

OFFENSIVE DECISION

Supreme Court ruling striking down sex offender law only endangers children

The overturning of a 1994 California state law last month has caused the convictions of an estimated 800 sexual offenders to come under scrutiny. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the law, which extended the statute of limitations on molestation charges, is unconstitutional, according to the Los Angeles Times. This ruling will give many admitted child molesters the chance to be released from prison and resume regular lives while leaving victims and their families questioning the judicial system.

The former law concerning molestation allotted time for victims to come to terms with the incident and removed the statute of limitations that normally confines other crimes. By ignoring the normal six-year deadline to press charges for molestation, the California courts had been inadvertently bending the law, making exceptions and, in some ways, giving preference to the plaintiff's side. Because of these marked injustices, the earlier California law was invalidated.

While the Supreme Court ruling reinstating the statute of limitation might make sense legally, the reality is very different. The Supreme Court should consider the sensitivity of the issue and not prevent victims from receiving justice or the public from being protected, regardless of time constraints.

Now, previously convicted sex offenders and those whose cases were still pending can go back to their old lifestyles and jobs, some of which

involved interaction with children. These offenders can move into neighborhoods where unsuspecting community members are unaware of their history. And while it may be beneficial for these people to be able to have a new life and make a fresh start, the looming threat is that they risk falling back into old habits at the expense of children and others.

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What is more alarming, though, is that because their conviction was a part of a case overturned by the Supreme Court, they are no longer required to register as a sex offender under Megan's Law, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. Instead, these formerly-convicted sex offenders can walk away without finishing their sentence and without a trace of their history following them. This is unacceptable.

Now, under the new law, victims have a much smaller window of opportunity to press charges against assailants. A statute of limitations may

be applicable for other crimes, even other sex crimes, but should not be applied when the injured party is a child. Although years may have passed, children who are molested often do not fully understand what has been done to them, and they sometimes do not have the courage to report it and press charges.

In all likelihood, a child who is in a situation vulnerable to molestation, often from relatives, may not have a strong adult figure in his life that he feels comfortable confiding in. By the time children are old enough to take action, the statute of limitations has expired, and they are forced to live with the anger and hurt, unable to seek any kind of justice over the offender.

California had made strides toward justice with the elimination of a statute of limitations for molestation crimes, a step toward all victims receiving justice, regardless of the time of the incident. Now, not only has that freedom been taken from them, but more cases of molestation could potentially occur due to the mass quantities of released offenders. All that has actually occurred with the Supreme Court's decision is the endangerment of the community and the injustice of the victims, followed with a crowded and complicated court system full of admitted criminals attempting to squeeze through the loophole and back into society.

Sara Foley is a junior journalism major.



SARA FOLEY



IVAN FLORES • THE BATTALION

MAIL CALL

Accredited A&M journalism degrees will retain value

To set the record straight, the Department of Journalism may be sinking, but it is sinking with all sails set and close-hauled. And there is no need for anyone in the department — faculty, staff or student — to feel like second-class citizens because the department is second to none in the country.

The faculty continues to provide J-majors the same quality education on which it made its national reputation, the kind most J-schools want but few provide. Of the eight full-time faculty, seven hold the terminal degree, five hold the coveted Ph.D., and four combine their academic credentials with a background of significant professional experience, combining the classroom and the office.

Your J-degree is not, and cannot be, diminished. It reflects the knowledge you gained and the work you did to achieve it. It remains sought-after by those who know the reputation of Texas A&M. Be proud of your education, your diploma, your school. Just look at the record. The Department of Journalism is the only department in the College of Liberal Arts to be recognized and accredited nationally by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Nationally, only one in four departments of journalism is accredited.

The department has held that accreditation since 1952, and the current accreditation will not expire until 2005. But that's not all. The department offers not only J-majors but every student on campus two universitywide summer Study Abroad programs that expose students to the culture and history of another country. The program in Mexico City and central Mexico has been in operation every summer since 1996, and the program in Madrid and Spain, since 2001.

The department's master's degree program in Science Journalism and in Technology Journalism attracts students from throughout the United States, China and Europe. And, until the war grabbed the Pentagon's attention, it was used by the Army to teach officers and prepare them for promotion.

