



Learn More About...

# Death Penalty

An Annotated Bibliography

Click [HERE](#) for more resources on the various interrelated issues affecting the death penalty.

*Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty* <<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/deathpenalty/index.shtml>>  
While the U.S. Catholic bishops have been calling for an end to the use of the death penalty for 25 years, this new campaign was launched in March of 2005. The impetus for the campaign was the anniversary of the first comprehensive U.S. Catholic bishops' statement on the topic issued in 1980. Since that time, numerous individual bishops and state Catholic conferences have issued similar calls to end the use of the death penalty. This unique website has all of this information and more.

*Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty* <<http://www.cuadp.org/about.html>>  
Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (CUADP) works to end the death penalty in the United States through education, and the promotion of tactical grassroots activism.

*National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty* <<http://www.ncadp.org/>>  
NCADP provides information, advocates for public policy, and mobilizes and supports individuals and institutions working to abolish capital punishment. NCADP organizes its work around four core areas: grassroots, legislative, media, and human rights advocacy. Their website features execution alerts and actions you can take, fact sheets on the death penalty, and a calendar of national events.

## Books

Ernest J. Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying* (New York: Random House, 1993)  
A young man who returns to 1940s Cajun country to teach visits a black youth on death row for a crime he didn't commit. Together they come to understand the heroism of resisting.

Helen Prejean, *Dead Man Walking* (New York: Random House, 1993).  
In 1982, Sister Helen Prejean became the spiritual advisor to Patrick Sonnier, the convicted killer of two teenagers. Sonnier was sentenced to die in the electric chair of Louisiana's Angola State Prison. In the months before his death, Prejean came to know a man who was as terrified as he had once been terrifying. At the same time, she came to know the families of the victims and the men whose job it was to execute him--men who often harbored doubts about the rightness of what they were doing. Out of that dreadful intimacy comes a profoundly moving spiritual journey through our system of capital punishment.

Helen Prejean, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions* (New York: Random House, 2005).  
In her second book Prejean focuses her argument on the ways in which an unjust system may be killing innocent people. The first part of the book explores the lives of several men who were put to death and the shaky cases against them. The second part of the book details "the machinery of death," the current legal process and the inequities inherent in the death penalty.

James J. Megivern, *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997)

A comprehensive history of the death penalty in the west, this book explores the development of the death penalty chronologically and through the early, medieval and modern periods while also providing geographical surveys. The author concentrates on the debate over its use by theologians and philosophers, and illustrates the inconsistencies in Western thinking on its merits.

## Articles/Papers

Amnesty International USA, "United States of America: The Execution of Mentally Ill Offenders," *Amnesty International*, 31 January 2006, <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR510022006?open&of=ENG-392>>

The execution of those with mental illness is clearly prohibited by international law and virtually every country in the world. Despite these standards, and constitutional law, the USA continues to execute people with diagnosed schizophrenia, those that suffer from severe delusions and others with clinically-labeled mental illnesses. The content of this report is not meant to excuse or minimize the consequences of violent crime perpetrated by the mentally impaired, or to suggest that the mentally ill are overly violent. However, research has found that a mentally ill defendant may be at a heightened and unfair risk of receiving a death sentence or being wrongfully convicted, compared to defendants with low or no impairment.

Jamie Fellner and Sarah Tofte, "So Long as They Die: Lethal Injections in the United States," *Human Rights Watch*, April 2006, <<http://hrw.org/reports/2006/us0406/us0406sumandrecs.pdf>>

Until the death penalty states and the federal government abolish the death penalty, international human rights law requires them to use execution methods that will produce the least possible physical and mental suffering. Lethal injection has become the most prevalent form of execution in the United States. Thirty-seven of the thirty-eight death penalty states and the federal government have adopted it; for nineteen states, it is the only legal method of execution. However, there is mounting evidence that prisoners may have experienced excruciating pain during their executions.

Andrew Gumbel, "The Innocence Project: Guilty until Proven Innocent," *Common Dreams*, 4 May 2006, <<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/0504-09.htm>>

Capital punishment in the U.S. is under the microscope and lawyers from The Innocence Project, using the latest forensic science techniques, have found justice wanting. The Project's lawyers have been instrumental in forcing courts to take new DNA-testing technology into account when reviewing convictions. Since 1992, when the Innocence Project first began, 175 prisoners have been exonerated, including 14 who spent time on death row.

