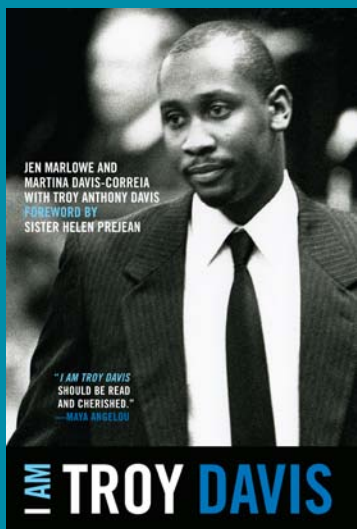


# DISCUSSION AND STUDY GUIDE



To accompany the book *I Am Troy Davis*  
by Jen Marlowe & Martina Davis-Correia  
with Troy Anthony Davis

Developed by Equal Justice USA  
Co-sponsored by Amnesty International USA and the NAACP  
In partnership with *I Am Troy Davis* (Haymarket Books)

**EJUSA**  
EQUAL ★ JUSTICE USA

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



**NAACP**

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## **About This Guide**

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This guide is an invitation to engage. It was designed to facilitate group discussion - and action - while reading the book *I Am Troy Davis*. The guide provides questions to promote critical thinking about the case and a deeper exploration of the death penalty and criminal justice system at large.

For readers who are hungry to learn more after reading the book, the guide provides a foundation of information about the death penalty in the United States. It also provides concrete ways readers can get involved to end the death penalty.

The guide was developed by Equal Justice USA (EJUSA) and co-sponsored by Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) and the NAACP, in partnership with the book, *I Am Troy Davis* (Haymarket Books).

Cover photo by Scott Langley, [deathpenaltyphoto.org](http://deathpenaltyphoto.org)

# How to Host a Book Discussion

## 1. Choose a date for the discussion. Provide at least three to four weeks advance notice for everyone to have time to read the book:

- ◆ If you are part of a book club, religious group, or school group, propose the idea of having an *I Am Troy Davis* book discussion.
- ◆ If you're hosting on your own, invite your friends. Keep the group size manageable - a few friends is enough! More than 12 to 16 people could get unwieldy.
- ◆ Provide a link for people to buy the book:  
[haymarketbooks.org/pb/I-Am-Troy-Davis](http://haymarketbooks.org/pb/I-Am-Troy-Davis)

## 2. Before the discussion, set the tone:

- ◆ Once everyone has settled, take time to make introductions if people in the group don't already know each other.
- ◆ Remind the group that a major goal of the discussion is to better understand one another's views on the book, the Troy Davis case, the death penalty, and the criminal justice system overall.

## 3. Facilitate an open and engaging discussion:

- ◆ Use the discussion questions in this guide to structure your conversation, but feel free to skip some or add new ones desired.
- ◆ Allow everyone the chance to participate in the discussion.
- ◆ Manage interruptions. There will always be someone who breaks in while another person is speaking, usually due to enthusiasm rather than rudeness. Control the interruptions by saying, "Hold that thought, Sheryl. We'll want to hear it again once Angie has finished."

## 4. After the discussion, take action:

- ◆ This guide has a list of actions you and your friends can take if you are inspired to do so. If you have a laptop or tablet, pass it around during the gathering for people to act on the spot.
- ◆ For more action ideas, contact EJUSA at [info@ejusa.org](mailto:info@ejusa.org) or AIUSA at [dpac@aiusa.org](mailto:dpac@aiusa.org).

### *Want more tips?*

*To get more help organizing your own I Am Troy Davis book discussion, contact Equal Justice USA at [info@ejusa.org](mailto:info@ejusa.org) or Amnesty International at [dpac@aiusa.org](mailto:dpac@aiusa.org).*

