

The scopes monkey trial research paper



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Scopes Trial Today evolution is taught in public schools in America, but it has not always been that way. The legal battle that led to the teaching of evolution in public schools has been a very long one. Creationism was taught in public schools until the late 19th century. Following Darwin's theories being introduced in 1859 many began to accept evolution during the 1860's. This would continue in America until a flamboyant, Christian, lawyer named William Jennings Bryan campaigned against the teaching of evolution.

Bryan found supporters very easily because of a grassroots movement in America following World War I; which was a vast change in society that led people towards a simpler and more religious lifestyle. This movement led several states to create laws banning the teaching of evolution in public schools. Bryan and his movement was of course opposed by many which led to the legal battles that have taken America from a non-evolution teaching society to the evolution teaching society it is today. In this paper I will discuss the first major court case that brought significant national attention to these laws.

The first major court case that brought significant attention to the laws banning the teaching of evolution in public schools is " The Scopes Trial" or " The Monkey Trial" in Dayton, TN in 1925. This trial was the State of Tennessee vs John Thomas Scopes, who was a high school football coach that was also a substitute. Although this case would turn out to be more about Scopes breaking a law than the teaching of evolution in public schools; it was significant in bringing national attention to the laws.

After the state of Tennessee passed the Butler Act, which banned the teaching of anything that contradicted the idea of creationism from the

Bible, there was a group of businessmen from Dayton, TN who felt they could bring business and attention to their small town thanks to the new law. They devised a plan to find a local teacher willing to oppose the law by teaching evolution in the classroom. They were able to find such a teacher in John Thomas Scopes; Scopes was the perfect candidate. He was young (25), new to teaching (first year), new to town, and was well liked by the towns people.

It took little convincing to get Scopes to oppose the law and he did so while substituting a high school biology class. When knowledge of Scopes teaching evolution was made public he was arrested and taken to trial. The trial quickly grew in fame when two of America's most prominent lawyers took the case. William Jennings Bryan volunteered to serve as the prosecutor for the State of Tennessee which led to Clarence Darrow becoming the Defending lawyer in the case. Darrow was a famous Agnostic, defense, lawyer who wanted to prove Bryan wrong more so than to prove Scope's innocence.

With the new "celebrity" lawyers on board for the trial; the case quickly gained fame. The business men of Dayton, Tennessee were quickly pleased to see their plan had worked. There were vendors, tourist, and media flocking to Dayton for the trial. The vendors were selling hot dogs, and water outside of the courthouse. The many curious people who came to Dayton to witness the trial caused the town to be flooded with people. All of the hotels were so full it led to many members of the media staying in a warehouse and sleeping on the floor.

For the first time there was a national radio broadcast from the courtroom of the trial and the trial was recorded on film. There were so many people in

the courtroom that the weight caused the support beams to buckle in the courthouse. The buckling of the beams lead to the trial being held outside one day; then returning inside with a limited amount of people able to attend. During the jury selection Darrow quickly realized he was at odds. It was hard to find an unbiased jury in Dayton Tennessee because the vast majority of residents were Christians and was neducated on what evolution is. They saw evolution as a direct threat to their religion rather than a scientific theory. The jury ended up being made up of farmers who were mostly illiterate with the majority being church goers; six were Baptist, four Methodist, one Church of Christ, and one was a non-church goer. Since Darrow knew he could not prove that Scopes was innocent of breaking the law. He would rather try to prove that the law itself was unconstitutional; and decided to make his case based on science versus ignorance.

He had planned on calling in several scientific scholars as witnesses to argue the topic of evolution over creationism but the judge deemed this unreasonable. The judge did not allow the witnesses and said that the case was about the law and not evolution. This was the case for Darrow but not for Bryan. Bryan argued that creationism was true and spent most of his time in court preaching from the Bible. Bryan even preached to the public on the courthouse steps and in the local Methodist church while he was in Dayton.

This tactic won over the local people and even the defendant. Scopes was quoted saying “ Bryan was a powerful speaker”. With Bryan’s tactics being allowed by the judge and going over well with the jury and local people Darrow saw only one way to “ win”. Instead of trying to keep Scopes from

being convicted he would make his case into a personal vendetta against Bryan's beliefs. When Darrow presented his defense he called one witness; Bryan. This was a shock to everyone in the court as well as around the country.

The judge allowed it as long as Bryan was okay with it. Bryan agreed so he took the stand to be questioned by Darrow. Darrow made the most of his opportunity and questioned the faith that Bryan held so dear. He began by asking him about stories from the Bible and how old the Earth was. He then delved deeper into the creation theory; asking if Bryan knew how long it took God to create the Earth, if the days that were spoke of in Genesis were man's days or God's days, and if they differed. Of course; Bryan could not answer truthfully, only guess.

This led to Bryan acknowledging that the periods of creation in Genesis could have possible been millions of years rather than days. This gave ground to the theory of evolution to be included in the creationist's idea of the beginning. The day after Darrow questioned Bryan the judge ordered the testimony to be absolved from the case. He said that it had no bearings on the case. Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100. Even though Darrow was unable to prove Scopes innocence he was able to show a chink in the armor of the creationist claims against evolution and make a bigger name for himself.

Bryan died five days after the trial in Dayton Tennessee while taking a nap after lunch. Darrow appealed the case to the State Supreme Court in an attempt to get the law deemed unconstitutional. The Supreme Court found that Scopes should not have been fined but did not retry him. It was not until

1965 when the American Civil Liberties Union made a case against the state of Arkansas that the Supreme Court ruled that laws against the teaching of evolution were unconstitutional. Works Cited

Crewe, Sabrina and Michael V. Uschan. The Scopes " Monkey" Trial. Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2005. Print. Groce, Eric, Tina L. Heafner and Katherine A. O'Connor. " Monkey Business: Teaching the Scopes Evolution Trial. " Social Studies Research ; amp; Practice (2011): 107-128. Print. Lovorn, Michael G. " Monkey Town: The Summer of the Scopes Trial. " Social Studies Research ; amp; Practice (2009): 99-106. Print. Singham, Mano. God vs. Darwin. Plymouth: Roman and LittlefieldEducation, 2009. Book.