

The Scopes Trial, Genesis, and the Nation's Obsession with Monkeys

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The Bible Since the Enlightenment

Introduction

The 1925 trial of *State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* served a purpose far more expansive than simply punishing one man's actions. What would become commonly known as the Scopes "Monkey" Trial brought notions and theories regarding evolution, creationism, and the extent to which the Bible could be literally interpreted to the public eye. Scientists and historians have taken up a fascination with this case's lasting implications. Both the prosecution and the defendant used the Genesis account of creation in their arguments. Evolution was still a relatively new concept at this time, and it presented many contradictions to the traditional explanation of creation that relied solely on the Biblical account found in Genesis. Most of the general population considered Genesis to be the official scientific account of how the world came to be. Some states even had laws directly prohibiting schools from teaching anything contradictory to the Genesis account, which is where our story begins.

The Scopes Trial exemplifies modern scholasticism through the obsession with reconciling the theory of evolution and the Bible. Court arguments that support either creation or evolution reveal much about the state of mind of the general populace at the time. A comparison of the original transcript of the Scopes Trial with the creation account in Genesis 1 will gauge the legitimacy of the accusations presented within the trial. The work of Charles Darwin provides a fundamental component of the trial, as his findings sparked discussions regarding divine creation. The secondary sources discussed in this essay explore the historical and religious implications inherent within the Scopes Trial. A close examination of these sources provides an interesting framework for the trial and its aftermath. While the trial itself may not have resulted in major policy changes, its

popularity and controversial nature opened up an entirely new outlet of discussion over creation vs. evolution at the layman's level.

Background and Historiography

In 1925 the state of Tennessee passed the Butler Act, an anti-evolution statute, which prohibited the teaching of “any theory that denies the story of Divine creation of man as taught in the Bible and teach instead thereof that man descended from a lower order of animals.”¹ The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was outraged and believed the statute to be unconstitutional.² In response, a group of men in small town Dayton, Tennessee sought out local teacher John Thomas Scopes to stand against the Butler Act, a decision that would bear consequences more significant than any of the men could have imagined.

The Scopes Trial brought much publicity to the quiet town of Dayton, Tennessee. National figures participated in the trial with the intentions of pushing their own political and theological agendas. The whole affair began when local high school teacher John Thomas Scopes broke the law and incited a scandal when he taught his students from a science textbook, *A Civic Biology: Presented in Problems* that discussed evolution. Scopes was a scholar that valued academic freedom, so he jumped at the chance to assist ACLU in influencing state policy.³ The case soon evolved into a major national event far beyond anything Scopes imagined possible.

¹ Leonard W. Levy, ed. *The World's Most Famous Court Trial: State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 4.

² Anne Janette Johnson, *Defining Moments: The Scopes “Monkey Trial”* (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2007), 144.

³ Johnson, *Defining Moments*, 143-4.

The textbook that Scopes presented in class, *A Civic Biology: Presented in Problems*, taught the main aspects of evolution as well as eugenics, both of which were forbidden subjects at the time. The book's author George William Hunter presents his information in an easy-to-understand way for young students to learn difficult concepts in the classroom. The chapter discussing evolution begins simply enough with the concept of heredity, even using the innocent example of comparing the physical differences between boys in class.⁴ Hunter then briefly touches on Darwin, natural selection, and how society has adopted the idea to breed certain plants and animals.⁵ His utilization of natural selection itself does not appear too offensive as he blends it well with the idea of breeding. However, Hunter then uses Darwin as foundational component of a personal belief that was not widespread at the time. After explaining artificial selection, Hunter launches into an explanation of eugenics and proposes the idea that mentally handicapped or behaviorally undesirable people are "parasitic on society."⁶ He seems to believe that eugenics is merely the next step after evolution to creating an ideal society: "Humanity will not allow this, but we do have the remedy of separating the sexes in asylums or other places and in various ways preventing intermarriage and the possibilities of perpetuating such a low and degenerate race."⁷ Such an idea seems shocking, and much of the public felt that his work held no respectable place in a high school classroom. Instead of presenting pure scientific facts, Hunter used his textbook to make a controversial argument and push an unpopular agenda.

