

## Did the Scopes Trial Prove that Evolution is a Fact?

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Folk law has it that the Scopes ‘Monkey’ Trial disclosed the following:-

- Evolution is a fact, &
- Creation science is not scientific.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- The Tennessee State (USA) passed the anti-evolution Butler Act in March 1925
- The bill made it unlawful for a teacher in a public school to teach evolution
- The Governor signed the bill only if the ban would not be enforced
- The ACLU sought someone to challenge this law in a test case
- George Rappleyea saw notoriety if the challenge took place in Daytona
- John Scopes was convinced by Rappleyea to admit to teaching evolution
- Scopes was not hauled out of the classroom and thrown in jail

## THE TRIAL

**Town:** Dayton, Tennessee.

**Dates:** Began on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1925, and lasted several days.

**Verdict:** Scopes was found guilty.

**Sentence:** Scopes was fined \$100. (Jail was not a penalty under this law)

### **Subsequently:**

- 1927 - The Tennessee Supreme Court threw out the fine on appeal
- 1968 - In the Supreme Court held that such statutes were unconstitutional



## THE MAIN PARTICIPANTS

### **William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925): *Assistant to the Prosecution***

- Presbyterian
- Famous politician and orator
- Secretary of State under US President Woodrow Wilson
- Bible-believer, but not a literalist, or a young-earth creationist
- Scientific knowledge of evolution was unusually sophisticated
- Had read Darwin's "On the Origin of Species"
- Wrote many articles which were critical of the evidence used to defend evolution
- Carried on a long correspondence on evolution with the famous Prof. Henry Osborn

### **Clarence Seward Darrow (1857-1938): *Defence Attorney***

- Nationally famous lawyer
- Prominent public speaker and debater
- Outspoken agnostic
- Poor grasp of evolution
- Believed what scientists wrote



**Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956): *Trial Reporter***

- Controversial and satirical journalist
- America's most popular journalist of the day
- Bitter critic of American life
- Colourful and prejudiced reporter
- Highly antagonistic towards biblical Christianity

**John Thomas Scopes (1900-1983): *The Accused***

- A high school coach
- Not a biology teacher
- Undergraduate degree in law
- Substituted for a biology teacher for two weeks
- Wilfully decided to join an arranged affair
- Was never actually attacked for teaching evolution during the trial



In his autobiography:-

*I said, “If you can prove that I’ve taught evolution, and that I can qualify as a defendant, then I’ll be willing to stand trial.”*

*“You filled in as a biology teacher, didn’t you?” Robinson said.*

*“Yes.” I nodded. “When Mr Ferguson was sick.”*

*“Well, you taught biology then. Didn’t you cover evolution?”*

*“We reviewed for the final exams, as best I remember.”*

*To tell the truth, I wasn’t sure I had taught evolution. Robinson and the others apparently weren’t concerned about this technicality. I had expressed willingness to stand trial. That was enough.*

In Sprague de Camp's book:-

*Scopes' defence lawyers had to coach his students to perjure themselves by claiming that he had taught them evolution, when in fact he hadn't.*

(Conversation between Scopes and reporter William K. Hutchinson of the International News Service)

## **THE LEGAL ANALYSIS** — Phillip Johnson

- American lecturer in Law for over 20 years at the University of California
- “Darwin on Trial” lays out his analysis of the trial

Johnson’s conclusion of the trial was:-

***“From a legal standpoint the outcome was inconclusive.”***



## **THE SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS**

The evidences of the notable religious leaders:-

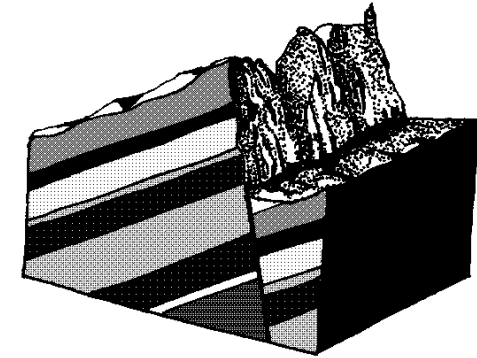
“To science and not to the Bible must man look for the answer to the question as to the process of man’s creation”

(statement by Dr Herbert E. Murkett, Pastor of First Methodist Church, Chattanooga)

Similar statements: Dr Shailer Matthews, Dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and Rabbi Dr Herman Rosenwasser.

## [A] THE GRAND CANYON

“For example, such a vast chasm as the Grand Canyon is explained not as produced by miraculous creation or by sudden catastrophe, but by running water acting upon the rocks throughout innumerable centuries.”



