



Without Mercy: The Stunning True Story of Race, Crime, and Corruption in the Deep South

David Beasley

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"Without Mercy reads like a John Grisham thriller."

---David R. Dow, author of *The Autobiography of an Execution*

On December 9, 1938, the state of Georgia executed six black men in eighty-one minutes in Tattall Prison's electric chair. The executions were a record for the state that still stands today. The new prison, built with funds from FDR's New Deal, as well as the fact that the men were tried and executed rather than lynched were thought to be a sign of progress. They were anything but. While those men were arrested, convicted, sentenced, and executed in as little as six weeks---E. D. Rivers, the governor of the state, oversaw a pardon racket for white killers and criminals, allowed the Ku Klux Klan to infiltrate his administration, and bankrupted the state. Race and wealth were all that determined whether or not a man lived or died. There was no progress. There was no justice.

David Beasley's *Without Mercy* is the harrowing true story of the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the violent death throes of the Klan, but most of all it is the story of the stunning injustice of these executions and how they have seared distrust of the legal system into the consciousness of the Deep South, and it is a story that will forever be a testament to the death penalty's appalling inequality that continues to plague our nation

Without Mercy: The Stunning True Story of Race, Crime, and Corruption in the Deep South Details

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Meriah says

--I received this book as part of a Goodreads Giveaway--

Living in the south in 2014 isn't glamorous. We are still riddled with racism, KKK meetings (we recently had a meeting in my hometown, I was honestly unaware this still existed), and the representation of that amongst literature is scarce. So, when I entered to win this giveaway and actually won it, I had hopes this novel would be a fantastic look into the history of the south through real events and accurate writing.

We often glamorize life in the south, let's be honest everyone talks about how nice it is down here, and forgets the harsh reality of the last 200 years in most southern states. Without Mercy is a fantastic representation (and well researched I might add) of life in the south. For both African-Americans and white individuals.

I would recommend picking up a copy of this book and truly see a glimpse of the lives of Southern people.

Kelseyanne Pleckaitis says

So interesting, but so, so heavy.

♥ Sandi ♡ says

In December 1939 Georgia executed 6 black men in 81 minutes at the Tattnall Prison in Reidsville Georgia. That record still stands today.

This book explores the injustices that the black man went through in the 1920' and 30's, especially in the South. The conviction rate was astounding. From incident to electrocution in a matter of weeks. Defense attorneys did not refute the Prosecutor, did not offer any witnesses or factual testimony, and once convicted did not appeal the conviction.

This book follows the story of the 6 men executed, from prior conviction to the suffering they experienced during electrocution. Examples were also followed, during this time frame in Georgia, of men who were white or affluent enough to buy their freedom or at least life in prison.

Political corruption, the Depression, The New Deal, the Ku Klux Klan and the very sediment and belief of the times throughout the general population is explored in this true life crime novel.

The same electric chair still sits in Tattnall Prison, Reidsville Georgia today.

Nisveta says

Heartbroken at every page turn. I could not put this book down. More people need to know this history.

J Roger says

Compelling at the beginning but lagged a bit by the end. It's difficult to tell a compelling story about that level of corruption. Not only were these elected officials in Georgia in the early 20th century reprehensible characters, but their actions went without consequence for decades. It was also an insightful, albeit limited, treatment of the plight of being accused and black in the Deep South. The justice system was not just and all too systemic in its equally barbaric treatment of the black man in Georgia accused of any crime. I could have used a bit more at the end to tie all the themes together, but still a good read.

Kenneth Barber says

This book deals with justice corruption and politics in the state of Georgia. The story begins in 1928 when two young white college students go on a robbery and murder spree. It then chronicles several other murders in the 1930's. These murders were committed by both Blacks and whites. The difference in the cases was in the justice meted out to the perpetrators. The white defendants tended to have better representation at trial and ended up not being sentenced to death. The Black defendants had poor representation who rarely appealed their verdicts received the death penalty this verdict was carried out. It culminates in the electrocution of 6 Black men in 81 minutes on December 9, 1938.

