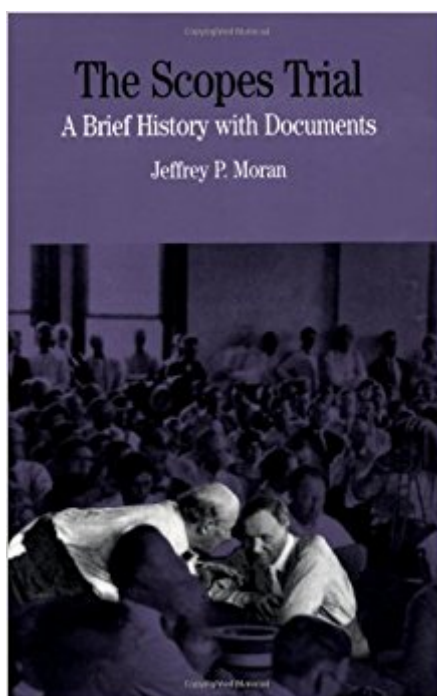


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# The Scopes Trial: A Brief History With Documents (Bedford Series In History & Culture (Paperback))



## Synopsis

The Scopes trial shocked America. Tennessee schoolteacher John Scopes brought the question of teaching evolution in schools to every dinner table, and it remains an essential topic in any course on American History, the History of Education, and Religious History. This volume's lively interpretative introduction provides an analysis of the trial and its impact on the moral fiber of the country and the educational system, and examines the race and gender issues that shook out of the debate. The editor has excerpted the crucial exchanges from the trial transcript itself, and includes these along with reactions to the trial, taken from newspaper reports, letters, and magazine articles. Telling political cartoons and evocative photographs add a colorful dimension to this collection, while a chronology of events, questions for consideration, and a bibliography provide strong pedagogical support.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This collection includes some heretofore unpublished documents and analysis on Scopes. Jeffrey Moran's use of newspapers brings out several points that I've never seen in print before, particularly regarding the role of women and African Americans. His introduction is outstanding and is a superb model of its genre: comprehensive, well organized, and--best of all--written in clear, declarative, jargon-free English. It will become the standard short interpretation of Scopes and antievolution."

Jeffrey P. Moran has taught at Harvard and Brown Universities and is currently a member of the

history department at the University of Kansas. A specialist in modern American social and cultural history, he is the author of *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (2000) and a clutch of popular and scholarly articles. He is also a recipient of the Louis Pelzer Memorial Award.

What Jeffrey P. Moran has put together with "The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents" is an excellent modern counterpart to Sheldon Norman Grebstein's "Monkey Trial: The State of Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes" in 1960, which was the first attempt to provide excerpts from the trial transcript with other historical documents that allow contemporary scholars to get a sense for what it was like to follow the trial of the century in 1925. There are three main parts to Moran's look at the Scopes Trial. Part One is Moran's "Introduction: The Scopes Trial and the Birth of Modern America," which consists of setting up the trial in the context of the issues of both the evolution controversy and the struggle against "modernity," a overview of the genesis of the test case and the key stages of the trial, and at look at the aftermath of the trial. The first two sections are a concise look at the history of the trial but it is the last section where Moran makes his mark looking at not only the how the evolution issues has reemerged in recent times as creationism, but also how the conflict represented issues of regionalism, ruralism, academic freedom, race, and gender. Part Two: "The Scopes Trial Day by Day: Transcript and Commentary" abandons the distinct stages Moran set up in his introduction to look at the trial each day. What Moran provides are excerpts from the trial transcript and one or more newspaper accounts covering the trial. For example, the second day's proceedings find both a transcript of defense attorney Clarence Darrow's speech in defense of religious liberty and journalist H.L. Mencken's column "Darrow's Speech Great but Futile." The celebrated duel in the shade when Darrow cross-examined Bryan is presented in sections focusing on the whale swallowing Jonah, Joshua commanding the sun to stand still, the flood wiping out civilization, and the chapter of Genesis, followed by the New York Times story "Laughter at Bryan's Expense." The part I most applaud is Moran's inclusion of most of Dudley Field Malone's reply to William Jennings Bryan on the fifth day on the issue of the admission of expert testimony from scientific experts, because that corrects what I consider to be the major flaw in Edward J. Larson's "Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion." Larson reduces Malone's speech, the oratorical highlight of the trial, to two paragraphs, one on the speech and the other on the reaction of the crowd. What he misses are that Malone's speech represents the position of reconciliation in which evolution and Genesis were seen as being compatible rather than contradictory. It is only under Judge Raulston rules against

