

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

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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.

Scopes was a 24-year-old high-school football coach and substitute science teacher in the Bible Belt town of Dayton who was recruited by the ACLU to test the law. In a sweltering, overflowing courtroom, he was convicted in a trial that pitted two of the legal giants of the age against each other. Clarence Darrow appeared for the defense, and three-time Presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan argued for the prosecution. Scopes was fined \$100 and resigned from teaching. His conviction was later overturned on a technicality, though the law was held to be constitutional.

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 The law was repealed in 1967 by the Tennessee legislature, and John Scopes died in 1970.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

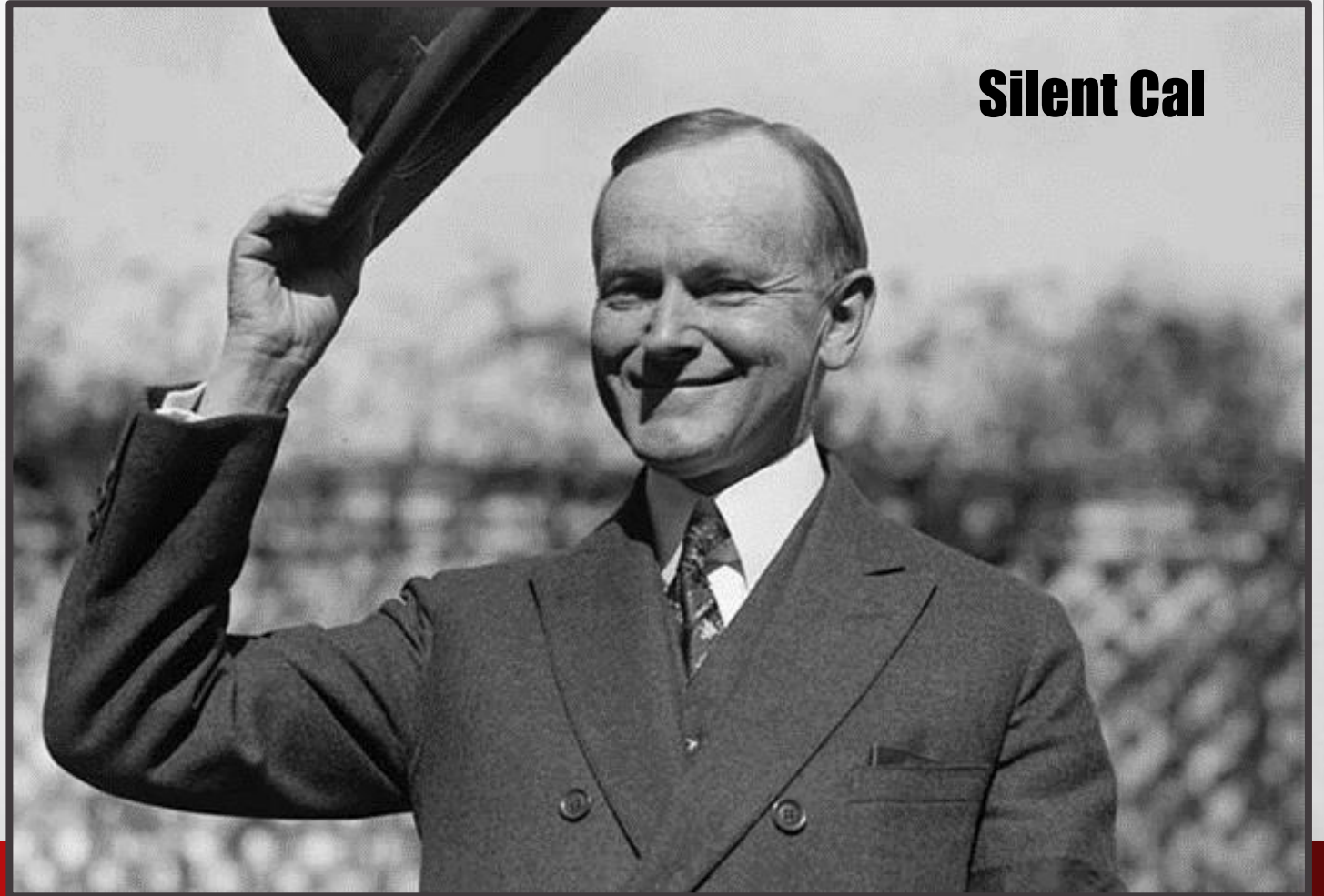


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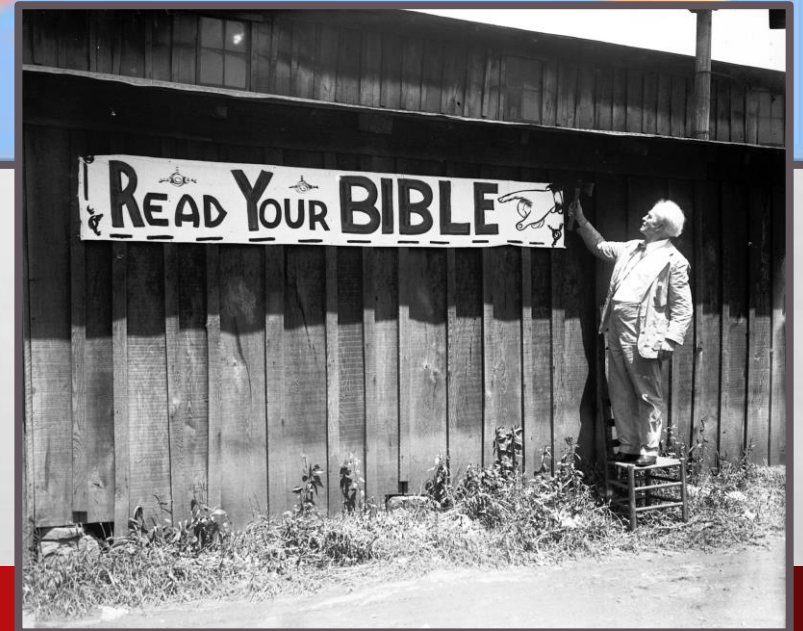
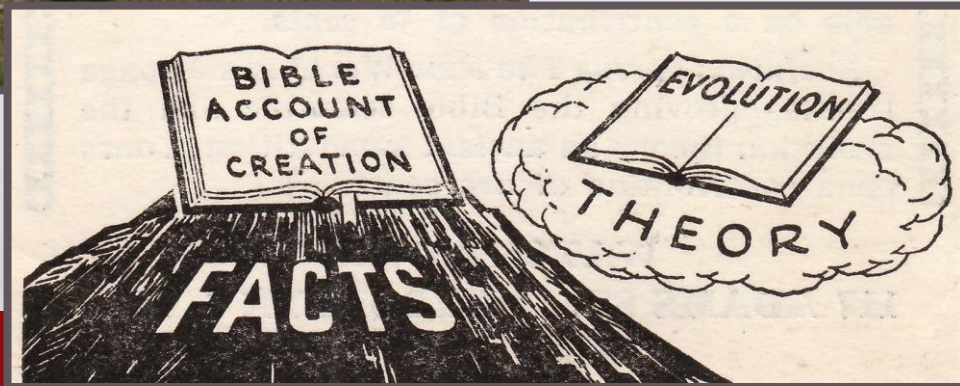
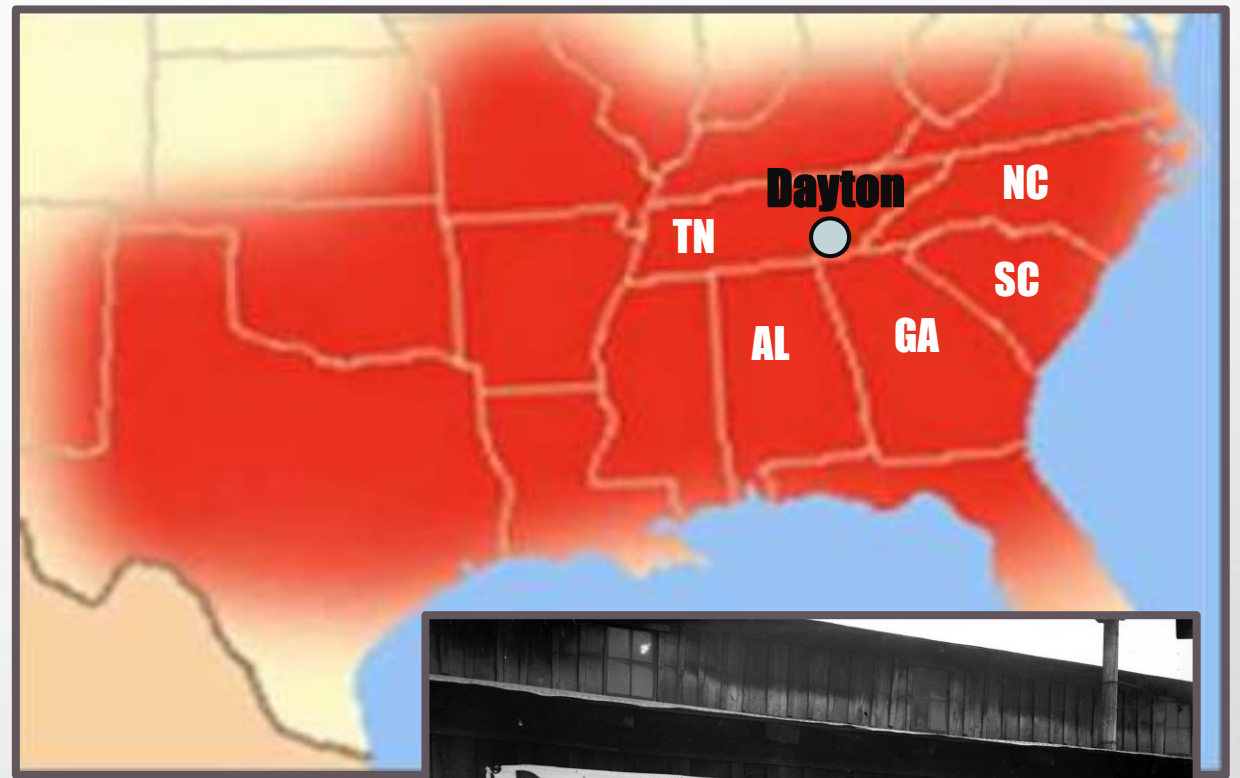


