

Death firing squad,  
each of them equally



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Death Penalty and The Eighth Amendment The expression “ an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” has taken on a whole new meaning. Lately, murderers have been getting a punishment equal to their crime, death. In 1967, executions in the United States were temporarily suspended to give the federal appellate courts time to decide whether or not the death penalty was unconstitutional. Then, in 1972, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of “ Furman versus Georgia” that the death penalty violated the Eight Amendments.

According to the Eighth Amendment, “ Excessive bail shall not be required, no excessive fines imposed, nor cruel or unusual punishments inflicted.” After the Supreme Court made this ruling, states reviewed their death penalty laws. In 1976, in the case of “ Gregg versus Georgia” the Supreme Court ruled state death penalty laws were not unconstitutional. Presently in the United States the death penalty can only be used as punishment for intentional killing. Still, the death penalty violates the Eighth Amendment and should be outlawed in the United States. Currently in the United States there are five methods used for executing criminals: the electric chair, gas chamber, lethal injection, hanging, and firing squad, each of them equally cruel and unusual in their own ways.

When a person is sentenced to death by electrocution he is strapped to a chair and electrodes are attached to his head and leg. The amount of voltage is raised and lowered a few times and death is supposed to occur within three minutes. Three whole minutes with electricity flowing through someone’s body, while his flesh burns. Three minutes may not seem like a very long time, but to someone who is waiting for his body to die, three

minutes can feel like an eternity. Three minutes is the approximate time it takes for a person to die if everything goes right, but in some cases it takes longer for people to die. In 1990, Jesse Tafero, a prisoner in Florida, remained conscious for four minutes while witnesses watched ashes fall from his head. In Georgia in 1984, it took nearly twenty minutes for Alpha Otis Stephens to die. At 12: 18 am on December 12, he was shocked with electricity for two minutes, and his body still showed signs of life.

The doctors had to wait six minutes to examine his body because it was too hot to touch. Stephens was still alive, so he was electrocuted for another two minutes. Finally at 12: 37 am doctors pronounced him dead.

When a person is executed in the gas chamber he is strapped to a chair in an airtight room. A cyanide pellet is dropped in sulfuric acid, which forms a lethal gas. The prisoner remains conscious for a few minutes while struggling to breathe. These gas chambers are similar to the ones used by the Nazis in World War II concentration camps.

Fifty years ago, America was quick to condemn the Germans for persecuting Jews, but, today, in 1996 Americans execute their own people the exact same way. Lethal injection is the newest form of execution in the United States. The person being executed is injected with a deadly dose of barbiturates through an intravenous tube in his arm. This method is considered the most humane and efficient way of execution, but a federal judge noted that " a slight error in dosage or administration can leave a prisoner conscious but paralyzed while dying, a sentient witness of his or her

own asphyxiation." Since 1985 there have been three botched injections in Texas alone.

In one case it took 24 minutes to kill a criminal because the tube leaked and sprayed the chemical towards the witnesses. In 1989, too weak a dosage of drugs caused Stephen McCoy to choke and heave for several minutes before he died. Hanging used to be the most common way to execute a person, but now it is only used in Delaware, Montana, New Hampshire, and Washington. Hanging is not a very useful way of execution, because if the drop is too short the person being executed dies through gradual strangulation and if the rope is too long the person's head is ripped off. There is no punishment more unusual than having your head ripped off, so the death penalty is in direct violation with the Constitution.

When someone is executed by a firing squad he is strapped to a chair and has a target attached to his chest. Then five marksmen aim for the target and fire. Having people being paid to shot