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Opportunity for review

The Supreme Court rightly decided to ban sentences of life without parole for juvenile criminals who do not commit murder.

Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in a concurring opinion that “Punishments that did not seem cruel and unusual at one time may, in the light of reason and experience, be found cruel and unusual at a later time.”

Scientific evidence shows a difference between the minds of juveniles and adults. The brain continues to mature through late adolescence.

The court is not ordering the juveniles’ release. Instead the court is giving these prisoners a chance to show that they have matured and been rehabilitated and may be considered for parole.

The ruling still allows courts to sentence juveniles to life in prison for murder. If a juvenile charged with murder is tried in juvenile court, the state could not hold him beyond his 21st birthday. Juveniles should still face life in prison for murder, although the Supreme Court banned the death penalty for juveniles in 2005.

Until this most recent Supreme Court decision, the United States was the only country in the world to impose life sentences on juveniles who did not commit murder. It was right to join the rest of the world.

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