Silent Cal



THE ROARING TWENTIES

THE BIBLE BELT



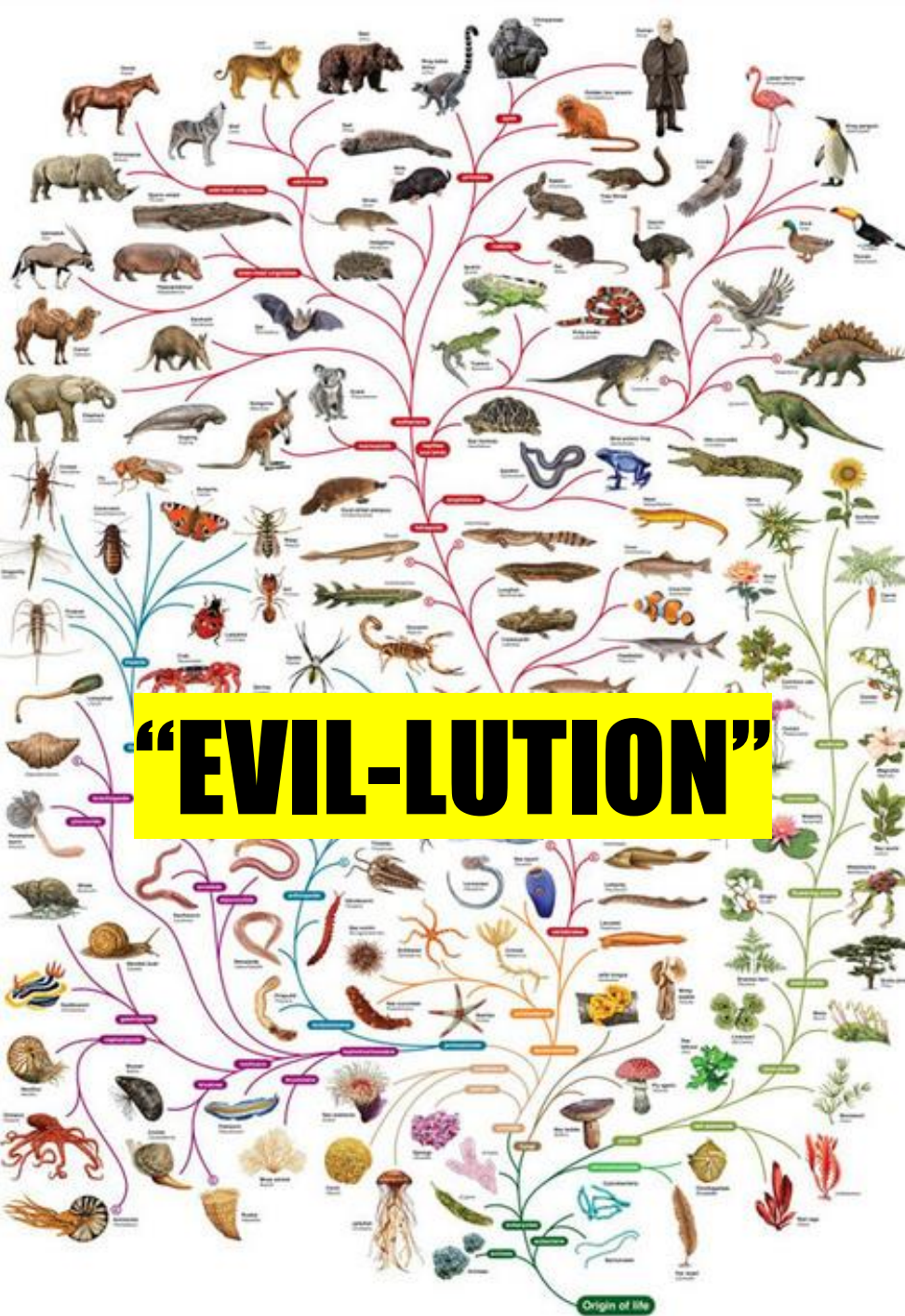


**John T. Scopes
1900-1970**



**“A TOWN MARK TWAIN
WOULD HAVE LOVED”**

Paducah, Kentucky



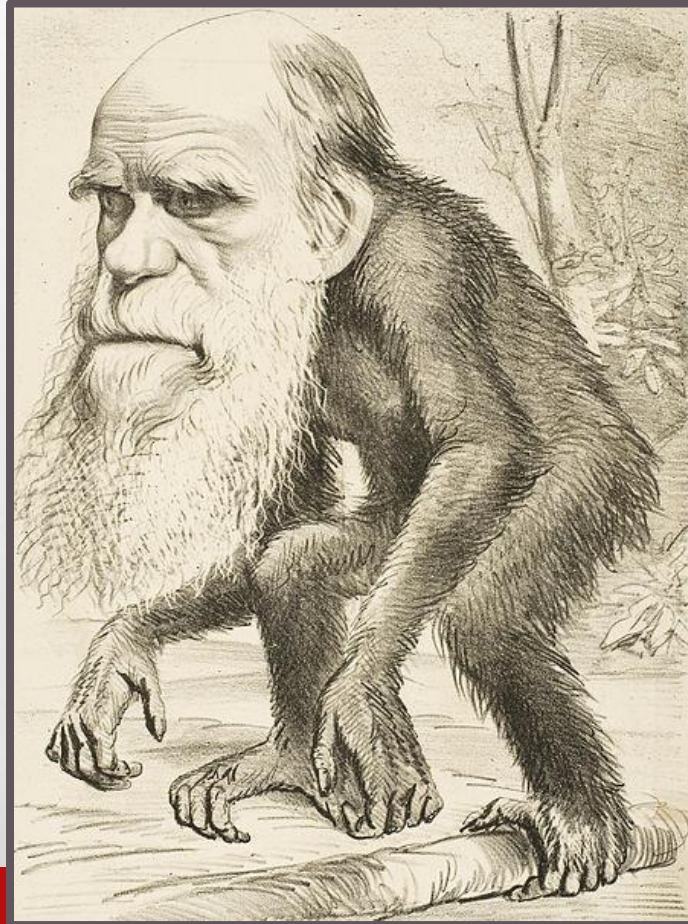
**ALL ANIMAL LIFE INCLUDING MONKEYS AND MEN,
HAVE EVOLVED FROM A COMMON ANCESTOR**



