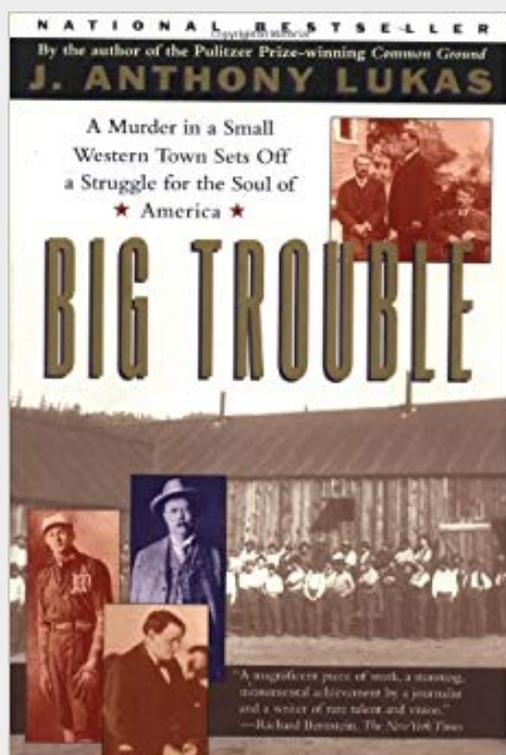


Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America by J. Anthony Lukas



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Recounts the trial of a radical union leader for the murder of Idaho's former state governor



Reviews of the Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America by J. Anthony Lukas

1. felt boot

Lukas instantly engages his reader and carries the story throughout this long, fascinating story of a political assassination in the early 20th century. The book shows--with detail and nuance, not statements--the class warfare that obtained then, and sets out the killing, its investigation, trial of the accused, and myriad vignettes of small but completely interesting matters, such as fraternal orders, private detectives and a ton more.

This is a book written for the literate human being. No background in history is needed, but just as you must engage with a good movie to "get" it, you must engage with this book. It's not difficult to do so, but this is more than a quick read while waiting to pick up your middle schooler from soccer practice.

2. Moonshaper

This is the best history book I've ever read. It captures the spirit of America, and has an amazing cast of characters, from Pinkerton detectives to Clarence Darrow to the Big Train himself, Walter Johnson, discovered sort of by a reporter covering the trial in Idaho. Lukas is an amazing writer. There are 50 page asides that read like thrillers. I learned more about labor history and union busting than in anything else I've read. In many ways the book indeed gets at the soul of America, both the good and the bad. It is all too relevant today. If someone wanted one book to understand America, this would be a good one to start with.

3. The Sinners from Mitari

This exhaustively researched book shed light on a period of Idaho history that I knew very little about. The rabbit trails that he went down from Teddy Roosevelt and the Black troops that helped win the Spanish-American war and why they ended up in Idaho, Clarence Darrow's background and his defense of his clients vs. the great orator, Senator Borah and how the great pitcher Walter Johnson began pitching for a team from Weiser, Idaho. All this and the national ramifications of the trial

on the assassination of a former Idaho governor around the turn of the century pitting mining interests against labor movements. I thought it was a good read.

4. Togor

Don't read this book if all you want to know about is the murder trial of Bill Haywood, defended by Clarence Darrow, and others- that is only the thread upon which the book hangs. The diversions are what make the book unique and which provide the varied dimensions that make one sense, and feel, in three dimensions, life at the turn of the last century. It is a stereopticon view. It is hard to conceive of any facet of turn-of-the-century American life which isn't explored, and described, in depth. If you don't like detail then avoid this book. I was constantly overwhelmed by the research that went into it, the amazing time and effort. The style is not dry but riveting and alive. It is a book that I wish I could say I produced, how anyone can give it less than five stars is beyond me. That the author committed suicide because he felt he failed is, truly, a tragedy, but it is impossible to see how he could have matched this effort in the rest of his lifetime. I read "Common Ground" when it first came out, the author's first book, it was good but this is great. I know of no other historical work that so totally conveys the sense of time and place as does this book.

5. Vozuru

Having survived 4 readings of this gargantuan treatise, I feel eminently qualified to tell you that this book is worth it. I have read many of the books in the bibliography and can tell you that Mr. Lukas did a fantastic job of synthesizing all of the material into one vision. Unfortunately, you have to do some of the work yourself as the story constantly goes down one rabbit trail after another--something that probably cost the author his life. Pulitzer Prize-winning author J. Anthony Lukas committed suicide just as this book was being published, leaving those of us who live in the area this all happened (and were awaiting special book signing events) in more shock and dismay than it did most. Whereas his earlier successes

maintained a razor sharp focus on the task at hand, this one is a bit jumbled and more than one person has speculated that he felt that self-loathing feeling that older authors like Hemmingway just don't tolerate. However, I don't believe this was the author's fault so much as the complexity of the subject. It is from this century old murder in my adopted home town that the labor movement of not only the United States, but even the world, has been affected to this day. The cast of characters is nothing short of astounding, given the humble rural setting, from Drew Barrymore's ancestor Ethel Barrymore to Hall of Famer Walter Johnson to a young Clarence Darrow to the infamous Pinkerton "Molly McGuire" instigator James McParland. Unlike the local conservative-slanted "sanitized" versions, this book pulls no punches in either camp, from eventual Soviet hero William D. "Big Bill" Haywood's womanizing to the involvement of victim Frank Stunenberg in a timber scandal that would eventually be part of what kept Idaho's Frank Borah from becoming our state's first president. For any citizen of Caldwell, the first chapter is required reading, that not only gives us insight into how the corrupt founding of our city has led to the local rivalries of today, but also into simpler times when even a bank owner had to milk his own cows. The rest of the world should understand how this trial (and the illegal methods used to prosecute the defendants) parallels our troubles today. Give this book the time and dedication it deserves and you won't regret it. Also, you can try the drier *Debaters and Dynamiters: The Story of the Haywood Trial* or read up on *Roughneck: The Life and Times of Big Bill Haywood* or *A Texas Cowboy: or, Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck of a Spanish Pony* (Penguin Classics) by Pinkerton cowboy Charlie Siringo, who has perhaps one of the most authentic voices of the "wild" west.

6. Rose Of Winds

A man is killed by an explosive device attached to his fence gate. The pursuit of the killers and their arrest and trial begins but along the way we are introduced to perhaps 100 people
The history of the northwest, Spanish American war, local, and national politics, the labor movement
A pleasure to read and to finish, it should have been organized into 3 books

7. ?????????????????????????????????????

I grew up partly in Wallace, Idaho and have lived in Boise for some time. Not only does this book deliver on local history, it also ties it to a national examination of class in turn-of-the-century America, and Lukas's meticulous research is presented in an absolutely thrilling manner. This is a book I have bought, more than once, for friends with an interest in history.

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