

Supreme Court Affirms Reid Convictions, Death Sentences for McDonald's Murders

The Tennessee Supreme Court has upheld the convictions and death sentences Paul Dennis Reid received for the execution-style murders of three Nashville McDonald's employees who were shot to death after being forced to lie face down on the floor.

In a majority opinion written by Justice Gary R. Wade, the court rejected all of the issues raised by Reid in his direct appeal. Chief Justice William M. Barker and Justices Janice M. Holder and Cornelia A. Clark concurred in the majority opinion, which affirmed a Court of Criminal Appeals decision.

Retired Justice Adolpho A. Birch, Jr., who heard the case as a specially designated member of the court, wrote a separate opinion in which he agreed that Reid's convictions should be upheld, but called upon the governor to suspend the use of lethal injections as a "killing agent" until further study.

Jurors convicted Reid and sentenced him to death for the 1997 murders of McDonald's employees Ronald Santiago, Andrea Brown and Robert Sewell. Reid attempted to shoot a fourth employee, Jose Ramirez Gonzales, but his gun malfunctioned. He then stabbed and kicked Gonzalez, who survived the attack by pretending to be dead. Reid took \$3,000 from the restaurant and fled.

Reid has a total of seven death sentences stemming from murders he committed during robberies at McDonald's, a Baskin-Robbins in Clarksville and a Captain D's restaurant in Davidson County. All of the convictions and sentences have been upheld by the Tennessee Supreme Court.

Issues raised by Reid in his McDonald's appeal included a claim that Criminal Court Judge Cheryl Blackburn erred by finding him competent to stand trial.

"In our view, the evidence in the record does not preponderate against the trial court's finding that the defendant was competent to stand trial," Wade wrote. "The trial court applied the correct legal standard: whether the defendant had 'the capacity to understand the nature and object of the proceedings against him, to consult with counsel and to assist in preparing his defense.'"

The Supreme Court also held that Blackburn was not required to recuse herself because she had presided over Reid's trial for the murders of two Captain D's employees.

The court set a Jan. 3, 2008, execution date for Reid, who has state and federal appeals remaining in the McDonald's case.