United States History

Why did people care about the Butler Act?

#### In 1925, Tennessee passed the following law, called the Butler Act:

#### It shall be unlawful for any teacher… to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.

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#### The Butler Act made it illegal to teach from textbooks like the one below.

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| Document A: Textbook - A Civic Biology, 1925 |
| The Doctrine of EvolutionWe have now learned that animals may begin with very simple one-celled forms and end with a group which contains man himself. The great English scientist Charles Darwin explained the theory of evolution. This is the belief that simple forms of life on the earth slowly gave rise to more complex forms.Man’s Place in NatureWe see that man must be placed with the vertebrate animals because of his vertebral column. We place man with the apelike mammals because of the structural likeness. The group of mammals which includes the monkeys, apes, and man are called the primates.Evolution of ManThere once lived races of men who were much lower in their mental organization than present people. If we follow the early history of man, we find that at first he must have been littler better than one of the lower animals. Gradually he must have learned to use weapons and kill his prey, first using rough stones for this purpose. Man then began to farm the fields, and to have permanent houses. Civilization began long ago, but even today the earth is not entirely civilized.***Source:*** *Excerpt from widely-used biology textbook, “A Civic Biology,” written in 1914 by George W. Hunter, a biology teacher from New York City.* |

#### Questions:

1. *(Close Reading)* How does this textbook explain where man (humans) came from?
2. *(Contextualization)* Why might people in Tennessee in 1925 have wanted to outlaw this textbook?

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# **Guided Note Questions: The Rise of Fundamentalism**

1. What role has religious movements played in the United States?
2. What is fundamentalism?

#### Watch *The Scopes Trial* video and answer the following:

1. What was happening in the 1920s? How does this set up the battle between science and religion?

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| Document B: Sparks’ Letter to the Editor |
| ***Head Note****: Many citizens wrote letters to Tennessee’s newspapers in response to the Butler Act. Below is an excerpt from a letter written by a parent.*Editor of the Nashville Tennessean:At the time the bill prohibiting the teaching of evolution in our public schools was passed by our legislature I could not see why the mothers in greater number were not conveying their appreciation to the members for this act of safeguarding their children from one of the destructive forces which . . . will destroy our civilization. I for one felt grateful for their standing for the right against all criticism. And grateful, too, that we have a Christian man for governor who will defend the Word of God against this so-called science. . . .The Bible tells us that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the church. Therefore we know there will always be standard-bearers for the cross of Christ. But in these times of materialism I am constrained to thank God deep down in my heart for . . . every . . . one whose voice is raised for the uplift of humanity and the coming of God’s kingdom.Mrs. Jesse SparksPope, Tennessee***Source****: Mrs. Jesse Sparks, letter to the editor, Nashville Tennessean, July 3, 1925.* |

#### Questions:

1. *(Sourcing)* Why does Mrs. Sparks care about what is taught in schools?
2. *(Contextualization)* To what does Mrs. Sparks refer when she says "these times of materialism"?
3. *(Close Reading)* Find all of the words that suggest the presence of a great danger. Why might Mrs. Sparks believe that evolution is such a threat?

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| **BIG QUESTION**: Why do you think people in Tennessee would support the Butler Act, which forbade the teaching of evolution? Use evidence from both *Textbook - A Civic Biology, 1925* (page 1 of packet) and *Sparks’ Letter to the Editor* (page 3 of packet). |
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# **Scopes’ Trial Document Analysis**

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| Document C: Malone’s Trial Speech |
| What is the issue that has gained the attention, not only of the American people, but people everywhere? Is it a mere technical question as to whether the defendant Scopes taught the paragraph in the book of science? You think, your Honor, that the News Association in London [is here] because the issue is whether John Scopes taught a couple of paragraphs out of his book? Oh, no. . . .The least that this generation can do, your Honor, is to give the next generation all the facts, all the available data, all the theories, all the information that learning, that study, that observation has produced—give it to the children in the hope of heaven that they will make a better world of this than we have been able to make it. We have just had a war with twenty million dead. Civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults. Civilization need not be so proud of what the grown-ups have done. For God’s sake let the children have their minds kept open—close no doors to their knowledge; shut no door from them. Make the distinction between theology and science. Let them have both. Let them both be taught. Let them both live. . . .We feel we stand with progress. We feel we stand with science. We feel we stand with intelligence. We feel we stand with fundamental freedom in America. We are not afraid. Where is the fear? We meet it! Where is the fear? We defy it! (Profound and continued applause.)(The bailiff raps for order.)***Source****: Excerpt from Dudley Field Malone’s speech on the fourth day of the Scopes trial, July 15, 1925. Dayton, Tennessee. Dudley Field Malone was a New York attorney who was on the defense team, defending John Scopes. He argued for the importance of teaching science* |

