

# Death penalty brings justice

One year ago this week, Harold Lamont Otey took his seat in the state penitentiary's electric chair. Sent to his eternal reward in the early morning hours of Sept. 2, 1994, Otey died more than 17 years after he raped, stabbed, bludgeoned and strangled to death Jane McManus of Omaha.

It wasn't swift, but justice had been served, nonetheless. What made the execution of "Walkin' Willi" Otey unforgettable was the crowd and events outside the penitentiary on the evening of Sept. 1.

The ugly sites of that night are still fresh in our memories: Two opposing sides yelling at each other; protesters burning the American flag; supporters holding up signs that read "Nebraska State Pen's first annual BBQ."

After the switch finally had been flipped, a cheer went from one side of the crowd. Bitterness poured from the other.

"An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth," cried one of the protesters. "Revenge is what these barbarians want."

Another Otey supporter said, "When we wake tomorrow, there won't be anything different. Crime and killing will be back to business as usual."

But the only words that mattered came from Joan McManus.

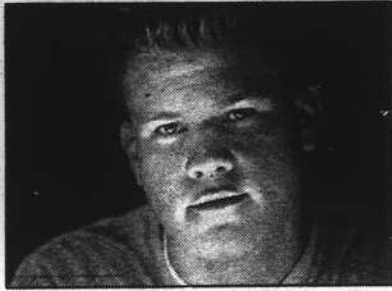
After Otey had been pronounced dead, Joan McManus, mother of Jane, came out of her Omaha home. Accompanied by her family, McManus spoke to the media.

"I can maybe think of Jane now in a little different way," McManus said, "a little more peaceful way."

This columnist learned a lot that night.

Those opposed to capital punishment prove it is easy to misinterpret the death penalty as an attempt to deter crime or as an act of revenge. Yet, it is neither.

Plain and simple, the death penalty is justice. It is an ugly necessity of a civilized state where murder has become "old news."



**Jamie Karl**

*"It wasn't swift, but justice had been served, nonetheless."*

Some crimes — such as Otey's — are so heinous, only the death penalty is fit punishment.

Capital punishment ensures that the accused and convicted will never again commit those atrocious acts.

What makes the death penalty work is the criminal's knowledge that he has been judged unfit to live by his fellow man, and that his life will soon end.

The pretty pacifists who sit around the coffee shops, in their beads and Birkenstocks, cry to ban the death penalty. "Don't kill for me," they plea.

But if we outlaw capital punishment, we tell the murderers, the rapists, the Oteys, that no matter what they may do to innocent people, their lives are secure. Guaranteed.

It is encouraging to hear Ben Nelson and Newt Gingrich call for more legislation mandating capital punishment. But, with due respect, our politicians are always jabbering about the "war against crime."

Despite their tough talk, only 1 in 50 felonies results in conviction and incarceration; only 1 in 1000 murderers pays with his life.

The only casualties in this "war on crime" come on the side of the innocent. That's no war; that's a

slaughter. When so-called "community leaders" like Cantor Michael Weisser and Scott Wesley hold candlelight vigils and "healing and memorial" services to remember convicted butchers — as they plan to do Friday in mourning of the anniversary of Otey's death — they send a very backwards message: You can rape women, slaughter innocent folks, sell drugs to our children, do whatever. But nothing you do will make us take away your life.

That message, itself, shows a lack of concern for innocent life. It is that message that has contributed to today's crime wave.

In this week marking the anniversary of Otey's execution, let us remember that the state killed no one in those early minutes of Sept. 2, 1994. Instead, a man guilty of a crime beyond savage sacrificed his own life some 17 years ago, long before he took a seat in the chair of justice.

If politicians, like Gov. Nelson, are really serious about this war on crime, they will take the lead in reforming this legal system that allows endless appeals, costing the taxpayers millions of dollars.

They will change this system that allowed Otey to appeal his sentence more than 50 times, and has kept the other death row inmates breathing for yet another year.

