

# Killer is sentenced to death; Chester Turner's guilt in slaying 10 women was established 'beyond all doubt,' judge says.

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Chester Turner, the most prolific serial killer in the history of Los Angeles, was sentenced to death Tuesday for the murders of 10 women, most of them prostitutes.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge William Pounders said Turner's guilt was established "beyond all doubt."

"I don't think any jury would arrive at a different conclusion," Pounders told Turner, 40, who had repeatedly proclaimed his innocence.

Turner was found guilty April 30 of killing 10 women, including one who was pregnant, in South Los Angeles and downtown's skid row between 1987 and 1998. He strangled eight with his bare hands. Four of the killings took place within six blocks of Turner's home.

DNA evidence linked him to all his victims. His identification cleared another man who had been wrongly convicted of two of his crimes.

Turner's brutal actions show "a level of cruelty rarely seen in murder trials," Pounders said. The judge denied motions for a new trial and agreed that the jury's finding that Turner deserved death was "proper according to the law."

Turner joins the roster of L.A. area's most notorious killers: Charles Manson, "Night Stalker" Richard Ramirez, "Freeway Killer" William Bonin and "Hillside Stranglers" Angelo Buono Jr. and Kenneth Bianchi.

Turner also raped his victims, most of them women in South Los Angeles addicted to crack cocaine.

Deputy Dist. Atty. Bobby Grace urged Pounders to impose a sentence of death. Probation officials reported that they could find no factors that mitigated Turner's culpability.

Turner "not only took pleasure in torturing and killing the women, but he apparently got pleasure from seeing the pain he caused their families to endure when he went to dinners held in the homes of the victims' families after the funerals," according to the report filed by probation officer Leon Alberts.

The victims, in the order they died, were Diane Johnson, 21; Annette Ernest, 26; Anita Fishman, 31; Regina Washington, 27, who was pregnant; Andrea Tripplett, 29; Desarae Jones, 29; Natalie Price, 31; Mildred Beasley, 45; Paula Vance, 38; and Brenda Bries, 37. Many of their relatives said the victims were not professional prostitutes, but had been driven to it by their addiction to crack cocaine.

"It's your turn now," said Frank Jones Jr., son of victim Desarae Jones. He is one of six survivors who spoke in court of their loss. Turner looked steadily at each speaker.

Survivors lined up to excoriate Turner and to praise both Grace and Cliff Shepard, the Los Angeles Police Department detective who cracked the case.

"The hole he has punched in our hearts will never close," Jerri Johnson Tripplett said of Turner. Tripplett's daughter, Andrea, died in 1993. Referring to Andrea's child, Tripplett said, "There is no more mommy to hug and kiss you. Mommy never had a chance to say goodbye. No more mommy at all. Only Granny." Mildred White, mother of Annette Ernest, a 1987 victim, said, "I've turned over all of my grief, all of my revenge over to the Lord," then described her agony as "a hurt that will never end."

Turner made no statement, nor did his lawyer, John Tyre. Turner receives automatic appeals, which often stretch out for decades. Grace predicted that before Turner is executed at San Quentin State Prison, as Pounders ordered, "I'll be retired."

Turner becomes the 665th inmate on California's death row. The state, however, is currently barred by a federal judge's order from executing any inmate until issues with the execution protocol are resolved.

Turner, dressed in orange jail garb, watched intently as the judge pronounced his sentence.

"He's doing the same now as he was before," Tyre said of Turner. "He claims he's innocent. He's very inquisitive about going over the transcripts, the police reports and reviewing what happened in trial, in anticipating the appeal."

Tyre said they had not discussed the possibility of his execution.

"No," Tyre said. "We don't talk about that."

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