The Death Penalty in Philadelphia

Robert Brett Dunham, Executive Director
Death Penalty Information Center

The Death Penalty Information Center provides information and analysis of death-penalty issues. DPIC does not take a position for or against the death penalty itself, but is critical of the manner in which it is administered.

Philadelphia Death-Penalty Outcomes, 1978-2018

201 death sentences since 1978

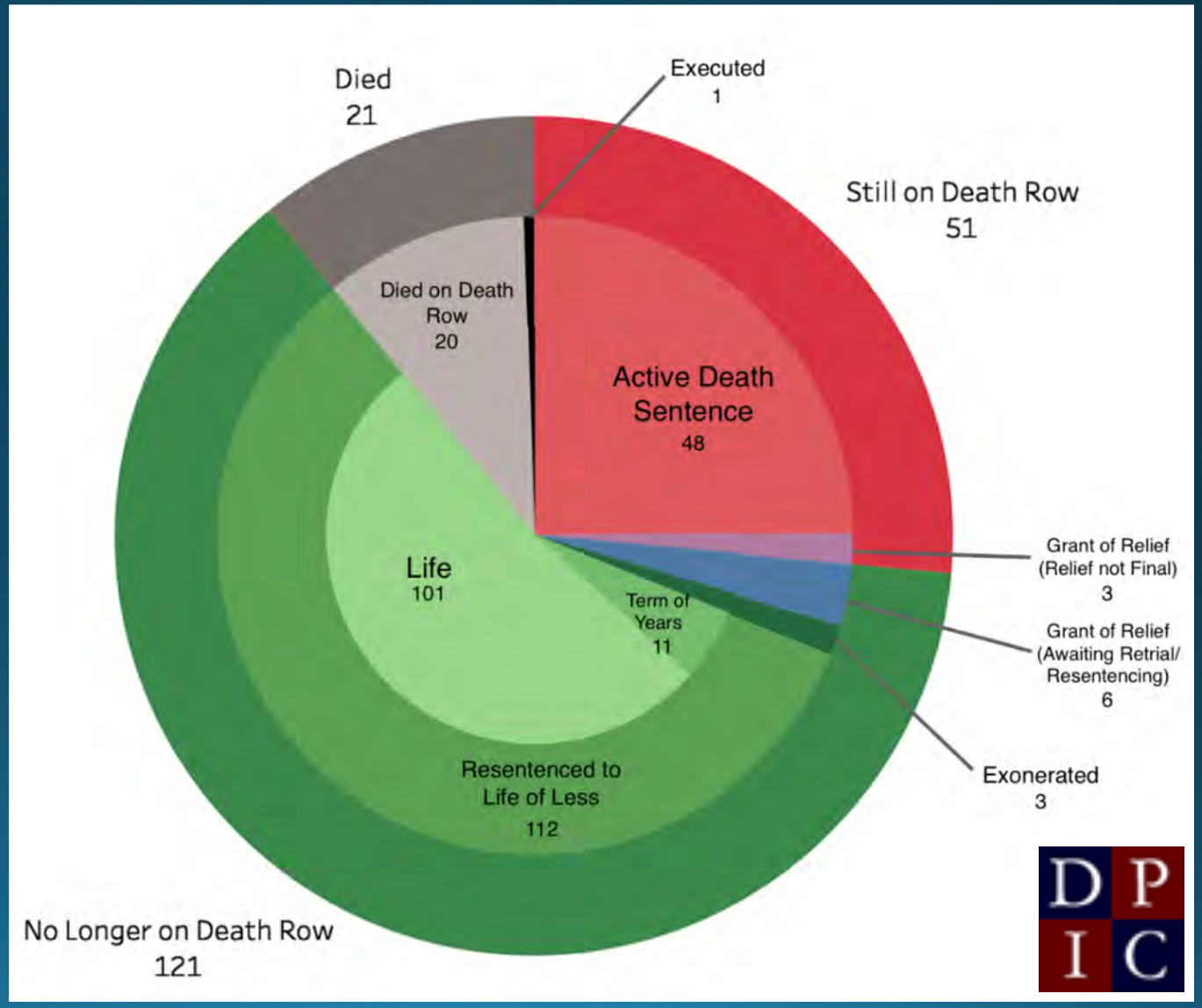
134 death sentences overturned

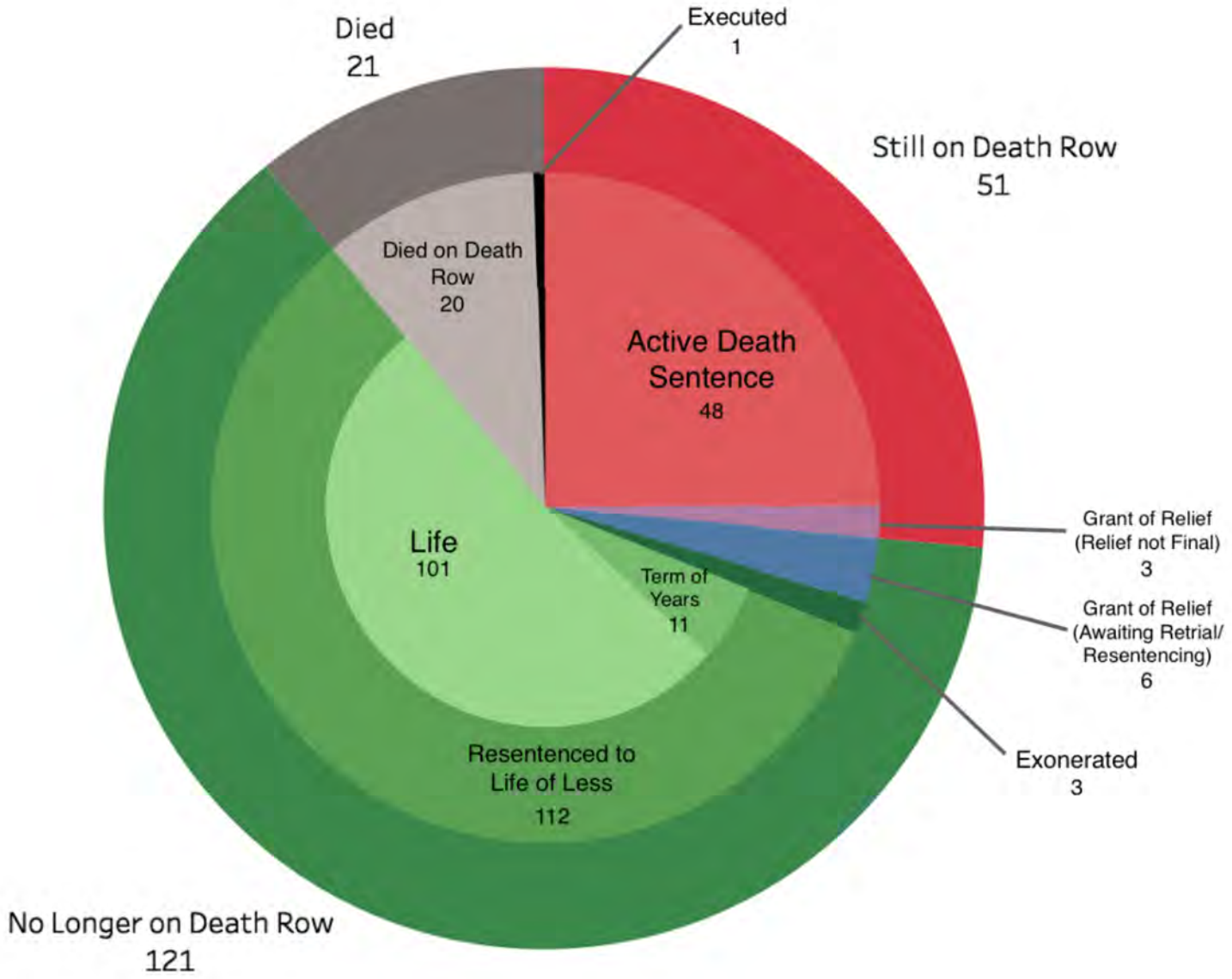
112 prisoners resentenced to life or less

