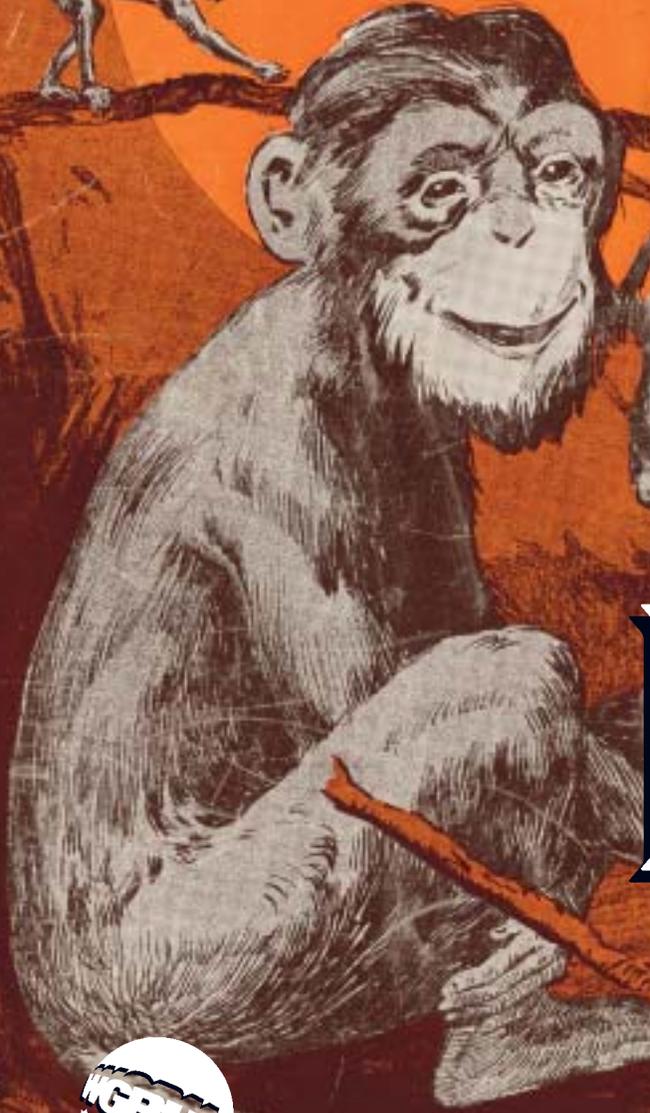


# YOU CAN'T MAKE A MONKEY OUT OF ME

by BILLY ROSE and  
CLARENCE GASKILL



1 x 60

# MONKEY TRIAL



International

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For eight sweltering days in July 1925, hundreds of people streamed into Dayton, Tennessee, to watch the trial of football coach and part-time biology teacher John Scopes. They had come to watch one of the most remarkable trials of the 20th century. With 175,000 words being dispatched daily and WGN Radio broadcasting the trial live, it was the first major media event in American history. The proceedings captured so much attention because they pitted science against religion and promised a battle royale between two of the most prominent men of the age. The Scopes trial created fault lines in American society that exist to this day.

Scopes was accused of violating a Tennessee law that forbade the teaching of evolution. “It was a symbolic law,” says historian Lawrence Levine, “It was a law symbolizing who was right, who was legitimate. Religion was legitimate. Darwin was not legitimate in the state of Tennessee.” Since the state’s official biology textbook included an explanation of evolution, no one expected the law to be enforced.

However, several months later, the fledgling American Civil Liberties Union seized on the Tennessee law as an attack on free speech. The ACLU ran ads in Tennessee newspapers looking for a teacher who would be willing to challenge the law. Faced with closing mines and tough times in their little town of 1,800, Dayton’s leaders thought a court case would bring attention—and business—to Dayton. They persuaded high school teacher John Scopes to be arrested and tried for teaching evolution.

The crowds didn’t come to see Scopes or to hear the arguments of his ACLU attorneys. They came to witness a clash of Titans, a fight to the finish between the lead prosecuting and defense attorneys, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan, who were two of the greatest orators of the day.

For thirty years, Bryan had been a progressive force in the Democratic Party. He’d supported women’s suffrage, the rights of farmers and laborers, and he believed passionately in majority rule. But on the question of the origins of man, Bryan put his faith in God. Opposing him was the country’s most brilliant defense attorney, Clarence Darrow. For years he had been trying to engage Bryan in a debate over religion. Hearing that Bryan was coming to Dayton, Darrow offered his services—without pay—to the defense. He came to Dayton because he believed in free speech.

The trial quickly took on a circus-like atmosphere. Outside the courthouse a chimpanzee dressed in a suit and indignant preachers competed for attention. Inside, the judge wouldn’t allow scientists to testify, irritating even John Butler, the Baptist legislator who had drafted the law.

In an unprecedented move, Bryan, the key prosecuting lawyer, was called as a witness for the defense. Historian Phillip Johnson says, “The idea of the defense lawyer calling the chief prosecutor as a witness is absurd. The other prosecutors thought it was crazy, but Bryan thought it was an opportunity to have the debate to make his case.” The jury took just nine minutes to convict Scopes. Often humorous and sometimes frightening, the story of two value systems colliding still resonates today.

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## AMERICAN EXPERIENCE™

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