

ROBERT BLECKER

With a gleam in his eye, Robert Blecker, a nationally known retributivist advocate of the death penalty, has managed to alienate both sides of the debate on the politically divisive and morally complex issue of capital punishment. But his position as designated outcast is nothing new, nor is his strongly held conviction that the most vicious and callous offenders deserve to die and that society is morally obliged to execute those “worst of the worst” criminals.

A radical at heart, like many who grew up in the 1960s, Professor Blecker railed against prevailing academic assumptions about the evils of capital punishment during his undergraduate years at Tufts, where he refused to major and nevertheless in 1969 earned a B.A. with honors in three fields, while vehemently protesting against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

At Harvard Law School, where he won the Oberman Prize for the best graduating thesis, Professor Blecker was one of only two students to publicly defend the death penalty. He went on to prosecute corrupt lawyers, cops, and judges and saw up close how the rich and powerful were given breaks denied to poor and powerless offenders. Later a Harvard University Fellow in Law and Humanities and also a playwright, Professor Blecker’s production “Vote NO!”, an anti-federalist case against adopting the Constitution, premiered in 1987 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and traveled to 16 states, convincing even staunchly patriotic audiences to vote against the Constitution.

Still rebellious, Professor Blecker espouses his carefully considered, yet almost universally unpalatable position in the academic community. Based on 13 years of interviewing convicted killers, and hundreds of hours inside maximum security prisons and on death rows, he makes a powerful case for the death penalty as retribution, but only for the “worst of the worst” offenders.

The sole keynote speaker supporting the death penalty at major conferences and at the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, he was also the lone American advocate at an international conference in Geneva on the death penalty sponsored by Duke University Law School.

Professor Blecker encourages emotional debate in his teaching and has co-taught his death penalty course with leading abolitionists—most recently Kevin Doyle, Director of New York’s Capital Defender’s Office—in order to give students both viewpoints. He also teaches Criminal Law, Constitutional History, and Criminals and Our Urge to Punish Them.

Frequently appearing in *The New York Times*, on PBS, CourtTV, CNN, BBC World News, and other major media outlets, and with privileged access to death rows across the country, Professor Blecker is making a documentary chronicling life on death rows and contrasting them with maximum security general population: Are they “living hell” as commonly portrayed? He, himself will be the subject of a feature documentary to be released to theatres Spring '08, which chronicles his odd relationship with Daryl Holton, recently executed by Tennessee.