

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



David Grann is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and an award-winning staff writer at *The New Yorker* magazine. His upcoming book, *The White Darkness*, which will be published in October, is a true story of adventure and obsession in the Antarctic.

His previous book, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*, documented one of the most sinister crimes and racial injustices in American history. Described by Dave Eggers in the *New York Times Book Review* as a “riveting” work that will “sear your soul,” *Killers of the Flower Moon* was a finalist for the National Book Award and a winner of the Edgar Allen Poe Award for best true crime book, a Spur Award for best work of historical nonfiction, and an Indies Choice Award for best adult nonfiction book of the year. A #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *Killers of the Flower Moon* was named one of the best books of the year by the *Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Time*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, NPR, PBS, *Bloomberg*, *GQ*, *Slate*, *Buzzfeed*, *Vogue*, and other publications. Amazon named *Killers of the Flower Moon* the single best book of the year, and so did Shelf Awareness. The book is being adapted

into a major motion picture, with Martin Scorsese slated to direct and Leonardo DiCaprio to play a role.

Grann’s first book, *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon*, was also #1 *New York Times* bestseller and has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. Shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, the book was chosen as one of the best books of 2009 by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Bloomberg*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and other publications. It won the Indies Choice award for the single best nonfiction book of the year. *New York Times* critic Michiko Katukani described *The Lost City of Z* as “suspenseful” and “rollicking,” reading “with all the pace and excitement of a movie thriller and all the verisimilitude and detail of firsthand reportage.” *The Washington Post* called it a “thrill ride from start to finish.” The book was adapted into a critically acclaimed film directed by James Gray and starring Charlie Hunnam, Sienna Miller, Robert Pattinson, and Tom Holland.

Grann’s other book, *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes*, contains many of his *New Yorker* stories, and was named by *Men’s Journal* one of the best true crime books ever written. The stories in the collection focus on everything from the mysterious death of the world’s greatest Sherlock Holmes expert to a Polish writer who might have left clues to a real murder in his postmodern novel. Another piece, “Trial by Fire,” exposed how junk science led to the execution

of a likely innocent man in Texas. The story received a George Polk award for outstanding journalism and a Silver Gavel award for fostering the public's understanding of the justice system, and the piece was cited by the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer in his opinion on the constitutionality of the death penalty. Grann—whom Vox called a “longform-journalism legend,” and whose work *Slate* said “inspires a devotion in readers that can border on the obsessive”—has twice received the Sigma Delta Chi Award for excellence in journalism.

Several of his stories have served as source material for feature films. “Old Man and the Gun” in *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes*, which is about an aging stick-up man and prison escape artist, was released in 2018 by Fox Searchlight Pictures. The film is directed by David Lowery and stars Robert Redford, Casey Affleck, Sissy Spacek, Danny Glover, and Tom Waits. A movie based on “Trial by Fire” is was released that year. It’s directed by Ed Zwick and stars Jack O’Connell and Laura Dern. And another story, “The Yankee Comandante,” is being developed into a film by George Clooney.

Over the years, Grann’s stories have appeared in *The Best American Crime Writing*; *The Best American Sports Writing*; and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. His stories have also appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Atlantic*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and *Wall Street Journal*.

Before joining *The New Yorker* in 2003, Grann was a senior editor at *The New Republic*, and, from 1995 until 1996, the executive editor of the newspaper *The Hill*. He holds master’s degrees in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy as well as in creative writing from Boston University. After graduating from Connecticut College in 1989, he received a Thomas Watson Fellowship and did research in Mexico, where he began his career in journalism. He currently lives in New York with his wife and two children.

