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SIX DAYS OF TWENTY-FOUR HOURS:
THE SCOPES TRIAL, ANTIEVOLUTIONISM, AND THE
LAST CRUSADE OF WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of Southern Studies

The University of Mississippi

by

KARI EDWARDS

May 2012

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ABSTRACT

The academic study of the Scopes Trial has always been approached from a traditional legal interpretation. This project seeks to reframe the conventional arguments surrounding the trial, treating it instead as a significant religious event, one which not only altered the course of Christian Fundamentalism and the Creationist movement, but also perpetuated Southern religious stereotypes through the intense, and largely negative, nationwide publicity it attracted. Prosecutor William Jennings Bryan's crucial role is also redefined, with his denial of a strictly literal interpretation of Genesis during the trial serving as the impetus for the shift toward ultra-conservatism and young-earth Creationism within the movement after 1925. The impact of the Scopes Trial's location in the rural East Tennessee town of Dayton is further analyzed in order to present a local religious and cultural history of its origins, as well as its immediate and long-term effects on Tennessee and the entire region of the South.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a native of Rhea County, Tennessee, creating this thesis has been a uniquely rewarding experience for me. So many people have assisted me along the way, and acknowledging their help here is the least I can do to show my gratitude. First and foremost, I thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson, as well as the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Zandria Robinson and Dr. Willa Johnson, for their invaluable guidance and advice. I also wish to thank Gene Mills, Dr. Andrea Becksvoort, and Dr. William Harman, my undergraduate senior project committee at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, whose encouragement and initial feedback ultimately led to the realization of this project.

The Scopes Trial archives at Bryan College, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville's Special Collections, the Chattanooga Public Library, the Scopes Trial Museum at the Rhea County Courthouse, and the Modern Political Archives at the University of Tennessee's Howard H. Baker Center all contributed greatly to my primary research. But the experiences I enjoyed the most came from the personal conversations I had with fellow citizens of Rhea County, including my own family and friends, who truly made this project worthwhile in my eyes. I am especially indebted to Tom Davis at Bryan College, who shares my love of our local history and works hard to keep the memory of the Scopes Trial alive in Dayton. I also thank Mary Galloway for her priceless recollections, Tom Robinson for his knowledge of his family's past, my grandmother Margaret Edwards for talking for hours about her childhood, and everyone else who provided me with the information I needed to piece together this story of where we're from.

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INTRODUCTION

"The eyes of the nation will be upon Dayton, and we trust that the nation does not gain the false impression that Dayton is a comic opera town; for the Rhea county center is a good place. It has several thousand decent, respectable, thoughtful people. It is not 'Monkeyville.'"

— *Chattanooga News*, May 29, 1925¹

The summer of 1925 was looking quite promising for the small East Tennessee town of Dayton. By the first of May the heat had already started to roll in, the high school had released its students for their much-anticipated vacation, and Rhea County's famous strawberries began to make an appearance in what would hopefully be a highly profitable season. The scene at Robinson's Drug Store, the unofficial gathering place of Dayton's leading businessmen, was becoming even more frenzied as the month wore on, with curious townspeople of all ages stopping in to talk about the latest big story. Not much happened in this rural valley, shielded on one side by picturesque mountains and comfortably situated at least an hour's drive from the nearest urban center, so usually the talk around Robinson's soda fountain involved more small-town gossip than anything else. But this summer, things were going to be different. The only subject on people's minds in Dayton that May was the trial. *Their* trial, to be exact; the one the Chattanooga papers were already predicting would be a media sensation the likes of which little

¹ *Chattanooga News*, "Let the Trial Be Dignified," May 29, 1925.

Rhea County had never seen. John Thomas Scopes, a popular science teacher and the local high school's football coach, had recently been accused of breaking the law, and few in town had seen it coming.

In many ways, the only thing the bustling capital city of Nashville and tiny Dayton shared in common was that they both happened to be located in the same state. But earlier that same year, a bill passed through the Tennessee legislature that would forever change the course of history for all of Dayton, triggering a rather chaotic chain of events that ultimately led from the imposing steps of the capitol building in Nashville to the understated brick facade of the Rhea County courthouse and culminated in what would soon be dubbed the "Trial of the Century." The Butler Act, which prohibited the teaching of any theory denying the Genesis account of creation in Tennessee public schools, had made its way to Governor Austin Peay's desk in January of 1925, and Peay wasted little time enthusiastically adorning it with his signature. From that moment on, unbeknownst to the people of Dayton or to John Scopes himself, their fate was sealed.

The idea that an event as notorious as the "Monkey Trial" simply fell into Dayton's hands, however, couldn't be further from the truth. In reality, *Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes* was a carefully orchestrated, meticulously planned, and surprisingly well-financed show-trial intended by a group of Dayton's business leaders to both challenge the constitutionality of the Butler Act and to simultaneously bring in some much-needed revenue to their struggling town. On May 4, 1925, a Chattanooga newspaper ran an advertisement purchased by a newly-formed organization known as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) which implored a Tennessee schoolteacher to volunteer to participate in a "test case." The teacher would need to be arrested

for violating the Butler Act and put on trial, and the ACLU would cover the expenses. When enterprising George Rappleyea, a native New Yorker who oversaw a failing coal and iron works in Dayton, caught sight of the ACLU's plea as he glanced over the daily paper during his lunch break, an idea formed in his mind that he just *knew* could help put Rhea County on the map.

That hot afternoon, Rappleyea enthusiastically pitched his idea to a small group of men seated around a glass-covered table in the back of the drug store. F. E. Robinson, druggist and school board member, listened intently while he served his chattering friends Coca-Colas. Young Sue Hicks, a local lawyer and the only man present who actually seemed to like what the Butler Act stood for, began formulating a way to make this trial a reality for Rhea County. Hicks's good friend, John Scopes, was off playing tennis with some of his students, blissfully unaware of what was transpiring down the road. Later that afternoon he would be casually summoned over to the drug store himself, agree to be the teacher who answered the ACLU's call, watch as his arrest warrant was carefully written out by Hicks, and leave Robinson's that evening to finish his game of tennis. Thus, amongst such seemingly mundane circumstances, the trial that would inevitably bear his name was born.²

Evolution was still a big word with little meaning to most people in East Tennessee at that time. The churches they attended had yet to concern themselves with the relationship between man and monkey, the specter of William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow, whose shadows would eventually overwhelm the legacy of the Scopes Trial with their larger-than-life celebrity, had yet to make their mark upon the city of Dayton, and the only "Darwin" that locals knew of

² For further reading on the origins of the Scopes Trial, see Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?: Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), and Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: the Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997). For the best first-hand account, see also John T. Scopes and James Presley, *Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John T. Scopes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1967).

was the dry goods salesman who ran a successful shop on Market Street.³ But that was all about to change, and it would change with the blink of an eye. What the Scopes Trial inevitably brought to Dayton was so much more than tourist dollars and a great deal of publicity. For a few weeks in July of 1925, the Rhea County courthouse became the veritable center of a worldwide religious debate that had consumed theologians and laypeople alike for well over a decade. What took place there would both make and break the careers of its participants, and would eventually serve to forever alter the way that future generations viewed evolution and creation, science and religion, Modernism and Fundamentalism, and even North and South.

The Scopes Trial has been written about extensively through the years. It has been immortalized in fiction, on Broadway, and on film. History books rarely forget to mention its significance. This work, then, rather than attempting to write yet another historical account of an event that has already received a huge amount of attention from many different disciplines, instead seeks to redefine the way we look at the Scopes Trial, the issues it involved, and its overall legacy. So often, commentators view the Scopes Trial simply at face value, as a *trial*, and thus analyzed from a traditional legal perspective. Though the merits of this approach are certainly not disputed, it is only when one departs from this legalistic viewpoint that the larger, arguably more important interpretation of the trial becomes clear. The Scopes Trial was far less a standard legal proceeding than it was a *significant religious event*, one which had very real and profound social, political, and theological implications not simply for the South, but for the entire nation.

³ John T. Scopes and James Presley, *Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John T. Scopes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1967), p. 84

What took place in Dayton that summer was the culmination of years of conflict between the Fundamentalist and Modernist movements within evangelical Protestantism. It drastically changed the face of antievolutionism, creating a far more conservative antievolution movement after the trial than that which existed beforehand and forcing Fundamentalists to regroup, redefine their doctrines, and defend their beliefs on an increasingly unforgiving national stage. The antievolution movement lost its most visible leader in Dayton, Progressive politician William Jennings Bryan, and the controversy surrounding his denial of a strictly literal interpretation of Genesis in his cross-examination by Clarence Darrow during the trial served as the impetus for the immediate shift toward ultra-conservatism and young-earth Creationism within the movement after 1925. The Scopes Trial not only altered the course of Christian Fundamentalism and the Creationist movement, but also served to perpetuate Southern religious stereotypes through the intense amount of nationwide publicity which surrounded it. The lasting effects of the scathing commentaries distributed across the country from reporters like H. L. Mencken have continued to be repeated as proof of Dayton's, and the South's, religious backwardness. Thus, terms such as the "Bible Belt" have stuck with the South to this day, perpetuating the image of this region as universally anti-science and endlessly committed to strict Biblical literalism.

Within the six chapters that follow, a picture of Dayton's infamous "Monkey Trial" is painted which focuses heavily upon local and regional primary sources from that time period in an attempt to create a balanced image of an event, and a place, that so often falls victim to gross caricaturization. The background of the trial, its reception, and its legacy are presented through the eyes of some of the people, both Rhea County's locals and its visitors, who actually lived it.

Their triumphs and their mistakes, some remembered and many long-forgotten, still provide us with the greatest means of understanding the various motivations driving those who shaped the Scopes Trial into what it ultimately became.

Chapter One offers a limited overview of the theological controversies that led to evolution becoming an all-encompassing social evil in the eyes of so many believers. It explains the Fundamentalist backlash against Higher Criticism, its link to World War I and the pre-/post-millennialism debate, as well as the birth of the Butler Act as a direct outcome of these earlier controversies. Chapter Two analyzes the crucial role of the most famous member of the Scopes prosecution team, William Jennings Bryan, focusing primarily upon his leadership of the antievolution movement, his own personal religious beliefs, his interactions with Fundamentalist groups, and his reasons for participating in the trial itself. Chapter Three argues that Dayton's identity as a New South town built largely with Northern money did not save it from the negative effects of Southern stereotyping, courtesy of the press, and thus by the time the trial actually took place it had taken on a regionalistic, Northern versus Southern dynamic that otherwise would not have been as prevalent. Chapter Four concentrates on how the influence of religion managed to shift the purpose of the trial from a standard legal proceeding to an overtly religious event, while Chapter Five presents the trial's aftermath, focusing especially on the death of Bryan and the public backlash against Dayton, the South, and the antievolution movement. The final chapter provides a unique glimpse at Rhea County today, the ways in which it remembers its most famous summer, the Christian college it dedicated to Bryan, and the long-term effects of being "Monkey Town."

Although by July a significant number of Dayton's citizens never wanted to hear words like "evolution," "Scopes," or "monkey" again, as the end of May 1925 rolled around the enthusiasm everyone felt in town was absolutely contagious. They were busy making their city a place they could be proud of; cleaning the streets, decorating the shops that lined the main thoroughfare, and waiting with anticipation to see what rumors would prove to be true. There were lots of them floating around, especially inside the increasingly cramped interior of Robinson's Drug Store, where even the table where the idea of the trial was conceived had become its own little tourist destination. Famous names from Billy Sunday to H. G. Wells to William Jennings Bryan were being thrown around as potential participants, and it seemed more and more reporters from every corner of the country were trickling into town each day in search of the very same gossip that the locals were all too willing to dish out. But Dayton's unassuming residents still had no idea what was in store for them in only a few short weeks.

**1. ON THE FIRING LINE OF THE LORD’S ARMY:
FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SCOPES TRIAL**

“The Bible deals with the science of how to live. While knowledge of the age of the rocks is desirable, such knowledge is insignificant in value compared with man’s knowledge of the Rock of Ages.”

— *William Jennings Bryan*⁴

T. T. Martin, field secretary of the Anti-Evolution League of America and self-proclaimed Fundamentalist defender of the Bible, arrived in East Tennessee from his native Blue Mountain, Mississippi, in early July of 1925 at the invitation of Reverend T. W. Callaway of the Chattanooga Baptist Tabernacle. Martin was well known nationally as a traveling evangelist, and the little booth he set up on the courthouse lawn during the Scopes Trial quickly became famous for its large signs promoting anti-evolution literature and pamphlets on the Bible written by William Jennings Bryan. Photographers snapped photo after photo of Martin as he preached, raising his Bible high into the air and shouting loudly about the ensuing battle between God and the enemy. “Hell and the High-Schools” was the subject of the lecture he intended to present in Dayton and in Chattanooga, and he openly advertised in local newspapers that he wished for

⁴ *Youngstown Vindicator*, “Bryan’s Bible Talks: the Old Testament Continued,” June 16, 1922. Retrieved from Google News Archives.

“any reputable minister of the Gospel holding modernistic views” to join him in a public debate while he was in town. Unfortunately for Martin, however, no one took him up on his offer.⁵

A casual glance at any of the newspapers in which Martin placed his ads that summer would undoubtedly yield articles with terms like “evolution,” “Darwinism,” and “Fundamentalist” featured prominently within its pages. The Scopes evolution trial had managed to capture the public’s attention, and suddenly everyone felt the need to weigh in on topics that only a decade before would have been considered the exclusive realm of scientists and theologians. What exactly was “evolution?” Did it really mean humans came from apes? Among the sea of opinionated voices, it was a loose-knit group of conservative ministers from various different denominational backgrounds known as “Fundamentalists” who, like T. T. Martin, seemed to be yelling the loudest. But these men weren’t new to the fight. They had been waging war against the dangers of modernism for years, and with antievolution as their chosen cause they were prepared to take their stand in defense of the faith in Tennessee.

Religion historian George Marsden defines the Fundamentalism of the early twentieth century as “a generic name for a broad coalition of conservatives from major denominations and revivalists (prominently including premillennial dispensationalists) who are militantly opposed to modernism in the churches and to certain modern cultural mores.”⁶ This definition is intentionally sweeping in scope, encompassing as it does a wide variety of beliefs under a single, often problematic label of “Fundamentalism.” In reality, the term “Fundamentalist” is more of a self designation than it is an actual fully-defined set of tenets to which one adheres. The word meant something slightly different in 1915 than what it meant in 1925, and today the dividing

⁵ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “Plans Completed for Evolution Talk,” July 2, 1925.

⁶ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2006), p. 234

line between “Fundamentalist,” “Evangelical,” and “Conservative Protestant” continues to grow increasingly thinner.

While the Fundamentalist movement accommodated a wide range of differing and sometimes contradictory beliefs, there were a few issues upon which the majority of self-proclaimed Fundamentalists in 1925 would have agreed. These include Biblical literalism and inerrancy, separation from the world, the accessibility of Scriptural truths to all, and premillennial dispensationalism. Though the nuances of each were potential points of contention among Fundamentalists, especially when premillennial dispensationalism was concerned, these four basic tenets represented a clear departure from the mainline Protestantism of the day. They were also essential to Fundamentalist arguments against evolution, and thus are critical in explaining the significant role of Fundamentalists in the Scopes Trial and the greater antievolution movement as a whole.

When Charles Darwin first published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, no one could have imagined the firestorm it would inevitably set off within the public consciousness. But this interest was not confined solely within the scientific community. Theologians were also both intrigued and challenged by Darwin’s observations, and they wished to study them in regard to their effect on Christian doctrine and the creation events depicted in the Bible. Early on, the common conclusion reached by both conservative and more liberal Christian theologians tended to lean toward reconciliation between Biblical scripture and biological evolution.⁷ In 1874, however, the trend of theological friendliness toward evolution was dealt a severe blow with the

⁷ George Marsden, “Review: *Darwin’s Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought*,” *Church History* Vol. 57, No. 4 (December 1988), p. 558

publication of *What Is Darwinism?* by renowned Princeton Seminary theologian Charles Hodge. The more conservative theologians within mainline denominations, especially Hodge's Presbyterians, had grown skeptical of Darwin's theories, and this skepticism shifted to downright hostility amongst a certain segment of conservatives who felt evolution wasn't simply a bad concept, but was inherently dangerous by design. *What Is Darwinism?* was one of the first serious refutations of evolution written from a theological standpoint, and, even more importantly, was also one of the first to propose a clear distinction between *evolution* and *Darwinism*. This distinction would be repeated countless times in the decades to come and would become a favorite argument used by antievolutionists.

The belief that evolution was detrimental wasn't confined solely to the halls of Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century, however. Historian Ferenc Szasz argues that the concept of evolution disrupted post-Civil War religious life by shaking certain basic beliefs to their core. "Most Americans," he states, "believed the planet on which they lived to be only a few thousand years old" at this time, a static world bounded by "two specific events—Creation and the Last Judgement," one in which each species "brought forth only its own kind." The theory of evolution essentially "made such notions obsolete."⁸ This radical shift in the conception of the world around them had an undeniable effect upon society, and soon Darwin's ideas began to creep steadily into mainstream science, literature, philosophy, and even religion.

Perhaps most troubling to the average American were the dramatic implications of our evolutionary origins. The concept of the Fall of Man as understood by the churchgoing public implied that humankind had once been perfect, made in the image of their God, and only due to

⁸ Ferenc M. Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), p. 2

sin and corruption had been relegated to our current, flawed state. According to evolution, however, the human race was actually *improving* over time. What role, then, did the Fall play in the history of humanity? More importantly, where does Jesus, the Redeemer, fit into a world where humans are steadily becoming better on their own through natural processes?⁹ These questions struck at the very heart of human understanding of the Biblical roots of our world. In the wake of Civil War, where unfathomable horrors had been endured and the sinful nature of humanity appeared for all to see, the idea of a gradual ascent over generations couldn't have seemed further from reality.

The Fundamentalism that developed in the late nineteenth century was a clear reaction against the perceived secularization of society which Darwin and his theory of evolution had prompted. Feeling threatened by an increasingly complicated and rapidly changing conception of the world, and perceiving an overall decline in religious feeling among average Americans, groups of conservative Protestants began to rally for a return to what they felt were the “fundamentals” of the faith. The loosely-defined tenets of the new “Fundamentalism” were first laid out in 1910 with the publication of *The Fundamentals*, a multi-volume collection of essays written by the most prominent religious leaders of the fledgling movement at that time. Financed in full by millionaire oil tycoons Lyman and Milton Stewart, more pamphlets were added to the anthology over the next five years, written on subjects ranging from interpretation of Scripture, evolution, and the evils of Mormonism, socialism, and cults.

The Fundamentals sought primarily to right the wrongs of theological liberalism that the authors felt were creeping into all aspects of religion at the turn of the century.¹⁰ Theological

⁹ Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America*, p. 2

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 78

acceptance of evolution was just one of many of the problems they observed. They strongly felt liberal Christians were compromising the true faith by allowing modernistic interpretations of the Scriptures, often reconciled with scientific discoveries and the increasingly popular Social Gospel, to water down their religious message. While a strong current of opposition to modernism is obvious throughout each essay, the ministers and theologians who were chosen to contribute to *The Fundamentals* did not agree on everything. This was the first and only attempt to collect a series of Fundamentalist belief statements in one place at that time, and because of the lack of a truly definable Fundamentalist doctrine, some essays are much stricter than others, and some even contradict each other outright.

