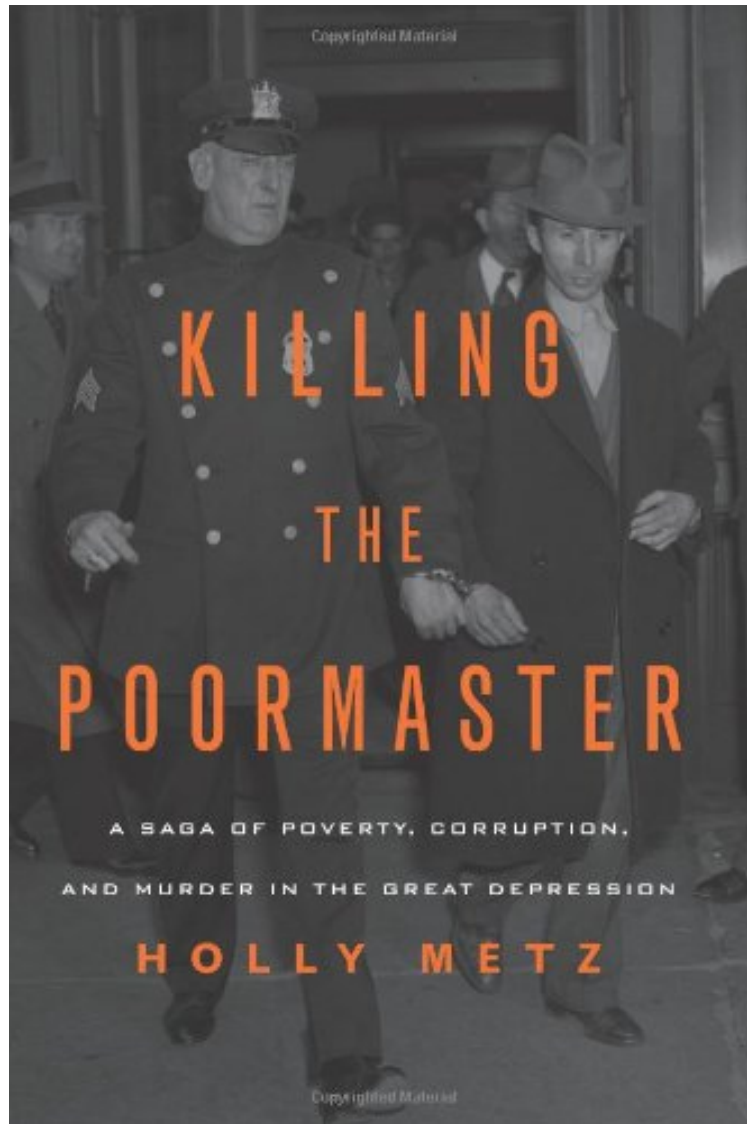


Killing the Poormaster: A Saga of Poverty, Corruption, and Murder in the Great Depression

Holly Metz

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Holly Metz : Killing the Poormaster: A Saga of Poverty, Corruption, and Murder in the Great Depression
before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Killing the Poormaster:
A Saga of Poverty, Corruption, and Murder in the Great Depression:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. the desperation of good people trying to keep their families alive
By Sandra Henry-Stocker
A riveting true story that brings the corruption of local officials during the Depression home

