



Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI

David Grann

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A *New York Times* Notable Book

Named a best book of the year by Amazon, Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, San Francisco Chronicle, GQ, Time, Newsday, Entertainment Weekly, Time Magazine, NPR, Vogue, Smithsonian, Cosmopolitan, Seattle Times, Bloomberg, Lit Hub, and Slate

From the #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Lost City of Z*, a twisting, haunting true-life murder mystery about one of the most monstrous crimes in American history

In the 1920s, the richest people per capita in the world were members of the Osage Nation in Oklahoma. After oil was discovered beneath their land, the Osage rode in chauffeured automobiles, built mansions, and sent their children to study in Europe.

Then, one by one, the Osage began to be killed off. The family of an Osage woman, Mollie Burkhart, became a prime target. One of her relatives was shot. Another was poisoned. And it was just the beginning, as more and more Osage were dying under mysterious circumstances, and many of those who dared to investigate the killings were themselves murdered.

As the death toll rose, the newly created FBI took up the case, and the young director, J. Edgar Hoover, turned to a former Texas Ranger named Tom White to try to unravel the mystery. White put together an undercover team, including a Native American agent who infiltrated the region, and together with the Osage began to expose one of the most chilling conspiracies in American history.

Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI Details

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From Reader Review Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI for online ebook

Liz says

A good nonfiction book will read as fast as a good piece of fiction, all the while imparting new knowledge to the reader. *Destiny of the Republic*, by Candice Millard, is a prime example. Now comes *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Enthralling, it tells not only of the killing spree against the Osage, but the rise of the oil industry, the development of private detectives and the Bureau of Investigation (the precursor to the FBI) and the political corruption of the day.

It's a sad look back on the prejudices of the day, along with the numerous scandals. But for someone who came of age in the 70s, when Hoover was more villain than hero, it's interesting to see how much he did to bring the bureau out of its prior history of corruption and scandal.

It was also interesting to see how White and his team finally put together a case after struggling to find hard evidence or live witnesses to bring the murderer to trial.

I highly recommend this book to those who enjoy an entertaining, enlightening nonfiction book.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"Today our hearts are divided between two worlds. We are strong and courageous, learning to walk in these two worlds, hanging on to the threads of our culture and traditions as we live in a predominantly non-Indian society. Our history, our culture, our heart, and our home will always be stretching our legs across the plains, singing songs in the morning light, and placing our feet down with the ever beating heart of the drum. We walk in two worlds."

The Osage Indians lived in Kansas until the 1870s when the government decided that their land was too valuable for them to own. Laura Ingalls Wilder, writer of *Little House on the Prairie*, was confused as to why the Osage Indians were being forced off their land. Her father explained: *"That's why we're here, Laura. White people are going to settle all this country, and we get the best land because we get here first and take our pick."*

Indians were looked on as a subspecies of human being who didn't deserve to breath and certainly didn't deserve to own any useful land. The Osage Indians were moved to Northeastern Oklahoma on a patch of ground that was deemed worthless.

But was it?

When oil was discovered beneath the reservation land in the 1920s, those dirt scratching Indians became extremely wealthy. The federal government, due to the Osages' inherent racial weakness, deemed them incapable of managing their own affairs and appointed guardians to manage their affairs, white guardians. As an example, if an Osage wanted a car, the guardian would buy a car for \$250 and sell it to the Indian for \$1,250. The definition of guardian used words such as protector or defender. It didn't say anything about

exploiter.

This is a tale of greed, but unfortunately, it didn't stop there.

It became murder.

When the suspicious deaths of Osage Indians reached twenty-four, the fledgling director of the Bureau of Investigations (It would not be called the Federal Bureau of Investigations until 1935.) J. Edgar Hoover decided that he needed Federal agents on the ground. Hoover had already been systematically removing agents from the program that did not meet his criteria for education level and impeccable character. The agents out West, many of them ex-Texas Rangers, did not fit either of those profiles, but Hoover was smart enough to realize that, for a case like this, spit shined shoes and snappy ties were not going to get the job done.