- Author’s website

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Before starting “Killers of the Flower Moon,” had you ever heard of the Osage murders? If so, how did you learn about it, and what did you know? Do you think this history should be taught in schools?
2. Author David Grann begins the book with a line describing the flowers spread over the Oklahoma hills where the Osage Indian nation resided — and how those flowers break and die in May. How does this line set the tone, and introduce the subject, of the rest of the book?
3. The first character we meet is Mollie Burkhart, whose family becomes a main target of the Osage murders. How does Grann signal to us early on what the murderer may be after?
4. Grann describes the discovery of oil on Osage land as a “cursed blessing.” How do you think it’s a blessing, and how is it a curse?
5. How trustworthy do you find the various authorities who appear throughout the book to investigate the murders? They include William Hale, who Grann initially describes as a “powerful local advocate for law and order,” as well as the frontier lawmen, the brothers who conduct autopsies of the bodies, the local sheriff, and later, the FBI.

6. Osage “headrights” — or the money received by members of the tribe, or by white guardians, from mineral royalties — soon become central to the book. Grann writes: “Although some white guardians and administrators tried to act in the best interests of the tribe, countless others used the system to swindle the very people they were ostensibly protecting.” Which sectors of society abused these guardianships? How was this able to happen?
7. Why do you think the FBI pursued the case of the Osage murders? What did you learn about the birth of the agency?
8. At this point in your reading, what do you think these murders say about America’s history with indigenous people?
9. As the FBI solved the case, how did J. Edgar Hoover try to shape the mythology of the bureau? What parts of the FBI’s investigation of the Osage Murders were left out of the story?
10. Grann ends the book with a quote from the Bible about Cain and Abel: “The blood cries out from the ground.” Why do you think he chose to close the book this way?
11. How does life for the Osage change during the events recounted in *Killers of the Osage Moon*?
12. How does the author portray tensions between white and Native peoples?
13. How do religion and spirituality influence Osage culture?
14. What similarities do you see between the experiences of the Osage and the early FBI's agents?
15. What political and societal forces shape the Osage investigation?

- <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/208562/killers-of-the-flower-moon-by-david-grann/9780307742483/readers-guide/>

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

**\*Starred Review\*** During the early 1920s, many members of the Osage Indian Nation were murdered, one by one. After being forced from several homelands, the Osage had settled in the late nineteenth century in an unoccupied area of Oklahoma, chosen precisely because it was rocky, sterile, and utterly unfit for cultivation. No white man would covet this land; Osage people would be happy. Then oil was soon discovered below the Osage territory, speedily attracting prospectors wielding staggering sums and turning many Osage into some of the richest people in the world. Grann (*The Devil and Sherlock Holmes*, 2010) centers this true-crime mystery on Mollie Burkhart, an Osage woman who lost several family members as the death tally grew, and Tom White, the former Texas Ranger whom J. Edgar Hoover sent to solve the slippery, attention-grabbing case once and for all. A secondary tale of Hoover's single-minded rise to power as the director of what would become the FBI, his reshaping of the bureau's practices, and his goal to gain prestige for federal investigators provides invaluable historical context. Grann employs you-are-there

narrative effects to set readers right in the action, and he relays the humanity, evil, and heroism of the people involved. His riveting reckoning of a devastating episode in American history deservedly captivates.--Bostrom, Annie  
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### **Publisher's Weekly**

New Yorker staff writer Grann (*The Lost City of Z*) burnishes his reputation as a brilliant storyteller in this gripping true-crime narrative, which revisits a baffling and frightening-and relatively unknown-spree of murders occurring mostly in Oklahoma during the 1920s. From 1921 to 1926, at least two dozen people were murdered by a killer or killers apparently targeting members of the Osage Indian Nation, who at the time were considered "the wealthiest people per capita in the world" thanks to the discovery of oil beneath their lands. The violent campaign of terror is believed to have begun with the 1921 disappearance of two Osage Indians, Charles Whitehorn and Anna Brown, and the discovery of their corpses soon afterwards, followed by many other murders in the next five years. The outcry over the killings led to the involvement in 1925 of an "obscure" branch of the Justice Department, J. Edgar Hoover's Bureau of Investigation, which eventually charged some surprising figures with the murders. Grann demonstrates how the Osage Murders inquiry helped Hoover to make the case for a "national, more professional, scientifically skilled" police force. Grann's own dogged detective work reveals another layer to the case that Hoover's men had never exposed. Agents: Kathy Robbins and David Halpern, Robbins Office. (Apr.) © Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

