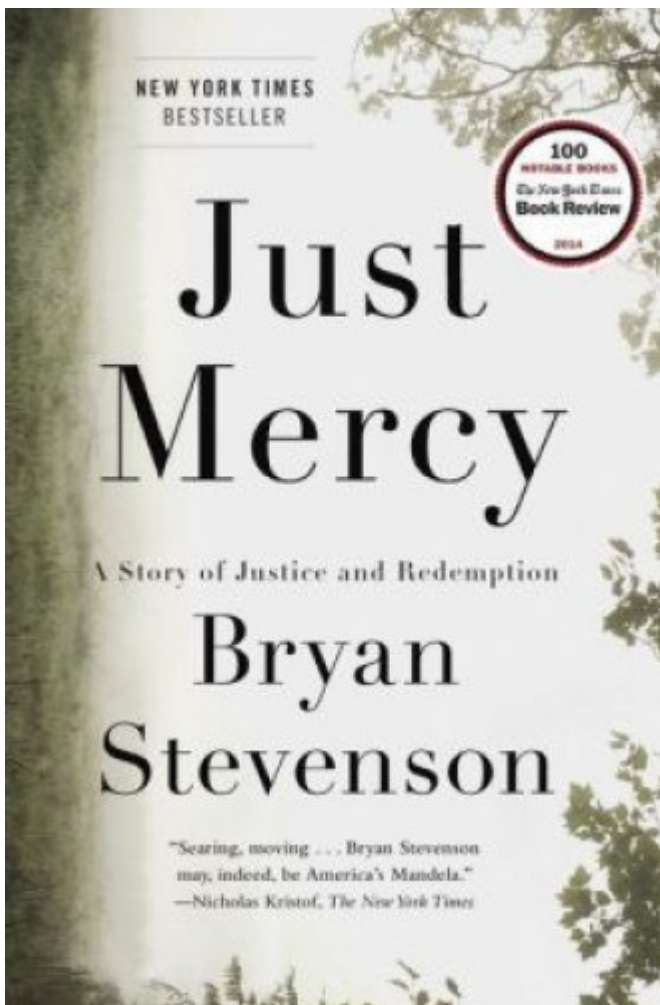


When mercy and justice meet

As we make laws and try to adjudicate justice, we often lose sight of the human faces affected.

by [Kelly Brown Douglas](#) in the [October 12, 2016](#) issue

In Review



Just Mercy

by Bryan Stevenson
Spiegel and Grau

As we make laws and try to adjudicate justice, we often lose sight of the human faces affected by those laws. We also forget that mercy and justice are not incompatible. Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* reminds us of both of these realities in a tangible and practical way. He tells the stories of people who have become trapped in a merciless criminal justice system, namely people of color. He provides a searing examination of the death penalty, revealing the biases and errors that wrongly sentence people to death and (most troubling of all) sentence children to die in prison.

Stevenson indicts not only a broken criminal justice system but also a broken society and nation. He turns a spotlight on the intersecting realities of racism and poverty in this country, which practically ensures that certain people will end up incarcerated or sentenced to death. For this reality, he makes clear in no uncertain terms, "we are all implicated" as we have become a nation of people who too easily "condemn" others—especially the vulnerable and least of these. "The true measure of our character," Stevenson tells us, "is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned."

Yet Stevenson does not leave us hopeless. Inspired by the hope that he sees in those who have been victimized by an unjust society, even those condemned to die, Stevenson speaks of the "seeds of hope" that will move us closer to reclaiming the humanity we have relinquished. Perhaps the greatest of these seeds is "proximity"—getting to know the very people who have been relegated to a life of crime and death. This book is a testament to proximity. It brings the abandoned and condemned of our society closer to all of us.

Read all of the responses to "A book I'd like my elected officials to read" [here](#).