Cambridge 02138
Training teachers, global health, climate change

THE DEATH PENALTY

I am not familiar with the Steikers’ work, other than through the comprehensive article in the November–December 2016 issue (“Death Throes,” by Lincoln Caplan, page 56). However, over the years (I suppose like most lawyers), I have given considerable thought to the death penalty, and I simply do not believe that much of the scholarship is useful or relevant.

People either believe that under certain circumstances it is appropriate for the society or the government to extinguish the life of a criminal, or they don’t. Trying to eliminate the death penalty under the rubric of the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment is pure sophistry. Where the founders’ intent cannot be ascertained because of subsequent factual or technological developments that they could never have anticipated—e.g., a crowded urban rather than agrarian society, automatic assault weapons, infrared surveillance tools—then there is some leeway for interpreting the Constitution other than by asking what the words mean or even might mean. It is a far more extreme argument to take a concept and its application of which the founders were certainly well aware and try to ignore the people’s judgment simply because it’s no longer fashionable in certain segments of American or European society to believe in the death penalty. The proper course is to treat this as the political issue that it is and work through state legislatures and Congress.

Moreover, even within the Constitutional framework, it is illogical to reach the conclusion that because the death penalty is unpredictable or rare, it is therefore within the ambit of the phrase “cruel and unusual.” Is it not true that in criminal law generally, in connection with both violent crimes and white-collar crimes, results can be characterized as random and unpredictable, highly subject to the discretion of prosecutors, and sometimes bizarre? That does not make the punishment unenforceable as cruel and unusual, though discrepancies and disparities often lead to its being voided as a violation of due process or equal protection.

Finally, even if randomness is seen as a necessary practicality, and therefore normally a tolerable element of the administration of justice, one might still say that such a thing is intolerable where a person’s life is at stake and a mistake cannot be corrected, but the reason lies not in the Constitution but in quite justifiable and honorable religious, moral or philosophical objections to the death penalty.

Robert Kantowitz
Lawrence, N.Y.

ONE WONDERS whether the authors’ speculations recounted by Lincoln Caplan, that if the Supreme Court abolishes capital punishment in the states, abolition of the federal death penalty is likely to follow, eventually even for terrorism, would include the Obama administration’s determination that it currently has the authority to impose pre-trial capital punishment via drone strike on American citizens abroad who are suspected of terrorism, although outside the theater of war.

Thomas V. Glynn, LL.B. ’68
Vero Beach, Fla.

In his commentaries Blackstone traced the English common-law death penalty for murder to the Mosaic Code. He affirmed that, according to the Noahic covenant,
murder was not just a capital offense but also unpardonable.

In 1976, the U.S. Supreme Court turned away from Blackstone, ruling that it was unconstitutional to require a person found guilty of murder to die. Instead, the Court insisted that not all murders deserve the death penalty, only those that meet Court-approved guidelines.

Today, the Court is reaping what it sowed. The death penalty is unevenly and disproportionately imposed. One would think that invested heavily in new facilities in Allston and in teaching abroad to accelerate enrollment (some of which has evaporated during past recessions). The Faculty of Arts and Sciences’ Extension School is on a roll, too. But those are the easy pickings.

The politically incorrect subject is undergraduate tuition ($43,280 of this year’s $63,025 term bill), which has been compounding at a 3 percent to 4 percent rate recently. Attacking universities for their tuition bills is a staple of political discourse, and Harvard, with its $35.7 billion endowment, makes an irresistible target—particularly among people who don’t delve into how research, libraries, and other essentials are supported.

In this environment, administrators and the Corporation have not seemed eager to stick their necks out. But a bloodless analysis might lead toward the unthinkable. Demand for admission is at a record level (39,041 applicants to the class of 2020), and acceptances are minute (5.2 percent of candidates got offers). The College’s financial-aid spending has grown minimally during the past five years, suggesting that students’ need is being at least relatively better met—and the campaign has endowed more of that cost. Critically, the financial-aid formula is highly progressive: families with incomes below $65,000 pay nothing, and those with higher incomes (up to $150,000) pay a graduated amount, rising to 10 percent of income—so for those families, setting a higher sticker price does not mean more money out of pocket. The College is upgrading the Houses, investing in fields from performing arts to engineering and applied sciences, tweaking the curriculum, etc. Thus it can talk about enriching an experience for which demand is already off the charts. If it can charge eager, upper-income applicants more tuition, the result, after added aid costs, would be a larger flow of unrestricted funds to invest in research and teaching.

