

The Death Penalty in the US

I. TO START WITH: SOME VOCABULARY

1. Punishments in the US: Match the following sentence halves to form explanations of punishments which are available to the courts.

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|--|---|
| 1 When someone is <i>sentenced to execution</i> , | a they are put in prison for a crime. |
| 2 When someone is <i>placed on a community service order</i> , | b they are given a period of time when they must behave well and not commit any more crimes in order to avoid being sent to prison. |
| 3 When someone is <i>sentenced to imprisonment</i> , | c they have to pay an amount of money as a punishment for breaking the law. |
| 4 When someone is <i>put on parole</i> , | d they are killed as a legal punishment for breaking the law. |
| 5 When someone is <i>put on probation</i> , | e they are released before their prison sentence is finished, with the agreement that they will behave well. |
| 6 When someone is <i>fined</i> , | f the court requires an offender to perform unpaid work in their spare time and to contribute to their community. |

2. The Death penalty: Match the words on the left with the correct meaning on the right

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| __1. capital punishment | a. terminated |
| __2. abolished | b. the purposeful administration of a drug that kills |
| __3. treason | c. a crime of betrayal against a country or its leaders |
| __4. lethal injection | d. prison area for people who have been sentenced to death |
| __5. autopsy | e. to help prevent someone from doing something |
| __6. refrain from | f. the death penalty |
| __7. moratorium | g. prisoner |
| __8. death row | h. to avoid doing something |
| __9. inmate | i. a medical procedure to determine exactly how a person died |
| __10. solitary confinement | j. the suspension of executions |
| __11. convicted | k. a chance to be free from jail based on good behavior |
| __12. deter | l. punishment preventing prisoners from interacting with others |
| __13. parole | m. found to be guilty of a crime |

3. Choose five words from the left column above to complete the following sentences.

1. The murderer was sentenced to death and will now wait on _____.
2. The _____ showed that the lethal injection caused a heart attack.
3. An Oklahoma _____ was recently executed by lethal injection.
4. Statistics show that capital punishment does not _____ murderers.
5. The man was on _____ for good behavior when he killed his neighbor.

II. TEXT TO READ:

5 The death penalty, also called capital punishment, refers to the killing or execution of a person as punishment for a crime. The term “capital” comes from the Latin word for head. Long ago, capital punishment referred to cutting off a person’s head. Half of the countries in the world have abolished it and The UN has asked that all countries refrain from using this cruel and unusual form of punishment.

History of the Death Penalty in America

10 In colonial America and the young United States, capital punishment was used frequently. Many crimes — including theft, adultery, and even cursing — were punishable by death in some colonies. And before the Civil War brought an end to slavery, slaves could be put to death for almost any crime. It was not until 1897 that rape, treason, and murder became the only federal crimes punishable by execution.

15 During the 20th century, popular opinion has swung both for and against the death penalty. Early in the century, mob justice sentenced many suspected criminals, particularly African Americans, to death. Lynching — hangings committed by violent mobs — were common until the 1930s. During the 1960s, however, the death penalty fell out of favor with many Americans. Although juries continued to sentence convicted murderers to death, no people were executed in the United States from July of 1967 until January of 1977.

20 Two important Supreme Court rulings in the 1970s helped to first uphold and then end this moratorium on the death penalty. In 1972, in the case of *Furman v. Georgia*, the Supreme Court ruled that the “unguided discretion” of juries determining death sentences was unconstitutional. The Court said that juries needed guidelines for determining whether a convicted criminal should be put to death. But in 1976, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Gregg v. Georgia* that the death penalty was constitutional under certain circumstances. On January 17, 1977, Gary Gilmore became the first person put to death in the U.S. following the Gregg decision. Gilmore was executed by firing squad in Utah for the murder of a young hotel clerk.

The Death Penalty in the USA today

30 Capital punishment is used in 29 of the 50 states in the US (only seven states executed in 2019). Statistics show that since 1976, 4 executions out of 5 have taken place in the South.