He sent in Tom White, one of those disreputable former Texas Rangers. White brought some people in as undercover agents, and slowly the details of what was going on began to shimmer into view. The problem was witnesses disappeared or clammed up when they were asked to testify at trial. One white man who was trying to help the Osage was mysteriously thrown from a train. Another was kidnapped. Building a case was one thing, but actually prosecuting someone was not easy. It became more and more clear that this was not the act of just one man, but a conspiracy.

"A conspiracy is everything that ordinary life is not. It's the inside game, cold, sure, undistracted, forever closed off to us. We are the flawed ones, the innocents, trying to make some rough sense of the daily jostle. Conspirators have a logic and a daring beyond our reach. All conspiracies are the same taut story of men who find coherence in some criminal act. "

--Don DeLillo, *Libra*

Meanwhile, the murders continued unabated. Osages were shot, poisoned, stabbed, and even in one case blown up with dynamite. The ruthlessness with which they were systematically eliminated was actually terrifying. I can't even imagine the level of fear that the tribe was living under. Death was not a nebulous unknown creature, but was actually embodied by members of their community intent on their destruction.

The other problem was that white people felt the Indians did not deserve the money. The adage the only good Indian is a dead Indian was still in common use, especially if anyone encountered a situation where Indian ownership was in their way.

David Grann has done a wonderful job of investigating these murders. Though some people were incarcerated for the crimes back in the 1920s, the more Grann dug, the more threads he found that led to other guardians who should have been investigated more thoroughly as well. The descendents of those murdered Osage still want closer. They still want justice, even if the killers are moldering in their graves. **"The blood cries out from the ground."**

"During Xtha-cka Zbi-ga Tze-the, the Killer of the Flowers Moon.
I will wade across the river of the blackfish, the otter, the beaver.
I will climb the bank where the willow never dies."

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

David Grann, a journalist, has done an excellent job investigating and chronicling the terrible story of the Osage American Indian murders in the 1920s. It's a chilling story - hard to believe it's true, hard to believe people could be so cruel and callous. Hard to believe I've never heard of this before.

In about 1904, the Osage tribe had negotiated a contract with the U.S. government; tellingly, their lawyer was able to slip in a clause that all oil, gas and other mineral rights on their land were "reserved to the Osage Tribe." By 1917, there were huge oil strikes on the Osage land, and the "headrights" - each tribe member's share of the oil lease royalties - were worth many thousands of dollars. Tribe members became hugely wealthy.

But then the vultures moved in: Congress required most of the Osages to have an appointed guardian to manage their wealth; most of these guardians were intent on fleecing and defrauding their charges. Local businesses would jack up their charges for the Osages. Banks charged usurious interest rates on loans. Some white people would marry the Osages for their money ... and some would kill to get their hands on their fortunes.

Three sisters: Minnie, Anna and Mollie

Anna Brown mysteriously disappeared one night in May 1921; her decomposed body was found about a week later, with a bullet hole in the back of her head. About the same time, the body of Charles Whitehorn was found near the base of an oil derrick. More deaths followed: some clearly murders, some unclear but suspicious (Anna's mother died soon after her of a mysterious wasting disease). Too soon, Mollie Burkhart was the only one in her family still alive, along with her white husband, Ernest Burkhart, and their three children.

Government and private investigators came up with almost nothing (how many of them were complicit, and how many were threatened into silence, is a question that may never be fully answered). And sometimes, too often, important witnesses or persons who were helping with the investigation would be found dead as well. It became known as the Reign of Terror.

Grann unfolds the story in a clear and logical way, with some fascinating and chilling details. When the Bureau of Investigation (the precursor to the FBI) finally gets involved, things start to look more hopeful. But the web of conspiracies and silence isn't so easy to take apart.

Highly recommended. This is a historical event that deserves never to be forgotten. Grann deserves praise for helping to bring it back to light, and for taking the extra steps to investigate and report on what may have happened to some of the forgotten victims. It makes you want to weep for humanity, but there are a few shining lights in the story.

