



Racism and the Death Penalty: The Intertwined Ropes of the Lynchman's Noose

By Rev. William J. Barber

The following are excerpts from an [op-ed published in USA Today](#).

The link between slavery, Jim Crow, lynching and the death penalty is as connected as the intertwined ropes of the lynchman's noose.

In 1976, the U.S. Supreme Court ushered in the modern death penalty in the case of *Gregg v. Georgia*, ruling that capital punishment was "essential." Without it, the court said, citizens would turn to "self-help, vigilante justice and lynch law." Essentially, the court charged the criminal justice system with a job once left to mobs with a noose.

Just as African Americans were once disproportionately lynched, they are now disproportionately represented on death row. Defendants convicted of killing whites are more likely to be sentenced to death than those who kill blacks, and prosecutors routinely exclude black citizens from capital jury service. Forty years after establishing the modern death penalty, we have professionalized and proceduralized the path to execution, but we cannot wash away the stain of racism.

For far too long, the nation has lived with the lie that we can construct a legal machinery capable of deciding who lives and dies with fairness and without racism.

North Carolina must decide: Will its people leave the legacy of lynching firmly in place? Or will they have the moral courage to finally end a death penalty deeply and irretrievably rooted in racism.

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