the scientific testimony that the Scopes defense is left with no other option but to put Bryan on the stand and hold him up to ridicule, ask for their client to be convicted, and start working on the appeal. While Moran pays even less attention to Malone's speech in his introduction, those who read it are going to be impressed by not only its oratorical flourishes but his arguments, which are the most reasonable articulated during the trial. The final part of Moran's book looks at "The Scopes Trial and the Culture of the 1920s: The Documents." This includes seven cartoons on the trial and its participants followed by sections devoted to the issues Moran had set up earlier: race, educational freedom, the "New Woman," religious alternative, and the invasion of "outsiders." The highpoints in this section are W.E.B. Du Bois's article "Dayton IS America," Bryan's "Who Shall Control Our Schools?", a pair of letters from women in Tennessee supporting the Butler Act, and the Reverend John Roach Straton's "A Fundamentalist Defends Tennessee against Outside Invasion." Most of these documents are from 1925, although a few come earlier and later. If you were paying attention to the Scopes Trial that year these are what you would have been reading about in the press. One interesting choice is the section included from George W. Hunter's "A Civil Biology," the science textbook used at Dayton's high school, is not about evolution but rather about race and eugenics (but the evolutionary tree in Hunter that Bryan ridiculed is provided during his first speech). For all of the documents Moran provides a brief introduction providing necessary background information and raising at least one question that readers can consider while reading each section. There are a series of photographs from the trial in the first part of the book, but neither of the shots I have seen of Darrow questioning Bryan on the platform outside the Rhea County Courthouse. I did my dissertation on the Scopes Trial and was impressed with how Moran edited the trial transcript because he includes not only the key arguments for each stage of the trial, but he also works in the most infamous exchanges between the lawyers. I can quibble on some of the selections from journalists (I always liked the coverage of the trial by the "Commonweal") and the editorial cartoons, but what is provided certainly performs the desired functions. The biggest irony behind the Scopes Trial is that John Thomas Scopes never taught evolution in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. He was substituting for the regular science teacher and as the school's football coach worked on plays with his boys. That was the main reason the defense did not allow Scopes to take the stand and when Howard Morgan was examined on the fourth day of the trial the young student had to be prepped on what was in the Hunter textbook (which, in another irony, was the mandated textbook selected by the state that had to be taught in class). But in the final analysis Scopes' innocence was a minor consideration in the clash of forces at Dayton, Tennessee in the summer of 1925, which Moran's book amply evidences.

There have been many efforts to summarize the Scopes Trial, but few do as good a job as TST: A Brief History in putting the trial in the context of the times. Unlike many writers who adopt an "Inherit the Wind" interpretation of the trial, Moran seeks to let the readers know what actually happened, based on court records, and to give a taste of the era's political, social and religious temperament. It's an excellent introduction to the topic and to the issues that combined to make the trial possible.

Came in great condition

Great book. Used for a college class and it was everything I needed. Great read and I would advise to read it if the topic interests you.

So informative, and interesting to read. The dialogue between the prosecutors and the defense attorney is great to read. Hearing the background story of those involved, figuring out which side they are on, and then watching them either conquer or slip up is great! It shows how much has changed since then, and how far we still have to go.

