

OPINIONPACKETS

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Our
VIEW

Blood-alcohol discontent

Tactics needed to avoid drunken driving disasters

Enough 16- to 20-year-olds died in alcohol-related car crashes in 1994 to replace every engineering college undergraduate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The approximately 2,222 deaths would wipe out nearly half of the arts and sciences undergraduates and one-quarter of the student section at Memorial Stadium. It would wipe out the architecture college students more than four times.

Last year, these statistics ripped into the flesh of our campus when student Laura Cockson was killed by a drunken driver. Many students pledged to stop drinking and driving, while many others pledged to become activists for the cause.

But drunken driving remains common in Lincoln, and a lot of it starts downtown — just right around the corner from the university.

The figures on local drunken driving arrests prove another death could happen here soon. As of Nov. 1, Lincoln police had arrested about 1,130 offenders this year for driving while intoxicated — a figure about 20 percent higher than last year.

It's good to know drunken drivers in Lincoln have a good chance of being caught. But for every one arrested, many more were on the road.

And national statistics show first-time DWI offenders who are arrested have an average blood-alcohol concentration of .19. People are legally drunk with .10, and drinkers' driving ability is considerably impaired at .05 — just two drinks for a 160-pound male.

The fact that first-time offenders have an average blood-alcohol content of almost double the legal level tells us that people are driving while obviously intoxicated, and that police with limited resources catch mostly the worst drunken drivers.

It's not the fault of the police. It's the fault of every Lincoln student and resident who does not wholeheartedly believe drunken driving is akin to driving with the intent to harm or kill.

It's the fault of everyone who has watched friends drive away from a bar or party with four or more beers under their belts.

It's the fault of every person or group — and that includes us — who has asked, "Are you OK to drive?" then has believed drunken friends when they answered, "Yeah, I'm fine. I quit drinking a couple of hours ago."

This holiday season, Lincoln police have more training to detect impaired drivers than they did last year.

They're doing their part to save our lives. We must meet them halfway.

Promise yourself you will help prevent drunken driving this holiday season. Give friends and family your phone number in case they need an emergency ride home. Be a designated driver. Write the number for a Lincoln taxi service in your wallet.

And, for more than 2,000 Lauras' sakes, don't drink and drive away.

Mook's
VIEW



DN LETTERS

Hostility not unjust

What? You mean there was a religious component in our early American history? How dare you be so politically incorrect ("The first thanks: Insight given into roots of holiday," Tuesday)! Wait until the academics get hold of what you reproduced. They'll expunge this offending document immediately before it contaminates our public-school children.

As for the unhappy relationships with the Indians, the Puritans, of course, could not rest secure then, as now, on the white man's total dominance and control; then they could hardly be magnanimous without risking death. Perhaps they had an excuse to feel apprehensive, even hostile. The obvious struggle with their faith in God during those utterly demoralizing times is a fascinating study in itself — a theme in early American history that is nowadays, by law and spiritual unease, consigned to oblivion. In either case, in terms of religion or security, those folks lived in a very different time, with very different perspectives.

By contrast, we, whose greatest dread is having to sign up for an 8 a.m. class and whose racial and ethnic relationships are comfortably theoretical anyway, may have trouble appreciating this difference.

Jon Mark Ruthven
associate professor
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focused, would likely have meant the end of the American colonies. A modern-day equivalent would be a war that claimed 5 million American lives. Vietnam, by contrast, killed fewer than 60,000.

The proclamation's authors had recently seen a large portion of the European population of western and southeastern Massachusetts — men, women and children — butchered. Those were their friends, their relatives, sometimes their children. (Of course, they retaliated with similar brutalities.) Recalling those circumstances might go some way to illuminating the 'anti-American Indian' sentiment of the proclamation, and maybe lead your readers to a somewhat more sophisticated view of history than the infantile 'white man bad, Indian good' sentiment that seems to be the essence of multiculturalism.

Happy Thanksgiving, and above all else, be thankful we're at peace.

Gerry Harbison
UNL professor
chemistry

Hotel prison?

Maybe another scenario should be considered in the punishment of murderers. A prison should be built with four bare walls and

iron bars for a door. No heat or any of the "luxuries" of life. Every day, twice a day, a bowl of gruel and a glass of water for the meals. No cable TV, no library access, no weight rooms, no phones or college-by-mail courses. We should make prison just that — a prison as well as a punishment. I agree with Tasha Kuxhausen ("Life or Death: Death penalty the best punishment for violent murderers in the United States," Nov. 20) that murderers (should) lose all rights once they're convicted.

And to go along with Cooper ("Capital punishment must be abolished to save taxpayers' money, conscience," Nov. 20), to save money, this bare-bones prison system should be built. I'm not sure on the actual amount, but it costs something like \$70,000 a year to house an inmate. This sounds like an obscenely large amount. Whether the death penalty is wrong or not, murderers have no rights, and they should receive a punishment, not a stay at a resort.

Brian Owens
UNL alumnus
Lincoln

... for a reason, anyway

The reproduction of the first Thanksgiving proclamation on your editorial page ("The first thanks," Tuesday) was, like all good propaganda, shorn of any historical context. Perhaps you'll permit me to provide it.

The proclamation was written toward the close of King Philip's War. King Philip's War was in proportionate terms the bloodiest war in American history: It kill-ed more people as a percentage of the total population than any conflict before or since. It was an extraordinarily brutal conflict, which, had the Indians remained united and



MATT HANEY/DN

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