



**SELECTED READINGS:  
THE SCOPES TRIAL ON RACE, GENDER, CLASS, AND REGION**

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**RACE**

**John W. Norris, “Evolution Not a Fact—The Bible a Fact,” *A. M. E. Church Review*, 2 (October 1925), 323-325.**

**REV. JOHN W. NORRIS** was a Baltimore minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. A theological conservative, he supported William Jennings Bryan and the antievolution cause.

The Bible and Evolution do not agree. They do not agree because the Bible is a fact and Evolution is not a fact. Evolution is a theory. A theory is a plan or scheme based on principles such as seems to agree with facts or may not agree. Theory is an open field of speculation. The ablest minds have been out in that endless field of speculation. They have in thousands of years found a few things they call facts. The Bible was not found out there in those speculative fields, but direct from the word of God. Hence the Bible comes to us along a path of inspiration....

Nothing can go beyond its kind. Everything God created and made was created and made after his or their kind. Now, there are no connecting links between the kinds, as all things were formed out of the nebula. God made no old forms of life to be developed into new forms of life after He closed up his creative and working or making days. When He finished, His work was complete. He said it was good. When god made the monkey, if man had to come from the monkey, neither the man or the monkey would have been complete. Therefore, in this incomplete condition how could it be good?...

God made a man. He did not make a white man, nor a yellow man, nor a black man, nor a brown man, nor a red man. He made a man, regardless of colors. God made man... While man is an animal, he is nevertheless a special piece of workmanship. He is favored in a way other animals are not. Man has no tail, but he has a brain case. The lower order of animals have tails, but no brain case. They are not thinkers. The man animal is a thinker. There is no connecting link between the lower animal with a tail and the upper animal without a tail. There is no connecting link between the lower animal without brains and the upper animal with brains. Please find me a link. I can find none. God moved the man far from the lower order of animal life when He made him. God placed the man between the lower creation and the angels. Man is

a little lower than the angels and above the lower order of animal life. Everything above man he was to fear, and everything below man was to fear him. Everything above the man was to be his master, and everything below the man the man was to master, and also master himself. No man has ever been mastered by man. Man cannot be mastered, never was mastered and never will be mastered. No slave was ever mastered. They had a master, but they were never mastered. If so, please tell me when.

Now, from what did this man evolve? Not a monkey, for the monkey was among the things and creatures mastered by the man. Man was a special creation to rule all other creatures. Slavery was wrong because man was never made to be a slave. No nation on earth ever ruled its slaves only by force. This shows that the man was made a special brain-case creature. He was given a brain case so he would be able to rule himself and other created creatures.... There is no other animal on this globe or any other globe so equipped. In no sense are there any connecting links below the man that would link him on to other animals.

**W. E. B. Du Bois, "Scopes," *Crisis*, 30 (September 1925), 218.**

W. E. B. DU BOIS was editor of *Crisis*, the newspaper of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

One hundred per cent Americans are now endeavoring to persuade hilarious and sarcastic Europe that Dayton Tennessee, is a huge joke and very, very exceptional.... But few are deceived, even those who joke and slap each other on the back. The truth is and we know it: Dayton, Tennessee, is America: a great, ignorant, simple-minded land, curiously compounded of brutality, bigotry, religious faith and demagoguery, and capable not simply of mistakes but of persecution, lynching, murder and idiotic blundering, as well as charity, missions, love and hope.

This is America and America is what it is because we believe in Ignorance. The whole modern Nordic civilization of which America is a great and leading branch has sold its soul to Ignorance. Its leading priests profess a religious faith which they do not believe and which they know, and every man of intelligence knows, they do not and cannot believe; and then when a knot of back-woodsmen led by some cheap demagogues try to drive out error in a logical way they learn to their own intense surprise that what the world was thinking and doing had in some unaccountable way been kept from them. Either, then, they have been deceived or are being attacked. They resent it and with the proper demagogue to lead them are ready to dive out heretics and defend the Truth as they have received it with gun and fagots.

Who is to blame? They that know; they that teach; they that have; they that sit silent and enjoy; great universities that close their doors to the mob; great scientists who prostitute truth to prejudice; great preachers who quibble with faith and facts; great rulers of wealth who fear understanding; and voluptuaries who have no wish to be disturbed by real democracy.

The folk who leave white Tennessee in blank and ridiculous ignorance of what science has taught the world since 1859 are the same ones who would leave black Tennessee and black America with just as little education as is consistent with fairly efficient labor and reasonable contentment; who rave over the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and are dumb over the 15<sup>th</sup>; who permit lynching and made bastardy legal in order to render their race “pure.” It is such folk who, when in sudden darkness they descry the awful faces of the Fanatic, the Fury and the Fool, try to hide the vision with gales of laughter.

