



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

MISCELLANEOUS , MURDER AND MAYHEM

Sandusky's fate in prison is no joke

While growing up in this area, I was a big fan of AM talk shows. Of course, talk radio was quite a bit different a half-century ago, both in content and style.

Back then, in the 1960s, I was an avid listener of Paul Benzaquin, Jerry Williams and Steve Fredericks, three stars of the airwaves who truly put the master in the role of talk-master. Benzaquin and Williams were honored by induction into the Massachusetts Broadcasters Hall of Fame, and Fredericks likely would have been nominated had he not moved back to his hometown of Philadelphia where he became a renowned sport announcer.

I hardly ever listen to talk shows anymore. It is not just the shift from liberal ideas to ultra right-wing thinking that I dislike. It is more the anger and vitriol that has turned me and my radio off to squawk shows.

I must confess, however, that I do enjoy sports talk programs during fall season. As a long-time pro football fan, and a season ticket holder going way back to the Friday night lights at Fenway when the Patriots competed in the pre-merger AFL, I spend hours listening to certain commentators (especially Gresh and Zolak) dissect the latest gridiron victory.

Because of my Pats passion, I tune into Dennis and Callahan on so-called Patriots Mondays just to hear the brilliance of Boomer Esaison during his weekly phone interview with the hosts. Otherwise and other times, I have little patience for the show's rudeness and crudeness.

But yesterday morning, my radio was still tuned to WEEI even after Esiason was done. The discussion moved off of sports and on to the upcoming sentencing of Jerry Sandusky, the former assistant coach at Penn State whose repeated acts of molestation disgraced the entire university.

I wasn't very surprised when the hosts speculated that had Sandusky been tried in Massachusetts, he would have gotten 3 to 5 years and have been awarded a state-funded sex change procedure to boot. This kind of facetious banter is routine for Dennis and Callahan. But then, the obnoxious turned to the offensive.

Serious or not, Callahan recklessly indicated that he hoped Sandusky would get shanked inside the Pennsylvania pen. John Dennis quickly tried to temper Callahan's murder wish by saying, shanked, but not killed. Sandusky should feel the pain, they agreed.

There is nothing funny about murder, even inmate homicide. Few people have any sympathy for criminals like pedophile priest John Geoghan or serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, but their untimely deaths at the hands of fellow prisoners were no reason for celebration.

Given the severity of his crimes, Sandusky certainly deserves to spend the rest of his life locked away from free society. And the 30 to 60 year term to which he was sentenced today will, in all likelihood, mean that the 68-year-old child molester will someday die in prison. But his longevity should not be shortened by an act of vigilantism behind bars.

Despite my personal opposition to the death penalty, I respect legitimate arguments in favor of state-sanctioned executions. But there is no legitimate argument that supports cellblock executions, no matter how unsympathetic the victim.

Given the violent nature of many prisoners, it is hardly surprising that conflicts occasionally turn fatal. In fact, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics figures from the Deaths in Custody Reporting Program, an average of 50 state prison inmates are murdered each year nationwide.

I understand and accept -- begrudgingly -- when homicide results from a fight between consenting convicts. I cannot accept, however, when an inmate decides to become the self-appointed executioner of some weak or vulnerable cellmate. Above all, I cannot tolerate when some journalist expresses the hope for such an assault, even if it is for joke or for ratings.