



The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer

By Skip Hollandsworth

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A sweeping narrative history of a terrifying serial killer--America's first--who stalked Austin, Texas in 1885

In the late 1800s, the city of Austin, Texas was on the cusp of emerging from an isolated western outpost into a truly cosmopolitan metropolis. But beginning in December 1884, Austin was terrorized by someone equally as vicious and, in some ways, far more diabolical than London's infamous Jack the Ripper. For almost exactly one year, the Midnight Assassin crisscrossed the entire city, striking on moonlit nights, using axes, knives, and long steel rods to rip apart women from every race and class. At the time the concept of a serial killer was unthinkable, but the murders continued, the killer became more brazen, and the citizens' panic reached a fever pitch.

Before it was all over, at least a dozen men would be arrested in connection with the murders, and the crimes would expose what a newspaper described as "the most extensive and profound scandal ever known in Austin." And yes, when Jack the Ripper began his attacks in 1888, London police investigators did wonder if the killer from Austin had crossed the ocean to terrorize their own city.

With vivid historical detail and novelistic flair, *Texas Monthly* journalist Skip Hollandsworth brings this terrifying saga to life.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

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 mother—the first victim—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.—Georgia Christgau, Middle College High School, Long Island City, NY

Review

Winner of the Texas Institute of Letters's Carr P. Collins Award

One of Book Riot's Best Books of 2016

"Skip Hollandsworth knows his way around a crime scene...Fans of Erik Larson's 2003 hit, *The Devil in the White City*...will find similar pleasures here. This is true crime of high quality... Mr. Hollandsworth handles gruesome details with a smart, restrained touch...Chilling."?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."?Publishers Weekly (Starred Review)

"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 – 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."?Lawrence Wright, Pulitzer Prize-winning author *The Looming Tower* and *Thirteen Days in September*

"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."?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 murderer?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."?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 feeling?booming Texas in the latter 19th century?in a way no nonfiction account I have read has done. A jewel of a book."?S.C. Gwynne, author of *Empire of the Summer Moon* and *Rebel Yell*

"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."?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."?Bryan Burrough, *Vanity Fair* special correspondent and author of *Barbarians at the Gate*, *Days of Rage* and *The Big Rich*

About the Author

Skip Hollandsworth is an award-winning journalist, screenwriter, and executive editor of *Texas Monthly* magazine. His work was included in the 2006 edition of *Best American Crime Writing* and he has won a National Magazine Award for feature writing. Hollandsworth co-wrote the acclaimed screenplay "Bernie" with director Richard Linklater. He lives in Texas with his wife.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mac Cutter:

Reading a publication tends to be new life style on this era globalization. With looking at you can get a lot of information that can give you benefit in your life. With book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Books can also inspire a lot of people. A lot of author can inspire their own reader with their story or even their experience. Not only the storyplot that share in the publications. But also they write about the data about something that you need example of this. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors these days always try to improve their talent in writing, they also doing some research before they write for their book. One of them is this *The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer*.

Joseph Mattos:

People live in this new time of lifestyle always try and and must have the free time or they will get great deal of stress from both lifestyle and work. So , if we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely indeed. People is human not really a huge robot. Then we consult again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to you of course your answer will unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading guides. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, often the book you have

read is definitely The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer.

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Reading a book being new life style in this calendar year; every people loves to study a book. When you study a book you can get a lots of benefit. When you read books, you can improve your knowledge, simply because book has a lot of information into it. The information that you will get depend on what kinds of book that you have read. In order to get information about your research, you can read education books, but if you act like you want to entertain yourself you are able to a fiction books, these kinds of us novel, comics, as well as soon. The The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer will give you new experience in examining a book.

Gregory Kile:

As a pupil exactly feel bored for you to reading. If their teacher requested them to go to the library or to make summary for some reserve, they are complained. Just small students that has reading's spirit or real their passion. They just do what the educator want, like asked to the library. They go to right now there but nothing reading really. Any students feel that reading through is not important, boring and can't see colorful photos on there. Yeah, it is to be complicated. Book is very important for yourself. As we know that on this period of time, many ways to get whatever we really wish for. Likewise word says, ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore , this The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer can make you really feel more interested to read.

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