

Institute for Scientific and Biblical Research
Presents a
Creation Science Forum

The Scopes “Monkey” Trial 100 Years Later—
Fact vs. Fiction

Bob Cooperman, ISBR President and Exec. Director
July 15, 2025, 6:30 PM

Zoom Meeting

This is the 100th Anniversary
of the famous
“Scopes Monkey Trial”
July 10 – 21, 1925

A misnomer, by the way since
evolution claims we evolved from
an ancestor that we had in
common with apes not monkeys!

Why Did This Matter?

- Drew attention to creation/evolution debate
- Led to widespread teaching of evolution as a fact after repeal of Butler Act
- Battle of lawyers with science triumphing over religion in the minds of the public
- Portrayal of “*Inherit the Wind*” presented many distortions of historical account

Why Does This Still Matter?

- Schools regularly present this play, which ridicules Biblical creation and praises evolution

≡ **TIME**

April 12, 2024

IDEAS • RELIGION

The Scopes Trial Is Still With Us

AP

≡ WORLD ▾ U.S. ▾ POLITICS ▾ SPORTS ▾ ENTERTAINMENT ▾ BUSINESS ▾ SCIENCE ▾ FACT CHECK ▾ ODDITIES ▾ MORE ▾

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LIVE Trump administration CPI report New Jersey election Fort Bragg Aaron Rodgers

March 13, 2025

U.S. NEWS

The Scopes monkey trial took place 100 years ago, but the fight isn't over

Why Does This Still Matter?



[Our Story](#)

[Events](#)

[Tickets](#)

[Scopes Trial Museum](#)

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[Scopes100 Assets](#)



SCOPES100

Rhea County, Tennessee | Scopes Centennial Celebration

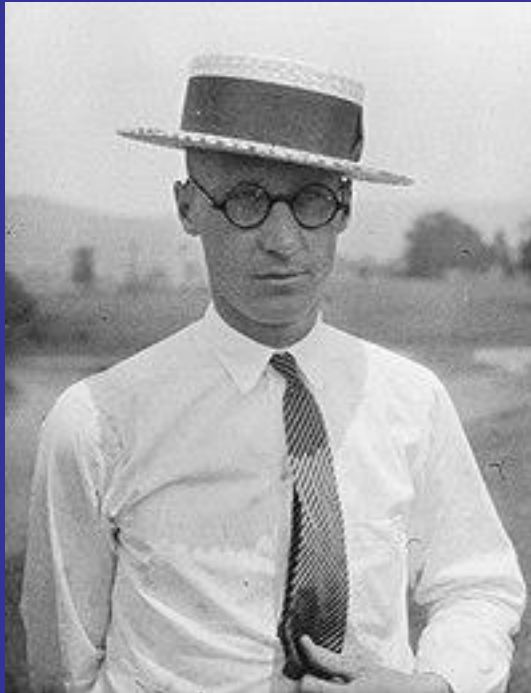
Our History. Our Story.

March - July 2025

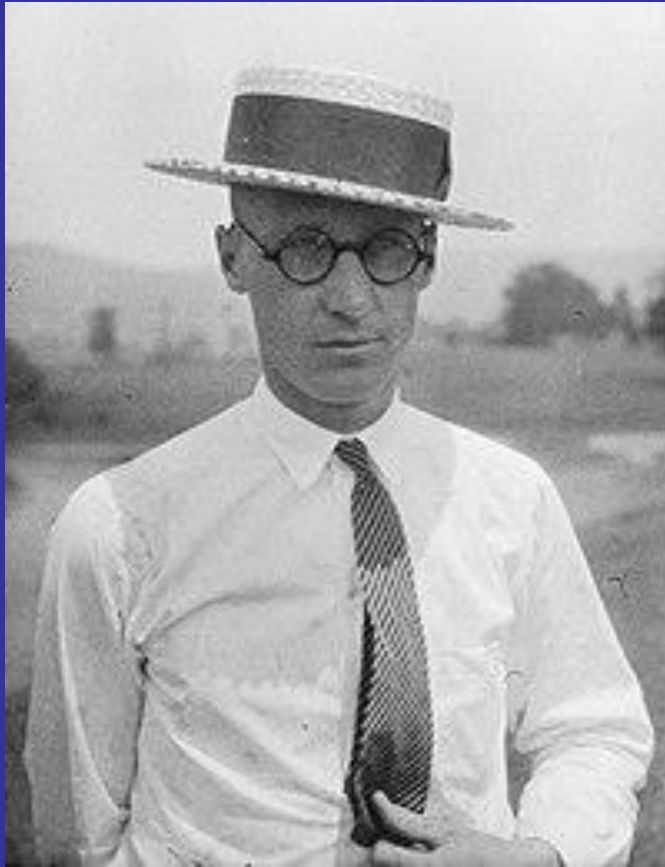
Rhea County, Tennessee | Scopes Centennial Celebration

What Was the Scopes Trial?

The State of Tennessee
vs
John Thomas Scopes



Who Was John Scopes?



- 1900, born in Paducah, KY
- 1924, earned a degree at the Univ. of Kentucky, major in law and minor in geology
- Took a job in Dayton TN as the Rhea County High School's football coach and occasionally filled in as a substitute teacher

State of Tennessee passed the Butler Act March, 1925 prohibiting the teaching of evolution

PUBLIC ACTS
OF THE
STATE OF TENNESSEE
PASSED BY THE
SIXTY-FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
1925

CHAPTER NO. 27

House Bill No. 185

(By Mr. Butler)

AN ACT prohibiting the teaching of the Evolution Theory in all the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of Tennessee, which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, and to provide penalties for the violations thereof.

Section 1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, That it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.

Section 2. Be it further enacted, That any teacher found guilty of the violation of this Act, Shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, shall be fined not less than One Hundred \$ (100.00) Dollars nor more than Five Hundred (\$ 500.00) Dollars for each offense.

Section 3. Be it further enacted, That this Act take effect from and after its passage, the public welfare requiring it.

Passed March 13, 1925

W.F. Barry,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

L.D. Hill,
Speaker of the Senate

Approved March 21, 1925.

Austin Peay,
Governor.

ACLU Jumped In With A Plot

- ACLU advertisement ran in Chattanooga Daily Press, May 1925
- “We are looking for a Tennessee teacher who is willing to accept our services in testing this law in the courts. Our lawyers think a friendly test can be arranged without costing the teacher his or her job. Distinguished counsel have volunteered their services. All we need is a willing client.”

