

The grossly falsified Scopes Monkey Trial—modern implications

The Other Side of the Scopes Monkey Trial: At its heart the trial was about racism

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Author Jerry Bergman is, or should be, a household word to creationists (and, for that matter, to non-creationists). He has taught biology, biochemistry, anatomy, genetics, psychology, and other subjects for decades. He has authored a staggering 1,800 papers and books, many of which have been translated into various languages. He has taught at several universities, including the University of Toledo Medical School and Bowling Green University. He has also spoken 2,000 times at various places around the world.

In this delightful book, Bergman deals with the fallout that came from the 1925 John Scopes Trial, where Scopes was prosecuted for teaching about evolution, which was then banned by Tennessee law in accordance with the Butler Act. As elaborated below, the trial has since been transformed into a cudgel for use against religious believers. In actuality, as Bergman deftly shows, the outlawing of the teaching of evolution was not based on a simple religious prejudice. It was based primarily on its deleterious effects on society, specifically its might-makes-right ethos that justifies war, racism, and eugenics.

However, I believe that Jerry Bergman could have made his case stronger by more of a connection of the Scopes Trial to current events in science. For this reason, I go beyond Bergman’s immediate content.

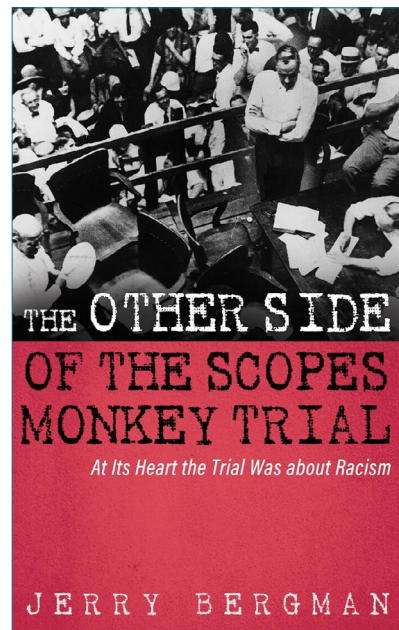
Why the hostility to evolution in Tennessee?

Contrary to the usual stereotypes, it was not simply ‘science versus religion’, much less ‘enlightened reason versus fanatical radical faith’. William Jennings Bryan (figure 1), the attorney who defended the anti-evolutionism of the Butler Act, raised multiple sensible concerns. He contended that ‘survival of the fittest’ encouraged militarism (p. 6), that it bred a disinclination to aid the weak (pp. 34–35, 79), that it reinforced racist ideas about ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ races (p. 60, 73), that it added legitimacy to eugenics (p. 77), and that it facilitated the re-emergence of pagan ideas about the value of force in place of centuries of Christian teachings about love and compassion (pp. 54–55).

At no time did the Butler Act require teaching the biblical account of creation, or even the generalized creation interpretation! (p. 99) Let us elaborate on this.

Grotesque distortions of the John Scopes Trial in *Inherit the Wind*: examples

William Jennings Bryan, the designated ‘bad guy’ who dared to speak his mind about evolution, was



not a ‘fundamentalist’. He was not a defender of biblical literalism and was willing to accept the organic evolution of non-human life-forms, as repeatedly stressed by Bergman (pp. 60, 72, 167). Nor was Bryan a fundamentalist in the caricatured sense of being preoccupied with rigid religious orthodoxy and theological minutiae. Bryan was actually concerned with broad-based theological principles, and he left doctrinal details up to the individual believer (p. 31).

Still less was Bryan some kind of right-wing fanatic, as sometimes portrayed. Ironically, he was a liberal populist Democrat with socialist leanings (p. 171)!

Inherit the Wind intentionally portrayed southern Americans as ignorant and bigoted. I thought that we were not supposed to make prejudicial generalizations about entire groups of people; not in our enlightened age anyway.

The ACLU wanted this trial to test the law and Scopes volunteered even though he wasn’t even sure that he had violated the Act. Town business leaders wanted the trial to give the town publicity. However, in *Inherit the Wind*, John Scopes was imaginatively portrayed as a poor victim who was even

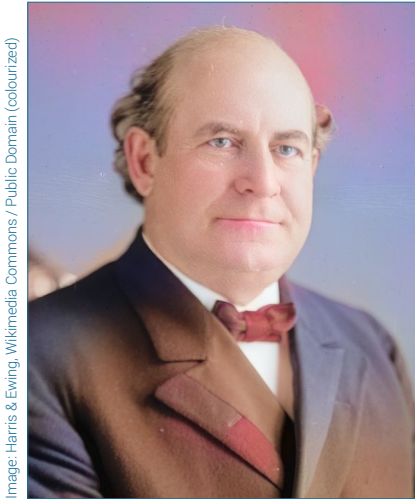


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Figure 1. William Jennings Bryan, the much-demonized ‘anti-scientist’

jailed for his potential advocacy of evolution (p. 170). To add to the fictional melodrama, the mayor of the town used high-handed tactics to try to prevent Clarence Darrow from testifying (p. 174). The evolutionistic bearers of tall tales are really getting desperate!

Grotesque distortions of the John Scopes Trial in *Inherit the Wind*: evolutionistic dissembling

The defenders of *Inherit the Wind* have tried to brush off its falsifications of facts by saying that ‘it is only fiction’. This gaslighting is nonsense. Prejudicial claims against Christians, which most viewers cannot even discern have no basis in fact, are promoted just the same whether the propaganda is factual or fictional. Bergman could have noted, using the same ‘it’s only fiction’ excuse, that we could justify paying a lot of attention to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and even to contemplate the teaching of Holocaust denial in schools.

