

Letters to the Editor, from the New York Times.

To the Editor:

I was disappointed to read that the death penalty will be a major factor in deciding where to hold the trial in the sniper case, according to a Justice Department official (front page, Oct. 29).

I was under the impression that the crimes themselves and not their potential punishments should be the primary determinants of the trial location.

Everyone is eager to see justice served in the sniper case; but in America, justice should still mean having a fair trial before a sentence is handed down.

I am much more interested in understanding how and why a person would commit such heinous crimes than I am in when, where or if he dies. I wish that the Justice Department felt similarly.

JESSE RYAN

Greenwich, Conn., Oct.29, 2002

To the Editor:

Along with every thinking person in this country, it is with contempt that I witness the legal authorities in the various jurisdictions involved in the sniping case so desperately trying to have the blood of the accused on their political resumes (front page, Oct. 29).

Their American constituencies may or may not put these officials into higher office, but the world will certainly judge them to be the cynical opportunists they are.

TIM HOFFMAN

Hyattsville, Md., Oct. 29, 2002

To the Editor:

I agree that deciding where to try John Muhammad and Lee Malvo on the basis of who will execute them is unseemly at best (“Competing for the Sniper Trial,” editorial, Oct. 30).

By the same token, and while I very rarely endorse the death penalty, because of the horror they allegedly inflicted, they fall into the very small group of those who, if convicted, would appear to have earned an execution.

That said, it would appear that Alabama and possibly Washington State should get the first try at convicting them, on the basis of where they allegedly killed first.

DAVID H. KEMPNER

Vernon Hills, Ill., Oct. 30 2002