

**MLK Civil Rights Violation Essay**  
~ Death Penalty in the States ~

By: Liam Smith  
Period-5

I believe that the death penalty used in the United States is very wrong. It is in violation of the civil rights of people everywhere in our country. Although Minnesota does not have a death penalty, other states do. There are about fourteen states that do not have a death penalty and about thirty six that do. There are plenty of reasons that support the idea that the death penalty is wrong. There are many violations of a human's rights in taking a person's life.

One major concern about the death penalty is that innocent people have been unfairly accused for things that they did not do and sentenced to death. People have been found to be innocent after they have been executed. This, unlike most other mistakes, cannot be undone or made right. This is in violation of article number three of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." How can we continue to use the death penalty when our system for trying accused people is not 100% effective in convicting the right person?

Another issue is unfair representation. This is where a person is most likely innocent but does not have a good lawyer or attorney. This is because either a person could not afford good representation or they do not know how to choose it. Article seven of the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) states that all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. This is clearly being violated when people who are accused of a crime are not given a lawyer that is able to help them the right way. A trial is very complicated and an average person may not know how to make sure they are being represented well. If you have no money to pay for help, help is assigned to you. That help can be good or bad. You don't have much choice.

Most religions practiced around the world believe its wrong to kill other people. This is why it is wrong to have death penalty in states, because not only is it unfair, it goes against what most people believe in. Our country is just like China and Iran when we deal with people's crimes, and accuse innocent people, and then take their lives. People in the media often talk about how unfair and sad it is that Iran and China treat their citizens in such bad ways, yet the United States does the same.

The whole main purpose of the death penalty is to keep people from committing crimes, because if they see someone die, they probably wouldn't want to be that person. But recent studies show that setting examples by executing people is not stopping criminals and lowering crime. If people are continuing to commit crimes and just a few are dying for them, what is the point? Article 5 of the Human Rights Declaration states that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Suffocating a person using a gas chamber, sending electricity through someone's body, or strapping them down and forcing a lethal overdose, seems to me cruel and tortuous. These are practices that the United States has allowed and supports. It is interesting that lawmakers see these as a humane way to die.

Using Martin Luther King as an example for fighting for people that have no or little rights, I feel the people in our country should stand up and say no to the terrible policies that take lives in an unusual and cruel way. If our legal system could take the energy and money used to execute people and channel it to better defense for the accused that can't represent themselves, or to families that suffer because of crime, our country would be better off and be an example to other countries in dealing with human rights. There are many people in many states fighting to have death penalty legislation changed. It will

take much persuasion for senators and house members to force the issue of change into law. Everyone can do their part by writing letters to their own states senators and representatives to show support of human life and human rights. Organizations such as Amnesty International lobby, inform people and try to change death penalty laws and fight for the accused that have little resources for appealing. Every person's voice can make a difference.