

Crime and punishment explored Drug war diverts attention from real crimes, causes

In the last ten years spending on criminal justice has risen twice as fast as health care spending. In this light, it is curious that all of the candidates in the recent presidential race advocated more of the same: harsher penalties, more police and more prisons.

In a sense, many conservative thinkers are on to something with harsher penalties. Both harsher penalties and a judiciary willing to hand them down increase the cost of committing crime and decrease the incentive to commit crimes.

Liberal thinkers are also on to something. Increasing the benefits of not committing crimes likewise decreases the incentive to commit crime. So the concern with poverty and crime is not without basis. Then why is the crime rate skyrocketing, despite all of the money and bullets being directed at this problem? Perhaps it is because so much of the "war on crime" is being misdirected into the war on drugs.

Discussing crime in America has become impossible without referring to the so-called drug problem. The "war on drugs" misuses metaphor. In no sense is this a war on drugs. It is a war on human beings.

After Ronald Reagan left office, more American citizens were in federal prison for drug crimes than were in federal prison for all other crimes. By 1995, it has been estimated that 67 percent of all convicts will be imprisoned for drug crimes.

The problem with drugs is that they are illegal. While drugs are sometimes associated with crime, as is alcohol, drugs are neither a necessary nor sufficient cause of crime.

Since people pay large sums of money to get drugs, suppliers take great risks to garner the profits that illegal drugs generate. The two great crime waves of this century were both associated with prohibition of some type. In the 1920s, it was alcohol prohibition. Now, it is "drug" prohibition. Both also brought more potent drugs into the market.

Prohibition in the 1920s generated alcohol ten times

more potent than pre-prohibition alcohol. In addition, prohibition alcohol was often adulterated with toxins. Between 1974 and 1984, the percentage of THC — the active ingredient in marijuana — increased eight times. Further, a more potent form of cocaine, crack, has also appeared. And like alcohol prohibition, many drugs today are adulterated with toxins.

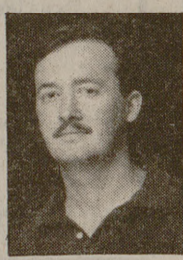
Both prohibitions this century also spawned gangs that have fought for territory to sell their substances. After the repeal of alcohol prohibition, liquor sellers stopped staking out their territory with drive-by shootings.

Neither the increase of more potent drugs nor the growth of gangs were present when these drugs were previously legal in America — even the Declaration of Independence was written upon hemp, or marijuana, paper. It is a symptom of the perversity and paranoia of the times when it is legal to carry a loaded gun about but not an empty syringe. It is time to re-legalize drugs. Aborting the drug war and the persecution of drug users, would release more resources for the real crime problems facing America.

Crimes that matter, crimes with victims, need more stringent punishments. I do not pretend to know the optimum punishment for murder, but it seems that the actual number of years served for murder, about six years, is laughable. Is that really a disincentive for murder? There needs to be a reasonable amount of certainty that those convicted of crimes such as murder and rape serve more stringent sentences. This should not be taken to mean that I support the death penalty.

