A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STAGE WORK *INHERIT THE WIND*

REGARDING ITS DEVIATION FROM THE HISTORIC SCOPES’ TRIAL OF 1925 AND SUBSEQUENT IMPACT UPON THE DEBATE OF HUMAN ORIGINS

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STAGE WORK INHERIT THE WIND REGARDING ITS DEVIATION FROM THE HISTORIC SCOPES’ TRIAL OF 1925 AND SUBSEQUENT IMPACT UPON THE DEBATE OF HUMAN ORIGINS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THE STAGE WORK’S ORGINAL INTENT AS A PRODUCT OF THE TIMES</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE STAGE WORK’S GRADUAL DEVIATION FROM ITS ORIGINAL INTENT</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE STAGE WORK’S DEVIATION FROM THE HISTORICAL PERCEPTION OF THE CHARACTER OF WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE STAGE WORK’S DEVIATION FROM THE HISTORICAL PERCEPTION OF THE CHARACTER OF CLARENCE DARROW</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE STAGE WORK’S DEVIATION FROM A HISTORICAL PERCEPTION OF DAYTON, TENNESSE’S RELIGIOUS POPULATION</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. L. Mencken</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding thoughts on the religious of Dayton, Tennessee</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. THE PHENOMENON OF ART’S ABILITY TO INFLUENCE SOCIETY AS SEEN IN THE STAGWORK INHERIT THE WIND</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic impact</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical impact</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological impact</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. THE PROGRESSION OF INHERIT THE WIND FROM DRAMATIC LICENSE TO MYTHIC LEGEND</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The progression of the Scopes’ myth..........................................................74

_Inherit the Wind_’s influence coupled with America’s cultural shift........80

Fictional drama in the form of _Inherit the Wind_ and America’s mindset...87

END NOTES........................................................................................................89

BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................100
CHAPTER I

THE STAGEWORK’S ORIGINAL INTENT AS A PRODUCT OF THE TIMES

The world of 1955 was a very different one from today in a number of ways. The first appearance of a black, female singer, Marian Anderson, at the Metropolitan Opera in New York; the launch of the first atomic submarine, the USS Nautilus; and the airing of the first televised Presidential debate between Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson, served to highlight modernization of American thought, technology and political pursuits. Among these emerging changes in societal progress, American theatre was experiencing some of its greatest works to date. The year 1955 marked the debut of such notable plays as Tennessee William’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Arthur Miller’s *A View from the Bridge*.

The threat of censorship in the form of McCarthyism had just recently been dealt a serious blow: McCarthy himself was under scrutiny by the Eisenhower administration and the press. His once unopposed reign in ferreting out Communist sympathizers in, among other things, the American
The entertainment industry, came under personal attack in a speech by then Vice President Richard Nixon who said, “Men who have in the past done effective work exposing Communists in this country have, by reckless talk and questionable methods, made themselves the issue rather than the cause they believe in so deeply.”¹ In addition, noted broadcaster Edward Murrow used his program See it Now in March of 1954, to criticize McCarthy’s methods. “Leading politicians in both parties had been embarrassed by McCarthy’s actions, and on December 2, 1954, a censure motion condemned his conduct by 67 votes to 22.”² Following this censure McCarthy lost his position on the Government Committee on Operations of the Senate. With most newspapers unwilling to print his stories, he soon faded from public interest.

Even with McCarthy out of the public eye, however, there still remained the potential for entertainers, writers and directors to clash with the House Un-American Activities Committee. One such individual was Arthur Miller. Just one year prior to McCarthy’s downfall, Miller wrote and premiered The Crucible, a play which metaphorically compared McCarthy’s actions to those of the judges in the Salem Witch trials. Two years later Miller was called before the HUAC for attending communist meetings with director Elia Kazan. Whether or not the McCarthy era had completely ended, its aftereffects continued on for some time.
It was in the midst of this atmosphere that playwrights Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, collaborators for more than ten years, produced what historically is considered their most significant dramatic work. Utilizing the same device as Miller, basing a fictional work on an historical incident, in this case the 1925 Scopes Trial, they penned *Inherit the Wind*. Lawrence and Lee tackled the idea that any attack upon free thought is tantamount to forcing individuals to live in ignorance and fear. They viewed the McCarthy investigations as a shackling of freedom of thought through coercion, public pressure and fear of punishment. In the Production Notes for their play, Lawrence and Lee, sum up its purpose, “It [*Inherit the Wind*] assaults those who would constrict any human being’s right to think, to teach, to learn.”3 They continue in this vein, stating, “Humanity is on trial. Anyone who would limit thought is on trial.”4

The play, loosely based on the factual incidents of the Scopes’ trial of 1925, features the fictional characters Henry Drummond for the defense and Matthew Harrison Brady for the prosecution. The issue at hand is that of a young school teacher, Bertram Cates who is being tried for teaching the theory of evolution in a public school system which deems such teaching as both illegal and morally dangerous. When Drummond masterfully corners Brady late in the proceedings, Brady begins to break down.
In one of the more compelling scenes of the play, a desperate

[...] Brady accuses Drummond of trying to “destroy everyone’s belief in
God.” Drummond angrily replies that he is “... trying to stop you bigots
and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States!”
Drummond’s reply is an expression of Lawrence and Lee’s
passion against censorship, not only in relationship to the Butler Law [the
Tennessee law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools] but to
McCarthyism as well.5

Lawrence and Lee’s play made a strong impression upon its audience. The
seeming David versus Goliath battle of the outsider Drummond facing the
overwhelming atmosphere of ignorance, religiously motivated intolerance and
hero-worship struck a chord with the American public. The oppressive,
controlling presence of the fanatical characters of Hillsboro led by the egomania
of the fictional champion Matthew Brady was unleashed in all its bigotry and
backwoods glory on the stage. In contrast the level-headedness and agnostic
pragmatism of Henry Drummond rang through the theater as the voice of
shrewd reasoning and clarity of thought. A message was delivered. A dramatic
impact was felt, and is still being felt decades later as this stage work continues
to play in theatres across the country.

As I investigated this production and the impact it has made throughout
the decades, some key questions rose to the surface:

◦What was the original intent of the authors?
How does this work deviate from the historical account of the trial of 1925 and various persons related to it?

How has that deviation from historical accuracy affected the audience perception of the real-life events of the trial?

What impact has that change in perception had on the modern origin’s debate?

Over the next few chapters, I will take an in-depth look at the literary text of Inherit the Wind and several noteworthy productions. After establishing the historical intent of the authors, I will examine the play’s dramatized version of the events of the Scopes Monkey Trial, noting especially the depiction of the main prosecutor, the defense attorney and the townsfolk in comparison to their historical counterparts. I will then investigate and attempt to analyze the impact that deviation from historical events has created in subsequent productions of the play and the effect those productions have had on the modern origin’s debate in America.
CHAPTER II

THE STAGE WORK’S GRADUAL DEVIATION FROM ITS ORIGINAL INTENT

Regardless of the intents of playwrights and authors down through the ages, works of literary art have, at times, had the power to take on a life and impact of their own. However, playwrights can also make deliberate symbolic and written choices directing their works to support a particular position or ideology. The question before us, then, is twofold: what was the original intent of the written text *Inherit the Wind*, and how has it deviated from the historical record?

The playwrights, Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee, state their intent as follows:

*Inherit the Wind* is not history. The events which took place in Dayton, Tennessee, during the scorching July of 1925 are clearly the genesis of this play. It has, however, an exodus entirely of its own. Moreover, the issues of their [Bryan and Darrow’s] conflict have acquired a new dimension and meaning in the years since they clashed at the Rhea County Courthouse. So, *Inherit the Wind* does not pretend to be journalism.6

The authors continue this line of thought in their Production Notes at the end of the play.
Inherit the Wind is not about the theory of evolution versus the literal interpretation of the Bible. It assaults those who would constrict any human being’s right to think, to teach, to learn. Our major theme is ‘the dignity of the individual human mind.’

Humanity is on trial. Anyone who would limit thought is on trial.7

With this information clearly stated in the work itself, one could speculate that the authors’ intentions to promote freedom of thought would be clearly understood by a reading or presentation of the piece and that the piece itself is not a historical retelling of the Scopes’ trial. With Lawrence and Lee’s written intent ready at hand, a director interested in presenting this piece would supposedly find him or herself well equipped to produce a stage production promoting the right of the individual to think. Upon deeper study of the text, a director might also be able to draw comparisons to the era of McCarthyism and its connection to similar modern-day scenarios. Two other courses of artistic choice, however, would prove to be harder to substantiate through an informed researching of this text: the promotion of a historical representation of Dayton, Tennessee in 1925 and a substantive debate on the issues of the origins of man.

In light of this conclusion, it is interesting to note, however, that a significant number of reviews seem to indicate that the stage work is being used to comment authoritatively on the current origin’s date. BBC Shropshire reviewer, Trystan Jones, drew a connection between the play and the origins debate in her review of the Shropshire County Drama Group’s 2005 production:
As in the real life events of 1925, the core of the play is the later courtroom confrontation between creationism and evolution, which bears the playwrights’ wider hopes and aspirations. In these scenes the production was gripping, eloquent and thought-provoking. While the audience filtered in, a large sepia-toned image of Darwin’s face looked down over the stage.8

Ironically enough, the production was staged in St. Chad’s Church, Shrewsbury, the place of Charles Darwin’s christening.

Critic Marianne Messina seems to have undertaken no search for the intent of the playwrights, choosing instead to begin her review of San Jose Stage Company’s production in 2006, this way;

Knowing *Inherit the Wind*, by film or play, well enough to anticipate the great lines before they’re spoken does not make San Jose Stage’s Company’s production of the Jerome Lawrence/Robert E. Lee play any less fascinating. In the play, Bert Cates (Bill Olson) is prosecuted for countermanding a Tennessee state law banning the teaching of evolution; the story is based on the actual 1925 trial famously called the Monkey Trial by H.L. Mencken.9

Commenting upon the 2006 Berkeley Community Theatre production, Karen D’Souza of the Mercury News A&E Interactive states that the majority of today’s critics and audiences perceive the content of Lawrence and Lee’s famous play as being historically sound and ideologically focused on the origins debate:

When “*Inherit the Wind*” first blew onto Broadway in 1955, it had already been 30 years since the Scopes Monkey Trial, the legendary courtroom battle where science and creationism faced off. […] Here in 2006, public debate has come full circle. The classroom has once again become an ideological battleground. How to reconcile the belief in God with the theory of evolution is once again a white-hot issue.10
These critics seem to make an innate assumption concerning the content of the play. Beyond this, however, they also present their impression of a widely held understanding of the intent of the play this way: *Inherit the Wind* is viewed by the majority of those who produce it and attend it as a treatise on the epic courtroom battle of creationism versus evolution.

If one considers the availability of subject matter in the text relating directly to the debate of human origins, one can see how this work has been produced at times as a straightforward examination of the trial itself. The fictionalized version, while changing names and the location of the historical event, does bridge the gap between fact and art through a number of historically accurate or atmospherically similar events, quotations and characterizations. By disregarding the disclaimer in the playbook itself, the director or producer of the work frees himself to represent the text much differently than how it was intended. Comments such as those by Chicago theater critic, Hedy Wiess, writing in response to the Northlight Theatre’s 2006 production, show a representative opinion in support of this thought.

In the final analysis, "Inherit the Wind" [...] is a play about the battle waged over two books. On one side is the Bible (author or authors unknown); on the other is The Origin of Species, Charles Darwin’s groundbreaking work on the theory of evolution, first published in 1859. Even more crucially, this 1955 drama by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee -- a fictionalized version of the fabled 1925 Scopes case (popularly
known as "The Monkey Trial") -- is about the battle between those who believe there is a place for only one of those books and those who understand the two texts can coexist and serve vitally different functions, with one as a poetic, mythic and spiritual guide to the universe, and the other as a crucial scientific explanation of life as we know it.\textsuperscript{11}

Weiss goes a step further in linking the fictionalized events portrayed in *Inherit the Wind* with the debate currently going on around the country.

The debate, as those keeping track of recent curriculum battles in school systems in Pennsylvania and Kansas well know, remains heated to this day, with the notion of "intelligent design" now put forth as a milder "alternative" to Genesis. Pare it all down to essentials, and it's "fundamentalism vs. secularism."\textsuperscript{12}

A deeper study of the piece’s genesis leads the reader to an understanding of its commentary on the McCarthy era of the 1950s; however, even a reviewer with that particular knowledge, places the emphasis more quickly upon the creationism versus evolution debate of our times.

Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee wrote *Inherit the Wind*, beginning in the late 1940s; its first production was in 1954, and it opened at the National Theater in 1955. While *Wind* is ostensibly a play about Creationism v. Darwinism, it is saturated with tones of McCarthyism throughout. [...] The story is dark, and as current today (see Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School Board) as it was when it was being written.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to the text being misappropriated as a credible commentary on the current origin’s debate, the mixture of fact and fiction in its retelling of
history abound. Character names, though changed, leave their historical counterparts completely recognizable. The location has been altered, but the geographical atmosphere parallels that of Dayton, Tennessee. The trial issues, the basic timeline, and even the presence of a hurdy-gurdy man point to that famous event of the summer of 1925. Pulitzer Prize winning author and anti-Darwinist, Edward J. Larson depicts public understanding of the piece with this comment: “The issue of Darrow slaying Bryan and routing the anti-evolution movement was further stamped on the public consciousness by the popular 1950s play about the trial, *Inherit the Wind*...” Authors Marvin Olasky and John Perry take this thought much further:

Thirty years later the play *Inherit the Wind* cemented those caricatures [...] To most of the audience, this was history; consciously or unconsciously, in the absence of the fact they accepted this depiction as the way it was. Thus, fiction gradually supplanted fact...15

And, again, in this way, dealing with the disclaimer itself, “Despite this clear disclaimer, generations of viewers came to see the play as a historic account of the Scopes trial. This gave popular culture a highly distorted view of the facts”16

A writer for the *New Yorker*, Brendan Gill, reviewing its Broadway opening, stated, “From one moment to the next, we can never be sure whether we are in history or out of it...”17 Finally, noted conservative educator, Carol
Iannone, comments that, in her opinion, the text itself deliberately blurs the lines of its original intent by stating,

The play reveals a great deal about a mentality that demands open-mindedness and excoriates dogmatism, only to advance its own certainties more insistently – that promotes tolerance and intellectual integrity, but stoops to vilifying the opposition, falsifying reality, and distorting history in the service of its agenda...

A careful examination of the history of the play reveals that Lawrence and Lee’s original intent was to use a fictionalized account of a famous historical event to make a statement regarding McCarthyism specifically and, in a broader sense, the right of the individual to think. Down through the years, however, this production has been represented onstage as a venue of both historical accuracy and a work of significant information regarding the creationism/evolution debate – something a study of the text reveals that it is not qualified to do. To further examine this phenomenon of gradual change in intent and the resulting impact on the viewing audience, I would like to make a study of how the text has deviated from the historical record. It is my belief that the majority of audience members attending productions of *Inherit the Wind* are unaware of both the deviation from the historical record and the original intent of the text.
Larson subsequently states it this way, “it may not have been accurate history, but it was brilliant theatre – and it all but replaced the actual trial in the nation’s memory.”19
CHAPTER III

THE STAGE WORK’S DEVIATION FROM THE HISTORICAL PERCEPTION OF THE CHARACTER OF WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

Those who would seek to glean a historical perspective of the real-life personalities represented by their fictional counterparts in *Inherit the Wind*, would find themselves at an academic disadvantage. Despite this fact, the play and the movie have been utilized during the past five decades in both history and English classes for that very purpose. Since *Inherit the Wind* was not created to serve this purpose, there should be no real expectation for it to give an accurate representation of the events and figures surrounding the famous trial of 1925. To further demonstrate how the play does not give this representation, one has only to look at the most prominent players in the Scopes’ trial itself -- especially William Jennings Bryan. Both Bryan’s and Darrow’s presence at the trial gave the event a prominence and attention it would otherwise not have achieved. A three-time candidate for President, the Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson as well as a firm believer in the Scriptures as he understood them, Bryan was a figure that commanded the respect of the people
and the admiration of his friends and opponents alike. Descriptions of him by his contemporaries fit a similar pattern. He was a gentleman; he was reasonable; he treated friend and foe alike. He was a man who spoke with grace and worked passionately at the tasks before him. His title, the “Great Commoner,” united him with the people for whom he stood. He was characterized often as a man of gentility and respect. His wife, Mary Baird Bryan, spoke of him this way:

When a man is in public life, the searchlight of publicity shows only his dominant traits, these often overemphasized and out of proportion to other qualities. It remains for those who knew him best to give, by the addition of more intimate knowledge, a well-rounded estimate of his character. Perhaps the dominant note which has been sounded by the recent obituary notices in the press is a belief in Mr. Bryan’s personal sincerity and integrity. "Even though we do not agree with some of his doctrines," they said repeatedly, "we can pay tribute to his honesty and sincerity." Under this qualifying phrase was often the shadow of years of bitter opposition.20

Trial historian Sprague de Camp, though not a fan of Bryan, characterizes him with these words:

In personality he was forceful, energetic, and opinionated but genial, kindly, generous, likable and charming. . . . Although an intellectual absolutist—a black and white thinker—he showed a praiseworthy tolerance towards those who disagreed with him.21

Author Tom McGowen has this to say: “Most historians of today agree that William Jennings Bryan was a sincere, honorable man who believed firmly in trying to do things for the good of the common people.”22 And, in fact, Bryan did
do many good things for the people. Central issues over which he struggled throughout his life were “the rights of labor and women, the regulation of big business, the reform of campaign finance, progressive taxation, anti-militarism, and more.” More specifically stated,

Bryan’s contributions to American political and social history far exceed most presidents. For example, Bryan is credited with early championing of the following: (1) graduated income tax (16th Amendment), (2) direct election of U.S. senators (17th Amendment), (3) women’s suffrage (19th Amendment), (4) workmen’s compensation, (5) minimum wage, (6) eight-hour workday, (7) Federal Trade Commission, (8) Federal Farm Loan Act, (9) government regulation of telephone/telegraph and food safety, (10) Department of Health, (11) Department of Labor, and (12) Department of Education.

This is not to say that Bryan was without his personal faults. His love of the spotlight was evidenced by his numerous public speeches during his time in Dayton – several given spontaneously to crowds that had gathered in the streets. In his courtroom speeches, he displayed a habit of promoting particular ideas without gathering the available intellectual data that would have given them credibility. Bryan was nearing the end of his career, and, as such, had narrowed his focus. In that narrowing, he at times discarded the study of issues whose premises he found implausible. Nevertheless, Bryan was considered a man of integrity. His faults, though apparent, spoke more to the persona he developed amidst the whirlwind of his political and religious battles, than to the character he brought with him to life.
In his book *A Godly Hero: the Life of William Jennings Bryan*, Michael Kazin, a self-proclaimed secular liberal, has this to say about the need for a reclaiming of the honorable name Jennings had while alive:

I wrote this book, in part, to gain a measure of respect for Bryan and his people. I would like to help “rescue” them from what E. P. Thompson, the great historian and activist, called “the enormous condescension of posterity.” Bryan was the first leader of a major party to argue for permanently expanding the power of the federal government to serve the welfare of ordinary Americans from the working and middle classes. ... He did more than any other man – between the fall of Grover Cleveland and the election of Woodrow Wilson – to transform his party from a bulwark of laissez-faire into the citadel of liberalism we identify with Franklin D. Roosevelt and his ideological descendants.25

So tarnished had his image become by the end of the 1950s, that Ernest R. May, author of *The World War and American Isolation 1914-1917*, remarks, “It is probably true that in the modern climate of opinion no man who can genuinely understand Bryan will be capable of writing his biography.”26

What was the reason for this divergent public view of Jennings which so keenly contrasted with his true reputation and character? One might cite the absence of abundant information on his private life, including little surviving correspondence. One might also look to the possible negative responses and character attacks that his staunch -- and, at times, unpopular -- public stands could easily have generated. As Kazin puts it, “Bryan acted in private much as he did in public – with kindness and optimism, yet stiff-necked toward anyone
who violated his sense of ethics or belittled his ideas.”27 Still, for all of this, the general populace of this present age could gain a proper historical understanding of Bryan’s reputation given easy access to the various media that recorded his life and work. The question remains then, why does Bryan’s memory suffer such open criticism and derision? In the opinion of some authors and critics, the answer is this: the man Jennings had been replaced in the public consciousness by the character Brady.

In the stage work, *Inherit the Wind*, the man Bryan is brought to fictional life in the character of Matthew Harrison Brady, an arrogant, gluttonous buffoon—a manipulator concerned only with his pride and his appetite. Leading constitutional law scholar Gerald Gunther upon seeing the Broadway premiere remarked:

For the first time, I walked out of a play in disgust. I ended up actually sympathizing with Bryan, even though I was and continue to be opposed to the ideas in the case, simply because the playwrights had drawn the character in such comic strip terms.28

Sue Hicks, a prominent member of the prosecution, after attending the film premiere of *Inherit the Wind*, called the piece, “a travesty on William Jennings Bryan,” and, as a result, “nearly purchased television time to denounce it.”29
To better understand the possible reasons for this negative reaction on the part of Bryan’s friends and, at times, critics to *Inherit the Wind*, one must take a look at how the life of Bryan contrasted with the character of Brady. The following are some examples taken from the play, along with the real life events they portrayed that may hold some of the answers: First, rather than being written as a disciplined man in his appetites, Brady was a “belching glutton.” According to *TheMonkeytrial.com*, “Bryan had a large appetite due, perhaps, to his being a diabetic. He was considered by observers of the trial, however, to be in good health, and, at about 230 lbs., considering his height of over six feet, was certainly not obese.” Second, Brady was portrayed as the lead prosecuting attorney, given to attention-grabbing tactics and non-stop orating. Rather, Bryan was invited to participate as an assistant prosecutor, not the lead prosecutor for the State of Tennessee. Except for a stray comment or two, Bryan literally did not address the Court or the jury at all until late in the fifth day of an eight-day trial. He never impaneled a potential juror, never cross-examined a witness, never made a motion, and only introduced two documents into evidence: Hunter’s *Civic Biology* and Darwin’s *Descent of Man.*

A third portrayal of Brady in the play, shows him as fierce and hypocritical in his treatment of witnesses as evidenced in the fictitious examination of Rachel Brown, the fiancée of Bertram Cates. In real life, however, Bryan never elicited testimony from any witness and conducted no direct or cross-examinations during the trial. Fourth, in one of the greatest departures from historical
evidence, Brady was portrayed as not only ignorant of the scientific issues at hand, but willfully and stubbornly so.

Drummond: I don’t suppose you’ve memorized many passages from the *Origin of the Species*?
Brady: I am not in the least interested in the pagan hypotheses of that book.
Drummond: Never read it?
Brady: And I never will.32

To the contrary, “Bryan was thoroughly aware of the scientific arguments both for and against evolution and had read Darwin’s *Descent of Man* in its entirety in 1905.” What might surprise the casual reader to note it that it “was Bryan who introduced Darwin’s *Descent of Man* at the trial, not Darrow.”33 Ironically enough, it was the defense that tried to deny Darwin’s position that man descended from a monkey, something Bryan proved later on in the trial. Additionally, although Bryan disagreed with the evolutionary theory on religious grounds, “he had written many well argued articles which were critical of the scientific evidence used in his day to defend the theory of evolution.”34

Bryan’s ongoing correspondence with evolutionist, Henry Fairfield Osborn, added to the unusual amount of knowledge that he, as a layman, had acquired. Harvard Law Professor and renowned trial lawyer, Alan Dershowitz, even lends this commendation to Jennings:
Nor was Bryan the know-nothing literalist of Inherit the Wind. For the most part, he actually seems to have gotten the better of Clarence Darrow in the argument over the Bible (though not in the question of evolution).\textsuperscript{35}

In a fifth and final characterization, Brady claims special revelation from God.

Drummond: And how do you know that God didn’t ‘spake’ to Charles Darwin?
Brady: I know. Because God tells me to oppose the evil teachings of that man.
Drummond: Oh, God speaks to you?
Brady: Yes.
Drummond: He tells you exactly what’s right and what’s wrong?
Brady: (doggedly) Yes.
Drummond: So you, Matthew Harrison Brady, through oratory, legislation, or whatever, pass along God’s orders to the rest of the world! Gentlemen, meet the “Prophet from Nebraska!”\textsuperscript{36}

Bryan, on the other hand, never made any such claim, on the stand or in public orations. His speeches, while liberally sprinkled with a mix of Scriptural allusions connected, properly or improperly, with political and moral beliefs, never rose to the level of his ever claiming special first-hand communication from God. Finally, in direct contrast to the events historical trial, Brady is reduced to “a mindless babbler...reciting the books of the Bible like a determined schoolboy.”\textsuperscript{37} Eventually, bereft of his pride, and, to some degree, his sanity, he sinks into his wife’s arms lamenting, “Mother. They’re laughing at me, Mother.”\textsuperscript{38} Although Bryan hotly debated Darrow during the Scopes trial, and at the end, slumped exhausted in his chair according to at least one report, he never
emotionally or intellectually fell apart. The transcript of those final moments of the examination bear this out as follows:

Mr. Bryan: Your honor, I think I can shorten this testimony. The only purpose Mr. Darrow has is to slur at the Bible, but I will answer his question. I will answer it all at once, and I have no objection in the world, I want the world to know that this man, who does not believe in a God, is trying to use a court in Tennessee –

Darrow: I object to that.

