



Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul

Edward Humes

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What should we teach our children about where we come from?

Is evolution good science? Is it a lie? Is it incompatible with faith?

Did Charles Darwin really say man came from monkeys? Have scientists really detected "intelligent design"—evidence of a creator—in nature?

What happens when a town school board decides to confront such questions head-on, thrusting its students, then an entire community, onto the front lines of America's culture wars?

From bestselling author and Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Edward Humes comes a dramatic story of faith, science, and courage unlike any since the famous Scopes Monkey Trial. *Monkey Girl* takes you behind the scenes of the recent war on evolution in Dover, Pennsylvania, the epic court case on teaching "intelligent design" it spawned, and the national struggle over what Americans believe about human origins.

Told from the perspectives of all sides of the battle, *Monkey Girl* is about what happens when science and religion collide.

Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul Details

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From Reader Review Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul for online ebook

Debbie says

This. Was. Hard. To. Read.

And I don't think I'm a complete idiot. I agree with every reviewer who stated that the author included too much (and varied) information about evolution, Christianity, legal battles in other states, etc. This was more of an exhaustive list of the current state of intelligent design being taught in the classroom than it was a story about the legal case in Dover, PA.

I will elect to read the Devil in Dover to see if it sheds different light on the specific case there. I also found many sources in Monkey Girl that would be interesting to pursue, including Michael Behe's Darwin's Black Box, among others.

Katherine says

I liked this book for two things: the simple, fascinating explanations of the many scientific experiments that prove evolution and the day to day account of the Dover, PA version of the Scopes Monkey Trial. Where the book went wrong was when the author tried to bite off more than he could chew - delving into the history of the evolution/creationism debate or inexplicably spending a few chapters of the book in Kansas, superficially tackling the debate the School Board there was having before returning to Dover. So, this book is ultimately a bit long and a bit meandering, but if you're willing to get through those parts there is a lot to benefit you. In particular, I thought the analysis of the judge's decisions was on point and thoughtful, and the presentation of the science was clear and intriguing. I found myself weeks later describing some of the experiments to my family, to great interest. I also thought the author made an impressive attempt to treat both sides with some humanity and fairness.

John says

So far this is one of the most frustrating books I've ever read. Frustrating not in the sense that the writing is bad or the story indecipherable, but frustrating in that it contains a cast of characters (creationists and intelligent design proponents) who I constantly want to yell at. Their ignorance and desire to impose their moral beliefs is both frightening and frustrating. Other than that, this is a fine book, which I haven't been able to put down since starting earlier this week.

Girls Gone Reading says

Monkey Girl is about evolution, but mostly it is about the people involved in the Dover, Pennsylvania case. Edward Humes does a good job of explaining all of the different people involved in the case and how it came about. He does pick a side however: he clearly believes that evolution should be taught in American schools.

Several of the people involved in the case were described as stereotypical villains, and this dismissal distracted from the original story. Humes does describe the other side a little-by explaining their movement, their museum, and then discrediting them. Where Humes shines in his historical background. He explains the former cases against evolution, and I was fascinated when he explained the irony of several key finds near Dover itself.

Monkey Girl does an excellent job of describing the machine that drives this movement, getting behind the money that drives both sides.

Jason says

An infuriating cautionary tale about what happens when religious fundamentalists attempt to subvert the Constitution in the service of forcing their misguided beliefs on the general population but also a spectacularly satisfying revenge story where these same fundamentalists find themselves outclassed, outmatched and outthought in a small town Pennsylvania courtroom. Although the book makes you want to pull your hair out in frustration at both the willful ignorance and unapologetic disingenuousness of the Dover, Pennsylvania school board in its unconstitutional and anti-education attempt to enforce teaching biblical creationism (misleadingly labeled intelligent design) in public school classrooms, it also makes you want to stand up in cheer as superior scientific thinkers and lawyers expose the attempt for what it really is: utter bullshit.