In today’s world, where it is harder and harder to discern what is real and what is not, the foregoing considerations take on added significance. This is deliberately lost on the evolutionists.

Ideas have implications and consequences; and, yes, this includes evolution

Defenders of the Tennessee law buried their heads in the sand and pretended that teaching evolution had nothing to do with advancing racial supremacy or encouraging disbelief in God. So ideas exist in a vacuum, huh? Ironically, in the USA, at least, secularists are the very last to assume that! And we are supposed to take them seriously? They were the first to drive prayer and Bible reading out of public schools, precisely because these actions have implications and consequences! After all, a child may possibly get the idea that God exists or that the government favours those who ‘are religious’ over those who are not, and the secularists would have a conniption if they did.

The proponents of evolution were not intellectual or moral giants; far from it

The atheists who opposed Bryan and strongly advocated the teaching of evolution, such as the ACLU, Clarence Darrow, and H. L. Mencken, are commonly portrayed as the enlightened and heroic ‘good guys’. Bergman shows that they were anything but. Even if they were ‘right’ about evolution, they were abysmally wrong on many other things.

Roger Baldwin, the founder of the ACLU, an organization supposedly dedicated to defending civil liberties, was a Communist (p. 6). He defended Soviet totalitarianism on the basis of ‘Communist economic liberties’. By what wonderful reasoning does Communism promote ‘economic liberty’? It is not explained. Ironically, some Soviet peasants regarded Communism as the new feudalism, where the state has taken the place of the noble as the owner of the agricultural estate and the agent that prevents the peasant from owning the land he farms.

Bergman points out M.L. Mencken was no moral giant that ‘put religious believers in their place’. He was an all-around racist, whose writings put down various ethnic groups, including African Americans, Native Americans and Jews. German-born, his bigotry extended to whites of English descent, and he became at the least sympathetic to Hitler’s nationalism, if not overtly pro-Hitler (p. 137). Atheist attorney Clarence Darrow was no paragon of rationality either. He strongly supported eugenics. (p. 71).

Nowadays, we hear a repeat of the Communist mantra about ‘being on the right side of history’. Anybody who questions Communism (or nowadays disagrees with the LGBT agenda) is ‘on the wrong side of history’. OK, then, let’s play this game. On the basis of their overall beliefs, neither the ACLU, nor Darrow and Mencken, were ‘on the right side of history’ in any substantive sense of the term. If Bryan was a ‘loser’, then the ACLU, and Darrow and Mencken, were ‘losers’ all the more.

Today, the censors are secularists and their allies

Complaints about religionists doing censorship (as of evolution), in the Scopes Trial, are rather ironic in view of the fact that such accusations work both ways. Nowadays, censorship is an issue whenever it comes to controversial issues, especially in the classroom.

Viewed in this light, the ‘censorship’ of John Scopes for teaching evolution is a triviality of the highest order! Yet that is all we hear about.

The ‘authority of science’ in proper context

The ‘authority of science’, used as a club to force Darwinism into schools against the will of most parents at the time of John Scopes, has exploded,

and has come back to bite us all. The ‘authority of science’ has recently been weaponized by both sides in the COVID debate. It has been used to delegitimize and to silence those scientists and intelligent laypeople who dissent from the ‘approved’ narratives. Ironically, the prestige of science itself has suffered because of all this. Various surveys have shown that public confidence in science is at an all-time low, at least in the USA.

Beyond Bergman: The Scopes Trial in historical context

The Scopes Trial, which revolved around outlawing evolution, is not the end of the story. Attempts were made by creationists, in the USA, in the early 1980s to counter evolutionistic triumphalism by introducing a two-model approach to origins in the classroom, but the secularists successfully got this banned as unconstitutional. Introducing an abstract Intelligent Designer into the classroom, without specifying the Designer as God, fared no better. It was still framed as ‘disguised religion’. Finally, those who object to the dogmatic teaching of evolution, for whatever motive, have been somewhat successful in getting disclaimer stickers, which specify the tentative and controversial nature of evolution, placed in evolutionistic textbooks. Evolutionists, clearly hankering for an absolute monopoly in the classroom, have been apoplectic over their dogma being challenged in *any* way.

Evolutionary theory most certainly is tentative, not factual

Consider Nebraska Man, Piltdown Man, Java Man, vestigial organs, and embryonic recapitulation. Bergman points out that all these evolutionistic shibboleths were presented at the Scopes Trial as proofs of evolution, but have since been discredited! So much for ‘the authority of science’. In

this respect, William Jennings Bryan has been vindicated.

This has additional implications not mentioned by Bergman. We see once again that evolution is not falsifiable: no matter what fossil hominids are discovered, there is always a way for evolutionists to fit them into evolutionary theory and to triumphantly promote them as ‘proofs of evolution’. Pointedly, no matter how often their favorite ‘proofs’ are discredited, or how many unsolved problems remain, evolutionists will not abandon their theories. This is hardly true science.

Lest we hear the ‘science is tentative’ excuse from the evolutionists, we should not allow evolutionists to simultaneously argue that ‘evolution is factual’ and ‘evolution is tentative’. So which is it? They cannot have it both ways!

The reality is inescapable. The presentation of evolution in the classroom as something virtually certain is unwarranted, and it is all the more imperative for evolutionary textbooks to have a disclaimer pointing out the tentative nature of evolutionary theory.

Conclusion

The Scopes Trial is an instructive example of how the secularists and their allies control the narrative and falsify history. They get to define ‘science’ and to demonize the opposition. In terms of public consumption, the Scopes Trial has become an absolutely anti-Christian parody of itself.