

Let the Punishment Fit the Crime

- 1 In medieval times, people accused of a minor crime such as theft, trespassing or even drunkenness were often locked in a wooden frame called "stocks" in the town square. Passersby could throw garbage and rotten food at them while they served their sentence. The aim of the punishment was to cause public humiliation and warn other people that crime doesn't pay.
- 2 But this kind of punishment disappeared with the Middle Ages, didn't it? Not so. It would seem that "shame punishments" are making a comeback in some parts of the USA. If you had driven through Charlottesville, Virginia last week, you would have seen a strange sight. A young man dressed as the character Bert from children's show *Sesame Street* was standing outside a store holding up a sign. It wasn't an ad but a form of punishment—for a teenage shoplifter.
- 3 Store owner Andrew Perry caught the 18-year-old stealing from his store and offered him a choice: either he called the police or the boy could stand outside the store for two days holding a sign saying "I got caught shoplifting at Halloween Express." Mr. Perry says that he was trying to be generous. If he had reported the crime, the boy would have ended up with a criminal record, which could have affected him for the rest of his life. No one wants to employ someone with a criminal record.
- 4 This is one of many recent cases of offenders being given the choice between a short-term prison sentence or carrying a sign advertising their crime. But is this any different from putting people in stocks? It seems distasteful in this day and age to use public humiliation as punishment.

Comments in chronological order (Total 2 comments)

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- 5  We need more of this kind of thing! Public humiliation really works, as many people can't imagine anything worse. Offenders accept responsibility and think twice about committing another crime. Others are deterred from committing the same crime as they don't want to experience this embarrassment. And society is given the satisfaction of seeing that criminals are being punished. If this type of punishment were more common, we might not need so many prisons.

Spongebob | Posted 09 October 6:26 p.m.

- 6  Why don't we go one step further and bring back the stocks? Public humiliation is an attack on human dignity. And it is counterproductive—it wouldn't reduce crime if we used this form of punishment more. On the contrary, it would trigger anger and antisocial behavior. It would just be a form of entertainment for the masses and could even encourage mob justice.

DustyDan | Posted 10 October 10:04 a.m.

Read the article one more time, Match the sections to the topics/questions.

- a. In favor of "shame punishment"
- b. A fairer type of punishment?
- c. The return of "shame punishment"
- d. Are things better than in the Middle Ages?
- e. Arguments against "shame punishment"
- f. Punishment in the past