



Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century

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Among the criminal celebrities of Prohibition-era Chicago, not even Al Capone was more notorious than two well-educated and highly intelligent Jewish boys from wealthy South Side families. In a meticulously planned murder scheme disguised as a kidnapping, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb chose fourteen-year-old Bobby Franks at random as their victim, abandoning his crumpled body in a culvert before his parents had a chance to respond to the ransom demand. Revealing secret testimony and raising questions that have gone unanswered for decades, Hal Higdon separates fact from myth as he unravels the crime, the investigation, and the trial, in which Leopold and Loeb were defended by the era's most famous attorney, Clarence Darrow. Higdon's razor sharp account of their chilling act, their celebrity, and their ultimate emergence as folk heroes resonates unnervingly in our own violent time.

Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century Details

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From Reader Review Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century for online ebook

Shannon says

It was actually a pretty boring account of what happened. All the friends' names get introduced and I forget who's who. I did like that that book went through till both men were dead.

Sandy Nawrot says

Most of you will know, I am obsessed with true crime. It's my brain candy. So you know that when I attempt to read one for TWO AND A HALF MONTHS and only get to 40% there is a problem.

The topic of Leopold and Loeb, two young affluent men in 1920's Chicago who kill a child for sport and show absolutely no remorse, is rich for mining. Is it the "crime of century"? Maybe it seemed like it back then. But the details are fascinating. I just think that this particular gentleman, Mr. Higdon, didn't know much about writing true crime. No details on the family, no pictures, no intrigue in the prose. Just a flat, dry account of what happened. It was suggested that this may have been a thesis or some such thing, that was later published. That would make sense.

We read this for one of my book clubs. I think our intent was to read about this crime and we landed on this particular book somehow. That is too bad because I have to believe there are better ones out there. God love the folks in this book club because they are thirsty for knowledge and are tenacious, and most finished this book, but none of them loved it. Give this one a pass.

Tracey says

An account of the Leopold & Loeb murder of their young neighbor Bobby Franks in the Kenwood neighborhood of Chicago in the 20's. Although I'm not a fan of crime novels, I thought this account was particularly compelling. It does not excuse the murderers, nor does it glamorize their crime, since neither Leopold nor Loeb ever admitted directly to the murder. What the book does bring across is the seeming pointlessness of their crime; they were two wealthy and privileged men who made a private intellectual bet that they could get away with anything, even murder.

Dolores Wendland says

The book was written in 1975 and its discussion of anything related to homosexuality is quite dated, but if you can get past that it's quite gripping.

Bérénice says

When you think of Chicago during the 1920s, the first thing that comes to mind is Al Capone, prohibition, gangsters and crime. But in 1924, for a few months, Al Capone was no longer the talk of the town, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb became the most famous and unlikely celebrities of the time. Two extremely bright 19 year olds from very wealthy Chicago families, decide to kidnap and kill at random a person just for the "thrill" of it, with no other apparent motive than getting away with it and committing the perfect crime. The author tells in details the planning of the crime, the day it happened, the investigation, the arrest, the trial and the aftermath. The trial in particular is fascinating as it gives you a great insight on the murderer's personalities, their intelligence, their upbringing and how their relationship with one another led to murder. The book is written as if it were a fictional mystery novel, you will sometimes find yourself wondering whether or not this really happened. The suspense builds extremely well throughout the book, as if Hitchcock himself had put his touch to it. Even if I knew from the beginning who the killers were, as the investigation unfolded, I almost thought they would get away with it.

Peg says

Unbelievable stupidity and genius?

Deanna Beaton says

It is very in depth chronicling the events before, during, and after the investigation/trial. Because of that, the last few chapters are boring & sort of slog on because it's about their years in prison. Besides that, I really liked it. Actually, it's that specific eye for detail that made the rest of the book so good. Super interesting. I highly recommend it if you're in the mood for some true crime.

M. Newman says

Nathan Leopold, Jr. and Richard Loeb were brilliant young men from wealthy families, who, seeking to commit the perfect crime, kidnapped and murdered 14 year-old Bobby Franks. The senseless crime captured the imagination of 1924 Chicago, as well as the rest of the nation. The newspapers ran with the story, calling it "The Crime of the Century" and readers were fascinated from the time the crime was perpetrated until the time the murderers were sentenced. Leopold and Loeb were represented in court by the great and flamboyant defense attorney, Clarence Darrow whose aim was not to have them found innocent but rather, to avoid the death penalty. Other courtroom characters included Robert Crowe, an ambitious State's Attorney and Judge John Caverly, whose mission it was to decide whether the killers should hang. Author, Higdon researched the case well and put together an excellent history. I found the sections of the book that covered the killers' time in prison and beyond, to be the most interesting part of the book.