Pope John Paul II, "Evangelium Vitae," *The Vatican website*, 25 March 1995, <[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html)>

Susannah Sheffer and Renny Cushing, "Creating More Victims: How Executions Hurt the Families Left Behind," *Murder Victims Families for Human Rights*, 2006,

<<http://www.willsworld.com/~mvfhr/MVFHReport%20Creating%20More%20Victims.pdf>>

This report draws upon the stories of three dozen family members of people executed in the United States and demonstrates that their experiences and traumatic symptoms resemble those of others who have suffered a violent loss.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Bishops' Conference Applauds Supreme Court Decision on The Death Penalty For Juvenile Offenders," *USCCB*, 1 March 2005,

<<http://www.nccbuscc.org/comm/archives/2005/05-047.shtml>>

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration," *USCCB*, 15 November 2000, <<http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/criminal.shtml>>

David Von Drehle, "Stephens' Death Penalty Case Lets Himself Off Too Easy," *Time Magazine*, 2 Dec. 2010,

<<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2034350,00.html?xid=rss-topstories-polar>>

Retired Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens has come out against the death penalty. Stevens makes the case that capital punishment as it is now administered in the U.S. is hopelessly flawed — and unconstitutional. However, the author argues, the flawed U.S. death penalty system that Stevens now rails against is one which he helped to create.

## **Audio/Visual/Interactive Resources**

*Dead Man Walking*. Prod. MGM, 1996

Superbly adapted and directed by Tim Robbins from the nonfiction book of the same name by Sister Helen Prejean, this spiritually enlightened drama is too intelligent to traffic in polemics or self-righteous pontifications against the death penalty. But in examining the issue of capital punishment from a humanitarian perspective, the film urges thoughtful reflection on the justifications for legally ending a human life. Although it features a fine supporting cast, the film maintains its sharp focus through flawless lead performances by Oscar-winner Susan Sarandon as the Catholic nun Prejean, and Sean Penn as the death-row killer she struggles to save.

*Do No Harm*. PBS/NOW, 2006 <<http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/228/>>

As capital punishment becomes more clinical, doctors and nurses are being given medical responsibilities as part of the execution team. NOW asks how this role can be reconciled with a physician's ethical duty to heal and the Hippocratic Oath, which states in part, "I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked..." When does medical care end and killing begin? This web-site follows up on the show with exclusive features and up-to-date information

*The Exonerated*. Court TV, 2005

This film places the audience as observer to personal interviews with ex-cons whose death row convictions were overturned. They describe the circumstances leading to arrest and conviction, and their states of life and mind before they were arrested. It is a biting commentary on the tragic state of racial and socioeconomic inequality and abuse, which then highlights severe failures of the U.S. legal system. It is maddening in its portrayal of police prejudice and ineptitude. There is no riveting plot, instead there is riveting dialog which makes you sit up and listen - then makes you think again about the death penalty.

*Redemption*. Prod. fX Network, 2004.

Redemption tells the story of Stanley "Tookie" Williams, founder of the Crips L.A. street gang. The story follows his fall into gang-banging, his prison term, and his work writing children's novels encouraging peace and non-violent conflict resolution which earned him multiple Nobel Peace Prize nominations. After exhausting all forms of appeal, Stanley Williams was executed by lethal injection at San Quentin State Prison, on December 13, 2005.

*The Green Mile*. Castlerock Entertainment, 1999

This prison drama, set in 1935 Louisiana, depicts a death-row guard (Tom Hanks) who comes to believe in the innocence of an inmate (Michael Clarke Duncan) whose miraculous healing powers affect those around him in startling ways. Adapted by director Frank Darabont, from the serialized 1996 Stephen King novel.

*Stones* <<http://www.nadp.net/stones1.htm>>

In this online exhibit of prose, watercolor and collage, artist Marylyn Felion documents her friendship with a death row inmate Robert who was executed in 1997.