

Death to Capital Punishment

by Chris Gold

1,397 people have died since 1976 due to the death penalty in the United States. Hundreds more wait for their execution date on death row. This isn't terribly out of place; the U.S. has used the death sentence as a punishment since colonial times. However, has our situation changed? Is this eye-for-an-eye way of thinking outdated? Absolutely; capital punishment is expensive, unnecessary, and needs to stop.

The first thing that should be taken into account is the financial cost of death penalty cases. For instance, a study in Nevada found that the cost of a trial where a death sentence was a possibility cost \$1.03 million to \$1.3 million. A case where the death penalty wasn't sought generally cost \$775,000. That's a difference of about \$500,000 per case. The state of Kansas found something similar, with the median death penalty case costing \$1.26 million. In comparison, the median life sentence without parole case was \$740,000, meaning that the death penalty case was 70% more. New Jersey recently stated that they had spent \$253 million on death penalty cases in the last 23 years, which is substantially more than what life sentence cases would've cost. In addition, many of these cases only had the death penalty as an option. Of the 197 trials where capital punishment was possible, there were 60 death sentences, 50 of which were revoked.

A haunting idea is that innocent people have been falsely executed. What is even more horrifying is that this has happened, several times. For instance, a Texan man named Cameron Willingham was executed in 2004 for killing his three daughters by setting his house on fire. However, in 2010 several fire science experts said there was no evidence of the fire being intentionally set, and the conviction was based on "flawed science". There was also a man named Gary Graham, who was sentenced to death in 1981 even though there was no physical evidence and two witnesses said that he was not the killer. Instead, the jury believed that a woman who said she saw him through a windshield 30 to 40 feet away proved that Graham was guilty. He was executed in 2000.

A popular argument in support of the death penalty is that it stops inmates from leaving prison and killing again. This makes little sense. Prisoners who receive life sentences always go to federal prisons.

These prisons are nearly impossible to escape. From the years 1996 to 1999 (the most recent records that are available to the public) only one prisoner escaped out of 155,000. This prisoner was recaptured several hours after he escaped, and he did not commit any crimes while he was out. It also should be kept in mind that prisons are growing even more secure each year, and these records are from 16 years ago.

In conclusion, the death penalty has no purpose in today's society, and it only causes problems. The use of capital punishment is declining though. It is illegal in 18 states, six of which have abolished it within the past 10 years. However, one state that issues death sentences is one too many.

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