pinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Does hate deserve harsh punishment?

Hate crimes are a sensitive subject for Americans. We preach tolerance and understanding, but a certain portion of our citizen harbor hatred based on anything from political persuasion to sexual orientation, and some of them are willing to commit crimes based on that.

The question is, should we punish these people more because their crimes were motivated by hate?

Our U.S. attorney general, Eric Holder, thinks so. Earlier this week he announced that, based on three hate-motivated crimes including the murder of Dr. George Tiller, an abortion provider from Wichita, he would be calling for stiffer punishment for perpetrators of hate crimes.

It is understandable to react with outrage at such crimes. Hate crimes seem more horrible to us because they stir up powerful emotions. Our hearts go out to the victims and our sensibilities cry out for justice for the oppressed. We want to show that our society does not condone this, that as a whole, we are better than the person who committed this crime.

On the other hand, we don't condone any crime. Should we punish anyone more or less because of what was in their heart or in their head when they committed it?

Why someone chose to commit a crime is important, but motive is a tool for investigators. Motive can and should be used to establish guilt, but for sentencing, it should be set aside. The punishment should fit the action.

Say two crimes were committed in exactly the same manner. Two men each commit murder with a gun in a deserted place, but one murder was motivated by race, the other simply a robbery. Will punishing the hate crime more than the robbery have any impact for the victim? Sadly, the outcome is the same either way for them.

Murder is a capital crime, and both perpetrators should be harshly punished. But no murderer should be punished less just because he killed someone for a quick buck rather than for the color of his skin.

Look at it this way. Before 9/11, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had a policy that said you prosecute terrorists as simple criminals. To treat them any differently is to give credence and a level of legitimacy to their agenda. It would give their beliefs a weight and show that society was particularly afraid of their ideas.

Why not have the same policy for hate crimes? If you punish them differently, don't you show them and their supporters that their ideas matter, that we're afraid of what they think? And isn't that exactly what they want? We don't want to give in to that, do we?

We must own up to the fact that we have many crimes motivated by hate in this country – that is reprehensible – but we should also recognize that all crimes are hateful, and all crimes must be punished equally based on the actions taken and not the motivation.

- Kevin Bottrell

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Colby Free Press

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Greatness means confronting mistakes

Any country can celebrate its success, but truly great countries admit their mistakes.

The United States of America has made great progress coming to terms with the mistakes we have made at home over the years: The massacres of Native American tribes, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, slavery, Jim Crow, and the disenfranchisement of women are all now rightfully seen by the majority as betrayals of the ideals this country is supposed to stand for.

Our ability to admit these serious moral lapses has made our country stronger, not weaker.

But, like other superpowers in history, our country still seems unwilling to admit the darker aspects of our foreign policy. Politicians and reporters rhapsodize about our commitment to democracy and human rights while neglecting our history of overthrowing democratically elected presidents and forging alliances with brutal dictators to gain access to cheap labor and oil reserves.

While the press rightfully is covering rigged elections in Iran, there is a deafening silence when comes to our role in overthrowing that country's last truly democratic president in 1953. Our loyal support of the Shah during his 26-year dictatorship played in inadvertently stoking the flames of revolution which brought a militant Islamic government into power. That has largely gone unmentioned in the mainstream media.

trampled all over their sovereignty. Apparently that kind of question is not important enough to examine critically.

Our blindness to our country's own moral shortcomings, intentional or unintentional, has been on display lately in the news media. What While reporters like Bill O'Reilly have de- sports and opinion writing.

Andy Heintz

 Wildcat Ramblings

has irked me about our news media in general is not what they say, but what they don't.

While the press has done an admirable job at covering Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his anti-democratic actions, they have been silent about our history of brutal imperialism in Latin America. While evidence points toward Chavez winning a fraudulent election in 2004, we should be be willing to admit the fact that our behavior in Latin America has been imperialistic over the years.

We have played a role in overthrowing democracies in Chile (1973) and Guatemala (1954). We indirectly supported state-sponsored terrorism in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s, sent the Marines to crush a democratic rebellion in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and directly sponsored terrorism in Nicaragua during the Iran/Contra affair.

It would be considered radical for a reporter to conclude that America has played a role in deterring democracy and impeding social progress in Latin America despite ample evipropaganda they can use to create an anti-American atmosphere in Venezuelan and in all of Latin America.

rided the press for its criticism of "enhanced interrogation" techniques, even going as far as accusing them of being America haters, in reality even the so-called liberal media has failed to connect the dots when it comes to our use of torture.

In his book "A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror," historian Alfred W. McCoy revealed that far from being a rare event, torture has been a tool used in United States foreign policy ever since the early days of the Cold War.

McCoy wrote that the photos from Abu Ghraib prison of hooded, naked Iraqis was not simply the work of a few bad apples or a rare breakdown in military discipline, but a CIA torture method that has metastasized inside the intelligence community for over a half a

Torture techniques were first utilized by the agency in South Vietnam in a program known as Operation Phoenix, and was eventually transmitted to South American countries via a handbook known as Project X. In his book, McCoy cites a section of the Project X handbook on handling of sources that refers, in the words of a Pentagon review, "to motivation by fear, payment of bounties for enemy dead, beatings, false imprisonment, executions and the use of truth serum."

We are lucky to have a free press where people are free to inform the rest of us about We will never know if the theocratic dic- dence backing this point of view. When we as the inner workings of government. This is why tatorship repressing the people of Iran today a nation fail to recognize our past imperialism, it's essential to give the public a honest look would have ever come to power if we hadn't we give authoritarian leaders like Chavez free at past and present foreign policy decisions by our government.

> Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, The media has also dropped the ball in its is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. coverage of American torture of detainees. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing,

Health care should be chosen

To the Editor:

The following was sent to U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran in Washington:

Dear Rep. Moran:

be "politically correct!"

On my computer, I was reading your newsletter "This Week in Congress - June 8,

You stated, "A lot is being said about health care in Washington and I want to hear what Kansans think about these important issues."

Forthrightly, I want to say that "one-payer system" means Medicare. There is a habit in D.C. to disguise words so that if one is not aware of this, you can wander around in a quandary thinking you have simply gone out of your gourd when the trouble is they have decided to change a word with the delicacy to

This way, the Committee Chairman, Max Baucas (D-Montana) doesn't even have Medicare "on the table," meaning that the insurance companies are in their heyday with no competing plans for the health care of this nation.

I think that constituents in all states should have the right to choose what insurance plans they would like, whether Medicare, a government-run insurance or insurance run by a private company.

The insurance companies, in their huddle against government-run insurance, have promised to clean up their act so that it will save



Free Press **Letter Drop**

 Our readers sound off

their subscribers trouble and money, but as the

old saying goes, "There's many a slip between the cup and the lip.'

I have Medicare and personally have no complaints. While I was employed in civil service with the State of California, my visits to the doctor were paid for by the state until I reached age 65. Then I had to have my own insurance, so I enrolled in Medicare and continued to work until I was 67.

Also, I had supplemental insurance in case Medicare didn't take care of all of it.

President Barack Obama said that he thought that every American should have the same insurance as Federal employees but that everyone should have their insurance with the insurance company they desired. Medicare could save the United States a great deal.

A short few days ago. I had a toenail removed on a big toe. I signed a paper saying that I would pay any service that wasn't provided. The nurse assured me that there prob-

ably would be no extra cost to me.

Yes, I'm glad I have Medicare. I didn't have to wait on an insurance company to determine if and when I should have that toenail removed.

Edna A. Hatcher, Colby

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