



Summer For The Gods: The Scopes Trial And America's Continuing Debate Over Science And Religion

Edward J. Larson

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In the summer of 1925, the sleepy hamlet of Dayton, Tennessee, became the unlikely setting of one of our century's most contentious dramas: the Scopes trial and the debate over science, religion, and their place in public education. This "trial of the century" not only cast Dayton into the national spotlight, it epitomized America's ongoing struggle between individual liberty and majoritarian democracy. Now, with this authoritative and engaging book, Edward J. Larson examines the many facets of the Scopes trial and shows how its enduring legacy has crossed religious, cultural, educational, and political lines. The "Monkey Trial," as it was playfully nicknamed, was instigated by the American Civil Liberties Union to challenge a controversial Tennessee law banning the teaching of human evolution in public schools. The Tennessee statute represented the first major victory for an intense national campaign against Darwinism, launched in the 1920s by Protestant fundamentalists and led by the famed politician and orator William Jennings Bryan. At the behest of the ACLU, a teacher named John Scopes agreed to challenge the statute, and what resulted was a trial of mythic proportions. Bryan joined the prosecutors and acclaimed criminal attorney Clarence Darrow led the defense—a dramatic legal matchup that spurred enormous media attention and later inspired the classic play *Inherit the Wind*. The Scopes trial marked a watershed in our national discussion of science and religion. In addition to symbolizing the clash between evolutionists and creationists, the trial helped shape the development of both popular religion and constitutional law in America, serving as a precedent for more recent legal and political battles. With new archival material from both the prosecution and the defense, paired with Larson's keen historical and legal analysis, *Summer for the Gods* is poised to become a new classic on a pivotal milestone in American history.

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Lillie Stein:

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