The noticeable shift toward ultra-conservatism that came after *The Fundamentals* can be attributed best to one single event: World War I. While Fundamentalists existed in various forms prior to the start of the war, it was the “American social experience connected with World War I” that ultimately served to fuel the “Fundamentalist theological militancy” that we began to see in the 1920s, leading to the popularity of the antievolution movement and the media circus that was the Scopes Trial.¹¹ “Evolution became a symbol,” notes George Marsden, and without the new cultural dimension fostered by war it is unlikely “that Fundamentalism itself would have gained wide support.”¹² But it did indeed gain support. As the end of the first World War came, the unifying effect of wartime quickly wore off, and a clearly defined enemy had vanished.¹³ Cultural conflicts became a priority again, and the Fundamentalists soon identified new and pressing theological battles that needed to be fought. Instead of arguing within the confines of

¹¹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 141

¹² *Ibid*, p. 149

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 53

their own Bible colleges, seminaries, and theological journals, however, they decided to make their causes public. It wouldn't be long before the word "Fundamentalist" would find itself in common usage.

The primary motivation behind the writing of *The Fundamentals*, and subsequently the Fundamentalist movement which was derived from it, was not the theory of evolution. In fact, Fundamentalists considered evolution to be of secondary importance when compared to a much greater, much more pervasive danger infecting theological seminaries and universities at the turn of the twentieth century: the study of Higher Criticism. This movement, which "submitted the Bible to historical analysis, proved to be one of the most crucial challenges that the American churches were to face."¹⁴ Early Fundamentalists were offended at the very idea of subjecting Scripture to the same critique as any other literature, and they felt this trend was undermining the very root of religious belief: faith.

Fundamentalists resented the assertion that there were Scriptural truths which were unable to be deciphered by anyone who was not trained to do so. They believed that advocates of the Higher Criticism were placing far too much emphasis upon the role of experts at the expense of the common Bible reader. For this reason, Ferenc Szasz labels Fundamentalism as "the revolt of the 'average man,'" and declares it as much a social movement as it was a religious one.¹⁵ The inherent trust which Fundamentalists placed upon the shoulders of the "common man," however, ended up fostering a resentment within the movement of experts, be they theological or scientific ones. This mistrust is best exemplified in *The Fundamentals* themselves: "Why is the cloistered

¹⁴ Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America*, p. 15

¹⁵ *Ibid* p. 132

scholar unable to accept the supernatural inspiration of the scriptures while the *men on the firing line of the Lord's army* believe in it even to the very words?"¹⁶

The war-like image invoked in the preceding passage was somewhat prophetic. Much of the hatred of Higher Criticism stemmed as much from its German origins as it did from theological or social disagreements. In many ways, "Higher Criticism" became a scare word often equated in the popular mind with "German rationalism" or "free thought."¹⁷ The height of these sentiments obviously coincided with World War I, and anti-German hysteria helped to push the idea that Higher Criticism had somehow turned Germany away from being a good Christian nation and into a barbaric, atheistic, war-loving culture. This only furthered the perception of Higher Criticism as a foreign and elitist concept that would ultimately prove damaging to the minds of American Christians. Fundamentalists certainly exploited these beliefs, conflating Higher Criticism, German barbarism, and modernism into a single, tangible enemy of true Christianity.

Although they objected to the Higher Criticism's historical approach to the Scriptures, Fundamentalists saw no inherent contradiction in their own habit of treating the Bible as a scientific treatise. Just as natural science is concerned with nature's laws, theology, they believed, is thus concerned with the facts and laws of the Bible.¹⁸ To Fundamentalists, the Bible was a wholly unique book in that God breathed each and every word into existence Himself. "Interpreting" the Bible, then, was merely a process of determining the meaning of each passage exactly as it was given to humans by God. Scripture contained nothing but facts, and each fact

¹⁶ James Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible—Definition, Extent and Proof" in *The Fundamentals, Volume 2*, p. 42

¹⁷ Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America*, p. 40

¹⁸ Mark A. Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer 1985), p. 223

was supernaturally inspired, thus not open to criticism or alteration. But Biblical literalism was hardly a new concept at the turn of the twentieth century. The Princeton Theologians advocated a form of it, and the “inerrant” nature of Scripture had been discussed since at least the 1880s. George Marsden claims also that Fundamentalists eventually began to attach an almost scientific quality to the term *inerrancy*, considering it to mean “absolutely reliable” and precise.¹⁹ Even in *The Fundamentals*, the concept of a literal and inerrant Bible and scientific truth are correlated, with more than one author alluding to the fact that the Bible is, in reality, the only truly scientific book.

One of the biggest points of contention between Fundamentalists and advocates of the Higher Criticism involved the miracles performed in the Bible. Higher Criticism claimed that the supernatural elements of Scripture could be easily explained as allegories, while Fundamentalists staunchly defended both their claims to Biblical literalism and the supernatural nature of the Bible itself. Science cannot disprove miracles, stated *The Fundamentals*, and “what the scientific man needs to prove to establish his objection to miracle is, not simply that natural causes operate uniformly, but that natural causes exhaust all the causation in the universe. And that, we hold, he can never do.”²⁰

In 1919, a group of conservative ministers organized a conference under the banner of an organization called the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA). Although the term “Fundamentalist” would not be coined for another year, the task at hand at this conference was nevertheless groundbreaking for the future of Fundamentalism. William Bell Riley, the founder

¹⁹ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), p. 56

²⁰ James Orr, “Science and Christian Faith” in *The Fundamentals, Volume 1*, p. 339

of the group, grandly described it as “an event of more historical moment than the nailing up, at Wittenberg, of Martin Luther’s ninety-five theses.”²¹ The real intent behind these meetings was to attempt to unite conservative Protestants under a single banner, the WCFA, which would represent their cause to the world. They failed. Even when called to do so by one of their own, the separatist impulse already present within them kept them divided over matters of principle.

But separation from individual denominations was not enough. Fundamentalists emphasized “separation from the world,” meaning that “Christians were to present to the world a way of life that marked them as different.”²² There was a clear delineation made in *The Fundamentals* and among leading Fundamentalist preachers between people of faith and people of this world. In order for Fundamentalists to remain the “mirror image of modernism” that they wished to always be, they needed to stress separation to its extreme.²³ The modern world was doomed, they felt, and they, the Fundamentalists, were the last hope of maintaining a God-fearing remnant of believers on the Earth before the end of days.

By 1925, premillennial dispensationalism was definitely a hallmark of a Fundamentalist, and to advocate otherwise would certainly draw the resentment of quite a few Fundamentalist leaders. Simply put, premillennialists believe that Jesus will return to Earth prior to the period of the millennium. Postmillennialists, by contrast, believe Jesus will not return until the millennium is brought about, potentially by human intervention. Premillennial dispensationalism, then, is the belief in premillennialism combined with the idea that human history is divided into distinctive “dispensations,” usually seven, “in which God sets the conditions for humanity to gain his favor

²¹ Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: the Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1992), p. 49

²² William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalism in the South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 17

²³ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, p. 41

and blessing.”²⁴ Of course, humanity always fails to meet God’s guidelines, and God is forced to punish us. Dispensationalists understand humanity to be currently in the sixth age, the “Age of Grace,” which, like all other ages, will end in disaster and punishment. Luckily for true believers, though, God will “rapture” his flock into heaven before the seventh age, and they will be saved. The rest of the Earth, however, is doomed.

Of all the beliefs shared by Fundamentalists, premillennial dispensationalism is the greatest key to understanding the Fundamentalist worldview. Contrary to mainline Protestantism, Fundamentalists decided “that it was not necessary to convert the world before the end of time. It was only necessary to present the Gospel to everyone.”²⁵ This represents a significant shift in the conservative belief system, and their certainty that the Bible accurately depicted the exact details of the end times also reinforced the Fundamentalist insistence upon strict Biblical literalism. It was important that people not only heard what the Bible had to say, but that it was introduced to them exactly the way it was originally intended to be.

Premillennialism had an effect not only where religious matters are concerned, but also for social and political issues as well. “The salvation of society regardless of the salvation of the individual is a hopeless task,” Charles Trumbull argues in *The Fundamentals*. “The Sunday School that brings the good news of Jesus Christ to the individuals of any community lifts society as the usual Social Service program can never do.”²⁶ This argument, while clearly advocating a premillennial view of the world, is also taking a rather obvious stab at the Social Gospel, a postmillennialist movement which promoted social uplift for the good of society as a

²⁴ Glass, p. 20

²⁵ Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America*, p. 75

²⁶ Charles Trumbull, “The Sunday School’s True Evangelism” in *The Fundamentals, Volume 3*, p. 215

whole. George Marsden sums up this Fundamentalist position best when he asks, “Why try to clean up the state rooms of the *Titanic* when you already know it’s doomed?”²⁷

“If we have any bias,” wrote Dyson Hague in the very first essay of *The Fundamentals*, “it must be against a teaching which unsteadies heart and unsettles faith.”²⁸ While this argument might seem familiar to anyone who has read about the antievolution movement in the past, Hague is *not* in fact referring to evolution. Instead he is placing the blame on the Higher Criticism for many of the same issues which would be repeated decades later in the fight against the teaching of evolution in public schools. *The Fundamentals* does include a number of essays that either mention or focus solely on the evils of evolutionary theory, but this was clearly not the Fundamentalists primary concern. For them, it was when evolution is linked to acceptance of the Higher Criticism that Darwin’s ideas become most dangerous to society.

Fundamentalists are often regarded simply as “conservatives who are willing to fight.”²⁹ While this is obviously an oversimplification, there lies within it a great deal of truth. Fundamentalists, from their very inception, seemed always to be looking for a good fight, and when they found one they pursued it with full force. Their ultimate battle proved to be with evolution, but not always for the reasons one would assume. Even in *The Fundamentals*, there is no clear consensus on what parts of evolution were acceptable, if any, or even what the term “creation” implied. One essay argued that, although evolution from lower forms of animals was dangerous to believe, species variations could certainly be the work of the Creator.³⁰ A definitive

²⁷ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, p. 101

²⁸ Dyson Hague, “The History of the Higher Criticism” in *The Fundamentals, Volume 1*, p. 41

²⁹ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, p. 1

³⁰ Dyson Hague, “The Doctrinal Value of the First Chapters of Genesis” in *The Fundamentals, Volume 1*, p. 272

objection to all forms of evolution by Fundamentalists only came about later, long after *The Fundamentals*.

The Fundamentalist view of creation was similarly vague for decades, something which would eventually be put to the test in the Scopes Trial during the famous cross-examination between Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. James Orr advocates in more than one of his articles in *The Fundamentals* that the six days of creation were not literal, 24-hour days. A number of his fellow contributors tended to agree with him. “There is no violence done to the narrative in substituting in thought ‘æonic’ days—vast cosmic periods—for ‘days’ on our narrower, sun-measured scale,” Orr wrote in his article *Science and Christian Faith*.³¹ George Frederick Wright also raises his own doubts: “The world was not made in an instant, or even in one day (*whatever period ‘day’ might signify*) but in six days.”³² As with the rejection of all forms of evolution, the acceptance of only a strict 24-hour period for creation was nowhere present in the earliest tenets of Fundamentalism.

A few years prior to the Scopes Trial, the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association, after having failed in its original task of creating a broad coalition of right-believing conservatives to attack modernism head-on, shifted its focus solely to the issue of evolution.³³ This change was perhaps most indicative of the state of the Fundamentalist movement as a whole by the start of the twenties. Unable to resolve their theological issues successfully, they attempted one last time to unite behind the only cause upon which they could all agree. Evolution became their chosen controversy, and they did everything within their power to keep

³¹ James Orr, “Science and Christian Faith” in *The Fundamentals, Volume 1*, p. 344

³² George Frederick Wright, “The Passing of Evolution” in *The Fundamentals, Volume 4*, p. 72

³³ Numbers, p. 49

the issue in the public eye. It wasn't long before the popular Fundamentalist assertion that evolution was nothing more than "mere guesses" perpetrated by liberal scientists became the rallying cry for an antievolution movement that would continue on, with only a few minor setbacks, up until the present day.

When State Representative J. W. Butler introduced his bill to the Tennessee legislature in January of 1925, the law became one of the most visible manifestations of the ongoing war between the Fundamentalists and their modernist foes, with evolution serving as their chosen ammunition. Butler, a professed Primitive Baptist who certainly did nothing to keep his own personal religious leanings a secret, proudly boasted to a Chattanooga newspaper that "there is no controversy between *true* science and the Bible. This case is a controversy between infidelity and Christianity." He went on to stress that "the foundation of our government and even civilization itself is threatened" by the teaching of evolution in public schools.³⁴ Butler's own pastor, who later took credit for inspiring his parishioner with the idea for the antievolution bill, took this sentiment a step further, claiming that "the theory of evolution as advanced by Charles Darwin is really the underlying principle of *modernism*; therefore to teach the doctrine in our public schools is to promote the cause of modernism at the expense of the state."³⁵ Even when heavily cloaked in the language of antievolutionism, the real root of their objections never failed to shine through.

Ultimately, the preoccupation with evolution which dominated the Fundamentalist movement almost from its inception gradually increased over time, culminating in the spectacle that took place in Tennessee in 1925. Their unique worldview was governed by a perception of

³⁴ *Chattanooga News*, "Butler Tells Why He Drew Evolution Bill," July 1, 1925.

³⁵ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, "Evolution Bill Work of Primitive Baptist," July 6, 1925.

the world in terms of absolutes, categorizing everything they perceived as *good* versus *evil*.³⁶ To them, modernism in all its forms was the epitome of evil, and evolution became the absolute embodiment of modernism at the start of the twentieth century. But in many ways, evolution was merely a symbol of the greater Fundamentalist crusade against a rapidly changing world. The use of evolution “provided conservatives with an easy means to criticize society,” and by 1925, Higher Criticism, theological liberalism, Social Gospel, the remnants of progressivism, and secularization all became “subsumed under the rubric of ‘evolution.’”³⁷

Prior to 1925, before T. T. Martin lectured Dayton on “Hell and the High-Schools,” before J. W. Butler made public his fears of the Bible soon becoming subservient to the science textbook, Fundamentalism, like Darwinism, liberalism, and modernism, was just another “-ism” that had no real bearing on the lives of most Americans. It was only in the context of the Scopes Trial and the massive amount of media attention it drew months before the proceedings began that the average person became well-acquainted with such terms on a regular basis. Before, these words had almost solely lived within the realm of the theologian, the scientist, the “expert.” Now, they were simply common usage.

In many ways, the fight against evolution helped Fundamentalism create a more concrete identity for its adherents. While they usually failed to agree on much, they were able to present a united front against an evil to which they attached all their known and perceived enemies. This alone cloaked them in an air of legitimacy that they would not have been able to obtain otherwise. Once evolution came to embody their entire conflict with everything which modern

³⁶ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, p. 102

³⁷ Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America*, p. 126

society held dear, Fundamentalism became more powerful, more influential, and more relevant to the churchgoing public.

During the weeks leading up to the trial, hundreds of Fundamentalist preachers swarmed into Rhea County, each of them eager to expose folks to the Gospel and to explain to them why their faith in science was flawed. Evolution was now their greatest foe. They sold their literature, preached their sermons, and even prompted one Yale professor to assume that “hunting heretics has long been Tennessee’s favorite outdoor sport.”³⁸ The war against a new “teaching which unsteadies heart and unsettles faith” was only beginning, and Dayton was now its battleground.

³⁸ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “Yale Man Says Hunting Heretics Tennessee’s Favorite Outdoor Sport,” July 10, 1925.

2. THE TRUTH WILL TRIUMPH:

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN AND THE ANTIEVOLUTION MOVEMENT

“The contest between evolution and Christianity is a duel to the death. . . If evolution wins in Dayton, Christianity goes—not suddenly of course, but gradually—for the two cannot stand together. They are as antagonistic as light and darkness, as good and evil.

In an open fight the truth will triumph.”

— William Jennings Bryan

Dayton, TN, July 7, 1925³⁹

As the sun set on his very first night in Dayton, William Jennings Bryan’s words to the city’s Progressive Club about the epic battle they would all soon be facing likely seemed prophetic. There was going to be quite a show unfolding before their eyes over the next few days, and that was something upon which everyone, Bryan’s devotees and critics alike, could agree. Reporters from all over the country had already begun to stream into the town in Mr. Bryan’s wake, each describing in their own words the reverence that so many of Dayton’s citizens expressed for their famous new visitor. Bryan had spent his first few hours in Dayton mingling informally with the locals, something which historian and biographer Lawrence Levine

³⁹ *The New York Times*, “Bryan in Dayton, Calls Scopes Trial Duel to the Death,” Wednesday, July 8, 1925. Retrieved from *New York Times* archives.

notes was not necessary for him to do. “He had been in hundreds of towns like it before,” he writes, “and he knew its people well.”⁴⁰

Dayton’s people were exactly those to whom Bryan had dedicated his extensive political career. From his early days as a lawyer to his brief role as Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson, he had consistently preached one single message more than any other: the wisdom of the common people. Often referred to as the “Great Commoner,” he had always been known as a defender of the views of the majority. But now, as he fulfilled multiple speaking engagements around Rhea County on the eve of the Scopes Trial, Bryan found his principles directly under attack by those who questioned whether or not his crusade against the teaching of evolution in Tennessee public schools was truly serving the common good. Critics asked how a three-time Democratic presidential candidate famous for his progressive political convictions had managed to become the undisputed leader of a movement whose main goal was to restrict scientific knowledge in the classroom. Indeed, the perceived inconsistencies of Bryan’s beliefs appear just as paradoxical today as they did in 1925.

The marriage between his conservative religious views and his liberal politics, however, was hardly an uncomfortable one. He saw evolution as a terrible public menace, and truly believed that its teachings could significantly contribute to the moral decline of American society. Through his speeches, books, newspaper articles, opinion pieces, and eventually his own newspaper, *The Commoner*, he was able to spread this message to a far broader audience than others within the antievolution movement, generating support among those who wouldn’t have necessarily been informed on the subject otherwise. His influence affected how the average

⁴⁰ Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan, the Last Decade, 1915-1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 339.

American viewed evolution because he addressed the issues directly to them, in terms they could understand. By taking his cause to the people for them to decide, he changed the nature of the antievolution debate, refocusing it on the social evils of evolutionary theory and away from complex issues of science or theology.

But none of these issues mattered to the hushed crowd of townspeople gathered high atop Dayton Mountain on the porch of the Morgan Springs Hotel the night before the “Trial of the Century” was scheduled to begin. They were all there for one reason, and as Bryan began to speak softly to them about the virtues of the common people of the South in his usual deliberate, inspired-sounding tone, few locals doubted they were witnessing history before their very eyes.⁴¹ A reporter for the *New York Times* who heard Bryan’s speech that evening was especially affected by the way the people of Dayton seemed to respond to him. “Bryan is more than a great politician, more than a lawyer in a trial, more even than one of our greatest orators,” the reporter wrote in his article the following day, “he is a symbol of their simple religious faith.”⁴²

The antievolution movement existed long before William Jennings Bryan decided to publish his thoughts on the matter. Bryan’s reputation and loyal following existed long before he first chose to discuss the topic of evolution, as well. The combination of a well-known, trusted public figure like Bryan with a cause he felt was just had already worked for the case of Prohibition, which he had vehemently supported for many of the same reasons he now gave for championing antievolution legislation. He believed that Darwinism, like alcohol, posed a serious

⁴¹ Levine, p. 340

⁴² Ibid, p. 341

danger to the well-being of most Americans. His solution, albeit a simple one, was still quite common among moral crusaders of his time: outlaw it.

