

# The Electric Chair

*An Unnatural American History*

CRAIG BRANDON

McFarland

# Electric Chair An Unnatural American History

**Frank R. Baumgartner, Marty  
Davidson, Kaneesha R. Johnson, Arvind  
Krishnamurthy**

## **Electric Chair An Unnatural American History:**

**The Electric Chair** Craig Brandon, 2009-09-25 This book provides a history of the electric chair and analyzes its features its development and the manner of its use Chapters cover the early conceptual stages as a humane alternative to hanging and the rivalry between Edison and Westinghouse that was one of the main forces in the chair s adoption as a mode of execution Also presented are an account of the terrible first execution and a number of the subsequent gruesome employments of the chair The text explores the changing attitudes toward the chair as state after state replaced it with lethal injection

*The Electric Chair* Craig Brandon, 2016-03-03 This book provides a history of the electric chair and analyzes its features its development and the manner of its use Chapters cover the early conceptual stages as a humane alternative to hanging and the rivalry between Edison and Westinghouse that was one of the main forces in the chair s adoption as a mode of execution Also presented are an account of the terrible first execution and a number of the subsequent gruesome employments of the chair The text explores the changing attitudes toward the chair as state after state replaced it with lethal injection

*The Death Penalty* Stuart BANNER, Stuart Banner, 2009-06-30 The death penalty arouses our passions as does few other issues Some view taking another person s life as just and reasonable punishment while others see it as an inhumane and barbaric act But the intensity of feeling that capital punishment provokes often obscures its long and varied history in this country Now for the first time we have a comprehensive history of the death penalty in the United States Law professor Stuart Banner tells the story of how over four centuries dramatic changes have taken place in the ways capital punishment has been administered and experienced In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the penalty was standard for a laundry list of crimes from adultery to murder from arson to stealing horses Hangings were public events staged before audiences numbering in the thousands attended by women and men young and old black and white alike Early on the gruesome spectacle had explicitly religious purposes an event replete with sermons confessions and last minute penitence to promote the salvation of both the condemned and the crowd Through the nineteenth century the execution became desacralized increasingly secular and private in response to changing mores In the twentieth and twenty first centuries ironically as it has become a quiet sanitary technological procedure the death penalty is as divisive as ever By recreating what it was like to be the condemned the executioner and the spectator Banner moves beyond the debates to give us an unprecedented understanding of capital punishment s many meanings As nearly four thousand inmates are now on death row and almost one hundred are currently being executed each year the furious debate is unlikely to diminish The Death Penalty is invaluable in understanding the American way of the ultimate punishment Table of Contents Abbreviations Introduction 1 Terror Blood and Repentance 2 Hanging Day 3 Degrees of Death 4 The Origins of Opposition 5 Northern Reform Southern Retention 6 Into the Jail Yard 7 Technological Cures 8 Decline 9 To the Supreme Court 10 Resurrection Epilogue Appendix Counting Executions Notes Acknowledgments Index Reviews of this book Banner deftly balances history and politics crafting

