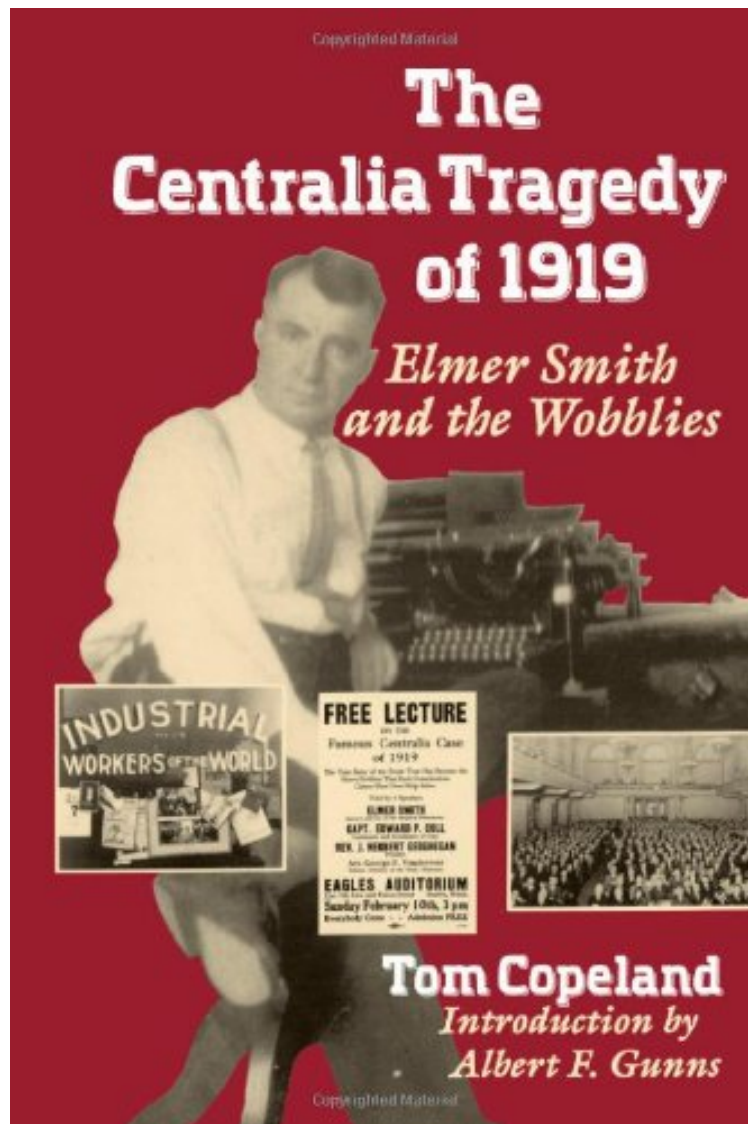


(Mobile ebook) The Centralia Tragedy of 1919: Elmer Smith and the Wobblies (Samuel and Althea Stroum Books)

The Centralia Tragedy of 1919: Elmer Smith and the Wobblies (Samuel and Althea Stroum Books)

Tom Copeland

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Tom Copeland : The Centralia Tragedy of 1919: Elmer Smith and the Wobblies (Samuel and Althea Stroum Books) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Centralia Tragedy of 1919: Elmer Smith and the Wobblies (Samuel and Althea Stroum Books):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Lynch Mobs, Official and UnofficialBy Charles L. SmithThis book

