



Honor Killing: Race, Rape, and Clarence Darrow's Spectacular Last Case

David E. Stannard

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In the fall of 1931, Thalia Massie, the bored, aristocratic wife of a young naval officer stationed in Honolulu, accused six nonwhite islanders of gang rape. The ensuing trial let loose a storm of racial and sexual hysteria, but the case against the suspects was scant and the trial ended in a hung jury. Outraged, Thalia's socialite mother arranged the kidnapping and murder of one of the suspects. In the spectacularly publicized trial that followed, Clarence Darrow came to Hawai'i to defend Thalia's mother, a sorry epitaph to a noble career.

It is one of the most sensational criminal cases in American history, Stannard has rendered more than a lurid tale. One hundred and fifty years of oppression came to a head in those sweltering courtrooms. In the face of overwhelming intimidation from a cabal of corrupt military leaders and businessmen, various people involved with the case—the judge, the defense team, the jurors, a newspaper editor, and the accused themselves—refused to be cowed. Their moral courage united the disparate elements of the non-white community and galvanized Hawai'i's rapid transformation from an oppressive white-run oligarchy to the harmonic, multicultural American state it became.

Honor Killing is a great true crime story worthy of Dominick Dunne—both a sensational read and an important work of social history

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