Throughout the book, Humes does a great job of characterizing all of the players on each side of the case, and, even though he clearly is biased toward logic and reason, he does attempt to paint as sympathetic a portrait of the Dover school board as is possible. In the process of covering the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* case, he digs deeply into the issue and presents a meticulous history of creationist assaults on the Constitution in the years between the Scopes Monkey Trial and the *Kitzmiller*--a history of underhanded, deliberate conspiracies to knowingly violate the law in order to force a Supreme Court showdown. It's unconscionable, which makes it so satisfying when this latest attempt is destroyed in such a public and unequivocal way. I promise it's a thorough and thoroughly enjoyable smackdown.

Although the book ends on a high note where facts, science and data triumph over superstition and small mindedness, Humes includes a grim epilogue reminding us that these attempts are far from over and that the religious right have no qualms about continuing to sabotage and fight against a modernizing culture that is increasingly leaving them behind and making them irrelevant. As such, the *Kitzmiller* victory is more of a call to arms than a call for celebration. The book itself is essential reading on the case itself and on its larger implications.

Sarah (Presto agitato) says

The argument between creationists and evolutionists was in the news recently after the debate between Bill Nye "The Science Guy" and Ken Ham, the Australian who runs the Creation Museum. The dispute is nothing new, though. Creationists and evolutionists have been butting heads since Darwin's day. Ken Ham's organization Answers in Genesis represents the more extreme end of the spectrum, the "young earth" creationists who believe that the earth is only 6,000 years old and that dinosaurs and people lived at the same time.

Dinosaur and human living in harmony at the Creation Museum.

This argument grows particularly heated when it involves the public school system. Since the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, school boards across the country have debated first whether or not they should allow the teaching of evolution, and more recently whether or not they should allow the teaching of creationism and/or intelligent design. A recent story in Slate reported that thousands of schools are allowed to teach creationism in science classes, in spite of Supreme Court decisions like *Edwards v. Aguillard* in 1987 that ruled that creationism could not be taught if it was advancing a particular religion.

There may be reasons you never learned this in school (Creation Museum).

In *Monkey Girl*, Edward Humes recounts the 2005 court battle over teaching intelligent design in the Dover Area School District in Dover, Pennsylvania. Two young earth creationists on the school board led the push to add intelligent design to the science curriculum. Intelligent design (ID) argues that certain biological features (like bacterial flagella and the coagulation cascade) are too complex to be explained by evolution alone, and must have required a “designer.” Mainstream science finds nothing “scientific” about this concept, viewing it as a Trojan horse to get re-branded creationism into schools, but the defendants in the case insisted that the goal of including ID in the science curriculum was to improve science education and had nothing to do with religion.

Previous actions by board members made this a difficult argument to defend. When discussing including ID in science classes, one member said, “Two thousand years ago, someone died on a cross. Can we have the courage to stand up for him?” (Prologue, *Monkey Girl*). With statements like those, it was hard to argue that religious belief was not involved.

Humes does a good job of summarizing the case, with a helpful discussion of the historical background. Unfortunately he gets bogged down in details in telling Dover’s story. It’s as if he wants to give a narrative with the dramatic impact of William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow facing off in the Scopes Trial, but the personalities here don’t have that larger-than-life flair. They are, for the most part, ordinary people with unwavering world views. That setting has a certain innate drama, but it doesn’t warrant the minute-by-minute treatment Humes gives it.

There is also an odd shift in tone throughout the book. Humes starts with a highly journalistic approach, presenting the facts and people on both sides in as fair a manner as possible. As the story progresses, though, it’s as if he loses patience, getting increasingly snarky. His Epilogue rambles strangely about right-wing pundit Ann Coulter. While there is no doubt that she is a good example of an anti-science demagogue, the rant is a bit off-topic for the book.

Monkey Girl is a good treatment of an important and still relevant topic, the inclusion of religion in science education in the public schools. It would have been a better book, though, without the excessive detail and the pretense of courtroom drama.

Better days in the Garden of Eden at the Creation Museum.

Dindy says

I'm about halfway through this book. I'm annoyed because it spends too much time exploring the history of evolutionary science and the creation/evolution controversy. I'm hopeful now that it will focus on the

situation in Dover and start bringing in other stuff with which I am already very familiar.

