

Texas executes mentally ill man who shot police officer

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11 April 2015

On Thursday, the state of Texas executed 42-year-old Kent Sprouse, the 11th person to be executed in the United States this year. His death by lethal injection took 22 minutes.

In 2002, Sprouse shot and killed two people outside a convenience store: 38-year-old Pedro Moreno and 28-year-old Harry Steinfeldt, a police officer who responded to a 911 call after the shooting. Sprouse was charged only for the killing of the officer.

Evidence suggests Sprouse was mentally ill and a drug addict. Witnesses at his trial testified that in the year leading up to the shooting he had become increasingly delusional and begun hearing voices.

Sprouse had been admitted to a mental institution earlier that year, but was released after several days. His mother testified that Sprouse thought the CIA and FBI were trying to kill him and thought voices on television were talking to him. He reportedly believed he might be God in human form.

On the same day that Texas executed Sprouse, the Oklahoma Senate voted 42-0 to reinstate the use of a sealed gas chamber to execute prisoners. If signed into law by the governor, the state would use nitrogen gas to asphyxiate the victims, killing them over time.

This method of execution has never been tried before in the United States and there is no known case of it being used on humans anywhere else in the world. California and several other states and municipalities ban the practice for the killing of animals.

Desperate to continue their execution programs, state governments are trying to find new ways of killing prisoners in the face of European export bans on key chemicals used in lethal injections. Texas, which executes more inmates than any other state, does not have enough of one lethal chemical to last through the year. Utah, facing the same issue, last month passed a

bill bringing back firing squad executions.

The state of Oklahoma was sued by inmates on death row after several prisoners suffered excruciating deaths as executioners experimented with new drug cocktails. Charles Warner, who was executed in January by Oklahoma, said he felt his body was “on fire” as he died. His last words were “It feels like acid.” Clayton Lockett, who was executed last year, was writhing on the table in pain, his body contorting, in a process that took more than three-quarters of an hour.

Richard Glossip, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, told the *Huffington Post*, “It just goes to show you how hell-bent they are on killing people... If they can gas them, use lethal injection—it should really scare everyone out there that they’re so bent on this.”

This statement, while referring to executions, could be said of the American state in general. The bloody wars in the Middle East, the escalation of police killings, and the return of execution methods associated with the Holocaust point to the barbarism at the heart of American capitalism. Since the 2008 financial crisis, the state has extrajudicially assassinated American citizens, bombed at least seven countries, deployed the military domestically to suppress protests, and declared de facto martial law in two American cities, Boston and Ferguson, Missouri.

Kent Sprouse was sent to the death chamber for killing a police officer in a country where killer cops routinely go scot-free. Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot and killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown last August, faces no charges. Nor does Daniel Pantaleo, the New York cop who strangled and killed Eric Garner.

Michael Slager, the South Carolina officer who this month shot Walter Scott, a retreating, unarmed man, has been charged with murder. It is clear, however, that

he would not have been charged had there not been a video taken of the event. In the video, Slager can be seen calmly planting a Taser next to the dying Scott.

The killing of civilians in the United States, whether by state execution or by the police, has taken on a perversely routine character. Since Michael Brown was shot and killed in August of 2014, there have been at least 746 people killed by police in the United States. 2015 is set to be a record year for police killings.

The American state is indeed “hell-bent” on killing people, but not just anyone. The victims of police violence and the 3,000-plus people on death row are overwhelmingly working class and poor.



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