

"The Penalty Phase" At NPR

On NPR various announcers, most of them, to judge by their voices, about 17 years old, have been talking about "the penalty phase" of the Tsarnaev trial. "Penalty phase" sounds like something in a football game – the time set aside for that penalty kick. It does not sound right, somehow, for a trial. The verdict of guilty has been reached. Isn't it time for the punishment – not a mere penalty – to be meted out? Why not the "punishment phase"?

And why does the word "multiple" keep coming up? Sister Helen Prejean, the sweet-faced nun whose moral meddling I can't stand – she thinks no one, ever, deserves to be put to death, while you and I can think of a half-dozen people right off the bat who deserve to be, with plenty more who could be recalled if we gave it a minute more of thought – has testified on behalf of Dzhokar Tsarnaev. She met, we are told, with Dzhokar Tsarnaev "multiple times" and they discussed "multiple subjects." Who at NPR is minding the store and monitoring the language? I know many of NPR's staff – judged too old? – has been let go, over the past few years, to be replaced by vibrant and diverse new voices, but their awkwardness, their maladroitness, their mishandling of English, their badly-modulated and often shrill voices – more likely because of their being so young, so vibrant, and so diverse – just isn't sustainable.