Hatching the Plot

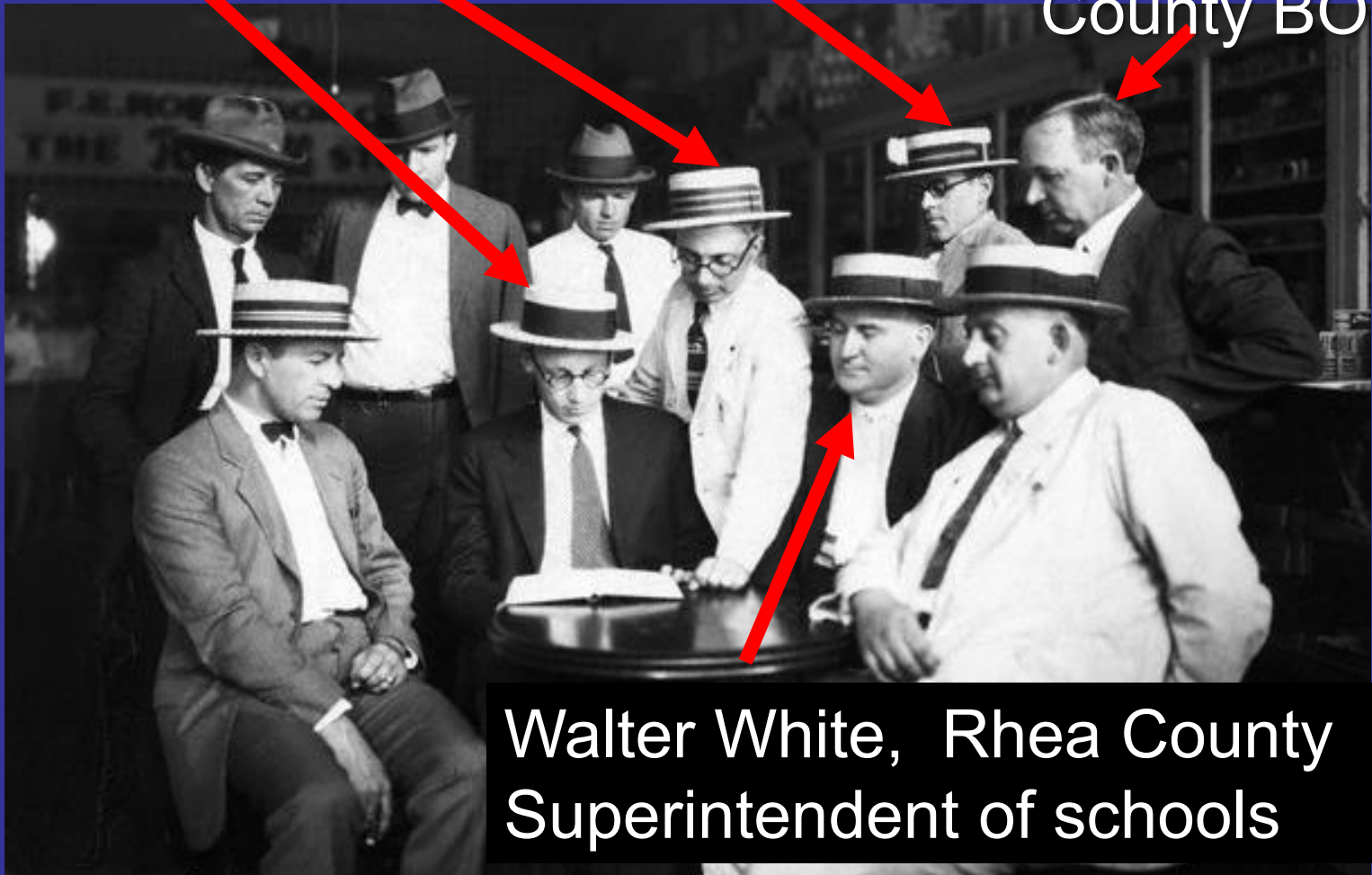
- George Rappleyea, Manager of the Cumberland Coal and Iron Company in Dayton, Tennessee
- He and other community leaders convinced 24-year old John Scopes to challenge the Butler Act
- They wanted notoriety and business for Dayton



Robinson's Drug Store in Dayton, TN

May 5th, 1925

Scopes Rappleyea Sue Hicks,
Attorney Frank Robinson,
Chairman, Rhea
County BOE



Walter White, Rhea County
Superintendent of schools

Rappleyea's personal agenda

- Rappleyea was upset with a Fundamentalist preacher who claimed a dead boy would be cast into the “flames of hell” because he had not “confessed Christ” or been baptized.
- He vowed he would “get even” with the “Fundamentalists” who he thought were behind the anti-evolution law and said “I made up my mind I’d show the world.”



The Great Monkey Trial , p 6-7 by Sprague de Camp

Summary of their plot

- Scopes accepted the offer
- Spring, 1925, Scopes accused of reading in class about human evolution and Darwin's Natural Selection from a chapter of the book "Civic Biology," written in 1914 by biologist George William Hunter
 - Book required by the state but the trial was at the local level attempting to challenge the constitutionality of the law
- Scopes arrested May 5, trial set for July 14
- Had the effect of bringing in famous lawyers and national publicity
- Journalists from all over the country came to little town of Dayton to see the famous lawyers

Summary of their plot

- Trial was first to be broadcast on radio nationally
- Vendors popped up selling food, Bibles, stuffed monkeys
- Trial basically a verbal duel between lawyers Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan
- Scopes found guilty on July 21, fine of \$100 imposed
- Verdict overturned
- Scopes went on to marry, to do graduate work in geology and worked in research of oil reserves
- Butler Act not enforced and repealed in 1968

The Defense

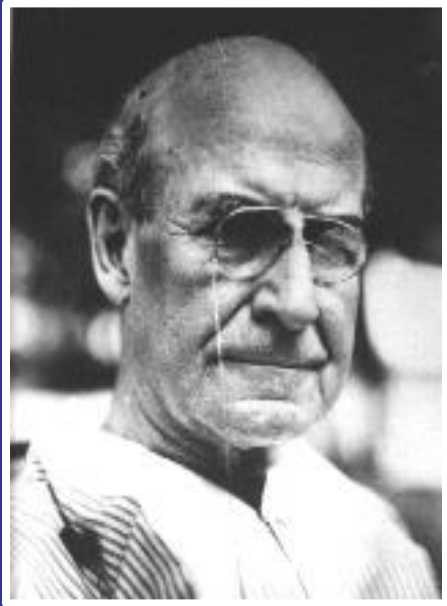


- Clarence Darrow
 - Agnostic
 - Famed trial lawyer, slick and sophisticated
 - Defended labor and political radicals
 - Defended Leopold and Loeb in murder case



- Dudley Field Malone
 - Divorce lawyer
 - Worked at the State Department
 - Advocate of women's suffrage
 - Helped organize presidential campaign of Woodrow Wilson
 - Actor appearing in a few movies

The Prosecution



- William Jennings Bryan
 - Christian who lobbied for constitutional amendment banning teaching of evolution across nation
 - Three-time presidential candidate
 - Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson
 - Rural, not sophisticated like Darrow
 - Bryan College named for him



- Thomas Stewart
 - Led prosecution
 - District Attorney for 18th Circuit
 - Future U.S. Senator from Tennessee