3 exonerations

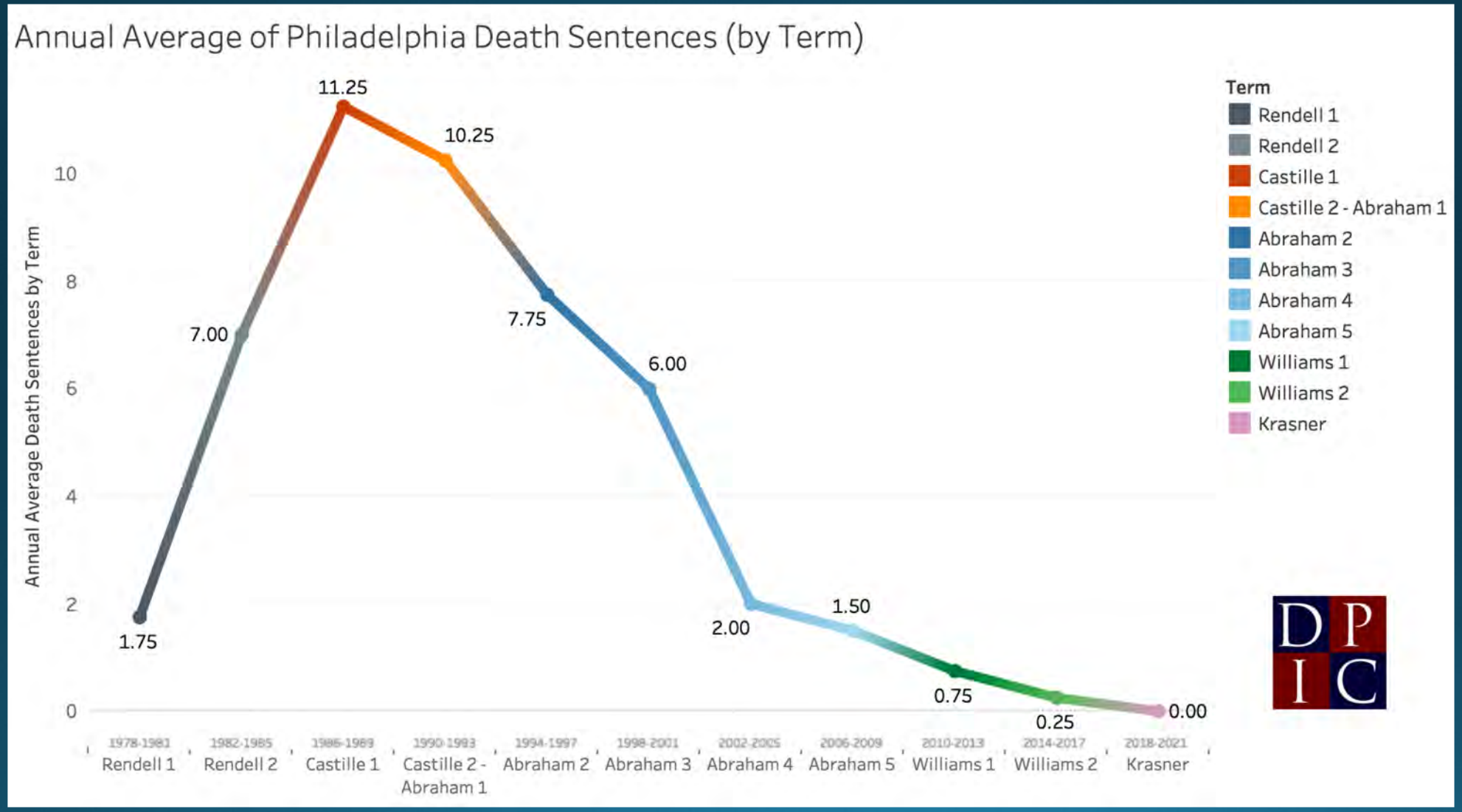
20 died on death row

1 execution

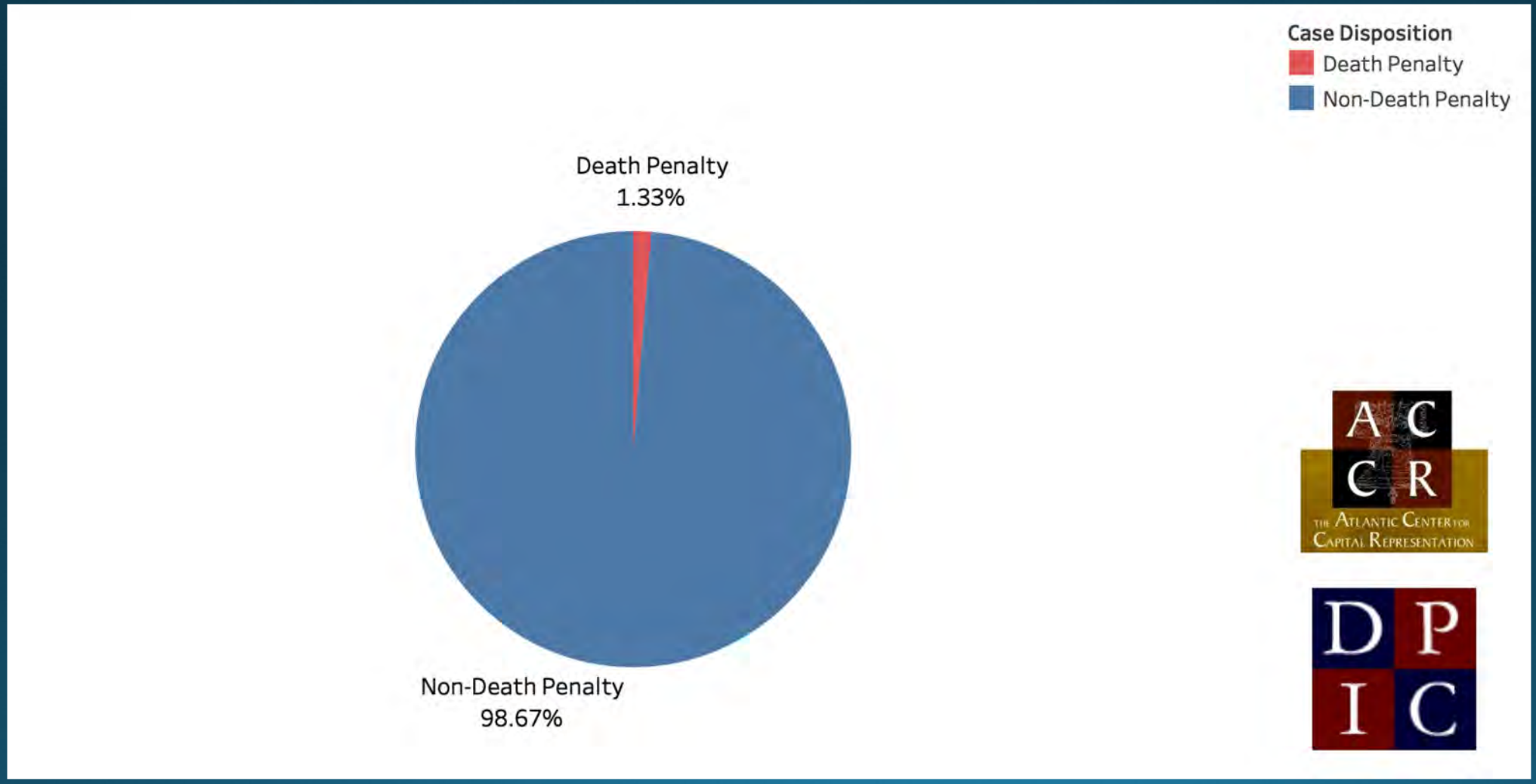



Died
21
Executed
1
Still on Death Row
51
Died on Death Row
20
Active Death Sentence
48
Life
101
Term of Years
11
Grant of Relief (Relief not Final)
3
Grant of Relief (Awaiting Retrial/ Resentencing)
6
Exonerated
3
Resentenced to Life of Less
112
No Longer on Death Row
121