“Bryan’s religious interests resembled his political ones,” George Marsden argues, “In both areas he dwelt on moral reform.”⁴³ By making alcohol illegal to purchase or consume, Prohibitionists like Bryan felt that they were providing a necessary intervention in the lives of easily exploitable citizens. In his mind, the liquor interests were exerting undue influence upon average Americans, encouraging them to drink instead of making the proper choices for themselves and their families. By taking away the powers unjustly granted to the liquor interests, then, Prohibition would free Americans from the sin of drunkenness, thus giving them a chance to lead better, more moral, more Christian lives. Attempts such as these to make sin less accessible to an otherwise highly susceptible populace were primary tactics involved in both the Prohibition and the antievolution movements, uniting the two under same basic premise of legislating public morality for the common good. Despite the fact that, by 1925, Prohibition had already proven both unpopular and difficult to effectively enforce, Bryan never wavered in his conviction that it had been the right choice to make for the welfare of the country. This unshakeable confidence in his decisions, or what his wife later referred to as his “freedom from doubt,” was one of the trademarks of his character that helps to explain his complex role in the antievolution crusade.⁴⁴

His celebrity alone meant that Bryan had more effect on popularizing the antievolution movement during his lifetime than any other public figure.⁴⁵ Though there were plenty of

⁴³ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 132

⁴⁴ William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia: United Publishers of America, 1925), p. 457

⁴⁵ Numbers, p. 41

Creationist thinkers who held similar views and had done considerably more research on the subject, in the end, Bryan's voice tended to drown out the rest. When Tennessee passed its infamous Butler Bill in January of 1925, a telegram from William Jennings Bryan swiftly found its way to the desk of Governor Austin Peay congratulating him on his state's courage. It read in part: "The Christian parents of the State owe you a debt of gratitude for saving their children from the poisonous influence of an unproven hypothesis. Other states North and South will follow the example of Tennessee."⁴⁶ In fact, while Tennessee senators were attempting to rally support for an antievolution statute prior to the introduction of the Butler Bill, one of the tactics used was to send copies of Bryan's speeches on evolution to fellow congressmen as a way of changing their minds.⁴⁷

From the moment he stepped off the "Royal Palm Express" from Miami at Dayton's train depot days before the Scopes Trial was set to begin, Bryan made it a point to become just another one of the locals. He understood them, and it was among them where he felt most comfortable. When he addressed them, "his delivery and gestures were a combination of fighting political oration, a sermon, and a homey, fireside chat, with emphasis on the informal chat," John Scopes reminisced in his memoir, "As I looked around there was no doubt about the response of the Daytonians to Bryan's magnetism and ability to lead."⁴⁸ Though some journalists like H. L. Mencken scoffed at his mesmerizing effect upon the townspeople, labeling him "a sort of fundamentalist pope," few would have argued that his impact on their way of thinking was

⁴⁶ Levine, p. 327

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 325

⁴⁸ Scopes, p. 22

anything short of substantial.⁴⁹ “These are his people,” wrote one of Mencken’s colleagues at the *Baltimore Sun*, “They are his; he is theirs.”⁵⁰

Newspaper reports across Tennessee and the rest of the country consistently emphasized the showdown expected to take place in Dayton between Bryan and his equally infamous opponent, Clarence Darrow, while simultaneously downplaying the actual issue of laws against the teaching of evolution in the state’s public schools. Bryan, however, chided the press on more than one occasion for this, warning them that “newspapers that have treated the Tennessee law as a joke will find it no joking matter.”⁵¹ For Bryan, the Scopes Trial promised to be an important vehicle for him to further a cause in which he was already deeply involved. His volunteering for the prosecution meant that he “did not enter the Rhea County Courthouse as a lawyer prosecuting a case before a small-town jury, but as an orator promoting a cause to the entire nation. The people of Dayton,” Edward Larson notes, “wanted it that way.”⁵²

Even in overwhelmingly Republican Rhea County, Bryan’s immense popularity was obvious to all, and its citizens appeared to truly sympathize and agree with the movement he was championing. But this should not have come as a surprise to anyone, for “evolution had long symbolized to the South the inroads of liberal culture.” It was a particularly intimidating scientific concept that called into question basic understandings of human existence, and because

⁴⁹ H. L. Mencken, *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter’s Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial* (Hoboken: Melville House Publishing, 2006), p. 75

⁵⁰ Michael Lienesch, *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Anti-Evolution Argument* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 149

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 148

⁵² Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: the Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), p. 97

of this it was “especially feared by Southern conservatives.”⁵³ The threat that evolution potentially posed not just to public education, but to Southern society in general, made the people of Dayton worried about the fate of their children’s generation.

In his well-known study of the American South, W. J. Cash identifies the antievolution crusade in this region as an “authentic folk movement” that cannot be dismissed simply as “the aberration of a relatively small, highly organized pressure group made up of ignorant, silly, and fanatical people, as some writers have attempted to do.”⁵⁴ Cash’s analysis sheds some insight onto how the movement, as well as Darwinism itself, was perceived in the South during the 1920s, when debates over evolution reached their heyday. There were some Southern preachers who warned that evolution was “certain to breed Communism,” some predicted the destruction of “the ideal of Southern womanhood,” and still others, most shocking of all to the region of Jim Crow, cautioned that “evolution made a Negro as good as a white man.”⁵⁵ Nothing less than the survival of the South was at stake, it seemed, and Bryan felt it was his God-given duty to help save it, whatever the cost might be.

A few days prior to the start of the Scopes Trial, at an event held in his honor in nearby Pikeville, Bryan charged that a “conspiracy among atheists and agnostics” sought to destroy the Christian religion, and that the power to resist those “who come from another state to call you yokels and bigots” was with the common people who believed in God and heeded Bryan’s warning.⁵⁶ The South had long been the home of his most ardent supporters, and later in life

⁵³ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 179

⁵⁴ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 1941), p. 337

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 339

⁵⁶ Levine, p. 347

Bryan began to more openly identify and empathize with the region, its people, and its values after his move to Miami, Florida. He “embraced the South so heartily in his final years,” Lawrence Levine argues, “not because he had changed but because to his mind *it had not*.”⁵⁷ The South represented the simple agrarian tradition Bryan loved so dearly, and he considered himself indebted to the region for its intense loyalty to him and his cause. The appreciation he had for the South’s moral, small-town culture also led him to the conclusion that it must be saved, lest certain modernistic forces take over and eradicate the last true American stronghold of “the people.”

The fact that, by 1925, William Jennings Bryan had become the antievolution crusade’s most vocal and most visible champion was far more puzzling than the South’s whole-hearted acceptance of the movement itself. Long considered by his critics to be “the personification of the agrarian myth,” Bryan was a political liberal who still somehow managed to keep a strong base of supporters within the increasingly conservative regions of the South and West.⁵⁸ As Michael Kazin writes in his biography of Bryan, this was a period of time when the idea of a Christian Left, which was so vital to Bryan’s continued appeal, was beginning to “sound rather quaint, almost an oxymoron.”⁵⁹ Yet he maintained ongoing, cordial relationships with both religious liberals and conservatives throughout his lifetime, was able to speak to both sides with remarkable evenhandedness, and never wavered in his dual commitments to Progressive-era social justice and to traditional Christianity.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 271

⁵⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 185

⁵⁹ Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), p. 245

At the heart of Bryan's disdain for Darwinian evolution was his belief that its teachings were to blame for the declining support for Progressivism he observed in his later years.⁶⁰ As a lifelong Democrat and advocate of social reforms such as women's suffrage, the outbreak of world war was a sobering reminder for him that there was a darker side to humanity, one whose ideological source needed to be identified and addressed. He believed that evolutionary theory was essentially selfish, based as it was on the "survival of the fittest" mentality, and thus couldn't possibly prove beneficial for a democratic society like the United States. Referring specifically to the horrors of World War I, Bryan said that "the same science that manufactured poisonous gasses to suffocate soldiers is preaching that man has a brute ancestry and eliminating the miraculous and the supernatural from the Bible."⁶¹

Bryan was certainly not alone in his feelings toward the onslaught of world war. In reality, World War I served as a turning point, a cultural crisis which helped create a sense of urgency within conservative Christian groups that the fate of humanity could possibly be at stake. Religion scholars have often credited World War I with being the catalyst for creating and popularizing what we know today as Fundamentalism.⁶² But Bryan's personal interest in combatting Darwinism was not fostered by a newly-acquired interest in the Fundamentalist cause. It was his *rejection* of evolution which ultimately led to his *acceptance* of Biblical literalism, and not the other way around.⁶³ His religious beliefs, though held with the greatest of convictions, would never have been accurately described as Fundamentalist.

⁶⁰ Lienesch, p. 87

⁶¹ Numbers, p. 41

⁶² Ibid, p. 149

⁶³ Levine, p. 350

Religion, Bryan felt, was the absolute basis for morality, and he referred to his own personal faith as “Applied Christianity.”⁶⁴ Belief in God, reliance on the Gospel, and the concept of social justice all went hand-in-hand. He grew up in a deeply religious Baptist home, but at a relatively early age decided to join a local Presbyterian church instead. In his memoirs he wrote that, though his father had encouraged him to search out a church where he felt he could do the most good, he never discovered until after his father’s death that “he was disappointed that I did not become a member of his own church.”⁶⁵ He later attended Illinois College, a Presbyterian school whose first president was Edward Beecher, the noted abolitionist pastor and brother to both author Harriet Beecher Stowe and fellow pastor Henry Ward Beecher.⁶⁶ The influence his attendance at this particular school had on Bryan’s thought is noteworthy. “It is a matter of profound gratitude to me,” he wrote of his college experiences, “that during these days I was associated with Christian instructors so that the doubts aroused by my studies were resolved by putting them beside a powerful and loving God.”⁶⁷

After having earned his iconic status as a Christian reformer and advocate for the common people through a long and relatively successful political career, Bryan’s attentions shifted fully toward the menace of Darwinism in 1921 with the publication of *In His Image*. The book was a collection of speeches given by Bryan on the subject of human origins and evolution from a Biblical viewpoint. It was reprinted numerous times, and provided the most succinct rebuttal of Darwinism that Bryan was ever able to offer. With that being said, however, Bryan

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 251

⁶⁵ Bryan, *Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*, p. 49

⁶⁶ Illinois College Website, “History,” <http://www.ic.edu/aboutus/historic.asp> Accessed March 26, 2010.

⁶⁷ Bryan, *Memoirs*, p. 51

was neither a scientist nor a theologian, and his arguments centered more on the social and political implications of evolution than on anything else.

Bryan viewed Darwinism as preaching the “law of hate,” which teaches that the strong will always kill off the weak.⁶⁸ This mentality, he claimed, was not only “the basis of the gigantic class struggle that is now shaking society throughout the world,” but also the reason why a rather toxic culture of Individualism was becoming commonplace, in which “the spirit of brotherhood” is eliminated.⁶⁹ Replacing the “law of hate,” or Darwinism, with the “law of love,” or social (“Applied”) Christianity, was the only solution to these problems. The possibility of believing in both concepts, however, was not something that he was willing to concede. “It is true that *some* believers in Darwinism retain their belief in Christianity,” he admitted, but “some also survive smallpox. We avoid smallpox because many die of it; so we should avoid Darwinism because it leads a larger percentage astray than smallpox kills.”⁷⁰ In the end, Bryan is able to distill the fate of Darwinian evolution down to one single statement: “Darwinism ends in self-destruction.”⁷¹

Because he spoke of the evils of evolution in plain terms that could easily be understood by most, his own understanding of the subject was often overshadowed in his speeches and writings. For example, although he was perfectly able to distinguish between Darwinian evolution and *Social Darwinism*, he often combined the two or used the terms interchangeably to emphasize what he saw as the devastating effects of both theories.⁷² This strategy was extremely effective, causing an indelible link between evolution and the concept of Social Darwinism in the

⁶⁸ William Jennings Bryan, *In His Image* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), p. 107

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 125

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 121

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 133

⁷² Lienesch, p. 87

minds of his followers. Anything that weakened one's faith in God weakened the individual, and ultimately rendered one incapable of doing good.⁷³ Whether it was Darwinism or Social Darwinism, evolution or eugenics, it mattered little. What did matter was that all of these concepts reduced the role of God, and thus were detrimental to society.

Many of Bryan's arguments against evolution would have seemed familiar to Christians of his day, as they often echoed those of other antievolutionist thinkers. But as Bryan biographer Michael Kazin has observed, "As with a fine preacher, it was the consistency of his ideals that mattered, not their originality."⁷⁴ In "The Menace of Darwinism," one of his more popular speeches on the subject, he ponders the origin of the eye in much the same way that Creationists had been doing since Darwin first published his theories. He finds it unbelievable that such a complex organ as the eye could have possibly been spontaneously mutated from "a piece of pigment" which, over large spans of time, became sensitive to the sun's light.⁷⁵ This sounds similar to what Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge wrote about the development of the eye in 1874, when he charged that "to any ordinarily constituted mind, it is absolutely impossible to believe that it is not a work of design."⁷⁶ Bryan's statement that "agnosticism is the natural attitude of the evolutionist" is also reminiscent of Hodge's thought.⁷⁷ Hodge, however, was not content with relegating belief in evolution to agnosticism. Instead, he boldly pronounced Darwinism as atheism, plain and simple.⁷⁸

⁷³ Levine, p. 264

⁷⁴ Kazin, p. 198

⁷⁵ Numbers, p. 43

⁷⁶ Charles Hodge, *What Is Darwinism?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 60

⁷⁷ Bryan, *In His Image*, p. 116

⁷⁸ Hodge, p. 177

Perhaps the most important element involved in virtually all of the causes Bryan furthered throughout his lifetime was the fact that, in some sense, he wanted to *merge* Christianity and the world together.⁷⁹ To him there should be no differentiation between a moral life and a Christian life, and it was the chief concern of those who wished to pursue a Christian life to spread their message to all who would hear it. Bryan truly felt that he was in a unique position to do just that. His reputation as a popular public figure gave him a chance to try and make the world a better place through preaching the word of God as he understood it. In performing this task, he believed he was simply echoing the concerns of his many loyal followers by “forcefully defending their common faith—in God and in the type of nation they wanted.”⁸⁰

This intentional fusion of Christianity and the world was by no means unique to his role in the antievolution movement. At the dawn of his political career, when he delivered his infamous “Cross of Gold” speech at the 1896 Democratic Convention, *The New York World* described the atmosphere as “that of a camp meeting,” noting the “revivalistic quality” which Bryan was able to bring to the otherwise restrained event.⁸¹ The speech itself could easily be likened to that of a charismatic preacher, invoking as it did numerous Biblical themes and, most famously, the cross-like pose Bryan adopted at the very end that stunned the entire crowd into silence for a moment before they erupted in thunderous applause. Speeches like this one not only gained him support among his fellow Democrats, but also won him respect among the Populist

⁷⁹ Ferenc M. Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders: The Roles of William Bell Riley, John Roach Straton, and William Jennings Bryan in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy” (PhD Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1969), p. 188

⁸⁰ Kazin, p. 198

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 63

movement of the late nineteenth century, as well.⁸² While some Populist newspapers “hailed Bryan as savior of the masses,” many Populists “expressed disgust for Bryan” and feared he would eventually turn his back on the issues they felt were most important.⁸³ But his passion for reform, combined with a charismatic personality and a talent for oration, made him a popular enough figure to even win endorsement by the Populists in 1896 despite the fact that he never actually joined the Populist Party.

Though the Bryan who arrived in Dayton to such great fanfare in the summer of 1925 was still the same Bryan who endeared so many to his Progressive political platform decades earlier, his image had largely declined by then because of his insistence on publicizing his battles against the teaching of evolution. But besides the unwavering support he received from his newly-adopted regional home, the South, Bryan had also managed to gain the enthusiastic approval of a somewhat unexpected group of religious conservatives during the 1920s: the Fundamentalists. The complicated and often misleading details of his relationships with various Fundamentalist leaders and groups give the impression that Bryan’s religious views shifted far to the right as he grew older, effectively echoing the Fundamentalists’ own doctrines by the time he passed away in Dayton days after the Scopes Trial ended. Lawrence Levine successfully argues, however, that Bryan’s lifelong interpretation of Christianity as *social* Christianity, anchored by the idea that “the message of Christ was not merely a preparation for the future world but a mandate for this world, as well,” stood entirely at odds with the message to which Fundamentalists adhered.⁸⁴

⁸² Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 248

⁸³ Joe Creech, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p.163

⁸⁴ Levine, p. 358

Although there is little doubt that Bryan considered himself opposed to most forms of theological modernism and embraced at least a somewhat literal interpretation of the Bible, Biblical literalism and theological conservatism alone did not solely define a Fundamentalist. To date there is no indication that Bryan ever owned (or even read) *The Fundamentals* during his lifetime.⁸⁵ He also refused to endorse premillennial dispensationalism, a concept that was close to the hearts of virtually all self-proclaimed Fundamentalists during the 1920s, and it is extremely probable that he never actually understood the complicated theological issues at stake in the arguments for or against premillennialism.⁸⁶

On the subject of evolution, the issue that would come to define the final decade of his life, Bryan also stood at odds with leading Fundamentalists. He did not consider himself anti-science, and in 1924 he even joined the American Association for the Advancement of Science “to rebut the notion that he was an enemy of the profession.”⁸⁷ In numerous speeches and printed articles Bryan stressed the fact that he took little issue with the concept of evolution *as it applied to animals*. His point of departure with evolutionists was with the idea of applying Darwinian theories to the development of humans, something which he felt undermined the special relationship between God and humanity. In 1925 the antievolution movement had already begun its shift toward a very strict, literalist interpretation of creation that left no room whatsoever for alternate explanations, and thus there were few Fundamentalists who would have admitted to agreeing with him on this by the time he arrived in Dayton in the summer of that year.

⁸⁵ Kazin, p. 264

⁸⁶ Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” p. 187

⁸⁷ Kazin, p. 273

Why, then, did Bryan and the Fundamentalists join together in their crusade against evolution? Both agreed that Darwinism was a potentially lethal theory that could undermine faith in the Bible if taught in classrooms as scientific fact, and while they each approached this conclusion from entirely different perspectives, they still shared a common goal. Fundamentalist groups such as the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, which Bryan himself declined to join despite numerous offers to be the organization's president, readily took advantage of his celebrity and his loyal following to help advance their own agenda against evolution. Having Bryan on their side, despite his political leanings and his considerably different understanding of Christianity, was highly advantageous for them, and his uniqueness led the Fundamentalists to "utilize him for all his worth."⁸⁸ While their relationship leading up to the Scopes Trial was mutually beneficial for both Bryan and the Fundamentalists, earning each of them continued publicity for a cause they both truly believed in, there is still room for doubt as to whether Bryan ever fully realized how "vastly different his program was from most of the organized Fundamentalists."⁸⁹

While curious tourists flocked into Dayton that summer for what was promised to be the event of a lifetime, there was no question among the locals that the presence of William Jennings Bryan in their town had almost single-handedly helped to thrust them into the national spotlight. When he first began addressing the issue of evolution, Bryan did so with the very same intentions he had in all the other moral crusades in which he participated during his lifetime. "Man's task," he believed, "was not merely to remake himself and await salvation, but to remake

⁸⁸ Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," p. 189

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 187

society and create an earthly salvation.”⁹⁰ This insistence upon the principles of social Christianity was a constant of Bryan’s character that determined virtually every decision he made, and also motivated him to become involved in combatting issues which he felt could possibly prove harmful to the common good. The teaching of a theory that humanity came from a lower order of animals undermined the very essence of what Bryan believed made humankind special: that we are made in God’s image.

