Dead. Wrong. Essay, Research Paper

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Most people do not know what goes on during a death penalty. The following is an eye witness account of an Arizona gas chamber execution given by Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens: “When the fumes enveloped Don’s head he took a quick breath. A few seconds later, he looked again in my direction. His face was red and contorted as if he were attempting to fight through tremendous pain. His mouth was pursed shut and his jaw was clenched tight. Don then took several more quick gulps of the fumes. His body started convulsing violently and his skin turned a deep red…the veins in his temple and neck began to bulge until I thought they might explode. After about a minute, Don’s face leaned partially forward, but he was still very conscious. He was shuddering uncontrollably and his body was racked with spasms. His head continued to snap back. His fists were clenched tightly. After several more minutes, the most violent of the convulsions subsided. At this time, the muscles along Don’s left arm and back began twitching in a wavelike motion under his skin. Spittle drooled from his mouth. Don Harling took exactly ten minutes and thirty-one seconds to die. Approximately three months later, he was found innocent.”(Death Penalty Information Center) Innocent men such as Don die all the time from the death penalty, which is not a deterrent to crime and is against the constitution. There are three very important reasons that the death penalty is wrong and should be discontinued.

First, the death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment, which is outlawed in our constitution. Most people argue that the death penalty is not a form of cruel and unusual punishment. However, this is extremely inaccurate. Electric chair victims can take up to fourteen minutes to die, being fully conscious as their flesh begins to burn off. During lethal injection, even a slight error in dosage or administration can leave a prisoner conscious but paralyzed with pain, causing him or her to watch their own demise.

Second, people who are sentenced to die are sometimes innocent. Amnesty International says that “from 1900 to 1985 over three hundred and fifty people sentenced to death were later found to be innocent of the crimes charged. Some escaped execution by only minutes, but twenty- three were actually executed. Within the last twenty years, fifty-four Americans under sentence of death have been released because of evidence that proves their innocence.” (Amnesty International Online) This does not include the innocent who were never able to prove their innocence. Unlike a life imprisonment, death offers no second chance. If new evidence surfaces after the person has been executed, it’s too late to do anything about it.

Lastly, the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime. Texas, one of the leading states in the number of people executed, has an extraordinarily high homicide rate. It is much higher then that of states such as Michigan, which has no death penalty. The United Nations found that the number of homicides actually increase around the time that a highly publicized execution occurs. (DPIC) In Canada, the homicide rate has dropped by twenty-seven percent since capital punishment was abolished in 1976, dropping most drastically within the first three years.

The death penalty should not be used. Criminals need to be punished for the lasting harm that they have caused society, however, the severity of the punishment has it’s limits. The Pope, the vicar of God, is against capital punishment; so should the United States. Governments that respect human life should use other measures to stop crime. The death penalty does not deter crime, sometimes kills innocent people and is illegal according to the constitution. The U.S. still uses it.