

WSWS readers comment on Nathaniel Abraham verdict

23 November 1999

Since the verdict in the Nathaniel Abraham case was delivered on November 16, the World Socialist Web Site has received a large volume of e-mail concerning our coverage of the case. Abraham, 13, is the youngest child in the US to be tried as an adult for murder. He was found guilty of second-degree murder in the October 1997 shooting death of 18-year-old Ronnie Greene. Below we reprint a selection of the letters.

I just read about the Nathaniel Abraham trial in Pontiac, Michigan and it made my blood boil. I find it unconscionable that the defendant could ever have been tried as an adult. Perhaps the American jurist is too expectant of the worst after Columbine, but it seems self-evident that there were mitigating circumstances in this case, not only in the age of the defendant and the facts of the "crime," but also in the basic circumstances of his life. It appears that the judiciary fails to make several key distinctions—between child and adult, between circumstantial and verifiable evidence, and between crime and what could even be termed "accident."

What will be next, if we assign such precocity to children? Doubtless, the boy's race and situation had much to do with the jury's decision—as the image of the inner-city black man is perhaps the most dangerous and most indelible stereotype in exchange today. The case also raises issues about the court's notions of mental health, and the framework that should be available for all citizens to avert the possibility of such tragedies.

But my intent in writing was to ask if there is anything I can do to raise awareness about this case. perhaps enough outcry (as I am sure all those with an active and healthy conscience will find this as appalling as I do) will preclude this result from being recorded as justice. I am a junior in college, outside of Boston. Please contact me.

Thank you for your information,

NB

16 November 1999

As a parent of three children, I really am shocked and outraged that a state could and would convict an 13-year-old child for murder, no matter what the degree it is. My oldest child is 10 years old and I see that he does a lot of things that a six-year-old child does. I do not believe that he has the mental capability to actually kill someone and know what will happen to him as a result. But to know and still do it, then, of course, he should be put on trial, but in no way as an adult. The prosecutor is a very heartless person. I know that she only wants to see that justice is being done, but can they not find some alternative solution than this one. Please seek the Bible. Let God be the judge of this little boy.

DM

16 November 1999

I just read your good article on the child in Michigan. It made me sick as my family as well as others are all affected by this way of family values in the new millennium. Many of the issues that you raised are valid, and as far as I can tell, the need for support for the care for families, for children or for anything other than the normally productive child-unit, is unseen by the system which doesn't assign economic value to the underpinnings of healthy adulthood. I am very distressed at our lack of moral fiber in favor of the gratuitous political/religious blatherings I hear.

Thanks

JL

16 November 1999

Editors,

I find it very odd that your story does not mention young Nathaniel's past criminal activity. Do you think that there could be a correlation in his past behavior and this crime? Of course not....

Your web site is amusing and humorous but fails to ever once take the view that people ought to be responsible for their own actions. Be it a 12-year-old boy or some long-term out-of-work factory worker who failed to identify trends and improve his skill sets.

After I send this message I'm going to check to see how my investments did today.

Have a good night!

BW

Atlanta, Georgia

17 November 1999

I think that it is terrible how the people of the system are going to take this young child's life forever. That's what's wrong with our society, they are always looking for someone to blame instead of trying to help these people. I'm sure that this 11-year-old at the time had no idea what was going on and that he never intended to kill this 18-year-old man. Something should be done to help this child out. Taking away the rest of his life and letting animals (adult inmates in prison/jail) raise him is not the answer!

CM

17 November 1999

Dear Editor,

The problem with America's youth today is not the politicians. The problem is lack of parental responsibility. If parents do not take responsibility for teaching their children discipline and respect for others, the children will never become responsible for their actions. The courts are sending a clear message to the American people. Take responsibility for your actions. Maybe this child's parents should be tried along with him. How did an 11-year-old get a rifle in the first place? Where were his parents when he was out shooting this rifle? What values has this child been taught? Teaching children right and wrong and values begins at home when they are toddlers. Too many of America's parents have failed in this responsibility and our society as a whole is paying the price for it now.

FP

16 November 1999

The prosecution's case against Nate, an 11-year-old, is one of extreme rightist conservatives who are blind to the destruction they bring about through their "moral" judgments. It is seen in conservatives such as Ken Starr (who all but destroyed America's faith in the justice system), the Congress (who have destroyed any chance of compromise in balancing the budget), and not to forget Newt Gingrich, who spearheaded the impeachment process against our president when (it is now revealed since

he is getting a divorce) he was having an "intimate" affair with a woman himself. Michigan must be controlled by these extreme conservatives to pass a law that requires a child to be treated as an adult when he breaks the law. Hopefully, Americans will be voting to correct this terrible force of "moral righteousness" and bring a balance and sense back to our judicial system.