Mr. Bryan: (continuing) -to slur at it, and while it will require some time, I am willing to take it.

Mr. Darrow: I object to your statement. I am exempting you on your fool ideas that no intelligent Christian on earth believes.39

At this point, the judge adjourned the court for the day, halting the proceedings. Undergoing a rigorous examination by a man of Clarence Darrow’s skill took a visible toll on Bryan. No doubt in the heat and stress of the argument, he was considerably fatigued. Several sources indicate that Bryan was made to appear foolish by his own less-than-effective answers to Darrow’s probing questions. It is apparent that Bryan faltered under Darrow’s attack, and did not represent his ideas well in the end. Despite these descriptions, however, it would be disingenuous to characterize Bryan’s final moments on the stand as mirroring those of the fictitious Brady, that of being reduced to a childish simpleton. The text of *Inherit the Wind* was never intended to be a historical recreation of the events and personalities connected with the Scopes’ trial. When it is used for
this purpose, whether in the classroom or as a stage production, it will, as seen in
the case of Bryan, inevitably create an inaccurate picture of the historical record.
CHAPTER IV

THE STAGE WORK’S DEVIATION FROM THE HISTORICAL PERCEPTION
OF THE CHARACTER OF CLARENCE DARROW

No discussion of the stage work Inherit the Wind would be complete
without an examination of the other ‘giant’ connected with the infamous Scopes’
trial: Clarence Darrow. An accomplished lawyer – arguably the greatest of his
day, a one-time Congressional candidate and an outspoken agnostic and
determinist, Darrow was a formidable match for any prosecutor in the court
room. Some of the most famous cases of the twentieth century were undertaken
and won by him. Despite his fame and notoriety, he was and is still a
complicated figure to describe. Douglas Linder, professor of law at the
University of Missouri, states his own struggle in describing Darrow:

How does one begin to explain this paradox, this sophisticated country
lawyer, this hedonistic defender of the poor and downtrodden, this
honest, devious man, Clarence Seward Darrow? It isn’t easy.40

Darrow read Nietzsche, Tolstoy and Voltaire. He enjoyed poetry and sang
heartily with guests in his home. For a large part of his life, he was, as a public
persona, a man who loved learning and good company.
His philosophical ideology was based upon determinism, “If men are not free agents, he asks, how can we hold them morally responsible for their acts?” This philosophy could be said to have had an impact both on Darrow’s personal actions as well as the public courtroom stands he took. For example, Darrow himself was, at one point, on trial against the charge of attempting to bribe a juror in order to win a case. He was acquitted, though the question of his innocence was held suspect. As well, in what is probably his second most famous case, Darrow defended two young men charged with murder: Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold. It was in this court case that his philosophy of determinism became even more apparent. Linder puts it this way:

Critics complain about the tendency of defense lawyers today to blame others for their clients’ crimes. They should have seen Darrow. He blames for their crime the boys’ youth, their parents, their nannies, their wealth, their hormones, detective novels, a dead German philosopher, college professors, and even World War I.

In his summation, Darrow proclaims this explanation for Leopold and Loeb’s killing of Bobby Franks:

Not for money, not for spite; not for hate. They killed him as they might kill a spider or a fly, for the experience. They killed him because they were made that way. Because somewhere in the infinite processes that go to the making up of the boy or the man something slipped, and those unfortunate lads sit here hated, despised, outcasts, with the community shouting for their blood.
He continues his wrap-up with this rationalization in an attempt to save the young men from the hangman’s noose:

We have grown to think that the misfortune is in not having it. The great misfortune in this terrible case is the money. That has destroyed their lives. That has fostered these illusions. That has promoted this mad act. And, if your honor shall doom them to die, it will be because they are the sons of the rich.44

His ability to take his two clients to the edge, almost discarding them to their fate, is a masterful example of his boldness and shrewdness in court.

I do not know how much salvage there is in these two boys. I hate to say it in their presence, but what is there to look forward to? I do not know but what your Honor would be merciful if you tied a rope around their necks and let them die; merciful to them, but not merciful to civilization, and not merciful to those who would be left behind. To spend the balance of their days in prison is mighty little to look forward to, if anything. Is it anything? They may have the hope that as the years roll around they might be released. I do not know. I do not know. I will be honest with this court as I have tried to be from the beginning. I know that these boys are not fit to be at large. I believe they will not be until they pass through the next stage of life, at forty-five or fifty. Whether they will be then, I cannot tell. I am sure of this; that I will not be here to help them. So far as I am concerned, it is over.45

In the end Leopold and Loeb were spared the rope, the issue of behavior being a product of environment took root in the American consciousness and the name of Clarence Darrow climbed further into national fame and infamy.

In what would be the final defining case of his career, Darrow entered into the fray of the Scopes’ trial. Unlike the characters, Cates and Drummond, both Scopes and Darrow were willing participants. The character Drummond is sent
by the *Baltimore Herald* to try the case as he is “the most agile legal mind of the 20th Century.” In real life, however, Darrow volunteered his services and even paid his own way, putting out more than two thousand dollars – a significant sum for that day. Also, in contrast to the fictionalized account, Darrow wasn’t welcomed with open arms to the defense team. In fact, the ACLU, which sought to create the trial opportunity itself, was “worried” about Darrow’s presence on the team, stating that “its leaders fear that Darrow’s zealous agnosticism will turn the trial into a broadside attack on religion.” They finally said that decision, however, “belongs to Scopes, and he [took] Darrow, along with two additional ACLU lawyers dispatched from New York.”

From the beginning of the fictionalized account, Drummond, though superior in reputation and admittedly a formidable adversary in the courtroom, is placed in the role of the underdog in the townspeople’s opinions. He is vilified and slandered before his arrival to the extent that when he does make his appearance, the first thing that is seen onstage, according to the authors’ notes, is “*a long ominous shadow*” signaling his approach. He enters, hunched over, head jutting forward, to the horror of a little girl who cries, “It’s the Devil!”

At his first appearance in court, he is affable, casual and ready with a purposeful joke or phrase, much to the consternation of the court and prosecuting attorneys. He uses a few early opportunities to ridicule Brady, a
humor device continued throughout the text. These jabs include a reference to Brady’s honorary title of “Colonel,” which was given him by the mayor upon his arrival into town.

As the scene progresses, the two lawyers involve themselves in the jury selection. This activity establishes both Drummonds’ attention to proper court procedure as well as reasonableness and independent thinking. In contrast it highlights Brady’s shallow character and showmanship-like techniques. One potential juror, after a cursory examination, is readily deemed by Brady as, “an honest, God-fearing man,” and is accepted into the pool. After being cross-examined, however, the juror doesn’t seem to suit Brady quite as much.

DRUMMOND: Well, from what you’ve heard about this Darwin, do you think your wife would want to have him over for Sunday dinner?
BRADY: Your Honor, my worthy opponent seems to be cluttering the issue with hypothetical questions –
DRUMMOND: I’m doing your job, Colonel.
DAVENPORT: The prosecution is perfectly able to handle its own arguments.
DRUMMOND: Look, I’ve just established that Mr. Sillers isn’t working very hard at religion. Now, for your sake, I want to make sure he isn’t working at evolution.
SILLERS: I’m just working at the feed store.
DRUMMOND: This man’s alright.
BRADY: I am not altogether satisfied that Mr. Sillers will render impartial judgment in this trial –

As the trial progresses, Drummond gains more and more mastery of both the witnesses on the stand and the crowd in the courtroom. He overcomes the overt
promotion of religious ideology: prayer before sessions, announcements concerning a prayer meeting and a banner in the courtroom itself. He endures jeering from the crowd at times and condescension from Brady. Through all of this, he displays, under his tough exterior, a heart of true compassion and equity as evidenced in several key moments in the script.

One of these moments deals with Drummond’s willingness to call off the trial, if Cates so wishes. “DRUMMOND: (Easily) We can call it off. You want to quit?”

Another incident involves Drummond’s fatherly examination of Howard, a student in Cates’ class. After issuing a philosophical challenge to the jury on the inanity of measuring all actions by a fixed grid of morality, Drummond receives little in return but blank stares. He then turns to Howard:

DRUMMOND: Do you have any idea what I’m talking about, Howard?
HOWARD: No, sir.
DRUMMOND: Well, maybe someday you will. Some day. Thank you, son. That’s all. (Pleasantly, Drummond musses the boy’s hair, then crosses back to his chair and sits.)
JUDGE: The witness is excused. (He raps his gavel, but Howard remains in the chair, staring goop-eyed at his newly found idol.)

A third moment, the most climactic in the play as far as establishing the compassionate side of Drummond, occurs very near the end. Just moments after Brady’s collapse on the stand, the judge reenters the courtroom to deliver the news, “Brady’s dead.” To this Drummond and Hornbeck have very different responses.
DRUMMOND: I can’t imagine the world without Matthew Henry Brady.
CATES: What caused it? Did they say?
HORNBECK: Matthew Henry Brady died of a busted belly. *Drummond slams down his brief case.* Be frank! Why should we weep for him? He cried enough for himself! The national tear duct from Weeping Water, Nebraska, who flooded the whole nation like a one-man Mississippi! You know what he was: a Barnum-bunkum Bible-beating bastard! *Drummond rises, fiercely angry.*

DRUMMOND: You smart-aleck! You have no more right to spit on his religion than you have a right to spit on my religion! Or my lack of it!
HORNBECK: Well, what do you know? Henry Drummond for the defense – even of his enemies!
DRUMMOND: *Low, moved.* There was much greatness in this man.52

With Brady dead and the other characters gone, Drummond is left alone upon the stage. It is here that he makes his final and most impacting act as a man of complete reason and fairness. He balances Darwin’s *Origins of the Species* alongside the Bible, as if measuring their worth. Then, in one decisive movement, he places them side by side and exits the courtroom alone.

While the character of Henry Drummond is fascinating to watch—a mix of wit, sharp observations and folksy charm—he was written as significantly different in manner and motivation from his obvious historical counterpart. A closer look at the life of Clarence Darrow, the man, as it relates to the events of that trial, paints a picture not supported by the dramatic text.

First of all, Darrow was not welcomed into the case by the defense. In fact, besides the ACLU, his entrance was resisted by a significant percentage of the American public as well. “Countless Americans never forgave Darrow for
his role in the Leopold-Loeb trial.” “Others distrusted Darrow due to his militant agnosticism. [...] Even Rappleyea, who hoped that the trial would promote a modernist Christian view of evolution rather than a materialistic one, did not want Darrow.” 53 It was John R. Neal, an eccentric law professor at the University of Tennessee, who eventually succeeded in bringing Darrow into the case. As suspect as Neal’s reputation was, this did little to advance Darrow’s credibility with the defense. The University of Tennessee’s historical archives describe Neal in less than flattering terms:

While Neal proved popular with many of his law students, his inattention to the University’s administrative requirements provoked his superiors. He did not turn in grades promptly; he failed even to grade his examinations. He announced to one class that he would give them all 90s as grades in lieu of an examination. Objectors could elect to take an exam! He often failed to meet his classes, and when he did, the prescribed lesson was discarded in favor of a discussion of current events.

His carelessness with dress deteriorated, in time, to positive slovenliness. He wore the same shirt for days without washing until it wore out; he would then put a new shirt over it. His hair was rarely combed, and he bathed only infrequently.54

Darrow and Neal would go on to have a stormy relationship during the trial.

Secondly, Darrow’s motivations for taking the case were not purely for the advancement of freedom of thought as the character Drummond espouses. “Darrow approached it as the culmination of his lifelong struggle against religious intolerance.”55 His approach contrasted strongly with leading attorney,
Neal’s. “Neal stuck by Darrow for the time being, but differences in their approach to the trial surfaced almost immediately, and each later conspired to remove the other from the case.”

Darrow had, for some time, been pictured as the champion of the underdog. Historically, he had taken a number of cases, including ones involving black clients whom no one would represent and who, for the most part, could not afford to pay him. That picture of Darrow, however, would become tarnished during a very significant two-year period in his life. Geoffrey Cowan, contributor to The American Lawyer and Dean of the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication, sought to uncover Darrow’s motivations during that period of Darrow’s life. His aim was to set the record straight and exonerate Darrow; what he succeeded in doing, however, was changing his own mind.

