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Devil's Knot: The True Story Of The West Memphis Three



Synopsis

"Free the West Memphis Three!" - maybe you've heard the phrase, but do you know why their story is so alarming? Do you know the facts? The guilty verdicts handed out to three Arkansas teens in a horrific capital murder case were popular in their home state - even upheld on appeal. But after two HBO documentaries called attention to the witch-hunt atmosphere at the trials, artists and other supporters raised concerns about the accompanying lack of evidence. Now, award-winning journalist Mara Leveritt provides the most comprehensive look yet into this endlessly shocking case. For weeks in 1993, after the murders of three eight-year-old boys, police in West Memphis, Arkansas, seemed stymied. Then suddenly detectives charged three teenagers - alleged members of a satanic cult - with the killings. Despite stunning investigative blunders, a confession riddled with errors, and an absence of physical evidence linking any of the accused to the crime, the teenagers were tried and convicted. Jurors sentenced Jason Baldwin and Jessie Misskelley to life in prison. They sentenced Damien Echols, the accused ringleader, to death. Ten years later, all three remain in prison. Here, Leveritt unravels this seemingly medieval case and offers close-up views of its key participants - including one with an uncanny knack for evading the law. Mara Leveritt has won several awards for investigative journalism, including Arkansas's Booker Worthen Prize for her book *The Boys on the Tracks*. A contributing editor to the Arkansas Times, she lives in Little Rock.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Having followed this case since 1996 and read much of the publically available documentation on the WM3.org site, I can say that Mara Leveritt's book is meticulously researched - more so than

most of the Pre-Mallett legal cases except perhaps Stidham's - and the fact that it is by a respected Arkansas journalist ought to help put to rest the notion that only "outsiders who don't understand" would support the WM3. Leveritt does a commendable job on two counts - showing Arkansans that not only "outsiders" believe that the WM3 cases were travesties of justice, and showing the "outsiders" that not all Arkansans are as biased, incompetent, self-serving, and self-deluded as the officials in Crittenden County involved with the WM3 case seem to be. It is preposterous that people continue to believe Misskelley's confessions after reading their transcripts and circumstances. You don't need to be an expert like Leo & Ofshe (whose papers can give much more detailed arguments as to why Misskelley's confession is bogus) to realize that the confession is coerced, and the specifics given in it are produced by Det. Ridge and fed to Misskelley. If you can read Chapter 7 in this book and still believe that this confession is valid, you've either not paid attention to the transcripts (feel free to ignore anything that you may consider Leveritt's "interpretations") or you have such preconceptions about the defendants' guilt (and/or the infallibility of Police and Prosecutors) that even scientific evidence would not convince you. You can't get through this book without feeling that there are serious grounds for a retrial, and that there is more than a reasonable doubt as to the defendants' guilt.

I suppose there are hundreds of cases such as this hidden away in American history justice files - sensational crimes, creating mass hysteria, law enforcement officials desperate to catch a break and solve terribly violent murders. What is most profoundly disturbing about "Devil's Knot - The True Story of the West Memphis Three," a well-researched and eye-opening account by Mara Leveritt, is there is no comfortable resolution to this case. If the three teenagers who were convicted in the slayings of three eight-year-old boys in 1993 are truly guilty - as the juries found them - then it is a sad testament to the ever-decreasing humanity existing within the interstate wasteland of faceless trailer parks, strip malls and fast food dives. However, if these three anti-social teens were railroaded simply because they were counterculture, adorned in black listening to Metallica and Black Sabbath while perusing Anne Rice, then this morbid tale is an example of a modern-day witch-hunt akin to the Salem Witch Trials hundreds of years ago. Has justice been served in West Memphis, Arkansas - a small, faceless Southern town near the banks of the Mississippi River? Someone murdered those three innocent boys in or near the woods outside of town. But is that someone truly behind bars? When reading "Devil's Knot," it is abundantly clear these law enforcement officials had little experience dealing with a violent case such as this. The crime scene was contaminated, officers didn't follow leads, interviews were not recorded, evidence was lost,

witnesses were threatened, body conditions leaked to the press.

I first became acquainted with the case which is the subject matter of the book while watching the HBO film, "Paradise Lost," about it. (That film, and its sequels, incidentally, are covered in the book). There was a gruesome murder of three young boys in a small town in Arkansas in the early 1990s. The hyper-zealous police arrested a few teens who, God forbid, listened to Metallica and did things that, well, teens do all over the world. And all were convicted, one sentenced to death and the other two to life in prison. In the meantime, I've become acquainted with a few pathological police tendencies, e.g., searching for "Satanic Ritual Abuse" (SRA), one of the lead "investigators" of which, Dale Griffis, who has a PhD from a mail order catalog, was among the "witnesses" in the show trial that made up the case. My interest has increased in that element of portions of our society; I'm not an atheist but find religious zealots of any denomination to be worthy of scrutiny and, in the case of many, SEVERE punishment for their waste of taxpayer dollars, their conviction of the innocent, and their disrespect--ironically?--of the law. Oh, I should add that while I saw the movie to which I referred, I worked for a county government. At one awards gathering, everyone stood up for an ovation for an officer who provided the circumstantial evidence to send a guy away probably for the rest of his life, the first time, if I recall, that a person was convicted of such a charge on circumstantial evidence. I was the only one who refused to stand. My office mate, an attorney, asked why. I answered that I don't think there was adequate evidence, and I don't like the zeal on which the fellow was convicted.

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