

## America has explosive history

The most cynical observers of the Oklahoma City bombing have several ways to look at what happened. Perhaps the broadest and most sweeping summation would acknowledge aspects of American culture and history that most people would prefer remain unmentioned. Suffice it to say that all the bombs we have dropped on the rest of the world's people have come back to haunt us. However, bombs have been exploding in this country since its birth.

Watching news about the Oklahoma City bombing reminds me that this isn't the first time in the 20th century that American-made bombs have exploded within American borders. It isn't the first time that the seemingly indiscriminate use of explosive devices has been used to violate the otherwise peaceful existence of American life. Nor is this the first time that bombs have been used on civilians in Oklahoma.

Few people are aware that in 1921, the U.S. Army Air Corps, in conjunction with the Oklahoma National Guard, bombed the black neighborhood in Tulsa to quell a race war that was being openly waged between blacks and whites in that community. Bombings in this country are nothing new.

During the civil-rights movement, the city of Birmingham, Ala. had an entire section of town nicknamed "Dynamite Hill." The name was due to its long history of Ku Klux Klan attacks on well-to-do blacks in a section of that city.

In relationship to the actual number of American bombings, these amount to a drop in the bucket. In fact, so many American-made bombs have been used on American people, I couldn't begin to tell about them all. The point is that this is not a new concept. Americans bombing Americans has been happening since the very first and last shells tore through the flesh



### E. Hughes Shanks

of a Native American. You might say that when there were no more Native Americans to kill, Americans turned on each other.

People should be reminded that some 15 years ago, Wilson B. Goode, an African American and then-mayor of Philadelphia, gave the go-ahead to public-service officials to release percussion bombs atop a row of apartments where members of a commune were holed up with their children. The bombs worked. Everyone died and an entire city block was destroyed because the fire chief chose not to put out the fires, for no apparent reason.

People are wrong to say that until now, Americans have escaped terrorism. We brought it with us, and it has continued in different aspects of our lives. There just wasn't a name for it. When the Spanish conquistador Hernando De Soto invaded the New World in 1540, he brought with him some 600 troops, including 200 horseman, 100 servants and artillery.

Sweeping across what is now Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, whole tribes of Native Americans were wiped out, enslaved or driven from their homes. Tribes like the Tunica and Mobile were overtaken and — I'm sure to them — it was for no apparent reason.

Last week's bomb blast in Oklahoma City will not be the last time innocent Americans will be ravaged by violence in such a large display. Native Americans would surely contend that their forefathers

endured the equivalent of hundreds of Oklahoma City bomb blasts, in that their culture was devastated and their people and lives destroyed for no apparent reason.

I'll never forget the time I watched a television broadcast of our country's involvement in the war in Nicaragua, when a village woman picked up an unexploded shell from the ground and presented it to the camera exclaiming, "Made in the U.S.A."

The wacko logic and reasoning of the perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing and our indignation with them are probably not relevant. The families of the victims and survivors of that act, or any act like this, are grieving.

In the end, a reasonable person would have to agree that nothing could justify the bombing in Oklahoma City, nor any other bombings.

Bombings aren't the only examples of mass destruction. But they may be the most profound statements to those of us who are basically sheltered and naive, at least until we hear the bang or feel the shock. People who have endured years of destruction in other ways are not naive and may hear no loud bangs, but rather a series of pops.

The favorite distinction attributed to terrorism is that it strikes the innocent unexpectedly. It mars the lives of people who would otherwise be living normally. People should not be surprised at what has happened, least of all African Americans and Native Americans. All of whose ancestors were living otherwise normal lives until that was taken away for no good apparent reason.

Of the Oklahoma City bombing, someone wrote, "No one of us can pretend to be safe anymore."

They were right. We never were.

Shanks is a graduate student and Daily Nebraskan columnist.

## Death row inmates deserve final 'buzz'

After years of soul searching, wavering and tiptoeing around the issue of the death penalty, I've finally made up my mind once and for all. I'm firmly against it.

That was my position when I was a young man. I went through my enlightened liberal phase and argued that it was wrong for society to take even a monster's life and that the threat of death didn't deter criminals.

But then I evolved into my indignant taxpayer phase and argued that creeps like John Gacy, Richard Speck and Ted Bundy weren't worth the expense of food and lodging.

This led to my hard-eyed, anti-anarchy phase, during which I called for the immediate execution of slack-jawed boobs who litter the parks, jar entire neighborhoods awake by blasting their car stereos or don't apologize when they dial the wrong number.

Then I switched to an anti-execution position when it became clear that most death-row inmates were poor and kind of stupid. That seemed unjust because I knew quite a few rich and smart criminals who were just as deserving.

But I lost my sympathy for poor and stupid menaces when a couple of young robbers who appeared poor and stupid stuck a gun to my nose and I came within one finger twitch of going out with a bang as well as a whimper.

Now I have had my final change of heart.

While I believe in swift and stern justice for killers, I am opposed to cruel and unusual punishment.

And in following the accounts of recent executions in Illinois, as well as Texas, Florida and other states that are really into zapping killers, I have found that most of them involve needlessly unusual meanness.

The evidence can be found in the last meals that are consumed by the condemned.

As we all know, a person who is about to be put to death is allowed to eat just about anything he wants, within reason.

