



Just Mercy - After graduating from Harvard, Bryan Stevenson heads to Alabama to defend those wrongly condemned or those not afforded proper representation. One of his first cases is that of Walter McMillian, who was sentenced to die in 1987. This movie is based on a true story.

Cast Information

- Bryan Stevenson: lawyer, opened Equal Justice Initiative - a Non Profit organization located in Montgomery, Alabama
- Henry Davis: inmate Bryan Stevenson visited in prison in Jackson, GA when Bryan was part of the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee
- Eva Ansley - worked with Bryan at Equal Justice Initiative as Director of Operations
- Herb Richardson: inmate convicted of murder, was a Vietnam Veteran suffering from PTSD, represented by Bryan Stevenson
- “Johnny D” Walter McMillian: convicted of murder and sentenced to death by execution, represented by Bryan Stevenson
- Ronda Morrison: 18 year old daughter of an influential local white family in Monroeville. On November 1st, 1986, Ronda was found murdered at her workplace, Monroe Cleaners.
- Anthony Ray Hinton: inmate, not represented by Bryan Stevenson during the movie
- Ralph Myers - inmate who originally testified that he saw Johnny D standing over the deceased
- Sheriff Tom Tate - took Walter McMillian into custody in June 1987, more than six months after Ronda Morrison was killed
- District Attorney Tom Chapman - assigned to Walter McMillian's case when Bryan Stevenson is fighting to get an appeal for the death row inmate.
- Judge Truman Foster - Judge in McMillian's retrial
- Judge Pamela Baschab - Alabama Supreme Court Judge

Study Guide Questions



1. Share scenes in the film that you found gripping or interesting about an inmate's experience on Death Row and also share why?

2. Share a character in the film you empathized with or identified with? If so, why?

3. Think about how Starr had to code switch in *The Hate U Give*. Give examples from this film of times when Bryan Stevenson had to code switch and explain why you think he did it.

4. Before watching *Just Mercy*, what did you think about the death penalty? Has your sense of it changed? Would you have felt differently about Walter's death sentence if he had been guilty of the crime? Would you feel differently about the death penalty if your family member were the victim of murder? Who has the right to kill another person? What might be an optional punishment for people who commit murder?

5. Throughout *Just Mercy* there are many examples of oppression (systemic racism, poverty, lack of mental health services, and others). How might things have turned out differently for the men on death row had they not faced such barriers?
6. What can cities do to improve the way they hire and train officers in ethics, cultural awareness, and addressing their racist beliefs?



7. Why would courts or judges refuse to review new evidence or to grant new trials in light of new information? What might hold them back and what can be done to reverse this hindering stance?

8. Monroeville mentioned its hometown hero Harper Lee and her book *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What would you say to a community that simultaneously wrongfully convicted Walter McMillian because of their own prejudice, all the while celebrating Harper Lee's work? Is it ignorance or naiveté? Look around in your backyard to see how you have treated blacks that you have encountered at work, church, or school.

9. Near the end of the movie, just before Bryan and Walter are shown seated at the Hearing on the Death Penalty in April 1993, Bryan said he came out of law school with grand ideas but now knows that in order to have change we need to have conviction in our hearts. We have to stay hopeful because hopelessness is the enemy of justice. Bryan said, "Hope allows us to push forward even when the truth is distorted by people in power. It allows us to stand up when they tell us to sit down, and speak when they say be quiet." Share scenes in this movie when Bryan or Eva demonstrated conviction in their hearts. How do you teach others to align their heart to beat for justice?
10. Bryan Stevenson said that the character of our nation is determined by how we treat our poor and misfortunate. How would you describe the character of America or California?

Additional information and resources related to this movie



- Click on the link to see the [60 minutes segment on Walter McMillian](#)
- Click on the link to read USA today's article on How accurate is 'Just Mercy'? [The real case behind Michael B. Jordan's Bryan Stevenson movie](#)
- Click here to see [Alabama Death Penalty Information Center](#)
- Women are rarely sentenced to death in the United States and executions of women are even rarer. Click here to read how [Researchers have suggested that women who are sentenced to death are often perceived as breaking gender norms.](#)
- Click here to read about [The long-Term Impact of PTSD in Vietnam War Veterans](#)
- **The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row, by Anthony Ray Hinton** [Click Here for more information](#)