### **Library Journal**

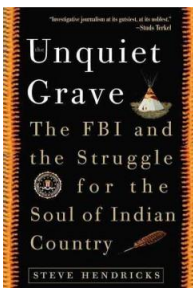
In the 1870s, the Osage Indians were herded onto a small tract of land in Oklahoma-land that unexpectedly held vast reserves of oil, rendering the tribe incredibly rich overnight. By law, the Osage had mineral rights outright, although they were still treated like children, requiring a white "guardian" to manage their assets. In 1921, there was a sudden upsurge in deaths of the Osage on the reservation-accidents, bad whiskey, and outright murder. Author Grann (*The Lost City of Z*) writes of these crimes, where at least 18 Osage and three nontribe members met suspicious deaths by 1925, many of them members of the same family. The Osage pleaded for the federal government to help, and J. Edgar Hoover, head of the fledgling FBI, sent agent Tom White to investigate. White discovered that many of the victims were connected to a single man, an upstanding community leader who stood to profit handsomely from the murders. The long, drawn out investigation finally resulted in convictions and good publicity for the agency, but some unanswered questions remain. VERDICT A spellbinding book about the largest serial murder investigation you've never heard of, which will be enjoyed by fans of the Old West as well as true crime aficionados. [See Prepub Alert, 10/17/16.]-Deirdre Bray Root, MidPointe Lib. Syst., OH © Copyright 2017. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

## School Library Journal

In 1920s Oklahoma, many members of the oil-wealthy Osage Nation were dying untimely and suspicious deaths. The widespread crimes against the Osage and the inability to identify those responsible led to the establishment of what is now known as the FBI. Grann, author of the best-selling *The Lost City of Z*, makes a complex web of violence and deception easy to follow by keeping the focus on one Osage woman, Mollie Burkhart, whose family members were murdered one by one. This gripping title uncovers a baffling level of corruption. The author points his investigative lens at the perpetrators of the murders, reveals cover-ups by authorities all the way up to the national level, and illustrates that the deception continued almost a century later. There are plenty of curriculum connections: Native American and Osage tribal history, economics, law enforcement, and journalism. A varied selection of photographs help to set the scene for readers. End pages include comprehensive source notes, citations, and a bibliography. VERDICT This thoroughly researched, suspenseful exposé will appeal to followers of true crime programs such as the podcast *Serial* and the Netflix documentary series *Making a Murderer*, as well as to fans of Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*. -Tara Kehoe, formerly at New Jersey State Library Talking Book and Braille Center, Trenton © Copyright 2017. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

## READALIKES

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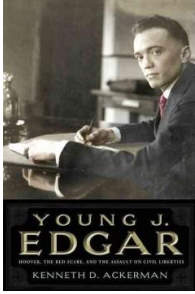
### ***Unquiet Grave* by Steve Hendricks**

Citing the 1976 murder of Native American activist Anna Mae Aquash, a history of the adversarial relationship between the FBI and Native Americans draws on the author's archival research into previously unreleased documents to reveal murderous conspiracies and cover-ups on both sides of the unofficial conflict.



### ***Black Klansman* by Ron Stallworth**

Relates how African American detective Ron Stallworth went undercover to investigate the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado Springs in 1978, describing how he disrupted Klan activities and exposed white supremacists in the military during the months-long investigation.



***Young J. Edgar* by Kenneth Ackerman**

Documents America's first domestic war on terror, a period in the early 1920s during which J. Edgar Hoover assembled a database of thousands of suspected communists and was enlisted by attorney general A. Mitchell Palmer to execute a series of home and office raids through which more than 10,000 Americans were arrested for treason.