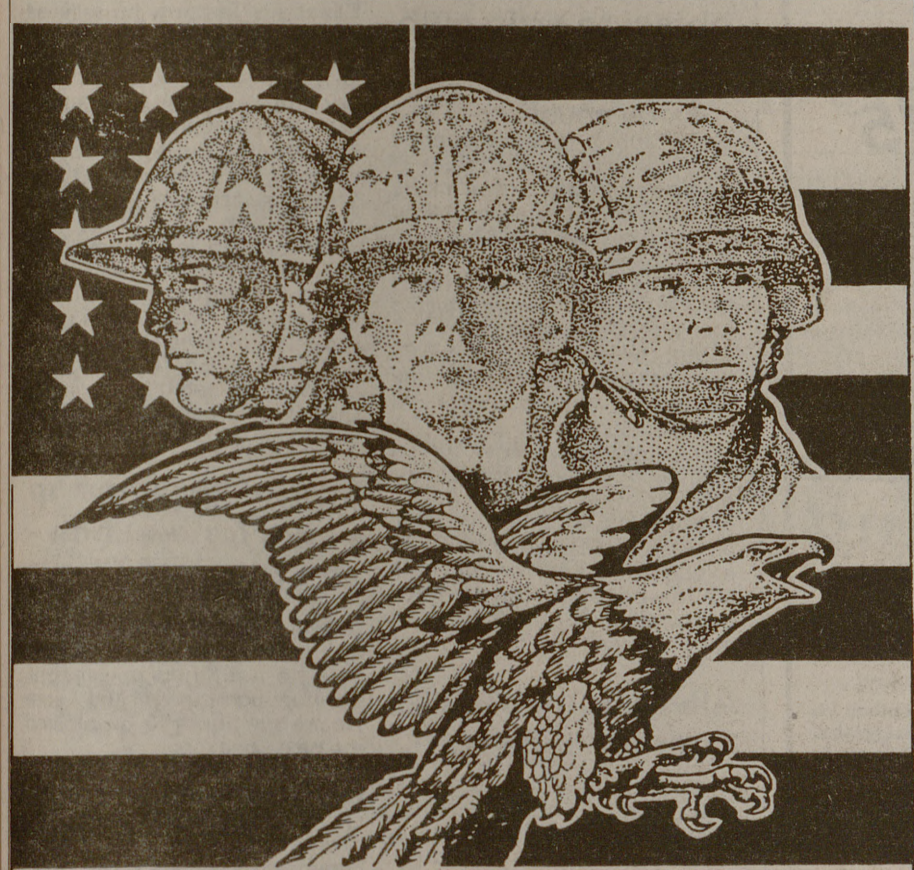
The economics of the effect of income level upon crime appears impeccable. As income levels increase, the opportunity costs of crime are increased. Therefore in a given society, crime would tend to decrease, everything else held constant, as income increased. Economic progress for the impoverished is imperative to give an incentive for non-crime.

Diverting efforts from the war on drugs to the war on crime will focus energies where they are more needed. Increasing the costs of crime and increasing the benefits of non-crime will bring the crime rate down.



MATTHEW DICKERSON
Columnist

Dickerson is a sophomore economics major



VETERANS DAY

NOVEMBER 11, 1992
A day to remember

EDITORIAL

Waste not, want not

Attention saves money and earth

The natural environment is eroding, and students at Texas A&M can do something about it.

Unlike the depletion of the ozone layer, water shortages and electricity costs are ecological concerns which, though less universal, hit a little closer to home.

Students living in dorms and some apartments pay a flat fee for utilities like water and electricity. This flat fee encourages students to use unlimited amounts of the utilities without paying one cent extra for the excess. Many students never realize that wasted water and electricity exert a cost on the environment as well as on bank accounts.

Too often, students leave lights on or water running simply because it's convenient.

A phone rings and the ensuing

conversation lasts for an hour, while the shower water continues to run. Classes start in ten minutes, and the student runs late to class disregarding the light, the fan, the radio, the computer, and the desk lamp which remain on. The scenario seems overblown, but students do it all the time.

Students can make a difference by taking a few seconds to turn off appliances when not in use. Water should be run only when needed and turned off if something occurs to delay the user.

A little thought makes a big difference. An ounce of prevention could be worth a gallon of water. Texas A&M is considered one of the most conservative campuses in the world; maybe it's time to learn how to conserve.

DRACULA!

RATED: R
(FOR RIDICULOUS)



HE'LL SUCK YOUR BLOOD! (OR YOUR ROOMMATE'S)

11-10-92 #40

MAIL CALL

Americans need not fear new president

The votes are in; the decision has been made; and Bill Clinton is now the president of the United States. I look at the faces of the people around me and see happiness, anger, disappointment and hope. For some reason too, amongst the faces of so many, I see fear. They fear the future, what it holds for America and what will happen now that there is a Democrat in the White House. All that they remember of the Democrats in office is pain and despair. They can only remember the sad happenings of that time.

