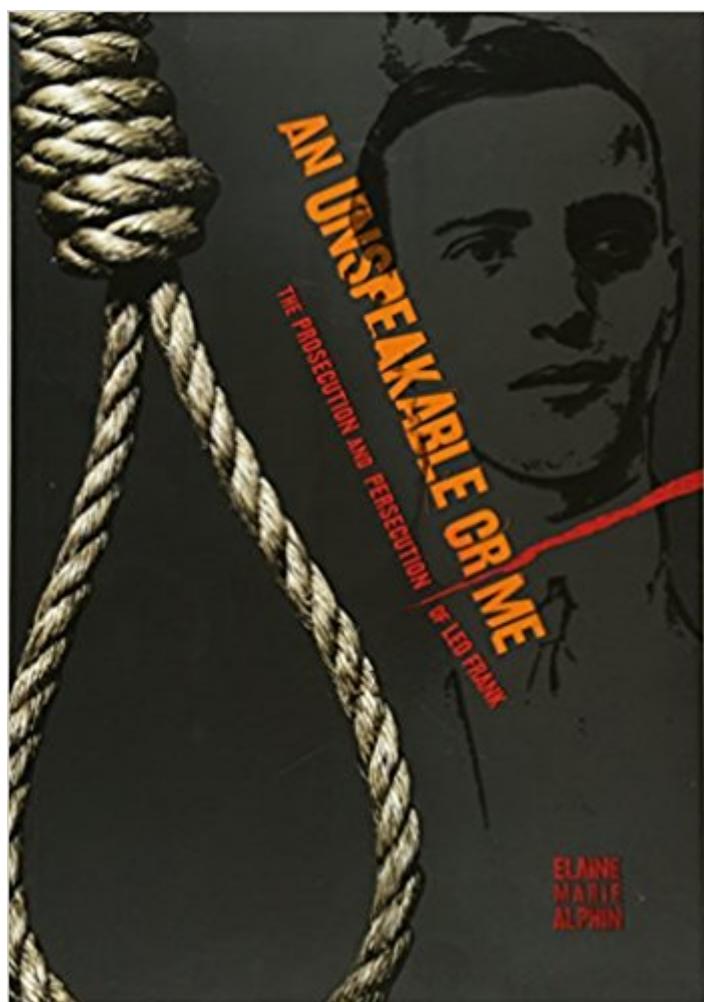


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# An Unspeakable Crime: The Prosecution And Persecution Of Leo Frank



## Synopsis

Was an innocent man wrongly accused of murder? On April 26, 1913, thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan planned to meet friends at a parade in Atlanta, Georgia. But first she stopped at the pencil factory where she worked to pick up her paycheck. Mary never left the building alive. A black watchman found Mary's body brutally beaten and raped. Police arrested the watchman, but they weren't satisfied that he was the killer. Then they paid a visit to Leo Frank, the factory's superintendent, who was both a northerner and a Jew. Spurred on by the media frenzy and prejudices of the time, the detectives made Frank their prime suspect, one whose conviction would soothe the city's anger over the death of a young white girl. The prosecution of Leo Frank was front-page news for two years, and Frank's lynching is still one of the most controversial incidents of the twentieth century. It marks a turning point in the history of racial and religious hatred in America, leading directly to the founding of the Anti-Defamation League and to the rebirth of the modern Ku Klux Klan. Relying on primary source documents and painstaking research, award-winning novelist Elaine Alphin tells the true story of justice undone in America.

## Book Information

Paperback: 152 pages

Publisher: 21st Century (August 1, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1467746304

ISBN-13: 978-1467746304

Product Dimensions: 6.9 x 0.4 x 10.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #257,692 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > History > United States > 21st Century #38 in Books > Teens > Social Issues > Prejudice