Let me start by saying that I liked this book a lot. In fact I'd recommend it to anyone aged 12 or over as an excellent - by the standards of America's academia - introduction to the Scopes trial. As the author and developer of a web site devoted to the facts and myths surrounding the Scopes Trial since the end of the 20th century I am very much aware of how widely the case is misrepresented by American academics. Indeed I have documented on that web site a number of instances of the kind of twaddle written about the events in 1925 by professors of US colleges and universities. So deep has this malaise penetrated, in fact, that even Bryan's entry in the "Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present" claims that Bryan died on the floor of the courtroom - a "fact" drawn not from history but from the play/film "Inherit the Wind" - though the author does at least get the date right: July 26th (a Sunday, and almost exactly 5 days after the trial ended, around mid-day on July 21st). In light of that, it is only fair to say that Moran's book is streets ahead of most other books on the subject that I've read so far, with the one exception of Edward Larson's outstanding "Summer for the Gods". Moreover, the way it is broken down into bite-size sections would seem to make it ideal as the basis for use in schools. So, what's the problem? In brief, Moran has collected plenty of "dots", but they aren't always accurate, and the way he "joins them up" leaves something to be desired. To be fair, many of the inaccuracies are fairly minor; but large or

small they are not what one would expect to find in a book by a history professor at the University of Kansas and, to quote the back cover: "A specialist in modern American social and cultural history". For example, there's the claim that the phrase "trial of the century" was invented in the 1920's (page 2). It wasn't. The title had been applied to the trial of Leo Frank, back in 1913. On page 28, Moran for some unexplained reason expands the population of Dayton from the usual estimate of 1,800 to 2,200. And again, Moran seems confused about the nature of eugenics as practised in the USA. On page 16 he rightly only mentions "negative" eugenics - the intention to erase anyone who the eugenicists didn't approve of. But on page 68 he describes both negative AND positive eugenics as though they were both in favour. ("Positive" eugenics being the intention to get eugenically "fit" citizens to produce as many children as was reasonably possible. In practice US eugenicists abandoned "positive eugenics" quite early on and concentrated on policies that promoted only "negative eugenics". See Edwin Black's extensively researched book, "War Against the Weak".) This last point is particularly relevant to the documentation featured in the chapter on "Race and the Scopes Trial", where we find that black writers of the period viewed the anti-evolutionists as their main enemy and seem to have completely overlooked the blatantly racist nature of eugenicist views such as those in the textbook at the heart of the trial 'A Civic Biology', which characterised "the Ethiopian or negro type" as the lowest of the "five races". One of the most useful features in the book is the way that readers are frequently invited to consider specific questions relevant to the material. This seemed like a sadly missed opportunity to raise a question about the various ways in which individuals and groups interpreted the events very much from the perspective of their personal views and perceptions. Still on the subject of failing to "join up the dots", Moran, in his introduction to the documentation drawn from "A Civic Biology", omits any mention of the fact that Hunter's comments on research into the "Jukes" and "Kallikak" families refers to material which either misrepresented the evidence (in the case of the Jukes), or was based on a highly questionable, subjective methodology rather than genuinely "scientific" research; and that the use of this material is prima facie evidence of the "negative" approach by eugenicists in the USA. Or again, in the chapter on "The Scopes Trial and the 'New Woman'" it seems strange indeed that Moran totally omits the advent of mass psychological manipulation of the American public using methods initiated by Edward Bernays, etc. This process originated in the pro-war propaganda during WWI, and was subsequently employed on behalf of American manufacturers with the express intention of changing public attitudes on a whole raft of subjects. Particularly relevant in this context is Bernays' "Torch of Freedom" campaign on behalf of the American Tobacco Company which concealed its true purpose (to radically increase cigarette sales) behind its avowed intention

to "empower women" by giving them access to symbolic penises (i.e. cigarettes). Overall it seemed to me that Moran makes every effort to be even handed to all parties, including William Jennings Bryan. Though his comment about Bryan being branded "an ignorant bigot" (page 2) is rendered the more partisan by his failure to mention that this assessment was, for the most part, only accepted by those who were anti-Bryan in the first place, whilst Darrow was characterised in much the same way by those who supported Bryan. I gave the book four stars mainly because it compares so favourably with most other books on the subject. Taken solely as a work of objective research, however, 2.5 stars would, in my opinion, be more appropriate.

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