# Death row in Trump's America: 4 executions in 4 days

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Four death row inmates were executed last week over a span of four days, with prisoners sent to their deaths in Florida, Alabama, Oklahoma and South Carolina. If two more executions proceed as planned before the end of June—one each in Florida and Mississippi—the same number of executions will have taken place in the first half of 2025 than in all of 2024.

This uptick comes as the Trump administration seeks to resume executions at the federal level and promote a fascistic escalation of the barbaric practice that remains on the books in 27 US states, the federal government and the military. State officials in death-penalty states have been emboldened by Trump's blood-thirsty stance on executions.

On Inauguration Day, January 20, President Donald Trump issued an executive order titled "Restoring the Death Penalty and Protecting Public Safety," which directed the US attorney general to "pursue the death penalty for all crimes of a severity demanding its use." The order specifically calls for the attorney general to seek the death penalty for capital crimes involving the murder of law-enforcement officers and capital crimes committed by undocumented immigrants.

Trump was responding in part to the outgoing Biden administration's commutation of the death sentences of 37 federal prisoners. Although the president cannot legally reinstate the death sentences of these individuals, he has called for the attorney general to "take all lawful and appropriate action to ensure that these offenders are imprisoned in conditions consistent with the monstrosity of their crimes and the threats they pose." This under conditions in which prisoners incarcerated in Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) institutions suffer brutally inhumane conditions and suicides are rampant.

Seeking to promote capital punishment at the state level, the White House called for the attorney general to ensure that each state practicing capital punishment has a "sufficient supply of drugs needed to carry out lethal injection" and to "encourage state attorneys general and district attorneys to bring State capital charges for all capital crimes." The executive directive is aimed at encouraging states officials to ramp up executions if they want to align themselves with Trump.

Of the 23 executions carried out so far this year, three were carried out by states that resumed the practice after hiatuses—one each in Arizona, Louisiana and Tennessee. The remaining executions took place in Alabama (3), Florida (6), Indiana (1), Oklahoma (2), South Carolina (4) and Texas (4). The firing squad was utilized in two executions in South Carolina, while nitrogen gas asphyxia was used to kill two in South Carolina.

The execution of one of this week's condemned inmates was expedited by Trump's Department of Justice, which ordered that he be transferred from federal custody in Louisiana, where he was serving a life sentence, to Oklahoma where he was put to death.

**Florida, June 10: Condemned man's case never reviewed in federal court**

Anthony Wainwright, 54, was put to death Tuesday, June 10, in Florida for the 1994 kidnapping and murder of Carmen Gayheart, 23, a nursing student and mother of two. Wainwright was the sixth inmate executed in Florida this year; Governor Ron DeSantis has also signed a death warrant for Thomas Gudinas, set to be executed June 24.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center (DPI), Wainwright was the 32nd person to be executed in the modern death penalty era without ever having a federal court review of his constitutional claims. One lawyer missed Wainwright's federal filing deadline, while another refused to challenge his execution. After attorney James T. Hobson missed the filing date, Wainwright's only option was to convince the court to provide him with an extension of the deadline "in the interests of justice," but he was not appointed an attorney to argue this before the court.

The Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals acknowledged that Hobson's "negligent miscalculation of the filing deadline—though troubling—was not extraordinary." That court dismissed Wainwright's claims that Hobson has "misrepresented his experience and qualifications in capital cases," saying that there was no "'causal link' between that 'apparent deceit' and the subsequent untimely filing of the habeas corpus petition." As a result, no federal court ever considered the merits of serious constitutional issues in Mr. Wainwright's case.

In last-minute appeals before the US Supreme Court and Florida Supreme Court, Wainwright's attorneys also argued that their client's exposure to Agent Orange before birth caused long-lasting cognitive and behavioral problems, and should have been a mitigating factor in his sentencing. His father had returned from the Vietnam War about six months before Wainwright was conceived. At the time Wainwright was sentenced to death, little research had been done into the effects of the herbicide on the children of its victims.

The nation's highest court rejected his appeal, allowing the execution to proceed. Wainwright received a lethal injection at Florida State Prison near Starke beginning about 6:10 p.m. He was pronounced dead at 6:22 p.m., according to a spokesman for the governor.

**Alabama, June 10: State carries out its sixth execution by nitrogen asphyxiation**

Gregory Hunt, 65, was sentenced to death for the 1988 murder of Karen Lane, 32, in Walker County, Alabama. He was executed Tuesday, June 10, the same day as Anthony Wainwright in Florida. Hunt was the sixth

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person killed in Alabama by nitrogen hypoxia, and the second to die by this method in 2025. Alabama killed death row inmate Kenneth Eugene Smith on January 25, 2024, in the first ever nitrogen asphyxiation execution in the US.

