

Volume 3

Number 169

The Saga of Leo Frank – II

Lead: In 1913 Leo Frank, a leader in Atlanta's Jewish business community, was accused of brutally murdering one of his female employees, Mary Phagan. It has been called "one of the most shocking frame-ups ever perpetrated by American law and order officials."

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: In order to obtain an indictment against Frank, Solicitor Hugh Dorsey withheld from the grand jury the key fact that he had another

suspect, Jim Conley, a janitor from the factory. Conley had been seen washing blood from a shirt after the murder, he admitted writing two notes found near the body which, in nearly unintelligible language, attempted to shift the blame away from himself, and under strong pressure from police investigators, changed his story over and over. In retrospect, it is clear that the police were determined to get Frank's conviction and used Conley to do it.

The trial began at the end of July, attended by crowds whipped up by anti-Semitism and rumors of the accused alleged sexual misdeeds. Jury members could hear shouts of "Hang the Jew" from outside the courtroom. Prosecutors based their case almost

completely on the testimony of Conley who in contrast to his pre-trial confusion and shifting stories had been thoroughly rehearsed and refused to budge from his assertion that Frank had admitted to killing the girl. He knew the result of failure. If Frank was acquitted, Conley was next in line for the gallows. Despite its previous reputation, Frank's defense team was incompetent and failed to exploit the obvious inconsistencies in Conley's story and even mishandled the appeals process.

The irony of the Frank case was that during this period no white, Christian Southerner would have been indicted much less convicted on the testimony of a black man particularly

one whose own actions and words were so suspicious, but Frank was a Jew and that changed the equation. Next time: Southern vigilante justice and the end of Leo Frank.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Dinnerstein, Leonard. "The Fate of Leo Frank," *American Heritage* (October, 1996): 99-109.

Dinnerstein, Leonard. *The Leo Frank Case*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia, 1987.

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