



Document A: Sparks Letter to the Editor

Many citizens wrote letters to Tennessee's newspapers in response to the Butler Act. Below is an excerpt from a letter written by a parent.

Editor of the *Nashville Tennessean*:

At the time the bill prohibiting the teaching of evolution in our public schools was passed by our legislature I could not see why the mothers in greater number were not conveying their appreciation to the members for this act of safeguarding their children from one of the destructive forces which . . . will destroy our civilization. I for one felt grateful for their standing for the right against all criticism. And grateful, too, that we have a Christian man for governor who will defend the Word of God against this so-called science. . . .

The Bible tells us that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the church. Therefore we know there will always be standard-bearers for the cross of Christ. But in these times of materialism I am constrained to thank God deep down in my heart for . . . every . . . one whose voice is raised for the uplift of humanity and the coming of God's kingdom.

Mrs. Jesse Sparks
Pope, Tennessee

Source: Mrs. Jesse Sparks, letter to the editor, *Nashville Tennessean*, July 3, 1925.

Sourcing

1. Why does Mrs. Sparks care about what is taught in schools?

Contextualizing

2. To what does Mrs. Sparks refer when she says "these times of materialism"?

Close Reading

3. Find all of the words that suggest the presence of a great danger. Why might Mrs. Sparks believe that evolution is such a threat?



Document B: Textbook – A Civic Biology

The excerpt below is from the biology textbook used by the State of Tennessee in 1925. The Butler Act made it illegal to teach from textbooks like this one. John Scopes could not remember if he actually taught the section on evolution from this textbook, but volunteered to say that he did in order to challenge the legality of Butler Act. Pay attention to how the textbook explains the theory of evolution.

The Doctrine of Evolution.

We have now learned that animal forms may be arranged so as to begin with very simple one-celled forms and culminate with a group which contains man himself. . . . The great English scientist, Charles Darwin . . . explained the theory of evolution. This is the belief that simple forms of life on the earth slowly and gradually gave rise to those more complex and that thus the most complex forms came into existence.

Man's Place in Nature.

If we attempt to classify man, we see at once he must be placed with the vertebrate animals because of his possession of a vertebral column. . . . Anatomically we find that we must place man with the apelike mammals, because of those numerous points of structural likeness. The group of mammals which includes the monkeys, apes, and man we call the primates.

Evolution of Man.

Undoubtedly there once lived upon the earth races of men who were much lower in their mental organization than the present inhabitants. If we follow the early history of man upon the earth, we find that at first he must have been little better than one of the lower animals. . . . Gradually he must have learned to use weapons, and thus kill his prey, first using rough stone implements for this purpose. . . . Man then began to cultivate the fields, and to have a fixed place of abode other than a cave. The beginnings of civilization were long ago, but even today the earth is not entirely civilized.

Source: Excerpt from widely-used biology textbook, *A Civic Biology*, written in 1914 by George W. Hunter, a biology teacher from New York City.

Close Reading

1. How does the textbook describe man's evolutionary relationship to other animals? Why might the supporters of the Butler Act oppose such a theory?

Corroborating

2. What do you think Mrs. Sparks (Document A) would find offensive about this textbook passage?
3. Why did many people in Tennessee support the Butler Act, which forbade the teaching of evolution?



Document C: American Federation of Teachers Statement

The American Federation of Teachers released a statement in support of John Scopes. As you read, think about their reasons for supporting him.

The American Federation of Teachers is deeply concerned about the effect of the Tennessee anti-evolution law. . . .

Teaching . . . has been menaced . . . by misguided legislative authority that fears to trust the intelligence, the public spirit and the devotion . . . of [teachers]. . . .

As teachers we especially fear the effect of the present wave of intolerance in education on the task of providing the schools with enlightened teachers. Without freedom in the intellectual life, and without the inspiration of uncensored discovery and discussion, there could ultimately be no scholarship, no schools at all and no education.

Source: Excerpt from resolution adopted by the American Federation of Teachers on July 18, 1925.

Close Reading

1. How do the teachers present themselves in this resolution? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Contextualizing

2. What do you think the teachers mean by the phrase, “present wave of intolerance”? What does this phrase suggest about how these teachers view the Butler Act?



Document D: Reverend Straton Article

John Roach Straton was a minister who preached across the country against the sins of modern life. Straton believed in the literal truth of the Bible and the literal truth of Biblical miracles. He was firmly opposed to the teaching of evolution. He also believed that parents and local communities should control their own schools.

The real issue at Dayton and everywhere today is: "Whether the religion of the Bible shall be ruled out of the schools and the religion of evolution, with its ruinous results shall be ruled into the schools by law." . . .

