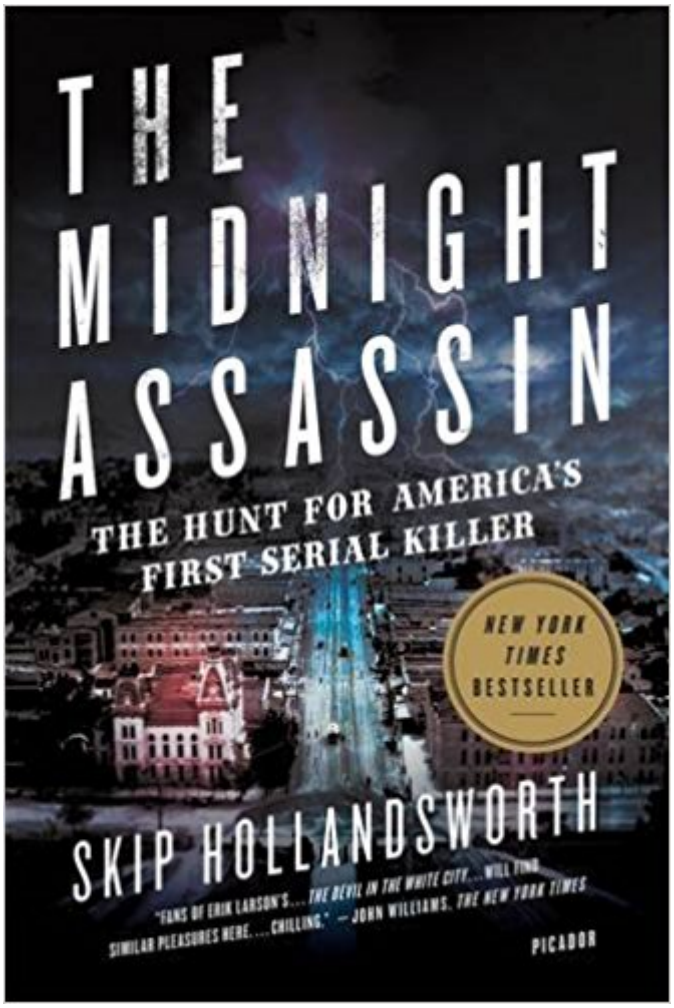
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The Midnight Assassin: The Hunt For America's First Serial Killer



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Synopsis

In nineteenth-century Austin, Texas, a ruthless murderer terrorized the city in what would soon become a story more shocking than any fiction.In the late 1800s, just as Austin was on the cusp of emerging from an isolated western outpost into a truly cosmopolitan metropolis, a series of brutal murders rocked the burgeoning city and shook it to its core. At the time, the concept of a serial killer was unknown and unimaginable, but the murders continued, the killer became more brazen, and the citizensÃ¢â ¬â„¢ panic reached a fever pitch.For more than a decade, Texas Monthly journalist Skip Hollandsworth has researched this gripping tale of murder and madness that plays out like a well-crafted whodunit. With vivid historical detail and novelistic flair, Hollandsworth's The Midnight Assassin: The Hunt for America's First Serial Killer brings this terrifying saga to life.

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Customer Reviews

Before Jack the Ripper mutilated prostitutes in the dark corners of London in the late 19th-century, Austin, TX, was besieged by a vicious killer whose victims were African American servants. He cut up women with an axe to the head and left them bloody in their beds. Husbands of the first three victims were arrested in succession, even though they had alibis and swore their innocence. Racism delayed justice for a year. Black men became so terrified of the police that they rubbed their feet and legs with asafoetida, a natural paste slaves had used when running away from their masters to throw off bloodhounds. Nicknamed "the midnight assassin," the murderer left an eyewitness, a nine-year-old boy who thought the man who killed his motherÃ¢â ¬â •the first victimÃ¢â ¬â •was white, but no one listened. Then on New Year's Eve, in 1885, two prominent

white women were hacked to death within an hour of each other, and a wider search was undertaken. This is a painstakingly researched book written by a Texas native that examines prejudices, which still keep justice at bay. VERDICT This work introduces students to a grisly piece of American history and models footnote and bibliographic research. A must-have.Ã¢â ¬â •Georgia Christgau, Middle College High School, Long Island City, NY