a book that will be valuable to anyone interested in knowing more about capital punishment no matter what his or her views are on the ethical issues surrounding the topic David Pitt Booklist Reviews of this book In this well researched and clear account Banner charts how and why this country went from having one of the world s mildest punitive systems to one of its harshest Publishers Weekly Reviews of this book Stuart Banner s book is fine and balanced and important His lucid history of this grim subject is scrupulously accurate It is refreshingly free of the tendentiousness and the sensationalism that this subject invites Richard A Posner New Republic Reviews of this book The contrast between the past and the present can now be seen with great clarity thanks to Stuart Banner and his comprehensive book The Death Penalty American historians have been slow to undertake anything like a full scale study of the subject Banner s book does much to fill the gaps His book is an important and comprehensive treatment of the topic Hugo Adam Bedau Boston Review Reviews of this book Despite the gruesome nature of the book s topic it is difficult to stop reading Banner s research is fascinating his writing style compelling Given the emotional nature of the subject few people known to me are wishy washy about whether the death penalty is moral or immoral Banner walks the line of neutrality skillfully without seeming evasive Steve Weinberg Legal Times Reviews of this book Stuart Banner s The Death Penalty is a tour de force remarkable for its neutrality as it traces the ways in which the death penalty has been applied and for what kinds of crimes from the Colonial era to the present Banner writes like a historian who believes perspective is best gained by dispassionately setting out what happened and letting everyone come to his or her own conclusions I think in this book that works wonderfully On a subject in which emotions run so high it seems awfully useful to have a dispassionate voice After all if Banner allowed his own feelings on the death penalty pro con or somewhere in the middle to be known the book easily could be dismissed as a diatribe He doesn t and it can t Judith Neuman Beck San Jose Mercury News Reviews of this book Law professor Banner offers a persuasive examination of the evolution of capital punishment from Colonial times onward He makes clear that the death penalty has possessed generally consistent support from the US populace although changes in the sensibilities of juries executioners legal theoreticians and judges have occurred Highly recommended R C Cottrell Choice Reviews of this book Stuart Banner aptly illustrates in The Death Penalty like the nation the death penalty has changed with the times Banner s account spotlights a number of interesting trends in American history Mostly evenhanded in the tour he provides through the history of the death penalty and its role in and reflection of American society he has managed to provide an accessible look at what is a profoundly controversial and complicated subject Steven Martinovich Ft Lauderdale Sun Sentinel Reviews of this book For centuries Stuart Banner tells us Americans had been proud to possess a criminal justice system that made less use of the death penalty than just about any other place on the globe including the countries of western Europe But no longer Now we possess one of the harshest criminal codes in the world The Death Penalty helps explain that turnaround but only in the course of a complicated story in which different factors emerge at different times to play often unforeseeable roles This is a superbly told history Paul

Rosenberg Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News Reviews of this book Stuart Banner's lucid richly researched book brings us for the first time a comprehensive history of American capital punishment from colonial times to the present He describes the practices that characterized the institution at different periods elucidates their ritual purposes and social meanings and identifies the forces that led to their transformation The book's well ordered narrative is interspersed with individual case histories that give flesh and blood to the account David Garland Times Literary Supplement Reviews of this book An informative even handed chillingly fascinating account of why and how the U S government and many state governments decided to sponsor executions of criminals even though innocent defendants might die too Jane Henderson St Louis Post Dispatch Reviews of this book Stuart Banner's The Death Penalty is a splendidly objective achievement Delightfully written free of academic pretense liberally sprinkled with apt references from contemporary sources the book exhaustively explores the multifaceted evolution of America's penal practices Elsbeth Bothe Baltimore Sun The Death Penalty is certain to be the definitive account of the American experience with capital punishment from its beginnings in the seventeenth century to the execution of Timothy McVeigh in 2001 This is a first rate piece of scholarship well written deeply researched fascinating to read and full of insights and good common sense It is in my view one of the finest books to deal with this troubled and troubling subject Historical and legal scholarship owe a debt of gratitude to Stuart Banner Lawrence Friedman Stanford Law School A masterful book This is a long overdue account which fills a huge gap in our understanding of America's long and complex relationship to state killing With meticulous scholarship and lucid prose Banner has written a compelling account of the place of capital punishment in our society It sets the standard for all future scholarship on the history of the death penalty in America Austin Sarat author of When the State Kills Capital Punishment and the American Condition The Death Penalty a study we have badly needed is the first history of the nation's engagement as well as its disengagement with capital punishment from the country's earliest days to the present With a sure grasp of the constitutional issues Stuart Banner greatly advances a conversation at last underway about the rightness of putting people to death for having inflicted a death Banner's greatest and most useful feat is remaining dispassionate on a subject that he cares deeply about as do a growing number of his fellow Americans William S McFeely author of Proximity to Death The Death Penalty beautifully explains the changing paths traveled by supporters and opponents of capital punishment over the years It explores a subject of enormous symbolic importance to Americans today linking our views about the death penalty to our larger concerns about crime David Oshinsky author of Worse Than Slavery Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice Banner's book is a superbly detailed and textured social history of a subject too often treated in legal abstractions It demonstrates how capital punishment has gnawed at the conscience and imagination of Americans and how it has challenged their efforts to define themselves culturally politically and racially Robert Weisberg Stanford Law School *Edison and the Electric Chair* Mark Essig, 2009-05-26 Thomas Edison stunned America in 1879 by unveiling a world changing invention the light bulb and then

