

TWO TRIALS

ONE JUDGE & TWO ALL-WHITE JURIES

The first trial proceeded against all eleven occupants of the house, as a group.

Ossian Sweet took the stand and described the fear he and his family experienced when a violent mob surrounded their new home. He linked the violence to the persecution that — in 1925 — Black people had faced in America for over 300 years.

At first, witnesses told the court that the crowd outside the house had been small and friendly. Attorney Darrow intensified questioning until the truth came out: hundreds — possibly thousands — of people filled the streets outside the Sweet house on the night of September 9, 1925, shouting and throwing rocks and trash.

The jury was unable to agree on a verdict.

Despite the testimony and evidence, this trial ended in a mistrial. The judge ordered a second trial.

Attorney Darrow requested that the members of the Sweet party face trial separately.

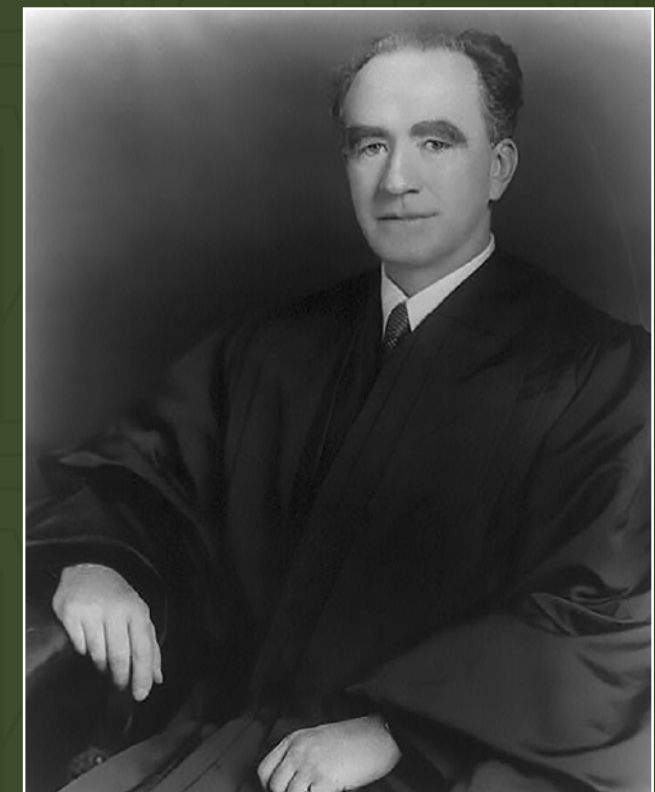
Prosecutors started with Henry Sweet, the only defendant who admitted to firing a gun on September 9. The jury consisted of 12 white men.

Darrow made the case that if a white man were on trial in the same situation, he would never be convicted. He made an eloquent closing statement, appealing to the jury to put prejudice aside.

The jury was persuaded and Henry Sweet was acquitted.

Charges were dropped against the rest of the Sweet family and the other eight people who had bravely helped them defend their house.

Photo: Library of Congress



Judge Frank Murphy presided over the Sweet trials. He later served as Mayor of Detroit, Governor of Michigan, U.S. Attorney General, and a U.S. Supreme Court justice.

