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NCJRS

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ACQUISITIONS

**CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR FEMALE OFFENDERS:**

**PRESENT FEMALE DEATH ROW INMATES**

**AND**

**DEATH SENTENCES AND EXECUTIONS OF FEMALE OFFENDERS,**

**JANUARY 1, 1973, TO DECEMBER 31, 1991**

**BY**

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**JANUARY 17, 1992**

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1992

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Both the female death sentencing rate and the female death row population remain very small in comparison to that for males, each being around 1% to 2% of the totals. Actual execution of female offenders is quite rare, with only about 500 documented instances beginning with the first one in 1632. The last female offender executed was Velma Barfield in North Carolina on November 2, 1984, the only female among the 157 offenders executed thus far in the current era.

#### FEMALE DEATH SENTENCES IMPOSED:

The current American death penalty era began when new death penalty statutes were passed following the Supreme Court's decision in Furman v. Georgia, 408 U.S. 238 (1972), which in effect struck down all then existing death penalty statutes. Sentencing began under the new statutes in 1973 and continues through today.

While some uncertainty exists as to the precise number of death sentences imposed in the early years of this period, Table 1 on the next page lists the sentences imposed each year according to the United States Department of Justice statistics and to my research. A total of 84 female death sentences have been imposed, only 1.8% of the total of about 4,581 death sentences for all offenders. Despite some fluctuations particularly in the early years of this period, the death sentencing rate for female offenders was typically about 5 per year beginning in the 1980s. However, in 1989 this annual death sentencing rate doubled for reasons unknown. As of 1990, the female death sentencing rate seems to have returned to about six or seven per year.

Of these 84 death sentences for female offenders, only 34 (40%) remain currently in effect (see Table 2 below). One (1%) resulted in an execution (Velma Barfield) and the other 49 (58%) were reversed or commuted to life imprisonment. Thus, for the 50 female death sentences finally resolved (excluding the 34 women currently on death row and still litigating their death sentences), the reversal rate for female death sentences is 98%.

Appendix A to this report (pp. 5-8) provides a more detailed listing of name, race, jurisdiction, dates of crimes and sentences, and current status for each female death sentence. While the sources of this information are many, the major sources are the outstanding data gathering effort of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc. (particularly their newsletter, Death Row, U.S.A.), and the equally fine monitoring effort of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

TABLE 1

DEATH SENTENCES IMPOSED UPON FEMALE OFFENDERS,  
JANUARY 1, 1973, TO DECEMBER 31, 1992

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Death Sentences*</u>	<u>Female Death Sentences</u>	<u>Portion of Total</u>
1973	42	1	2.4%
1974	167	1	0.6%
1975	322	6	1.9%
1976	249	3	1.2%
1977	159	1	0.6%
1978	209	4	1.9%
1979	172	4	2.3%
1980	198	2	1.0%
1981	245	3	1.2%
1982	264	5	1.9%
1983	259	4	1.5%
1984	280	8	2.9%
1985	273	5	1.8%
1986	297	3	1.0%
1987	299	5	1.7%
1988	296	5	1.7%
1989	250	11	4.4%
1990	300**	7	2.3%
1991	300**	6	2.0%
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Totals:	4,581**	84	1.8%

\* Source of data for total death sentences:  
U.S. Department of Justice, SOURCEBOOK OF  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS 1989 (1990)  
at p. 625.

\*\*Estimates

CURRENT FEMALE DEATH ROW INMATES:

Of the 84 death sentences imposed upon female offenders since 1973, only 34 female offenders remain on the death rows of 16 states. Two-thirds of the offenders are white. Half were age 30 or younger at the time of their crimes, with the total age range remarkably from 18 to 67. Three-quarters of their victims were white and a similarly large proportion were adult males (where these data are known). About one-third of these cases involved the murder of the offender's husband or lover.

The present ages of these 34 female death row inmates range from 21 to 71. They have been on death row from 2 weeks to nearly 10 years. Despite the statistically high probability that death-sentenced female offenders will never be executed, some of these women have nearly exhausted their appeals and seem to be nearing execution.