"To believe that the Osages survived intact from their ordeal is a delusion of the mind. What has been possible to salvage has been saved and is dearer to our hearts because it survived. What is gone is treasured because it was what we once were. We gather our past and present into the depths of our being and face tomorrow. We are still Osage."

Initial post: I've borrowed this from a friend for a December book club read. She says it's due back at the library in 5 days. *cracks knuckles* No sweat, right?

P.S. I read it in just two days - it was that gripping.

Montzalee Wittmann says

Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI by David Grann was a difficult book to read because of all the injustice to the Osage people and victims especially. What a horrible stain on our history. I wish it was a compulsory book for high school kids to read and discuss today. Would it make a difference? I don't know but there is so much white-washing in the history books as it is. This was a book for our reading group and I am so glad it was picked or I probably would never have picked it up. Great book!

Matthew says

3 to 3.5 stars

Interesting and eye opening. A scary true story of greed and racism in the development of the American West. This is one of those hard to read and accept truths of American history. If you enjoy history and/or true crime I think this is worth giving a go.

My main criticism is that while the story is interesting, I am not quite sure it is book worthy. It seems like this whole story could have been told in 30 to 50 pages or in a Wikipedia article. It feels a bit drawn out when expanded to 300+ pages. Because of the length I was waiting for a lot more to happen, but it never really did.

Also, the title of this book would indicate that there is a lot of detail about the formation of the FBI - I don't really feel this was the case. There were a few pages about how local law enforcement was too corrupt so they needed the federal government involved, but that was about it. Some may disagree, but I hardly felt that this book could be used for a history report on the start of the FBI.

This book is recommended for hard core history and true crime buffs. If you like your history and true crime to be a little less textbook, this may not be the book for you.

Side note: the audiobook is mediocre. The more I listen, the more I think I don't care for Will Patton as a narrator.

PorshaJo says

Lies, greed, murder, cover-ups....what a frightful Halloween read. Except this one is a true story, which makes it even more frightening. This is the true story of the Osage Indians. How they were taken advantage of and belittled by everyone. In the early 19th century, they were forced from their lands and eventually ended up taking up residence on Indian territory, which is now known as Oklahoma. Then, in the early 20th century, there was found to be oil on those lands. They had a headright on the lands, which is a legal grant of land to settlers. (Yup, I looked it up.) Leasing land allowed the Osage to become some of the wealthiest people in the country. But the white people did not like this, referring to them as 'filthy redskins' and other remarks. The government even thought they were not educated enough to manage their own money, appointing trustees for each Osage Indian. The Osage had an allowance, very small, in which they could

spend each month. When they needed money for something...sending a child to a better school, medicine for a sick child, they had to ask their trustee, who often told them no. And then, if it was not bad enough, they were being murdered.....for their land. It is one of the most chilling, true stories I have read (well, except Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders.)

The book details all of this and the many murders of the Osage. It seemed everyone was against them. The government, even local officials, everyone. They could not stand that they had this wealth. It was found that the trustees appointed to them were often stealing money from them, in large amounts. And after a number of years, when the murders were not solved, and more were being committed, the federal government got involved. Oh, but what became the FBI CHARGED the Indians a large fee to actually investigate the murders. Nothing that was done in any other investigation. Sometimes I thought, how could this happen, how could our government do this, how could this greed and corruption go on....and then I turn on the news. Yeah, nuff said.

Anyway, an incredible book about a time in our history. An utterly fascinating story that I'm so glad I read. When the book was released, the title alone hooked me. So I immediately requested the audio. Now, the bad part...one of *the worst* audio narrations I have come across. There were three narrators in total. The first narrator, read like she was telling a bed-time story, with over the top embellishments. Like she was telling me a story about a fuzzy monster under my bed when she was describing how a person was murdered. I wanted to stop, I really did. But the print version at my library....yeah, I would have been #72 in the queue. At this point, I was hooked, and just tried to put the narration out of my head. I looked at a preview of the book and saw it has tons of photos. So I have it on order and plan to revisit this one after I get the book.

