Use of Death Penalty Solves Nothing

By Daniel G. Stevenson

In a column last week, ["Enforcement of Death Penalty Requires Extreme Caution", Oct. 22] Michael Chung presented a slant of confusing, fallacious, and above all hypocritical arguments for a strong enforcement of the barbaric practice of capital punishment. Chung’s line of reasoning demonstrated an extraordinary lack of respect for human life and dignity, the very same values that he was supposedly so strenuously trying to defend.

Archaic and inhumane moral codes espousing concepts such as "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" were manipulated to provide justification for what is really a horrific criminal act, the all the more repugnant because it is government supported. Those who argue for a strong death penalty, or that releasing wrongdoers does not work, are just as wrong as those who do not even make a right.

Killing one person for the killing of another is in my mind an unconscionable abuse of the democratic process and a savage expression of vicious primal instincts. The death penalty is the most naïve and contemptible manner of law enforcement ever created by a supposedly civilized nation.

Chung argued that people convicted of serious crimes take up valuable prison space, and that it would be more moral and humane to execute them if they were extraditionally executed. "Is it really worth it to keep these people there [in prison]?" he asked. What kind of an elitist attitude relieves criminals, who are still human beings like the rest of us, to become "those people even worthy of our consideration?" Considering that a violent offender does not make anyone less a human being: in fact, he is often a more unfortunate trademark of the human race.

Chung further implies that a criminal might rather choose initial execution over a long, harsh life in prison. This argument scours out with the obvious: any person in prison, no matter how poor the conditions, would be more than willing to scrub toilets or wash dishes night and day, in order to maintain a semblance of his personhood.

The death penalty must be more vigorously opposed, as an abomination, as it is to kill murderers. Lives cannot be traded like commodities and added and subtracted like the grains of sand we do with the punishments of fines and prison terms. It is foolish and morally blupheasous to assign a discrete amount to something of inestimable and deeply personal worth. The value we place on a human life has long been a murky and illusive scale, but to encourage the death penalty is to effectively condone, by enforcing the death penalty, society is implicitly condoning their violent way of life.

In his column, Chung brought up the case of Shon McHugh as an example of why the death penalty must be more vigorously opposed. Chung presumes McCra’s guilt and implies that human life is sacred and should not be wasted. Just because people commit atrocious deeds does not mean we must stoop to their level in handing out retribution. By punishing McHugh and other murderers with death, we as a society would be implicitly condoning their violent way of life.

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Opinion Policy

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