The book also details the politics of the era, the corruption of public officials, and the influence of Klan. This was an interesting book covering this era of Georgia history.

Sydney says

This book left me with the feeling that I had read an extended local newspaper article. The subject matter was compelling; the presentation was not. The author simply presented the facts of several Georgia criminal cases from the same era and then told us the resolutions and that racism and money affected them. There really wasn't much depth to the exercise and certainly nothing about the situations that was new or surprising to the average adult American. The writing itself was bland but serviceable. As good as it is to see that racism and government corruption are being discussed, I don't think this book added much to the conversation.

Justina says

I thought this book was very interesting. I didn't realize the hold the KKK had on Georgia even in the 1930's. It brought up some very interesting points about the unfairness of the death penalty. Easy to read and

understand. My only criticism was that the book would sometimes be repetitive in reminding the reader who characters were and what they had done as if the reader might have forgotten since the last chapter. This would be very helpful if you were a forgetful reader I guess. All in all, it is worth your time to read. And I won this in a goodreads first-reads giveaway so I was super excited!!!!!!

Lynn says

This book caught my eye at the bookstore. It was the title that caught my eye. "The stunning true story of Race, Crime, and Corruption in the deep south.". I thought this book was about slavery, but i was wrong. It's about these 6 black men were executed in 81 minutes in Tattnall Prison's chair in Georgia. These executions were a record for the state that still stands Today. TODAY. That is unbelievable. When I read that, i automatically had to read it.

Wanda Keith says

Wanda
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Wanda Keith
3 mins ·
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Powerful story about racial injustice within the criminal system in Georgia during the 1930's and 1940's. The story starts with seven men headed to the electric chair on December 9, 1938. Of these seven men, six are black and one is white. Before the hour of the execution the white inmate has his sentence overturned and is

given life in prison but the six black men will receive no mercy for their crimes. In fact, several of these men were being executed within six weeks of their crimes. They received poor representation in court and no request for appeal. The white man's crime was no less heinous as he had impregnated his own daughter and then to cover up his deed he had killed the infant born of this disgusting act. Beasley also tells the story of two young men from wealthy families who committed murder while on a robbery spree. One was given the death penalty which was overturned and then they both received life sentences. One of these young men served his time on a chain gang but the other served his in relative luxury while in prison. They were both pardoned after ten years mostly due to the fact that huge sums of money went to the governor and other officials. The governor in this case was a member of the Ku Klux Klan and received huge support from them. His open racism was never put into question until years later when he attempted to run for governor after being out of office for a while. The governor sold pardons almost openly and anyone who had enough money could receive one which left the poor with no options. Along the way people such as Thurgood Marshall enter into the story as well as Martin Luther King, Jr. and changes begin to be made within the system. Certainly, things improved and racism and inequality for the poor has gotten better. There are now automatic appeals in place if someone receives the death penalty and public defenders have improved. But for us to think that there is no longer racism, unequal justice for the poor, and corruption in the system is naive at best. In 2015 Anthony Ray Hinton was released from death row after serving thirty years for a crime he did not commit simply because he was black, poor and lived in Alabama. Hinton's attorney, Bryan Stevenson, has an entire career dedicated to helping prisoners who have been unfairly accused or convicted. At the end of Hinton's book, 'The Sun Does Shine', he provides a list of all of the people on death row and asks that you read the names and for every tenth person to say, "innocent", because that is the estimated number on death row who are actually innocent. That is a powerful statement and one that cannot be ignored. It isn't just the minorities who suffer from the injustice in our system. We have all seen the disparity when someone with the money to wage a good defense is on trial vs. the poor who do not have the funds to hire the people necessary to prove their innocence. Until our system can prove that it is fair and just then the death penalty needs to be under serious consideration in this country. If even one innocent person is put to death then the system has failed. I highly recommend this book as well as Hinton's book and that of Bryan Stevenson, "Just Mercy".

