



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

The Officer Cain Case

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Description

A case study that can be used in a research ethics case that discusses the court trial of an officer charged with the brutal beating of a member of an ethnic minority group. Readers are asked to pretend they are a member of the jury and are asked to think about the reasons behind the verdict they decide on.

Body

[See PDF for discussion notes and opinion cards.](#)

You are a member of a jury for a case concerning Officer Cain, a police officer charged with the brutal beating of a member of an ethnic minority group. Officer Cain, like most of the city's police officers, is a member of the ethnic majority.

There is considerable tension between the majority and minority ethnic groups. Just a month before Officer Cain's trial began, another officer was found not guilty in a similar case, and the minority community exploded in anger. There was rioting in the streets for three days, four people died, more than seventy others were hospitalized, and it is estimated that property damage amounted to over \$2.4 million.

If Officer Cain is found guilty, he will lose his job on the police force and be sentenced to a minimum of five years in prison; the term could be as long as twenty years. Incarcerated police officers typically spend their entire sentence in solitary confinement since it is unsafe for them to have contact with the rest of the prison population.

You have heard two weeks of testimony in the case and the jury is beginning its deliberations. The jury must bring in a verdict of guilty or not guilty; there are no other options.

The foreman of the jury plans to call for a straw vote to begin deliberations. In a moment you will receive a card specifying the key opinions you have formed during the deliberations. You will be asked to make an initial vote based on those opinions.

Notes to Discussion Facilitator

When I present a case, I like to simultaneously display the case using an overhead projector and allow participants to read the case from their own copies. Thus page 1 of this packet (the page that includes two footnotes) is intended to be photocopied and handed out to participants, and page 3 (the one in larger type) is intended to be printed on a transparency for use with an overhead projector.

The opinion "cards" ([see pdf](#)) should be printed, cut apart, and handed out. All of the opinion cards are the same and intended to be used as follows:

Once participants have read their cards, take a straw poll. Participants voting "guilty" are probably acting from a consequentialist orientation, while those voting "not guilty" are probably acting from a deontological orientation. Discussion should not turn on which answer is "right," but on the reasons behind the answer.

You should feel free to create variations of the cards to meet your own goals.

Notes

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Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

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Topics

Teaching Ethics

Ethical Decision-Making

Case Study Method

Discipline(s)

Teaching Ethics in STEM

Research Ethics