

Prof. Baumgartner
POLI 203, Race, Innocence, and the End of the Death Penalty
Fall 2014
Possible Paper topics

- A. Take one of these three cases: a) Cameron Willingham (possible errors in arson investigation); b) Michael Morton (prosecutorial misconduct); or c) Carlos deLuna (possible misidentification of the perpetrator). Lots of information is available on-line about all three cases. Compare the errors in your chosen case with what went wrong in the Henry McCollum / Leon Brown case. Base your analysis on published news reports as well as academic / non-journalistic publications.
- B. The various states differ dramatically in their use of the death penalty, as you know. Pick two states that have the death penalty on the books but differ from each other in how much they use it: California and Pennsylvania for example sentence but rarely execute; Virginia and Texas execute higher proportions of those they sentence. Pick any two states that differ in some important way, based on evidence shown in class or from other sources. What is there about your chosen pair of states that explains the difference?
- C. Lethal injections have recently been in the news because of “botched executions.” Review five recent cases of botched lethal injections. What went wrong? What are the underlying causes of these problems? Do these present constitutional challenges? Base your study not only on news stories but also on official reports for example those compiled by state corrections agencies reviewing the problems that have occurred.
- D. If you have a strong preference for a particular topic not covered above, and it can be designed in such a way that purchasing a pre-written term paper is impossible, you may make the suggestion to your TA and they will have the authority to agree or not. Our goal in these assignments is just that you go beyond the readings and lectures for class, and that you explore a relevant topic in some detail. At the same time, we don't want simple book reviews or topics that can easily be assembled from pre-existing sources.

Note: You must submit your proposed paper topic to your TA in recitation during the week of September 22, and the paper is due in lecture on October 15. It's fine just to hand in a copy of this sheet with your name on it and one of the topics circled.

Paper technical requirements: Your name, date, section, title for your essay, the essay itself in 12 point font, 1 inch margins, 5-7 pages, at least some academic sources as well as any journalistic sources. Academic sources means books published by university presses, articles you find in JSTOR, or official statistical and other reports issued by government agencies. Journalistic sources means magazines, newspaper stories, opinion pieces, non-governmental web sites, blogs, etc.