But Dayton, Tennessee, is no laughing matter. It is menace and warning. It is a challenge to Religion, Science and Democracy.

## GENDER

**“Women and Evolution,” editorial in the *Lexington (KY) Herald*, February 11, 1922.**

The present agitation about evolution has a deep significance for woman, since it amounts to a challenge of her position.

The anti-evolutionist who repudiates with his whole soul the idea that “man came from a monkey” on the grounds of its opposition to the story in Genesis, must necessarily accept with his whole soul the idea that man was created, not out of nothing, but out of the dust, on the same grounds. He must believe that on the same day woman was created, not out to nothing, but out of Adam’s rib. If he thinks at all, he will wonder whether this creation was instantaneous or, according to science, gradual. In the second story of the creation he will find that Adam was created so long before Eve that God found it was not good for him to be alone, so long that Adam had time to name all the animals before Eve was created. But according to the first story, Adam and Eve were created on the same day. The anti-evolutionist ought to have an hypothesis as to what a “day” means.

But he will have to explain further why woman was made out of a rib and not out of the dust. The Bible story has this conclusion from such fact: “Therefore (note the word) shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” The anti-evolutionist will find this verse to be only an explanation of the inviolability of marriage in the matter of divorce and not an explanation of the fact of the creation of woman. He will find it a case of believing one thing only to prove another. Why did woman come from a rib and man come from the dust? He must still find an hypothesis to explain that.

He can never explain it. But he believes it and can be pressed to the point where he will be found to hold such belief merely as a convenient premise from which to draw some conclusions. He wants a difference to be established between men and women. And all history shows that this difference, once established, has been used against woman and not for her.

Modern democracy repudiates a difference between men and women. And democracy here means a mental attitude that recognizes an essential sex equality. No one needs to emphasize the

importance today of correct mental attitudes. It is known that in them is to be found the real dynamics of progress. As long as woman has to fight a mental attitude toward her as something different from man she will be constantly misunderstood and discriminated against in the complex issues yet to arise as to her position in a changing social order.

Women vote and the present agitation about evolution is a challenge to them to oppose a mental attitude that willfully hypothecates a difference between men and women—a difference that does not tend to secure her at all but tends constantly to breed false imaginations of her.

Evolution is a great fact that emancipates woman from a lot of nonsense heretofore pressed upon her.

**Mrs. Jesse Sparks, letter to the editor of the *Nashville (TN) Tennessean*, July 3, 1925.**

Editor of the *Tennessean*:

At the time the bill prohibiting the teaching of evolution in our public schools was passed by our legislature I could not see why the mothers in greater number were not conveying their appreciation to the members for this act of safeguarding their children from one of the destructive forces which combined with other evils if left unchecked will destroy our civilization. I for one felt grateful for their standing for the right against all criticism. And grateful, too, that we have a Christian man for governor who will defend the Word of God against this so-called science....

Mrs. Jesse Sparks  
Pope, Tennessee

## CLASS

**from H. L. Mencken, “Darrow’s Eloquent Appeal Wasted on Ears That Heed Only Bryan, Says Mencken,” *Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 14, 1925.**

Henry Louis Mencken was an author, editor, and newspaper writer known for his acerbic and outspoken criticism of American culture. In his reports from Dayton to the *Baltimore Sun*, he described what he called the “Monkey trial” as a contest between the sophisticated few and the poor, rural, and uneducated many.

The net effect of Clarence Darrow’s great speech yesterday seems to be precisely the same as if he had bawled it up a rainspout in the interior of Afghanistan....

During the whole time of its delivery the old mountebank, Bryan, sat tight-lipped and unmoved. There is, of course, no reason why it should have shaken him. He has these hill billies locked

upon in his pen and he knows it. His brand is on them. He is at home among them. Since his earliest days, indeed, his chief strength has been among the folk of remote hills and forlorn and lonely farms. Now with his political aspirations all gone to pot, he turns to them for religious consolations. They understand his peculiar imbecilities. His nonsense is their ideal of sense. When he deluges them with his theological bilge they rejoice like pilgrims disporting in the river Jordan.

The case will not be decided by logic, nor even by eloquence. It will be decided by counting noses—and for every nose in these hills that has ever thrust itself into any book save the Bible there are a hundred adorned with the brass ring of Bryan. These are his people. They understand him when he speaks in tongues. The same dark face that is in his own eyes is in theirs, too. They feel with him, and they relish him.

I sincerely hope that the nobility and gentry of the lowlands will not make the colossal mistake of viewing this trial of Scopes as a trivial farce. Full of rustic japes and in bad taste, it is, to be sure, somewhat comic on the surface. One laughs to see lawyers sweat. The jury, marched down Broadway, would set New York by the ears. But all that is only skin deep.