Despite their differences, Bryan’s extremely visible role in the antievolution movement has served to link him indelibly to the Fundamentalists and their belief system. But Bryan himself was far less concerned with the complex intricacies of theology than with practically applying his religious beliefs for the good of the world. His eternal optimism and sincere conviction that the harmful nature of evolutionary theory could potentially destroy religious faith were the primary motivations for his entrance into the antievolution movement, and were also what guided him to Dayton in July of 1925 to combat the forces of modernity head-on. The issues at stake in the Scopes Trial convinced him that this was the most important crusade he had ever undertaken, and as the so-called “trial of the century” loomed nearer, his confidence never wavered. “It is a test case,” he calmly assured his fellow member of the prosecution, young Dayton lawyer Sue Hicks, “and will end all controversy.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ Levine, p. 359

⁹¹ Letter from William Jennings Bryan to Sue Hicks, June 28, 1925.

3. WELCOME TO “MONKEY TOWN”:

DAYTON, TENNESSEE IN 1925

“Scopes consented to the arrest and the plans were drafted. I wired the American Civil Liberties Union that the stage was set and that if they could defray the expenses of production the play could open at once. They agreed.”

— George Rappleyea⁹²

That he would be engaged in such a well-staged drama at the Rhea County courthouse that summer was hardly a point lost on local businessman George Rappleyea. A relative newcomer to the area who hailed originally from the big city of New York, Rappleyea was a bit of an oddity around town despite being well-respected by his fellow members of the Dayton Progressive Club. He spoke in a noticeable New York accent, with his short stature serving only to make his bushy hair, thick glasses, and quick, nervous gait seem almost comical.⁹³ Officially he was known as a mining engineer who came to Dayton in order to manage the Cumberland Coal and Iron Works, but by 1925 that business was swiftly going under despite the town’s best efforts. Once the Scopes Trial was front-page news across the country, however, Rappleyea became known as everything from a doctor, a chemist, an engineer, and an attorney, with little supporting information as to which, if any, of these professions were correct. Even his young

⁹² Levine, p. 329

⁹³ Scopes, p. 36

friend John Scopes was confused as to which of Rappleyea's many identities was the real one. After all, the company he supposedly managed in Dayton was practically defunct, all their mines "were full of water, and there wasn't even a guard to protect the property."⁹⁴

Regardless of the confusion surrounding his persona, however, George Rappleyea was by far one of the most important players involved in the early planning stages of what became the Scopes Trial. In many ways his multifaceted character adequately mirrored the city of Dayton itself in 1925: each harbored conflicting natures, were extremely difficult to pin down and label effectively, and they both appeared to like it that way. In the midst of a media frenzy in which stereotyping and broad, sweeping assumptions were king, Dayton somehow managed to become the absolute epitome of the rural, backward, overzealous Southern town despite a heritage that seemed to contradict this image. Begun as a small village called Smith's Crossroads, it became officially known as Dayton in 1878 because the original name was too long and confusing to the postmaster.⁹⁵ Thanks in large part to the Cincinnati Southern Railroad, Dayton eventually grew into a rather prosperous little town within the course of a decade.

His adopted home of Dayton and Rappleyea himself shared another intriguing detail, as well: they both had strong roots not in the South, but in the Northeast. The city was built up virtually from its inception by Northern money from Northern companies who sought to take full advantage of the significantly cheaper resources available in this section of the South. Unfortunately, by 1925 the Southern economy was dwindling, and Dayton was hit hard by the relatively recent closure of a number of their factories, mines, and larger businesses. While the Scopes Trial cannot entirely be described as a mere ploy for publicity, it is difficult to deny that

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 37

⁹⁵ *Chattanooga News*, "Reed Gave Name 'Dayton' to Smith's Cross Roads in 1878," June 3, 1925.

the influx of potential tourist money from all over the country was indeed alluring to folks like George Rappleyea, whose own business was hit hard by the economic downturn.

The unintended consequences of the publicity they would receive in coverage of the trial eventually meant that Dayton, an accurate archetype of what a struggling New South town in the early twentieth century looked like, would soon come to embody all the negative images of the South and its inhabitants that the press could conjure up. This forced Rhea County to rush to its own defense, trying desperately to protect its image from media ridicule. It also notably created within the collective mind of many of Dayton's residents a specter of the outsider, the Northern "Other," who wished only for the downfall of the South's long-cherished customs, ideals, and most importantly, its faith. The Scopes Trial, then, became not simply a legal skirmish between the forces of Christianity and of science, but a regionalistic battle between "us" and "them."

While George Rappleyea and his Progressive Club buddies were busy setting the stage for their groundbreaking production, no one had any idea just how cluttered that stage would soon become. Many actors would play their parts in Dayton that summer, and they would turn the show into something far bigger than Rappleyea had ever envisioned the day he helped mastermind what became the Scopes Trial at the soda fountain of Robinson's Drug Store.⁹⁶ What was initially intended to be a show-trial orchestrated by the ACLU in order to test the constitutionality of the Butler Act soon morphed into what the *Chattanooga Times* mockingly described as a "publicity stunt" on the grandest of scales.⁹⁷ In spite of such criticisms from both near and far, the tiny town of Dayton was determined to have its trial. And why shouldn't it, its

⁹⁶ Larson, p. 88

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 93

citizens asked? “Of all places,” read a promotional pamphlet distributed to visitors during the weeks leading up to the trial, “why *not* Dayton?”⁹⁸

Despite reassuring skeptics that, if anything, they were at least “the greatest strawberry growers on earth,” Dayton quickly found itself scrambling to find a good enough reason to justify their desire for nationwide attention.⁹⁹ In reality, the town was far from typical, and many of those who were instrumental in bringing the trial to Dayton were not from Dayton in the first place. Historian Edward J. Larson describes it as both a new town, and one that was “fundamentally disconnected from its state and region.”¹⁰⁰ But even with Dayton standing out as somewhat of an anomaly within the otherwise more homogenous culture of East Tennessee, it did in certain ways reflect the overall attitudes and ideals expressed by generations of those who came before them. Self-sufficiency, political and social conservatism, and close-knit family ties were all distinct hallmarks of this section of Tennessee. Folks in this region traditionally “favored low taxes, minimal government services, and local control of institutions such as churches and schools.”¹⁰¹

Religion was also just as important in Rhea County as it was anywhere else in East Tennessee. Though it could hardly be referred to as “a hotbed of modernism,” the majority of its people were Methodist as opposed to the more traditionally conservative Baptists who dominated the South.¹⁰² Despite its moderate leanings, pastors enjoyed a huge amount of influence within

⁹⁸ F. E. Robinson and W. S. Morgan, *Why Dayton? Of All Places?* (Chattanooga: Andrews Printery, 1925), p. 17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16

¹⁰⁰ Larson, p. 93

¹⁰¹ Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 2

¹⁰² Larson, p. 93

local society. Although Dayton in 1925 was well on its way to transforming itself into the more modern, progressive city that its leading voices envisioned, religion invariably maintained an important hold on its everyday citizens, proving that even though things around them might be changing, religion still offered a way for people to “maintain continuity with the world of their fathers.”¹⁰³ Any perceived threat to the Bible was interpreted as a threat to their way of life, and thus when the antievolution controversy reached its climax that summer at their courthouse, “all the region’s squabbling denominations” were united in the Bible’s defense, cutting across “denominational, economic, and political lines” in the process.¹⁰⁴

John Thomas Scopes, himself a transplant from Kentucky who had grown up in Illinois, liked to describe Rhea County as “straight-shooting Alvin York mountain country.”¹⁰⁵ They loved their families, their Bible, and, by the time the Scopes Trial came to town, they also loved former three-time Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. The *Chattanooga News*, an afternoon newspaper with a large readership in Dayton, proudly ran Bryan’s nationally-syndicated Bible Talks each week, serving to popularize Bryan not as a political figure, but instead as a preacher interpreting the Word of God. It is this element of his character that undoubtedly endeared Bryan to the people of Rhea County even before the trial took place, enabling them to somehow overlook the otherwise unforgivable sin of being a Democrat. This particular area of East Tennessee was overwhelmingly Republican, and though Bryan had always

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 3

¹⁰⁴ Keith, p. 57

¹⁰⁵ Scopes. p. 35

swept the Southern states in each of his three presidential races, he never once managed to carry Rhea County.¹⁰⁶

When word spread that such famous, important figures as William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow had offered to play the leading roles in Dayton's performance, the town's response to their impending trial took a drastic shift toward the spectacular. Live monkeys began to appear in shops across the city, monkey-themed decorations adorned Market Street, and the city started to embrace its newly-earned nickname of "Monkey Town" with much enthusiasm.¹⁰⁷ Some condemned such displays as tacky or missing the point, but for the majority of Daytonians it was all in good fun. The money to be made from merchandizing the trial was something that was near and dear to the hearts of Dayton's leading business owners, as well. The Progressive Club estimated that they would soon be entertaining 5,000 people from all over the country, and they wanted to make sure that "every visitor will go away with a good word for the city on his lips."¹⁰⁸

"If the Scopes Trial at Dayton was an abortion," University of Tennessee history student Warren Allem wrote in his 1959 thesis on the origins of the trial, "the press was the midwife."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the summer of 1925 created very few friends for poor Dayton, despite the best intentions of its townspeople. Citizens from all over Rhea County had pitched in to try to make the Scopes Trial a shining moment for the place they called home, but when the dark cloud that was the national press descended upon them in June, their efforts proved to have been mostly in vain.

¹⁰⁶ Larson, p. 92

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 105

¹⁰⁸ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, "Dayton Ready to Entertain 5,000 People," June 4, 1925.

¹⁰⁹ Warren Allem, "Backgrounds of the Scopes Trial at Dayton, Tennessee" (Masters Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1959), p. 31

The trial itself was a media sensation unlike anything else that had been seen prior. It pioneered the use of radio broadcasting as a means of transmitting the daily court proceedings to cities across the United States. Newsreels allowed moviegoers to actually see what was happening in Dayton with their own eyes on the silver screen. Headlines featuring Scopes, Bryan, and Darrow appeared across the globe, with people worldwide, from Germany to South Africa to China, sending in telegrams to both the prosecution and the defense teams expressing their support or their disdain. “Monkey Town” was famous, that was certain, but the notoriety they had earned was hardly the kind anyone would have wanted.

Back in May, many weeks before the media firestorm had begun, press coverage of the impending trial had seemed far less threatening than useful. George Rappleyea, always looking for a chance to be in the spotlight, utilized the local Chattanooga and Knoxville newspapers to his full advantage by making sure they all ran stories about the ACLU test case that would soon be coming to East Tennessee. From there, the story travelled all over the country in only a matter of days and stayed there for the rest of the summer. It wasn’t long before rumors started floating around that famous Fundamentalist preacher Billy Sunday had been invited by Walter White, the superintendent of Rhea County schools, to join in the prosecution.¹¹⁰ Another tale had floated around earlier that H. G. Wells, the iconic British novelist, would be asked to serve as a witness for the defense.¹¹¹ Both men, however, politely declined the offer to participate.

The lone defendant soon seemed lost among the headlines. John Scopes, the man being accused of teaching evolution in the Rhea County high school, opened the newspaper each morning only to find his own face staring right back at him from its pages. He swiftly became

¹¹⁰ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “White Asks Sunday to Aid Prosecution,” July 4, 1925.

¹¹¹ *Chattanooga News*, “Can’t Mean Me, Says H. G. Wells To Scopes Call,” May 15, 1925.

the most famous man in America, scarcely able walk down the streets of Dayton without a reporter popping out and snapping a photograph. But once he volunteered to become the living, breathing test of what he saw as an unjust law, he was left to his own devices. He had even strolled out the doors of Robinson's Drug Store the day of his "arrest" without giving a thought as to hiring a lawyer for his own defense. Luckily, as Scopes explained in his memoirs, one found him: a well-known constitutional lawyer with many years of experience, John Randolph Neal. His involvement in the trial began simply enough, when he approached Scopes and essentially told him that he had heard a great deal about his case, and that he would be his lawyer whether Scopes wanted him to or not.¹¹²

Neal, unlike Rappleyea or Scopes himself, had been born and raised in Rhea County and knew practically everyone who lived there. The idea of a show-trial happening in his own backyard, then, took on an entirely personal element for him. First and foremost, Neal understood the powerful role of the media in manipulating public opinion. Together he and Scopes decided on Clarence Darrow as the obvious choice to be the "face" of the defense team.¹¹³ Darrow had a personal score to settle with the man he considered to be his nemesis, William Jennings Bryan, and he relished the opportunity to come to Tennessee and fight him in the courtroom. While Neal remained the chief defense counsel throughout the trial, having the infamous lawyer from Chicago on their side was a move that allowed the press to become just as enamored with the defense team as they had already proven to be with Bryan and the prosecution.

¹¹² Scopes, p. 63

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 72

“Dayton is now the home of the press,” exclaimed the *Chattanooga News* a few days before the trial began.¹¹⁴ With the influx of reporters came also the inevitable assumptions about Tennessee and the South, courtesy of Northern newspapers. By far the most famous of these was Baltimore writer H. L. Mencken, whose fantastical depictions of frenzied Holy Rollers worshipping ecstatically high atop Dayton Mountain in the dead of night still color the public perception of Dayton even today.¹¹⁵ Despite the fact that Scopes, Neal, and even George Rappleyea would have found this supposed facet of Rhea County’s religious culture utterly foreign to that which they knew firsthand, this was indeed the picture that continued to be painted each day, inviting millions of readers across the country to partake.

But even the local media was often less than complimentary toward their newly-famous neighbor. The *Chattanooga Daily Times* ran many articles that were reprinted from other newspapers, including one written originally for the *Kansas City Star* that hypothetically suggested Dayton’s Progressive Club change its motto from “You’ll do well in Dayton” to “You’ll do well in Dayton if you reject the teachings of modern science.”¹¹⁶ As the trial wore on, however, it became clear to even the most critical of Southerners that, whether they agreed with the Butler Act or not, they were being painted with an awfully wide brush by the rest of the world, and they would not likely recover from the damage this had caused. Reporters wrote up pieces that they knew their readership wanted to see: tales of monkeys dressed in clothes walking around town, stories of fiery Fundamentalist preachers shrieking about hellfire and damnation,

¹¹⁴ *Chattanooga News*, “‘Local Color’ Cry Writers At Dayton,” July 7, 1925.

¹¹⁵ Mencken, p. 46

¹¹⁶ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “Dayton, Progress and Opportunity All in One,” July 6, 1925.

and backward country folk drinking it all in with wide-eyed wonder. This was what the people wanted, and it was largely what they received.

“Perhaps they think that Dayton does not know the war is over,” opined one Tennessee journalist. “It is a great pity that there is not an influx of southern colonels to give the town local color. If any cities of the south have any such colonels there should be a rush order for them at once. They should be addicted to wide hats, long cigars, and have a mania for mint juleps and say ‘Suh’ on all occasions.”¹¹⁷ While clearly written in jest, many Southerners likely echoed this sentiment, having grown tired of the stereotypes and offensive generalizations to which they were subjected. Jack Lait, a playwright who surveyed the scene at Dayton for his opinion column with the *Chattanooga News*, even went so far as to argue that “not one indigenous freak have I encountered, and I have met everybody in the town—yea, in the county. This is not even essentially a typically southern city, except that it is in the south. It is very much like a New England or Illinois community of the better class, though agricultural rather than industrial.”¹¹⁸ His argument, however, didn’t seem to change any minds. In the eyes of the nation, Dayton would be quaint and stereotypically Southern regardless of what any the locals had to say about it.

“I came from Chicago, and my friend, Malone, and friend Hays, came from New York,” Clarence Darrow began on the second day of the Scopes Trial proceedings, identifying himself and some of his fellow lawyers in the courtroom that morning, “and on the other side... another who is prosecuting this case, and who is responsible for this foolish mischievous and wicked act,

¹¹⁷ *Chattanooga News*, “Local Color,” July 7, 1925.

¹¹⁸ *Chattanooga News*, “Jack Lait Finds Dayton Nice Burg,” July 10, 1925.

who comes from Florida.”¹¹⁹ The intriguing dynamic that Darrow’s words are hinting toward is perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of the trial that, in 1925, was seemingly placed front-and-center by the media outlets who covered the events in Dayton that summer. Few newspaper articles failed to address it, and within the transcript of the trial itself there are overt references throughout. The issue is a regional one, one that purposely placed rural against urban, country against city, South against North, and “us” against “them”. The man from Florida to which Darrow alludes is William Jennings Bryan, a self-professed Southerner at this point in his life, with the two other defense lawyers mentioned being Dudley Field Malone and Arthur Garfield Hays, both from the North. In so many ways, Southerners interpreted criticism of the Butler Act, antievolution legislation, and the role of religion in schools as attacks upon their very way of life, and Dayton sat firmly within the crossfire.

The press had been less than kind to the South during the months surrounding the Scopes Trial, certainly doing little to help the situation. Dayton had already been characterized as a remote village inhabited by Bible-thumping fanatics, and by the time the trial was actually underway much of Tennessee had grown sick of the ridicule. “It looks like to me,” said a citizen of Dayton being interviewed on the street by a reporter, “that a lot of people who claim to be free thinkers in this section are coming back to a more orthodox view of things. Maybe that’s because the kind of religion they were born and bred to is being attacked so hard. When the other fellow begins to prod you too much with a lot of wild ideas you find out that you are a whole lot more orthodox than you ever thought you were.”¹²⁰ This sentiment was by no means unique to a few

¹¹⁹ *The World’s Most Famous Court Trial: State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes; complete stenographic report of the court test of the Tennessee anti-evolution act at Dayton, July 10 to 21, 1925, including speeches and arguments of attorneys* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 74

¹²⁰ *Chattanooga News*, “Religion Topic of Conversation,” July 2, 1925.

people within Dayton's borders. Religion became a refuge of sorts for them, a way in which they could stand up against the "Other" who threatened their values.

In January of 1925, when Governor Austin Peay signed J. W. Butler's antievolution bill, there was hardly a consensus about it one way or another in Rhea County. Some agreed with the law, some didn't, but it certainly wasn't a point of contention between average churchgoing citizens. By the time July came around, however, The Butler Act had become a symbol. "The law attacked is, we believe, one of exceedingly doubtful wisdom," the *Chattanooga News* conceded, "but it may not be so easy to explain how it infringes on the liberty of anybody in New York."¹²¹ In other words, the newspaper was essentially telling New York to mind its own business. The South, they felt, could abide by its own laws, regardless of how wise those laws may or may not seem.