From the outset of the book's circulation in classrooms, *A Civic Biology* was

⁴ George William Hunter, *A Civic Biology Presented in Problems*, (New York: American Book Company, 1914), 249-50.

⁵ Hunter, *A Civic Biology*, 253-4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁷ *Ibid.*

controversial. Later evaluations of *A Civic Biology* discuss it in the historical context of the trial, which provides excellent hindsight. Adam Shapiro in particular examines the textbook via his article “Civic Biology and the Origin of the School Antievolution Movement” that sheds light on some of the factors pertaining to the controversy of the 1920’s. As Shapiro interestingly points out, “Darwinian evolution had been well known and accepted by virtually all American scientists for over half a century. There was no sudden realization in the 1920’s that Darwin did not accord with the Bible. No new science-religion conflict led to antievolution legislation.”⁸ So why was the Scopes Trial such a big deal? Shapiro explains that until this point, evolution had not been taught in schools. The obvious religious conflict was easy to ignore as long as it stayed in the scientific realm. Yet its introduction in schools influenced the mind of young impressionable students, which was viewed as unacceptable.

Former politician and passionate proponent of reform William Jennings Bryan leapt to the prosecution’s aid, accompanied by a large team of eager attorneys. Bryan possessed an impressive political career spanning over 20 years, during which he gained popularity for backing the silver standard and for expanding the Democratic Party.⁹ William Jennings Bryan had combated against Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution for much of his career and played a major role in the nationally gripping antievolution movement.¹⁰ Bryan feared that “the teaching of evolution could undermine children’s faith in God.”¹¹ His strong Christian ideals prompted him to fight for the well being of the nation, beginning with the

⁸ Adam Shapiro, “Civic Biology and the Origin of the School Antievolution Movement,” *Journal of the History of Biology*, vol. 41 (2008): 413.

⁹ Johnson, *Defining Moments*, 112-3.

¹⁰ Jeffrey P. Moran, *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002), 16.

¹¹ Johnson, *Defining Moments*, 114.

education of the nation's youth. He propagated laws (much like the Butler Act) that prohibited the instruction of evolutionary ideologies in schools.¹²

Clarence Darrow led the trial's defense accompanied by an extensive team. Darrow was a famed agnostic lawyer who seized the trial as an opportunity to put forth his opinions and to test the Christian ideology.¹³ Darrow's turbulent career as a defense attorney placed him in the perfect position to fight against William Jennings Bryan in the Scopes "Monkey" Trial, as he had skillfully won cases that most had considered impossible.¹⁴ John Scopes personally pushed for the controversial Clarence Darrow to represent him, against the wishes of ACLU on account of his controversial beliefs.¹⁵

The judge presiding over the Scopes Trial was John Tate Raulston. Raulston had built a decent law career for himself, and he, too, could not forgo the chance to participate in *State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*.¹⁶ From the onset of the trial, Judge Raulston's personal views pervaded his court decisions. Although Judge John Tate Raulston declared that Scopes' crime was technically only considered a misdemeanor, the nature of his crime deserved a higher penalty. He asserted that the job of a teacher is to serve young students and develop minds, thus a teacher who takes advantage of such a position by polluting the students threatens the future generation.¹⁷

The judge's thoughts aligned with those of the public, which assisted in elevating the status of the Scopes Trial. The legacy of the trial lives on and has sparked numerous studies. Historian Jeffrey Moran examines the Scopes Trial in detail, accompanying the

¹² Johnson, *Defining Moments*, 114-5.

¹³ Moran, *The Scopes Trial*, 27.

¹⁴ Johnson, *Defining Moments*, 120-1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

transcripts from the trial with historical context in his book *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*. Part of the reason for such substantial public frustration with teaching evolution lay with the rise of educational opportunities. While education previously had not been universally available in the United States, Moran claims, “By 1920, however, attendance had shot up to nearly 2 million students per year, making the public schools a central object of political and social concern.”¹⁸ So not only did Scopes break the law, he endangered the very morality of his students by teaching such a controversial subject.