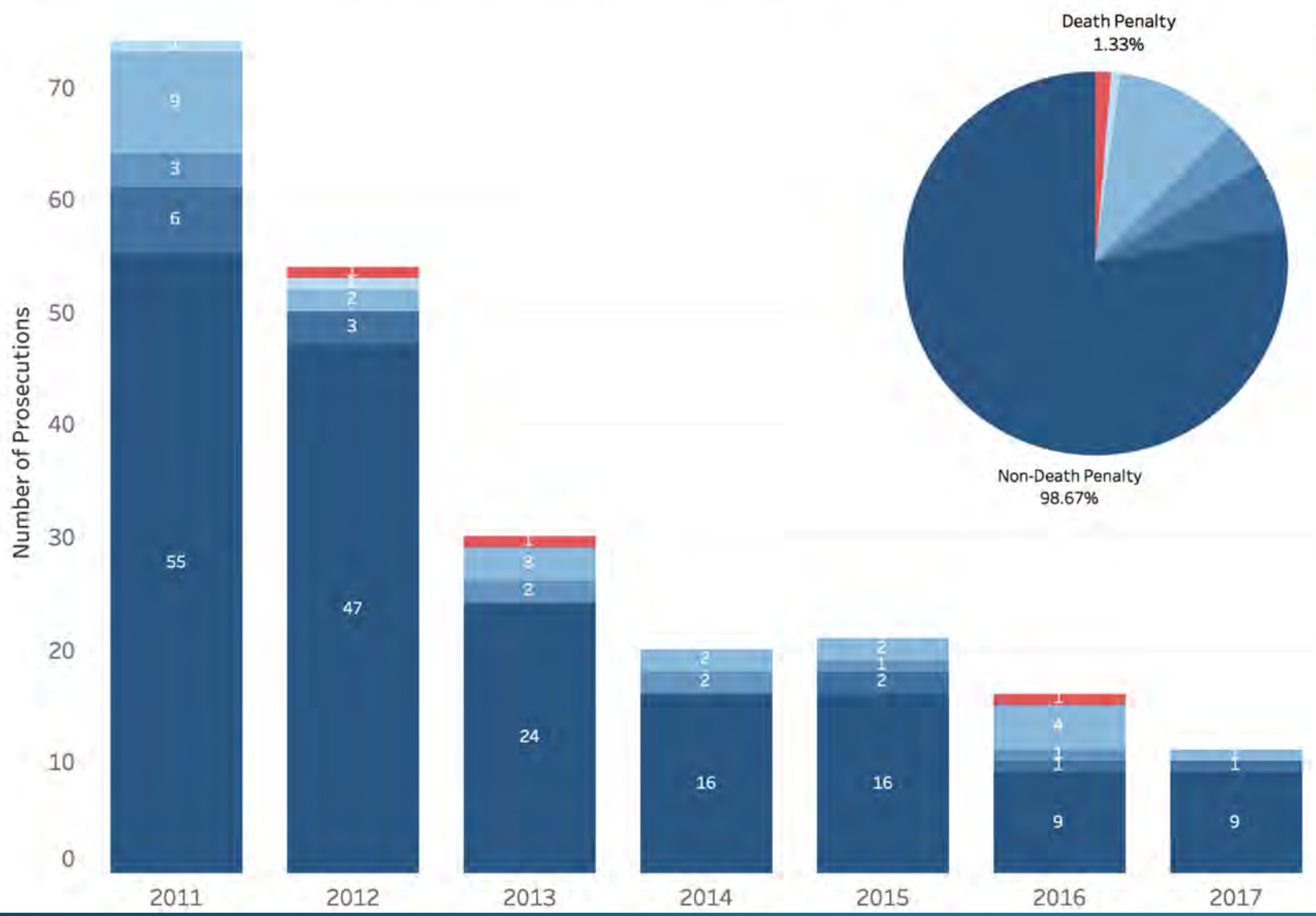
The Decline of the Death Penalty in Philadelphia