Sue Hicks, the young Dayton lawyer who helped organize the prosecution of his good friend John Scopes, was a supporter of the Butler Act from the very beginning. During the trial proceedings, he never failed to remind the audience in the courtroom that his side was the one who was truly defending local interests. "Down here, in Tennessee, we believe in Tennessee law," he chided the defense during one of his statements.¹²² Only moments later, Hicks was reprimanded by Judge John Raulston, himself an East Tennessee native, for referring to the defense team's expert scientific witnesses as "these foreign gentlemen."¹²³ But Hicks's most scathing criticism of his opponents had come a month prior when, in a press interview, he accused the defense of being aligned with "agnostics, socialists, and communists, and other so-

¹²¹ *Chattanooga News*, "Rhea in Supreme Test," May 7, 1925.

¹²² Trial Transcript, p. 161

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 163

called radicals” who were “trying to tear down the laws of the United States of America.”¹²⁴ With Rhea County native John R. Neal being the only exception, the overwhelmingly Northern defense stood in stark contrast to a prosecution team made up almost entirely of Southerners.

Following the example set by his colleague Sue Hicks, Dayton resident Ben McKenzie was also reprimanded by Judge Raulston for his numerous “sarcastic references to Scopes’ lawyers ‘from the north,’” causing a minor controversy in the courtroom in the process.¹²⁵ On the fifth day of the trial, he took particular offense at Clarence Darrow’s assertion that evolutionists were plentiful throughout the country. “I tell you one thing,” McKenzie snapped, “no great number of them grow on the mountain sides and in the valleys of Rhea.”¹²⁶ Happy playing the role of the quintessential Southern gentleman in the midst of so many out-of-town guests, McKenzie’s folksy speeches only added to the local appeal of the prosecution amongst his fellow Tennesseans. While his assumption that no evolutionists existed within Rhea County’s borders was clearly exaggerated, his choice of words is what makes his statement particularly important. No great number of them *grow* here, he claims. Rhea County might be the current home of a few souls who choose to believe in evolution, but, according to McKenzie, they didn’t *grow* here. They grew somewhere else, *then* came to Rhea County.

By most accounts, Dayton had already become tired of its newly-found fame even before the first day of the Scopes Trial had begun. It simply wasn’t fun being “Monkey Town” anymore. The joke was over, and it had clearly been at their own expense all along. The amount of visitors

¹²⁴ *Chattanooga News*, “Terms Scopes Aides Pro-Communistic,” June 10, 1925.

¹²⁵ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “Judge McKenzie Offends Opposing Counsel With Civil War Talk,” July 13, 1925.

¹²⁶ Trial Transcript, p. 169

they had expected failed to show up as promised, and the ones who did come certainly weren't spending the kind of money the Dayton Progressive Club had counted on them spending.¹²⁷ As the first few days of the show wore on, things did start to look up a bit. More people came, and the trial itself grew more intriguing. But one thing was for certain: Dayton's fleeting moment in the sun had only left them burned.

In crafting the show-trial they hoped would put their town on the map, George Rappleyea and other Dayton business elites could hardly have imagined the ways in which their county, state, and region would ultimately suffer. Rappleyea himself, who found the Butler Act repugnant and hoped it would someday be struck down as unconstitutional by a higher court thanks to the Scopes Trial, watched as his prized play morphed into a media circus that left Dayton, the city he wished to revive, looking like a worldwide laughing stock. Everything he plotted had backfired, and instead of seeing the Butler Act exposed for the silly legislation he believed it was, he witnessed it become a rallying point for Southern religiosity in the face of the Northern scientific aggressors.

The great performance, however, was far from over. The issues at hand had become more visible, the intentions of its participants more obvious, and the tone much more serious.¹²⁸ The monkey ornaments, the playful cartoons, and the attention-grabbing trinkets had nearly disappeared from the shop windows on Market Street, replaced instead with "READ YOUR BIBLE" signs and warnings to "Prepare to Meet Thy Maker."¹²⁹ Although the local drug stores were still selling Monkey Fizzes to groups of giggling teenagers, the tide had clearly turned

¹²⁷ *Chattanooga News*, "Crowd 'Flop', Dayton Rues Lack of Folk," July 10, 1925.

¹²⁸ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, "Dayton Now Frowns On Monkey Shines; Has More Serious View of Scopes Case," July 9, 1925.

¹²⁹ Scopes. p. 100

against embracing whole-heartedly the spectacle that was the Scopes Trial. If the South had lost the battle against public opinion, they must now shift their focus instead to winning the war for souls.

4. “THE TRIAL OF THE CENTURY”:

STATE OF TENNESSEE VS. JOHN THOMAS SCOPES

"And so the battle progresses – Bryan of the prosecution, defending what he believes to be the Faith of the Fathers, Darrow of the defense, prosecuting the case for the Light of Science, Scopes the self-styled 'goat' bowing his head in prayer – and the sunlight of Heaven beating down upon Dayton, the City of Light."

— Howard K. Hollister¹³⁰

Somewhere, hidden amongst all the talk of evolution and Darwinism and God and monkeys, sat the living, breathing defendant in this most infamous of conflicts: football coach and occasional peddler of unlawful scientific theories in Dayton’s biology classrooms, John Thomas Scopes. Far outweighed by the celebrities who would rush to both his defense and his prosecution, he became a silent spectacle virtually from the moment the trial was deemed worthy of media attention. He was a plot device, necessarily emblematic of the young, studious, idealistic academic type who was being metaphorically crucified on the public stage for his crimes against Southern small-town conceptions of decency. Without a word he remained seated throughout every single battle of ideals that took place in the courthouse that summer, perhaps knowing better than most that what was playing out before his eyes didn’t really concern *him* at all. “Poor little Scopes!” lamented the *Chattanooga Daily Times* on July 10, “He was seen in

¹³⁰ Howard K. Hollister, Press Release - [The Day in Dayton](#), 1925. Retrieved from the Sue K. Hicks Papers, University of Tennessee.

Robinson's drug-and-information store, but nobody seemed to pay any particular attention to him. After all, he's only the defendant in this case."¹³¹

What was really at stake in Scopes's legendary trial depended on who you asked. Some said academic freedom, others the sovereignty of the views of the majority. However, as defense attorney Dudley Field Malone stated so plainly, there was a much deeper issue involved which dominated the trial from its inception. "I defy anybody to believe that this is not a religious question," Malone challenged after prosecutor Bryan had given a long speech before the court on the evils of teaching evolution.¹³² Both the prosecution and the defense constantly echoed this theme, and almost immediately after the trial had begun the question of whether or not John Thomas Scopes was guilty of teaching an unapproved theory to the high school students of Rhea County took a back seat to other issues, such as whether or not evolution contradicted the Biblical account of creation.

Religious rhetoric drove the movement against evolution from its very inception. J. W. Butler, the man behind the antievolution bill in Tennessee, was outspoken about the fact that he had crafted the law for religious reasons, and those who supported such legislation generally cloaked their explanations for doing so in religious imagery long before the subject of evolution's scientific merits, or lack thereof, were brought into the discussion. Far less a conventional legal proceeding than a religious event, the Scopes Trial truly served as a cultural turning point for Fundamentalism and the antievolution movement, purposely placing well-known public figures against each other in an epic fight over the role of the Bible in modern

¹³¹ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, "Bryan Captures Town," July 10, 1925.

¹³² Larson, p. 178

American life. It was a battle between Genesis and Darwin, and it would subsequently set the tone for all future arguments of its kind.

But the “trial” itself carried no real legal ramifications for its elusive namesake. If he was found guilty, he would have to pay a fine, and that was that. His own presence at the proceedings was scarcely needed, for Scopes was but a faceless member of the ensemble in this glorious play. He had no lines, no directions, and no discernible purpose other than to occupy a chair on the defense’s side of the courtroom while the *real* actors eloquently stated their cases in the name of Christianity or of science. Scopes was never the defendant at all. In the eyes of the prosecution, it was religion that was being threatened in Dayton, and they ultimately felt it was their job to defend it. As chief defense counsel John R. Neal calmly walked through the doors of the Hotel Aqua two days before the case began, he seemed to realize what he and his team would soon be up against before anyone else did. In one hand he held a law book, and in the other a Bible. Looking particularly pleased with himself, he remarked to reporters, “Well, I am ready for Bryan.”¹³³

“They did not come here to try this case,” William Jennings Bryan accused the defense. “They came here to try revealed religion.”¹³⁴ The “they” Bryan spoke of was referring to none other than “the greatest atheist or agnostic in the US,” defense attorney Clarence Darrow.¹³⁵ Both men knew each other’s views well, as they had debated publicly a number of times even prior to the Scopes Trial. Both men were also seen, especially by younger observers, as aging relics left

¹³³ *Chattanooga News*, “Doings At Dayton,” July 9, 1925.

¹³⁴ Trial Transcript, p. 288

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 299

over from 19th century Progressivism, only further polarizing the atmosphere in Dayton. H. L. Mencken described Bryan's appearance in the courtroom as "a bit mangy and flea-bitten, but by no means ready for his harp."¹³⁶ Meanwhile, a New York reporter wrote that Darrow stood in stark contrast to the younger faces which otherwise made up the defense team. He also noted Darrow's "trademark colored suspenders and pastel shirt—both a generation out of date."¹³⁷

Responding to a piece on evolution that Bryan had written for the *Chicago Tribune* back in 1923, Darrow replied with a series of questions intended to derail Bryan's arguments, and their own personal war began. The public loved it.¹³⁸ But it is important to note that these types of exchanges, contrived as they were to provoke strong feelings on both sides, had an impact on the antievolution movement for the very same reason that the Scopes Trial did: they showcased the most extreme positions at the expense of the middle ground.¹³⁹ If Bryan and Darrow were any indication, there would appear to be no possible compromise between Biblical literalism and indifferent agnosticism.

In the months leading up to the trial, however, such issues weren't always considered relevant enough to inject into either side's arguments. "Whether the Bible is to be taken literally or figuratively is beside the point," the *Chattanooga News* claimed, "and if counsel for the prosecution and defense can prevent it, will not be raised during the trial of Prof. J. T. Scopes, indicted for teaching evolution in Dayton schools."¹⁴⁰ To the defense, the problem with the Butler Act was simple: it was unconstitutional because it infringed upon a teacher's right to

¹³⁶ Mencken, p. 74

¹³⁷ Larson, p. 149

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 73

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 121

¹⁴⁰ *Chattanooga News*, "Bryan Here, Says Test Case Most Vital Yet," June 4, 1925.

freedom of speech. The prosecution saw it a bit differently, alleging that because a teacher is a public employee, the parents of a particular state have every right to dictate what their children should or should not be taught in schools funded by their tax dollars. If a majority of citizens didn't like the idea of evolution, then it had no business being taught to the students of Tennessee.

Especially dear to William Jennings Bryan was this concept of majority rule, and, in his own mind, it was really the only issue at hand in the prosecution of John Scopes. Evolution was of secondary importance, although he knew it would be highly unlikely for the subject to not come up at all during the trial. “The *right* of the *people*, speaking through the legislature, to control the schools which they *create* and *support* is the real issue as I see it,” he confided to fellow prosecutor Sue Hicks in a letter sent in June of 1925, “If not the people, who? A few scientists, one in ten thousand? No such oligarchy would be permitted.”¹⁴¹ Though the prosecution team started off by shaping their tactics around this particular interpretation, it took little time for other, more sweeping issues to become entangled in the simple test case they had initially envisioned.

The World's Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA), a Fundamentalist coalition founded in 1919 in order to combat the forces of modernism within churches, had since shifted virtually its entire focus to what they felt was the global menace of Darwinian evolution by 1925. On May 14 of that year, a letter was sent from the law offices of Hicks & Hicks in Dayton to the Memphis headquarters of the WCFA asking them if they could perhaps help the Hicks brothers in getting in touch with William Jennings Bryan, whom they desperately wanted for their

¹⁴¹ Letter from William Jennings Bryan to Sue Hicks, June 28, 1925. From the Sue K. Hicks Papers, University of Tennessee - Knoxville, Modern Political Archives.

prosecution team in the upcoming trial against John Scopes.¹⁴² Two days later, a telegram exchange between Sue Hicks and the WCFA briefly discussed the possibility of the organization providing financial assistance to the prosecution, to which they ultimately agreed.¹⁴³ A month afterward, on June 12, Bryan himself accepted another offer from “the fundamentalists,” this time to provide the prosecution with a stenographer.¹⁴⁴

But the WCFA’s clear monetary involvement in the fight to convict Scopes was certainly not the only example of religious issues creeping their way into even the earliest discussions of the trial. *The Watchman*, a Seventh-Day Adventist magazine based in Nashville that frequently published articles on the evolution controversy from their own Biblical perspective, sent an advance copy of an editorial that they felt “confirms the right of the state” to pass a law such as the Butler Act with “arguments that are sound and irrefutable” to Sue Hicks while he was in the process of crafting the prosecution’s case.¹⁴⁵ Sue and Herbert Hicks’s older brother, Ira, was a pastor at a Presbyterian church in New Jersey, giving the young Dayton lawyers a direct link to all the latest religious controversies surrounding evolution. The letters that Ira and Herbert exchanged concerning the upcoming trial clearly indicate that they were planning to call into question the faith of any witness the defense might throw at them. Ira, a firm believer that one could not be both a Christian and an evolutionist, confidently assured Herbert, “You will have no trouble showing they do not really believe (*sic*) the Bible.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Letter from Sue Hicks to Christian Fundamentalists Association in Memphis, TN. May 14, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁴³ Western Union Telegram from Sue Hicks to Christian Fundamentalists Association in Memphis, TN. May 16, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from William Jennings Bryan to Sue Hicks, June 12, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from *The Watchman Magazine* to Sue Hicks, June 25, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Ira Hicks to Herbert Hicks, June 5, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

On June 19, the *Nashville Tennessean* newspaper wired attorneys on both sides of the Scopes case “requesting information in regard to their religious convictions.”¹⁴⁷ While there is no way to know for sure how many of the men involved actually replied to their inquiry, that such a question was even being asked in the first place directly illustrates just how vital the role of religion already was in a trial that was still a month away from taking place. Suddenly, issues such as majority rule and freedom of speech no longer seemed as important as defending Genesis from the onslaught of scientific criticism. “We have no fear of the outcome of the trial of Mr. Scopes, because we know that God is on your side,” wrote H. H. Jones of Birmingham, AL in an encouraging note to the prosecution.¹⁴⁸ There were many folks across the country, it seemed, who felt the exact same way.

“Wishing you a great victory for God over Clarence Darrow and the Devil,” read the last line of a short letter to Sue Hicks written by “E. W. Brickert, Christian Minister.” In this note, Brickert repeated many of William Jennings Bryan’s favorite arguments against evolution almost word-for-word, mocking the “learned” gentleman whose misguided faith in the realm of science left him grasping at mere guesses for an explanation of the world around him. “They guess,” he complained, “and the great majority of them are very poor guessers.”¹⁴⁹ The absolute certainty apparent in Brickert’s words, the imagery of the Scopes prosecution team directly taking on the powers of Satan in the form of the famed attorney from Chicago, the figurative showdown between the forces of light and those of darkness, of good and of evil, illustrate just how epic the Scopes Trial had become in the minds of the faithful. The stakes were higher than ever, and if

¹⁴⁷ Western Union Telegram from the *Nashville Tennessean* to Herbert Hicks, June 19, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from H. H. Jones to Herbert Hicks, July 2, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from E. W. Brickert to Sue Hicks, July 3, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

evolution and its scientific minions could be shamed that summer in Rhea County, then perhaps the sanctity of the Genesis creation story could be preserved, and the monkey tales would finally vanish.

Deck Carter, “Bible Champion,” proudly joined the likes of Anti-Evolution League field secretary T. T. Martin and other Fundamentalist preachers shuffling around the courthouse lawn during the Scopes Trial proceedings, attempting to save a few souls by “demonstrating the Bible” to them.¹⁵⁰ Carter was just one of many who found the trial to be a perfect excuse to spread the Gospel, due largely to the fact that evolution had managed to become less of a scientific question in the popular mind than a religious one. Evolution wasn’t something you accepted, it was now something you *believed*, and through the long, arched windows of the room inside the Rhea County Courthouse where John Scopes was being tried, belief was put prominently on display for all to see.

“READ YOUR BIBLE,” read the huge sign visible from virtually any seat within the packed courtroom. Each day, the court’s proceedings were begun with a prayer given by a local minister, much to the dismay of Dayton’s out-of-town visitors. When Clarence Darrow and the rest of the defense team registered their objections to the morning prayer on the fourth day of the trial, they were met with shock and dismay from locals as to why anyone would dispute a little devotional before a big event such as this. “This is a religious question,” argued John R. Neal, carefully explaining to the hushed audience why the defense took issue. “The whole atmosphere of the court in every respect should be neutral.”¹⁵¹ But Sue Hicks, always ready with a calculated rebuttal, soon chimed in, claiming that, “We are trying to avoid any religious controversy and we

¹⁵⁰ *Chattanooga News*, “Crowd ‘Flop,’” July 10, 1925.

¹⁵¹ Trial Transcript, p. 96

maintain that there is no religious controversy in this case.”¹⁵² The prayers continued for the duration of the trial, by order of Judge Raulston himself.

If Hicks’s confident assertion that there was no religious controversy involved was indeed true, then no one remembered to spread the word to the other participants on both sides of the case. All evidence pointed to the defense team being just as prepared to address religion as the prosecution was, with specific Bible verses marked in their notes and many references to more modernistic theologians who saw no conflict between evolution and Genesis.¹⁵³ But Clarence Darrow, who admittedly loved a good scandal, was certainly not doing himself any favors if he wanted to win over local opinion. “Darrow did not increase his scant popularity among the people of Dayton by objecting to the opening of court by prayer,” the *Chattanooga News* decried the following day.¹⁵⁴ “A man can tamper with anything I’ve got almost with impunity,” whispered an anonymous man overheard by a reporter in the audience, “but when he gets close to my religion and faith he gets close to home.”¹⁵⁵ When Darrow famously called Bryan to the witness stand to testify as a Bible expert on the seventh day of the trial, it became even more apparent that the case was far less about the teaching of a theory than a clash of ideologies.

Remembered by history primarily for the rather embarrassing answers Darrow was able to get out of Bryan, including the often quoted “I don’t think about things I don’t think about,” this interrogation highlighted the real reason why Darrow had come to Dayton in the first place:

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ “Statement of Defense Counsel,” document undated. John R. Neal Papers, MS-1126. University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Special Collections.

¹⁵⁴ *Chattanooga News*, “Darrow Didn’t Gain Any In Popularity,” July 14, 1925.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

to put Bryan himself on trial.¹⁵⁶ While Bryan was preoccupied with the opportunity to place his antievolution crusade even further upon the national stage through the Scopes Trial, Darrow had been busy planning a crusade of his own, one which would expose what he felt was the narrow-minded and potentially dangerous nature of Fundamentalism. Although Darrow's set of questions to Bryan were judged by some, including one Tennessee theologian who reported on the trial, as even "more disgraceful than Mr. Bryan's answers," the questioning itself was especially significant to the antievolution movement for one answer in particular.¹⁵⁷ "Do you think the earth was made in six days?" Darrow asked him. Bryan replied: "Not six days of twenty-four hours." "Doesn't the Bible say so?" Darrow inquired further.¹⁵⁸ The simple "No, sir," Bryan offered in response would quickly become a point of serious contention between himself and his followers, though he would not live long enough to defend his position.

