About the Book
The U.S. death penalty is a peculiar institution, and a uniquely American one. Despite its comprehensive abolition elsewhere in the Western world, capital punishment continues in dozens of American states—a fact that is frequently discussed but rarely understood. In a brilliantly provocative study, David Garland explains this tenacity and shows how death penalty practice has come to bear the distinctive hallmarks of America's political institutions and cultural conflicts.

Whereas the elites of other nations were able to impose nationwide abolition from above despite public objections, American elites are unable— and unwilling— to end a punishment that has the support of local majorities and a storied place in popular culture.

In the course of hundreds of decisions, federal courts sought to rationalize and civilize an institution that too often resembled a lynching, producing layers of legal process but also delays and reversals. Yet the Supreme Court insists that the issue is to be decided by local political actors and public opinion. So the death penalty continues to respond to popular will, enhancing the power of criminal justice professionals, providing drama for the media, and bringing pleasure to a public audience who consumes its chilling tales.

About the Author
David Garland is Arthur T. Vanderbilt Professor of Law and Professor of Sociology at New York University. He has held visiting positions at Leuven University (Belgium), the University of California, Berkeley and Yale University. Garland is the founding editor of the international journal Punishment & Society, and the author of an award-winning series of books on punishment and social control: Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies (1985), Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory (1990) and The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society (2001).

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