launching the electrification of America's cities A decade later despite having been an avowed opponent of the death penalty Edison threw his laboratory resources and reputation behind the creation of a very different sort of device the electric chair Deftly exploring this startling chapter in American history Edison the Electric Chair delivers both a vivid portrait of a nation on the cusp of modernity and a provocative new examination of Edison himself Edison championed the electric chair for reasons that remain controversial to this day Was Edison genuinely concerned about the suffering of the condemned Was he waging a campaign to smear his rival George Westinghouse's alternating current and boost his own system Or was he warning the public of real dangers posed by the high voltage alternating wires that looped above hundreds of America's streets Plumbing the fascinating history of electricity Mark Essig explores America's love of technology and its fascination with violent death capturing an era when the public was mesmerized and terrified by an invisible force that produced blazing light powered streetcars carried telephone conversations and killed *Power Lines* Jennifer L. Lieberman, 2017-07-14 How electricity became a metaphor for modernity in the United States inspiring authors from Mark Twain to Ralph Ellison At the turn of the twentieth century electricity emerged as a metaphor for modernity Writers from Mark Twain to Ralph Ellison grappled with the idea of electricity as both life force illumination and death spark electrocution The idea that electrification created exclusively modern experiences took hold of Americans' imaginations whether they welcomed or feared its adoption In *Power Lines* Jennifer Lieberman examines the apparently incompatible notions of electricity that coexisted in the American imagination tracing how electricity became a common though multifarious symbol for modern life Lieberman examines a series of moments of technical change when electricity accrued new social meanings plotting both power lines and the power of narrative lines in American life and literature While discussing the social construction of electrical systems she offers a new interpretation of Twain's use of electricity as an organizing metaphor in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* describes the rhetoric surrounding the invention of electric execution analyzes Charlotte Perkins Gilman's call for human connection in her utopian writing and in her little known *Human Work* considers the theme of electrical interconnection in Jack London's work and shows how Ralph Ellison and Louis Mumford continued the literary tradition of electrical metaphor Electrical power was a distinctive concept in American literary cultural and technological histories For this reason narratives about electricity were particularly evocative Bridging the realistic and the romantic the historical and the fantastic these stories guide us to ask new questions about our enduring fascination with electricity and all it came to represent **The Republic Shall Be Kept Clean** Tariq D. Khan, 2023-09-05 The long relationship between America's colonizing wars and virulent anticommunism The colonizing wars against Native Americans created the template for anticommunist repression in the United States Tariq D Khan's analysis reveals bloodshed and class war as foundational aspects of capitalist domination and vital elements of the nation's long history of internal repression and social control Khan shows how the state wielded the tactics weapons myths and ideology refined in America's colonizing wars to repress anarchists labor unions and a host of

others labeled as alien multi racial multi ethnic urban rabble The ruling classes considered radicals of all stripes to be anticolonial insurgents As Khan charts the decades of red scares that began in the 1840s he reveals how capitalists and government used much practiced counterinsurgency rhetoric and tactics against the movements they perceived and vilified as anarchist Original and boldly argued The Republic Shall Be Kept Clean offers an enlightening new history with relevance for our own time The Oxford Companion to American Law Kermit L. Hall,David S. Clark,James W. Ely,Joel B.

Grossman,N. E. H. Hull,2002-05-02 A landmark in legal publishing The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court is a now classic text many of whose entries are regularly cited by scholars as the definitive statement on any particular subject In the tradition of that work editor in chief Kermit L Hall offers up The Oxford Companion to American Law a one volume A Z encyclopedia that covers topics ranging from aging and the law wiretapping and electronic eavesdropping the Salem Witch Trials and Plessy vs Ferguson The Companion takes as its starting point the insight that law is embedded in society and that to understand American law one must necessarily ask questions about the relationship between it and the social order now and in the past The volume assumes that American law in all its richness and complexity cannot be understood in isolation as simply the business of the Supreme Court or as a list of common law doctrines Hence the volume takes seriously issues involving laws role in structuring decisions about governance the significance of state and local law and legal institutions and the place of American law in a comparative international perspective Nearly 500 entries are included written by over 300 expert contributors Intended for the working lawyer or judge the high school student working on a term paper or the general adult reader interested in the topic the Companion is the authoritative reference work on the subject of American law

