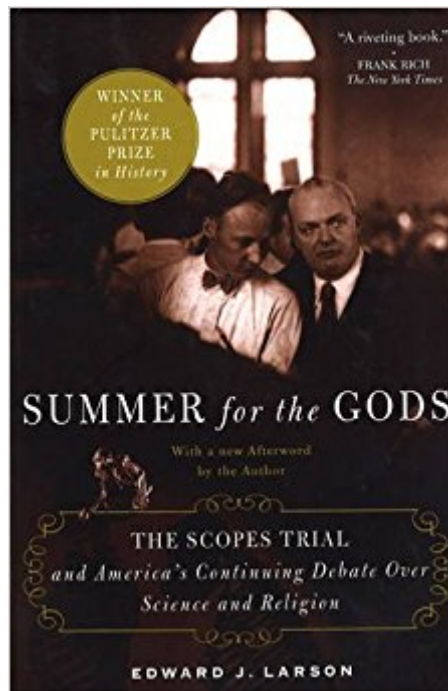




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# Summer For The Gods: The Scopes Trial And America's Continuing Debate Over Science And Religion



## Synopsis

In the summer of 1925, the sleepy hamlet of Dayton, Tennessee, became the setting for one of the 20th century's most contentious dramas: the Scopes trial that pit William Jennings Bryan and the anti-Darwinists against a teacher named John Scopes into a famous debate over science, religion, and their place in public education. That trial marked the start of a battle that continues to this day—in Dover, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Cobb County, Georgia, and many other cities and states throughout the country. Edward Larson's classic, *Summer for the Gods*, received the Pulitzer Prize in History in 1998 and is the single most authoritative account of a pivotal event whose combatants remain at odds in school districts and courtrooms. For this edition, Larson has added a new preface that assesses the state of the battle between creationism and evolution, and points the way to how it might potentially be resolved.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you haven't seen the film version of *Inherit the Wind*, you might have read it in high school. And even people who have never heard of either the movie or the play probably know something about the events that inspired them: The 1925 Scopes "monkey trial," during which Darwin's theory of evolution was essentially put on trial before the nation. *Inherit the Wind* paints a romantic picture of John Scopes as a principled biology teacher driven to present scientific theory to his students, even in the teeth of a Tennessee state law prohibiting the teaching of anything other than creationism. The truth, it turns out, was something quite different. In his fascinating history of the Scopes trial, *Summer for the Gods*, Edward J. Larson makes it abundantly clear that Truth and the Purity of

Science had very little to do with the Scopes case. Tennessee had passed a law prohibiting the teaching of evolution, and the American Civil Liberties Union responded by advertising statewide for a high-school teacher willing to defy the law. Communities all across Tennessee saw an opportunity to put themselves on the map by hosting such a controversial trial, but it was the town of Dayton that came up with a sacrificial victim: John Scopes, a man who knew little about evolution and wasn't even the class's regular teacher. Chosen by the city fathers, Scopes obligingly broke the law and was carted off to jail to await trial. What happened next was a bizarre mix of theatrics and law, enacted by William Jennings Bryan for the prosecution and Clarence Darrow for the defense. Though Darrow lost the trial, he made his point--and his career--by calling Bryan, a noted Bible expert, as a witness for the defense. *Summer for the Gods* is a remarkable retelling of the trial and the events leading up to it, proof positive that truth is stranger than science. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Few courtroom dramas have captured the nation's attention so fully as that played out in 1925 when Tennessee prosecuted John Scopes for teaching evolutionary science in the classroom. Seventy years later, Larson gives us the drama again, tense and gripping: the populist rhetoric of Scopes' chief accuser, William Jennings Bryan; the mordant wit of his defender, Clarence Darrow; the caustic satire of the trial's most prominent chronicler, H. L. Mencken. But as a legal and historical scholar, Larson moves beyond the titanic personalities to limn the national and cultural forces that collided in that Dayton courtroom: agnosticism versus faith; North versus South; liberalism versus conservatism; cosmopolitanism versus localism. Careful and evenhanded analysis dispels the mythologies and caricatures in film and stage versions of the trial, leaving us with a far clearer picture of the cultural warfare that still periodically erupts in our classes and courts. Bryce Christensen --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

A detailed, thorough, and authoritative look at the clash between Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan during the Scopes "Monkey" Trial. The author discusses the background contexts of the cultural forces that culminated in the trial, in the backgrounds of each of the major (and several of the other) participants in the trial, and the ongoing struggles over cultural and legal issues raised in the trial. Of course, the trial itself is brought to life in accurate detail that maintains the drama and excitement of more fictional takes on the clash. Whether one is interested in American history, the question of evolution or creationism in schools, the roll of fundamentalism in the past and future, critical chapters in the biographies of Darrow and Bryan, or a myriad of other subjects,

this is a must read. If one simply wants an enjoyable, engaging read that happens to be factual rather than fictional, you've found the right book. I cannot say enough good things about this work.

