



Washington Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

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Founded in 1984, WCADP is a statewide 501(c)(3) non-profit organization comprised of individuals and organizations. WCADP is dedicated to public education and activism to abolish the death penalty.

Fast & Vigil

by Dave Avolio – St. Margaret’s, Bellevue

It all started with a story in the Summer Newsletter of the WCADP which I received in mid-June. The headline read National Abolition Fast and Vigil Set For June 29th to July 2nd in Washington, DC. Having come to be something of an activist fairly late in life, my response was an email to Washington Coalition President, Andrea Crabtree, inquiring if any local activities were planned. The dates were very significant for the Abolition Movement: June 29th was the 33rd anniversary of the Furman v. Georgia which struck down the existing state death penalty statutes and July 2nd marked the 29th anniversary of Gregg v. Georgia, which allowed states to once again conduct executions.

While I was really intending to participate locally, as I awaited Andrea’s response, I became convinced that I had to do something. In the absence of any organized activity here in “our” Washington, that “something” became a trip to Washington, DC and a four day fast. Prior commitments kept me from being able to participate for the entire event, but I hurriedly made travel arrangements and flew in the morning of June 30th. As soon as I arrived, I was put to work holding a large banner on the sidewalk in front of our Supreme Court building. The day’s activity alternated between holding banners and giving out informational leaflets to passers-by. We often made conversation with people and invited them to sign our petition for a moratorium on executions.

That evening, there was a teach-in during which we heard from David Kaczynski, Executive Director of New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty; Shari Silberstein, Co-Director of Equal Justice USA/Quixote Center; and Bill Pelke, Chairman of the Board of the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty.

It had been 55 years since I last visited our nation’s capital. I was surprised and saddened by what I found. There were barricades and police everywhere. Not only were there Metropolitan Police, the Supreme Court has its own force as does our Congress, just across the street. Fear seems to be an increasingly growing factor in our daily lives. Many people who passed by would not make eye contact or respond to our greetings as though we were something to be feared.

I was also struck by the realization that our right to assemble and protest is very vulnerable and needs to be vigorously defended. We had to follow strict guidelines set forth by the police, including not allowing the supports of our banners to rest on the sidewalk. “Free speech” seemed to be an oxymoron. Those of us involved in abolition work found the inscription over the Supreme Court’s entrance, “Equal Justice under the Law,” both ironic and tragic.

In the midst of these unsettling things, I found reason for hope. David Kaczynski and Shari Silberstein told of their successful effort to eliminate the death penalty in New York, this year. Hundreds of DC citizens and visitors accepted our leaflets and many signed our petitions. We demonstrated that we are just ordinary people who only seek justice and love mercy, and are not scary, wild-eyed zealots. The Court Police and others we met made us feel welcome. We found our individual resolve strengthened by our working together and our knowledge of all

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From time to time we receive correspondence from people who have been directly effected by the death penalty. Sometimes these letters are from people who do not agree with our position. We thought it would be useful to share such a letter, and our response, with our members.

My name is R. L.,

I am the mother of C. N. who was brutally murdered in Spanaway Park on July 20th. I saw that you are rallying to keep his murderers from being put to death. I am sure you would not publish this because it probably doesn't meet your agenda. I just want to tell you from a personal perspective why I believe you are wrong in changing the death penalty in this state.

On the night of July 20th my son was out doing what many, many normal 18 year olds do, he had just turned 18 three months previously and just moved out 1 week prior to his murder. I let my baby go not knowing it would be the last time I saw him.

One of his friends called his cell at 12:30 AM and told him there was a party at spire rock at Sprinker park, so he and three friends headed there for some fun.

Instead to put a long story short, my son was stripped naked, pistol whipped in the head and kicked all over his body so savagely that they fractured his skull in three places. Then, as he was bleeding to death, he ran like a dying animal who had been hit by a car, and was chased down and shot in the back three times. As he lay dying, his murderers stood over him and shot him with a BB gun, just for fun. It took the funeral home 8 hours to put my son back together before I could see him, his beautiful blonde hair was stained red by all of the blood, and his head was covered in stitches. His ear had literally been torn off during the attack and had to be sewn back on.

When a cross was put up as a memorial for my son, his killers defiled it by placing their gang colors at the base. I consider that a throwing down the gauntlet to our community. These people are killers, and they don't care about you, your family, me or anyone else in this state. I consider them a terrorist organization, worthy of death.

Don't tell me the death penalty is wrong. People in this state get sentenced to the death penalty, and NEVER make it to the chamber!

The only hope I have of justice is that the men who killed him will lead a life of living death on death row, for as long as they will keep them there, and that the rest of their lives will be spent behind bars like the animals they are.

