

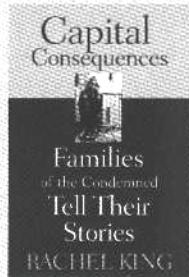
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CAPITAL CONSEQUENCES

by Rachel King

Rutgers University Press

Reviewed by Kathleen A. O'Shea



Rachel King has done us all a favor by writing *Capital Consequences: Families of the Condemned Tell Their Stories*, a book about the consequences of capital punishment for those closest to the condemned.

It is easy for us to acknowledge that victims have families. King invited us to meet some of them in her earlier book, *Don't Kill in Our Names: Families of Murder Victims Speak Out Against the Death Penalty* (Rutgers, 2003). But in *Capital Consequences* we come face to face with the parents, siblings, relatives, and friends of death-row inmates, and are forced to recognize that theirs is a different sort of pain. They navigate the murky waters of the criminal justice system from the other side.

Fortunately, most of us will never live through the shock of a midnight phone call or a radio report informing us that a family member has been arrested for murder. But as the title of the first chapter affirms, "It Could Happen to Anyone," and through these nine stories we are able to experience something of the tragedy many families have been subjected to.

In the book's prologue, Katherine Norgard, a psychologist whose son was on death row, writes that, like those who have lost their loved ones to violent crime, family members who have lost their loved ones to prisons are survivors, too. She says their experiences of stigmatization, social isolation, depression, grief, and guilt by association cut across any and all differences between them. Once a family member is condemned

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In what appears to be a sequel to her first book (*Don't Kill in Our Names*, 2003), King (American Civil Liberties Union) provides readers with a compassionate, often moving account of the impact of capital punishment on the families of death row inmates. In-depth interviews with eight families outline the devastating impact that a death sentence has on those closest to the condemned person. Families of death row inmates must deal with the stigma associated with being related to one who has been convicted of a capital crime; the financial burden of trying to garner an adequate defense; the emotional pain of having to watch a loved one endure the arbitrariness of a criminal justice system that discriminates by class and race; and the irresolvable shame, anger, isolation, and guilt the families must face alone. King illustrates dramatically how little visibility or sympathy is granted to these families. Their suffering, the immorality of society's practices, and the unintended consequences of capital punishment remain concealed from a public that demands capital punishment without having to consider the long- and short-term impacts. **Summing Up:** Recommended. All levels/libraries.—*M. A. Norton-Hawk, Suffolk University*

to death everyone in that family is changed forever. With passionate prose King reveals how these families are the unseen victims of capital punishment.

The cover of *Capital Consequences* shows a woman—elderly, forlorn, a blanket wrapped around her against the cold—standing in front of San Quentin the night of her son's execution. It is a poignant reminder of what families of the condemned look like—ordinary people like you and me who love their children immeasurably. Reading these stories will change each of us in some way. Hopefully, it will give us reason to continue questioning the misnomer of the "criminal justice system." ■

Kathleen A. O'Shea is a social worker, human rights advocate, and writer who has published several books about women on death row. She is currently a scholar-in-residence in the Women's Studies Department at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.