

Scottsboro Timeline

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1931

March 25: In the depths of the Depression, a fight breaks out between white and black young men who are riding as hoboes on a Southern Railroad freight train. The train is stopped by an angry posse in Paint Rock, Alabama, and nine black youths are arrested for assault. Rape charges are added, following accusations from two white women who have also come off the train, [Victoria Price](#) and [Ruby Bates](#). The accused are taken to Scottsboro, Alabama, the Jackson County seat. The women are examined by Drs. R. R. Bridges and Marvin Lynch.

News of the incident spreads quickly; the *Jackson County Sentinel*, printed that evening, decries the "revolting crime." White outrage erupts over the allegations, and a lynch mob gathers at the Scottsboro jail, prompting the sheriff to call Alabama Governor Benjamin Meeks Miller. Governor Miller in turn calls in the National Guard to protect the jail and its prisoners.

March 30: A grand jury indicts all nine "Scottsboro Boys."

April 6-7: Before Judge A. E. Hawkins, [Clarence Norris](#) and [Charlie Weems](#) are tried, convicted, and sentenced to death.

April 7-8: [Haywood Patterson](#) is tried, convicted, and sentenced to death.

April 8-9: [Olen Montgomery](#), [Ozie Powell](#), [Willie Roberson](#), [Eugene Williams](#), and [Andy Wright](#) are tried, convicted, and sentenced to death.

April 9: The case against [Roy Wright](#), aged 13, ends in a hung jury when 11 jurors seek a death sentence, and one votes for life imprisonment.

April-December: Shocked by the speedy trials, the extreme youth of the defendants, and the severity of the sentences, progressive national organizations take up the Scottsboro case and call for the country to reject the "Alabama frame-up." The [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#) (NAACP) and the [International Labor Defense](#) (I.L.D.) court the defendants, their parents, and public opinion for the right to represent the young men in an appeal, and raise money for their defense.

June 22: The executions of the defendants are stayed pending appeal to the Alabama Supreme Court.



1932

January: The NAACP withdraws from the case.

January 5: A letter from Ruby Bates to a boyfriend surfaces; in it, she denies having been raped.

March 24: The Alabama Supreme Court, voting 6-1, upholds the convictions of seven of the defendants, granting Eugene Williams a new trial because he was a juvenile at the time of his conviction.

May 27: The United States Supreme Court agrees to hear the case.

November 7: In *Powell v. Alabama*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the defendants were denied the right to counsel, which violated their right to due process under the [Fourteenth Amendment](#). The cases are remanded to the lower court.

1933

January: The I.L.D. asks [Samuel Leibowitz](#) to take the case while acknowledging its inability to pay any fees. He agrees.

March 27: Haywood Patterson's second trial begins, this time in Decatur, Alabama, before [Judge James Horton](#).

April 6: Ruby Bates appears as a surprise witness for the defense, denying that any rape occurred and testifying that she was with Victoria Price for the whole train ride. Her assertion that she and Price were with boyfriends the night before explains the presence of semen in their vaginas. On the stand, [Dr. Bridges admits](#) that the sperm found in his examination were non-motile, and indicates that Victoria Price showed few physical signs of having been forcibly raped by six men, as she claimed, but he refuses to say how old the semen could have been.

April 9: Patterson is found guilty and sentenced to death by electric chair.

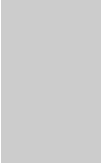
April 18: Judge Horton sets the sentence of death for Patterson, and then suspends it on a motion for a new trial. Then, the judge postpones the trials of the other defendants because tensions in town are running too high to expect a "just and impartial verdict."

June 22: Judge Horton sets aside Patterson's conviction and grants a new trial.

October 20: The cases are removed from Judge Horton's court into [Judge William Callahan's](#) court.

November 20: Seven of the defendants appear in Callahan's court. The youngest two, Roy Wright and





Eugene Williams, have been transferred to a Juvenile Court.

November-December: The trials of Patterson and Norris end in death sentences for both. Judge Callahan's bias might be exemplified by his omissions: he forgets to explain to Patterson's jury how to render a not guilty verdict (Leibowitz reminds him before the jury goes out) and neglects to ask the mercy of God upon Norris's soul.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/scottsboro/timeline/index.html>

How does this historic trial impact *To Kill a Mockingbird*?