35 In America, execution is now carried out by lethal injection. Some states having lethal injection as primary method also authorize other methods such as electrocution, hanging, gas chamber and firing squad. While the lethal injection method of killing is not as disturbing to watch, autopsies show that the injections are not always quick and painless. The procedure sometimes goes wrong, and the injections cause severe pain. Some states have decided to put a moratorium on executions after questions surfaced about the effectiveness of increasingly hard-to-get lethal injection drugs.

40 People who oppose the death penalty use the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution to support their views: *Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.*

45 Many opposed to the death penalty also say that death row is a form of torture. Death row is a section of a prison for those sentenced to death. Some inmates spend years waiting for their execution date. This happened to Manuel Valle, a Floridian man who killed a police officer. He spent 33 years on death row before being executed. How does death row differ from regular prison life? In some cases, prisoners spend their days in solitary confinement. They are not allowed to worship, exercise, or take part in group activities.

50 Amnesty International calls the death penalty the “ultimate denial of human rights”. Statistics show that minorities are more likely to face capital punishment. Americans who murder a white male are at least three times more likely to be executed than those who kill a black male. In addition, those who can’t afford a good lawyer are more likely to face the death penalty. Studies also show that capital punishment does not deter criminals. Furthermore, capital punishment is extremely expensive. Would you believe that a death penalty sentence costs tax payers more than a sentence of life imprisonment?

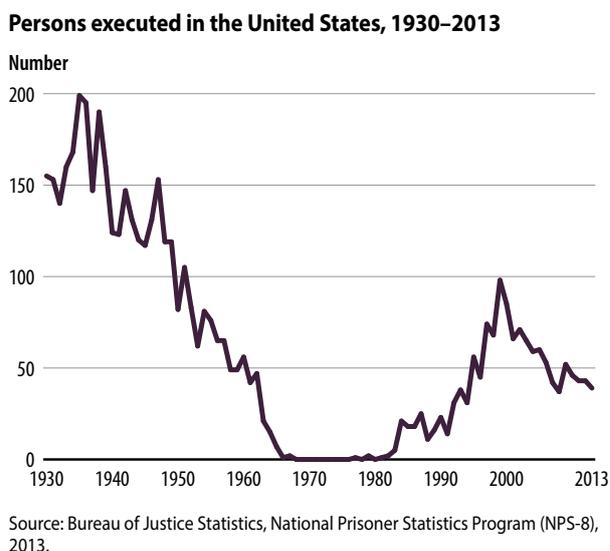
1. COMPREHENSION: Read the text then answer these questions.

1. What is another word for the death penalty and why does it have this name?
2. a) What is mob justice?
b) Does this form of justice still happen anywhere in the world today? (note that this information is not in the text, however a quick check on the Internet will help you find an answer)
3. What events in the 1970s changed the legal status of the death penalty in the U.S.?
4. Which amendment to the Constitution is used by opponents to the death penalty and why?
5. What do autopsies of previous death row inmates sometimes show?
6. Why do you think drugs for lethal injections are “increasingly hard” to get? (note that this information is not in the text. If you don’t know the answer to the question, the following link will give you a hint: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_11_1578)
7. Why is death row compared to a form of torture?
8. What economic, racial and geographic factors contribute to a sense of unfairness regarding the death penalty in the U.S.?
9. How do you explain the fact that a death sentence costs more to U.S. tax payers than a sentence of life imprisonment? (note that this information is not in the text, however a quick check on the Internet will help you find an answer)

2. COMPARING GRAPHS AND TEXT:

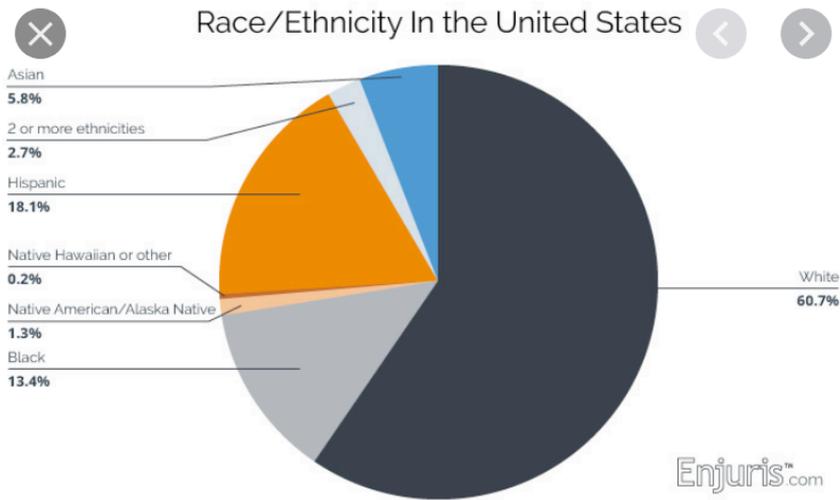
Look at the series of graphs below and use the information provided in the text to answer the questions on these graphs.