In the meantime, we can find satisfaction in that, albeit very occasionally, the system does work.

And, while there may be no "healing and memorial" services for the victim of Otey's evil, we can find comfort in the fact that Jane McManus is finally at rest.

That somewhere, the soul of Jane McManus is at peace, knowing Harold Lamont Otey will never again repeat the atrocities done to her.

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## From the INTERNET

### Revolt leaves scars

**Editor's note: The following essay ran in a more developed form under the heading "Chronicles of Love and Resentment." The address for this and other columns by Dr. Gans appears below.**

The Body Sacrificial  
Eric Gans

A search of the World Wide Web will not uncover a plethora of information concerning originary anthropology. Not directly, that is.

For all cultural activities inform us of our origins.

Does not the greatness of market society lie precisely in its indifference to theory and its concentration on the cutting edge where history is made? Or on the focusing of that edge into a point, in the curious activity of body-piercing.

We are privileged to observe the emergence within our own culture of a sacrificial phenomenon of the sort that ethnologists have traveled thousands of miles and endured unspeakable conditions to experience "in medias res" in societies they can never fully understand.

The pioneer Australian ethnologists Spencer and Gillen, in order to become more fully integrated into Aboriginal culture, underwent an initiation rite that included subincision of the penis.

What would they say to be able to examine at the click of a mouse the ceremonial jewelry worn by young Americans in their body's most intimate recesses?

Body art compels our interest because it is sacrificial, or in other terms, irreversible. A paste-on tattoo is as trivial as a sculpture made out of modeling clay.

A hole in one's anatomy, on the other hand, is a serious matter. The body has many nooks and crannies, and we cannot help but identify with what happens to them and in them, since our bodies are usually mimetic.

Instead of imprinting on the body a predetermined structure as Levi-Strauss theorized, piercing inscribes a message of personal identity.

Considering the number of different places to pierce and the various types and sizes of jewelry wearable in them, piercing encodes a message of considerable informational content.

No corporeal activity, except perhaps tattooing, which in men at least is not new, has the capacity to generate so much information.

Even if we assume a modest total of 100 mutually independent pierces including the jewelry, 2-100 is a 30 digit number. But information of this sort cannot be measured in bits.

What counts is how long, how often, and with what effect one can maintain the interest of one's audience, sharing with some, shocking others, arousing the curiosity of still more, especially their erotic curiosity.

The healing problems, the need for continued care, the possibility of enlargement leading to new gauges of rings (gauge measurements figure prominently in this literature — the smaller the gauge, the larger the size) the narratability and photographability of the piercing operation and its results generate an immense wealth of data.

*"At first the single male earring is introduced by a fashion-setting minority, then multiple ear piercings, then nose rings ..."*

For the investment in time and effort, a generally nondescript adolescent is compensated by a payoff in significance far exceeding what he or she could dream of obtaining by more conventional means.

How is such significance generated? Mere difference from the norm does not suffice. A short time ago, any body-piercing at all would have been stigmatized as weird, and the Saussurean difference between one pierce and another, merely ignored.

The phenomenon must be sufficiently abnormal to arouse a sense of social danger, but not enough to be simply unacceptable. On the frontier, negotiation proceeds anonymously, following the market model: children with parents, lovers with lovers, workers with employers ...

At first the single male earring is introduced by a fashion-setting minority, then multiple ear piercings, then nose rings ...

At each step, there are obstacles; the body's topography is uneven, and the forces flow along the lines of least resistance.

The end of the fad is also clearly predictable. The banalization of the activity, which despite the infinite variety of detail is quite monotonous in its overall result, leads to boredom with others' stories, with repeating one's own, with displaying and soliciting interest.

The real payoff is, after all, quite limited; a bit of erotic stimulation at the price of possible infection, partial stigmatization, and (I imagine) just plain inconvenience in having that ring there to put in and take out, to wash around, etc.

One day, the whole phenomenon is exposed as a Ponzi scheme built on the expectation of further gain from drawing others into the semantic orbit into which one has been seduced.

