

Texas executes ninth inmate of 2014

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19 September 2014

Texas put to death Lisa Coleman, 38, on Wednesday, September 17 for the 2004 murder of 9-year-old Devontae Williams, the son of her live-in girlfriend. The autopsy would later show that Devontae died from severe malnutrition and pneumonia. His body was also found to show a history of physical abuse.

Coleman was killed by lethal injection in Huntsville, Texas. The execution took 12 minutes, lasting from 6:12 p.m. to 6:24 p.m., and nothing unusual happened, the Department of Criminal Justice reported. Her last words were, “I’m done.”

Texas is one of eight states that use a single-drug method for executions. Texas has been using a compounding pharmacy since October 2013 when its stock of pentobarbital, the drug used in its lethal injections, expired.

Compounding pharmacies combine, mix, or alter drugs. The Food and Drug Administration does not approve the products of compounding pharmacies, and they do not have to register with the FDA or inform the FDA what drugs they are making.

Compound drugs and the sedatives routinely given to inmates prior to their executions have been linked to such botched executions as those of Dennis McGuire in Ohio in January, Clayton Lockett in Oklahoma in April and Joseph Wood in Arizona in July.

The use of a compound drug whose qualities and effects are unknown force the inmate to become a biological test subject, violating their eighth amendment right to be free of cruel and unusual punishment.

Coleman was the sixth woman executed in the state since 1982 and the ninth Texas inmate to be put to death in 2014. Nationally, she is the 30th inmate executed this year.

Her case was unique in that up until 2011, the murder of a child under 10 in Texas was not a capital case. It only became eligible for the death penalty if

“aggravating circumstances” could be found. Prosecutors, eager to get a death penalty conviction, claimed that the victim was kidnapped by Coleman because she hid him from authorities and members of the community who could have intervened on his behalf.

After Coleman was found guilty and sentenced to death, Davontae’s mother, Marcella Williams, pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to life in prison. She will be eligible for parole in 2044.

Child Protective Services (CPS) first investigated Williams in 1995 when she was 14 and Davontae was 2 months old after receiving reports that he was being abused. At one point, he was even removed from his mother and placed in foster care. For reasons not entirely clear, he was eventually returned to his mother. By 2002, CPS had lost track of the family.

In 2004, Davontae’s case was part of a state review of 1,103 child abuse cases in North Texas. The state’s Health and Human Services Commission Office of Inspector General found that CPS caseworkers failed 70 percent of the time to act quickly to protect a child in danger.

Coleman never denied involvement in the death of Devontae, saying it was not intentional. She denied kidnapping him.

During her appeals process, Coleman’s attorney produced four new affidavits from people who knew Davontae and saw him on a frequent basis, thus refuting the kidnapping charge brought against Coleman by the prosecution. Even the 5th Circuit Court admitted in 2010 that the charge of kidnapping to be “the weakest component of the capital charge” against her.

Nonetheless, her appeals were dismissed, and Governor Rick Perry, who has overseen 277 executions under his administration, refused to grant clemency.

During the mitigation phase of her trial, Lisa

Coleman's background was made known to the jury.

Patricia Coleman became pregnant with Lisa when she was 13 years old after being raped by her stepfather. Patricia was ill-equipped to deal with a child, and Lisa was soon being abused by other family members. She was frequently beaten and whipped with extension cords. Her uncle repeatedly molested her, and she was eventually placed in a succession of foster homes. By her early teens she was abusing drugs and alcohol. At sixteen, she gave birth to her own child. She would later be diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Mitigation in Texas is only done after a defendant has been found guilty. A jury who has just convicted someone of a crime is less likely to consider mitigating circumstances when considering punishment.

It took Coleman's jury just under three hours to condemn her to death.



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