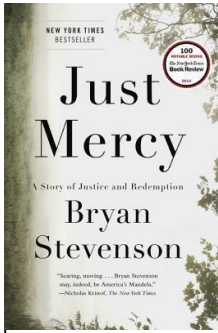




Discussion Guide



About the Book

Book Title: *Just Mercy*

Author: Bryan Stevenson

Published by: New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2014

Equal Justice Initiative Website: <http://eji.org/>

Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. The author graduated from Harvard Law School and then went to work on criminal defense of the poor in Alabama for \$25,000 or less a year. Why do you think he chose that work?
3. The story of Walter McMillan became the centerpiece of this book. What did you think of Walter's conviction? The work Stevenson did as his attorney? The difficulties they both encountered? What do you think determined the outcome?
4. Did you find the stories in this book surprising and/or disturbing? Explain.
5. What does this book teach you about discrimination in our country?
6. Stevenson asserts: "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done." After reading this book, do you believe our criminal justice system is fair? How should people pay for the bad things they do?
7. Stevenson also says: "The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned." Do you agree or disagree and why?
8. Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?
9. In what ways, if any, will this book change your life or perspective?

Other Links...

Bryan Stevenson Ted Talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2tOp7OxyQ8>

*Bryan Stevenson Interview at National Cathedral:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7YaE5P2xy8>*



NANCY: One of the members of our MAMS Book Club Springfield chose this book and told us we would really like it and that it won the Dayton Peace Prize last year. So I started reading with high hopes, and quickly became engaged in the stories Stevenson writes so well. But then I became angry and upset as I read injustice upon injustice. This book puts a human face on *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander which I recently read as part of a community book study here in Springfield. Together, they have awakened me to a very harsh reality facing too many Americans in our criminal justice system. Now, I must get involved in solutions. What we can do to change these problems? I'm not sure, but I know I must do something.



SALLIE: I had no idea what they do to abused children in the criminal "justice" system. I didn't know they could put children in jail for life for noncapital offenses. The stories of these young people break my heart. Like Nancy, I feel like I should help change what's going on. I so respect Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative for focusing on the children, and getting a Supreme Court decision reversing the trends. But we need to do so much more.



ABIGAIL: Bryan Stevenson is such an amazing human being. I am so impressed with the love he felt for his clients; and for the love he experienced from their families. I remember the one mother who promised her son she would be there when he got out of prison. She was 99 when he got out. The dedication and humility of Stevenson really blew me away. This man should be knighted or canonized. He does incredible work and speaks to us all of what we should change.



MOLLY: Mmm, mmm, mmm. I made my husband Tom read this one with me. He says that they don't do stuff like this in River City where we live, but didn't the KKK just visit the FARM in that new book Nancy's writing about us? What does he know? What did they just reveal about the Chicago PD? Racism runs deep in this country and baby, we've got our work cut out for us. Yes, ma'am, the USA's got issues.



PRISCILLA: Oh my, ladies. I am speechless. This is very bad. Jesus didn't want people to do such terrible things. This book made me cry. Remember the lady who just watches the trials and tries to care about the people; the families of the victims and the criminals? Catching stones, she said. Jesus said the one without sin to throw the first stone. But too many stones are being thrown. Jesus would be very upset. She called Bryan a stone catcher, too, and hugged him. That was good.



KATHARINE: This book stuns me. You know the KKK exists. You know racism flourishes, but then you read this. In Monroeville, the setting of *To Kill a Mockingbird* they are serving up food named after Atticus and they frame a Black man for murder and want to kill his attorney for exposing the truth? I listened to Stevenson's TED talk and his talk at the National Cathedral. He is the MLK of today. Very well written, and he's just as articulate in person. I would love to bring him to Mainline College to let our students hear his story. His life work makes such a difference for so many in the justice system.



JANE: After reading this book, you won't hear me pontificating about law and order and putting the criminals behind bars any more! This books raises more questions than it answers. If our criminal justice system is this jacked, we need big time change. And I know my fellow Republicans don't want to hear it. But I can see reading this that we are part of the problem.. What a mess. What injustice. They didn't teach me about this in school!