**Empires of Light** Jill Jonnes,2004-10-12 The gripping history of electricity and how the fateful collision of Thomas Edison Nikola Tesla and George Westinghouse left the world utterly transformed In the final decades of the nineteenth century three brilliant and visionary titans of America s Gilded Age Thomas Edison Nikola Tesla and George Westinghouse battled bitterly as each vied to create a vast and powerful electrical empire In Empires of Light historian Jill Jonnes portrays this extraordinary trio and their riveting and ruthless world of cutting edge science invention intrigue money death and hard eyed Wall Street millionaires At the heart of the story are Thomas Alva Edison the nation s most famous and folksy inventor creator of the incandescent light bulb and mastermind of the world s first direct current electrical light networks the Serbian wizard of invention Nikola Tesla elegant highly eccentric a dreamer who revolutionized the generation and delivery of electricity and the charismatic George Westinghouse Pittsburgh inventor and tough corporate entrepreneur an industrial idealist who in the era of gaslight imagined a world powered by cheap and plentiful electricity and worked heart and soul to create it Edison struggled to introduce his radical new direct current DC technology into the hurly burly of New York City as Tesla and Westinghouse challenged his dominance with their alternating current AC thus setting the stage for one of the eeriest feuds in American corporate history the War of the Electric Currents The battlegrounds Wall Street the 1893 Chicago

World's Fair Niagara Falls and finally the death chamber Jonnes takes us on the tense walk down a prison hallway and into the sunlit room where William Kemmler convicted ax murderer became the first man to die in the electric chair **Dark**

**Light** Linda Simon, 2004 From the invention of the telegraph to the discovery of X rays Simon has created a revealing portrait of an anxious age when Americans welcomed electricity into their bodies even as they kept it from their homes

*Artifacts from Modern America* Helen Sheumaker, 2017-11-03 This intriguing book examines how material objects of the 20th century ranging from articles of clothing to tools and weapons communication devices and toys and games reflect dominant ideas and testify to the ways social change happens Objects of everyday life tell stories about the ways everyday Americans lived Some are private or personal things such as Maidenform brassiere or a pair of patched blue jeans Some are public by definition such as the bus Rosa Parks boarded and refused to move back for a white passenger Some material things or inventions reflect the ways public policy affected the lives of Americans such as the Enovid birth control pill An invention like the electric wheelchair benefited both the private and public spheres it eased the lives of physically disabled individuals and it played a role in assisting those with disabilities to campaign successfully for broader civil rights *Artifacts from Modern America* demonstrates how dozens of the material objects items technologies or inventions of the 20th century serve as a window into a period of history After an introductory discussion of how to approach material culture the world of things to better understand the American past essays describe objects from the previous century that made a wide ranging or long lasting impact The chapters reflect the ways that communication devices objects of religious life household appliances vehicles and tools and weapons changed the lives of everyday Americans Readers will learn how to use material culture in their own research through the book's detailed examples of how interpreting the historical cultural and social context of objects can provide a better understanding of the 20th century experience *Deadly Justice* Frank R. Baumgartner, Marty Davidson, Kaneesha R. Johnson, Arvind Krishnamurthy, 2018 Forty years and 1 400 executions after the U S Supreme Court ruled the death penalty constitutional eminent political scientist Frank Baumgartner and a team of younger scholars have collaborated to assess the empirical record and provide a definitive account of how the death penalty has been implemented A Statistical Portrait of the Death Penalty shows that all the flaws that caused the Supreme Court to invalidate the death penalty in 1972 remain and indeed that new problems have arisen Far from perfecting the mechanism of death the modern system has failed

**Executioner's Current** Richard Moran, 2007-12-18 A fascinating and provocative story The Washington Post of high stakes competition between two titans that shows how the electric chair developed through an effort by one nineteenth century electric company to discredit the other In 1882 Thomas Edison ushered in the age of electricity when he illuminated Manhattan's Pearl Street with his direct current DC system Six years later George Westinghouse lit up Buffalo with his less expensive alternating current AC The two men quickly became locked in a fierce rivalry made all the more complicated by a novel new application for their product the electric chair When Edison set out to persuade the state of