"There may be a conflict between evolution and the peculiar ideas of Christianity, which are held by Mr. Bryan as the evangelical leader of the prosecution, but we deny that the evangelical leader of the prosecution is an authorized spokesman for the Christians of the United States," charged Dudley Field Malone during one of his most remembered speeches of the trial. "The defense maintains that there is a clear distinction between God, the church, the Bible, Christianity and Mr. Bryan."¹⁵⁹ If Clarence Darrow came to Tennessee to expose Bryan as the hypocritical charlatan he believed him to be, Malone himself possibly came for even more personal reasons. Having worked for the State Department during the same time that Bryan held

¹⁵⁶ Levine, p. 333

¹⁵⁷ Carlyle Marney, "Dayton's Long Hot Summer" in *D-Days at Dayton: Reflections on the Scopes Trial*, ed. Jerry R. Tompkins (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 135.

¹⁵⁸ Trial Transcript, p. 299

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 113

the position of Secretary of State under President Wilson, the two men apparently had a falling out, and Bryan's daughter Grace later accused Malone of participating in the Scopes Trial simply to "get even" with her father for the "severe rebuke" he had given to him that "resulted in his dismissal from the State Department."¹⁶⁰

While the details of this supposed feud between Malone and Bryan are sketchy at best, coming as they do from an obviously biased source, it is difficult to dispute the fact that Malone certainly saved his most severe criticisms during the trial for his former boss. Whether this was out of spite or merely a smart legal move to discredit the prosecution's leading voice, Malone definitely succeeded regardless of his motives, accusing Bryan of having abandoned his previously Progressive views of the world in favor of backward, simplistic Fundamentalism. "We of the defense appeal from his fundamentalist views of today to his philosophical views of yesterday," Malone argued, "when he was a modernist to our point of view."¹⁶¹

Moments after Malone made the previous statement, when Judge Raulston reprimanded him and asked him to please not refer to Bryan by name unless it dealt directly with the issue at hand, Bryan interjected on his own behalf. "I ask no protection from the court," he replied, "and when the proper time comes I shall be able to show the gentlemen that I stand today just where I did."¹⁶² To Bryan, his role in the Scopes Trial was a logical extension of his belief that the people were the ultimate judge of what was right and what was wrong. He saw no real contradiction between his antievolution crusade and the countless other causes he had championed during his previous political career. He vehemently disagreed with Malone labeling him a modernist-

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Grace D. Bryan to Sue Hicks, April 12, 1940. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁶¹ Trial Transcript, p. 117

¹⁶² Ibid

turned-fundamentalist, and in his heart he truly believed he had not changed a bit from the Progressive Democrat whose “Cross of Gold” speech had first launched him into the public eye. He was the same, and he aimed to prove it in Dayton.

When Tuesday, July 21, 1925 finally came, Bryan was especially anxious for closing arguments to begin. His reputation had undoubtedly suffered greatly the day before due to Darrow’s relentless questioning in their cross-examination, but he had spent weeks perfecting a lengthy, eloquent final speech that he described to his editor as the “mountain peak of my life’s efforts.”¹⁶³ The prosecution intended this new speech to be the highlight of their whole case, and he had been saving up all of his energy in preparation. As Darrow rose from his seat in the courtroom that morning and calmly requested Judge Raulston return a verdict of guilty, however, he thwarted Bryan’s meticulous plan in an instant. Darrow himself had calculated this move wisely, depriving Bryan of his last chance to use the Scopes Trial as a platform for his antievolution crusade. He later admitted in his memoirs that he had feared Bryan’s effects upon the “assembled multitudes,” and wanted the opportunity to “cut him down.”¹⁶⁴

As he left the Rhea County Courthouse that day, the prosecution having been handed a technical victory and John Thomas Scopes fined \$100 for his crimes, Bryan’s understanding of this issue at stake in this case seemed to be vindicated. The will of the common people had been enforced, and an unpopular scientific theory would remain omitted from public school curricula. But this was not the sweeping triumph Bryan had predicted. His chance to deliver a final oration had been taken away, and thus no one ever heard the speech he believed would “answer all the

¹⁶³ William Jennings Bryan, *The Last Message of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1925), p. 8

¹⁶⁴ Levine, p. 351

arguments of the evolutionists.”¹⁶⁵ While the rest of Dayton recovered during the days following the end of the trial, as reporters boarded trains headed North and the constant stream of visitors abruptly vanished, William Jennings Bryan sat working diligently in his guest house, revising for print his full-scale attack on Darwinism. It was simply his Christian duty, he reminded his editor in a telephone conversation on Sunday, July 26, only a few hours before his death: “The evolutionists really are a menace to the faith and morals of America.”¹⁶⁶

“All who favor Mr. Bryan’s proposition to submit the divinity of Christ to a popular vote hold up your hands,” the *Chattanooga Daily Times* teased.¹⁶⁷ Like it or not, however, Bryan and his prosecution team had won the Battle of Dayton that summer. One of the very last moments of the proceedings saw John Thomas Scopes and his chief defense attorney, John R. Neal, standing before the court receiving his guilty verdict in the midst of an anxious audience. After the \$100 fine was announced, Neal politely interjected on behalf of his overlooked client, “May it please your honor, we want to be heard a moment.” Judge Raulston, a genuine look of confusion momentarily engulfing his face, paused and allowed Scopes his first and only opportunity to speak the entire eight days of his own trial. “Your honor,” he stated, “I feel that I have been convicted of violating an unjust statute. I will continue in the future, as I have in the past, to oppose this law in any way I can.”¹⁶⁸ And with that, the show concluded.

¹⁶⁵ Bryan, *The Last Message*, p. 8

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 9

¹⁶⁷ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “They’re off at Dayton!” July 10, 1925.

¹⁶⁸ Trial Transcript, p. 313

The Scopes Trial was officially over, and now Rhea County hoped it could finally get back to a much-anticipated sense of normalcy for the first time in many, many months. John Scopes himself had no plans on staying, and as he packed his things and prepared for a new life in graduate school at the University of Chicago, his waving goodbye to the little town he had known was in many ways the final breath of the Dayton which had existed prior to “Monkey Town.” His trial had changed it for good, but although he and many of the other local participants left the area to its own devices after 1925, moving on to bigger cities and away from the shadow of the infamous courthouse, Dayton would never be able to forget. It was etched on the collective mind of the world now, and its identity was forever altered.

But Rhea County’s claim to fame was only the first act in a much larger play of sorts. It wouldn’t be long before the religious issues raised during the Scopes Trial would once again become a point of contention between sparring factions of Fundamentalists and their Modernist enemies. Although William Jennings Bryan and John Thomas Scopes both wished for the showdown in Dayton to be the final word in the ongoing theological arguments over evolution and the Bible, they could never have fully realized that their hopes were already lost. A new generation of warriors soon took up the proverbial torch passed on to them by their predecessors, with the memory of what took place during Dayton’s fleeting moments as the “Religious Capital of the World” remaining firmly etched in their minds.

**5. CREATION REDEFINED:
ANTIEVOLUTIONISM AFTER 1925**

*“In this controversy, I have a larger majority on my side than in any previous controversy,
and I have more intolerant opponents than I ever had in politics.”*

— *William Jennings Bryan*¹⁶⁹

The sudden and unexpected death of the “Great Commoner” in Dayton only days after the Scopes Trial commenced came as a shock to the world. Before all the dust stirred up by the media frenzy of the evolution case even had a chance to settle, once again Rhea County found itself in the headlines across the globe, this time for being the place where William Jennings Bryan took his very last breath. The town that had only recently hosted what was now being heralded as the “Trial of the Century” quickly shifted from enjoying a collective sigh of relief to sincerely mourning the passing of the defender of their faith. Contrary to some reports, however, the death of Bryan had *not* come as a result of the embarrassment he had suffered days prior on the witness stand at the hands of Clarence Darrow. Instead, he had eaten Sunday dinner with his wife, laid down for a short nap afterward, and quietly drifted away.

One of the many locals affected by the news of Bryan’s death was Dr. John R. Neal, former defendant John Scopes’s chief attorney and Bryan’s foe in the trial that had recently captured the nation. Somewhat of an oddity in overwhelmingly Republican Rhea County, Neal

¹⁶⁹ Bryan, *Memoirs*, p. 304

had long been a professed liberal and had thus followed Bryan's career with immense interest from his college years onward.¹⁷⁰ He admired Bryan for his strong convictions and his constant dedication to the common people, and although they had stood at odds with one another only days prior in the local courthouse, Neal couldn't help but feel saddened by the loss of one of the last great voices of the Progressivism they both loved so dearly. He paid his respects to Mrs. Bryan, the new widow, and stayed in his home of Rhea County long enough to see the funeral train slowly whisk the Commoner away from his final battleground in Tennessee to the quiet hills of Arlington National Cemetery.

But there was one subject that likely weighed more heavily on Neal's mind than any other as the rest of the nation mourned the loss of Bryan. It was another similarity the two men shared, albeit one upon which they also disagreed in many ways. From the start of the discussion surrounding antievolution legislation in Tennessee, John R. Neal had been an outspoken critic of such a law out of fear it might hurt educational standards within the state. Having been a university professor for many years and now running his own private law school in Knoxville, the idea that students from Tennessee could possibly be considered substandard in comparison to those from elsewhere was something to which he took great offense.¹⁷¹ His involvement in the Scopes Trial from the beginning hinged more on his interest in maintaining freedom of speech for teachers than anything else. Now, as the somber procession surrounding Bryan moved further and further from Dayton, there was even talk of a Fundamentalist university to be built in town that would immortalize the Great Commoner for all time.

¹⁷⁰ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, "Funeral Address At Bryan's Bier," July 29, 1925.

¹⁷¹ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, "State University Doomed if Ban on Evolution Not Lifted, Says Neal," July 9, 1925.

Neal's concern for education and freedom of speech, although it might have seemed somewhat misplaced at that time, was indeed foreboding. A so-called "Fundamentalist" university in his own backyard certainly was unnerving to the man who had fought so hard against his own neighbors to try to strike down the Butler Act once and for all. But Neal, like virtually everyone else who occupied the now-empty streets of Dayton in early August of 1925, had absolutely no idea just how important their famous trial would end up being, not simply for antievolution legislation, but for the Fundamentalist movement that ultimately beget it. The face of antievolutionism was changing fast, shifting away from the flexible interpretations of creation that Bryan had championed during the Scopes Trial and growing to resent them in the process. Soon, rumors of potential colleges and a much-anticipated return to normalcy would be abandoned. Neal and his fellow Rhea County natives quickly found themselves facing yet another negative onslaught brought on by the trial they were already so desperate to forget. Dayton's reputation, it seemed, had been ruined beyond repair. Fundamentalists were mortified by what took place there that summer, the antievolution movement had realigned itself due to the ensuing controversies, and William Jennings Bryan, the man whose popularity had never seemed to cease during his lifetime, was posthumously being labeled the culprit of it all.

"There was no way now to separate Bryan's death from the Dayton trial," John Scopes wrote in his memoirs, "it was merely another act, a coda, to the incredible tragicomic drama that had unfolded when Bryan had first come to town."¹⁷² Indeed, as much as Dayton loved Bryan, no one who lived there could honestly say that the trial had brought to them anything but bad

¹⁷² Scopes p. 197

news and bad publicity. “If the newspaper reporters are as disgusted with local circumstances as their articles indicate,” said the *Chattanooga News* in mid-July, “we can assure them that, in many cases, it is a mutual feeling between them and the community.”¹⁷³ Dayton was glad to see the press leave them be, and while they might now have a slightly better understanding of the debate between evolution and the Bible, the Scopes case did little to actually convince locals one way or another. They still went to church on Sunday, and if they hadn’t gone before the trial, you could bet they were going now. Religion, it seemed, was both a refuge and a source of protest for the town against the continued negative media coverage.

While Dayton was busy paying its final respects to its newly-minted hero Bryan, there was indeed still talk going around town that a memorial university of some sort would be built, and that Bryan himself had approved whole-heartedly of it.¹⁷⁴ Bryan had chosen the location for the proposed college just prior to his death, high atop a picturesque hill overlooking the town. Money came in from all over the country, from Boston to nearby Chattanooga, in the hopes that the school would soon become a reality. There was also some discussion, most often by pastors of local churches, of a Bryan memorial to be built either in Dayton or in Washington D.C., a place where everyone who revered the Great Commoner could go to celebrate his life and works.¹⁷⁵ Josephus Daniels, the former Secretary of the Navy, was even involved in the organization committee of such a monument, but it apparently never made it beyond the initial planning stages.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ *Chattanooga News*, “Dayton Tired of False Writings,” July 16, 1925.

¹⁷⁴ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “Full Support of Bryan Was Pledged To Proposed College in Dayton,” July 28, 1925.

¹⁷⁵ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, “Pastor Proposes Bryan Monument,” July 30, 1925.

¹⁷⁶ Excerpt from Louisville Herald-Post, August 30, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

But the affinity Rhea County continued to feel for Bryan was certainly not shared by everyone. What had happened at the courthouse that July ruptured an already fragile union that had existed between Bryan and his unlikely allies in the antievolution fight, the Fundamentalists. Embittered by the overwhelmingly brutal blow they themselves had suffered at the hands of the press during the Scopes Trial, they now struggled to pick up the pieces, regroup, and attempt to right the perceived wrongs Bryan's defense of their beliefs had wrought. "Bryan's followers were more Fundamentalist than he," Scopes admitted years after the debacle at Dayton, "but he had never taken the trouble to disagree with them."¹⁷⁷ This simple fact had practically escaped Bryan during his lifetime, but now it was being placed front-and-center for all to see by those who felt betrayed by Bryan's actions in the trial. The cross-examination with Clarence Darrow had especially bothered the Fundamentalists, and while Bryan initially saw it as an attempt for him to meet a challenger of the faith head-on in a public debate, it quickly tainted his reputation even amongst those whom he had believed he was helping the most.

Forever an optimist, Bryan remained positive until the very end of his life that his views, the views he believed he shared with average churchgoing Americans throughout the country, would win out in this fight as they had so many times before. Even his death in Dayton, only a short distance from the platform outside the courthouse where his campaign against the teaching of evolution had culminated in that mortifying cross-examination at the hands of Clarence Darrow, ultimately failed to silence his voice on the subject. The final speech he had so intensively labored over was quickly printed and distributed nationwide in newspapers and magazines for all to read, just as he had wished.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Scopes, p. 181

¹⁷⁸ Levine, p. 356

In this speech, he eloquently restated many of the same arguments he had published a few years prior in *In His Image*, emphasizing the dangers inherent in teaching evolution as factual to young, impressionable minds. He liberally quoted Nietzsche and Darwin, used parables from the Bible as proof against the validity of evolution, and openly declared religion as not being hostile toward learning, only toward unprovable hypotheses such as Darwinism. Evolution, he charged, “would eliminate love and carry man back to a struggle of tooth and claw.”¹⁷⁹ He also notably likened blind belief in the sovereignty of scientific discovery to a ship without a compass. Because science could not dictate one’s morals, Bryan reasoned, it was missing a crucial part of what made a human being truly human: spirituality. According to his analogy, this not only robbed the ship of its sense of direction, but also seriously endangered the ship’s precious cargo.¹⁸⁰

“Mother was greatly opposed to father’s activities in assisting in the passage of the anti-evolution laws in several states,” Bryan’s daughter Grace confided in former Scopes prosecutor Sue Hicks fifteen years after the trial. “I was the only member of our immediate family that encouraged him in his efforts. Mother did all she could to prevent father from taking part in the Scopes Trial.”¹⁸¹ With even his wife and the majority of his children standing opposed to his involvement in both the case itself and the overall antievolution movement, including his son William Jennings Bryan, Jr. who actually participated alongside his father in prosecuting Scopes in Dayton, it might appear difficult to understand exactly why Bryan continued to pledge his support to such causes. His wife Mary was especially concerned about his legacy. She feared that

¹⁷⁹ Trial Transcript, p. 334

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 338

¹⁸¹ Letter from Grace D. Bryan to Sue Hicks, April 12, 1940. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

all the work he had done prior to the antievolution controversy might possibly become overshadowed by such an immensely polarizing issue, and thus her husband would be remembered not as a champion of the people, but instead as a religious zealot whose beliefs as he grew older contradicted his previous life's work.

The actions he took in Dayton that summer would indeed serve to define his historical legacy for many decades to come, just as his wife predicted. Largely forgotten are the progressive reforms he fought for throughout his life, the successful political career which led him to three separate Democratic presidential nominations, and the immense popularity he enjoyed among countless Southerners and Westerners who enthusiastically shared his ideals. The Scopes Trial, the culmination of Bryan's final moral battle, was intended to be a great victory that would settle once and for all debates over the evils of Darwinian evolution. As with virtually every other cause he championed during his lifetime, Bryan did not try to win this crusade by arguing with scientists and theologians behind closed doors. Instead he brought his concerns to the people, the common citizens of the nation, and trusted them to make the right decision for themselves. It was particularly fitting, then, that this last battle, the infamous "Monkey Trial" of Tennessee, was his most public, his most remembered, and by far his most controversial.

For the majority of the readers who saw Bryan's posthumous defense of his beliefs, however, their minds were already made up before they finished the first sentence. As scientist W. C. Curtis commented about the Scopes Trial after its conclusion, these people "came to see their idol, 'The Great Commoner', meet the challenge to their faith. They left bewildered but with their faith unchanged despite the manhandling of their idol by the 'Infidel' from

Chicago.”¹⁸² Regardless of the constant arguments back and forth over social issues surrounding evolution or the constitutionality of antievolution legislation, in the end, it seemed most people, including Bryan’s dedicated fans busily preparing grand monuments to his memory in Dayton, based their decision primarily on their religious convictions.

Some, like former defendant John Scopes, evaluated the response to his infamous trial in an entirely different way. “I believe that the Dayton trial marked the beginning of the decline of Fundamentalism,” he speculated, “Each year—as the result of someone’s efforts to better interpret what the defense was trying to do—more and more people are reached. This has retarded the spread of Fundamentalism.”¹⁸³ While Scopes’s analysis would often be repeated by historians as factual, Fundamentalism and its adherents had hardly disappeared in the wake of the trial. Though the antievolution movement they championed had lost its most visible defender with the death of Bryan, the curtains had not fallen on their cause by any stretch of the imagination. Instead, Creationists simply sat quietly backstage, awaiting their next cue.

