

Topic Page: [Darrow, Clarence \(1857 – 1938\)](#)

Summary Article: **Darrow, Clarence Seward**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

1857–1938, American lawyer, b. Kinsman, Ohio. He first practiced law in Ashtabula, Ohio. In 1887 he moved to Chicago, where he was corporation counsel for several years and conducted the cases that the city brought to reduce transit rates. Later general counsel for the Chicago and Northwestern RR, he resigned (1894) to defend Eugene V. Debs and others in connection with the Pullman strike. It was this case that made Darrow famous. The defense was unsuccessful, but he soon renounced his lucrative practice to defend the underdog. During his long career, he took part in some 2,000 trials and was paid nothing for about a third of them.

A staunch opponent of capital punishment, Darrow exerted his tremendous courtroom skill in behalf of those charged with murder; none of his more than 100 murder trial clients was sentenced to death, although he failed to win a reprieve (1894) for Robert Prendergast, who had already been convicted of murdering Chicago Mayor Carter Harrison before Darrow took his case. Darrow procured, in 1906, the acquittal of William D. Haywood and his associates on the charge of murdering former Gov. Steunenberg of Idaho. He offended many socialists (with whom he had been popularly identified) by introducing a plea of guilty in his defense of the McNamara brothers in the Los Angeles *Times* dynamiting case (1911). Darrow was himself tried for allegedly bribing a juror in the trial, but he was acquitted. In the Chicago “thrill” kidnapping and murder trial (1924) of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb (see Leopold and Loeb) he saved the defendants from execution.

Long an agnostic, Darrow fought fundamentalist religious tenets in the Scopes evolution case (1925; see Scopes trial). Pitted against William Jennings Bryan, he defended without success a schoolteacher charged with violating a Tennessee statute prohibiting teaching that humans are descended from other forms of life. Many felt, nevertheless, that Darrow's examination of Bryan on the witness stand did much to discredit fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. Among Darrow's books are an autobiographical novel, *Farmington* (1904); *Crime: Its Cause and Treatment* (1922); and *Attorney for the Damned* (1957), a collection of his defense summations, ed. by A. Weinberg.

See his autobiography (1932);

The Essential Words and Writings of Clarence Darrow (2007), ed. by Larson, E. J. ;

biographies by I. Stone (1941, repr. 1971), M. Gurko (1965), J. E. Driemen (1992), R. J. Jensen (1992), J. A. Farrell (2011), and A. E. Kersten (2011);

McRae, D. , The Great Trials of Clarence Darrow (2010).

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