



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

COURTS AND SENTENCING

Jeremy Prince - Contrition and conviction

Posted by James Alan Fox, Crime and Punishment July 30, 2010 02:30 PM

There is an important lesson underscoring the willingness of [Jeremy Prince](#) to forgive those accused of having tormented his daughter Phoebe just prior to her suicide: a critical factor in assessing the appropriate level of punishment is how offenders react in the aftermath of their crimes.

Do they brag about their conquests, as reportedly a couple of the teenagers charged with murdering a Mount Vernon, NH woman last year did at school on the day after? Or, do they video their crimes as apparently did a group of youngsters arrested for beating a man to death in Somerset, NJ? Or do they, like so many offenders, attempt to flee and escape any consequences whatsoever.

I realize that I've devoted considerable space to debating the justice of John Odgren's life without parole sentence. Still, it is hard for me not to compare the brazen or evasive post-crime responses of so many youngsters to what John Odgren did in the moments after he stabbed James Alenson in a bathroom at Lincoln Sudbury Regional High. Realizing what he had done. Odgren attempted to get help for his victim.

Trying in vain to save the life that one has just destroyed should in no way excuse the criminal act, but it should be considered as a significant mitigator. Unfortunately, the rigid, one-size-fits-all murder statute of Massachusetts law allows no room for such judgments.

Back to Jeremy Prince's magnanimous gesture, no one would blame him, of course, were he to feel differently. Moreover, there are likely many people who will find it difficult to understand his compassionate response to those who may have contributed to his daughter's death. Frankly, I don't know if I would be so charitable (and am not interested in finding out).

But at least based on what we know about restorative justice, Jeremy Prince may be much better off in the long run by not holding on to the anger and resentment for the rest of his life. It may allow him to think more about his daughter's life than about her tragic death.