

Community Reading

Project: *The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas*

Summary

The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas is a nonfiction book written by journalist Anand Giridharadas. It tells the true story Raisuddin Bhuiyan and Mark Stroman.

The book begins by giving the background of both Bhuiyan and Stroman. It starts with Bhuiyan before he emigrated from Bangladesh—his childhood, his career in the Bangladeshi Air Force, and his aspirations to go to school for IT in the US. Then, through a former employer, audiences learn more about Stroman—who he was and his criminal background.

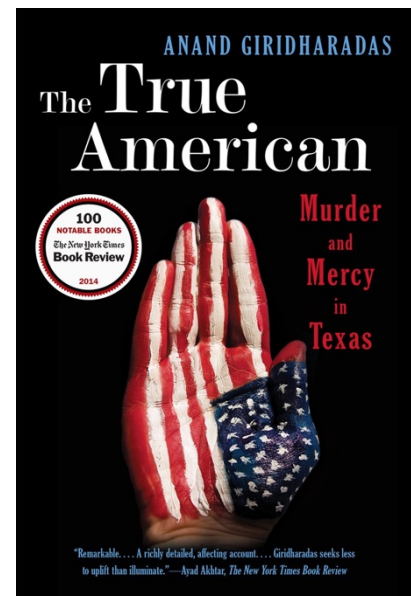
The story then shifts gears into how these two men crossed paths. In the days following 9/11, Stroman shot three gas station clerks, including Bhuiyan, the only one to survive. He claimed to have done this to avenge those killed in the 9/11 attacks. Stroman was tried and found guilty of capital murder—a charge which, in Texas, qualifies a person for the death penalty.

The story then after follows their separate, though at times intersecting, journeys through mercy and redemption. Bhuiyan received public support and, once healed enough from his injuries, took a spiritual journey to Mecca. On this trip, he decides to dedicate his life to others, and the person he begins with is Stroman, working to have him spared from death. Stroman also professed to have undergone a similar transformation—partly due to Bhuiyan's compassion, partly due to facing his own inevitable death and the inhumane conditions inmates are kept in.

Despite Stroman's seeming transformation and Bhuiyan's pleas, Mark Stroman was executed on July 20th, 2011.

Background

September 11, 2001: coordinated attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the failed attempt on Washington DC. Between the four planes, the World Trade Center and surrounding area, and the Pentagon, 2,996 people died and many more were wounded. For several days after, the US was unaware who was responsible for



the attacks and whether another might happen. This is the tumultuous time the inciting event of the books takes place.

Themes

The True American touches on many different themes worthy of discussing.

The US Healthcare System

The US Criminal Justice System

Citizenship

Islamophobia

Classism

Intersection of race and class

Terrorism

American Isolationism

Questions

Who is the "True American"? Is it Mark Stroman or Raisuddin Bhuiyan? What does it mean to be a "true American"? What values do Stroman and/or Bhuiyan exhibit that you consider to be "American"?

Discuss the theme of mercy present within the book. Was Bhuiyan's mercy for Stroman realistic? Would you have forgiven him?

What role does the author, Giridharadas, play in the book? Did he seem to take sides? What specific parts make you feel that way?

Do you think Stroman was sincere in his redemption? Or was it just to avoid the death penalty?

How has this book shaped your understanding of the aftermath of the September 11th attacks? What did you know before and what do you know now?

How do issues like classism manifest in this book?

What attitudes are exhibited by Bhuiyan and Stroman that are still prevalent in the U.S. today? Are they common or rare? Do you think that attitudes like these still have influence over people's actions?

What sort of connections can be made to today? In terms of Islamophobia? Our reaction to terror attacks?