U.S. CAMPAIGN TO END THE DEATH PENALTY

DEATH PENALTY

Documentaries & Movies

A curated viewing guide for public education, community conversations, and abolition organizing

ABOUT THIS GUIDE These films illuminate the failures and human consequences of capital punishment through stories of innocence, race, arbitrariness, victims' families, execution personnel, punishment, mercy, and resistance. Use the viewing links to support screenings, discussions, trainings, and public education.

Visit enddeathpenalty.org

DOCUMENTARIES

Real cases, directly impacted voices, and the systems surrounding capital punishment

1. Racist Roots: Origins of North Carolina's Death Penalty (2022)

Traces North Carolina's death penalty from slavery and lynching through Jim Crow, mass incarceration, and the modern death penalty, examining the continuing influence of race on capital punishment.

Watch: Racist Roots — Full Film

2. Fighting to Live, While Waiting to Die (2024)

Tells the story of Billie Allen, who was sentenced to federal death row at age 19 and has maintained his innocence, examining his case and his continuing fight for freedom after decades of incarceration.

Watch: Full Documentary

3. The Last Defense: Julius Jones (2018)

This documentary series examines flaws in the American criminal legal system through death-row cases. Its final three episodes focus on Julius Jones, a Black Oklahoma man sentenced to death for the murder of Paul Howell, examining his arrest, trial, disputed evidence, claims of innocence, and efforts to obtain a new trial.

Watch: Justice for Julius — Documentary

4. The Window on Death Row (2025)

Tells the story of Joaquín José Martínez, the first Spaniard exonerated from a U.S. death row. Martínez reflects on wrongful conviction, trauma, faith, forgiveness, capital punishment, and his transformation from a death-penalty supporter into an advocate.

Watch: Full Film • **Official Film Site**

5. The Phantom (2021)

Investigates the execution of Carlos DeLuna in Texas and evidence suggesting another man may have committed the murder for which DeLuna was executed.

Access: Viewing Options

6. The State of Texas vs. Melissa (2020)

Follows the case of Melissa Lucio, a Texas mother sentenced to death for the death of her two-year-old daughter, examining questions surrounding her interrogation, conviction, and claims of innocence.

Watch: Prime Video

7. The Penalty (2017)

Examines the American death penalty through the experiences of a former death-row prisoner, a capital defense attorney, and a murder victim's family member.

Watch: Tubi

8. In the Executioner's Shadow (2018)

Explores capital punishment through the perspectives of a former executioner, a survivor of the Boston Marathon bombing, and parents whose daughter was murdered but who opposed executing her killer.

Access: Film Page

9. Into the Abyss (2011)

Werner Herzog examines a Texas murder case through interviews with a death-row prisoner, his accomplice, victims' relatives, and others affected by the crime and punishment.

Access: Viewing Options

10. At the Death House Door (2008)

Follows Texas prison chaplain Carroll Pickett, who witnessed 95 executions, and explores how those experiences transformed his views about capital punishment.

Access: Viewing Options

11. The Execution Protocol (1993)

Examines the procedures and people involved in carrying out executions, including access to Missouri's execution system and condemned prisoners.

Access: Amnesty International Reference (page 7)

12. Fourteen Days in May (1987)

Follows the final two weeks in the life of Edward Earl Johnson, a young Black man on Mississippi's death row who maintained his innocence until his execution.

Access: Film Information

13. The Thin Blue Line (1988)

Investigates the case of Randall Dale Adams, who was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of a Dallas police officer.

Access: Viewing Options

14. Deadline (2004)

Documents Illinois Governor George Ryan's examination of the state's death-penalty system and his decision to commute the sentences of death-row prisoners.

Access: Viewing Search

15. Paradise Lost Trilogy (1996–2011)

Chronicles the West Memphis Three case, including Damien Echols's death sentence, questions about the evidence and convictions, and the defendants' eventual release.

Access: Viewing Options

16. After Innocence (2005)

Examines people attempting to rebuild their lives after DNA evidence exonerated them of crimes for which they had been wrongfully convicted, including individuals who faced the death penalty.

