

Spring 5-14-2015

# Institutionalized Racism and the Death Penalty

Ashleigh Ellis

Chapman University, [ellis154@mail.chapman.edu](mailto:ellis154@mail.chapman.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd\\_abstracts](http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts)

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), [Law and Race Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Ellis, Ashleigh, "Institutionalized Racism and the Death Penalty" (2015). *Student Research Day Abstracts and Posters*. Paper 133.  
[http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd\\_abstracts/133](http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts/133)

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research Day Abstracts and Posters by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [laughtin@chapman.edu](mailto:laughtin@chapman.edu).



# Institutionalized Racism and the Death Penalty

Ashleigh Marie Ellis

Department of Political Science, Chapman University; Orange, California

## Introduction to Research

•Death Row resembles a concentration camp in which a disproportionate amount number of black inmates live in an indistinct zone between life and death, typically for over 10 years.

•Compared to the traditional Jim Crow racism where punishment on blacks was considered entertainment and was an expectation of whites when given the opportunity, institutionalized racism is embedded in the subconscious of whites in the United States to where decisions in the judicial system and government are influenced by stereotypes that have governed our country for more than 200 years

•The assessment of the death penalty in relation to institutionalized racism is applicable because the jury that must be present at times when death of the defendant is being considered, can provide a current moral opinion and is used to represent the community. •The disadvantage to using a jury is that the community, depending on the majority race, in this case Whites, may have stereotypes that may alter their decision making.

•The death qualification rule which is the "[exclusion of] potential jurors who hold strong feelings for or against the penalty that would prevent or substantially impair the performance of [their] duties."

• A study from 2005-2009 on the usage of the death qualification rule in Houston County Alabama (note the black population is nearly one third, 27%, of the community) revealed that 80% of black jurors were removed from failure of meeting the qualifications. Along with those results, 50% of the time, the juries consisted of an all white jury, while the other 50% of the time, the jury consisted of all white with the exception of one black juror.

## Death Penalty

•As of 2013, the United States population consisted of:

- White alone: 77.7%
- Black alone: 13.2%

•From 1976-2011, there has been 1,259 executions from the death penalty

•Of those executed, 77.86% of the black people that received the penalty were convicted of murdering a white person when 83% of white people are killed by a white offender, and 90% of black people are killed by a black offender.

•Today, black people represent 35% of the executed, 42% of the people on death row, yet 12% of the population

•It could be assumed that due to history in the United States, the black population fears the power of states and the power of a majority opinion.

## Hypotheses:

H1: The older you are, the more likely you are to support the death penalty.

H2: White people are more likely to support the death penalty than are black people.

H3: If you feel that the government is corrupt, you are more likely to support the death penalty.

## Data

### H 1: Age

Cross Tabulation Results:

- Ages 17-24
  - Favor 61%
  - Oppose 35%
- Ages 25-34
  - Favor 66%
  - Oppose 30%
- Ages 35-49
  - Favor 70%
  - Oppose 26%
- Ages 50-60
  - Favor 70%
  - Oppose 27%
- Ages 60 and up
  - Favor 68%
  - Oppose 29%

Significant level of .415.

### H3: Corruption of Government

Table 2

State	Death Row Inmates	Judge appointment system
California	743	Appointment
Florida	403	Retention Election
Texas	276	Election
Alabama	198	Election
Pennsylvania	188	Election

### H2: White vs. Black support

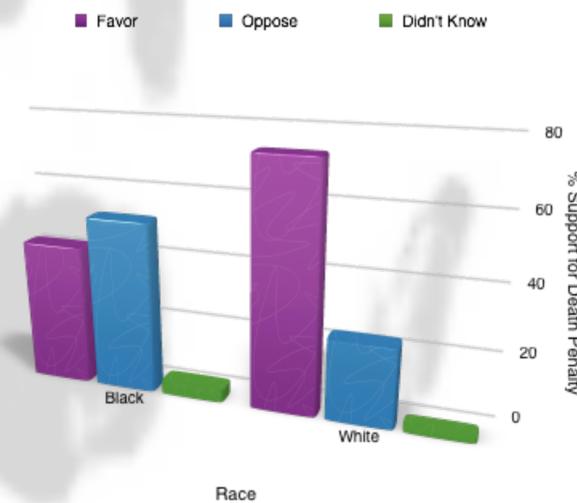


Table 1: Cross Tab Results of Support for Death Penalty

### Table Interpretation

•Age has little significance (.415) on support for the death penalty.

