

In the Killing Chamber

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Today, execution by lethal injection is the method used by death penalty states. Until the fall of 2013, a three-drug cocktail of the anesthetic, sodium thiopental, to induce unconsciousness, the paralyzing drug, pancuronium bromide, to halt breathing, and potassium chloride to stop the heart, were the drug mix of choice. Then the only U.S. manufacturer of sodium thiopental had stopped its production. European countries won't supply it to the U.S. per their ethics. Now, states like Missouri, are experimenting with drugs untested for use in killing people. Tennessee has passed a law to use the electric chair when it can't obtain the lethal drugs. Missouri tried to be the first state to use propofol, but its makers have gone to great lengths to ensure that their drug not be used in executions. Because of a lawsuit filed against MO Dept. of Corrections, for failing to comply with the Sunshine Law request for records about its supply of propofol, MO Governor Jay Nixon, announced the cancellation of the execution of Allen Nicklaason, set for Oct. 23, 2013. Then on October 22, 2013, he announced the new state execution protocol using the animal anesthetic, pentobarbital, and adding a compounding pharmacy to its execution team. That was used in the execution of Joseph Paul Franklin on November 20, 2013, and ~~five~~^{six} others since then.

How smoothly did those killings go? Lethal injection was meant to transform execution into a more humane and less gruesome act as electrocution, which often made witnesses uncomfortable when seeing smoke and flames shoot out of the condemned's head. In practice, executioners sometimes fail to administer enough dosage or to inject properly. In 2006, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, imposed a moratorium on his state's executions after the badly botched execution of Angel Diaz, sentenced to death twenty years earlier for the killing of a

p.2) Miami topless-bar manager. The I.V. needle punctured Diaz's veins so that the toxins went directly into his flesh, causing one-foot-long chemical burns and great pain as he writhed, grimaced, shuddered, gasped for air, and even tried to mouth words, while suffocating for 24 minutes. A second dose killed him in 10 more minutes. In 2014, Oklahoma prisoner, Michael Lee Wilson, remained fully conscious during his execution using midazolam, saying he could feel his "whole body burning." A week later in Ohio, midazolam was used in killing Dennis McGuire who took 25 minutes to die while gasping and heaving on his gurney. In May 2014, back in Oklahoma, Clayton Lockett, was fully conscious for 43 minutes, as he bucked, grunted, and even tried to get up during his execution in which his veins had exploded. Were these the "cruel and unusual punishments," prohibited by our U.S. Constitution (which needs to be followed in protecting the rights of us all)?

Citizens may think that the condemned deserve such pain, for causing untold pain to victims and indeed they might. Should states be as barbaric and sadistic as psychopathic murderers and follow that heinous standard by tortuously killing them? Need society be that bad? If so, perhaps states should consult with torture experts, such as some agents of the CIA (which is under investigation for allegedly using illegal torture methods like counterproductively bashing heads onto walls), to inflict maximum pain? A May 2014, poll shows 65% of Americans support the death penalty (down from 78% in 1996), including 82% of Republicans and 53% of Democrats, and 74% of the supporters want executions to continue if the condemned is gasping for breath over 20 minutes. It would be more honest to hold hangings in the public square before cheering crowds, since there is no longer the illusion that executions are civilized. "The more you try to make executions more civilized and bloodless, the more you try to drain it of terror and rage, the more barbaric it becomes," stated Tim Cavanaugh in "National Review.com" quoted in "The Week." While the condemned suffers the terror do the death penalty supporters suffer their own rage and hatred?

p.3. Seventeen states do not condone nor conduct executions and many states now have theirs on hold. Washington state governor Jay Inslee, indefinitely suspended his state's executions because "There are too many flaws in the system today," he said. Only nine states are now actively executing. Although support for the death penalty has waned nationally, it is going strong with a vengeance (literally reveling in revenge) in conservative states. Do Christians supporters of the death penalty believe that Romans 12:17-19, asks us not to recompense evil for evil, nor to avenge, leaving that to God, or do they believe they are avenging for God, judging who is to die? That power over life and death can be easily corrupted by politics, prejudices, and the fervor of revenge, becoming evil itself. Are some citizens who are "pro-life," regarding the unborn, are also, "pro-death," concerning the condemned? Although there is no comparison between the lives of the innocent fetus and the criminal, who are we to judge the value of or to terminate either? Does adding more killings to humanity's wrongs improve the human condition? Didn't death penalty supporters grow up hearing, "Two wrongs don't make a right," like I did from my father? I finally came to understand that in 1996, when I met the three women condemned to die by Missouri. Although they had committed murders, I came to believe that it would do more harm than good to in turn, kill them. Later, all three of their death sentences were overturned by the courts, in lieu of, "life without parole" sentences.

Are states more reluctant to kill women in their death chambers than they are men? If so, is this inequality under the law of death? What criterion do prosecutors use in pleading for the deaths of some defendants over others? With no explanation, MO Governor Jay Nixon, a long-time advocate of the death penalty, granted commutation of Richard Clay's death penalty, in his only use of any form of clemency during his two terms as governor. Was he motivated by politics or the need to ensure justice?

Justice has not been served in executing those wrongfully convicted of crimes they did not commit. Louisiana's longest-serving death row prisoner, Glen Ford, was exonerated of the crime he did not

p.4) commit, but for which he served 30 years. At least he wasn't executed or would he have been murdered? ~~By~~ the time others who were guilty were finally executed, some had been serving godly purpose, doing some good. I've seen female offenders talk others out of committing suicide and violent acts. It's conceivable that some of the condemned had done as much in their dangerous prisons (the danger can come from prison staff as much as from inmates). Prison staff do try to prevent suicides, upholding the policy of "safety and security upmost". It's a sad irony that some of those saved from suicidal deaths are later killed by "judgement of death," in executions. What a paradox of policies!

Texas's Department of Criminal Justice has conducted 37% of all U.S. executions. Seven Texas counties have sent so many people to their deaths ~~that~~ ^{with} capital punishments, that they are in the top ten counties doing so, out of a total of 3,143 such counties. St. Louis County also ranks in that infamous top ten. Texas has gone the extra mile to keep its killing chamber operating, including submitting an alleged falsified prescription to a compounding company. At what increased cost to Missouri, is the addition of a compounding pharmacy to its execution team; was this done to avoid dealing with regulations and the ethics of others? Will MO Governor Jay Nixon override the ^{U.S.} Supreme Court's stay of execution to Russell Bucklew, like OK Governor Mary Fallin overrode the stay of execution to Clayton Lockett, so determined to kill him? Will Missouri keep up the pace of its monthly executions and as humanely as possible? Is killing by any name or method humane or human tragedy and failing?

In the 2014 MO legislative session, House Bill 1470, was proposed to administer judgement of death by firing squad. Was this done to quell complaints that lethal injection has caused prolonged, agonizing deaths? Indeed, death by firing squad would be much quicker, most cost effective, and more efficient if several of the condemned were lined up together and killed all at once, ~~as is~~ done routinely in North Korea.

Would this bring society to a higher or lower level of morality? How far will MO go?
Citizens who do not want the government killing people on their behalf, should ask legislators to rescind their law of death.