To my surprise, I soon came to know a Darrow who was very different from his popular image. He might have been idealistic and heroic in the late nineteenth century, but by 1911, in his mid-fifties, Darrow had become cynical and, in the view of many friends and former admirers, greedy and corrupt. While he still handled an occasional case for the underdog, Darrow spent most of his time representing corporate clients, often against the poor and helpless. Reading manuscripts of the era, including the private correspondence of scores of Darrow’s "friends," I learned that by the time he moved to Los Angeles, long before the bribery charges, most of these friends—including the poet Edgar Lee Masters, who had been Darrow’s law partner, and Hamlin Garland, the novelist—had turned away from him. Offended by the man he had become, they
complained, for example, that in personal injury cases he regularly represented corporations that had injured workers and pedestrians. People who knew his tactics in other cases, including the defense of Big Bill Haywood in Idaho in 1907, were confident that he had bribed witnesses and jurors in the past. So in 1912, when he was charged with jury tampering in the McNamara case, they were convinced, on the basis of substantial evidence, that he was guilty.\textsuperscript{57}

The significance of this in regards to the play is that the historical character of Darrow, as portrayed in the fictitious Drummond, sets forth a dramatic picture of an honest lawyer nobly defending innocent Cates. The Darrow of reality, however, was a much different man.

In Darrow’s personal life, Cowan was also surprised by his investigative findings:

People familiar with Darrow’s personal life were also outraged by his treatment of his wife, Ruby (whom he betrayed during a long affair with a young socialist reporter named Mary Field), and by his behavior toward Field (whom he abandoned to return to his wife).\textsuperscript{58}

With this information in hand, it is hard to picture the man described above as the inspiration for the character Drummond, father-figure to Bertram Cates and Rachel Brown, idol of young Howard and defender of dead Brady.

In fact, probably the most contradictory painting of Darrow in the text is the incident in which the character Drummond compassionately responds to the news of Brady’s death. The real-life events of Darrow and Bryan tell a different story:
Word of Bryan’s death reached Darrow that afternoon as he vacationed in the Smoky Mountains. “People down here believe that Bryan died of a broken heart because of your questioning,” a journalist commented. Darrow reportedly shrugged his shoulders and replied, with a reference to the Commoner’s legendary appetite, “Broken heart, nothing; he died of a busted belly!”

Darrow himself gives us a picture of his resentment of Bryan: “I made up my mind to show the country what an ignoramus he was, and I succeeded.”

As a work of fiction, *Inherit the Wind* succeeds in crafting an entertaining tale of courtroom conflict. Lawrence and Lee brought to life on the stage the characters of Brady and Drummond in an effective and impacting way. The misperceptions regarding their real-life counterparts, Bryan and Darrow, lies with the stage directors or educators who seek to represent the text as an accurate account of the trial and these two men’s lives as well as the willingness of a percentage of the American public to take as fact that which they find dramatically convincing.
CHAPTER V

THE STAGE WORK’S DEVIATION FROM A HISTORICAL PERCEPTION OF DAYTON, TENNESEE’S RELIGIOUS POPULATION

From the first Broadway production, there was controversy concerning whether or not to market *Inherit the Wind* based upon its historical merits in order to capitalize on the fame of the 1925 court case. While many producers, the director and other theatrical personnel greatly desired to utilize this available marketing technique, others connected with the show were less enthusiastic for two main reasons: the significant discrepancies between the show and the historical event; and the characterization of the inhabitants of Dayton, Tennessee.

The following clipping from the New York Library’s Billy Rose Theatre Collection describes this aspect of the dissenting opinion as follows:

A second problem with using *Inherit* as an accurate representation of history is the potential for bias which Lawrence and Lee loaded into the play. There are subtle references to the benighted South, mainly represented in the character of E.K.Hornbeck, the reporter from Baltimore. The play suggests, through the filter of Hornbeck, that the monkey trial was a southern failure and a sign of the region’s ignorance and stagnation. He loathes the suffocating society of Hillsboro and longs to return to the North.61
That “potential for bias” was a legitimate concern of the production’s director and staff considering the text’s seemingly abundant comment on the ignorance and fanaticism of the people of Dayton as pictured in the characters of Hillsdale’s citizens. Even the earliest performance, the 1954 Texas production, staged by Margo Jones, was met with concern – from Lawrence and Lee’s agent no less. Originally, Jones’ general manager, Tad Adoue, upon reading the script, sent a note to her declaring, “I double-dog dare you to produce this. Will take GUTS to do it in the Bible Belt.”62 A phone call to Harold Freeman, the playwrights’ agent, was met with the response, “You don’t want to do this play, Margo, they’d crucify you down there in the Bible Belt.”63 While Freeman’s comment may have held implications regarding his opinion of the religious South, they definitely displayed his concern over how the material itself would be received considering its openly negative characterizations of fundamentalists.

One of the first images created in the play is that of a fanatical group of religious zealots mesmerized by their hero, Brady, and agitated by their nemesis, Drummond. In one early scene, upon hearing that Drummond has been sent to represent the defense, the townspeople attempt to keep him from entering their town:

BROWN: Henry Drummond, the agnostic?
BANNISTER: I heard about him. He got them two Chicago child-murderers off, just the other day.
BROWN: A vicious, godless man.
BROWN: Henry Drummond is an agent of darkness. We won’t allow him in this town.⁶⁴

As the text progresses, the citizens of the fictional Hillsboro, led by the Reverend Jeremiah Brown, deliver similar harsh characterizations of Drummond:

BROWN: I saw Drummond once. [...] A slouching hulk of a man, whose head juts out like an animal’s. You look into his face, and you wonder why God made such a man. And then you know that God didn’t make him, that he is a creature of the Devil, perhaps even the Devil himself!⁶⁵

What makes for good fiction, however, doesn’t represent the actual climate of the greeting the townsfolk created for the real-life Darrow. Karl Spence, writer and web author, offers this quotation from regarding the South and its treatment of Darrow:

For a passel of “bigots and ignoramuses,” the people of Tennessee were remarkably well-behaved. Their treatment of Darrow belies the picture of local-yokel hostility toward the evolutionist camp painted by Inherit the Wind. Darrow himself gave this account of his reception in Dayton: “I don’t know as I was ever in a community in my life where my religious ideas differed as widely from the great mass as I have found them since I have been in Tennessee. Yet I came here a perfect stranger and I can say what I have said before, that I have not found upon anybody’s part — any citizen here in this town or outside, the slightest discourtesy. I have been treated better, kindlier and more hospitably than I fancied would have been the case in the north.” ⁶⁶

The description in the play of Drummond by the townspeople serves two purposes. First, it demonizes Drummond, giving the authors a platform from which to make him appear more human later on. Secondly, it displays the
authors’ intended impression of the wide-eyed religiously-inspired ignorance and fear on the part of the citizenry of all things progressive or secular in nature. A number of sections in the play serve to illustrate further the townsfolk’s blind devotion not only to religion, but also to their hero Brady. For example, as the townspeople gather to greet Brady at the train station, they are heard singing a new verse to the old spiritual, *Gimme That Old-Time Religion*: “It is good enough for Brady, and it’s good enough for me!” As jury selection rolls around, a decidedly biased response from a would-be juror easily lands him a place in the box by the Brady team,

DAVENPORT: Do you believe in the Bible, Mr. Dunlap?
DUNLAP: *(Vigorously, almost shouting)* I believe in the Holy Word of God. And I believe in Matthew Harrison Brady!
DAVENPORT: *(Crossing to his table)* This man is acceptable to the prosecution.

Later in the play, an onlooker reacts as Brady topples from his place on the witness stand, crying, “O Lord, work us a miracle and save our Holy Prophet!”

This image of the fanatical religious southerner is played out in a different vein in the role of Elijah, a traveling ‘holy man.’ In the text, he is described as “bearded, wild-haired, dressed in a tattered burlap smock.” He enters the town with a sign “Where will you spend eternity?” and a crate full of Bibles, which he intends to sell. When approached by the self-styled cynic and reporter, E. K. Hornbeck, he proudly states his own ignorance, “*(Haughtily)* I
neither read nor write.” Elijah’s disdain for education, his other-worldly dress and opportunist mentality make him the symbol of ignorance and hypocrisy that the playwrights use to epitomize what would happen to the people of Hillsboro if they completely gave themselves over to their simplistic faith.

In the character of the Reverend Jeremiah Brown, this image of religious ignorance and hypocrisy, takes on a disturbingly judgmental and cruel tone. The Reverend is depicted as a harsh and austere man given wholly to condemnation of others and exaltation of self. The persecution of Bertram Cates, the school teacher on trial for teaching the theory of evolution, seems to be Brown’s outlet for righteous indignation.

In Brown’s initial scenes, he is characterized as a hero worshipper, awaiting the coming of Brady. At his direction banners are posted about the town with such sayings as, “Read your Bible,” so that Brady may see the townspeople’s devotion. He rushes his followers to greet Brady at the station and is honored to have him to dinner. As the play progresses, however, a more sinister side of Reverend Brown appears.

His deeper malice can be seen chiefly in two dramatic elements: his relationship with his daughter, Rachel, and his condemnation of Bertram Cates. Rachel, who serves as a softening agent in favor of the defense and Bertram himself, is caught up in a world of confusion as she fights within herself to
understand the connection between what she has been taught all of her life and what she is now feeling for Cates and the ideas he espouses. Her father, rather than being a guiding and loving force in her life, is rather a source of great fear.

DRUMMOND: Don’t let Brady frighten you. He only seems to be bigger than the law.
RACHEL: It’s not Mr. Brady. It’s my father.
DRUMMOND: Who’s your father?
RACHEL: The Reverend Jeremiah Brown. (Drummond whistles softly through his teeth.) I used to feel this way when I was a little girl. I used to wake up at night, terrified of the dark. I’d think sometimes that my bed was on the ceiling, and the whole house was upside down; and if I didn’t hang onto the mattress, I might fall outward into the stars. (She shivers a little, remembering) I wanted to run to my father, and have him tell me I was safe and that everything was all right. But I was always more frightened of him than I was of falling. It’s the same way now.71

Probably the starkest of these scenarios, however, deals with the reactions of the inhabitants of Hillsboro during an evening prayer meeting hosted by Brown. Lawrence and Lee describe the townspeople and their reactions to his preaching in the following excerpts: “the voices and faces contain the seed of the frenzy which will burst forth later on;” “the crowd bursts out into an orgy of hosanna’s and waving arms;” “The prayer meeting has passed beyond the familiar bounds into an arena of orgiastic anger.”72 Blind devotion, easy manipulation and ignorant fear remain the dominant features of the townspeople until they are ‘enlightened’ later in the play by the verbal craft of Drummond.
It is during the prayer meeting scene that a dark side of the town’s religious devotion is revealed. As Bertram Cates languishes in the local jail awaiting his trial, Brown leads a frenzied, bloodthirsty mob in declaring Cates’ guilt. At the height of his zeal-filled message, the Reverend Brown exclaims the full wrath of his hatred for Cates in the following excerpt:

BROWN: Do we believe the Word?
ALL: (Coming back like a whip crack.) Yes!
BROWN: Do we believe the Truth of the Word?
ALL: Yes!
BROWN: (Pointing a finger toward the jail.) Do we curse the man who denies the Word?
ALL: (Crescendo, each answer mightier than the one before.) Yes!
BROWN: Do we call down hellfire on the man who has sinned against the Word?
ALL: Yes!
BROWN: [...] O Lord of the Tempest and Thunder! O Lord of Righteousness and Wrath! We pray that Thou wilt make a sign unto us! Strike down this sinner, as Thou didst Thine enemies of old, in the days of the Pharoahs! Let him feel the terror of Thy sword! For all eternity, let his soul writhe in anguish and damnation -

At this point, Brown is interrupted by the horrified pleas of his daughter, Rachel, begging him to stop this harsh sentence. To this, Brown replies with even more malice and hatred, stating, “Lord, we call down the same curse on those who ask grace for this sinner – though they be blood of my blood, and flesh of my flesh!”

Having made this irreconcilable error, Brown is pulled back from his pedestal of thunder by Brady, aghast at this shocking turn of events. From this point on, the
voice of the religious element of Hillsboro is much more subdued. It is Brady alone who carries the tone of faith and fanaticism until the end.

Before the town is completely silent, however, one more picture of the Reverend Brown is painted in order to solidify his deep-seated need to condemn. As his daughter Rachel testifies on the stand, she is called upon to explain why Bertram Cates no longer attends her church. In the midst of Rachel’s cautious explanation concerning his leaving the congregation over the death of a boy he knew there, Cates himself stands up and declares, “Tell ‘em what your father really said! That Tommy’s soul was damned, writhing in hellfire!” He then follows up this remark with the cry, “Religion’s supposed to comfort people, isn’t it? Not frighten them to death!”74 Rachel is then taken from the stand by her father and is removed from the court. The mood from thereon is one of timid support from the formally vocal tenants of Hillsboro for the religious ideas they previously espoused with zeal. As the playwrights begin to draw Drummond’s character as being more and more in command of the trial’s direction, the townspeople slowly transform from scoffing at his secular attitudes and arguments to applauding them.

These fictional events, while effective in establishing the playwrights’ goals of depicting blind acceptance of ideas without a willingness to listen to
reason or evaluate another point of view, nevertheless had a powerfully negative effect on the real-life inhabitants of Dayton.