Deeper down there are the beginnings of a struggle that may go on to melodrama of the first caliber, and when the curtain falls at least all the laughter may be coming from the yokels. You probably laughed at the prohibitionists, say, back in 1914. Well, don't make the same error twice.

As I have said, Bryan understands these peasants, and they understand him. He is a bit mangey and flea-bitten, but no means ready for his harp. He may last five years, ten years or even longer. What he may accomplish in that time, seen here at close range, looms up immensely larger than it appears to a city man five hundred miles away. The fellow is full of such bitter, implacable hatreds that they radiate from him like heat from a stove. He hates the learning that he cannot grasp. He hates those who sneer at him. He hates, in general, all who stand apart from his own pathetic commonness. And the yokels hate with him, some of them almost as bitterly as she does himself. They are willing and eager to follow him—and he has already given them a taste of blood....

**Joseph Wood Krutch, "Tennessee: Where Cowards Rule," *The Nation*, 121 (July 15, 1925).**

Joseph Wood Krutch, a native of Tennessee, was a writer and critic who covered the Scopes trial as editor of the *Nation* magazine.

Even those who do not happen, like the present writer, to have been born and bred in Tennessee should not find it difficult to forgive Dayton....

And so when I sit at the little table in Robinson's drug-store where the argument began and discuss with the county superintendent of schools his attitude as one of the prosecution, I feel the

shame of Tennessee is not in Dayton. There is no State of the Union, no country of the world, which does not have communities as simple-minded as this one, and if Tennessee has become the laughing-stock of the world it is not because she has her villages which are intellectually a half century behind the centers of world thought but rather because among her sons who know better there is scarcely one who has the courage to stand up for what he thinks and knows instead of flying quickly to cover lest he might have to sacrifice to his convictions some political advantage or some material gain.

At Dayton no one is afraid to tell me what he thinks. But when I go to Knoxville, seat of the State University and one of the three largest cities in Tennessee, I enter a different world. One of the most important member of the university board of trustees takes me aside to whisper in my ear; the president of that institution, telling me I am a good fellow, takes me confidentially by the arm; the editor of one of the leading newspapers, distinguished by the safe piety of its editorials upon the subject, closes the door of his office; and the remarks of all might be summarized in what were the actual words of one: "Of course it's a damn-fool law—but I won't be quoted." These and other Knoxvilleians are defensive and indignant; they resent in various terms the publicity they have attracted and they protest against being judged by the laws their legislature passes; but these Knoxvilleians will not admit that, fundamentally, they are to blame. In Tennessee bigotry is militant and sincere; intelligence is timid and hypocritical, and in that fact lies the explanation of the sorry role which she is playing in contemporary history. Dayton's only crime is the naive belief that a law may be intended to be enforced.

Meanwhile the law is accepted by the people of the State in a manner worthy of the legislators whom it elected to represent it. The average business man is puzzled by the furor created in the outside world; he cannot understand why anyone would care whether evolution is taught in the schools or not when obviously neither business nor industry is affected by questions so highly abstract. The president of the university, who ought to know better, can think of no plan more courageous than weakly to disobey the law when necessary, while pretending to the legislature that he approves of its acts or, more accurately, gives it to understand that he will not embarrass it by publicly stating his opinion of the law which both he and it know to be asinine. Concerned above all else with his precious appropriations, it never occurs to him to ask whether his chief duty might not possibly be something other than wrangling money from a cowardly legislature....

As for the faculty which serves under this unhappy president, it is by no means comfortable. Not every member follows willingly its leader and, as one confessed to me, some are a little concerned over what their colleagues in more honest universities think of them, but seven professors were recently summarily dismissed, and so the others are drawn into the vicious circle of fear which includes nearly every public or semi-public man in the State. The legislator is afraid of some fundamentalist hid in the mountains; the president is afraid of the legislature; the faculty is afraid of the president; and the newspaper editor who "leads public opinion" is afraid of someone who is afraid of someone else. Nobody knows how strong the party which honestly desires the anti-evolution bill really is, and as long as the present circle is not broken nobody every will....

Tennessee has no idea how this vicious circle may be broken. From her experience with prohibition she has learned that it is much easier to violate a law than it is to oppose it, and she was proposing quietly to apply this useful lesson to the anti-evolution law when along came Dayton to disturb her contented anarchy and to make her a national spectacle, bewildered and indignant, face to face with the laws which she had allowed to be written upon the statute books.

