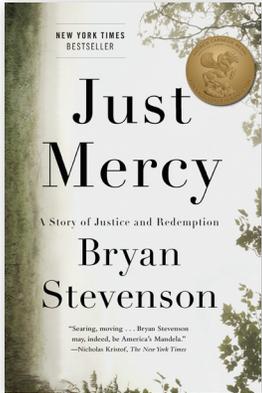


Andrew Carnegie

Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction



2015 NONFICTION WINNER

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption
by Bryan Stevenson
published by Spiegel & Grau, an imprint of Random House

If an indictment of the American justice system can be searing yet compassionate, this is that book.

BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. How would you define “justice”? How would you define “mercy”? What role does mercy have in criminal law?
2. Do you think the juvenile justice system is fulfilling its mission? What do you think is working and what do you think needs to be changed?
3. In his acceptance speech for the Carnegie Medal, Bryan Stevenson referenced America’s tendency to want to move beyond the past rather than acknowledging it. He contrasted this with Germany’s public acknowledgment of the Holocaust, and that these public reminders exist in many places to move toward reconciliation with a terrible past. Do you think this is a fair statement? Are there things we could do to better acknowledge our troubled racial history in this country?
4. This book clearly stands in opposition to capital punishment. Did the author’s examples of flaws within the justice system change your thinking about the death penalty?
5. One of the most disturbing chapters in this book focuses on the long prison sentences given to very young offenders. Do you think that a “life without parole” sentence is ever appropriate for a juvenile offender? Are long prison sentences an effective deterrent to crime for juvenile offenders?
6. While the problems that Stevenson cites hold true across most of our country, he began his work in the American South. How do you think his perspective might be influenced by this? Do you think that the problems that he exposes are worse in the South?

Cont. on next page



BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE CONT.

7. Stevenson discusses the role of mental illness in some of the cases that he talks about. Do you think that racial minorities suffering from this problem are more likely than white people to end up in prison, rather than receiving the treatment they need?
8. Have you read any other books on this topic? How does this one compare? Were there things that you wanted to learn more about?
9. Desmond Tutu referred to author Bryan Stevenson as “America’s young Nelson Mandela.” This is a first book for the author. What do you think he might write next? What would you like to see him write next?
10. In interviews, Stevenson talks about the influence of books and reading (particularly fiction) in his own development, citing his appreciation for authors like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Toni Morrison, among others. How do you think his love of character-driven fiction influenced the way he told the stories about the people he encountered in his legal work?
11. Why do you think the author chose to write this book from a personal perspective, rather than a more detached and sociological one?
12. Are there any cases in which you feel the author was too compassionate in his interpretation of his clients’ motives? If so, do you think it was a conscious choice on his part to be as generous as possible with people that may not have had that treatment from society as a whole?
13. Did this book leave you with a sense of hope that things can change, and that the inequities in our judicial system can be addressed and improved? Do you feel there is anything you can do to facilitate this?
14. The subtitle for this book is “A Story of Justice and Redemption.” What is the “redemption” referring to? Who, or what, needs to be redeemed?

INTERESTED IN STARTING A BOOK GROUP?

The American Library Association offers resources on how to get started, how to structure a meeting, how to select books and how to facilitate a meaningful literary discussion.

For more information visit ala.org/tools/atoz/book-discussion-grps.

ABOUT THE ANDREW CARNEGIE MEDALS FOR EXCELLENCE

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