# Karla Faye Tucker: Another victim of state killing

**The IWB Editorial Board**
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The decision of the state of Texas to execute Karla Faye Tucker sets the stage for another state murder. The unanimous decision of the Board of Pardons and Paroles to carry out the first execution of a woman in Texas since the Civil War underscores the increasing resort to capital punishment nationwide.

Last year 74 men were put to death in the United States, the most since the Supreme Court restored capital punishment in 1976. Half of them died in Texas. But even this horrific toll is only a down payment for the bloody work which is on the agenda. Some 3,270 people are now on death row, and the bulk of them are exhausting their appeals, or have had their appeal rights stripped away by the 1996 crime bill passed by Congress with the enthusiastic support of the Clinton White House.

As a result of this legislation, 20 government-funded "death-penalty resource centers," which provided legal counsel to prisoners under sentence of death, have been closed down. In many cases prisoners now face lethal injection or the electric chair without any legal representation.

America executes teenagers, the mentally retarded, the insane, the brain-damaged. It executes those whose cases are still on appeal, those whose appeals have been denied because of procedural technicalities, even those whose convictions are conceded to be unfair by their former prosecutors. One recent study estimated that as many as 10 percent of death row prisoners have been wrongly convicted and that 5 percent of those executed in the past 20 years, some two dozen people, were innocent of the crime for which they were put to death.

It has been widely noted that Karla Faye Tucker's execution will be the first of a woman in Texas since the Civil War. But there has been little inquiry into the social reasons for the reversion of America to the state-sanctioned murder that was commonplace in more primitive times. There is a sharp contrast between the official picture of America as a prosperous and contented society and the increasing savagery of its social relations.

Typical was Monday's editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, hailing the scheduled execution of Tucker. The *Journal* denounced the notion of "rehabilitation" as a goal of social policy, declaring its support for "the value ... of retribution, and society's proper claims thereto."

The *Journal* is speaking for a ruling class which has broken with any perspective of ameliorating the conditions of poverty, ignorance and deprivation which produce social evils like crime. It has only one answer to all social problems: the criminalization of the victims and the use of state violence against them.

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