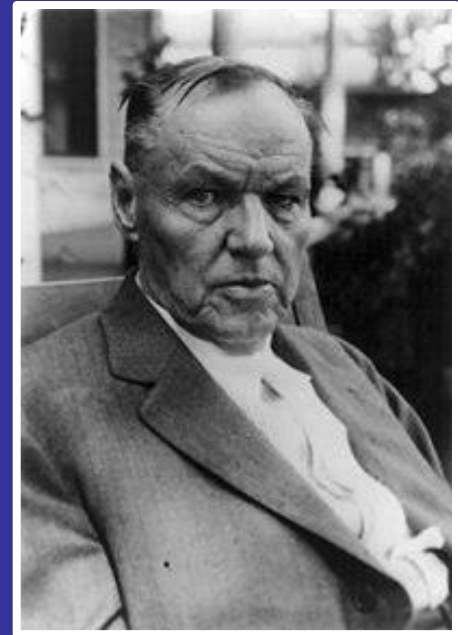
The Media



- H.L. Mencken
- Journalist from The Baltimore Sun
- Sun paid part of the defense's expenses
- Provided the trial with its most colorful labels such as the "Monkey Trial" of "the infidel Scopes"
- Very sarcastic coverage, biased against Bryan
- Called townspeople "morons" and "yokels"

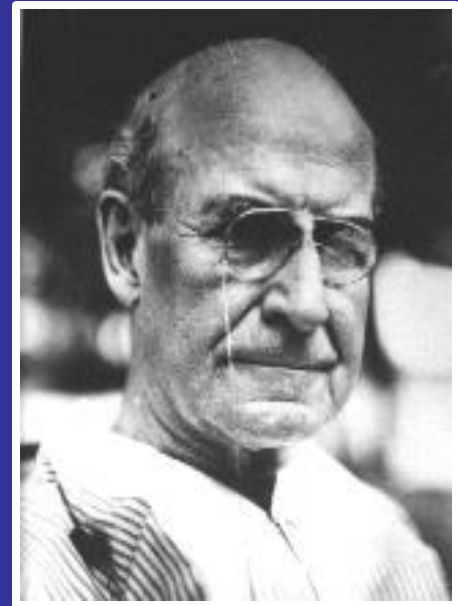
What Did Each Party Want?

- Darrow
 - “My object and my only object was to focus the attention of the country on the program of Mr. Bryan and the other fundamentalists in America” (*The Story of My Life*, autobiography)



What Did Each Party Want?

- Bryan
 - “To establish the right of taxpayers to control what is taught in their schools” and “to draw a line between teaching evolution as a fact and teaching it as a theory.”
(The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan, autobiography)

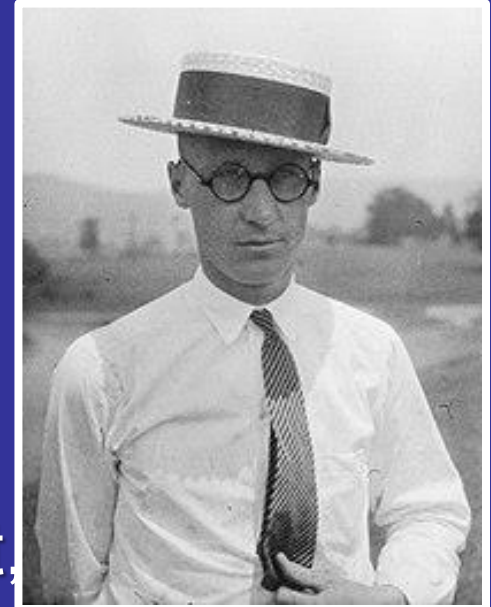


What Did Each Party Want?

- Scopes

- At trial's end, he said

“Your honor, I feel that I have been convicted of violating an unjust statute. I will continue in the future, as I have in the past, to oppose this law in any way I can. Any other action would be in violation of my ideal of academic freedom—that is, to teach the truth as guaranteed in our constitution, of personal and religious freedom. I think the fine is unjust”



Darrow's Strategy

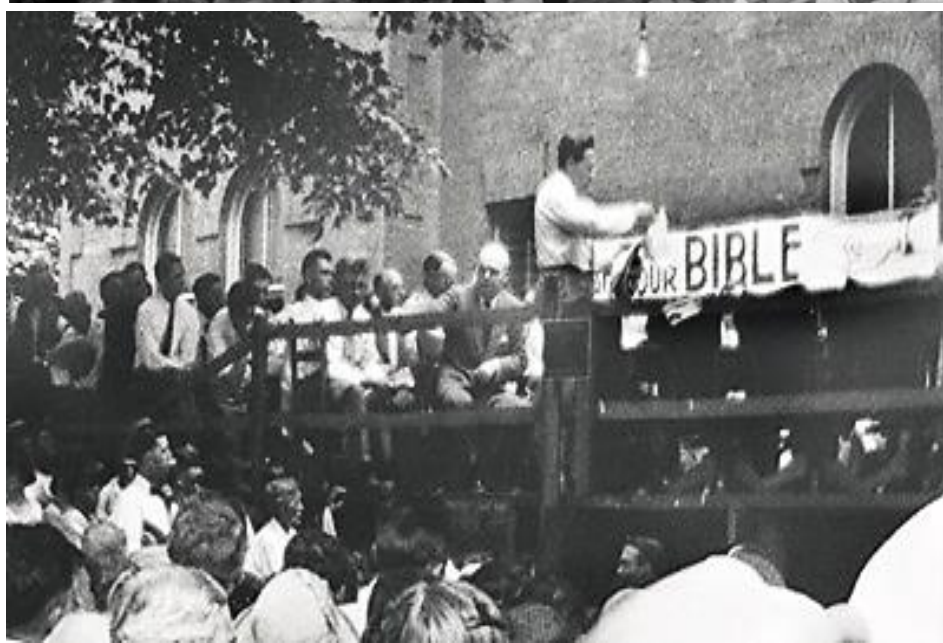
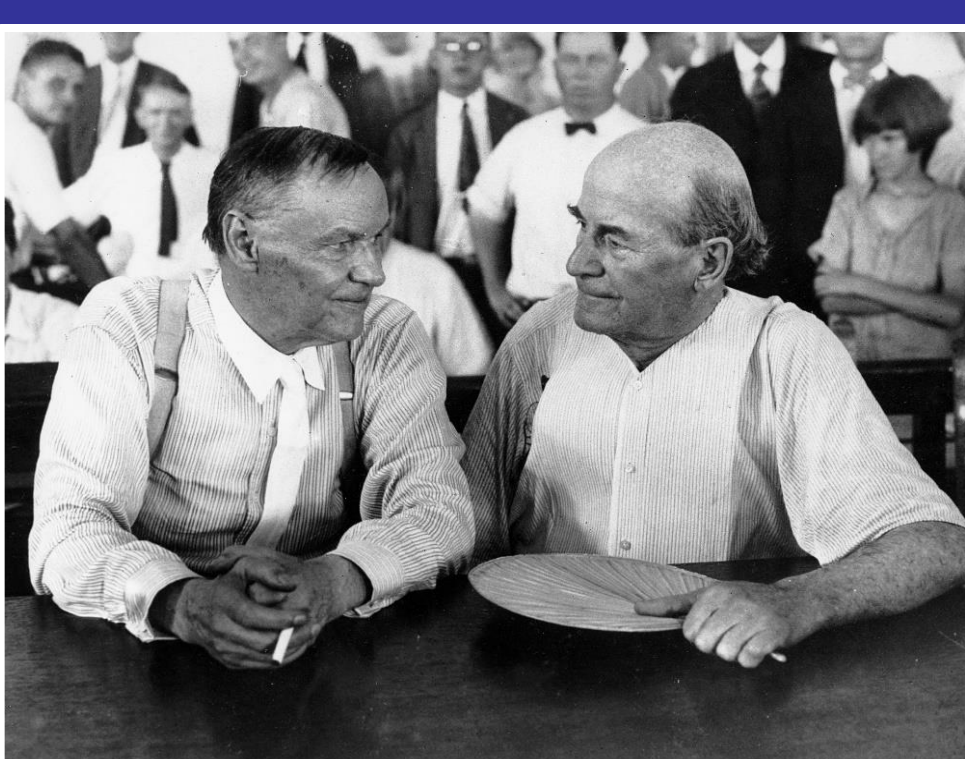
Plan A - Expert testimony on validity of theory of evolution