[John Scopes's lawyers] left New York and Chicago, where real religion is being most neglected, where law, consequently, is most defied, where vice and crime are most rampant . . . and they went to save from itself a community where women are still honored, where men are still chivalric, where laws are still respected, where home life is still sweet, where the marriage vow is still sacred. . . .

Think of the illogic of it! and the nerve of it! and the colossal vanity of it!

Source: Excerpt from Reverend John Roach Straton's article in *American Fundamentalist*, "The Most Sinister Movement in the United States." December 26, 1925.

Close Reading

1. What words does Straton use to show that he is complimentary of small towns?
2. According to Straton, what are signs of corruption in New York and Chicago?

Contextualizing

3. According to Straton, how is the Scopes trial bigger than a simple debate between evolutionists and creationists?



Document E: Chicago Defender

The Chicago Defender was one of the main African American newspapers in the country. In the decade before the Scopes trial, the newspaper played a major role in convincing blacks to leave the South and move North. The excerpt below is from an editorial about the Scopes trial.

In Tennessee a schoolteacher is being tried for teaching evolution to his pupils. If convicted, a prison term awaits him; he will be branded as an ordinary felon and thrown into a cell with robbers, gunmen, thugs, rapists and murderers. . . .

That is the South's way. Anything which conflicts with the South's idea of her own importance, anything which tends to break down her doctrine of white superiority, she fights. If truths are introduced and these truths do not conform to what southern grandfathers believed, then it must be suppressed.

The Tennessee legislators who passed the law . . . probably never read the text themselves and all they know about the subject is that the entire human race is supposed to have started from a common origin. Therein lies their difficulty. Admit that premise and they will have to admit that there is no fundamental difference between themselves and the race they pretend to despise. Such admission would, of course, play havoc with the existing standards of living in the South.

Source: Excerpt from *Chicago Defender* editorial, "If Monkeys Could Speak." May 23, 1925.

Close Reading

1. According to this editorial, why did the South oppose the theory of evolution?

Corroborating

2. Both the *Chicago Defender* and the American Federation of Teachers (see Document C) oppose the Butler Act. What are the similarities and differences between their arguments?



Document F: Malone's Trial Speech

Dudley Field Malone was a New York attorney who was on the defense team. He argued for the importance of teaching science. Though the local Tennesseans viewed Malone with suspicion, the force and passion of this speech surprisingly lifted the audience to its feet.

What is the issue that has gained the attention, not only of the American people, but people everywhere? Is it a mere technical question as to whether the defendant Scopes taught the paragraph in the book of science? You think, your Honor, that the News Association in London [is here] because the issue is whether John Scopes taught a couple of paragraphs out of his book? Oh, no. . . .

The least that this generation can do, your Honor, is to give the next generation all the facts, all the available data, all the theories, all the information that learning, that study, that observation has produced—give it to the children in the hope of heaven that they will make a better world of this than we have been able to make it. We have just had a war with twenty million dead. Civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults. Civilization need not be so proud of what the grown-ups have done. For God's sake let the children have their minds kept open—close no doors to their knowledge; shut no door from them. Make the distinction between theology and science. Let them have both. Let them both be taught. Let them both live. . . .

We feel we stand with progress. We feel we stand with science. We feel we stand with intelligence. We feel we stand with fundamental freedom in America. We are not afraid. Where is the fear? We meet it! Where is the fear? We defy it!

(Profound and continued applause.)
(The bailiff raps for order.)

Source: Excerpt from Dudley Field Malone's speech on the fourth day of the Scopes trial, July 15, 1925. Dayton, Tennessee.

Close Reading

1. According to Malone, why is the Scopes trial bigger than a simple issue of teaching a few paragraphs about evolution?

Sourcing

2. The audience in the courthouse mostly supported Bryan and the Butler Act. Why do you think they applauded Malone's speech?

Contextualizing

3. Why does Malone say "civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults"? How does he use the disastrous events of his time to support his main point?



Document G: New York Times Article

The New York Times covered the Scopes trial extensively. Its editorials condemned the Butler Act and sided with the defense. As you read, think about how a newspaper from New York City portrayed a small Tennessee town. Dayton's population in 1925 was 1,800.

Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton:
Strange Creeds and Theories are Preached and Sung within Shadows of the Court House . . .

Visitors for the Opening Day of the Scopes Trial are Mostly Tennessean Mountaineers.

Dayton, Tenn., July 10.

Tennessee came to Dayton today in overalls, gingham and black to attend the trial of John Thomas Scopes for the teaching of evolution. The Tennesseans . . . came from mountain farms near Dayton, where work, usually begun at day light, had been deserted so that gaunt, tanned, toil-worn men and women and shy children might . . . see William Jennings Bryan's "duel to the death" with "enemies of the Bible." . . .

