

# Editorial

## Juvenile offenders on trial

Capital punishment question resurfaces with no easy answers

The U.S. Supreme Court heard a case Monday that not only will decide the fate of Wayne Thompson, but could shape a facet of the punishment of a certain type of criminal — the juvenile.

According to a United Press International report Sunday, Thompson was convicted for murdering his former brother-in-law.

Charles Keene was found floating in a river a month after he was murdered. He had been beaten, shot and slashed in the throat, chest and abdomen.

He had reportedly abused Thompson's sister.

Although this sounds like a "typical" case, something we read about often, it was anything but usual.

Thompson was sentenced to death in an Oklahoma courtroom at the age of 15.

Twenty-eight states permit execution of juveniles. Indiana will allow anyone over 10 to be executed. A 1982 ruling put Nebraska's minimum age for the death sentence at 18. That puts our country in the same sphere as countries like Bangladesh, Iran and Pakistan, which some consider barbaric.

Besides Thompson, there are 35 other people on death row who were condemned for crimes that occurred when they were between the ages of 15 and 17 — about 2 percent of inmates sentenced to death.

Much has been said and written

about capital punishment, and there are many arguments either way.

Approximately 80 percent of the American public is in favor of the death penalty for adults, but less than 50 percent are in favor of executing juveniles. Nothing I could say in this column would sway anyone away from their personal values, beliefs and opinions about this issue.

This is a complex and seemingly unsolvable issue that needs attention. Monday's Supreme Court hearing provides a timely reason to discuss this issue again.



Jeanne Bourne

By the time a minor spends five to 10 years in the appeals system, people tend to forget the defendant was merely a child when the crime was committed. But some could answer with: What difference would it make if a person were under 18 or over 18 when the crime was committed?

Issues regarding capital punishment in general that need discussion include:

- Mistakes. Nine people have been executed in error by our criminal justice system since 1962. Should we call

that "justice"?

- Deterrence. Depending on the statistics used, one can argue either for or against the death penalty, but never has there been undisputable evidence that points either way.

- Expense. Reports have said it costs anywhere from \$30,000 to \$50,000 to house one inmate per year. Vast amounts of tax money are also spent on prosecution and defense costs.

- Eye-for-an-eye theory. Some people feel "justice" can only be served when criminals are punished with death for horrible crimes.

- Inhumanity. Opponents of the death penalty say execution is lowering our society to the offender's level. They say it is sending mixed signals to criminals: It is wrong to kill, but society kills as well.

No matter what one's views are about capital punishment, almost everyone will concede that the criminal justice system is in shambles. There are no easy answers.

People can only become what their socialization and circumstances allow them. If juvenile offenders are taken completely out of their economic and social situations, there's hope for rehabilitation. But in a society that allows capital punishment, that's impossible.

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## Numbers decrease

Transfer students precious commodity

A recent drop in transfer students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln shows the need for the university to improve communications with community colleges and students.

According to an article in Monday's Daily Nebraskan, the number of transfer students at the undergraduate level has dropped from 1,043 last year to 938 this year. A study of more than 600 student files showed that miscommunication between the transfer students, UNL and the colleges was one of several factors in the drop.

The main problems lie in interpretation of transfer credits. Fortunately, the UNL administration has acted swiftly and has started searching for information for a book that will outline all transferable credits from community colleges to UNL. The book should be ready by April.

Transfer students are a

unique breed. They attend the smaller schools for a number of reasons. Many of them opt for smaller colleges that are close to home. Others are financially strapped and have to stay near home. Some students prefer the smaller teacher-student ratio at the colleges.

But in the end, all of the students are attracted to the university and its programs. They want to improve their education by moving up to larger, accredited programs. To deny them this opportunity because of university red tape is ridiculous.

And it's not just the transfer students who benefit. The students also are a precious commodity to the university. The university generally lures the top-notch students from smaller community and junior colleges. Many of these students are enrolled in the university's law, dental, business and journalism colleges.

# Readers upset over AIDS, columnist

## Letters

### Jail and Bail raises \$1,609 for charity

Our thanks to Steve Mossman, the Interfraternity Council and Panhellenic delegates for a great Jail and Bail event. Last year's total was exceeded by \$600. A total of \$1,609 was raised for the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation and will go toward research and area programs. We especially want to recognize Mossman for all of his hours of hard work and dedication.

Jennifer Schizas  
director  
Cornhusker Division  
March of Dimes

### AIDS a civil-rights and public-health issue

Your recent call for letters concerning AIDS with slanting toward the safety of school children only builds the hysteria and moral furor around this disease. While many Bible-beaters are anxious to cast the "moral light and truth" on AIDS for whatever political or religious advantage, AIDS must be dealt with as a civil-rights and public-health issue.

With more than 1 million Americans now infected (not including the 47,355 dead as of Oct. 28 in the United States), we must simply ask what policy will serve the interest of those affected (dignity, compassion, health care) — and choose a common goal of preventing new infections.

This two-prong approach will make the civil-liberties lawyers and gay activists recognize the duty of the infected to not further spread the disease, and the hard-liners and moralists to acknowledge the claims of the infected to protection.

Controlling AIDS is a national priority. It is not a continuation of the

sexual revolution that Jesse Helms, Paul Cameron, Jane Fonda or gay activists are trying to "win" or "lose." These people must quit fighting old wars and develop a comprehensive approach to AIDS, civil rights and health care.

