

The Scopes Trial: The Great Fundamentalist-Modernist Schism

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Individual Website

Website: 1200 words

Multimedia: 1:43 minutes

Process Paper: 499 words

Process Paper

After hearing that this year's theme was Communication in History: the Key to Understanding, I felt that a court case would effectively portray the importance of communication as the defense and prosecution both argue two different perspectives on one topic. I also wanted to research a court case because I thought it was a unique form of communication compared to traditional ones such as letters and newspapers. When searching for my topic, I looked at various trials across American history. I discovered the Scopes Trial and researched how it mediated a domestic discussion amongst people divided between modernism and fundamentalism. I was immediately fascinated about the eclectic ways I could draw connections from the trial to the theme. Moreover, I thought the Scopes Trial would be a good topic because it was about evolution, which I've never heard about in a legal case, and wanted the project to be a learning experience.

My research relied on several primary and secondary sources. I located first-hand accounts by venturing into online archives, such as the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Tennessee Virtual Archive. I consulted several books, like *The Origin of Species*, in order to witness different perspectives on the evolution versus creation debate and to find quotes to analyze my ideas. I searched up the transcript of the Scopes Trial to delve into its events and the arguments made by fundamentalists and modernists. Knowing that the press was actively involved in the trial, I studied political cartoons and newspapers of 1925 to see their reactions, which was extremely insightful. I started the project knowing little to nothing about the topic, but after creating my website, my knowledge of not just the Scopes Trial grew but also that of the evolution controversy in America.

I decided to do a website because I wanted to show some of the images and cartoons created during the trial, while also providing lots of information on the case itself, so I felt that the website's 1,200 word limit was sufficient for me. I roughly sketched the blueprints of my website, labeling where I would insert quotes, images, etc., and navigated through the NHD website builder, exploring its components. I chose a green color scheme to represent the idea of nature and evolution and assembled my website.

The Scopes Trial fits the theme because it prompted unprecedented communication over evolution across America, and both supporting and opposing ideas were uncovered. The Scopes Trial was the first U.S. evolution case, being monumental, and challenged the constitutionality of a Tennessean bill that made evolution illegal as well as allowed for the advocacy over the legitimacy of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. It was a bridge between fundamentalism and modernism that was crucial to understanding two polar sides and the changes taking place in America during the 1920s and showed the significance of communication even in concealed forms. The Scopes Trial was ultimately the origin of the discussion over evolution that still persists today.