Politically, this is a pipe dream. But financially—and in terms of explaining the value of a residential undergraduate education at a world-leading university—the case for raising tuition to a level more commensurate with ‘peers’ assumes a more than theoretical allure. 

~John S. Rosenberg, Editor
TEACHER FELLOWS

HAVING GRADUATED from the College and the Graduate School of Education, I am long gone from the difficulties faced by teachers in their first weeks in a classroom (“Educating Teachers,” November-December 2016, page 34). I was fortunate to have had a thoughtful mentor and to have begun my career in a supportive school system (in Newton, Massachusetts). Several years later I had the good fortune to visit an elementary school in Pittsburgh that demonstrated how local school administration can pave the way toward excellence in an underprivileged area. I recall very clearly how its principal did it.

First, no new teacher was allowed to teach full-time for the first two or three months. Instead, they were required to sit in the classrooms of experienced teachers for half of their otherwise scheduled classes.

Second, every teacher was assigned a route from his or her home to the school with stops along the way to inquire if any untoward events had occurred that might affect students. If any such event had occurred, any student from that area was met at the door and escorted to a special room where a parent would meet and talk with him, let him talk, and offer modest treats before sending him off to his classroom.

Third, the principal dictated that no parent was ever to be summoned to the school to hear bad news. Instead, he made it his business to bring the news to the parent himself, at home, sitting on the doorstep to await the parent’s return if necessary.

And perhaps most important, he organized parents to invite new teachers home before school began, to meet neighbors and talk about the school and their concerns.

What a man! What a school!

RANDOLPH BROWN ’51, M.A.T. ’56, A.M. ’61
Bay City, Mich.

GLOBAL HEALTH AT HOME

THANK YOU for publishing “Global Health at Home: Harvesting innovations from around the world to improve American medical care” (by Howard Hiatt, Charles Kenney, and Mark Rosenberg, November-December 2016, page 49). In 2010 I founded the Moms2B program in Columbus, Ohio, in order to help pregnant women living in poverty have healthy babies. We are a weekly group pregnancy and parenting program located within four impoverished neighborhoods. There is such a need, we are
expanding every day. We have over more than 100 pregnant and parenting women plus their partners and children every week. They participate and receive a heart-healthy meal and connection to services to address their social and medical determinants of health. And we train community health workers.

Dean Hiatt (who was serving as dean when I attended the School of Public Health) champions this model outreach worker. We agree. Our community health workers graduate from our Moms2B program and then train to earn a community health worker certificate. Our community health workers are invaluable. They understand the needs and reach out to pregnant women living in poverty. They make a difference in reducing our unacceptably high, Third World-country levels of infant mortality.

**McNamara at Harvard**

I do not recall Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara having been “shouted down” when speaking to an anti-war crowd during his visit to Harvard in November 1966 (John Bethell, quoted in The College Pump, November-December, page 8e). I could hear him pretty clearly.

McNamara was spending two days at Harvard, in a series of closed-door meetings with various individuals and groups. The antiwar movement had about 1,800 signatures on a petition asking that he stand up and defend his policies in public if he thought he could. This petition was rejected. We then caught him on his way from one closed-door meeting to the next, and demanded that he speak to us. I felt, and most of those in the crowd with me seemed to feel, that if the point of the exercise was to get him to speak to us, shouting him down would not be helpful.

**The College Pump** recalls a 1966 visit to Harvard by then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, during which he was confronted by a large antiwar demonstration while on his way to participate in a seminar. I was one of the graduate students in the seminar, which was taught by then-professor Henry Kissinger. When McNamara arrived, the first thing he did was ask if someone could find out if any of the demonstrators were hurt. (They weren’t.) He then proceeded to answer all the questions which time permitted, albeit in the quiet atmosphere of a Law School meeting room.

According to The College Pump, John Bethell quoted McNamara as shouting at antiwar demonstrators in 1966, “I was tougher then, and I’m tougher now.” I was a Quincy House sophomore and was drawn to the commotion when McNamara climbed up on a car. As I recall, he actually said something to the effect that “I was tougher and more courteous then, and I’m tougher now.”

