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A Short History of Hawaiian Executions, 1826-1947

IT WAS ON A HOT DAY in 1943 that Ardiano Domingo grabbed a pair of scissors and stabbed a woman to death in a Kaua'i pineapple field. No one was surprised when, five months later, he mounted the scaffold at O'ahu Prison, listened to the death warrant read, had a black sack tied over his head and his arms and legs bound, and then plunged through the trap door to his death.¹

But many would have been surprised if you had told them that Ardiano would be the last civilian hanged in Hawai'i. Oh, there would be others sentenced, and the dates would be set, and scaffolds built, but nothing would come of them. Some said it was because there were too many *haole* (Caucasians) who risked hanging. And Hawai'i—the melting pot of the Pacific, the land of *aloha*, the Ellis Island of the West, the islands of “the new race”—did not hang *haole*.

For Ardiano Domingo was Filipino. Filipinos used to be hanged in Hawai'i with great regularity, just as the 19th century saw an equal number of Hawaiians hanged. Out of 75 documented civilian hangings in Hawai'i, 48 have been Filipino and Hawaiian (see Appendix I).

This place has always enjoyed a good hanging. During Territorial days, it reached its peak. There was standing room only at Miles Fukunaga's execution in 1929,² though the Republic of Hawai'i saw its share. Even before that, in 1846, mobs sur-

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rounded the inner gate of the old Honolulu Fort to witness the double hanging of two Hawaiians, Ahulika and Kaomali. They had murdered Kaomali's husband, one Kawao.³ (But William Ellis tells us that banishment was a more likely punishment for murder in those days.⁴)

There have been nine double hangings at O'ahu Prison (fig. 1). But at one time the hanging room boasted three metal rings above the trap. On two occasions, all three rings were employed simultaneously.

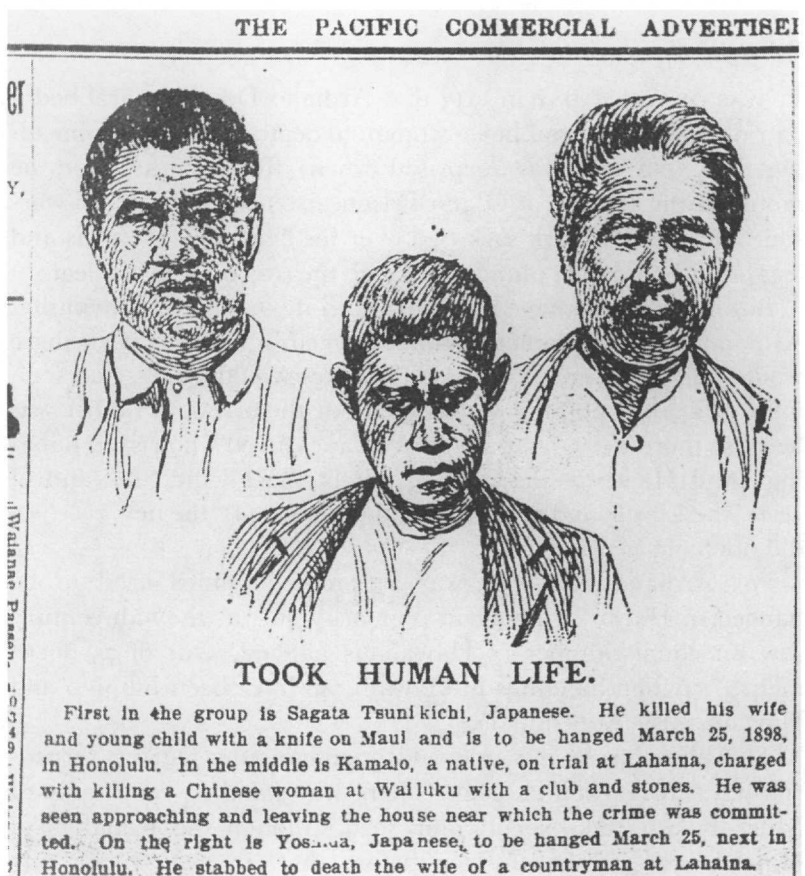


FIG. 1. The PCA of December 13, 1897 featured sketches of three prisoners. Tsunikichi and Yoshida were executed at O'ahu Prison on March 25, 1898, in what was called a "double header." Kamalo escaped the hangman's noose. (Author's photo.)

