

## **Judgment on Son of Sam**

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For all its shortcomings, the courtroom ceremony in which David Berkowitz pleaded guilty to six murders has produced a reasonable result. The defendant, for reasons sufficient to himself, waived all defenses including the obvious one of insanity and admitted responsibility for the homicides that so frightened New Yorkers and appalled the world. He was judged competent to enter the pleas after persuading the court he understood his situation and was able to take part in his own defense.

Some grounds for uneasiness remain. The theatrical entrances and exits of judges from Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens, each to receive the guilty pleas for crimes committed in his jurisdiction, were bizarre. The ritual questions and answers to leave a public record on matters of competence and guilt carefully avoided any reference to "Son of Sam" or the "demons" that Mr. Berkowitz had said were plaguing him and thus failed to

explore all aspects of the case. Those who want this wretched defendant executed will find support for capital punishment in this case. Those who believe that only an insane person could have committed such atrocities will deplore a verdict of guilty even though the accused demands it.

Yet it was better to bring the judges to Mr. Berkowitz than to parade him through the boroughs he once terrorized, and the court had already determined that whatever "demons" possessed him at the time of his crimes were not now interfering with his capacity to defend himself.

Public safety and humanity now require that David Berkowitz be securely confined and provided with appropriate psychiatric care. No ending to this case could have satisfied everyone, but the courts seem to have achieved the least unsatisfactory solution.

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