Graph #1: Why is there a drop in the number of executions between the late 60's and the early 80's?

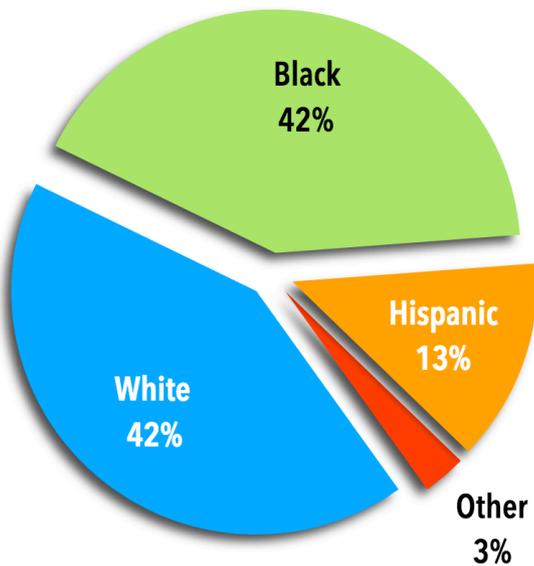


Graph #2: What points mentioned in the text do the following two pie charts illustrate?

US POPULATION BY RACE (2019)



DEATH ROW PRISONERS BY RACE

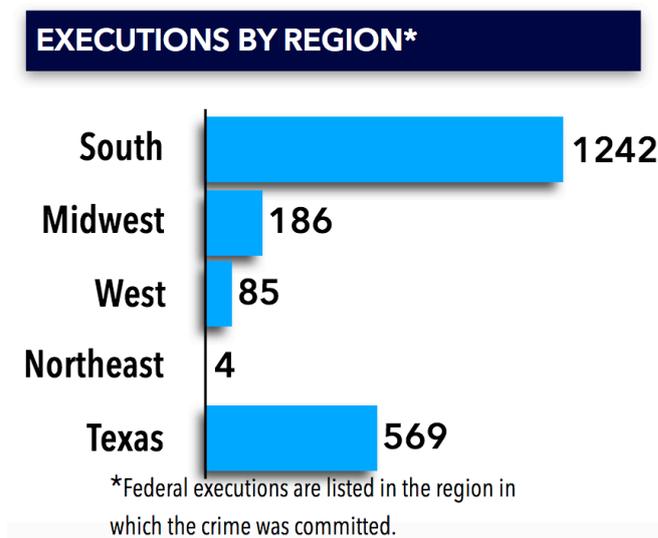


Graph #3: What argument mentioned in the text can opponents to the death penalty use when comparing the following two graphs?

Number of murders per 100,000 inhabitants by region (with Texas included in the South Region)



Number of executions in 2019 by region (Texas not included in the South Region)



III. COMPARING LWOP AND THE DEATH PENALTY:

In the very first vocabulary exercise on punishments in the US, you read about the word “parole”. When a person is put on parole, it means that he or she will go to prison but has a chance to be released before the end of the prison sentence thanks to good behavior.

A punishment of Life Without the possibility of Parole (LWOP) is considered to be the most severe form of punishment after the death penalty. The criminal who gets a life sentence will never be allowed to be released. In other words, the criminal will serve time until he or she dies from natural death in prison. This type of punishment is used in a few European countries like the UK, the Netherlands and Italy.

Some people argue that “a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole is as severe as the death penalty”. Do you agree or disagree? Answer this question in about 60 words.