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# DEATH ROW

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You've lost your case—maybe because the court-appointed lawyer didn't know the law or just didn't give a damn, and of all the convicted murderers in the state, you're one of the few to receive the death penalty. You live in a tiny cell with no lights and opaque glass in your only window. Every day from six in the morning till eleven at night radios and TVs blare at you through the air vents and from the hallway—but you can't change the programs or even turn them off.

Sometimes you sleep all day and stay up in the few quiet hours of night to read by the dim light from the hall. But sleeping during the day is dangerous. You make sure to sleep with your head far from the cell door. Who knows when one of the other inmates on his way to the showers might smash his water glass on your cell bars, hurtling deadly shards in your direction?

Even this isn't really bad; prisons are full of these constant dangers. But here on Death Row it's worse. Along with the usual degrading conditions, you're treated as if you're already dead. Even though the prospect of death has you more terrified than you ever thought possible, there's no one to help. The doctor rarely visits and

when he does, he won't prescribe anything to calm your nerves. The prison psychologist and chaplain don't bother to talk with you. So you cut your wrists to get some attention—but instead they call you a trouble-maker and take away your already brief recreation time. Your muscles begin to atrophy. Your eyes grow weak from so much time in the dark.

Your only hope is an appeal, but about the only time you see the inside of a courtroom is when they take you down to set an execution date. Well, by this time you're ready for it—but then at the last minute they call it off. That's worse than dying. By the time it's for real, you've died as many times as they've set that date.

"Every day go around, it come in your mind: 'When all this going to be over with?' That's how they really punish you. That's the hurting part. Waiting on death."—Death Row Inmate, Huntsville, Texas.

Bruce Jackson and Diane Christian are Executive Directors of Documentary Research Inc., the organization that initiated the research for *Death Row*. The author of six books on criminology, Bruce Jackson has published articles in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Republic*, *Harper's*, and the *Nation*, and is Director, Center for Studies in American Culture and Adjunct Professor of Law and Jurisprudence, State University of New York at Buffalo. Diane Christian, who conducted most of the interviews on which *Death Row* is based, teaches in the SUNY Buffalo English Department. Jackson and Christian recently produced and directed a documentary film about Death Row in Texas.

Upon reading *Death Row*:

"A society that kills human beings in order to deal with a social problem cannot be called civilized or humane, especially when it has been abundantly demonstrated that the official and ceremonious homicide of the people in *Death Row* will not solve—will not even affect—the problem of violent crime in our country."

—Henry Schwarzschild, Director,  
Capital Punishment Project, ACLU

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