

Sabbatical Leave Request

Slavery, Colonialism, and the Racialized Practice of the Death Penalty: The Experience of the Bahamas

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Objectives

The research questions that serve as the focus of my attention relate to the ways in which historical practices of race-based control shape historical and contemporary experiences of punishment, particularly the death penalty. This research, which grew out of research I completed as part of my previous sabbatical, has led me to investigate the racial patterning of the death penalty in the United States and the Bahamas.

My present research project is focused on documenting and explaining the historical practice of the death penalty in the Bahamas. As a former slave society, a former British colony, and a nation that has transitioned to black majority rule and independence, while maintaining its use of the death penalty, the Bahamas presents an excellent opportunity to explore the historical and contemporary racial dynamics of the death penalty.

Complicating this research is the absence of a complete and compiled documentation of Bahamian death sentences and executions. As a result, the first phase of my research, which I hope to complete through this sabbatical, is the creation of this documentary record. This process involves exhaustive examination of primary and secondary documents in US, Bahamian, and, perhaps, British archives.

My objective is to identify and examine all available documentary records of Bahamian death sentences and executions, both through interlibrary loans and through travels to Bahamian and British archives. Thus far, I have traveled once to the Bahamian Ministry of Archives in Nassau and to Fox Hill Prison, also in Nassau, to evaluate and collect data from their archives.

Schedule

I anticipate completing my review of available Bahamian newspapers by the end of 2007. This will provide me a good overview of the use of the death penalty in the Bahamas since 1784. However, this newspaper record is incomplete (e.g. no newspapers were published between 1838-1848; many early newspapers are illegible or damaged). Also, the newspaper record provides incomplete and inconsistent information related to death sentences and executions. Some cases are covered in close detail. Many other cases, including cases as recent as the 1950s, receive only passing mention and do not include

critical details about the offense and important characteristics of the victim and the offender.

As a result, my research must ultimately draw more on primary documents. I am still trying to determine what type of documentation is available and where it may be found. In my travel to Nassau, I found that court documents are available, though access to them is limited and cumbersome and the documents themselves are often of poor quality. I am trying to determine whether similar documentation, though more accessible and better preserved, is also available in the Colonial Records Office in London. Court records may also be available through the Privy Council, the court of last resort for the Bahamas throughout its history. Bahamian police records may also be of some assistance.

My expectation is also to identify and review all primary source materials that are available via InterLibrary Loan before the spring of 2008. With all remotely available primary and secondary documents reviewed by the beginning of my proposed sabbatical, I would be free to travel to archives in the Bahamas and Great Britain during the sabbatical. As the scope of this travel becomes clearer, I will pursue the necessary grant support to fund my travel.

I plan to complete my review of primary documents during the spring of 2008. This would put me in a position to write a comprehensive history of the death penalty in the Bahamas. It would also make it possible for me to begin a social science analysis of the factors associated with the changing patterns of death sentences and executions in the Bahamas.

Stated more concisely, with the necessary provisos given the long lead times, my schedule is as follows:

- Fall 2006-Fall 2007: Complete review of Bahamian newspapers and loanable primary source materials;
- Spring 2008: Conduct archival travel necessary to complete review of primary source materials;
- Spring-Summer 2008: Complete article-length manuscript documenting all death sentences and executions in the Bahamas;
- Spring-Summer 2008: Continue research analyzing the patterns of death penalty use in the Bahamas, particularly the relations between slavery, colonialism, black majority rule, and independence, as independent variables, and the death penalty.

Expected outcomes

The successful completion of this project will have associated with it several outcomes:

1. Completed documentation of all death sentences and executions in the Bahamas since 1784;
2. Investigation of the social, economic, and political factors that shape the patterning of the death penalty in the Bahamas;

3. Completion of an article-length manuscript providing a comprehensive history of the death penalty in the Bahamas;

Beyond these objectives, I intend to write a book-length manuscript on the history of the death penalty in the Bahamas and its relationship to the major cross-currents in Bahamian history, including slavery, colonialism, the transition to black majority rule, and independence. I would also like to extend the type of analysis that I am developing for the Bahamas to other former slave states and British colonies, such as Jamaica and Barbados. These projects will make important contributions to the emerging study of the legacy of slavery in the use of the death penalty.

Contributions of project to teaching effectiveness and/or scholarship

Completion of this sabbatical will advance my teaching effectiveness in two ways: (1) better understanding of the relationship between race and punishment makes important contributions to my teaching of our regularly-offered American Criminal Justice System and Criminology courses, as well as the Mass Imprisonment and Death Penalty courses I have developed in recent years; (2) better understanding of the relationship between race and punishment and the role of the death penalty in the Caribbean will contribute to the study abroad course I have developed, Race and Punishment in the Caribbean. That course is being offered for the first time in Barbados in the summer of 2007.

Completion of this sabbatical will also mark a significant advance in the scholarship on the relationship between slavery and the death penalty as well as scholarship on the history and present practice of the death penalty in the Caribbean. These are emerging areas of scholarship within the discipline and I am well-positioned to make important contributions in each area.

Need for an extended leave to accomplish objectives

Unlike the United States, where documentation of death sentences and executions is pretty readily available to scholars, the record of the death penalty in the Bahamas is poorly developed. It is largely through efforts that I have undertaken over the past several years that such a record exists at all, though it remains incomplete. As a result, developing the dependent variable – the documentary record of death sentences and executions in the Bahamas – on which social science research can be built, requires travel to foreign archives.

The research that I have done thus far has required travel to Nassau, Bahamas. Additional travel to Nassau is expected. Travel to London, the repository of records from the period of British colonial rule of the Bahamas (1784-1973), is also expected. This latter travel is particularly important due to the poor physical quality and inaccessibility of records in the Bahamian Ministry of Archives.

Evidence of productivity during prior leaves; evidence of ongoing research

My previous sabbatical, in the spring of 2000, provided me the opportunity to complete an analysis of the regional patterning of the death penalty in the United States. That study was published as "Putting Them There, Keeping Them There, and Killing Them: Explaining State-Level Variations in Death Penalty Intensity," in the *Iowa Law Review* (a top twenty law review), in 2002 (attached).

That research has formed the foundation of the research agenda I have pursued since that time. Projects undertaken since that time include a further exploration of the relationship between slavery and the death penalty in the United States (published with Margaret Vandiver and David Giacopassi in *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*) and my present research on the history of the death penalty in the Bahamas.

The first manuscript from my Bahamas research is presently under review at the *Caribbean Journal of Criminology and Social Psychology* (attached). This paper directly extends my research on the relationship between slavery and the death penalty in the United States. I have also presented a conference paper that looks more closely within the slave era in the Bahamas and examines the patterning of death sentences and executions in that era.

This record demonstrates my ability to carry a sabbatical project through to a successful completion and to develop a series of related projects. It also demonstrates that I have established a foundation on which the present research will be built, ensuring that the project I am proposing holds promise for further development.

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