

Discussion Guide



Texas Hospitality Final Meal Requests



A film by Michael Pfaendtner



If you knew your next meal would be your last, what would you choose?

Until recently, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice provided a variety of answers to this question on their website, making available the final meal requests and last statements of over 300 executed offenders.

Using nothing more than photographs and type, filmmaker Michael Pfaendtner's documentary short, *Texas Hospitality* examines the final meal requests of ten of these executed offenders. In the process the film offers a revealing look at the individuality and humanity of these condemned men and women as they awaited their imminent deaths.

One by one, the image of each offender appears along with their name, execution date and details of their conviction. The screen then begins to fill randomly with food selections.

Despite the filmmaker's strong feelings against capital punishment, the seemingly ambivalent attitude of this film leaves it open to interpretation. While the heinous nature of these crimes makes a compelling case for the death penalty, there is also the realization that these were still human beings, facing one final decision before their lives were terminated.



National Film Network

4501 Forbes Boulevard, Lanham, MD 20706

www.nationalfilmnetwork.com

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Audience

Viewers interested in the issue of Capital Punishment

Courses

- Sociology
- Government
- Social Studies
- Current Events
- Criminal Justice
- Law
- Psychology

Notes

Age/Grade

High School and College Students

Instructions/Advice

Texas Hospitality serves as a springboard to discussions about capital punishment and other death penalty related issues. The teacher should visit the links listed below, especially the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Death Row Page. This site contains many facts about how the death penalty is administered in Texas, as well as prisoner information and final statements. It is also recommended that the teacher visit the archived site of executed offender's final meal requests as well as the Sound Portraits site "Witness to an Execution" which tells the stories of men and women involved with the execution of death row inmates.

IMPORTANT FEATURES

Cautionary Remarks

Inform viewers in advance that there are no disturbing images.

Understanding

While more than half of the countries in the world have abolished capital punishment in law or practice, the United States continues to use the death penalty in all but 12 states.

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Texas currently houses 409 offenders on Death Row, including 9 females.

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Chronology of Capital Punishment in the United States

(Congressional Quarterly Researcher, March 10, 1995 Volume 5, No. 9)

17th Century: England prescribes death for 14 offenses, but the American colonies impose the death sentence for fewer crimes.

1636: The Massachusetts Bay Colony lists 13 crimes punishable by death, including idolatry and witchcraft.

1682: Under William Penn's Great Act, the death penalty is prescribed only for murder and treason in Pennsylvania.

19th Century: Politics and advances in technology influence use of the death penalty.

Dec. 2, 1859: Abolitionist John Brown is hanged for treason, conspiracy and murder at Charles Town, Virginia.

Aug. 6, 1890: Murderer William Kemmler is the first person executed in the electric chair, at New York's Auburn Prison. The "chair" is later installed at Sing Sing Prison.

1900s: A short-lived abolition movement leads to the repeal of numerous state death penalty statutes.

1907: Kansas abolishes capital punishment. Eight more states follow suit over the next 10 years.

1920s: Two sensational murder cases sparked renewed debate over the death penalty:

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