



STUDY GUIDE

IS THE DEATH PENALTY EVER MORAL?

KEY TERMS: murder
emotional appeal

capital punishment
justice

sanctifies
fairness

NOTE-TAKING COLUMN: Complete this section during the video. Include definitions and key terms.

CUE COLUMN: Complete this section after the video.

What happened to Dr. Petit's family?

What arguments do opponents of capital punishment present?

What argument is used as an emotional appeal to oppose capital punishment?

What is Mr. Prager's argument for capital punishment?

What makes executing an innocent person in modern times virtually impossible?

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Towards the beginning of the video, Mr. Prager asks, “Is there nothing a person can do to deserve to be put to death? To those opposed to capital punishment the answer is no. In fact, many opponents of capital punishment equate executing murderers such as Hayes and Komisarjevsky with the murders they committed.” How would you answer Mr. Prager’s question? Explain. Do you agree with the argument of capital punishment opponents that putting a murderer to death as a punishment is the same as a criminal committing murder in the first place? Why or why not?
- Later in the video, Mr. Prager points out that, “Opponents of capital punishment argue that keeping all murderers alive sanctifies the value of human life. But the opposite is the case. Keeping every murderer alive only cheapens human life because it belittles murder.” What do you think the capital punishment opponents mean by believing that keeping murderers alive ‘sanctifies’ human life? Do you agree with Mr. Prager’s point that keeping murders alive lessens the seriousness of their crime (and, thus, the value of life)? Why or why not?
- Mr. Prager goes on to explain that, “Society teaches how bad an action is by the punishment it metes out... The death of their loved one’s murderer doesn’t bring back their loved one, but it sure does provide some sense of justice. That’s why Dr. Petit... wants the murderers of his wife and daughters put to death. In his words, death ‘is really the only true just punishment for certain heinous and depraved murders.’” Do you agree with Mr. Prager’s notion that scaling consequences are commensurate with the severity of an offence in a society? Why or why not? Why do you think that so many people disagree with Dr. Petit’s belief that death is the only punishment that fits the crime in certain cases?
- Later, Mr. Prager states that, “...opponents of capital punishment maintain that the death penalty doesn’t deter murders. This is truly absurd. Everyone acknowledges that punishment deters every other crime. Why is murder the one exception?” Well, it isn’t. Punishment deters every crime, and the death penalty is the ultimate deterrent. If applied fairly and often, would it deter all murders? Of course not. But every murder it did deter is an infinitely precious human life saved.” Why do you think that capital punishment opponents argue that the death penalty doesn’t deter murders, even though common sense and statistics don’t support their claim? Do you agree with Mr. Prager that capital punishment is valid due to the lives saved by deterring potential murders from happening? Why or why not?
- Towards the end of the video, Mr. Prager asks, “Do you really believe that the torturer-rapist-murderers of Dr. William Petit’s wife and daughters, and diabolical men like them, should be allowed to keep the very thing they deliberately took from others – their lives? Well, if you’re like most people, your answer is no. Your heart, your mind, your whole being cries out for some justice and fairness in this world.” How would you answer Mr. Prager’s question? Explain. In what ways might ending the life of a murderer constitute justice?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Cheshire Triple Murder

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Dad rebuilds life after family was bound, tortured and murdered,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What did Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky do to Dr. Petit? What did Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky do to Jennifer, Hayley and Michaela? What did the bank teller do? What did Dr. Petit do afterward? What happened to Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky?
- Do you think that Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky deserve the death penalty for what they did? Why or why not? Do you think that there will be more or fewer murders in Connecticut now that the state has abolished capital punishment? Explain.
- Which side do you think presents the more compelling and convincing argument overall- the side advocating capital punishment or the side opposing it? Explain.



QUIZ

IS THE DEATH PENALTY EVER MORAL?

- 1. To those opposed to capital punishment, is there *anything* a person can do to deserve the death penalty?**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 2. Many opponents of capital punishment believe that killing murderers is _____.**
 - a. different than murder
 - b. the same as murder
 - c. perfectly acceptable
 - d. a sad reality

- 3. Opponents of capital punishment also argue that keeping all murderers alive _____.**
 - a. keeps would-be murderers at bay
 - b. keeps their families happy
 - c. is extremely expensive
 - d. sanctifies the value of human life

- 4. Society teaches how bad an action is by _____.**
 - a. holding regional meetings
 - b. the punishment it metes out
 - c. the rate of personal income tax
 - d. how many welfare programs a person can apply for

- 5. Which religion holds the belief that only God has the right to take human life?**
 - a. Mormonism
 - b. Catholicism
 - c. Judaism
 - d. None



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<http://nypost.com/2015/09/06/dr-william-petit-rebuilds-life-after-losing-family-in-home-invasion/>



Dr. William Petit with his daughters, Michaela (front) and Hayley, and his wife, Jennifer Hawke-Petit, during a family vacation on Cape Cod. AP

Dad rebuilds life after family was bound, tortured and murdered

By Maureen Callahan

September 6, 2015 | 6:00am

On Dec. 9, 2010, the world first heard from Dr. William Petit, who had lost his wife, Jennifer Hawke-Petit, and young daughters, Hayley and Michaela, in a brutal, random attack at their home in Connecticut. Petit himself barely survived. He sat down with Oprah Winfrey.