Lupe says

This book was chock-full of information but it was terribly dry. It read like a newspaper or magazine article. If you are not truly interested in this topic, do not bother.

Jennifer says

This book was unbelievable. Seriously. Gah. The level of Southiness in the American South's history--I thought I knew, but I had no idea. This should be required reading. Technically, it read like a story, rather than a history. It hit me so viscerally--the inequity within the justice system that we still have to deal with in America.

Carla says

I live in Georgia, so when I saw this book listed, I immediately wanted to read it. I was shocked when I read this book...I knew that African Americans weren't always provided justice in the past, but this story still managed to surprise me. I was particularly surprised at the audacity of the former governor Ed Rivers, who was not only a card carrying member of the K.K.K. but was so brazen in his corruption that even a lot of his supporters turned on him. It was saddening to read that confessed killers were pardoned by him due to their family connections and/or race while blacks were routinely executed for cases that were so flawed that even during their time there were serious doubts. This book was definitely eye-opening. The one complaint I would have about this book is that the chapters could've been better organized, but other than that, it was a enlightening read.

Winnie says

I was interested in this book because I'm from Georgia (born 1948) as were my parents. I lived there until 1970 and had heard my parents speak of years of corruption in the political and justice system. However, I had never heard the story that Beasley relates in this book. Beasley begins the book with the pending execution on December 9, 1938 of six black men at what was then known as Tatnall Prison near Reidsville.

Key political figures of this time were: Eugene Talmadge – governor from 1933-1937; Ed Rivers – governor from 1937-1941 and Eugene Talmadge governor again from 1941-1943. The story reveals how the political climate of the time led to the executions of these men – selling of pardons to the highest bidders, Gov. Ed Rivers also a KKK official, rampant racism, etc.

Three of those executed on December 9, 1938 had murdered the Sheriff of Butts County on Tuesday, October 25, 1938. The executions occurred after a one-day trial on November 9, 1938. The jury deliberated only 20 minutes and brought back guilty verdicts and death sentences.

It's an interesting read although ugly history. Beasley does a fair amount of repetition but this may be in order to help remind/emphasize the dates and the rapid dispensation and injustices of the events.

Ware says

Confession:

This is not the kind of confession that could have earned a date with Georgia's electric chair. Those confessions, if you were black in the 1930s, were much less detailed and most likely much less voluntary. This is a confession, by a lawyer, a Georgia lawyer no less, that for a long period of our history after the Civil War justice was a precious and illusive ideal if you were an African-American in the South.

Six inmates died within 81 minutes at what was then known as Tatnall Prison near Reidsville. They were all black. Three of them had murdered the Sheriff of Butts County on Tuesday, October 25, 1938. The execution occurred after a trial which began and ended on November 9, 1938 with guilty verdicts and death sentences. The jury deliberated for twenty minutes. Their lawyers did not file motions for new trial which would have

resulted in a stay while the cases were considered by Georgia Supreme Court. So these three black defendants were executed on December 9, 1938 approximately six weeks after the death of the sheriff.

The Governor of Georgia at the time was a Klan official named Ed Rivers. A seventh inmate was a white man who killed his daughter and her baby, who was the product of the forcible rape of the daughter by her father. This inmate received a commutation of his sentence to life. He in fact served twelve years before being released.

Additional confession-I have known about Ed Rivers all my life and his racism and practice of selling pardons to the highest bidders. In part this was because Rivers was a political enemy of Governor Gene Talmadge who was my grandfather's best friend as a boy. Talmadge was also a racist, and issued many peculiar pardons, but in fairness to him was not a Klan official.

Final confession-I am a graduate of the law school at the University of Georgia. We were trained to vigorously advocate on behalf of our clients, no matter their station in life. Some of the lawyers who represented these poor defendants were business and social friends of members of my family. I will never think as well of them again.