Jerry Roemer  
senior  
ag honors

### Commonwealth gone, but far from forgotten

On Nov. 1 on the north steps of the State Capitol was a true revelation of the heart and core of the Commonwealth fiasco.

Basically, rotten representation of the people's rights by the unicameral (as a body), greed on the part of the banking industry and total lack of proper actions on the part of our recent governors, our courts at all levels (city, county and state) and most certainly the American Bar Association as represented by the state attorney general's office (past and present). Jurisprudence at its worst. No justice done, not even close. Information and facts galore. No action. The news media was not too innovative at any time. Why? They have the investigative reporters. We pay for new news.

The fourth anniversary of the Commonwealth closing is past, and to the "Good Old Boys" in the Capitol, all departments (judicial, legislative and administrative), a reminder of a remark that was made at the first public meeting at the McPhee School by and of Commonwealth depositors and I quote a remark by a senator's secretary: "It will all blow over in six months."

It hasn't blown over and it should never subside, at least as long as the participants at all levels of the legislative, judicial and administrative bodies are still aiding and abetting in many ways. This manipulated injustice to humanity must honestly be resolved.

Among those who are trying is Dr.

Michael Breiner, who has the guts and staying power with more than just a few bucks at stake. May the bankers, news media, lawyers and certainly our government representatives try to measure up before they have the gall to look in the mirror at their own image and be proud of what they see. The lawyers did well and are prospering regularly at the victim's expense.

Breiner is not a politician, a lawyer or a news reporter. He did the work mentioned above at no cost. Did anyone learn anything or feel ashamed of their shortcomings? If not, why not?

Roy F. Gray  
Davey

### Writer doesn't know Socio-political history

In his column on the recent stock market crisis in Friday's Daily Nebraskan, Curt Snodgrass commits historical reductionism and factual manipulation, and is ignorant of general American socio-political history. The following corrects a few of his manifestations:

- The 1920s and 1980s are not the only periods to experience a widening gap between rich and poor. The depression years of the 1930s actually increased the gap at a faster pace.

- Citing vague statistics on bankruptcies is misleading. Snodgrass makes no differentiation between small businesses and large corporations. He conveniently omits that small business start-ups are an indication of economic prosperity, although they do have a very high rate of failure during their first years. This is only one explanation for high failure rates in the 1980s.

- Accusing Reagan of the re-institution of a hands-off economic policy is another fallacy. Snodgrass forgets that Jimmy Carter not only deregulated gas prices but started the deregulation of the airline industry. Contrary to his statements, the 1920s were not

a period of complete withdrawal from the economy by the government. The federal government did play a role, albeit indirect, in fostering economic development; although it was the 1930s that saw the beginnings of the era when direct government intervention would become the norm.

- Thursday's Lincoln Journal stated that the 1986 deficit spending decreased because of a growth in revenues due to recent changes in the tax structure pursuant to Reagan's economic policies. On the other hand, Snodgrass would have us believe that these tax changes are the same as the tax reforms in the 1920s, which were, in part, reversals of policies that had been enacted to support the war efforts of the Wilson administration.

- Snodgrass says, "People are gambling on the market, not investing in business as the stock market was intended." Apart from his presumption in telling us what was intended by the stock market, he ought to realize that investment in the stock market in any form is speculative, regardless of when it's done. Contending that this speculation is exacerbated by computerized trading is more nonsense. Earlier, Snodgrass had said that the crashes of 1929 and 1987 were related to investor realization of inflated prices, thus contradicting his own mistaken assertions.

- World War II brought the country out of the Great Depression, not FDR's New Deal policies, hence they wouldn't necessarily be any more appropriate now than they were then.

- Snodgrass connects the firing of the air traffic controllers and the collapse of PATCO to the so-called "union-busting" of the 1920s. Being federal employees, it was illegal for the air traffic controllers to strike. The reasons for firing them was to uphold the rule of law, not to bust unions. Further, comparing this action to the 1920s is nonsense in as much as unions did not begin to gain wide public acceptance until the 1930s.

- There is no correlation between Prohibition and the current anti-drug campaign. The former was an outright

ban on choice; the latter is promotion of an informed choice.

- There is no comparison between the "Red Scare" of the 1920s and the "Evil Empire." The former was a widely held internal fear responding to the Russian revolution and failed communist revolts throughout Europe following World War I. The "Evil Empire" is a narrowly perceived external threat.

- The stock market is not a good economic indicator of great depressions. There has been only one great depression in the 20th century. Building a cause-and-effect relationship on a single coincidence is questionable. The connection between the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression remains problematic.

- Another of Snodgrass' tortured analogies is his comparison of Coolidge's appointment of William Humphrey to the Federal Trade Commission with Reagan's alleged attempts at dismantling the Department of Education. Space prohibits miring ourselves in a further discussion of this particular irrelevancy wrapped in inanity inside confusion.

Snodgrass closes his column with an unattributed misquote. (The real quote: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." George Santayana, "The Life of Reason, vol. 1, "Reason in Common Sense.") One wonders how many more unattributed misunderstandings he has perpetuated. Searching for superficial similarities between two decades without attempting to understand the forces that produced them does not constitute remembering the past. To quote Snodgrass, "Scary, isn't it?" What is scary is that an apparent senior economics major who has either never had a class on American socio-political economic history, or else has slept through it, is paid to write uninformed gibberish in a column for the Daily Nebraskan.

John Anderson  
James Cox  
Kenneth Remfry Jr.  
graduate students  
history