

Death of a Texan

State executions represent bad means of punishment



Welcome to Texas, leader in executions." This organ may never make it into the state travel guide, but it would fit nicely. No other state in the nation executes more individuals than the state of Texas. Twenty-four individuals have been executed in Texas, and there are 14 more scheduled for the month of July. The single-year record for executions already has been broken, and the trend is toward even more state-sanctioned murders. This trend must raise questions over the validity and effectiveness of the death penalty in American society.

This year, Texas has killed more prisoners than the countries of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria combined. The fact that all three countries operate under a system of government dictated by Muslim law makes their treatment of felons more civil than the democratic system of the United States. The moral implications of capital punishment have been ignored by the American justice system. This implies that either the religious life has not put enough pressure on the government to change, or the separation of church and state has prevented the topic from being addressed properly.

Other moral issues have been ignored in the implementation of the death penalty. The finality of the punishment means that the imperfect system of justice in the U.S., innocent people will die. Some might justify this by saying the appeals process is designed for this inevitability, but even that is not a perfect system. The actual carrying out of the execution is another barbaric aspect of the debate.

The protection from cruel and unusual punishment is violated by the murder itself. Although Texas uses lethal injection, the most painful method used, many other states use methods that inflict unnecessary pain. The psychological abuses suffered in the final hours before an execution also can be considered cruel. Even when the prisoner may be prepared for the awaiting fate, there is no way to be certain when the actual event may occur. Last-minute appeals and stays of execution mean that some may prepare to die many times before they are actually killed.



GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber

The economic implications of capital punishment have proven it to be a disproportionate drain on government resources.

The U.S. General Accounting Office reports that executing a prisoner costs 42 percent more than imprisoning the individual for life. In Florida, a state also known for its use of the death penalty, each execution cost an average of \$3.2 million, a rate six times higher than life imprisonment in that state. In a nation where 7.6 million school-age children live in poverty, there are better uses for the money generated for trying, appealing and carrying out capital punishment cases.

One of the major goals of government is to properly distribute the money it collects through taxes in a way that proves beneficial to society.

The U.S. is the only Western country to still use the death penalty as a form of punishment. The reasons government cite for executing criminals are primarily deterrence and retribution.

To murder a criminal as retribution for crimes is no excuse for denying others, especially disadvantaged children, from benefits that will help improve social standards. With the majority of individuals on death row being minorities, there also is a need to educate those who are at high risk for ending up in jail: the underprivileged youths growing up in poverty.

The deterrence method is flawed because

it requires people to rationally balance out the benefits of committing a crime punishable by death with the penalty associated with the crime. Any person who legitimately considers murdering someone for any reason is by no means acting in a rational manner — quite the opposite is true.

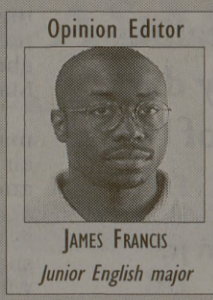
The deterrence aspect also falls short due to the time factor that the appeals process calls. For death to be a viable deterrent, it must be carried out quickly — something that is far from the truth in the appeals process of capital crimes.

The retribution aspect of the death penalty doesn't work well either. Any form of punishment is retribution, and saying that execution is the only proper sentence for committing a crime is to discount other forms of punishment. Retribution requires that society will be better off by the killing of the individual. Placing criminals in jail for life, and not paroling those offenders will fulfill the aspects of retribution for crimes.

The execution of a human being as a means of punishment for crimes has become an ineffective means to prevent crime. Capital punishment has become a burden upon the government's budget, causing a deficiency in the total well-being of the public. Executions should be deemed a barbaric means of controlling crime in society today. There is no place for capital punishment in a civilized society, and it must be abolished.

American public accepts low-end of societal stick

Employee: "Welcome to McDonald's, how may I take your order?"
Customer: "I'd like a Big Mac with a super-sized order of french fries and a small diet Coke, please."
Employee: "Your total comes to \$4.35, please drive to the second window."



and alcohol abuse. And even though society realizes how tragic it is for a child to die from drug and alcohol abuse, the same sentiment is heard everyday: "I hate to hear things like this, but what can I do?"

This might seem like an ordinary conversation at one of America's best-selling fast-food restaurants, but what happens next is an occurrence everyone has experienced at least once in a lifetime.

The customer gets the order and drives from the restaurant. At a stoplight, only a few blocks from home, the individual decides to snack on a few french fries and check to make sure everything was placed into the bag. Sure enough, the order must have been crisscrossed with someone else's, and the unlucky customer is stuck with an order of chicken nuggets, an apple pie and a large Dr. Pepper. But the answer and sigh of frustration is always the same: "Oh well, it's just fast food. I'm almost home, and I'm not turning back around."

