

FACTS & FIGURES

Number of Americans living in poverty: **47 million**

Percentage of Americans who believe that all you need is a good work ethic to escape poverty: **49%**

Portion of U.S. 20-24 year olds who actively engage in community service: **1 in 5**

Percentage of those making \$20,000 or less annually who believe that poor people have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return: **37%**

Percentage of those making \$150,000 + who believe the same: **57%**

Percentage of Democrats and Republicans, respectively, who said that immigrants today strengthen the country through hard work and talents: **78% and 35%**

Percentage of those born after 1980 who hold that view: **76%**

Percentage of Americans who have a generally unfavorable view of Islam: **61%**

Average number of anti-Islamic hate crimes per year from 2010-15: **150.8**

In the 4 years before 9/11: **27.3**

Anti-Islamic hate crimes in 2001 surrounding 9/11: **481**

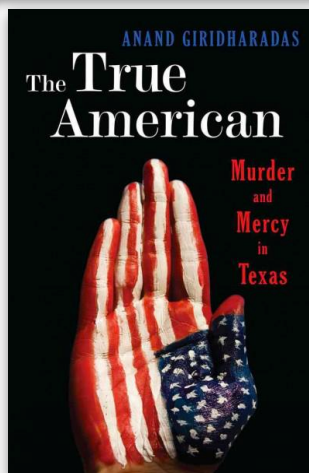
Rank, if Texas were a country, that it would occupy in global rankings of nations based on number of state-sponsored executions in 2011: **7th**

Countries in Western Europe and North America other than the U.S. where the death penalty is legal: **0**

Percentage of Americans who support the death penalty: **60%**

Percentage who supported the death penalty in 1995: **80%**

Sources: <http://goo.gl/LgxTff>



About the Book

The True American tells the story of Raisuddin Bhuiyan, a Bangladesh Air Force officer who dreams of making a life in America. 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, nearly killing him. *The True American* explores how these two men from opposite ends of the earth found their lives tragically linked on the day of the shooting, and it follows them as they attempt to rebuild shattered lives—one striving on Death Row to become a better man, the other to heal, forgive, and succeed in an unfamiliar country. Ranging from Texas’s juvenile justice system to the swirling crowd of pilgrims in Mecca, from a biker bar to an immigrant mosque in Dallas, from a wealthy household of chicken importers in Karachi, Pakistan, to the sober residences of Brownwood, Texas, *The True American* 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. [adapted from [author website](#)]

Identifying with *The True American*

- ◆ America has often been described as a nation of immigrants, a patchwork of racial and ethnic cultures whose sheer diversity is its greatest strength. What do you think threatens this ideal in today’s society?
- ◆ *The True American* paints a portrait of an America divided between those who can seize opportunity and achieve the American dream, and those for whom that dream is more like a cruel illusion. What do you think provides access to that dream? And what makes that dream unattainable for so many?
- ◆ Many found themselves drawn to Stroman’s story not because it is a horrific exception, but because it in many ways reflects what America itself would become in the years after 9-11 as racism and xenophobia have increased. Do you agree with this comparison?
- ◆ What makes us who we are? Are our actions determined by our upbringing and identity or by the decisions we make? 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?
- ◆ What values do you think America has lost and needs to recover? And what new values do think America needs to embrace?
- ◆ Whatever struggles you have faced in your quest to attend college, you now have the opportunity to join what Giridharadas has called a “flourishing America.” But this America, he contends, faces a “moral challenge that begs each of us to take on the wilting America as our own.” How might you undertake this moral challenge in the years ahead?

Engaging *The True American*

- ◆ How does Bhuiyan’s Muslim faith shape his relationship with his would-be killer—and his response to the death penalty—over the course of the book?
- ◆ *The True American* is a story about the power of what Giridharadas calls “enduring mutuality,” of relationships between parent and child, between criminal and victim, between a solitary self and a what the author calls a “world of others.” What relationships in *The True American* were most interesting to you and why?
- ◆ In his Author’s Note, Giridharadas positions himself as an objective reporter. “My movements as an author remain invisible in the text,” he writes. After reflecting on the way the author relates this story, do you agree that he remains objective and invisible? How do the facts speak for themselves and how does Giridharadas also subtly speak for them?
- ◆ How does Stroman’s “New American” manifesto (76-77) embody what Giridharadas calls a “republic of fear” that often overshadows what he calls the “republic of dreams”? How do you think Stroman would re-cast specific terms of this manifesto as he awaited execution?
- ◆ The case against Stroman had less to do with the crime he committed and more to do with how responsible he was for his actions given his difficult upbringing. Did learning more about Stroman’s background lead you to view his actions in a different light?
- ◆ What, to you, was the most successful aspect in *The True American*? What part of the book was most problematic?

About the Author

Anand Giridharadas is a *New York Times* columnist, writing the biweekly “Letter from America.” The author of *The True American*, in 2011 he published *India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation’s Remaking*. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, he was raised there, in France, and in Maryland, and educated at the University of Michigan, Oxford, and Harvard. He appears regularly on TV and the radio in the United States and he has given talks on the main stage of TED and at Harvard, Stanford, the Aspen Institute, the Sydney Opera House, the United Nations, the Asia Society, and Google. He has received honors from the Society of Publishers in Asia, the South Asian Journalists Association, the Poynter Fellowship in Journalism at Yale, and the New York Public Library’s Helen Bernstein Award. Anand lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife, Priya Parker, and son, Orion. [adapted from [author website](#)]



© Darshan Photography