John T. Scopes: A Summer in Hell and a Career in Petroleum Geology*

Matthew R. Silverman¹

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¹Robert L. Bayless, Producer, Denver, CO, United States (msilverman@bayless-cos.com)

Abstract

The most famous person who was a petroleum geologist -- but you probably didn’t know it -- is John T. Scopes. Remember the “Monkey Trial” from your American history books? Scopes was the defendant in the sensational 1925 trial that tested a Tennessee law prohibiting the teaching of human evolution in public schools.

He attended graduate school in geology at the University of Chicago, though the PhD he sought proved elusive. Scopes did field work for two years on the shores of Lake Maracaibo for Gulf Oil’s affiliate in Venezuela. In 1933 he accepted a position as a geologist with United Gas Corporation, for whom he worked in Houston, then in Shreveport, Louisiana, until he retired in 1964. His work focused on reserves, appraisals, economics, and regulatory affairs.

Scopes lived a quiet life after the trial, generally uncomfortable with his notoriety. The trial was the subject of an award-winning 1955 play, Inherit the Wind, as well as several movie and TV adaptations. The law was repealed in 1967 by the Tennessee legislature, and John Scopes died in 1970.

Scopes provides a lesson for our times: the denial of science and the disdain for facts are with us today. It’s still our job as geoscientists to enlighten the public and speak truth to power.
JOHN T. SCOPES: A SUMMER IN HELL AND A CAREER IN PETROLEUM GEOLOGY

EVOLUTION

Matthew R. Silverman
Robert L. Bayless, Producer
AAPG ACE  May 19-23, 2018
• Mary Barrett, Professor Emeritus, Centenary College
• Cat Campbell, Camino Natural Resources
• Vern Stefanic and Andrea Sharrer, AAPG
• Rachel McNerney, Shreveport Geological Society
• Hans Krause, Editor, “Historical Highlights” in *The Explorer*
THE ROARING TWENTIES
John T. Scopes
1900-1970

“A TOWN MARK TWAIN WOULD HAVE LOVED”

Paducah, Kentucky
ALL ANIMAL LIFE INCLUDING MONKEYS AND MEN, HAVE EVOLVED FROM A COMMON ANCESTOR

“EVIL-LUTION”
DARWIN AND DAYTON

Great is the power of steady misrepresentation . . .

Myths die hard and Dayton is not the only place in America where evolution is still thought to mean that *homo sapiens* descended from monkeys rather than our common ancestors.
- John T. Scopes

TENNESSEE PASSES THE BUTLER ACT 1925
John T. Scopes in custody at the trial

“Clarence Darrow, ‘Attorney for the Damned’

“I furnished the body that was needed to sit in the defendant’s chair.”
The antagonists: Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan
H. L. MENCKEN, THE SAGE OF BALTIMORE

COINED THE TERMS “BIBLE BELT” AND “MONKEY TRIAL”

Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.

No one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public.

World-class curmudgeon
GUILTY!

The Monkey Trial

EVOLUTION

Speak not. Hear not. See not.
Post-trial

NOTORIETY IS AS TENACIOUS AS A BEDBUG. I HAD HOPED THAT, ONCE THE TRIAL WAS OVER, MY NOTORIETY WOULD EBB AND I WOULD BE FORGOTTEN. THESE WERE FALSE HOPES.

• JOHN T. SCOPES
General Juan Vicente Gomez

Mene Grande HQ

Zumaque-1 (1914)

General Juan Vicente Gomez
“The offer I got from the oil company was a good one and a young fellow takes what he can get.”

“I would be just another Yankee oil hunter”

“I hate office work and city life.”

Scopes in Venezuela, 1927
“there was no prize that Gulf Oil could win that was worth the risk of going into a Colombian jail.”
- Founded 1930 in Shreveport
- One of the first great gas transmission companies
- First to deliver 1 BCFD
- Moved 8% of US gas; Gulf Coast markets
- Merged into the much smaller Pennzoil 1968; early leveraged buyout (aka raid)

“My personal depression ended in the summer of 1933”
“Mine was the normal, ordinary work characteristic of any large oil and gas company. There were no high lights and I had the same number and same kind of experiences as anyone else who did that type of work.”

Gas reserves, appraisals, oilfield economics, taxation and regulatory affairs, testimony
The Play!

Inherit the Wind

The Movie!

The Road Sign!

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.
Butler Act finally repealed in 1967: “I am very happy.”
IT'S STILL OUR JOB AS SCIENTISTS TO SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER
“THE BASIC FREEDOMS OF SPEECH, RELIGION, ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO TEACH AND TO THINK FOR ONESELF DEFENDED AT DAYTON ARE NOT SO DISTANTLY REMOVED; EACH GENERATION, EACH PERSON MUST DEFEND THESE FREEDOMS OR RISK LOSING THEM FOREVER.”
THANK YOU