Death Row Essay, Research Paper

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The death penalty is outmoded and should be eliminated from our justice system. The death penalty is extremely racially biased and is not assigned justly. While advocates claim it is cheaper to execute than to support a felon for life in prison, it is actually more expensive to sentence a man to death. Opponents to the death penalty say that death is actually revenge rather than justice.

The number of prisoners on death row is increasing. The public favoring the death penalty is reaching record levels of 80% in some polls. Barring reprieve, four death row inmates are waiting to be executed next week for a record number of executions nationwide in a week. Many of the inmates scheduled to die have arrived at the end of their appeals through a long and tangled legal path. The question now remaining is how should they be executed (Mauro). New York legislators are expected to approve a death penalty bill in the next few weeks. Sponsors say the measure will do away with the electric chair in favor of lethal injection, which some death penalty advocates say is a more humane execution method (Hughes).

As of April, in the United States, there are 2,848 death row inmates, half of them minorities. Whites constitute 50%, Blacks 40%, Hispanic 7% and 3% other races. A black man who kills a white man is 63 times more likely to be executed than a white man who murders a black man (McCollum p 12). The prosecutors who pursue capital cases are usually white, a fact that might be responsible for the high percentage of blacks on death row, according to a report out today. The death penalty is more often sought for black defendants, especially in cases where the victims are white. The Black defendants were 38% more likely to be sentenced to die than others who committed similar crimes. This system is extremely racially biased (Jones p3A).

In the United States, the largest death row stands in Texas with 324 people: 144 whites, 120 African Americans, 52 Hispanics, 4 Native Americans, and 4 Asian Americans. The smallest states are Connecticut with 2 whites, New Mexico with 1 Native American and 1 white, and Wyoming 2 whites, (Mumia). Blacks constituted some 40% of men on death row in Pennsylvanian, yet blacks constitute just over 9% of Pennsylvanian’s population and just fewer than 11% of America’s. The proportions are not even (Mumia p 18).

The death penalty has never been proven as an effective deterrent against crime, and is disproportionately used against blacks and the poor. It costs more to execute people than keep them in prison for life with no possibility of parole (University Wire). A study indicated it cost the state an average of $2.3 million over seven years of appeals to execute someone. The cost of imprisoning the same person for life was $750,000 (Mauro).

Is the death penalty justice or revenge? Our criminal justice system shouldn’t be about vengeance, because it makes us as a society no better than those we condemn. Yet, we have to weigh what we accomplish by killing those who kill. It doesn’t bring anyone back. It doesn’t accomplish anything but revenge. Of course, in cases of clearly guilt or particularly heinous crimes, it’s easy to say they deserve to die. However, the case involves the death of someone we love, it’s hard to say good-bye (University Wire).

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