Nathan Freudenthal Leopold, Jr. (November 19, 1904 – August 29, 1971) and Richard A. Loeb (June 11, 1905 – January 28, 1936), more commonly known as "Leopold and Loeb", were two wealthy University of Chicago students who murdered 14-year-old Bobby Franks in 1924, and were sentenced to life imprisonment.[1]

The duo were motivated to murder Franks by their desire to commit a perfect crime. Once apprehended, Leopold and Loeb retained Clarence Darrow as counsel for the defense. Darrow’s summation in their trial is noted for its influential criticism of capital punishment and retributive, as opposed to rehabilitative, penal systems.
Motive

Leopold, age 19 at the time of the murder, and Loeb, 18, believed themselves to be Nietzschean supermen who could commit a "perfect crime" (in this case a kidnapping and murder). Before the murder, Leopold had written to Loeb: "A superman ... is, on account of certain superior qualities inherent in him, exempted from the ordinary laws which govern men. He is not liable for anything he may do."[3]

The friends were exceptionally intelligent. Nathan Leopold was an intellectual prodigy who spoke his first words at the age of four months. Leopold had already completed college, graduating Phi beta Kappa and was attending law school at the University of Chicago. He claimed to have studied 15 languages but in reality spoke four. He was an expert ornithologist, while Loeb was the youngest graduate in the history of the University of Michigan. Leopold planned to transfer to Harvard Law School in September, after taking a trip to Europe. Loeb planned to enter the University of Chicago Law School after taking some post-graduate courses.

Leopold, Loeb and Franks lived in Kenwood, a wealthy Jewish neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. Loeb's father, Albert, began his career as a lawyer and became the vice president of Sears and Roebuck. Besides owning an impressive mansion in Kenwood, two blocks from the Leopold home, the Loeb family had a summer estate in Charlevoix, Michigan. Richard Loeb was born to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father. Franks' family, originally Jewish, had converted to Christian Science.

Leopold and Loeb met at the University of Chicago as teenagers. Leopold agreed to act as Loeb's accomplice as long as Loeb would be his lover. Beginning with petty theft, the pair committed a series of more and more serious crimes; the series culminated in murder.

[edit] Timeline
Leopold and Loeb spent a year planning the murder, working out a way to get ransom money with little risk of being caught. On Wednesday, May 21, 1924, they put their plot into motion. The pair lured Franks, a neighbor and distant relative of Loeb, into a rented car. Either Loeb or Leopold first struck Franks with a chisel. Leopold or Loeb then stuffed a sock into his mouth. Franks died soon thereafter.

The killers covered the body and drove to a remote area near Wolf Lake in Hammond, Indiana. They removed Franks' clothes and left them at the side of the road. Leopold and Loeb poured hydrochloric acid on the body to make identification more difficult. They then had dinner at a hot dog stand. After finishing their meal, they concealed the body in a culvert at the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks near 118th street, north of Wolf Lake.

After returning to Chicago, they called Franks' mother and said her son had been kidnapped. They mailed the ransom note to the Franks. The killers burned items of their own clothing that had been spotted with blood. They also attempted to clean blood stains from the upholstery of their rented automobile. The two then spent the rest of the evening playing cards.

Before the Franks could pay the ransom, Tony Minke, a Polish immigrant, discovered the body. When Leopold and Loeb learned that the body had been found, they destroyed the typewriter used to write the ransom note and burned the robe used to move the body.

A pair of eyeglasses were found near the body, unremarkable except for a unique hinge mechanism. In Chicago, only three people had purchased glasses with such a mechanism, one of whom was Nathan Leopold.

Upon being questioned, Leopold told police he had lost the glasses while birdwatching. Loeb told the police that Leopold was with him the night of the murder. Leopold and Loeb claimed they had picked up two women in Leopold's car and had dropped them off near a golf course, never learning their last names. Unfortunately for Leopold and Loeb, Leopold's car was being repaired by his chauffeur that night. The chauffeur's wife also said the car was in the Leopold garage that night.

During police questioning, Leopold's and Loeb's alibis fell apart. Loeb confessed first, followed by Leopold. Although their confessions corroborated most of the facts in the
case, each blamed the other for the actual killing.\textsuperscript{[7][8]} Most commentators believe that Loeb struck the blow that killed Franks.\textsuperscript{[6]}

The ransom was not their primary motive; each one's family gave him all the money that he needed. They admitted that they were driven by the thrill. While in jail, they basked in the public attention they received and regaled newspaper reporters with the crime's lurid details again and again.

