

Katherine Swope
RHE 330 Fall 2013
Visual Argument Two

Analysis of [Capital Punishment is State-Assisted Murder](#)

Capital punishment has been executed in numerous ways throughout American history, with methods such as hanging and the electric chair being discarded in favor of a more sterile approach: lethal injection. Despite the clinical appearance of lethal injection, however, the end result is the same: a citizen of the United States dead by their government's hand. In a state where 14 people were executed this year alone, the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP) meets in cities all over to make progress on this important cause. This video aims to establish the brutal and disgusting nature of capital punishment in order to garner support for the anti-capital punishment movement, offering the TCADP as an option to get involved in the fight.

The music accompanying this presentation is both somber and passionate. The simple, yet grand, melody created by a single violin invokes feelings of anxiety and solemnity in the viewer to match the haunting images. The music also builds speed throughout the presentation, creating a sense of urgency and realization. The theme of the presentation is fairly simple, with text growing larger as if coming at you and images fading into view through a field of black. The images fading through black allows the somber power of the images to remain uninterrupted.

The first slide establishes the claim of the presentation: "Capital punishment is state-assisted murder". The phrase "state-assisted" reminds the viewer of the idea of assisted suicide, which is illegal in the United States in all but 4 states. The theme of the text slides create a sense of growing importance and the forward motion makes the viewer feel as if these words are directed towards them. The words are also rimmed in white, making them even more highlighted against a simple black background.

The following slide portrays a bleak scene as it fades through black: the only thing in focus is a pair of feet dangling in the top right corner. In the back left corner is an out of focus silhouette of a man

who has been hung, neck cocked at an unnatural angle. The mundane nature of the pair of feet wearing sandals is quickly eradicated when the image is viewed as a whole, giving the viewer a sense of realization that coincides with the “aha” moment in the music. This realization makes the resultant emotion, despair, more resonant.

The third slide shows a black man strapped into an electric chair surrounded by white men. This image also offers evidence for the claim of the presentation, capital punishment is state-assisted murder, by showing the multiple men actively involved in this execution. The subject of the picture, the man in the chair, stares directly into the camera and seemingly at the viewer. This creates a sense of connection between the viewer and the subject, making the emotions more potent. This image stirs up a deep feeling of unease and a sense of empathy within the viewer. The multiple straps up and down the subject’s leg and body heighten the anxiety in the audience and create an eerie feeling when combined with the subject’s blank face.

The fourth slide brings us into modern times with the image of a man strapped to a table awaiting lethal injection. The image is distorted through a fisheye lens, shot as if the camera was in the ceiling. This distortion creates a surreal feeling that heightens the sensation of discomfort in the viewer as they take in the disturbing scene. The setting is very clinical, yet dirty, with a dingy white composing the majority of the scene. This juxtaposition of a clinical setting with the dirty white color leads the viewer to feel an unsettled feeling: something isn’t right in this scene. This feeling is validated by the strained, almost grotesque expression on the subject’s face as he lays strapped to the table. This face brings to life the pain and disgust associated with this unnatural scene.

The final slide abandons the fade through black and a text slide bursts through, surrounded by bright light. This transition immediately sets this slide apart from the grisly images you’ve been viewing to give you hope. The text is straightforward, offering you a solution should you be compelled to help.

The language is pointed, with the phrase “end the killing” reminding the viewers of the true stakes of the situation and reinforcing the claim of the presentation.

The overall emotion of the piece is bleak and ominous, leading the audience to feel relief when the final slide appears, prompting them to action. This architecture allows for the audience to easily realize the behavior that this presentation is designed to elicit as well as feel the severity of the situation. The viewer must interpret capital punishment as both deplorable and correctable in order to spur the desired behavior: join an organization combatting capital punishment.

PHOTO CREDITS

Image 1: Reuters/ Morteza Nikoubazl " <http://rt.com/files/news/20/cc/00/00/iran-hanging-survivor-execution.si.jpg>"

Image 2: William M. Vander Weyde

"<http://static.environmentalgraffiti.com/sites/default/files/images/electricchair500.jpg>"

Image 3: EPA/ Ulises Rodriguez

"<http://xmb.stuffucanuse.com/xmb/image.php?&aid=1479&Salvadorean-prisoner-death-penalty.jpg>"