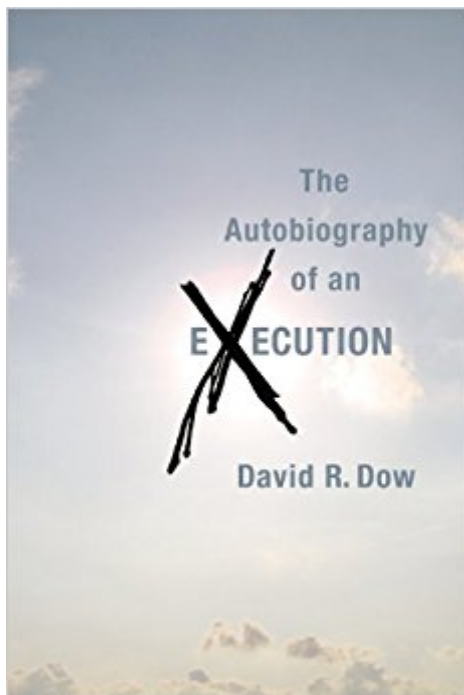


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# The Autobiography Of An Execution



## 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." In 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

In an argument against capital punishment, Dow's capable memoir partially gathers its steam from the emotional toll on all parties involved, especially the overworked legal aid lawyers and their desperate clients. The author, the litigation director of the Texas Defender Service and a professor at the University of Houston Law Center, respects the notion of attorney-client privilege in this handful of real-life legal outcomes, some of them quite tragic, while acknowledging executions are not about the attorneys, but about the victims of murder and sometimes their killers. While trying to

maintain a proper balance in his marriage to Katya, a fellow attorney and ballroom dancer, he spells out the maze of legal mumbo-jumbo to get his clients stays or released from confinement in the cases of a hapless Vietnam vet who shot a child, another man who beat his pregnant wife to death and another who killed his wife and children. In the end, Dow's book is a sobering, gripping and candid look into the death penalty. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"I have read much about capital punishment, but David Dow's book leaves all else behind."  
(Anthony Lewis)"In an argument against capital punishment, Dow's capable memoir partially gathers its steam from the emotional toll on all parties involved, especially the overworked legal aid lawyers and their desperate clients. The author, the litigation director of the Texas Defender Service and a professor at the University of Houston Law Center, respects the notion of attorney-client privilege in this handful of real-life legal outcomes, some of them quite tragic, while acknowledging executions are 'not about the attorneys,' but 'about the victims of murder and sometimes their killers.' While trying to maintain a proper balance in his marriage to Katya, a fellow attorney and ballroom dancer, he spells out the maze of legal mumbo-jumbo to get his clients stays or released from confinement in the cases of a hapless Vietnam vet who shot a child, another man who beat his pregnant wife to death and another who killed his wife and children. In the end, Dow's book is a sobering, gripping and candid look into the death penalty." (Publishers Weekly)"For a lot of good reasons, and some that are not so good, executions in the U.S. are carried out in private. The voters, the vast majority of whom support executions, are not allowed to see them. The Autobiography of an Execution is a riveting and compelling account of a Texas execution written and narrated by a lawyer in the thick of the last minute chaos. It should be read by all those who support state sponsored killing." ( John Grisham, author of The Innocent Man ) "Defending the innocent is easy. David Dow fights for the questionable. He is tormented, but relentless, and takes us inside his struggle with candor and insight, shudders and all." ( Dave Cullen, author of Columbine ) "David Dow's extraordinary memoir lifts the veil on the real world of representing defendants on death row. It will stay with me a long time." ( Jeffrey Toobin, author of The Nine )

Dark and twisty, but a long book. Struggling to get through it but enjoy this perspective on a touchy subject.