The new leading voices of Creationism that emerged after 1925 sounded radically different from their politically liberal predecessor. Embarrassed and disillusioned by the perceived setback they had endured in Dayton, they began to retreat from the public eye, shifting their movement to the far right in the process. Scopes Trial historian Edward Larson accurately points out that Bryan’s emphasis on social activism as an integral part of the Christian faith stood at complete odds with those who made up the bulk of the Creationist movement at the time. “Even in the early 1920s,” Larson explains, “when leading fundamentalists enlisted Bryan to aid

¹⁸² W. C. Curtis, “The Evolution Controversy” in *D-Days at Dayton: Reflections on the Scopes Trial*, ed. Jerry R. Tompkins (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 78

¹⁸³ Scopes, p. 31

in their fight against teaching evolution, it is doubtful if many of them ever voted for him.” In fact, the officials at the Moody Bible Institute admitted after his death that they had never voted for him in any of his presidential campaigns.¹⁸⁴

One concession made by Bryan during the Scopes Trial was particularly troubling to Creationists, and served to tarnish his legacy within the movement for years to come. His statement that the earth had not been formed in its entirety “in six days of twenty-four hours” cut to the very heart of Fundamentalist belief.¹⁸⁵ Rooted in a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible, Fundamentalists began to reevaluate their ties with Bryan almost immediately after the trial had ended. Earlier in the century, more flexible interpretations of the age of the earth had existed rather comfortably alongside those that insisted on a fixed date of creation occurring around 4004 BCE. The onslaught of bad publicity surrounding Fundamentalism triggered by the Scopes Trial, combined with the writings of well-known Creationists, meant that, by the end of the twentieth century, “the very word *creationism* had come to signify the recent appearance of life on earth and a geologically significant deluge.”¹⁸⁶

This view, originally differentiated as “young-earth creationism,” swiftly overtook the entire Creationist movement, leaving very little room for diverging interpretations. When asked by Clarence Darrow during the Scopes Trial if he could name any scientists who believed the same way he did, Bryan initially attempted to avoid the question, but eventually gave in. The first name he provided was that of George McCready Price.¹⁸⁷ Price was already well-known

¹⁸⁴ Larson, p. 238

¹⁸⁵ Trial Transcript, p. 299

¹⁸⁶ Numbers, p. 336

¹⁸⁷ Trial Transcript, p. 297.

among Seventh Day Adventists as the primary force behind the flood geology movement. Taking Genesis as an absolutely literal story of creation, along with the writings of the Adventist prophet Ellen G. White, Price had established a name for himself among Creationists during the 1920s as a geologist despite his lack of both formal training and an actual degree in the subject.¹⁸⁸

During the 1940s, Price himself recounted how he had suggested to Bryan before the trial that he should mention some of Price's own theories, such as a literal reading of the age of the earth and the idea that Noah's flood had been the sole cause of the fossil record, in order to "put the evolutionists on the defensive in Dayton." Pastor Ira Hicks, the older brother of two of the prosecuting lawyers in Scopes's case, wrote to them a month before the trial and also suggested they take a look at Price's work as an example of a top geologist who did not believe in evolution.¹⁸⁹ There is no evidence, however, that the Hicks brothers ever tried to contact Price for his assistance. In failing to take his advice seriously, Price insinuated that Bryan was essentially to blame for the failure of the antievolution movement. Had Bryan listened to him, he wrote, "the history of the trial would certainly have been different."¹⁹⁰ Similar sentiments toward Bryan were echoed by countless Creationists in the decades that followed.

As their interpretations of Genesis became narrower and their views more conservative, many within the antievolution movement began to actively encourage withdrawal from public school systems in favor of homeschooling or church schools, where curricula can be closely controlled.¹⁹¹ Though this tendency certainly existed prior to the Scopes Trial, the extreme

¹⁸⁸ Numbers, p. 73

¹⁸⁹ Letter from Ira Hicks to Herbert Hicks, June 5, 1925. Sue K. Hicks Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Lienesch, p. 204

¹⁹¹ Larson, p. 261

scrutiny of their beliefs that accompanied the trial only served to promote such a retreat even further. In the August 1925 issue of the Seventh-Day Adventist magazine *The Watchman*, an issue dedicated entirely to coverage of the events in Dayton and critiques of evolution, one article stated emphatically that any teaching “contrary to the will of the general public, or even to the will of minorities” should have no place in public schools. Rather, these teachings, including both religious subjects and evolution, should be confined instead to private institutions or churches.¹⁹²

While this trend was by no means universal among antievolutionists, it does illustrate one of the few instances where the Creationism that existed after the Scopes Trial accurately resembled that which had existed prior. Writing in 1922, Bryan had echoed virtually the exact same message. “If atheists want to teach atheism, why do they not build their own schools and employ their own teachers?” he questioned in a piece refuting Darwinism written for the *New York Times*, “If a man really believes that he has brute blood in him, he can teach that to his children at home or he can send them to atheistic schools.”¹⁹³ His concern that a “scientific soviet” had overtaken academia in order to force the insidious theory of evolution upon students also troubled him immensely, and the idea that a few “elitist scientists” could demand that their dangerous philosophies be accepted as truth was offensive to him both religiously and politically.¹⁹⁴ By framing the evolution argument in this manner, Bryan and those who came after him obscured the complex issue of science versus religion, relegating both to a more equal playing field of *philosophy* versus *philosophy*.

¹⁹² “The Real Issue in the Tennessee Anti-Evolution Law,” *The Watchman Magazine* Vol. 34, No. 8 (August 1925). p. 21

¹⁹³ *The New York Times*, “God and Evolution,” February 26, 1922. Retrieved from *New York Times* archives. p. 6

¹⁹⁴ Numbers, p. 44

Such calls for “equal time” for both evolution and Creationism, though reaching their zenith during widely-publicized cases in the 1980s, were hardly novel. In a 1925 article entitled “The Real Issue in the Tennessee Anti-Evolution Law,” *The Watchman* stated that, “legislation which shall define what a man shall believe with regard to evolution is *religious legislation*, and is taboo in a free country.”¹⁹⁵ If the perception of evolution could be shifted from a legitimate scientific theory to that of an unprovable hypothesis, then evolution and religious belief could be viewed as dependent upon precisely the same factor: faith. The teaching of any particular system of faith in public schools, argued *The Watchman* and other shrewd Creationist publications, was unacceptable, be it evolution or Christianity.

In 1978, a Yale law student named Wendell Bird went a step further in a paper he published in the *Yale Law Journal*, arguing that Creationism was not religious at all, but scientific. Teaching it in public schools, then, was not only constitutionally legitimate, but *not* teaching it could violate the right of free exercise guaranteed to Creationist students.¹⁹⁶ This new approach resolved many of the lingering legal issues surrounding the teaching of Creationism by not simply demoting evolution to the level of individual belief, but instead raising the status of Creationist theories to the level of legitimate scientific hypotheses. It proved to be quite successful, and within a few years of Bird graduating from Yale, model bills which explicitly referred to the balanced teaching of “evolution-science” and “creation-science” were being introduced in several states.¹⁹⁷ But gaining public acceptance still proved difficult despite these intricate legal maneuvers. Whereas Bryan’s earlier crusade had captured attention on a

¹⁹⁵ “The Real Issue in the Tennessee Anti-Evolution Law,” *The Watchman Magazine*, p. 8

¹⁹⁶ Numbers, p. 320

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 321

nationwide scale, the antievolution crusaders of the latter half of the twentieth century came to depend on a more subtle approach, taking their cause directly to individual teachers and school boards in the hope that small victories would eventually lead to much larger ones.¹⁹⁸

The scientific merit of today's Creationism, nonetheless, is hotly disputed. Many Christian colleges, such as the one eventually founded in Dayton after Bryan's death and named in his honor, now proudly house Creation research centers dedicated to training scientists who can contribute to the academic growth of scientific Creationism both in the United States and abroad. In fact, Bryan College's Center for Origins Research (CORE) had as its former director Kurt P. Wise, a Harvard-trained geologist whose graduate advisor was none other than Stephen Jay Gould.¹⁹⁹ Specializing in the study of "created kinds," or *baraminology*, CORE's biologists work with the small number of other leading creation-scientists through study groups and academic conferences, and were even involved in the planning of the Answers in Genesis Creation Museum in Kentucky.²⁰⁰ Ironically, their beliefs on creation more closely mirror those of George McCready Price than those of William Jennings Bryan. An article published in 2006 on the status of *baraminology*, written by the current director of Bryan College's CORE, Dr. Todd C. Wood, openly employs Price's theories on "created kinds" as reliable source material for his own research on the subject.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 322

¹⁹⁹ Kurt P. Wise, "Truly A Wonderful Life: Review of Stephen J. Gould's *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*," *Origins Research* Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 1990).

²⁰⁰ Answers in Genesis Blog, "Counsel with Many Advisors," <http://blogs.answersingenesis.org/blogs/creation-museum/2006/03/31/counsel-with-many-advisors/> Accessed April 3, 2010.

²⁰¹ Todd C. Wood, "The Current Status of Baraminology," *Creation Research Society Quarterly Journal* Vol. 43, No. 3 (December 2006).

Perhaps the most enduring aspect of the movement has not been the methods used in trying to eradicate evolution from public schools, nor the attempts to legitimize their beliefs through science, but instead the system of thought behind antievolutionary philosophy. “The real question is, did God use evolution as His plan?” Bryan inquired in a *New York Times* piece from 1922, “If it could be shown that man, instead of being made in the image of God, is a development of beasts we would have to accept it, for truth is truth and must prevail.”²⁰² The threat to humanity’s uniqueness in the eyes of God has always been a constant theme of Creationist arguments against evolution, specifically those focused on the social and moral impacts of teaching Darwinism, such as Bryan himself.

Modern-day Creationism, firmly rooted as it is in the “young earth” ideas which took over the movement after the Scopes Trial, continues to struggle with the question of humanity’s unique creation, abandoning more liberal interpretations in favor of meticulous Biblical literalism on this and virtually every other point of contention. “The very nature of God comes into question if He chose evolution as a means to form man,” Dr. Kurt P. Wise commented in a review of one of Stephen Jay Gould’s books on evolution. “The literal reading of the macroevolutionary history of the earth is that man is an accident—at best an afterthought of nature’s process.”²⁰³ Despite a degree from Harvard and advanced training in his field, Dr. Wise’s remark still appears to echo the same sentiment *The Watchman* put forth in an issue from 1922: “If evolution is God’s way of doing things, then God did not inspire the writing of the story of creation; but we believe He did.”²⁰⁴

²⁰² *The New York Times*, “God and Evolution,” p. 4

²⁰³ Wise, “Truly A Wonderful Life.”

²⁰⁴ “Evolution Not God’s Way of Doing Things,” *The Watchman Magazine* Vol. 31, No. 12 (November 1922).

By 1959, the year that John R. Neal passed away, the worries about the state of education in Tennessee schools he had voiced most of his life suddenly didn't seem nearly as far-fetched as they had back in 1925 when he defended John Scopes in a test case against an antievolution statute. The Fundamentalist university that Dayton had wanted so desperately was now a reality. William Jennings Bryan College stood a short drive down the highway from Neal's own home in the northern end of Rhea County, though the interesting dynamic between himself, the advocate of liberal public education without limitations upon the freedom of speech of its teachers, and the private Christian college, with the catchy slogan "Christ Above All" and its plethora of conservative-minded Bible classes, was perhaps lost upon the folks of Dayton. They were immensely proud of their new school, and they hoped it could finally heal the many open wounds that still permeated the lovely valleys and scenic mountains of Rhea County.

But some of the original local critics of the Butler Act, such as Neal and George Rappleyea and Scopes himself, would have likely been far less concerned with the advent of a Christian Bible college in town than with the overall shifting of both tactics and views experienced by the antievolution movement in the decades following the Scopes Trial. Antievolutionists weren't just looking for a fight anymore, they were trying to start another crusade, and education would be their designated weaponry of choice. While they might have done everything in their power to sweep under the rug the embarrassing memories of William Jennings Bryan contradicting the very beliefs they held so dear on the witness stand that hot July day back in 1925, the new faces of Creationism intended to come out victorious this time, and to do it on their own terms with their very own science.

What would become of Rhea County then? Could it finally sit back and watch as all the talk of evolution and Genesis moved on to another venue, preferably as far away from Tennessee as it could get? As the recollections of the “monkey business” slowly faded from the minds of the locals, as many of the participants and witnesses involved in the trial died or moved on to other places, the stories they could have shared about what happened there went with them. The generation that had experienced the Scopes Trial with their own eyes seemed less than willing to remember it, let alone pass down their memories to their children and grandchildren. So many of the monkey trinkets, the lighthearted signs, the songs and pamphlets and photos of the “Trial of the Century,” once plentiful in Dayton, were thrown away or lost to us over the years. What little remained, however, would serve to shape the heritage of the Scopes Trial in Rhea County even up to the present day. After all, Dayton couldn’t hide from its history as “Monkey Town” forever.

6. “WE WON”:

DAYTON AND THE LEGACY OF THE SCOPES TRIAL

“Bryan made the grade. His place in the Tennessee hagiocracy is secure. If the village barber saved any of his hair, then it is curing gall-stones down there today.”

— *H. L. Mencken*²⁰⁵

Sue Hicks was the kind of person who kept everything. Combing through the countless stacks of papers he collected throughout his years of being an attorney and later a judge, virtually every case he was involved in is somehow represented. But by far the largest archive in Hicks’s possession when he passed away in late 1980 had to do with the most well-known trial in which he ever participated, *State of Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes*. Inside the boxes of folders now housed at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, you can find everything from telegrams to personal letters to some of the original schoolwork from Rhea County High School’s infamous biology classroom, graded by John Scopes himself. Tucked away behind old newspapers and legal briefs is a small card, an invitation to attend the opening of a movie that premiered at the Dayton Drive-In Theatre on July 21, 1960. “In honor of Scopes Trial Day,” it reads, “you are cordially invited to the first public U.S. presentation of Stanley Kramer’s ‘Inherit the Wind.’ Admission by reservation only.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Mencken, p. 130

²⁰⁶ Invitation, Sue K. Hicks Papers.

For the initial showing of the play-turned-film that would alter the way people around the globe interpreted the Scopes Trial, all the living participants in the case, including John Scopes himself, were invited back to Dayton for the big event. The town intended it to be a celebration of sorts, one of the first of its kind in a town that had tried for so many years previously to forget about what had taken place there back in 1925. People treated Scopes like a celebrity on his return to Dayton, presenting him with a key to the city and giving him an opportunity to speak publicly on a few different occasions, a privilege he had not enjoyed during the original trial that bore his name. At the same time, the mayor announced it would soon create a Scopes Trial Museum in the basement of their famed courthouse to honor their legacy for generations to come.²⁰⁷

The fanfare surrounding the Scopes Trial Day of 1960 was indeed a huge departure for Dayton, a place that had actively worked to counteract the ill effects of their reputation as “Monkey Town” ever since the last few sensationalistic reporters trickled away from the city thirty-five years prior. It took the intervention of Hollywood to finally force Dayton to embrace its controversial legacy, and although many locals today still resent the image of their beloved town painted in *Inherit the Wind*, it is far more probable that the tourists who have visited Dayton over the past few decades since its release have done so because of the film and not the actual trial. While Dayton struggles to come to terms with its place in history, the college that was founded in the name of William Jennings Bryan has flourished, and numerous reminders in the form of festivals and monuments to the trial have popped up throughout Rhea County over the years.

²⁰⁷ *The Dayton Herald*, “‘Scopes Trial Day’ In Dayton Thursday Amid Big Celebration,” July 21, 1960. From the personal collection of Mary Galloway.

“Today, the people of Dayton can discuss the case among themselves without hard feeling,” wrote Frank Glass, Jr. in a brief *Dayton Herald* opinion piece for Scopes Trial Day, “But let a stranger speak and all of Dayton rises together to let it be known that accounts circulated throughout the world in 1925 concerning the town, the people, their habits and beliefs, were simply not true.”²⁰⁸ In 1960, Dayton was still fighting back against the idea of their home as a place where science was unwelcome and superstition reigned supreme. Although *Inherit the Wind* certainly did nothing to help change this backward conception of the town and of Bryan, their hometown hero, Rhea County as a whole has made great strides in attempting to embrace what they once were, taking both the good and the bad and combining them into something unique and marketable to the rest of the world. But the Scopes Trial itself, the primary culprit behind all of Dayton’s heartache, is still a point of contention that is often forgotten, even in its own place of birth.

High atop a scenic hill looking down over all of Dayton sits the small but beautiful campus of Bryan College. Drive through the elaborate, newly-constructed brick entrance off of Highway 27, past the twin lion statues flanking signs that read “Christ Above All,” up the little road framed with flowers, park benches, and monuments dedicated to its alumni, and you will soon find yourself face-to-face with Dayton’s pride and joy. “We’ll build our own university!” the “hustling druggist” who helped orchestrate the Scopes Trial, F. E. Robinson, exclaimed when asked by reporters in 1925 if he anticipated any trouble concerning academic standards within Tennessee not measuring up to the rest of the nation thanks to the Butler Act.²⁰⁹ And build it they

²⁰⁸ *The Dayton Herald*, “Not ‘Monkey Town,’” July 21, 1960. From the personal collection of Mary Galloway.

²⁰⁹ Allem, p. 101

did, albeit with a five year delay due to initial funding issues. William Jennings Bryan University, as it was then called, first opened its doors in 1930 and has been educating students to be Christian leaders in a secular world ever since.

“No religious test is required of any student for admission,” wrote the *Dayton Herald* in 1960 in an article singing the good praises of what Bryan College had managed to do for the community since its inception, “but by charter provision no person may serve as a trustee or faculty member of the college who does not subscribe to the evangelical theological position of the college.”²¹⁰ Dedicated to the famous defender of their faith during the earliest years of the antievolution controversy, William Jennings Bryan’s personal philosophy of a well-rounded Christian education can still be found everywhere on campus even to this day. The mission of the college is simple: “Bryan College is founded upon the belief that God is the author of truth; that He has revealed Himself to humanity through nature, conscience, the Bible, and Jesus Christ; that it is His will for all people to come to a knowledge of truth; and that an integrated study of the liberal arts and the Bible, with a proper emphasis on the spiritual, mental, social, and physical aspects of life, will lead to the balanced development of the whole person.” The school encourages all of its students to “practice a Christian lifestyle” and to “maintain a well-developed Biblical worldview.”²¹¹

But what is a “Biblical worldview?” All new students at Bryan College receive a lengthy handbook filled with guidelines that seeks to answer just such a question. The handbook specifically states that the college is both an academic *and* a faith community, one that has a set

²¹⁰ *The Dayton Herald*, “Bryan College is an Outgrowth of the Scopes Trial,” July 21, 1960. From the personal collection of Mary Galloway.

²¹¹ Bryan College website, “Educational Philosophy.” <http://www.bryan.edu/570.html> Accessed April 9, 2012.

of standards by which all students, faculty, and staff are expected to abide. There is a dress code, applying more stringently to women than it does to men, and there are particular rules governing everything from interpersonal relationships, off-campus activities, and church membership. Dancing and objectionable movies, television shows, and music are prohibited on the college grounds so as to “avoid evil and enhance a pure life.”²¹² Attendance three days a week at the on-campus chapel is mandatory. These rules seem quite severe, but they all add up to what their adherents see as a reverent, more Christian, and more Biblical way of viewing the world around them. “While this set of standards may not be the preference of each individual,” the handbook states, “those who choose to join the Bryan community do so voluntarily and, therefore, willingly take upon themselves the responsibility to abide by these guidelines.”²¹³

When Warren Allem, a history student at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, asked locals in 1959 if any good had come out of the Scopes Trial, the response he received was a fairly uniform one: “Well, we got Bryan College.”²¹⁴ Despite its meager beginnings in 1930, the school has truly helped to shape the modern face of Dayton. One of the most important ways it has continued to do so is through the Center for Origins Research, or “CORE,” a Creationist academic organization housed on campus that has established itself as one of the most respected centers of its kind in the country. Home to a few scientists who openly advocate Creationism as a valid scientific alternative to evolutionary theory, CORE has had on its staff over the years both old- and young-earth Creationists.²¹⁵ While they do not openly advocate one particular approach

²¹² Bryan College Student Handbook 2011-2012, p. 27

²¹³ Ibid, p. 24

²¹⁴ Allem, p. 103

²¹⁵ Personal interview with Tom Davis, February 28, 2012.

to Creationism over the other, their current research does tend to be geared more toward a young-earth viewpoint.

