

The ultimate punishment?

Justice system
imperfect for
such a decision

American society has progressed a lot since Greg vs. Georgia (1976), the momentous court decision to continue the death penalty.

From the firing squad to the electric chair to the "oh-so-sophisticated" lethal injection needle. Congratulations America. The country has come a long way. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Too bad no one mentions that nifty "Thou shalt not kill" commandment.

Capital punishment in America is plagued by institutionalized racism, economic inequality and the wrongfully convicted. The United States criminal justice system is too biased to decide whether any person should live or die. America has condoned the barbaric system of capital punishment for the last 23 years. In those 23 years, fewer than five white people have been sentenced to death for murdering African-American citizens; only one of these men has actually been executed.

Is this because whites just do not murder African-Americans? No, it is because as tolerant and progressive as America tries to appear as a nation, the lives of African-Americans do not seem to be valued as much as the lives of white people.

Take a trip to Georgia, where the death penalty was upheld in 1976. Since then, over 60 percent of murder victims have been African-Americans, yet 20 of the 22 people executed during that period were white.

Georgia prosecutors sought the death penalty in 70 percent of cases involving murders committed by blacks against whites, but they seek the death penalty in less than 10 percent of cases involving other racial combinations.

It should be no surprise to anyone that, nationally, more than 80 percent of prisoners executed had white victims. Is this just a coincidence?

Race is not the only factor that makes the death penalty inherently unjust. Jeff Emery, Daniel Corwin, J.D. Gleaton, Larry Gilbert, and Kevin Cardwell are perfect examples of injustice that exemplifies the American judicial system.

They are five recent prisoners who have been executed. All of these men were white, convicted murderers. Their crimes were no more heinous than other murderers. So what made these men candidates for the death row? The answer is poverty. All of these men were poor.

Basic economics plays a huge role in capital punishment cases. The American Bar Association has shown it is not the facts of the case, but legal representation that decides whether a defendant will get the "chair" or not.



MARK MCPHERSON/THE BATTALION

More than half of death row inmates' lawyers had never handled a capital murder case before. Statistics show the more money a defendant has, the less likely he or she is to receive the death penalty. Who would have guessed?

The number one justification capital punishment proponents state for the death penalty is that it deters crime. This is pure nonsense.

Currently, of the 3,500 criminals on death row, only 6 percent have actually been executed; with so few prisoners actually receiving their punishment, can it actually be classified a deterrent?

If a parent gives her teenager a curfew, but only punishes the teenager 6 percent of the time, does this punishment deter the teenager's little brother from breaking the curfew when he eventually receives one?

Of course not — yet this is what capital punishment proponents want Americans to believe.

The most obvious answer to this problem is to have more executions, but the only groups this would hurt are African-Americans and the economically challenged.

The most compelling reason the death penalty should be eliminated is the number

of death row inmates who have been wrongfully convicted. There is a long list of falsely accused people who were on death row once but have been released because of new evidence.

This list consists of the lucky ones, not the ones who could not appeal before they were wrongfully put to death. America will never know how many victims were put to death for crimes they did not commit.

The criminal justice system is not perfect enough to decide matters of life or death. America can never call itself a civilized nation as long as it allows race and money to dictate who lives or dies within an imperfect criminal justice system.

Where the sanctity of life is concerned, those factors must be ignored.

The system has proven its inability to ignore race or economics and the death penalty adds no benefit to society, consequently the only way to solve the problem is to abolish the death penalty.

No one wants to mock the memory of a murder victim, but the criminal justice system should not be allowed to create new victims through inbred social inequality.

Christian Robbins is a junior speech communications major.

Death penalty best method for reducing crime, expense

The American criminal justice system may have its faults. But capital punishment is not one of them.



BRANDON MULLEN

Despite arguments to the contrary, the use of the death penalty is more cost-effective than life in prison without parole. It is not racially biased to one ethnicity. And it does have a role in deterring crime.

One organization which works to prove these facts is Justice for All. Founded in 1993, its purpose is to protect American from violent crime. Their Website provides pertinent information to refute many of the anti-death penalty arguments.

A mainstay argument for those against the death penalty is its racist.

Justice for All states, "Whites are executed at rates nearly 50 percent above their involvement in murder, African-Americans are executed at rates 20 percent below their involvement in murder."

Ignoring the fact whites make up the majority of criminals executed, anti-death penalty advocates argue that the vast majority of victims in capital offense cases are white. And only a very small percentage are African-American.