I had high hopes that this book would provide a unique view of the death penalty process in the

United States and was not disappointed. The author, as a lawyer specializing in death row appeals, has a special view into the process of death penalty cases, as well as the inmates that are convicted of capital crimes. The author uses his expertise to detail the toll taken on all sides (families, lawyers, inmates) of the process, while admitting that the majority of his clients are guilty. The ones that seem to haunt him are those that are most likely innocent, yet are beyond help due to the way the system is set up. It is certainly a revealing look into the process. The main detraction from the book is the writing style, which rambles, jumps and is rather unfocused. The book could have been great had it been written in a more readable style. Reading this book as written is a challenge, and that detracts from the message the author is attempting to convey.

I have read David Dow's books "Things I've Learned From Dying", and "The Autobiography of An Execution". I am looking forward to reading "Machinery of Death", by David Dow and Mark Dow. These books expose serious flaws in the legal system. David Dow powerfully describes his observations through compelling true case stories. These books are difficult to put down, as they draw the reader in to the struggles of the stories. I would certainly recommend these well written books

I work in this field and really enjoyed Dow's way of putting it all out there. At first I questioned the ethics of revealing stories about his clients but feel that may be outweighed by the good it does for all of us to hear these stories.

A great read for anyone interested in the death penalty, whether for or against. His views on the death penalty are amazing.

The Autobiography of an Execution is a fascinating account of some of the details of the legal struggle, as well as the emotional burden of the corrupt process that leads to execution. It is a very personal and very human record of one man's struggle. Hard to put down. Hard to ignore. Hard to be comfortable with as you read it, and days after you finish it. If you are concerned about issues of due process, if you are troubled by this twisted aspect of our justice system, this book will make you sad. If you are satisfied with capital punishment as a moral and just component of the justice system in this great nation, don't bother reading this book. Take comfort in your righteousness, and sleep well.

Great, thoughtful book. Documents author's personal, moral struggles against the judicial system in our country. Everyone should read this book.

In *Autobiography of an Execution*, author David Dow uses several devices to present a compelling argument for the elimination of the death penalty. This is not, however, a dry casuistry, but a personal account that makes a powerful argument at the gut level. This book is memorable and has impact because it is so personal. Dow claims that he was a supporter of the death penalty, but that his experience has changed his viewpoint. Dow readily acknowledges that many of his clients have done heinous things. He also admits that he does not like many of his clients. In relating the stories of cases he has worked on, however, he shows that the administration of justice is riddled with injustice, and that the community of people claiming to uphold the law is lawless in its disregard for its administration of that very law. Before I purchased this book I read a number of reviews that point to Dow's account as being "Unfocused". I think the juxtaposition of a normal family life and the life of his clients is disturbing. Dow's simple pleasures, such as a drink, or a cigar, or the embrace of his son are seen against the unrelenting forces working against his clients. Dow's life as a family man stands in contrast with Quaker, also a family man, sentenced to die for murder. The juxtaposition of the two made this book real and vivid: both men profess love for their wife and family, but circumstances make the inmate, Quaker, powerless to change his fate, though his love for his family appears to be no less than Dow's. Dow does an excellent job of portraying the chaos associated with an execution through a seemingly disjointed chronology: neither he, nor the condemned, nor, seemingly, the system itself has any real idea of when boards of pardon, courts of appeal, the Supreme Court, or any other party will rule. Not only is the timing of the ruling questionable, but the steps leading to it and the logic of the ruling are equally dubious. By showing the inconsistencies in the appellate process Dow shows the randomness of the death process. In effect Dow is saying that there is a disconnect between the way we talk about the sanctity of life and the gravity of taking of life and the procedures which lead to the taking of that life. Based on Dow's descriptions, can we truly say the scales of justice are balanced? I was somewhat put off by what I considered Dow's egocentrism, particularly in passages describing Judge Truesdale's attempted (?) seduction. A story of a woman who aided him in getting home seemed completely gratuitous. On reflection, I can understand that I would need something to shore up my ego if I practiced Dow's trade. Although these, and a bargain to trade infidelities, seemed less than credible, they are not sufficient to mar the otherwise convincing narrative. This excellent book is a fast read that will challenge the reader to reflect on the justice of and administration of the "ultimate penalty".

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