



Exploring *INHERIT THE WIND*

by Jerome Lawrence & Robert E. Lee
September 14 - October 8, 2005 : Mainstage

The Trial of the Century

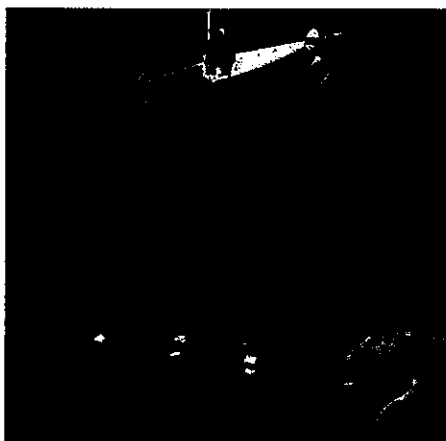
America in the 1920s was embroiled in a great controversy, one which has risen again today. In some ways, this controversy began in 1859 when Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. In his book, Darwin argued that plants and animals changed over time. Although the change between one generation and another might be so small as to be unnoticeable, over many generations a species could change a great deal.

Darwin theorized, based on his own observations, that those changes or adaptations that enabled a species to better survive the dangers of its environment would be passed on to succeeding generations. Adaptations that made the species more vulnerable would disappear as those who developed such weaknesses would fail to survive or to produce descendants. Darwin called this process "natural selection," commonly referred to as "survival of the fittest."

Many Christian theologians objected to Darwin's theories, often on the grounds that the random process of natural selection implied a cruel God strongly at odds with their religious beliefs. But over the years, as Darwin and other scientists refined his ideas, and as religious minds studied the theory and its implications, many Christians, both theologians and scientists, were able to reconcile the concepts of both a loving God and evolution.

In the early 1900s, however, two

developments brought this argument back to the nation's forefront. One was the rise of religious fundamentalism in America, which advocated a return to traditional values through a literal interpretation of the Bible. Fundamentalists found irreconcilable conflict between the concept of evolution and the Biblical story of creation. This disagreement was intensified by the second development, the rise of public schools in America. Traditionally, schools had not always been accessible for



every child, and many children were educated at home, if at all. In the early twentieth century, however, people began to view education as more of a necessity for all than a privilege for the few, so in most states mandatory education laws required attendance from everyone. By the 1920s, Darwin and his theories were a standard part of every science textbook, and more and more parents began to feel that school teachings were contrary to family beliefs.

In the early 1920s, several state legislatures discussed and even voted on statutes banning the teaching of evolution. The first of these bills to become law, the Butler Act, was enacted in Tennessee in March 1925. That May, in the small town of Dayton, Tennessee, high school teacher John Scopes was charged with violating that law, and in July he was brought to trial.

This small-town courtroom action became one of the century's most significant trials as well as a major media event, the first trial ever broadcast live on radio. Three-time Presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan led the prosecution against a defense team led by Clarence Darrow, at the time America's greatest and most famous lawyer.

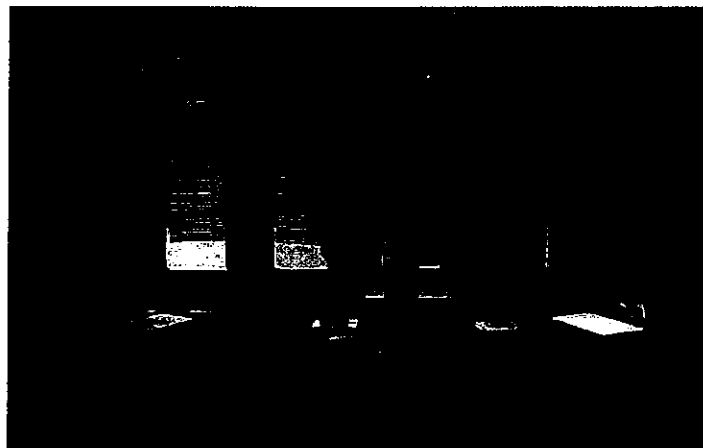
In 1955 Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee wrote *Inherit the Wind*, which presents the essence of this historic event in dramatic form. Instantly hailed as an American classic, the play has been seen and read by millions. It is important to note that Lawrence and Lee wrote a play, not a history. They changed the names of their characters, created a fictional fiancée for their defendant, and re-arranged or invented certain events to intensify dramatic impact. The issues at the center of their play, however, are the same as those discussed in Tennessee in 1925, and which once again call for our attention. The IRT offers this beloved American drama as a community forum for thoughtful discussion on these profound issues. ★