## Customer Reviews

Grade 8 Up  
On April 26, 1913, 13-year-old Mary Phagan left her Atlanta, GA, home to pick up her paycheck at the National Pencil Company and then attend the Confederate Memorial Day celebration. She never made it to the latter. Instead, her battered body was found in the basement of the factory along with two cryptic, semiliterate notes and some bloody handprints on a nearby door. The investigation was compromised from the get-go by a determination on the part of the

police to bypass an obvious suspect and indict Frank, the company supervisor. The strictly chronological structure of this account of his arrest, indictment, conviction, and lynching is extremely helpful in understanding both the progression of the case through the court system and the impact of anti-Semitism and resentment toward Northerners in the post-Reconstruction South. The author's stance can hardly be termed objective, as her pro-Frank bias is clear. As presented, it seems obvious that he was innocent of the crime. The actual murderer confessed to his lawyer, who divulged the information in an autobiography published 46 years later, and an eyewitness confession in 1982 corroborated this. However, many people in Georgia still believe wholeheartedly that Frank was guilty. As the record stands, with his death sentence commuted in 1915 and official pardon issued in 1986, this recounting of an injustice is as haunting as the author contends. Well-placed period photos and reproductions add immediacy to the text, though the photographs of Frank's lynching are graphic and disturbing.

•Ann Welton, Helen B. Stafford Elementary, Tacoma, WA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This detailed, fully documented account tells of the trial and lynching of a Jewish factory superintendent, falsely accused of the 1913 rape and murder of teenager Mary Phagan in Atlanta. Alphin digs into the roots of anti-Semitism that grew from post-Reconstruction hardship and shows that Leo Frank was viewed, and despised, by many in his community as a "privileged Yankee Jew." Throughout his trial, a racist mob raged outside the courtroom, spurred on by high-ranking government officials and by sensationalized press coverage. On one level, this is a whodunit. How did Phagan's body end up in the basement? Was an African American worker involved? The details are made even more horrific when accompanied by the numerous black-and-white photos, including court scenes and a picture postcard of the lynching. The detailed back matter includes an annotated list of major figures in the case, as well as source notes and a bibliography. The case revitalized the KKK and prompted the formation of the Anti-Defamation League, and it clearly connects with the contemporary ongoing struggle by the underprivileged for fair judicial process. Grades 9-12. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I found this account heartbreaking and at times I could not believe what I was reading. I see that some reviewers have differing opinions as to what actually happened and who was the killer of this poor, lovely innocent. But from any viewpoint this was a tragic chapter in American history.

It is actually for my daughter for her English class' requirement.

Purchased by school district. Didn't hear any complaints from the teacher (and I would), so assume all's good.

Elaine Marie Alphin raises that question in her carefully researched, well-written book *An Unspeakable Crime, The Prosecution and Persecution of Leo Frank*. The 1913 murder of thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan has been a controversial subject for years. In the media frenzy following the tragic incident, antisemitism clouded the investigation of the crime and the subsequent prosecution of Leo Frank, the Jewish superintendent of the plant where Mary worked. Alphin traces this story of injustice in clear and powerful prose and with excellent visuals like old photographs, newspaper stories, facsimiles of the notes found near Mary Phagan's body, and even postcards of Frank's lynching. Teens will be intrigued and moved by this accounting of an historical matter of conscience.

An Unspeakable ActElaine Marie Alphin wrote more than a dozen books. She lives with her husband in Bozeman Montana. This 2010 book has 18 chapters, *Major Figures*, *Timeline*, *Legal Terminology*, *Selected Bibliography*, *Source Notes*, and *Index* in its 152 pages. This book provides an overall summary of this case. Aside from this crime, it teaches the reader on how unreliable the press can be. Newspapers play the news to sell copies, its their business. Just as manufacturers advertise their products to sell to customers. It is your duty to understand the news, you can't believe everything you read or hear from the media. Its like those voices on talk radio who say things that you can't verify. Its show business, not history or legal testimony. You'll learn this in time. On Saturday April 26, 1913 Mary Phagan went to the pencil factory where she worked to collect her pay. She was attacked and murdered, her body was found in the basement. Who was guilty? Or who did the people want to be guilty? [Most people are never happy unless they have somebody to hate or look down on. Just observe your friends and relatives to see how this works. Or listen to the callers on talk radio.] Two notes were found near the body. The police telephoned Leo Frank, the superintendant, at home. The police detectives considered Frank a suspect. Chapter 4 has the

