

## **Leopold and Loeb 1924**

**Nathan Freundenthal Leopold, Jr. (1904 – 1971) and Richard A. Loeb (1905 – 1936) were two wealthy University of Chicago students who murdered 14-year old Bobby Franks in 1924, in an attempt to commit the “perfect crime.” They received sentences of life in prison plus 99 years.**

**1904** – Leopold born to an affluent family in Kenwood, Chicago. Has a number of early homosexual encounters, culminating in a relationship with Loeb.

**1905** – Loeb born to an affluent family in Kenwood, Chicago. His father was the Vice-President of Sears and Roebuck.

**1920** – the boys begin a four-year crime spree, they committed robbery, vandalism, arson and petty theft, but it was not enough for Loeb.

**1922** – Leopold graduates from the University of Chicago with a genius IQ, attends law school at University of Chicago. Plans to transfer to Harvard Law School in September 1924.

**19??** – Loeb is the youngest graduate in the history of the University of Michigan. Plans to attend law school at University of Chicago.

**1924** – on May 21, after 7 months of working on their plan, they put their plot in motion, luring 14 year old Franks, a neighbor and distant cousin of Loeb's, into a rented car. Being acquainted with them Franks happily went off with them.

After striking him with a chisel they suffocated him, concealing the body in a railroad track outside of Chicago, the body was burned with acid to make identification more difficult.

They then went out to lunch and spent the evening drinking and playing cards.

**Midnight** – they telephone Frank's home and tell him he can soon expect a ransom demand for the return of his son.

They type and mail a letter asking for a \$10,000 ransom from the Franks family.

**May 22, 9:30 am** – special-delivery letter arrives at Franks home demanding \$10,000 ransom. It says additional information will be delivered by telephone at 1:00 pm.

Franks family begin making preparations to pay ransom.

**May 22, afternoon** - Tony Minke with a RR crew finds the body. A pair of eyeglasses is found with the body (and was eventually traced back to Leopold).

The ransom note had been typed on a typewriter that Leopold had used with his law school study group and was from his fraternity.

**May 31** - During questioning their alibis broke down and they each confessed. Their confessions were in agreement for the most part, although each blamed the other for the actual killing.

Ransom was not their primary motive; each one's family gave him all the money he needed. They admitted they were driven by the thrill. While in jail they basked in the public attention they received, regaling newspaper reporters with the crimes lurid details again and again.

The public was outraged, and the fact that both murderers were of Jewish origin led to fears of anti-Semitic responses.

The trial was a media spectacle, dubbed the “Trial of the Century.” Loeb's family hired the famous Clarence Darrow to defend the boys against the capital charges of murder and kidnapping.

Leopold and Loeb's behavior during the trial – constantly clowning around, smirking, laughing and hamming it up – turned the public even more against the “poor little rich boys.”

Darrow gave a 12-hour speech, which has been called the finest of his career. In the end he was successful in avoiding the sentences of execution but the judge sentenced Leopold and Loeb each to life in prison (for murder), plus 99 years each (for kidnapping).

Leopold and Loeb sent to the state prison in Joliet and officials there were ridiculed for the special treatment they received.

Each enjoyed a private cell, books, a desk, filing cabinet, and even pet birds. They showered away from the other prisoners and took their meals (prepared to order) in the Officer's Lounge. They were allowed unlimited, unsupervised visitors and even allowed to keep their own gardens.

They used their educations to good purpose however, teaching classes in the prison school.

**1936** – Loeb is murdered by another prisoner who claimed he had made homosexual advances towards him. Loeb was slashed 56 times in the back and left to bleed to death in the shower room. Others claimed the murder occurred because Loeb had not given the man as many cigarettes as he had to others.

**1958** – Leopold's fourth appeal is pled by the poet Carl Sandburg, who offers Leopold a room in his own home. Many believe Leopold has been rehabilitated completely.

After his release he writes a book about his experiences called *Life Plus 99 Years*, moved to

Puerto Rico and worked among the poor. He marries a widow.  
1971 – Leopold dies in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

you think they would have been caught?

#### Books about the Event

Fass, Paula. *Making and Remaking an Event: The Leopold and Loeb Case in the American Culture*. Journal of American History. 1993.  
Higdon, Hal. *Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century*. 1975/1999.  
Levin, Meyer. *Compulsion*. 1956/1996.  
Saul, John. *In the Dark of the Night*. 2006.

#### Notable Sources

[www.prairieghosts.com](http://www.prairieghosts.com)  
[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)  
[leopoldandloeb.com](http://leopoldandloeb.com)  
Fleisher, Richard (director), *Compulsion*. Film 1958.  
Haneke, Michael (director). *Funny Games*. Film 1997.  
Kalin, Tom (director), *Swoon*. Film 1990.

#### Personal Essays/REMEMBER

\* Have you ever envisioned committing the "perfect crime?" What would it be?

#### Reports/DISCOVER

\* Clarence Darrow was a famous lawyer, against capital punishment. Why did he have this stance?

\* Why would someone as renowned as Carl Sandburg have pled on Leopold's behalf during his 4<sup>th</sup> appeal hearing?

\* How common/uncommon was this type of crime in the 1920's? Use examples.

Leopold and Loeb did not fit any ordinary profile of the criminal type. If not for their errors do

#### Opinions/DECIDE

\* Who do you believe was the mastermind of the plan – Leopold or Loeb?

\* Darrow brought on a team of psychologists and other experts to testify on the boys behalf. Do you think mental illness played any role in Leopold and Loeb's actions?

#### Historical Fiction/IMAGINE

You are a prisoner or guard at Joliet Prison and see the special treatment given to Leopold and Loeb. What actions do you think you could take to change this?

\* You are a reporter and get an exclusive interview w/ Leopold (or Loeb) during the trial. Write about it.