When the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Furman vs. Georgia*, 1972, that capital punishment was cruel and unusual punishment, one of the points the Court made was that there was an inordinate number of Blacks hanged in the South. The Court noted that racial discrimination was an obvious feature of the sentences. (It did not take into account the popular Ku Klux Klan sport of lynching, which took thousands of Black lives.)⁵

In Hawai'i over the years, there have been nine Japanese hanged, six Koreans, three Puerto Ricans, five Chinese, 24 Filipinos, possibly 15 Hawaiians, and one Caucasian.

In 1889, there were two Chinese on Hawai'i's death row. One was Ah Hop, who had killed a Hawaiian teacher by the name of David Kapaha'e.⁶ The other was Akana, who had stabbed Ah Sing, his roommate, and then burned the house to dispose of the body.⁷ While they were awaiting execution, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* editorialized on "The Epidemic of Murder" and, later, on "the treacherous Chinese." Wherever white men lived closely with the Chinese, the editor wrote, they grew to despise the wily race, who frequently murdered for revenge.⁸ The *Advertiser* also helpfully carried accounts of the experiments that were taking place at Thomas Edison's Mainland laboratory on the use of electricity in "humane killing." (The laboratory had already dispatched a dog, a goat, and a horse, and was pleased with the results.)⁹

All this heightened the anticipation for the upcoming "double header," as they were known, which finally took place on March 5, 1889. Both Chinese were from the Big Island of Hawai'i.¹⁰

Another case which received much publicity was that of Po'olua. In 1881, the Hawaiian grew enraged when his common-law wife, according to the papers, "paraded her infidelity" before him and slaughtered her with a "big butcher knife." Then, in a fit of remorse, he draped his house in mourning with black crepe paper.

The case is instructive because, as far as I can ascertain, it is the first of its kind in Hawai'i that used insanity as a plea. The experts of the day—family doctors and preachers—were conducted in to interview the bewildered man. They questioned him and concluded that he was not insane. Po'olua himself agreed that

he was sane but “darkened in my mind.” Reverend Charles McEwan Hyde, he of the infamous slander on Father Damien, maintained that Po‘olua was not insane but “intoxicated.” And the Reverend H. H. Parker explained the man’s actions this way: “A Hawaiian would do many things which a white man would not.”

When it was found that Po‘olua had a heart abnormality and that he would likely die soon anyway, letters of clemency were circulated on his behalf. But he was hanged on May 20, 1881. Permission was sought for a post mortem to investigate the state of his heart, but officials denied the request. The *Advertiser* remarked that it “should have been done. Being attended to, might have laid him quiet in his grave; but being forbidden, his spirit will rise up Banquo-like for many a day to come.”¹¹ In the spirit of judicial murder, the Hawaiian government, like Macbeth, continued on its bloody course.

MacBeth and insanity were also features in the death of Gil Jamieson, who had been kidnapped by a mad youth who filled his ransom letters with quotations from the Shakespearean play: “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / that struts and frets his hour upon the stage / and then is heard no more. . . .” The victim had his skull chiseled in and was strangled and left near Seaside Avenue in Waikīkī. The murderer and author of the letters was captured some days later, tried, convicted, and sentenced to hang, all within three weeks. This feat was facilitated because his lawyers, Beebe and Huber, offered no defense and called no witnesses. The jury included members who were part of the search party and the victim’s bodyguard and gravedigger. A Navy psychiatrist offered to testify for the defense but was rebuffed. The medical examiner was also the prosecution psychiatrist, Doctor Robert Faus. He testified that past suicide attempts by Miles Fukunaga were “normal.”¹² Despite protests and appeals, Fukunaga was hanged.¹³

