Three executions in a single day in America: Far more than a scheduling coincidence

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Three men were put to death in the United States on Thursday, August 13, the first time since January 7, 2010 that three executions were carried out in a single day. Tennessee and Oklahoma killed their prisoners within 30 minutes of each other in the morning and Alabama followed suit in the evening. All three men died by lethal injection.

These state killings passed with only perfunctory coverage: wire copy noting the coincidence of scheduling, recording times of death, moving on. There was little examination of who these men were, of the courts that cleared the way, of the brutality of what took place, or the fact that the killings occurred amid the most sweeping campaign of domestic and foreign repression in modern American history.

While the scheduling of the three executions on the same day was a coincidence, this confluence of brutality was no accident. All three executions took place in states governed by Republicans—Bill Lee in Tennessee, Kevin Stitt in Oklahoma, Kay Ivey in Alabama—who have aligned themselves with Trump's assertion of unconstrained executive power. Their actions are in line with Trump's executive order on Inauguration Day, "Restoring the Death Penalty and Protecting Public Safety," which called for a dramatic expansion of the use of the death penalty.

Hines, 66, was executed at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution in Nashville for the 1985 killing of Catherine Jean Jenkins, a 54-year-old motel housekeeper. Pronounced dead at 10:43 a.m. CDT, Hines had spent 40 years under sentence of death and maintained his innocence throughout—DNA from two unidentified men was found on the victim's clothing, none of it his, and crime-scene fingerprints matched no one. That claim was never heard; it had been procedurally defaulted, and the Supreme Court summarily reversed a 2020 appellate ruling that would have granted him a new trial.

Hines had suffered multiple strokes, was living in the prison infirmary, could not walk, and was partially paralyzed. His attorneys argued the execution team could not safely obtain IV access—the same physician who had spent over an hour failing to do so during Tennessee's aborted May execution of Tony Carruthers, a family doctor who had not placed a central line in over a decade. Tennessee's position was that his competence did not matter: maladministration claims, the state argued, are not cognizable under the Eighth Amendment. The Supreme Court denied a stay without explanation. Witnesses reported Hines groaning, then choking. His attorney said afterward he had been "poisoned to death," and described a childhood of extreme poverty and abuse. Hines had met his son for the first time four days earlier. The son watched him die.

Cuesta-Rodríguez, 70, was executed at 10:13 a.m. CDT in McAlester for the 2003 killing of Olimpia Fisher, his common-law wife. He turned to two relatives, mouthed "I love you," and breathed laboriously for several minutes before death. A Cuban immigrant, he had grown up in poverty, was beaten as a child, suffered a traumatic bus crash requiring a metal skull plate, was subjected to electroshock, and had dementia at the time of his death. He asked the parole board not to grant him clemency, and the board's chair said he had been inclined toward mercy until Cuesta-Rodríguez requested death.

Williams, 42, was executed Thursday evening at Holman prison for the 2021 killing of five-year-old Kamarie Holland. He waived a sentencing jury, refused to allow any evidence of his background or mental health, represented himself on appeal, and personally petitioned to be moved to the top of the execution list—a case concluded in roughly two years where such cases ordinarily take two decades. Research cited by the Equal Justice Initiative found that of 106 death-row execution "volunteers" nationally, 88 percent had documented mental illness or severe substance-abuse disorders. Alabama, whose nitrogen asphyxiation protocol had just been ruled unconstitutional, reverted to lethal injection—the method by which it holds the national record for the longest execution gone wrong, three hours, and whose drug protocol remains secret. Witnesses described a convulsive reaction after the first drug was injected. A member of the execution team performed two consciousness checks on Williams. He was pronounced dead at 6:16 p.m. CDT.

Poverty, brain damage, abuse, untreated illness defined them. None of the three had anything resembling a nurtured life; two were physically or cognitively destroyed at the time of death. Their appeals were foreclosed by procedure, by waiver, or by a doctrine holding that the executioner's incompetence raises no constitutional question. Clemency was ceremony. The deaths themselves were medically supervised suffocations—autopsy studies find the great majority of lethal-injection deaths show pulmonary edema, the drowning sensation both Hines and Cuesta-Rodríguez visibly exhibited.

Methods of terror, at home

In 2025 the leading executing states were China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United States, whose total nearly doubled, from 25 to 47. Only 17 countries executed anyone; 113 have abolished the practice outright. The US remains the only country in the Americas that still practices capital punishment. Since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty, 1,676 men, women and juvenile offenders have been executed. These state killings are one component of a general offensive for repression and dictatorship domestically.

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US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has shifted to mass workplace raids under an arrest quota of 2,000 people a day. A secret DHS memo authorized agents to enter homes without a warrant, using only administrative paperwork.