should get stars just for covering one of the most tragic events in Washington State history. For an allegedly progressive state, Washington's judicial system has been and is little more than a lynch mob. Elmer Smith was disbarred for defending a number of controversial defendants, though the technical reason was the accusation that he was a member of the Socialist Party. It is still controlling legal authority in Washington that membership in any socialist organization will result in disbarment. Likewise, it is controlling legal authority in Washington that if a potential draftee is classified as a conscientious objector by a draft board, he will be denied admission to the state bar. Within the last ten years the state bar has finally removed its ban on people of Japanese ancestry from becoming lawyers, and the state supreme court has withdrawn its opinion supporting the lynching of Native Americans.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By Eric Travis
great item! Thank you!
8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Up in Arms: Elmer Smith and the Wobblies in American Society
By Katrina M Brede
In the midst of the first annual Armistice parade in Centralia, WA on November 11, 1919, four soldiers were slain on the streets of their hometown by members of the Industrial Workers of the World, a labor union dedicated to organizing all facets of production workers into "one big union." The chaos and vigilante efforts which immediately followed the shootings resulted in the gruesome lynching of a union man believed to be responsible for the seemingly unprovoked attack and a severe imprisonment sentenced to virtually every union man in the region, regardless of culpability. Significantly, the shootings in Centralia and the struggle to gain clarity on the situation during the aftermath have been largely ignored in American history. Dismissed as a brutal clash rife with misunderstanding on both sides of the labor versus management issue, many historians have elected not to pursue the complex issues surrounding the movement gone tragically awry. Yet Tom Copeland does a magnificent job in bringing these tragic events back to the forefront of consciousness in his biography rife with historical analysis. Copeland reprises the events from the unique perspective of attorney Elmer Smith, virtually the only lawyer in the timber industry region who was willing to champion the working class and the disenfranchised over the deep pockets of big business. Other historical works have deliberated on the actions of both the Legionnaires and the I.W.W., or "Wobblies," on that fateful November day. Though outraged sentiment at the time demanded harsh punishments against the Wobblies, it would later be revealed that a trial laden with manipulated testimony and enforced by the intimidating presence of the U.S. Army only masked the fact that, in this instance, the Legionnaires had provoked the attack. Copeland's book, however, is the first to isolate the actions of Elmer Smith, a lawyer who not only counseled the Wobblies prior to the November attack, but who advised them that they were well within their rights to defend themselves and their I.W.W. hall against mounting aggressions from the Legionnaires and who was jailed for nearly 6 months pending trial for soliciting this (quite legal) advice to the Wobblies. This book should be read for a number of reasons. It is, of course, particularly insightful for those of us who live in the Northwest region and within spitting distance of where the most tumultuous labor disputes in American history took place. More than that, though, it is a sobering lesson in how the wheels of government really turn for those Americans not wealthy enough to grease the axles. It is a demonstration of how the U.S. Constitution can become a suspended after-thought when the concerns of Big Business are at hand. The book also illuminates a rather ghastly period of Americana in the World War One era that many have thought best forgotten: the mighty decimating the weak; the rampant xenophobia which dictated public and business policy; the patriotic jingoism which overruled any dissent in American foreign policy. Copeland's book mostly succeeds on a humanitarian level, though, in his portrayal of plain Elmer Smith as a man of integrity, ignited by his passion for social reform and at all times gifted with an overwhelming sense of morality and human decency. It's not by coincidence that others joked of him: "What's more frightening than a working man with brains? A lawyer with a heart." Copeland is every bit as strong in pointing out the flaw in Smith's character along side his strengths. In his zeal for supporting the Wobblies both before 1919 and in the decade after when he worked tireless for their release from prison, Smith's family suffered enormously. They were instantly social pariahs to the community of Centralia, WA and their needs were often secondary to Smith's concerns for the union. Smith's family barely scraped by financially after he was disbarred by the State of Washington and were left devastated after Smith, ignoring his own deteriorating health, died at the age of 42 from a series of bleeding ulcers. In all, Copeland does a tremendous job gathering the sentiments of Smith's surviving family and molding a 3-dimensional portrait of a human being, warts and all. I read a review recently of the Academy Award winning documentary, "One Day in September" which chronicles the kidnapping and assassination of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. "Why should the film have been made and why should it be shown?" the Washington Post asked. "Because the world must not be allowed to forget, no matter how much it would like to." The same could be said of the tragedy in Centralia, which sadly, seems to have totally been forgotten in a truly deliberate fashion.

On November 11, 1919, the citizens of Centralia, Washington, gathered to watch former servicemen, local Boy Scouts, and other community groups march in the Armistice Day parade. When the marchers swung past the meeting hall of the Industrial Workers of the World, a group of veterans broke ranks, charged the hall, and were met by gunshots. Before the day was over, four of the marchers were dead and one of the Wobblies had been lynched by the mob. Through a wealth of newly available primary source material including previously sealed court documents, FBI

records released under the Freedom of Information Act, and interviews with surviving witnesses, Tom Copeland has pieced together the events of that day and has traced the fate of the men who were accused and convicted of murdering the marchers. Copeland focuses on Elmer Smith, the local attorney who advised the Wobblies that they had the right to defend their hall against an anticipated attack. Although he never belonged to the IWW, Smith sympathized with their interests, championing the rights of working people, and speaking on their behalf. He was originally arrested with the Wobblies and then took up their cause in the courts, beginning a life-long struggle to free the men who were charged with murdering the Centralia marchers. Copeland recounts Smith's disbarment and eventual reinstatement, his run for political office, his speeches throughout the Northwest, and his unyielding support for the workers' cause. This book is a balanced treatment of the Centralia tragedy and its legal repercussions written by a practicing lawyer. It is also a compelling human drama, centering on the marginal life of an industrial frontier labor lawyer, a study of radical politics of the 1920s, and a depiction of conditions of life in the lumber camps and towns. It is thus biography as well as legal, political, and social history.

"The Centralia Tragedy of 1919 is a stunning book. Copeland makes the whole sorry Centralia affair come alive, as he tells the life story of its most fascinating character, the IWW attorney Elmer Smith. It is replete with personal details that make the story vivid and memorable. It is a tragic account of mutual fears and misunderstandings on the Pacific Northwestern industrial frontier during and after World War I." From the Back Cover The book is a balanced treatment of the Centralia tragedy and its legal repercussions. It is also a compelling human drama, centering on the marginal life of an industrial frontier labor lawyer; a study of radical politics of the 1920s; and a depiction of conditions of life in the lumber camps and towns. It is thus biography as well as legal, political, and social history.