## REGION

**from “Why the Dayton Trial Will Resound to the South’s Good,” *Manufacturers’ Record* 99 (August 1925), 70.**

Despite all the tomfoolery of the monkey business..., the Dayton trial, instead of injuring the South in the minds of intelligent people, will benefit it. The very activities connected with that trial, and the demonstration of the firm religious views of the people of Tennessee and of other southern states, will ultimately prove to be an advertisement of immeasurable value to the South.

There are millions of people in other parts of the United States who do not want to raise their children in an atmosphere of agnosticism and atheism so prevalent throughout the North and West, where the alien foreign element is so dominant, and who, having learned as a result of this trial that there is a section in this country where religion pure and undefiled still holds sway, will turn their eyes longingly to that Land of Promise, hoping that in the South they may be able to have their children raised in an atmosphere of Christianity rather than an atmosphere of anti-Christianity. These people will not regard the Dayton trial as demonstrating any backwardness on the part of the people of the South, but they will hold that the influence which the trial demonstrated that religion still has upon the southern people will be of immense value to this section and will bring to the South thousands and tens of thousands of people who will seek to escape for themselves and their children from the agnosticism and atheism which curses much of the North and West. Despite all of its monkey business, therefore, the Dayton trial will be one of the South’s supremest advertisements which will do boundless good.

**George F. Milton, “A Dayton Postscript, *The Outlook*, 140 (1925), 550-553.**

George F. Milton was editor of the *Chattanooga (TN) News* and a friend of William Jennings Bryan, but he opposed the antievolution bill in Tennessee.

...Let me here define my own feelings toward the law and the trial. In March, when the Tennessee General Assembly first passed the Butler Bill, I wrote an editorial in the Chattanooga “News,” calling the law an outrageous attempt to curb freedom of thought by statute, and saying that our legislators had made monkeys of themselves. I still think so. The law is foolish; even if its ends had been worthy, the ban encouraged reading of evolution more than it checked it....



It is doubtful if the anti-evolution feeling is stronger in Tennessee than in most other American States. The mass of the American people are Fundamentalists; and the mass of American legislators are creatures of vast political fear. Tennessee is no exception; hence the Tennessee law. A clever engineer saw the possibilities of a test case; hence the fame of John Doe Scopes and of Dayton. It might quite as well have come in Kansas or Missouri, in Washington or the State of Maine. Under such circumstances, it is hardly fair for Tennessee to be crucified on the cross of public opinion as a bog of bigotry...

The whole world suffers from the handicap of ignorance, and no section can with good grace point the finger of scorn at another. That the "monkey bill" came to a test here was accidental—the spirit that gave it birth was Nation-wide. Let us hope that the circus has folded its tents....

**from Donald Davidson, *Southern Writers in the Modern World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958), 39-41.**

Donald Davidson was a poet, writer, and member of the Fugitive group of Southern intellectuals committed to preserving the region's agrarian economy and traditional cultural values.

The Dayton trial was not actually a contest between religious bigotry and enlightened science, although the small army of newspaper correspondents who attended the trial went to great lengths to represent it as such to the world at large. On one side, it is true, were certain sincere public champions of religion who no longer commanded the searching dialectic that was actually at their disposal, and so had only the most naïve means of presenting their intuition of religious truth; but on the other side, even more naïve, were the vain-minded modernists, all resolved to define God as science and to give the theory of evolution the status of quasi-religious dogma. But the cardinal issue was the right of the state, through its legislature, to control and administer instruction in its public schools. This right was challenged, in the evolution case, as an infringement on what is now known as "academic freedom." But it was soon evident that the challengers were actually more anxious to capture this right than to deny it, if only they could use it in behalf of their own special interest, acting through a front of progressive educationalists.....

The Dayton trial occurred in 1925. Five years later, in the autumn of 1930, twelve Southerners published a symposium entitled *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. Between these two events there was something more, perhaps, than a merely symbolical connection. I can hardly speak for others, but for John Ransom and myself, surely, the Dayton episode dramatized, more ominously than any other event easily could, how difficult it was to be a Southerner in the twentieth century, and how much more difficult to be a Southerner and also a writer. It was horrifying to see the cause of liberal education argued in a Tennessee court by a famous agnostic lawyer from Illinois named Clarence Darrow. It was still more horrifying—and frightening—to realize that the South was being exposed to large-scale public detraction and did not know or much care how to answer.



As for myself, in 1924, I had become literary editor—which is to say, principal book reviewer—for the Nashville Tennessean. The Dayton episode vastly fortified a resolution that had already occurred to me as an inviting possibility—namely, to lose no opportunity to advance the cause of the South whenever book reviewing or literary discussion could, with honesty, serve that purpose; or at any rate to be perfectly independent in criticism and at all times to be on guard against weakness and surrender on the Southern front, or against wrongful attack from the Northern front....