

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:

Na Urquhart:

The knowledge that you get from *The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer* will be the more deep you searching the information that hide into the words the more you get interested in reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to know but *The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer* giving you enjoyment feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by means of anyone who read the idea because the author of this book is well-known enough. That book also makes your vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having that *The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer* instantly.

Travis Davis:

The book untitled *The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer* is the publication that recommended to you to read. You can see the quality of the book content that will be shown to you. The language that creator use to explained their way of doing something is easily to understand. The writer was did a lot of exploration when write the book, so the information that they share to

you personally is absolutely accurate. You also could get the e-book of The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer from the publisher to make you far more enjoy free time.

Ronald Peyton:

Reading can called mind hangout, why? Because while you are reading a book specifically book entitled The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer the mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe unfamiliar for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging every word written in a guide then become one type conclusion and explanation this maybe you never get previous to. The The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer giving you an additional experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful data for your better life with this era. So now let us show you the relaxing pattern the following is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a casino game. Do you want to try this extraordinary shelling out spare time activity?

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