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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

October 15, 2009 - Issue 346

[Home](#)

Can We Charge Governor Rick Perry With Murder?

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Just as the Texas Forensic Science Commission was about to expose Governor Rick Perry as a willing accomplice to the state murder of Cameron Willingham, Perry ousted three of its members. This move effectively shut down the commission's review of a report that challenged arson findings that led to Willingham's 2004 execution. The Innocence Project turned over its investigation of the case to the state commission who had the good sense to hire an arson expert. Craig Beyler found no scientific evidence (not the Texas-style science) to support the conclusion of arson.

That means Willingham, who literally screamed out his innocence on his journey to the death chamber, was innocent of the 1991 deaths of his three young daughters. Imagine the grieving of your loved ones being interrupted to face charges of murder and your ultimate execution. How painful is that?

Rick Perry served as Lieutenant Governor under George Bush. Texas has held the title of Top State Executioner since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. Then Governor Bush topped the country as the governor with the most executions under his belt. Perry longed for that cherished position and climbed over the 200th body to take his throne back in June this year. The Perry-Bush team sent 350 citizens to their deaths with African-Americans represented disproportionately in those numbers.

Perry is running for re-election and political pundits point to his tight race as his reason to squash the impending news that he sent an innocent man to his death. The information about the faulty arson charge was presented to the governor prior to Willingham's execution but the governor put his hands over his ears. Just as Governor Perry used Willingham as political fodder to advance his career at execution time;

maintaining his office now is tied to burying the truth about the poor man's fate.

Both his Republican and Democratic opponents are condemning Perry's cowardly actions. Democratic candidate Hank Gilbert said that justice was being controlled by a "Governor desperate to retain his grip on power." The death penalty has always been about power; it has never been about justice.

Of course, the Willingham case is not the first case of an innocent person being executed in Texas or in other states. This was special because it would have been the first time that a state entity would admit it. In the Texas case, that confession was coming from the state's Forensic Science Commission.

I believe the death penalty is on its way to the trash bin of injustices and examples like will only hasten its demise. You can also add the botched execution of Romell Broom in Ohio. The governor of that state was recently forced to intervene after two hours of Broom getting poked 18 times by guards who didn't know how to find a vein. It is alleged that at one point, Broom himself asked for the needle to find a vein. Ohio now has executions on hold.

Add to the heap of reasons the cost of executions at a time when most states are in dire financial stress. In a recent New York Times editorial, it pointed out that the bankrupt state of California, has spent about \$250 million each for its 13 executions since the 1976 return of the death penalty. This is the same state with a record number of prisons that are unconstitutionally bulging with inmates because of unsustainable crime policies and laws.

For governors like Rick Perry, for police commanders like Chicago's Jon Burge, for rogue prosecutors--what should be the charge for their willful and active roles in sending innocent people to their death? Is it different from the average citizen who knowingly plans or participates in the death of another human being?

It is a serious question for those of us who seek a more just and secure society. It's past time to snatch off the armor of immunity for these people and make them accountable for their crimes.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member Jamala Rogers is the leader of the [Organization for Black Struggle](#) in St. Louis and the [Black Radical Congress](#) National Organizer. [Click here](#) to contact Ms. Rogers.



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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

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