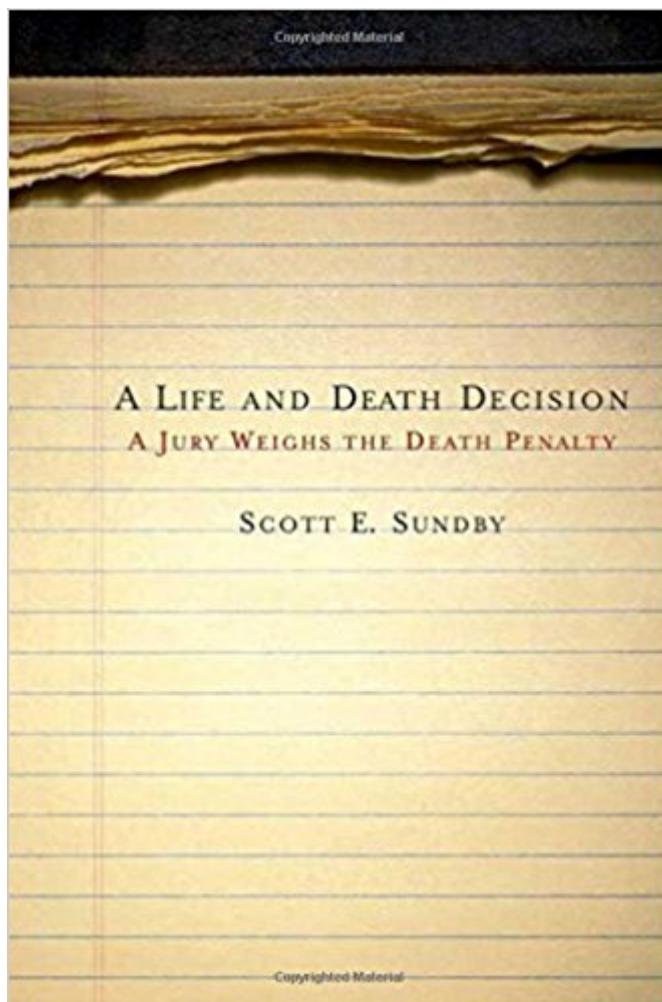


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# A Life And Death Decision: A Jury Weighs The Death Penalty



## Synopsis

With a life in the balance, a jury convicts a man of murder and now has to decide whether he should be put to death. Twelve people now face a momentous choice. Bringing drama to life, *A Life and Death Decision* gives unique insight into how a jury deliberates. We feel the passions, anger, and despair as the jurors grapple with legal, moral, and personal dilemmas. The jurors' voices are compelling. From the idealist to the "holdout," the individual stories of how and why they voted for life or death drive the narrative. The reader is right there siding with one or another juror in this riveting read. From movies to novels to television, juries fascinate. Focusing on a single case, Sundby sheds light on broader issues, including the roles of race, class, and gender in the justice system. With death penalty cases consistently in the news, this is an important window on how real jurors deliberate about a pressing national issue.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan; First Edition edition (April 16, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1403961182

ISBN-13: 978-1403961181

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 0.9 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #513,608 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > Law > Rules & Procedures > Jury #462 in Books > Law > Legal Theory & Systems > Jurisprudence #532 in Books > Law > Criminal Law > Criminal Procedure

## Customer Reviews

Although law professor Sundby casts this book as an impartial look at capital jury deliberations, it would be difficult to walk away from it without a few lingering doubts about the efficacy of the current system of death penalty sentencing. Drawing on information from the Capital Jury Project, a nationwide study that interviewed more than 1,000 capital jurors, as well as on data from studies of group decision-making, this work offers a gripping and important look behind the jury room doors. Those who oppose the death penalty will no doubt come across much here to bolster their views. And those who support it will find themselves with plenty of food for thought as Sundby surveys crucial issues such as jury instructions, jury room setup and voir dire procedures. Regardless of

where one stands in the debate, however, Sundby uses the personal stories of the jurors so compellingly that he brings the drama of the jury room to vivid life.