Under an arrangement between journalism and the Department of Management, first-semester junior J-majors may qualify for a unique program in which they earn a bachelor's degree in journalism in four years, and a master's degree in management in one more year.

But now, the dean of liberal arts is abolishing journalism, but only as a department. He has said that journalism will continue to be taught at A&M, just not as an academic unit. He charged the J-faculty

with developing a replacement J-program, one that will offer J-courses to students in any discipline on campus.

So, this is no time to lament the situation. This is the time to buckle down and develop a J-program that continues the excellence in journalism education that was built up during the past half century.

For me, I relish my time in the J-department and at A&M, and I wear my Aggie watch with pride. You should continue to have the same pride.

Dr. Douglas Starr

Closure of A&M journalism is not to be applauded

In response to a July 15 mail call:

For anyone to "applaud" the decision to do away with any program at a major university is asinine. Especially when that major university is trying to be one of the top in the country. How do you expect Texas A&M to compete with the Stanfords, UCAs and UTs of the world without such a vital program intact?

I truly believe ignorance is the quickest way to discredit yourself. It is ignorant to just assume that since there is writing done in The Battalion they are directly affiliated with the journalism program. This isn't your high school journalism class. Another thing, just because they don't write what you want to hear, doesn't mean they're not good journalists.

I'm not writing this to step on your toes, Mr. Swanick, but when you have a little more collegiate experience under your belt and are "within a year or two of graduating," I may value your opinion more. For now I don't. I would like to add that I believe A&M does have outstanding alternatives for journalism majors, but none the less, it's a sad situation.

Shelby Smith
Class of 2003

Loss of journalism program 'doesn't trouble' everyone

I hate to discount the hard work journalism students claim to put into their degrees, but the impending loss of the department doesn't trouble me at all. There are plenty of other great institutions producing journalists, and if the industry loses a few Texas A&M journalists, I think I can probably live with the consequences.

Tom Walling
Class of 2004

Bryant, other athletes under public scrutiny

Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? Inspiration for lyrics detailing America's need for the return of a classic hero is less than forthcoming these days. Can anyone even remember the last time the public had an athlete who was a positive example? Barring the Twin Towers of San Antonio, Tim Duncan and David Robinson, Simon and Garfunkel's lyrics ring truer today as American sports figures continue to be embroiled in lawsuits, drug busts and murder cases. The concept of a wholesome sports star and role model is rapidly disappearing, as the public focuses on whether these stars can rebound, make the hit or score the goal, turning a blind eye to the fact that they were arrested for choking their own coach (at least in the case of Larell Spewell).



WILL KNOUS

the walls of the bedrooms of the children who idolize them.

These people have thrust themselves into the vortex of public opinion, and therefore they have become public people. Former NBA great Charles Barkley was once quoted as saying that he didn't want to be a role model. At the same time his picture appeared on trading cards and posters along with everyone else's. Whether or not he wanted it, he was adored by hordes of aspiring young athletes for the way he played basketball.

When a person becomes famous for one reason, he rarely remains public for that reason alone. People know about the personal love lives of their favorite Hollywood stars after they have become famous. When in the public eye, almost every aspect of one's life becomes fodder for public news and opinion, and stars should keep this in mind.

Sports figures become known for their athletic prowess or charismatic behavior on and off the field, then subsequently all of their behavior becomes newsworthy. When they set a poor example, it will be at the very least noticed — and sometimes imitated — by those who follow that example. That does not mean that just because you play football you will be brought up on charges, but it does show children that criminal behavior is tolerated more if you can catch 40 touchdowns passes a year.

Right or wrong, these athletes represent so much about American culture and what Americans deem important. And right or wrong, their behavior will be judged on a very public level. The fact that they get oversized amounts of attention for bad behavior should prompt them to be more careful in the way they are seen and their actions are portrayed.

It may not be fair to Kobe Bryant that his alleged foibles are grounds for a 10-minute segment on SportsCenter, but when he signed that multi-million-dollar contract, he accepted the eyes of the world on his every move. If he is lucky, for the good of the game he plays and the name of the profession in which he is employed, he will be exonerated. If proven guilty, he can be added to the list of fallen heroes.

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Will Knous is a junior journalism major.