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Florida to Execute Michael Bernard Bell for 1993 Double Murder Outside Bar

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– Categories: Crime



A Florida man convicted in the deadly 1993 shooting of two people outside a liquor lounge is set to be executed by lethal injection Tuesday evening, barring a last-minute intervention from the United States Supreme Court.

Michael Bernard Bell, 54, is scheduled to be executed at Florida State Prison in Starke after spending nearly 30 years on death row. He was found guilty in 1995 of killing Jimmy West and Tamecka Smith outside a Jacksonville bar in what prosecutors described as a failed act of vengeance.

Defense attorneys have continued to fight his execution in the courts. Last week, Bell's legal team filed a last-minute appeal with the Florida Supreme Court, claiming new evidence casts doubt on the reliability of a key witness. However, the state's justices unanimously rejected the claim, saying the evidence against Bell remains substantial and compelling.

The legal team then turned to the U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday, filing a similar appeal in a final effort to delay the execution. As of Monday afternoon, the nation's highest court had not issued a decision.

If the appeal is rejected, Bell will become the eighth person executed in Florida this year. A ninth execution is already scheduled in the coming weeks. The state carried out six executions in 2023, after only one the previous year.

Unless the court intervenes at the eleventh hour, Bell's sentence is expected to be carried out Tuesday evening.

In December 1993, Bell thought he had spotted the car belonging to the man who had taken his brother's life earlier that year. Unbeknownst to him, that vehicle had been sold to West. Bell, armed with an AK-47 and accompanied by two friends, waited outside a local liquor lounge for the driver to appear.

When West, Smith, and another woman left the club and approached the car, Bell opened fire. West died on the scene. Smith was critically injured and later died on the way to the hospital. The third woman escaped safely. Witnesses later told authorities that Bell fired more shots at a group of bystanders before fleeing.

Prior Killings

This was not Bell's first brush with deadly violence. Authorities say he had already committed three separate murders before the 1993 shooting. In 1989, he fatally shot a woman and her toddler. Months before the Jacksonville killings, he murdered his mother's boyfriend. These earlier cases would later play a role in solidifying the death sentence.

Bell's trial led to a swift conviction, with prosecutors presenting what was described as overwhelming evidence. This included eyewitness testimony, forensic ballistics, and Bell's own statements. In 1995, a Florida jury sentenced him to death.

Across the country, 25 inmates have been executed so far in 2025, matching the total number of executions carried out nationwide in 2024.