TABLE 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS IN FEMALE  
DEATH PENALTY CASES CURRENTLY IN FORCE, DECEMBER 31, 1991

Offenders

<u>Age at Crime</u>		<u>Race</u>
Under 21 =	3 (9%)	B = 11 (32%)
21-30 =	14 (41%)	H = 1 (3%)
31-40 =	10 (29%)	W = <u>22</u> (65%)
41-50 =	4 (12%)	34 (100%)
51-60 =	2 (6%)	
61-70 =	<u>1</u> (3%)	
	34 (100%)	

Victims

<u>Age</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>
Under 18 = 9 (22%)	B = 10 (22%)	M = 32 (70%)
18 & over = <u>32</u> (78%)	H = 1 (2%)	F = <u>15</u> (30%)
41 (100%)	W = <u>35</u> (76%)	47 (100%)
Unknown = <u>10</u>	46 (100%)	Unknown = <u>4</u>
51	Unknown = <u>5</u>	51
	51	

Appendix B to this report (pp. 9-12) sets forth the names of these offenders and some brief details about their crimes and sentences. Multiple sentencing dates mean that the earlier death sentence was reversed but then a new death sentence was imposed.

APPENDIX A

FEMALE DEATH SENTENCES IMPOSED,  
JANUARY 1, 1973, TO DECEMBER 31, 1991

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>OFFENDER'S NAME</u>	<u>RACE</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>DATE OF CRIME</u>	<u>DATE OF SENTENCE</u>	<u>CURRENT STATUS</u>
1973	Ward, Mamie Lee	W	N.C.	?	9-?-73	reversed in 1976
1974	Hunt, Rozell O.	AI	N.C.	?	6-?-74	reversed in 1976
1975	Boykin, Margie	W	N.C.	?	12-?-75	reversed in 1976
	Lockett, Sandra	B	Ohio	1-15-75	4- -75	reversed in 1978
	Osborne, Alberta	W	Ohio	12-15-74	6-2-75	reversed in 1978
	Sanders, Janet (AKA Miller)	W	Okla.	2-24-75	8-26-75	reversed in 1977
	Smith, Rebecca	W	Ga.	8-31-74	1-30-75	reversed in 1983
	Glenn, Mabel	B	Cal.	?	10-21-75	reversed in 1979
1976	Brown, Faye B.	B	N.C.	?	1-?-76	reversed in 1977
	Jacobs, Sonia	W	Fla.	2-20-76	8-20-76	reversed in 1981
	Wernert, Patricia	W	Ohio	11-18 -75	11-22-76	reversed in 1978
1977	Smith, Benita	B	Ohio	?	12- -77	reversed in 1978
1978	Anderson, Mary	W	Texas	1-3-78	8-29-78	reversed in 1982?
	Barfield, Velma	W	N.C.	2-1-78	12-2-78	executed 11-2-84
	Bracewell, Debra	W	Ala.	8-15-77	5-17-78	reversed in 1981
	Detter, Rebecca	W	N.C.	6-2-77	9-26-78	reversed in 1979
1979	Binsz, Michelle	W	Okla.	?	10-23-79	reversed in 1984
	Burnett, Linda	W	Texas	6-01-78	3-20-79	reversed in 1983
	Cunningham, Emma	W	Ga.	1-1-79	10-26-79	reversed in 1983
	Tyler, Shirley	B	Ga.	10-22-79	12-04-79	reversed in 1986

