



Leopold and Loeb: The History and Legacy of One of 20th Century America's Most Notorious Crimes and Trials

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures

*Includes accounts of the crime and trial, including the confessions

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"A superman ... is, on account of certain superior qualities inherent in him, exempted from the ordinary laws which govern men. He is not liable for anything he may do." – Richard Loeb

There has been no shortage of shocking crimes and trials that generated frenzied coverage across America, but few can lay claim to “crime of the century” like the murder carried out by Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb in 1924. While studying as young adults at the prestigious University of Chicago, Leopold and Loeb devised a meticulous plot to kidnap and murder a child while managing to get away with ransom money, thereby perpetrating what they considered a “perfect crime.”

On May 21, they put their plan in motion and targeted 14 year old Bobby Franks, who had the misfortune of being acquainted with Loeb. Franks was lured into a vehicle and brutally murdered before Leopold and Loeb dumped his body 25 miles away. When attempts at ransom went awry almost immediately, Leopold and Loeb tried to cover their tracks, only to have a special set of eyeglasses link Franks’ murder back to Leopold. Barely less than a week after the murder, the “perfect crime” completely unraveled when Leopold and Loeb were brought in for formal questioning and confessed.

The crime was horrific enough, but the trial brought even more attention to the case, and it touched on several crucial issues. Both young men cited the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche as a motivation for attempting to commit the crime and prove they were better than the common man. As Leopold told his own attorney, "The killing was an experiment It is just as easy to justify such a death as it is to justify an entomologist killing a beetle on a pin."

Moreover, in addition to the killers’ families hiring renowned defense lawyer Clarence Darrow, the crimes took place at a time when various forms of media were becoming ever more popular, particularly radio and film. Thus, the trial generated more coverage than just about any before it on the way to being billed as the “Trial of the Century,” and Darrow did his best to prevent the boys from suffering the death penalty by citing other factors: “This terrible crime was inherent in his organism, and it came from some ancestor... Is any blame attached because somebody took Nietzsche's philosophy seriously and fashioned his life upon it?... It is hardly fair to hang a 19-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him at the university.”

Ultimately, the boys were given life sentences + 99 years for the kidnapping, which would lend its name to a memoir written by Leopold. For his part, Darrow would use his increased prestige to participate the following year in the famous Scopes Trial.

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Trials chronicles the shocking crime and the trial that followed. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Leopold and Loeb like never before, in no time at all.

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