They overflowed the crowded courtroom, where only the earliest comers found seats, onto the great lawn of the court house shaded by newly white-washed maples and newly planted with strange pipes, where one pressed a button and bent to drink for relief from the sun which beat down upon the village. . . .

They stood in groups under the trees, listening to volunteer and lay evangelists, moved by the occasion to speak for the "Word." They listened to blind minstrels, who sang mountain hymns and promises of reward for the weary and faithful, to other minstrels who sang of more worldly songs, and to a string quartet of negroes. They walked up and down hot, dusty Market Street, with its squat one and two story buildings, hung with banners, as for a carnival in which religion and business had become strangely mixed, lined with soda-water, sandwich and book stalls.

Source: Excerpt from a front page *New York Times* article, "Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton." July 11, 1925.

Close Reading

1. How does the *New York Times* regard the local Tennesseans?
2. What evidence can you find that the *New York Times* regards the events as bizarre and interesting?

Contextualizing

3. What does this article suggest about why people came to Dayton to watch the trial?



Document H: Dallas News Cartoon

Newspapers all over the country covered the Scopes trial in the tiny town of Dayton, giving the people of this small town a degree of publicity that would have otherwise been unimaginable.



[6] Playing It for All It's Worth. (Knott in the *Dallas News*)

Source: John Knott, "Playing It for All It's Worth," *Dallas News*, July 1925.

Sourcing

1. Why might a cartoonist from a big city newspaper in Dallas, Texas, be making fun of Dayton, Tennessee?

Close Reading

2. Who is playing the music? What is the cartoonist saying about why Dayton is hosting the trial?



Document I: Larson – Summer for the Gods

Edward J. Larson is a historian who wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning book on the Scopes trial called Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion. He traces the rise of fundamentalist Christianity in the 1920s. Fundamentalists opposed "modernism," which claimed that humans wrote the Bible and that its stories should be interpreted, rather than assumed to be literally true.

Middle ground did exist between modernism and fundamentalism but gained little attention in the public debate surrounding the Scopes trial. . . .

The popular press seemed intent on pitting fundamentalists . . . against modernists . . . or against agnostics . . . all of whom scorned the middle. . . . Christians caught in the middle sat on the sidelines. "The thing that we got from the trial of Scopes," a Memphis *Commercial Appeal* editorial observed, was that the most "sincere believers in religion" simply wanted to avoid the origins dispute altogether. "Some have their religion, but they are afraid if they go out and mix in the fray they will lose it. . . . Some are in the position of believing, but fear they can not prove their belief."

Source: Excerpt from historian Edward J. Larson's book, *Summer for the Gods*, 1997.

Contextualizing

1. According to Larson, newspapers ignored the "middle ground." Why might newspapers have painted the trial as a debate between fundamentalists (people who believe that the Bible is literally true) and agnostics (people who doubt the existence of a god)?

Close Reading

2. Who occupied the "middle ground," according to Larson? What did the "middle ground" believe?



Document J: Stereotypes – Monkey Business

*The passage below is from a book called *Monkey Business: The True Story of the Scopes Trial* by two journalists, Marvin Olasky and John Perry. Olasky and Perry argue that the Scopes trial gave rise to the common stereotype of creationists as backward and stupid. As you read the passage below, think about how Olasky and Perry would answer the main inquiry question.*

Journalists who descended on Dayton in 1925 . . . carried with them antipathy toward fundamentalist Christianity. . . .

[R]eporters described the story as one of pro-evolution intelligence versus antievolution stupidity. . . . [For example, one journalist] summarized his view of the debate's complexity by noting, "On the one side was bigotry, ignorance, hatred, superstition, every sort of blackness that the human mind is capable of. On the other side was sense." . . .

Newspapers ran humorous comments about Dayton similar to today's ethnic jokes; the *New York Times*, though, worried that the situation was serious, and trumpeted of "Cranks and Freaks" in a front-page headline. The *Times* . . . portrayed as zombies the Tennesseans entering the courthouse. . . .

The stereotypes the Scopes trial pinned on Christians eighty years ago show no signs of fading. . . . It's time to shake off the crippling legacy of the Scopes trial and show the true face of evangelical Christianity to a world more desperate than ever for truth, assurance, and answers.

Source: Excerpt from Marvin Olasky and John Perry's book, *Monkey Business: The True Story of the Scopes Trial*, 2005.

Close Reading

1. What facts do Olasky and Perry use to back their argument? What part of their argument is supported by opinion?

Contextualizing

2. What are the connections Olasky and Perry make between 1925 and today? Do you agree with them?

Corroborating

3. What other reasons might the press have had to paint a simple, two-sided picture of the debates? Consider the cartoon (Document H) and the Larson source (Document I).