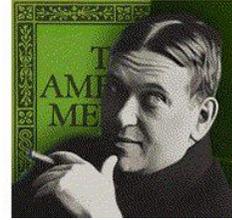
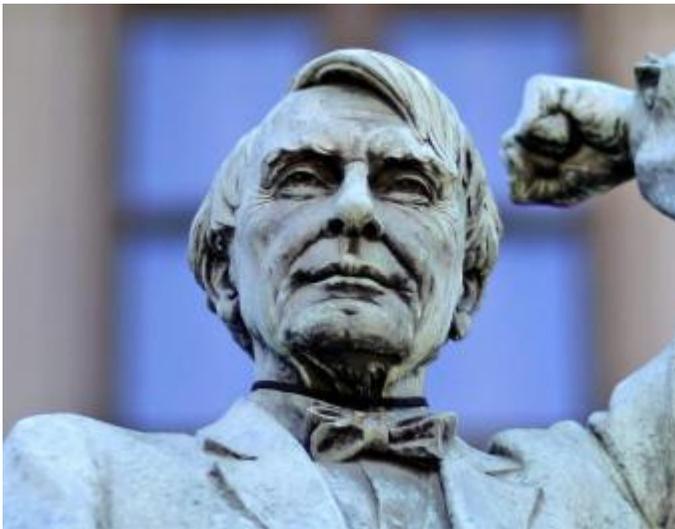


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A Mercury Exclusive: Tom Watson on the Leo Frank Case

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Exclusive to the American Mercury

by Bradford L. Huie

ON THE 100th anniversary of his initial article on the Leo Frank case, the *American Mercury* is proud to be the first online publication to present, in full, the groundbreaking series of articles about the case by populist reformer and muckraker [Thomas E. Watson](#) from his *Watson's Magazine* for January, March,

August, September, and October 1915. (ILLUSTRATION: A close-up view of the statue of Tom Watson that stands on the grounds of the Georgia capitol building. It has recently been ordered to be removed. The legend on its base reads: "A champion of right who never faltered in the cause.")

Previously available only in scattered and tattered library archives and in imperfectly rendered scans of the originals, this important historical series has now been fully transcribed and digitized by Penelope Lee of the *American Mercury* staff.

Tom Watson is often mentioned in modern books and articles on the Frank case, but authors promoting the "received narrative" — that Frank was an innocent victim of anti-Semitism (and such are almost all authors today) — never cite him at length, only quoting a sentence or two, or even a fragment, to illustrate that he called rich Jews "rich Jews" — or that he was highly critical of Roman Catholicism — or some such selection designed to shock modern sensibilities to such an extent that any right-thinking man or woman would immediately conclude that nothing Tom Watson could say could possibly have any value.

A Mercury Exclusive: Tom Watson on the Leo Frank Case

But Tom Watson has a great deal to say of *immense* value to anyone who wants to fully comprehend the Leo Frank legal case — to anyone who wants to gain deeper insight into the mystery and intrigue surrounding the murder of Mary Phagan — to any honest man or woman who wants to understand how a strain of anti-Jewish feeling took root in the largely philo-Semitic South — and to anyone who cares about the influence of money and media on our justice system.

Nowhere, except in Watson’s articles, do we have such a fair and full exposition of the case against Frank, which was enough to convince three juries and the judges of courts all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Nowhere, except in these pieces, do we have even an intimation of the underhanded dealings of the Burns detective agency and the Haas Finance Committee in suborning perjury and purchasing false testimony. Nowhere except from Watson’s pen do we have such a brilliant analysis of the facts in the Brief of Evidence, even bringing out angles ignored by the able lawyers on both sides of the case. Nowhere except here do we find the story of the ironic tragedy of how a massive Jewish campaign to exonerate Leo Frank and “fight anti-Semitism” had, in the South, the opposite effect of that intended.

It’s little known today, but, in the early stages of the case, both the prosecution and defense tried to recruit Watson for their respective legal teams. According to the [Leo Frank Case and Trial Research Library](#), “Ironically, the Leo M. Frank legal defense fund that began growing rapidly after the murder of Mary Phagan was used for the purpose of trying to hire one of the best and most influential criminal lawyers in the South, firebrand Tom E. Watson, to defend Leo M. Frank for \$5,000 — an impressive sum by 1913 standards. The State’s prosecution team also attempted to recruit Tom Watson, but for a fraction of the offer made by the Leo M. Frank defense fund. Watson turned down offers from both parties.” Watson was later to be a U.S. Senator, and had earlier been a candidate for Vice President of the United States for the Populist Party, sharing the ticket with William Jennings Bryan for President.

One of the most preposterous allegations made by Frank partisans in recent years is that Watson’s “inflammatory” writings poisoned the atmosphere of the trial and swayed the jurors — a claim that makes one wonder just how familiar with the case these “expert” writers are after all, since Frank’s trial [ended in August 1913](#), and Watson’s first public mention of the case wasn’t until March 1914.

Herewith, dear reader, with iterated thanks to Miss Lee for her monumental task of hand transcription of this book-length collection, we present the full *Watson’s Magazine* series on the murder of Mary Phagan and the trial and lynching of Leo Frank.

* * *

MAKE SURE to [check out the FULL American Mercury series on the Leo Frank case by clicking here](#).

[Tom Watson: The Leo Frank Case](#)

A Mercury Exclusive: Tom Watson on the Leo Frank Case

[Tom Watson: A Full Review of the Leo Frank Case](#)

[Tom Watson: The Celebrated Case of The State of Georgia vs. Leo Frank](#)

[Tom Watson: The Official Record in the Case of Leo Frank, a Jew Pervert](#)

[Tom Watson: The Rich Jews Indict a State!](#)

Resources for further research:

Newsreel footage of Tom Watson:

[Hickory Hill, the historic home of Thomas Watson](#)

[More of Watson's writings on the Leo Frank case, from his Jeffersonian newspaper](#)

[Agrarian Rebel, a biography of Watson \(PDF, complete book\)](#)

[The Thomas E. Watson papers digital archive](#)