Capital Punishment: Is It Right Or Wrong? Essay, Research Paper

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Capital Punishment is a controversial topic discussed in today’s society. There is a heated debate on whether states should be able to kill other humans or not. People that are in favor of the death penalty say that it saves money by not paying for housing in a maximum prison. Those opposed say that it is against the constitution, and is cruel and unusual punishment for humans to be put to his or her death. I believe that the death penalty is against the constitution and is cruel and unusual punishment. The death penalty is cruel because you cannot punish anyone worse than by killing them. It is an unusual punishment because it does not happen very often an it should not happen at all. Therefore, I think that capital punishment should be abolished.

Capital punishment is the death penalty, and has been legal in most states for many years. The death penalty did not begin reporting executions until 1930, although legal executions have been preformed before then. From 1930 to 1992, there have been 4,002 executions in the United States (Foster, Jacobs, Siegel 54). From around the 1930s to the 1960s there was a steep drop in the total numbers of executions in the US until the mid 1960s. The drop in executions is due to the lack of public support and legal challenges. Then a 10-year moratorium began in order to determine a constitutionally acceptable way to carry out the death penalty (54). The moratorium stopped in 1976 and since then, there have only been 525 executions. Currently there are about 3000-3500 inmates on death row (Wekesser 139), waiting for their death to come by either hanging, lethal injection, or even shot by a firing squad. The number is constantly changing due to the release of inmates on death row.

America’s laws are based on the Constitution. They are considered to be justifiable and what should be right; and are supposed to be the foreground for future laws. It is unconstitutional, though, for an American to be sentenced to his or her death. The eighth amendment states that “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted” (US Constitution). It would be against the Constitution for an American to be put to death because it can be considered cruel and unusual punishment. The death penalty is cruel because you cannot punish anyone worse than by killing them. It is an unusual punishment because it does not happen very often. It is also stated in the Constitution under the fifth and fourteenth amendments: “[No person shall be] deprived of life, liberty, or property” (US Constitution). Once a criminal is put in jail, his or her liberty and property is taken away. However, when a murderer is put to death, then his or her life is taken away along with his or her liberty and property. It is unjust to violate the constitution in such a way.

Although capital punishment is unjust, there are still people who believe that we as Americans should still have it. A few reasons why capital punishment is still legal are because government officials believe that it deters future crimes and murders, and that it is a safeguard for society. By eliminating murderers, society would be considered safer because there would not be a possibility that murderers could roam the streets of America. The states believe that it is a last resort for The United States to take the life of another human being. This argument is not necessarily true. By putting murderers in jail, it would be the same as taking them out of society. There are two ways to take murderers out of society. One way is to execute them. Another way is to keep those murderers in jail for their entire life. I believe that putting murderers in jail instead of killing them would be the more humane way to take care of society. 75% of Americans support capital punishment and only 17 percent oppose it (Foster, Jacobs, Siegel 80). With the overwhelming number of people that support capital punishment, there must be other reasons why people prefer to keep it. The only other possibility that I can come up with is that people like to see other people suffer greatly for crimes that have been committed. They may think that if the people who commit horrible crimes are executed, then there will never be any risk that they will ever be free to commit those crimes again. This may be true, but it does not give a relevant excuse to kill yet another human.

Also, capital punishment by no means deters any future murders or crimes from being committed (Hood 3). It is because of a human’s own free will and freedom of choice that propels him or her to commit crimes. If a criminal commits a crime, he or she is usually deliberately choosing to commit that crime. Hate and murder are not naturally born in humans. It has to be learned and contemplated. There are many ways that people learn hatred and anger, a common feeling related with murderers. One place it can come from is their family. Anger from family members is passed down from generation to generation not necessarily by teaching them hatred but through observations of hatred. If a father beats his wife, then his kids see that as being right. With anger and violence, kids are usually the victims of watching hatred and anger in the family. Although kids learn hatred and violence, they will not learn from the death penalty because they can not understand the death penalty as where it is easier to understand hate.

America’s youth are violated of their rights when they are sentenced to the death penalty. The death penalty has no effect on juveniles because most juveniles are convicted of a murder that is not premeditated (Foster, Jacobs, Siegel 103). Adolescents who kill, usually come from a disturbed family of drugs and violence. Disturbed families generally have physical fights between the parents and children, which instills violence in those children’s minds. This in turn results to fights with schoolmates, or on a higher lever, the juveniles may accidentally kill someone. The juveniles also show more signs of paranoia and illogical thoughts than a non-violent child does (103). The minds of young killers have been shown to be less developed and have lower IQs than average children their age (104). Since the minds of those young killers have not completely developed, they cannot completely understand the consequences behind murdering another human. If they cannot vote or serve as jurors, then they should not be punished with death. If children were able to vote for whom they want in their government, then there is a possibility that some government officials would not want the death penalty. They should not be stripped of their rights as Americans and be sentenced to the death penalty.