This is not to say that the text is completely devoid of historical accuracy concerning the religious atmosphere during that period in Dayton’s history. As the beginning of the play depicts, Dayton was extraordinarily festive during the time of the famous trial. There was much fanfare and commotion in the usually quiet and peaceful town.

Preachers of every stripe and persuasion were streaming into town hoping to make their opinions known to the trial participants and perhaps save a few souls among the crowd; in some places a listener could hear three or four sermonettes at once. Some preached from a large platform outside along the north wall of the courthouse set up for Independence Day festivities. Vendors hawked food and souvenirs, including a monkey-shaped key fob […] Mountain folk came to see all the commotion shouldering their rifles as they always did, to the shock of outsiders. 75

This atmosphere, however, was not only expected, it was intended.

Having formerly been a successful mining town, by 1923 Dayton was suffering a severe economic depression. Three devastating explosions brought the once prosperous mining company to bankruptcy and left the town with dismal prospects. An advertisement in the Tennessee newspapers placed by the ACLU soliciting teachers to participate in a “friendly test case” against the established state law prohibiting public schools from teaching that man descended from a lower form of animal, was quickly snatched up by local businessman and
visionary, George Rappleyea. Rappleyea soon gathered together a small band of respected businessmen and proposed his plan to enlist the help of local school teacher John T. Scopes and, by accepting the offer of the ACLU, put Dayton back on the map financially.

Rappleyea was, in the short term, successful. Crowds gathered from all over to participate in the carnival-like atmosphere of the Dayton community. And along with these crowds, came religious speakers-genuine and phony alike. To say that the religious atmosphere of Dayton during that time was over-zealous, would be an accurate portrayal of what happened. Darrow sums up his view of the landscape this way:

> Evangelist tents were propped up at vantage points around the town square, where every night one not knowing what was going on would have thought hordes of howling dervishes were holding forth. […] There was no reason why they should not be prohibitionists, for they were so elated and intoxicated by their religious jags that they needed no other stimulants.76

One group particularly caught his attention:

> …over the river, under the trees, a band of Holy Rollers gathered every night. As they grew excited and shouted and sang and twitched and twirled, the people crowded closer around them in curiosity and wonder.77

Darrow noted as well, however, that Bryan confined his religious speaking engagements to the local churches in an effort to maintain a sense of religious propriety.
Did these described activities accurately portray the religious
townspeople of Dayton? One could speculate that on any typical day it did not.
In the excitement that surrounded the events of the Scopes trial, however, there
is no doubt that any and all brands of faith and practice labeled as Bible-
believing-- whether accurately or not -- found their home in and lent their voices
to the noise of those summer nights in 1925. However, Lawrence and Lee’s play
as well as a significant cross-section of subsequent productions, characterize not
the outsiders, but the homegrown citizens of Dayton and their local minister as
religiously fanatical. This characterization marks a notable deviation from the
historic perception of this quiet religious town.

One incident that contradicts the image of judgmental hatemongering
conjured up in both the text and subsequent stage productions is the
townspeople’s relationship to the defendant, John Scopes. In the play, the
defendant, Cates, is vilified, hated, and attacked by the religious community. In
Cates’ words from the text, “People look at me as if I was a murderer. Worse
than a murderer!” and, “People I thought were my friends look at me now as if I
had horns growing out of my head.”78 The real-life Scopes, however, was well-
liked by the community. His involvement in the trial was not borne out of strife,
but through agreement with some of the town’s prominent citizens. Whether or
not Scopes’ was considered a favored teacher, he was very popular as the school’s winning football coach.

Even Scopes’ relationship with the trial’s most visible prosecutor, William Jennings Bryan, was good-natured. One particular true-to-life incident shows Bryan and Scopes in a somewhat humorous light.

The Progressive Dayton Club held a banquet in Bryan’s honor that night at the Hotel Aqua that was by popular agreement the biggest social event in the town’s history. Oddly enough Scopes was invited too. He was, after all, the one who had made the whole adventure possible. Scopes and Bryan sat across from each other at the head of the table and talked agreeably.79

Rather than eliciting scorn from the townsfolk, Scopes was treated the same as he had been in the past. Scopes commented on this treatment stating, “I could detect neither suspicion nor fulsome praise for my part in making the town the scene of action. I was just another hillbilly.”80 He was not persecuted by his fellow-citizens, and, in fact, unlike the fictionalized Bertram Cates, was welcomed to return to his teaching job, if he so chose.

Bryan College, the institution created in honor of Bryan and his life’s work, has but a simple statement on its website regarding the religious people of Dayton in 1925. “The people of Dayton in general and fundamentalist Christians in particular were not the ignorant, frenzied, uncouth persons the play pictures them as being.”81
One area of life that did harmonize with the fictional account, however, was the media treatment of Bryan and his followers and other religious persons of the day.

Both *Literary Digest* and the popular humor magazine *Life* (1890–1930) ran compilations of jokes and humorous observations garnered from newspapers around the country. Overwhelmingly, the butt of these jokes was the prosecution and those aligned with it: Bryan, the city of Dayton, the state of Tennessee, and the entire South, as well as Fundamentalist Christians and anti-evolutionists.82

H. L. Mencken

In order to get a clearer understanding of the town of Dayton during the trial, it is important to hear from the words of the reporters of that day. One of the most famous of these was H. L. Mencken, characterized in the play as E. K. Hornbeck. His columns on the trial, the person of Bryan and the religious people of Dayton in general were viewed as being particularly harsh. One such sampling of his writing follows:

Malone was put up to follow and dispose of Bryan, and he achieved the business magnificently. I doubt that any louder speech has ever been heard in a court of law since the days of Gog and Magog. It roared out of the open windows like the sound of artillery practice, and alarmed the moonshiners and catamounts on distant peaks. The yokels outside stuffed their Bibles into the loud-speaker horns and yielded themselves joyously to the impact of the original. In brief, Malone was in good voice. It was a great day for Ireland. And for the defense. For Malone not only out-yelled Bryan, he also plainly out-generated and out-argued him. His
speech, indeed, was one of the best presentations of the case against the fundamentalist rubbish that I have ever heard.83

In an article following the trial, Mencken again sought to malign the citizens of Dayton and their church leaders:

Dayton, of course, is only a ninth-rate country town, and so its agonies are of relatively little interest to the world. Its pastors, I daresay, will be able to console it, and if they fail there is always the old mountebank, Bryan, to give a hand. The Daytonians, unshaken by Darrow’s ribaldries, still believe. They believe that they are not mammals. They believe, on Bryan’s word, that they know more than all the men of science of Christendom. They believe, on the authority of Genesis, that the earth is flat and that witches still infest it. They believe, finally and especially, that all who doubt these great facts of revelation will go to hell. So they are consoled.84

Mencken seemed to come to the South with deeply held opinions regarding it, Christianity, Brady and the trial itself. In regards to faith and Christianity, Mencken is quoted throughout his life as uttering a number of pointed statements laced with his own brand of humorous cynicism such as

“Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable,” “The chief contribution of Protestantism to human thought is its massive proof that God is a bore,” and “A Sunday school is a prison in which children do penance for the evil conscience of their parents.”85 These thoughts no doubt had some of their roots in Mencken’s formative years. The son of August Mencken, a cigar factory owner and avowed agnostic, H. L. Mencken was raised to regard money and business as the chief pursuits of life. His view of
religion was shaped by the fact that he was sent off to Sunday school in order that his father might have time to himself. His father’s association with the Free Masons and the Shriners further impacted young Mencken’s religious views. It was probably, however, the early death of his father, coupled with his almost euphoric freedom to pursue his chosen path of journalism that brought him to his most profound conclusions in favor of his own agnostic views of life.

Douglas Linder, faculty member of the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, summarizes Mencken’s adult feelings on Fundamentalism this way:

Fundamentalists [...] belonged to the great masses of Americans who neither appreciated, nor contributed to, the best of American culture. They, like most people, were ignorant, ignoble, and cowardly. Moreover, fundamentalists lacked the intelligence to understand their own follies and superstitions. Fundamentalists, he believed, found comfort in the imbecilities of their creed and “no amount of proof of the falsity of their beliefs will have the slightest influence on them.”86

One group that particularly epitomized Mencken’s views of religion-devoid-of-intelligence was the Holy Rollers. It was to them that he devoted a significant amount of his reporting. Menken even went so far as to visit a gathering of this group of “worshippers.”

We left Dayton an hour after nightfall and parked our car in a wood a mile or so beyond the little hill village of Morgantown. Far off in a glade a flickering light was visible and out of the silence came a faint rumble of exhortation. We could scarcely distinguish the figure of the preacher; it
was like looking down the tube of a dark field microscope. We got out of the car and sneaked along the edge of a mountain cornfield.87

His observation of the meeting proved to everything he had hoped for – hysteria, zealous ignorance, and genuine fanaticism. Indeed, Mencken seemed to revel in the backwoods ignorance of religion wherever he could find it. But for all of his apparent prejudices, even Mencken deferred that it was, in fact, the influx of mountaineers and hill people who generated religious hysteria, and not the townspeople themselves, stating,

The cities of the lowlands, of course, still resist, and so do most of the county towns, including even Dayton, but once one steps off the State roads the howl of holiness is heard in the woods, and the yokels carry on an almost continuous orgy.88

In Mencken’s opinion, to the Holy Rollers, “Dayton itself was a Sodom” and the established denominations of the town, heretics to the Holy Rollers, held the mountain folk in rather low esteem. Nunnally Johnson, at that time a reporter for the New York Herald Tribune, concurs with Mencken’s sentiments in a reply to an invitation to Inherit the Wind’s Broadway Premiere:

But there was one bit of enlightenment for the sophisticated metropolitan newspapermen. Being admirably cultivated fellows, they were all of course evolutionists and looked down with contempt on the local Fundamentalists. But some of us soon learned that there were still further levels of intelligence. The Fundamentalists had a group to look down on too. The objects of their contempt were the members of something called the The Church of God, who assembled under a great oak tree in the country near Dayton, babbled in tongues, and whose first
and firmest belief was that the world was flat. The Fundamentalists shook their heads sadly over these ignoramuses.\textsuperscript{89}

For all of his negative impressions of the religious air in Dayton during the trial, Mencken has, nonetheless, kind words for the citizens themselves:

The town, I must confess, greatly surprised me. I expected to find a squalid Southern village, with darkies snoozing on the horseblocks, pigs rooting under the houses and the inhabitants full of hookworm and malaria. What I found was a country town full of charm and even beauty—a somewhat smallish but nevertheless very attractive Westminster or Belair…

Nor is there any evidence in the town of that poisonous spirit which usually shows itself when Christian men gather to defend the great doctrine of their faith. I have heard absolutely no whisper that Scopes is in the pay of the Jesuits, or that the whiskey trust is backing him, or that he is egged on by Jews who manufacture lascivious moving pictures. On the contrary, the Evolutionists and Anti-Evolutionists seem to be on the best of terms, and it is hard to distinguish one group from another.\textsuperscript{90}

One person who did not gain an inch of ground or appreciation in Mencken’s writings, however, was Bryan. He says of Bryan,

It was hard to believe, watching him at Dayton, that he had traveled, that he had been received in civilized societies, that he had been a high officer of state. He seemed only a poor clod like those around him, deluded by a childish theology, full of an almost pathological hatred of all learning, all human dignity, all beauty, all fine and noble things. He was a peasant come home to the barnyard. Imagine a gentleman, and you have imagined everything that he was not.\textsuperscript{91}

Believing little of importance would occur in the final days of the trial, Mencken returned to Baltimore where he prepared his final report for publication. A few days later, despite having missed Darrow’s examination of
Bryan, Mencken reported on Bryan’s untimely demise saying, “Well, we killed the son of a b-tch.” His public statement concerning Bryan’s death was even more pointed. “God aimed at Darrow, missed, and hit Bryan instead.”

He continued to launch merciless attacks on Bryan in the weeks following the Commoner’s death. One Scopes trial historian, remarking on the Bryan post-mortems, wrote that Mencken “succeeded in shocking Bryan’s admirers as severely as if he had literally scalped Bryan’s corpse and done a war dance around it, waving his bloody trophy.”

For Mencken, the Scopes’ trial was “the journalistic opportunity of a lifetime.” In writing the editor of American Mercury, he declared that the scene in Dayton was almost too good to be true.

“The thing is genuinely fabulous,” he enthused. “I have stored up enough material to last me twenty years.” Everywhere he ventured in the Tennessee hill country he encountered faith healers, religious fanatics, ape handlers, medicine men, and conspiracy theorists: all inviting targets for his venomous pen.

