

Williamson

English III AP; Period 5

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An Eye for an Eye?

“That old law about an ‘eye for an eye’ leaves everyone blind” - Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Our great American treasure, Donald Trump, leads a campaign for tougher punishments for crime. Brilliantly stating that “100% of the people who are executed never commit another crime,” this promising future president reminds us that criminals are just that, animals. Our ability as a country to be “tough on crime” dictates our future and our prospective crime rates. Tough on crime? More like “tough on the men and women who commit crimes (after the said crime has occurred).” Why not tough on mental disease? Tough on addiction? Tough on the problems that cause crime? Why tough on criminals? Because we as humans specialize in our ability to fix problems after they have happened. We cannot prevent problems so we close our eyes and wish that strict consequences will make a mentally insane person weigh the ramifications with the benefit of going on a killing spree.

“Victim” has obtained a certain connotation. Implying a person consumed by self pity or by anger, the term hardly represents stability. A person may be drowned in pity. Drowned by the hands of others, drowned by hands their own. Or anger may be their poison, consuming their peace until that sanity becomes a new identity from the distant idea of “before.” Either way, victims are not perceived to be strong. The simple utterance of the word strips a person of their independence. So to this I ask: why do we insist on an “eye for an eye” on the assumption that we are acting on behalf of the victims? Is it because of the horrid load we must bear dealing with the aftermath of the crime that didn't happen to us?

Justice that is driven by a passion for revenge does not benefit the victim. Often it is a matter of Pride. Pride fuels the feeling that ramifications are due, though as Douglas Horton reminds, “while

seeking revenge, dig two graves- one for yourself.” Destructive in nature, revenge no more amends a crime than does inaction. The idea of revenge stems from an idea of intense pride. It is the idea that Romeo killing Tibalt atoned Tibalt killing Mercutio. ‘Tis a blood-for-blood mentality that leaves everyone bleeding.

Why do people need retribution? Is it really because the suffering of the wrongdoer brings ease? Do they find security in the fact that the perpetrator will not act again? How is it that anger brings forth such an intense desire for justice? If we were to know what causes this, then perhaps we could improve the assistance to victims rather than improving the punishment of criminals. For isn't the entire purpose of laws to protect victims?

With the greatest and endowed respect to the guilty party, the idea of an “eye for an eye” once again is harmful. For what is an individual that they are to determine good vs evil? seemingly equal in nature, no cause nor consequence presents in contrasting black and white. The idea of parallel punishment to the crime eliminates any prospect for redemption. Any prospect for life after. And on whose divine opinion?

The American Court system is comprised of a “ jury of peers” and such is guaranteed in a criminal's Seventh Amendment right. Though these men and women are no more than people; there is little cause for them to be able to decide severe irreversible, punishments. How much power do we leave people over people? A man's freedom is his and his alone. His alone, only if he does not hinder the liberty of others. The liberty of others becomes held with high regard. High regard that is no longer granted to that man. That man's freedom is no more.

I hear American “justice” warning me. It whispers not so subtly that my freedom is a game. A game with rules taken directly from our national pastime. Three strikes and I’m out-- right? “It deters crime, though,” they say. So, it “deters crime.” It yells at society: “go ahead. Commit a crime. Surrender

your rights. Surrender any personal identity you held in the past. Forfeit your value as a human.” So sure, that's some deterrent. And however you look at it, however temptingly easy the decision, bypassing the rights and morals surrounding a wrongdoer is wrong. Because crime does not a criminal make. Because good people sometimes do bad. Because, in the end, they too are human and it is not moral to decide such a harsh consequence from a single action. Less than 5% of the world population is American, but about 25% of the prisoner population is American. Most of these are due to minor drug possession crimes.

Rarely pausing to solve issues that scream of future tragedies, humans ignore problems until they implode in a magnificent array of dilemma. Dothea Dix did not spend her life fighting for the reform of mental health for it to be still overlooked hundreds of years later. It should not be easier for someone to buy drugs than it is for them to find help for their addiction to it. There are many problems that cause crime; “soft” punishment is not one of them.

In a crime there are three parties: the perpetrator, the victim, and those who take an interest in the crime for whatever reason. Revenge benefits none.

The perpetrator is denied the rights of a human, the benefit of the doubt. Because they are stripped of their humanity when they commit a crime? I call ludicrous. Most of the rights granted to people by the Bill of Rights are in fact to protect them upon committing a crime.

The victim is not compensated. They live with the memory of the crime and the idea that the person who did it is somewhere with them on their mind.

The public, however, receives the most. They get the pleasure of being social justice warriors. Fighting crime and being adamant that every terrible thing directly affects them. They get to feel safe, unaffected in their daily lives. As much as they will tell you, revenge does not affect them.

Those waging war on minor criminals declare combat onto those who may have, in a parallel universe, acted against them. But I apologize to you people, because I find myself unaware. Unaware of

how a crime of passion makes you feel unsafe. Let's face it, you're basically the victim in the robbery of the store a few cities over. I weep not for the man that was robbed, the woman who was raped, but to *you*, my dear friend, because now *you* feel scarred. Now *you* feel unsafe. Let's start a riot to end *your* struggling.

You can try; to rally- to riot- to yell. No protest can overturn hundreds of years of establishment. A man's rights will always prevail. But louder- louder- louder you become. Don't you see? Your idea of "tough on crime" justice will never triumph.

Revenge shakes the foundations of society. A community in which justice is driven by the passion of vengeance nears anarchy. Consider America. The structure established by the Constitution, the rights granted to avoid such disorder, the stability of determining a punishment that is not cruel nor unusual. Though if punishment to crimes mirrored Hammurabi's Code, society would lose its structure. When considering who wins in a quest for revenge, the conclusion is often always no one. The strife to find justice often ends with a simple chalice of poison and a poisoned tip to a sword causing the death of all the royalty in Denmark. To be or not to be impulsive- that is the question.

Abraham Lincoln warned against the ramifications of a search for justice. Aware of the impending detriments to society, he discouraged consequences for the South after the Civil War. Promoting unity rather than dissonance is essential to the prosperity of humanity. Our morals define us. Our actions create us. Will we be made of our morals, or of rash emotions?

So yes Mr. Trump, we should be tough on crime. But does this mean we give humans so little faith that we need a 100% guarantee that they will never again have the chance to make a bad decision? Personally, I believe that humans, at this point in time, are a little more civilized than such. But people are bad. They will always disappoint. It is the truth of the matter that man will always kill and steal and cheat and lie. Though, who are we to decide who is capable of that? So maybe before deter a man from crime

by stripping him of freedoms, we should solve the problems that cause that man to kill, to steal, to cheat, to lie. Slightly more brilliantly than Mr. Trump, Carrie P. Meek states that “if we were really tough on crime, we’d do more to stop it from happening in the first place.”