1. *(Sourcing)* The audience in the courthouse mostly supported Bryan and the Butler Act. Why do you think they applauded Malone’s speech?
2. *(Close Reading)* Why does Malone think science is so important?
3. *(Contextualizing)* What is Malone referring to when he says “civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults”?

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| Document D: Reverend Straton Article |
| The real issue at Dayton and everywhere today is: “Whether the religion of the Bible shall be ruled out of the schools and the religion of evolution, with its ruinous results shall be ruled into the schools by law.” . . .[John Scopes’s lawyers] left New York and Chicago, where real religion is being most neglected, where law, consequently, is most defied, where vice and crime are most rampant . . . and they went to save from itself a community where women are still honored, where men are still chivalric, where laws are still respected, where home life is still sweet, where the marriage vow is still sacred. . . .Think of the illogic of it! and the nerve of it! and the colossal vanity of it!***Source****: Excerpt from Reverend John Roach Straton’s article in American Fundamentalist, “The Most Sinister Movement in the United States.” December 26, 1925. John Roach Straton was a minister who preached across the country against the sins of modern life. He was firmly opposed to the teaching of evolution.* |

1. *(Close Reading)* What words does Straton use to show that he likes small towns?
2. *(Contextualizing)* According to Straton, what are signs of corruption in New York and Chicago?

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| Document E: New York Times Article |
| **Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton: Strange Creeds and Theories are Preached and Sung within Shadows of the Court House . . .****Visitors for the Opening Day of the Scopes Trial are Mostly Tennessean Mountaineers.**Dayton, Tenn., July 10. Tennessee came to Dayton today in overalls, gingham and black to attend the trial of John Thomas Scopes for the teaching of evolution. The Tennesseans . . . came from mountain farms near Dayton, where work, usually begun at day light, had been deserted so that gaunt, tanned, toil-worn men and women and shy children might . . . see William Jennings Bryan’s "duel to the death" with “enemies of the Bible.” . . . They overflowed the crowded courtroom, where only the earliest comers found seats, onto the great lawn of the court house shaded by newly white-washed maples and newly planted with strange pipes, where one pressed a button and bent to drink for relief from the sun which beat down upon the village. . . .They stood in groups under the trees, listening to volunteer and lay evangelists, moved by the occasion to speak for the "Word." The listened to blind minstrels, who sang mountain hymns and promises of reward for the weary and faithful, to other minstrels who sang of more worldly songs, and to a string quartet of negroes. They walked up and down hot, dusty Market Street, with its squat one and two story buildings, hung with banners, as for a carnival in which religion and business had become strangely mixed, lined with soda-water, sandwich and book stalls.***Source****: Excerpt from a front page New York Times article, “Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton.” July 11, 1925. The New York Times editorials sided with the defense and criticized Dayton’s small-town mentality. Dayton’s population in 1925 was 1,800.* |

1. *(Sourcing)* What was New York City like in the 1920s? Why might the New York Times look down on Dayton, Tennessee?
2. *(Close Reading)* According to Straton, what are signs of corruption in New York and Chicago?

# **Discussion Questions**: Science vs. Religion

1. Who supported the Butler Act? What were their reasons?
2. Who opposed the Butler Act? What were their reasons?
3. How did Reverend Straton view the big cities? How did the New York Times view Dayton, Tennessee? Why did those views play a role in the Scopes trial?
4. In what way did the historical context of the 1920s affect the battle over the Butler Act?
5. How was the Scopes Trial more than just a simple debate between evolution and creationism?

# **Graphic Organizer:** The Butler Act

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| **SUPPORTED the Butler Act** | **OPPOSED the Butler Act** |
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| **Person or Source:****Reason for SUPPORTING Butler Act:****Quote:** | **Person or Source:****Reason for OPPOSING Butler Act:****Quote:** |
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# **Central Historical Question**

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| Why did people care about the Butler Act? Use at least two sources from both sides of the debate (SUPPORT and OPPOSE) to support your answer. |
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