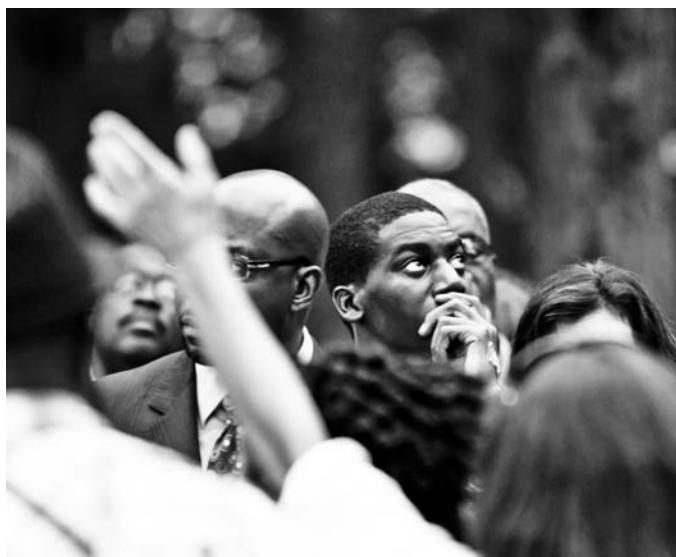


Photo credit: Evan Bench

# Discussion Questions

1. Why did you read this book? Were there any aspects of the Troy Davis story that were different from what you expected? If so, what were they?
2. At one hearing for Davis, Georgia Congressman John Lewis states, “I do not know Troy Anthony Davis. I do not know if he is guilty of the charges of which he has been convicted. But I do know that nobody should be put to death based on the evidence we now have” (p. 54). What were the weaknesses in the evidence that gave Lewis pause?
3. Do you think there were failings in the system that allowed Davis to be executed? If so, what were they?
4. Why do you think the witnesses who originally pinpointed Davis as the shooter later recanted their stories? Which version of their accounts do you believe?
5. Eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions nationwide. Why do you think that is the case? Why is it still so persuasive to juries?
6. Early in the book Martina Davis-Correia remembers her father warning her and her siblings as children that “there will be times when the color of your skin will get in the way” (p. 66). In what ways did race “get in the way” for members of the Davis family or other characters in the book? What did they do to overcome this?
7. Engraved on the front of the U.S. Supreme Court Building is the phrase “Equal Justice Under Law.” Do you believe that everyone in the country receives equal justice? What are some of the factors that influence the kind of justice someone receives?
8. Why do you think Troy Davis’ case became so high profile?
9. Why do you think the authors chose to highlight Martina Davis-Correia’s cancer in addition to Troy Davis’ case?
10. Shortly before Davis’ execution, a correction’s officer called his sister to say “I just want you to know that Troy is doing okay” (p. 140), but would not reveal his identity. Why do you think the guard made that call? What effect do you think the death penalty has on prison workers who carry out executions?

Photo credit: Scott Langley, deathpenaltyphoto.org





**Discussion Questions, cont.**

- 11.** Were there other types of people whose reaction to the case surprised you?
- 12.** Prosecutor David Locke states, “You need finality in cases at some point” (p. 98). On the same page we see the translation of an inscription on a wall of the Georgia Supreme Court building: “Let justice be done though the heavens fall.” How does the desire for finality affect the pursuit of justice? Should finality ever take priority over justice? Why or why not?
- 13.** Some people say that we need the death penalty to provide closure to the families of murder victims, while others say there’s no such thing as closure. What does this case make you think about the impact of the death penalty on murder victims’ families?
- 14.** Does Davis’ guilt or innocence affect the suffering of the Davis family? Does their experience indicate a need for the system to help families of the executed? If so, how?
- 15.** Did the book impact the way you think about the death penalty? If so, how?
- 16.** Did the book impact the way you think about the criminal justice system overall? If so, how?
- 17.** Martina Davis-Correia reflected that her “family had a lot more in common with the MacPhail family than what kept them sitting on different sides of the courtroom aisle” (p. 171). Do you think this is true? If so, how? What do you imagine the MacPhail’s experience with the criminal justice system was like?
- 18.** Two-thirds of the world’s countries have ended the death penalty in law or practice. Many governments and organizations like Amnesty International believe that the death penalty violates human rights. What do you think? Do you believe the Troy Davis execution was a violation of human rights?



Photo credit: Scott Langley, deathpenaltyphoto.org

# Get Involved

Less than a year after Troy Davis' death, Connecticut repealed the death penalty. Many leaders evoked the case as a powerful reason why the death penalty had to go. The next year Maryland followed suit, raising the count of death penalty-free states to 18. Concerns over cases like Davis' and broader issues of innocence, fairness, cost, and the damage the system often inflicts on those involved have bolstered a quickly growing movement to end the United States' broken death penalty.

