

DEATH

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than actually let he or she sit in prison. The death penalty isn't a deterrent for crime. The death penalty also points to the racial inequality we have sitting in our prison system. Statistically, 82 percent of studies reviewed show that the race of the victim was found to influence the whether or not the defendant received the death penalty.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, a comprehensive study of the death penalty in North Carolina found that the odds of receiving a death sentence rose 3.5 times among those

defendants whose victims were white. By Oct. 1, 2011, North Carolina had 164 death row inmates.

In one of the most surreal moments of my life, I was able to witness the decision that a human being should be put to death. The summer after my freshman year of college, I interned for the public defender's office in Miami, Fla., on a death penalty trial.

The case, commonly referred to as the Baby Lollipop's Case, made headlines in 1990 when a toddler was found dead and duck-taped beside a home near the Miami shore.

The mother of the child, a Cuban immigrant named Ana Cardenas, who found her way to the United States as

a teenager, found herself facing a jury as she was immediately convicted and placed on death row.

Fifteen years later Cardenas was moved off death row after prosecutorial misconduct was found to have played a part during her trial. Five years later, I found myself sitting behind a woman in her late 40s, almost skin and bones, crying as she was found guilty of killing her son once again.

I had only known Cardenas for roughly a month, but the frustration and exhaustion of knowing the ins and outs of her case brought me to tears and rage. A few months later, I found out that the jury voted for her to be executed. I could deal with Cardenas being in

prison, but the thought of her being put to death like a unwanted dog made my stomach turn.

The death penalty has no place in our justice system as we move toward the future. Condemning other countries for murdering innocent civilians makes us look hypocritical, while we continue to execute those who may have been innocent all along.

Our system is one of the best, but it isn't perfect and it certainly isn't flawless.

We can reform the death penalty system in the United States. Even better, we can abolish an archaic, expensive, arbitrary, ineffective and inhumane practice.

LEGAL

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lowed to drink?

The International Center for Alcohol Policies provides information on the minimum ages to legally purchase and consume alcohol in more than 100 countries.

In some Islamic countries, like Brunei or Libya, sale of alcohol is banned.

A few countries on the list simply don't have an age limit set for buying or drinking alcohol.

Albania is one of them.

Evisa Ravi, 21, said she has never heard of a case when a minor received a fee for buying or drinking alcohol.

"Only fancy clubs ask for your ID, The majority of pubs and clubs don't care about your age," said Ravi, who started going out in Albania when she was 16.

In Albania, the obstacle for drinking is generally more about money than legal or social restrictions.

Since the parents control the children until they are 18, most young people don't start going out until then and therefore they are more economically independent.

In Sweden, the age limit to get into the bars is 18.

That's also the limit for buying beer containing up to 3.5 percent alcohol by volume in a normal store.

In order to buy alcohol from the liquor store, you need to be 20. Generally, the attitude towards alcohol is very laid back.

Most children grow up with alcohol in the home, so it's seldom considered taboo.

As secular societies, religion doesn't really affect the alcohol policies in the Scandinavian countries.

For us, drinking is a habit that's always been there – just think of the

Drinking age limits by country

- United States: 21
- Mexico: 18
- Finland: 18
- England: 18
- France: 18
- Germany: 16 for beer, 18 for spirits
- Ireland: 18
- Italy: 16
- Portugal: 16
- Brazil: 18
- Fiji: 21
- Cambodia: None



International Center for Alcohol Policies

Vikings – and because of that, we sometimes feel some social pressure to drink.

We get to know alcohol and its consequences early, so by the age of 21, drinking is really not that exciting anymore.

Instead we might arrange wine or whiskey tastings with our friends, drinking in a more grown-up way, so to speak. The legal drinking age is also 18 in Mexico, but in practice, stores, bars and restaurants don't ask young people for their ID.

Alcohol is considered part of the everyday life there as well.

"My parents have always allowed us to drink small quantities of alcohol during meals and family reunions. Because of that, I never felt the need to drink outside of home before I was 18," said

23-year old Carolina Garza Amparán from Mexico.

If alcohol is seen as something forbidden it might trigger people to drink more or even use substitutes that are easier to get a hand on.

Those people who drink illegally may drink more than those who drink legally, and knowing when to stop is hard when you are young and inexperienced. Knowing how to say no to substitutes such as marijuana and other drugs is hard too.

When talking about the consequences of minors using alcohol, these side effects shouldn't be ignored.

Nathalie Holmgren is an international journalism student from the University of Helsinki in Helsinki, Finland.

INMATES

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Books everywhere is to help educate and prosper prisoners.

Books are a fundamental part of the political, spiritual and educational development of all people. To rob those who committed crimes of that not only ceases a chance of any doing well in society, but takes away the chance to redeem those incarcerated from the mistakes that lead them to give up a certain time of their lives in the first place.

Moirra Bradford, an English and history teacher at Asheville Middle School, helps organize and coordinate Prison Books in Asheville.

Bradford became involved in Prison Books when she was looking for an organization that would feed her activist need.

"Often at times these people in prison are forgotten, once they have a criminal record they can literally kiss their life goodbye. Prison Books helps these people who think they have no chance by providing them something so simple yet so effective – books," Bradford said.

Education remains the most powerful tool to generate or degenerate a generation. The chances of an inmate returning to the prison system after their release are greatly reduced by education.

According to Prison Book's officials, prison educational programs have been drastically cut and most prisoners cannot afford to buy their own books. Most prisons don't even allow family and friends to send books into prisons as it might seem like a threat. Books must come from a book store or publisher.

This is when the people start taking control of the situation