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LETTERS

Abolish the Death Penalty? (responding to Nicholas Kristof article, "When We Kill," published on June 16)

To the Editor:

I only wish Nicholas Kristof had extended his excellent article to criticize the death by incarceration with which some states (including New York) have heedlessly replaced the death penalty. The "life without parole" sentences now handed out more and more frequently condemn thousands of people to a slow but inevitable death behind bars, in brutal, cruel conditions that are now coming to public attention. As these sentences become more common, they will keep feeding the crisis of mass incarceration.

The answer is not just to remove the death penalty but to transform our thinking and our system to reflect the reality that everyone can change, that most people at age 50 are far different from who we were at 18, 19 or even 30, and that long sentences serve no purpose other than promoting vengeance and violence and filling our prisons with people whose incarceration does nothing to promote public health and safety.

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