

# Double state murder: Alabama inmate executed by nitrogen asphyxiation, and a lethal injection in Texas

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The United States executed two death row inmates Thursday evening, September 25—one in Alabama and one in Texas—as the number of state-sanctioned killings continues to rise. The executions of Geoffrey Todd West in Alabama and Blaine Milam in Texas brought the national total of executions to 33, making 2025 the year with the most state killings since 2014. The US Supreme Court denied both West and Milam’s final appeals, allowing their executions to proceed.

This uptick in executions is directly linked to the assault on democratic rights orchestrated by the Trump administration. Following his inauguration, Trump signed an executive order titled “Restoring the Death Penalty and Protecting Public Safety,” whose stated aim is to ensure that capital punishment laws are “respected and faithfully implemented.” This measure directed the attorney general to challenge those few Supreme Court rulings that limit the ability of federal and state governments to carry out executions.

The order also directed the attorney general to seek the death penalty in federal cases “for all crimes of a severity demanding its use,” with specific emphasis on cases involving the murder of law enforcement officers, and any “capital crime committed by an alien illegally present in this country.”

Just hours before the back-to-back executions Thursday, Trump signed a presidential memo directing US Attorney General Pam Bondi to “fully enforce” the death penalty in Washington, D.C. for federal crimes. The jurisdiction abolished capital punishment in 1981 and residents voted against its reinstatement in a 1992 referendum. The memo explicitly states that enforcing federal capital punishment remains a priority for the president.

Taking its cue from the White House, the state of Florida has passed a bill mandating the automatic imposition of the death penalty for “unauthorized aliens” convicted of a capital offense. This nakedly fascist policy flies in the face of longstanding US legal precedent and international laws prohibiting mandatory death sentences.

## Alabama’s fifth nitrogen gas asphyxiation

The state of Alabama executed Geoffrey Todd West, 50, using the new method of nitrogen hypoxia. West was convicted of the 1997 capital murder of Margaret Parrish Berry, 33. Berry, a mother of two, was shot in the back of the head while lying on the floor behind the counter during a gas station robbery in Etowah County. Court documents indicate that West, 21 at the time and desperate for cash, killed Berry to ensure there was no witness after taking just \$250 from a cookie can.

West repeatedly expressed deep remorse for the crime, stating he wished he could “take that back” and that he struggled at 50 to understand what he did at a much earlier age. West was pronounced dead at 6:22 p.m. local time at the William C. Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore.

West’s execution proceeded despite the opposition of the victim’s family. Will Berry, one of Margaret Berry’s sons, actively campaigned against the state murder of West, joining death penalty opponents to protest outside the Alabama capitol. Berry wrote that executing West would not “bring my mother back; it will only add to the pain.” He condemned the state’s action: “I don’t want this man to die. Vengeance isn’t for the state. It’s for the Lord.”

West and Berry exchanged letters and requested to meet ahead of the scheduled execution so Berry could offer forgiveness and comfort, but this request was denied by prison officials, citing security reasons. Alabama Governor Kay Ivey brutally rejected the plea for clemency, stating that it was her “solemn duty to carry out these laws” because Alabama law “imposes death as punishment for the most egregious forms of murder.” West’s attorneys condemned the denial of the meeting as a “lost opportunity—for closure, for healing, for humanity.”

## Nitrogen hypoxia: A modern method of torture

Geoffrey West was the fifth person executed in Alabama using nitrogen gas asphyxiation. The development of this grotesque technique—which involves strapping a mask to the inmate’s face and forcing them to breathe pure nitrogen, depriving them of oxygen—represents the state’s desperate scramble to keep the assembly lines of state-sponsored killing in operation.

Nitrogen hypoxia, which critics correctly define as conscious suffocation, was authorized by Alabama lawmakers in 2018, followed by legislatures in Louisiana, Mississippi and Oklahoma. This search for an alternative method arose because pharmaceutical companies ceased providing the drugs used in lethal injections amid public outrage over the cruelty of the process. Nationally, six people have now died via nitrogen gas, five in Alabama and one in Louisiana.

Alabama earned the macabre distinction of being the first government entity internationally in modern times to use this method when it executed Kenneth Eugene Smith in January 2024. Witnesses and spiritual advisers described Smith convulsing, violently shaking the gurney, and gasping for air for several minutes before finally losing consciousness—a prolonged agony which easily fits the legal definition of torture. Despite claims by state officials that the process is quick and humane, the three subsequent nitrogen hypoxia executions in Alabama have seen inmates grimacing and quivering, movements which critics argue demonstrate the struggle against suffocation.

### **Texas executes inmate for “exorcism murder”**

Just 18 minutes after West was pronounced dead, Texas carried out the execution of Blaine Milam, 35, by lethal injection in Huntsville. He was pronounced dead at 6:40 p.m. local time. Milam was condemned to death for the December 2008 assault and murder of his fiancé’s 13-month-old daughter, Amora Bain Carson.

Milam and the child’s mother, who were both 18 at the time, claimed Amora was possessed by a demon. Over a horrific period of 30 hours, they subjected the baby to torture in a supposed effort to “exorcise” the demon. Investigators found Amora’s brutally injured body covered in 24 human bite marks, 18 broken ribs, multiple skull fractures, extensive injuries to her genitals, cuts and bruises. A forensic pathologist was unable to determine a specific cause of death due to the sheer number of injuries to the infant’s body.

Milam’s execution proceeded despite arguments from his attorneys that his conviction was based on “now-discredited” bite mark evidence, which a 2016 report noted is “clearly scientifically unreliable.” His defense also claimed that his intellectual functioning and adaptive skills were significantly

impaired, meeting the clinical criteria for intellectual disability that requires exclusions from the death penalty as cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment. The office of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, fascistic Governor Greg Abbott’s partner in attacks on the US Constitution and democratic rights, ensured the execution proceeded.

### **Upcoming executions in 2025**

The barbaric US assembly line of death shows no signs of slowing. Following the double execution of West and Milam, nine more executions are scheduled in eight states by the end of the year. This trajectory puts the United States on pace to put at least 42 inmates to death in 2025, a number not reached since 2012. October is anticipated to be a particularly busy month in US execution chambers, with seven state killings scheduled, including five over a four-day period, in each in Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri and Texas.

Florida leads the nation in state killings this year, setting a new record of 12 executions already carried out, a number driven by Governor Ron DeSantis signing more death warrants than ever before. The state is scheduled to lethally inject Victor Tony Jones on September 30, which will mark Florida’s 13th execution this year.

Among the notable upcoming state murders is the October 16 execution in Texas of Rob Roberson, who previously won a rare stay of execution due to significant questions regarding his guilt. Roberson’s attorneys argue that he should not be executed because he was wrongfully convicted based on discredited scientific evidence related to “shaken baby syndrome.” They contend that new evidence shows his daughter Nikki died from chronic illness, not violent shaking as prosecutors claimed.

Additionally, Roberson’s lawyers point to his undiagnosed autism, arguing this neurodevelopmental condition affected his ability to receive a fair trial and should be considered in seeking clemency. They have sought a new trial, highlighting numerous constitutional violations during his original prosecution, including improper judicial involvement and custody disputes that influenced the case.



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