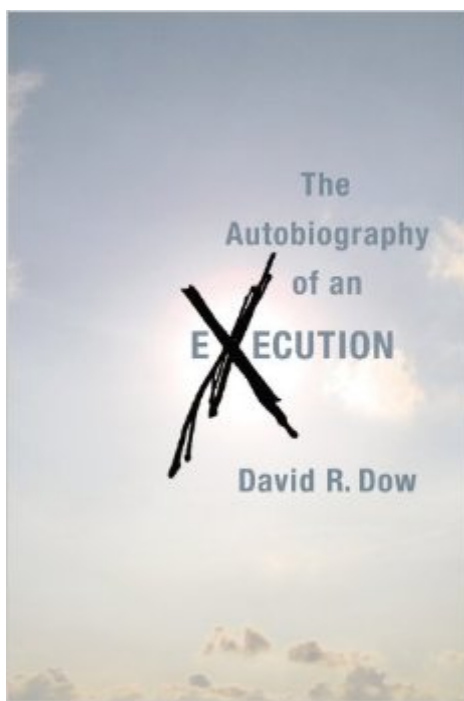


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The Autobiography Of An Execution



Synopsis

Near the beginning of *The Autobiography of an Execution*, David Dow lays his cards on the table. "People think that because I am against the death penalty and don't think people should be executed, that I forgive those people for what they did. Well, it isn't my place to forgive people, and if it were, I probably wouldn't. I'm a judgmental and not very forgiving guy. Just ask my wife." It is this spellbinding true crime narrative, Dow takes us inside of prisons, inside the complicated minds of judges, inside execution-administration chambers, into the lives of death row inmates (some shown to be innocent, others not) and even into his own home--where the toll of working on these gnarled and difficult cases is perhaps inevitably paid. He sheds insight onto unexpected phenomena-- how even religious lawyer and justices can evince deep rooted support for putting criminals to death-- and makes palpable the suspense that clings to every word and action when human lives hang in the balance.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

David Dow, professor of law at the University of Houston and active legal representative of numerous deathrow inmates in Texas, offers a candid look at the way he lives around the constant impending deaths of his clients. Without being preachy, the book reveals all of the problems with the death penalty as it is administered in Texas (one of the most bloodthirsty states). Dow has offered legal and philosophical critiques of the death penalty elsewhere; this book is more personal, and at times (as an epilogue on legal ethics provided by a colleague makes clear) Dow comes very close

to transgressing against legal ethics. I found one story in particular quite questionable, since for readers in TX this book will practically be a roman a clef. His criticism of the fifth circuit is particularly intense, and one has to wonder whether this is really wise if he continues to want to work in this area. (To be fair, the fifth circuit is widely considered a notoriously problematic appeals court, even if Dow hadn't said it.) Of 100 clients he has represented, he has won only seven times. This is a depressing professional life to be leading, and Dow makes clear the absolute drear of this aspect of his life by contrasting it with his own marriage and family. He has difficulty switching gears between the worlds of the condemned and those of the blissfully happy. At the same time, his clients do not have breaks from their confinement -- except in death -- and this fact keeps Dow going. Probably the most dominant aspect of the book is the subtle case Dow makes for the position that the innocence of many of the accused is not the major reason that the death penalty is problematic.

To those who have read this book and still stand by your position on the death penalty in America, I say your hearts are very hard indeed. David R. Dow presents an unflinchingly honest personal account of his life, both private and public. His tone is even considering the work he does; last-minute attempts at trying to save those facing the death penalty in Texas. The most sentimental moments in this book are when he writes of his love for his young son and wife. His clients? Most are guilty, most he neither likes nor cares about, and some are innocent, and he tries not to care. Dow does care about the law, which, in Texas, is shockingly disregarded. Dow lays out his day-to-day encounters with those who are executed, in spite of their being mentally retarded, in spite of their innocence, in spite of having lawyers who are literally asleep on the job, and because of the state of Texas, which seems not to care about the Constitution of the United States of America. What I have just written above is far more preachy than what Dow has written. His is a heartfelt, often wrenching book, even with its almost almost noir tone. Others have said the book is rambling, not focused enough. Dow lets us see him as a whole; he has nightmares, doesn't care for famous artists, is worried about being a bad father. Yes, these and other things may seem irrelevant, but how human they are! Dow tells us again and again that he doesn't want to care, but he does. How can he and keep his sanity in the face of such poor odds, and exposed daily to death, bad law, and bad or hardened people on all sides?

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