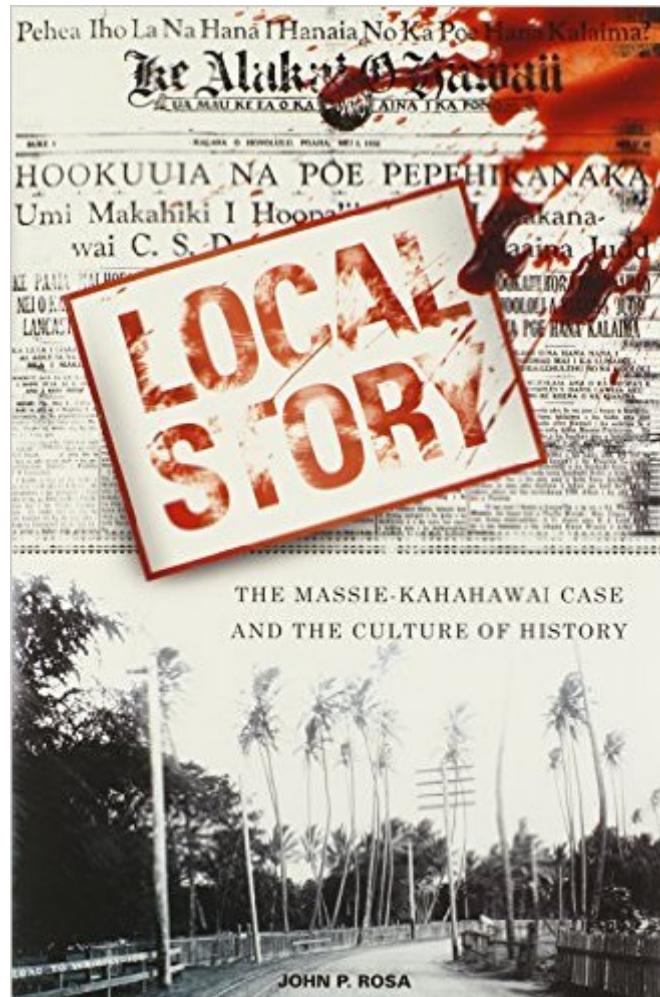


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Local Story: The Massie-Kahahawai Case And The Culture Of History



Synopsis

The Massie-Kahahawai case of 1931â1932 shook the Territory of Hawaiâi to its very core. Thalia Massie, a young Navy wife, alleged that she had been kidnapped and raped by âesome Hawaiian boysâ in Waikâkâ. A few days later, five young men stood accused of her rape. Mishandling of evidence and contradictory testimony led to a mistrial, but before a second trial could be convened, one of the accused, Horace Ida, was kidnapped and beaten by a group of Navy men and a second, Joseph Kahahawai, lay dead from a gunshot wound. Thaliaâs husband, Thomas Massie; her mother, Grace Fortescue; and two Navy men were convicted of the lesser charge of manslaughter, despite witnesses who saw them kidnap Kahahawai and the later discovery of his body in Massieâs car. Under pressure from Congress and the Navy, territorial governor Lawrence McCully Judd commuted their sentences. After spending only an hour in the governorâs office at âIolani Palace, the four were set free. Local Story is a close examination of how Native Hawaiians, Asian immigrants, and others responded to challenges posed by the military and federal government during the caseâs investigation and aftermath. In addition to providing a concise account of events as they unfolded, the book shows how this historical narrative has been told and retold in later decades to affirm a local identity among descendants of working-class Native Hawaiians, Asians, and othersâin fact, this understanding of the term âlocalâ in the islands dates from the Massie-Kahahawai case. It looks at the racial and sexual tensions in preâWorld War II Hawaiâi that kept local men and white women apart and at the uneasy relationship between federal and military officials and territorial administrators. Lastly, it examines the revival of interest in the case in the last few decades: true crime accounts, a fictionalized TV mini-series, and, most recently, a play and a documentaryâall spurring the formation of new collective memories about the Massie-Kahahawai case.

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