



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

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Gribble: A quick and correct verdict

Posted by James Alan Fox, Crime and Punishment March 25, 2011 12:45 PM

The wheels of justice may be notoriously slow, but at least the dozen men and women charged with determining the fate of Christopher Gribble acted swiftly. Of course, a lengthy deliberation would have been almost as surprising as any verdict other than guilty of murder in the first degree. At least from the sideline, south of the New Hampshire border, this case seemed as open-and-shut as ever there is.

The defense strategy of portraying the confessed killer as being so devoid of empathy and human emotion that his decision to kill was little more than an involuntary reflex was surely a long shot. But in defense of the defense, it was the only shot. Gribble may certainly be deeply flawed; but his defect is of the character, not of the mind.

The unfortunate part about this failed attempt to portray Gribble's violent acts as the product of mental disease or defect is the mockery it makes of the insanity defense itself. I absolutely do believe in the validity and the important role of the insanity defense in our legal system, as there are indeed some offenders whose actions are beyond their understanding and control. But public cynicism fueled by long shots like Gribble's makes it almost impossible for deserving defendants to prevail in insanity cases, especially in high profile trials.

In the final judgment, I am quite satisfied with the resolution of Gribble's trial. His absurd insanity claim was summarily dismissed by the jury, and he will be incarceration for life without ever having the possibility of parole release. This is exactly how it should be for the most violent, vicious and ruthless of murderers.