



# **Scottsboro and Its Legacy: The Cases that Challenged American Legal and Social Justice (Crime, Media, and Popular Culture)**

*James R. Acker*

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Nine black teenagers were accused of raping two white women on a train in 1931 in northern Alabama. They were arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death in the town of Scottsboro in little more than two weeks. The Scottsboro Boys case rapidly captured public attention and became a lightning rod for fundamental issues of social justice including racial discrimination, class oppression, and legal fairness. Involving years of appeals, the Scottsboro trials resulted in two landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings and were a vortex for the sometimes-competing interests of the American Communist Party, the NAACP, and the young men themselves. The cases resulted in a damning portrayal of southern justice and corresponding social mores in several national and international media outlets, and in a spirited defense of the judicial system and prevailing cultural norms in other news reports, particularly in the South. Here, Acker details the alleged crimes, their legal aftermath, and their immediate and enduring social significance as evidenced in media portrayals and other forms of popular culture.

Using extensive media reports, including contemporaneous newspaper accounts and interpretations of the proceedings, as well as the sallies of champions of various organizations and social causes, the author illustrates the role of the media in the cases and the effect the cases had on society at the time. In addition to tracing the history of the cases and their media portrayal, the book explores the legacy of the Scottsboro trials and appeals. It examines several issues relevant to the cases that, even today, have enduring significance to law and popular perceptions of justice, including capital punishment, racial discrimination, innocence, the composition and functioning of trial juries, the quality of legal counsel for indigents, evidentiary issues in rape cases, and media interactions with the courts. More than a true crime tale, this book takes readers through the crime but also illustrates its enduring legacy.

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