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Frank Murphy - Michigan's Only U.S. Supreme Court Justice

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Almost everyone knows that Gerald R. Ford was the only American president born in Michigan. But did you know there has been only one United States Supreme Court Justice born in Michigan?

Frank Murphy had quite an impressive career before he became a Supreme Court Justice. He served as a Captain in the Army during World War I, later opened a law practice in Detroit, and soon became a U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. He then served as a Judge in Detroit's Recorder's Court, where he presided over the famous murder trial of Dr. Ossian Sweet, who was represented by Clarence Darrow. In 1930, Murphy was elected Mayor of Detroit, and served during the early years of the Great Depression.

As part of the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt set up the first convention of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and Murphy was elected its first president. As a reward for his service, President Roosevelt appointed Murphy as the Governor-General of the Philippines, to work on social justice issues. Murphy later became the High Commissioner to the Philippines (essentially the President's representative). Upon his return to Michigan in 1936, Murphy was elected Governor, where he served for 2 years. In 1939, President Roosevelt appointed him to be the Attorney General of the United States.

A year later, Murphy was nominated by Roosevelt and became a Supreme Court Justice. As a Justice, he authored 131 majority opinions and 68 dissenting opinions. He was known for his passion for civil rights and as a 'voice for the voiceless.' As he wrote in his dissent in *Falbo v. United States*, "*The law knows no finer hour than when it cuts through formal concepts and transitory emotions to protect unpopular citizens against discrimination and persecution.*"

Murphy is perhaps best known for his vehemently dissenting opinion in *Korematsu v. United States*, which upheld the constitutionality of the government's internment of Japanese-Americans during WW II. Murphy sharply criticized the majority ruling as "legalization of racism."

While serving on the Supreme Court during World War II, Murphy still found time to serve as an infantry officer at Fort Benning, Georgia, while on breaks from the Court. Murphy died at the age of 59 of a heart condition, still serving on the Supreme Court at the time of his death.

As a side note, a client of our firm was one of the Japanese-Americans interned by the U.S. government during WWII. Through his efforts and the efforts of many other Japanese-Americans, the 442nd Regiment of the Army, made up almost entirely of Americans of Japanese ancestry, was formed. This regiment served with honor and distinction for the remainder of WW II and became the most highly decorated regiment in the history of the United States armed forces.