In one of Mencken’s articles while at Dayton, “Mencken Likens Trial to a Religious Orgy, with Defendant a Beelzebub,” he draws a more realistic picture of the connection between the hill people and the religious townsfolk, stating that, while the majority of the religious hubbub is a direct result of the influx of mountain folk, the townspeople themselves are willing to engage and debate Biblical teaching with them whenever the opportunity occurs. In his opinion, this made the townsfolk at least guilty by association, if not exact replicas of their mountain counterparts.
Concluding thoughts on the religious of Dayton, Tennessee

Joseph Wood Krutch, trial correspondent, sums up his feelings about the play’s treatment of the townspeople this way:

The little town of Dayton behaved on the whole quite well. The atmosphere was so far from sinister that it suggested a circus day. The authors of *Inherit the Wind* made it chiefly sinister, a witchhunt of the sort we are now all too familiar with. Scopes never truly faced any jail, and the defense actually instigated the trial.⁹⁴

It was against a broad, and at times, slanted media coverage of the Dayton trial that the religious of that day were measured. The quiet town of Dayton and its people were really no match for the public exposure they were given. David Menton, PhD., gives the opinion in his article, “Inherently Wind,” that the film, as well as the play, paints an unfortunate and damaging picture of the people of Dayton.

The historical inaccuracies are systematic and of a kind that presents a consistent bias of slanderous proportions against a particular class of people and their beliefs. Specifically, people who believe in the miracles recorded in the Bible, and especially the Biblical account of creation, are portrayed in an outrageously uncomplimentary way. On the other hand, those who are critical or virtually unbelieving, with regard to the miracles of the Bible, are portrayed as eminently reasonable people who must suffer the abuse, threats and ignorance of the fundamentalist Christians around them. Although the following story lines and criticisms refer specifically to the 1960 film version of *Inherit the Wind*, in most instances
they apply with equal validity to the original play as well as the NBC television remake.95

Is there a fault in the resulting characterization of the religious people of Dayton as zealous fanatics and ignorant backwoods folk? There is when the question is posed in the context of what the historical record shows. The dramatic image that Lawrence and Lee created, however, was intentional. Their intent was to create a scenario in which a zealously motivated and uneducated mob attack an individual whose ideologies differ from and threaten their own. More specifically, they hoped to create for their viewers a picture of what can happen when close-mindedness and censorship prevails in a society. They found, as their foil, the inhabitants of Dayton, Tennessee and characterized them to suit their purpose. The benefit of their efforts for the theatrical world is a powerful work of art; the irony is that a significant portion of Americas have accepted that art as history.
CHAPTER VI

THE PHENOMENON OF ART’S ABILITY TO INFLUENCE SOCIETY AS SEEN

IN THE STAGEWORK INHERIT THE WIND

Despite the authors’ original intentions for their play’s meaning, their decision to utilize a historical event to comment on that intent, connected with the powerful artistic images they have created, seems to have resulted in a significant alteration of public perception regarding the event itself. Even the reporters of that Scopes’ day, knowing the historic account of the trial, were quick to point out the effect this artistic rewriting of history would have for both present and future generations.

At the time, most published reviews of the stage and screen versions of Inherit the Wind criticized the writers’ portrayal of the Scopes Trial. “History has been not increased but almost certainly fatally diminished,” the New Yorker drama critic complained. “The script wildly and unjustly caricatures the fundamentalists as vicious and narrow-minded hypocrites,” the Time magazine movie review chided, and “just as wildly and unjustly idealizes their opponents, as personified by Darrow.”

One of the most noteworthy venues in which this impact has taken place is the American classroom, where the lines between fiction and historical fact can
be easily blurred in the minds of young people who only have the text of the play to go by as their account of the Scopes’ trial. Gradesaver.com, a widely used study-guide website, supplies young people with a clear description of Lawrence and Lee’s intent, but adds this qualifying paragraph:

Despite Lawrence and Lee’s intentions in the written text of the play, the producers and promotional people looking to draw audiences chose to capitalize on the play as dramatization of historical fact. Many promotional materials emphasized the circus atmosphere of the real life Monkey Trial, with lines like “Carnival in the Courtroom” and “A Battle of Giants: The Greatest Verbal Boxing Match of the Century.” In more recent days, the presentation of Inherit the Wind as fact rather than fiction has earned the ire of various groups, including Southerners, offended by the degrading image presented by the ignorant people of Hillsboro.97

Had Inherit the Wind been written about a less volatile incident in American history or one with less potential to have the recurring relevance of the origin’s debate, it might have been able to keeps its focus effectively on the writers’ desired target: the McCarthy hearings. The choice of such a prominent and controversial event as the Scopes’ trial, coupled with the dramatic images crafted by Lawrence and Lee of those events, has made this stage work something that has attracted both evolutionists and creationists in the discussion of human origin. The selection of this trial as the basis for the fictional work was an effective theatrical and business move. The origins issue itself, however, eventually became the focus for which the play is known. The issue of free
speech, while of immense significance, became less and less of the focus in public debate where *Inherit the Wind* was concerned. In addition, the issue of McCarthyism disappeared almost entirely from the national discussion. The notable links between the written text and the actual events along with the dramatic appeal of the play have been the glue that has kept *Inherit the Wind* connected to the argument concerning human origins for the past five decades.

*Inherit the Wind*'s status is that of a successful and notable play. The numerous awards, positive reviews and revivals of the show have all attested to its allure as a staple of the modern American stage. Beyond its success in the theatre, however, is a more significant discussion regarding its larger impact upon society in the realms of academia, and its influence on historic understanding and ideological thought regarding the origin’s debate.

**Academic Impact**

An examination of the various stagings of *Inherit the Wind* uncovered repeated ties to a school program or similar educational training ground. The play’s consistent connection with universities and high schools has only served to advance the impact of the play upon academic thought concerning both the
Scopes’ trial and the origins issue. This advancement has been furthered by the appearance of the play on many schools’ suggested or required reading lists. LaGuardia Community College, for example, offers science clusters for its students in which they will learn, “basic concepts of biology, read and write about evolution, and, finally, debate issues related to the topic of evolution.”98 As part of this science study each year, the students are required to read *Inherit the Wind* and are encouraged to attend the play as part of their education in evolution and the surrounding debate. Monmouth College boasts a similar tie between its educational program and the play. In a course on the History of American Education, whose stated intent is that “the student will know at least five major developments in the history of American education,”99 the program requires four texts. Among those is Lawrence and Lee’s *Inherit the Wind*.

As a result of the proliferation of this text in American high schools, colleges and universities, many students have come to view *Inherit the Wind* as both historical fact and a source from which to create academic opinions about both the trial of that day and the evolution/creation debate as a whole. Guided by instructors who teach this dramatic piece in the context of educational studies regarding evolution or the historical Scopes’ Trial, students are often left with an inaccurate view of the reality regarding the trial itself.
As part of its *Saint Joseph’s University Reads* program, the school featured *Inherit the Wind* as its choice of common reading. It supplied the faculty and staff copies of the play and encouraged them to utilize it in their classes, made available free copies for students in those classes, and set aside multiple copies in its library. One instructor at the school, Dr. Jeff Hyson, in connection with an orientation lecture introducing the reading of the play as a study in history characterizes the play’s impact this way:

In 1955, playwrights Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee took the general framework and central themes of the Scopes’ trial and produced a fictionalized version of this great historical drama. Yet because of the play’s enormous success – on Broadway, on film and television, and at countless high schools and community theaters – *Inherit the Wind* has come to be seen as a compelling re-creation of the Scopes’ trial and an influential contribution to America’s ongoing debate over creation and evolution.100

The embracing of the text of *Inherit the Wind* by the academic community is not a new phenomenon, but, rather, occurred soon after its public debut. “By the 1960s, distaste among liberals for evangelicals and their beliefs helped make *Inherit the Wind* a favorite of high school drama teachers...”101 The choice of high school teachers to utilize *Inherit the Wind* in their classrooms brought the play an academic respectability it might not otherwise have had.
To get a glimpse of the impact of this play upon the typical high school student, one can look to these reviews by Lynbrook High School students of the 2006 Berkeley Community Theatre Production in San Jose, California. One described the play as “the fight between creationism and the Bible, versus evolution and a biology textbook;” another called it, “the trial of the battle of Darwinism over creationism.”

To evaluate the influence of the play in higher education, one can turn to a symposium, “Religion and Public Life: 70 Years After the Scopes Trial,” hosted by Vanderbilt University in November of 1995. The discussions and seminars of this event advanced the idea that society has not progressed very far beyond the issues raised during the Scopes’ trial, such as the origin’s debate’s place in the classroom and the rights of parents and responsibility of educators when it comes to creating curriculum. One topic covered during the Symposium addressed the rise of Fundamentalism’s prompting of the return of the origin’s debate to the public forum, stating, “During only the first few months of this year, the creationism-evolution debate reached a height unforeseen since the 1967 retraction of Tennessee’s anti-evolution law.”

From this starting point, however, the Symposium raised an interesting and valuable point: the modern legal battle over the debate of human origins has
uncovered a public cultural shift that displays a need for both a revival of the
debate and “its artistic manifestation in Inherit the Wind.” The revival of the
academic debate speaks to the need of the American intellect to address this
topic in a factual and educationally significant way. To what, however, does the
‘cultural need’ to revive the ‘artistic manifestation’ of the events of 1925 speak?

In my opinion, the need for the “artistic manifestation” of the events of the
Scopes’ trial speaks to a desire in this media-saturated age for an image-
prompted and driven method of debate. America is a society molded by sound-
bytes, influenced by headlines, and affected by drama. In addition, the typical
American gains most of his knowledge of the world via electronic, and, at times,
spectacular means. The artistry of Inherit the Wind speaks to a deep-seated desire
for the comfort of being engaged in a debate via entertainment and imagery.
Furthermore, the dramatic images of Inherit the Wind are striking enough that
they evoke a very real and very poignant response from those who read or view
the work. The result is a lively, though academically lopsided, discussion.

Audience members are forced to think, to question and to comment on an issue
cleverly wrapped in an entertaining package. Although not educationally or
historically sound, and, as a result, a faulty tool when used by itself for teaching
the history of the Dayton trial and persons involved in it, Inherit the Wind,
nonetheless, serves as a means for sparking even the culturally lazy to consider the debate on the highly charged issue of human origins.

Historical Impact

Despite the disclaimer written in the piece itself, as well as, at times, spoken from the stage, audiences continue to regard the play as a factual account of the Scopes’ trial. According to Olasky and Perry, “…generations of viewers came to see the play as a historic account of the Scopes trial. This gave popular culture a highly distorted view of the facts. “105 As Carl Wieland, book reviewer for Answers in Genesis, puts it:

“Even Time magazine at the time slammed the play as ‘wild and unjust’ in its portrayals. Since then, sadly, this unjust recital has become deeply ingrained in the American psyche.”106

What, then, are the historical concepts that have been established as a result of this ‘considerable national influence’? And, furthermore, what is the underlying reason for this influence? I will look at these questions in order.

There are a number of ideas about the Scopes’ trial that have come to be accepted as fact as a result of the proliferation of Inherit the Wind upon both the stage and screen. Probably the most significant of these is the faulty notion that
Darrow, in fighting for the cause of evolution, won the case. The historical evidence of the trial lays out the facts very clearly. The trial itself, if argued solely on the grounds of whether or not John Scopes taught evolution in the classroom, would have been won and finished almost before it started. Scopes had violated the established law, or at least agreed to admit he violated it, in order to be available as a test case for the ACLU to judicially confront the law then on the books in Tennessee stating that no public school teacher would be allowed to teach that man descended from a lower animal form. Both sides of the case, however, believed that much more was at stake. Darrow sought to dethrone not only Bryan from his position as a national religious spokesman, but also to expose what he felt was the ignorance and intolerance of organized fundamentalist religion. Bryan, on the other hand, sought to defend not only a state’s rights to legislate its educational system, but also to protect the Biblical account of creation from what he felt was an outright attack on faith and religion. The natural outcome of the case was that John Scopes was found guilty of violating the law and was sentenced, against Bryan’s wishes, to pay a nominal fine. In essence, the movement to further the teaching evolution in the classroom had been dealt a slight defeat. What remains ingrained in the minds of most Americans, in relation to the trial, is not that John Scopes had lost his
case, but rather that evolution and creation faced one another as opposing ideologies, with evolution emerging the victor.

With sensationalized reports in hand, from newspapermen present at the trial, future writers began to pave the way for a possible revision of history – one that did not focus as much on the facts of the trial as it did on the impression those facts created. Added to this reconstruction of history was the powerful imagery of *Inherit the Wind* which served to stoke even more deeply the fires of controversy surrounding what actually took place back in 1925. America in the 1950s was a country greatly divided between those who knew what happened and staunchly proclaimed it, and those who believed what happened based on what a dramatic text or theatre production told them. Surprisingly, it is the play, a fictional work, that remains deeply imbedded in the national consciousness regarding the great Scopes’ trial.

