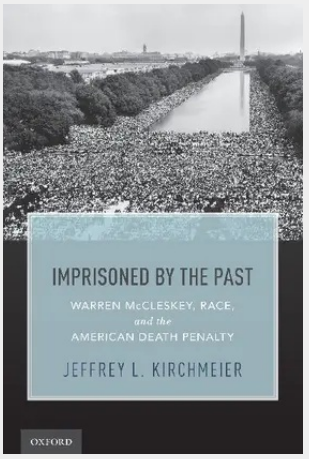
Kirchmeier

Imprisoned by the Past

Warren McCleskey, Race, and the American Death Penalty

Imprisoned by the Past: Warren McCleskey, Race, and the American Death Penalty connects the history of the American death penalty to the case of Warren McCleskey. By highlighting the relation between American history and an individual case, Imprisoned by the Past provides a unique understanding of the big picture of capital punishment in the context of a compelling human story. McCleskey's criminal law case resulted in one of the most important Supreme Court cases in U.S. legal history, where the Court confronted evidence of racial discrimination in the administration of capital punishment. The case marks the last that the Supreme Court realistically might have held that capital punishment violates the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. As such, the constitutional law case also created a turning point in the death penalty debate in the country. The book connects McCleskey's case -- as well as his life and crime -- to the issues that have haunted the American death penalty debate since the first executions by early settlers and that still affect the legal system today. Imprisoned by the Past ties together three unique American stories in U.S history. First, the book considers the changing American death penalty across centuries where drastic changes have occurred in the last fifty years. Second, the book discusses the role that race played in that history. And third, the book tells the story of Warren McCleskey and how his life and legal case brought together the other two narratives.



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