



At the Death House Door
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Capital punishment in Texas commands national attention because of the unusually high number of executions performed there each year. A total of 414 people have been executed in Texas since 1982 (twenty-six in 2007 alone), and there are currently 359 people on death row in the state. Compared to other jurisdictions, these numbers are quite high; the four states with the next highest total numbers of executions (Virginia, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Florida) each have less than a quarter of those in Texas. These startling numbers have led human rights groups to levy sharp attacks on Texas's criminal justice system for human rights violations, accusing the state of having an under-qualified and under-paid indigent defense bar and an overzealous and politicized court system.

AT THE DEATH HOUSE DOOR examines capital punishment in Texas through the eyes of Pastor Carroll Pickett, who served 15 years as the death house chaplain to the notorious "Walls" prison unit in Huntsville, TX. Pickett presided over ninety-five executions during his career, including the world's first lethal injection. After each execution, Pickett recorded an audiotape account of his trip to the death chamber.

The film also tells the story of Carlos De Luna, a convict Pickett counseled and whose execution troubled Pickett more than any other because he firmly believed De Luna was innocent. De Luna was convicted of murder in 1983 and maintained his innocence for the six years he was on death row. He also named acquaintance, Carlos Hernandez, as the true perpetrator of the murder for which De Luna was convicted, but neither the prosecution nor the defense investigated this claim. Sixteen years after De Luna's death, the *Chicago Tribune* turned up evidence that strongly suggests De Luna's innocence and published a three-part series of articles that raises profound questions about the fallibility of a system that professes to mete out truth and justice while presuming to take the lives of those it deems guilty.

For more information:

American Civil Liberties Union Moratorium Campaign: <http://www.aclu.org/capital/moratorium/index.html>

Amnesty International: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/010/1998>

Chicago Tribune story: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/newspaper/printedition/friday/friday/chi-tx-1-story,0,4226884.htmlstory>

The Official Independent Film Channel (IFC) Site: <http://www.ifc.com/atthedeathhousedoor>

National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty: <http://www.ncadp.org/>

Maryland Citizens Against State Executions: <http://www.mdcase.org/>

Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project (based in Washington, DC at American University Washington College of Law):
<http://www.exonerate.org/>

Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty: <http://www.vadp.org/>

Texas Dept. of Criminal Justice Death Row Info: <http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/stat/deathrow.htm>

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