



## Simple justice gives teen offenders a second chance

May 19, 2010

In ruling out life sentences without possibility of release for some juvenile criminals, the U.S. Supreme Court demonstrates how America is simultaneously a nation both of laws and of justice.

Monday's 5-4 vote allows teenagers jailed for life for crimes other than homicide the opportunity to show they are worthy of parole at some point.

This is a landmark ruling. The United States is the only nation that sentences juveniles to life in prison without the possibility of release for crimes other than murder.

That's no international laurel for being tough on crime. It's bullheaded blindness to reality.

Past behavior is not the sole arbiter of future acts. A wealth of respected research on the developing mental and emotional abilities of teenagers show they are innately given to poor judgment.

A life sentence ignores the possible benefit to society of teen inmates' maturation, specifically sincere regret for their victims and the ability to become redeemable, contributing members of society.

That lost opportunity, as the high court's majority concluded, violates the Eight Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

To get the opportunity, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy said, the offender must show "demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation."

That's a simple, acceptable standard of proof for these criminals. The absence of such a bar makes us mean-spirited and, even worse, undemocratic.

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**Mom Dilemma #36:**  
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

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