(continued)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>OFFENDER'S NAME</u>	<u>RACE</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>DATE OF CRIME</u>	<u>DATE OF SENTENCE</u>	<u>CURRENT STATUS</u>
1980	O'Bryan, LaVerne	W	Ky.	7-5-79	9-12-80	reversed in 1982
	Perillo, Pamela	W	Texas	2-24-80	9-2-80 & 11-13-84	now on death row
1981	Buttrum, Janice	W	Ga.	9-3-80	8-31-81	reversed in 1989
	Stebbing, Annette	W	Md.	4-9-80	4-30-81	reversed in 1985
	Thomas, Patricia	B	Ala.	2-28-81	12-28-81	reversed in 1990
1982	Cannaday, Attina	W	Miss.	6-3-82	9-23-82	reversed in 1984
	Ford, Priscilla	B	Nev.	11-27-80	4-29-82	now on death row
	Foster, Doris	AI	Md.	1-29-81	2-8-82 & 4-4-84	commuted in 1987
	Smith, Nadean	W	Okla.	7-4-82	12-29-82	now on death row
	Whittington, Teresa	W	Ga.	1-2-82	5-7-82	reversed in 1984
1983	Grant, Rosalie	B	Ohio	4-1-83	10-21-83	commuted in 1991
	Neelley, Judith	W	Ala.	9-23-82	4-18-83	now on death row
	Summers, Sheila	W	Nev.	9-14-82	12-20-83	reversed in 1986
	Young, Sharon	W	Ohio	6-12-83	9-30-83	reversed in 1986
1984	Foster, Doris	A.I.	Md.	1-29-81	4-4-84 & 2-8-82	commuted in 1987
	Hendrickson, Pat.	W	Ark.	3-10-83	4-13-84	reversed in 1985
	Jackson, Andrea	B	Fla.	5-16-83	2-10-84	reversed in 1990
	Moore, Marie	W	N.J.	1- -83	11-19-84	reversed in 1988
	Perillo, Pamela	W	Texas	2-24-80	11-13-84 & 9-2-80	now on death row
	Tucker, Karla	W	Texas	6-13-83	4-25-84	now on death row
	Williamson, Celia	W	Miss.	3-23-82	3-14-84	reversed in 1987
	Windsor, Karla	W	Idaho	9-6-83	2-28-84	reversed in 1985?

(continued)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>OFFENDER'S NAME</u>	<u>RACE</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>DATE OF CRIME</u>	<u>DATE OF SENTENCE</u>	<u>CURRENT STATUS</u>
1985	Beets, Betty	W	Texas	8-6-83	10-14-85	reversed in 1991
	Brown, Debra	B	Ohio	7-13-84	6-18-85 & 6-23-86	commuted in 1991
	Buenoano, Judi	W	Fla.	9-16-71	11-26-85	now on death row
	Houston, Judy	W	Miss.	6-03-84	11-30-85	reversed in 1988
	Thacker, Lois	W	Ind.	11-03-84	06-27-85	reversed in 1990
1986	Brown, Debra	B	Ind.	6-18-84	6-23-86 & 6-18-85	now on death row
	Cooper, Paula	B	Ind.	5-14-85	7-11-86	reversed in 1989
	Owens, Gaile	W	Tenn.	2-17-85	1-15-86	now on death row
1987	Caillier, Carla	W	Fla.	11-20-86	3-19-87	reversed in 1988
	Casteel, Dee Dyne	W	Fla.	8-20-83	9-16-87	reversed in 1990
	Cox, Sue	W	N.C.	7-12-86	10-30-87	now on death row
	Dudley, Kaysie	W	Fla.	9-30-85	1-27-87	reversed in 1989
	Foster, Lafonda	W	Ky.	3-9-86	4-24-87	now on death row
1988	Green, Elizabeth	B	Ohio	1-4-88	7-11-88	commuted in 1991
	Haney, Judie	W	Ala.	1-1-84	11-18-88	now on death row
	Newton, Francis	B	Texas	4-7-87	11-17-88	now on death row
	Wacaser, Nila	W	Mo.	8-28-87	5-31-88	reversed in 1990
	Walker, Altione	W	Ala.	3-31-88	12-15-88	now on death row
1989	Allen, Wanda	B	Okla.	12- -88	4-26-89	now on death row
	Balfour, Susie	B	Miss.	10-7-88	-89	now on death row
	Coffman, Cynthia	W	Cal.	11-7-86	8-30-89	now on death row
	Harris, Louise	B	Ala.	3-11-88	8-11-89	now on death row

(continued)