Later: This book is at its best when it focuses on the events in Dover. Someone who is unfamiliar with the Creation/Evolution battle would probably find all of it very interesting-- it is told in an entertaining style and breaks down hard concepts into easily understandable bites. Because I am already familiar with this battle, I found the detours into the Scopes trial, the Kansas State Board of Education and the story of Darwin to be an unnecessary distraction. Of course the book would only have been about 1/3 as long if it hadn't ventured into the other stories.

This book should be required reading for anyone who is interested in the education of our students. One hopes that the people who are elected to School Boards have at least a modicum of advanced education themselves but this book shows that some people who are elected to the boards are more motivated by political agendas than actually providing the best education possible for their students. What is especially appalling was the very little interest or knowledge the Dover School Board had about science, evolution or Intelligent Design. The School Board allowed itself to be led by a zealot and the entire community was split as a result.

Nikki says

I found this book to be good in the I-want-to-pull-my-hair-out, oh-why-are-people-so-stupid kind of way. Humes writes a thorough and well explained book about the battle between evolution and creationism (or intelligent design) and schools in Dover, Pennsylvania. He includes various other cases and situations regarding this battle as well, dating back more than eighty years ago (rather ridiculous that this country is STILL battling evolution after that length of time). Aside from the battle detailed within I also found errors an editor should have spotted and fixed prior to publication, such as "problems arises" and including important words like "not" when you meant the opposite. I found it very distracting.

Growing up in a family which allowed you to decide on religion without pressure I became rather curious as to what the appeal was for others, why were they so "faithful"? Even at a young age I decided after curiosity led me to explore religion, that it was simply not for me. So I grew up happy with my dinosaur and other species books and eventually went to college and majored in biology. Of my classes, some of my favorites were based on evolution so I had a strong understanding of the field when I began this book. But even in college I still wondered what was the great appeal of religion? I did not get it. I eventually attended numerous religious events with religious friends of different denominations of various faiths, dated a guy who went to church weekly and read parts of the Bible. So I can, unlike many who blindly follow any belief, religious or not, say with conviction that I am one of those hated atheists of which the pro-creation/ID individuals in the book throw like a curse word to those who dare dispute them. So while after Humes book I see all of the pieces of the ID/creation point of view, I still do not understand how one can proceed in life this way. Most of the individuals who battled against evolution did not even understand it (and some did not even understand their own position clearly). Why oh why are we letting the Ann Coulters of the world influence so many minds?

I think I need a nice long nap and some ibuprofen after this book. Just read the actual trial information Humes includes and you will be astounded as to why anyone would think they even had a chance against evolution. These were the most entertaining of all the chapters and the decision by Judge Jones was thorough and thankfully rational. The poor man received death threats for simply upholding one of the most basic tenets of the USA, separation of church and SCIENCE (or state).

One of the sections which had the greatest impression on me was regarding those who believe in evolution

broken down into such things as what part of the country they live, their level of education, sex or religious background (chapter 2). During the discussion of those Humes writes of a young man who worries about what evolution could cause. He states: "I'm really afraid to learn too much about evolution, because it might make me doubt my religion. And then where would I be? What would I tell my family?" This young man stated this at a conference with other people of faith who disagreed with evolution as well (although most could not explain the theory to you). So what I take from this, and the fact that people agreed rather than spoke against this individual, is that his faith is not solid enough to even simply LEARN about evolution? And others who heard this were not appalled by his lack of conviction? What kind of faith is that? If I believe in something I am not afraid to learn about the other side, this is simply ignorance. And I must say, if anything, the battle between evolution and creationism does seem to come down to simply that.

Overall though, evolution is an absolutely fascinating subject and more data to back it up is found everyday it seems. Is science my religion as some creationists try to state about people who agree with evolution? Nah, but it sure is fun. But that may be because I was brainwashed by going to college (did you know college did that?). Ignorance IS bliss! Oh and atheists aren't the work of Satan or at least I haven't found my mark yet, where is it usually located? ;)

Paul says

It's amazing to think that the Scopes "monkey trial" took place in 1925, and nothing has essentially changed in some parts of the U.S. The book relates the story of the Dover, Pennsylvania, school district, as it takes yet another stand against evolution in 2004. The story reveals much ignorance and bullying from a fundamentalist Christian sect that wants to reintroduce creationism into the school's science curriculum under the guise of "intelligent design," which its proponents insist is nothing at all like creationism. The science teachers are appalled. One of the leaders of the group says that his daughter didn't descend from no monkey, a sentiment that the author says Darwin would have agreed with.

