

## Intro...

Take the case of Ron Williamson, an innocent man who spent 14 years on death row in a Texas prison. His hard-luck story is detailed in John Grisham's latest, nonfiction thriller, *The Innocent Man*. Grisham describes a modern-day nightmare, the story of has-been baseball player, Ron Williamson, known after his fall for drinking and womanizing and wrongly convicted for murder. The Williamson case reminds us that our system, indeed humanity, is flawed. Had the Innocence Project not come to Williamson's defense and sought DNA testing to confirm or refute his conviction he would have been executed—no matter that he'd been forced to live with an untreated mental illness for more than a decade. No matter that the poor health care he received in the system resulted in his premature death a mere year after his release. It is the wrongly convicted whom but for a chance encounter, failure of science, or fallibility of man, we must strive to defend to the best of our abilities.

Our best costs money. Investigations, DNA testing in capital cases might sound like a steep price for tax payers to pay, but consider the reverse. According to Judge Myron Bright, the state pays, on average \$21,352 per year to house, clothe and feed an inmate. Bright's opinion from *US v Roberto Gallardo Chavez*, US Court of Appeals filed in October of 2000 is a conservative estimate considering the passage of time, inflation and the current recession. So how much does one life sentence cost tax payers? A life sentence in Florida is 25 years (Florida Department of Corrections); multiplying the years by the cost one arrives at an average cost well over a half of a million dollars: \$533, 800. Quiet a nest egg, but how does that compare to the cost of executing even one man?

In Florida, the Palm Beach Post reports an average and execution cost that is nearly 50 times the cost of a life sentence. The post states, "Florida would save \$51 million each year by punishing all first-degree murderers with life in prison without parole, according to estimates by the Palm Beach Post. Based on the 44 executions Florida has carried out since 1976, that amounts to an approximate cost of \$24 million for each execution." Why are we paying the price to execute

criminals when it would cost us less to imprison them? Why take the chance of executing a criminal convicted on the word of a jail house snitch or faulty eyewitness? (transition needed)

This is very rough through here. I'm leaving myself notes about connecting the

Below I colored coded my points, evidence & commentary—evidence should be wrapped in commentary!

I believe "life is precious" (Koch 320).

Like Koch, I too believe that "life is indeed precious" (320). However unlike Koch I do not believe that the death penalty acts as a life affirming deterrent. Koch argues that the death penalty protects the sanctity of human life, by penalizing those that disrespect it. In "Death and Justice" he writes, "Human life deserves special protection, and one of the best ways to guarantee that protection is to assure that convicted murderers do not kill again" (322). I believe a better way to protect the sanctity of human life would be to keep that life, all lives, sacred. Policemen take a vow to protect and serve. Protect the public, protect the citizens of our nation, protect the people—it is time to protect all people, even the criminal. The Bible and in fact Jesus's teachings command us to "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (NIV Bible, Mark 12:31). I myself would not want to face death penalty, if ever I committed a capital crime, I would seek punishment and feel the force of guilt, but I would also want to be forgiven. If those Christian beliefs are the very foundation of our society why would we choose to put criminals to death?

Some argue that allowing criminals to live allows them also to commit further crimes. Indeed, no person, no system can totally control the actions of the individual. There will be times when while in prison an inmate kills again, but these events are rare.

My position is simple: let us not use the death penalty in this nation. We should not deceive ourselves, the death penalty does not lower crime rates. Putting people to death does not deter criminals—instead it doubles the wrongs done.

## Works Cited (working list)

The New International Version (NIV Bible). Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, 1984.

Bright, Myron. US v Roberto Gallardo Chavez, US Court of Appeals filed in October of 2000

Grisham, John. The Innocent Man.

Koch, Edward. "Death and Justice." in *40 Model Essays: A Portable Anthology*.

Jane E. Aaron, ed. New York, NY: Bedford St. Martin's, 2005, p. 319-324.

The Innocence Project

Florida Department of Corrections <http://www.doc.state.fl.us/life/crimes-max.html>

The Palm Beach Post.

Koch citation is in the correct MLA format; as is the Bible citation, all others are rough versions. I'm just keeping track here. Once I've finished writing, I'll go back and correct my full citations.