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Race to Execution

2006

[Reviewed by Douglas Reed, Department of Political Science, Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, AR](#)

 **Highly Recommended**

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Distributed by
Filmakers Library,
124 East 40th
Street, New York,
NY 10016;
202-808-4980

Produced by
Rachel V. Lyon

Directed by Rachel
V. Lyon

DVD, color, 54
min.

Sr. High - Adult

African American
Studies, Criminal
Justice, Ethics,
Human Rights,
Law, Political
Science, Sociology

In *Race to Execution*, Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Rachel Lyon exposes a harsh reality in the U.S. criminal justice system—race is a significant factor in capital punishment.

The film cites an abundance of noteworthy social science research that demonstrates how the race of suspects as well as victims determines who receives the death penalty. In addition, it discusses the important role of prosecutors, inexperienced defense attorneys, and jury selection in the capital punishment process. Special attention is given to the method of jury selection and its influence on case outcomes. Moreover, the prosecutorial use of peremptory challenges - those which require no explanation to remove jurors from the jury pool - is explained in a clear and concise manner. Notably, these peremptory strikes are used most often to eliminate jurors of color from serving in capital punishment cases.

Along with this compelling evidence, the documentary puts a human face on the inconsistencies in our capital punishment system. In the case of Madison Hobley of Chicago, Illinois, a botched investigation, discriminatory interrogation, and ineffective legal counsel put Hobley on death row for nearly six years. After considerable questions were raised about the methods used to obtain his conviction, Hobley was pardoned. A second case study—Robert Tarver of Russell County, Alabama—involved other complicating issues. Despite serious concern about the constitutionality of jury selection procedures and his chief accuser's involvement in the crime, Tarver was put to death.

Instead of arguing for or against the death penalty, *Race to Execution* presents a broader perspective of

capital punishment through the eyes of the accused, the accusers, and legal analysts.

Race to Execution aired on the PBS [Independent Lens](#) series, which includes a variety of instructional resources as does the film's production company web site, [Lioness Media Arts](#).

Highly recommended for academic libraries that support pre-law and social science curricula, *Race to Execution* is a must-see for students seeking careers in law and criminal justice.

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