



At the Cross: Race, Religion, and Citizenship in the Politics of the Death Penalty

Melynda J. Price

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Curing systemic inequalities in the criminal justice system is the unfinished business of the Civil Rights movement. No part of that system highlights this truth more than the current implementation of the death penalty. *At the Cross* tells a story of the relationship between the death penalty and race in American politics that complicates the common belief that individual African Americans, especially poor African Americans, are more subject to the death penalty in criminal cases. The current death penalty regime operates quite differently than it did in the past. The findings of this research demonstrate the racial inequity in the meting out of death sentences has legal and political externalities that move beyond individual defendants to larger numbers of African Americans. *At the Cross* looks at the meaning of the death penalty to and for African Americans by using various sites of analysis. Using various sites of analysis, Price shows the connection between criminal justice policies like the death penalty and the political and legal rights of African Americans who are tangentially connected to the criminal justice system through familial and social networks. Drawing on black politics, legal and political theory and narrative analysis, Price utilizes a mixed-method approach that incorporates analysis of media reports, capital jury selection and survey data, as well as original focus group data. As the rates of incarceration trend upward, Black politics scholars have focused on the impact of incarceration on the voting strength of the black community. Local, and even regional, narratives of African American politics and the death penalty expose the fractures in American democracy that foment perceptions of exclusion among blacks.

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