New York to use Westinghouse's current to execute condemned criminals Westinghouse fought back in court attempting to stop the first electrocution and keep AC from becoming the executioner's current In this meticulously researched account of the ensuing legal battle and the horribly botched first execution Moran raises disturbing questions not only about electrocution but about our society's tendency to rely on new technologies to answer moral questions Imagining the American Death Penalty Birte Christ, 2025-04-29 Imagining the American Death Penalty traces the US American cultural imaginary of capital punishment through popular visual representations from the 1890s to the twenty-first century The book focuses on three generic and historical clusters of representations early film from the 1890s through *Intolerance* 1916 crime film noir of the 1950s and 1960s and legal TV series from the 1990s through the early 2000s The book makes two central arguments First it demonstrates that an increased concern with the death penalty in popular media does not mean that these texts promote an abolitionist agenda their cultural work is ambiguous at best This ambiguity is always contingent upon both the affordances of the particular genre and medium in question and on political legal discursive context The book explores both in detail Early film is enchanted with its own representational possibilities due to the progress of technology and in analogy with the progress in execution technique specifically the electric chair In film noir genre conventions and the legal back and forth before and after Furman predicate ambiguity In legal TV series the genre's ensemble casts and its focus on conversational exchange invite open debate The second argument is that popular visual representations consistently whitewash the death penalty The book demonstrates that this is the case because the most common narrative around executions in film and TV is to cast the condemned man as a hero who defies the violence of the state gains dignity by accepting his fate and faults and in some ways triumphs over death The American imaginary until very recently did or could not imagine Black men to possess that measure of agency that it attributed to its white heroes **Frank Lloyd Wright and Ralph Waldo Emerson** Ayad Rahmani, 2023-09-27 **Frank Lloyd Wright and Ralph Waldo Emerson** *Transforming the American Mind* is an interdisciplinary volume of literary and cultural scholarship that examines the link between two pivotal intellectual and artistic figures It probes the degree to which the transcendentalist author influenced the architect's campaign against dominant strains of American thought Inspired by Emerson's writings on the need to align exterior expression with interior self Wright believed that architecture was not first and foremost a matter of accommodating spatial needs but a tool to restore intellectual and artistic freedom too often lost in the process of modernization Ayad Rahmani shows that Emerson's writings provide an avenue for interpreting Wright's complex approach to country and architecture The two thinkers cohered around a common concern for a nation derailed by nefarious forces that jeopardized the country's original promise In Emerson's condemnations of slavery and inequality Wright found inspiration for seeking redress against the humiliations suffered by the modern worker be it at the hands of an industrial manager or an office boss His designs sought to challenge dehumanizing labor practices and open minds to the beauty and science of agriculture and the natural

world Emerson's example helped Wright develop architecture that aimed less at accommodating a culture of clients and more at raising national historical awareness while also arguing for humane and equitable policies Frank Lloyd Wright and Ralph Waldo Emerson presents a new approach to two vital thinkers whose impact on American society remains relevant to this day

**The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Daily Life in America** Randall M. Miller, 2008-12-30 The course of daily life in the United States has been a product of tradition environment and circumstance How did the Civil War alter the lives of women both white and black left alone on southern farms How did the Great Depression change the lives of working class families in eastern cities How did the discovery of gold in California transform the lives of native American Hispanic and white communities in western territories Organized by time period as spelled out in the National Standards for U S History these four volumes effectively analyze the diverse whole of American experience examining the domestic economic intellectual material political recreational and religious life of the American people between 1763 and 2005 Working under the editorial direction of general editor Randall M Miller professor of history at St Joseph's University a group of expert volume editors carefully integrate material drawn from volumes in Greenwood's highly successful Daily Life Through History series with new material researched and written by themselves and other scholars The four volumes cover the following periods The War of Independence and Antebellum Expansion and Reform 1763 1861 The Civil War Reconstruction and the Industrialization of America 1861 1900 The Emergence of Modern America World War I and the Great Depression 1900 1940 and Wartime Postwar and Contemporary America 1940 Present Each volume includes a selection of primary documents a timeline of important events during the period images illustrating the text and extensive bibliography of further information resources both print and electronic and a detailed subject index

