

Executions carried out in three US states

A reporter
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Three men were executed in Texas, Oklahoma and Florida late Wednesday night, and Florida was set to kill again on Thursday.

Tyrone Fuller, 35, was executed by lethal injection for the 1988 rape and murder of Andrea Duke, a medical technician in Paris, Texas. Fuller was the 180th person to be put to death in Texas since executions resumed in that state in 1982. A lethal injection was also the method of execution in Oklahoma, where Norman Lee Newsted, 45, was put to death for the murder of Larry Donnell Buckley, a cab driver.

In a practice which is becoming increasingly common, a large number of family members of the victims attended the two executions. The mother, sister and brother of Andrea Duke witnessed Fuller's execution in Huntsville, Texas, while eight members of the Buckley family witnessed the execution of Newsted at the Oklahoma state prison in McAlester.

The most controversial and grisly of the executions took place at Starke, Florida, in the refurbished Florida electric chair. Despite claims by state officials that the death apparatus had been repaired and would produce nearly instantaneous results, witnesses were shocked as blood gushed from the mouth and chest of the prisoner, 54-year-old Allen Lee Davis, who took several minutes to die.

The crime for which Davis was executed was a particularly atrocious one, the 1982 murder of a Jacksonville woman, Nancy Weiler, and her two young children, Kristina, 9, and Katherine, 5. But the actions of the state authorities were no less horrible, and all the more chilling for their deliberate and pondered character.

Attorneys for Davis and for a second death row prisoner, Thomas Provenzano—set to die the following night—appealed to the state's highest court to block the execution on the grounds that the use of the electric chair constituted “cruel and unusual punishment.”

The Florida electric chair was replaced after a 1997 execution in which flames a foot long shot from the condemned man's head. A subsequent legal action led to a state supreme court ruling upholding the use of the electric chair once defective parts were repaired.

In the course of Davis's appeal, state officials revealed that they had not actually replaced any of the electrical components in the device, some of them more than 40 years old. Only the wooden chair itself had been replaced, with a stronger frame that would not collapse under the strain of holding a 350-pound inmate like Davis.

According to memos introduced in the suit, an engineer hired to work on the electric chair had noted that its circuit breakers had failed several tests and were “obsolete,” but the state refused to replace them because it would cost \$265,000. The corrections department also rejected a recommendation to replace the head and leg electrodes which deliver the lethal charge, although this was recommended “to reduce tissue damage” to those executed.

During the last four executions carried out in 1998, tests showed that the chair delivered less voltage than is prescribed under corrections department standards for instant death. The attorney for the state of Florida said that the test device, not the electric chair itself, had been faulty.

The court record strongly suggests, however, that the Florida authorities are deliberately seeking to make death in the electric chair as painful and long-drawn-out as possible, a form of state-imposed torture as well as killing.

Davis was the first prisoner sent to the electric chair under a death warrant signed by Florida's new governor, Jeb Bush, the son of the former president and brother of current Republican frontrunner George W. Bush. The Florida governor issued a statement declaring, “It is my hope that the use of the death

penalty sends a strong signal that the people of Florida will not tolerate the murder of innocent civilians.”



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