DARWIN AND DAYTON

**Great is the power of steady
misrepresentation ...**

**- Charles Darwin, *Origin of
Species* (6th ed., 1872)**



**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

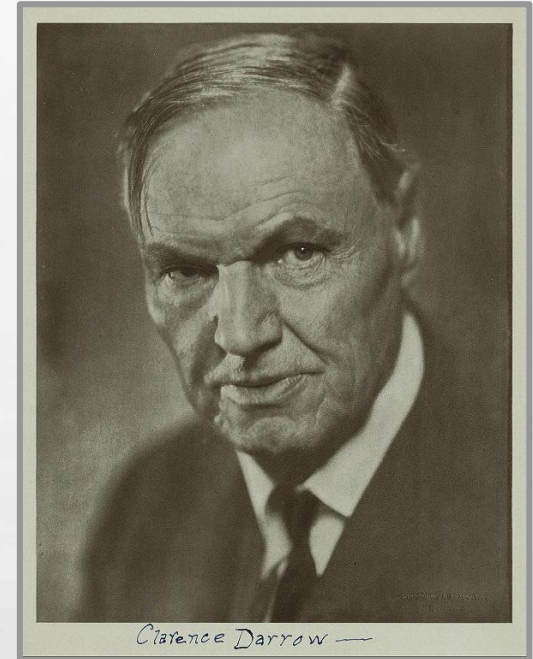


**TENNESSEE
PASSES
THE BUTLER ACT
1925**

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.

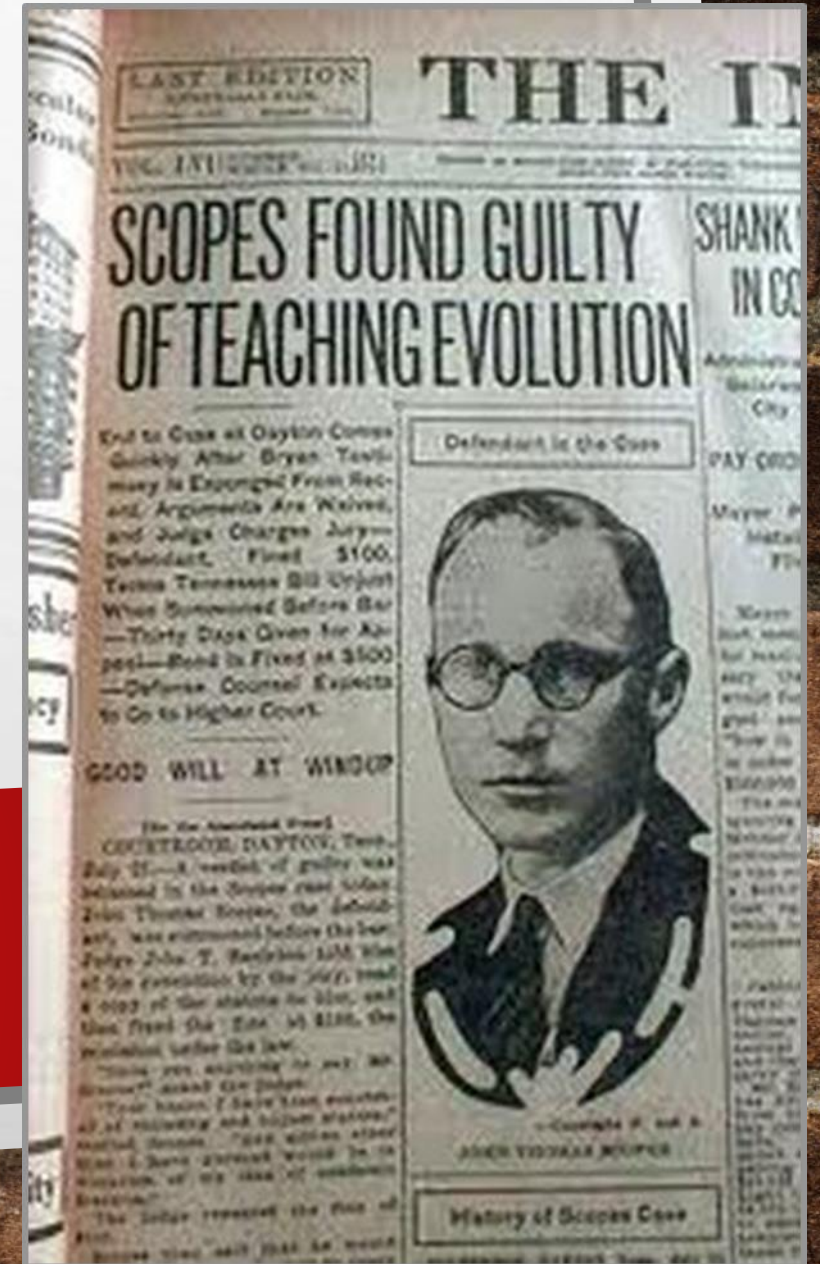
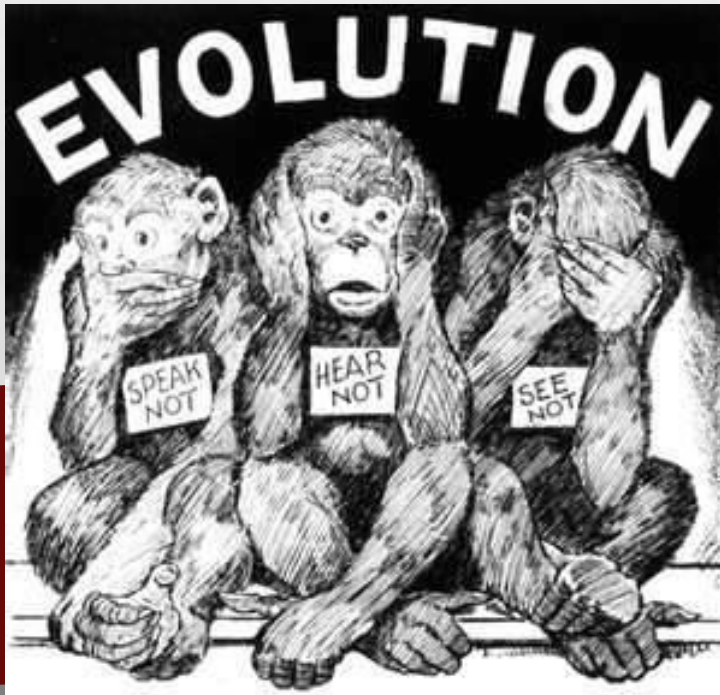
No one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public.

