

Beat: News

Missouri man executed for 1995 rape-murder of neighbor

-, 06.08.2014, 23:57 Time

USPA News - A Missouri man sentenced to death for the brutal rape and murder of a student nearly two decades ago was executed by lethal injection on Wednesday, state officials said, making it the country's first since an execution in Arizona last month in which an inmate took nearly two hours to die. Michael Worthington, 43, received a lethal injection just after midnight local time at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre, a city in St. Francois County. He was pronounced deceased at 12:11 a.m., said Mike O'Connell, a spokesman for the Missouri Department of Public Safety (DPS).

Worthington was convicted of raping and murdering his neighbor, 24-year-old Melinda "Mindy" Griffin, on the night of September 29, 1995. He broke into her apartment by using a razor blade to cut through the screen in the kitchen window, after which he confronted Griffin in her bedroom. After strangling her into unconsciousness, Worthington raped Griffin with such force that she suffered severe injuries in her private area. Griffin regained consciousness during the rape and attempted to fight Worthington, after which he beat her and strangled her again, this time killing her. He then stole her jewelry, credit cards, mobile phones, keys, and car. The student's body was not found until two days later, when another neighbor went to check on her and found her body at the foot of her bed. When officers located Worthington later that day, his fanny pack was found to contain Griffin's jewelry and keys, upon which he was arrested and charged. Worthington initially told investigators that he had been high and intoxicated for the previous four days, but he later confessed to killing Griffin after being confronted with the evidence against him. He claimed he could not remember the details of the murder. DNA testing later identified Worthington's semen on Griffin's body. Missouri Governor Jay Nixon denied Worthington's request for clemency on Tuesday, saying there was no question about either the brutality of the crime or doubt of Worthington's guilt. "[Griffin], only 24 years old, was viciously raped and killed in her own home by Worthington. DNA evidence and his possession of items stolen from her home reinforced his confession and guilty pleas to murder, rape and burglary," he said. The U.S. Supreme Court denied applications for a stay of execution. But before being executed, Worthington provided a final written statement in which he condemned the death penalty. "I finally will get to live in peace with my true Father," he wrote. "May God forgive those who call this justice. When in truth, it's truly about politics and revenge. Amen and peace unto you all." Griffin's parents, Jack and Carol Angelbeck, both witnessed Wednesday's execution. "Tonight we watched the quiet, peaceful death of Worthington, who murdered our Mindy," Jack said. "His peaceful death was in stark contrast to the violent and painful death that Mindy suffered at his hands." Jack added: "After 18 long and painful years for our family and friends, we have reached justice. These 18 years were the longest roller coaster ride, with many ups and downs, but now it is time to get off the roller coaster and get on with the rest of our lives. We will always have Mindy in our hearts and thoughts, remembering the joy she gave to everyone who was a part of her short life." Carol said the family was relieved after Worthington's execution, explaining that they would no longer have to remember the man who killed their child. "His brutal act cut out the heart of our family, sending Mindy to an early grave and depriving us, her siblings and their children of a loving presence that would have enriched their lives," she said. Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster also commented on the execution, saying Worthington "paid the price for his callous brutality." "Mindy Griffin's parents waited for nearly two decades for justice for their daughter. She was just 24-years old, finishing the final year of her studies at UMSL when her promising life was cut short," he said. Worthington was the seventh inmate to be executed in Missouri so far this year, and came just weeks after the botched execution of 55-year-old Joseph R. Wood III in Arizona. Wood's execution last month, which fueled new criticism of the death penalty, took nearly two hours to complete, with the convicted murderer gasping and snorting.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2554/missouri-man-executed-for-1995-rape-murder-of-neighbor.html>

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.

3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168

Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA

(702) 943.0321 Local

(702) 943.0233 Facsimile

info@unitedpressassociation.org

info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com