Of the 39 men on Louisiana's death row, 33 are there for murdering whites, six for killing blacks.

Of the seven men who went to their death in Louisiana's electric chair since capital punishment resumed in 1983, six died for the murder of whites, one for the murder of a black.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments Wednesday on whether the death penalty should be outlawed because killers of whites are more likely to be executed than killers of blacks.

The scheduled executions of nine Louisiana death-row inmates have been blocked pending a decision in McCleskey vs. Kemp, a Georgia case that opponents hope will end capital punishment in the United States.

But, if the court rules in McCleskey's favor, the case will affect many more death-row dwellers.

The Supreme Court agreed to hear the case in July after a federal appeals court rejected McCleskey's contention that the death penalty is more likely to be applied to killers of whites and is, therefore, unconstitutional.

McCleskey's lawyers relied on a study by a law professor to support their position.

In Louisiana, Benjamin Berry, who had been scheduled to go to the electric chair Aug. 1 for the murder of a white sheriff's deputy, gained a stay of execution when his lawyer raised the issue.

Since then, eight other Louisiana death-row inmates — Jimmy Wingo, Alvin Moore, Willie Watson, Jimmy Glass, Willie Celeste, John Brogdon, Sterling Rault and Herbert Welcome — got stays of execution based either solely or primarily on the issue in McCleskey vs. Kemp.

"It was the only issue I had," said Berry's attorney, Sam Dalton. "It could have been better timing for Berry."

Berry, who is white, received the death penalty for killing a white Jefferson Parish deputy during the attempted robbery of a Metairie bank.

Moore's situation was similar to Berry's when his attorneys sought a stay of execution pending the outcome of the McCleskey case.

Moore's lawyers had exhausted their appeals and had also made an unsuccessful plea to the state Pardon Board in an attempt to get a reprieve.

Moore, who is black, received the death penalty in the brutal rape-stabbing death of a white Bossier City housewife. The murder occurred during a robbery while the woman's young child was in the house.

Five white and three black Louisiana death-row inmates granted stays on the McCleskey issue were convicted of killing whites.

However, the ninth and most recent stay of execution was granted for Herbert Welcome, an Iberia Parish black man convicted in the shooting death of a black woman, his aunt.

In connection with the same incident, which began with a dispute over a pocket knife, Welcome received a life sentence for killing his aunt's white lover. The lover was killed first.

Welcome's appeal on McCleskey seems at odds with the thrust of the challenge, which claims the death penalty is more likely to be levied when the victim is white.

But the court stayed Welcome's execution because the McCleskey case strikes at the heart of the death penalty. If the system through which the death penalty is handed out is not working, opponents argue, no one should be sentenced under it.

Of the 39 men on death row, 20 are white and 19 are black. Among them, they account for a total of 48 victims.

Of those victims, 21 were white males, 19 were white females, three were black males and five were black females.

None of the white inmates was convicted of killing a black victim. All eight black victims were killed by black men.

On a national level, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund has compiled a list of 62 executions from 1977 through July 31, 1986.

Thirty-seven whites, 22 blacks and three Hispanics have been executed since capital punishment resumed.

The executed murderers had a total of 63 victims — 56 whites and six blacks, with the race of one victim unknown.

Sixteen of the black murderers killed a white, five killed a black and one killed a black and a white.

No whites were executed for the murder of a black.

Since executions were resumed in Louisiana in 1983, the only man to die for the murder of a black was Robert Wayne Williams, a black man convicted in the murder of a black security guard during the armed robbery of a supermarket.

Other Louisiana death-row inmates who have had their executions stayed pending a Supreme Court decision in the McCleskey case are:

- Glass and Wingo, both sentenced to die for the Dec. 25, 1982, murder of a Webster Parish couple. The two white men escaped from the Webster Parish jail while being held on armed robbery charges and killed the white couple during a burglary of their home.
- Watson, who received the death penalty for the April 1981 rape, robbery and murder in St. Charles Parish of Kathy Newman, a Tulane University medical student. Watson is black; Newman was white.
- Celeste, who is black, convicted in the 1981 murder in Lafayette of Marcelline Richard, who was white. He was also convicted on two counts of rape.
- Brogdon, who is white, received the death penalty for the murder of an 11-year-old white girl in St. Mary Parish. The murder was committed during an aggravated rape.
- Rault, who is white, on death row for the 1981 murder of Jane Ellen Francioni, also white. The murder occurred in Orleans Parish during an aggravated rape and aggravated kidnapping.