<u>YEAR</u>	<u>OFFENDER'S NAME</u>	<u>RACE</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>DATE OF CRIME</u>	<u>DATE OF SENTENCE</u>	<u>CURRENT STATUS</u>
(1989)	Jones, Patricia	W	Okla.	4- -88	12-7-89	now on death row
	Lampkin, Beatrice	B	Ohio	11-4-88	4-26-89	commuted in 1991
	Landress, Cindy	W	Ind.	4-23-88	6-26-89	now on death row
	Plantz, Marilyn	W	Okla.	8- -88	3-31-89	now on death row
	Rivers, Delores	B	Pa.	2-?-88	3-16-89	now on death row
	Stager, Barbara	W	N.C.	2-1-88	5-19-89	reversed in 1991
	Twenter, Virginia	W	Mo.	5-4-88	1-6-89	reversed in 1991
1990	Butler, Sabrina	B	Miss.	4-11-89	3-14-90	now on death row
	Hunt, Deidre	W	Fla.	10-20-89	9-13-90	now on death row
	Jennings, Patricia	W	N.C.	9-19-89	11-5-90	now on death row
	MaHaley, Marilyn	W	N.C.	3-20-90	12-17-90	now on death row
	McDermott, Maureen	W	Cal.	4-28-85	6-15-90	now on death row
	Moore, Blanche	W	N.C.	-89	11-16-90	now on death row
	Smith, Rebecca	W	S.C.	7-17-89	12-10-90	now on death row
1991	Copeland, Faye	W	Mo.	1986-88	4-27-91	now on death row
	Gay, Yvette	B	N.C.	5-30-90	8-10-91	now on death row
	Isa, Maria	H	Mo.	11-6-89	12-19-91	now on death row
	Milke, Debra Jean	W	Ariz.	12-2-89	1-18-91	now on death row
	Smith, Geraldine	B	Ill.	6-?-87	2-20-91	now on death row
	Williams, Dorothy	B	Ill.	7-31-89	4-18-91	now on death row

## APPENDIX B

### CASE SUMMARIES FOR CURRENT FEMALE DEATH ROW INMATES, DECEMBER 31, 1991

#### ALABAMA

Haney, Judy: White; age 32 at crime and now age 40 (DOB 6-29-51); murder of her white husband (hired her brother-in-law to commit killing) in Talladega County on 1-1-84; sentenced on 11-18-88.

Harris, Louise: Black; age 34 at time of crime and now age 38 (DOB 6-16-53); murder of her black husband (hired someone to commit killing) in Montgomery County on 3-11-88; sentenced on 8-11-89.

Neelley, Judith Ann: White; age 18 at time of crime and now age 27 (DOB 6-7-64); kidnapping and murder of white female age 13 in DeKalb County on 9-28-82; sentenced on 4-18-83.

Walker, Maxine Altione: White; age 43 at crime and now age 47 (DOB 9-10-44); murder of white male boyfriend (hired nephews to commit killing) in Talladega County on 3-31-88; sentenced on 12-15-88.

#### ARIZONA

Milke, Debra Jean: White; age 25 at crime and now age 27 (DOB: 3-10-64); murder of white male age 5 (her son) in Maricopa County on 12-2-89; sentenced on 1-18-91.

#### CALIFORNIA

Coffman, Cynthia: White; age 24 at crime and now age 29 (DOB 1-19-62); murder in San Bernadino County on 11-7-86; sentenced on 8-30-89.

McDermott, Maureen: White; age 37 at crime and now age 44 (DOB 5-15-47); murder in Los Angeles County on 4-28-85; sentenced on 6-8-90.

#### FLORIDA

Buenoana, Judias V. (AKA Judy Ann Goodyear): White; age 28 at crime and now age 48 (DOB 4-4-43); arsenic murder of white husband in Orlando on 9-16-71; sentenced on 11-26-85.

Hunt, Deidre: White; age 20 at crime and now age 22 (DOB: 2-9-69); murder of two white males ages 18 and 19 in Datona Beach on 10-20-89; sentenced on 9-13-90.

### ILLINOIS

Smith, Geraldine: Black, age 39 at crime and now age 44; hired man to kill her lover's wife (black female, age 37) in Chicago in June 1987; sentenced on 2-20-91.

Williams, Dorothy: Black, age 35 at crime and now age 37; robbery and murder of black female age 97 in Chicago on 7-31-89; sentenced on 4-18-91.

### INDIANA

Brown, Debra Denise: Black; age 21 at crime and now age 29 (DOB 11-11-62); murder of black female age 7 in Gary on 6-18-84; sentenced on 6-23-86.

Landress, Cindy Lou: White; age 30 at crime and now age 33 (DOB 1-20-58); murder of white male adult (her boyfriend) in Hammond (Lake County) on 4-23-88; sentenced on 6-26-89.