- But on Day 6 of the trial, Judge John Raulston refused to admit it
 - "It is not within the province of the court under these issues to decide and determine which is true, the story of divine creation as taught in the Bible, or the story of the creation of man as taught by evolution."
- In other words, no experts were needed to interpret the Butler Act
- Darrow irate with judge and almost charged with contempt but apologized the next day

Plan B – Attack literal interpretation of the Bible

- Day 7, Darrow got Bryan on the stand as an expert in the interpretation of the Bible
 - Bryan was not necessarily a literalist but maintained the truth of miracles
- Darrow badgered Bryan with questions like
 - Strict acceptance of creation of Eve from Adam's rib
 - Great fish swallowing Jonah
 - Flood, etc.
- Bryan declared that the defense had "no other purpose than ridiculing every Christian who believes in the Bible."







What do most “know”
about the trial?

STANLEY
KRAMER

PRESENTS

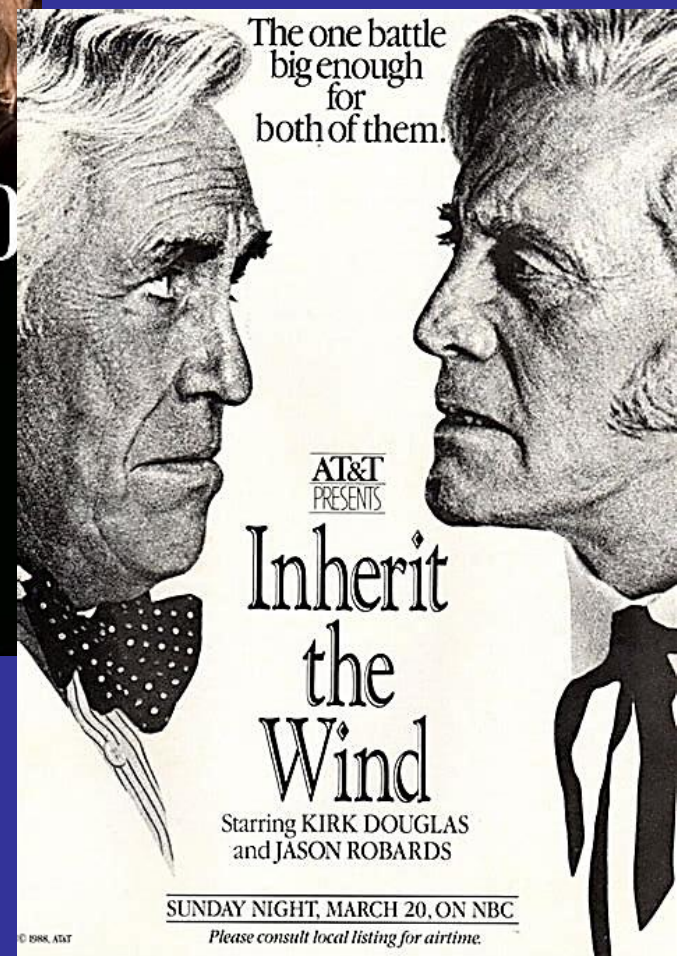
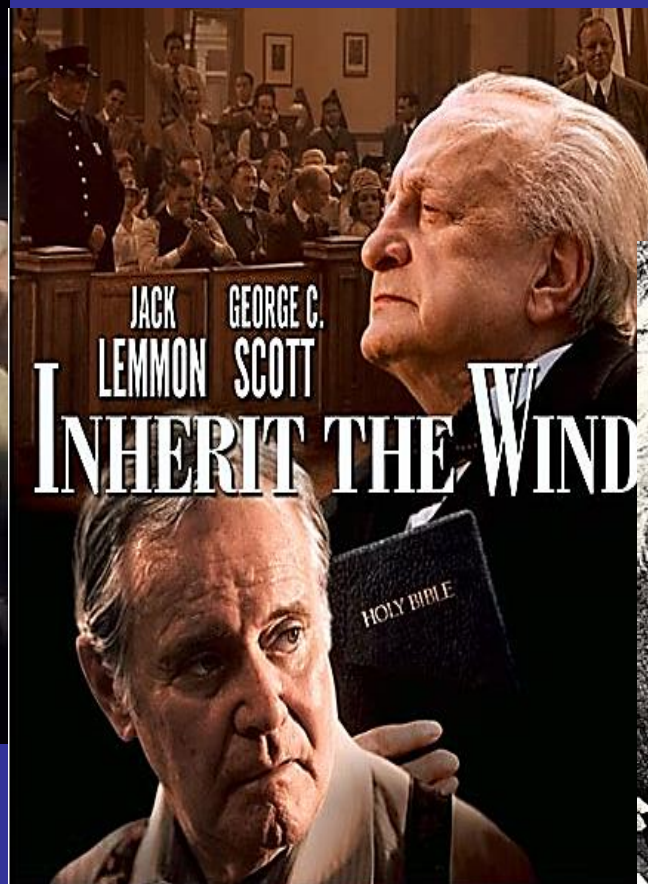
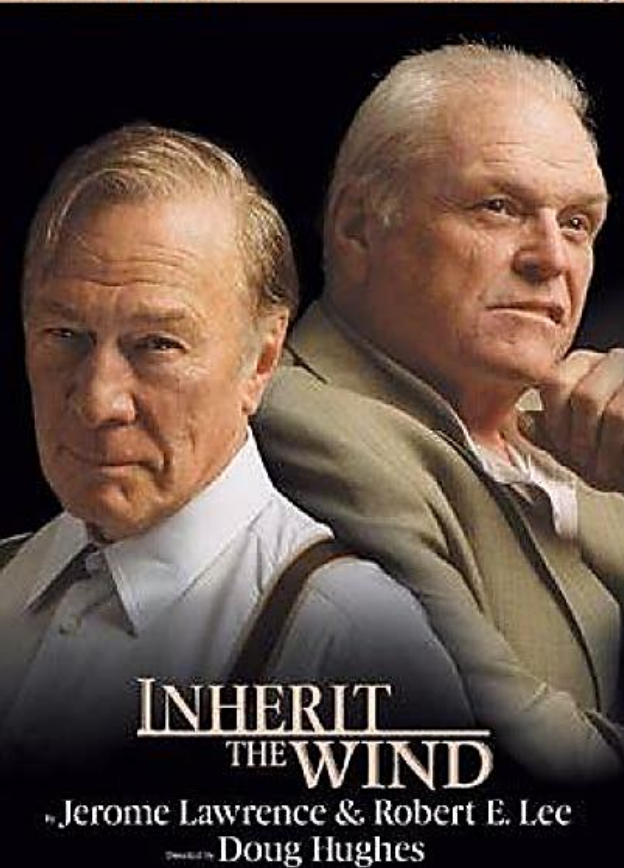
A
UNITED ARTISTS
RELEASE