A highly recommended read! But read the print, your missing pictures pertaining to this history. And the narration is just dreadful. Plus, there are a lot of people involved in this story, and print can help keeping track, you can go back easily and re-read portions. I plan on reading more from this author and perhaps reading more non-fiction in general.

Diane S ? says

I don't know why or even how, after all I have read, I can still be surprised at man's cunning and greed. I knew nothing about the Osage Indians, certainly nothing about headrights that provided them with a great deal of money. It is the money and the way the law was provisioned that made them a target for the unscrupulous and there were plenty of those.

This is the story of the investigation into murders that until Hoover involved himself and his men, we're virtually shoved under the rug and going nowhere. Even after so many suspicious deaths, often in the same family. So we learn about the murders, a little about Hoover, more about a man who was known as a cowboy in the service and he would be the one who broke open this case. Well put together, though out, this book was easy to read and very informative. Some things were glanced over, maybe not as thorough as some would expect, or like but that would have made for a much longer book. Liked that the author pursued this even after the initial findings, going back over the records, finding missed connections and came to some additional conclusions.

Linda says

"We Indians cannot get our rights in these courts and I have no chance at all of saving this land for my

children." (Widow of Joe Bates, Osage Nation, 1921)

No horror novella could possibly mirror the horrendous crimes that were visited upon the Osage Indian Nation in the 1920's. The catastrophic bungling of crime evidence, the leaks and sabotage, and the willful insidious behavior by unscrupulous individuals is mind-boggling. The devil and his cohorts wore well-pressed suits and walked among the honest and the God-fearing.

In the 1870's, the Osage Indian Nation were driven from their lands in Kansas and forced upon rocky, worthless land in Oklahoma. The Osage embraced this land as a means of being left alone. That wish never came true. Beneath this forsaken land were some of the largest oil deposits in the United States. The Osage shared the rich dividends amongst themselves. But their new-found wealth came at a great price. The law forced appointed "guardians" to manage their growing bank accounts.

David Grann tells this incredible story through the wide periphery of Mollie Burkhart and her family members. Mollie was an Osage woman married to a white man, Ernest Burkhart. It is through Mollie that we come to know the brutal crimes committed against her and her family and others living in this town. The photographs of Mollie, her mother, and her sisters will breathe life into this story. It will enrage you at the thought that these defenseless individuals died from poisoning, suspicious fires, and fatal gunshot wounds. No one dared to speak names behind closed doors out of fear of retribution. And insatiable greed turned hearts to blackened stone.

Grann's story reads like a well-tuned work of pure fiction. But as you turn the pages, you are aghast by the hardcore truth that awaits you. Justice didn't exist on this Osage territory. It took years and years before a case could be brought before the court system. That is unless you could find a jury that was not lined with bribes. Years of ineptness took their toll on Mollie until a remarkable former Texas Ranger, Tom White, took charge. We will experience the birth of the FBI with the initiation of J. Edgar Hoover. The journey towards that justice was a long and arduous one.

I came upon David Grann on C-SPAN one evening. I had to know the story of Mollie Burkhart for myself. I believe you will, too. "The blood cries out from the ground." The silence no longer exists and the truth, finally, prevails.

Beata says

This is a powerful book on murders committed on Osage people during the second decade of the 20th century. The author is an investigative journalist and does a tremendous job bringing this tragic story to the general public. I was astounded and could not put this book down...

PattyMacDotComma says

5★

“He was six feet four and had the sinewy limbs and the eerie composure of a gunslinger. Even when dressed in a stiff suit, like a door-to-door salesman, he seemed to have sprung from a mythic age.”

John Wayne? No, but if this had been written right after it happened and Hollywood had made a movie of it, John Wayne would have played Tom White, the special agent in charge of the Bureau of Investigation's field office in Houston.

