

Welcome--we are looking forward to your arrival on campus this fall! Below you will find some important information to help you prepare for Convocation 2016—your first chance to engage in academic dialogue with a professor and your new classmates. You have received a copy of *The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas* by Anand Giridharadas which you will read over the summer.

Convocation 2016 is Monday, August 22 from 9:30-11:30am. You and others from your residence hall will be directed to a location on campus where a faculty member will be waiting to meet you. Together you will engage in a discussion about *The True American*, the book you received at Orientation and submit your essay. Following your small group discussion, your faculty member will lead you through Porter's Lodge and into Cistern Yard where you will be welcomed into the College of Charleston's community of scholars by the Provost and President.

Convocation will be the first of many discussions and activities related to *The True American* and the author, Anand Giridharadas, will visit campus on October 24th. Raisuddin Bhuiyan, who you will meet and get to know in the book, will also be on campus.

Preparing *The True American* Essay. After you have read *The True American*, write a 500-750 word essay that responds to one of the prompts below. You will find the Reading Companion (LINK) helpful. Take some care in organizing your thoughts. This essay will provide you with a basis to join the Convocation discussion and relieve some of the stress of wondering if you are prepared! **Bring a printed copy of your essay (typed and with your name on it) to Convocation and give it to the faculty member leading the discussion.**

Choose one:

(1) The title of Giridharadas's book is less a declaration than a question: what or who, the title asks its reader, is a "true" American? Mark Stroman and Raisuddin Bhuiyan, through their ideas and actions, make distinct claims about what it means to be a "true" American. Drawing on specific examples from the book, explain how each man's view of America influences his behavior as their motivations evolve over the course of the narrative. Are they completely opposing views, or do they have something in common? Where do you see each of these views on display today? What impacts do you see them having?

(2): A recurring question behind Giridharadas's *The True American* is, to put it simply: what makes us who we are? Are our actions determined by our upbringing and identity or by the decisions we make? Choose any person in *The True American* and describe the ways in which their background and choices influence what happens to them. As you start this new chapter in your life, consider what has influenced your own life. What will you embrace and what might you choose to discard?

(3): Giridharadas describes the "essential being" of America as lying not in its singular history and sturdy traditions, but in the continual infusion of new identities and new ideas. "This," Giridharadas writes, "was America's strange, stirring commitment: to keep itself vital by allowing itself, again and again, to become somebody else's" (201). Raisuddin Bhuiyan felt particularly responsible to become that "somebody else" who might improve his adopted homeland. Drawing examples from the book, describe ways in which Rais makes America new. In what ways does he fail to do so? As a young person with a distinct identity of your own, as someone with the potential to refresh what has grown stale, how might you and your generation make America new? What barriers might you face?