



Last Words of the Executed

Robert K. Elder

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Some beg for forgiveness. Others claim innocence. At least three cheer for their favorite football teams.

Death waits for us all, but only those sentenced to death know the day and the hour—and only they can be sure that their last words will be recorded for posterity. *Last Words of the Executed* presents an oral history of American capital punishment, as heard from the gallows, the chair, and the gurney.

The product of seven years of extensive research by journalist Robert K. Elder, the book explores the cultural value of these final statements and asks what we can learn from them. We hear from both the famous—such as Nathan Hale, Joe Hill, Ted Bundy, and John Brown—and the forgotten, and their words give us unprecedented glimpses into their lives, their crimes, and the world they inhabited. Organized by era and method of execution, these final statements range from heartfelt to horrific. Some are calls for peace or cries against injustice; others are accepting, confessional, or consoling; still others are venomous, rage-fueled diatribes. Even the chills evoked by some of these last words are brought on in part by the shared humanity we can't ignore, their reminder that we all come to the same end, regardless of how we arrive there.

Last Words of the Executed is not a political book. Rather, Elder simply asks readers to listen closely to these voices that echo history. The result is a riveting, moving testament from the darkest corners of society.

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