Ten years earlier, a well-known local *haole* athlete, David Buick, found himself down on his luck. He ordered a taxi driver, one Ito Suzuki, to drive out of Honolulu proper to a place called Red Hill. He ordered the man to stop the car and get out. He pointed a gun at the driver and robbed him of one dollar. When Suzuki

turned to flee, Buick shot him in the back. Before he died, the taxi driver identified Buick as the gunman. The charge was eventually reduced to second degree murder, and Buick is said to have returned to the Mainland following his jail time.¹⁴

In both cases, there was premeditation, kidnapping, murder, and flight. Fukunaga willingly confessed and indeed showed extreme remorse. Buick never confessed or showed the slightest regret over his actions. But Fukunaga had murdered a fine boy of a prominent *haole* family. Buick had only murdered a middle-aged Japanese taxi driver.

Race (and politics) was also an issue in the shooting of Doctor Jared K. Smith on Kaua'i in 1897. Smith had decreed, or was about to, that a Hawaiian woman, a leper, should be sent to the leper settlement on Moloka'i. Her cousin, one Kapea, brooded on the decision and then made one of his own. He practiced with a revolver, and then on September 24 of that year shot Doctor Smith in the man's doorway. Justice was swift. Kapea was convicted in November and sentenced in December to hang, the sentence carried out four months later. One of the reasons justice was so swift was that Smith's brother, W. O. Smith, was the Attorney General of the Republic of Hawai'i.

Kapea, described as a young, handsome, six-footer, was asked on the scaffold if he had any last words. He complained that, yes, the rope was too tight.¹⁵

But, of course, there was one *haole* who was hanged in Hawai'i: Frank Johnson in 1906. That was not his real name. He was John O'Connell, an illiterate Irishman who had deserted the cargo ship *Frank Johnson* upon her arrival in Hawai'i. He became a laborer with a predilection for children. On January 3, 1906, he kidnapped and mutilated the son of a prominent *kama'aina* (native born) family, Simeon Wharton. Newspapers called it "the most awful deed in the criminal annals of Oahu." When it was revealed that the boy had been dismembered, decapitated, and disemboweled with a knife and hatchet, the papers called it "the work of a human pervert" but carefully added, "not necessarily a lunatic." "Johnson" later explained that the mutilations were required because he could not fit the body into the shallow, rocky grave he had dug in the Waialua canefield. "Johnson" was

known to be backward and shrunken and was probably retarded as well.¹⁶ Fukunaga, who grew up in the same area and was born three years after the murder, no doubt heard all the stories about it and was influenced by it: he, too, would kidnap and murder the son of a prominent *haole* family.

There have been at least seven military executions in Hawai'i, most of them at Schofield Barracks' Execution Gulch, located behind the post cemetery (see Appendix II). Garlan Mickles was the last, hanged April 22, 1947. He was in such good spirits that he helped the guard adjust the rope.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that both Black soldiers who were sentenced to execution were killed by firing squads. No explanation was ever given for this departure from military custom. The other soldiers were hanged.

All the executed men were buried at Schofield's post cemetery without ceremony. They are separated from the other dead by a mock orange hedge, and their graves face away from the flag (fig. 2).



FIG. 2. Schofield Barracks post cemetery, O'ahu. The graves of those executed, separated by a hedge from the other dead and facing away from the flag. (Author's photo.)

