

DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER

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U.S. Death Penalty Continues Steady Decline as 1000th Execution Approaches

Public Opinion, Executions, Death Sentences Drop as Public Skepticism Rises

WASHINGTON, DC – Before the end of this year, the U.S. is likely to conduct the 1000th execution since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976. However, this impending milestone occurs at a time when the country is sharply moving away from the use of the death penalty. The number of death sentences, the size of death row, the number of executions, and public support have all declined in recent years.

“The 1000th execution is a significant event in the nation’s 30-year experiment with capital punishment, but it is not indicative of an expanding or strongly-endorsed use of capital punishment,” said Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC). “To the contrary, there is a wealth of evidence that the country is pulling back from the death penalty.”

DPIC reports that the national trend away from the death penalty is evidenced by a 50% decline in the annual number of death sentences since the late 1990’s. In addition, executions are down by 40% since 1999, and the size of death row has also decreased every year since 2001. According to the latest Gallup Poll, 64% of Americans support the death penalty, a sharp decline from the 80% support registered in 1994.

Since capital punishment was resintated the vast majority of all executions have taken place in the South, and only a handful of states within that region are responsible for most executions. Just three states - Texas (352), Virginia (94), and Oklahoma (79) - have accounted for more than half of the nation’s total executions. Most states have not carried out an execution during the past year. Beyond geographic isolation, more than 80% of the people executed in the U.S. were sentenced to die for murders involving white victims, despite the fact that less than 50% of all murder victims are white.

As noted in DPIC's latest report, *Blind Justice: Juries Deciding Life and Death With Only Half the Truth*, jurors in capital cases have become skeptical about the fairness and accuracy of the death penalty. More than 120 innocent people have been freed from death row during the past three decades, and the systemic problems revealed through their wrongful convictions have played a role in a turn toward more life sentences. Kathleen Hawk Norman, a juror in the trial of Dan Bright, who was later exonerated, stated, "I don't think many jurors feel comfortable playing Russian Roulette with people's lives. Jurors are recognizing that life in prison is perhaps the only responsible way to vote."

Similar concerns about the death penalty have also prompted some state legislators to halt executions or abandon the death penalty altogether. For example, a moratorium on executions remains in place in Illinois and New Jersey, and lawmakers in New York decided to drop the death penalty after a series of public hearings revealed public skepticism about the fairness of the punishment. Lawmakers in a number of other states – most recently, California and North Carolina – have appointed commissions to review state death penalty laws.

DPIC has a number of resources available as the 1000th execution approaches. There have been 992 executions since the death penalty was reinstated, and the 1000th execution is currently scheduled to take place at the end of November, though ongoing legal developments could change the schedule. A list of scheduled executions for November and December 2005 may be found at the end of this press release. Updates to this list may be found on DPIC's Web site at <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?scid=8&did=190>. More general execution information may be found at <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?did=414&scid=8>. DPIC's latest report, *Blind Justice*, is available from DPIC's homepage: www.deathpenaltyinfo.org. In addition, a 4-page fact sheet containing detailed information about the U.S. death penalty is attached for your review. To obtain more information or to arrange an interview with DPIC's Executive Director, please contact Brenda Bowser Soder at (202) 289-2275 or bbsoder@deathpenaltyinfo.org

The Death Penalty Information Center is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. The Center was founded in 1991 and prepares in-depth reports, issues press releases, conducts briefings for journalists, and serves as a resource to those working on this issue.

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SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING EXECUTIONS THIS YEAR

| Projected Execution Number | Date | State | Name |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| 993 | 11/9/05 | TX | Charles Thacker |
| 994 | 11/11/05 | NC | Steven Van McHone |
| 995 | 11/15/05 | TX | Robert Rowell |
| | 11/15/05 | OH | John Spirko - Stayed |
| 996 | 11/16/05 | TX | Shannon Thomas |
| 997 | 11/18/05 | NC | Elias Hanna Syriani |
| 998 | 11/28/05 | AR | Eric Randall Nance |
| 999 | 11/29/05 | OH | John R. Hicks |
| 1000 | 11/30/05 | VA | Robin Lovitt |
| 1001 | 12/2/05 | NC | Kenneth Lee Boyd |
| 1002 | 12/2/05 | SC | Shawn Humphries |
| 1003 | 12/2/05 | VA | Daryl Atkins – Stay Likely |
| 1004 | 12/5-9/05 | MD | Wesley Baker |
| 1005 | 12/7/05 | TX | Tony Ford |
| 1006 | 12/8/05 | PA | Leroy Fears – Stay Likely |
| 1007 | 12/13/05 | CA | Stanley Williams |