with surprising clarity and sensitivity. The telling of the poormaster's death, the handling of his "killer", the desperation of good people trying to keep their families alive, and the courage of those who stood up for what was right has left me feeling as if I was there during those years, looking over people's shoulders and sharing their agonies. The story is especially relevant to me because one of the book's heroes (Herman Matson) just happens to be my grandfather. I wish that I could tell him how proud I am of all that he did back then. I didn't know how hard he fought for compassion and for justice when I was growing up. I didn't know how much he and my grandmother risked during those days when my mother and five of her siblings were children. And, while this book is about a particular time in our history, its relevance in portraying the insensitivity of officials when dealing with the poor (most looking for any kind of work in a time when jobs were very scarce) has value today. It's a story about the Depression in Hoboken, NJ, but it's also a story about how people act when their greed and arrogance goes unchecked.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Magnificent recounting of a slice of American life in Hoboken during the depression
By Frank Marciano
In real life there are few real heroes or demons, just people looking to advance their own interests as best they can. The author does a great job in bringing to life events that, at the time, for the people involved, were so momentous, but would be totally forgotten, or minimized, if not for the Herculean effort that must have gone into uncovering the facts, both large and small, that are retold in this book. As an attorney practicing law in Hoboken on the same streets and in the exact same buildings as described in this book, I felt transported to the time of these events. The true life epilogue that the author presents shows her dedication to her craft as an historian. The attention to detailing not just the story of one event, but the historical context of those events is what puts this book into the highest class of literary works. The fact that she would spend all this time on events that were all but forgotten is a gift to people, like me, that do care about such events. Reading this book has been a great experience and I have deep respect and admiration for the Author's efforts in researching and writing this book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting study of the times
By Michael I found *Killing The Poormaster* created a vivid picture of life in Hoboken prior to and during the Depression. It gave me a clear feeling for the atmosphere of corruption, prejudice, and a community held fast in the grip of a despot and his family. As a sociological study into the Depression in the late 1930's it was well presented. However as a crime story and its legal aftermath it left me confused and disappointed. This centered around one very large flaw in the story telling. In the first chapter (I think, or at least early on) we are given a description of the "crime" that occurred and how the poormaster was killed. As the book unfolds we are taken through the ensuing trial in careful, thoughtful steps. Without giving the outcome away, suffice it to say that the outcome of the trial mostly relies on the jury either believing or not believing the presentation of how the poormaster met his end. The outcome of the trial is presented in all its details as well as the subsequent lives of the principal characters. However there is never any explanation regarding how the author can present the description of the "murder" (or accidental death) of the poormaster in the beginning of the book as fact. Based on her description of the incident, the reader would be led to believe that either more facts came out after the trial or she uncovered some new evidence which would absolutely prove what had occurred. And based on the description of the incident the reader would be saddened by the outcome of the trial - if you were absolutely sure the author was correct in her description. As I said, I was confused, and unless I missed something in my understanding of what happened, the author never presented a backstory as to how she could present her description as fact, as what really happened. And if you can't do that, you either need to qualify it or present it as a possible or probable scenario, not as what actually happened.

From Booklist
True-crime works often promise that the examination of one crime serves as a lens for examining a wide range of social ills, but too often they deliver only a reworking of a crime, with merely a gloss of critique. Journalist Metz's recounting of a famous Depression-era crime, however, does a great deal to deepen our understanding of those desperate times. During the Depression, the poormaster of each community was in charge of handing out public aid, in the form of money or bread tickets. Poormasters were, literally, masters of the poor in total control of which supplicants in their offices would receive aid. Metz focuses on the 1938 killing of Hoboken, New Jersey, poormaster Harry Barck in his office by one rejected supplicant. In a detail worthy of Dickens, the spike that held rejected applications on the poormaster's desk impaled him. Whether the applicant stabbed Barck with his own spike or whether Barck fell onto it during an altercation was the central issue of much media speculation and trial testimony. This well-constructed work of historical nonfiction is heart-wrenching and thoroughly absorbing. --Connie Fletcher
"A vivid and illuminating book. By focusing on particular events in the late 1930s Holly Metz manages to reveal the political dynamics of relief and the real tragedies our policy produces." Frances Fox Piven, author, *Regulating the Poor*, and Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York
"Holly Metz offers a grim and fascinating glimpse of Americans left to the mercy of petty bureaucrats and party pols once federal relief was withdrawn in the mid-1930s. Gripping history, *Killing the Poormaster* is also a warning to those who would continue to casually slash assistance programs today. A powerful and compelling book." Stephen

Pimpare, author, A People's History of Poverty in America