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**Exploratory Paper**

The three topics I decided to explore for this project are the continued use of the death penalty in the United States, child trafficking and the torture used by governments. These are the 3 issues I decided to pursue further because they are all enormous issues that deal with morally upsetting topics. We live in a world today where many of the social issues that were not given enough attention or even outright ignored earlier in time, are now being brought up constantly to be discussed. It is no longer taboo or seen as too deep to openly question some of the seedy things occurring in our country. With the advent of the internet and social media so many more problems are being brought to the forefront so that everyone can get information and join the discussion.

The topic of the death penalty in the U.S. is constantly being debated and will always be a hot topic for as long as its use is continued in this country. The major issue that comes up is the fact that the United States is the only well developed country in the world that still a practices this archaic method of punishment. Even countries who very actively practiced capital punishment have abolished its existence in recent times. According to Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle “The change in policy and practice in Turkmenistan (where 89 percent of the people are Muslim) was also remarkable. Although no official figures were published, it was thought that well over 100 people were executed each year in 1994, 1995, and 1996—one of the highest ratios in the world in relation to population. The new criminal code adopted in 1997 provided the death penalty for as many as 17 offenses; yet on January 1, 1999, the president announced a moratorium on executions, and by December of that year he had abolished the death penalty completely by presidential decree.” (Hood and Coyle 13) Advancement is clearly very possible if in a matter of 5 years the country of Turkmenistan can go from having hundreds of people executed a year to completely outlawing the death penalty. If a nation such as that is outright abolishing the death penalty I think that should send a very strong message to our government. Taking the life of someone as a punishment for a crime to me seems like something designated for the middle ages. However, a majority of the county still legally practices this method. 31 states in fact are still putting prisoners on death row and the number of executions performed every year is steady enough that there doesn’t seem to be an abolishment of the punishment in sight (“Facts About the Death Penalty”). There are numerous reasons why the death penalty is an outdated and inefficient method to be used. The biggest issue of all is the chance that an innocent person is accidentally executed. New evidence always has the chance to prove a person formerly convicted as guilty, as actually being wrongly accused. Now if they are serving a normal jail sentence they can be released from prison and be thankfully free. But what if that person was put on death row? What if they were killed by lethal injection prior to their proof of innocence? Then do we hold the government responsible? Are they held to the same standards since, theoretically they just committed the murder of an innocent human? This small chance of accidental murder should be enough to abolish the use of capital punishment. The United States wants to be seen as the most advanced country in the world yet we are still punishing our prisoners as if we’re living in ancient times.

The issue of child trafficking is one that bothers me very much. It is a problem that hasn’t necessarily become any better but for some reason is one that seems to be ignored almost entirely. It is also an issue that doesn’t seem to be getting much better currently. For example in 2013, 44,000 victims of human trafficking were rescued in the world however there are still 20 million cases that are being held against their will according to the Trafficking in Persons Report of 2014. This makes it seem that it is a problem that although affects millions of lives, including those that are taken and their families, is not being treated by authorities as the major worldwide issue that it is. One of the problems is that many people in the United States don’t think the trafficking occurs in their home country. They see it as an issue that happens in foreign countries and even though it is still a major dilemma, if the public doesn’t believe it is happening in their backyard they won’t be able to truly muster up the caring that is necessary. The United States is actually one of the biggest places for kidnapped children to be transported to. From 2008 to 2010 there were 2,515 suspected cases of child trafficking in the United States, with 83% of these victims forced into the sex trade (Banks and Kyckelhahn). When most people think of trafficked children they only think of the sexual trade as a destination for these victims. However, these victims are also forced to work in restaurants, sweatshops or even as illegal soldiers. It is tragic when adults feel like they have no choice but to take on these soul crushing lines of work, but it is absolutely terrifying to think that innocent children are being forced into these awful things. Being taken against their will to do these things is something that we should be constantly paying attention to and actively trying to prevent no matter how difficult.

The third topic I decided to do further research into is the torture acts committed by governments. The idea that such people as prisoners are being tortured to try and extract information from them is astounding. It is already awful that lesser developed countries have used torture in modern times, but to know that the United States and other developed nations that get assistance from the U.S. have also actively used torture as a means to get information or as crowd control techniques is terrible. In an article by David Usborne reports that came out in 2014 are delved into that showed the CIA had regularly been using torture to try and learn about new terror plots. Prisoners were beaten, deprived of sleep, waterboarded and in some cases even had their families threatened if they did not cooperate. Not only are torture methods used by higher powers such as armies, but lower level law enforcements have also engaged in such things. One of the most astonishing uses of torture is its occasional use by police detectives to try and gain a confession from suspects. This can result in false confessions. This was the case when a man named Damon Thibodeaux confessed to murdering his wife. As discussed in an article written by John Woodrow Cox, it was later found when his confession had extreme inconsistencies compared to actual evidence, that he made a false confession since he was thoroughly interrogated through the night and deprived of sleep and food. A man was put on death row and jailed for over 15 years because he endured a form of torture by detectives. This is a very extreme case that shows just what kind of psychological effect this kind of seemingly innocuous torture can have on a human. When we factor in the idea that police brutality can also be seen as a type of torture then we’re looking at a large number of cases constantly occurring in the United States. Torture has no place in this modern world, especially in a country that wants to be known seen in the forefront of ethical nations.

The topic I decided to do further research into is the use of the death penalty in the United States. This topic really struck a chord with me when I was reading sources on its use and effects. Seeing how other countries that aren’t even close to being on our level of opulence have banished capital punishment was really what did it for me. I see how often people in power want to discuss how great of a nation this is and how ahead of other countries we are in terms of issues of social justice. However we still take part in a disgusting practice as outdated and ineffective as the death penalty, so really how advanced can we really be?

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