**Climate Change**

A letter in the November-December 2016 (page 8) issue stated: “I am embarrassed by your editorial policy regarding climate change. You are supposed to represent one of the greatest intellectual institutions on the planet, and you continue to promote the obvious partisan big lie that Earth’s climate isn’t stable enough and that it is determined by trace gases rather than by the sun.”

*Harvard Magazine* replied: “The magazine does not have a policy on climate change, or other issues. It does cover the research of faculty members active in this, and other, fields.”

The existence of climate change and the impact of trace gases on global tempera-
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Editors note: Other correspondents weighed in similarly: the magazine does not editorialize on such topics. It has devoted many tens of thousands of words to covering climate change and global warming in the past decade and more (likely more than on any other topic covered during that period). The articles report on the work of Harvard scholars—scientists, public-policy researchers, law professors, and so on—who focus on climate change and warming. None of their research suggests even slightly that climate change is not real or significant.

7 ware street notes the virtues of reconsideration, even when doing so is difficult or comes at a cost (“Do-Overs,” November-December 2016, page 4). One such challenge—and opportunity—is presented by the ongoing fight over fossil-fuel divestment [Editor’s note: mentioned in that column]. After years of letters, meetings, debates, and protests, the Harvard Corporation and divestment proponents are locked in a war of attrition. Is the end game for our fair Harvard a perpetual civil war until climate becomes a non-issue or fossil fuels are no longer available for investment? That war may be a long one, and may not serve the University well.

The world has changed since divestment first became a topic of discussion on Harvard Yard. First, with the ratification of the Paris Agreement we have an explicit global consensus on where the boundary of unacceptable climate harms lies. Second, and crucially, we are obtaining a clearer understanding of the resource economics implied by that boundary.

In particular, it is now clear that investing in additional fossil-fuel exploration is not consistent with the Paris climate goals. Perhaps more surprising, a growing literature shows that investing in additional fossil-fuel development and infrastructure (e.g., new pipelines and power plants) is also not consistent with those goals. If Harvard supports the Paris goals, then it would be logical to draw down its investments in new fossil-fuel exploration, development, and infrastructure at this time, including both new equity and outstanding stock. If the Corporation continues to invest while professing support for the Paris climate goals,
LETTERS

then it is either not being honest about its support, or it is not fulfilling its fiduciary duty to seek sound investments.

Harvard can take a do-over on divestment with little to no moralizing, only the question: is this investment economically consistent with climate goals?

Benjamin Franta, Ph.D. ’16
Palo Alto

CHARTER SCHOOLS, REDUX

The six letters responding to Paul Peterson’s article (November-December 2016, page 2, regarding “Post-Regulatory School Reform,” September-October, page 37) fascinated me because none of them mentioned the sine qua non for the success of any school system—and the necessity has been made crystal clear both in charter schools and the Catholic parochial school system: viz. concerned, caring, and, above all, interested parents who will spend the time to work with the school for the betterment of the child, which includes homework and discipline.

For example, in New York, charter schools, drawing from the same demographics as the balance of the public schools, regularly outperform and have, in some instances, literally five times the amount of applications as space available. Those parents applying wish to see their children succeed and are prepared to do what is needed to accomplish this.

You need to start at ground level; you need to understand this and your systems must implement it. Then, the comments and their differing points of view become relevant and interesting.

Howard G. Seitz, LL.B. ’66
New York City

It’s a truism that “You’re entitled to your opinion but not to your facts.” The letters piling on Peterson for his article holding out charter schools as an increasingly sound solution to the failure of American K-12 education all (with one exception) claim there is no difference in outcomes between charters and traditional public schools (TPS). False.

The best detailed work comparing charters and TPS is from CREDO (Center for Research on Education Outcomes), at Stanford. It compiled exhaustive data from 27 states for its National Charter School Study 2013. Measures were taken to nullify the charge that charters skim the best by discharging underachieving and difficult students.

It shows that while white students, Asians and non-poverty blacks and Hispanics do
not improve in charters (indeed, whites do worse), minority students in poverty do substantially better. And where there is concentrated poverty, there are wonderful positive outcomes from charters: in Washington, D.C., 99 days of additional learning equivalent; in New York City, 92 days.

The KIPP organization has 11 schools in Brooklyn, Bronx, Harlem, and Washington Heights, areas of minorities in poverty. They get near-incredible results: 96 percent graduate; 89 percent enter college (nearly twice the rate for low-income students); and 44 percent get a B.A. or equivalent (versus 9 percent for low-income students nationally). They must be doing something right.

