

## Topics / Capital Punishment / Capital Punishment: Timeline

**2013** - On February 11, 2014, the state of Washington abolishes the death penalty.

**2013** - On October 15, Florida executes William Happ through lethal injection using an untested sedative, midazolam hydrochloride. Some fear this new sedative wears off before the other drugs take effect, meaning a person being executed may go through unnecessary pain. Many states are being forced to look for a new sedative to use during executions as they are running out of the most common drug used during executions, pentobarbital.

**2013** - On May 2, the governor of Maryland signs a bill abolishing the death penalty. The action makes Maryland the first state in the South to ban capital punishment.

**2012** - On April 25, Connecticut governor Dan Malloy signs a bill abolishing the death penalty in the state. The new law makes Connecticut the 17th state to abolish capital punishment, but does not affect the sentences of the 11 inmates on Connecticut's death row.

**2011** - John Kitzhaber, the Democratic governor of Oregon, announces on November 22 that he will not allow any more executions in his state. He explains his decision by saying that he refuses "to be a part of this compromised and inequitable system any longer."

**2011** - Georgia executes Troy Davis for the 1989 murder of an off-duty police officer despite efforts by supporters including the pope and former president Jimmy Carter. The case is particularly controversial because several key witnesses in the case had recanted their testimony.

**2011** - Serial killer Anthony Sowell is sentenced to death after being convicted for the murders of 11 women in Ohio.

**2011** - Mexican citizen Humberto Leal Garcia Jr. is executed in Texas despite the efforts of the White House and international officials. Central to the issue is a 2004 ruling by the International Court of Justice that authorities violated the Vienna Convention by not telling Garcia that he could contact the Mexican consulate when he was arrested. The Supreme Court denies a White House request to delay the execution in order to give Congress time to act, stating that it will not "prohibit a state from carrying out a lawful judgment in light of unenacted legislation."

**2011** - According to a study by Ninth Circuit judge Arthur Alarcon and Loyola Law School professor Paula M. Mitchell, taxpayers in California have paid more than \$4 billion implementing the death penalty since its reinstatement in 1978. That is \$308 million per execution, of which there have been 13 since reinstatement.

**2011** - The U.S. Department of Justice steps in hours before the scheduled execution of an Arizona death row inmate when it discovers that the state is out of compliance with federal regulations regarding the importation of Sodium Thiopental, a drug used in the death penalty cocktail. This comes after the Drug Enforcement Administration seized the drug from prisons in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and South Carolina, citing violations of federal importation laws.

**2011** - Illinois joins 15 other states and Washington, D.C., in banning the death penalty.

**2011** - After initially considering stopping production of Nembutal, an epilepsy drug used in death penalty cocktails, Danish pharmaceutical company Lundbeck considers tougher rules on distribution to prisons. According to a company spokesman, Lundbeck is "horrified" at the implementation of the drug in the execution process, which is not its intended purpose.

**2010** - The United Kingdom agrees to impose export restrictions on Sodium Thiopental, a drug used in death penalty cocktails. The export ban comes as a result of news that prisons in the United States use the drug to knock out inmates before administering two other drugs, which ultimately lead to death.

**2009** - New Mexico repeals the death penalty. The signing governor, Democrat Bill Richardson, says that the potential for executing innocent people outweighs any benefit capital punishment confers on society.

**2008** - In *Kennedy v. Louisiana*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturns state laws that impose the death penalty in convictions of child rape. Additionally, it opposes capital punishment in crimes against individuals when the victim's life is not taken.

**2008** - On April 16, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the three-drug system used for lethal injection in Kentucky and roughly 36 other states does not amount to cruel and unusual punishment.

**2008** - On February 8, the Nebraska Supreme Court rules that electrocution—the state's only means of execution—is cruel and unusual punishment.

**2007** - In December, New Jersey governor Jon Corzine signs a law repealing the death penalty in the state, making New Jersey the first state to revoke the death penalty since it was reinstated by the Supreme Court in 1976.

**2007** - In late September, two Kentucky death row inmates challenge the U.S. Supreme Court to decide whether lethal injections constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

**2007** - On August 30, Texas Gov. Rick Perry commutes the death sentence of Kenneth Foster Jr. hours before he is to be executed. The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles had voted 6–1 in favor of sparing Foster's life.

**2007** - On July 13, South Dakota carries out its first execution in 60 years. A lethal injection is given to Elijah Page for the torture death of Chester Allan Poage in 2000.

**2007** - In late June, the execution of mentally ill inmate, Scott Louis Panetti, is blocked in Texas after a 5–4 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Panetti's lawyers claim he suffers from gross delusions after he murdered his in-laws in front of his wife and young daughter 15 years ago.