Winner of the Texas Institute of Letters's Carr P. Collins Award One of Book Riot's Best Books of 2016Ã¢â ¬Å“Skip Hollandsworth knows his way around a crime sceneÃ¢â ¬Â¦Fans of Erik LarsonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s 2003 hit, The Devil in the White CityÃ¢â ¬Â¦will find similar pleasures here. This is true crime of high quality. . . Mr. Hollandsworth handles gruesome details with a smart, restrained touchÃ¢â ¬Â¦Chilling."Ã¢â ¬â ¢The New York Times"Gripping and atmospheric...This true crime page-turner is a balanced and insightful examination of one of the most stirring serial killing sprees in American history, and certainly one of the least well-known."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Publishers Weekly (Starred Review)Ã¢â ¬Å“Readers who loved The Devil in the White City now have the pleasure of reading The Midnight Assassin. It paints a compelling portrait of a culture at a turning point Ã¢â ¬â œ that is, the capitol of Texas at the end of the 19th Century, when the barbarism of the frontier was giving way to the savagery of urban life.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â ¢Lawrence Wright, Pulitzer Prize-winning author The Looming Towerand Thirteen Days in SeptemberÃ¢â ¬Å“As a magazine journalist, Skip Hollandsworth has forged a reputation as one of the best storytellers in the country. The Midnight Assassin takes his singular narrative skills to a thrilling new level. Reading this book is like cracking open a time capsule and breathing the air of a vanished era. In Hollandsworth's hands, one of the ghastliest and most inscrutable crimes in American history becomes hair-raisingly immediate, and the mystery at its center grows ever more mysterious with every page.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â ¢Stephen Harrigan, author of The Gates of the Alamo and A Friend of Mr. Lincoln"Skip Hollandsworth has achieved a literary miracle with The Midnight Assassin. With haunting granularity, Hollandsworth breathes vivid life into a forgotten, century-old tale of the hunt for America's first diabolical serial murdererÃ¢â ¬â ¢set in, of all places, the quaint but upwardly mobile town of Austin, Texas. To read The Midnight Assassin is to experience the lost innocence of a 19th-century capital city set on edge by the unseen monster in its midst."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Robert Draper, The New York Times Magazine and author of Dead Certain "Skip Hollandsworth, one of the great true-crime writers of our era, has brought his remarkable talent to bear on one of the most fascinating untold criminal stories in American history. The Midnight Assassin captures a time, a place, and a feelingÃ¢â ¬â ¢booming Texas in the latter 19th centuryÃ¢â ¬â ¢in a way no nonfiction account I have read has done. A

jewel of a book."Ã¢â ¬â ¢S.C. Gwynne, author of Empire of the Summer Moon and Rebel YellÃ¢â ¬Å“Skip Hollandsworth has a bloodhound's nose for a great tale. With The Midnight Assassin, he's found the perfect subject for his many talents. Through scrupulous research and a finely tuned sense of the gothic, Hollandsworth has brought this Texas-sized true-crime story, more than a century old, to vivid, chilling life on the page.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â ¢Hampton Sides, author of Hellhound On His Trail and In the Kingdom of Ice"As the state of Texas's best-known magazine writer, Skip Hollandsworth is not just a Lone Star treasure, but a national treasure. In this, his first book, he uncovers the amazing untold story of America's first serial killer, a phantom who stalked the streets of Austin in 1885, three years before Jack the Ripper. Whether you love true crime, history or Texana, The Midnight Assassin is bursting at the seams with everything you want in a great book; a spellbinding mix of mystery, horror and historical detective work. It's the book Hollandsworth was born to write.''Ã¢â ¬â ¢Bryan Burrough, Vanity Fair special correspondent and author of Barbarians at the Gate, Days of Rage and The Big Rich

Riveting & informative read about a new kind of killer--a serial murderer--terrorizing Austin, Texas, from December 1884 through December 1885 in the days before forensic science. The police force had no clue how to catch this fiend or stop the reign of terror. Although many men were arrested and three prosecuted the killer of several women in grusome fashion was never identified or apprehended. When Jack the Ripper started killing prostitutes in 1888 in London many wondered if the Midnight Assassin of Austin had gone to London & started over. Both killers abruptly stopped killing & disappeared from history. Most Austin residents thought blacks were responsible for the murders as the first victims were black servant women until the double event on Christmas Eve 1885 when two white women were murdered. The prejudices of the time were on display but the inability of authorities to do anything led to political careers being ruined & a sex scandal developed for good measure. Highly recommended.