It's another repeat of the heresy that started with Galileo, when he said the earth revolved around the sun, and not vice-versa. This version plays out with much bitterness and arguments from ignorance. The book encompasses the ultimate court case that decided in favor of the "Darwinists," as the fundamentalists called them. It's fascinating and horrifying at the same time to see that the nation is still retrying the Scopes trial in 2004.

A great book. I would highly recommend it.

Mikey B. says

This is a polarizing book – you will likely be on one side or the other.

A school-board in Dover, Pennsylvania elected to teach creationism/intelligent design along with Darwinian evolution in the science curriculum. Their argument was that evolution was “just a theory” that they felt had gaps in it. Creationism and/or Intelligent Design filled those gaps by postulating a “design maker”. Also there were those on the school board who simply felt that Darwin’s teaching conflicted with their literalist interpretation of the Bible. Darwinism and evolution would encourage their children to become atheistic and un-Christian. In a nutshell they felt that evolution conflicted with their view of Christianity.

Many in the Dover community, like science teachers and parents, disagreed with introducing Creationism/Intelligent Design into the science curriculum. They correctly said that science is rational and Creationism/Intelligent Design is irrational and introduces a supernatural explanation into the science course. So this came to be settled by a court case in the state of Pennsylvania well described by the author.

After the trial the judge ruled in favour of the plaintiffs and Creationism/Intelligent Design was removed from the science curriculum. But the polarity continues. The judge who took the decision had his life threatened. In the initial school-board meetings one parent complained that the Creationism/Intelligent Design quorum were Talibanizing the school with their religious ideology.

I simply cannot understand people, like those in Dover, who interpret the Bible literally. The Bible is not a science book, but they are treating it as such, referring to Genesis, Noah's Ark as truth. They believe the earth to be 5,000 years old. When people believe that the Bible instead of a multitude of geology books explains the different eras of life on earth this is indicative of a vast cultural and educational gap between those who believe fantasy and those who believe truth. It is a clash of modernity and an ancient medieval view of religion.

All this is not helping science in the U.S. It is anti-science. It is part of a culture war in the United States between those with a "liberal education" and the "fundamentalist mindset" This book was published over 10 years ago, so I do not know the extent to which the anti-science agenda has grown and how much it has suppressed real science education.

Page 148 (my book)

In August 1999, the state of Kansas decided that the Niobrara Chalk [a geologic formation] and its fossils simply did not exist – at least, not as the vast majority of scientists and a beloved museum conceived of them. In that year the state's independent, elected board of education adopted science teaching standards that conspicuously omitted most references to evolution or other principles of cosmology, biology, and geology that might contradict creationist views or suggested the earth might be older than 10,000 years.

Laura says

"In the time of Galileo it was argued that the texts, 'And the sun stood still ... and hasted not to go down about a whole day' (Joshua x. 13) and 'He laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not move at any time' (Psalm cv. 5) were an adequate refutation of the Copernican theory."

Alan Turing, 1950

This is one of the latest episodes of the struggle between those who feel that Science describes nature pretty well and those who believe that anything other than a strict literal interpretation of the Bible deserves a trip to hell. I think that those who ridicule the scientific method and mock Darwin's work while refusing to read it, do not deserve to benefit from the fruits of science (such as a computer and the internet), much less influence science curriculum in public schools.

I still remember how Math and Science were emphasized if only to remind us that we needed to compete with the Soviets. Until reading this book, I assumed that all but the most extreme religious fundamentalists were fine with this truce-for many years public school biology books limited discussion to a small description of evolution as "changes over time" in high school biology. I was wrong.