background and history of Frank. The police wanted a worthy victim (Chapter 6). Employees said Frank was “familiar” with some of the girl employees (Chapter 7). Prosecutor Hugh Dorsey used the press to attack Frank and get an indictment (Chapter 8). [Most people today believe what they read in the press, unless their experience says otherwise.] The police used Jim Conley as a witness against Frank (Chapter 9). Prosecutor Dorsey forced the cook to incriminate Frank (Chapter 10). The defense lawyers picked the sweeper as the murderer, they had a witness - Mincey. The trial began, popular feeling considered Frank guilty (Chapter 11). Frank didn’t talk to the detectives because they were trying to frame him. Conley blamed Frank for the murder. The defense showed how Conley was coached in his testimony (Chapter 12). The Prosecutor used rumors (p.78). Frank was convicted. Frank appealed, the judges rejected him (Chapter 13). Was he convicted on rumors? A new defense team appealed based on suppressed or overlooked evidence (p.90). Witnesses told who really did it (p.93). The Georgia Supreme Court rejected the appeal (p.94). The US Supreme Court rejected the appeal because the defense did not object in a timely manner (p.95). The courts ruled against Frank because they followed the law, not common sense (Chapter 14). The mob spirit hated Frank as a northern industrialist, a violater of a southern woman, and a Jew. Governor Slaton studied the trial and commuted the death sentence (Chapter 15). Frank was sent to the State Prison Farm as an ordinary prisoner (Chapter 16). Another prisoner nearly killed him with a hidden knife. A group of men conspired to kidnap Frank and hang him (Chapter 17). One electrician cut the telephone lines. The Lynch Party is named, “leading citizens of the community” (p.117). In 1982 Alonzo Mann told what he had eyewitnessed (Chapter 18). Frank was given a posthumous pardon (p.130). The controversy remains. Was Frank convicted on the evidence or because of prejudice (p.131)? There have been changes in the US legal system since then, but not all prosecutors follow the rules (personal ambition). This case shows the injustice in the “justice system” (p.133). There is racial, religious, and geographic prejudice, and, the commercial need to play the news for sensation to attract customers. One unanswered question is why did the Pinkerton detective turn against his employer? Was he ordered to sacrifice Frank to benefit the corporation that hired him? Or did his instincts tell him Frank was guilty? The involvement of Conley suggests his guilt; why was he used against Frank? The events before the crime are unlisted here.

As someone from a family who takes history very seriously, I have been familiar with the details of the Leo Frank case for a long time, and I thought it a great pity that no recounting of the case

existed for teen readers like me, because so many teens were involved in the trial, so I was excited to see this book coming out. Now that I've read it, I've got to say it exceeded my expectations. Rather than condescending to simplify the information to a young person's level, like so many writers do, Ms. Alphin elevated the reader to the complexity of the case. I was really impressed at the quality of original research evident in the book, at the detailed endnote citations, and at the excellent period photographs and newspaper reproductions. These focus the reader's attention on the impact that period media had on the trial and its aftermath, and make you think about how the same is so true today. I think this book will encourage readers to think about the impact that we can have on current events, and teachers should like it because it invites debate and discussion. So I suppose the early review by the gentleman claiming that this book is weak on facts shouldn't surprise me, as this case is still a hot topic in more places than around our dinner table, especially on holidays when the whole family is together. In the 21st century, one of those places is the internet, and I've seen that this reviewer has a website dedicated to misrepresenting the facts of the case. He similarly misrepresents the book he claims to review here, making it sound as if the material in the book is not footnoted when it is, stating that the author seems unaware that newspapers were an excellent source for the trial, when she consistently cites newspaper sources. And he challenges information such as the Frank miscarriage, which a family interview states. The fact is, anybody can write anything on the internet without having to face the type of fact-checking that a publisher requires before releasing a book such as this, so I've got a lot more faith in the book's sources than his. Hopefully other teen readers, and teachers who work with teens, will decide for themselves where injustice and responsibility lies. Misrepresentation of facts convicted Leo Frank of Mary Phagan's murder. Fear of challenging those people who stuck with those flawed facts destroyed the appeal process. Blind belief in those flawed facts led to an illegal lynching. As Ms. Alphin makes clear, the reader's judgment is a matter of conscience.

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