HILLSBORO COURTHOUSE

SPENCER FREDRIC GENE
TRACY MARCH KELLY

INHERIT
THE WIND

Christopher Plummer Brian Dennehy



Scopes Trial Portrayal

Inherit the Wind

- 1955 – Play by Jerome Lawrence & Robert Lee
 - Written as commentary on McCarthyism and freedom of thought and expression
 - Issue of evolution used as a metaphor for control over people's thoughts and expression
- 1960 – MGM Movie with Spencer Tracy and Frederic March
 - Video clips

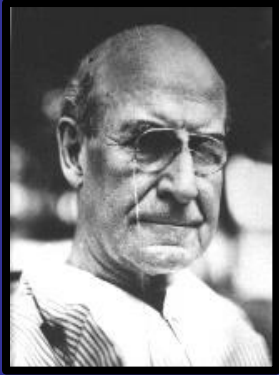
Where Did the Title Come From?

He who troubles his own house will
inherit the wind

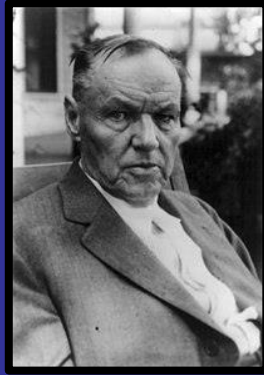
Prov. 11:29 NKJV

Bring trouble into your own family, then
you will receive nothing in the long run,
something as worthless as the wind,
noisy and troublesome

The Players – Real and Movie



Bryan



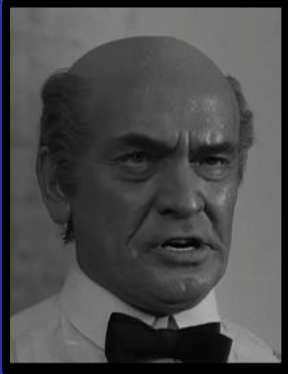
Darrow



Scopes



Mencken



Frederic
March

(Matthew Harrison
Brady)



Spencer
Tracy

(Henry
Drummond)



Dick
York

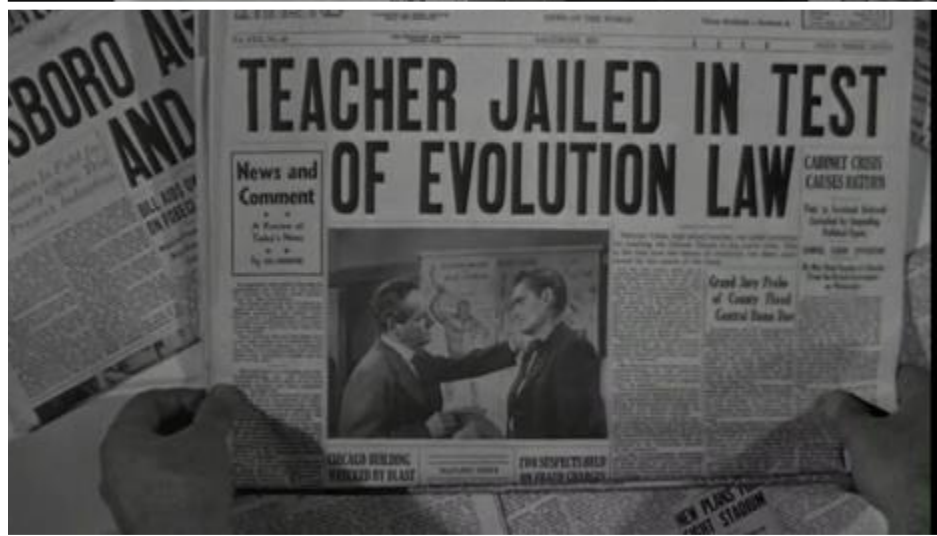
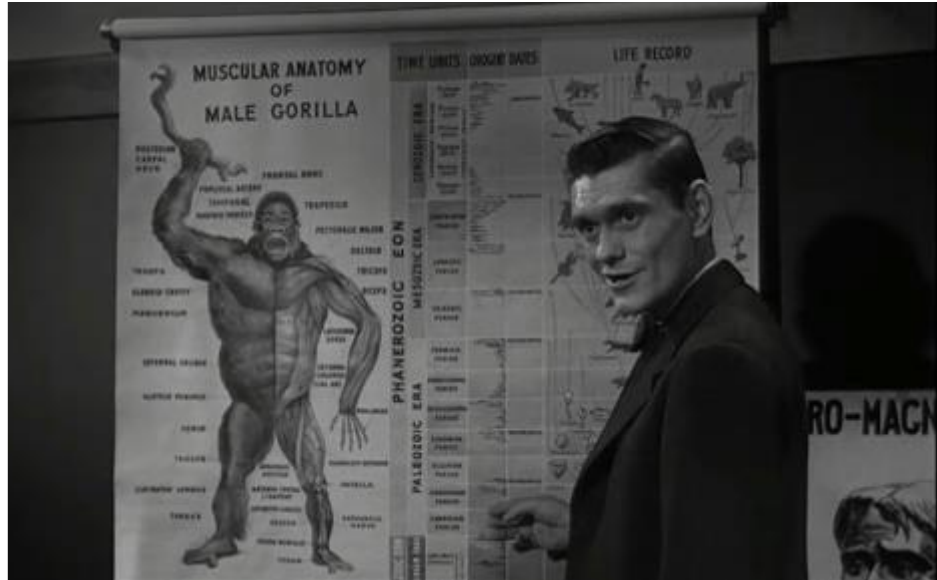
(Bert Cates)



Gene
Kelly

(E.K. Hornbeck)

Movie opens with march into classroom to jail Scopes



Fact

- No one marched into Scopes' classroom
- Scopes was arrested but \$1,000 bond posted and he was never jailed
- Violation of Butler Act had maximum penalty of \$500 with no prison
- Scopes didn't even teach evolution

What Scopes said toward the end of the trial

“There’s something I must tell you. It’s worried me. I didn’t violate the law ... I never taught that evolution lesson. I skipped it. I was doing something else the day I should have taught it, and I missed the whole lesson about Darwin and never did teach it. Those kids they put on the stand couldn’t remember what I taught them three months ago. They were coached by the lawyers.”

