



Activist and Author of *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*

In her book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, Sister Helen Prejean takes us deep within our death penalty system and begs us to answer the question: how can our society benefit by replicating the violence it condemns? A Roman Catholic nun, Sister Helen Prejean's mission to end capital punishment began with a letter. In 1982, she began writing to Louisiana death row inmate Pat Sonnier, and it began a relationship that ended December 28, 1984, with his execution in the state's electric chair. While counseling Sonnier, she began an intense study of the issue of the death penalty, and discovered one of the most bleak and disturbing facets of American society. She found that ours is a chaotic justice system in which violence is a solution to violence; racism ignored; the poor disposable. She came to believe that capital punishment is a military solution to a social problem, and therefore no solution at all. She has been a spiritual counselor to many death row inmates and has also witnessed execution of some of those same men; if America did the same, her work would be over—only out of sight, she knows, can the death penalty survive.

There are few issues as complex and emotionally gripping as capital punishment. Yet Helen Prejean will take you on an intimate journey into the lives of both the murderers and the murdered victim's families; she confronts the issue from both sides, and while you may or may not agree with her, you will find her work transcends old familiar debates and approaches the subject with exceptional moral clarity, compassion, and courage.

Helen Prejean, C.S.J., is a writer, lecturer, and community organizer who has lectured extensively on capital punishment, and has appeared on ABC World News Tonight, 60 Minutes, the BBC World Service radio, and an NBC series on the death penalty. Her articles have appeared in numerous publications, including the San Francisco Chronicle, St. Petersburg Times, and the Baltimore Sun. Recently awarded the Champion of Liberty Award from the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (the first time it has been awarded to a non-lawyer), she is also the recipient of the 1994 Christopher Book Award. Her story was made into the major motion picture, *Dead Man Walking*, for which actress Susan Sarandon won an Oscar for her portrayal of Sr. Helen. She is a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Medaille.

An immensely moving affirmation of the power of religious vocation...Stunning moral clarity...a profound argument against capital punishment.

Washington Post Book World

"This arresting account should do for the debate over capital punishment what the film footage from Selma and Birmingham accomplished for the civil rights movement: turn abstractions into flesh and blood. Tough, fair, bravely alive—you will not come away from this book unshaken."—Bill McKibben
"Providing a gritty look at what really happens in the final hours of a death row inmate...Prejean takes readers to a place most will thankfully never know...adeptly probing the morality of a judicial system and a country that kills its citizens."

San Francisco Chronicle

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