Take my son's name off of your web site. I will fight you personally on this level. You anger and hurt me when you use his name to further your cause. It is not befitting of my son's memory, or of the personal feelings of his loved ones.

Dear Ms. L.,

First, I would like to say that we are so very sorry for your loss. What has happened to your son, your entire family, and this community as a whole is horrendous. That is why our organization has no interest in hurting you further. We struggle with how to do our best to honor victims while still advocating for the end to capital punishment. Many of our members are family members or friends of murder victims and we have asked them about this very issue. Unfortunately, different families have different needs or demands so we find ourselves doing our best to provide the facts we collect from the court and the news without insulting the memory of the deceased.

I hope you understand that we do not advocate for the release of any criminal who is clearly guilty of a crime. We believe that a just alternative to the death penalty is life without parole. This eliminates the threat to society in a humane manner. This is no reward. Some people on death row volunteer to die rather than face the prospect of a sentence with no end.

We have reviewed our website and the only reference to your son's name is a link to a newspaper article published by the [newspaper] in our "News" section. We have never used his name in any of our publications and do not intend to do so at this time.

Finally, we do appreciate hearing from you even if your message includes opposition to our position. It is important to keep in mind the many different perspectives surrounding this issue, especially of those who are impacted most.

Sincerely,

Andrea Crabtree, President WCADP

Note: The three individuals accused of this crime are currently set to go to jury trial at the end of August, 2006. We neither condone nor excuse the actions of the guilty parties. Instead, we extend our deepest sympathies to all murder victims and their loved ones.

Why I am an Abolitionist:

Hubert Locke is Dean Emeritus of the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, where he also held the John and Marguerite Corbally Professorship in Public Service, as well as appointment on the faculties of Comparative Religion, Jewish Studies, and Sociology

The emergence of and advances in DNA forensic science, the stellar work of the Innocence Project, and the increasing number of public officials who have called for or are beginning to demand cessation in employing the death penalty in our society have made it far easier to be an abolitionist in today's America than it was two or three decades ago. The growing numbers of Americans who have doubts about capital punishment – the corresponding decline in the populace who support it – are encouraging signs in an effort that has been waged by a small but persistent band of citizen for whom capital punishment is a monstrous societal evil that should be abolished in every state in this nation.

In pursuing the abolition of capital punishment, we should take full advantage of every favorable opportunity that comes our way. This is why DNA forensics, the work of the Innocence Project, the unflagging efforts of individuals like Sr. Helen Prejean and, on the local front, Theresa

McMahill, and the stance of public officials such as Governor Ryan are so important. Every single challenge to a system that relies, for its credibility, on the premise that it is carrying out justice and that its procedures are fair and error-free, takes one more evidentiary brick out of the dike of moral invincibility with which the death penalty has cloaked itself in this nation for the past two centuries.

It has always been easy to support the death penalty by focusing on the gruesome crimes committed by those who are sentenced under its demands. Most death penalty convicts, if their convictions are solid, do not deserve sympathy. This is why DNA and the persistent investigations and the stance of courageous public officials are so important. At the least, they separate out those who are unquestionably victims of a system that sweeps the innocent as well as the guilty into its orbit.

In the final analysis, however, the effort to abolish the death penalty

cannot rest on the result of DNA tests, or the diligence of students and their instructors who doggedly pursue questionable convictions, or public officials who have the courage to put a stick in the spokes of the wheel that grinds inexorably toward the death chamber in far too many states in this country.

The death penalty must be opposed because it is a moral abomination – a barbaric ritual in a society that claims to be a model of the highest virtues and values in Western society.

One need not add what an indecent image America strikes when it seeks to promote and export its ideas of freedom and democracy abroad while it persists in preserving and implementing one of the most primitive ideas about justice in the modern world. Squaring one's rhetoric with one's actions or behavior is among the first requisites of a moral being. Striving to rid our society of a practice that every moral principle in which I believe is unalterably opposed is why I am an abolitionist.

The Next Strategic Step toward Abolition: Exempting the Mentally Ill?

by Glen Anderson

In the past few years the U.S. Supreme Court has exempted entire categories of persons from execution: persons who are mentally retarded, and more recently persons who committed their crimes while under age 18. The Court's decision cited "evolving standards of decency."

As far back as 1958 in *Trop v. Dulles*, Chief Justice Earl Warren said that the Eighth Amendment "must draw its meaning from the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society."

Over a period of years, a growing number of states passed laws excluding mentally retarded persons from execution. The Supreme Court listened, recognized a national consensus against executing them, and provided nationwide protection in its 2002 *Atkins v. Virginia* decision.