He was described as **“an impressive sight in his large, suede Stetson, and a plumb-line running from head to heel would touch every part of the rear of his body.”**

This reads like a mystery. The fact that it’s a true crime history makes it as compelling as it is appalling. **“Over the sixteen-year period from 1907 to 1923, 605 Osages died, averaging about 38 per year. . . .”** The author mentions even more cases beyond that date, so who really knows?

Why? Because members of the Osage tribe were the world’s richest people per capita of an `UIKeyInputDownArrow` in the world! It’s quite a story.

David Grann is a highly regarded journalist, New Yorker staff writer, and best-selling author. He could easily have called this “Osage Outrage”, but this title is much more memorable. The Osage refer to May as the time of the flower-killing moon, and Grann’s account begins in May 1921 when Mollie Burkhart is worrying about the disappearance of her sister, Anna.

Anna is known for wild, free-wheeling sprees, but Mollie is convinced she’s truly missing. They had already lost their sister Minnie three years earlier under what Mollie thought were suspicious circumstances.

Photo of sisters Rita, Anna, Mollie, and Minnie, healthy, wealthy Osage women

The reason the Osage were awash with oil and money was that they had been pushed off their homelands in Kansas into a area of Oklahoma. Oklahoma was anxious to gain statehood and needed to get this agreement in place first, so they were happy to meet the Osage request to divide the land equally among only members of the tribe.

“The Osage also managed to slip into the agreement what seemed, at the time, like a curious provision: “That the oil, gas, coal, or other minerals covered by the lands . . . are hereby reserved to the Osage Tribe.”

They already knew there was oil there, having seen the “rainbow” slicks on some water, and each member now had a “headright”, a share in the mineral rights of their “underground reservation”.

Back to Mollie. About a week after Mollie raised the alarm about her sister’s disappearance, the body of a man was discovered with two bullet holes. Then a week later, Anna’s body was discovered – she’d been shot in the head.

Neighbourhood dogs die of strychnine poisoning, a bomb blast wipes out a home and family, and people are rightly terrified.

Enter our man Tom White (John Wayne) in the summer of 1925. He got an urgent call to hurry to Washington, D.C., to meet J. Edgar Hoover, the new boss. Hoover was always a controlling (and odd) man.

“Hoover demanded that his staff wear dark suits and sober neckties and black shoes polished to a gloss. He wanted his agents to be a specific American type: Caucasian, lawyerly, professional.”

(Later, Hoover obviously livened up the professional look a bit.)

Photo of Tom White and FBI boss J. Edgar Hoover

Tom White collected some good undercover operators he could trust and they moved into town as cattle ranchers and insurance salesmen and such. Nobody was sure who the next target might be, so they watched everybody.

Each member of the tribe had to have their money managed by a white guardian, which gave these men (I think they were all men) tremendous power.

“One Osage who had served in World War I complained, ‘I fought in France for this country, and yet I am not allowed even to sign my own checks.’”

The guardians seemed able to issue invoices to these accounts for all sorts of supposed services, and the Osage were powerless to prevent it, in spite of their wealth.

“In 1923 alone, the tribe took in more than \$30 million, the equivalent today of more than \$400 million.”

The murders, the lies, the clandestine love affairs, the betrayals and overall Wild West nature of this period are all captured in Grann’s splendid book. His research is extensive, everything is footnoted with easy links in the digital version of the book, and the photographs are wonderful.

Absolutely first-rate whether you’re a history buff or a thriller enthusiast!

Here’s talk by the author about the book. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?427931-...>

Elyse Walters says

Reading about injustice -historical tragedies--such greed - such ugliness---does something to us. It's hard to explain the depths of what transforms.

We feel the anger... the incredible unfairness. We feel different- changed in ways - after reading a book like this. It's the type of book that makes me want to 'do something'.

White people cheated Indians out of their land! That we 'knew'.... but there is much in this small book many people are not aware of. Author David Grann kept peeling off the layers of the onion....by uncovering the magnitude of the numbers of murders that took place within the Osage Tribe. --- His research gives us a true story of history that just makes you sick!