Philadelphia Death Penalty Trial Dispositions, 2011-2017



Philadelphia Outcome of Capital Prosecutions by Year



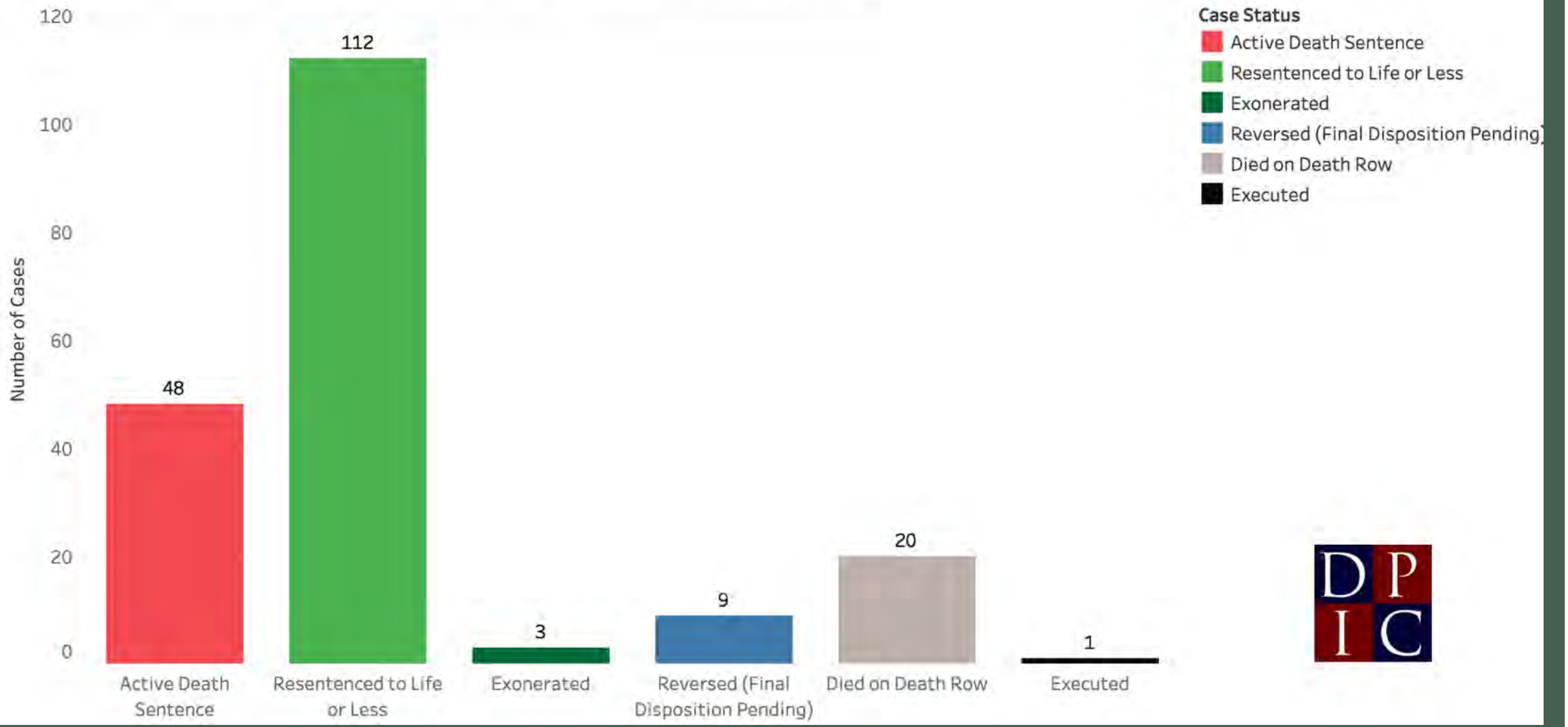
Case Disposition

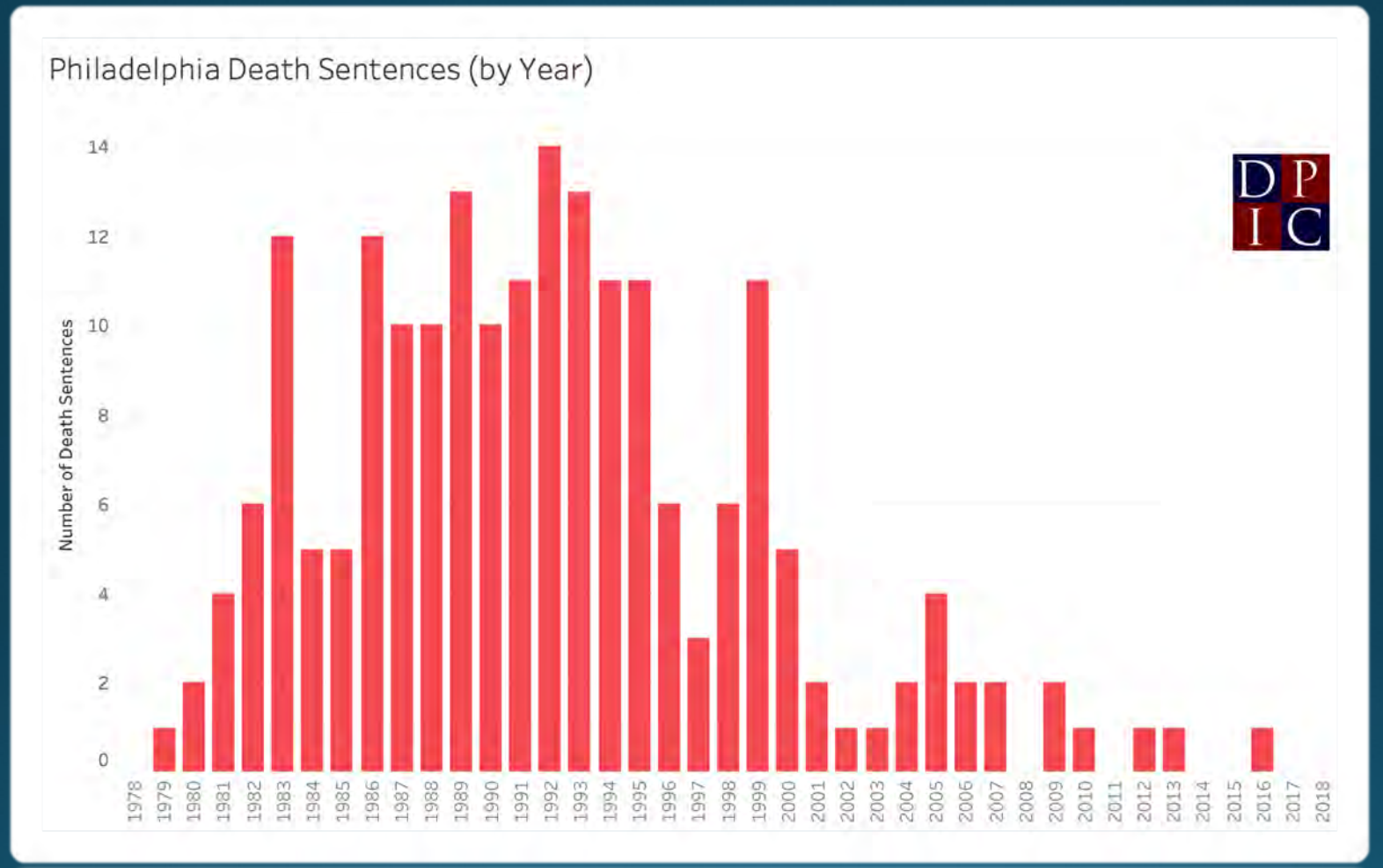
- (6) Death Penalty
- (5) Other Non-Capital Disposition
- (4) Trial: Non-Death Outcome
- (3) Guilty Plea - Less Than 1st-Degree Murder
- (2) Guilty Plea - 1st-Degree Murder
- (1) Voluntarily Decapitalized

