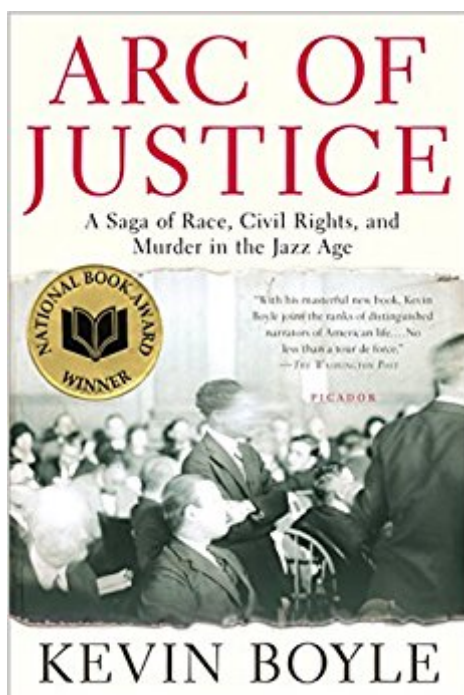


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Arc Of Justice: A Saga Of Race, Civil Rights, And Murder In The Jazz Age



Synopsis

An electrifying story of the sensational murder trial that divided a city and ignited the civil rights struggle. In 1925, Detroit was a smoky swirl of jazz and speakeasies, assembly lines and fistfights. The advent of automobiles had brought workers from around the globe to compete for manufacturing jobs, and tensions often flared with the KKK in ascendance and violence rising. Ossian Sweet, a proud Negro doctor-grandson of a slave-had made the long climb from the ghetto to a home of his own in a previously all-white neighborhood. Yet just after his arrival, a mob gathered outside his house; suddenly, shots rang out: Sweet, or one of his defenders, had accidentally killed one of the whites threatening their lives and homes. And so it began—a chain of events that brought America's greatest attorney, Clarence Darrow, into the fray and transformed Sweet into a controversial symbol of equality. Historian Kevin Boyle weaves the police investigation and courtroom drama of Sweet's murder trial into an unforgettable tapestry of narrative history that documents the volatile America of the 1920s and movingly re-creates the Sweet family's journey from slavery through the Great Migration to the middle class. Ossian Sweet's story, so richly and poignantly captured here, is an epic tale of one man trapped by the battles of his era's changing times. *Arc of Justice* is the winner of the 2004 National Book Award for Nonfiction.

Book Information

Paperback: 415 pages

Publisher: Holt Paperbacks; 1st edition (May 1, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0805079335

ISBN-13: 978-0805079333

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 21.1 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 109 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #30,217 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #21 in [Books > Law > Legal History](#) #22 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science > Civil Rights](#) #63 in [Books > Textbooks > Law > Criminal Law](#)

Customer Reviews

History professor Boyle (*The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945–1968*) has brilliantly rescued from obscurity a fascinating chapter in American history that had profound implications for the rise of the Civil Rights movement. With a novelist's craft, Boyle opens with a

compelling prologue portraying the migration of African-Americans in the 1920s to the industrial cities of the North, where they sought a better life and economic opportunity. This stirring section, with echoes of Dickens's *Hard Times*, sets the stage for the ordeal of Dr. Ossian Sweet, who moves with his young family to a previously all-white Detroit neighborhood. When the local block association incites a mob to drive Sweet back to the ghetto, he gathers friends and acquaintances to defend his new home with a deadly arsenal. The resulting shooting death of a white man leads to a sensational murder trial, featuring the legendary Clarence Darrow, fresh from the Scopes Monkey trial, defending Sweet, his family and their associates. This popular history, which explores the politics of racism and the internecine battles within the nascent Civil Rights movement, grips right up to the stunning jaw-dropper of an ending. 8 pages of b&w photos not seen by PW. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In the steamy summer of 1925, Detroit, like many northern cities, was in the throes of rising tension from racism as native-born whites, immigrants, and blacks, drawn by the flourishing automobile industry, jockeyed for jobs and housing in the teeming metropolis. In the jazz-age era of changing social mores and rising expectations, Dr. Ossian Sweet, grandson of a slave, attempted to move into a working-class white neighborhood. His neighbors, fanned into a panic by avaricious real-estate brokers and the growing presence of the Ku Klux Klan, threaten Sweet and his family with violent eviction. In self-defense, Sweet and his friends arm themselves and end up killing a member of the mob. The murder indictment of Sweet, his wife, and their defenders attracts Clarence Darrow as defense attorney and the newly organized NAACP, which was in the midst of a national campaign against racial restrictions in housing. Boyle, a history professor, brings immediacy and drama to the social and economic factors that ignited racial violence, provoked the compelling court case, and set in motion the civil rights struggle. Vanessa Bush Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In *Arc of Justice*, Kevin Boyle examines the volatile nature of race relations in early twentieth century Detroit through the lens of the experiences of Dr. Ossian Sweet. The majority of readers are most likely unaware of Dr. Sweet and his life. This narrative provides a unique and personal perspective on race relations and the infiltration of the Ku Klux Klan into a northern city, especially when people consider the Klan as a southern affectation. Boyle took the reader on a literal and figurative journey from Bartow, Florida, to Detroit, Michigan, with stops along the way in Xenia, Ohio,

