

Racism On Death Row

By Jakov Marohnic

Anthony Ray Hinton was an innocent man who spent 30 years on death row in solitary confinement. By his release in 2015, he had spent more of his life locked up than as a free man. In an article in *The Guardian*, he states, “My only crime was being born black, or being born black in Alabama. Everywhere I looked in this courtroom, I saw white faces – a sea of white faces. Wood walls, wood furniture and white faces.” In Hinton’s book about his death row experience, he writes about how the system didn’t even give him a chance at innocence. He was guilty until proven innocent just like many other poor people of color. In our current justice system you are better off guilty and rich than innocent and poor.

In a lot of death penalty cases, the defendant is poor. They can’t pay for their own lawyer so they get assigned an overworked public defender. These lawyers are being paid very little by the government. So now we have the rich being able to obtain good legal counsel and the poor getting left with overworked and underpaid lawyers. This is one of many reasons why we have innocent people getting sent to death row.

Statistics show that the race of the victim and of the defendant affect the outcome of the case. A study by the Death Penalty Information Center shows that of the 315 people executed for interracial murders, murders in which the defendant and the victim were different races, 294 black people were executed for killing a white person, while only 21 white people were executed for killing a black person. Still not convinced? A NYT article about Louisiana’s death row states, “In Louisiana, a black man is 30 times as likely to be sentenced to death for killing a white woman as for killing a black man. Regardless of the offender’s race, death sentences are six times as likely — and executions 14 times as likely — when the victim is white rather than black.” Just by looking at the numbers you know that something is seriously wrong.

Instead of sentencing people to death, if we focused on reform and trying to turn people's lives around, we would have fewer crimes in the first place. Please read Anthony Ray Hinton’s book *The Sun Does Shine* to educate yourself. It’s time to abolish the death penalty. It’s immoral, we are the only Western nation that has it, and doesn’t work to deter crime. None of us should sleep well while innocent people like Mr. Hinton are wrongly incarcerated and waiting to die.

Sources Cited:

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