

Grade 12

Fatima High School

Destroy the Death Penalty

## **Destroy the Death Penalty**

In 1821, Stephen Clark was arrested for burning down a barn. Even though he had no criminal background, arson was a capital crime at the time and he was sentenced to death at the age of sixteen (Banner 1). Since the colonial times, there has been large support by many individuals to end the death penalty. If Clark had instead gotten a life sentence, his family could have visited him, and he could have been released early due to parole. I strongly believe that the death penalty should be replaced with life sentences to save money, remove the chance of killing an innocent person, and prevent unethical and inhumane executions.

A common argument of those in favor of the death penalty is that putting someone to death is cheaper and quicker than a life sentence. That argument is just not true. Since capital punishment is irreversible, putting someone to death is a lengthy process that can take much longer than a trial in which a death penalty is not sought. Executing someone also costs considerably more than a life sentence-even if the life sentence is served in a maximum security prison without parole. Because the court process is much more drawn out for a capital case and often reaches Supreme Court, justices have to be paid and juries be compensated for their time. Potential inmates can be left on death row for months at a time waiting for their life to be ended. If the death penalty was abolished, criminals could hear of their fate and be convicted much quicker while at the same time saving millions of dollars per year.

One of the main reasons that I think that the Death Penalty should be abolished is because of the chance of putting an innocent person to death. Even though the probability of this happening is low, death is irreversible. In 1991, Cameron Willingham was convicted of starting a fire that killed his three children and later put to death. Five years after his execution, new evidence arose that proved the fire was an accident (Peitzmeyer). Even though the chances of

executing an innocent person are low, the impact can be monumental to a family. A 2014 study done by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences determined that one person in every twenty-five sent to death row is innocent. (Peitzmeyer 2018). Although young Clark was not innocent in barn burning, I do believe that his execution at the age of 16 tore his household apart. Even if a person is convicted of murder and facing the death penalty, I believe that the chances of putting an innocent person to death outweighs any crime they might have committed.

Another reason that I think that the death penalty should be done away with is because of ethics. If we as a human race are ending the lives of those who have ended others' lives, what makes the system better than the killer? The Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal. I do not believe that one human has the right to kill another no matter the atrocities committed. I believe that God created everyone to be equal so it should be up to him to judge the convicted, not us. Killing one man or woman would not bring back their victims and would be just one more death. If a murderer was sentenced to life in prison instead of death row, he would have a chance to repent for his crimes, and a human life would be spared. Eventually, if evidence of reform is shown, someone previously considered a murderer could be offered parole and even given the chance to again become a contributing member of society. Clark was put to death when he still had his entire life ahead of him. If the death penalty had been nonexistent, he could have gone to school in prison while still being able to visit his family. Even if the chance for parole is never reached, I believe that it is better to give the criminal mercy because it would make us more humane as a society.

A final point that could be made against the death penalty is the inhumane nature of it. Since the 1600's, execution has been an optional consequence for a variety of different crimes such as murder, rape, spying, and even theft (Bedau 15). While many would recoil at the

thought of putting someone to death because of simple thievery, even more would shudder at the many different methods used to carry out a capital sentence before modern methods were made available. Options such as hanging, electric chair, gas chamber, and firing squad seem to be practically torture when compared to more modern method of lethal injection. Although it is rare that one of these methods is used to carry out an execution in the present century, all methods previously listed are still perfectly legal ways to perform capital punishment. Lethal injection may sound like a much more sophisticated way to kill than hanging, but it still has many of its own shortcomings. The cocktail of chemicals must be mixed to extremely precise measurements or the patient will be put through a torturous experience. Many states do not even have specified ingredient amounts and instead require the doctor administering the drug to concoct a potion strong enough to kill a human being. This has resulted in many blotched executions from poisons suffocating the victim to causing muscle seizure instead of simply stopping the heart. One execution was so unsuccessful that the criminal sat up and exclaimed, "It's not working" (Gerber and Johnson 111). Although many of these convicts have done grave deeds against other human beings, no one should have to suffer a slow and painful death of a lethal injection gone wrong.

I believe that there is never a need for the death sentence. Even though we have had execution as a consequence for murder for centuries, the most precise method of putting someone to sleep as painlessly as possible has not yet been reached. Sentencing life without parole has the same effect as the death penalty, but based on figures previously cited in the essay, is 58% cheaper and can be done without ending another life. Without the death penalty, we would not have had inhumane cases such as Clark's. Human beings are not perfect creatures, so it should not be up to us to judge a person and decide whether they get to live or die.

## Works Cited

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