

## The Scottsboro Case: A Detailed Overview

### The Accused

Nine Black teenagers faced charges in this case: Haywood Patterson, Olen Montgomery, Clarence Norris, Willie Roberson, Andy Wright, Ozzie Powell, Eugene Williams, Charley Weems, and Roy Wright.

### The Charges

Rape—a capital crime in Alabama, meaning the defendants could receive the death penalty.

### What Happened

On March 25, 1931, nine Black teenagers were accused of raping two white women on a freight train near Paint Rock, Alabama. During the Great Depression, many people illegally rode trains for free transportation. On this train heading to Memphis, a fight broke out between white and Black passengers. The white passengers were forced off the train. When the train stopped, the nine Black teens and two white women got off. The women then claimed they had been raped, and the nine teenagers were arrested immediately.

### The Legal Process Before Trial

- **Indictment (March 30, 1931):** All nine men were indicted without being told they had the right to speak with a lawyer or contact their families.
- **Protection from Mobs:** The defendants had to be moved 60 miles away from Scottsboro and kept under military guard. This was necessary to protect them from angry mobs that wanted to lynch them.

### The Trial: Legal Representation

**Who Defended Them:** Two court-appointed attorneys were assigned to defend all nine men. However, both had serious problems:

- One attorney was a local 69-year-old lawyer who had not practiced law in many years
- The other attorney was a real estate lawyer from Tennessee who was not familiar with Alabama law and had a drinking problem. One reporter noted he appeared inebriated and "couldn't walk straight" the morning of the trial

**Time to Prepare:** The attorneys spent less than 30 minutes with the defendants before the trial began.

**Trial Location:** One lawyer requested that the trial be moved to a different location because of intense media coverage and angry crowds. The judge refused this request. The trial remained in Scottsboro.

**Who Decided the Case:** A white judge and an all-white jury oversaw the trial.

### Trial Results

Each trial lasted only one day. Eight of the nine defendants were convicted and sentenced to death. Only one defendant avoided the death penalty.