**[edit] Trial**

Robert Franks and his father

Defense attorney Clarence Darrow

The trial became a media spectacle. Held at Courthouse Place, it was one of the first cases in the U.S. to be dubbed the "Trial of the Century."\textsuperscript{[13]} Loeb's family hired 67-year-old Clarence Darrow — a well-known opponent of capital punishment — to defend the men against the capital charges of murder and kidnapping.\textsuperscript{[14]} While the media expected Leopold and Loeb to plead not guilty by reason of insanity, Darrow surprised everyone by having them both plead guilty. In this way, Darrow avoided a jury trial which he believed would most certainly have resulted in a conviction and perhaps even the death penalty.\textsuperscript{[14]} Instead, he was able to make his case for his clients' lives before a single person, Cook County Circuit Court Judge John R. Caverly.
During the 12-hour hearing on the final day, Darrow gave a speech, which has been called the finest of his career. The speech included: "this terrible crime was inherent in his organism, and it came from some ancestor … Is any blame attached because somebody took Nietzsche’s philosophy seriously and fashioned his life upon it? … it is hardly fair to hang a 19-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him at the university."[15]

In the end, Darrow succeeded. The judge sentenced Leopold and Loeb each to life imprisonment (for the murder), plus 99 years each (for the kidnapping).[14]

**[edit] Prison and later life**

At Joliet Prison, Leopold and Loeb used their educations to teach classes in the prison school.[10] On January 28, 1936, Loeb was attacked by fellow prisoner James E. Day with a straight razor in the prison's shower room, and died from his wounds.[2][16] Day claimed afterward that Loeb had attempted to sexually assault him. This was never proven and Loeb's throat was slashed from behind. Nonetheless, an inquiry accepted Day's testimony and the prison authorities ruled that Day's attack on Loeb was made in self-defense.[2][16] According to one widely reported account, newsman Ed Lahey wrote this lead for the Chicago Daily News: "Richard Loeb, despite his erudition, today ended his sentence with a proposition."[17][18]

In 1944, Leopold participated in the Stateville Penitentiary Malaria Study, in which he volunteered to be infected with malaria.[19] Early in 1958, after 33 years in prison, Leopold was released on parole.[2][4] While in prison he mastered 27 languages.[citation needed] That year he wrote an autobiography entitled Life Plus 99 Years.[3][4][20] Leopold moved to Puerto Rico to avoid media attention, and married a widowed florist.[2][4] He was known as "Nate" to neighbors and co-workers at Castañer General Hospital in Castañer, Puerto Rico, where he worked as a lab and x-ray assistant.[21]
At one time after his release from prison, Leopold talked about his intention to write a book entitled, *Snatch for a Halo*, about his life following prison. He never did so. Later, Leopold tried to block the movie *Compulsion* (see below) on the grounds of invasion of privacy, defamation, and making money from his life story.[2][1]

He died of a diabetes-related heart attack on August 29, 1971 at the age of 66.[2][4] He donated his organs.[2]

**[edit]** Impact on popular culture

Leopold and Loeb have been the inspiration for many works in film, theater and fiction, such as the 1929 play *Rope* by Patrick Hamilton, which served as the basis for Alfred Hitchcock's film of the same name. In 1956, Meyer Levin revisited the case in his novel *Compulsion*, a fictionalized version of the actual events in which the names of the pair were changed to "Steiner and Strauss." Three years later, the novel was made into a film of the same name, *Never the Sinner*, a theatrical recreation of the Leopold and Loeb trial, was written by John Logan in 1988.


The case has also inspired episodes of the TV crime drama *Law & Order*. One episode involving a thrill kill by two young men, each refusing to implicate the other (they know neither can be definitively proven to have fired the murder weapon) elicits a reference from Jack McCoy's assistant: "Darrow got Leopold and Loeb. What do we get?"

McCoy's reply: "Beavis and Butt-head."

The Leopold and Loeb case is a theme in Daniel Clowes' 2005 graphic novel *Ice Haven*, which includes a short story about the criminal duo, as well as references to the incident in other stories.

An episode of the comedy show *Mystery Science Theater 3000* that riffed on the short film *Are You Ready for Marriage?* includes the line, "I hope Leopold doesn't find out about this," over a shot of a young man kissing a girl.

**[edit]** References

11. ^Chicago Daily News, 2 June 1924
12. ^Chicago Daily News, 10 September 1924, pg. 3
21. ^e-mailed comment at www.law.umkc.edu