

Scopes v. Tennessee & Inherit the Wind

Through the evaluation of the Scopes Trial and *Inherit the Wind* several major themes regarding culture and media during monumental trials emerged.

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Media and History

Media has the opportunity to change the perceptions of events and how they are remembered. In *Scopes v. the State of Tennessee*, history is swayed with extensive coverage and filled with public confusion about the facts actually argued. The trial was covered across the nation as depicted by the Los Angeles Times article. The headlines are important to note because of their implicit biases. The pictures chosen in the articles as well tainted the public's opinion of Osborn, Bryan, and the trial as a whole. No one remembers that Scopes won the appeal on a technicality because it was seen as a battle of evolutionism versus creationism. The play also dramatized the events by changing events, the exaggeratedly weak depiction of Bryan, and adding characters like Rachel. When the play was written over 30 years after the trial, the media distorted the infamy of the case and the real arguments surrounding the case rather than changing the portrayal of the individuals involved. The playwrights used this infamy as a platform to discuss McCarthyism.

The poster consists of 3 rings that have the lawyers, Scopes and Rachel, and Scopes with a monkey. The quote "it's a three-ring circus" is located at the top and it also says "the fabulous 'Monkey Trial' that rocked America!". It furthers the symbolism by looking like the shape of Africa and conclusions can be drawn that it relates to the monkey theme present throughout the case and play. The monkey symbolized that we evolved and it could also represent the chaos that the trial caused.

The trial was a spectacle all over the US. An article titled "Courts to Test Right of State to Bar Darwinism" was printed in the Los Angeles Times in May of 1925. The article is extremely rational in talking about what is being argued, the quotes from the judge along with his background, and discusses the national attention that has been directed to the case. The article leans in Scopes favor because it discusses the appeals process and the headline is slightly more focused on the movement away from religion.

The article's title is only about Osborn with "Osborn States Case for Evolution". It includes portraits of both Osborn and Bryan and there is a direct contrast of the picture quality with lightness and darkness. The illustration of Osborn is much more intimidating compared to Bryan who looks slightly ill and weak. In between the two portraits, there is an illustration of what looks like a cavewoman and they seem to be approaching Bryan in an attacking way. This depiction so early on is interesting because it only will be more exaggerated years later when the play was written.



Court Cases, the Media, and Consumerism

There have been many instances throughout history in which the media has perpetuated consumerism and the business aspect of a trial as well as turned these court cases into public spectacles which in turns takes the emphasis away from the actual fight for justice. The Scopes trial is a great example of one of these instances. People flocked to the small town of Dayton, Ohio and the town soon resembled a circus with the trial being held outside and vendors selling trinkets outside the courthouse.

CRANKS AND FREAKS FLOCK TO DAYTON

The movie version of *Inherit the Wind* came out in 1960, only five years after the play debuted. The poster for the 1960 release of the movie *Inherit the Wind* exclaims, "It's a circus... a picnic... a witch hunt... a Roman holiday... and the most dramatic event that ever happened in any town in the heart of America!"

The July 11, 1925 publication of the New York Times reads, "Crank and Freaks Flock to Dayton" and "Strange Creeds and Theories Are Preached and Sung Within Shadows of the Court House." From the portrayal of the case in the news, it starts to sound less and less like a trial and more like reality television.

The newspaper headlines from the time of the case, "Bryan, made witness in open air court, shakes his fist at Darrow amid cheers; apology ends contempt proceedings." The mention of cheers and open air does not elicit the normal courtroom feelings. From that headline alone, the reader can infer that this case was like no other.

BRYAN, MADE WITNESS IN OPEN AIR COURT, SHAKES HIS FIST AT DARROW AMID CHEERS; APOLOGY ENDS CONTEMPT PROCEEDINGS



COURTS TO TEST RIGHT OF STATE TO BAR DARWINISM; FIGHT ON TENNESSEE
DAYTON (Tenn.) May 13.—The right of a State to prohibit the study and teaching of the theory of evolution will be fought to a final decision by the highest court of the land. It was announced tonight by Judge John Neal, chief counsel for the State.