Marge Betley, Resident Dramaturg for the Geva Theatre, comments in a 2006 article for the Theatre Communications Group, entitled “Inherit the Wind: Fact in Fiction,” on the phenomenon of how art can replace historic fact in her notes, stating, “the very success of the stage and film versions of *Inherit the Wind* have colored our perspective of what really happened in July 1925.” In her essay, she utilizes the phrase ‘the mythology of *Inherit the Wind*’ to describe the
play’s effect on the national understanding of several key historical pieces of the event. It is this mythology—the thought that Scopes was persecuted, that Darrow triumphed over Bryan and that the antievolution movement effectively ceased— that has come to influence American thought concerning the Scopes’ trial. Given the text’s original message, that of attacking and exposing McCarthyism, how did the play make the crossover to its new role as the great theatrical treatise concerning the debate of man’s origin? At the time of Inherit the Wind’s initial production, the origin’s debate had reached a relatively quiet plateau. There were many in the entertainment industry as well as the political realm who felt that Creationism, as a whole, had become a fringe belief at best. Darwinism appeared as such a settled issue in the minds of some that a public understanding of the authors’ original intent of the play seemed to be clear. As the success of the play reached a national level, however, the stark images that contradicted both history and a significant cross-section of the populace’s firmly held beliefs, the issue of McCarthyism began to take a secondary position to that of the evolution/creationism debate.

As the decades passed, the play began to resurface whenever the debate took on public prominence. The University of Virginia’s website supports this idea, stating, “the large-scale productions of Inherit over the past forty years
coincide with periods of crisis in American culture and a heightened debate over creationism versus evolution.”

Dr. David Menton, creationist and author of *Inherently Wind*, offers the viewpoint that “the great interest in *Inherit the Wind* rests largely on its perceived relevance to the growing creation-evolution controversy.” He admits that,

…while *Inherit the Wind* is obviously not a documentary, it is understood to be a documentary-drama of the famous Scopes’ trial of 1925, which pitted William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow in a classic confrontation over the teaching of evolution and creation in the public schools. The composite that resulted has unfortunately become widely perceived as essentially an historical account of the trial…

In recent days the play has once again found its place in American theatre as an editorial on the origin’s debate. In contrast to its review of the original production,

…the *New York Times* now praised the text’s ‘dramatic life.’ The critic explained, “here was a headline-making heavyweight bout between the rational thought of a newly rational age and old-fashioned Christian Fundamentalism, which was deemed to be on its last legs, though today it’s alive and well and called Creationism.”

Tony Randall, who played Hornbeck in the 1955 production, staged this revival, calling it his response to what he saw as a “rise in the religious right.” Randall offering his viewpoint of the original, states, “When we opened on April 21, 1955, I did not think the play would be taken seriously; the fundamentalists had
became a lunatic fringe. The play is one-thousand times more pertinent today.”

He continues somewhat ruefully, “You think this is over? It’s never over.”111

Randall’s comments are but an echo of author Jerome Lawrence’s a year earlier, “Here we go again. It hasn’t stopped. Civilization is always on trial.” 112

Ironically enough, both quotations are reminiscent of the character Drummond’s speaking to Cates about his supposed victory: “You don’t suppose this kind of thing is ever finished, do you?”113 The connecting thread of all three quotes, however, is that each has its roots in the creation/evolution debate. It is this central issue alone that sparks these thoughts, spoken and written alike.

Over the years the art of Inherit the Wind has repeatedly merged with the controversy of the origin’s debate resulting in a discussion that, though intense, is lacking in historic accuracy. This inaccuracy, however, does not seem to be the most important issue at stake. The fact that the play presents the compelling artistry that it does speaks to the theatre-goer in such a way that he is drawn to the conclusions of the play whether they match with historical fact or not.

The art supplied the fuel, the renewed debate, the spark. Combined, the powerful images of Inherit the Wind and the controversial nature of the origin’s debate have resulted in a distorted historical understanding and perception of the events of 1925.
Ideological impact

As the dramatic images of the play have influenced a significant segment of our nation to accept inaccurate characterizations and conclusions regarding the Scopes’ trial as fact, the debate over not only the evolution/creation issue, but also the play itself has become a point of public debate and contention. As ideas become imbedded in the human mind, the intellect becomes a willing partner in defending, and, at times, expanding upon those ideas. What began as the play’s artistic impact upon its viewing audience has become, for some, an ideological viewpoint concerning not only the Scopes’ trial, but the larger human origins debate as well.

Ranged on conflicting sides in this debate are several types of people:

1. those who hold to an evolutionary viewpoint, but are uniformed concerning the events of 1925 and have, therefore, accepted the events in the play as fact;

2. those who hold to an evolutionary viewpoint, who are informed about the historical events of the trial, but still find value in the impact made by *Inherit the Wind*;
3. those who hold to the creationist viewpoint, who are informed about the events of 1925; and

4. those who hold to a creationist viewpoint, but, though uniformed about the historical events of the trial, still take issue with the play based solely on emotional response to what they would consider an offensive portrayal of their position.

The debate among these groups becomes clouded with personal biases and irrelevant issues at times. In order to discuss the ideological impact this play has had on our nation’s human origin’s debate, I must of necessity admit that a completely thorough evaluation would be impossible. There are, however, some general conclusions that can be drawn based upon the writings of selected individuals who have been more visible in the overall debate. It is on these individuals that I will concentrate for this section of my findings.

The two groups that most often rise to the surface in this debate are the first and third groups listed above: evolutionists who are uniformed about the actual events of the trial and creationists who emphasize (almost to a fault) the historic happenings of the trial to the exclusion of any discussion regarding the genuine intent of the play itself. Due to the fact that both sides of this issue come to the table with extremely strong attitudes and ideas regarding both this
piece and the origin’s debate itself, it is no surprise that the ensuing statements that are generated by each are rather forceful. For the creationist side, two outspoken authors offer their commentary on the issue: Carol Iaonne, author of First Things, states her opinion on the issue this way,

The play reveals a great deal about a mentality that demands open-mindedness and excoriates dogmatism, only to advance its own certainties more insistently – that promotes tolerance and intellectual integrity, but stoops to vilifying the opposition, falsifying reality, and distorting history in the service of its agenda. 114

Richard Dawkins, author of The Blind Watchmaker, touched on what he deemed the stereotype set forth in Inherit the Wind with these words, describing his opponents as “anti-evolution propagandists [who] are always religiously motivated.”115 A response typical from the type of evolutionist specifically described above is contained in a review by Gary Zeidner in his opinion column for the Boulder Weekly. Likening his admitting to the palatability of eating sushi to the thought of Christians accepting Darwinism, Zeidner writes, “how can I be anything but understanding that it would take a similarly ignorant God-fearing person a few decades to accept that Darwin’s theory of evolution better fits with the reality of our world than the events described in Genesis?” Zeidner continues in this vein mingling some historical error of his own in a somewhat disingenuous commentary, stating:
However, that trial, during which the full power of the State backed Creationism as it prosecuted a lone schoolteacher for espousing evolution, occurred 66 years after the publication of The Origin of Species and 80 years ago. Yet fundamentalists are still championing Creationism under the new name, intelligent design. C’mon folks. Wake up and smell the sushi! After 146 years of unfounded denial, I think you’ve tested the rest of our collective compassion quite enough.

Zeidner, in concluding his thoughts on the subject, calls his readers to attend the local production of *Inherit the Wind* with these words in order to both help their understanding of the debate and what he believes to be the historical events of the trial:

For many of us, especially in the progressive bastion that is Boulder, it is easy to forget that even today Creationists still roam the land trying desperately to refute, forbid or undermine evolution. Earlier this year a judge had to force a school district in Georgia to remove stickers from science textbooks stating that evolution is “a theory, not a fact.” For that reason as much as any other I recommend seeing *Inherit the Wind*. Let it serve as a reminder that the Dark Ages exist just outside the circle of light cast by the candle of knowledge, and it is our responsibility to keep that candle lit.116

Like Zeidner, Elizabeth Weir, regional reviewer in Minnesota for *Talk’n Broadway*, cites the need for the rational clarity of the ideas contained in *Inherit the Wind* in the face of the growing dangers of the Fundamentalist right:

In a time when the political climate in the USA has turned sharp right, religious fundamentalism is in the ascendancy and Creationism is once more being pushed as an alternative to Evolution, *Inherit* brings urgent tidings of rationalism.
It’s a sound production that will feel fresh to you, and its overly simplified, right-versus-wrong take on the Scopes trial will send you out into the world infused with a satisfying sense of moral superiority.\textsuperscript{117}

That both of these sides have determined the origin’s debate to be the central issue of \textit{Inherit the Wind} is not in dispute. A sampling of quotations and reviews from either camp serves to illustrate this. The ad for \textit{The Sands Theatre Center} of Florida’s 2006 production describes the play as a “classic of American Theater that is as alive today as it was back then.” It went on to encourage the audience with this tag line: “Creationism vs. Evolution—your chance to be the judge.”\textsuperscript{118} Rosie Forest, an artistic associate at the Northlight Theatre in Skokie, Illinois, has this to say about her 2006 production’s relevance to current events, stating, “We can single out the central argument of the play – creationism vs. evolution – and compare the debate to the Dover trial of 2005 that addressed intelligent design.”\textsuperscript{119} Creationist, Phillip E. Johnson, in his book \textit{Defeating Darwinism}, echoes these sentiments: “\textit{Inherit the Wind} is a masterpiece of propaganda, promoting a stereotype of the public debate about creation and evolution…”\textsuperscript{120} Nicholas Aksionczky, author of \textit{A Second Look}, states it this way, “The belief that evolution is based on science and reason while creationism is based on religion and faith was another myth perpetuated by the Scopes’ trial and the productions of \textit{Inherit the Wind}.\textsuperscript{121}
That the ideology of America has been, to some extent, influenced by the repeated productions of *Inherit the Wind* upon the stage is evident. That this influence has led a significant number of Americans to believe ideas that are not historically accurate to the event itself, however, elevates the discussion into the realm of phenomenon.

The dramatic images created decades ago by Lawrence and Lee have made a profound impact upon not only the audiences of their day, but subsequent audiences over the past fifty years. The original intent of the stagework has been lost, or at least extensively sidelined, through both the text’s close association with such a historically monumental event in American history and its deviations from the facts of that event combined with the intensity of the great debate over human origins. The lasting influence of the piece, for all practical purposes, has been one of being an artistic, and in some people’s minds factual, retelling of the trial of 1925. As the debate over the origins of man continues, *Inherit the Wind*, in all of its dramatic impact, will remain both a defining piece of literary theatre as well as a powerful catalyst for public belief and debate.
CHAPTER VIII

THE PROGRESSION OF INHERIT THE WIND FROM DRAMATIC LICENSE TO MYTHIC LEGEND

What can explain the profound impact Inherit the Wind has had on society? How has it been able to reach the level of historical influence that it has? Why has this piece of dramatic fiction become so deeply imbedded in America’s current perception of the facts of the 1925 Scopes’ trial? To answer these questions, one must examine two crucial concepts: the progression of the Scopes myth through various media and the ability of drama to impact the typical American mindset.

The progression of the Scopes’ myth

The retelling of the Scopes’ trial far precedes the appearance of Inherit the Wind on the American stage. In 1931, twenty-four years before the play was penned, a writer by the name of Frederick Lewis Allen published what would
become not only a wildly popular book, but also a basis for many history books to come, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*. Allen’s book, though not deliberately intended to shape public perception of the trial, resulted in doing just that. Allen had no formal training as a historian, but, rather utilized his skills as a reporter to chronicle the events of recent history in a “lively, journalistic fashion.” Due to the Scopes’ trial’s prominence, Allen decided to use it as a feature event in one of his chapters.

To a degree, Allen’s treatment of the Scopes’ trial paralleled that of Lawrence and Lee’s. His account reduced the trial to a colossal struggle between two men: Darrow and Bryan. He described Bryan as withering under Darrow’s examination as, in his opinion, Bryan’s “sort of religious faith…could not take the witness stand and face reason as a prosecutor.” Gone were the other trial lawyers. Gone was the ACLU. Gone also was the true outcome of the trial. Allen became “the first published commentator to transform Bryan’s personal humiliation at Dayton into a decisive defeat for fundamentalism generally.”

Similar to Lawrence and Lee, Allen never claimed that his literary version of events was based on solid fact. He considered his work an attempt to tell and even interpret the history of what he felt would be a distinct era in America’s
recent past. To Allen’s utter surprise, the book became a national bestseller, and, in fact, sold more copies than any other book of its decade.

What is more surprising than *Only Yesterday*’s success, however, is the immediate and subsequent influence it would have on several professional history books that followed it. In fact, *Only Yesterday* would be widely utilized for the next fifty years as both a high school and college history text. Historian Roderick Nash comments on Allen’s impact on America’s perception of the 1920s, stating, “No one has done more to shape the conception of the American 1920s than Frederick Lewis Allen.”\textsuperscript{125} This influence would come to have a profoundly misleading effect upon history texts to come. Nash sums up Allen’s typical style of reporting as, “seizing on the decade’s most glamorous aspects and generalizing from a few headlines.”\textsuperscript{126} This particular approach to writing, both effective and engaging as fictional drama, would turn out to be pivotal in the eventual construction of the Scopes’ legend.

In addition to Lawrence and Lee, other history writers also relied heavily on Allen when crafting their own works. Gaius Glen Atkins did so when writing *Religion in Our Times* in 1932. Mark Sullivan, author of the 1935 bestseller, *Our Times: The United States 1900-1925*, mirrored many of Allen’s conclusions about the trial. William W. Sweet actually revised his *The Story of*
Religion in America, a widely used college text on religion between 1930-1939, to reflect Allen’s thoughts on the resolution of the trial – namely, that fundamentalism suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of scientific evolution. Sweet writes, “Darrow attempted to make Bryan look ridiculous...It was Fundamentalism’s last stand.”127 As George Marsden states in his History of Fundamentalism,

“in the trial of public opinion and the press, it was clear that the twentieth century, the cities, and the universities had won a resounding victory, and that the country, the South, and the fundamentalists were guilty as charged.”128

It was during the fifties, ironically enough, that the Allen version of the Scopes’ trial, its participants, and its outcome reached a new level of public credibility and acceptance. In 1954, Norman F. Furniss made the Scopes’ trial, the pivotal event in his book, The Fundamentalist Controversy 1918-1931. William E. Leuchtenburg’s The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932, portrayed the Scopes’ trial as the antidote to the earlier anti-evolution movement. Ray Ginger, in the first book-length study of the trial, Six Days or Forever: Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes relied heavily on Allen’s version of the events as source material. From that time numerous history texts have been produced that have adopted Allen’s original tale as a legitimate basis for recounting the events of the 1920s.
It was during this point in our nation’s history that Lawrence and Lee would seize upon the popularity of the Scopes’ trial as a starting point for their dramatic commentary on McCarthyism. The nation, having already been primed academically as to the purported focus and outcomes of the original trial, was now ripe for a fictionalized version that would further stamp those impressions in its collective memory. Despite a clear disclaimer, the play became for many Americans a factual retelling of the events of the Scopes’ trial. Larson echoes this idea calling Inherit the Wind, “the single most influential retelling…” of the trial.

It was not Lawrence and Lee’s written version alone that propelled the myths of the Scopes’ trial into national prominence. After its stage debut in 1955, the play ran for nearly three years on Broadway. It then took to the road, touring a number of major American cities. Eventually, the fame of the play spawned the creation of several films of the same name, most notably the 1960s version starring Spencer Tracy, Fredric March and Gene Kelly.

This original movie version did little to present itself as a fictionalized deviation from the actual events of 1925. Life magazine declared it to be representative of the facts. Newsweek wrote that Inherit the Wind, ‘is based on the actual trial of John Scopes […] as most people should know by now.’129
movie continued to play regularly throughout the 1960s and remains a staple of historic cinema today. By 1967, trial correspondent Joseph Wood Krutch remarked that, “Most people who have any notions about the trial get them from the play, *Inherit the Wind*, or from the movie.”

In our nation’s history classrooms the play and film versions became popular instruction tools on twentieth century history. As recent as 1994, the National Center for History in Schools published instructional standards that encouraged teachers to utilize *Inherit the Wind* as a means to educate high school students about the 1920s.

Eventually, this collective impact of dramatic fiction-poised- as-fact would take a toll on the nation’s understanding of history. Religious historian, Martin E. Marty, in his 1970 work *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*, describes the actual trial as becoming “one final irrelevancy as an event of media-mythic proportions.”

The trial had become so exaggerated and farcical in the multiple retellings it had endured, that it had now reached a level of myth – a story widely accepted by the public and supported by the various modern media that portrayed it.
While *Inherit the Wind* the text and stagework has aided in the America’s skewed understanding of the events of 1925, it has not done so alone. Rather, the play became an accepted part of American historical understanding due to its concurrence with a time of great cultural change in our country. To understand how this shift continued to influence America’s perception of the Scopes’ trial and the origin’s debate, one needs to look at several key events that occurred during the past half century of our nation’s history. The most impacting of these events include a series of legal battles focused on the origin’s debate in relation to what is taught in the classroom; the militaristic and technological competition between Russia and the United States; the disconnect between the youth of the sixties and the previous generation; the advent of public origin’s debates in the 1970s and 1980s; and the rise of evangelical Christianity in the 1990s coupled with subsequent responses from media, legal, and political sources.

Although it is not possible, considering the scope of this discussion, to exhaust the impact of each of these events, I would like to highlight some important facts and incidents involving each of them.
The first of these influences is the series of legal cases involving the teaching of creationism in public school classrooms. Of these cases, two stand out as decisive turning points: the original case (Epperson et al. v. Arkansas) fought in 1961 in which the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Arkansas’ antievolution statue and established the public legal concept of “separation of church and state,” and the U.S. Supreme Court case of 1987 (Edwards vs. Aguillard), in which Louisiana’s mandated “equal time clause” for the instructing of both creationism and evolution was ruled unconstitutional on the basis that creationism is considered a religion and not a science. From the 1950s on, lawsuits have been raised and won in the name of promoting evolution in the public school to the exclusion of any other theory of origin. Three important characteristics dominated each of these cases: the idea that creationism is strictly religion while evolution is strictly science; the concept that the inclusion of creationism requires the exclusion of teaching evolution; and the public acceptance of a subsequent backlash of negative press and editorial reviews similar to the ridicule heaped upon the early prosecution in the original Scopes’ trial by the press and scientific community. It is equally important to note that the primary plaintiffs involved in each case were, in addition to evolutionary
scientists, ACLU lawyers, professing atheists, and liberal ministers of various religious stripes.

The second of these influences that encouraged the Scopes’ myth was America’s deep-seated fear of trailing Russia in technology and science in general combined with the ever-looming threat of possible war in particular.

Cold war fears that the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union in technology led the Congress to pass the 1958 National Defense Education Act, which pumped money into science literacy programs and encouraged the National Science Foundation to fund development of state-of-the-art textbooks. [These new textbooks] stressed evolutionary concepts.134

In America’s concern to keep in step with what we felt was the certainty of Russia’s imminent technological superiority, only those ideas and theories that advanced American’s goal of being considered the scientific world leader were promoted. As a result science began to develop into as much of a modern institution of American life as religion ever had been. Langdon Gilkey, author of Creation on Trial: Evolution and God at Little Rock, comments on this phenomenon of scientific prominence, stating,

Scientific inquiry and its technological consequences are thoroughly established in our common life. […] As a result, since we are always willing to pay for what we feel to be necessary, federal, state, and foundational funds are almost without question expended to keep those advances going. Correspondingly, they quite dominate the curricula and the budgets of our universities and colleges. The creationists are quite
right: Science does represent an establishment in modern culture, much as religion once did – an establishment wielding vast financial, intellectual, and spiritual power.\textsuperscript{135}

The more technology advanced and the more men became accustomed to the comforts that it brings, the more we as human beings have come to believe in its absolute grasp of all things related to human experience, including the origins of man.

The third of these influences, and one of great personal impact on our nation, was the rejection of a significant segment of the generation of the sixties of the values held by previous generations. Michael Schaller, Robert D. Schulzinger, and Karen Anderson, co-authors of \textit{Present Tense: The United States Since 1945}, comment on this segment’s social revolution, stating that the decade was characterized by “…volatile political and cultural energies…” They describe the youth of that generation as adrift, noting that, “their political activism was sometimes enhanced, sometimes enfeebled by the cultural forms they created, as they gloried in sexual expressiveness, musical innovation, and pharmaceutical experimentation.” Psychology authors of the mid-1960s describe them as, “…a generation at loose ends, disconnected from meaningful relations with other people, and lacking a sense of social purpose.”\textsuperscript{136} This rebellion from the social, cultural and religious norms of the society in which they grew up, manifested
itself in the causes the youth of the American ‘60s espoused such as peace, social justice and personal non-Christian spirituality.

The last two influences that aided the cementing of the Scopes’ myth, brought attention to the origin’s debate in such a way that they stirred more open confrontation from secular think tanks than any other part of the creationism movement previously experienced. The first was a series of public debates between noted creationists (supporting a variety of creation theories) and evolutionists. These debates served as a venue for scientists who held to the creation account of human origins to present their theories publically before a large, and, often friendly crowd. Evolutionary scientists unprepared for the charisma and crowd appeal of these speakers, at times came across as uninspired, arrogant and unimpressive. Equally, however, these same evolutionists came away from many debates frustrated with what they felt was a lack of scientific evidence from their counterparts. These debates, while not directly impacting public opinion regarding Inherit the Wind nonetheless served to spark the national debate over human origins. In fact the growing popularity and apparent success of those debates, according to Jerry Bergman, author of A Brief History of the Modern American Creation Movement, “…came as an unanticipated surprise to many in the American mainstream scientific
community, most of whom had not heretofore regarded creationist’s views seriously.” As these debates grew, the evolutionary community and various media outlets took the opportunity to portray the Biblical view of creationism and its subsequent arguments on the origins of life as primitive and unscientific. The recent opening of the Creation Museum in Hebron, KY, boasting state-of-the-art facilities and dioramas, coupled with extensive scientific research and an even-handed style of presenting the creationists’ record of human origins, nevertheless, drew derision from news articles and evolutionary scientists alike. Wherever the concept of creationism as an explanation for man’s origin has surfaced, it has been relegated to the status of religious fable – far below the level of legitimate science, appearing to the casual observer as little more than hollow religious language. Add to this downplaying of religious credibility the dramatic rendering of the Scopes’ trial as seen in *Inherit the Wind* and it is little wonder a significant portion of the American public is more apt to accept both the play’s account of the trial and its statements about religion and evolution as fact.

The second of these final influences is that of the political rise of evangelical Christianity in the late 1990s and the subsequent responses it garnered from the public media, political groups, and the secular scientific
community. Along with this religious rise came many creationism-related events. One such was the movement of a handful of states who sought to publish disclaimers in their textbooks stating that evolution, though freely taught in their schools, would be presented as a theory and not as fact. Among these was the famous Dover, Pennsylvania, school board whose actions received national attention. Another event, as noted earlier, was the opening of the Creation Museum to record numbers of visitors in excess of 250,000 during the first summer – the projected total for the entire first year. Beyond this the religious right, and most notably evangelical Christianity, used its political clout to take strides in confronting and winning decisive political victories in cases involving abortion rights and same-sex marriages. In addition the movement added to its already growing population of homeschool families as a response to what they considered the God-free atmosphere of the public school system. The growth of the evangelical movement meant an increase in political and financial power, but also provided its opponents with a very visible target for public attack and ridicule. Despite the level of success the evangelical movement has achieved, it pales in comparison to the marketing ability, publicity and public financing available to its evolutionary counterparts. As a result the national awareness of the debate consistently rests in favor of the evolutionist whose
funding and media coverage gives him constant access to the public at large.

Add to this the high-profile production of *Inherit the Wind* in a star-studded revival on Broadway, and the myth is once again firmly cemented in the American public’s minds.

Fictional drama in the form of *Inherit the Wind* and America’s mindset

Despite the overwhelming misrepresentations of the Scopes’ trial through various forms of media, the question remains as to why the national response has been one of general acceptance of the myth. To answer this question, one must briefly examine the mindset of the American public over the past fifty years. Since the 1950s, America has experienced a boom in scientific discovery and an ever-progressing development of technology. As earlier generations found themselves more and more disconnected with these intellectual advancements, modern Americans became increasingly reliant upon them. The progression of radio to television to the internet has been one of gradual national dependence upon outside sources for knowledge of both daily happenings and historic events. The greater this dependence has grown, the more the individual’s initiative to seek out factual evidence for himself has decreased.
This progression has reached a point at which modern man finds himself more concerned with getting the story now, than getting the story accurately. In an atmosphere of passive learning such as this, the dramatic retelling of history finds a ripe field in which to sow seeds of misrepresentation – even in a case, similar to Lawrence and Lee’s original text, where it does not seek to do so.

*Inherit the Wind*, the creation of two men whose goal was to comment upon and to combat the growing influence of McCarthyism, has become, for the ages, the defining retelling of the Scopes’ trial of 1925, in the nation’s collective memory. Built upon the shaky foundation of Fredrick Allen’s original characterization of the trial, along with each subsequent history text that drew from that account, and coupled with the American propensity towards a mindset of gaining knowledge second hand, the Scopes myth has become, for all practical purposes, a record of fact.
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