ACCR The Atlantic Center for Capital Representation

DPIC

Status of Philadelphia Death Sentences (Imposed since 1978)




Philadelphia Death Sentences (by Year)
Number of Death Sentences
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
1978
1979
1980
1981
1982
1983
1984
1985
1986
1987
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
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2006
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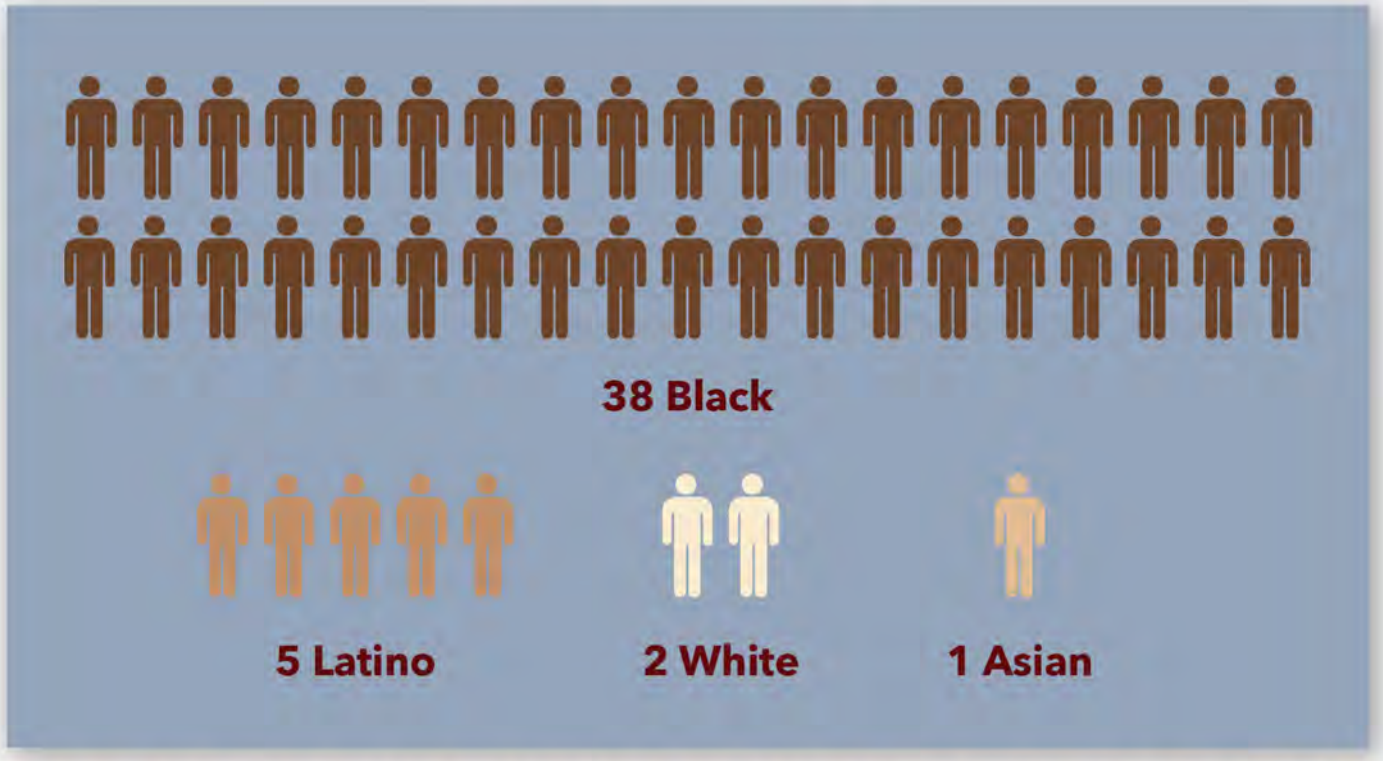
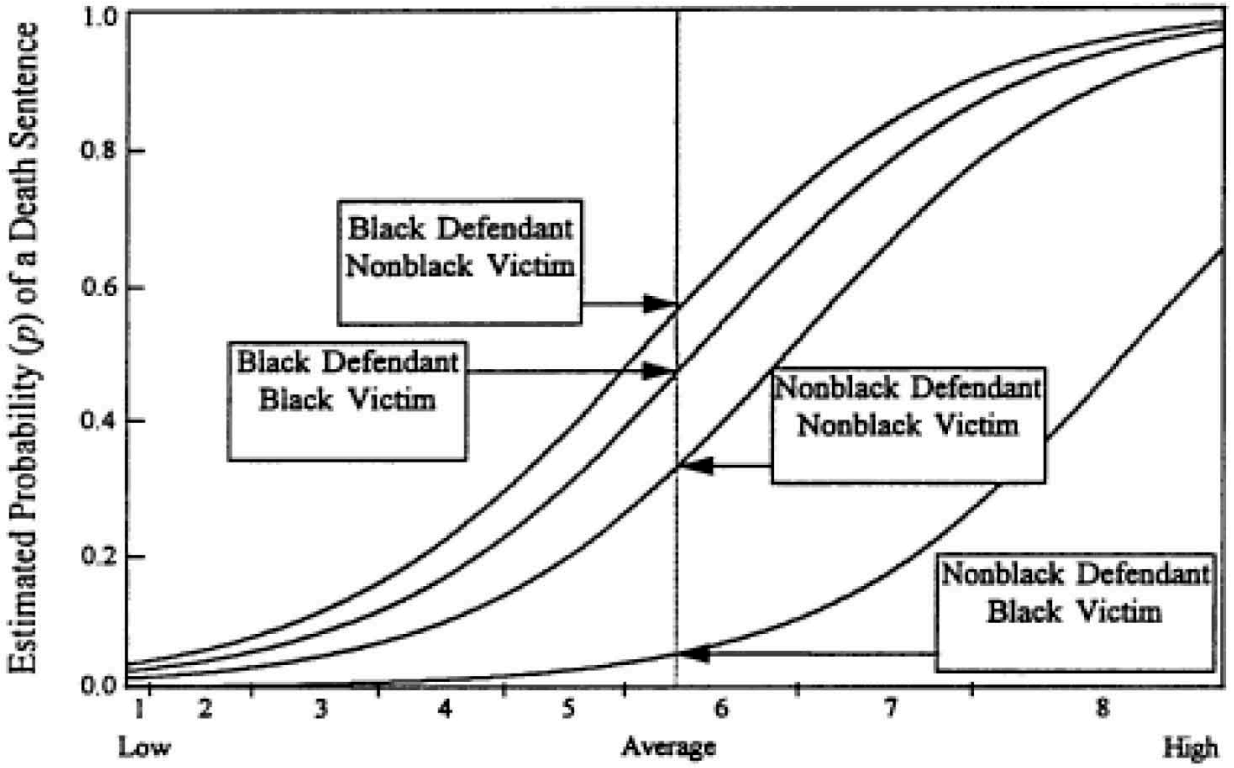
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
D P
I C

In the past two decades, 83% of defendants sentenced to death in Philadelphia have been Black.