The conflict between fundamentalists and evolutionists stems from the larger divergence in opinion between religion and science. The Scopes Trial was just one example of this conflict that both sides used for their argument. The importance of this trial extends eighty years into the future to today’s battles in legislation regarding separation of church and state in education. The Scopes Trial itself was insignificant. It was a weeklong trial accusing a small-town teacher of committing a misdemeanor. The guilty verdict charged Scopes a \$100 fine. Yet the implications of Scopes’ battle against the anti-evolution act represents a much larger social issue. In fact, *A Civic Biology*, the textbook that started it all, underwent such criticism following the trial that Hunter actually revised it. He removed offensive material to please antievolutionists.¹⁹

Charles Darwin

Nineteenth century scientist Charles Darwin published two highly controversial pieces during his lifetime: *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* and

¹⁸ Moran, *The Scopes Trial*, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 231.

Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex. These books rapidly rose to the public eye because he introduced a new concept: natural selection.

Darwin discusses the idea of natural selection in chapter IV of *Origin of Species*, which suggests that nature causes gradual changes in animals and plants to assist in their adaptation to their surroundings. Darwin asserts that natural selection will “banish the belief of the continued creation of new organic beings, or of any great and sudden modification in their structure.”²⁰ In other words, he believes that animals evolved over time and in no way suddenly came into being. This statement, along with similar ones throughout the book, panicked theologians. Darwin seemed to refute the idea that God created the earth, mankind, and all other living things from scratch.

Darwin’s *Descent of Man* caused even more of a ruckus. Published in 1909, this book became popular only 16 years before the Scopes “Monkey” Trial. In *Descent of Man*, Darwin actually declares that mankind descended from a lower form of animal, such as monkeys. Recall that the Butler act specifically prohibited teaching “that man descended from a lower order of animals,” meaning that Darwin’s theories specifically rebelled against the statute.²¹ Chapter I of *Descent of Man* compares the bone structure and functions of man to other mammals and remarks on their similarities, which leads Darwin to conclude that “the homological construction of the whole frame in the members of the same class is intelligible, if we admit their descent from a common progenitor, together with their subsequent adaptation to diversified conditions.”²² Darwin’s writing appears more

²⁰ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 6th edition, (London: J. Murray, 1872), 76.

²¹ Levy, *The World’s Most Famous Court Trial*, 4.

²² Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, (London: J. Murray, 1909), 35.

scientific than hypothetical in this book, which again angered fundamentalists who supported divine creation.

Yet Charles Darwin never actually addresses the theory of divine creation, much less attempts to refute it. He appears to have avoided it completely specifically to sidestep any controversy. This omission was irrelevant to his legacy, however, as anytime a layman in today's society mentions evolution and biblical interpretations, Darwin's name appears. Thus, his work provides a background for understanding the Scopes Trial and why the public was so passionate about the anti-evolution statute, whether they were for or against its enforcement.

Genesis 1 provides a detailed account of creation by the hands of God. The Scopes Trial relied heavily on the King James Version of this account to support a biblical explanation for how the world came to be. To Christians in the early twentieth century United States, the Bible was undoubtedly true and straight from the mouth of God. Evolution was impossible because Genesis had already explained creation. The very first line in the entire Bible states, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."²³ This statement does not leave room for Darwin's idea of natural selection or evolution. Later on in Genesis 1, we see the statement: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."²⁴ Again, the Bible conflicts with the idea of gradual development of man from monkeys. Reading through the Genesis account of creation reveals an apparent conflict with natural selection. Many apologists have attempted to defend both the scientific and religious accounts as working in harmony. Yet 1920's United States could see no value in such reconciliation.

²³ Gen 1:1 KJV

²⁴ Gen 1:27

The Scopes “Monkey” Trial

The World’s Most Famous Court Trial lays out the original transcript of the case. The very first action carried out in court was a prayer. The reverend prayed that that God’s justice be carried out in the courtroom.²⁵ The reverend believed that the side upholding the Bible is in the right, and he intentionally stated in his prayer that the just side should win. It is difficult for a court that so obviously supports religion to possibly remain unbiased in a case that threatens its very belief system. A closer examination of crucial moments in the trial will assist in understanding the legacy of this popular case.