Scopes interview with reporter William K. Hutchinson
of the International News Service
from book, *The Great Monkey Trial* by Sprague de Camp

What Scopes said toward the end of the trial

“Honest, I’ve been scared all through the trial that the kids might remember I missed the lesson. I was afraid they’d get on the stand and say I hadn’t taught it and then the whole trial would go blooey. If that happened, they would run me out of town on a rail.”

Scopes interview with reporter William K. Hutchinson
of the International News Service
from book, *The Great Monkey Trial* by Sprague de Camp

What Scopes said toward the end of the trial

When Hutchinson replied that would make a great story, Scopes said: “My god no! Not a word of it until the Supreme Court passes my appeal. My lawyers would kill me.”

Scopes interview with reporter William K. Hutchinson
of the International News Service
from book, *The Great Monkey Trial* by Sprague de Camp

Townsmen 'Greeting'



“I want to tell you we’re just plain folk down here. We don’t need no outsiders to tell us how or what to think ... why don’t you go back where you came from?”

Fact

- Townspeople were friendly
- Darrow: “I don’t know as I was ever in a community in my life where my religious ideas differed as widely from the great mass as I have found them since I have been in Tennessee. Yet I came here a perfect stranger and I can say what I have said before that I have not found upon anybody’s part—any citizen here in this town or outside the slightest discourtesy. I have been treated better, kindlier and more hospitably than I fancied would have been the case in the north.” (transcript, pages 225-226).

Fact

- Newspaper man from Toronto:
 - I would like to “express my great appreciation of the extreme courtesy which has been accorded me and my brethren of the press by the court and the citizens of Dayton. I shall take back with me a deeper appreciation of the great republic for which we have felt so kindly, and whose institutions we so magnify and admire.”

(transcript, page 315)

Fact

- H.L. Mencken's first dispatch sent to his newspaper: 'Nor is there any evidence of that poisonous spirit which usually shows itself when Christian men gather to defend the great doctrine of their faith. ... On the contrary, the Evolutionists and the Anti-Evolutionists seem to be on the best of terms, and it is hard in a group to distinguish one from the other.'

The Great Monkey Trial, Sprague de Camp, p. 432

Scopes in jail, people protesting against him, burning him in effigy



Fact

- Scopes never in jail
- Mobs did not march for Scopes and Darrow death

Student Testifies



Fact

- Student was coached by Darrow and Scopes into claiming Scopes taught evolution
- Scopes was indicted on May 25, after three students testified against him at the grand jury; one student afterwards told reporters, “I believe in part of evolution, but I don't believe in the monkey business”

Larson, Edward J. (1997), *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*, p 108

“Fiancé Rachel” Tells Scopes to End Trial



Rachel: “Bert, you have to call the whole thing off right now. Don’t you see what’s happening, Bert? They’re using you as a weapon against your own people. What you think or believe is not the point anymore. You’re helping something bad.”

Bert: “I tried to open their kids minds. Their kids. I tried to give them knowledge they could use. They’re using it. As a stranglehold on me.”

Rachel Testifies



Bryan badgering her
into saying that
Scopes no longer
believed the Bible

Scopes threatening
to plead guilty if
Darrow cross-
examines Rachel



Fact

- Both Rachel Brown and her father Reverend Brown were fictional
- Scopes didn't even have girlfriend at that time
- Not only was "Rachel" fictional, but no women even participated in the trial
- Movie only tried to sympathize with Scopes and portray Bryan as badgering Scopes "fiancé" and Scopes threatening to plead guilty to avoid Darrow from cross-examining her

Darrow's Witnesses



Fact

- Darrow brought in 8 experts on evolution, only one was allowed to testify, Dr. Maynard Metcalf, Johns Hopkins zoologist
- Metcalf confused evolution with embryonic development, the growth of an individual from one cell
- The movie ignored all of the scientific testimony, and did not make the case of a “triumph of science over religious dogma”

Darrow's Star Witness Agrees to Testify



Fact

- On Day 7, Darrow called Bryan to show that belief in historicity of the Bible and miracles was unreasonable
- Bryan accepted because he thought he would also have a chance to cross-examine Darrow
- Scientists and ministers Darrow brought to Dayton coached him the night before as to what to ask

Bryan testifies never reading Origin of Species



Fact

- Bryan was very well-versed in evolution
- Corresponded regularly about the creation/evolution controversy with scientists such as Henry Fairfield Osborn
 - American geologist, paleontologist, and eugenist, and the president of the American Museum of Natural History for 25 years
 - Osborn wanted higher rates of reproduction among people with desired traits (positive eugenics), or reduced rates and sterilization of people with less-desired or undesired traits (negative eugenics).
- Bryan did read Origin of Species 20 years earlier even though movie says he didn't.

Darrow gets Bryan to admit Earth could be millions of years old – Turning Point in the Trial



Fact

- Although Bryan believed the Bible, he was not a literalist
 - Admitted millions of years would have been consistent with Scripture
 - In a speech he had said:
 - “no matter how long you draw out the process of creation; so long as God stands back of it you cannot shake my faith in Jehovah”
- Trial was about human evolution, not evolution in general

Verdict and Sentence



Bryan gives unhinged speech and collapses dead in the courtroom



Fact

- The guilty verdict was a formality because Darrow instructed the jury to find his client guilty!!
 - This prevented Bryan from cross-examining him as he did to Bryan. Judge even struck Bryan's testimony from the record
 - There were around 20 other states with similar laws and Darrow wanted to appeal to the Supreme Court to kill them all with one trial

Fact

- There were no closing statements
 - Bryan wrote a well thought-out scientific and religious argument against evolution, which he arranged to be published one day before he died
 - Not the raving of a madman as portrayed in the movie

Fact

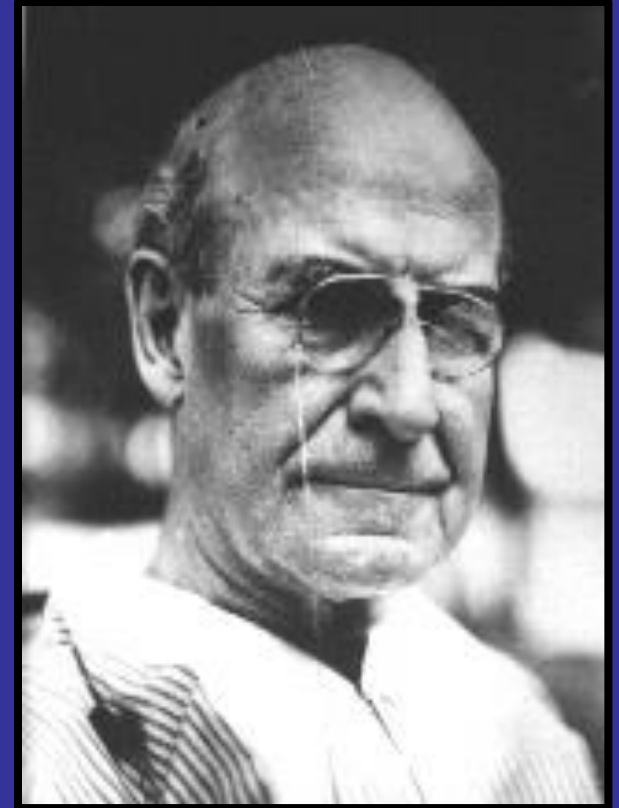
- No imprisonment was part of the law, only a fine
- Bryan never protested the amount of the fine as too small and even volunteered to pay it himself
- The verdict was overturned on a technicality
 - Judge was limited to imposing a \$50 fine – anything over that would have to be imposed by the jury
- Bryan died 5 days later of a stroke, not in the courtroom

