Opinion
Editorial



Protestors demonstrate outside the scheduled execution of South Carolina inmate Brad Sigmon, on March 7, 2025, in Columbia, S.C. (AP/Chris Carlson)

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Brad Sigmon, 67, was executed by firing squad for the brutal murders, by baseball bat, of David and Gladys Larke, the parents of his ex-girlfriend. The rampage, which occurred 24 years ago, continued when Sigmon then kidnapped the estranged woman at gunpoint. She later escaped as he shot at her.

Sigmon's violent tale is not over. About 6 p.m. local time on March 7 at the Broad River Correctional Institution in Columbia, South Carolina, Sigmon was strapped onto a wooden chair, wearing a standard prison-issued black jumpsuit, his ankles restricted by leather restraints, according to three media witnesses who provided details in a news conference.

His lawyer read Sigmon's final statement before his death and then a dark hood was placed over his head. A basin was set below to catch his blood. On his chest a tiny white target with a red bullseye was pinned precisely over his heart, designed to ensure swift death, though nothing about this scene speaks of mercy.

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A wall away, a prison employee opened a black shade partially revealing three anonymous executioners — state employees who volunteered for this macabre duty — standing poised, rifles loaded, their weapons aimed to deliver violent death. Witnesses to this grim affair were shielded from the shooters, only able to catch a glimpse of Sigmon's profile, the faceless, hooded figure.

With chilling precision, the command came. No countdown. Three bullets, carefully chosen for their capability to fragment and devastate human tissue, surged into Sigmon's chest, obliterating his heart in an instant.

Sigmon chose to be the first person executed in the U.S. by firing squad in 15 years. He did so not because it offers any form of mercy, but because he believed the alternatives — lethal injection and electrocution — are more horrific, his lawyers said . Sigmon's decision to prefer bullets over electric shocks or lethal drugs reflects a profound moral failure, exposing the cruelty inherent in all capital punishment.

"The white target with the red bullseye that had been on his chest, standing out against his black prison jumpsuit, disappeared instantly as Sigmon's whole body flinched," wrote Associated Press reporter Jeffrey Collins, one of the media witnesses to the gruesome tableau. "A jagged red spot about the size of a small fist appeared

where Sigmon was shot. His chest moved two or three times. Outside of the rifle crack, there was no sound."



The South Carolina Department of Corrections headquarters is seen behind barbed wire fence. Death row inmate Brad Sigmon was executed March 7, 2025, by firing squad method at the Broad River Correctional Institution in Columbia, South Carolina. (OSV News/Reuters/Shannon Stapleton)

Advocates of the death penalty argue that it is a necessary deterrent, yet what happened in South Carolina reveals a more profound truth: The method is not justice but violent vengeance, a chilling spectacle that undermines our collective humanity. Historically, the firing squad conjures disturbing images of authoritarian regimes, oppressive punishments, and scenes reminiscent of war zones, rather than modern justice systems.

The execution of Ronnie Lee Gardner in Utah in 2010 — the last time this barbaric ritual was enacted in the United States — left onlookers shaken by its swift brutality.

Execution methods such as firing squads magnify the cruelty of state-sanctioned death, stripping away any veneer of civility and confronting society with the raw brutality of killing.

Pope Francis, echoing unwavering moral clarity, labels the death penalty as unequivocally "inadmissible," asserting that it violates the inviolability of life and eliminates any possibility of redemption or reconciliation.

Yet, despite the shifting public opinion against capital punishment, five states continue to devise primitive means of execution. South Carolina, Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Utah now permit execution by firing squad. President Donald Trump, on his first day in office, signed an executive order restoring the federal death penalty, saying "efforts to subvert and undermine capital punishment defy the laws of our nation, make a mockery of justice, and insult the victims of these horrible crimes."

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By embracing capital punishment, particularly the firing squad, the United States aligns itself with disturbing company, connecting with nations known for severe human rights violations. Indonesia uses firing squads for offenses such as drug trafficking; the United Arab Emirates allows firing squad executions for crimes like murder and terrorism; Saudi Arabia, notorious for its violent practices, has also employed this method in mass executions, though beheading is more common; and Belarus, the last European nation to uphold capital punishment, carries out executions with a single bullet to the head. This alignment starkly highlights the moral decay associated with such a policy.

As Sigmon's life ends violently and grotesquely, society must confront uncomfortable truths. Are we willing to endorse an archaic, bloody method of punishment, or can we rise above primitive vengeance and embrace mercy and human dignity as the foundations of justice? The barbarity of South Carolina's firing squad execution demands an immediate moral reckoning and urgent action to

finally abolish the death penalty.

Here are, in part, Sigmon's final words: "I want my closing statement to be one of love and a calling to my fellow Christians to help us end the death penalty."

Sigmon concluded: "We are now under God's grace and mercy."