



# The California Snatch Racket: Kidnappings During the Prohibition and Depression Eras

*James R Smith, W Lane Rogers*

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Bringing a dark and forgotten era into vivid life, this fascinating history explores a booming criminal enterprise that was spawned in California in the 1920s and 1930s. Exposing a spree of kidnappings referred to as the "snatch racket," true accounts of the crimes and the unfortunate victims are revealed. Driven by greed, desperation, or sheer stupidity, this detailed discussion explains that the ransom artists preyed indiscriminately on Hollywood socialites, wealthy heiresses, and even the poor--while each new disappearance brought new headlines and sales to the newspaper companies. Illustrating the manner in which even the simplest capers would often run tragically awry, 15 bizarre and often ironic tales are presented, including how a modern city rose to lynch a pair of kidnappers, the college kids who chose to imitate Leopold and Loeb, and the famed evangelist who faked her own abduction to cover up an affair. Early forensic techniques are described, including the first documented call tracing using a bevy of operators in a phone chain, as well as the birth of the modern symbiotic relationship between the news media and high-profile crime, demonstrating how the sensationalism of personal tragedy became a source for increased media sales.

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