Access: Viewing Options

17. The Fear of 13 (2015)

Nick Yarris recounts spending more than two decades on Pennsylvania's death row before DNA evidence led to his exoneration and release.

Watch: Documentary

18. West of Memphis (2012)

Examines the West Memphis Three case, disputed evidence underlying the convictions, and the campaign to secure the defendants' release.

Access: Viewing Options

19. Lovely Jackson (2022/2024)

Tells the story of Rickey Jackson, who was wrongfully convicted of a 1975 Cleveland murder at age 18 and sentenced to death based on coerced eyewitness testimony from a 12-year-old boy. Jackson spent three years on death row and 39 years incarcerated before his exoneration and release in 2014. The documentary explores wrongful conviction, survival, forgiveness, and the journey from death row to freedom.

Watch: Apple TV • **Watch: Amazon Prime Video**

20. Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2 (2017)

Follows Lindy Lou Isonhood, a Mississippi juror who voted to sentence a man convicted of a double homicide to death. Twenty years later, struggling with guilt and regret, she seeks out her fellow jurors to learn how the experience affected them. The documentary examines the lasting emotional consequences of capital punishment on jurors.

Access: Viewing Information • **PBS POV Film Page**

21. Last Day of Freedom (2015)

When Bill Babbitt realizes his brother Manny has committed a crime, he agonizes over whether to call the police. This animated documentary tells the story of Bill's decision to stand by his brother in the face of war, crime, and capital punishment, exploring veterans' care, mental health access, race, family, and the criminal legal system.

Watch/Access: Official Film Site

22. Prisoner by Choice: The Frankie San Story (2024)

A documentary following Frankie San and his experiences and work connected to incarceration.

Watch: Full Documentary

23. The Empty Chair: Death Penalty Yes or No (2003)

Examines the aftermath of murder through four victims' families who hold differing views about capital punishment. The documentary follows their struggles with grief, anger, revenge, forgiveness, and healing and asks whether execution can address the pain experienced by victims' families.

Watch: Justice Productions • **Discussion Guide**

24. There Will Be No Stay (2015/2016)

Examines the death penalty from the rarely heard perspective of people charged with carrying out executions. The documentary follows former executioners and others connected to the execution process as they describe the psychological and emotional consequences of participating in state-sanctioned killing.

Watch: Tubi • **Full Film: OADP**

25. Faith Leaders of Color Coalition (FLOCC) Video

Highlights the work of Black clergy organizing to abolish the death penalty.

Watch: FLOCC Video

26. Sentenced to Death: The Murder that Unsettled Arkansas (2023)

Forty years ago, Barry Lee Fairchild was arrested for the murder of Marjorie 'Greta' Mason. This documentary looks at the investigation and the questions that remain.

Watch: YouTube

27. I Am Ready, Warden (2024)

Follows the final days of Texas death-row prisoner John Henry Ramirez as he seeks redemption and forgiveness before his execution, examining the human impact of capital punishment.

Watch: Paramount+

28. The Yogurt Shop Murders (2025)

A four-part documentary series revisiting the 1991 murders of four teenagers in Austin, Texas, including the wrongful convictions of two men, one of whom was sentenced to death.

Watch: HBO/Max

29. God Save Texas: Hometown Prison (2024)

Filmmaker Richard Linklater examines daily life in Huntsville, Texas, home to the state's execution chamber, through conversations with prison employees, students, and community members.

Watch: HBO/Max

30. The Innocence Files (2020)

A documentary series examining wrongful convictions caused by flawed forensic evidence, mistaken identification, and prosecutorial misconduct. Episode 8 focuses on Texas death-row exoneree Alfred Dewayne Brown.

Watch: Netflix

31. A Broken Promise in Texas: Race, the Death Penalty and the Duane Buck Case (2013)

Examines racial discrimination in the Texas death-penalty system through the case of Duane Buck, whose sentencing included testimony linking race to future dangerousness.

Watch: YouTube

32. #DeathPenaltyFail: A Conservative Concern (2016)

Follows Pat Monks as he speaks with conservatives who have firsthand experience with the death penalty and Texas death-row exoneree Alfred Dewayne Brown.