On March 1, 2005, the Court ruled in *Roper v. Simmons* that persons who commit murder while under age 18 cannot be executed. Justice Kennedy's majority opinion recognized that state after state was protecting minors from execution, and that the US was virtually alone among the world's nations in allowing that. The majority found that the *Atkins* case had reflected a growing national consensus, and that this "evolving standard of decency" was a compelling reason to also protect minors from

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Death Row Update

by Judith Kay

The Steering Committee has asked the death row prisoners for permission to print something personal about them. For those who participate, one item will be featured in each newsletter.*

Dwayne Woods

Dwayne Woods is 36 years old and becoming prematurely gray. He has been housed for well over two years in the Intensive Management Unit (IMU), where prisoners spend 23 hours a day in cells in which they can touch both walls with their arms spread. New library policy restricts them to two books per month, when Woods could easily read a book a day. Woods is bright and has spent his time keeping several chess games running simultaneously in his head (chess boards are not allowed in IMU) and learning something new everyday, such as a new word. He tries to keep “moving forward.”

But the intensity of the IMU weighs heavily on him as he struggles to keep his mind and heart open. He was hospitalized recently, presumably for a deep depression, and is searching for ways to retain his interest in living.

Woods feels bound to other humans through a silver chord that connects all life. He yearns to make sense of a beautiful world marred by cruelty. He has four children, ages ten to sixteen. Wanting to make a positive difference, he mentors younger prisoners, counseling them to use common sense and reminding them that every human has feelings. They call him “righteous brother.”

Woods is in almost daily contact with his mother, who is in failing health. His father’s health is also frail.

The State Supreme Court denied Woods’ most recent appeal. At this time, Woods, being a lover of words, welcomes notes from people containing their favorite word, its definition, and maybe a paragraph in which it is used. You may write him at:

Dwayne Woods
DOC# 978623
IMU, Tier C, Cell 2
Washington State Penitentiary
1313 N. 13th Ave.
Walla Walla, WA 99362

**WCADP accepts no responsibility for the truth or accuracy of any statement made by prison pen pals. We strongly recommend that you take appropriate safeguards and abide by the Department of Corrections rules when corresponding with incarcerated individuals. For more information, contact the correctional facility directly via www.doc.wa.gov.*

Death penalty curriculum available from DPIC

As students return to the classroom this fall, the Death Penalty Information Center is offering educators an updated version of its award-winning Educational Curriculum on the Death Penalty to assist teachers who wish to include this topic in their classrooms. DPIC’s balanced and dynamic online curriculum was designed in conjunction with the Michigan State Communications Technology Laboratory. This free classroom tool offers separate teacher and student sites, flexible lesson plans, teacher overviews, and objectives meeting national educational standards.

To supplement the many resources available on these sites, DPIC also offers teacher training workshops and a Teacher Listserv for educators interested in teaching about the death penalty. Teachers who register for the Listserv receive a printable teacher’s guide, timely updates on significant death penalty news and events for classroom discussion, and access to death penalty experts.

For more information go to the DPIC website at www.dpic.org and search for the word “curriculum,” or call (202) 289-2275.

Book Review: Murdering Myths: The Story Behind the Death Penalty by Judith W. Kay

Review by Jeff Ellis

Napoleon Beazley was the second-to-last juvenile executed in this country. I was fortunate to meet him. As his execution grew closer Napoleon called for a new path—if not for him then for others. Napoleon's last words condemned the “eye for an eye” mentality of the death penalty, and called for reconciliation: “Tonight we tell the world that there are no second chances in the eyes of justice. Tonight, we tell our children that in some instances, in some cases, killing is right.”

Judith Kay, an associate professor of religion at the University of Puget Sound and a member of this Coalition's steering committee, has written a moving and rigorously researched answer to Napoleon's plea for justice. In *Murdering Myths*, Judith argues that Americans share a counter-productive idea of justice—that punishment corrects bad behavior, suffering pays for wrong deeds, and that the judicial system must validate a victim's desire for revenge. Drawing on religious and philosophical works, images from pop

culture, and the stories of murderers and those who have lost love ones to murder, Judith shows us the common rationale that both murderers and the State use to justify their actions. “The ultimate similarity is expressed in the death penalty—both murderers and the state are willing to kill in order to show who has the upper hand, who will never again be disrespected, and who has the last word. The same story sustains them both.”

