

URGENT ACTION

MISSOURI'S 100TH EXECUTION SINCE 1989 RESUMPTION

Marcellus Williams, a 55-year-old Black man, was executed in Missouri on 24 September 2024 despite serious questions about the quality of his legal representation at trial, the credibility of key prosecution witnesses, the state's handling of DNA evidence, and the role of race in the case. The Governor denied clemency, and the courts rejected final appeals.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

The murder victim, a 42-year-old white woman, was stabbed to death in her home in University City, St. Louis, Missouri, on 11 August 1998. At Marcellus Williams's 2001 trial, the prosecutor dismissed six of the seven Black would-be jurors. The jury comprised 11 white people and one Black person. Marcellus Williams was sentenced to death in August 2001.

On 21 September 2024, a Circuit Judge on a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit wrote that while she "reluctantly" agreed with her two colleagues that they were procedurally prevented from granting Marcellus Williams relief, she remained "deeply troubled by many aspects of the proceedings that have taken place thus far", including evidence that "racial bias infected his trial from the start", and how "the evidence in this case also looks different today than it did at the time of the trial", such as new evidence that "undermines the reliability" of "the only two witnesses to place Williams at the scene of the crime", and "additional DNA testing results on the physical evidence". She concluded that there was "nothing about our ruling today that rules out other potential avenues of relief for Marcellus Williams".

However, any such avenues – judicial or executive – remained blocked. On 23 September, the Missouri Supreme Court ruled that "there is no credible evidence of actual innocence or any showing of a constitutional error undermining confidence in the original judgment". Governor Mike Parson announced on the same day that he was rejecting clemency. The Governor, a former state legislator and county Sheriff, has yet to grant clemency in a death penalty case. This was the 12th execution in Missouri since he was sworn in as governor on 1 June 2018. In a statement announcing that the execution of Marcellus Williams would go forward, Governor Parson said that "Capital punishment cases are some of the hardest issues we have to address in the Governor's Office, but when it comes to it, I follow the law and trust the integrity of our judicial system". Nevertheless, the next day, it was revealed that at least a third of the US Supreme Court's Justices had serious concerns with the case when they disagreed with the Court's refusal to intervene to stop the execution. The three Justices – Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson – said they would have granted a stay.

In a statement before the execution of Marcellus Williams, his lawyers said: "The victim's family oppose his execution. Jurors, who originally sentenced him to death, now oppose his execution. The prosecutor's office that convicted and sentenced him to death has now admitted they were wrong and zealously fought to undo the conviction and save Mr Williams' life. More than one million concerned citizens and faith leaders implored Governor Parson to commute Marcellus's death sentence. Missouri will kill him anyway. That is not justice. And we must all question any system that would allow this to occur... Tonight, we all bear witness to Missouri's grotesque exercise of state power".

There have been 15 executions in the USA this year, bringing to 1,598 the total number of executions in the country since the US Supreme Court upheld new capital statutes in 1976. Missouri conducted its first post-1976 execution in 1989. The execution of Marcellus Williams was the 100th in the state since 1989, with three so far this year. Only Texas (590), Oklahoma (125), Virginia (113, now abolitionist), and Florida (106) have higher totals. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and under any circumstances.

NAME: Marcellus Williams

THIS IS THE FIRST AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 81/24

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