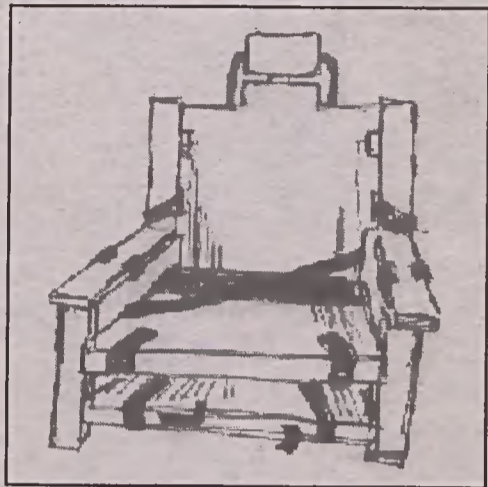


America and capital punishment

Is the death penalty a just sentence for first-degree murder in today's world?



Yes

Is one life worth more than another? Is "an eye for an eye" an immoral practice? When referring to capital punishment, I feel that "no" is the obvious answer to these two questions.

While this is a highly publicized issue, the majority of stories reported deal with the criminal and his rights rather than the rights of the victim and their family. Rarely do you hear stories about the victims and their loved ones left behind. You don't read about 13-year-old Karen Patterson, who was shot and killed in her bed in North Charleston, SC. She was murdered by her neighbor, Joe Atkins, who had recently been released from prison after serving ten years of a life sentence. After shooting Patterson, he then murdered his adopted father, who, ironically, had worked hard to get his son's parole. You don't hear about the children of Kenneth Boyd, ages 13, 12 and 10, who watched as their father shot and killed their mother and grandfather. These children experienced a horrible event, the likes of which the majority of Americans have only seen on TV.



By Tyler Ross

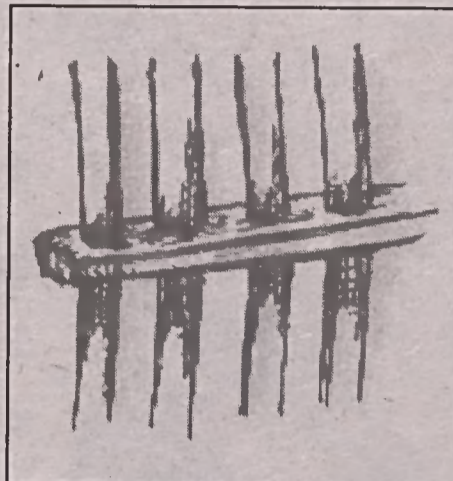
The act of murder, in this context, is nearly unfathomable and is worthy of a punishment that matches the crime. A life sentence does not seem to adequately fit the crime. As seen in the case of Atkins, a life sentence is not necessarily what it sounds. In some states, convicted first-degree murderers have been given a life sentence with the option of parole after a certain number of years. The sentence of life without parole is reserved for those who jurors believe do not have the right to life outside of confinement.

The death penalty is only used in extreme cases. Jurors, who represent the public voice, have done a good job of reserving the death penalty for the crimes that were most deserving. With an average of 15,000 murders per year and just over 1,000 executions in the last 30 years, juries have reserved capital punishment for the worst of the worst.

Many critics argue that capital punishment is too expensive. A death penalty case will cost the state at least 40 percent more than a case seeking life without parole. For many, this is adequate explanation that the death penalty is ineffective and unnecessary. However, the average lethal injection dose costs \$86.08. The surplus costs to the state lie in the excessive numbers of appeals, personal restraint petitions and the elongated trial period. When examining cost, it may be more important to change the legal procedures rather than doing away with the penalty.

The job of the American justice system is to protect society. If it is our duty to protect ourselves and our loved ones, then capital punishment is the most effective way to do so.

Statistics and information from pro-deathpenalty.com



Art by Laura Chao

No

The Constitution says that there shall be no "cruel and unusual punishment." There is no exact line that says where "necessary" ends and "cruel and unusual" begins, but how can ending someone's life not be cruel and unusual? The additional killing of human beings cannot be beneficial to our country and it makes our government just as bad as the Saddams and Castros it is condemning.

Killing someone cannot be undone, and in some cases is done to innocent people. Juries don't always give the correct verdict, and no matter how much the evidence stacks up against a person, it is possible that they are innocent. There have been many reported instances in which people on death row have been proven not guilty, including a case in North Carolina in which Alan Gell was on death row for eight years due to vital evidence being withheld. Finally it was proven that there was no possible way that Gell could have committed the crime and he was set free. Had the state had its way, an innocent man would have been killed for a murder that he did not commit.

Some think that if the death penalty is abolished, there will be criminals roaming the streets. 37 out of 38 states that allow the death penalty offer life in prison without the opportunity for parole as an alternative, so no convicted murderers will be freed if capital punishment is abolished. Life in prison keeps our government from becoming murderers and still is a very harsh punishment for people who commit horrible crimes. Criminals would also have a lifetime to pay back society for their crimes through the mandatory service required of prisoners. Killing these criminals would be a waste of a life that could be spent in service to their victims.

If the death penalty was a good crime deterrent, it might be more acceptable statistically, even if not morally. However, it cannot be proven that the death penalty stops crime more effectively than any other punishment, so there is no reason why the government should still use this inhumane form of punishment. With over half of the countries in the world having abolished the death penalty, the United States is a member of a quickly shrinking minority of nations that maintains this form of punishment. Countries are realizing the inhumanity of capital punishment and are putting an end to this savage practice. In 2005, 94 percent of all known executions took place in four countries: China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the U.S.. To be included in a statistic about capital punishment with beacons of human rights as Iran and Saudi Arabia is shocking. It is deplorable that the U.S. cannot process the idea that we are in league with the very terrorist nations that we speak out against. The death penalty makes our government and our country just as much to blame as the criminals we are putting to death, and that needs to change.



By Kathleen Boudreau