

MICHAEL JUSTICE

Build solutions, not prisons

Americans generally don't agree on much. Pro-life or pro-choice? Universal health care or the current private system? Death penalty or no death penalty?

But there is one thing we all agree upon: crime. It is the prime concern of this citizenship, bar none. Here in Nebraska, a Gallup poll revealed crime was the most important issue facing the state. Taxes were a distant second.

Violent crimes (assaults, robberies and sexual attacks), totaled 10.9 million in 1993, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. (The total number of personal and household crimes, including violent crimes, totaled 43.6 million.) However, this survey does not include homicides. Why? Because the victims cannot be interviewed.

Granted these numbers can be deceiving, because most instances occur in large metropolitan areas. But do not try to fool yourself by clinging to the thought that Nebraska could not be affected. If you do, you may well become what eight out of 10 Americans fear becoming: a victim.

If you haven't noticed, Omaha has a gang problem, and it is growing. What's worse is that it is fairly new and unstable, unlike those in Chicago and L.A., where the violence is specifically targeted to rival gangs. Omaha is frighteningly random.

That is what scares me the most about the budding gangs in Lincoln. With a population of just less than 200,000, Lincoln has joined the fraternity of cities with the most regrettable of all entrance requirements. A gang problem.

Fortunately, the local police are aware of the situation and have started attempts to quell the potential chaos.

But this crime problem transcends gang warfare and inner-city



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anarchy. It reaches beyond the murders and robberies. It begins with a system that is entirely, unequivocally and unquestionably broken.

A look at statistics from "Comparing Federal and State Prison Inmates" shows that the average sentence for murder is 31 years and nine months. The average actual time served is 14 years and 11 months. Sexual assault is similar in that less than half the ordered time is actually served: 17 years and seven months handed down and only seven years and 11 months spent behind bars.

All the stats look like this. No wonder criminals don't fear the system. Why should they? It's practically a cake walk. Actually, it is.

Inmates get three square meals a day, a roof over their heads, cable television, recreational facilities, access to library materials and enrollment in high school and college courses. They even can get a college degree. All for free.

Let's be honest here. The system, and the way we judge and govern criminals, has failed us. How many more times do we have to hear about all the families who have been devastated by criminal acts, only to then be equally crushed by the action, or lack thereof, taken by the legal system?

Terry Teevin was out of prison for less than six weeks when he attacked a woman with a knife in a video store parking lot in rural

Mundelein, Ill. He had been convicted of attempted rape and served less than half of his 10-year sentence before being paroled. He reportedly threatened to rape the woman, but she was able to break free and get help. She was fortunate.

A (rather stupid) Kansas state law requires that convicted juveniles be released on their 21st birthday, regardless of the crime. Elbert Hurd Jr. and Corey Carlisle are benefactors of this law, even though they shot and killed four members of Hurd's family when they were 15 years old. Six years in a youth center in exchange for four lives.

So the government has decided to cure our criminal ills by doing what it always does: throw money at it and hope it goes away. That won't work. It never has.

We could build prisons like they were condos and put a million more cops on the street, and we still wouldn't get anything accomplished.

Crime and criminal acts are merely weeds growing from a seed that is not as simple as we would like to think. Family values, work ethic, pride in oneself and one's community, open-mindedness, respect, equality, love. These are the things we should be building, not prisons.

We already have enough of those.

Justice is a news-editorial and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

MICHELLE PAULMAN

Put down those cancer sticks

The other day, I was reading a magazine and thinking to myself, "Gee, I could really use a registered quarter horse."

Then lo and behold, in the middle of the magazine was a little insert for the Marlboro Country Store Best of the West Sweepstakes, offering 21 coveted prizes like a log cabin, a mechanical bull or a five-day trip to glamorous Cheyenne, Wyo.

And prize No. 12 was a registered quarter horse.

All I had to do to fulfill my grandest dream was send in the entry blank and be the first entrant drawn who picked the registered quarter horse.

Alas, my dream was dashed into tiny pieces by one rule: "By entering this sweepstakes, you certify that you are a smoker"

My heart quailed. My lips trembled. My hair fell out in large clumps. Deep down, I knew I had to admit the awful truth: I am not a smoker — anymore.

Oh, I used to be. Some days I would smoke a whole pack. Sometimes I still sneak one, especially after a few beers.

A lot of college students must have this problem, judging from the sales of single cigarettes at the bars.

We are smart enough to know that smoking is directly related to lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, wheezing, hacking, bad breath, yellow teeth, stinky clothes and empty wallets.

But get some drinks in us, and our perception of reality just flies out the window.

In fact, I'm drunk right now, and these smoking statistics I got from the American Cancer Society, the Surgeon General and other sources aren't nearly so scary as they seemed when I was sober.

For instance, this year alone, 72,000 women and 100,000 men will be diagnosed with lung cancer.



We are smart enough to know that smoking is directly related to lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, wheezing, hacking, bad breath, yellow teeth, stinky clothes and empty wallets.

Of these, 82 percent of the women and 94 percent of the men will die. And since 1987 lung cancer has killed more women than breast cancer, and the number continues to grow.

Ah, so what? (Hiccup!) What about them other 18 percent who don't die? They're probably the picture of health. They're probably the people the tobacco companies use in their ads. You know — that Marlboro man is a pretty sharp-looking fellow.

On a hunch, I'll bet the reason that the tobacco companies spent \$4.65 billion dollars on advertising in 1991 was to pay that guy the money he deserved to look sexy and rugged on the back of all them magazines.

Why, the Marlboro man is more famous than the pope. After all, cigarettes are second only to automobiles as the most promoted consumer product in the United States.

Now that cartoon character, Joe — he's famous, too. In fact, kids are more likely to recognize that dorky camel than Micky (Hiccup!) Mouse. Not too bad for a guy whose face — if you cover up his eyeballs — resembles the private parts of the male anatomy.

But poor, popular Joe probably has nothing to do with the fact that almost all smokers start before the age of 20, or that bans on cigarette ads cut the number of kids who start smoking by 50 percent.

Sure, kids are more naive than us mature (Hiccup!) adult-type folks. But could they really be so gullible as to believe that smoking is fun, cool, hip and happening?

Even when we're tipsy, the statistics clearly show that we're killing ourselves. But those statistics don't show up on billboards or in magazine ads.

Instead, we get warnings telling us that cigarettes may be hazardous to pregnant women's fetuses, plastered on an ad depicting the ruggedly handsome Marlboro man who will never in his life be a pregnant woman.

The tobacco companies would have adults and kids alike believe that smoking can make us rich, svelte, beautiful and magnetically appealing to the opposite sex. As if that weren't enough, they're giving away prizes, too.

It's high time we all sobered up to what the tobacco giants are pushing on us — death on a stick. We need to show them they can't put a price on our health.

That's what the Great American Smokeout is for. I'm asking smokers to wake up to what's happening. You're being used by cigarettes, not the other way around. Put 'em away, at least for a day.

If I can give up my quarter horse, surely you can give smoking.

Paulman is a senior news-editorial and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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