How then is the death penalty racist? If there is any racism, it would appear to be against African-American murder victims. But nearly all African-American murders are committed by other African-Americans. Realizing this, if the death penalty were to achieve more racial equality, the number of African-Americans executed would need to increase significantly.

Another significant issue the anti-death penalty side argues is the cost. Both sides of the issue accept that a death penalty conviction can cost around \$2 million over six years. This price includes higher-court costs and increased security.

But the anti-death penalty constituents suggest a cheaper alternative would be life without parole. Using a 50-year average, those against capital punishment figure a life without parole case would cost only \$1 million.

Justice for America views this figure to be a large under-estimate. They think that this estimate only applies to an average criminal. Their estimate takes into account the added security necessary for criminals convicted of capital offenses. Time magazine found it costs \$24,000 a year to keep prisoners in average cells and \$75,000 a year to keep them in maximum security cells. Including this difference, Justice for America figured it would cost over \$3 million to keep a criminal in prison for life, using the same 50 year average.

Regardless of the estimates and the figures, common logic would

suggest that keeping someone on death row for six years, the new standard under the Writ of Habeas Corpus, would be cheaper than 50 years or more, especially when health care costs are added in for inmates who survive into old age.

A major concern with a judgment as final as death is the innocence of those convicted. The possibility of an innocent man being executed is made very slim due to the numerous steps the legal system has set up to prevent this. Justice for America states, "37 percent of all death row cases have been overturned for due process reasons or commuted." Also, death row convicts "are six times more likely to get off death row by appeals than by execution." These statistics show that if there is any chance a person is innocent, they will likely be removed from death row.

The death penalty succeeds by keeping those guilty of capital crimes from striking again. Far more innocent lives are being saved than are being executed. Justice for America uses Department of Justice statistics to show that 84,800 violent crimes every year, are committed by paroled and probated criminals.

The death penalty is also more of a deterrent than life without parole. Of those suspects convicted of capital murders practically 100 percent argued for life without parole versus death. This shows a true fear for the death penalty. If the justice system could make it more of a threat, then perhaps future murders could be prevented.

Justice for America uses Houston as proof that the chance of getting the death penalty does actually deter criminals. In 1981, there were 701 murders in Harris County. The next year, Texas reinstated capital punishment. By 1996 there were only 261 murders in Houston. This is an incredible reduction of 63 percent. Solid evidence criminals will think twice if they believe they will die if they commit murder.

The way to counter the opposition to the death penalty is to examine their arguments. Some say capital punishment shows racial bias, but for their stance to be resolved more minorities would have to be executed. Others say it is more cost-effective to simply put criminals in prison for life, but they fail to take into account that capital criminals can not be treated like an average criminal. They require increased security, which over a life term becomes too expensive.

The main reason the death penalty must remain a part of the justice system is that it works and would work better if it were used more often. The swift and frequent use of the death penalty on those who have been proven guilty would stop future capital crimes.

Brandon Mullen is a senior history and English major.

MAIL CALL

Fraternities provide friends, role models

In response to Russell Page's n. 27 opinion column.

I take exception to his characterizing all fraternities as liars their approach to recruitment. He said "Each fraternity seeks to draw in potential rushees by promising they are the smartest, most athletic and smoothest of the ladies."

I feel that Mr. Page has decided to base his comments on what many television and popular magazines would like readers believe in order to gain their attention.

As someone that never thought I would ever join a Greek letter society, I can say that my leadership skills were developed spontaneously through my involvement.

The friends I made in my four years of college are family to

me. I've stood in their weddings, visited them when their children were born and stood with their families as they were laid to final rest.

It's foolish to label so many groups with tags that are not necessarily earned but rather inherited from members past. There are still groups out there that recruit by using alcohol and women to sell a very pretty package of something that is empty inside.

These types of groups are far behind the times. Those that are truly successful are those that use recruitment as an extension of opportunity for the organization to grow and become stronger through personal contact and friendship.

It is easy to complain about fraternities because they are often in the social eye of the community at this incredible school.

Many of the members of all three councils of Greek letter societies are Fish Camp coun-

selors, Student Government representatives, members of the Corps of Cadets and above all Aggies.

Please be careful in the words you use to describe Greeks. You're not only labeling Greeks, but every other organization that those individuals participate in.

Tom Sullivan
Class of '95 and '00

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