

Teens do not earn right to be executed
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The announcement by Attorney General John Ashcroft that John Allen Muhammad and John Lee Malvo soon will face trial in Virginia brings to a close an unseemly process that saw the highest law enforcement officer in the land shopping for the most death-penalty-friendly state as if he were shopping for the ripest apples ("Sniper suspects to be tried in Va.," News, Friday).

Muhammad and Malvo are accused of horrific crimes and, if they are found guilty, must be held accountable. But the Justice Department's eagerness to kill them is hardly worthy of a civilized society and, in the case of the juvenile, Malvo, is a gross violation of international human-rights standards.

The legal systems of virtually every nation in the world provide justice without executing juvenile offenders. Indeed, Malvo epitomizes why juveniles should not be as culpable as adults. He reportedly refused even to eat a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich without Muhammad's permission.

Easily influenced and unable to foresee the results of their actions, teenagers are denied the right to vote and buy alcohol. Why, then, do they earn the right to be executed?

By steamrolling over jurisdictions that do not execute juveniles, the government is adopting the same brutal tactics of which these men are accused.

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