Although many of us have conducted ourselves in this same manner, it is ironic how some situations are allowed to persist while others never would be tolerated. With food, for example, it can be assumed that no one would go to a fancy restaurant and accept the wrong order, as in the case with fast food.

This "rule of acceptance" is not new in today's society, and it doesn't just pertain to eating at fast-food restaurants. It's time for people to start standing up for what they believe and deserve, thereby helping society become a more finely-tuned mesh of operations.

Some of the biggest problems America faces today are teenage smoking, drinking and illegal drug usage. Although these social ills might seem too grand to tackle, one area for improvement falls under the simple category of parenting. If parents would start teaching their children about the harsh consequences of these health-abusing violations, the nation would see a dramatic decrease in percentages.

While it is true that many parents instruct their children on the evil aspects of abusing their bodies, it is also obvious that many more could do the same. Each year, America loses multitudes of teenagers to drug

persist in our government. People are constantly dying from horrific ailments that range from cancer to AIDS, but government intervention is not the full-scale attack we would all like to see.

Instead of spending \$3.2 million on the execution of a criminal in Florida, that money could be used to further research on terminal illnesses and possibly save a life. The government, however, seems too preoccupied with nuclear advancement, repairs to the White House and pay raises to members of Congress.

A good example of how people can stand up for their rights was demonstrated in the Student Rec Center debate earlier this summer. A policy was enacted which prevented students who were not enrolled for the summer terms to attain membership to the Rec Center — normally, a student could purchase a \$70 pass to work out in the center. To put an end to what many students felt was an unfair policy, individuals got together, voiced their opinions and the University administration helped to return the re-implement the summer passes.

This is the way anything and everything in society should work. People must stop overlooking wrongdoings and start acting to prevent any future problems. A simple fast-food order, where a mistake is made, should sound more like this:

Employee: "Welcome to Taco Bell, how may I take your order?"
Customer: "I'd like two bean burritos, one soft taco and a medium Sprite."

Employee: "Your total comes to \$2.69, please drive up to the first window."

Customer (after receiving the order and checking the bag's contents): "I'm sorry, I think you must have mixed up my order with someone else's, because I didn't order any of these items."

Employee: "Sorry for the mix-up. I'll be right back with your correct order and a free side order of Spanish rice."

Customer: "Thank you."
This conversation is the way things should be, and yes, it really is that simple sometimes.



MAIL CALL

Liberal ideology criticizes Baptists

In response to Mandy Cater's July column:

Cater blasts the Southern Baptist Convention for taking a stand (not endorsing hate or bigotry) against Disney, calling the Convention's delegates close-minded." The SBC has stood firm in its position against not only homosexuality, but other forms of immoral and sinful behavior (premarital sex, alcoholism, gambling, etc.) — a stance of which few religious groups still adhere.

Cater claims that companies such as IBM, Microsoft, Bank of America, and even the 49ers have jumped on the bandwagon." Sounds like her column should

have been entitled, "Gay supporting groups think alike."

Cater only demonstrates how liberal minds pride themselves in being open-minded, yet gag at the notion of listening to the other side's viewpoint.

It was always my perception that liberals and free-thinkers jumped off the bandwagon and went against the norm.

It is becoming more evident, however, that the embracing of homosexuality is becoming more mainstream.

Cater should examine her views, determine which views are simply "in," and think twice before ridiculing a group for having "conventional minds."

Steve Walkup
Class of '98

Disney driven by business mentality

In response to John Lemon's July 2 column:

Let's talk entertainment, let's talk Southern Baptist and anyone else who wants to boycott Disney. If you boycott Disney and everything associated with it or ever has been, people would have to give up Burger King — the conveyor belt that grills the burgers was

made for Disneyland in the '50s. Coca Cola and Diet Coke are the official soft drinks of Disney, you would have to leave home without the American Express card, these are just a few examples. As far as Disney supporting 'Gay Days,' the last time I checked, Disney was still a business.

Let me ask you this question: If you were a business, would you turn people away at the door because of their sexual orientation? I don't think so. Furthermore, as a Disney cast member who has worked for the company during one of these weekends, the company's stance is "We do not support it, but we aren't going to turn away a paying guest if they are here for a vacation." Disney has put up with a lot of grief because of its stance. Once again, Disney leads the way as far as benefits for gay couples.

Look at the other companies that are following instead of leading. For those of you who wish to boycott Disney, go ahead, but you won't be able to see Hercules, Con Air and other blockbuster movies this summer. Lemons should know that Disney is an entertainment company, not just for kids and families anymore.

Matthew Hunt
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