

The Saga of Leo Frank -III

Lead: In 1915, Georgia Governor John M. Slaton commuted the sentence of Leo Frank, a man wrongfully convicted in the brutal murder of one of his employees, young Mary Phagan. That summer a mob broke into the prison farm where Frank was being held, took him out and lynched him.

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: Slaton said later he would have pardoned Frank had he been asked to, but the failure to request

complete exoneration was the latest in a long series of blunders by Frank's defense teams and the ultimate triumph of a prosecution which conspired in what was little more than an official frame-up. Frank was convicted by the testimony of a black janitor who was almost certainly guilty of the murder himself. An ironic twist of American justice: anti-Semitic prejudice prevailed over anti-black bias. In 1942 Rev. L.O. Bricker, the Baptist pastor of Mary Phagan's parents, revealed the popular sentiment at the time, "My own feelings, upon the arrest of the old Negro night-watchman, were [that he] would be poor atonement for the life of this little girl. But, when the police arrested a Jew, and a Yankee

Jew at that, all of the inborn prejudice against Jews rose up in a feeling of satisfaction, that here would be a victim worthy to pay for the crime."

When Slaton's commutation was announced, mobs filled Atlanta's streets and eventually one got to Frank. None of the lynching party was arrested even though their identities were widely known, but justice of a sort finally came in 1986 for Leo Frank. After repeated appeals, Georgia pardoned him for the technical reason that the state had abridged his civil rights by failing to prevent his lynching, but not because of his innocence. Professor Leonard Dinnerstein says "Leo Frank's unquiet spirit continues to vex the conscience

of many Georgians[long] after he died on an oak tree in Marietta.'

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.