Nearly 300 immigrants have been rendered to El Salvador's CECOT mega-prison under the Alien Enemies Act, held for months without counsel under conditions amounting to torture. ICE operates additional black sites where people are held for weeks without sanitation or legal access.

In January 2026 in Minneapolis, ICE and CBP agents killed Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti; an EMT who tried to reach Pretti after he was shot was physically restrained by masked officers and prevented from administering CPR. In July, ICE shot and killed Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston, Texas, and Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero in Biddeford, Maine; neither was the intended target of an ICE immigration raid.

Congress has funded a $38.3 billion detention network of 92,600 beds. GEO Group and CoreCivic, in which Trump holds personal stock, reported $1.4 billion in combined quarterly revenue. Three detainees have died at the Delaney Hall facility in Newark after ICE's contracts declared that state and local health law "shall not apply."

The government is now preparing to spend as much as $20 million on electric-shock gloves for ICE agents, designed to inflict intense pain through direct physical contact, including during kidnapping operations, detention and forced deportations.

Methods of terror, abroad

The Iran war opened with the assassination of Iran's head of state and roughly 40 senior officials, killed alongside members of his family, while diplomatic talks with Washington were still ongoing. The war was launched without congressional authorization, announced in a video posted to social media at 2:30 a.m.

Strikes in Iran have been extended from military targets to bridges, power plants and ports. A girls' elementary school was hit in Minab, with roughly 150 schoolchildren reported killed in the war's opening hours. Trump has asked whether low-yield nuclear weapons against underground missile sites are "doable."

As of July, 18 American soldiers have been killed and more than 430 wounded, among forces already strained. The carrier USS Abraham Lincoln has been at sea for over 260 days, with sailors reportedly attempting to go overboard amid mental health struggles. Soldiers describe broken plumbing, food shortages and plummeting morale.

Israel—with full US backing and coordination—has imposed a total blockade of food, water, fuel and medicine in Gaza. At least 66 children have died of malnutrition. The US-Israeli "Gaza Humanitarian Foundation" set up aid points that function as killing zones. More than 400 Palestinians were killed in a single day in March 2025, an attack the White House acknowledged it was informed of in advance.

Trump's stated plan—"The US will take over the Gaza Strip ... We'll own it," with the population expelled to Sudan and Somalia—is a revival of the logic of forced population transfer perfected by the Nazis. Every strike in Gaza is carried out with American weapons.

A ruling class atop a powder keg

The pursuit of these atrocities, along with the continued use of capital punishment, reflects a system in crisis, driven by economic breakdown, trade war and inter-imperialist rivalry pushing toward broader war.

Popular support for capital punishment has fallen to 52 percent, the lowest since 1972, and to 41 percent among adults under 35. The Democratic Party offers no channel for that sentiment: in 2024 it dropped abolition of the death penalty from its platform for the first time in over a decade. The party has taken no serious action against ICE, complaining instead that Trump has mismanaged rather than that he has waged war and repression at all.

Nor can workers look to the union apparatus. UAW President Shawn Fain and Teamsters President Sean O'Brien have both embraced Trump's tariff program, the economic scaffolding of war preparation. The value these officials place on workers' lives is witnessed into the plants: Ronald Adams Sr., 63, crushed to death at Stellantis' Dundee Engine Complex on April 7, 2025, when a gantry crane engaged during maintenance—15 months on, no findings have been released. Antonio Gaston, 53, was crushed at the Toledo Assembly Complex in August 2024. Gregory Knopf, 61, was crushed at Ford's Sharonville Transmission Plant in March 2026. The bureaucracy that cheers trade war has said almost nothing about any of these tragic deaths.

How should we understand the executions of three men in a single day in America? Was this simply a ghastly fluke? Friedrich Engels, in his *Dialectics of Nature*, confronted the common-sense view that treats chance and necessity as mutually exclusive opposites. "What can be more sharply contradictory than these two thought determinations?" he asked. "How is it possible that both are identical, that the accidental is necessary, and the necessary is also accidental?" Against both the metaphysical outlook, which dismisses whatever cannot be explained as mere chance, and the mechanical determinism that denies chance altogether, Engels endorsed Hegel's proposition that "the accidental is necessary, that necessity determines itself as chance, and, on the other hand, this chance is rather absolute necessity."

The convergence of three execution dates on a single Thursday in August is, in a narrow sense, the product of separate dockets, separate governors, separate court calendars. But to treat it as random is to abandon the attempt to understand it. As Engels wrote, science "has to investigate precisely that which we do not know." Necessity does not announce itself; it works through what appears to be chance. Three state apparatuses, all governed by right-wing Republican allies of Donald Trump, arrived at the same date because they are moving in the same direction under the same political pressures. The coincidence is the surface expression of a deeper logic—the logic of a society in which state killing has become a routine instrument of class rule.

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