**2007** - On May 22, the Louisiana Supreme Court upholds the death sentence for Patrick Kennedy who was convicted of raping an eight-year-old female relative. The judge who wrote the opinion said the Louisiana law allowing for the use of the death penalty as punishment for child rape meets the U.S. Supreme Court's aggravating circumstances test due to the age of the victim.

**2007** - On May 9, Tennessee carries out its first execution since the state's temporary ban on capital punishment ran out. In February, Tennessee governor Phil Bredesen had halted executions until the state could review its lethal injection procedure.

**2007** - On January 31, a New York jury sentences Ronell Wilson to death for the shooting of two undercover police officers. It is the first federal death sentence handed down in the state of New York in more than 50 years.

**2007** - In January, a New Jersey legislative committee recommends that the legislature abolish the death penalty in that state. If it acts upon this recommendation, New Jersey will become the first state to revoke the death penalty since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated it in 1976.

**2006** - On December 30, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein is executed by hanging in Baghdad.

**2006** - On December 15, both Florida and California suspend executions: Florida out of response to the botched execution of Angel Nieves Diaz and California addressing a state supreme court decision labeling lethal injection "cruel and unusual."

**2006** - In Florida, the execution of Angel Nieves Diaz raises questions about the state's two-step lethal injection protocol. Diaz requires two doses of drugs to complete the lengthy execution and, according to some witnesses, appears to exhibit pain. A medical examiner issues a report stating that the execution was botched.

**2006** - Attorneys for California death row inmate Michael Morales file a brief charging the execution team at San Quentin prison with incompetence. It alleges that there are fewer regulations and safeguards in place regarding the lethal injection of prisoners than those used by veterinarians in animal euthanasia procedures.

**2006** - Kentucky state Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of lethal injection. Death row inmates Thomas Clyde Bowling and Ralph Baze had challenged the execution practice in 2004, calling it "cruel and unusual." The ruling allows executions in Kentucky to resume.

**2002** - In *Atkins v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that executing persons with intellectual disabilities violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

**1997** - The U.S. Supreme Court rules that issuing a death sentence for the crime of rape constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. The ruling applies only to cases in which the victim is an adult.

**1994** - Support for the death penalty reaches its highest point in U.S. history with Gallup polls showing approval at 80%.

**1989** - The U.S. Supreme Court declares in *Penry v. Lynaugh* that it is not unconstitutional to impose the death penalty on a person with intellectual disabilities.

**1986** - The U.S. Supreme Court rules that defendants who are deemed insane may not be given the death penalty.

**1976** - The U.S. Supreme Court decision *Gregg v. Georgia* reestablishes the constitutionality of the death penalty. The decision is based upon the fact that several states have revised their death penalty laws. Arbitrary state laws had caused the Court to outlaw capital punishment in 1972. The Court reinstated the states' ability to execute prisoners once these state laws were fixed.

**1972** - In *Furman v. Georgia*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the death penalty as currently administered in the United States is cruel and unusual punishment. The 629 prisoners on death row have their sentences commuted to life in prison.

**1966** - Support for the death penalty reaches its lowest point in U.S. history. A Gallup poll shows that only 42% of the population supports capital punishment.

**1953** - Ethel and Julius Rosenberg go to the electric chair after they are convicted of espionage. Charged with turning over atomic weapons information to the Soviet Union, many feel the Rosenbergs are the victims of anticommunist hysteria.

**1930** - On February 21, the state of Arizona executes its first woman, Eva Dugan, by hanging. Misjudging the execution, Dugan's head is ripped from her body.

**1925** - Clarence Darrow and Lewis Lawes found the American League to Abolish Capital Punishment. This organization becomes one of the most influential anti-death penalty organizations in the United States.

**1924** - Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb are convicted after admitting to murdering a 14-year-old boy. Both are spared the death penalty due to the pleas of their attorney Clarence Darrow.

**1890** - William Kemmler becomes the first criminal to die in an electric chair in the United States on August 6.

**1879** - The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the public execution of a murderer does not violate the Eighth Amendment rule against cruel and unusual punishment.

**1846** - Michigan formally abolishes capital punishment, except in cases of treason against the state. The first state to outlaw the death penalty, other states soon follow.

**1845** - The American Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment is formed by representatives from several states to fight the death penalty.

**1834** - Pennsylvania becomes the first U.S. state to ban public executions. Other states soon follow by ceasing public executions without formal legislation.

**1764** - Published in Italy, Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishments* calls for an end to capital punishment, greatly influencing European nations and eventually the United States.

**1689** - The English Parliament adopts a Bill of Rights forbidding cruel and unusual punishment.

**1608** - The first execution takes place in British America, when George Kendall is executed for allegedly plotting to betray the British colony to the Spanish.

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