

A Question of Life or Death:
Capital Punishment and Mental Illness

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The theme of this year's History Day is "Debate and Diplomacy". When choosing my topic I began to lean towards the death penalty because of my interest in law, but in order to narrow it down, I settled on the death penalty and mental illness, along with the Ford v. Wainwright case. In 1986, Alvin Bernard Ford successfully appealed for a stay of execution following his trial, where his mental capabilities and fitness to stand trial were discussed. Ford isn't an isolated case when it comes to debating whether or not the constitution bans the execution of those suffering from mental illness. Rather, mental capabilities and psychological issues weigh heavily on nearly every death penalty case in the United States to this day. The case helped to shift opinions regarding the execution of defendants with diminished mental faculties, but in the absence of established standards for such rulings, these decisions continue to be made on a case by case basis.

I really wanted to show that mental illness is a huge factor when it comes to court and what a difference it could make in any case. After searching a few different databases and websites, I realized I didn't have a lot of information. I interviewed Michael E. Ray of Brightwork Lawgroup, he helped me to find better sources and more accurate information with clear answers to my questions. My research helped me to learn that there are so many different ways mental illness can be interpreted and determined in court, and answering the question of whether or not mental illness can affect if someone is given the death penalty is very difficult.

While researching my topic, I made sure to pay attention to how many photos and videos I could find relating to my topic. Because of the lack of both, I decided to present my project as a website. After researching, I put all my information into categories to create pages for my website. I wanted my website to give off a very dark undertone and make people feel almost uneasy, because it would help convey my point. I chose a dark monochrome color scheme to further accentuate the daunting tone. Even though I had troubles trying to navigate the website maker, I was eventually able to sort through everything and create a result I was happy with,

When hearing the topic "Debate and Diplomacy" many people would think of the government, war, and national conflicts. But, I think that my topic relates to the theme in a more unique way, which really highlights the importance of it. The death penalty is a highly debated over topic and when you add mental health into that mix, it creates a huge controversial discussion. My topic is so important because it highlights the problems within the justice system, the death penalty, and mental health court.

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