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The Saga of Leo Frank - I

Lead: On August 17, 1915 in the small Georgia town of Marietta, a mob lynched Leo Frank. The story behind the murder of this clearly innocent young man may serve as a snapshot of social tensions in early 20th century America.

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: Leo Frank represented much that irritated Southerners or for that matter, most rural Americans. He was an outsider, a Yankee transplanted to a South still struggling

to rise above the destruction and humiliation of the Civil War. Raised in Brooklyn, he came to Atlanta at the turn of the century to help establish a family business, the National Pencil Company. He was an urban industrialist come to bring change to the agricultural South, but most of all he was a Jew. For many white Christian Southerners, he represented a race that had rejected the True faith and killed the Savior. Jews were considered too bright, too aggressive, and much too rich. The life of Cornell graduate Leo Frank lay in the path of such envy and prejudice and for that he suffered and died.

His story began on April 26, 1913 when Mary Phagan, one of his

employees stopped by Frank's factory to collect her paycheck. There she was brutally murdered. She was choked with her undergarments and her skull crushed. Frank was called to identify the body and it so unsettled him that he appeared nervous. This looked suspicious and the police, already under fire for a series of unsolved Atlanta murders, chose to focus their investigation on Frank and two days later he was arrested.

Evidence given to a coroner's jury, later proven false or recanted, inaccurately portrayed Frank as sexually abusing his female employees. This was not true but by that point newspapers were feeding the rumor mill and visions of Jewish men taking

advantage of gentile girls whipped public opinion into a frenzy. Four weeks later the grand jury gave Solicitor General Hugh Dorsey the indictment he sought. What he did not tell the jury was that there was another suspect. Next time: Black against Jew and Southern justice.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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Lindemann, Albert S. *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank), 1894-1915*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

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