

May 2, 2021

To: Resentencing Journal

From: Paul J. Rogers [REDACTED]

Subject: Writing Submission

I was convicted of first degree murder and sentence to Life Without the Possibility of Parole. I commenced this sentence ^{IN} 1991 and was 19 years old when my alleged crime was committed. I still dispute the degree in which I was convicted and that I acted with deliberate intent to take someone life. I don't sit here and write this statement with the presumption I'm innocent of any wrong doing and have no remorse for the life lost. I do accept responsibility for my actions that ultimately lead up to the victim and my own demise. Its not a day that goes by that I don't experience regret and sorrow for the choices I made in my life. I write from the perspective of whether this sentence is justice for the families involved or just cruel and unusual punishment. From a societal perspective, its a waste of human life and resources to condemn young adult offenders to prison for the rest of their lives.

Specially when our offenses aren't considered heinous and deprived of human compassion. Such crimes are punishable by death and life sentences are suppose to be leniency. However, society must revisit this assumption, because many people come to view these sentences as death by incarceration. The idea that offenders are incorrigible and unsalvageable are a misconception. I'm living proof that incarcerated people are correctable, I have underwent a radical change in my principles, values and character. There are many examples of individuals who turn over a new leaf and are considered model inmates. The US Supreme Court revised the constitutionality of life sentences for juvenile homicide offenders in 2012 case Miller vs Alabama. The court held, "compared to adults, juveniles have lack of maturity and an underdeveloped sense of responsibility. They are more vulnerable or susceptible to negative influences and outside pressures, including peer pressure, and their character is not well formed".

Prior to Miller vs Alabama the US Supreme Court ruled in Roper vs Simon case, that execution of individuals under eighteen years of age when they committed their crime are prohibited by the constitution. The significance of these two ruling are the expert testimonies and science relied upon by the courts that demonstrated the human mind is still developing in juveniles and young adults. They draw the line at eighteen for societal reasons but acknowledge that, "the qualities that distinguish juveniles from adults do not disappear when an individual turn eighteen". Basically, society have many young adults with juvenile characteristics and are still developing or havn't reach full maturation. Our judicial system should reflect and respect the establish science on such matters.

I understand that the science at the time of my trial wasn't developed. So my opinion is in hindsight of where we should be now legally, and it explain why my sentence are fundamentally inhumane. As a young boy Philadelphia School Department classified me with a learning disability. I experience homelessness and move frequently in with relatives, disrupting my education and by the fifth grade I was transferred to eight different schools. Additionally, in the 80's and 90's Philadelphia gun violence and homicides was at an all time high. I lost several close friends to gun violence and feared being the next statistics. When I was confronted with serious bodily harm and death threats, my immature response whether reasonably or unreasonably are better understood in context of the above mentioned science.

Legitimate fear are known to make mature adults make irrational decisions and one can make the argument a young immature mind lacking sufficient development would make even worse decisions. Philadelphia right now are facing even greater homicides and gun violence statistics. The establish laws and policies in place are not deterrence of criminal behavior and a new approach are warrant. Sadly, this new generation of youth will be victimize by the environment which they're born into.

Ignoring this reality and failing to address this issue are a injustice in it self. These young adults are as much as victims then they're perpetrators of crime. As a society, we have a preconceived notion that these individuals have no hope of rehabilitation and redemption. The facts doesn't support this assumption and the recently paroled juvenile homicide offenders are making positive adjustments as law abiding citizens. People shouldn't be defined by the worse moment of teir lives. Human nature are to error and no justice system should deprive a individual the right to redeem themselves.