**Unit 6: Law and Sofciety**

**Student’s Name**

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**A Case that exemplifies social change in laws**

**Stanford v. Kentucky, 492 U.S. 361 (1989**)

Before 1989, the death penalty was unapplicable to juveniles, however, the court ruling sentenced to death Kevin Sanford, a 17-year old, and Heath Wilkins, a 16-year. Kevin committed rape and murder in Kentucky while Wilkins murder a woman in Missouri (Legal Dictionary, 2019). The Supreme Court ruling in both states convicted death sentences to both. During that time, the Eighth Amendment prohibited cruel and brutal punishment for juveniles.

The decisions of the Supreme Court were precipitated by social and societal happenings in the 1960s to 1980s. Following political activism in the 1960s, crime surges characterized by youth violence and increase in gangs were experienced in the 1970s and 80s. Gun and drug-related violence increased tremendously. The majority of those who involved were juveniles. These situations led to an increase in the number of juveniles tried and convicted. Some of the offenses committed by youth were capital offenses which warranted maximum sentences.

**How this situation exemplifies how social change can affect law**

Social changes in the 1960s- 1980s brought unprecedented increased in Juvenile crimes with capital offenses. This complicated the law because the Eighth Amendment prohibited heavy punishment for juveniles. With youths like Kevin Sanford and Heath Wilkins committing dangerous crimes like rape and murder the law became highly ineffective

**Legal change can affect the aspect of society**

The ruling above exemplifies how legal change can influence aspects of society. Naturally, the law prohibits giving capital punishment to juveniles, however, changes in the law disrupted this status quo. As in the case of Sanford and Wilkins, the Supreme Court, contrary to the aspects of the society, gave death sentences for murder and rape. This shows how legal changes influence aspect of the society.

**References**

Legal Dictionary (2019) Stanford V. Kentucky. Retrieved from <https://legaldictionary.net/stanford-v-kentucky/>