

## The Scopes' Monkey Trial

During the 1920s, some people welcomed change while others feared it. One of the biggest controversies was whether science would change the way we think about our world. Some religious people feared that scientific ideas would undermine belief in the Bible and religion.

One of the most famous trials in the United States occurred in 1925. It took place in a small town in Tennessee. A high school teacher named John Scopes was on trial for teaching his class about evolution. Teaching about evolution was against the law in Tennessee.

People from all over the country came to Dayton, Tennessee for the trial. The prosecuting attorney was William Jennings Bryan, a former Presidential candidate and an expert on the Bible. The defense attorney was Clarence Darrow, who was famous for defending constitutional rights in very difficult cases.

During the trial, the judge ruled that no one could testify about the ideas of evolution. To defend his client, Darrow called to the stand Mr. Bryan. In his questions to the prosecutor, Darrow tried to show that the Bible could be interpreted in different ways.

He wanted to show that Mr. Bryan's beliefs were opinions, not the "truth". Darrow also wanted to show that someone's opinions about religion should not be allowed to prevent teaching students about evolution and science.

Mr. Scopes was found guilty of teaching about evolution, but the case was later dropped. The case was widely reported in newspapers and later was made into a play called "Inherit the Wind". Below is an interchange between Mr. Bryan and Mr. Darrow. It is from the July 21, 1925 issue of the New York Times.

Darrow: Mr. Bryan, do you believe that the first woman was Eve?

Bryan: Yes.

Darrow: Do you believe that she was literally made out of Adam's rib?

Bryan: I do.

Darrow: Did you ever discover where Cain got his wife?

Bryan: No, sir; I leave the agnostics (non-believers) to hunt for her.

Darrow: You have never found out?

Bryan: I have never tried to find.

Darrow: The Bible says he got one, doesn't it? Where other people on the earth at the same time?

Bryan: I cannot say.

Darrow: You cannot say? Did that never enter your consideration?

Bryan: Never bothered me.

Darrow: There were no others recorded, but Cain got a wife. That is what the Bible says. Where she comes from you don't know.

Bryan: (To the Court) His purpose is to cast ridicule on everybody who believes in the Bible.

Darrow: We have the purpose of preventing bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States.

Bryan: I want the papers to show I am not afraid to get on the stand in front of him and let him know that agnosticism is trying to force agnosticism on our colleges and on our schools.

1) What strategy is Mr. Darrow using in his questions to Mr. Bryan? What does he want to show?

2) Do you think this is a fair strategy? Why?

3) Do you agree with Mr. Bryan's charge that Mr. Darrow is trying to "ridicule" people who believe in the Bible?

4) Why do you think this was such an explosive issue in the 1920s?

5) Do you think this is still an explosive issue today? Why?