And why? For those who have not read this yet.... JUST READ IT.... it becomes very clear. It will infuriate you -- but like the Holocaust-- some stories need to be told - so we don't forget.

Having recently read Sherman Alexie's memoir- "You Don't Have To Say I Love You"..... plus this Native American Historical story.....

.....If the combination of these two books alone don't completely transform you about your stand about American Indian RightsSO MUCH SO

that you're ready to rally for them - vote for them - protest 'with' them - fight 'with' them

Then I sure don't know what will.

Warning: This book can make you FURIOUS!!!!

THE PHOTOS included of the Osage Tribe were beautiful!!!!

Julie says

Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann is a 2017 Doubleday publication.

A Conspiracy is everything that ordinary life is not. It's the inside game, cold, sure, undistracted, forever closed off to us. We are the flawed ones, the innocents, trying to make some rough sense of the daily jostle. Conspirators have a logic, and a daring beyond our reach. All conspiracies are the same taut story of men who find coherence in a criminal act- Don Delillo

This is a stunning historical true crime 'novel' centered around corrupt and shameful politics, racism, and greed that fueled the 'Osage reign of terror', back in the 1920's and was responsible for the birth of the first 'Bureau of Investigation'-

When Mollie Burkhart's sister disappeared, and was later found shot to death, an investigation into her death, as well a bombing and a string of poisonings all aimed at wealthy Osage Indians who benefited from the oil found on their land, began that would eventually expose an incredible conspiracy. This conspiracy involved anyone and everyone, it seems, as the Osage were being systematically killed off. This included law men and lawmakers, all the way to Washington, as white men schemed to take control of the vast wealth the Osage were entitled to.

Finally, with increasing pleas for help the FBI got involved in the case, but rife with corruption, they floundered horribly. Eventually, Tom White was assigned the case by J. Edgar Hoover. His investigation would expose men at their darkest and most unconscionable. It's hard to imagine Hoover in this light, but he was trying to build his reputation at this time, so solving this case would be a big feather in his cap.

I am ashamed to admit I didn't know anything about this dark piece of history. This is a true crime accounting, but it reads like a modern -day murder mystery, one you simply can not put down, with enough plot twists to keep the reader right on the edge of their seats. While many true crime books are hard to read due to the creepiness and graphic details of the crimes, this book doesn't really have that same, 'don't read it alone at night' quality to it, but I was so shocked by what I was reading, I experienced plenty of shock waves, all the same.

Usually, I find myself feeling a great many emotions for crime victims and their families, but I don't think I've ever felt more sympathy than I did for Mollie Burkhart. My God!! That poor woman suffered such an incredible amount of loss, in unimaginable ways.

But, I am also ashamed of the way the Osage was treated by our country. Men of power who schemed to limit access to their money, assigning them guardians, who could easily steal from them... or worse. They were treated like children!! Can you imagine having someone monitoring every penny you spent- down to a tube of toothpaste?? SERIOUSLY??

'The US government, contending that many Osage were unable to handle their money, had required the Office of Indian Affairs to determine which members of the tribe were capable of managing their trust funds. Over the tribe's vehement objections, many Osage were deemed incompetent, and were forced to have a local white guardian overseeing and authorizing all their spending, down to the tube of toothpaste they purchased at the corner store. One Osage who had served in World War 1 complained, "I fought in France for this country, and yet I am not allowed even to sign my own

checks.'

The history that unfolds in this book riveting. So many innocent lives lost, so many lies, scandals and cover-ups, it's hard to keep count of it all. But, at the end of the day, this book resonated with me because I learned some eye-opening truths about the Osage, which I knew virtually nothing, and came away with a much better understanding and deep respect for them. It also solidified, unfortunately, my cynicism about our government and what truly lies at the bottom depths of a person's heart. Greed, racism, and the desire for complete control, at any cost, still governs our lives today. While I did feel a long overdue feeling of triumph, and relief that this story is finally out there, that some justice was served in the end, there are still many who didn't get that kind of retribution or closure.

