

Hello, and welcome to the Death Penalty Information Center's podcasts examining the status of the death penalty in each of the states. In this podcast, we will briefly discuss the history of the death penalty in Hawaii and some of the circumstances that led to its abolition.

Before the arrival of white settlers in the mid-1800's, Hawaii had a long history of using the death penalty. Under the sovereign kingdom, native Hawaiians were put to death for crimes such as rape and murder. Capital punishment remained intact as foreigners, including white settlers and Asian migrant workers, began to immigrate to the islands.

When white missionaries and entrepreneurs arrived in Hawaii, they quickly had an economic and political impact. Poor Asian immigrants were brought to the islands under a form of indentured servitude in order to work in the sugarcane industry. These Asian immigrants quickly began to make up large percentages of the population, and white settlers attempted various methods of controlling them, including the use of the death penalty.

In 1893, the Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown and a republic was declared by the settlers, effectively guaranteeing white control of the justice system. There were 54 executions between this time and the abolition of the death penalty in 1957, all of which were hangings for murder. Almost all of those executed were minorities such as Native Hawaiians, Chinese, Japanese, or Filipinos. Capital punishment reinforced the prevailing economic and racial realities and struck fear into the immigrant population.

The problem of racial bias in the death penalty was illustrated in a number of high-profile cases. In 1928, Myles Fukunaga, a Japanese-American, kidnapped and

murdered a ten-year-old boy. Despite strong evidence of Fukunaga's insanity, he was sentenced to death and executed. The Japanese community protested the sentence and was angry that white offenders who had murdered Japanese victims did not receive the death penalty.

Economic and social development after World War II contributed to calls for a new justice system. Universal suffrage was adopted in 1954. Native-born minorities gained power through trade unions. A political coalition of Chinese, Filipinos, and Japanese succeeded in repealing the territorial death penalty statute in 1957. Two years later, Hawaii gained statehood.

Reinstatement has been proposed occasionally since 1971. Violent crime increased from 1959 to 1990, raising concerns in the tourism industry. However, recently, murder rates have decreased, and tourists feel safer. Many Hawaiians fear reinstatement of the death penalty would affect primarily minorities and the poor, making it unlikely that capital punishment will be restored.

In 2014, the federal government conducted a death penalty trial in Hawaii for Naeem Williams, a former soldier. Williams was convicted of killing his 5-year-old daughter on military property. He received a sentence of life in prison without parole.

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