

## Why It's Not a Good Idea to Televisе Executions By Allison Gamble

Public executions have been around about as long as there has been a legal system. In the past, these punishments have been designed to be as degrading as possible, not only taking away the life but also the dignity of a criminal in front of crowds of people. Hanging was perhaps the most popular method, but there were several other even more horribly degrading punishments that could be enacted upon a criminal in public. As we have moved into the modern era, we have done away with these cruel and unusual punishments, and they are even outlawed in the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. Yet while our capital punishments are less graphic than in the past, there is still a pronounced interest in watching them, and with the advent of television and the Internet these executions can be watched by millions of people miles away from the event itself.

Why show punishments publicly? In the past, one explanation has been that publicizing executions discourages crime. In the modern day, when execution is typically much less violent, it is said to be a good political move, showing that the state is more humane than the murderers they are killing. Another argument is that of [political transparency](#), that people should have a right to see what is being done in their name and with their tax dollars. Furthermore it is argued that people should be allowed to see for themselves whether or not lethal injections are humane, rather than rely on media reports to form the bases of their opinions.

However these arguments are not necessarily valid. For example, the most commonly cited argument, that the death penalty discourages crime, doesn't actually hold up to scrutiny. Studies in [forensic psychology](#) show that murderers are often acting irrationally and impulsively, without a second thought as to the consequences of their crime, so the existence of a death penalty actually has a negligible effect on deterring murder. In fact, it has been found that states without a provision for capital punishment actually have [lower murder rates](#) across the board than states that have a death penalty.

Another of these arguments, that of showing the state as humane, also does not seem to be based in reality. Consider the argument of people such as Sister Helen Prejean, the noted death penalty opponent, who supports televising executions on the grounds that it would turn people away from state authorized murder. Watching a death happen is not likely to promote positive feelings in anyone, especially as it regards the parties involved. The only remotely good feeling it might engender is one of justice having been served, although there are accounts that say many victims who have watched executions [feel just the opposite](#). As well, a public execution is a very poor symbol of the humaneness of a government: if you have to compare yourself to a murder to appear benevolent, then you have greater problems at hand than whether or not to televise capital punishment.

In fact, there are far more reasonable arguments against allowing the death penalty to be televised than there are for it. If such images were commonplace, it is well known that people become inured and eventually numbed to the imagery of death, which can in turn lead to a poorly balanced view of life and death as well as a devaluing of life. In war torn countries, we have seen this imbalance become a problem of never-ending violence. If we use the comparable analogue of violence, we can think of how crime rates have risen worldwide since the introduction of television and newscasts, where we are made to see terrible things every day. How much more would this be the case if public executions were televised as well?

There is no good reason to televise executions. The fallacious arguments people use in an effort to

make it more prevalent only go to show that they are just trying to explain away their sick voyeurism. As civilized human beings, we should not be beholden to our base tendencies of vengeance and violence, nor should we enact literally medieval humiliations upon people.