

Editorial

Ashcroft's Blood Lust

Running roughshod over local law-enforcement officials, Attorney General John Ashcroft first snatched the two "D.C. sniper" suspects away from Montgomery County, Maryland, and has now handed them over to prosecutors in Virginia—a state which ranks second only to George W. Bush's Texas in the number of executions it has carried out. The bloodthirsty Ashcroft has an overriding obsession—to execute John Muhammed and Lee Malvo as fast as possible.

Because six of the ten sniper killings near Washington took place in Montgomery County, officials there say that this alone should make Maryland the site of the first trial. Montgomery County was the first to file charges against the two suspects. "What's really distressing," said former U.S. Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder, even before Ashcroft's announcement, "is that we are allowing the desire to execute these defendants to be the determining factor as to where these prosecutions are to be venued. That's like the tail wagging the dog. What you need to focus on, is what community suffered the most harm."

Ashcroft has quite a history of overriding local concerns when capital punishment is involved. He has overruled his own Federal prosecutors at least 16 times, when they did not think the death penalty was appropriate, including in two states that don't even have the death penalty. (So much for "states' rights.")

Since the suspects were captured in Maryland on Oct. 24, Justice Department officials were saying off-the-record that Maryland is too soft on the death penalty, using it too infrequently, and even having had a moratorium on executions in effect. In order to get the suspects out of the custody of Maryland authorities, Federal law-enforcement officials botched up the questioning of Muhammed by Federal and state investigators in the hours after he and Malvo were captured. Angry investigators told the *New York Times* that while an FBI agent and a Maryland detective were talking with Muhammed, they were ordered by the United States Attorney, Thomas DiBiagio, to hand him over to the Feds. The detectives, who were at the Montgomery County police building after Muhammed's arrest, said that Muhammed was beginning

to talk to them, and they believed they were on the way to getting a confession, when they were told to hand him over to Federal authorities to face Federal weapons charges. At that point, Muhammed clammed up, and reportedly has said nothing more since.

One Federal agent said he told DiBiagio that he should drop the Federal charges, because they were in the middle of an interrogation, and they could later file state charges. But DiBiagio said, "It is out of my hands, and this was coming from the White House and the Justice Department."

What Ashcroft's Justice Department is doing in this case, is precisely the sort of rush to prosecution and conviction which prevents getting to the truth about such a hideous crime. It is reminiscent of what happened with the 2001 execution of Timothy McVeigh, who was convicted of conspiracy in the 1993 bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal building, and who went to his grave without telling anyone what he actually knew about the circumstances of the bombing and who else was involved. Beyond the travesty of killing the best witness to the Oklahoma City bombing—which might have enabled law-enforcement officials to prevent later terrorist acts—Ashcroft created a Roman-circus type of environment around the McVeigh execution, as he can be expected to do again, around the executions of Muhammed and Malvo.

Lyndon LaRouche called the McVeigh execution "Ashcroft's pay-per-view snuff film," after Ashcroft announced that he had okayed a "state-of-the-art video conferencing" broadcast, on closed-circuit television, to allow hundreds of family and friends of the bombing victims to view the execution live.

"Worse than the proposed execution as such, are the arguments which have been made publicly, either by Attorney General Ashcroft, or on his behalf, in the case of the execution of McVeigh," LaRouche said at the time. "There is no difference between the posture of Ashcroft and the mob howling for a pay-per-view execution, and the role of Nero and the Roman mob of 'public opinion' in the ancient Colosseum's barbarous, homicidal entertainments."