While the book mostly focuses on the Dover trial, Humes also takes us to the nearly parallel trial in Kansas, the controversy in the Grand Canyon Giftshop (where Creationists have had some success in censoring information about the geological age of the national monument), and the pseudo-scientific think-tank which excludes any science in conflict with Christian Scripture. I couldn't be certain, but they probably

conveniently ignore the scripture at the top of the page regarding the sun going around a stationary earth. The Dover Trial is full of drama and bad debate, A Scopes Monkey Trial for the 21st century, or *Inherit the Wind, Redux*. Humes shows in the Dover case how Creationism in public schools, having been defeated in courts during the late 20th century under the Separation of Church and State clause of the First Amendment, evolved (pun intended) into the virtually identical Intelligent Design movement, to Dover, Pennsylvania among other places. Some of the most shocking moments of the trial feature the ironic displays of dishonesty which ultimately brought down the school board members who were trying to bring religion into the local biology classrooms, and had designs on bringing it into the history and government classes as well. The Dover case pitted one kind of Christians against another. Those who favored the separation of Church and State were attacked as "not Christian enough", in a great example of how the separation of these two functions protects freedom of religion. Another surprising turn of events showed how the presiding judge, a Bush-supporting Republican was branded as a liberal judicial activist for defending the constitution. Regarding extreme religious views which by definition do not tolerate any opposing views, what are the limits of tolerance in society? The Framers of the Constitution were historically not far away from centuries of religious wars in Europe which constantly threw governments into turmoil. They saw the value of the separation of church and state to both. Back in those days religious persecution meant death. This latest version of the old Darwin-vs.-God controversy is the product of the removal of Critical Thinking skills from the mainstream public school curriculum, and the lack of a Cold War Era push towards developments in Math & Science, supported by all but the most outspoken of Bible literalists, who constantly attempt to couch the debate as "God vs. Darwin", when in fact, most religions don't require people to choose between the two. Young-Earthers might benefit from not ignoring the history of the Catholic Church's censorship of Copernicus and Gallileo centuries ago, and ask themselves why the Pope doesn't have a big problem with Darwin's theories today.

Melki says

The preacher gazes at the sea of faces turned up at him as he holds aloft a well-worn copy of the Bible, waving it at a packed church the size of a concert hall.

"I look forward to the day when every teacher is teaching out of *this* book," he shouts, and he is answered by a loud chorus of hallelujahs. "And there will be no separation of church and state...We will live in a theocracy. And what a glorious day that will be!"

Yikes!

It all started as an obscure dispute over science textbooks. A group of evolution-doubting school board members wanted teachers to use *Of Pandas & People: The Central Question of Biological Origins*, a "science" book that makes it clear that *man was created as he is*, and *Darwin's theory of "from goo to you" is a fairy tale*. Despite vocal objections, the measure passed, and a lawsuit was filed against the board by a group of parents who felt that the action was *inherently religious, not scientific in nature*. What followed was a media circus, complete with clowns and, of course, monkeys.

Even though the Supreme Court banned "creation science" from public schools in 1987, certain factions have not given up on the idea of a challenge, mainly by using the new term - "intelligent design."

You can either read the book or Google to learn the outcome. Just know that the judge who heard the case received death threats...and not from the godless evolutionists.

Now listen to this sad violin music - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuNhTL...> - while I pontificate:

In last week's election, Rep. Paul C. Broun, a Republican from Georgia ran unopposed. Broun has called evolution and the Big Bang Theory "lies straight from the pit of hell." In a pro-science protest, 4000 voters wrote in the name of Charles Darwin. Broun also believes the earth is 9,000 years old. He currently serves on the House Science Committee alongside Rep. Todd "Legitimate Rape" Akin.

Yeah. That's where we're at right now.

The "Young Earth" people are not giving up. And they are procreating at alarming rates. As their numbers swell and their children become politically active, look for this controversy to be repeated. It pains me to say this, but one of these days, they just might win.

Jamie says

The full title here is *Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul* by Edward Humes. There are surprisingly few monkeys or girls in this book, but it does tell the story of the lawsuit between the Dover, Pennsylvania school board and parents who didn't like the idea of religion under the thin guise of intelligent design (ID) being taught in their public schools.

