

## **“Affirmation And Suggestions: On The Evils of Extreme Penalties”**

**By Runqi Tan**

“The Arbery Case Is Heinous, but His Killers’ Sentences Are Extreme” was published in the *Washington Post* by David A. Singleton on August 11, 2022. The author, in his capacity as a former public defender, points out that criminals should receive reasonable punishment after committing a crime, but excessive imprisonment and torture not only wastes society's resources but also deprives criminals of the opportunity to be rehabilitated. Proper incarceration is a punishment for the mistakes made by criminals but giving them a chance to rehabilitate themselves is the only way to make life worth living for everyone. Sentences that are too harsh to allow for reflection and change make the justice system more of a disciplinary punishment than a way to rehabilitate offenders. Strong factual evidence, clear argumentative logic, and words that evoke empathy in the reader are the cornerstones that make Singleton's essay agreeable to many. Still, the repetitive emphasis on race may confuse the reader's understanding of the true purpose of this article.

Extreme sentencing cases become favourable factual arguments that enhance the credibility and authority of Singleton's writing. He begins with the case of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man who was fatally shot by three White men while jogging through a Georgia neighbourhood—an event that drew national attention. Highlighting the life sentences given to all three men, Singleton critiques the extremity of the punishments, noting, “the McMichaels will die in prison, while Bryan, who is 52, won’t even be considered for release until he is 82.” This example effectively underscores the limited prospects for rehabilitation under such severe sentences. By grounding his critique in a case that initially evoked public

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approval, Singleton's argument gains credibility and compels readers to reconsider their views on justice and punishment. Not only that, his status as a communal defense attorney as well as a political progressive strengthens the credibility of his words. Just as people trust what their doctors prescribe and what their professors tell them, rather than blindly following unauthorized and unprofessional advice, the words spoken by researchers in specialized fields can be easily trusted. Even though the reader may initially be delighted by the outcome of the verdict, his questioning of it shakes the reader to the core because of his identity.

Examples of rehabilitation after committing a crime and leading a positive life are used as arguments to emphasize the need to give offenders a chance to change and the possibility that offenders will realize their mistakes from serving their sentences. Robinson's story is mentioned in the seventh paragraph of the article, where he writes, "He was punished for his crime; and now he is living, breathing proof that there is much more to incarcerated people's stories than their guilt." Even though Robinson has been in prison for murder and drug dealing, he has reformed and moved on with his life. Obviously, the whole point of prisons and jails existing is for criminals to realize the problem and pay for what they have done, and then turn around and be good again. Singleton is trying to show that rehabilitation is the fundamental purpose of serving a prison sentence and that there are people who go from being criminals back to being law-abiding citizens. People inevitably make mistakes, and it is pointless to dismiss someone after one. With this example, the reader is easily convinced by the powerful logic.

Powerful language and rendered words enhance Singleton's persuasive power and leave many readers emotionally moved. In his article, he quotes Bryan Stevenson, "People should not be defined forever by the worst things they've done." This succinct passage retains a certain ambiguity that allows readers to interpret it based on their own experiences and emotions as they

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reach this point in their reading. This type of concise but insightful language is very good at evoking the reader's emotions and making them emotionally moved. In addition to this, the author uses rhetorical questions to reinforce his point, provoking the reader to think and interact. Not only does it enhance the tone and stance with strong feelings, but this sense of urgency also inspires emotional resonance in the reader. The rhetorical device of pathos is used throughout the text, and words of strong feeling consistently drive the progress of the text and the mood of the author's expectations.

The downside that the discussion of black people that appears several times in the article makes the central idea the author is trying to convey unclear. There is no denying that the topic of racial discrimination resonates with many people and is an issue that needs to be addressed in today's society, where racial equality is one of the goals of today's development. However, the topic of this article is the discussion of over-incarceration, and the audience is white, black, Asian, Latino, and all of whom are under the control of United States law. His emphasis on being black at the beginning of the article may lead the reader to believe that the focus of the article is to call for racial equality. The affirmation that the law does not decide cases with colored glasses praises the police and judges for not making biased decisions based on skin color. However, the example of the percentage of blacks in Ohio prisons disguises the fact that racial discrimination still exists, and these factors disrupt the reader's understanding of the true purpose of the article. There is nothing wrong with any of what he expresses, but some of it is redundant in this article.

As a result, this essay is mostly very successful, with effective examples, sound logic, and strong words all emphasizing the importance of serving a reasonable amount of time. Whether thinking rationally or being persuaded emotionally, this article does a perfect job of providing arguments and appealing to the masses. But unfortunately, there are confusing

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examples that cloud the central argument. The prison sentencing system is truly a thought-provoking and underappreciated topic by the general public, and many people feel that mistakes should be punished without regard to the manner, effect, and correctness of the punishment. The minor flaws do not detract from the fact that the author presents this idea very well to the public.

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