Watch: YouTube

33. Debunked Science Put This Man on Death Row. He's Going to Be Executed Anyway (2024)

A New York Times Opinion video examining the case of Texas death-row prisoner Charles Flores and the use of testimony from a witness who had been hypnotized.

Watch: YouTube

34. A Plea for Justice: Why Texas Will be Executing an Innocent Man

A multi-part documentary series examining the evidence in the case of Rodney Reed and the campaign surrounding his scheduled 2019 execution.

Watch: Vimeo

35. Why This Son Fought to Stop His Father's Killer From Being Executed

Profiles Mitesh Patel's opposition to the execution of Christopher Young and explores mercy, remorse, family, and the effects of execution on children.

Watch: YouTube

36. 48 Hours: Grave Injustice (2012)

Tells the story of Anthony Graves, who spent years on Texas death row for a crime he did not commit before his conviction was overturned and he was exonerated.

Watch: CBS News

37. On Death Row (2012–2013)

Werner Herzog interviews people sentenced to death in a documentary miniseries examining their cases, crimes, and lives under sentence of death.

Access: Viewing Options

38. Executing the Insane (2007)

Chronicles the case of Scott Panetti, who was sentenced to death in Texas despite a long documented history of severe mental illness, and examines the impact on his family.

Access: Viewing Search

39. Incendiary: The Willingham Case (2011)

Examines the arson evidence used to convict and execute Cameron Todd Willingham in Texas and the later scientific controversy surrounding the case.

Watch: Official Film Site

40. Juan Melendez 6446 (2008)

Tells the story of Juan Roberto Melendez-Colon, who spent 6,446 days on Florida's death row before being exonerated.

Access: Viewing Search

41. One for Ten (2013)

An online documentary series profiling ten people freed from death row and using their cases to examine major causes of wrongful convictions.

Watch: YouTube

42. True Conviction (2018)

Follows Texas exonerees Christopher Scott, Johnnie Lindsey, and Steven Phillips as they investigate claims of innocence and help wrongfully convicted prisoners seek freedom.

Access: Viewing Options

43. True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality (2019)

Profiles attorney Bryan Stevenson's work challenging racial discrimination, poverty, wrongful convictions, and capital punishment.

Watch: Equal Justice Initiative

44. #SaveChrisYoung Series (2018)

A short-film interview series by filmmaker Laurence Thrush featuring Christopher Young, his family, and others involved in his case, including reflections on fatherhood, art, family, and life on death row.

Watch: Christopher Young Interview

45. Death Row Stories (2014–2020)

An HLN documentary series examining capital cases through the accounts of current and former death-row prisoners, lawyers, investigators, and others, with episodes exploring wrongful convictions and the fallibility of capital punishment.

Access: Series Information

46. He Didn't Kill His Child, But He's About to Be Executed Anyway (2024)

A New York Times Opinion video featuring a meeting on death row between Robert Roberson and Rev. Brian Wharton, the former detective who investigated the case.

Watch: YouTube

47. Watching the Dallas Cowboys on Death Row: Our Visit to a Supermax Prison (2024)

A video report in which Dave Fleming visits Charles Don Flores on Texas death row and explores his life in solitary confinement, his innocence claim, and the role sports play in life on death row.

Watch: YouTube

48. It Could Happen to You (2021)

Two documentaries featuring Sabrina Butler-Smith and Randal Padgett, death row exonerees who survived a nightmare faced by far too many: being sentenced to death for a crime you did not commit.

Watch: Witness to Innocence

49. Interview with an Executioner (2011)

Follows Don Cabana from his days as a warden at Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi to his anti-death penalty work thirty years later.

Watch: YouTube

50. Too Ill to Execute (2019)

A film detailing the urgency of a movement to exclude those with severe mental illness from the death penalty across the U.S.

Watch: YouTube

51. La Libertad de Fierro (2018)

A documentary about César Fierro's transition back into society after his release from death row in Texas. He must rebuild his life after being wrongfully sentenced to death.

Watch: Amazon

NARRATIVE / FEATURE FILMS

Dramatized stories that open conversations about punishment, innocence, race, mercy, and state power

1. Just Mercy (2019)

Based on attorney Bryan Stevenson's representation of Walter McMillian, a Black Alabama man wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to death.

