

• **Arthur Miller** || *Get It Right. Privatize Executions.*

The time has come to consider the privatization of executions.

There can no longer be any doubt that government — society itself — is incapable of doing anything right, and this certainly applies to the executions of convicted criminals.

At present, the thing is a total loss, to the convicted person, to his family and to society. It need not be so.

People can be executed in places like Shea Stadium before immense paying audiences. The income from the spectacle could be distributed to the prison that fed and housed him or to a trust fund for prisoner rehabilitation and his own family and/or girlfriend, as he himself chose.

The condemned would of course get a percentage of the gate, to be negotiated by his agent or a promoter, if he so desired.

The take would, without question, be sizable, considering the immense number of Americans in favor of capital punishment. A \$200 to \$300 ringside seat would not be excessive, with bleachers going for, say, \$25.

As with all sports events, a certain ritual would seem inevitable and would quickly become an expected part of the occasion. The electric chair would be set on a platform, like a boxing ring without the rope, around second base.

Once the audience was seated, a soprano would come forward and sing “The Star-Spangled Banner.” When she stepped down, the Governor, holding a microphone, would appear and describe the condemned man’s crimes in detail, plus his many failed appeals.

Then the Governor would step aside and a phalanx of police officers or possibly National Guard or Army troops would mount the platform and surround the condemned. This climactic entrance might be accompanied by a trumpet fanfare or other musical number by the police or Army band, unless it was thought to offend good taste.

Next, a minister or priest would appear and offer a benediction, asking God’s blessing on the execution.

The condemned, should he desire, could make a short statement and even a plea of innocence. This would only add to the pathos of the occasion and would of course not be legally binding. He would then be strapped into the chair.

Finally, the executioner, hooded to protect himself from retaliation, would proceed to the platform. He would walk to a console where, on a solemn signal from the Governor, he would pull the switch.

The condemned man would instantly surge upward against his bindings, with smoke emitting from his flesh. This by itself would provide a most powerful lesson for anyone contemplating murder.

For those not contemplating murder, it would be a reminder of how lucky they are to have been straight and honest in America.

For the state, this would mean additional income; for the audience, an intense and educational experience — people might, for example, wish to bring their children.

And for the condemned, it would have its achievement aspect, because he would know that he had not lived his life for nothing.

Some might object that such proceedings are so fundamentally attractive that it is not too much to imagine certain individuals contemplating murder in order to star in the program. But no solution to any profound social problem is perfect.

Finally, and perhaps most important, it is entirely possible that after witnessing a few dozen privatized executions, the public might grow tired of the spectacle — just as it seizes on all kinds of entertainment only to lose interest once their repetitiousness becomes too tiresomely apparent.

Then perhaps we might be willing to consider the fact that in executing prisoners we merely add to the number of untimely dead without diminishing the number of murders committed.

At that point, the point of boredom, we might begin asking why it is that Americans commit murder more often than any other people. At the moment, we are not bored enough with executions to ask this question; instead, we are apparently going to

demand more and more of them, most probably because we never get to witness any in person.

My proposal would lead us more quickly to boredom and away from our current gratifying excitement — and ultimately perhaps to a wiser use of alternating current.

Miller, Arthur. “Get it Right: Privatize Executions.” *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader & Guide*, tenth edition. Kirsner, Laurie G. and Stephen Mandell, eds. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007.