

LAW 6276: History of Punishment

Punishment, from the chastisement of children to the execution of murderers, is deeply embedded in all human societies, and there are enormous consequences to getting it wrong: a government that punishes too leniently risks anarchy, while punishing too harshly risks rebellion. In this class - beginning in the ancient world, then focusing on the early modern and contemporary Anglo-American tradition - we will learn how people have tried to walk this tightrope, and how their efforts have resulted in the systems and theories we live with today. While punishment of course has directly utilitarian aims, it's also mean to communicate: to the person being punished, to the person wronged, to society at large, to other countries, to supernatural forces. We will ask what historical and contemporary punishments are trying to say, who they're saying it to, and whether we should believe them. These approaches will help us to understand punishment in America today, but they can take us further, too. Many of our debates about criminal justice reform stall over a lack of imagination about how we might do things differently, an imagination that the histories and theories introduced in this class will hopefully spark. **Exam Information:** No Exam

Credits: 2.0