

Throughout history, statistics have proven that Capital Punishment or otherwise known as the death penalty, has been an effective deterrent of major crime. Capital Punishment is the lawful infliction of death among criminals and has been used to punish a wide variety of offenses for many years all over the world (Bedau 16). When the death penalty is enforced, it shows society that committing a capital crime has deadly consequences.

In early times, many methods of Capital Punishment were used to deter a variety of crimes. For over a century, the uniform method for executing persons in America was hanging, although starvation was very common also. There were exceptions which included spies, traitors, and deserters who would face a firing squad. Then in 1888, New York directed the construction of an "electric chair" (Flanders 11). It was believed that the new harnessed power of electricity would prove to be a more scientific and humane means of execution. The first electrocution took place

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in New York in 1890.

In the past, capital crimes were much different than they are now. Robbery and the selling of alcohol to underage customers was a serious capital crime (McCuen and Baumgart 21). Rape was also a crime where the criminal was sentenced to death.

In America, only thirty-seven states authorize the death penalty. In most of those thirty-seven states, murder is the only capital crime. The Supreme Court requires that two conditions must be met in order for a specific murder to warrant the death penalty (Nardo 32). The first condition is that it must be first degree murder, which is the deliberate and premeditated taking of

life. The second is that one or more aggravating circumstances must be present. Aggravating Circumstances refer to those aspects of a crime that increase its severity. An example of an aggravating circumstance would be torture in conjunction with a murder.

("Capital Punishment" 32).

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Every society has faced the problem of what to do with its most troublesome criminals. Many people in the past have argued whether or not Capital Punishment is justified and necessary.

Most societies now believe that a criminal should receive punishment proportional to the crime committed. Most societies believe that such a severe punishment was necessary to install fear in others.

While more social structures developed, the crimes developed into public and private offenses. Public offenses such as witchcraft and blasphemy, were punished by the state; while private offenses still were answered by acts of personal retribution.

The enforcement of Capital Punishment in the early twentieth century declined drastically because of all of the controversy. Today, many more states are taking the death penalty into consideration.

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Methods of Capital Punishment used today are somewhat different than what was used in the past. The lethal injection method, which is by far the most common, and the "electric chair" are the most recently used. The gas chamber is still used but in

very rare cases.

In 1924, the gas chamber was introduced in Utah with a hope to still find a more humane way to execute the convicted. The gas chamber method proved itself to be a very inhumane way of execution. There were many errors while using the gas chamber. Using too little or too much of the gas was a huge factor that was constantly argued.

The continuing desire for a less painful, error-free means of execution led to the development of the lethal injection method in the 1970's. Initially it was approved in Oklahoma and Texas in 1977. This method involved injecting a combination of a sedative, which is used to make the execution less painful, and a fatal

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chemical agent into the condemned prisoners bloodstream. Lethal injection was first used to carry out the death penalty in 1982.

In 1980, The American Medical Association [AMA] went on record to oppose the participation of any physician in an execution by lethal injection. A doctors involvement was seen as a contradiction of the professional responsibility under the Hippocratic Oath to save lives. As it now stands, no state that uses lethal injection, requires a physician to be present. The deadly solution is normally administered by medically trained technicians.

There is much evidence showing that Capital Punishment is a deterrent of crime. The most persuasive research compared the homicide rates of states that did and did not prescribe the death penalty. For instance, Michigan, which abolished Capital Punishment in 1847, was found to have had a rate higher to adjacent states, Ohio and Indiana, that were executing. Similarly,

Minnesota and Rhode Island, states with no death penalty, had

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many more killings than their respective neighbors Iowa and Massachusetts, which had Capital Punishment. In 1939 South Dakota adopted and used the death penalty, and its homicide rate fell twenty percent over the next decade; North Dakota went without Capital Punishment for the same ten years, and homicide rates went up.

Similar before and after studies in Canada, England, and other countries likewise found that the suggestion of Capital Punishment had deterred murderers better than the prospect of long prison terms. In Britain during the 1950's, a typical "lifer" actually served only seven years, compared with a much tougher average, the United States life term today of twenty years.

Between 1930 and 1980 there have been 3,860 executions in the United States. Of this number 3,380 had been executed for murder. Rape, armed robbery, burglary, and aggravated assault no longer are capital crimes.

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Only thirty-two women have ever been executed. Since 1930 half of all persons executed were non white. Over 1,200 death row inmates were awaiting execution by 1984.

In 1980, thirty-nine states had enacted death penalty laws. From 1965 to 1983 favoritism of the death penalty has risen thirty-two percent. Now, seventy percent of Americans favor Capital Punishment.

Washington D.C. had the highest murder rate in the country with 35.1 murders per 100,000 population. Nevada is second

with twenty, Texas with 16.9, Florida at 14.5. South Dakota has the lowest murder rate with .7 murders per 100,000 population.

Since the Supreme Court rulings in the 1970's up to 1984, only sixteen death row inmates have been executed.

In America we have many criminals. Different societies have different views on how these criminals should be punished. The more harsh we are on the criminals and the more death penalties

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we hand out, there will be a drastic drop in capital crime. Capital Punishment is necessary in any imperfect society.