The Aftermath

- In a sense, both sides won
 - Jury sided with Bryan
 - Darrow brought widespread attention to the theory of evolution
 - Trial began to fade but *Inherit the Wind*, brought new life to the controversy

- The Appeal
 - The Tennessee Supreme Court case narrowly upheld the constitutionality of the Butler Act in 1927 but reversed Scope's sentence on a technicality.
- The Repeal
 - Four decades after the Scopes Trial, the Tennessee General Assembly repealed the Butler Act, allowing teachers to introduce evolution as legitimate science theory.

- The Prosecution
 - Bryan died of a stroke in Dayton five days after trial.
 - Stress of the trial, the excessive heat, and diabetes probably contributed to his death.
 - Bryan College, a Christian liberal arts school in Dayton, is named in his honor.

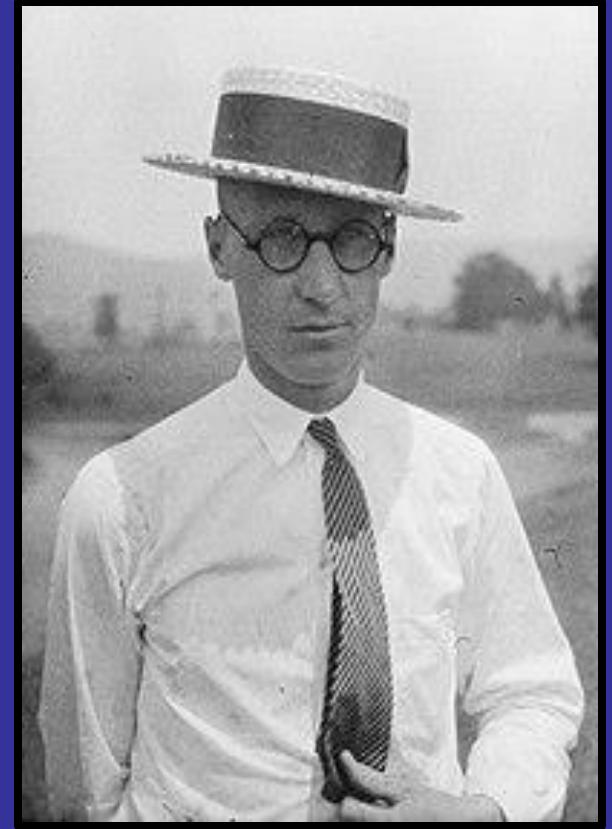


- The Defense
 - Clarence Darrow appealed the case to the Tennessee Supreme Court but largely withdrew from public life after the Scopes Trial. He published his autobiography in 1932 and died six years later at the age of 80.



- The Defendant

- Scopes, never comfortable in the limelight, left teaching altogether. After completing a master's degree, he became a professional geologist and worked in the oil industry. He lived to see the Butler Act repealed and died in 1970.



Inherit the Wind – Implications

- Authors never intended for this to be an accurate historical account
 - Christians depicted as bigoted and suppressing thought
 - Skeptics depicted as intelligent and modern thinkers
 - Scopes depicted as heroic for standing up for his beliefs
- “Fundamentalists” attacked in movie
 - Always used in negative sense of intolerant, zealous and inflexible in religious beliefs

Inherit the Wind – Why Presented in Schools?

- Shown in history, science and social studies classrooms
 - History
 - inaccurate and misleading
 - Social Studies
 - highly biased against one group of people with their religious beliefs
 - Science
 - none in the movie
- Many modern materials are available
 - Creation/evolution debates by knowledgeable people

CURRICULUM ARTICLE

Inheriting *Inherit the Wind*: Debating the Play as a Teaching Tool

Edward J. Larson • David Depew • Ronald Isetti

Published online: 15 February 2008

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Darwin's *Origin of Species*." For innocently teaching his students, the script notes, Scopes "is threatened with fine and imprisonment." The movie and play suggest various basic tensions that animate modern American life: science vs. religion, small town vs. big city, North vs. South, tradition vs. progress, law vs. conscience, the mob vs. the individual, popular control over public education vs. academic freedom for teachers and students, biblical literalism vs. religious liberalism, and tolerance vs. conformity. Many of these issues resonate with teenagers, especially when presented in the context of what is taught in high school. Accordingly, *ITW* has become a staple for high school drama productions in addition to its widespread use in history classes.

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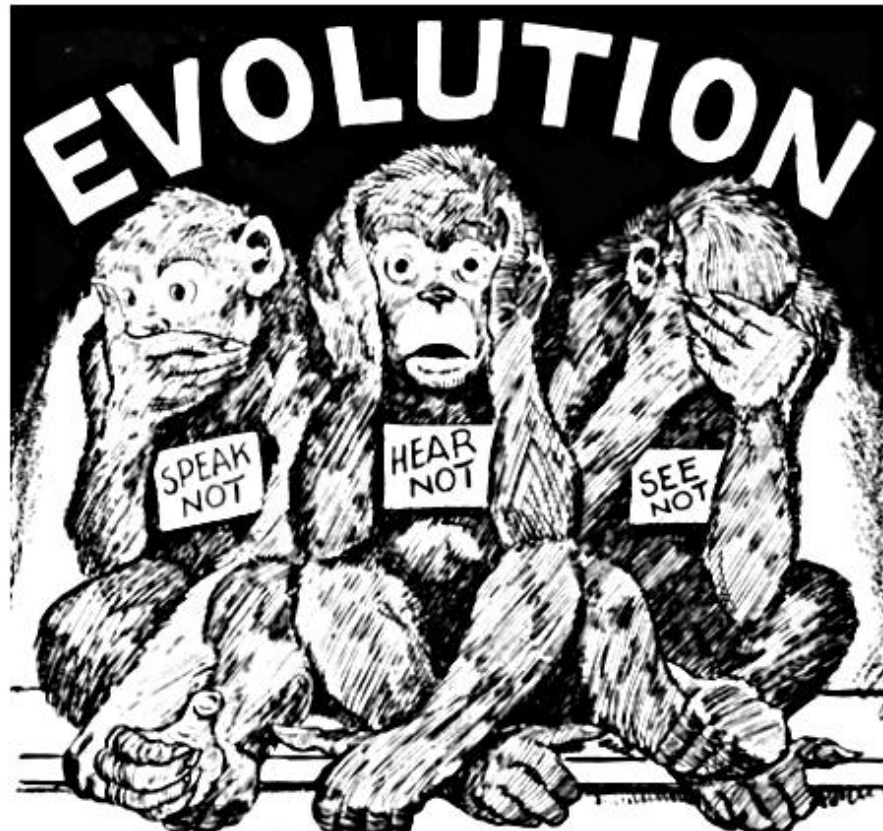
Starts off with two lies – he didn't teach evolution and there was no threat of prison!