This is a MUST READ!! I promise it is one of those books that will give you pause, make you stop to reconsider, and will change your outlook about the past, help one recognize that we are still battling many of those same issues in the present, which could, just maybe, keep history from repeating itself.

‘History is a merciless judge. It lays bare our tragic blunders and foolish missteps and exposes our most intimate secrets, wielding the power of hindsight like an arrogant detective who seems to know the end of the mystery from the onset.’

While this story chilled me right to the bone, it also broke my heart and tapped into a well of emotions, while teaching me a lot about a time in history I so glad I discovered. It's a book we can all take something away from, and hopefully learn from it.

5 stars

Diane says

This is the best nonfiction book I've read this year. I've enjoyed David Grann's earlier work, but this latest one is just fantastic.

Killers of the Flower Moon tells a story I hadn't heard before: The "Reign of Terror" in the 1920s, when white folk were murdering dozens of Osage Indians in a despicable attempt to steal their money and rights to Oklahoma oil reserves. This case occurred during the beginnings of the FBI, and J. Edgar Hoover used it as marketing tool for the agency.

This book is rich with American history. First, there's the irony that the Osage were only in Oklahoma because the U.S. government had forced them to resettle there, after the feds decided to take Kansas away from Indian Territory and let the whites settle it instead. Then, once the indigenous people were settled in Oklahoma and oil was found, suddenly the whites wanted the land back. But the Osage had set it up so mineral rights were to stay within tribal families, which led to some whites intermarrying with the Osage, and then a rash of mysterious deaths.

I really liked how Grann structured this book into three parts. First, we see things from the perspective of an Osage woman who lost several members of her family. Then, we follow an FBI man who is tasked with

investigating the murders. Finally, Grann gives his perspective as a reporter working on the case nearly 100 years later, and we learn things that not even the FBI had discovered.

I listened to this on audio, which featured a different narrator for each of the three sections. Actor Will Patton was especially great in the FBI part. I also had a print copy of the book, which I recommend looking through because it includes dozens of historic photographs (including the one mentioned in the passage below) and also pictures of the people and places mentioned in the text.

Grann has an engaging writing style, and this is such an engrossing read that I raced through it in two days. I would highly recommend *Killers of the Flower Moon* to anyone who likes true crime stories or books about history.

Favorite Passage

In Pawhuska, I stopped at the Osage Nation Museum ... The most dramatic photograph in the museum spanned an entire side of the room. Taken at a ceremony in 1924, it was a panoramic view of members of the tribe alongside prominent local white businessman and leaders. As I scanned the picture, I noticed that a section was missing, as if someone had taken scissors to it. I asked [Kathryn] Red Corn what happened to that part of the photograph. "It's too painful to show," she said.

When I asked why, she pointed to the blank space and said, "The devil was standing right there."

She disappeared for a moment, then returned with a small, slightly blurred print of the missing panel: it showed William K. Hale, staring coldly at the camera. The Osage had removed his image, not to forget the murders, as most Americans had, but because they cannot forget.

Paula Kalin says

This book was nominated for a lot of awards, but for me it didn't live up to its praise. The cold-blooded murders of the Osage American Indians was a tragic part of American history. Full of greed and racism. The book, however, was too long and repetitive. The greed behind the murders and the disregard for Osage lives was not enough for a full book. There wasn't much written about the birth of the FBI either. I would have liked to have seen more.

I listened to the audiobook and wasn't impressed by the first narrator who talked about two Osage women, Anna and Mollie, for it seems half the book. Too much information was repeated. I preferred listening about the tracking of the killers by Tom White whom was sent to the oil-rich territory of Oklahoma by Hoover to get the crimes solved.

3.5 out of 5 stars

Trish says

That we as a nation, less than one hundred years after the Osage Indian killings, have no collective memory of these events seems an intentional erasure. The truth of the killings would traumatize our school children and make every one of us search our souls, of that there is no doubt. David Grann shows us that the systematic killings of dozens of oil-wealthy Osage Indians were not simply the rogue deeds of a psychopath or two in a small town in Oklahoma.