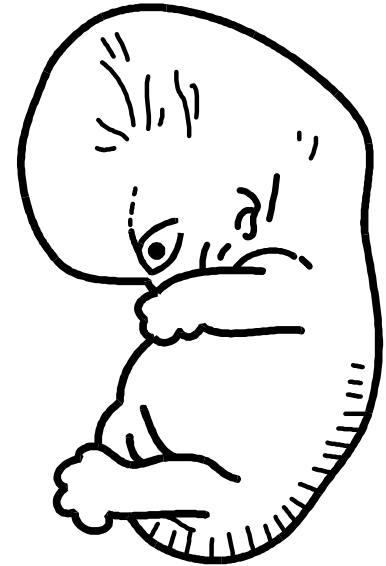
(Dr Winterton C. Curtis, Zoologist, University of Missouri)

**TODAY** — Numerous evolutionary geologists propose catastrophic theories

## [B] EMBRYONIC RECAPITULATION

“The kind of evidence everywhere discoverable may be illustrated by the gill-slits in the embryos of higher vertebrates like reptiles, birds and mammals.”

(Dr Winterton C. Curtis, Zoologist. University of Missouri)

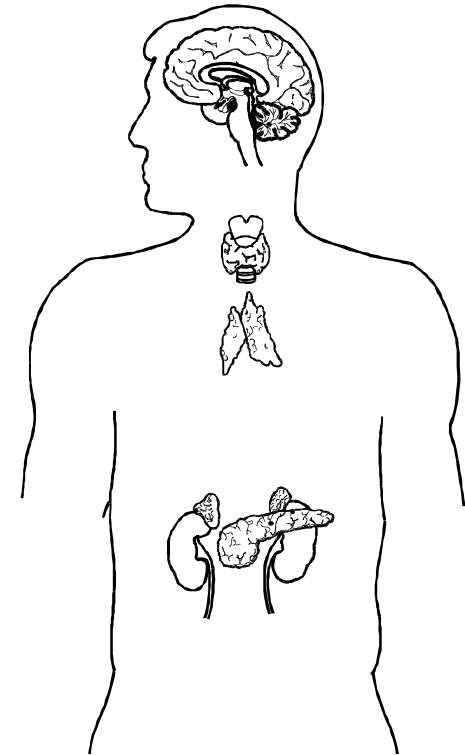


**TODAY** — Abandoned, as a fraud.

## [C] VESTIGIAL ORGANS

“There are, according to Wiedersheim, no less than 180 vestigial structures in the human body ... Among these are the vermiform appendix ...”

(Professor Horatio Hackett Newman, Zoologist, University of Chicago)

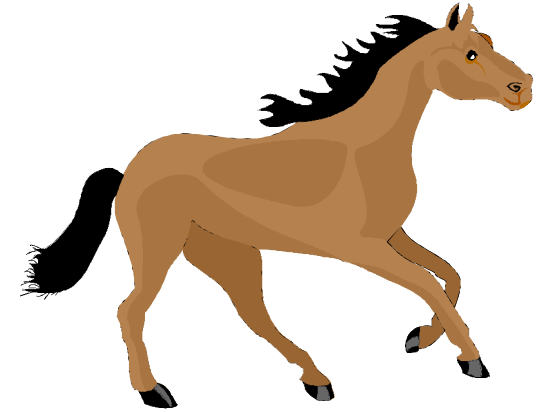


**TODAY** — Abandoned, as almost all have important functions.

## [D] HORSE EVOLUTION

“... the course of evolution of the horse family (Equidae) ... One could hardly ask for a clearer or more conclusive story of evolution that this ...”

(Professor Horatio Hackett Newman, Zoologist, University of Chicago)



**TODAY** — Abandoned, as incorrect.

“... some of the classic cases of Darwinian change in the fossil record, such as the evolution of the horse in North America, have had to be discarded or modified as a result of more detailed information ...”

(David Raup, Curator of Geology, Field Museum of Natural History, 1979)

**[E] PILTDOWN MAN** (*Eoanthropus dawsoni*)

“The most ancient English human relic has been called the dawn man of Piltdown.”

(Professor Horatio Hackett Newman, Zoologist, University of Chicago)



**TODAY** — Abandoned, as a fraud.

**[F] NEBRASKA MAN** (*Hesperopithecus haroldcookii*)

- A very famous American discovery.
- Not brought up as evidence at the trial.
- Greatly prejudiced the opinions of those present.



**TODAY** — Abandoned, as a mistake

Therefore:

***From a scientific standpoint all the evidences have been found to be false, and so they do not prove that evolution is a fact.***



## CONCLUSION



1. Today, in retrospect, from both the scientific and legal standpoint, the Scopes Trial DOES NOT PROVE that evolution is a fact.
2. Nor does the trial prove that creation science is not scientific.
3. It was only the news media coverage that generated the belief that they were proven.