

Name: _____ Class: _____

Title: The Scottsboro Boys

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The trial of the Scottsboro Boys was a historic event in which nine black youths were wrongfully accused and convicted for a crime they didn't commit. Occurring in 1931, the Scottsboro Boys' trials sparked outrage and a demand for social change. As you read, take note of the variety of ways in which the criminal justice system failed the Scottsboro Boys.

- [1] There are few legal cases in U.S. history that have received as much media attention as the trials of the nine Scottsboro Boys in 1931. The trials of the African American teenagers went on for decades and began to carve out a path for racial equality in the U.S. justice system.

False Accusations

On the morning of March 25, 1931, nine young black men rode illegally in the back of a freight train chugging across Alabama. Charlie Weems, Ozie Powell, Clarence Norris, Olen Montgomery, Willie Roberson, Haywood Patterson, Eugene Williams, and brothers Andrew and Leroy Wright were all unemployed, travelling to a new destination to look for work. The oldest was 19, and the youngest only 13.

During the journey, a fight broke out between the nine young men and some white men who had also jumped onto the freight car. The train had to stop in Scottsboro, Alabama to end the fight, and the white men went to the local authorities to accuse the black youths of assault. As it turned out, two white women had also been hiding in the train car. They falsely claimed the nine black teenagers had raped them.



"7 'Scottsboro Boys' Win: 1932" by Washington Area Spark is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

The accusation was inflammatory¹ in the Jim-Crow South.² News of the alleged³ crime spread rapidly across the county; later that same day, the *Jackson County Sentinel* condemned⁴ the "revolting crime." Whites in Scottsboro were so upset that a mob gathered outside the jail where the boys were held, and the Alabama Army National Guard had to step in to control the crowd.

1. **Inflammatory (adjective):** stirring up anger, disorder, or rebellion
 2. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, southern states enforced "Jim Crow" laws, which promoted racial segregation.