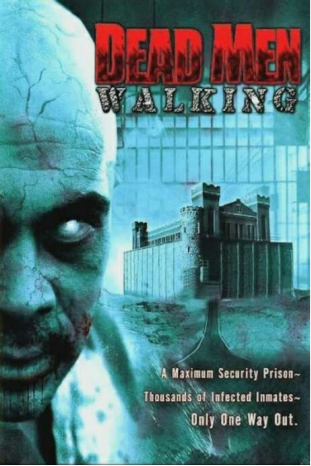


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Dead Man Walking is about how you shouldn't kill people. That seems fairly straightforward, right? "Thou shalt not kill" is one of the Ten Commandments; every state, and every country, and every moral or political philosopher, agrees that murder is wrong. "Don't kill" seems like a universal baseline for morality. So everyone agrees. Close the book, go home, be happy, and commit sins lesser than murder, like eating double-stuff Oreos or watching Seinfeld. All is well. Right? Well, not exactly right. Because if you start thinking about it, the whole not-killing-people thing starts to get a little tricky. Yes, don't kill—but what about during wars? And what if someone does commit murder? What should the punishment be? If we all agree that murder is super-wrong, then it seems like murder requires a super-punishment—like, maybe, death? If killing is wrong, does that mean it's right to kill killers? Or does that mean that any killing, even if it's done by the state, is wrong? Dead Man Walking thinks that the answer to that last question is "yes"; any and all killing is wrong. "Kings and Popes and military generals and heads of state have killed, claiming God's authority and God's blessing. I do not believe in such a God," Sister Prejean writes (1.116). Well, then, what do you do about people who murder? Sister Prejean's on that: "In an ideal world, there would be no need for retribution. But in real societies, punishing the guilty is as integral to the function of law as exonerating the innocent and preventing crime" (7.6). In other words, there needs to be some kind of punishment for murder, but the issue of killing a killer presents a contradiction that both death-penalty supporters and opponents have to wrestle with. Prejean's personal efforts to wrestle with these issues have resonated with a lot of people. Her book became a bestseller when it was published in 1993, and it inspired a high-profile 1995 film starring Susan Sarandon as Prejean and Sean Penn as a Death Row inmate. The book was also adapted into an opera in 2000 and a play in 2002; the play was written by actor Tim Robbins, who also wrote the screenplay for the movie. Sister Helen Prejean continues to work for death penalty abolition. In 2004, she wrote a book called The Death of Innocents about two men she believes were wrongly executed. As she says in the twentieth-anniversary edition of her book, "The fire in my soul still burns bright, and I know, with God's good grace, until my dying breath, that I'm going to work to put government killing machines in museums behind blue velvet ropes where they belong." Preach, sister. Twenty years ago, when Dead Man Walking was first published, people cared about it because the death penalty was a controversial issue. Some people supported capital punishment, and it was legal in some states. Some people didn't support it, and it was illegal in some states. Those for and against tried to convince each other. Sometimes a legal death penalty state would switch to banning the practice, and sometimes the opposite would happen. Folks argued about it, politicians argued about it, everyone argued about it, so everybody cared. But now we all agree on death penalty policy, so the book is no longer relevant... Yeah, no. This issue is every bit contentious as it always ways—maybe even more contentious now that several states have been botching executions. Two decades after Prejean published her book, America is still torn, conflicted, indecisive, and argumentative about the death penalty. There has been some movement away from it in some states. For example, in 2011, Illinois banned the death penalty after an 11-year moratorium, originally imposed because of fears that the death penalty system was so flawed that innocent people were being executed. But at the same time, the Supreme Court still maintains that the death penalty is constitutional, meaning that it does not violate the prohibition on "cruel and unusual punishment" in the Eighth Amendment. Thirty-two states continue to use the death penalty, including Louisiana, where Prejean's book is set. News flash: if you live in a death-penalty state, your tax dollars go to kill people. If you don't live in a death-penalty state, then life imprisonment is the most extreme punishment possible for murder. Prejean's idea, though, is that no matter where you live, the death penalty is a basic issue of human rights. If killing is happening anywhere, she believes, then it deserves attention. After all, you never know when you yourself might be a target—innocent or not. Prejean on the Internet Battling (You Guessed It) The Death Penalty Here is Sister Helen Prejean's anti-death penalty site, including a biography, news articles, and the texts of some of Prejean's speeches and interviews. Lots and Lots of Information About Why the Death Penalty Is Bad The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) is a massive resource of anti-death penalty reports, facts, articles, and more. Lots and Lots of Information About Why the Death Penalty Is Good If you want an alternative view, this website provides information and resources for supporters of the death penalty. It also tracks scheduled executions. National Center for the Victims of Crime An organization supporting and advocating for victims and victims' rights. Movie or TV Productions Susan Sarandon Does Not In Fact Look Much Like Sister Helen Prejean But that's Hollywood, huh? The 1995 movie starred Sarandon and Sean Penn, and Sarandon won the Best Actress Oscar. Articles and Interviews "Sometimes the prisoner catches fire..." Here's a positive 1993 review of the book from the LA Times. No One Like Sean Penn... and This is Good And Here's a positive 1995 review of the movie from the New York Times. "The place of us is to be... with those on