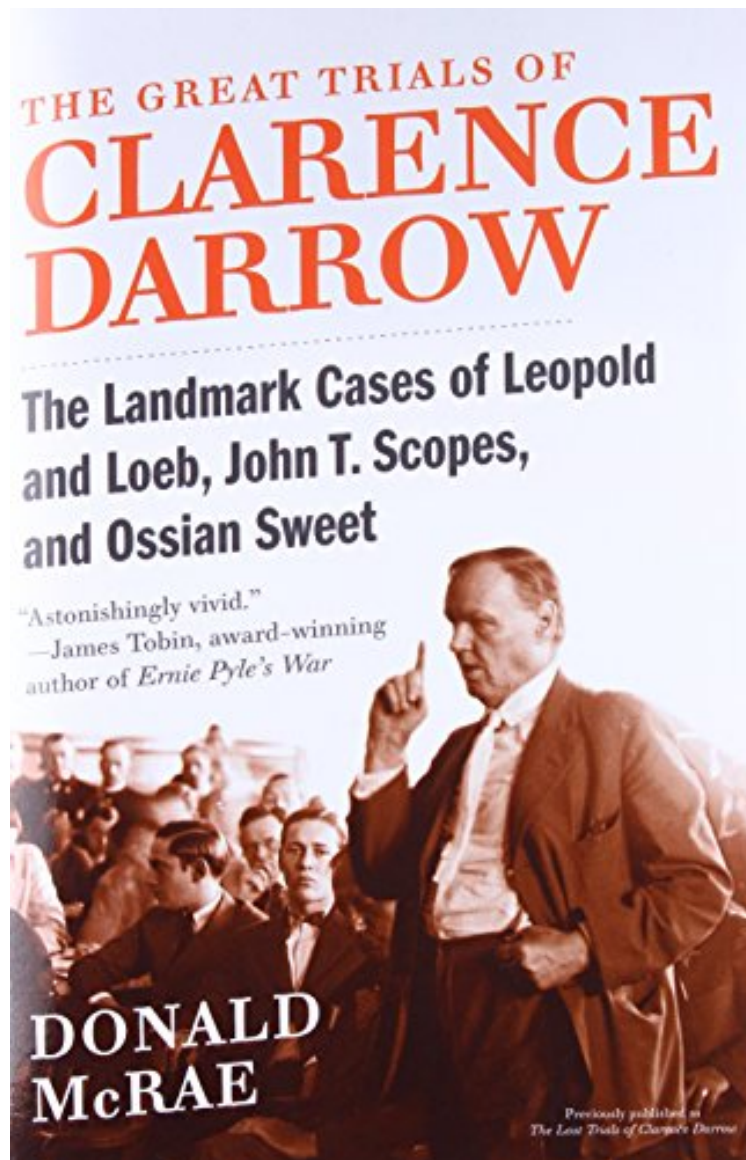


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## The Great Trials of Clarence Darrow: The Landmark Cases of Leopold and Loeb, John T. Scopes, and Ossian Sweet

Donald McRae

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**Donald McRae : The Great Trials of Clarence Darrow: The Landmark Cases of Leopold and Loeb, John T. Scopes, and Ossian Sweet** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Great Trials of Clarence Darrow: The Landmark Cases of Leopold and Loeb, John T. Scopes, and Ossian Sweet:

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Wonderfully evocative Donald McRae captures the Great Defender in all his complexity.... A joy to read. Kevin Boyle, National Book Award-winning author of *Arc of Justice* "Astonishingly vivid." James Tobin, Award-winning author of *Ernie Pyles War* The story of the three dramatic trials that resurrected the life and career of Americas most colorfuland controversialdefense attorney: Clarence Darrow. Many books, plays, and movies have covered Darrow and the trials of Leopold and Loeb, John T. Scopes, and Ossian Sweet before: Geoffrey Cowans *The People v. Clarence Darrow*; Simon Baatzs *For the Thrill of It*; Kevin Boyles *Arc of Justice*; Meyer Levins *Compulsion* and the film adaptation of the same name; *Inherit the Wind*; but few, if any, have achieved the intimacy and immediacy of Donald McRaes *The Great Trials of Clarence Darrow*.