As part of their commitment to Creationist biology, Bryan College has recently implemented an Origins Studies minor, with a class called Biological Origins as one of its foundational requirements. The course textbook is written by the current director of CORE, Dr. Todd C. Wood, and its purpose according to a 2009 syllabus is to “cover the nature of science, interpretations of Genesis, evidence for evolution, the creationist biology model, and popular creationism.”²¹⁶ The students discuss the merits and shortcomings of both the evolutionary and creationist theories each week, become more familiar with both through lectures and assigned readings, and take three exams to test their knowledge. Class sessions each day could easily be mistaken for a typical biology course at any college or university anywhere in the United States, with the most notable exception being that this biology class “opens in short prayer or reading of a Scripture verse,” and the supplementary textbook is the Bible.²¹⁷

The proud stance taken on behalf of a Biblical Christian way of life by those affiliated with Dayton’s one and only college in many ways harkens directly back to the Scopes Trial from whence it came. William Jennings Bryan, the college’s ideological founder and namesake, while seen by his critics as a failure because of his humiliating performance in the trial, is regarded in Rhea County as a hero of the faith. His embarrassment on the witness stand as a Bible expert against the relentless questioning of Clarence Darrow is emblematic of the way Bryan College continues to approach its concept of a Biblical worldview. Bryan’s “defeat” at the hands of Darrow is interpreted instead as his victory, “the occasion of a man’s standing up

²¹⁶ Syllabus for BIO 314: Biological Origins, Spring 2009, available on CORE website. <http://bryancore.org/>

²¹⁷ Ibid

publicly for the Bible, for God, taking upon himself the ridicule and scorn of all unbelievers.”²¹⁸ Bryan was a martyr to their cause that hot summer of 1925, and the college named in his honor wishes to carry on his mission and spread it to the world. But unlike Bryan, who was caught off guard and subsequently made to appear foolish by Darrow, they teach their students instead to always be ready with an answer. The school requires Christian Worldview classes of everyone here, regardless of your major, so Bryan College can send out into every corner of the globe Christian innovators who will never be unprepared for a fight again. Whether it’s standing one’s ground on the subject of Creationism or of Biblical truths, the ultimate goal is to pick up where William Jennings Bryan left off.

For four days every July since 1988, Rhea County once again adorns the brick walls of its courthouse with “READ YOUR BIBLE” signs, fills the courtroom with anxious spectators, and puts on yet another show. The Scopes Trial Festival attracts curious visitors each year, culminating in a live “documentary drama based almost entirely on the transcript of the trial,” performed in the actual courtroom where it all took place in 1925.²¹⁹ This performance, the highlight of the annual Scopes Trial Festival, is generally acted out by locals from Rhea County and surrounding areas, many of whom have been involved in it for years and have done a great amount of research on their particular characters in order to portray them as accurately as possible.²²⁰ The script itself, scheduled to be re-written for the 2012 festival, is both produced and overseen by students and others affiliated with Bryan College.

²¹⁸ Susan Field Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 71

²¹⁹ Richard Cornelius, “The World’s Most Famous Court Trial,” Bryan College Website, <http://bryan.edu/802.html> Accessed April 10, 2010.

²²⁰ Personal interview with Steve Orender, September 9, 2011.

Although the Scopes Trial Play and Festival is one of the biggest attractions Dayton holds each year, it is not necessarily popular among locals who aren't involved with the production themselves. It is, in fact, mostly attended by visitors from out of town, with non-locals making up roughly two-thirds of the audience annually.²²¹ Rhea County businesses, however, still set up tents and booths all over the courthouse lawn, much as they did in 1925 when the real trial was taking place. Churches especially are a big presence, handing out religious pamphlets and talking with visitors as they pass. Perhaps the real draw for any Daytonians who might venture down to the courthouse to check out the festivities is the fact that, in addition to the festival commemorating the Scopes Trial, it also features an antique tractor show and gospel singing, the latter of which is a constant presence at virtually every public occasion in Rhea County to this day.

Celebrating such a contentious event in the history of their city was not always a priority for Dayton, and at one point people considered it something bordering upon disrespectful. In the 1970s, local leaders simply were not interested in promoting the Scopes Trial to tourists or to anyone else for that matter. They saw it as less of a historic case than as a blight upon Rhea County, one that was an “embarrassment to the older generation.”²²² Since then, there has been a more concerted push toward allowing the trial its rightful place in the legacy of Dayton, coinciding especially with the advent of an association of businesses and individual citizens who sought to renovate and preserve not just the courthouse area, but all of downtown. The streets are filled with Scopes Trial landmarks, and in the past 30 years much more effort has gone into highlighting these places rather than hiding them.

²²¹ Personal interview with Tom Davis, February 28, 2012.

²²² Ibid

Walking around downtown Dayton today, visitors will undoubtedly notice the small bronze plaques placed conspicuously on the side of buildings along Market Street. The Scopes Trial Trail markers designate specific places that were relevant during the 1925 trial, including the former site of F. E. Robinson's Drug Store where the whole performance was initially plotted, now an empty field next to the parking lot of a drive-thru bank. Outside of the Rhea County Courthouse, a Tennessee historical marker stands near the sidewalk detailing briefly what took place there so many years ago. The sign reads: "Here, from July 10 to 21, 1925, John Thomas Scopes, a county high school teacher, was tried for teaching that man descended from a lower order of animals, in violation of a lately passed state law. William Jennings Bryan assisted the prosecution; Clarence Darrow, Arthur Garfield Hays and Dudley Field Malone the defense. Scopes was convicted." Notably absent from the official Tennessee state marker are the people involved in the trial who were actually *from* Tennessee. No mention is made of Sue and Herbert Hicks, John R. Neal, Ben McKenzie, or any of the other important local players. Instead, the sign commemorates the men who came from far away to make Dayton what it is today, and somehow forgets to credit those who were already there to begin with.

Tucked away in the basement of the courthouse is the Scopes Trial Museum, originally planned by Mayor J. J. Rogers during the inaugural Scopes Trial Day back in July of 1960.²²³ When you first step inside the dungeon-like series of rooms, an aging multi-volume set of *The Fundamentals* sits under glass ready to greet you. Large images of William Jennings Bryan in the middle of one of his fiery speeches adorn the walls, and around the corner you can view the infamous table from Robinson's Drug Store where it all started back in May of 1925. The

²²³ *The Dayton Herald*, "Creation of Scopes Museum Announced for Courthouse," July 21, 1960. From the personal collection of Mary Galloway.

museum houses a few original artifacts: some stuffed monkey dolls, a promotional pamphlet extolling the virtues of Dayton to visitors to the trial, a dress worn by a local woman during one of the daily proceedings. The majority of the items on display in the museum, however, are not originals, but reproductions.²²⁴ Dayton's residents, so eager to forget the event that had left such a noticeable stain upon their town, just didn't seem to care about keeping many of the now-priceless items that once commemorated their "Trial of the Century."

"These people came down here to tell us we came from monkeys and that the Bible isn't true," a mother explained softly to her two children as she guided them through the windowless rooms of the basement museum, "But we won."²²⁵ It is impossible to know if the woman who described the events of the Scopes Trial this particular way to her young sons in July of 2011 was from Rhea County or possibly a tourist visiting from out of town. Like the annual Scopes Trial Festival, the courthouse's museum typically attracts far more visitors than it does locals. Regardless of where she was from or why she came, her words draw attention to the interesting legacy that still surrounds the trial in both Dayton and beyond. It was an argument, a fight between people who "came down" from some distant place far away to try to prove "us" wrong. They tried to get rid of our religion and convince us that science was the real answer. But in the end, "we" came out victorious. "We" won.

Now more than ever before, the issues at hand in the Scopes Trial are viewed in such absolute terms by the people who call Dayton home. The community that, in 1925, was largely made up of moderate Methodists is still sprinkled with numerous churches, but today those churches seem a great deal more conservative than they did back then. Outward expressions of

²²⁴ Personal interview with Tom Davis, February 28, 2012.

²²⁵ Conversation overheard by author, July 26, 2011.

religion, such as the ubiquitous sound of gospel music at the Scopes Trial Festival and virtually every other local event, are quite common and accepted without question. Dayton's McDonald's restaurant has long hosted a Thursday night gospel singing that is open to the public each and every week.²²⁶ Religion in many ways is a defining characteristic of the community, and that sentiment even extends into the public schools. At the Rhea County High School, mornings are begun with a "moment of silence" announcement over the intercom, giving students a chance to pray if they wish. Local football games, themselves eliciting an almost religious devotion around the county, are still prefaced by a devotional.

But not all things stay the same in Dayton. Evolution is taught without much incident at the high school even though a renowned Creationist research center lies just a few miles down the road. According to Joe Wilkey, the long-time head of the science department at Rhea County High School, he himself only recalls "maybe two or three times" that a parent has complained about their child having to learn about evolutionary theory in biology class, and there haven't been many disagreements coming from the students themselves, either.²²⁷ A minor controversy did erupt as recently as 2008, however, over a billboard that was conspicuously placed inside the southern border of Rhea County commemorating the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin. "I felt like they were trying to take a swipe at Bryan College and Dayton," said a local woman interviewed by the *Chattanooga Times-Free Press*.²²⁸ The billboard was eventually taken down with little fanfare.

²²⁶ *The Rhea County Herald-News*, "Church Notes," January 27, 2012.

²²⁷ Personal interview with Joe Wilkey, January 17, 2012.

²²⁸ *Chattanooga Times-Free Press*, "Tennessee: Evolutionist group erects Darwin billboard," January 31, 2009.

Since its founding in 1930, Dayton and Bryan College have shared a symbiotic relationship, deriving their collective sense of identity from the enduring legacy of the Scopes Trial. The adoration of the school's namesake has never ceased throughout Rhea County, as well. In 2005, the town erected a large statue depicting William Jennings Bryan on the courthouse lawn.²²⁹ He fought the good fight against evolution for the sake of the Bible in Dayton, and his death in the heart of Republican East Tennessee undoubtedly helped to fuel the cult of personality that has arisen around the unlikely Democrat. During the summer of 2011, signs appeared along the highways throughout Rhea County instructing passersby to "Save America, Vote Republican." The admiration locals still feel toward Bryan somehow allows them to be more than willing to forgive him his otherwise inexcusable political leanings.

When the epic production that ultimately became the Scopes Trial was first plotted in early May of 1925, Dayton was proud of its heritage as a progressive, forward-looking Southern town with unconventional roots. It was a New South town, built and financed by money from the Northeast, filled with factories and coal works and folks from all over the country who had settled there and adopted the city as their own. After the trial and the media frenzy that surrounded it had finally passed them by, Dayton shifted its conception of itself considerably as a clear reaction to the negative images painted of them for all the world to see. Today, Dayton's reflection in the mirror reveals a traditional, conservative place, one that embraces the Southern small-town ideal with enthusiasm and wouldn't dream of wincing if you were to refer to them as the metaphorical buckle of the Bible Belt. In fact, many locals would smile and agree with you. If the ever-critical H. L. Mencken were to visit Dayton today, he would probably dislike it even

²²⁹ Richard Cornelius, "The World's Most Famous Court Trial," Bryan College Website, <http://bryan.edu/802.html> Accessed April 10, 2010.

more than the Dayton he saw first-hand in 1925. Instead of pushing back against the stereotype of the South as a religious haven, they now whole-heartedly embrace it.

Looking back through the overstuffed folders of various documents former local prosecutor Sue Hicks collected during his lifetime, you can see with your own eyes the attempt that was made by someone whose life was directly affected by the debacle at Dayton to preserve as much as he could about what really happened there. Hand-written notes scribbled on hastily-typed witness statements, careful clippings from area newspapers containing important details, and correspondences between members of the prosecution discussing issues as mundane as meeting times and lodging preferences, all assembled together and saved, perhaps knowing they might be some of the only records left one day. Among these were numerous items pertaining to William Jennings Bryan, ranging from letters to a speech Hicks apparently gave at an event held in Bryan's honor after the Great Commoner had passed away in Dayton. Another piece of paper contained the lyrics to a common hymn that had been rewritten with Bryan as the chosen subject. "His Soul Goes Marching On," sings the refrain.

"Since I have left the locale," John Scopes opined in his autobiography, "there have been a great many efforts through the years, by mail and by telephone, to evangelize me, proving that the people of Dayton were a great deal more sensible than many in the world outside."²³⁰ Despite its continuously bad reputation following the media circus that was the Scopes Trial, Dayton has somehow weathered the storm and now finally appears ready to start confronting its storied past. Sweeping it under the rug and trying to forget about it simply won't do anymore, and with the

²³⁰ Scopes, p. 97

fabled Rhea County Courthouse still standing in the heart of the city and Bryan College just up the hill, it would be practically impossible for the memory of the trial that put Dayton on the map to continue to be buried in the minds of the few remaining residents who retain any recollections of it. Those who lived it are long gone, and now the second-hand stories of Bryan and Darrow and “Monkey Town” are all that remain. The courthouse museum, the Scopes Trial Festival, the plaques and the monuments are all attempts to grasp once again at something that could have easily been lost in time.

From the first moment they descended upon Rhea County that fabled summer of 1925, ready to report back with all the Southern backwardness and religious zealotry that curious readers wanted to see when they opened their newspapers each morning, the great legend of Dayton has been primarily shaped by those who hailed from far outside its own borders. The overall narrative of the Scopes Trial, and of Dayton itself, has since continued to be written from that very same perspective; outsiders looking in on an event and a place they themselves do not know. The image they create is often out of focus, crafted together from many different and often conflicting fragments of information about the town, its people, and its values. Today, Dayton has finally started to take control of its own legacy. Perhaps now they realize that if they fail to piece their story together themselves, they are once again giving others the chance to define them.

CONCLUSION

"Dayton is the center and the seat of this trial largely by circumstance... Here has been fought out a little case of little consequence as a case, but the world is interested because it raises an issue, and that issue will some day be settled right, whether it is settled on our side or the other side."

— *William Jennings Bryan*²³¹

Summer approaches once again in Rhea County. Locals line up at the fruit stands surrounding the courthouse, hoping to catch their first glimpse of the bright red strawberries that once held claim to being the single biggest attraction in these parts. The heat approaches, the students are out for the season, and the energy breezing through the warm May air feels surprisingly similar to how it likely felt that most infamous of summers so many years ago. A few people sit beneath the old maple trees on the courthouse yard in what is now known as the “Scopes Trial Grove,” while others shuffle down the decorated sidewalk nearby, the entire length of which is dotted with notable events in Rhea County’s history etched neatly into the concrete. The scene here is a familiar one, repeated year after year in the center of a town where things tend to change very little despite the passage of time.

Change, however, has certainly not failed to pay Dayton a visit over the past eight decades since the Scopes Trial. So many of the places that made the event what it was have long been

²³¹ Trial Transcript, p. 316

gone, torn down and replaced by newer, potentially more pleasant buildings that don't evoke such heated memories among those who lived through the media circus experienced there back in 1925. But sometimes, in the smallest of ways, these memories are allowed to live again. Whether it's through the Scopes Trial Festival scheduled to take place each July, or through the occasional stuffed monkey placed precariously in the window of a shop on Market Street, the trial that forever altered Dayton simply refuses to disappear completely from the town's collective mind. Regardless of the controversies surrounding it or the hotly-disputed images of Rhea County it still cultivates, it has in so many ways recreated, rebuilt, and reshaped Dayton into what it is today.

Overlooking the scene on the courthouse lawn is the specter of William Jennings Bryan. The statue of his likeness stands upon a pedestal bearing the words "Truth and Eloquence," two of Bryan's qualities most revered by Dayton's citizens, who will always consider him their defender and their hero. While Rhea County still adores the Great Commoner as if he had visited their town only yesterday, his reputation outside of Tennessee has not generally been so overwhelmingly favorable. Critics still argue over the complexities of his beliefs, disagree about whether or not he was sincere in his endeavors in the antievolution movement, and even place the blame solely upon him for the perceived decline in antievolutionism and Fundamentalism after the Scopes Trial. But regardless of what kind of effect Bryan actually had on the movement, it is difficult to deny that he was the major voice behind it, and that his views on evolution tended to have a direct and powerful influence upon those who heard them, to a far greater extent than any other Creationist figure during his time.

The complex and contentious issues fought over during Dayton's trial are far from resolved. Antievolutionism is a movement that is as much alive in 2012 as it was in 1925, and it shows no signs of diminishing as the years progress. It has a fresh new face now, and it comes equipped with a barrage of scientific books, journals, and studies all wrapped up in the more widely acceptable guise of modern-day Creationism. The Scopes Trial was its tipping point, revealing the movement's true friends and its true enemies and allowing them to reevaluate their approach in a more conventional, academic way. Gone are the days of William Jennings Bryan preaching on the merits of the Genesis story of creation from a moralistic viewpoint in order to convince the common people of its worth. Now, the popular appeal of Bryan has been virtually discarded by the antievolution crusade he helped shape, favoring instead a more even-handed fight between the scientific theory of evolution versus the scientific theory of Creation. "You boys might live to know whether evolution is true or not," Bryan remarked to Sue Hicks in a comment that would later prove especially foreboding, "but I will not."²³²

In April of 2012, Tennessee governor Bill Haslam allowed the passage of House Bill 368, which "prohibits the state board of education and any public elementary or secondary school governing authority, director of schools, school system administrator, or principal or administrator from prohibiting any teacher in a public school system of this state from helping students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories covered in the course being taught, such as evolution and global warming."²³³ Collectively known by its harshest critics as "Monkey Bill

²³² Allem, p. 107

²³³ "HB0368 Bill Summary," Tennessee General Assembly. <http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/billinfo/BillSummaryArchive.aspx?BillNumber=HB0368&ga=107> Accessed April 15, 2012.

II,” this law renews the issue of teaching evolution in Tennessee’s public schools eighty-seven years after the original “Monkey Bill,” the Butler Act, initially went into effect. Although it is worded differently and is presented as a form of legal protection being granted to public schoolteachers who want to raise valid questions about scientific theories, there is little doubt in the minds of many around the nation that this law simply wishes to open up a wound that has never been given the opportunity to properly heal. The relentless phantom of 1925 once again haunts the halls of the Tennessee state legislature, proving that the more things change, the more they inevitably will stay the same.

All of these debates between theology and science ultimately mean little to the folks still left behind in the place where it all began. July of 1925 marked the period in Rhea County’s history when absolutely everything changed around them in a rapid whirlwind of press coverage and spectacle. Their values and their traditions were subsequently scrutinized by those looking for evidence of the South’s continued backwardness. The Scopes Trial would always be symbolic of the moment when their hometown became part of something far bigger than anyone who initially orchestrated the trial could have ever foreseen. The people of Dayton's lives changed forever that summer. They were no longer living in an area proud of its beautiful scenery, its hard-working people, and its famous strawberries. Now, they lived in “Monkey Town.” Their children, grandchildren, and future generations would all live in “Monkey Town.” Rhea County will never be the same, and no matter how hard it might try, it will never shake its legacy.

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