The tentacles of guilt and the politics of fear extended to townspeople who earned their reputation as “successful” because they allowed these murders and thefts of property to go on, as well as implicated law enforcement. Grann outlines how the case was solved and brought to court by the persistence of FBI officer Tom White and his band, but Grann is not full-throated in his praise of Hoover's FBI. He leaves us feeling ambiguous, not about White, but about Hoover.

The Osage Indians once laid claim to much of the central part of what is now called the United States, “a territory that stretched from what is now Missouri and Kansas to Oklahoma and still farther west, all the way to the Rockies.” The tribe was physically imposing, described by Thomas Jefferson as “the finest men we have ever seen,” whose warriors typically stood over six feet tall. They were given land by Jefferson as part of their settlement to stop fighting the Indian Wars in the early 1700s.

Jefferson reneged on the agreement within four years, and ended up giving the once-mighty Osage a 50-by-125 mile area in southeastern Kansas to call their own. Gradually, however, white settlers found they liked that particular Kansas farmland and moved onto it anyway, killing anyone who challenged them, oftentimes the legal “owners”. The government then forced the Osage to sell the Kansas land and buy rocky, hilly land in Oklahoma, land no white man would want, where the Osage would be “safe” from encroachment. This was the late 1800s.

In the early 1900s oil was discovered on that ‘worthless’ Oklahoma land and because a representative of the Osage tribe was in Washington to defend Osage interests, he managed to include in the legal agreement of the allotment of Indian Territory “that the oil, gas, coal, or other minerals covered by the lands...are hereby reserved to the Osage Tribe.” Living Osage family members each were given a headright, or a share in the tribe’s mineral trust. The headrights could not be sold, they could only be inherited.

The Osage became immensely wealthy. The federal government expressed some concern (!) that the Osage were unable to manage their own wealth, and so ordered that local town professionals, white men, be appointed as guardians. One Indian WWI veteran complained he was not permitted to sign his own checks without oversight, and expenditures down to toothpaste were monitored. But this is not even the most terrible of the legacies. The Osage began to be murdered, one by one.

When Grann discovered rumblings of this century-old criminal case in Oklahoma, he wanted to see the extent of what was called the Reign of Terror, thought to have begun in 1921 and lasted until 1926, when some of the cases were finally successfully prosecuted. The “reign,” he discovered, was much longer and wider than originally imagined, and therefore did not just implicate the men who were eventually jailed for the crimes. “White people in Oklahoma thought no more of killing an Indian than they did in 1724.” said John Ramsey, one of the men eventually jailed for crimes against the Osage. A reporter noted, “The attitude of a pioneer cattleman toward a full-blood Indian...is fairly well recognized.”

What we learn in the course of this account is that a great number of people had information that could have led to answers much sooner than it did, but because there was so much corruption, even the undercover agents and sheriffs were in on the open secret of the murders. Those townspeople who might be willing to divulge what they knew were unable to discover to whom they should share information lest they be

murdered as well. Grann was able to answer some questions never resolved at the time, with his access to a greater number of now-available documents.

Why this history is not better known is a mystery still. Memory of it was fading already in the late 1950s when a film, *The FBI Story* starring Jimmy Stewart, made mention of it. The 1920s are not so long ago, and some of the people who were children then have only recently passed away, or may even be still living. Among the Osage there is institutional memory, and still some resentment, naturally, and a long-lasting mistrust of white people. Need I say this is a must-read?

The audio of this book is narrated by three individuals: Ann Marie Lee, Will Patton, and Danny Campbell. Interestingly, the voices of the narrators seem to age over the course of the history, and it is a tale well-told. But the paper copy of this has photographs which add a huge amount of depth and interest to the story. This is another good candidate for a Whispersync option, but if you are going to choose one, the paper was my favorite.