OSBORN STATES THE CASE FOR EVOLUTION
 In Answering Bryan He Summarizes the Evidence in Support of the Darwinian Theory and Condemns as Extraneous the Assertions That Evolutionists "Are Exponents of the 'Monkey Origin' Doctrine"

DAYTON'S REMOTE MOUNTAINEERS FEAR SCIENCE
 Reject the Theory of Evolution as Blasphemy and Use the Bible as Their Daily Guide—Simple Faith Commands the Stranger's Respect—Economic Changes Stimulate Interest in Education

THE SCANDAL THAT SHOOK MAIN ST. U.S.A. NOW SHAKES THE WORLD!
IT'S A CIRCUS! A PANIC! A PICNIC! A WITCH HUNT! A ROMAN HOLIDAY! AND THE MOST DRAMATIC EVENT THAT EVER HAPPENED IN ANY TOWN IN THE HEART OF AMERICA!

A newspaper article from the New York Times published on February 9, 1955 explains that "The courtroom play is based on the furor created by the 1925 Dayton, Tennessee, 'monkey trial' involving William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow." The word choice of "furor" further emphasizes the public spectacle aspect of the case as well as explains that they were trying to capture this with the production of the play.

PAUL MUNI TO STAR IN SCOPES DRAMA
 "Inherit the Wind" Based on the 1925 "Monkey Trial," Will Open Here on April 13

BRYAN MADE WITNESS IN OPEN AIR COURT, SHAKES HIS FIST AT DARROW AMID CHEERS; APOLOGY ENDS CONTEMPT PROCEEDINGS

Inherit the Wind still resonates with audiences today. This is proven by the current sale of a rare ticket envelope and stub (pictured below) from the Original Broadway production at the National Theatre in New York City on Amazon.com. Due to the media surveillance during the Scopes Trial, society was enraptured by the case and, owing to that infatuation, society too was and is captivated with *Inherit the Wind*.

Literature and Culture

While *Inherit the Wind* offers a direct allusion to the Scopes trial of 1925, its meaning is one that goes far beyond that. Through their portrayal of the trial, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee offer a dire warning of the dangers of challenging modern intellectualism as the McCarthy trials came to the forefront of the nation's attention in the 1950s.



PROGRESS

This *New York Times* article from April 22, 1955, shortly after *Inherit the Wind's* release, offers insight to what viewers of the time perceived its meaning to be. The author claims that the play serves, "...to remind us all once again that conformity and thought control are enemies of progress and enlightenment."

FUTURE TRIALS

The play serves as a warning to not just the intellectual dangers of the McCarthy trials but future trials as well. The image above the "Literature and Culture" headline depicts the crowd from the 1925 *Scopes v. Tennessee* trial, every member of which was white. This depiction offers foreshadowing into the next national trial over which conformity v. progress would be challenged, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Media and Language

The multifaceted characterization of E. K. Hornbeck in *Inherit the Wind* serves as the narrative vehicle through which the play explores the invasive role of the media and its influence over the nation

HORNBECK AND HEADLINES

A newspaper clipping from the time of the Scopes Trial reads, "Bryan and Darrow Wage War of Words in Trial Interlude" with another subheading that describes the trial as a "Duel to the Death". The alliteration and use of figurative language in the media is very similar to the language Hornbeck uses in his daily speech.

BRYAN AND DARROW WAGE WAR OF WORDS IN TRIAL INTERLUDE

Much like deliberate headlines seen throughout media outlets, news sources intentionally create attention grabbing titles with chosen language in order to draw in readers. Examining Hornbeck in *Inherit the Wind* as an agent for analyzing the media during the time of the Scopes Trial reveals the presumed prejudice found in media that influences how society perceives everything it reports on.

POPULARITY DUE TO LANGUAGE
 Because Hornbeck is a noticeably flashy character, the spectacle his presence creates would be a laughingstock without the bookish and calculated language he speaks with.

Inherit the Wind is still studied and performed today; causing the reality of the Scopes Trial to continue to be skewed within the framing of the play. The play was an immediate hit when it opened in 1955 due in part to Paul Muni's Tony award winning role as Drummond. The cover of the original 1955 playbill showcases Muni as Drummond.

