

LASALLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

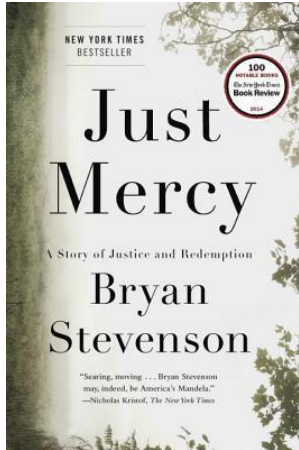
A.P. UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT & POLITICS (Juniors & Seniors)

SUMMER READING 2018

SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT

BOOK: **JUST MERCY** by Bryan Stevenson
ISBN: 13: 978-0812984965

Amazon Paperback: \$9.42
Kindle Available: \$14.95



Attached is the assignment for **Just Mercy** for junior year, United States History. Each grade level assignment has been reviewed to make it appropriate for that grade. As has been our summer reading custom for students, books selected also provide a transition between the school years by introducing themes and ideas that will be explored in the new school year. By reading and completing their summer assignment the student's will develop the ability to discuss **Just Mercy** across classes as they are introduced to reading, critical thinking, and writing skills, from the same book. The hope is that the students will find the selected book informative and enjoyable and will want to continue to explore the world of

books.

Before you begin writing consider/think about/reflect on the following:

- Stevenson writes that the United States has become an unprecedentedly harsh and punitive nation of mass imprisonment where the prison population has risen from 300,000 in the early 1970s to 2.3 million today. (There are more than a half-million people in state or federal prisons for drug offenses today, up from just 41,000 in 1980) One in every fifteen people born in the United States in 2001 is expected to go to jail or prison; one in every three black male babies born in this century is expected to be incarcerated.
- Consider the collateral consequences of mass incarceration – women with children banned from receiving food stamps and public housing. Prior convictions making thousands of people unemployable. Many people disenfranchised because of their criminal convictions.
- Spending on jails has ballooned from \$6.9 billion in 1980 to \$80 billion today.

ASSIGNMENT:

Your work will be due on our first day of class. We recommend that you get started early enough to get as much out of your reading and writing as your able.

All students will answer **Question #1** (2-3 paragraphs) and then choose **2** of the prompts from questions #2 thru 8 (1-2 paragraphs per question), be sure that you directly cite Stevenson to support each answer. You do not need any sources beyond **Just Mercy**. You do not need to make these one unified essay.

- 1) **REQUIRED:** Stevenson writes that “Each of us is more than the worst things we’ve ever done. My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice...I’ve come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned. We are all implicated when we allow other people to be mistreated...we all need mercy, we all need justice, and—perhaps—we all need some measure of unmerited grace.” With this in mind, tell the key pieces of the story of Walter. In what ways did we, society, deny him compassion, justice, and mercy?
- 2) Explain the historical precedents that underlay Walter and Karen’s relationship (be thorough – explain ***Loving v. Virginia***). What conclusions does this help you draw about the state of race relations?
- 3) Stevenson mentions the Supreme Court cases of ***Strauder v. West Virginia*** and ***Batson v. Kentucky***. Briefly explain each of those, and then explain how it is possible, in light of those decisions, that in many counties with 40-50% black populations black defendants like Walter end up staring at all-white (or nearly all-white) juries.
- 4) Stevenson talked about judicial elections. Explain the significance of this practice on the system of justice in states that employ them.
- 5) Explain the US Supreme Court’s decisions in ***Booth v. Maryland*** and ***Payne v. Tennessee***. What impact has had on the administration of the death penalty in the United States?
- 6) Stevenson writes that today, over 50% of prison and jail inmates in the United States have diagnosed mental illness, a rate nearly five times greater than that of the general population. Nearly one in five prison and jail inmates has a serious mental illness. Using one of Stevenson’s clients explain the way our criminal justice system treats those with mental illness.
- 7) The 1996 welfare reform act passed by Congress included a provision that allowed states to ban people with drug convictions from public benefits and welfare. What have been the consequences of this policy? Use the story of Marsha Colbey to explain.
- 8) Explain Stevenson’s argument to the Court in seeking to have them ban life imprisonment without parole for juveniles (what part of the Constitution is he using, and what does it mean?). Use one of his clients to illustrate.

Have a Great Summer,

Mr. Bielecki