

Daily
Nebraskan
Editorial Board
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Jeff Singer Editor, 472-1766
Jeremy Fitzpatrick Features Editor
Jeff Zeleny Copy Desk Chief
Sam Kepfield Columnist
DeDra Janssen Staff Reporter

EDITORIAL

Dangerous precedent

Supreme Court custody decision wrong

"Mommy!"
Two-year-old children use this term often, but it probably never had as much meaning as when Jessica Schmidt said it Monday.

Jessica, who screamed this at Jan DeBoer as she was being taken away from her adopted mother, was returned to her biological parents this week following a landmark custody case in which both the Michigan and Iowa Supreme Courts said the Schmidts had more of a right to Jessica's custody than the parents who raised the young girl for her first 29 months.

But when Cara Schmidt decided to give the toddler up for adoption in 1991, she lost her role as Jessica's mother and Jan DeBoer became a mom.

That is the way it was two years ago, and that is the way it should have stayed in 1993.

The two state supreme courts set a dangerous precedent when they granted the Schmidts custody of the child that was once given up for adoption, as the DeBoers were willing to provide the parental duties that the Schmidts initially did not want.

And for this reason alone, Jessica's real last name is and always will be DeBoer, and for the Schmidts to think anything different is absurd.

Another point the pair of state supreme courts did not seem to take heavily into consideration was the well-being of Jessica.

For this experience to happen to a child who is much older, such as when he/she is a teenager, would make it easier for that child to understand what was going on, despite the actual level of rationale that was being used.

But for a little girl who is barely over two years old, whose entire world centers around a loving mother and father that have cared and nurtured her in her delicate couple of years in existence, this type of sudden change could be devastating not just in the short-term for Jessica, but for a lifetime.

The courts have now made the saying 'you never get a second chance' a moot point when it comes to adoption cases.

Let's just hope Jessica, and now the children who will consequently follow in this precedent of parents swapping, get a first chance on a happy and successful life.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Summer 1993 Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees, the students or the NU Board of Regents. Editorial columns represent the opinion of the author. The regents publish the Daily Nebraskan. They establish the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its students.

LETTER POLICY

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others. Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject all material submitted. Readers also are welcome to submit material as guest opinions. The editor decides whether material should run as a guest opinion. Letters and guest opinions sent to the newspaper become the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Letters should include the author's name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted. Submit material to the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.



SAM KEPFIELD

Citizens not at fault for homeless

In our society today, professional cause-seekers have so warped the discussion over homelessness that whenever we see some dirty, ragged person pushing a shopping cart, our first instinct is guilt for being so well-off and having a roof over our heads. Maybe even a stray thought that "there, but for the Grace of God goeth I."

The very label given to this new, sainted victim class—"homeless"—is itself a smokescreen, making it out to be a housing problem. Like other liberal social justice issues (racism, sexism, homophobia), even the merest hint of criticism brings down a torrent of abuse.

The liberal revisionism of the homeless problem goes something like this. The homeless were once as you and I, honest, hardworking souls, the "working poor," who got by from paycheck to paycheck. Then, in 1980, Ronald Reagan came into office, and immediately began a mad dash to gut social programs that they relied on, throwing these hapless victims out onto the mean streets, where they began sleeping over heating grates. There were literally millions of them.

And you, heartless people that you are, cheered this all through the 1980s, cheering as Reagan ruined their lives. And you had the nerve to actually make money, taking it right out of their back pockets. That's why Bill Clinton has to tax you blind, to pay you back for being so bad in the Decade of Greed.

In fact, what we did was so terrible that rich white liberals, racked with guilt, have persuaded the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals to last week declare that the homeless have a 1st Amendment right to panhandle. The court said "there is little difference between those who solicit for organized charity and those who solicit for themselves."

Well, it just ain't so, folks. Alice Baum and Donald Burnes, in their



The next time you are accosted for change by one of the panhandlers on campus, you can get rid of a few spare pennies if you wish. Feel sorry for them if you will, but don't feel guilty, don't feel that it's your fault.

new book "A Nation in Denial: The Truth About Homelessness" expose this for the fraud that it is. The authors themselves are old poverty warriors from the '60s, who took the above view when they began their research.

In the 1970s, the professional social-justice types railed against the inhumanity of institutionalizing the mentally ill. They should not be "warehoused." They now had a constitutional right, created out of thin air, to refuse treatment. They were released, free as the wind, with nary a thought as to outpatient treatment for their problems.

The social justice crowd felt good, patted themselves on the backs, and went on to their next cause—the nuclear freeze, El Salvador, saving whales, etc. They became horrified a couple of years later when all these homeless began showing up on the streets—the very same people who they freed a few years earlier. Their response was, of course, to blame Ronald Reagan and you for a problem

that they created.

Baum and Burnes estimate between 60 and 85 percent of the homeless suffer mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction. At least 40 percent are male alcoholics, the old "skid row bum" of yore. From 10 to 25 percent are drug addicts, and one-third are mentally ill. Many of the homeless deliberately cut ties to family and friends that could have helped. Furthermore, the baby boom put a bulge in the number of people suffering from these afflictions.

Social spending by the federal government, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, rose from \$584 billion in 1980 to \$787 billion (in constant 1990 dollars), from 13.58 to 14.40 percent of the GNP. As for Americans not caring during the '80s, charitable contributions went from \$76 billion in 1980 to \$117 billion in 1990.

Is any of this acknowledged by the compassion fascists? Of course not. To even suggest that the homeless are in any way responsible for their own plight undercuts all their arguments and tactics. If you feel responsible for all of this, then you're likely to dig into your wallet to assuage your guilt. And the Mitch Snyders of the world take their cut, and pass the rest on to their clients.

If you actually solve the problem, by putting the homeless into treatment, maybe even reinstitutionalizing them, then you take away the homeless advocates' livelihood. They might have to go out and do an honest day's work for a change.

So, the next time you are accosted for change by one of the panhandlers on campus, you can get rid of a few spare pennies if you wish. Feel sorry for them if you will, but don't feel guilty, don't feel that it's your fault.

Kepfield is a graduate student in history, an alumnus of the UNL College of Law and a Summer Daily Nebraskan columnist.