Yes, as the letter writers claim, we do not respect teachers, do not train them effectively, and do not pay enough to attract the talented. Yes, many students come to school with tremendous learning deficits, due to parents in poverty who failed to instill a love of reading and the like. Pervasive poverty is a problem. But KIPP and like charters are meeting those problems head on and prevailing. Let TPS schools learn from those successful charters, as Peterson urged.

WINTHROP DRAKE THIES, J.D. ’59
New York City

DEMONSTRATION AND EXCEPTIONALISM

Arguments about U.S. exceptionalism are dangerous (“Toward Democracy in America,” a review by Alan Wolfe of a book by James T. Kloppenberg, November-December 2016, page 74). To say that the United States of America was “the world’s first democratic nation” is factually incorrect. It is not all just a story about English and Scottish writers and U.S. Founding Fathers. Moreover, it is not all just a matter of being a “republic” rather than a “constitutional monarchy.” Representative democracy has antecedents in European history at least a century before the Declaration of Independence. Does Kloppenberg mention the Netherlands and Belgium? If so, Wolfe should have made note of that. If Kloppenberg himself failed to do so, Wolfe should have mentioned the Netherlands as a nation-state. The Kingdom of the Netherlands (which initially included Belgium) was created in 1815 but, like the United Kingdom and other constitutional monarchies, the Netherlands and Belgium are still highly democratic nation-states.

J. I. (“Hans”) Bakker
Professor (retired), University of Guelph
Guelph, Ontario, Canada

FINAL CLUBS AND GYNOPHOBIA

In the November-December issue (page 6), admirably respecting the First Amendment, the editors chose to print a nicely phrased but ultimately inopportune letter about President Drew Faust and what one might summarize as a perceived conspiracy against final clubs under the false flag of political correctness.

Rape (not to mention alcoholism, social discrimination, etc.), the letter alleged, isn’t really a problem, merely a red herring. The problem is “correctness cabals” limiting personal freedom that have infected Harvard and other institutions of higher learning.

I remember the hubbub at the New York Harvard Club that night, years ago, as to whether the time had come to make de jure, the de facto reality that Radcliffe students were as much Harvard students as the young men who were officially so.

Much has rightly been written about the problems of homophobia. I think it is time, however, for scholars, doctors, and researchers to tackle head on the problems of gynophobia—the pandemic of distrust/feet/hatred of women, and the subsequent violation of their physical, personal, social, and economic rights. Gynophobia is deep, pervasive, and seen in a global dimension: as destructive as any mosquito-borne plague. It is unquestionably among the greatest failings of humankind in the twenty-first century.

JAMES LICHTENBERG ’62
Beacon, N.Y.

Editor’s note: For more on final clubs and other gender and sexism issues, see page 23.

POLITICAL PINS

The November-December Treasure, “Pins for Women” (page 56), referred to “the Cosmos Club, an elite Washington social club that didn’t allow women to enter through the front door (a policy it would end, begrudgingly, in 1988, after the city found it in violation of anti-discrimination law).”

Virtually every assertion in this statement is false. According to Tedson Meyers [LL.B. ’53], a former club president, the “front-door policy” for women entering the club was eliminated long before he became a member in 1974. Women were admitted as full members on June 18, 1988, not “begrudgingly” but by a membership vote of 775 in favor, 12 abstentions, and 14 opposed. The club was never found in violation of the District of Columbia’s anti-discrimination law, no hearing was ever conducted on such a charge, and no penalty was ever imposed. Eighteen women were admitted within months of the vote and a number have served as presidents of the club.

DANIEL A. REZNEK ’56, LL.B. ’59
Washington, D.C.

Editor’s note: The Cosmos Club voted to open its front door to women in 1973, but rejected proposals to grant them membership in 1973, 1975, and 1980. According to a 1991 Washington Post report, the club in 1985 “reprimand[ed] retired economist Samuel P. Hayes for his activities as leader of the movement to admit women.” According to a 1988 New York Times account, the club’s vote to admit women followed a Washington Human Rights Office ruling the prior fall that “there is probable cause to believe” that the club’s men-only policy violated the city’s anti-discrimination law. The office was ready to order public hearings on the case, which could have resulted in the loss of all city licenses and permits if the all-male policy had continued.”

KATHRYN ALLAMONG JACOB
Curator of Manuscripts, Schlesinger Library
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