

# Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann

## Author Bio

Birth—March 10, 1967

- Where—New York, New York, USA
- Education—B.A., Connecticut College; M.A., Tufts University; M.A., Boston University
- Currently—lives in New York, New York

David Grann is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. Grann's first book, *The Lost City of Z*, was a *New York Times* bestseller and has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. Shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, England's most prestigious nonfiction award, *The Lost City of Z* was chosen as one of the best books of 2009 by countless newspapers and magazines, including *the New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Bloomberg*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *Christian Science Monitor*. The book was adapted to film in 2016.

*Killers of the Flower Moon*, about the murder of the Osage Indians during the 1920s and the birth of the modern F.B.I. under J. Edgar Hoover.

At *The New Yorker*, Grann has written about everything from the mysterious death of the world's greatest Sherlock Holmes expert to the hunt for the giant squid, from the perilous maze of water tunnels under New York to a Polish writer who may have left clues to a real murder in his postmodern novel. Grann is also author of a 2010 collection of stories, *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes: Tales of Murder, Madness, and Obsession*.

Grann's stories have also appeared in *The Best American Crime Writing* (2004, 2005, and 2009), *The Best American Sports Writing* (2003 and 2006) and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading* (2009). As a finalist for the Michael Kelly award for the "fearless pursuit and expression of truth," Grann has also written for the *New York Times Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Weekly Standard*, and *New Republic*.

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. (From the [author's website](#).)

## Discussion Questions

1. Trace the "path" by which the Osage Indians eventually landed on the swatch of land in what would become the state of Oklahoma. Talk about their treatment at the hands of the U.S. government and others over the years. What angered or shocked you most?
2. Describe the early days of the Bureau of Investigation, its founding under Theodore Roosevelt, its original purpose, structure and operation, as well as its corruption, ineptness and bungled investigation of the Osage

murders.

3. What made young J. Edgar Hoover an unlikely choice to head the Bureau of Investigation? What was his vision for the bureau—why, for instance, a nationalized police force rather than the existing patchwork structure?

4. How would you describe Tom White? Talk about how he approached the investigation into the Osage murders? When he solved the crime, were you surprised by the identity of the mastermind? Or had you figured it out along the way.

5. Grann writes that "history is a merciless judge." What does he mean by that?

6. Talk about the last 70 pages of the book, in which Grann writes about working with current tribal members to uncover an even deeper conspiracy. By the book's end, what were your feelings about the Osage nation, its history, and its people?

7. What is the significance of the book's title?

8. Does this story have relevance to current events? Are there parallels regarding the Standing Rock Lakota nation and the Keystone pipeline?

*(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)*

## Reviews

*[Killers of the Flower Moon]*...is close to impeccable. It's confident, fluid in its dynamics, light on its feet...the crime story it tells is appalling, and stocked with authentic heroes and villains. It will make you cringe at man's inhumanity to man. About America's native people, Saul Bellow wrote in a 1957 essay, "They have left their bones, their flints and pots, their place names and tribal names and little besides except a stain, seldom vivid, on the consciousness of their white successors." The best thing about Grann's book is that it stares, hard, at that stain, and makes it vivid indeed.

**Dwight Garner - New York Times**

A master of the detective form...*Killers* is something rather deep and not easily forgotten.

**Wall St. Journal**

A shocking whodunit...What more could fans of true-crime thrillers ask?

**USA Today**

A marvel of detective-like research and narrative verve.

**Financial Times**

Extraordinary

**Time**

Best book of the year, so far.

**Entertainment Weekly**

(*Starred review.*) Grann burnishes his reputation as a brilliant storyteller in this gripping true-crime narrative.... [He] demonstrates how the Osage Murders inquiry helped Hoover to make the case for a "national, more professional, scientifically skilled" police force.

***Publishers Weekly***

(*Starred review.*) 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. —*Deirdre Bray Root, MidPointe Lib. Syst., OH*

***Library Journal***

(*Starred review.*) 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. —*Annie Bostrom*

***Booklist***

(*Starred review.*) This page-turner surges forward with the pacing of a true-crime thriller, elevated by Grann's crisp and evocative prose and enhanced by dozens of period photographs. Dogged original research and superb narrative skills come together in this gripping account of pitiless evil.

***Kirkus Reviews***

## Summary

*From 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 Indian 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, they began to be killed off. One Osage woman, Mollie Burkhart, watched as her family was murdered. Her older sister was shot. Her mother was then slowly poisoned. And it was just the beginning, as more Osage began to die under mysterious circumstances.

In this last remnant of the Wild West—where oilmen like J. P. Getty made their fortunes and where desperadoes such as Al Spencer, "the Phantom Terror," roamed — virtually anyone who dared to investigate the killings were themselves murdered. As the death toll surpassed more than twenty-four Osage, the newly created F.B.I. took up the case, in what became one of the organization's first major homicide investigations.

But the bureau was then notoriously corrupt and initially bungled the case. Eventually the young director, J. Edgar Hoover, turned to a former Texas Ranger named Tom White to try unravel the mystery. White put together an undercover team, including one of the only Native American agents in the bureau. They infiltrated the region, struggling to adopt the latest modern techniques of detection. Together with the Osage they began to expose one of the most sinister conspiracies in American history.

*In Killers of the Flower Moon*, David Grann revisits a shocking series of crimes in which dozens of people were murdered in cold blood. The book is a masterpiece of narrative nonfiction, as each step in the investigation reveals a series of sinister secrets and reversals.

But more than that, it is a searing indictment of the callousness and prejudice toward Native Americans that

allowed the murderers to operate with impunity for so long. *Killers of the Flower Moon* is utterly riveting, but also emotionally devastating. (From the publisher.)