One reason I picked up this book was that while I had soaked up some of the ID controversy through various other media, my knowledge pretty much stopped at "Dem Kansas people sure are dum, hur, hur, hur." The Pennsylvania suit actually went to trial first, and was more influential from a legal standpoint. Basically, here's what happened: a few very vocal and influential members of the Dover school board decided they wanted to reintroduce religion to public schools, and that the godless and anti-religious (to their view) science of evolution needed to go. The best way to do this was to start with a small wedge like creationism -- the view that the Old Testament stories of creation should be taken literally-- and then widen the entrance until happy children everywhere are thumping Bibles during recess and that Goldstein kid just stands in the corner looking REALLY uncomfortable. Later, when they actually started getting legal council about how teaching religion in publicly funded schools is kinda sorta totally illegal and unconstitutional, the school board changed their tune slightly from promoting creationism to backing intelligent design as an alternative to evolution. ID posits that the universe in general and mankind in specific are too complex to happen by chance or evolution, and that they had to be designed by someone. They don't come out and say that that "someone" is G-O-D, but that's pretty much where everyone's guesses start and end.

So this is what the school board did, even as their science teachers and a few dissenting board members yelled themselves hoarse in protest. And then some concerned parents --many of them Christians themselves-- said "oh no you di'ent!" and sued the board for violating their children's constitutional rights. Because ID was still basically religion in the classroom. The school board and their council said "Nuh-uh! Is not!" and the judge had to take it from there.

As far as the book itself, Humes does a really good job of presenting the issues and the case surrounding this lawsuit. It's clear that he's on the side of the evolutionists, but it's also clear from his account how the intelligent design proponents were using ID as a means of bringing religion into schools and had no interest in its scientific merits, which is convenient seeing as it has few. Humes tells the story of this conflict through its players, taking you meticulously through how each step was made and each decision was arrived at, from the beginning of the school board's decision through the verdict of the resulting trial and its aftermath. The author is exceedingly detailed and specific, but at the same time he keeps the narrative moving forward and keeps things interesting enough so that I wanted to keep reading. Like any good story teller, he lets the characters in the drama shine and tells the tale through them.

Another great thing about *Monkey Girl* is that it's fairly educational. I already knew the basics of evolution (animals differ, some of those differences are beneficial, those possessing such benefits proliferate, etc.), but Humes goes beyond the basics, both in his recounting of the trial testimonies and his own asides. After closing the book, I felt that I not only had a better grasp on the historic lawsuit and verdict, but also the issues and science surrounding it. Plus I was entertained, so what's not to like?

Kristi says

This was a well-written and enthralling read, although the topic it covers is frustrating on so many levels to me. Several times I wanted to pull my hair out, reading about the ignorance and closed-mindedness that would cause people to try to force an untested new "science" on their children, without any real knowledge themselves of the evolutionary theory they reject, or for that matter, the intelligent design theory they're trying to push. It's especially upsetting to me as a Christian to see so many of my fellow travelers equate evolution with atheism without even bothering to try to understand it. This book completely explodes many of the myths that surround ID, and it does so in a lucid fashion that makes for compelling reading even for non-scientists who have never considered the issue before. It's a must-read for anyone who mistakenly believes that ID or creationism has a leg to stand on when it comes to scientific credibility, or who thinks that a Christian can't accept evolution as God's means of creation.

Rob Squires says

An excellent journalistic look at the religious mentality in America...although the same mentality is very much alive elsewhere. The author tries his best to be balanced, and he manages to remain disinterested (not to be confused with uninterested) about as much as humanly possible. However, probably due to the fact that he's writing about some really ignorant and hard-headed people, in the end one gets the feeling that he's on the side of the Darwinists. What I got out of this book is not that Intelligent Design is necessarily wrong, but that most religious people just don't "get it" when it comes to this topic. A lot of the antics that some religious organizations are involved in, including outright deception and misinformation, are downright shameful. Due to this, it's rather clear that if religious people want to have their beliefs respected, they're going to have to recognize that they stand outside the realm of science. Indeed, an Intelligent Designer is still the most coherent explanation for the formation of the universe and everything in it, but the arguments for this need to be reformulated since religious people have performed embarrassingly poorly in what they've done so far. That's one reason why scientists have circled the wagons and refused to take "Creationists" seriously. Overall, this is a great book about a fascinating trial that everyone interested in this topic should read.
