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# Why wasn't Alex Murdaugh given the death penalty?

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**There's never been a millionaire executed in the United States**



Maggie Murdaugh (left), Paul Murdaugh (center), and Alex Murdaugh.

Richard “Alex” Murdaugh was convicted on March 2 of murdering his spouse and youngest son. Those are horrible crimes. So why didn’t the South Carolina

prosecutor demand the death penalty for the wealthy white lawyer instead of seeking a life sentence for Murdaugh?

It isn't as if the Palmetto State has been shy about inflicting capital punishment. It has executed 665 people since 1718.

Among them was 14-year-old George Stinney, Jr., who was executed in the electric chair on June 16, 1944. The Black youth was convicted by an all-white jury in a one-day trial. Stinney was so small that his Bible was used to boost him in the electric chair.

The Black sharecropper Sammy Osborne was 18 when his drunken landlord pulled a gun on him. Osborne shot the white landlord in self-defense.

The Second Amendment right to bear arms isn't for everybody. Sammy Osborne was [sentenced to death](#) by future senator Strom Thurmond and was electrocuted on Nov. 19, 1943.

Thurmond was the personification of the lynch rope in the U.S. Senate, where he filibustered every civil rights bill. His bloody record didn't stop then-Senator Joe Biden from [giving the eulogy](#) at Thurmond's funeral.

Forty-five Black people were hanged in South Carolina for slave revolts, including 35 in the 1822 bid for freedom led by Denmark Vesey.

One day after Donald Trump announced he was running for president and denounced Mexicans as rapists, the white supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine Black people on June 17, 2015, in Charleston, South Carolina. They were killed while attending Bible study at Denmark Vesey's place of worship, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The arresting cops provided Roof with a meal from Burger King. He was sentenced to death, but has not been executed.

Robert Johnson was electrocuted in 1960. He was the last of 25 people, all of whom were Black men, who were executed on charges of attempted rape.

Nine white men and one Black man, all heroes, were [executed for aiding enslaved Africans](#) who escaped.

## **Freedom of choice in executions**

These statistics don't include at least 191 persons, almost all Black people, who were [lynched](#) in South Carolina.

Nor do they include three Black youths — Samuel Hammond Jr., Delano Middleton, and Henry Smith — who were murdered by the South Carolina Highway Patrol. They were killed on Feb. 8, 1968, in Orangeburg following protests at a segregated bowling alley.

The Murdaugh family was part of this state killing machine. Alex Murdaugh's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather sought the death penalty more than 30 times as prosecutors. His grandfather — [Buster Murdaugh, Jr.](#) — sent 14 people to the electric chair.

In addition to their role in filling the prisons and death row, the Murdaugh dynasty's law practice made them multi-millionaires. Alex Murdaugh's estate where he killed his spouse and son had 1,700 acres. That's three square miles or twice as large as Central Park in New York City.

The Murdaugh family's base is Hampton County, named after the slave owner and Confederate general Wade Hampton III. Following the Civil War, he overthrew the Reconstruction government which was a brief hope of freedom for Black people.

Its Black-majority state legislature — dubbed "the Black Parliament" — set up public schools for everybody. It was the best government poor white people in the state

ever had. ("Black Reconstruction" by W.E.B. Du Bois)

Some members of the state legislature are upset that South Carolina hasn't officially killed anybody since 2011. The rub is that under public pressure, pharmaceutical companies are refusing to sell the drugs for lethal injection.

So the legislators [passed a law](#) that's offering inmates the right to choose whether they want to die in the electric chair or before a firing squad. Meanwhile, a state lawmaker has [introduced a bill](#) making abortion a death penalty offense.

## **Blaming Black men**

Some legal observers felt that it was a mistake for Alex Murdaugh to take the stand in his own defense. Several jurors said his testimony helped convince them he was guilty.

A few decades ago, Murdaugh might have claimed that Black people killed his spouse and son. That's what Susan Smith did when she drowned her two sons in a South Carolina lake in 1994. It was the mercy shown by Black jurors that saved Smith, who had psychiatric problems, from the death chamber.

Up in Boston, Charles Stuart had no such excuse. He murdered his spouse Carol Stuart, who was pregnant, in October 1989 for insurance money.

Stuart claimed he had been carjacked by a Black man. One day after Carol Stuart died on Oct. 24, 1989, Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn announced a manhunt.

Black men were stopped and searched wholesale by police, with many stripped naked. Some politicians demanded that Massachusetts bring back the death penalty.

Just as Sam Osborne had no right to self-defense in South Carolina, Black men in Boston didn't have Fourth Amendment rights against illegal searches.

This [police terror continued](#) even after Charles Stuart committed suicide by jumping off a bridge on Jan. 4, 1990. Stuart's own brother said he was guilty.

The U.S. government has also used this tactic. The CIA needed to rub out Mary Pinchot Meyer in its clean-up campaign after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Divorced from Cord Meyer, a top CIA official, Meyer allegedly had a relationship with JFK. She was killed on Oct. 12, 1964, while walking along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal towpath in the Georgetown section of Washington, DC.

James Angleton, the CIA's sinister head of counterintelligence, broke into Meyer's studio to search for her diary. Mary Meyer may have known too much.

Authorities charged a Black laborer, Raymond Crump, with Meyer's murder despite evidence that the shooter was taller and much heavier. No gun was ever found. Using a racist stereotype, prosecutors claimed that Crump tried to sexually assault Meyer.

The CIA hoped Crump would be convicted and any doubts would end with his execution. Fortunately, Crump was defended by the famous lawyer Dovey Roundtree and acquitted by the jury. Justice demands a reopening of Mary Pinchot Meyer's murder.

### **Terrorism against the oppressed**

The death penalty is used in the United States as an act of terrorism against poor people and political activists. Italian-American labor organizers Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were framed on murder charges and executed in the Massachusetts electric chair on Aug. 23, 1927.

Ethel Rosenberg was electrocuted on Juneteenth 1953 for supposedly typing up spy

reports. The Jewish mother was really killed in order to intimidate opponents of the Cold War.

Despite murders committed by the rich — which have been a staple of TV police detective shows — there's never been a millionaire executed in the U.S.

There was no capital punishment for John Eleuthère du Pont after he murdered the Olympic gold-medal-winning wrestler Dave Schultz on Jan. 26, 1996, in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania. The local prosecutor immediately declined to ask for the death penalty.

You can't execute somebody with a \$250 million fortune. The member of the DuPont dynasty may have been mentally ill, but there are hundreds of inmates with severe psychiatric problems on death row.

Meanwhile, Pennsylvania kept the innocent political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal on death row for almost 30 years and is still holding him in prison.

Why isn't a war criminal like Dick Cheney on death row? The former vice president should be extradited to Iraq to face justice.

War criminal Henry Kissinger should be on trial for mass murder in Angola, Chile, East Timor, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. It's a shame that Kissinger is 99 years old. If Medgar Evers, Dr. King, Malcolm X, and Che Guevara had not been murdered, they would still be younger than Kissinger.

The entire Bush family should be investigated. A terrorist bomb exploded inside Cubana de Aviación Flight 455 on Oct. 6, 1976. All 73 people aboard were killed.

CIA operatives Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch were responsible for this mass murder. It was revenge for Cuban volunteers helping to defend the People's Republic of Angola against an invasion from then-apartheid South Africa.

Future President George H.W. Bush was the CIA director at that time. Both his sons, future President George Bush and Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, protected Carriles and Bosch.

Capital punishment in the United States was aptly described by John Arthur Spengelink, who was electrocuted in Florida in 1979. He said, "Them without the capital get the punishment."