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2013 Fall Play Announcement

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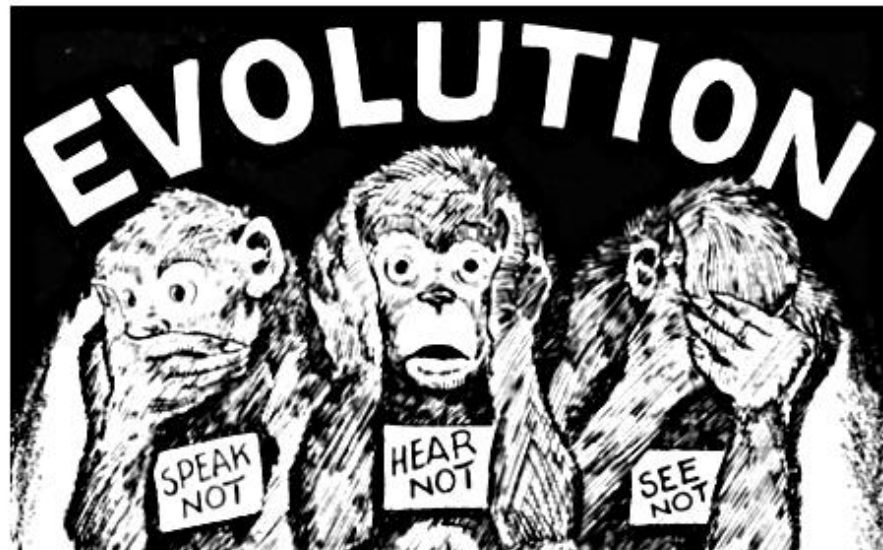
I am thrilled to announce that the 2013 Fall Play will be *Inherit the Wind* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee! Let's get our Scopes Monkey Trial on! Watch this space for audition information, coming soon.



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Meanwhile, The Debate Continues

- 1968 November 12
 - Ruling in the case Epperson v. Arkansas, The United States Supreme Court strikes down all remaining state anti- evolution laws as being in violation of the Establishment Clause in the Bill of Rights.
- 1987 June 19
 - In the case Edwards v. Aguillard, the United States Supreme Court bars the inclusion of creation science in Louisiana public school curricula as a violation of the Establishment Clause in the Bill of Rights.

- 1996 October 22
 - Pope John Paul II confirms a previous papal encyclical, *Humani generis* (1955), stating that the theory of evolution can be compatible with Roman Catholic doctrine, as evolution accounts for physical changes but does not account for the presence of an immortal soul in each human being
- 2004 October
 - A school board in Dover, Pennsylvania, mandates that district science teachers read a statement about intelligent design before beginning any instruction on evolutionary theory.

- 2005 September 26
 - Local parents challenge the legality of the Dover Board of Education's pro-intelligent design actions in the case *Kitzmiller et. al. vs. Dover Area School District et. al.*
- 2005 November 8
 - All eight members of the Dover, Pennsylvania, school board that supported the adoption of a policy mandating the reading of a statement about Intelligent Design in high school biology classes lose their seats in school board elections; they are replaced by a slate of candidates who ran on an anti-ID platform.

- 2005 December 20
 - In the Kitzmiller case, federal district court judge John E. Jones III rules that intelligent design does not meet established scientific criteria; mention of intelligent design in public schools therefore violates the Establishment Clause in the Bill of Rights.

Kitzmiller v. Dover: Defining Science and Religion in U.S. Schools

Discover how Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District shaped the debate over teaching intelligent design in public schools and reinforced the separation of church and state in education.



Von Wooding, Esq.

May 3, 2025 · 8 min read

blog.counselstack.com/kitzmiller-v-dover-defining-science-and-religion-in-u-s-schools/

What is the Establishment Clause?

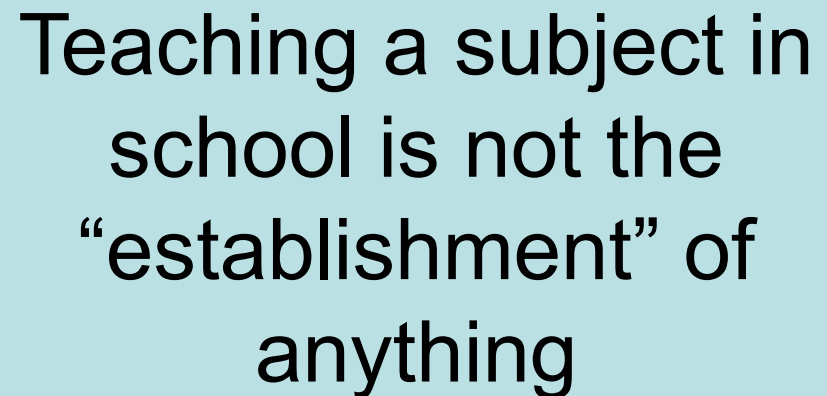
- The U.S. Bill of Rights

- Ratified December 15, 1791

- Amendment 1

- Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, or to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

[archives.gov/founding-docs/bi](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights)



Teaching a subject in school is not the “establishment” of anything

But this ignores the “Prohibition Clause”

Even if Biblical Creation is
a religion, no (federal) law
can prohibit its exercise,
even in a school

no law respecting an
establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free
exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of
speech, or of the press; or the right of the people
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[archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript)

Additional Comments by ISBR VP Jay Auxt

- Key word in 1st Amendment is “Congress”
 - Does not mean that the states cannot pass laws, confirmed by the 10th Amendment :
 - Federal government has only those powers delegated to it by the Constitution
 - All other powers not forbidden to the states by the Constitution are reserved to each state, or to the people
- The quoted decisions above cited the Establishment Clause, but it did not apply to states passing their own laws

Additional Comments by ISBR VP Jay Auxt

- In both the 1987 Edwards vs. Aguillard and in the 2005 Dover case, what was made illegal was the mandate to teach Creation
 - But teachers would be risking their careers from potential lawsuits if they did choose to teach it
- By the way, the Dover case defines science as “...observations and experiments ...”
 - Obviously, evolution fails that test as well

Finally,

He who troubles his own house will
inherit the wind

Prov. 11:29 NKJV

Schools that teach evolution as truth
bring trouble into society so that instead
of truth, students inherit something as
worthless as the wind