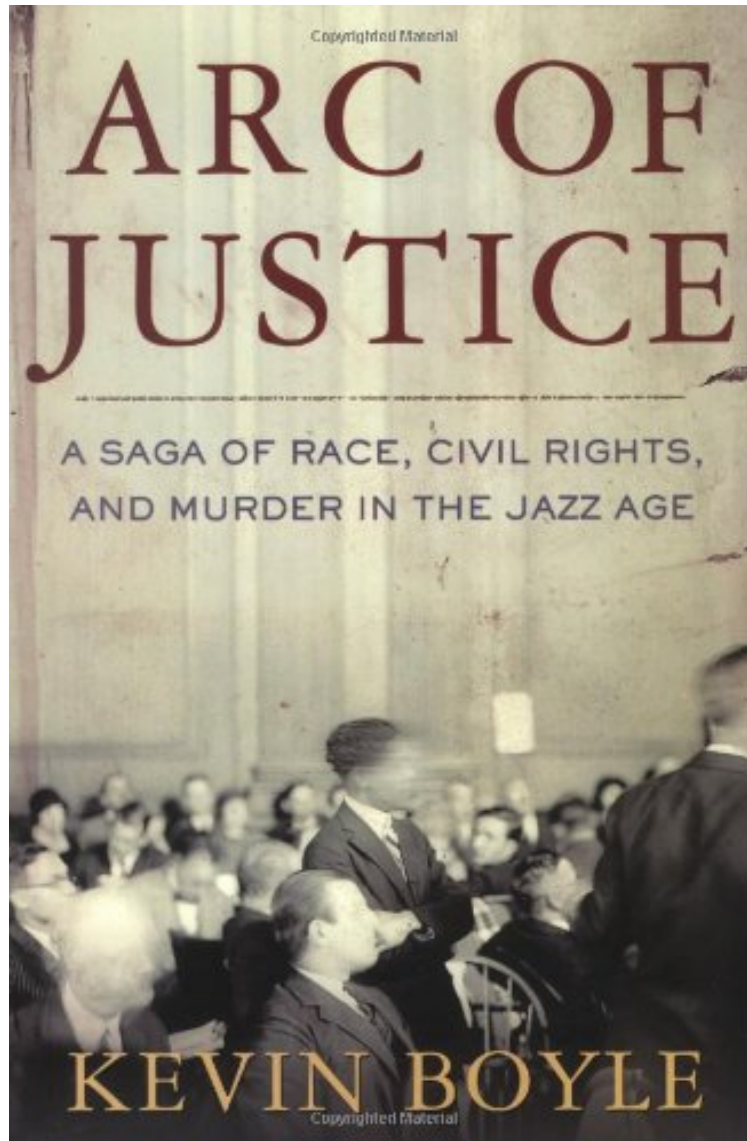


[Free] Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age

Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age

Kevin Boyle

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Kevin Boyle : Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Race Relations in the Early 20th CenturyBy Rebecca S DobrinskiIn

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 bachelors 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 Ossians medical education and allowed him to study under Anton von Eiselsberg in Vienna and Marie Curie in Paris, the couple stayed with Gladys 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 Boyles analysis comes in the Prologue and adding additional context would have helped instill the importance of the Sweets cases on Civil Rights history.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Read
By Iddshepherd
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.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Maybe the best way to fully understand a given time and place ...
By MJM-Dayton
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!

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.

From Publishers WeeklyHistory 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 bw photos not seen by PW. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From BooklistIn 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 BushCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved.

Dr. Ossian Sweet bought a house in a white neighborhood in 1925. Detroit exploded as a result, and a largely forgotten, yet pivotal, civil rights moment in modern American history unfolded. Kevin Boyle's vivid, deeply researched *Arc of Justice* is a powerful document that reads like a Greek tragedy in black and white. The lessons in liberty and law to be learned from it are color blind.

David Levering Lewis, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of W. E. B. Du Bois"*Arc of Justice* perfectly illustrates why W.E.B. Du Bois insisted that a keen sense of drama and tragedy is the ally, not the enemy, of clear-eyed historical analysis of race in U.S. history. By turns a crime story and a gripping courtroom drama, a family tale and a stirring account of resistance, an evocation of American dreams and a narration of American violence, Boyle's study takes us to the heart of interior lives and racist social processes at a key juncture in U.S. history.

David Roediger, Babcock Professor of African American Studies and History, University of Illinois, author of *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* What a powerful and beautiful book! Kevin Boyle has done a great service to history with *Arc of Justice*. With deep research and graceful prose, he has taken a single moment, the hot September day in 1925 when Ossian and Gladys Sweet moved into a bungalow on Garland Avenue in Detroit, and from that woven an amazing and unforgettable story of prejudice and justice at the dawn of America's racial awakening.

David Maraniss, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and author of *They Marched Into Sunlight* and *When Pride Still Mattered*There are many hidden and semi-hidden and half-forgotten markers of the civil rights movement. Kevin Boyle's careful, detailed study of a 1925 murder trial in Detroit is one such precursing marker. *Arc of Justice* is a necessary contribution to what seems like an insoluble moral dilemma: race in America.

Paul Hendrickson, author of *Sons of Mississippi: A Story of Race and Its Legacy*A welcome book on an important case. In Kevin Boyle's evocative account, the civil rights saga of Gladys and Ossian Sweet finally has the home it has long deserved.

Philip Dray, author of *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America**Arc of Justice* is one of the most engrossing books I have ever read. It is, at once, a poignant biography, a tour-de-force of historical detective work, a gripping courtroom drama, and a powerful reflection on race relations in America. Better than any historian to date, Kevin Boyle captures the tensions of the Jazz Age: a period that witnessed the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and the flowering of the Harlem Renaissance; the clampdown on immigration and the emergence of an ethnic insurgency; the crystallization of racial segregation both north and south and the rise of the modern civil rights movement. The

troubled and exciting history of America in the 1920s comes alive in his vivid portraits of striving black physician Ossian Sweet, charged with murder; Sweet's brilliant legal team led by the incomparable Clarence Darrow; his tireless advocates James Weldon Johnson and Walter White; and trial judge and future Supreme Court justice Frank Murphy. *Arc of Justice* is a masterpiece. Thomas J. Sugrue, Bicentennial Class of 1940 Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania, author of the Bancroft Prize-winning, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*