From the Back CoverOne of the most famous, if controversial, lawyers in America, defense attorney Clarence Darrow was sixty-seven years old in 1924. His reputation was in tatters after a scandalous trial in Los Angeles and his life and career appeared almost over. Then, in rapid succession, he found himself at the forefront of three remarkable courtroom dramas. Each was dubbed "the Trial of the Century" by the press: the trial of teenage Chicago "thrill killers" Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb; Tennessee's infamous Scopes Monkey Trial, later immortalized in the play *Inherit the Wind*; and the incendiary case of Ossian Sweet, an African American man accused of murder while defending his Detroit home against a white mob.In *The Great Trials of Clarence Darrow*, award-winning author Donald McRae re-creates these momentous courtroom battles with breathtaking vividnessand offers a compelling, intimate, and unforgettable portrait of a true American icon.About the AuthorDonald McRae is the acclaimed author of five nonfiction books, including *Every Second Counts: The Race to Transplant the First Human Heart* and *Heroes Without a Country: America's Betrayal of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens*. He is the only writer to have won the William Hill UK Sports Book of the Year Award twice. In 2005 he was named Feature Writer of the Year for his work in *The Guardian*. McRae lives near London with his family.From The Washington PostFrom The Washington Post's Book World/washingtonpost.com ed by Jonathan Yardley On March 13, 1938, a strange woman named Mary Field Parton, who over the years had had a strange relationship with the celebrated defense attorney Clarence Darrow, wrote in her diary: "Darrow died today at this hour. That is, his body died following the earlier death of his brilliant mind. It will not be long before a generation will say, 'Who was Darrow? Never heard of him.' So quickly the waters of oblivion close over the great of a generation." Her prediction was pretty much on the mark. As a teenager in the 1950s, I was very aware of Darrow, principally through the play "*Inherit the Wind*" and its subsequent movie adaptation, as well as Meyer Levin's bestselling novel "*Compulsion*," which was also made into a film. No American lawyer today is as famous as Darrow was in the first decades of the 20th century -- not merely famous, but also adored and despised, venerated and reviled -- but now, nearly three-quarters of a century after his death, he is as forgotten as the people he defended: Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, wealthy Chicago youths who in 1924 murdered a 14-year-old boy as "an experiment"; John T. Scopes, arrested in 1925 for teaching evolution in a Tennessee public school; Ossian Sweet, an African American accused, along with 10 others, of murdering a white man during a racial confrontation that same year in the Detroit neighborhood into which he, his wife and baby daughter had just moved. But recently Darrow's been enjoying something of a revival. Two books were published last year in which he plays a central role: "*For the Thrill of It*," Simon Baatz's first-rate account of the Leopold and Loeb case, and "*American Lightning*," Howard Blum's inept retelling of the 1910 bombing of the Los Angeles Times building in which Darrow, representing the radical unionists who had committed the crime, came within a whisker -- a hung jury, to be precise -- of being convicted of jury-tampering, a case that left him disbarred in California, his reputation in shreds. This is where Donald McRae comes in. Straining mightily (and for the most part unsuccessfully) to put a new twist on Darrow's story, McRae begins with Darrow wallowing in the slough of despond, saved from suicide in January 1912 -- "he had just learned that he was about to stand trial on the charge of bribing two members of a jury in a murder case that had gone disastrously wrong" -- by the loving intercession of Mary Field Parton, who was then his mistress. McRae, a British journalist who up to now has written primarily about sports, then launches into detailed accounts of the three aforementioned cases, his premise being that the trials of Leopold and Loeb, Scopes and Sweet provided, within the space of two years, the opportunity for Darrow to regain not merely his reputation but also his self-respect. He's right about that. Such clat as Darrow still enjoys, primarily among lawyers and history buffs, rests on his defense of Scopes in the famous "*Monkey Trial*," as H.L. Mencken called it. Darrow took the case out of deep contempt for the Tennessee law, passed in 1925, that made it "unlawful for any teacher in any of the universities, normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any

theory that denies the story of Divine creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals." Fundamentalist fever was white hot in Tennessee at the time, the Ku Klux Klan was on the march, and the American Civil Liberties Union was delighted when Darrow and another prominent lawyer, Dudley Field Malone, declared themselves "willing, without fees or expense, to help the defense of Professor Scopes in any way you may suggest or direct." The presence of Darrow for the defense and William Jennings Bryan for the prosecution promised that the trial would be a circus; Bryan, who had been defeated for the presidency three times, had turned his attention and his formidable oratorical skills to the fundamentalist cause, and a circus is just what it was in Dayton, Tenn., that summer: "A carnival atmosphere swept through the whole town. Apart from the brightly colored flags and slogans draped over Main Street, most of the local stores featured images of monkeys and coconuts. In between the lemonade counters and hot-dog stands, erected especially for the trial, vendors sold 'Your Old Man's a Monkey' buttons and Hell and the High Schools booklets. The diminutive author of that tract, T.T. Martin, bustled around Dayton, distributing leaflets mocking 'Mass Meetings for Infidels, Scoffers, Atheists, Communists, Evolutionists and Others' or making impromptu street-corner sermons on the literal truth of the Bible." Darrow lost the battle but won the war. The jury found Scopes guilty, and the court fined Scopes the \$100 minimum penalty, which was paid by Mencken's paper, the Baltimore Evening Sun. But Darrow put Bryan on the stand and made a fool of him, ridiculing his literal interpretations of the Bible and his utter inability to comprehend Darwinism. Mencken wrote: "This three-time candidate for the Presidency came in a hero and he sat down in the end as one of the most tragic asses in American history." Days after the trial's end Bryan, a notorious glutton, "suffered a massive stroke and died in his sleep." Asked by a reporter if Bryan had died of a broken heart, Darrow replied: "Broken heart nothing. He died of a busted belly." As to the two other trials, Leopold and Loeb confessed to the murder of Bobby Franks, indeed boasted about it, so the only issue was whether they would be executed for the crime. Darrow argued that they had acted out of mental illness, but the judge didn't give that as the reason for handing down life sentences. Instead, he said, "In choosing imprisonment instead of death, the court is moved chiefly by the consideration of the age of the defendants." Probably Darrow's eloquence persuaded the judge to go (relatively) easy on the boys, but he declined to hand Darrow a clear victory. The case of Ossian Sweet is now the least known of the three. It didn't get the saturation coverage that the other two did, probably because the defendants were African Americans. It was an early civil-rights case, though, and an important one, as Darrow managed to plant sufficient doubt in the minds of the all-white jury to persuade them not to convict Sweet's brother, leading the way to the exoneration of all the defendants. The Sweet family clearly had been victimized by a mob, and whoever actually killed a white man in the mob presumably never will be known. So long as McRae is writing about the three cases, his narrative moves along nicely, but when he turns to the relationship between Darrow and Mary Field Parton his prose quickly descends to the depths of treacle. These passages -- and there are many of them -- are to my taste almost completely unreadable, though I do not discount the possibility that others may feel otherwise. Copyright 2009, The Washington Post. All Rights Reserved.