Of the 46 defendants sentenced to death in Philadelphia since 1997, 44 have been people of color.

Estimated Race of Defendant and Race of Victim Effects
in Jury Death Sentencing Decisions Among All Death Eligible Cases
Philadelphia 1983-93



Defendant Culpability Index and Scale Score
Estimated in a Logistic Regression Analysis

In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, black defendants tried for killing white victims were twice as likely to be sentenced to death if they had "stereotypically" African facial features.

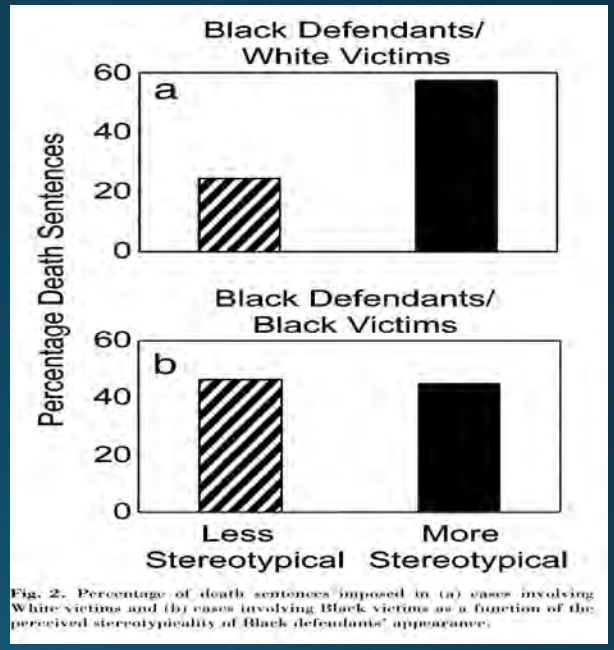


Fig. 2. Percentage of death sentences imposed in (a) cases involving White victims and (b) cases involving Black victims as a function of the perceived stereotypicality of Black defendants' appearance.