World-class curmudgeon



GUILTY!

The Monkey Trial



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**



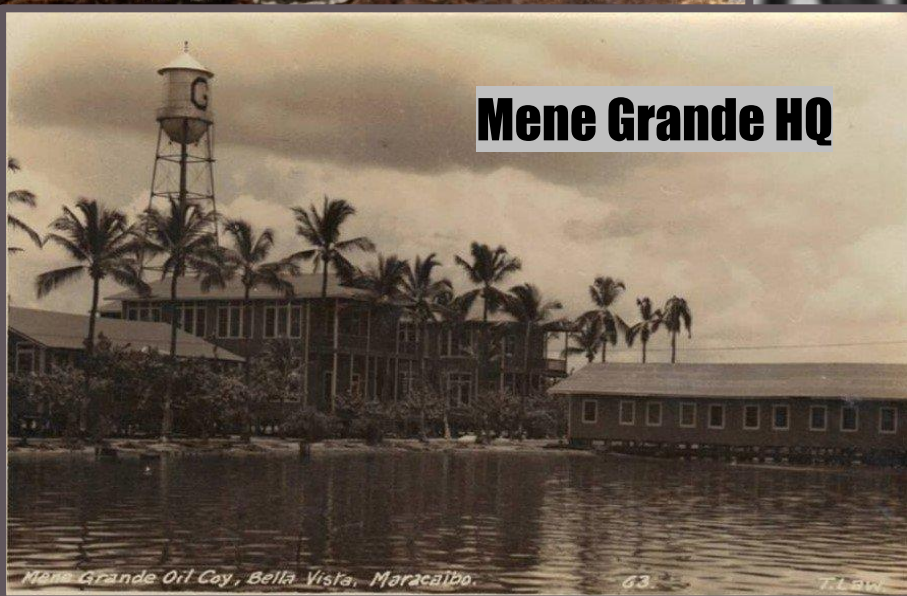
GRAD SCHOOL AT CHICAGO



Zumaque-1 (1914)



