

DEB MCADAMS

# Neglect today, prison tomorrow

Today in Chicago, six parents will be sentenced in Illinois' largest case of child neglect.

When police investigated reports of drugs being sold from the window of a row house, they discovered what Officer Patricia Warner described as the worst thing she'd seen in ten years as a Chicago cop.

Nineteen children, wearing little more than dirty underwear and soiled diapers, were huddled together on bare mattresses scattered on the floor. Dirty dishes were piled in the sink and on the floor. Most of the food in the refrigerator was rotting, and there were roaches everywhere. Two of the smaller children were chewing on what one officer described as a neck bone from the dog's dish. One four-year-old boy with cerebral palsy had cigarette burns and welts all over his body.

Eight of the children were younger than four, and all but one 14-year-old boy were younger than nine. Most of the children did not know their full names or have a complete change of clothes.

The parents did not understand why police began to remove the children from the apartment. When an officer asked one of the women to help with a frightened child who was lying in a fetal position, she replied, "he ain't none of mine."

The six adults who were at the apartment were arrested on charges of misdemeanor child neglect. Another woman, suspected of being one of the parents, was in the hospital giving birth at the time of the arrests.

Police eventually discovered that 28 people lived out of the two-bedroom apartment. The Chicago Tribune reported that the adults had a combined income of \$65,000 a year from public assistance.

Sixty-five thousand dollars and there was no food, few clothes, little heat, no soap, shampoo or toothpaste. Obviously, there were no toys, no books, no birthday cakes or bicycles.



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There were no crayons or Play-doh.

Nineteen children in Chicago had nothing that every child in the world's richest nation should have. They had roaches, filth, ignorance and squalor, and the most helpless among them was probably tortured. These children represent a raindrop in a sea of dirty little faces that will never appear on a right-to-life billboard.

Five of the six arrested parents were mothers, aged 20 to 26. Three were described as struggling with drug addictions, and one had been arrested for prostitution. The mother of the little boy with cerebral palsy had three children before she was 19 years old. The only father among the parents expressed disgust at the conviction, as he saw it, of being found "guilty over some dirt."

Each of the parents could be fined up to \$1,000 and sentenced to a year in prison and two years of probation. They will appear in Juvenile Court on May 14 to try to regain custody of their children, who will either end up in foster care or be returned to people who see nothing wrong with raising children in conditions objectionable to animal activists.

It doesn't seem likely that hungry, neglected children who live in filth with unmotivated, uneducated parents have much of a chance of becoming productive adults. They have more of a chance of becoming unmotivated, uneducated adults involved in some form of crime.

Congress is poised to approve a \$22 billion investment to fight crime,

but as long as people are indiscriminately producing unwanted, uncared for children, no amount of money will reduce crime. The majority of incarcerated criminals share a background of abuse and neglect. Most violent crimes are committed by men between the ages of 15 and 25, and the average age is becoming progressively younger.

Most people don't remember the way they comprehended the world when they were very young. Sometimes it's possible to recall the feelings associated with moments of fear or betrayal, but most people literate enough to read a newspaper could never associate with the perspectives of the 19 children in the stinking Chicago apartment.

So much human behavior is formed in the first few years of life. Children learn to interpret the world through the actions of their parents. They are imprinted with an image of what the rest of their lives may be like. For these children, that image is one of a filthy, crowded, cold, barren apartment where parents don't work and children share food with a dog.

The mark of that image is as indelible as any violent crime, yet the child neglect is a misdemeanor. As long as it remains one, Clinton may as well sink \$22 billion into prisons so neglected children have someplace to go when they grow up.

McAdams is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

SAM KEPFIELD

# Nixon gave us gift of resilience

Richard Nixon finally has met an obstacle from which there will be no comeback. Death overtook the 37th president on Saturday, and his funeral is today.

If a few die-hard Nixon haters drank toasts, most of us were left with mixed feelings about the man who occupied the American political scene for nearly half a century.

Richard Nixon was the first president of whom I was personally aware. At age 8 I sat up with my father and watched the returns roll in on his landslide re-election. A year later, I watched the Watergate hearings during summer break. Finally, I sat with my family as Nixon resigned on Aug. 8, 1974. My mother was in tears. My father, a confirmed Nixon hater, sat stunned in front of the television.

Obituaries and retrospectives never fail to mention the one fact that distinguishes Nixon from other occupants of the White House—he was the first, and so far only, president to resign. Photos accompanying the news of his death were of his farewell wave on Aug. 9, 1974, stepping into Marine One for the last time. Watergate, it seems, will forever define Richard Nixon's tenure at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

Yet, we must ask in the midst of another presidential scandal, how serious was Watergate? What was it? At its inception, it was nothing more than the June 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters. Watergate was a third-rate burglary transformed into high crimes and misdemeanors by Nixon's maddening inability to admit his mistakes. It soon became a cover for everything from J. Edgar Hoover's domestic surveillance to Nixon's policies in the Vietnam War. Watergate was politics as much as anything else.

If Richard Nixon, on the Monday after the break-in, had gone before the press and said, "Yes, we did it, and it was a mistake, and those who took



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part will pay the legal price—oh, and by the way, you might be interested to know what my predecessors were up to," he would have served two full terms and be remembered today as one of our greatest presidents.

The sainted John F. Kennedy tried to kill a foreign head of state, had his brother install wiretaps (on, among others, Martin Luther King Jr.) and had countless extramarital affairs. Lyndon Johnson stole a Senate election, made millions on shady business deals through his political connections and was every bit as inclined to curtail civil liberties as was Nixon. Both men gave us Vietnam and the twisted web of entitlements that threaten to bankrupt us today.

Apart from Watergate, Nixon's legacy is a complicated one. Elected as a conservative "law and order" candidate in 1968, pledging to "bring us together," Nixon dismayed his right-wing supporters. He took us off the gold standard and instituted wage and price controls. He declared that "we are all Keynesians now" in 1971, before we all became supply-siders. He also gave us Harry Blackmun.

Abroad, Nixon was at his best. He went to China, he went to Russia—and only he could have. He ended Vietnam, imperfectly to be sure, and the morass of Watergate caused much of the postwar holocausts in Cambodia. He signed the first arms control treaty. Even as Watergate consumed his presidency in the summer of 1974, he was welcomed by huge crowds in Russia and the Middle East.

In reading all the tributes to Nixon, the word that keeps reappearing is "resilience." He avoided being dropped from the GOP ticket in 1952 and 1956, survived a heartbreakingly close defeat in 1960 and the ill-considered California governor's race in 1962. He got knocked down, but he bounced back up.

What is one to take from the life of Richard Nixon? It is perhaps the lesson of the pitfalls of pride, in owning up to your mistakes no matter how painful. The truth will hurt, but getting caught in a half-truth is far worse. The real tragedy of Nixon's presidency is the opportunities missed because of Watergate.

It is, though, the story of the power of perseverance. Nixon loved to say that a friend told him he would make an excellent lawyer because he "had an iron butt." He wasn't glamorous, and he was awkward at times, but he forced himself into the arena, possibly to meet those demons and slay them.

Never knowing when he was beat, picking himself up time after time, forcing others to notice and take him seriously, winning through sheer power of will—this is Richard Nixon's gift to us. It is one that many in our country would do well to emulate.

Nixon has truly given his last press conference, and if some won't have him to kick around anymore, the rest of us will regret that we don't have him to look up to anymore.

Kepfield is a graduate student in history and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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