

American rhetoric – mercy for leopold and loeb assignment

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American Rhetoric: “ Mercy for Leopold and Loeb” by Clarence Darrow

Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, the sons of two of Chicago’s wealthiest and most prominent German Jewish families, precipitated one of the twentieth century’s most sensational mass media events when they kidnapped and murdered a fourteen-year-old neighbor boy, Robert Franks, in May of 1924. At first, there was little suspicion that the pair, close friends since childhood, had any involvement in the disappearance of the Franks boy.

Law enforcement, back in 1924, was able to track down a killer from a pair of eyeglasses. This just recently was profiled in a homicide update story on a missing child. Police first missed the glasses altogether, missed the reflection in a beer can they chose not to dust for prints, and a couple of years later a Cold Case squad picked up on both. Police stated they would not have been able to trace the glasses “ back then”. On May 31, 1924, however, the pair shocked the nation when they abandoned their alibis, turned against one another, and confessed to the Franks murder.

Because a tragedy of three young lost lives, a dead fourteen-year-old victim and the imprisonment of two teenage killers, unfolded in Chicago in 1924, therefore the murder trial of Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold that shocked the nation is best remembered decades later for the twelve-hour long plea of Clarence Darrow to save his clients from the gallows, since Clarence Darrow summation, rambling and disorganized as it was at times, stands as one of the most eloquent attacks on the death penalty ever delivered in an American courtroom.

Even without Darrow in his major, the Leopold and Loeb trial has the elements to justify its statement as the first “ trial of the century. ” It is not surprising that the public responded to a trial that involved the kidnapping and murder of a young boy from one of Chicago’s most prominent families, a bizarre relationship between two promising scholars-turned-murderers, what the prosecutor called an “ act of Providence” leading to the hesitation of the teenage defendants and an experienced and sharp-tongued state’s attorney bent on hanging the confessed killers in spite of their relative youth.