

Survey Says Students Favor Abolishing Capital Punishment

In conjunction with the current discussions concerning the abolition of capital punishment in North Carolina, the UNC News undertook a campus-wide telephone survey Monday night to determine student opinion concerning this controversial issue.

The students who were interviewed agreed two to one that capital punishment should be abolished in North Carolina. Most of those who opposed complete abolition of the death penalty were somewhat conservative as to what extent it should be used.

Students who favored abolition of the North Carolina law did so for the following reasons:

1. Religious factors definitely oppose the use of capital punishment. "Human life is sacred—man cannot create it; therefore, he should not destroy it." This statement by June White, a graduate student, sums up students' comments concerning the religious aspect of the question.

2. Man is not infallible. He makes mistakes by committing crimes, and courts can make mistakes in trying him. "The execution of many guilty men does not compensate for the life of one man who is innocent," one undergraduate coed affirmed.

3. Capital punishment does not deter crime enough to warrant its use. A person who commits first degree murder, rape, arson, or first degree burglary, the four capital offenses in North Caro-

lina, does so from anger, fright, or overruling passion without thinking at the time that he may be executed. Furthermore, one student noted that England, for example, has no death penalty; yet England's crime rate is still lower than that of the United States.

4. Capital punishment is not equally or fairly applied, especially in the South. A defendant's money, social status, and race often influence legal representation and jury prejudices. "A Negro with no money will be more likely to receive the death sentence for rape than would a white man with money who committed the same crime," a graduate student said.

5. Life imprisonment would serve the purpose better than the death penalty. "But," one student cautioned, "life imprisonment isn't the answer if people are paroled in just a few years—they may do it again." Most of the students interviewed felt that imprisonment can have rehabilitative effects if properly sought and properly provided. "Rehabilitation is possible in many cases, and is certainly preferable to taking human life," affirmed a junior coed.

The majority of students interviewed who favored retaining capital punishment in North Carolina gave the following reasons as support of their opinion:

1. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—a person who

takes another's life should lose his own," a freshman stated. Another student added, "I think there are times when destroying human life is excusable—war and certain crimes, for example."

2. Capital punishment should be used only when rehabilitation will not work. In this case it would serve as a safeguard for American society to prevent repetition of the same crime by the same person. "I think the average American does feel some responsibility for capital punishment, but we still need it for protection," a sophomore student affirmed.

3. The death penalty should be used if the crime was premeditated—if the defendant was aware of the consequences before committing the capital offense. "If the person realized what he was doing, and did it anyway, then he should be willing to pay the price," one student commented.

4. "Television and movies have exaggerated the aspect of executing the innocent man because of its use as a good mystery plot. In actual cases, the possibility of human error is only one in a million," another undergraduate said.

When asked their opinions concerning the possibility of televising executions, the purpose being to make society more aware of its responsibility for capital punishment and thus more willing to have it abolished, most of the students interviewed thought the idea "horrible" and "barbaric."

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