Following the opening prayer, Judge Raulston relayed the official charges against Scopes. He read the Butler Act aloud so that the jury would be familiar with the misdemeanor in question.²⁶ The judge then immediately launched into a reading of the creation account in Genesis 1, using the King James Bible, to make the court aware of the biblical account mentioned in the anti-evolution act.²⁷

The judge warned the jury, “You will bear in mind that in this investigation you are not interested to inquire into the policy or wisdom of this legislation.”²⁸ This statement is interesting in that it covered the court’s bases. The jury could not declare Scopes innocent on the principle that they did not agree with the anti-evolution act, nor could they declare him guilty if they agreed with the anti-evolution act. The statement required that the jury remain objective and look at the facts only. Judge Raulston supported his statement with

²⁵ Levy, *The World’s Most Famous Court Trial*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

the reminder that the three branches of government have separate duties, and that it was not the duty of the jury to decide whether or not a certain law should be in place.²⁹

Mr. Darrow on the defense objected to prayer on the third day of the trial. He reasoned, “there should be no part taken outside of the evidence in this case and no attempt by means of prayer or in any other way to influence the deliberation and consideration of the jury of the facts in this case.”³⁰ In other words, the use of prayer in the courtroom in the presence of the jury could persuade them to vote in favor of the side of religion. General Stewart made the cutting response that prayer should not be an issue since the case was *not* about science and religion but about a teacher’s failure to follow the law. Dudley Malone argued for the defense that the prayers “help to increase the atmosphere of hostility to our point of view, which already exists in this community by widespread propaganda.”³¹

The conversation quickly turned into argument regarding the exact nature of the case, seemingly contradicting Stewart’s previous remark. This conversation exemplifies how a technically straightforward case sparked such controversy. The men had this conversation in private, and the high tensions among them are evident through the trial transcript. They argued about the way that religiosity of the nation pertained to the case and that it remained impossible for the public to separate the two. Mr. Hayes actually gained the support of religious leaders all over the area to maintain that prayer led by one

²⁹ Levy, *The World’s Most Famous Court Trial*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

denomination was offensive, thus supporting their objection to daily prayers in the courtroom.³²

The above-mentioned actions from the trial mark only the beginnings of what would be an eight-day trial. The transcript reveals men that became impassioned almost to the point of mania in certain points of the trial. These lawyers were feisty! The transcript reads like a dramatic novel. The constant bickering between the court and the lawyers makes courtroom drama television appear dull.

The actual opening statements did not begin until the fourth day of the trial. Dudley Malone made the opening statement for the defense. He interestingly pointed out that while creation theories according to evolution and according to the Bible seemingly contradict one another, the Bible itself contains conflicting versions of creation.³³ Many scholars and Christians alike believe in both evolution and creation, and that a balance between the two “is a matter of faith and interpretation, which each individual must determine for himself.”³⁴

The defense’s opening statement is extensive. Malone moved to explain the technicalities of the case and the defense’s attempt to explain evolution and how it does not conflict with Christianity. Malone explained, “While the defense thinks there is a conflict between evolution and the Old Testament, we believe there is no conflict between evolution and Christianity.”³⁵ Such a distinction allows for less condemnation of Scopes’ actions by violating the Butler Act. Yet the court would not allow any expansion upon evolution theories, which presented difficulties in questioning expert witnesses. Rather,

³² Levy, *The World’s Most Famous Court Trial*, 92-3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

only theories directly addressing the idea that man descended from animals as pertained to the Butler Act were allowed in court.³⁶

One particularly amusing portion of the trial occurs towards the conclusion. Before the judge sent for the jury, Clarence Darrow objected to a sign encouraging viewers to read their Bible location near the jury stand, and the following conversation ensued:

Mr. Darrow: The word "Bible" is in large letters, perhaps a foot and a half, and the printing—

The Court: Hardly that long I think, general.

Mr. Darrow: What is that?

The Court: Hardly that long.

Mr. Darrow: Why, we will call it a foot.