It comes as a shock to learn that in the land of *aloha*, much of this institutionalized racism was given a seal of approval by one of the Territory's brightest and best-known intellectuals. Stanley Porteus, author of the informal Hawaiian history *Calabashes and Kings* (1945), was also the co-author of a perfectly disgusting volume called *Temperment and Race*.¹⁸ In it, he said Australian Aborigines were nearly on a par with "the idiot or imbecile." Filipinos had "a list of racial defects," Hawaiians were unstable and dimwitted, Portuguese were "impulsive, irresolute and excitable," and Puerto Ricans were "largely selected from amongst the most undesirable strata of the population" and were "probably the worst timber for citizenship." He gave much advice on how to maintain "Nordic strongholds in America and Australia. . . ." (Porteus also noted that the Aboriginal invention of the boomerang was probably an accident.) The American "negro" (he refused to capitalize the word) belonged to an inferior race, had low "brain weight," and failed "to avail himself to the full of educational opportunities that are afforded him."¹⁹

His book came out in 1926, during a lull in executions. In the year following its appearance, there were four executions, all of Filipinos, a race that Porteus wrote was "in an adolescent phase of development" and generally "unstable."²⁰

The Mainland's record on executions has been equally racist. The *Los Angeles Times* notes in its October 18, 1988 issue:

The only convincing explanation for the persistence of executions here is race. Almost half of the approximately 2,000 inmates now on Death Row belong to minority groups. Blacks make up 40% of executed persons. Studies consistently show that killers of whites are much more likely to receive death than murderers of blacks; no white has been executed for killing a black. In the last decade all executions of persons who did not consent to die have occurred in former slave-holding states.²¹

In 1957, the law changed in Hawai'i. House Bill 706 revised the act relating to capital punishment by providing "a sentence of imprisonment at hard labor for life not subject to parole." The legislature passed the bill on June 4, 1957. Governor Samuel King,

who was part-Hawaiian, signed HB 706 the following day, thus abolishing the death penalty. The bill became Act 282 and saved several men from the gallows.²²

James Majors and John Palakiko were due to be hanged in 1951, but Governor Oren Long had stayed their executions. Governor King, who succeeded Long, commuted their sentences to life in August 1954. By signing HB 706, King also saved the hangman the chore of dispatching Sylvestre Adoca and Joseph K. Josiah. Adoca had butchered his two daughters to death with a bolo knife. Josiah had beaten a man to death in a payroll robbery.²³

But the public occasionally clamors for a return of the noose. In 1976, a *Honolulu Advertiser* survey found 67 percent in favor of reinstating the death penalty. In 1978, it was 65 percent. In 1982, it was again 67 percent. The paper noted that feeling was particularly strong among Republicans, 76 percent being pro-execution. When the legislature has reconsidered the issue, the proposal has rarely gotten out of committee.²⁴

In 1868, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* ran an editorial entitled "Capital Punishment." Not surprisingly, the paper was for it.²⁵ But a scant five years later, an editorial under the identical title stated:

. . . calmer reflection reminds us that vengeance is not for man, and that prevention and security are all that are required of our penal laws. . . . The time may be far distant when murders will cease; but we doubt it will come any the sooner for the practice of strangling to death those who are convicted at the bar of human justice.²⁶

The execution room is now a dormitory at "Oh-Triple-See"—OCCC, the O'ahu Community Correctional Center—and the hole of the trapdoor has been cemented shut.

NOTES

¹ *HA*, 5 Aug. 1943 and 8 Sept. 1951.

² *HSB*, 20 Nov. 1929.

³ *HA*, 4 May 1929, and P, 15 Aug. 1846.

⁴ William Ellis, *Journal of William Ellis* (Honolulu: Advertiser Publishing, 1963) 113 and 306.

