

Executions this week in Arizona, Texas and Georgia

By Kate Randall
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Three men were sent to their deaths this week, one each in the states of Arizona, Texas and Georgia. Twenty-nine people have been executed so far this year in the US. Since the US Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976, 1,263 individuals have been put to death across the country. Currently, 32 US states carry out the death penalty, a barbaric practice that has been outlawed in the vast majority of industrialized nations.

This week's state killings follow the July 7 execution in Texas of Humberto Leal Garcia Jr., in violation of international law. Leal, a Mexican national, was denied consular access on his arrest, but the US Supreme Court refused to block his execution and Texas Governor Rick Perry refused to grant a stay. (See "Texas sends Mexican national to death in violation of international law")

Arizona

Thomas West, 52, was executed in Arizona on Tuesday, July 19. West was sentenced to death for the July 1987 murder of Donald Bortle in Tucson, whom he brutalized after breaking into the man's trailer to steal stereo equipment.

At West's clemency hearing last week at the Eyman prison in Florence, Arizona, relatives, lawyers and psychologists argued that his sentence be commuted to life in prison because he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder due to physical and sexual abuse as a child.

In a letter arguing for clemency, Catholic Bishop Jerry Kicanas of the Diocese of Tucson noted that "there is a good likelihood that Mr. West was abused, not just by one perpetrator, but probably three times by three different individuals: a special education teacher, a neighbor, and possibly a priest."

The Arizona Board of Executive Clemency ruled three to five against commutation of West's sentence, allowing the execution to proceed.

West's attorneys had also argued that the director of the Arizona Department of Corrections had too much authority in determining how condemned inmates are put to death. In particular, they cited the department's continued use of catheters surgically implanted in a prisoner's groin to deliver the lethal drugs, instead of injecting them through "peripheral lines," like a common IV, in the arm, hand or ankle.

A three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Monday that the execution could go forward if the legal protocol were followed. West's catheter could be seen inserted into his arm just before 11 a.m. Tuesday.

However, according to the *Tucson Citizen*, Dale Bach from the Office of the Federal Public Defense in Phoenix reported that "West signaled his attorneys to show that the executioners had inserted the femoral line as well."

West flashed the peace sign before the execution got under way. He was pronounced dead at 11:01 a.m.

Texas

Mark Stroman was executed on Wednesday, July 20, for the 2001 shootings of three South Asian convenience store workers in the Dallas, Texas area. Wagar Husan, a Pakistani immigrant, and Vasudev Patel, a naturalized US citizen from India, were killed.

Rais Bhuiyan, a Bangladeshi Muslim, was critically injured but survived. He is now blind in one eye and still has 35 gunshot pellets embedded in his face. During his recovery, he pledged to "dedicate his life to the poor and needy." He subsequently campaigned,

along with the families of Stroman's two other victims, for their attacker's life to be spared.

The shootings took place in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Stroman, an alleged member of the Aryan Brotherhood at the time, reportedly carried out the shootings with the intention of gunning down people of Middle Eastern descent "as a patriotic response to terrorism."

Under Texas law, crime victims have the right to mediate on behalf of their attacker. Bhuiyan and the families of Husan and Patel claim that prosecutors never consulted them regarding Stroman's death penalty charge. Following the trial, some members of the jury also said that they would have honored the victims' families' request and would not have agreed to the death sentence.

Republican Governor Rick Perry ignored Bhuiyan's efforts and signed Stroman's death warrant. While Texas authorities are quick to defend "victims' rights" when it suits their law-and-order objectives, Bhuiyan's request fell on deaf ears. Perry's legal team commented that "the 'right' [guaranteed to crime victims] is essentially symbolic."

Mark Stroman was pronounced dead just after 10 p.m. on Wednesday. He had long since renounced his racist views, and his final words were, "Hate is going on in this world and it has to stop. Hate causes a lifetime of pain."

The execution was the eighth in Texas this year. Governor Perry, who is considering a run for the Republican presidential nomination, has overseen 233 executions, surpassing the 152 overseen by his predecessor, as Texas Governor, George W. Bush.

Georgia

Andrew Grant DeYoung, 37, died shortly after 8 p.m. on Thursday, July 21, at a prison in Jackson, Georgia. Jackson was convicted of the 1993 killings of his mother, father and sister, reportedly to get inheritance money to set up a business.

For the first time in Georgia, a videographer was present in the execution chamber to record the event. A state superior court judge had ordered the execution be videotaped in response to claims by DeYoung's defense attorneys that replacing one of the drugs in the three-drug lethal cocktail used in the execution would cause the prisoner pain.

Following a shortage of the sedative sodium thiopental, Georgia and several other states have replaced the drug with pentobarbital, a drug commonly used to euthanize animals, to be used as one of the three drugs in the lethal execution cocktail.

DeYoung appealed his case all the way to the US Supreme Court, which refused to hear his case. Georgia has executed 51 people since the high court reinstated the death penalty.

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