### KENTUCKY

Foster, Lafonda Faye: White; age 22 at crime and now age 28 (DOB 8-30-63); murder of 3 white male adults and 2 white female adults in Fayette County on 3-9-86; sentenced on 4-24-87.

### MISSISSIPPI

Balfour, Susie: Black; 27 at crime and now age 30; murder of white male police officer in DeSoto County on 10-7-88; sentenced in late 1989.

Butler, Sabrina: Black; age 19 at crime and now age 21; murder of black male infant (her son) in Lowndes County on 4-11-89; sentenced on 3-14-90.

### MISSOURI

Copeland, Faye: White; age 67 at crime and now age 71; murder of four white male adults in Livingston County from 1986 through 1988; sentenced on 4-27-91.

Isa, Maria: Hispanic (Brazilian); age 48 at crime and now age 50; murder of daughter age 16 in St. Louis on 11-6-89; sentenced on 12-19-91.

### NEVADA

Ford, Priscilla: Black; age 51 at crime and now age 62 (DOB 2-10-29); murder of 3 white females and 3 white males in Reno on 11-27-80; sentenced on 4-29-82.

### NORTH CAROLINA

Cox, Donna Sue: White; age 27 at crime and now age 32 (DOB 4-6-59); murder of white male adult (her boyfriend) in Parkton (Robeson County) on 7-12-86; sentenced on 10-30-87.

Gay, Yvette: Black; age 27 at crime and now age 29; murders of a black female age 40, a black female age 16, and a black male age 13 in Beaufort County on 5-30-90; sentenced on 8-10-91.

Jennings, Patricia JoAnn [Wells]: White; age 47 at crime and now age 49 (DOB: 8-24-42); murder of elderly white male adult (her husband) in Wilson County on 9-19-89; sentenced on 11-5-90.

Mahaley, Marilyn [Rudd]: White; age 34 at crime and now age 36 (DOB: 9-3-55); murder of white male (her husband) in Alamance County on 3-20-90; sentenced on 12-17-90.

Moore, Blanche [Taylor]: White; age 56 at crime and now age 58 (DOB: 6-?-33); murder of white male adult (her boyfriend) in Alamance County in late 1989; sentenced on 11-16-90.

### OKLAHOMA

Allen, Wanda Jean: Black; age 29 at crime and now age 32 (DOB 8-17-59); murder of female adult in Oklahoma County in December 1988; sentenced on 4-26-89.

Jones, Patricia: White; age 36 at crime and now age 40; murder in Oklahoma County in April, 1988; sentenced on 12-7-89.

Plantz, Marilyn Kay: White; age 27 at crime and now age 31 (DOB 10-19-60); murder of white male adult (her husband) in Oklahoma County in August, 1988; sentenced on 3-31-89.

Smith, Lois Nadean: White; age 41 at crime and now age 51 (DOB 9-12-40); murder of white female adult in Gans (Sequoia County) on 7-4-82; sentenced 12-29-82.

### PENNSYLVANIA

Rivers, Delores: Black; age 34 at crime and now age 38 (DOB 12-25-53); murder in Philadelphia in February (?) 1988; sentenced on 3-16-89.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

Smith, Rebecca: White; age 39 at crime and now age 41; murder of white male age 49 (her husband) in North Myrtle Beach on 7-17-89; sentenced on 12-10-90.

TENNESSEE

Owens, Gaille Kirksey: White; age 32 at crime and now age 39 (DOB 9-22-52); murder of husband (had someone commit killing) in Shelby County on 2-17-85; sentenced on 1-15-86.

TEXAS

Newton, Francis Elaine: Black; age 21 at crime and now age 26 (DOB 4-12-65); murder of husband (black male age 23), son (black male age 7), and daughter (black female age 1) in Houston on 4-7-87; sentenced on 11-17-88.

Perillo, Pamela Lynn: White; age 24 at crime and now age 36 (DOB 12-3-55); robbery and murder of white (?) male age 26 in Houston on 2-24-80; sentenced on 9-2-80 and 11-13-84.

Tucker, Karla Faye: White; age 23 at crime and now age 32 (DOB 11-18-59); murder of white female age 32 and white male age 27 in Houston on 6-13-83; sentenced on 4-25-84.