Larson's Pulitzer Prize winning work is careful, clear, and revealing. Book thesis: A book solely about the [Scopes] trial and its place in American history; America's continuing debate over science and religion. This book does precisely what it sets out to do: take a look at the Scopes trial and evaluate what it has meant for American society since that time. In fact, as one reads the book, one finds that Larson accomplishes exactly what he intends to with each chapter. Is it written so clearly that the reader never has to wonder where Larson will be going in the respective chapter--the chapter thesis is almost always placed at the end of the first paragraph, and summarizes to the reader the happenings during the chapter. Of course, the remainder of the chapter is not redundant, but merely substantiates the initial claim. Although one might determine the first section ("Before...") to be a bit dry, this section is crucial to understanding the remainder of the book and the significance of the trial even at the onset. Truly, the way Larson sets up the arguments for both sides of the case (chapters 2 and 3), create an immense amount of tension within me as I wrestled with the validity of both claims. It really does make sense for the majority to determine what is taught to their children, but it also makes sense to have the experts determine what should be taught in their field. So, even though the first section may be a bit dry, it is essential to understanding what this trial represents. Of course, it represents different things to different peoples--to some it merely means money. Larson does an excellent job of pulling back the curtain to reveal the actual events that occurred; he is not influenced by later recapitulations of the trial (but in fact devotes a whole chapter to explain these and why they are misguided). His recounting is measured and accurate, and he does not allow subjective interpretation or framing of the events (indeed, throughout one is hard pressed to find evidence for which side they believe Larson himself agrees with!). The interpretation which he eventually does offer is merely more historical recounting--what people thought and believed about the trial after it was over. Larson is a careful historian who is truly interested in clearing up the dust surrounding one of America's most famous and influential trials. For those who grew up hearing the legends of the Scopes trial, this is for you. For those of a younger generation who have never heard "Scopes" except in passing reference, this is for you too--it helps not only understand history, but understand today and our trajectory. (Responding to what another reviewer has said regarding Intelligent Design, Larson answers in the new Afterword.)

This is a very informative book, but a good editor was needed to eliminate some of the repetitive

detail. The mid-section, about the trial itself, was interesting, but the first and final sections, dealing with events leading up to the trial and the events resulting from the trial were way too detailed for anyone but a scholar or student of this period. It seemed as though Mr. Larson did a great deal of research and decided to use everything he found. For the interested but casual reader, this level of detail was hard to slog through and unnecessary.

'Summer of the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's continuing debate over Science and Religion' by Edward J Larson. Hardcover Edition: used This is an excellent account of the Scopes Trial from beginning to end. When I went to school in the 50's and graduated from High School in 1960. The subject was not presented in US Schools, or at least I don't remember ever reading anything about it. I remember having heard later there was a theory that man descended from apes in the mid 60's, but will admit at the time it sounded preposterous. Mostly, because I was not aware of the discovery's that had already been made in the field. It was not due to any large amount of religious belief, I never bought into it as a child either. I was raised by Christian parents to be skeptical of the world. Which may sound a little strange, because they both bought into the creation myth wholeheartedly. So I will have to plead ignorance at the time. But, having since then gotten heavier into evolution, it almost seems preposterous now that was the belief of the day. I bought the book wanting more information on that aspect of the controversy over evolution, that is still raging today in various ways between science and Fundamentalist Christian's who do not want their children hearing any other version than creationism. That is something I found a great amount of in this book was information. That includes discovery's of man's origins at the turn of the century. The author paints an excellent well balance portrait and background as to the atmosphere of the day, political happenings and those people who were involved in the trial. It doesn't take either side of the issue, just gives the reader the details to decide for themselves what they want to believe. It made the whole story come to life. I bought this book used, received in a timely manner and it was in excellent condition. I will be keeping it for future generations of my family. So far I have had good luck buying a few used ones.

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