*Lethal State* Seth Kotch, 2019-01-10 For years American states have tinkered with the machinery of death seeking to align capital punishment with evolving social standards and public will Against this backdrop North Carolina had long stood out as a prolific executioner with harsh mandatory sentencing statutes But as the state sought to remake its image as modern and business progressive in the early twentieth century the question of execution preoccupied lawmakers reformers and state boosters alike In this book Seth Kotch recounts the history of the death penalty in North Carolina from its colonial origins to the present He tracks the attempts to reform and sanitize the administration of death in a state as dedicated to its image as it was to rigid racial hierarchies Through this lens *Lethal State* helps explain not only Americans deep and growing uncertainty about the death penalty but also their commitment to it Kotch argues that Jim Crow justice continued to reign in the guise of a modernizing orderly state and offers essential insight into the relationship between race violence and power in North Carolina The history of capital punishment in North Carolina as in other states wrestling with similar issues emerges as one of state building through lethal punishment

**Death Row Welcomes You** Steven Hale, 2024-03-26 An eye opening journey to a place that's hard to access rarely seen and shrouded by myths of monsters and abominations *Death Row Welcomes You* demands that we not look away

New York Times In the vein of *Waiting for an Echo* and *Dead Man Walking* a deeply immersive look at justice in America told through the interwoven lives of condemned prisoners and the men and women who come to visit them In 2018 after nearly a decade s hiatus the state of Tennessee began executing death row inmates bucking national trends that showed the death penalty in decline In less than two years the state put seven men to death more than any other state but Texas in that time period It was an execution spree unlike any seen in Tennessee since the 1940s one only brought to a halt by a global pandemic Award winning journalist Steven Hale was the leading reporter on these executions covering them both locally for the Nashville Scene alt weekly and nationally for *The Appeal* In *Death Row Welcomes You* Hale traces the lives of condemned prisoners at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution and the people who come to visit them What brought them the visitors and convicted murderers alike to death row The visitors are for the most part not activists or at least they did not start out that way Nor are they the sort of killer obsessed death row groupies such settings sometimes attract In fact in most cases they are average people whose lives not to mention their views on the death penalty were turned upside down by a face to face meeting with a death row prisoner Hale s access to the people that make up that community afforded him a perspective that no other journalist has been granted largely because Tennessee s Department of Correction has all but shut off official media access Combining topics that have long fascinated readers crime death and life inside prison Hale writes with humanity empathy and insight earned by befriending death row prisoners and standing witness to their final moments

**An Evil Day in Georgia** Robert Neil Smith,2015-04-15 Follows a homicide case committed in Georgia in 1927 from the crime to the executions of those convicted of the crime almost a year later Along the way the narrative highlights a number of issues impacting the death penalty process many of which are still relevant in the modern era of capital punishment in the United States Moreover the case in question illustrates a range of themes prevalent in post Progressive Georgia and brings them together to create a broader narrative Thus issues of race class and gender emerge from what was supposed to be a neutral process demonstrates that capital punishment cannot be administered in an untainted fashion but its finality demands that it must be From Athenaeum UGA website [Sing Sing](#) Denis Brian,2010-05 Based on extensive research with original sources Brian s narrative covers every period of the prison s checkered history from the awful conditions of the 19th century to the relative improvements of the 20th century to today **Perspectives on Health and Human Rights** Sofia Gruskin,2005 This anthology of articles collected by a cast of award winning scholars in the field of public health illustrates that promoting and protecting human rights is fundamental to promoting and protecting health New issues covered in this volume include emerging technologies family and health responding to violence and methods and strategies

## Enjoying the Song of Term: An Mental Symphony within **Electric Chair An Unnatural American History**

In a world used by displays and the ceaseless chatter of immediate communication, the melodic elegance and psychological symphony created by the prepared word usually diminish into the back ground, eclipsed by the constant sound and interruptions that permeate our lives. Nevertheless, located within the pages of **Electric Chair An Unnatural American History** a charming fictional value filled with natural feelings, lies an immersive symphony waiting to be embraced. Constructed by an elegant composer of language, that interesting masterpiece conducts readers on an emotional journey, skillfully unraveling the concealed songs and profound influence resonating within each carefully constructed phrase. Within the depths of the poignant examination, we shall examine the book is central harmonies, analyze their enthralling writing fashion, and surrender ourselves to the profound resonance that echoes in the depths of readers souls.

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### **Electric Chair An Unnatural American History Introduction**

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