Mene Grande HQ



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



FIELD WORK AT LAKE MARACAIBO, 1927-30

“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)**



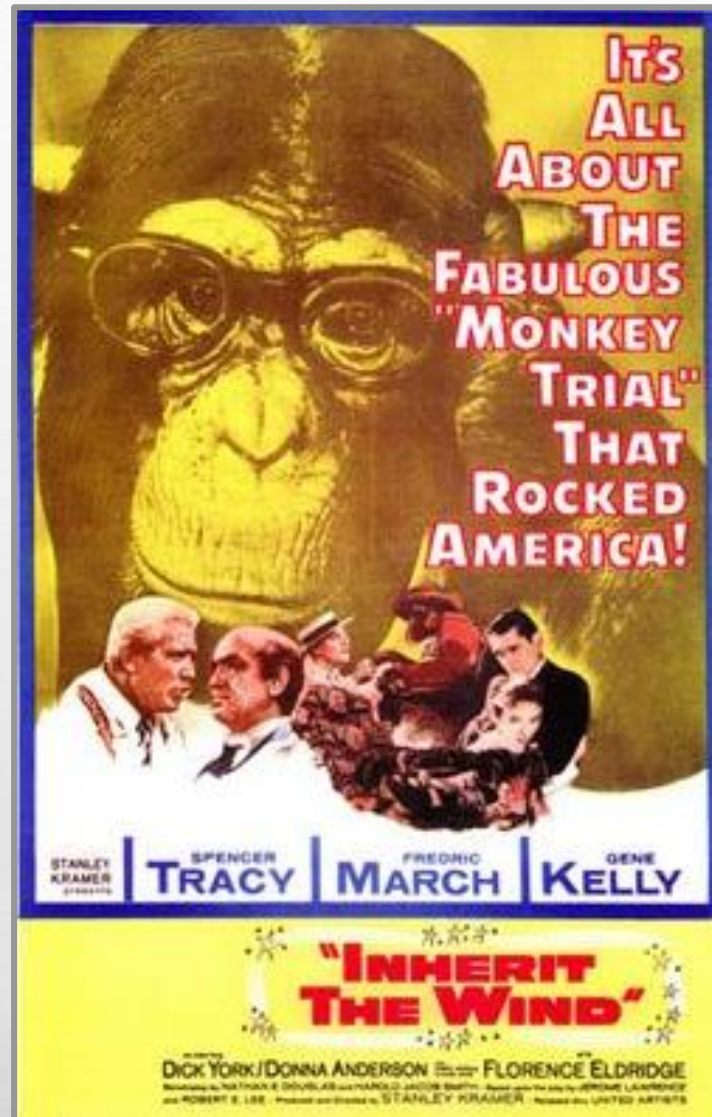
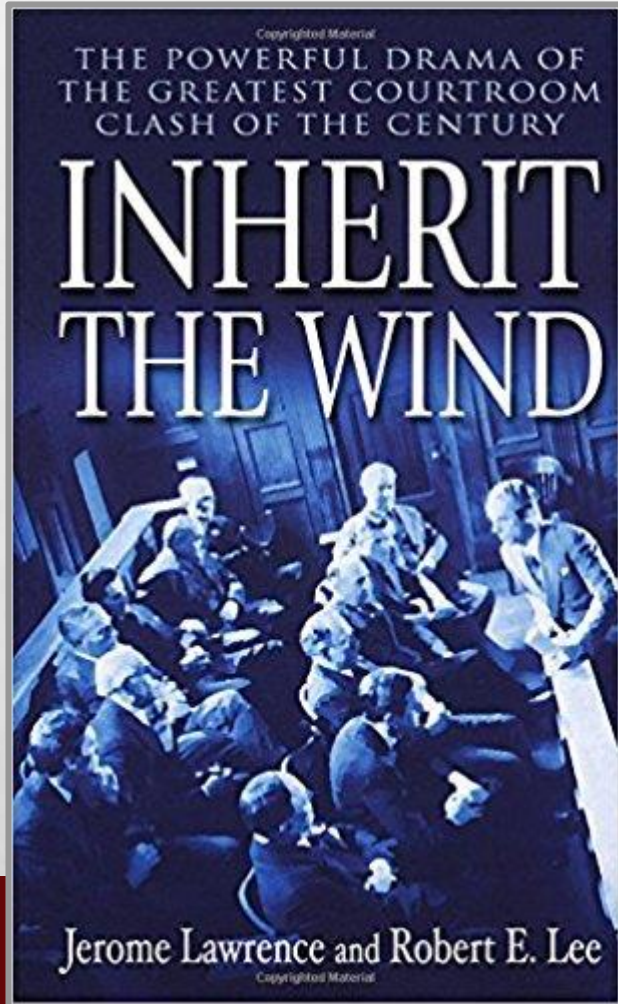
“My personal depression ended in the summer of 1933”

