

Unit 3 Essay

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In certain areas of the world, execution methods such as beheading and stoning are still practiced. Now, while these extreme methods are banned from most countries, they are still legal in the Middle East along with some parts of Africa. This is partially due to the ancient history of the countries where it was a standard method of public execution. In recent years, countries have attempted to deconstruct these methods because of how they would tarnish the country's reputation. Around 60% of Americans are in favor of the death penalty, but 80% say there is a risk of innocent people being harmed (Pew Research Center, 2021). The whole ideology behind the death penalty is that when a person kills another (or commits a crime of a similar caliber), they deserve the same punishment. Not only is the death penalty inhumane, but it is an irreversible form of punishment where a simple mistake can cost someone their life. It has also been often associated with racial discrimination and the average cost to carry out the death penalty is roughly \$1,260,000 and totals around \$137,000,000 a year (Nevada Electronic Legislative, 2008). Recent studies have also shown that the use of the death penalty does not deter crime or lessen it.

The death penalty can inflict severe physical and psychological torment upon the people who have been sentenced on death row. In some cases, inmates may develop types of mental illnesses (Morin, 2022). One of the most obvious signs of psychological torment while living on death row is the suicides that occur before the execution date. According to Tartaro (2020), who is a professor of criminal justice, “the average rate of suicides per year on death row was 2.74, while the mean rate was 129.7 per 100,000 per year.” This shows the mental torture these prisoners endure while being placed on death row. When someone is placed on death row, they usually spend over a decade before the given execution date. This means that they face these psychological torments for a very long time. The evidence of psychological torture is directly

shown by the suicides alone. Nevertheless, since most death row inmates are placed in solitary confinement (in a cell alone), they begin to experience a rapid decline in their mental health, which can lead to depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Inmates are also not told when they are to be executed, so they live in a constant state of paranoia, which is another cause of their deteriorating mental health.

Another reason the death penalty should be abolished is because of the high costs. Taxpayers, especially the ones who do not support the death penalty, do not want their money going toward something they do not support. One of the reasons for the high costs is due to the various separate accommodations that are needed for each prisoner. Death row inmates are not simply sentenced to death and then executed; they remain an inmate for quite some time, which causes expenses to be a lot higher. To put into perspective how pricey the death penalty system is, California's death penalty system costs roughly \$137,000,000 annually, while it would only cost \$11,500,000 without it (Death Penalty Costs, 2023). Although California does tend to have quite the reputation for high living expenses, a decrease of over \$120,000,000 would surely change how much people pay in taxes. Many sources suggest a similar ridiculous cost of housing a death row inmate. According to Death Penalty Cost (2023), "Even if all post-conviction proceedings (appeals) were abolished, the death penalty would still be more expensive than alternative sentences." They say this because most of the expense is incurred during the post-conviction proceedings. Another large expense is the investigation costs that go into the case alone. Taxpayers incur the costs of the pretrial (investigative) costs and then the costs of incarceration. Some may argue that the costs that go into the death penalty could be used elsewhere, such as mental health research, more job opportunities, and education. The article Equal Justice USA (2023) suggests that "More than a dozen states have found that death penalty

cases are up to 10 times more expensive than comparable non-death penalty cases.” This shows that removing the death penalty could potentially result in 10 times lower case costs, which would save a lot of money.

The death penalty fails to deter crime in any way. When states with the death penalty are compared to those without, the crime rate is no different. According to the ACLU (2007), “there is no credible evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than long terms of imprisonment. States that have death penalty laws do not have lower crime rates or murder rates than states without such laws.” One would think that a punishment of death would at least partially deter crime, but it does not. The ACLU (2007) also suggests that some criminals who commit crimes punishable by death want to get caught and be sentenced to death. This may be due to something traumatic in their life or poor mental health/mental illness. According to the DPIC (2023), “Deterrence is probably the most commonly expressed rationale for the death penalty.” This means that the people who support the death penalty believe that it is effective at deterring crime, which has been proven false numerous times. People assume the threat of dying will stop crime, but as stated earlier, some individuals who commit these crimes have lost the will to live and do not care about the consequences.

A fourth reason the death penalty should be abolished is that it violates the fundamental rights of human life. This includes the violation of being subjected to physical and psychological torture. The UN (United Nations) adopted a policy in 1966 that says every human has the fundamental right to life and that “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” However, they still choose to enforce the death penalty upon people. The DCIP (2023) also suggests, “In countries which have not abolished the death penalty, sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the

crime.” Although the death penalty is illegal, they still have the option to enforce it, and judicial officials can, and will, abuse this power to their liking. The government continues to violate everyone's right to life and will continue to do so unless something changes. According to the CCR (N.D.), “As long as governments have the right to extinguish lives, they maintain the power to deny access to every other right enumerated in the Declaration.” The CCR says this because it shows that the government can almost do whatever it pleases, and when it continues to break the rules of the Declaration, it begins to weaken its reputation.

Over 8,700 people have been sentenced to death row, and almost 200 of them were proven not guilty (Morris, 2023). This number does not include the innocent who were never proven. There is a story about a man named Kwame Ajamu, who was sentenced to death at just 17 years old. He was found guilty in 1975 and spent 27 years of his life in prison after a 13-year-old boy lied in his testimony. Even after being released from prison, he wasn't found innocent for another 12 years. Morris (2023) from National Geographic says, “The post-traumatic stress faced by a wrongly convicted person who has awaited execution by the government does not dissipate simply because the state frees the inmate, apologizes, or even provides financial compensation. [...]” Ajamu will never get back the time he lost while being incarcerated. Another person who was falsely imprisoned for over 20 years was a man named Derrick Jamison. He was arrested for a robbery in 1984 and was placed on death row until 2005. Six times, he faced execution, but each time, he was given a stay. These former death row inmates now try to teach people about the injustice they faced and the flaws within the judicial system. Roughly 4% of the people sent to death row were found innocent (Innocence and The, 2023). Although the percentage seems low, each one of those people had a family and a life of their own. It is not fair to them to spend so much time of their life in prison for a crime they did

not commit. Over half of the people who have been exonerated from death row were African-American (Innocence and The, 2023). This shows the racial injustice and discrimination during sentencing. A large number of these people were sentenced to death with very little evidence, even just based on the testimony of one person. The racial unfairness in the judicial system is shown loudly when the statistics of people sent to death row are shown. It is not just racial, but also different cultural and religious groups are discriminated against in the judicial system.

In conclusion, 112 countries have abolished the death penalty entirely, an increase of 94 since 1977 (Amnesty, 2023). That is a significant step towards the abolishment of the death penalty entirely. Reading stories about the inmates who spent much time on death row is very saddening because their life was thrown away so quickly. Although the former prisoners are now free, their lives are forever changed, and nothing will bring back the time they lost. The death penalty will continue to violate fundamental human rights and claim the lives of the innocent unless abolished.

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