"In this most recent publication from the prolific capital jury project, Sundby (law, Washington and Lee Univ.) reports the details of a single murder case as it unfolds, from the shifting perspectives of the jurors who have to decide whether to impose the death penalty. The defendant's guilt is certain; however, the narratives show that the various jurors view him through the frames of their own values and that they differ markedly from one another in the ways in which they reconstruct the crime. Confirming the findings of most other recent jury studies, Sundby finds that these conscripts approach their task conscientiously, determined to do justice. But he also finds that even when the legal requirements are clear, it proves surprisingly difficult for most jurors to actually vote to impose death on a human being. This is a model for what can be done with in-depth interviews by a scholar who is steeped in the subject and approaches it with compassion. Because of its insider perspective, thoroughness, and clarity, this book will be valuable in courses in which the death penalty is considered as a policy problem. Summing Up: Highly recommended."--ChoiceÃ „ "Scott Sundby provides a remarkable new perspective on the death penalty--from the jury room. To some, it will confirm their faith in the magic of twelve citizens to find the truth. To others, it exposes the fragility of an imperfect system with which we impose the ultimate penalty."--Bill Kurtis anchors A&E's American Justice and is the author of *The Death Penalty on Trial: Crisis in American Justice*"Reading like a legal thriller, Sundby's book is a fascinating study proving the imposition of the death penalty depends more on who is on the jury than who is on trial. Like Sherlock Holmes, Sundby peers deep into the jury box and the mind of each juror to follow the Byzantine process used to send another human being to a grisly death."-- Roy Black, the famed criminal defense attorney who has handled more than 200 capital cases in the last four decades. Ã „ "This is the best account I have ever read of how a jury decides whether to impose a death sentence. We see the case from the jurors' multiple and sometimes inconsistent points of view. Deftly combining a narrative of one trial with conclusions drawn from broader research, Sundby provides unique insight into the realities behind debates about the death penalty."--Stuart Banner, author of *The Death Penalty: An American History*"While this book will resonate with criminal justice professionals and academics, it is also provides a fine introduction to thinking seriously about the death penalty from the inside out" --Diana R. Gordon, *New York Law Journal*, May 2005

This is a decent criminal justice book and it is an easy read. More than likely you are getting this

book because it is required for a class. It gives a in depth look at what jurors on capital cases go through. I would recommend this if you have to read it for a class but maybe not so much for leisure reading.

Mark Bishop Turner

Required for class! But it is a good book, that is very well written!

Great insight. Had to read for a college coarse on the Death Penalty. Very eye opening and not boring to read.

I read this book in my work as an attorney, but recommend it to anyone looking for insight into the legal system and how juries decide cases. Extremely thought provoking.

Sundby's book takes the reader beyond abstractions about how capital punishment decisions are made, and provides a rare and consistently fascinating account of how two actual juries reach their decisions. The book is filled with insights about the legal and emotional dynamics of the jury room and the courtroom in death penalty cases. It pulls off a couple of very difficult feats. It treats all the jurors interviewed with respect and understanding, and should be equally informative for those with strong feelings for or against the death penalty and for those who are undecided. In addition, it manages to convey quite a bit of valuable information about the death penalty and the criminal justice system in a way that should be accessible and interesting for those with or without a background in the law. In short, a must-read for anyone who wants a better understanding of the American system of capital punishment, or of jury decision-making in general.

I can't say I enjoyed this book, because it's not a subject that is enjoyable, but it is insightful to look into the minds of twelve individuals and see how their opinions and personalities are shaped, what their prejudices are, how they reason.

Scott Sundby gives the reader a window, almost a fly-on-the-wall peek, into the capital jury room, a place most people do not experience first-hand. Whether or not you have a strong opinion about the use of the death penalty in the U.S. criminal justice system, this book will challenge your views and provide new insights. Professor Sundby has succeeded in writing a true page-turner that is at once

emotionally provocative and incredibly informative. The prose is elegant and smooth, and it is a pleasure to read. Everyone interested in justice in America should read, and discuss the issues raised, in this book.

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