

Welcome to the Just Mercy Summer Grace Group



Linda Hitchens and Ed Bryant

Bless You

- Awesome response to the class
- We will make every effort to make this a rewarding experience
- You make the class
- Thank you, Grace
- Opening Prayer

Introduction, Higher Ground

- Despite not having any background in law, Bryan Stevenson decided to obtain a law degree as means to solving racial injustice in America
 - Wow, just let that sink in; he is in his early 20s
 - Felt disconnected while studying at Harvard
- As an intern, asked to visit a Georgian death row prisoner.
 - No lawyer available
 - He is sent to tell Henry, the prisoner, *"You will not be killed in the next year"*
 - Three-hour conversation
- Henry alters Bryan's understanding of human potential, redemption, and hopefulness
- The question of how and why people are judged unfairly

The History of Mass Incarceration and Extreme Punishment

- Historical overview
- Read together summary on bottom of 14 to end of page 15
- Collateral consequences of mass incarceration
 - Homelessness, unemployment, loss of right to vote, mental illness
 - Economic costs
 - Creation of new crimes, harsher and longer sentences
- “The opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice.”
 - Group Discussion
 - Thoughts? Reactions?

U.S. Rate of Incarceration

600% growth from 1970 to 2010

This photo was taken at the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on 31 May 2015. The century-old penitentiary is now a tourist site. It's been closed to prisoners for quite some time.

Compliments of Alan Goldstein



Chapter 1, Mockingbird Players

- Now a full-fledged lawyer working for Southern Prisoners Defense Committee
- Assigned the case of Walter McMillian
- Gets a call from Judge Robert E. Lee Key to persuade him from not taking the case
- Walter McMillian
 - Successful, hard-working, well-liked
 - Affair with a white woman
 - Parallels to "To Kill a Mockingbird"
 - No real evidence against Walter that he killed Ronda Morrison
- History about interracial relationships in the South – anti-miscegenation statutes
- End of Reconstruction and return of white supremacy

Chapter 2, Stand

- Cruel practices within prisons/jails
- New law project to represent death row inmates in Alabama
 - Shocking number of executions, mostly black men
- Cases, Black Males
 - Traffic stop, beaten by guards, denied inhaler, dies
 - Teenager shot after running a red light, claimed he was reaching for a gun
- Bryan Stevenson outside his apartment
 - Police points gun
 - Illegal search of his car
 - "It's alright, its okay"
 - Files a complaint
 - How at risk young kids are when stopped by the police
 - Presumption of guilt
- Medals of Honor - Scars
 - Man from 1960 Civil Rights Movement
 - Resolves to open his own Alabama office

Chapter 3, Trial and Tribulations

- Case against Walter
 - Ralph Myers shoddy testimony
 - Pressure to arrest someone
 - Rape and sodomy of Ralph
- Arrested
 - Sherriff Tate interrogation, racial slurs, references to lynching
 - Lack of a credible case, they get Bill Hooks to say he saw Walter's truck at the scene
 - Ralph recants
 - Both placed on Death Row
- Death Row
 - Conditions, Yellow Mama, Execution
 - Inmates try to get Walter to file a complaint
 - Ralph agrees to testify
- Trial
 - Practice of excluding all African Americans from jury service – moved to a mostly white county
 - Obvious gaps in the case
 - Rushed trial
 - Jury finds him guilty

Quote from the 1619 Project

Slavery gave America a fear of Black people and a taste for violent punishment. Both still define our criminal-justice system.

Bryan Stevenson
August 14, 2019

Intro to Chapter 3: Discussion and Questions

- Anything we did not highlight that the group would like to share?
- Walter McMillian
 - In the face of seeing injustice all around him, he still believes in the “system”
 - Even after his arrest
- Bryan Stevenson
 - Can you see any of yourself in Bryan? (when you first starting out in your career)
 - How is he different?
- Remembering the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre

Next Class, Chapters 4 to 6

- Old Rugged Cross
- Coming of John
- Surely Doomed

Resources and References

■ Primary Resources

- Just Mercy – the movie, available on Prime Video and YouTube
- Opinion: When it comes to knowing U.S. history we should all be 'woke' (an article from the Washington Post):
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/05/27/american-history-we-should-all-be-woke/>
- 13th - A Documentary by Ava Duvernay

■ Recommended reference materials

- CNN documentary film **Dreamland: The Burning of Black Wall Street** – Monday, May 31, at 9 pm
- *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* by Jemar Tisby
- *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo