The Scopes Trial

  

The **Scopes Trial**, formally known as ***The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*** and commonly referred to as the **Scopes Monkey Trial**, was an American legal case in May 1925 in which a substitute high school teacher, [John T. Scopes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_T._Scopes), was accused of violating [Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennessee)'s [Butler Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butler_Act), which had made it unlawful to teach human [evolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution) in any state-funded school. The trial was deliberately staged in order to attract publicity to the small town of [Dayton, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dayton%2C_Tennessee), where it was held. Scopes was unsure whether he had ever actually taught evolution, but he purposely incriminated himself so that the case could have a defendant.

Scopes was found guilty and fined $100 ($1366 in 2016), but the verdict was overturned on a technicality. The trial served its purpose of drawing intense national publicity, as national reporters flocked to Dayton to cover the big-name lawyers who had agreed to represent each side. [William Jennings Bryan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Jennings_Bryan), three-time presidential candidate, argued for the prosecution, while [Clarence Darrow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarence_Darrow), the famed defense attorney, spoke for Scopes. The trial publicized the [Fundamentalist–Modernist Controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundamentalist%E2%80%93Modernist_Controversy), which set [Modernists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_the_19th_century#Modernism_in_Christian_theology), who said evolution was not inconsistent with religion, against [Fundamentalists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundamentalism), who said the word of God as revealed in the [Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible) took priority over all human knowledge. The case was thus seen as both a theological contest and a trial on whether "modern science" should be taught in schools.