and Washington, D.C. Ossian Sweet was raised in Bartow, on the other side of the tracks. The eldest surviving child of former slaves Henry and Dora Sweet, Ossian learned early the value of hard work as well as the lesson of the cruelty of his fellow human beings. Early on, the Sweets knew they wanted more for their children than sharecropping in the South. In his early teens Ossian began attending Wilberforce University in Xenia. There he received an extensive education resulting in a bachelor's degree, which led him to medical school at Howard University in Washington. While at Wilberforce, Ossian spent summers working in Detroit and, after graduating from Howard, opted to return to Detroit to start practicing medicine. While the Sweets, Ossian, his wife Gladys, and brothers Otis and Henry are at the center of the story, Boyle showed that it was about more than the people involved. Once Ossian and Gladys returned from a year-long trip through Europe, one that enhanced Ossian's medical education and allowed him to study under Anton von Eiselsberg in Vienna and Marie Curie in Paris, the couple stayed with Gladys's parents in order to save the down payment for a home of their own. Gladys fell in love with a house on Garland Avenue, a house in a traditionally white part of town. It was the house on Garland Avenue that began the Sweets' legal troubles. The legal plight of the Sweet brothers compels readers to examine a wide variety of issues urban areas had to deal with after the Civil War. Migration and integration are at the forefront of the changes Detroit and many other northern cities dealt with in the early 1900s. African Americans from the former Confederate states continued to migrate north with hopes of earning money and respect. At the same time, southern Europeans migrated into the United States looking for a better life than they experienced. Both groups lured by stories of fortunes being made in the automobile industry and tried to integrate themselves into life in the city. People need places to live, and those migrating to Detroit were no exception. Unfortunately, especially for African Americans, there were few options. Although not mandated by law, segregation was enforced by tradition and more often by violence. This violence, organized by local "Improvement Associations," was apparent throughout Detroit. It was through these Improvement Associations that the Ku Klux Klan made their inroads into northern cities. Not surprisingly, the Sweets did not escape this violence when they moved to Garland Avenue. Ossian Sweet, filled with memories of violence at the hands of southern white supremacists, organized a group of men to help him defend his home. This group included friends, former classmates, and his brothers. Once the white mob began throwing stones and inflicting damage to the Sweet house, the men opened fire, killing one white man and injuring another. That same night, the Sweets and their friends were arrested and their plight became

national news, even attracting the attention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and renowned attorney Clarence Darrow. Boyle used the Epilogue to describe the affects the Sweet cases had on the plight of urban race relations. The NAACP continued to fight Jim Crow laws and practices in the courts, from local venues to the US Supreme Court. Frank Murphy propelled himself from judge to mayor and eventually to the Supreme Court as well. Some attorneys went back to their usual practices, others continued to fight for justice. The Sweet brothers endured their share of ups and downs. Gladys contracted tuberculosis while incarcerated and later infected their daughter, who died shortly after her second birthday. Gladys also passed away at a young age. Henry earned his law degree and worked with the NAACP, but also died early from tuberculosis contracted in prison. Ossian became the financial success he always dreamed. However, that success did not last and he never really had a satisfying personal life again either. On the eve of the Civil Rights movement in 1960, Ossian committed suicide. The story of the Sweets' struggles in Detroit contributes to the historiography of urban race relations in both the North and the South. However, Boyle could have provided more analysis of the influences this trial had on race relations both in Detroit as well as other northern cities. He mentioned what seemed to be a common origin of organized violence, the local "Improvement Association," but does not expound on whether or not this was a frequent phenomenon. The majority of Boyle's analysis comes in the Prologue and adding additional context would have helped instill the importance of the Sweets' cases on Civil Rights history.

Would recommend. Very eye opening, shocking, and detailed in ways history books cannot be. It has given me a better understanding as to what the fight for civil rights really looked like.

Maybe the best way to fully understand a given time and place is to see it through the experience of one individual life. Early 20th century housing discrimination could not have been better portrayed than in the story of Ossian Sweet. Boyle's work presents a powerful picture of what fear and intense bigotry begot in the city of Detroit. As a native Detroiter, it helped me understand the racial bitterness that lingers, to some degree, well into our present day. A tragic tale of a past Detroit with implications very much alive today - a splendid read!

I am not a history reader. This reads like a novel, with a story propelling the narrative forward. It starts after slavery, with migration to Detroit to work in the factories, and the racially segregated real

estate policies of the day that made it almost impossible for African Americans to live in Detroit. This is all to set up a legal battle with a famous lawyer fighting for justice. Truly a great book, and a must for anyone in the Detroit area or interested in the history of race in the United States.

For those who truly want to know what happened to African-Americans' after emancipation.

In *Arc of Justice*, Kevin Boyle chronicles with sweeping eloquence America's civil rights movement, using Detroit in 1925 as his historic focal point. For the opening three-quarters of his narrative, the protagonist is a black doctor, Ossian Sweet, whose rise to prominence is an amalgam of boot-straps-self-discipline and high aspiration and dire circumstance, framed against the competing forces of a nascent NAACP and a moribund KKK. Then, in the last intense quarter of the saga, onto center stage for the climactic legal drama of Dr. Sweet's trial, strides the Great Defender himself--the iconic Clarence Darrow...Be edified. J. Michael Thompsonmazais@aol.com October 4, 2013

Arc of Justice is truly a book to read. Kevin Boyle wrote the book in such a fascinating manor, the book starts off with the story of Ossian and his friends in Detroit. But soon into the book the author dives down talking about Ossian's family and ancestors who were once slaves themselves. This book is one truly to read, Boyle writes the well known story in such a fascinating manor.

compelling and tragic history of racism in America which leaves one astonished at the level of vitriol and brutality aimed at black Americans over many decades - and all of this is AFTER the years of slavery. In terms of the story of Ossian Sweet, a bit of a concern was the length of time taken to get through the story plus the repeated hypothetical descriptions of what Sweet may or may not have felt. Highlight is the trip through time beginning with Reconstruction through the 1920s to highlight just how brutal American society was for so many years. Hardly a ringing endorsement for the so called 'greatest country in the world' and a reminder of how America may best be described as a work in progress and which may also be described as a country far removed from the modern world.

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