroman and Bhuiyan, and of their fateful encounter. It follows them as they rebuild shattered lives?one striving on Death Row to become a better man, the other to heal and pull himself up from the lowest rung on the ladder of an unfamiliar country.

Ten years after the shooting, an Islamic pilgrimage seeds in Bhuiyan a strange idea: if he is ever to be whole, he must reenter Stroman's life. He longs to confront Stroman and speak to him face to face about the attack that changed their lives. Bhuiyan publicly forgives Stroman, in the name of his religion and its notion of mercy. Then he wages a legal and public-relations campaign, against the State of Texas and Governor Rick Perry, to have his attacker spared from the death penalty.

Ranging from Texas's juvenile justice system to the swirling crowd of pilgrims at the Hajj in Mecca; from a biker bar to an immigrant mosque in Dallas; from young military cadets in Bangladesh to elite paratroopers in Israel; from a wealthy household of chicken importers in Karachi, Pakistan, to the sober residences of Brownwood, Texas, *The True American* is a rich, colorful, profoundly moving exploration of the American dream in its many dimensions.

Ultimately it tells a story about our love-hate relationship with immigrants, about the encounter of Islam and the West, about how?or whether?we choose what we become.

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The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas By Anand Giridharadas Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #66530 in Books
- Brand: W W Norton Company
- Published on: 2015-04-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.30" h x .90" w x 5.50" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback

- 336 pages

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Editorial Review

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Journalist Giridharadas' eloquent, bordering-on-academic examination of the 2001 xenophobic murders and attempted murder by self-described Dallas biker Mark Stroman of people he perceived as Muslims bears stark witness to ideological weaknesses woven throughout twentieth-century American culture. He closely follows events leading up to and following Stroman's rage-fueled killing spree that took place on the heels of the 9/11 attacks, including his trial, conviction, and sentencing. This rampage left two dead and Raisuddin (Rais) Bhuiyan critically injured. Giridharadas alternates between the two men's stories, including their personal histories, interviews with families and friends, and courtroom coverage. But it is by letting convicted murderer Stroman and the others speak for themselves via extensive quotes that the inconsistencies and cognitive dissonances of ideological thinking become achingly clear. The primary incongruity, alluded to in the oxymoronic subtitle, is Bhuiyan's determined, if failed, attempt to rescue Stroman from the death penalty. From murder to execution, forgiveness, personal responsibility, governmental intervention and more, there are enough dichotomies here to fuel heated book-club discussions for years. --Donna Chavez

Review

“The suspense in this book runs deeper than whether Stroman will live or die. Mr. Giridharadas is most interested in examining the viability of the American dream... an enterprising and clear-eyed reporter.” (Stephen Harrington - Wall Street Journal)

“Gives you new eyes on your nation, makes you wonder about both the recent South Asian immigrant behind the counter at the food mart and the tattooed white man behind you in line. It reminds you that there are some Americas where mercy flows freely, and other Americas where it has turned to ice.” (Eboo Patel - Washington Post)

“A riveting tale, dense with detail, from Giridharadas’ unflinching descriptions of the struggling neighborhoods on the eastern edge of Dallas, to Stroman’s troubled and brutal childhood, to the ebullient optimism of these new Americans determined to create better lives.” (Michael E. Young - Dallas Morning News)

“Moving and indelible... manifestly inspirational... a finely textured portrait of lower-class despair.” (Laura Miller - Salon)

“An enthralling real-life tale of murder and forgiveness...enthralling.” (Walter Isaacson, author of Steve Jobs)

“Exhilarating and deeply affecting, Giridharadas’s book is not only a captivating narrative; it reminds us of the immigrant’s journey at the heart of the American story and how, in the wake of violent tragedy, one new to our country can help us to see through to the best in ourselves, even when the law requires far less.” (Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, Harvard University)

“Simply impossible to put down. Just when we thought that we had read everything we could possibly absorb about 9/11, *The True American* finds a new and compelling perspective, one that explores two sharply opposed dimensions of the American experience in a style that neither celebrates nor condemns. We

readers become the jury, weighing what it means to be a true American today.” (Anne-Marie Slaughter, president and CEO of the New America Foundation)

“An unforgettable story about two men caught in the jaws of history. In this compassionate, tenacious, and deeply intelligent book, Giridharadas casts brilliant new illumination on what we mean by ‘American.’” (Teju Cole, author of Open City)

About the Author

Anand Giridharadas writes the Admit One column for the New York Times's arts pages and the Currents column for its global edition. He is the author of India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of A Nation's Remaking. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Earl Diehl:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive now, people have do something to make these individuals survives, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice simply by surrounding. One thing that occasionally many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Sure, by reading a reserve your ability to survive boost then having chance to stand up than other is high. For you who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you this The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas book as beginner and daily reading publication. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

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Peggy Dunn:

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