Why are you afraid? You forget that it is not the president who makes the rules but us, the people of America. The president is an embodiment of the beliefs of the people of America. He will do what the people feel is better. We cannot let him know how we feel if we continue to act alone. We must

unite together as Americans, and let him know what is up.

We must always remember that we are not Aggies or t-sips, Democrats or Republicans, Corps turds or non-regs. We are citizens of the United States of America, united under the beliefs of a free nation. So through this letter I hope that I have turned some fear into faith. Now that we move into a new era of politics, I wish to leave the people of America with this one quote that I have learned so very well. "Per Uniatem Vis" — "Through Unity, Strength."

John R. Bianchi
Class of '94

Twelfth Man lost against Louisville

I am writing this letter to say something to the Texas A&M Twelfth Man that I never thought I'd have to say — Shame on you!

Last Saturday at the Louisville game, I got a lump in my throat and a tear in my eye as I looked out on the student body from my seat on the alumni side. Was it the Aggie Band's beautiful rendition of our school song that tugged at my heartstrings? Was it the brilliance of the Aggie football team that stirred me so?

No it was the paltry attendance on

your side of the stadium. Where were you? Our team is 9-0 and number four in the nation. The national championship is within our grasp. We have something that hasn't happened in decades.

Yet all this is irrelevant. You are the Twelfth Man on the team, and you didn't show up to your own game. Don't tell me you watched it on TV. Everyone knows that nothing compares to "being there."

Let me remind you that the student side of Kyle Field is in full view of our players' bench. What kind of message are you sending them? That you're only there for the "really important games"?

I also noticed the flood of students leaving late in the third quarter, once the game was in the bag. There was a time when only t-sips did that.

Did you even know that had we been outscored, the game would have been followed by yell practice? Or has the Aggie dominance on the field for the last few years spoiled you? For what it's worth, you missed a great game.

The 48,000 that were and I will continue to turn out in full force for the rest of the season. A lot of us already have hotel reservations in Dallas for the Jan. 1. Hope you can make it.

E. King Gill was ready to play for his team once. Where were you?

Keith W. Johnson
Class of '91

MSC a memorial, not a shopping mall

This letter is addressed to the organizers of the clothing sale on Tuesday in the MSC. MSC does not stand for Main Shopping Center. Remember, the MSC is a memorial to the Aggies who have given their lives in past wars.

The shopping mall is a good place to buy clothes. The MSC is a good place to pay respects for those who have made the final sacrifice for you and your country.

Certainly you don't think that I would buy clothes at a cemetery just because the price was right. Next time, think about a more appropriate setting at which to display and sell your goods.

Matthew Michaels
Class of '93

Where is the line drawn on tolerance?

In response to David B. Nash III's letter, I must question the reference source used for his assertions. As a Christian, my reference is the Bible, which tells me that homosexuality, bestiality, necrophilia and pedophilia are all wrong.

Having the Bible as a reference point

is how I base my beliefs. Mr. Nash, where do your beliefs come from? What tells you what is right and wrong? And who are you to say that homosexuality is OK, but the others are not? Does some inner voice tell you?

I believe the point trying to be made by Zeke and Owen is, "Where is the line drawn?"

What is to prevent fathers from coming forth and claiming their rights to have sex with their daughters because they have their daughters' "consent"? I have seen a daughter give her consent, so do not think it can't happen.

I also do not believe that Zeke and Owen's intolerance for homosexuality can be called bigotry.

If you have the right to be gay, then others have the right to believe you are wrong.

Shiloh Green
Class of '96

Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the opinion page staff and editor in chief only. They do not represent, in any way, the opinions of reporters, staff, or editors of other sections of the newspaper.

Columns, guest columns, and Mail Call items express the opinions of the authors only.

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows in the Mail Call section. Letters must be 300 words or less and include author's name, Social Security number, class, and phone number.

We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy.

Letters should be addressed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call
013 Reed McDonald / Mail stop 1111
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843