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*Bad Stories:*  
*Toward a Unified Theory of How It All Came Apart*

POLITICAL NONFICTION BY  
Steve Almond

If you're one of the millions of Americans lying awake at night, asking yourself, *How did we get here?* you need to read *Bad Stories*. In a short lamentation, New York Times bestselling Steve Almond explains why the election of a cruel con artist was not only possible, but inevitable.

Like a lot of Americans, Steve Almond spent the weeks after the 2016 election lying awake, in a state of dread and bewilderment. The problem wasn't just the election, but the fact that nobody could explain, in any sort of coherent way, why America had elected a cruel, corrupt, and incompetent man to the Presidency. *Bad Stories: Toward a Unified Theory of How It All Came Apart* is Almond's effort to make sense of our historical moment, to connect certain dots that go unconnected amid the deluge of hot takes and think pieces. Almond looks to literary voices—from Melville to Orwell, from Bradbury to Baldwin—to help explain the roots of our moral erosion as a people.

The book argues that Trumpism is a bad outcome arising directly from the bad stories we tell ourselves. To understand how we got here, we have to confront our cultural delusions: our obsession with entertainment, sports, and political parody, the degeneration of our free press into a for-profit industry, our enduring pathologies of race, class, immigration, and tribalism. *Bad Stories* is a lamentation aimed at providing clarity. It's the book you can pass along to an anguished fellow traveler with the promise, *This will help you understand what the hell happened to our country.*

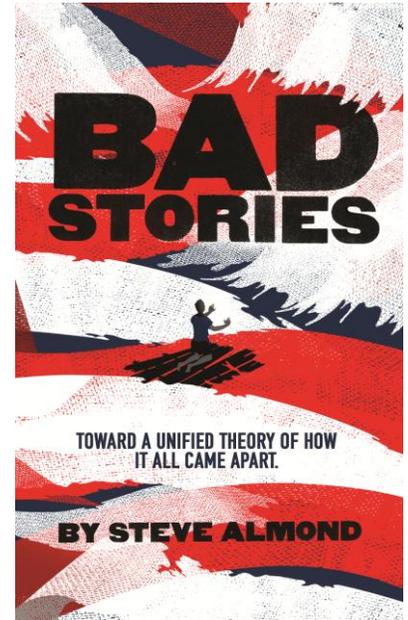
**PRAISE FOR *BAD STORIES***

"It's a rare writer who has the power to make one aware in every paragraph of the moral necessity of literature, but in *Bad Stories*, Steve Almond has done just that. With fierce intelligence, moving candor, and dazzling insight, Almond draws on everything from *The Grapes of Wrath* to the voting practices of his babysitter to dismantle the false narratives about American democracy that got us into the political pickle we're in. I was enlightened and spellbound by *Bad Stories*, outraged and consoled. This is a profound and essential book for all time, but especially for now."

—Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Steve Almond** is the author of eight books of fiction and nonfiction, including the *New York Times* bestsellers *Candyfreak* and *Against Football*. His short stories have been anthologized widely, in the *Best American Short Stories*, *The Pushcart Prize*, *Best American Erotica*, and *Best American Mysteries* series. His essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post*, and elsewhere. He teaches at the Nieman Fellowship for Journalism at Harvard, and hosts the *New York Times* podcast "Dear Sugars" with fellow writer Cheryl Strayed.



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**MORE PRAISE FOR STEVE ALMOND**

“Almond is a shifty cornerback of a writer: rangy, sarcastic, offbeat. And every once in a while, he’ll blindside you with a big hit.”

—*The New York Times*

“Powerful...Almond is a sympathetic narrator, his evidence incontrovertible, the moral authority firmly on his side.”

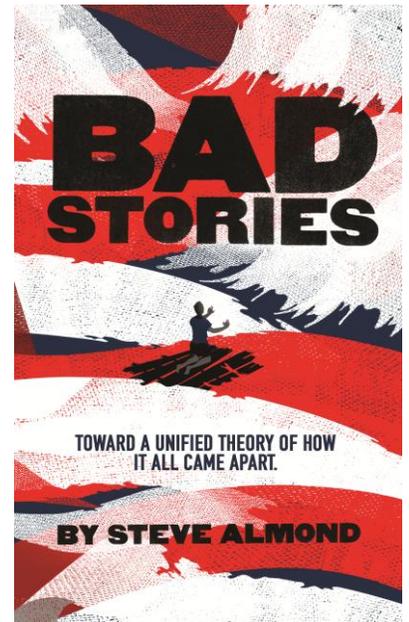
—*Harper’s Magazine*

“Almond doesn’t pretend to have all the answers, but sometimes it’s enough to raise the right questions at the right time.”

—*National Memo*

“Almond’s book is slim but potent... Almond makes his case in a style that is conversational, self-deprecating, sharp and often laugh-out-loud funny.”

—*Plain Dealer*



**FROM BAD STORIES**

The subtitle of this bewildered little book matters. I’m not offering a single theory, or even a set of theories, as to how our democracy, in the year of our sponsors 2016, fell apart. I am working toward a synthesis of theories. The ascension of Donald Trump to the presidency is certainly the impetus for this investigation. But it should not be mistaken for my subject. In fact, our democracy has been on an odd and lurching course since its inception.

I’ve sought to understand America not as an academic—a historian or a political scientist—but as a storyteller. I’ve placed my faith in stories because I believe them to be the basic unit of human consciousness. The stories we tell, and the ones we absorb, are what allow us to pluck meaning from the rush of experience. Only through the patient interrogation of these stories can we begin to understand where we are and how we got here.

What happens, then, when some of the stories we tell ourselves are bad, meaning fraudulent either by design or negligence? What happens when the stories we tell ourselves are frivolous? Or when we ignore stories that are too frightening to confront? What happens when we fall under the sway of stories intended to sow discord, to blunt our moral imaginations, to warp our fears into loathing and our mercy into vengeance? The principle argument of this book is that bad stories lead to bad outcomes.

The 2016 election is an object lesson in just how much harm bad stories can inflict upon even the sturdiest democracy. And yet I am also struggling in these pages to see Trumpism in a more hopeful light: as an opportunity to reckon with the bad stories at the heart of our great democratic experiment, and to recognize that often, embedded within these bad stories, are beautiful ideals and even correctives that might help us to contain the rage that has clouded our thoughts.

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