Some really stuff themselves, such as an Oklahoma killer who ordered a Burger King double cheeseburger, canned spaghetti and meatballs, barbecued ribs, steamed mussels and clams, two milkshakes and pumpkin pie with whipped cream.

In Texas, a killer was furious to the end because he was served regular spaghetti instead of the can of O-shaped pasta he had requested.

Bundy had steak and eggs, and Gacy had fried chicken. And an Illinois convict recently settled



### Mike Royko

for a cup of coffee and a smoke.

But I noticed a strange omission in all of the last meals. Not one pre-dinner martini or Scotch on the rocks. No robust red wine with that last rare steak. No snifter of after-dinner cognac. Not even a humble shot of Old Skull Popper with a beer chaser.

That struck me as being odd. I'm sure that many of the people reading this would agree that if there were ever an occasion when a couple of martinis, a bottle of wine and a touch of brandy would hit the spot, it's when you are about to take that dreaded last walk.

And I wondered why the convicts didn't request their favorite beverages. It couldn't be that they were concerned about their lives or feared being arrested for drunken driving.

So I asked the prison officials, and they said the answer was simple: Liquor cannot be served as part of the last meal.

Nic Howell, of the Illinois Department of Corrections, said: A prison is a state building. And it is against the law to serve liquor in a state building.

"Sure, they'll ask for it, but they can't get it. We try to accommodate them as much as we can with a last meal, but not with booze."

That was what they said in Texas, Louisiana and other states. No drinking on prison grounds.

"They'll say, 'I can really use a drink,' but it is against the law," a Texas official said.

If that isn't cruel and unusual punishment, I don't know what is. Even a hardened criminal should be permitted one last buzz before he departs.

But I'm sure that there are pitiless avengers who will say convicted killers don't deserve even that small gesture of kindness.

To satisfy them, drinks could be served early enough so that the condemned man would have enough time to pass out and wake up with a world-class hangover.

When he moans and says those ancient words, "Oh, man, my aching head. I feel like I'm about to die," the warden could say, "How'd you guess?"

(c) 1995 Tribune Media Services, Inc.

## Purpose of classes questioned

The end is near, or so I'm told. The end of this dreadful and lengthy semester.

Although it is probably equal to the fall period in pure volume of silly and mostly useless information, the spring term feels as if it is bending the rules of time.

My problem with this semester seems to be viral; an infection has spread throughout campus and can be recognized and identified in the glazed eyes of weary pupils, including mine. It is a disease spawned from the mating of exhaustion and disinterest, and it is especially unkind to those who actually care about passing or maintaining a GPA.

It has gotten to the point where I would rather watch bad television ("The Love Boat" reruns or "Melrose Place,") than crack open a book. I just can't care. It's not that I don't want to; I just can't. It has become an impossibility.

Why can't I negotiate a grade with my instructors?

"I'll give you Park Place and a free pass on a hotel for a B-plus. OK, two free passes and Baltic Ave."

How about a class-wide auction for grades?

"I got 10, gimme 10, 10, can I get 10 for the B-plus? I need 10, 10 ..."

"Ten!"

"I got 10, gimme 20, 20, 20 now, gimme 20, I need 20 ..."

These forms of grading would be about as accurate as, say, giving final exams.

Think about it. We're required to memorize four months worth of reading and notes and tests so we



### Michael Justice

can spend two hours regurgitating it like so many bits of vomit. And this has to be done for several classes! Who are they kidding?

I can't remember what I did 15 minutes ago, much less spit up facts from January. That's ridiculous. Am I to be tested like this when I get a real job?

"Mr. Justice, we have to give a midterm exam, because we need to know how much crap you can store in short-term memory. I trust you crammed all last night?"

"Of course. What's the point of learning anything in advance when, if it's not pertinent to my life, it will simply be forgotten?"

I don't think so. This brings me to another problem. Why in the name of all that is sane do I have to waste 16 credit hours on a foreign language? Sixteen credits that could go to my major, which is something I will retain longer than 50 minutes.

When I go to Paramount studios and apply for a writing job, will they ask me to write a composition? Probably. Will it have to be in Spanish? NO! Will the interviewer suddenly trick me by asking me questions in French? NO!

I'm sure my interview will go like this:

"Hola, señor Justice. ¿Como estas?"

"Uh, bien or bueno or whatever."

"Tell me about the French Revolution and name every King of England in chronological order."

"What?"

"What do China, India and Guatemala have in common in regards to soil content and infant mortality rates?"

"Yeah, uh, I'm here for the writing job, remember?"

"Yes, but didn't you learn this in college? It's vital for you to have a successful writing career."

"Uh, I gotta go. Adios amigo."

I can see it now; I'll be out of work forever because I never mastered a language. Conversely, because I took all my goofy required classes, I have an open road to riches beyond my wildest imagination.

There's no getting around it, so all I can do is gripe. I guess I'll have to take my finals after all. That is if I want to get that little piece of paper that proves I can put up with four years of absurdity and nonsense for its own sake.

It's the goal of the degree that pulls me along through the days of glazed and contused. Some of you are getting yours soon. I have to wait before I'm allowed to leave this disenchanting realm to enter into the "real world," with which I'm quite familiar.

I just hope I don't have to write another Spanish composition.

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



Mike Luckovich