The trend collapses, and another, unpredictable until that moment, begins its takeoff.

As with any market phenomenon, the sudden rise of body-piercing results from the confluence of numerous factors. Perhaps the most historically specific is the imperative of control over one's body in the era of Roe vs. Wade.

Parents are confronted with a new kind of demand for self-determination. Instead of a girl's negotiating for the traditional symbols of adulthood, or something easily reversible like a punk hairstyle, she requests permission to wear a ring in her nose — or insists on it, or has it done without parental consent.

The mark of adolescent revolt is borne as an ornament that leaves a permanent scar.

<<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/views.html>>

# Newt values Victorian values

Newt Gingrich and John Ruskin, that great nineteenth century Victorian philosopher, were down at the watering hole in Washington, D.C., where they regularly met to drink and hash over the week's events.

"You're looking good, John," said Newt, loosening his tie and rolling up his cuffs. "You're looking damned good for a dried up old Victorian. You're looking like you could fit in."

Ruskin smiled, a slow, sad, stiff smile. Considering that he had rarely smiled when alive, it was quite an achievement.

"Thank you, Newt," he said. "I'm really starting to feel at home here in fin-de-siecle America. I never thought it was possible, but the Republicans' Contract With America is like Victorian England all over again."

Newt clapped Ruskin on the shoulder, beaming approval.

"That's what we're doing, John, that's what it's all about. I've been trying to get you to come back to us for decades now."

"I couldn't even reach you over on the Other Side during the Johnson and Kennedy years. You only started materializing during the Nixon Administration. I finally got through during the Reagan and Bush years, when we really started attacking welfare. And here you are!"

Ruskin smiled again, tearing a few unused cheek muscles.

"You've been a good friend, Newt," he said. "I really appreciate it."

"Don't mention it, John old man."

Newt took another swig of Pabst Blue Ribbon. "When I'm elected president, I want you to be my speech writer."

Ruskin stared at him. "Ghost-writer, you mean," he said, a faint smile playing about his cracked lips.



**Debra Cumberland**

*"Once we dismantle student loans, and the Department of Education, only privileged white guys like ourselves will have access to higher education. It'll be just like good old Victorian times."*

Newt leaned forward intently. "I want you to tell it like you did in your books, John."

He reached into his bulging briefcase, pulling out a tattered copy of "Sesame and Lillies."

"Like right here, where you talk about a woman's role." Newt pointed to a well-thumbed page.

"She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise — wise, not for self-improvement, but for self-renunciation."

Newt shut the book, licking his lips. "I love that part — especially where you talk about how the home is a woman's true place and power."

Ruskin nodded sagely. "And that's the Republicans'

Contract With America."

Newt leaned forward, fanning Ruskin's sallow cheeks with his cheap, beery breath. "And you can be the ghostwriter. After all, you wrote it all over one hundred years ago, so all you'd have to do is touch it up a bit."

Ruskin sipped his pale ale, nodding thoughtfully.

"Like, abolishing welfare," said Newt, taking a swig of beer. "Of course, you didn't have welfare then, so you might want to study up."

"We also want to take away leave for working mothers and do away with abortion rights. Make it more like Victorian England, you know? Women need to stay home and be a strong moral force."

Ruskin nodded. "It's so true, Newt, and I'm glad to see that after a hundred years America has finally come to realize this, and turn back the clock. Especially with the arts. I am appalled at the state of art since I died."

Newt rolled his eyes. "Well, don't you worry, John," he said, leaning forward. "We'll do away with government funding. No more Robert Mapplethorpes, thank God."

Ruskin nodded. "And education?"

"We're taking care of that, too," said Newt, chugging down the last of his Pabst. "Once we dismantle student loans, and the Department of Education, only privileged white guys like ourselves will have access to higher education. It'll be just like good old Victorian times."

Newt cackled gleefully as Ruskin started to fade away, called back to the Other Side until next week.

Victorian England — it was even better than the '50s.

Newt could hardly wait.

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