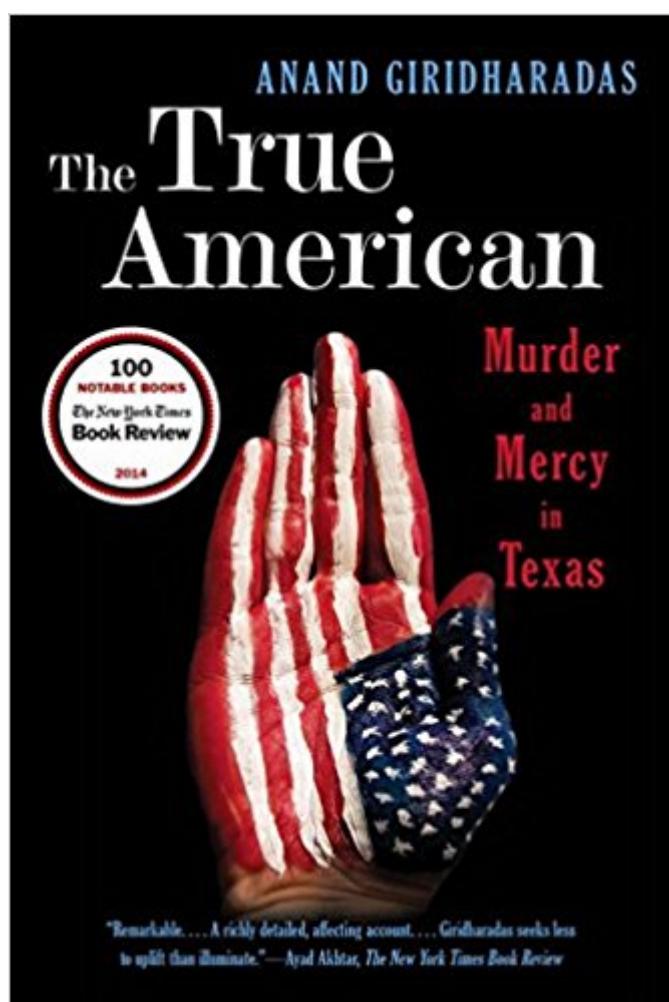


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# The True American: Murder And Mercy In Texas



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2015 NYPL Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism.

"Remarkable...a richly detailed, affecting account...Giridharadas seeks less to uplift than illuminate...Which of these men is the "true American" of the title? That there is no simple answer to that question is Giridharadas's finest accomplishment." —Ayad Akhtar, *New York Times Book Review*

The True American tells the story of Raisuddin Bhuiyan, a Bangladesh Air Force officer who dreams of immigrating to America and working in technology. But days after 9/11, an avowed "American terrorist" named Mark Stroman, seeking revenge, walks into the Dallas minimart where Bhuiyan has found temporary work and shoots him, maiming and nearly killing him. Two other victims, at other gas stations, aren't so lucky, dying at once. The True American traces the making of these two men, Stroman and Bhuiyan, and of their fateful encounter. It follows them as they rebuild shattered lives—one striving on Death Row to become a better man, the other to heal and pull himself up from the lowest rung on the ladder of an unfamiliar country. Ten years after the shooting, an Islamic pilgrimage seeds in Bhuiyan a strange idea: if he is ever to be whole, he must reenter Stroman's life. He longs to confront Stroman and speak to him face to face about the attack that changed their lives. Bhuiyan publicly forgives Stroman, in the name of his religion and its notion of mercy. Then he wages a legal and public-relations campaign, against the State of Texas and Governor Rick Perry, to have his attacker spared from the death penalty. Ranging from Texas's juvenile justice system to the swirling crowd of pilgrims at the Hajj in Mecca; from a biker bar to an immigrant mosque in Dallas; from young military cadets in Bangladesh to elite paratroopers in Israel; from a wealthy household of chicken importers in Karachi, Pakistan, to the sober residences of Brownwood, Texas, The True American is a rich, colorful, profoundly moving exploration of the American dream in its many dimensions. Ultimately it tells a story about our love-hate relationship with immigrants, about the encounter of Islam and the West, about how—or whether—we choose what we become.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Journalist Giridharadas is eloquent, a bordering-on-academic examination of the 2001 xenophobic murders and attempted murder by self-described Dallas biker Mark Stroman of people he perceived as Muslims bears stark witness to ideological weaknesses woven throughout twentieth-century American culture. He closely follows events leading up to and following Stroman's rage-fueled killing spree that took place on the heels of the 9/11 attacks, including his trial, conviction, and sentencing. This rampage left two dead and Raisuddin (Rais) Bhuiyan critically injured. Giridharadas alternates between the two men's stories, including their personal histories, interviews with families and friends, and courtroom coverage. But it is by letting convicted murderer Stroman and the others speak for themselves via extensive quotes that the inconsistencies and cognitive dissonances of ideological thinking become achingly clear. The primary incongruity, alluded to in the oxymoronic subtitle, is Bhuiyan's determined, if failed, attempt to rescue Stroman from the death penalty. From murder to execution, forgiveness, personal responsibility, governmental intervention and more, there are enough dichotomies here to fuel heated book-club discussions for years. --Donna Chavez --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"The suspense in this book runs deeper than whether Stroman will live or die. Mr. Giridharadas is most interested in examining the viability of the American dream -- an enterprising and clear-eyed reporter. -- Stephen Harrington, Wall Street Journal  
"Gives you new eyes on your nation, makes you wonder about both the recent South Asian immigrant behind the counter at the food mart and the tattooed white man behind you in line. It reminds you that there are some Americas where mercy flows freely, and other Americas where it has turned to ice. -- Eboo Patel, Washington Post  
"A riveting tale, dense with detail, from Giridharadas' unflinching descriptions of the struggling neighborhoods on the eastern edge of Dallas, to Stroman's troubled and brutal childhood, to the ebullient optimism of these new Americans determined to create better lives. -- Michael E. Young, Dallas Morning

