

POLI 203: Race, Innocence, and the End of the Death Penalty

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- As of 2016, over 206,268 people were serving some type of life sentence in US prisons.
- Over 53,000 people are serving life without the possibility of parole sentences.
- Noncapital prisoners receive no legal representation on their appeals.
- More than 100 people sentenced to LWOP have been exonerated since 2013
- Lifers account for approximately 12 percent of North Carolina's prison population; 40 times the number of life sentenced prisoners in the United Kingdom.

DEATH BY INCARCERATION

It is scary to think lawmakers and death penalty abolitionists alike believe life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) is a more humane alternative to executions. It seems unlikely they really understand what living the rest of your life in prison is like. If they did, LWOP wouldn't exist.

I don't want to die in prison, yet if I am executed or receive LWOP, that's exactly what will happen. For many people on death row, LWOP is the only form of "relief" they may receive from a court. In many ways it's worse than being executed. You watch all of your family and friends die or drift away as the world leaves you behind. You work 50-60 hours a week earning 40 cents a day, unable to afford a stamp let alone a tube of toothpaste. Refuse to work and get put in solitary confinement. If you get sick you suffer. Medical care in prison is a joke, and the only people laughing live in the free world. Prison can be a violent place and no one escapes that threat if they spend their whole life here. Some might try to argue it's a better quality of life than on death row - I'm pretty sure those people don't live in prison or know how degrading it can be. Maybe, under some circumstances, a lifer has access to "programs", but they're limited. The state of higher education in prison is abysmal, which leaves GED programs and Basic Adult Education - not the kind of stuff that stimulates growth.

Let's not forget about the gangs. Imagine being 60 years old and needing to call home, but having to deal with whichever gang claims the phone in their territory. Maybe they charge you a fee - are you going to pay them with your 40 cents a day? Imagine being 19 or 20 and trying to resist recruitment - for the rest of your life.

And then there are the rigors of aging in prison. Nurses care little and doctors even less. Imagine being 70 years old and relying on another prisoner to push your wheelchair, wipe your butt and wash you and provide