The death penalty is also an unfair act of racism. There are currently “48 percent of the death row population in our country to be black [and that] is clearly practicing genocide when you consider that Afro-Americans are only 12 percent of the population” (McAdams 1). If Afro-Americans are only 12% of the population, then how come the 48% of death row inmates are Afro-American? Of the 48 percent Afro-Americans on death row, 54 percent of their victims were Anglo-Saxons, which is greater than the majority of killings. This suggests that almost half of the murderers on death row were convicted from blacks killing whites. Since there are more blacks that kill whites, that shows that the sentencing is unfair and racial.

When we look at the death penalty, another issue is presented and that is that the value of life is lessened. When a person is put to his or her death, that just shows that the human life is not worth living. We as humans should be concerned with the penalty inflicted on society when a life is sentenced to die by a jury of people. Being put to death by a jury of people sounds exactly like a common murder committed by a murderer. A murder is still a murder even if it is sentenced by a jury. Society has learned to accept killing a human because that human has murdered another person. With all of the media reporting executions, Americans see the death penalty as what is the correct way to take care of murderers. People in America have become desensitized to what killings really mean. They themselves might see the government legally murder a person and accept it as what is right. Nothing is gained by taking one more life or adding one more victim to the death count. The act of premeditated execution is no better than the accused murderer and is a denial of the sanctity of life. People are denying that life is precious. By punishing a person with death, society lowers itself to the level of violence and cruelty that was posed upon the criminal. Although a criminal may commit an act of violence, that should give no right for Americans to commit that same crime.

There are many times that once a death row inmate is executed, evidence proves his or her conviction to be false. Haines quotes Senator Rudy Boschwitz saying that “This is an even more terrifying thought because the execution is not reversible” (93). No matter what procedures are being used, there are bound to be mistakes in the rulings of the innocent, but they will still be sentenced to die. The people who sentence a person to the death penalty are a jury of humans. It is possible that humans are going to make mistakes. If a mistake is made, such as wrongful accusing, what has been done cannot be undone. It is then that those criminals who murder a person can be considered victims themselves. Americans cannot escape the fact that the judicial system is run by human beings and is susceptible to errors. Since the judicial system is not perfect, the death penalty should be abolished completely so that there is no possibility of errors to be made.

Capital punishment is an excuse for inaction on other steps to fight against America’s crime. Capital punishment is being used so that it can reduce the crime in America. A good point is: “Since it is targeted to less than one percent of violent crimes, it cannot seriously be argued that capital punishment is an important factor in the reduction of crime in America” (Foster, Jacobs, Siegel 92). It is as though the death penalty is a substitute for the measures that can be taken to lower the crime rate. Americans do not want to deal with putting up with murderers so the easiest possibility is to take them out of society by killing them. Americans also believe that it would cost less money to execute them rather than keeping them in jail for life imprisonment. This may be true for only the execution, but the entire process of sentencing a person to death row costs $3.2 million, including court and attorney fees in the state of Florida, the state with the most death row killers (Bedau 16). On the other side of this issue, it only costs $15,777 per prisoner annually to be confined to a state prison (Hood 84). For a prisoner with a 40-year sentence, that total only comes out to $631,080, which is quite a bit smaller bill for the taxpayers to give. The amount of money it costs for prisoners in jail shows that there are other humane ways to punish prisoners other than death, such as life imprisonment.

Capital punishment has been accepted for many years and will continue to be accepted for many years to come. I for one do not think that it should be legal for man or woman to kill another human being. Punishment of criminals should be both humane and cost efficient. It is one of the acts of society that people accept as justifiable murder. Most of all, murderer’s rights are being stripped away as soon as they cease to live because they were sentenced to death by fellow American jurors. Also, juveniles are one small group that is being mistreated by the government because they are not even able to vote for their representatives. It is an unjust and unconstitutional, according to the Bill of Rights, way to take care of murderers. It is more humane to sentence a murderer to life imprisonment than to take away his or her life. It is sad to see the Congress of the United Sates being pushed by Americans to return to the Dark Ages of law enforcement by permitting the death penalty for murders. Overall, capital punishment is cruel and unusual punishment and should be abolished from America’s laws.

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