

## Why was the Bloody Code abolished in the 1820s and 1830s?

Severe punishments were meant to frighten people into obeying the law but they didn't actually work. While public executions were being carried out, the crowds laughed and drank. During the 1700s crowds at executions grew larger, partly because newspapers publicised them. Some factories even shut on execution day.

As the crowds grew the government felt that it was harder and harder to keep order. There was always a danger of escape or rescue, if the criminal was popular or the crowd thought they were innocent. The government also feared that the large crowds could become angry and riot or even a revolution may start.

In the early 1700s 40% of those sentenced to death were actually hanged. By the 1800s juries became less and less likely to convict people who were accused of minor crimes because the punishment for many crimes was actually death. They thought the punishment was too harsh. This meant that the Bloody Code was no longer working as an effective punishment. It meant that the property of the law makers was not being protected because people were getting away with stealing.

With courts less likely to convict people, some criminals grew in confidence as they thought that they could well escape being punished.

Ideas at the time were changing too. More and more people thought punishments should fit the crime and that criminals should be reformed and not just made to pay for their crimes. On reforming MP, William Meredith stated in Parliament in 1770:

*"...a man who has picked a pocket of a handkerchief worth thirteen pence is punished with the same severity as if he had murdered a whole family. None should be punished with death except in cases of murder."*

Politicians had already begun to look for different punishments which would be more effective because they would be used to frighten people away from crime. By the 1820s transportation was becoming popular and many people who had been sentenced to death were actually transported.