Innocence and the Death Penalty

THE MORNING CALL

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2006 www.mcall.com 50¢

"I'm more frustrated than angry. I spent all this time for something I didn't even do."
DENNIS COUNTERMAN

Partly cloudy
69° / 49°
Forecast, B12

BRIEFING

AT LEAST 9 U.S. TROOPS were killed in Iraq the last two days, bringing October's toll to 70. Hundreds of Iraqis have been killed in the past week. A2

DENNIS COUNTERMAN, who spent more than 18 years in prison after being charged with an arson that killed his three children, was released Wednesday this under a plea agreement. A1

SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS to retirees are going up by 3.3 percent next year, less than half the rate of inflation in the Lehigh Valley. A1

REPUBLICAN LYNN SWANN on Wednesday brought his gubernatorial campaign to the Lehigh Valley again. He stumped in Slatington, Trexlertown and Easton. A8

SEVEN FUNERAL HOME DIRECTORS indicted in a scheme to sell body parts from corpses for transplants pleaded guilty and have agreed to cooperate with investigators, prosecutors said Wednesday. A14

SEVEN MIL FOOTBALL STADIUMS will be lit with radiological dirty bombs this weekend, according to postings on a Web site, but the government expressed doubts about the threat. A10

Death row to freedom

Dennis Counterman released after plea agreement in children's deaths.

By Debbie Gerlich
Of The Morning Call

Dennis Counterman, who spent more than 18 years in prison — some on death row — after being charged with setting a fire that killed his three children, was released Wednesday as a result of a rare plea agreement.

"Today, Mr. Counterman, you are a free man," Lehigh County Judge Lawrence J. Brenner said after a 45-minute hearing in the case, which stemmed from a July 25, 1988, fire that raged through the Counterman family home at 436 S. Chestnut St., Allentown.

Still dressed in dark blue prison-issue shirt and pants, Counterman walked to the courtroom's gallery and embraced two nieces, who wept on his shoulders. For the first time since he was charged in August 1988, he left the courtroom without handcuffs and leg shackles.

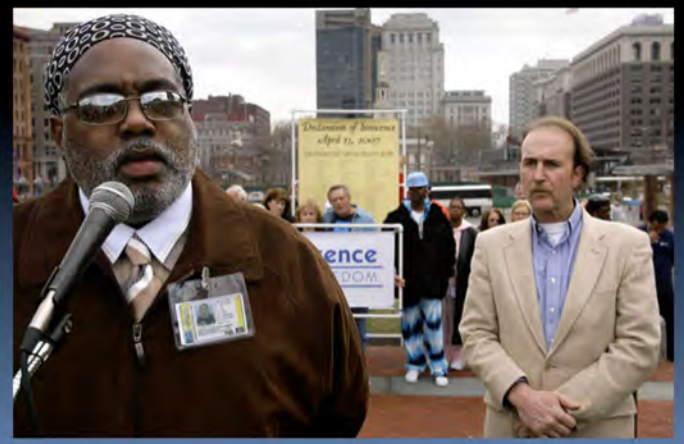
"I'm glad to be with family," he said. "It's been a long time."

Outside the courtroom, he hugged one of his brothers, Russell Dyenes, who came from Omaha, Neb., for the

DENNIS COUNTERMAN leaves the Lehigh County Courthouse with nieces Melissa Borrero (left) and Marcia Wrigley, both of Allentown, Mo. case turned around when it was learned his oldest son had a history of setting fires.

Dave Kidner The Morning Call

COUNTERMAN PAGE A2



DPIC

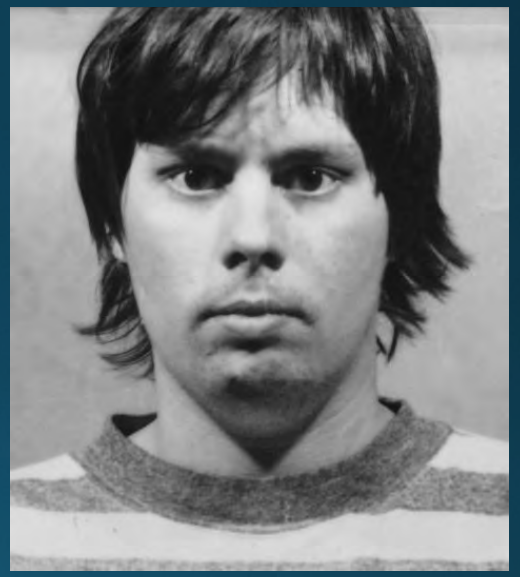
Innocence and the Death Penalty

Innocence in Philadelphia

Exonerated:

Harold Wilson, William Nieves, Neil Ferber

Innocence in Philadelphia

Should Be Exonerated:

Fred Thomas, Jimmy Dennis, Daniel Dougherty, Walter Ogrod