*"I want to make sure that people keep fighting to end the death penalty."*

- Troy Davis

## Spread the Word:

- ◆ Share *I Am Troy Davis* widely. Give a copy to friends, family, and colleagues. You can even send a copy to your representatives in the state legislature or Congress - so that they can learn about this important story, too.
- ◆ Post this link on Facebook, Twitter, your blog, and anywhere else people might see it: [ejusa.org/IAmTroyDavis](http://ejusa.org/IAmTroyDavis)

## Take Action:

- ◆ Email your lawmakers and tell them that you read *I am Troy Davis* and that you support ending the death penalty: [ejusa.org/act/email](http://ejusa.org/act/email)
- ◆ Take the Amnesty International action pledging to abolish the death penalty and calling for an investigation into the handling of the Troy Davis case: [aiusa.org/troy](http://aiusa.org/troy)
- ◆ Text TROY to 62227 to join the NAACP's fight against the death penalty.

## Sign Up, Stay Informed:

- ◆ Receive news and future opportunities to help repeal the death penalty and reform our criminal justice system: [ejusa.org/signup](http://ejusa.org/signup)
- ◆ Receive news and future opportunities to take action for human rights: [amnestyusa.org](http://amnestyusa.org)



# Death Penalty Facts

## **We've learned a lot about the death penalty in the last 30 years.**

For three decades, we have tinkered with the death penalty in an effort to make it fair, accurate, and effective. Yet the system continues to fail.

### **Innocent Lives in the Balance**

Since 1973, at least 144 people were freed after evidence showed they were sentenced to die for crimes they did not commit. These are just the wrongful convictions that we know about. How many others were not so lucky?

- ◆ Innocent people are sentenced to death due to mistaken eyewitnesses, incompetent lawyers, incorrect or fraudulent forensics, unreliable jailhouse informants, coerced confessions, and more.
- ◆ Many death row exonerations have come only because of the extraordinary efforts of people working outside the system - pro bono lawyers, family members, even students.
- ◆ Innocent people have spent up to 33 years awaiting execution, or come within hours of execution, before the truth came to light. Any effort to streamline the process or cut appeals will only increase the risk that an innocent person will be executed.

### **Fair and Equal Before the Law?**

We all expect justice to be blind - otherwise it's not justice at all. Yet geography, poverty, and race continue to determine who lives and who dies.

- ◆ The majority of those on death row are too poor to afford an attorney.
- ◆ The death penalty is a lottery of geography. A similar murder might get 40 years in one county and death in the next county over. A majority of executions come from just 2% of the counties in the U.S.
- ◆ The victim's race profoundly affects the sentence. Over 80% of those executed in the U.S. were convicted of killing a white person, even though African Americans are the victims in half of all homicides.
- ◆ Some communities keep people of color off of juries. In Houston County, Alabama, 80% of qualified African Americans have been struck by prosecutors from death penalty cases.

### **Did you know?**

*DNA is only available in 5-10% of criminal cases - far fewer than one would think from watching crime shows like CSI. DNA can't solve the problem of wrongful conviction.*

*"The Constitution guarantees the right to an attorney. It doesn't say the lawyer has to be awake."*

*- Texas trial judge in the case of George McFarland, whose lawyer slept through much of his trial.*

## Death Penalty Facts, *cont.*

### Neither Swift Nor Sure

To be meaningful, justice should be swift and sure. The death penalty is neither. Indeed, a full two-thirds of all death penalty cases are reversed for serious error. The long and complicated process has prolonged the pain of victims' families and devoured millions of crime-fighting dollars that could save lives and protect the public.

- ◆ Every state that has ever studied the cost of the death penalty has found it to be more expensive than alternatives like life without parole - often millions of dollars more.
- ◆ The death penalty process is more complicated because a life is on the line, involving far more lawyers, witnesses, experts, pre-trial motions, and court time - racking up exorbitant costs even before a single appeal is filed.
- ◆ The death penalty's high costs add up to more than just dollars. The time spent pursuing one capital case could solve and prosecute scores of other non-capital cases. Meanwhile, the critical needs of victims' families for services like specialized grief counseling are severely underfunded.
- ◆ The death penalty drags victims' families through an agonizing and lengthy process that forces them to relive the crime over and over again, leaving them in limbo for years.

### A New Set of Victims

The mythology is that executions heal wounds, but studies and individual experiences suggest that executions inflict more wounds than they heal.

- ◆ Corrections officials, haunted by the experience of putting people to death, have committed suicide, turned to alcohol, or suffered mental and physical health problems.
- ◆ Many journalists have reported symptoms of anxiety, nausea, and nightmares after witnessing an execution.
- ◆ Jurors who serve on death penalty trials endure prolonged distress as a result of determining whether someone should live or die.
- ◆ Every execution leaves a family behind - a son or daughter who doesn't understand why their parent was executed, a grieving mother who will never hear the voice of her child again. Theirs are among the hidden stories of capital punishment.

