

**America,
We Must Leave
No One Behind
A Celebration of Diversity**

**Rev.
Jesse L.
Jackson**

**Free
Admission**



**Friday, April 9
10:30 AM
U of M Hill Auditorium**

Sponsored by: MSA, LSA Student Govt., CAAS Collective, UPSA, Bursley House Council, Speaker Initiative, Golden Key, UM's ACLU, and College Democrats

**Killing People
To Show Killing Is Wrong**

by Bob Krzewinski

We've probably all seen the movies. It's an arena in the times of the Roman Empire. In the center area, Christians, criminals or slaves are loosely assembled. Then the lions are sent in. The crowds cheer wildly over the ensuing carnage yet the Roman leaders sit rather passively watching the spectacle. Most movie viewers shake their heads thinking how horrible these Romans were, a hysterical population putting people to death without any real thought on the matter.

Moving forward nearly 2000 years, we still have the state putting people to death, but now the so-called leaders are among the loudest cheerers. The United States government is doing things that would make the Romans, or the Third Reich, proud. States are executing the poor, minorities and people that are mentally incompetent. Even children are sentenced to be executed upon reaching adulthood. At the same time, the highest courts of the nation are doing all they can to speed up the rate of executions. We like to think of how civilization is moving forward, but is it really?

The people of Michigan may have a chance to decide whether they want to move forward as a civilization or step back. Resolutions have been introduced in the Michigan Senate to bring back the death penalty in Michigan, with politicians stating that such a law will lower crime rates and give punishment to those who break the law. Voters would ultimately decide if the death penalty should be enacted in Michigan, but before that takes place two-thirds of the Michigan Senate and House would need to approve a referendum item for the ballot.

Back in 1846, Michigan did have the death penalty. However, our state became a leader in human rights by being the first government in the English-speaking world to abolish capitol punishment. Michigan's example started a trend where today the vast majority of world governments no longer execute people. Great Britain abolished capital punishment in 1971, France in 1981, Canada in 1976. Nations that continue to use the death penalty include Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

Proponents of the death penalty often like to tell of the wonderful things such a punishment will accomplish. The sad truth is that the most common reasons given for state-sponsored executions are based on rumor, not fact. For example.....

Doesn't the death penalty lower crime rates? - Federal Bureau of Investigation studies have shown that states which abolished the death penalty averaged 5.1 murders per 100,000 population. States still using capitol punishment averaged 9.1 murders. Other studies have shown that homicide rates actually *rise* immediately following well-publicized executions. It seems that government executions send out the subtle message that killing people is permissible when the someone "deserves" to die, or when you are frustrated and angry.

Isn't putting people to death cheaper than life in prison? - Because a life is at stake, trials involving capitol punishment are complex and expensive. Counting the time for appeals, a case may last ten years or more. In Texas, it cost taxpayers there an average of \$2.3 million dollars for each death penalty case, three times the cost of life imprisonment for 40 years.

Aren't there enough safeguards in place so that innocent people are never executed? - The legal system is far from perfect. This is perhaps shown nowhere better than in death penalty cases. One of

the main reasons why Michigan stopped executions in the first place was due to the execution of a man, who afterwards was discovered to have been innocent. In the US, since 1976, at least 74 convicted death row inmates have been found innocent. In Michigan, where the penalty for murder is mandatory life in prison, 14 people have been wrongly convicted since 1910.

With a death penalty, won't people think first before committing a crime? - Most murders occur under great stress and perhaps under the influence of drugs or alcohol, both of which suspend or distort logical thinking. Other people who commit crimes do not expect to ever be caught. As for those who kill for political motives, the state's putting them to death can mean martyrdom and a boost for their cause.

Doesn't the Bible condone the death penalty? - In the story of Cain, when God judged the first murderer, he did not kill him but instead punished Cain in other ways. Throughout the Bible there is a message of redemption and forgiveness, not of revenge. Most religious groups actively oppose the death penalty. As for the saying "an eye for an eye", perhaps Mahatma Gandhi refuted this best by pointing out that "an eye for an eye means we all end up blind".

If you would like to keep Michigan a place free of the death penalty, letters and telephone calls are needed now to your State Senator and Representative. Initial Senate hearings to re-establish the death penalty were held in March with additional proceedings to take place in the coming months so any comments are very timely. All letters can be addressed to State Senator/Representative _____, State Capitol, Lansing, MI 48909. If you are unsure of the name of your State Senator or Representative, call your local library reference desk.

For more information on the death penalty contact the Michigan Committee Against Capitol Punishment at 1735 Abington Place, Lansing, Michigan 48910 or visit the National Coalition To Abolish The Death Penalty's web page at www.ncadp.org.

[Editor's Note: A public hearing on the death penalty was held March 23, 1999 in Pontiac, Michigan. American Friends Service Committee, active in local campaigns against the death penalty, can be contacted for upcoming events and actions at 761-8283.]

YOU CAN HELP!



Volunteer

at

SOS Community Services

- be a listening ear on a helpline
- take care of or tutor homeless children
- distribute food to those in need
- help a homeless family find a place to live

**No experience necessary!
Training starts soon!**

**For more information:
go to <http://comnet.org/sos>
or contact Julie or Donna at
734-485-8730 or volserv@tir.com.**