NewsÃ¢â€”Moving and indelibleÃ¢â€”Ã| manifestly inspirationalÃ¢â€”Ã| a finely textured portrait of lower-class despair.Ã¢â€”Ã• - Laura Miller, SalonÃ¢â€”An enthralling real-life tale of murder and forgivenessÃ¢â€”Ã|enthralling.Ã¢â€”Ã• - Walter Isaacson, author of Steve JobsÃ¢â€”Exhilarating and deeply affecting, GiridharadasÃ¢â€”â„¢s book is not only a captivating narrative; it reminds us of the immigrantÃ¢â€”â„¢s journey at the heart of the American story and how, in the wake of violent tragedy, one new to our country can help us to see through to the best in ourselves, even when the law requires far less.Ã¢â€”Ã• - Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, Harvard UniversityÃ¢â€”Simply impossible to put down. Just when we thought that we had read everything we could possibly absorb about 9/11, The True American finds a new and compelling perspective, one that explores two sharply opposed dimensions of the American experience in a style that neither celebrates nor condemns. We readers become the jury, weighing what it means to be a true American today.Ã¢â€”Ã• - Anne-Marie Slaughter, president and CEO of the New America FoundationÃ¢â€”An unforgettable story about two men caught in the jaws of history. In this compassionate, tenacious, and deeply intelligent book, Giridharadas casts brilliant new illumination on what we mean by  
Ã¢â€”ÃœAmerican.Ã¢â€”â„¢Ã¢â€”Ã• - Teju Cole, author of Open City

If this book were fiction, it could easily be deemed "unrealistic". The lives of two very different men are forever intertwined due to an act of violence which changes the future of each man. Following 9/11 Mark Stroman takes it upon himself to avenge the deaths of Americans by killing Arabs. After two murders of convenience store clerks, he shoots Rais Bhuiyan in the face. Bhuiyan is from Bangladesh; none of his victims are Arabs. Following that act of violence, the author retraces the lives of both men. Stroman, born into a dysfunctional loosely- knit family, has a record of trouble from early days in school. Bhuiyan was raised in a tightly knit Muslim family and served as a disciplined pilot in the Bangladesh Air Force. He comes to America to pursue what he understands to be the American dream. Their past and their future prospects couldn't be further apart. The author retells the events of the murder, the trial, and the path both men follow to find redemption. Believing he owes God for saving his life, Bhuiyan eventually overcomes anger and disappointment and forgives Stroman and works to appeal his death sentence. Due to several encounters with others in prison and the forgiveness of Bhuiyan, Stroman comes to believe that his death sentence is actually a "life saving" event as he finds a sense of peace. This is a book about faith and religion, poverty and ambition, culture and politics, and a view of American values from the viewpoint of an immigrant and a man who believes himself to be the "true American." The final chapters given an insightful

view of generational poverty, dysfunction, and lack of direction. Although the events in the book are complicated, the book is extremely readable and gripping and provides plenty of food for thought.

The story of Rais Bhuiyan's life, from humble Bengali beginnings, to post-9/11 casualty, redemption and outspoken advocate against violence and the roots of post-9/11 hate in America, is nothing short of extraordinary. For this alone, I give Anand Giridharadas's *True American* a solid 5 stars. And while I applaud Giridharadas's courage in telling the story of a Muslim who defies the stereotypes and generalities of today's 'War on Terrorism' world, and his attempt to uncover and help his readers understand the roots of the prejudice, frustration and hatred that led Mark Stroman to murder 2 innocent immigrants and seriously injure another shortly after 9/11, for much of *True American*, particularly the latter half, I felt like I was somewhere between a docudrama and high level social study. For this I give *True American* 4 stars, and 4 stars overall. *True American* is an important and revealing book, however, especially if you've never been exposed to the underbelly of today's meth-addicted, transient social stratum. Following Mark Stroman's execution (another form of violence explored in the book), Giridharadas takes his readers on a journey through the lives of Stroman's children as they deal with the horror and guilt of their father's racism and violent actions, while concurrently struggling to free themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty, addiction and extreme dysfunction they were brought up in. The same roots that led Stroman to murder and his ultimate fate. There are many valuable topics and messages in *True American*. Skipping through the lesser details, it is definitely worth a read and follow up discussion. Hope that you find the same.

I really enjoyed reading this story, and was impressed by the writer's compassion toward the Stroman family. It would be easy to dismiss Mark Stroman as the worst of America, and in my mind, I did. It was worth continuing to read to further understand the complications of a marginalized person's life. I appreciated learning about Rais and how he also managed the complications of his life back in Bangladesh and here in the US as he recovered from this hate crime, and became profoundly American. This work can be a wonderful tool in helping all of us to understand each other more deeply and see what makes all of us Americans. I'm glad I read it.

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