*"As a police chief, I find this use of state resources offensive. Give a law enforcement professional like me that \$250 million, and I'll show you how to reduce crime. The death penalty isn't anywhere on my list."*

*– New Jersey Police Chief James Abbott, former death penalty supporter*

*"I myself was haunted by the men I was asked to execute... I would wake up in the middle of the night to find them lurking at the foot of my bed."*

*– Former Florida warden Ron McAndrew, who presided over eight executions*



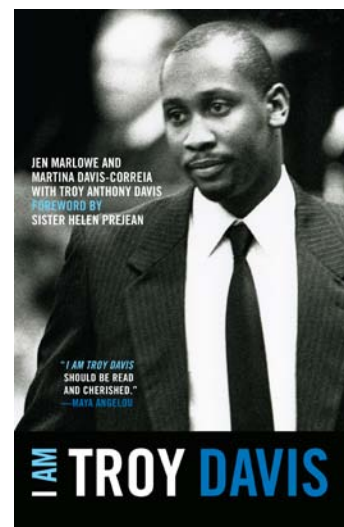
# About...

## ...the Book

On September 21, 2011 Troy Davis was executed in Georgia despite significant doubt about his guilt. Nearly a million people spoke out against the execution, including Pope Benedict XVI, President Jimmy Carter, and 51 members of Congress. How did one man capture the world's imagination, and become the iconic face for the campaign to end the death penalty?

*I Am Troy Davis* tells the story of an ordinary man caught in an inexorable tragedy: his childhood in racially charged Savannah; the confused events leading to the 1989 shooting of police officer Mark MacPhail; and Davis' sudden arrest, conviction, and two-decade fight to prove his innocence. *I Am Troy Davis* takes us inside a broken legal system where life and death hang in the balance. It is also a testament to the unbreakable bond of family, the resilience of love, and the power that comes when voices across the world rise together to demand justice even when it seems out of reach.

Buy the book at [haymarketbooks.org/pb/I-Am-Troy-Davis](http://haymarketbooks.org/pb/I-Am-Troy-Davis).



## ...the Authors



**Jen Marlowe** is a human rights activist, writer, and filmmaker. She is the author of *The Hour of Sunlight: One Palestinian's Journey from Prisoner to Peacemaker* and *Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival*. Jen also started a fundraising campaign to support the educational pursuits of Troy Davis' surviving niece and nephew. Find out how to contribute at her website: [donkeysaddle.org/index.php/i-am-troy-davis](http://donkeysaddle.org/index.php/i-am-troy-davis).

**Martina Davis-Correia** is Troy Davis' sister. She was Amnesty International USA's co-Death Penalty Abolition Coordinator for Georgia, and a leading advocate for women with breast cancer until her death in 2011, shortly after her brother's execution.

## ...the Publisher

Haymarket Books is a nonprofit, progressive book distributor and publisher, a project of the Center for Economic Research and Social Change. We believe that activists need to take ideas, history, and politics into the many struggles for social justice today. Learning the lessons of past victories, as well as defeats, can arm a new generation of fighters for a better world.



## About..., cont.

### ...Equal Justice USA

Equal Justice USA (EJUSA) is a national, grassroots organization working to build a criminal justice system that is fair, effective, and responsive to everyone impacted by crime. We believe in a justice system that is part of the solution instead of the problem: one that prevents crime before it occurs and rebuilds people's lives in its aftermath, so that all of us can be safer.

EJUSA has been a longtime leader in the movement to repeal the death penalty, partnering with state organizations in over two-dozen states to strengthen local leaders, find common ground across the political spectrum, and build grassroots campaigns that win. We played a critical role in every state that has ended the death penalty in the modern era. Join us to build a justice system that works: [ejusa.org](http://ejusa.org).



### ...Amnesty International and the NAACP



#### *Amnesty International*

Amnesty International is a global movement of people fighting injustice and promoting human rights.

We work to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are denied. Currently the world's largest grassroots human rights organization, we investigate and expose abuses, educate and mobilize the public, and help transform societies to create a safer, more just world. We received the Nobel Peace Prize for our life-saving work.

Amnesty has led the global movement for abolition of the death penalty since 1977. In the USA, Amnesty mobilizes it's more than 300,000 members and supporters to oppose executions and support efforts to repeal the death penalty in their states.



#### *NAACP*

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest nonpartisan civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities. You can read more about the NAACP's work and our five "Game Changer" issue areas here: [naacp.org/pages/game-changers](http://naacp.org/pages/game-changers)