

One of the defining controversies in American society today is the rift between science and religion, especially as it applies to public school education. Sadly this has been a long standing problem in this country and no subject has divided more people across the United States than the teaching of evolution. Much of the modern debate can be traced back to the sensationalistic Scopes Trial in the summer of 1925. Edward Larson has written the definitive account of these seminal events in his 1997 chronicle *Summer For The Gods*. Larson is a legal professor as well as a historian but this work is not overly technical from a legalese standpoint though it seems that everyone in Dayton, Tennessee during that hot summer almost ninety years ago was involved in the Scopes Case so it may be difficult for readers to keep all the names straight. Larson attempts to break down the mythology surrounding the proceedings, most importantly the legendary confrontation between William Jennings Bryan, the Great Commoner, and the agnostic Clarence Darrow. The author goes to great pains to explain the motivations, especially Bryan's for the criticism of Darwin's theory and what these legal and religious experts were really fighting for during the mid-1920's, a decade of supposed social and intellectual change.

Larson divides his book into three basic parts. The first section deals with the events leading to the trial including the origins of Tennessee's and other states' anti-evolutionary legislation and Scopes' indictment and subsequent involvement with the ACLU. It also

introduces how both Bryan and Darrow became involved in the case as well. Part two chronicles the trial itself and the circus atmosphere that for a little more than a week made Dayton, TN, the hub of the religious, cultural and scientific universe as everyone from HL Menken to President Calvin Coolidge had an opinion on the case (and Coolidge wanted the matter to stay in Tennessee and not become a national issue) (Larson, 122). Finally the third part deals with both the immediate aftermath of the trial and the subsequent appeals and long-term effects that are still felt when any state tries to exercise its right to control its educational curriculum today.

Larson vividly captures the intense heat of those hot summer days and the need for some of the testimony to be heard outside in a make shift courtroom. Bryan is described as jacketless yet still wearing a tie while constantly fanning himself with a handheld straw waver. The Great Commoner appeared for most of the trial as a conquering hero and a true defender of the faith. Clarence Darrow was seen by many in the fundamentalist sect as an almost satanic bully especially in his now apocryphal questioning of Bryan on the latter's biblical knowledge.

Another colorful character and major player during the proceedings who hasn't really gotten his just due historically in any prior accounts of the trial include one Dudley Malone who was actually one of the lead counselors for Scopes. Malone had that typical Irish American brashness and which along with his previous legal reputation and questionable political loyalties (a prominent socialist) alienated him from most of Dayton's politically conservative citizens who may have felt he was as unwelcome as Charles Darwin's ideas. Presiding Judge John T. Ralston, whose overtly fundamentalist beliefs hardly made him an impartial jurist in the

case seemed to be a better suited adversary to Darrow than Bryan as the judge continually checked the brash Chicago attorney's agnosticism and attitude with both citations of contempt and sustained objections from the prosecution. In many ways Ralston seemed to reflect the soul of Dayton and seemed to be much more suited to its defense than a tired old out-of-towner like Bryan. Leading the charge from the ACLU was the man probably most responsible for initiating the Scopes Trial, Arthur Garfield Hays, who represented the Jewish side of Liberalism as Malone represented the Irish immigrant end of the invasion that much of this typical Bible Belt burg feared would corrupt their Protestant Christianity. Hays had hired Malone and George Rappleyea to lead the charge with Clarence Darrow as a sort of "secret weapon" and get an acquittal not only for John T. Scopes but for evolution as well.

Another myth that Edward Larson goes to great lengths to shed a more accurate historical light on is the true meaning of William Jennings Bryan's mission. Was he just a holy roller who would go to any lengths to make teaching evolution illegal nationwide solely because it conflicted with his religious beliefs? Larson explains that Bryan's purpose had true democratic value in that he felt that since public schools were supported by tax dollars then the citizens who paid those taxes should have a say in the curriculum. When presented in this light, Bryan does not come across as the fanatic he has been portrayed as by the popular media of the time or by historians of the 1920's. In fact, Bryan's crusade was very consistent with what he fought for his entire public life; making sure America remained a truly democratic state and not a realm where government could simply impose its will on the people. "Bryan's antievolutionism was compatible with his progressive politics because both supported reform, appealed to majoritarianism, and sprang from his Christian convictions" (Larson, 39). Bryan also compares

with Darrow more favorably in that Darrow would defend anyone anytime if the price was right as he proved during the infamous Leopold and Loeb case (although he, like Malone, worked the Scope's case for free),

"At once I wanted to go...To me it was perfectly clear that the proceedings bore little semblance to a court case, but I realized that there was no limit to the mischief that might be accomplished unless the country was aroused to the evil at hand". (Larson, 101)

The Leopold and Loeb case also perfectly illustrated everything that Bryan thought t was wrong with evolution in its contribution to the eugenics theory; supermen killing someone that they thought was developmentally lacking such as young Bobby Franks and then have these same men defended by Darrow because he was the best defense lawyer money could buy. Also having an acknowledged agnostic such as Darrow proved to be very polarizing and may have actually defeated the ACLU's propaganda battle which in some ways they seemed to want to win as much as the legal one. However a majority of the American people believed contrary to what HL Menken and the other big city intellectuals believed and a Dayton jury with a very unsympathetic (especially toward agnosticism) judge in Ralston made the decision that many of the religious majority in the United States would have approved whole-heartedly.

Speaking of myths about the Twenties, contemporary writers such as Frederick Lewis Allen seemed to champion the rise of secularism and claimed that fundamentalism was on the wane; that quite simply people didn't care as much about religion as their forebears did during the Victorian Age. Darrow's so called destruction of Bryan and the folly of his puritanical and unshakeable beliefs had led many people in the decades since Scopes to claim that evolution and science were the victors in this epic battle. Nothing could have been further from the truth

and according to Larson; the verdict was never in doubt. Popular opinion in the large urban areas where people read Menken and Allen and other liberal intellectuals was not really what a majority of Americans truly cared about.

Religion has not only survived Scopes but the furor over teaching evolution in schools has never gone away. In part three and into his epilogue, Larson narrates the various examples in the United States where the battle between evolution and creationism or intelligent design are still waged into the present day. The communities of Cobb County, Georgia and Dover, Pennsylvania have included in their by-laws clauses that say that science education books either have to carry disclaimers saying that evolution is only a theory or that God's intelligent design makes evolution possible,

“Indeed, the issues raised by the Scopes trial and legend endure precisely because they embody the characteristically American struggle between individual liberty and majoritarian democracy, and cast it in the timeless debate over science and religion.” (Larson, 265)

It seems inevitable that science and religion will forever be at odds no matter how many Galileos, Newtons, Einsteins or Darwins present astounding hypotheses that will continue to drag mankind away from the dark ages of superstition and ignorance.