

# [PDF] A Trial By Jury

## D. Graham Burnett - pdf download free book

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### Books Details:

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Author: D. Graham Burnett  
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### Description:

Historian D. Graham Burnett writes about his experience as the foreman of the jury in a murder trial in New York City, what he calls "the most intense sixty-six hours of my life." There was nothing especially spectacular about the case; it was not a famous one, and while *A Trial by Jury* holds interest, it's not a John Grisham potboiler. Yet Burnett uses the experience to illuminate the heavy responsibilities of jury duty and all the maddening frustrations associated with determining something as deceptively simple as reasonable doubt.

"The jury room is a remarkable--and largely inaccessible--space in our society, a space where ideas, memories, virtues, and prejudices clash with the messy stuff of the big, bad world," Burnett writes in this elegant chronicle. His primary characters--his fellow jury members--come alive on these pages: "a clutch of strangers yelled, cursed, rolled on the floor, vomited, whispered, embraced, sobbed, and invoked both God and necromancy." He grows to like some, and "loathe" others. ("Are there some

citizens not clearly able to distinguish daytime television from daily life?" he asks at one point.) Parts of the book are funny, as when he describes the small steps he took to encourage the trial lawyers to strike him out of the jury pool: "I promised to give any healthy prosecutor hives. I brought along a copy of *The New York Review of Books* just in case." Alas, Burnett found himself in the courtroom, and eventually he became foreman. This allows him to wrestle through the contradictory evidence presented by both sides--and forces him to conclude that even the truth can resemble a muddle when presented in court. He has trouble making up his own mind about the case--this is no *Twelve Angry Men* update, though its insights on jury-room dynamics are just as instructive. Burnett also ruminates on his own profession: "I realize now that for me--a humanist, an academic, a poetaster--the primary aim of sustained thinking and talking had always been, in a way, *more thinking and talking*. Cycles of reading, interpreting, and discussing were always exactly that: cycles. One never 'solved' a poem, one read it, and then read it again--each reading emerging from earlier efforts and preparing the mind for future readings." Jury duty, of course, demands an awesome finality--and the conclusion to the trial involving Burnett is one that haunts the author after the gavel falls. --*John Miller* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**From Publishers Weekly** Combining an ethical examination of civic obligation with a meticulous character study, Princeton historian of science Burnett (*Masters of All They Surveyed*) dramatizes his experience of being selected for jury duty in a capital case. Told as two parts of the same tale (trial and jury deliberations), the story is appropriately navigated between several Scylla-and-Charybdis pairings the court and the jury room, the truth and lies of the case, the application of laws and the fiery desire for justice. While the murder trial delves into sordid details of transvestism, male prostitution and rape, the tale takes its potent turn when Burnett is unexpectedly moved into the position of jury foreman (the original foreman simply disappeared one day) and must play a critical role in the jury deliberations. Holding other jurors' wide-ranging emotions in check while staying focused on the case himself, Burnett ultimately brings readers face-to-face with the stultifying bureaucracy of American law in praxis. Drawing on an academic and intellectual background, he builds an impressive melodrama and tense, emotionally exhausting scenes in the jury room that surely will recall *Twelve Angry Men*. But while the ruminations are articulate and engrossing, readers may wonder how Burnett plays a key role in the story while managing to remain distant enough to render the facts of the jury room as easily as he does. (Sept. 19)Forecast: Knopf is taking a big position on this, with a first printing of 100,000, a 10-city author tour and national advertising on CNN and Court TV, where Burnett will also make appearances. If he comes across as personable, his glimpse behind the closed doors of justice could tempt a wide range of curious readers.

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