Access: Viewing Options

2. Clemency (2019)

Follows a prison warden whose years of overseeing executions take an increasing psychological and emotional toll as another prisoner approaches execution.

Access: Viewing Options

3. Dead Man Walking (1995)

Based on Sister Helen Prejean's experiences counseling people sentenced to death and working with victims' families, exploring guilt, punishment, forgiveness, accountability, and execution.

Access: Viewing Options

4. The Green Mile (1999)

Tells the fictional story of a Black man sentenced to death in the Jim Crow South whose case raises questions about race, innocence, disability, humanity, and execution.

Access: Viewing Options

5. Monster's Ball (2001)

Centers on a corrections officer involved in executions whose life becomes intertwined with the widow of a Black man he helped execute.

Access: Viewing Options

6. The Life of David Gale (2003)

A fictional thriller about a prominent death-penalty opponent who is convicted of murder and sentenced to death, raising questions about capital punishment and wrongful execution.

Access: Viewing Options

7. True Crime (1999)

Follows a journalist racing to investigate evidence suggesting that a Black man scheduled for execution may be innocent.

Access: Viewing Options

8. The Chamber (1996)

Based on John Grisham's novel, the film follows young attorney Adam Hall as he represents his grandfather, Sam Cayhall, a former Ku Klux Klan member awaiting execution in Mississippi for a bombing that killed two young Jewish boys. The film explores the death penalty alongside racism, white supremacist violence, accountability, redemption, and mercy.

Watch: Universal Pictures • **Access: Viewing Options**

9. A Lesson Before Dying (1999)

Based on Ernest J. Gaines's novel about a young Black man wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to death in 1940s Louisiana.

Access: Viewing Options

10. The Hurricane (1999)

Dramatizes the story of boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter and his fight to overturn a murder conviction he maintained was wrongful and racially influenced.

Access: Viewing Options

11. Marshall (2017)

Dramatizes an early case involving Thurgood Marshall's defense of a Black man accused of raping and attempting to murder a white woman in 1940s Connecticut.

Access: Viewing Options

12. In Cold Blood (1967)

Dramatizes the murders of the Clutter family, the prosecution of Perry Smith and Richard Hickock, and their eventual executions by hanging.

Access: Viewing Options

13. I Want to Live! (1958)

Dramatizes the case of Barbara Graham, who was convicted of murder and executed in California's gas chamber in 1955.

Access: Viewing Options

14. Let Him Have It (1991)

Dramatizes the controversial case of Derek Bentley, who was executed in Britain for a murder committed by another person and was later posthumously pardoned.

Access: Viewing Options

15. Pierrepoint: The Last Hangman (2005)

Dramatizes the career of British executioner Albert Pierrepoint and explores the personal, psychological, and moral consequences of carrying out state executions.

Access: Viewing Options

16. 83 Days (2018)

Based on the true story of George Stinney Jr., a 14-year-old Black boy in segregated South Carolina who was accused of murdering two white girls in 1944. Stinney was arrested, tried, convicted, and executed in the electric chair in just 83 days. The film examines racial injustice, failures of due process, and the deadly consequences of racism within the criminal legal system.

Watch: Short Film

17. Sing Sing (2024)

Follows Divine G, incarcerated at Sing Sing, who finds purpose and hope through a prison theater program. Blending professional actors with real-life Rehabilitation Through the Arts alumni, the film explores incarceration, friendship, resilience, humanity, and the transformative power of art.

Watch: Video

18. The Last 40 Miles (2014)

An animated short film following a condemned prisoner's final journey from Livingston to Huntsville, Texas, and his interactions with a compassionate prison guard.

Watch: Vimeo

19. Trial by Fire (2018)

Dramatizes the true story of Cameron Todd Willingham, who was convicted of setting the fire that killed his three daughters and was executed by Texas in 2004 amid later disputes over the forensic evidence.

Access: Viewing Options

20. Wag the Dog (1997)

A political satire in which a political strategist and Hollywood producer manufacture a fictional war to divert public attention from a presidential scandal shortly before an election. The film explores political manipulation, propaganda, media influence, manufactured narratives, and the ability of institutions to shape public opinion.