The Court: Compromise on a foot.³⁷

The judge and Darrow along with the other lawyers proceeded to argue about the size of the sign and whether it should be removed in order to avoid any bias. This conversation is just one example of the utterly ridiculous de-railings that persisted throughout the trial. Darrow and the judge spent an inappropriate amount of time arguing over the minor detail of the length of the sign before they even moved on to why it should be removed. This superfluous argument demonstrates the high tensions in the courtroom. Everyone was on edge and ready to pounce on any minor piece of information to prove a meaningless point. (By the way, after several minutes of arguing and deliberation, the sign was removed.)

The two parties deliberated between different versions of the Bible, namely the Catholic, Hebrew, and King James versions. They argued about whether or not these versions could be interpreted differently due to translation.³⁸ The defense asked if the court can accept the Catholic and Hebrew versions of the Bible as evidence, but the

³⁶ Levy, *The World's Most Famous Court Trial*, 145.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 280-1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 283.

prosecution argued that these two versions were not pertinent as the indictment was based on the King James Version.³⁹

The defense eventually called William Jennings Bryan to the stand. This moment in the trial was one of high intensity and drama, and is often the most remembered. Clarence Darrow grilled him about different stories in the Bible and their literal and figurative interpretation. They battled over the interpretation of popular passages such as Jonah and the whale—was it a whale or a fish?!—why such a creature even existed, Joshua making the sun stand still, the date of the great flood for Noah’s ark, and more.⁴⁰ When General Stewart inquired about the purpose of the examination, Bryan snidely retorted: “The purpose is to cast ridicule on everybody who believes in the Bible,” to which Darrow responded: “We have the purpose of preventing bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States and you know it, and that is all.”⁴¹ Such biting exchanges occur for several pages of the transcript. Darrow obsessed over the question of dates in the Bible in order to trap Bryan into admitting that one cannot always conclude with literal interpretations of the Bible. He reasoned that if dates in the Bible cannot be established, then one cannot determine how long man has inhabited the earth as a race.⁴²

This conversation led into a debate over the account of creation. Darrow asked if Bryan believed that Genesis literally meant the word “day” as a twenty-four hour period of time, to which Bryan claimed that he did not.⁴³ Genesis states, “and God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”⁴⁴ In

³⁹ Levy, *The World’s Most Famous Court Trial*, 283.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 284-7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 290.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁴⁴ Gen 1:5.

this context, it appears that the first day occurred in a twenty-four hour period. Yet science leans toward the notion that the earth came into being over a much, much longer period of time. If the Bible meant “one day” as an abstract concept covering hundreds or thousands of years, then reconciliation between science and religion makes sense in this particular instance. A figurative interpretation of this word choice lends efficacy to such reconciliation, whereas a literal interpretation is less forgiving.

On the eighth day of the trial, defense attorney Clarence Darrow actually asked for a guilty verdict.⁴⁵ The ACLU’s plan was to use this verdict in order to appeal to the higher courts and question the constitutionality of the anti-evolution act.⁴⁶ A nationally renowned defense attorney would not have traveled to the small town of Dayton, Tennessee without an ulterior motive. He knew that he could take the principles behind this case to promote his personal agenda and that of ACLU of allowing religious and academic freedom in the classroom.

The final verdict was indeed guilty. Surprisingly enough, this verdict was good news for both parties! The prosecution punished Scopes for corrupting the minds of his young students, and the defense could use the verdict to appeal to the state supreme court. The case was later overturned on a technicality, thus leaving what could have been a reforming affair as no more than a scandal.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Levy, *Most Famous Court Trial*, 306.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Defining Moments*, 122.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Lasting Implications

The Scopes “Monkey” Trial had the potential to turn the religion vs. science debate on its head. It had already wrought so much publicity that taking the case all the way to the Supreme Court would likely have considered revising the educational system.

Unfortunately for the defendant, since the case fizzled out before it could gain any momentum as a nationally charged case for reform, *State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* did not have any immediate results. Nonetheless, the case holds lasting implications for the discussion of evolution.