JL

16 November 1999

What can I do to support this? I am a firm believer that all children are essentially good at heart, they learn bad things not from other children but from us adults. When our children commit these crimes the main cause is lack of self worth and self love. That's when we, the adults all around them need to step in and help them by firmly loving them and giving them mental help, counseling, treatment, schooling, food and shelter, and most of all love.

The jails and detention centers for children should provide all of this, instead of what they now seem to provide is an atmosphere of terror, from rape assaults, boredom and a sense of abandonment.

I think this can be done in some type of confinement but we should change what we offer the children once they're shoved in there. These sexual and mental abuse centers called jails and juvenile detention centers have to stop! We need to reform those places, so they give our children their own self worth back. We can be firm about it, but in a living and positive way! Sort of like the Boot Camp places featured in Sally J.R. and Maury Pauvich.

It hurts me so much to see this child being sent to a fate worse than death almost, I tear my heart out. Sad to say, but probably most persons applauding this kangaroo court today are meticulous church going persons of many religions, I bet.

I wonder what Jesus would do if we had him here and could ask him. No ... I am not a religious freak at all. I don't even go to church, but I really can't help but wonder that over and over.

MA

16 November 1999

I am a social worker in the state of West Virginia. I am concerned with the welfare and the future of this child. In West Virginia we are fortunate to have organizations who are concerned with the safety and well-being of mentally ill and mentally retarded children, as well as adults. The organization that I now work for is dedicated to serving families and children. We provide case management, behavior management, therapy, supportive therapy, and foster care services. We help families to preserve, by supporting them and teaching parenting skills. Many of the situations that have been brought to our organization have been tragic. Nothing surprises me anymore.

I feel that Nathan and his family were neglected by the system. We as a society need to realize that we are dysfunctional. We need to preserve families, teach parents and educate society as a whole. We do not need the media to hype such tragedies, as this one. We need to "nip these troubled youth in the bud." I feel that the State of Michigan should be on trial for failing this family by not providing the services so desperately needed. We need to educate society of what services are available to those in need. We need the Federal Government to open their eyes and see that we have trouble right here in our own yard. We need to keep monies available to fund mental health, and family preservation.

KR

17 November 1999

Your reporting is one-sided and leaves a lot to be desired. Adults are responsible for teaching children right from wrong and as adults we are responsible for what our children do if we allow them to just run free. Someone should have been there with that child when he came home from school. Yes, I know the government has cut back, but where there is a will, there is a way. I'm speaking as a mother that raised three children

almost entirely on my own. I traded babysitting with someone that had a different schedule than mine and all sorts of things. I really feel for all the people involved, even the ones you left out. That 18-year-old was called a man in your story, I call him a boy who is dead without a reason. Someone has to pay for that life.

MK

Kentucky

16 November 1999

If a child decides to take an adult weapon and commits an adult act, then he should be tried as an adult for his negligent actions. What is wrong with society is that organizations like yours feel that there should not be any negative action taken against these mini-murderers; they should be coddled and freed to do the same thing again. Give us all a break from this mindset and allow justice to prevail. If that had been your child gunned down in the street, you would be singing a different tune. Personally, I hope the kid and others like him spend the rest of their rotten lives in prison—where they belong.

SW

16 November 1999

I am a 24-year-old woman. I just cannot believe that the government failed this child. It really hurts me to see this child like this. I also learned a lot about this case that I didn't know. I know that this baby did not know what he was doing. He has years to deal with the fact that he has taken someone's life. That is going to be hard as it is. Plus he was only 11 years old and charged as an adult. What is wrong with the world today? How can they charge a baby who has many years to grow and learn as an adult? America we have got to change. Change for the better. May God bless him and his family. My heart goes out to Ronnie's family too.

JH

16 November 1999

Thank you for the direct and frank coverage about this poor child. It is truly frightening to see what our prosecutors and justice system are doing these days. I send my heartfelt condolences to Nathaniel's family ... what is to become of us poor folks if the justice system continues to operate as it is?

J

16 November 1999

After reading the article on the 13-year-old child in Michigan I am sickened that we can send crews into space to repair a telescope for millions of dollars and yet this can happen to poor and sick children. This child should be in some kind of rehabilitation and from the contents of the article the evidence was weak. But even if the evidence were strong is this the answer? This boy is going to rot in prison for at least 50 years and what is he going to be if and when he gets out? You know we talk the talk when it comes to reform for our youth but can we walk the walk? I guess not. Why? Because this kid's parents do not have money to declare insanity for the child like the rich would probably do had it been their child. Tell me what can I do. Please send me information on how I can help both families in some way.

WD

16 November 1999



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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