

## 20 So Help You God!

In the sweltering summer of 1926, Guthrie witnessed the commencement of the trial against William K. Hale and John Ramsey for the murder of Henry Roan, an event widely regarded as the culmination of a series of tragedies afflicting the Osage tribe. The anticipation was palpable, as the Tulsa Tribune captured the sentiment, suggesting the trial was not just a legal proceeding but the unfolding of a great tragedy involving the Osage. The case was fraught with challenges, including attempts to intimidate or bribe witnesses, and a palpable skepticism regarding whether a jury of white men would convict another for the murder of an American Indian.

As the trial progressed, the courtroom became a hotbed of tension and suspense. The prosecutor, John Leahy, accused Hale and Ramsey of a meticulously planned murder, implicating them in a broader conspiracy of exploiting and eliminating the Osage for financial gain. The defense, meanwhile, painted a different picture, suggesting their innocence and attempting to discredit the prosecution's witnesses. Ernest Burkhart's testimony was particularly damning, shedding light on the calculated strategies employed to murder Osage members, including his uncle's preference for poisoned moonshine over bullets.

Despite the overwhelming evidence and the moral indignation it spurred, the trial's resolution was far from straightforward. After days of deliberation, the jury was hopelessly deadlocked, influenced, it was suspected, by bribes and corruption. The failure to reach a verdict reflected not only on the integrity of the trial process but also underscored the systemic racial injustices that favored the perpetrators over the victims.

Undeterred, the government prepared for a retrial, now more determined to secure justice for the Osage. This time, the jury convicted Hale and Ramsey, sentencing them to life imprisonment rather than the death penalty—a decision that, while falling short of some expectations, marked a significant victory against the prevailing norms of racial injustice. The case, as reported by the New York Times and hailed by prosecutor Leahy, was seen as a pivotal moment for law and justice in the United States.

Beyond the immediate legal triumphs and tribulations, the Osage murders revealed deeper societal fissures and prompted critical reflections on the integrity of the justice system, racial prejudice, and the value of human life. The case also became a defining moment for the FBI, positioning it as a capable national force in the fight against crime and corruption, albeit with Hoover cautious to cast the bureau's role in the most favorable light. Amidst the legal and investigative successes, the personal tragedies of those involved—especially the victims' families—remained a haunting reminder of the cost of justice and the enduring scars of greed and exploitation.