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'**Execution machine**' in Huntsville studied

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**BODY:**

"THE **Execution Machine:** Texas Death Row" - that's the title and focus of HBO's show at 9:30 tonight.

This latest in HBO's ongoing series of America Undercover **documentaries** is an inside view of what's happening up the road in Huntsville.

"With seven correctional facilities and 7,400 inmates, Huntsville is the prison capital of Texas," the narrator tells viewers.

As anticapital punishment demonstrators chant outside, the cameras move inside for "unprecedented access to one of the largest communities of condemned men in America, Ellis Unit 1 in Huntsville."

"Texas," says the narrator, "is in the midst of a series of executions whose pace has no equal in modern history."

It cites "more than 20 executions" in the first six months of this year, since state law limited the number of appeals available to prisoners. When this film was made, there were about 420 men on death row. The three who are profiled on the show were executed by lethal injection. But not on camera - TV still hasn't done that, thank God.

"It's a high-speed chase to the death chamber," says Excell White, who's been on death row 23 years, longer than any other inmate. "They're fixin' to fry everybody as soon as they can."

"They need more room," says another.

There are sound bites from a number of condemned prisoners about how it feels to be there. We don't find out why most of them are there, though, until the end of this hour.

The three main cases of the report are:

Joe Gonzalez, who had the fastest track to execution in Texas history (eight months). On film, he admits he murdered and robbed his ex-boss, and says he wants to die. "This place is full of pussyfooters; they live off taxpayers," he says.

"I have nightmares about what I did," says David Lee Herman, who murdered a woman and wounded two others in a robbery. His fellow inmates call him "the yuppie" and say he wouldn't hurt anybody. "He's the only person I ever met who voted," says one. Herman was executed the day after he tried, and failed, to commit suicide.

David Wayne Spence, convicted of killing three Waco teen-agers, maintained his innocence to the end, and several key witnesses against him recanted. In this report, his family and supporters try to get a last-ditch stay of execution, but fail. The brother of one of the victims tells the press how it felt to witness Spence's execution.

This **documentary** mostly focuses on what a death-row prisoner's life is like. But there are brief comments from some of the guards. Two women, while on duty, explain why they work there. One says opportunities are limited in Huntsville. The other says the condemned men flatter her ego. "Every woman wants to hear what you hear here," she says.

You wonder why the male guards give their brief comments in the "good ol' boy" setting of a country-and-western dance, instead of in uniform and on the job.

That's not the only subtle message from outside these walls. The camera's only other stop in Huntsville is at the Prison Museum, where touring school kids are told that inmates used to call the electric chair "Sparky."

The weekend scene

Baywatch body Yasmine Bleeth is always the runner-up and never the beauty pageant queen in ABC's Sunday movie, Crowned and

Dangerous (8 p.m., Channel 13). Danielle (Bleeth) may be ready to give up the crown to her nemesis Shauna (Cassidy Rae), but Danielle's Mama Rose (Jill Clayburgh) isn't about to concede. The movie starts out tongue-in-cheek and it's fun. But after things turn nasty, Crowned and Dangerous isn't so funny anymore. This try for something different, from executive producer Tony Danza's production shop, only partly works.

A bearded, flannel-shirted Richard Chamberlain goes deep into Northwest Indian territory to anguish over his lost love (Karen Allen), and his dying uncle (Hal Holbrook) in CBS' Sunday movie (8 p.m., Channel 11). All the Winters That Have Been reminds me of the awful sequel to Chamberlain's TV hit, *The Thorn Birds: The Missing Years*. This movie is so predictable and so boring, that if you watch it, don't fall out of your chair when you go to sleep.

**GRAPHIC:** Photo: 1. Excel White, looking from behind bars; Mug: 2. David Wayne Spence

**LOAD-DATE:** October 14, 1997