Charles Darwin & "The Origin of Species"

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was studying to become a cleric at England's Cambridge University when he fell in love with science. The school's professor of botany, John Stevens Henslow, took a liking to Darwin and often shared his ideas with the young student. When, in 1831, the Admiralty approached Henslow wanting a student for its next voyage, he recommended Darwin. Despite his father's protests that science and natural history were of no use to a cleric, Darwin boarded the HMS *Beagle* to assist the crew in mapping out the South American coastline.

By 1846, ten years after returning from this voyage, Darwin had published several works on his geological and zoological discoveries and had become one of the leading scientists of his day. He had also begun his *Origin of Species*. Contrary to popular belief, the idea did not spring into his mind while he was in South America, but rather came from years of meticulous observation begun even before the trip.

Darwin was well aware that his theory would create great religious controversy, which is one reason he waited fourteen years after it was written to publish his work. *Origin of Species* sold out its first printing of 1,250 copies on the first day it was available. Darwin continued to rewrite and revise his theories for the rest of his life. ★



Inherit the Wind calls for several locations throughout a small town; the IRT production moves swiftly from place to place with a minimum of scenery. Examine this photo of scenic designer David Birn's model for the courtroom scenes. The set does not attempt to recreate a realistic court room; one wall of windows and a few pieces of furniture suggest the space, while twirling ceiling fans evoke the oppressive heat of summer.

Study this rendering by costume designer B. Modern. It depicts a wide range of characters, from an urbane newspaper reporter to local farmers, businessmen, and housewives. Note how everyone, male and female, wears or carries a hat. People dressed more formally in the 1920s than we do today. In public, women never wore pants, and men almost always wore suits and ties. This social dress code reflected the stricter standards of etiquette, speech, status, and behavior that were the norm at the time.

from the Book of Genesis King James Version

1: 26 **A**nd God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. 29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. 31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day....

2: 6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. 7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. ★

"Inherit the Wind" on stage

The IRT production of *Inherit the Wind* features 21 actors, a large number for an IRT production, but a very small number compared to the hundreds of people who crammed the courtroom for the historic Scopes Trial in 1925. In order to more effectively depict the events of the trial, the IRT has recruited stage "jurors" from local law firms and other businesses who have generously donated both time and money in order to be seated on stage for the trial scene in Act II.

There will be one significant difference between the IRT's courtroom and the real Scopes Trial courtroom: In the 1920s, only white men were allowed to sit on a jury. The IRT has invited both men and women of any race to participate in this exciting dramatization of one of America's most historic court cases. ★

INHERIT THE WIND

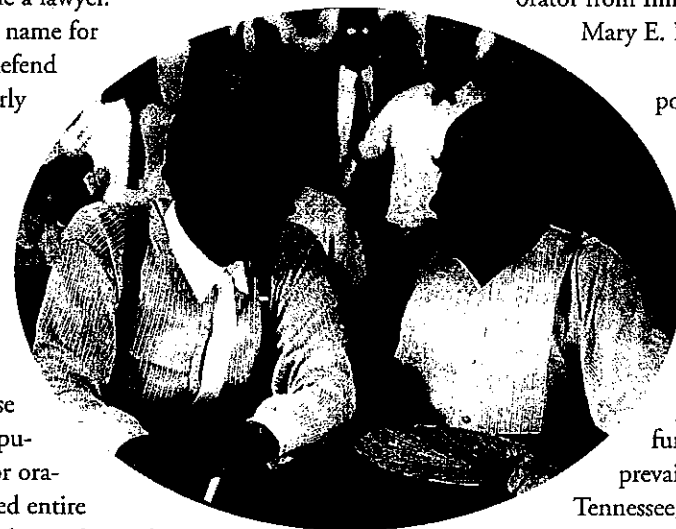


Clarence Darrow Attorney for the Defense

Clarence Seward Darrow (1857-1938) was raised in Kinsman, Ohio, the son of the town's only atheist, Americus Darrow, coffin-maker. Darrow grew up reading the work of scientific writers such as Charles Darwin. As a teen, he participated in town debates, "always arguing the negative, and always winning." It seemed as if he was fated to become a lawyer.

