

# Preventing Injustice

## *Early Social Activism Led Andrea Lyon to Represent Clients Facing the Death Penalty*

### **Angel of Death Row: My Life as a Death Penalty Defense Lawyer**

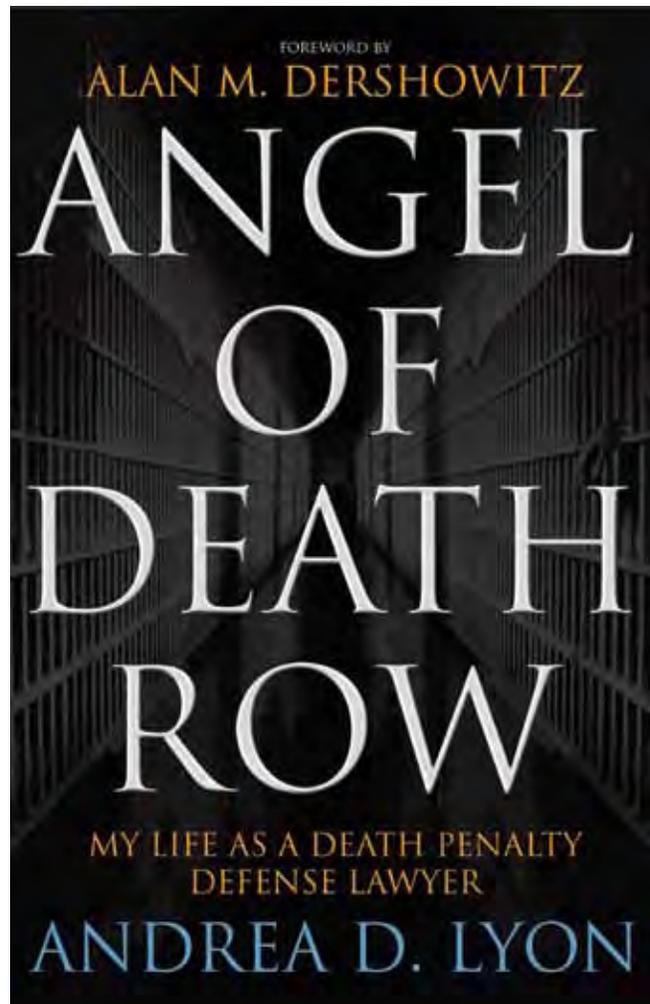
*Written By Andrea D. Lyon*

288 pages

\$24.95, Kaplan Publishing

**I**n 1995, the *Chicago Tribune* coined the moniker “The Angel of Death Row” to refer to Andrea Lyon because she has argued 19 cases where her clients were found guilty of capital murder and 19 times she has persuaded a jury to spare their lives. “The Angel of Death Row” is an autobiographical account of Lyon’s life and most fascinating cases. As the first woman to ever serve as lead attorney in a capital punishment murder case, Lyon is undeniably a tough woman. The story of her career is sprinkled with anecdotes of male lawyers and judges who underestimated or openly doubted her abilities as a female criminal defense lawyer. This book is worth reading just to read Lyon’s clever and irreverent banter with her male contemporaries. But, Lyon’s sharp wit and tongue are just one reason.

“The Angel of Death Row” tracks Lyon’s career as she moved through the lives and cases of her clients. Lyon defended Milton, a young man who killed three members of his family while hallucinating on angel dust, and Charlotte, a chronically battered woman who killed her husband with a meat carving knife during one of his assaults. Lyon represented Lonnie, a man who shot and killed an attorney and judge in open court and who was arguing in favor of his own death to achieve martyrdom. Annette was a client accused of killing her own 22-month-old daughter. Richard, a gang enforcer, made a unique impression on Lyon in their first meeting where he recounted the story of Aristophanes’ “Lysistrata.”



From that point on, Richard and Lyon’s jail conversations were split between discussing his case and the literature that Lyon would bring to him on death row.

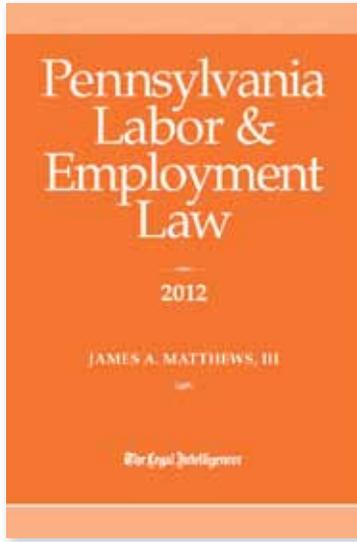
Alan Dershowitz writes in the foreword, “[w]e represent the ‘guilty,’ [ . . . ] in order to prevent injustice to the innocent.” Lyon recounts the social activism in her youth that was the catalyst for her to become a lawyer. This choice stemmed from her belief that the only way to create change in a system that is unfairly stacked against certain races, social groups and classes

is to become part of the system. Lyon ascribes to certain basic, yet lofty, ideals: every person’s life is valuable, every person deserves a good legal defense and no one’s race, gender or class should impact the outcome of trial. Her career has been dedicated to the protection of these ideals.

Lyon’s empathy for her clients has made her a formidable lawyer, but it also makes her an insightful author. She illustrates the fallibility of the “system” through the stories of her innocent clients and humanizes her guilty clients by telling their tragic histories, which brought them to a point where their right to continue living is left in the hands of twelve strangers. Her talent of humanizing through storytelling has prevented any jury

from sending her clients to their deaths. In this book, Lyon uses her same knack for narrative to illustrate her clients’ potential for redemption and makes a strong case against capital punishment. Her argument is subtly woven into her clients’ riveting stories and is persuasive because it appeals not only to one’s rational views of fairness, but also to one’s visceral sense of justice. ■

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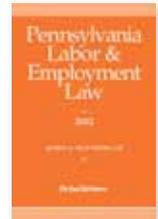
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