Oprah: Do you suffer from post-traumatic stress?

Petit: Yes.

Oprah: How does it affect you?

Petit: Uh, the sleep. Disruptive sleep. Intrusive thoughts. Focus and concentration at times.

Oprah: You don't think of killing yourself anymore, do you?

Petit: No.

Oprah [pointing to a family photo]: Will you ever be able to be this guy again?

Petit: Not the exact same guy.

Oprah: Will you ever be able to feel happiness again?

Petit: Ah...I'm not convinced. A lot of people tell me yes, that will happen.

Oprah: Can you see yourself building another family? Can you see yourself loving again?

Petit: I've imagined it. On good days, yes. On bad days, no.

Bill Petit, through his own inner fortitude, was not only able to survive that night but the torments to come. His survival, physical and emotional, is recounted in Ryan D'Agostino's "The Rising: Murder, Heartbreak, and the Power of Human Resilience in an American Town" (Crown).

On July 22, 2007, the Petit family enjoyed a lazy Sunday evening at home in Cheshire, Conn. Hayley, 17, had just returned from the beach. Jennifer, 48, and Michaela, 11, had gone food shopping at the Stop & Shop. When Bill called on his way home from a round of golf, his wife asked him to stop by the farm stand for fresh veggies.

By the time Bill got home at 7:15, Michaela, who loved to cook, had made tomato bruschetta and pasta. After dinner, he took the Sunday paper into the sunroom while the girls settled into the living room to watch one of their favorite TV shows, "Army Wives."

When the show ended at 11, Hayley went up to her room, and Michaela snuggled up to Jen in her parents' bed with the new Harry Potter book. Bill had fallen asleep on the sunroom sofa.

At 3 a.m., he was awoken by sharp pain. Disoriented, it took him a moment to realize he was being beaten in the head with a baseball bat, the warm liquid on the side of his face his own blood.

He could make out two men.

"If he moves, put a bullet in him," one said to the other.

The men bound Petit's wrists and ankles with zip ties, then rope. They told him they were there only to rob the house and asked where the safe was.

Petit told them there wasn't one. He was in excruciating pain and could barely see. The two men went upstairs. They tugged pillowcases over Jen and Michaela's heads, then took Michaela to her room and tied her to the bed. Hayley, too, was tied to her own bed, a pillowcase over her head.

The men went back downstairs, grabbed Bill Petit and dragged him down to the basement, where they tied him to a pole and threw a blanket over his head. He was losing blood at an alarming rate.

Back upstairs, the men ripped the telephone line out of the jack, then ransacked the house for cash. They found \$103 in Hayley's wallet but little else — until they came upon a bankbook showing a Bank of America account.

They decided to wait until the bank opened that morning. One of them would stay in the house; the other would drive Jen there.



Joshua Komisarjevsky (left) and Steven Hayes were convicted in the home invasion. AP

Bill Petit forced himself to stay awake. He could hear birds chirping, so the sun was coming up. Then he heard the sprinklers, which go off at 5 a.m.

A little while later, he heard Jen's voice above, saying she needed to get her husband's checkbook. Bill realized she was being taken to the bank.

It went quiet. Then Bill heard moans and thumps above. It sounded "as if someone were throwing 20 or 50-pound sacks on the living-room floor," he would later testify.

He heard a man say, "You are all right. Don't worry, it's all going to be over in a couple of minutes."

"I felt a major jolt of adrenaline and thought, 'It's now or never,' " Petit later testified. "In my mind, at that moment, I thought they were going to shoot all of us. My heart felt like it was beating 200 beats per minute."

It was now about 9 on Monday morning. One of the men had taken Jen to her local bank in the family's minivan and circled in the parking lot while she went in.

Jen calmly told the teller her family was being held hostage, and if she didn't come back with the money, they'd all be killed.

She didn't have \$15,000 in her account, but the teller gave it to her anyway. After Jen walked out at 9:23 a.m., the teller called 911.

Over the next 23 minutes, Jennifer was taken home, where she was raped and strangled. Michaela had been sexually assaulted, the girls doused with gasoline. Bill Petit managed to free himself and used all his strength to climb the basement stairs.

By the time Bill burst out of the house, the cops were there, but he couldn't see them. He collapsed, then rolled himself across the lawn to his neighbor's garage door.