“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

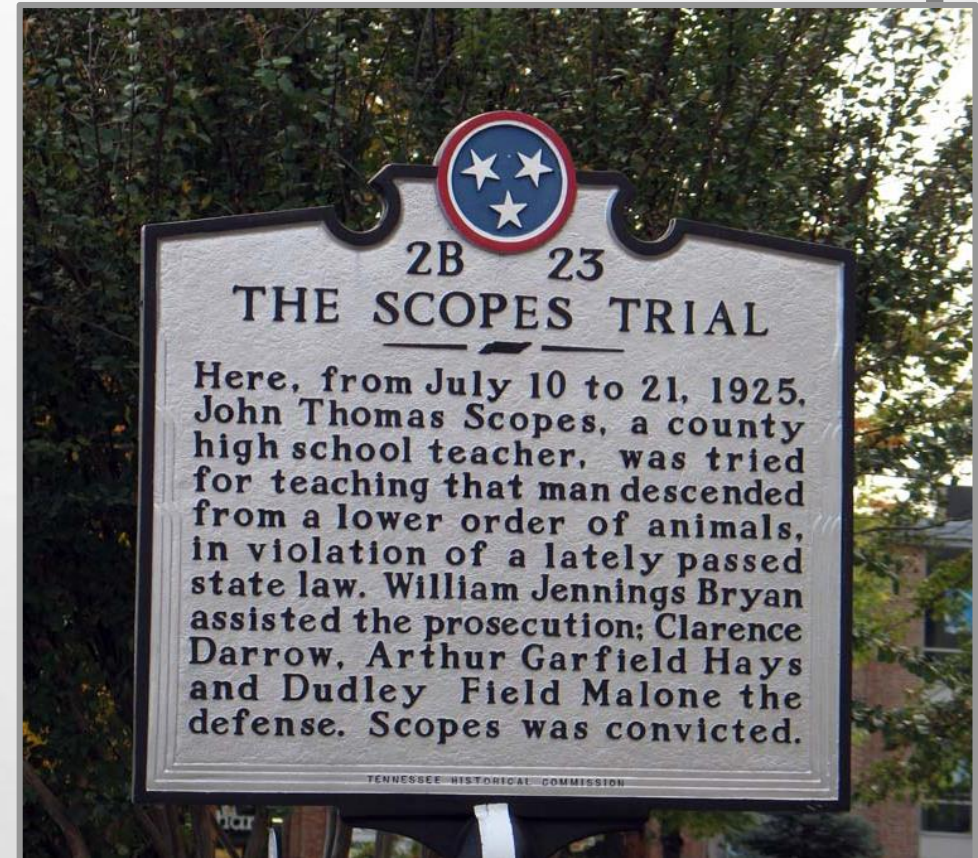


The Play!



The Movie!

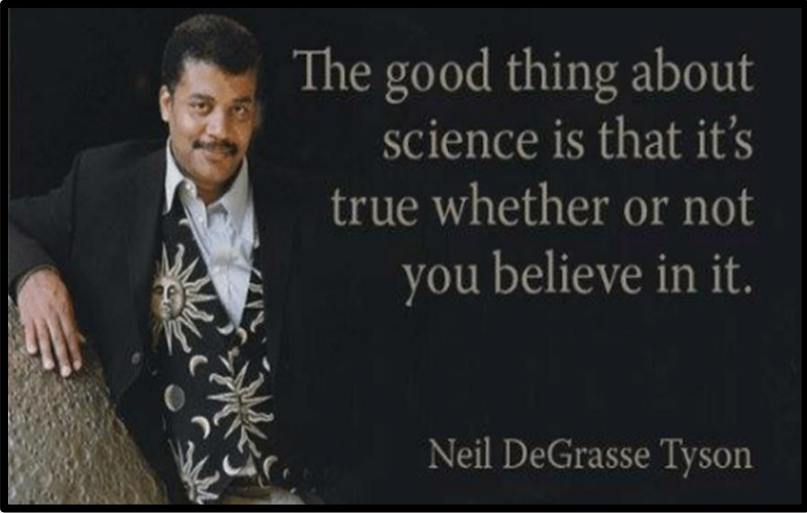
The Road Sign!



Scopes Trial Museum Photo

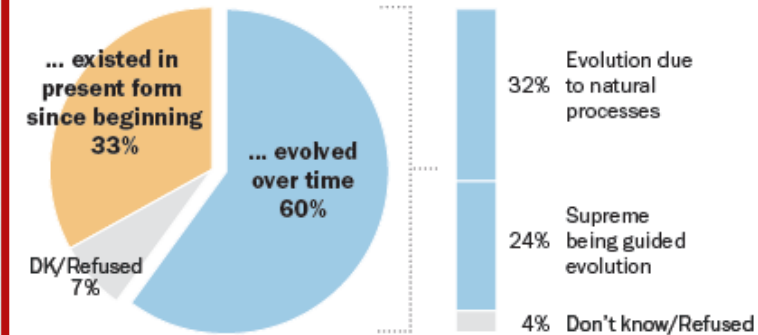


Butler Act finally repealed in 1967 : "I am very happy."