For example, Judith uses the story of Jim Elledge, the last person executed in Washington State, to illustrate “how murderers and the state tell the same story and attempt to follow the same rules of the game.” Jim killed Eloise Fitzner because he felt she had harmed and humiliated him. The State killed Jim, who volunteered for the death penalty and refused to present any evidence about his humanity, as payback. Both Jim and the State believed that some people deserve death as punishment. “Both used excessive rather than proportional responses.” In

the end, both Jim and the State “used a distorted golden rule requiring them ‘to do unto others as was done to them.’”

Ultimately, Judith reminds us that we are part of a community and have a responsibility to that community. “Bystanders can interrupt habits of silence and shunning by practicing hospitality. Bystanders can welcome survivors into their lives, listen to their stories, and welcome emotional healing.” “They can lend their ears and hearts to the children who have been brutalized, to the belligerent youth who see no option but to become violent, or to offenders locked within their habits.” It is only through reaching out to those in need (on both sides of the equation) that we can change today's “story” that violence is the answer to violence and replace it with justice.

Napoleon's final words were: “No one wins tonight. No one gets closure. No one walks away victorious.” By telling us a new story and calling us to action, Judith urges us to “walk away victorious.” Napoleon would be proud.

Gifts for the children of those on death row

Some of the prisoners on death row have children who would benefit from receiving small gifts at birthdays and holidays. If you feel moved to make a donation for this use, please earmark your donation to “DR-children” and send it to the WCADP office at P. O. Box 3045; Seattle, WA 98114-3045. For more information (or if you would like to charge your gift to Visa or MasterCard) please contact the WCADP office at (206) 622-8952 or info@abolishdeathpenalty.org.

Fast & Vigil

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those who supported us.

I'm an idealist, for certain. I want to bring about the elimination of war, poverty and many of the ills that have plagued the world since the dawn of history. I'm also a realist. I know that with the remaining few years given me, I can't accomplish all those goals. The elimination of the death penalty is something which I believe can be achieved in my lifetime. I believe it is important to do so not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is a necessary step in the achievement of those broader goals. No nation that systematically kills its own citizens can ever speak to other nations with any moral authority. Only by realizing that killing is neither an appropriate nor effective means of achieving objectives, can war be eliminated.

Thank You For Your Support! Donors from 4/1/05 through 9/30/05



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Exempting the Mentally III

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execution. The Roper case explicitly states the Court's criteria for evaluating "evolving standards of decency."

In past years when Washington State passed laws protecting the mentally handicapped WCADP's efforts helped lay the groundwork for the nationwide Atkins and Roper cases. Because individuals with mental illness are especially vulnerable to the death penalty for many reasons, could mental illness be our next challenge? If a number of states were to pass laws excluding mentally ill persons from execution, could we not start laying the groundwork for further "evolving standards of decency" with nationwide victory down the road? Considering the growing public understanding of and compassion for persons with mental illness, along with the good number of advocacy groups and other potential allies, this seems like a good possibility.

That is why we are coming together in January 2006 at a conference in Seattle to discuss mental illness and the death penalty. We will educate ourselves and each other and discuss a plan of action for the bill we have drafted. When such legislation passes, we will have successfully chipped away at the machinery of death. Even if a state level bill does not pass right away, our efforts will create new opportunities for WCADP to reach out to potential allies and create public awareness of yet another flaw in the death penalty.

Until we can abolish the death penalty altogether, perhaps we can protect more kinds of people, impose other kinds of obstacles and restrictions, to reduce the number of cases that can qualify for death sentences.

Interested? Attend the Mental Illness and the Death Penalty Conference/Annual Steering Committee Meeting on Saturday, January 14, 2006, at Seattle University in Seattle.

The Washington Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty is funded primarily through the support of individual donors like you. We sincerely believe in our motto: "It is easy to support the death penalty when you don't have the facts." That is why we are out at public events doing outreach and education. That is why we provide a speakers bureau to schools and other groups. That is why we work to educate our elected officials about this immoral practice. We need your help if we are to continue. Please consider clipping this form and mailing it in today with your gift. Ever dollar we receive will bring us closer to that day when the death penalty is just a terrible memory.

Make checks payable to "WCADP" and mail to: P. O. Box 3045; Seattle, WA 98114-3045.

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This amount would really help.

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(The Washington Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty is a 501(c)(3) organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.)

Save the Date!

*2006 Abolition Day Dinner & Auction
In conjunction with International Abolition Day on
Saturday, March 4, 2006 ~ Seattle, Washington
Guest Speaker Bud Welch*

*Auction Items Needed! If you have something to donate or are interested in helping
us procure items – please contact us at (206) 622-8952, or info@abolishdeathpenalty.org.*

Annual Meeting:

Attend the Annual Meeting/
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at Seattle University in Seattle.

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