

Missouri executes mentally disabled inmate

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Missouri death row inmate Andre Cole was executed Tuesday after losing a last-ditch appeal before the US Supreme Court. Cole, a 52-year-old man convicted of murder in relation to a stabbing incident in 1998, is the third inmate to be killed by the state of Missouri in 2015.

In the lead up to his execution, scheduled for 6 p.m. Tuesday, Cole waited for hours to receive word about the appeal, before finally being put to death by lethal injection between 10:15 and 10:24 p.m.

Cole's lawyers had appealed the sentence, citing clear signs of mental illness, including hallucinations such as hearing voices. Cole "hears voices over the TV, over the prison intercom, everywhere" and claims that Missouri governor Jay Nixon is "giving him messages about his case," the lawyers noted in official statements.

Cole's defense attorneys also argued that the execution should be stayed in light of the state's refusal to disclose the source of the drug cocktail to be used in the execution.

In 1998, apparently angered over thousands of dollars in child support money taken from his paychecks by the state government, Cole entered the home of his ex-wife, Terri Cole, where he wounded her and killed another man, Anthony Curtis, by stabbing. Cole claimed during his trial that Curtis started the incident by assaulting him.

State officials have unequivocally defended the decision to execute Cole, despite clear evidence that the inmate struggled with mental illness and intellectual incapacity.

"This was a brutal crime, and my denial of clemency upholds the court's decision to impose a sentence of death," Missouri Governor Jay Nixon said this week.

Judges on the 8th US appellate court voted 2-1 to uphold Cole's death sentence Tuesday, overturning a previous ruling by US District Court judge Catherine

Perry that Cole's life should be spared.

Taking place in Missouri, where officer Darren Wilson gunned down unarmed African-American teenager Michael Brown last summer, it is not insignificant that the death sentence against Cole, an African-American, was handed down by an all-white jury. The St. Louis executive for the American Civil Liberties Union responded to the ruling by commenting that the US criminal system is "unfair" and "targets persons of color."

Missouri led the nation in executions during 2014, killing 10 prisoners.

Texas, the only other US state to kill 10 inmates during 2014, carried out its latest execution this week, bringing the state's total to six executions so far in 2015. The Texas state penitentiary administered a lethal dose of pentobarbital Wednesday to Manuel Garza, the second of four executions scheduled by the state government for the month of April.

Garza was convicted of the killing of SWAT team officer John Riojas in San Antonio in 2001. Riojas had chased Garza into a residential complex, where Garza shot the officer during an ensuing struggle.

Turning to a number of colleagues of the dead police officer during the final moments before his death, Garza asked forgiveness for the pain he had caused them.

Garza wished the officers "peace and love," saying he hoped that they would "find God like I have." "I'll see you on the other side," Garza said. "I love you."

Garza's execution came just days after Texas corrections officers injected the state's final supply of pentobarbital into Kent Sprouse, another death row inmate convicted of killing a policeman.

Garza claimed that the killing "wasn't intentional" and said he "truly thought this was the cop's fault." Prior to his execution, Garza had appealed his conviction without success, claiming that his attorneys

neglected to introduce evidence showing that Garza was severely beaten on the day of Riojas' death.

"I don't see why he wanted to pull out his gun" Garza wrote in a statement to the court during his trial. "I want to say to the judge and the jury to please do justice and please have mercy on me and give me the benefit of the doubt. I don't think I should get death or life in prison,"

"I need a lot of help about how to do life. I wasn't raised right," Garza wrote, referring to the criminal records and alcohol abuse of his close family members.

Faced with growing refusals to supply the lethal drugs by pharmaceutical firms, who are under pressure from opponents of capital punishment not to sell them for use in lethal injections, US prisons have increasingly sought to acquire the cocktails from less regulated producers. The state was somehow able to procure an additional supply in time for Garza's sentence to be carried out, but Texas officials have refused to disclose the source of the drugs. Additional drugs have already been acquired to facilitate two more executions scheduled for this month.



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