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The Risk of Some Rewards

The effects of teenage melodrama can have an unrelenting hold over those who experience them, but in a few cases we can see the extremes of this play out. Countless cases of teenagers lashing out in some of the most violent and heinous ways possible have been happening all over the country, and there doesn't seem to be a general consensus on how to exactly handle it. Does one mistake someone made at such a young age make them evil? Does it make them a danger to society, enough to be locked up for their whole life? Some might argue that it does not, that people like this are wrongly tried as adults for these adult crimes. Others might argue these criminals should *always* be tried as adults and face the full consequences of their actions. But some make the more level-headed argument that teenage murders deserve to be tried however the judge sees fit, and I am one of these some. I believe that a judge should have the right to charge violent juveniles as either adults or not depending on the case, as there is a *wide* range of situations in this category of crime.

The issue at hand is not now, nor has it ever been, just black and white. Never just hot or cold, and especially not just "yes" or "no" on whether or not kids should be tried as adults. It is far more complex, and the issues with the convicts run deeper than that. David Dobbs writes "Compared with adults, teens tended to make less use of brain regions that monitor performance, spot errors, plan, and stay focused- areas the adults seemed to bring online automatically" (113).

This quote is saying that teenagers' brains are underdeveloped, which leads them to be reckless and never fully think things through. In contrast to adults, teens have a way of only seeing things at face value, while adults are able to fully comprehend the velocity of serious situations. We cannot condemn a life for the rest of its duration for a reckless decision someone made early on and continues to grow from, it's how they grow from it that must be judged. Through all these varying cases there is one steady ideology of risk-versus-reward behind each teen-murderer case, and all for different reason. This is why it's important for the judge to have the right to decide how to deal with each case.

In each case that deals with juvenile violent crime, every suspect convicted was out to seek some sort of reward. For some it was safety, eliminating the abuse from their life. Others it was shelter in a community, the joining in of gang violence. But for most, it was the feeling of sovereignty, to chase the thrill of power. The article "Beautiful Brains" states "Teens take more risks not because they don't understand the dangers but because they weigh risk versus reward differently: In situations where risk can get them something they want, they value the reward more heavily than adults do" (Dobbs 115). Basically put, teenage people lose themselves in the process of attaining their desires if wanted- or needed- badly enough. This is a key concept behind many, many cases that deal with teen killers, and all for very skewed reasons. A kid who joined the bloods for protection and happened to get caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, like Sean, is not the same as kids who planned out a murder in recreation of a horror movie, like Torey and Brian, but both instances boil down to risk versus reward. What should be an imperative factor in deciding how to charge the offender is the thing driving their desire for reward, whether it was something like thrill or something like safety.

Many people who think that juveniles should *never* be tried as adults make the argument that just because a terrible act has been committed, the condemned should not be tried as an adult simply because they are not adults and their brains cannot work like one. The article “Should 11-Year Olds Be Charged With Adult Crimes” claims “However, two wrongs do not make a right; prosecuting a very young child for murder and sending him to prison for life is tragic in and of itself. It essentially takes the life of another child and causes unimaginable heartache for others” (Holloway 119). That is a tone deaf argument and shifts the attention away from the criminal act onto others that have nothing to do with it. It does make sense in some context, but again, it all comes back to the same problem, *this does not apply to every case*. Sometimes it is better that a growing danger to society is locked away and corrected rather than become a bigger threat. The stark contrast between cases is the one factor that makes it impossible to demand a clear answer on how to handle them. The biggest argument of this side of the situation is that not every person who commits an “evil” crime is evil, and for the most part I believe this to be true, but few cases are the reason this is not an applicable argument.

Jennifer Jenkins shares in her talk on the punishment of teen killers that the boy who murdered her sister was a “serial killer in the making” (Jenkins 128). He had been privelged his whole life, always having is parents get him out of the many other crimes he had committed priviously to carefully planning the murder of two innocent people. This is an excellent example of how even though he was young and his brain was not developed all the way, he understood how wrong it was, and that made crime even more desirable to him. He showed how dangerous

of a person he would be to society if not stopped. This in contrast to a case like Jacob Ind's clearly demonstrates how even though they were both young and committed the same crime, it was the intention behind the action that makes these cases dramatically different, meaning they should not be judged or ruled the same. Jacob Ind fatally shot his mother and stepfather after failing to get away from the constant harassment and abuse he received from them in a better way. He was desperate for safety and did not want to be a murderer, he hired someone else but they failed to complete the act, leaving Jacob to do so. The drastic difference in these two cases portrays how someone desperately needing safety is not the same as someone who planned out a murder like it was some sort of sick hobby, therefore it would not be fair to handle both cases in the same way.

No one is born inherently evil, and a lot of bad people are driven by worse people to do the very things that make them bad, which is what makes this all the more complicated. This is why there should be a set list of criteria to meet in order to condemn such criminals as adults. It is clear when a kid with a history of crime is growing into a dangerous person, but the cases with kids who were in the wrong place at the wrong time, or desperately needed something like safety or protection, should be up for debate. The bottom line is, because of the extremely wide range of situations crimes like this can stem from, a judge should have the right to charge these juvenile criminals the way they see fit, as adults or not, for the betterment of both the criminal and society.