

Racist system

EVANSTON—The Campaign to End the Death Penalty is concerned with media reaction to the death sentence handed down to John William King in Jasper, Texas. King stands convicted for a brutal racist murder, and we rejoice in the historic ruling in this trial. This is the first time a white man has been found guilty of a lynching case in Texas.

But 85 percent of the men and women on Death Row in this country are there for killing whites, despite the fact that half of all murder victims are black. What this means is that the execution process is systematically biased against black Americans. Yet advocates of the death penalty will use King's sentence as proof of racial fairness, to defend the legal lynching of others who are mostly black and poor.

This execution will be a defeat, not a victory, for those who struggle to end the racist violence that black people in the U.S. have suffered since the days of slavery.

Andrew Freund
Campaign to End the Death Penalty

Repulsive crime

ORLAND PARK—It was recently reported that John William King, the supremacist, was sentenced to die. "Justice was served" is what many readily come to mind, but for what was done, there can be no justice. Although it was noted that blacks and whites were pleased with the verdict, there was no need to mention race—people were gratified to know that what had happened could not be tolerated regardless of who was the victim.

The fact that King chose his victim on the basis of race alone makes the crime even more repulsive. Many of us need to find something of benefit in the midst of such hatred and cruelty. Perhaps it is that King will no longer be able to spew his hate freely to those who might choose to listen. In prison he will no longer have his accomplices, and those like him are never brave alone.

Bobby Stalzer

Postpone execution

WILMETTE—Illinois' capital punishment system is in crisis. Police continue to arrest people, state's attorneys continue to prosecute them, judges and juries continue to sentence them to death for crimes that, it turns out, they didn't commit. It has now happened 11 times in 12 years.

The Chicago Council of Lawyers has joined with Rep. Coy Pugh (D-Chicago) to draft a bill, House Bill 723, to stop executions for one year while the state attempts to reform the system to prevent more innocent people from being sentenced to death. The bill calls for the creation of a bipartisan commission to study the system and make recommendations to the General Assembly on how to fix it.

In the meantime the next execution is scheduled for March 17. The defendant, Andrew Kokorobis, and his lawyer contend he is not guilty. The governor has the constitutional authority to grant a temporary reprieve, and the Illinois Supreme Court has the power to postpone the execution. One or both of them should act to stop this execution while the legislature is deliberating on Pugh's bill.

The people of Illinois need to tell their government: Repeat this damaged system before it results in the killing of an innocent person.

Ed McManus
Chairman
Committee on the Death Penalty
Chicago Council of Lawyers
and Appellate Fund
for Justice



Too civilized

LOMBARD—In a sense it's a shame we live in such a humane and civilized society in the United States. As punishment for a person murdering another human being, we can only sentence that person to a relatively painless and worry-free incarceration for life or a quick, relatively painless execution.

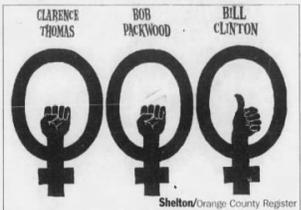
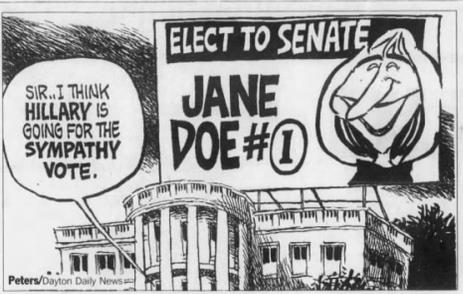
Is either a satisfactory punishment for such heinous and outrageous crimes as cutting a fetus from a woman's womb while she is still alive and conscious or dragging a man to his death over an asphalt road while he is alive and conscious?

Carl Blankenship

End death penalty

NAPERVILLE—There has been some discussion recently on how to avoid condemning an innocent person to die in the electric chair. There is only one absolutely sure way: Abolish capital punishment.

Agnes P. Schaller



The Gallery
A collection of political cartoons from across the nation



What other newspapers are saying

Old French customs die hard

The Financial Times, London:
In spite of having barely three weeks left to reach agreement, France demanded, and won, a postponement in the European Union negotiations on reforming the common agricultural policy. It is hard to see what any delay can achieve. Capping the CAP is an essential precondition for any deal on Agenda 2000, the package aimed at a general reform of the EU finances. If that cannot be agreed before the end of this month, it probably will not be agreed before the end of 1999, at the earliest.

Shedding light on Guatemala's hellish past
Clarín, Buenos Aires:
In Guatemala the Commission for Historical Clarification (last week) delivered its report on the violence witnessed by that country in the 36 years leading up to the signing of a peace accord in 1996. It is a account of the hell created by the conflict between superpowers, by authoritarian rule and by poverty. In that small Central American nation, whose population is about 12 million inhabitants, political violence caused the death and disappearance of more than 200,000 people. And the report holds the army and security forces responsible for the vast majority of the crimes. The land of the Mayas suffered a long war which, in addition to the huge number of victims, left the national territory devastated and much of the population in great poverty. Shedding light on the events of the past is an important step toward the consolidation of the peace process.

Make renaming official

The Tampa Tribune:
Last year it was reported nationwide that the state Legislature renamed the Florida Turnpike the Ronald Reagan Turnpike. The bill to honor the former president did pass, but it only pretended to change the name of the 200-mile toll road. House lawmakers "designated" it in Reagan's honor, and only a few signs went up. News stories, maps and most signs still refer to the highway by its old name.

Reagan's political courage, it will correct last year's half-hearted tribute with a plain, bold law that declares the money-making road officially the Ronald Reagan Turnpike.

No federal cures for local crime

Clarkburg (W.Va.) Telegram:
If America wants to reduce crime, Congress needs to pass tough new federal laws, right? Wrong.

Congress has enacted a flood of federal criminal laws since 1970 and they haven't worked. That's the conclusion of a task force sponsored by the American Bar Association. The task force spent two years preparing a report called "Federalization of Criminal Law."

After Monica, tackle Social Security

East Oregonian, Pendleton:
Now that the impeachment distraction is behind us, the federal government will turn its attention to a problem most of us agree is our most important: Social Security.

Before we can really fix Social Security, we must define exactly what it should be, and more importantly, what it isn't.

Investing Social Security money is highly controversial, but it does make sense for people to have more control of how their money is used. But making these decisions could create another bureaucracy that none of us wants.

Lawmakers must understand that we want a strong Social Security system that doesn't break the taxpayers but provides a secure retirement for those who need it. That's a tall order, and how we get there from here is bound to be an interesting trip.