Skip Hollandsworth does an excellent job of taking you back in time to the late 1800s in Austin, Texas as a serial killer terrorizes the city. Layered with details about what was happening in Austin at the time the story comes to life as the citizens and lawmen hunt the murderer. The story ultimately covers years as the search and theories evolve. Most interesting was the timing of the murders, which happened around the time of the Ripper in London and HH Holmes in Chicago (Devil in the White City). Not that there was a connection with those, but the speculation is there and an interesting historical side note. Well done and would be enjoyed by anyone who enjoys reading

true crime stories.

SPOILER ALERT- It's a well researched book, and I'm sure somewhat inspired by the success of Devil in the White Cit,y but at the end of the day we're talking about 8 murders that go unsolved. Most of the book depicts social events and other random facts about Austin, which are interesting but not all that relevant to the story. (I think there's a whole chapter about street lights.) The murders themselves take place in a span of one year but the book spans many decades. The author really goes down a rabbit hold when he speculates that perhaps the same killer is Jack the Ripper. There are no conclusions made so if you like your true crime tidied up this is not the book for you.

I'm looking forward to reading more books by this author. If you do not like history, you may not like this book. There are parts that are a bit slow but if you are interested in history as I am, this may not bother you. I found this book and it touched on areas I had been familiar with. I am recommending this to friends/family now who are in need of title choices for summer reading as well as for book clubs.

Lived in Texas all my life and never heard this story. Not only do you get a history lesson about Austin, Texas, but you will read a bizarre, grisly story that's chilling in every sense of the word. Who could be roaming the streets of Austin late at night killing women for no perceptible reason while often leaving their husbands or lovers damaged, but not dead. And not only killing them but inflicting horrific physical damage. The city becomes paralyzed while both local and imported law officers make no headway. Lots of detail given how long ago it happened (1885), but all necessary and informative.

I really love Skip Hollandsworth's longform journalism, but I wasn't a fan of this book. It was well-written overall, but the pace was plodding and the ending was very unsatisfying. It was too rushed and open after dissecting minute details about Austin politicians, etc.I think that Austin residents or casual historians might find the overall story more compelling than the general public.

Fans of Erik Larson will enjoy Midnight Assassin. (BTW, there are at least two other books out there titled Midnight Assassin, so make sure you get the one by Skip Hollandsworth.)In 1884 to 1885, someone was slaughtering women in Austin, Texas. Both black servants and white society women were targeted, and were killed by ax blows to the head. No one ever got a good look at the killer but

witnesses insisted he was black. No, white. Bloodhounds brought in to track the killer could never get a proper scent since the crime scenes were trampled by family, police and the multitude of "lookie lou" townspeople.In 1888, when Jack the Ripper began carving up Whitechapel prostitutes, London police wondered if it was the American Midnight Assassin come to town.The reason I've mentioned Erik Larson is because Midnight Assassin is very much like Larson's book "The Devil in the White City" in which serial killer H.H. Holmes built a "murder hotel" at the 1893 World's Fair so he could experiment on, torture, and murder people who came to the fair.Midnight Assassin includes photos from 1880s Austin, and interesting facts about the city and its citizens.

Austin, Texas, in the late 1800's was a prosperous, thriving community, but when a series of grisly murders begins, the citizens begin to panic. The murders begin in the African- American community as one after another woman is found slaughtered leaving law enforcement bewildered and increasingly frustrated. The crimes continue and eventually white women are murdered. When the unsolved murders eventually stop, similar crimes begin in London, by an assailant we all now know as Jack the Ripper. The similarity of the murders suggests a connection between the two, although it has never been proven. The author's thorough research and readable style contribute to a very satisfying story about a little known period in the history of Austin, Texas.

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