

# Punishment Deters Crime, Or Does It?

VIOLENCE has been a problem of mankind since the beginning. Our culture and technology abet and promote violence to the point that civilization often appears to be near defeat.

Terrorism, turbulent politics, and perpetual threats of war on every continent are made more terrible by scientific discoveries from the tiny atom to limitless space.

Instead of violence being subdued it has become an object of worship. A mass killer in Texas recently declared hundreds more like him are members of a cult called "The Hands of Death." Violence sometimes breaks out among peaceful religions, too.

In April the Justice Department said 456,000 cases of family violence occur annually. Violent parents and violent children may be expected to treat others roughly. Love and sex frequently are more violent than romantic.

Such attitudes ought not surprise us. We absorb daily doses of violence from the news, literature, movies and TV. Much of our music

is basically violent and may sound more so. People often display violent postures by clothing, makeup, or other fads.

As a nation of sports fans we turn out by thousands to watch violent games in mammoth arenas. Violence is an element of many forms of individual or private recreation, too.

Violence is a characteristic of business, competition being its milder form. Labor disputes often involve use of force for economic gains, while corporate executives wield monetary power violently to gobble up rival companies.

We are not safe from violence anywhere. If you think so, just get into your car and venture forth to the perils of wild motorists, drunken drivers, and speeding trucks.

While you are gone criminals may break into your home to rob, commit arson, rape or even murder. If they are caught, and if they are convicted, and if they are sent to prison, we are being told they must not be dealt with violently.

A new Oklahoma law says that in

order to reduce prison population, sodomy, second degree rape, attempted robbery and attempted murder are to be regarded as non-violent crimes. Those convicted of them may be released from punishment.

Our softened attitudes toward violence are reflected in widespread campaigns against putting felons behind bars at all. Research has shown that certainty of punishment is an effective deterrent to crime but quite a few argue otherwise.

Richard Moran, who teaches criminology at Mount Holyoke College, recently wrote in Newsweek magazine: "We assume that punishment deters crime, but it just might be that crime deters punishment, that there is so much crime that it simply cannot be punished."

If that reasoning is logical, it might also be true that there is so much violence that it cannot be stopped. Therefore, the rest of us may be compelled to become violent, too. If that happens, can civilization survive?