A report in the *Daily Mail* detailed the gruesome procedure at the Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore on June 10:

> Strapped to a gurney with a blue-rimmed mask covering his entire face, Hunt gave no final words but appeared to give a thumbs-up sign and a peace sign with his fingers.
>
> The gas began flowing sometime after 5:55 p.m., but it was not clear exactly when.
>
> At 5:57 p.m. Hunt briefly shook, gasped and raised his head off the gurney. He let out a moan at about 5:59 p.m. and raised his feet.
>
> He took a series of four or more gasping breaths with long pauses in between, and made no visible movements after 6:05 p.m.
>
> The shaking movements and gasps were similar to previous nitrogen executions in Alabama.

**Oklahoma, June 12: Justice Department transfers federal inmate to state for execution**

John Fitzgerald Hanson, 61, was sentenced to die for the 1999 shooting death of Mary Agnes Bowles, 77, after he and another man stole her car and kidnapped her from a mall. The men also killed witness Jerald Thurman.

Hanson's execution was only made possible by the Trump administration's approval of his transfer from federal custody in Louisiana to Oklahoma in February for the express purpose of having him put to death. Hanson had been serving a life sentence in Louisiana for bank robbery and other crimes.

Hanson's execution had been scheduled for December 15, 2022, but the Biden administration blocked his transfer to Oklahoma. Three days after Trump's "Restoring the Death Penalty" executive order, US Attorney General Pam Bondi directed the federal BPO to transfer Hanson from Louisiana. He arrived in Oklahoma in March.

Three days before Hanson's scheduled execution, Oklahoma County District Judge Richard Ogden granted him a stay of execution based on Hanson's argument that one of three members of the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board who voted 3-2 against recommending him clemency, was biased, having been a prosecutor in Tulsa County when Hanson was resentenced to death in 2006.

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond appealed the ruling and the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals overturned the county judge's ruling, allowing the execution to proceed. Hanson was executed by lethal injection at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester and was pronounced dead at 10:11 a.m.

When Bowles' grand-niece, Alana Price of New York City, learned that "the Trump administration had suddenly greenlighted" Hanson's execution, she told *USA Today* that she was upset, referring to her grand uncle's disabilities.

"It gives me a sick feeling of guilt and complicity to know that this execution has occurred invoking the name of Aunt Mary and, as one who loved her, implicitly me," she said. "Executions like these don't heal violence—they reproduce the violence and make the pain worse, forcing everyone in our society to be complicit in murder."

**South Carolina, June 13: The "choice" between lethal injection and the firing squad**

Stephen Stanko, 57, was convicted and sentenced to death for the 2005 murder of Henry Lee Turner, a father of three. He received a death sentence separately for the murder of his girlfriend, 43, and the rape of the girlfriend's daughter, 15.

Stanko had originally elected to die by firing squad, which the South Carolina legislature in 2021 had authorized for use in executions, alongside the electric chair and lethal injection. He changed his mind, choosing lethal injection after autopsy results from the last prisoner to die by firing squad showed the bullets from the three execution volunteers nearly missed the man's heart.

An autopsy photo of Mikal Mahdi, who died by firing squad April 11, showed only two distinct wounds. A Corrections Department spokeswoman claimed that all three bullets hit Mahdi, but a pathologist hired by attorneys representing condemned inmates said that since there was only one photo taken post-mortem, and Mahdi's clothes were not examined, that conclusion could not be assumed.

"The shooters missed the intended target area and the evidence indicates that he was struck by only two bullets, not the prescribed three. Consequently, the nature of the internal injuries from the gunshot wounds resulted in a more prolonged death process," stated the pathologist, Dr. Jonathan Arden.

Arden said it was likely it could have taken 30 to 60 seconds for Mahdi to lose consciousness, during which time Mahdi would have suffered excruciating pain as his lungs tried to expand against a broken sternum and he experienced "air hunger" as his lungs tried, and failed, to inhale oxygen, Arden said.

Stanko received a lethal injection at the Broad River Correctional Institution in Columbia and was pronounced dead at 6:34 p.m. His lengthy final words were read by his attorneys. They read in part:

> We execute people in this country for moments in their life. For over 20 years, people have only seen these moments and judged us for those alone. I have lived approximately twenty thousand nine hundred and seventy-three days (20973) but I am judged solely for one (1).
>
> I am NOT trying to lessen what has happened. There is no way for me to EVER make up for what happened. That has been my life for over 20 years.
>
> If I spent another 20973 days apologizing, it would not be enough for that day, but that was NOT my only day.

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