

The scopes trial's role in us education history research paper

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When science revealed to the world about Darwin's evolution theory, it suggested that human beings evolved from apes. Based on this assertion, there was widespread public uproar because many people thought this fact was far-fetched (Derstine 1). In the years after this revelation, different religious groups debated how such scientific ideologies affected biblical teachings about human existence (Age of the Sage 1). Mainly, they debated whether it was necessary for the church to endorse such evidences, or support their faith, as they knew it. Although some sections of the Christian faith reconciled the evolution theory with mainstream religious teachings, some fundamental religious groups (mainly Protestants) preferred to adopt a strict position against evolution theories (US History 1). In 1925, religious fundamentalists pushed legislators to enact an anti-evolution law as a solution to what they perceived as an increasingly materialistic (scientific) world. This law was the Butler Act (US History 1).

The Scopes Monkey Trial happened in 1925 as a contravention of the Butler Act. It involved a high school teacher, John Scopes who stood trial for teaching evolution to his students. The state charged the teacher with this crime because it was unlawful for such professionals to teach human evolution to students (mostly in public schools). The court found the defendant guilty of the crime and fined him \$100 (Groce 108). This paper shows that this trial was significant to America's social, political and economic development because it described the relation between the church and the state. Based on this understanding, this paper argues that the trial was important to America's social and political progress by expounding on the debate surrounding the conflict between science and religion. In line with

this realization, the major conflicts of the time included the clash between modernism and religion. These details explain the main thesis of this paper.

The Scopes Monkey trial was significant to America's education history because it influenced how the country should teach science in schools. For example, high school curricula often excluded evolution and scientific dogma in their teachings based on the outcome of the trial (Groce 107). Notably, high school biology texts showed this fact. The publishers of high school texts paid a very close attention to the kinds of information that the public would tolerate in their publications (Groce 108). Here, they were more concerned with public opinion than the need to impart knowledge to the students. Another significance of the scopes trial was its role in highlighting the debate between science and religion, which exists in the 21st century.

It was the first public attempts by the American society to explore this clash (US History 1). The trial helped to expose the underlying arguments surrounding the clash between religion and science (Groce 108). The trial also helped to question fundamental beliefs about Christianity by explaining the need for Christians to understand what they believe and why they believe so. This importance emerged when some of the religious fundamentalists could not support their views of anti-evolution laws, based on their biblical beliefs.

The Scopes monkey trial was a landmark case that represented the clash between modernism (science) and religion. Conservative Christians believed that the bible was the ultimate authority that explained human existence.

Stated differently, they believed that God created plants and human beings on the sixth day of creation. Modernists contradicted these beliefs by saying that human beings evolved from monkeys. Christian fundamentalists said such assertions contradicted their faith (Derstine 2). In fact, although some religious fundamentalists wanted the state to prosecute John Scopes for teaching evolution to his students, they did not know much about it (Derstine 2).

In fact, the US History (1) says they were mostly scared that their children would think that the bible's teachings were false. Stated differently, the people who supported John Scopes' conviction supported religious doctrines, which opposed evolution and its teachings. These people argued that God's word was more powerful than all knowledge acquired by human beings (US History 4). Therefore, they opposed any information taught to young people, which contradicted the "word of God." Comparatively, the people who supported the acquittal of the defendant supported the modernist approach of human evolution. Some scientists decided to merge conflicting beliefs between Christianity and science by saying that human beings evolved from God's creation (monkeys) (US History 1).

The conflict between modernism and science has been there for a long time. In fact, even today, the same debate continues. For example, in 1999, an education board in Kansas contemplated the prospects of banning teachers from teaching evolution theories in state-funded schools (Linder 4). The same debate persisted throughout the years 2004 and 2006 when the public voted out anti-evolution advocates from the Kansas education board (Linder

4). Conservative school board members who reintroduced the subject in 2006 later countered this move (Linder 4). Overall, the Scopes Money trial was a theological contest. Many authors and researchers explained how the conflict between religion and science characterized American culture in the 20th century. For example, author, Edward J. Larson, got a prize for explaining this conflict in his 1998 work, titled, *Summer for the Gods* (Linder 7).

The author also explored the same issue in 1985 through his literary work, “*Trial and Error: The American Controversy over Creation and Evolution*.” In these works, the author explored how policy changes mediated the conflict between religion and science (Linder 7). Other authors, such as Augustine Larson, also explored the same issue. For example, Larson highlighted the conflict between modernity and religion through his 1859 work, titled, *The Origin of Species* (Linder 7). In this work, he explored the religious opposition to Darwin’s evolution theory. He further drew a comparison of this conflict to a similar conflict about the earth and the solar system. In this work, he said the earth had a long history that contravened biblical teachings about creation (Linder 7). Overall, the conflict between religion and science dominated social and political debates for a long time. Although science has progressed and proved itself through new evidence, there are no indications that the same conflict, which led to the Scopes trial, would disappear soon.

The Scopes trial highlighted the growing chasm in American Christianity. The clash between evolution and biblical teachings characterized it. Here, it is important to understand that, during the trial, many Christians opposed

evolution and its teachings (Linder 1). Many works of art evidence this fact. For example, the movie, *Inherit the Wind*, highlights the wider social and historical context of the trial (Groce 111). It showed how the trial supported the fundamentalist view of anti-evolution. Here, it is also important to acknowledge that the fundamentalist view of Christianity retreated into the political and cultural background of the time, after the death of the fundamentalist leader, Bryan (Groce 111). His death left a void that was difficult to replace. Therefore, it was a huge blow to the fundamentalists.

The Scopes Trial escalated the conflict between religious fundamentalists and proponents of evolution because it fuelled similar debates in other states around the US. Before the trial, some states (South Carolina, Dakota, and Kentucky) had successfully passed new legislation to guide the conflict that existed between both doctrines (Groce 115). After the three states passed anti-evolution laws, and after the conviction of John Scopes, religious fundamentalists started pursuing the implementation of anti-evolution laws in other states around the country (US History 4). By 1927, about a dozen states in America either passed anti-evolution laws, or were in the process of doing so.

Although some of these states failed to pass such laws, some of them, notably Mississippi and Arkansas, successfully criminalized evolution teachings in state-funded schools (US History 4). Some religious crusaders who failed to convince lawmakers to pass similar legislations suggested that the teachers should teach evolution in schools as an unproven hypothesis (Olson 12). In fact, most of them suggested that the teachers should teach

evolution alongside the biblical understanding of human existence. The anti-evolution movement later subsided after Americans developed trust in science. This shift mainly occurred in the 1960s. It marked a period when people stopped being overly religious to covertly religious (Olson 12).

This paper shows how the Scopes trial explained religious tensions and changes in American society. When understanding these contributions, it is also important to comprehend how the changes in moral and social views of the American society explained the religious tensions and societal views regarding evolution and its clash with religion. Understanding the intricacies of the Scopes trial helps us to comprehend the powerful social and cultural insights that characterized the 20th century. In the same regard, it highlights the conflict between science and religion that characterized the 20th century and even today.

Age of the Sage. The Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. 2002. Web.

Derstine, Ken. Science v. Religion: The history and significance of the 1925 Scopes trial. 1998. Web.

Groce, Eric. " Monkey Business: Teaching the Scopes Evolution Trial." Social Studies Research and Practice 6. 2 (2011): 107-128. Print.

Linder, Douglas. The Evolution Controversy. 2013. Web.

Olson, James and Roberts Randy. My Lai: A brief History with documents, Bedford, NY: Bedford Series in History and Culture, 1998. Print.

US History. The Monkey Trial. 2013. Web.