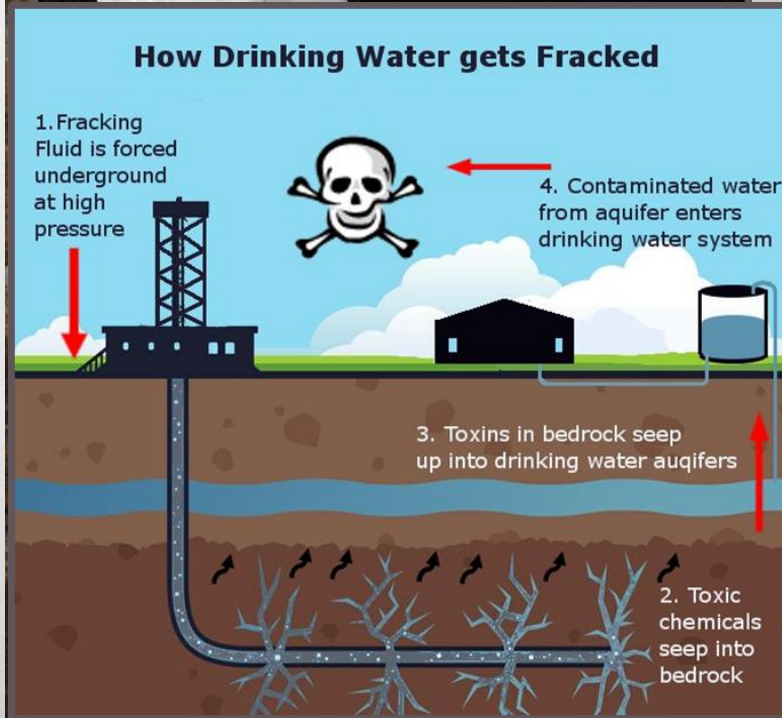
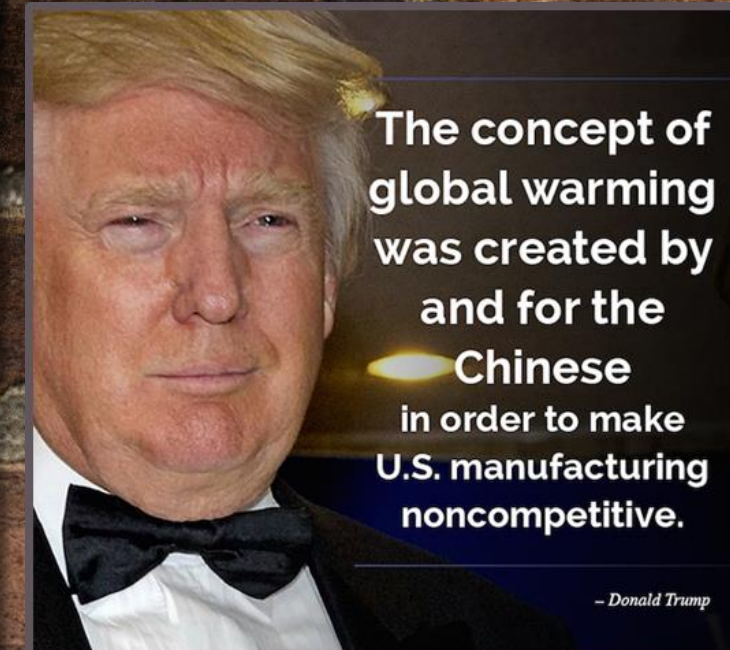
Public Views About Human Evolution

Percent of U.S. adults saying humans have ...



Source: Pew Research Center survey March 21-April 8, 2013. Q54-55.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

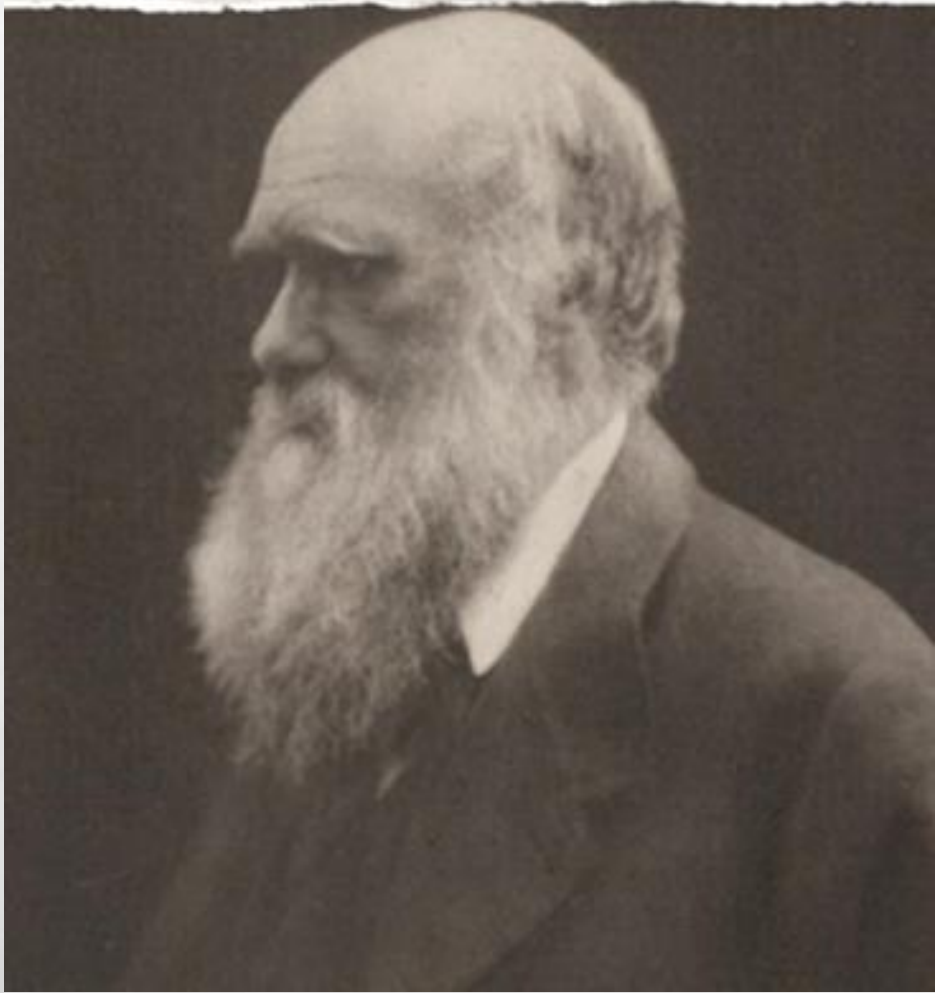


**IT'S
STILL OUR
JOB AS
SCIENTISTS
TO SPEAK
TRUTH TO
POWER**



John T. Scopes
Defendant

**“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**

