

The New York Times

Editorials / Op-Ed

Death Penalty Revisited

To The Editor:

Re “Death Sentences Decline, and Experts Offer Reasons”
(news article, Dec. 15):

Now that the public appears to be evenly split as to whether the death penalty or life without parole is preferable in capital cases, it might be a good time for states to end the practice of devoting far too much time to trying to remove all of the imperfections that are inherent with the use of the death penalty.

The use of DNA and specialists to develop arguments for mitigation may have played a role in the decline, but the reality is that the death penalty exists in America because legislators believe that the public wants the death penalty.

If public opinion shifts, what happens to the hundreds of inmates languishing on death row today? California and Texas would have to move very quickly to clear up their backlogs.

Now is the time to bring this issue to an end once and for all, and to devote our energies to other problems that exist in the criminal justice system.

Roland Nicholson Jr.

New York, Dec. 15, 2006

The writer is chairman of the Fortune Society.

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