In Chicago, he quickly made a name for himself as the lawyer who would defend even the most impossible cases. Early in his career he focused on Labor cases; later in life he participated in some of the nation's most sensational trials. Darrow used court cases to comment on the important social, political, and religious issues of his time. He frequently tried to shift blame away from the defendant and onto society. In these pre-television years, the general population had a greater appreciation for oratory skills. Newspapers often printed entire speeches, which allowed Darrow's ideas to be read on a large scale. This presence, combined with the extreme cases he undertook, made him one of the most famous lawyers in the country.

When Darrow heard about the Scopes Trial in Tennessee (and that William Jennings Bryan was heading the prosecution), he immediately wanted to be involved. He had already attempted to debate Bryan on the exact subject of the trial without success. Through the trial, Darrow hoped to meet his greatest opponent head on. Darrow was a firm believer in science and the quality of the human mind to observe, evaluate, and comprehend. ★



Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan in private conversation during the trial. Adversaries in this case, they were lifelong friends.

William Jennings Bryan Attorney for the Prosecution

William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) was born in Salem, Illinois, where he enjoyed a quiet childhood consisting mostly of reading and playing sports. His mother home-schooled him until he was ten, which he described as "the pleasantest memory of my boyhood." Eventually, Bryan graduated as valedictorian and class orator from Illinois College, after which he married Mary E. Baird and moved to Nebraska.

In Nebraska, Bryan began his political career, eventually becoming known as the "Great Commoner." His focus on the rights and morals of the common people got him the Democratic Party's presidential candidacy three times (1896, 1900, 1908) and brought him close to winning all three times. Bryan swiftly rose to the position of celebrity particularly in the South, where both fundamentalism and democratic values prevailed. In fact, after he spoke in Tennessee, most people were so moved that the state enacted the Butler Act, an anti-evolution law for its public school system.

Bryan began his crusade against evolution after reading *The Belief in God and Immortality* by Professor James H. Leuba. This book solidified Bryan's belief that evolution "introduced a real and present danger to the country's moral health." In 1925 when the Scopes Trial came along, Bryan volunteered his services for the prosecution, even though he had not practiced law for thirty years. It turned out to be his last case; he died five days after the conclusion of the trial. Bryan died as he had lived, in the spotlight, fighting for the rights of the average citizen. ★

On-Line or at the Library

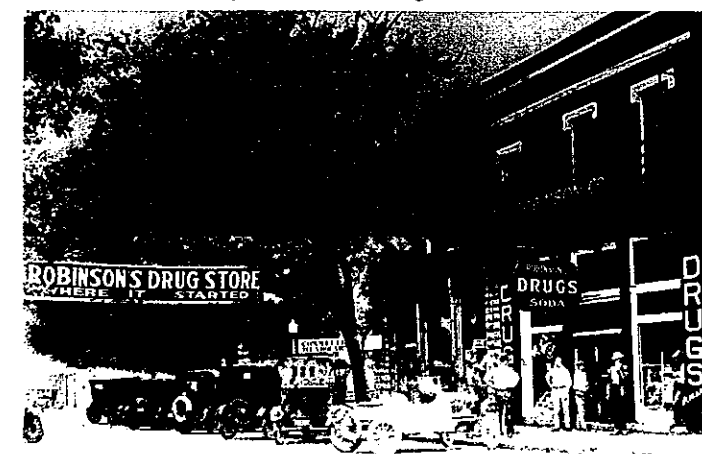
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SCOPES TRIAL, CHECK OUT:

Summer for the Gods by Edward J. Larson, Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the issues, the trial, and the consequences
The Scopes Trial: A Photographic History by Caudill, Larson, and Mayshark
<http://www.siarchives.si.edu/research/scopes.html>, recently discovered Scopes Trial photos from the Smithsonian Archives
Landmark American Trials: The Scopes "Monkey Trial"—1925 from World Almanac Video (www.worldalmanacvideo.com)

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE 1920S, LOOK UP:

Jazz Age • Prohibition • Ku Klux Klan • Women's Suffrage
Famous Trials: Sacco & Vanzetti, Leopold & Loeb, Fatty Arbuckle
F. Scott Fitzgerald • Charles Lindbergh • Clara Bow • Babe Ruth
Harlem Renaissance • Algonquin Round Table • the Crash

Dayton, Tennessee, was a sleepy little hill town until the Scopes Trial focused the world's attention there. Research the history of the trial to find out who started all the commotion and why Robinson's Drug Store is "where it started."



Questions for Discussion

What is the central conflict in *Inherit the Wind*? Discuss the ways in which the playwrights support this theme through their characters and motifs.

Discuss the present day significance of *Inherit the Wind*. What do you suppose was relevant about the play when it first appeared in 1955?

Compare and contrast the characterization of Brady and Drummond. Explain how the perception of the townspeople reinforces their characterizations.

How does Brady's character relate to the idea of hubris, or excessive pride? Is his character tragic? How?

After researching the historical facts of the Scopes trial, discuss why the authors of the play may have made the creative choices they did.

In the course of the play, Brady refers to the "pagan hypotheses" of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. What does Brady mean by "pagan"? Look the word up in several different dictionaries; you will find a wide range of meanings. Why might that be? How has the word's meaning changed since the 1920s?

How does the character of E. K. Hornbeck function in the play? Do some research on H. L. Mencken, the famous journalist who inspired this character. How does the character compare to the person?

What purpose does Bert and Rachel's romantic relationship serve in the play?

Discuss the historical context of the Scopes trial and the rapidly changing society of the United States in the 1920s. Discuss the trial's place in the twentieth century as a whole.

What other historic events have inspired stage plays? What historic events or issues that interest you might be the basis for new stage plays?

Paintings, novels, plays, and other works of art may be fictional or based on fact. What lies behind the human impulse to make art out of real life? What does this transformation give the artist? What does it bring to the viewer or the audience?

As you watch *Inherit the Wind*, notice the theatrical means used to tell such a large-scale story on a relatively small stage. Imagine what kind of creative ideas you might use to theatrically depict "unstageable" events such as the attacks of 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina.

How does the play speak to the struggle of the individual versus society at large? What message does it contain about the power of the individual to change society?

What is your opinion on the issues presented in the play? How does the play address your personal point of view? Did the play help you to understand other points of view? How, or why not? ★

Vocabulary

agnostic: A person who believes that the human mind cannot know whether there is a God or an ultimate cause, or anything beyond material phenomena.

atheist: A person who believes that there is no God.

Chautauqua: An institution that flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries providing popular education combined with entertainment in the form of lectures, concerts, and plays often presented outdoors or in a tent. The original Chautauqua began after the Civil War as an assembly for the training of Sunday school teachers and church workers at Chautauqua Lake in New York State.

Pentateuch: The first five books of the Bible, traditionally attributed to Moses.

the Revealed Word: The fundamentalist view holds that the Bible is the revealed Word of God, which was given by inspiration of God. Inspiration means verbal and/or mechanical inspiration; i.e. the Holy Spirit was in full control of the Bible writer, either by verbally dictating everything he was writing or by using the person as a tool to work through. This theory of inspiration has the logical conclusion that the original manuscripts are without error or contradiction.

venireman: A member of a venire, a group of people summoned for jury service (from whom a jury will be chosen); from the Latin venire, to come. ★

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Questions or comments?

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December 1, 2, 6-9, 13-16, 19, 20

Intimate Apparel • February 2, 8

The Color of Justice

Monday-Friday, February 1–March 10

King Lear • March 7-10, 14-17, 21, 22

Underneath the Lintel

March 29, April 12, 18, May 3

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April 25, 26, 28, May 3, 4

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