



AIMS OF PUNISHMENT CASE STUDIES

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THESE CASE STUDIES ARE ALL REAL LIFE
CASES. THE AIM OF THESE IS TO CONSIDER
WHAT AIM OF PUNISHMENT THEY MIGHT LINK
INTO AND WHETHER IT SHOWS A STRENGTH OR
WEAKNESS OF THAT PUNISHMENT MEETING
THAT AIM.

THERE ARE EIGHT IN TOTAL.

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Case	Aim of Punishment	Do you think it was an appropriate punishment?
John McAvoy		
Michael Fay		
Charles Bronson		
Boy George		
Timothy Jackson		
Jon Venebles		
Alice Marie Johnson		
Peter Tobin		

JOHN MCAVOY



The Crime: John McAvoy was part of a highly organised gang that committed terrifying armed robberies. They used sawn-off shotguns to hold up security vans, threatening the lives of guards who were just trying to do their jobs.

The Punishment: Sentenced to life in a high-security prison. While inside, a prison guard introduced him to an indoor rowing machine, and he discovered a natural talent for endurance sports. Through the prison's support system, he changed his mindset entirely, broke world records on the rowing machine while inside, and is now a free man and a professional Ironman athlete who visits schools to steer young people away from crime.

MICHAEL FAY



The Crime: In 1994, an American teenager named Michael Fay was living in Singapore. Over a ten-day period, he and his friends vandalised 18 cars belonging to random strangers by spray-painting them and slashing their tyres, and they stole public road signs.

The Punishment: The punishment in Singapore was extremely strict: he was sentenced to jail, a massive fine, and six strokes of a cane (a physical beating). Despite the US President asking for mercy, Singapore went ahead with the punishment. Because people are terrified of these harsh consequences, Singapore has incredibly low crime rates and is considered one of the safest countries in the world.

CHARLES BRONSON



The Crime: Originally named Michael Peterson, he walked into a post office in 1974 carrying a sawn-off shotgun, terrified the worker behind the counter, and stole just £26.18.

The Punishment: He was given a 7-year sentence, with the judge's aim to keep the public safe from him. However, the harsh prison environment caused him to become incredibly violent. He regularly attacked guards and took hostages while inside. Because the system locked him away rather than addressing his behaviour, he became much more dangerous and has now been in prison for 50 years.

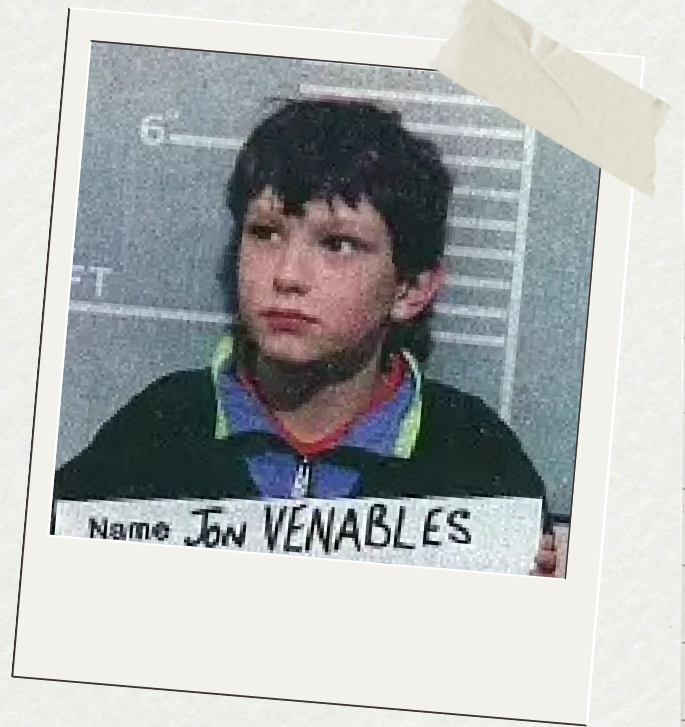
BOY GEORGE



The Crime: In 2006, famous 1980s pop star Boy George called the police in New York claiming his apartment had been burgled. When police arrived, they realised he was lying and had wasted their time, and instead found a large amount of illegal drugs in his home.

The Punishment: The judge decided that instead of a standard fine, the most appropriate punishment was a Community Payback order. He was forced to wear a high-vis jacket and spend his days physically sweeping the streets of New York, picking up rubbish while the public watched. The public felt that making him physically give back to the city was a fair way for him to pay his debt to society for wasting police time.

JON VENABLES



The Crime: In 1993, an unimaginably horrific crime was committed by two 10-year-old boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thomson. They abducted a two-year-old toddler from a shopping centre and brutally murdered him, shocking the entire world.

