

Dallas Morning News
11/5/65 **How Cruel?**

Two convicted murderers were sentenced to life in prison recently by Dallas juries. In one court, the last four murder cases have resulted in life sentences.

The sentence "life in prison" sounds almost as harsh as the violent crime of murder itself. Many people visualize the murderer spending the rest of his life behind the high, gray walls of prison. But this rarely happens.

A study of Texas' convicted murderers' prison time revealed that a white man under a life sentence spends an average of 8 years and 9 months behind bars. For the Negro or Latin American serving life for murder, the actual time is 9 years and 2 months.

The most common sentence in Texas for a capital crime is 5 years, which can be served in about half that time.

A study of multi-offense criminals started in 1963 by the FBI shows that the 265 murderers included in the nationwide analysis committed 737 additional offenses after being released on parole. Twenty-five per cent of these offenses were for serious crimes — murder, rape, robbery, burglary and auto theft. Twelve of the parolees were charged with having committed another murder.

The Constitution outlaws "cruel and unusual" punishment. The trouble with our system of criminal justice is not cruelty but lack of certainty. When half the criminals in some state penitentiaries are repeaters, something is wrong. And it's not cruelty.