Historians have examined the legacy of The Scopes Trial. Edward Larson’s book, *Summer of the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* serves as a reference point for many other studies, including Anne Janette Johnson’s *Defining Moments*. discusses the before, during, and after effects of the trial. According to him, the immediate aftermath of the case was disappointing in terms of educational progression. Nothing came of anti-evolution, science vs. religion, or anything pertaining to the trial for quite some time. In fact, Clarence Darrow appeared to have done more harm than good for evolutionists due to his condescending and harsh behavior during the trial.⁴⁸ Because he pushed his own agnostic views so severely, he inadvertently swayed people to the fundamentalist side.

Scholars struggled to address the significance of the trial.⁴⁹ They had no doubt that it was important to the battle between fundamentalists (literal interpreters of the Bible) and evolutionists, but since the trial had no real conclusion finding a concrete significance

⁴⁸ Edward J. Larson, *Summer of the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 207.

⁴⁹ Larson, *Summer of the Gods*, 222.

proved difficult. A few years after the case ended, a magazine editor published a book detailing the Scopes Trial. He twisted the information around and misinterpreted facts. His unintentionally falsified book became an unexpected success, so much so that it became a point of reference for historians for years.⁵⁰ The trial continued to spark interest for antievolutionists and fundamentalists for decades.⁵¹

Conclusions

The Scopes “Monkey” Trial now holds a permanent spot in American history, both in academia and in popular culture. As previously mentioned, the theory of evolution itself was not in question, just as long as it was not forced upon students. The lasting aftermath of the Scopes Trial continues today, in that the implications of the Scopes Trial delve deep into the religious foundations of many individuals. It provides a tangible example of how society polarizes on religious and political matters and exploits this polarization to push individual agendas. Yet such a discord between evolution and divine creation may not be necessary. The Bible is difficult to interpret, and even literal interpretations are up to interpretation, as the trial demonstrated with concepts of time and space. Laymen often expect the Bible to serve the purpose of providing a scientific background of how the earth works rather than simply explain moral truths. Most scientific discoveries do not reject religious ideals. However, these discoveries may conflict with some religious translations and interpretations, and hence the controversial nature of creationism.

⁵⁰ Larson, *Summer of the Gods*, 226-7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

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The Scopes trial pitted William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow in a confrontation over the teaching of evolution and creation in the public schools. There has never been a stranger trial in the history of American jurisprudence than the famous Scopes "monkey trial" that took place in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. This trial pitted William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow in a classic confrontation over the teaching of evolution and creation in the public schools. Regrettably, much confusion about the important issues raised in this trial has been perpetuated by the frequent production of the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee play *Inherit the Wind* (and its many film and television versions). The Scopes "Monkey" Trial (official name is *State of Tennessee v John Thomas Scopes*) began on July 10, 1925, in Dayton, Tennessee. On trial was science teacher John T. Scopes, charged with violating the Butler Act, which prohibited the teaching of evolution in Tennessee public schools. Monkey-themed memorabilia was sold on the streets and in shops. In an effort to attract business, the enterprising owner of the local drugstore sold "simian sodas" and brought in a trained chimp dressed in a little suit and bow tie. Both visitors and residents alike remarked on the carnival-like atmosphere in Dayton. *State of Tennessee v John Thomas Scopes Begins*. The Scopes Monkey Trial was a nationally-famous Tennessee court case that upheld a state law banning the teaching of evolution in public schools in that state in 1925. During the Roaring Twenties, some in the United States were concerned about the supposedly immoral lifestyle that their neighbors were pursuing. Many opponents of this more open and less conservative lifestyle were followers of the Progressive Movement. Many of these people were religious fundamentalists, people who believe that the Scopes Trial, also known as the Scopes Monkey Trial, was the 1925 prosecution of science teacher John Scopes for teaching evolution in a Tennessee public school, which a recent bill had made illegal. Darrow, meanwhile, arrived into Dayton the day before the trial to little fanfare. *Scopes Monkey Trial Begins*. The trial day started with crowds pouring into the courthouse two hours before it was scheduled to begin, filling up the room and causing onlookers to spill into the hallways. There was applause when Bryan entered the court and further when he and Darrow shook hands. The trial began "somewhat ironically" with a lengthy prayer.