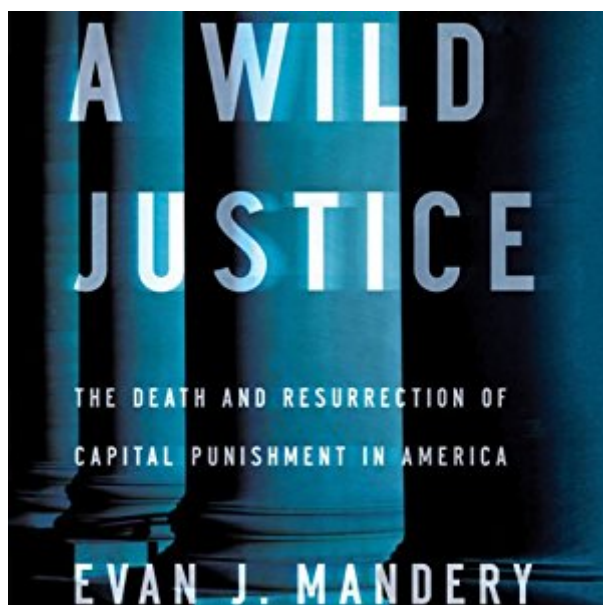


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# A Wild Justice: The Death And Resurrection Of Capital Punishment In America



## Synopsis

New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice. Drawing on never-before-published original source detail, the epic story of two of the most consequential, and largely forgotten, moments in Supreme Court history. For two hundred years, the constitutionality of capital punishment had been axiomatic. But in 1962, Justice Arthur Goldberg and his clerk Alan Dershowitz dared to suggest otherwise, launching an underfunded band of civil rights attorneys on a quixotic crusade. In 1972, in a most unlikely victory, the Supreme Court struck down Georgia's death penalty law in *Furman v. Georgia*. Though the decision had sharply divided the justices, nearly everyone, including the justices themselves, believed *Furman* would mean the end of executions in America. Instead, states responded with a swift and decisive showing of support for capital punishment. As anxiety about crime rose and public approval of the Supreme Court declined, the stage was set in 1976 for *Gregg v. Georgia*, in which the Court dramatically reversed direction. *A Wild Justice* is an extraordinary behind-the-scenes look at the Court, the justices, and the political complexities of one of the most racially charged and morally vexing issues of our time.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 16 hours and 22 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: November 5, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00FSWUU14

Best Sellers Rank: #250 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Law #397 in Books > Law > Rules & Procedures > Courts #626 in Books > Law > Criminal Law > Criminal Procedure

## Customer Reviews

Meticulously researched and annotated, *A Wild Justice* is a compelling and thoroughly convincing account of the struggles surrounding capital punishment in America, both in society and within the Supreme Court itself. The book illuminates the specific issues involved in a number of fascinating cases, provides the historical context for the decisions, and explores how personalities and deal-making impact the decision-making of our highest court. It is this last point which is particularly

revelatory. Using a brilliant strategy of interviewing the clerks of the Justices, Mandery uncovers previously unknown details, including a true bombshell which will be of great interest to both general readers and scholars in the field.

The early reviews are spot-on: Evan Mandery's study of the Supreme Court's history with the death penalty in the 1960's and 1970's is engrossing, breathtakingly informative, and scholarly (but at the same time accessible to non-lawyers). The insight he offers into the inner workings of the Court's deliberative process is first-rate and is based on interviews with several then Supreme Court Clerks who actually witnessed history (and helped write the opinions). Mandery has taken us into the Justices' chambers (and the lunchrooms they frequent) with the goal of delivering an objective account of the Court's stance on the death penalty in the United States---to say he succeeds is an understatement.

This book was not an easy read. I had to restart it a few times. It became very complex when the author examined the nation's shift from not favoring the death penalty overwhelmingly with abolishment a very real possibility under the Warren court. When president appointed Warren Burger as Chief Justice of the Court, the death penalty was all but insured a new life and was reinstated with new laws passed in thirty-five states. The crusade against the death penalty was "killed" by the Burger and then the Rehnquist courts. The book was still very enjoyable and covered a topic that most people are aware of, but would rather not be bothered about. The state "legally" killing a human being.

Mandery is preaching to the choir, insofar as I have always been extremely interested in this subject, even though as an attorney I have only watched it from afar. I studied under Tony Amsterdam, so it was all the more illuminating for me, and I think the author does an excellent job portraying this unique, if not widely known, person who is part of American History. Aside from a few historical mistakes - the year of the Freedom Summer was misdated, and there were a couple of other things that the editors missed, this is a great book that looks at the unusual institution of capital punishment from all sides. Don't expect that the author is anything but an abolitionist - but he presents the opposing viewpoints with clarity and fairness. Most exciting are the inside stories from what went on behind the opaque walls of the Supreme Court, which the public doesn't get to see in any decent measure, except from books like this.

A truly wonderful book that provides extraordinary details about death penalty cases in the late 60s and early 70s. It should be compulsory reading for young lawyers, if only so that they are exposed to the brilliance of Tony Amsterdam.

What an excellent book. After taking a course on the death penalty in law school, spending two years as a research assistant for a capital defense attorney and interning for a capital defense organization, I assumed I knew about as much as there was to know about the Furman/Gregg line of cases. But this book challenged that assumption and then some. From interesting tidbits about the justices to the LDF's strategy, Mr. Mandery takes us on an easy to read, but deeply informative overview of just how we went from total abolition to a reinvigorated capital system in just a few years. I can't recommend this book enough. On a side note, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Mandery a few months ago. Very thoughtful and nice.

I am a lawyer, so I know I'm not a normal person, but I devoured *Wild Justice* in a weekend. I actually wish it had been longer! The story the book presents is not just historically fascinating (and rivetingly told) but has real lessons for anyone interested in how court decisions of all kind get made and the huge impacts they can have on our lives. My only complaint is the detour into statistics and other criminological data â€” I would have preferred those pages to be filled with more stories and more cases. But those stats speak to the book's breadth and the depth of the writer's knowledge, so they aren't all bad.

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