the margins." You want a long interview with Sister Helen Prejean on the death penalty? Look no further than this baby, from 2013. Video "He Is An Unfeeling, Perverse, Misfit, and It is Time" The trailer for the 1995 film. "David Keaton Did Not Do It" Rachel Maddow discusses the state of the death penalty in 2013 and interviews Sister Helen Prejean. "It's About a Nun Who Got In Over Her Head" Sister Helen Prejean Speaks on the Death Penalty at the Nobel Peace Prize Forum. Audio "I Watch What I Do to See What I Really Believe" A 2008 NPR commentary by Sister Helen Prejean. Images The Death of Innocents Here's an NPR report on Prejean's 2005 book The Death of Innocents, about two men she believes were wrongly executed. Elmo Patrick Sonnier A picture of the first death row inmate Prejean worked with. Robert Lee Willie A picture of the second death row inmate Prejean worked with. Angola Prison It's the cheery Louisiana prison where Prejean advised Sonnier and Willie. Extracts from this document... Dead man walking - Film analysis coursework For many years, the death penalty has been a punishment for severe crimes. However, the law has long moved on since then, and more humane ways of death have been devised for the few states where the death penalty is still legal. Lethal injection is now the main way of carrying out the penalty, and Texas is the state that uses it most. It is a very controversial punishment and the moral issues of it have been debated for a very long time. Many protests have been made to try and change this law, and they have been successful in most countries. The film 'Dead man walking' is set in the state of Louisiana, near Texas and re-enacts an ethical case where a decision whether to sentence a murder to death or not has to be made. During the film we can never be certain whether Tim Robbins is in favour, or against the death penalty. He uses very effective methods to represent both sides of this moral argument. For example, his methods include his choice of the character Matthew Poncelet, his choice of Sister Helen Prejean, sound effects and music, flashbacks, characters viewpoints, costumes and many more. One of the most important of these techniques is the way he has decided to present his main character, Sister Helen Prejean. The first time we see Helen Prejean is when she is driving to the 'Hope House' in her car. There is happy music in the background, which is another media technique used by director Tim Robbins to suggest to us that she is a likeable person. ...read more. This shows that she loves her children and does what she can for them. She also talks about how Matthew's actions have affected her other kids. She sounds very upset when talking about how other boys from school pick on them. Overall, she is portrayed as a caring person. She accepts Helen's invitation to attend the appeal. The courtroom scene at first influences us against the death penalty, both when we see Mrs. Poncelet leaving the room in tears and with Hilton Barber's arguments. However, the prosecution lawyer evens out the balance with his arguments. The appeal scene begins with Mrs. Poncelet speaking about her son. Immediately she begins crying, whilst talking about what a nice person her son is. She does exactly what Hilton Barber expected, and he wanted her to do this to portray Matthew as a human being, rather than a monster. Poncelet's lawyer straight away starts in a negative way. He puts himself down by saying Matthew Poncelet couldn't afford a good lawyer and could only take what the state gave him. Also, when he is talking, he remains seated behind a desk, which shows signs of him being nervous. He has not argued a case for a long time, as he had retired and only returned for this one case. Hilton tries to get the sympathy vote from the panel, by pleading that everyone deserves to live and explaining in detail how lethal injection works. When he starts talking, Tim Robbins uses the voiceover technique to show how upset Matthew's mother was, but also let us hear Hilton Barber's argument. ...read more. The fact that Matthew is crying, and literally shaking with fear through this scene makes us feel sympathetic towards him. When Matthew says his last words, he is held up on the bed with his arms spread out. This is reminiscent of Jesus being crucified. A connection is made between the two, and this leads us to believe Matthew's execution was also wrong. However, just as we begin thinking the death penalty is wrong and immoral, we see disturbing flashbacks of Matthew Poncelet and Carl Vitello \*\*\*\* and murdering the two teenagers. This reminds us of why Matthew is in this position. While the liquids are being injected into Matthew, there is plenty of cutting between the two scenes of death, the execution and the murders of Hope and Walter. The scene ends on Matthew Poncelet's death, which leaves it in our mind last. Straight away, we hear the voice of the priest speaking, as a voiceover at the very end of the execution scene. It carries through to the scene of Ponclet's funeral. Because the last things we see are the dead body of Matthew Poncelet, and people grieving at his funeral, the last thing we think of is how much pain the death penalty has caused. This leaves us thinking the death penalty is wrong. Although Tim Robins tries to even out the arguments for and against, the arguments against come over stronger, and overall, this film portrays the death penalty as immoral. The vast amounts of media techniques and character choices allow Tim Robbins to make us see exactly what he wants us to and this film is a very good example of how media is used effectively in films to get the right final impression. ...read more. The above preview is unformatted text This student written piece of work is one of many that can be found in our GCSE Capital Punishment section.

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