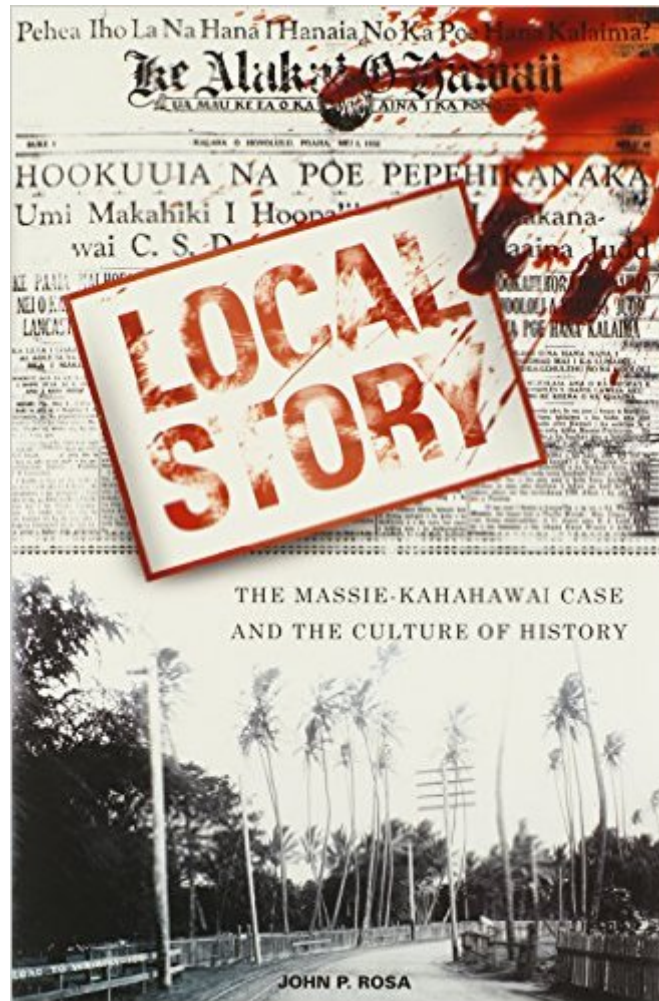


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Local Story: The Massie-Kahahawai Case And The Culture Of History



Synopsis

The Massie-Kahahawai case of 1931-1932 shook the Territory of Hawai'i to its very core. Thalia Massie, a young Navy wife, alleged that she had been kidnapped and raped by a handsome Hawaiian boy in Waikāʻiā. 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. Thalia'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 Massie's car. Under pressure from Congress and the Navy, territorial governor Lawrence McCully Judd commuted their sentences. After spending only an hour in the governor's office at the 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 case'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 others—in fact, this understanding of the term “local” in the islands dates from the Massie-Kahahawai case. It looks at the racial and sexual tensions in pre-World War II Hawai'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 documentary—all spurring the formation of new collective memories about the Massie-Kahahawai case.

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