***Kent v. United States* (1966)**

**Issue:** Juveniles and Serious Crime

**Bottom Line:** Teens Can Be Tried as Adults

**Background**

Morris Kent, 16, who had been on probation since he was 14 for burglary and theft, was arrested and charged with three home burglaries, three robberies, and two counts of rape in Washington, D.C. Because of the seriousness of the charges and Morris's previous criminal history, the prosecutor moved to try Morris in adult court.

Morris's lawyer wanted the case to stay in juvenile court where the penalties were much less severe. He had planned to argue that Morris had a mental illness that should be taken into account when deciding where he would be tried. Without a hearing, the judge sided with the prosecutor and sent Morris to adult court, where he was found guilty and sentenced to 30 to 90 years in prison. Morris appealed, arguing that the case should have remained in juvenile court.

**Ruling**

The Supreme Court ruled against Morris, and said that a minor can be tried and punished as an adult. However, the Justices said that in deciding whether to remove a case from juvenile court, judges must weigh a variety of factors, including the seriousness of the crime; the juvenile's age; and the defendant's criminal background and mental state.

**Impact**

How the courts treat juveniles in the legal system varies from state to state. In many states, those under 18 can be tried as adults for crimes such as murder, sexual assault, or possession or sale of drugs, with punishments that range up to life in prison without the possibility of parole. In 2005, the Supreme Court abolished the death penalty for juvenile offenders, saying it violated the Eighth Amendment's protection against "cruel and unusual punishments."

Information from: <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20080915monday.html>

**Thematic Question:** How does the topic of rights and responsibility relate to this court case?

**Notes:**