Lord Beardsley says

I've already read this about five times (yeah, I actually have...depressing and pathetic, why yes I am. thank you). It's the definitive work about Leopold and Loeb. It's the Real Slim Shady.

Nikmaack says

A fantastic, fascinating, comprehensive look at the Leopold and Loeb murder. While reading this book, I actually found and rewatched the Hitchcock film ROPE. And I tried to watch SWOON but it was too arty and I gave up on it.

All that to say, the book is a deep look into the crime, and the lives of the criminals, inspiring an even deeper look. Well written and sourced, it makes me want to call high school teachers and tell them this is the history they should have been teaching us.

Cerebral true crime. Great stuff.

Christy says

well written. seemed very even-handed and its presentation. very detailed account of the crime and aftermath. enjoyable

Katherine Addison says

This book, originally published in 1975 as *The Crime of the Century*, is excellent. Higdon is patient and thorough; he answers questions that a much later book, *For the Thrill of It* (2008) fails even to ask, and he manages something else Baatz fails at: to make the story gripping and compelling, despite the fundamental emptiness at its core. Partly this is because Higdon is a gifted writer; partly, I think, it's because he's genuinely interested in the unanswered--and unanswerable--question that lives a dark Heisenbergian life underneath the whole thing: who actually killed Bobby Franks?

Legally, Leopold and Loeb were equally responsible, so in one sense it doesn't matter. But Leopold said Loeb did it, and Loeb said Leopold did it, and neither of them ever wavered. Circumstantial evidence suggests Leopold did it; psychological evidence (including what may be a Freudian slip in his confession) suggests, much more strongly, that Loeb did it. But we can't know, and that uncertainty at the very heart of the case, for me, spreads outward, twisting and unsettling everything it touches. We don't know when exactly Bobby Franks died--the coroner contradicted himself on the witness stand, and neither prosecution nor defense demanded he resolve his testimony. (A tremendous flaw in the American legal system, as I have said in other reviews, is that a trial is a competition to tell the most compelling story, not an investigation to uncover the truth.) There are injuries to Bobby Franks' body that have never been explained. There are things about this crime, which is the epitome of the senseless murder, that don't make sense, even in its own upside down logic. There's the mystery of the other four crimes that Loeb mentioned but that were never pursued--the defense didn't want them brought to light, and the prosecution, arguing a death penalty case on first

degree murder *with confessions from both murderers*, couldn't be bothered with. There's something very existentialist about Leopold and Loeb, about the dreary banality of their "perfect crime," about the unknowability of the details, about the tremendous emptiness that sits where a motive should be, as if they were invented by Sartre or Camus.

For two young men of such academic precocity and high IQs and with such inflated ideas of their own *Übermensch*-ness, Leopold and Loeb were most dreadfully stupid. As Higdon points out, even without the most damning evidence of the glasses which Leopold somehow dropped when they were shoving the body into a culvert, there were a dozen leads that would have pointed the police directly at them, and the two of them were a fractured enough unit (they couldn't even keep their alibi straight) that they would inevitably have been tripped up in interrogation.

So much for Nietzsche.

Jane Anne says

Who cd not be a Babe & Dickie junkie? Young, beautiful, wealthy, in love. Accomplished yet dangerously immature. The details so haunting -- how yrs later, a cache of 1920s nude male photos found in Babe's garage; Leopold family's changing their name. Their initial shaved-head mugshots (u can see elsewhere. Babe was to have entered Harvard right about then!) Dickie's murder in prison shower. Babe's chauffeur, who burst the case wide open, was kept on by his father afterward! Epic tragedy.

Lisa Scott says

Good book well worth a read

Good book, factual but not boring, non judgmental, and I have to say it kept me riveted! Couple of reasons why it's not five stars:

Weird numbers in lots of sentences, and also a few spelling and grammatical mistakes.

Lisa Yudin says

I found this book as a teen, with newspaper clippings my grandparents placed inside from the trial.
