

Beat: News

Florida executes man for brutal 1987 murders of co-workers

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USPA News - Robert Henry, who was convicted of beating two female co-workers with a hammer before burning them alive as part of a robbery, was executed at a prison in Florida on late Thursday, state officials said. It raised the number of people executed in the United States so far this year to 12. Henry, 55, received a lethal injection at the Florida State Prison in Raiford and was pronounced dead at 6:16 p.m. local time on Thursday.

The execution took place after Governor Rick Scott signed a death warrant last month and the Florida Supreme Court rejected an appeal for a stay. Reading from a written statement in the death chamber, Henry apologized to the victims of his crimes and their relatives, while at the same time speaking out against the death penalty. But he also apologized to his own family and friends, calling them innocent victims of his crimes. "To the innocent women of my crime, Mrs. Phyllis Harris and Ms. Janet Thermidor, their families, friends and communities, I sincerely apologize for my devastation to your lives, and for the grief, loss and pain that I have caused and if indeed this event will help you to heal or feel better because it is the law, I do not begrudge you your closure," Henry said. Speaking against the death penalty, he added: "Hopefully, in the not-so-distant future, this society shall truly evolve in its law and practice, in that, if we are not a society whom are comfortable with castrating and raping a rapist, and we do not chop-off the hands of thieves, well then, why would we continue to be murders (sic) to those whom have murdered. Many would argue, that is the law and my counter would be, so too was slavery." Henry was convicted in 1988 of the gruesome murders of his two co-workers, 53-year-old Phyllis Harris and 35-year-old Janet Thermidor, in Deerfield Beach of Broward County on November 2, 1987. According to court documents, when first arrested, he initially denied any involvement in the murders but later confessed. Prosecutors say Henry, who worked at a fabric store with the victims, approached Harris on the day of the murders and falsely claimed that the store was being robbed. He then blindfolded Harris and brought her to the men's restroom, purportedly on the instructions of the robbers, and bound her. Henry then went to the store office where he struck Thermidor repeatedly with a hammer before robbing the store of money. He then returned to the office, doused Thermidor with a flammable liquid, and set her on fire, critically injuring her with more than 95 percent of her body burned. Henry then went back to the men's restroom where he used the hammer to repeatedly struck the bound and blindfolded Harris before dousing her with flammable liquid and setting her on fire as well. Harris died at the scene of the crimes while Thermidor died at a hospital the following morning. In their own statement, the family of Harris described Thursday as "a sad and somber day," but only one day in 27 years of pain and sorrow. "While we are satisfied that justice has finally been served, today's execution is not the end of this tragedy. We will never know or fully understand the lasting impact of the horrible crimes committed by Robert Henry," the said. Thermidor's family described Henry as a "demon from hell," saying they hoped to be able to forgive one day. "Today should be closure, but how can you forget the brutal way in which two lives were taken, without remorse," they said. "Our family will never be able to experience what life would or could have been like had Janet been here." Thursday's execution raised the number of people executed in the United States so far this year to 12, four of them in Florida.

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