

## Violence begets violence:

Society is right to want to stop violent crime. But when fear or other emotions cause us to retaliate with more violence, we only make the problem worse. **The death penalty is the wrong response.**

## Death penalty does not deter murder:

When many murders occur, the offender is under severe emotional stress and/or the influence of alcohol or drugs. They are not thinking rationally enough to analyze the probabilities of being caught, convicted, and sentenced to death.

Nor does the death penalty deter those crimes that are rationally planned, because those persons plan to avoid getting caught.

Indeed, **decades of scientific studies** have consistently shown that **the death penalty does not deter people from committing murder**. Nowadays when experts debate the death penalty, supporters, no longer raise this claim.

## Death penalty does not do justice:

Even if the death penalty does not deter, doesn't it at least provide some kind of justice -- "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"? No, civilized society's sense of true justice has evolved beyond mere retaliation. We don't burn down the homes of arsonists, and we don't cut off the hands of thieves.

**The US is virtually alone among Western countries in failing to abolish the death penalty.** The US is one of the world's biggest executioners -- along with several nations with horrible human rights records (e.g., China and Saudi Arabia).

## Nor does it help the victim:

Nothing could ever bring the victim back to his or her family. Instead, the death penalty makes an additional family suffer -- the family of the executed person. Many families of murder victims oppose the death penalty and have created an organization to abolish it.

## Innocent people are executed:

To speed executions and cut costs, some people want to limit appeals. But even with current appeal processes, some innocent people are executed. Many other innocent people are spared before the execution date. Since the mid-1970s more than 140 persons on death row were released because they were actually innocent! Many had spent more than ten years for crimes they did not commit. Police, prosecutors, judges, juries, and the regular appeal processes all saw guilt. Victories often came outside of the regular system. Mistakes often happen -- but it is too late to correct the mistakes after the people have been executed.

## Death penalty has race & class bias:

Many decision points occur while investigating, arresting, prosecuting, trying, and sentencing. Each decision point allows for bias and discrimination on the basis of race, social class, economic resources, political considerations, and other factors.

Research consistently shows that even when the basic facts of the crime are similar, **persons of color are more likely than whites to receive the death penalty**. Research also shows that **death sentences are much more likely when the victim is white**. The US Supreme Court recently allowed the death penalty to proceed regardless of such racism.

## Death penalty escalates violence:

The death penalty is inherently contradictory. When our government itself (in society's name) kills people, we contradict our stated intent of showing that killing is wrong. **The death penalty actually promotes the notion that it is OK to kill people in order to achieve your purposes.**

Indeed, some studies have shown increases in violent crime near the dates of highly publicized executions. Executions unleash ugly and uncivilized behaviors. You might have seen these in execution-eve news reports of people supporting the execution.

## What are the alternatives?

Murders are a very tiny part of the crime rate. Very few killings meet the criteria for death sentences because they are really manslaughter or second-degree, or they lack the aggravating circumstances necessary for a death sentence. As a result, the law already reserves death sentences for very few cases.

Washington State law allows a jury to give a death sentence in a case of aggravated first-degree murder when mitigating circumstances are not sufficient. **The law already states that if a death sentence is not imposed, the automatic sentence must be life in prison without the possibility of parole.** This means exactly what it says: the person would be in prison for the rest of his or her life and could never qualify for parole. This is a **very severe** punishment. It would protect society.

**We don't need the death penalty at all.** We need to work harder at preventing all forms of violence, treating substance abuse, and providing services to people who are at risk.

### Where could I get more information?

#### **Committee for Alternatives to the Death Penalty**

(Part of the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation)

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