The Punishment: Because of his young age, he was sent to a secure youth unit where he received years of intense psychological support and education. The system believed he was fully fixed and released him as an adult with a new secret identity. However, the system failed to change his core behaviours. He was later caught committing new crimes and was sent back to prison multiple times.

TIMOTHY JACKSON



The Crime: In the 1990s, the USA introduced "Three Strikes" laws. If you committed three crimes, your third crime meant an automatic life sentence. Timothy Jackson had two previous convictions for minor, non-violent burglaries. For his third crime, he walked into a department store, slipped a \$159 jacket under his arm, and walked out without paying.

The Punishment: Because it was his third minor theft, he was sentenced to life in a maximum-security prison. The law failed to stop him from stealing the jacket, and taxpayers ended up paying millions to lock up a petty shoplifter.

PETER TOBIN



The Crime: Peter Tobin was a highly dangerous Scottish serial killer. He was a predator who kidnapped and murdered several young, innocent women across the UK, burying their bodies to hide the evidence and causing unimaginable grief to their families.

The Punishment: When he was finally caught, the judge handed down a "Whole Life Order," meaning he would never be allowed out. He was kept in maximum security at HMP Edinburgh until he died in 2022. Because he was permanently locked away, the Scottish public and the victims' families had the absolute guarantee that he could never walk the streets or harm anyone again.

ALICE MARIE JOHNSON



The Crime: Alice Marie Johnson was a mother who lost her job and was facing bankruptcy. Desperate to feed her family, she agreed to act as a "telephone mule" for a drug gang, passing on phone numbers and messages. She never touched the drugs and never used any violence.

The Punishment: Even though it was her first-ever offence and she was completely non-violent, the judge wanted to make her "pay" and sentenced her to life in prison with no chance of parole. She spent 21 years in prison for a desperate mistake until a massive public campaign led to her release in 2018.

Case	Aim of Punishment	Do you think it was an appropriate punishment?
John McAvoy	Rehabilitation	Strength of Rehabilitation - Shows that treating the root cause and teaching skills drastically lowers re-offending.
Michael Fay	Deterrence	Strength of Deterrence - Shows that fear of strict punishments can successfully stop people from breaking the law.
Charles Bronson	Protection	Shows that locking people away to protect society can sometimes backfire and create worse criminals.
Boy George	Retribution	Shows that making the criminal "pay" for their specific actions provides a sense of fairness and justice.
Timothy Jackson	Deterence	Shows that relying on extreme fear doesn't work and can result in massively unfair punishments for minor crimes.
Jon Venebles	Rehabilitation	Shows that trying to help and change a criminal only works if the criminal is actually capable of change.
Alice Marie Johnson	Retribution	Shows that seeking harsh revenge can ruin a person's life completely for a non-violent mistake.
Peter Tobin	Protection	Shows that taking dangerous people out of society guarantees they cannot create more victims.

Timothy stole a jacket because he was in poverty; Alice got involved in drugs because she was bankrupt and desperate to feed her family. Should a judge give a lighter punishment if the criminal committed the crime out of absolute desperation?

Does it matter why you break the law, or is a crime just a crime?

Singapore uses physical beatings (caning) for crimes like vandalism, and as a result, it is one of the safest places in the world with almost zero crime. Do you think physical punishment is justified if it guarantees society will be safe?

Is it better to have a harsh justice system with no crime, or a fairer justice system where crime still happens?

Boy George was forced to sweep the streets in a high-vis jacket while the paparazzi took photos of him. Do you think this was a genuine punishment, or was the judge just trying to humiliate someone famous?

If a millionaire is fined £1,000, it doesn't affect them, but for someone in poverty, it ruins their life. **How can we make punishments truly fair for everyone, regardless of how much money they have?**

John McAvoy was a terrifying armed robber who completely turned his life around and now helps kids. Jon Venables was given world-class help but went on to re-offend. How many chances should a criminal get to change their ways?

Are there some crimes that are so horrific that the person should never be offered rehabilitation, even if experts think they can be fixed?

Charles Bronson originally went to prison for stealing just £26, but the harsh, violent environment inside turned him into one of Britain's most dangerous men, keeping him locked up for 50 years. If a punishment actually makes a person worse, who is to blame—the criminal for their own violent choices, or the justice system for failing them?

If we know that locking young or minor offenders up often just teaches them how to be better criminals, should we stop using prisons altogether for minor crimes?

Imagine you are the judge and you have to make a choice between two flawed systems. Which is worse: A justice system that is too soft and accidentally lets a dangerous person go free to re-offend, or a justice system that is too harsh and ruins the life of someone who just made a silly mistake?

Discussion Questions