Watch: Apple TV • **Access: Viewing Options**

21. Return to Paradise (1998)

A drama-thriller about three friends grappling with a difficult decision: split a prison sentence or let one of them receive the death penalty.

Access: Viewing Options

22. The Exonerated (2005)

A film recounting the stories of six people, some of whom were wrongfully convicted of murder and other offenses, placed on death row, and later exonerated and freed after serving varying years in prison.

Purchase: Amazon

23. Redemption: The Stan Tookie Williams Story (2004)

A crime drama dealing with the life of Stanley Tookie Williams, the co-founder of the Crips. The film shows his life in the streets and in San Quentin State Prison and the work he did to help reduce gang violence. The film was shot while he was still imprisoned. He was executed in 2005.

Purchase: Amazon

TED TALKS

Ted Talks about capital punishment by attorneys, advocates, jurors, and survivors of death row from around the world.

1. Bryan Stevenson: We need to talk about an injustice (2012)

Human rights lawyer Bryan Stevenson shares hard truths about America's justice system, starting with a massive imbalance along racial lines: a third of the country's Black male population has been incarcerated at some point in their lives.

Watch: YouTube

2. David R. Dow: Lessons from death row inmates (2012)

In looking for ways to reduce death penalty cases, David R. Dow realized that a surprising number of death row inmates had similar biographies. In this talk he proposes a bold plan, one that prevents murders in the first place.

Watch: YouTube

3. Lindy Lou Isonhood: A juror's reflections on the death penalty (2019)

Lindy Lou Isonhood grew up in a town where the death penalty was a fact of life. But after she served as a juror in a capital murder trial, something inside her changed. She reflects on the question she's been asking herself in the 25 years since the trial: Am I a murderer?

Watch: YouTube

4. Herb Donaldson: How to survive an execution (2015)

Playwright Herb Donaldson documents what happens to the execution's hidden victims–the family members left behind after their loved one is put to death.

Watch: YouTube

5. Sunny Jacobs: The Joys of Forgiveness on Death Row (2016)

As an innocent person condemned to death, exoneree Sunny Jacobs realized she had some serious choices to make. Her decisions led her to understand more about life and freedom than anything she had ever experienced. She shares her thoughts on how to achieve ultimate liberation. Sunny's conviction was overturned nearly 17 years after her arrest.

Watch: YouTube

6. Kirsten Han: Stories behind the death penalty in Singapore (2017)

Singaporean journalist Kirsten Han explores the power of resilience in the face of imminent death and shares poignant stories on the families of death row inmates.

Watch: YouTube

7. Sohail Emmanuel: Life in Imprisonment; A Talk on Capital Punishment (2019)

Activist Sohail Emmanuel discusses how he was wrongfully imprisoned in Pakistan for a crime he didn't commit and spent many years in a prison and faced further discrimination due to his faith.

Watch: YouTube

8. Leon Huang: Confessions of a death row lawyer (2018)

Death penalty defense attorney Leon Huang discusses a high profile case and his personal struggles with identifying root causes and possible prevents to capital offenses.

Watch: YouTube

9. Peter Ouko: From death row to law graduate (2018)

Peter Ouko spent 18 years in Kamiti Prison in Kenya. He tells the story of how he was freed and his current mission with the African Prisons Project: to set up the first law school behind bars and empower people in prison to drive positive change.

Watch: YouTube

10. William Okumu: Diamonds from the Gallows: How poetry saved me while on death row (2015)

William Onyango Okumu gave this talk while serving a death sentence at Kamiti Prison in Nairobi. He shares how poetry saved him while he was on death row. (He was released in 2019.)

Watch: YouTube

11. Susan Kigula: How I Made It Through Death Row (2019)

Susan Kigula shares about her journey from death row to activism. While serving a death sentence for a crime she did not commit, Susan started a legal clinic in prison and eventually led 417 other women in prison to help abolish mandatory death sentences in Uganda. Susan was released in 2016.

Watch: YouTube

FILM CAN START THE CONVERSATION. ORGANIZING CAN TURN IT INTO ACTION.

Learn more and take action at enddeathpenalty.org