The Petit's house on the morning of July 23, 2007. AP

Moments later, the Petit house went up in flames. Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky were arrested attempting to flee.



AP

Beginning with jury selection in January 2010, Bill Petit was present each day in court, where the first of the two perpetrators stood trial for kidnapping, sexual assault, arson and murder.

Bill was recovering from a brain injury, able to sleep only a couple of hours a night, living with his parents, waking every night at 3 a.m., the hour he was attacked.

After months in the courtroom gallery, he testified against Hayes, a career criminal who had been in and out of jail since age 16.

Bill saw the crime-scene photos, the charred remains of his wife. He heard testimony about Hayley's escape, how she died of smoke inhalation at the top of the stairs. He was subject to gruesome debate about the nature of the sexual assault Michaela suffered.

Texts between the perps were projected in court. They began at 7:45 on the night of the crime.

Hayes: I'm chomping to get started. Need a margarita soon.

An hour passed.

Hayes: We still on?

Komisarjevsky: Yes.

Hayes: Soon?

Komisarjevsky [referring to his 5-year-old daughter]: I'm putting kid to bed hold your horses.

Hayes: Dude the horses want to get loose! Lol.

It took the jury four hours to convict Hayes on 16 of 17 counts, six capital felonies. He was sentenced to six death sentences plus 106 years and yawned as his lawyer argued for life in prison.

On the courthouse steps, Bill Petit finally spoke to reporters.



Dr. William A. Petit addresses reporters on the steps of the New Haven County Courthouse. AP

“Michaela was an 11-year-old little girl,” he said. “You know, ah, tortured and killed . . . in her own bedroom . . . you know? Surrounded by stuffed animals. And Hayley had a great future and was a strong and courageous person.”

He spoke of his wife, a pediatric nurse. “She helped so many kids . . . and now she cannot do that.”

A reporter asked whether the conviction brought Petit closure.

“I don’t think there’s ever closure,” Petit said. “I think whoever came up with that concept’s an imbecile.”

In the summer of 2011, shortly before Komisarjevsky’s trial, Petit was at his country club with his friend Ron. After playing golf, they retired to the Founders Room, and Ron pointed to the young woman tending bar.

“How about her?” Ron asked.

Petit didn’t know how to react; the idea of dating again seemed alien. But not long after, the young woman called him. Her name was Christine Paluf. She was a freelance photographer, 20 years Petit’s junior. Like most everyone in Connecticut, she knew of the foundation Petit established in his family’s memory.

Could she donate her services?

Bill said yes.

They began quietly dating without ever defining it, but by the time Komisarjevsky’s trial began in September, Christine was with Petit nearly every day in court.

This trial lasted less than a month. Komisarjevsky was sentenced on 17 counts, including six capital felonies.

“We think justice has been served,” Petit said. “We want to go forward with the Petit Family Foundation and create good out of evil.”

On New Year’s Eve, Bill proposed to Christine. They were married in 2012, with Jennifer’s family in attendance. Jennifer’s father, a Methodist preacher, gave the newlyweds a framed copy of the hymn “New Beginnings.”

“Our family needed this to help us heal,” said Jen’s sister Cindy.



Dr. William and Christine Petit were married on Aug. 5, 2012. AP

Petit himself has never spoken of resilience, of how he was able to rebuild his life. But studies of POWs and Holocaust survivors have shown that those who have a strong support system and who develop a sense of purpose — who are determined to turn their personal tragedies into a force for good — are most likely to thrive.

Petit had both.

On Nov. 11, 2013, Christine gave birth to a boy, William Petit III.



Christine Petit

Bill Petit, however, resists the neat narrative that would see him healed by a new family. He told the Hartford Courant that he's sometimes paralyzed by fear.

"I used to have awful weeks and awful days," he said. "Now, most of the time, it's awful minutes and awful hours. That happened last night while I was thinking about the baby — racing thoughts, thinking, 'What if something happens to the baby? What would you do?'"

Today, Petit lives in the in-between. His Twitter feed is full of commentary on his new life in Farmington, Conn., on everything from Deflategate to biblical verses to photos of him with his little boy: at the shore, at an air balloon festival, sitting in a sunflower field.

FILL US AT DAYBREAK WITH YOUR LOVE, THAT ALL OUR DAYS WE MAY SING FOR JOY.
PSALM 90:14 NIV

— Doc Petit (@docpetit_art) August 29, 2015

He remains a victims' advocate. Last month, after Connecticut's highest court overturned the state's death penalty, he said the judges "disregarded keystones of our government structure."

It was remarkably measured, given Hayes and Komisarjevsky will now likely live out the rest of their days in prison. But it's also an indicator that Bill Petit is moving on while honoring the lives of his wife and daughters the best he can.

"I want some good to come because they would have done an awful lot of good if they had lived their natural lives," he said last year. "I want their lives to go forward, and I want to be able to pay it forward for them."