- ⁵ 3,499 between 1882 and 1964, peaking at 161 in 1892: see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: 1975): 422. Lynching also occurred in Hawai'i. In 1889, a Japanese storekeeper was hanged at Honoka'a. It was no suicide, for his "arms and legs were pinioned and a genuine hangman's knot was under his left ear": *PCA*, 31 Oct. 1889.
- ⁶ *PCA*, 26 Nov. 1888.
- ⁷ *PCA*, 3 Dec. 1888.
- ⁸ *PCA*, 8 Feb. and 12 Mar. 1889.
- ⁹ *PCA*, 9 Jan. 1889.
- ¹⁰ *PCA*, 6 Mar. 1889.
- ¹¹ *PCA*, 2 and 9 Apr. and 21 May 1881.
- ¹² Joseph Theroux, "Walking Shadow," *Honolulu Magazine*, July 1990: 52-5 and 75-8.
- ¹³ *HSB* and *HA*, 18 Sept. 1928 through 20 Nov. 1929.
- ¹⁴ *HSB*, 31 May 1918 and 11 Apr. 1923.
- ¹⁵ *PCA*, 12 Apr. 1898.
- ¹⁶ *PCA*, 5 Jan. 1906.
- ¹⁷ *HSB*, 22 Apr. 1947.
- ¹⁸ Stanley Porteus and Margery E. Babcock, *Temperment and Race* (Boston: R. D. Badger, 1926).
- ¹⁹ Porteus and Babcock, *Temperment and Race* 68, 101-8, 144, 207, 307, and 330.
- ²⁰ Porteus and Babcock, *Temperment and Race* 104.
- ²¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Oct. 1988.
- ²² *HA*, 6 June 1957.
- ²³ *HA* 6 June, 1957.
- ²⁴ *HA*, 12 June, 1982.
- ²⁵ *PCA*, 25 July 1868.
- ²⁶ *PCA*, 21 June 1873.

APPENDIX I
 LEGAL HAWAIIAN EXECUTIONS, ALL CRIMES OF MURDER,
 IN THE 19TH CENTURY

NAME	ETHNICITY	DATE	SOURCE
1) through 13)	Probably Hawaiian	1826-1841	Wilkes*
14) Ahulika	Hawaiian	8/14/1846	HA 5/4/1929
15) Kaomali	Hawaiian	8/14/1846	HA 5/4/1929
16) ?	?	/1857	ARCJ*
17) Pa'akaula	Hawaiian	4/3/1867	PCA 4/6/1867
18) Kahauliko	Hawaiian	4/3/1867	PCA 4/6/1867
19) Ho'oleawa'awa	Hawaiian	8/22/1867	PCA 8/23/1867
20) Agnee	Chinese	4/9/1869	PCA 4/10/1869
21) Tin Ah Chin	Chinese	4/9/1869	PCA 4/10/1869
22) Kuheleaumoku	Hawaiian	3/21/1873	PCA 3/22/1873
23) Kaaukai	Hawaiian	3/12/1875	PCA 3/13/1875
24) ?	?	/1880	BRJC*
25) Po'olua (Poloa)	Hawaiian	5/20/1881	PCA 5/21/1881
26) ?	?	/1881	BRJC
27) Ah Hop (Ahapa)	Chinese	3/5/1889	PCA 3/6/1889
28) Akana	Chinese	3/5/1889	PCA 3/6/1889
29) Woo Sau	Chinese	8/5/1889	PCA 8/6/1889

*Sources: Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1841*, vol. iv (Philadelphia: G. Sherman, 1845): 39-41. The only identification Wilkes gives is a breakdown by island: Kaua'i, 3; O'ahu, 7; Maui, 2; and Hawai'i, 1; ARCJ: Annual Report of the Chief Justice, 1858:8-9; AH; BRJC: Biennial Report of the Chief Justice, 1882:30, AH.

EXECUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF HAWAII' I (1897 TO 1900)
AND THE TERRITORY OF HAWAII' I (1900 TO 1944), ALL FOR
FIRST DEGREE MURDER

NAME	ETHNICITY	DATE
30) Noa	Hawaiian	12/13/1897
31) Sagata Tsunikichi	Japanese	3/25/1898
32) Yoshida	Japanese	3/25/1898
33) Kapea	Hawaiian	4/11/1898
34) Tanbara Gisaburo	Japanese	8/14/1902
35) Jose Miranda	Puerto Rican	10/26/1904
36) Kang Yong Bok	Korean	5/23/1906
37) Shim Miung Ok	Korean	5/23/1906
38) Woo Miung Sook	Korean	5/23/1906
39) "Frank Johnson"	Caucasian	5/31/1906
40) Okamoto	Japanese	5/31/1906
41) Lorenzo Colon	Puerto Rican	6/28/1906
42) Yi Hi Dam	Korean	6/21/1909
43) Jozo Higashi	Japanese	10/28/1909
44) Kanagawa	Japanese	2/3/1910
45) Espridon Lahom	Filipino	2/14/1911
46) Eigira Nakamura	Japanese	1/16/1912
47) Miguel Manigbas	Filipino	7/8/1912
48) Domingo Rodrigues	Filipino	7/8/1913
49) Hilao Bautista	Filipino	7/8/1913
50) Simplicio Javellana	Filipino	4/7/1914
51) Pak Sur Chi	Korean	6/25/1915
52) Juan Coronel	Filipino	10/15/1915
53) Ponciano Golaste	Filipino	10/15/1915
54) Feliciano Hirano	Filipino	10/15/1915
55) Yee Kelik Yo	Korean	1/26/1917
56) Gabriel Verver	Filipino	10/26/1917
57) Florencia Bonelia	Filipino	10/25/1917
58) C. Dojoylongsol	Filipino	11/16/1917
59) Antonio Garcia	Filipino	11/30/1917

continued

APPENDIX I—*Cont'd*

NAME	ETHNICITY	DATE
60) Senkichi Ichioka	Japanese	6/2/1921
61) Cleofe Ruiz	Puerto Rican	10/26/1923
62) Narciso Reyes	Filipino	5/27/1927
63) Marcelo Rivera	Filipino	5/27/1927
64) Pilipi Austero	Filipino	8/12/1927
65) Lacambra Santiago	Filipino	8/12/1927
66) Vicente Kagal	Filipino	3/2/1929
67) Myles Y. J. Fukunaga	Japanese	11/19/1929
68) Lazaro Calibo	Filipino	7/28/1932
69) Leoncio Encio	Filipino	7/15/1933
70) Risalino Tabiolo	Filipino	11/1/1933
71) Solomon Mahoe	Hawaiian	8/5/1937
72) Mateo Quinones	Filipino	5/27/1940
73) Mariano Flores	Filipino	9/19/1941
74) Anaclito Gagarin	Filipino	10/24/1941
75) Ardiano Domingo	Filipino	1/7/1944
Totals:		
Caucasian	1	
Puerto Rican	3	
Chinese	5	
Korean	6	
Japanese	9	
Hawaiian	24	
Filipino	24	
Unknown	3	

Sources: *HA*, 8 Sept. 1951, and the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Civil Identification (n.d.), *AH*.

APPENDIX II
MILITARY EXECUTIONS IN HAWAII

NAME	ETHNICITY	CRIME	DATE	SOURCE
1) Edward J. Leonski	?	?	9/9/1942	TLMR*
2) Louis Gargus	?	?	3/5/1943	TLMR
3) Herman Perry	?	?	3/15/1945	TLMR
4) Robert A. Pearson	?	?	3/20/1945	TLMR
5) Jesse D. Boston	Black	Robbery, <i>murder</i>	8/1/1945	<i>HSB</i> 8/2/1945
6) Cornelius Thomas	Black	Murder	8/1/1945	<i>HSB</i> 8/2/1945
7) Garlon Mickles	Black	Murder, <i>rape,</i> assault, escape	4/22/1947	<i>HSB</i> 4/22/1947

*Tropic Lightning Museum records, Schofield Barracks. The museum people point out that, contrary to some public opinion that there may have been more military executions, there are but seven graves behind the mock orange hedge.

