

The value of life

Business



“ What says the law? You will not kill. How does it say it? By killing!” The death penalty has been a controversial topic since it was first installed in the eighteenth century B. C, and is still one of the most prevalent issues in modern America.

Victor Hugo, author of *Les Miserables*, identifies the irony behind the inhumane practice of the government taking their people’s lives for revenge in his quote above. The United States of America claims to be the ‘ land of the free’, but is a country really free if they seek revenge on their citizens? In order for today’s United States to be the progressive nation they claim to be, the anachronous practice of the death penalty must be abolished. There are four main reasons as to why we punish people; retribution, deterrence, isolation, and rehabilitation. Retribution, simply put, is revenge and punishing a criminal in a similar manner as their crime, but that only reveals that we are no less better than the criminals themselves. The death penalty is also significantly more expensive than a life sentence, and using this alternative method of punishment could save states around to ninety million dollars annually. If We the People are indeed better individuals than murderers, we cannot be murderers ourselves.

Instead of killing these criminals, and proving ourselves no different than them, a life sentence is a cost-effective and more humane alternative. As children we were taught that two wrongs don’t make a right, but in today’s disconcerting society this is no longer applicable. One of the four core reasons for punishment is the act of retribution, which is often described as ‘ an eye for an eye’. This ancient justification for punishment punishes offenders in a similar way as the crime they committed, which is basic

human instinct. As mentioned above, as cliché as it may sound, two wrongdoings do not make something right. If the United States takes the lives of criminals who did the same to someone else, we are showing that we are no less merciful than the criminals themselves.

Another reason for punishment is deterrence, meaning that the punishment is there to scare possible criminals and prevent them from committing a crime in the first place. Contrary to common belief, deterrence is not effective regarding the death penalty. Statistics strongly show that murder rates in states with the death penalty are almost identical to the murder rates of states without the death penalty. In fact, every year from 1991 to 2011, the murder rates are slightly lower in states without the death penalty than states that use this cruel punishment. Criminals are isolated so that they can be kept away from the general public for their safety. While most agree that criminals should not freely roam the streets, a life sentence served in jail keeps criminals away from the streets as well as a the death penalty, but the ladder of the two is much more brutal and leaves no possibility that the person could ever be pardoned if they are actually innocent.

Lastly, criminals are disciplined for rehabilitation, the possibility that by serving their time they will change into law-abiding people. Rehabilitation improves the criminal for their own benefit and reduces the probability that they will return to crime. When a criminal is sentenced to the death penalty, they do not receive any rehabilitation, instead they are killed. By using the death penalty the United States is neglecting rehabilitation, a service that all other criminals are entitled to. For a better United States, we must change our reasoning for punishment and look to our European allies, all of whom

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have banned the death penalty, and revoke retribution, an idea tens of thousands of years old.

America must also see the alternative methods of isolation, the fact that deterrence has no effect on criminals regarding murder, and give all criminals, no matter the severity of the crime, the opportunity to rehabilitate. Many people believe in the death penalty because they are under the impression that it is significantly less expensive than serving life in jail. Shockingly it is incomparably cheaper to serve a life sentence than it is to endure the death penalty. Ironically the government wishes to be 'humane' in their methods of killing their citizens, and most states only use the lethal injection method to kill criminals. Lethal injection is a carcinogenic fluid that is injected into one's veins, entering the bloodstream and causing that person to die, similar to the way sick animals are often put to sleep. Lethal injections involve expensive procedures and a multitude of specialized experts.

The death penalty is more expensive for taxpayers, and the court process is lengthy to ensure the defendant is guilty, which adds extra costs due to additional lawyers, judges, ect. California could save over one billion dollars in five years if they eradicated the death penalty. Instead of this money being used towards murder and trials, it could be used on programs to improve today's society, including education, poverty, public safety, and mental health services. This way not only would there be no death penalty, but the money saved could be used to prevent people from committing a crime in the first place and instead helping them grow into a person who enriches society. The most common and accepted alternative to the death

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penalty is a life sentence without parole, meaning that the criminal spends the rest of their life in jail without the possibility of ever returning to everyday society (except if they are later found innocent of the crime they allegedly committed).

According to Time Magazine, people serving a life sentence usually claim that they are happy and grateful to still be alive, despite the circumstances. No European countries have the death penalty except for Belarus; instead, the majority utilizes the life sentence as an alternative. Other than China, most countries still practicing the death penalty are either developing and poor or in conflict. If the United States wishes to be a country of inspiration and forward-moving, how can we do so when we are the only country of our kind using such barbaric methods of punishment? Lastly, a life sentence keeps the criminal isolated, therefore ensuring the public's protection while eliminating the possibility of an irreversible mistake costing a life could be made. It is true that in today's age, DNA identification helps us tremendously in court cases, but there is always room for error, and a few have been made in the past few decades.

The life sentence not only erases the slight possibility of an innocent person being killed, but it is also more economical and using it would show other countries a less brutal image of the United States. In conclusion, the death penalty is preventing the United States of America from reaching its full potential. This ancient practice of a government killing their citizens for revenge is not only callous, but obsolete today's world in that it costs more than the more humane alternative of spending life in jail. If the United States wished to secure their spot as a progressive and modern nation, how can <https://assignbuster.com/the-value-of-life/>

they continue to use a punishment almost no other powerful or even stable country strictly prohibits? The death penalty may have seemed like a good idea to King Hammurabi of Babylon in eighteenth century B. C when he officially established the idea of retribution, but that was 1700 B.

C and this is 2014, yet the United States continues to use this age-old method of discipline. If you, reader, dream of an improved country, opposition to the death penalty is key. With the death penalty, America is simply stuck behind a barrier with countries such as North Korea and Afghanistan, but when that wall is knocked down an innumerable amount of countries and people, even Americans will see the land of the free in a different way.