•Table 1 clearly shows the levels of opposition compared to support for the death penalty for both black and white people. The ANOVA table along with research revealed a direct impact on support for the death penalty when race was a variable with a significant level of .000.

•Distrust of the government has a significance of .000 which supports my hypothesis that the public will take opportunities to express themselves when given the opportunity if they feel misrepresented.

•Table 2 identifies the top 5 states that have death row inmates but also how 4 out of 5 of these states elect their supreme court justices.

## Findings

### H 1: Age on Death Penalty

Although there is little research on support for the death penalty, research has proven that there is little significance in age, especially when compared to age. My hypothesis that the older you are the more likely you are to support the death penalty was not supported.

### H 2: White vs. Black support

There is an evident racial gap in support for the death penalty, however, research supports that this racial gap is not a coincidence. Race significantly impacted the outcome on support for the death penalty, with a .000 significant level. With the United States having a rich history in racism expressed through slavery, lynching, and segregation, the idea of white supremacy is embedded in the roots of people's subconscious which influences their decision making.

### H 3: Opinion of Corrupt Government on Death Penalty Support

While addressing the issue that people and politicians can use politics to directly express their views on racism, people who thought that the government was corrupt had a significant level of impact on support for the death penalty. Especially when analyzing the judicial system, four out of 5 of the states with the highest death row inmates also use an electorate based system to elect state supreme court judges.

## Conclusion

•Institutionalized racism is the current expression of racism in our communities today. While there is an apparent racial gap in support for the death penalty that clearly has a significant impact on the black community, we must ask ourselves how we can address this subconscious issue.

•When we look at today's population, black represent 13.2% of the population in 2013, yet 42% of death row inmates.

•From 1787-1954, the signing of our Constitution to the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, it took us nearly 167 years to realize our wrongs in enslaving, lynching, discriminating, and segregating a race all based on color, a biological production of either two forms of melanin, pheomelanin and eumelanin.

•My concern is how long is going to take the United States to discard 167 years of habit that has been passed on through de facto segregation to realize that we are all people that are presented different opportunities. If we overcome racism, is discrimination regardless of gender, age, race, political perspective, or religion inevitable?

## References

- Lee, Michelle. 2014. "Giuliani's Claim That 93 Percent of Black Murder Victims are Killed by Other Blacks." *The Washington Post*.
- Unnever D. James and Cullen T. Francis. "The Racial Divide in Support for the Death Penalty: Does White Racism Matter?" *Oxford University Press* 85.3 (2007): 1281-1301.
- "State and County Quick Facts". United States Census Bureau. Updated: March 31, 2015. <[www.quickfacts.census.gov/qf/state/00000.html](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qf/state/00000.html)>
- "Facts About the Death Penalty". *Death Penalty Information Center*. Updated: April 30, 2015. <[deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/Factsheet.pdf](http://deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/Factsheet.pdf)>
- Unnever D. James, Cullen T. Francis, and Jonson L. Cheryl. "Race, Racism, and Support for Capital Punishment." *University of Chicago Press* 37.1 (2008): 45-98.
- Peffley Mark and Hurwitz Jon. "Persuasion and Resistance: Race and the Death Penalty in America." *American Journal of Political Science*. 51.4 (2007): 996-1012.
- Messner F. Steven, Baumer P. Eric and Rosenfeld Richard. "Distrust of Government, the Vigilante Tradition, and Support for Capital Punishment." *Law & Society Review*. 40.3 (2006): 559-590.