

*JAST*, 2018; 49: 77-99

Submitted: 02.03.2018

Accepted: 16.05.2018

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**Clash Between Science and Monkey Business: Decline of  
Fundamentalism from the Democratic Party Politics after the  
Scopes Trial**

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**Abstract**

In 1925, a small legal case occurred in Dayton, Tennessee, which came to the fore in the United States. In this case, known as the Scopes Monkey Trial, John T. Scopes, a biology teacher in a high school in Dayton, was accused of violating the law by teaching Darwin's evolution theory. Fundamentalists believed that this theory was a law of hate, while the liberal aspect approached it as a matter of freedom of thought. This clash turned into a showdown in the Democratic Party, by the representation of two wings of this party in this trial. While William Jennings Bryan, a religious fundamentalist, a three-time presidential candidate of the Democrats was the accuser, liberal Democrat lawyer Clarence Darrow was the defender. Bryan and Darrow stepped forward in this trial, as the representatives of the different wings of the Democratic Party, which was in a crisis of identity in the 1920s. Although Scopes was convicted of a 100-dollar penalty, this was not perceived as a victory of the fundamentalism in the American society, specifically in the Democratic Party. After that trial, the decline of the fundamentalist type of politics and politicians in the party began. In the second part of the 1920s, the fundamentalists took only the backseat in the Democratic Party. Firstly, the fundamentalist leader Bryan passed away with a broken heart after the trial. Secondly, leaderless fundamentalists tried to pass anti-evolutionist legislations in the Midwest and South; however, they could not succeed. In the end, the nomination of the Al Smith, a liberal, progressive character as the presidential candidate of 1928, pushed the fundamentalists aside. Therefore, this article aims to evaluate the fundamentalist aspect in the

Democratic Party politics and its transformation throughout the 1920s, over the Scopes Trial debates and its consequences.

### **Keywords**

Fundamentalism, liberalism, anti-evolution, Democratic Party

## **Bilim ve Maymun Davasının Çatışması: Scopes Davası Sonrasında Demokrat Partide Muhafazakârlık Politikalarında Gerileme**

### **Öz**

1925 yılında Dayton, Tennessee’de görülen küçük bir dava bir anda Birleşik Devletler gündemine oturdu. Maymun Davası olarak bilinen bu davada, John Scopes adlı, Dayton’daki bir lise biyoloji öğretmeni Darwin’in evrim kuramını öğreterek kanunu çiğnemekle suçlanıyordu. Köktenciler, bu kuramın muhafazakârlığa karşı bir nefret kuramı olduğuna inanıyor ancak karşılarındakiler ise bunu düşünce özgürlüğü ile bağdaştırıyordu. Davanın her iki tarafında bulunan iki Demokrat Parti kanadı, bu çatışmanın bir parti içi mücadeleye dönüşmesine sebep oldu. Köktenci ve üç kere Demokrat Parti başkan adayı olan William Jennings Bryan davacı olurken, özgürlükçü Demokrat avukat Clarence Darrow savunmayı üstlendi. Böylece Demokrat Parti’nin özgürlükçü kanadı ve köktenci kanadı bu davada karşı karşıya geldi. Davanın sonunda her ne kadar Scopes 100 dolar gibi küçük bir cezaya çarptırılrsa da bu köktencilerin kesin bir zaferi olarak algılanmadı. Aksine bu davadan sonra köktencilik Demokrat Parti içerisinde büyük bir yara aldı. 1920’li yılların ikinci yarısında köktenciler parti içerisinde geri plana geçti. Önce, köktencilerin lideri Bryan davadan hemen sonra kederinden hayatını kaybetti. Sonrasında, lidersiz kalan köktenciler evrim karşıtı kanunları, özellikle orta batı ve güney eyaletlerinde, kabul ettiremediler. Sonunda ise ilerici, özgürlükçü Demokrat Al Smith’in 1928’de partinin başkan adayı olması ile iyice geri çekilmek zorunda kaldılar. Bu makale, köktencilik’in Demokrat Parti içerisindeki yerini, 1920’lerdeki dönüşümünü ve Scopes Davası’nın getirdiği tartışmaları ve sonuçları değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Köktencilik, özgürlükçülük, evrim karşıtlığı, Demokrat Parti

In the spring of 1925, the Tennessee legislature approved the “Butler Act,” which set back the liberal enthusiasm of the 1920s by prohibiting public school teachers from teaching Darwin’s theory of evolution in public schools across the state. In fact, the state of Tennessee was not the only state at the time to pass such a law encouraged by fundamentalist politicians; various other states in the nation were also passing and encouraging similar laws. When the American Civil Liberties Union gave an advertisement in a Tennessee newspaper calling for a teacher with legal standing to challenge the law, a twenty-four-year-old high school science teacher named John Thomas Scopes stepped up to the challenge. Eventually, the high school teacher Scopes was charged with violating the state’s law against teaching evolution instead of the Biblical account of man’s creation. Scopes was soon called for trial in court. The Scopes Monkey trial would have started as a regional event, however, when it was declared in the national newspapers it turned out to be a nationwide event. The prominence of the trial became more significant when the opposing attorneys of the trial were announced. On the one hand, William Jennings Bryan, an anti-evolution activist, three-time presidential candidate and former Secretary of State, arrived at the side of the prosecutor. On the other hand, Clarence Darrow, liberal Democrat, agnostic and a charismatic Chicago lawyer—who had made his name as the champion of tough cases, arrived in Dayton as Bryan’s opponent. In addition, many scientists and hundreds of news reporters attended the event turning this ordinary trial into a historical event.

After days of arduous arguments and statements, Judge John Raulston concluded the case. The final verdict was turned over to the jury and it took only nine minutes for them to announce that Scopes was guilty. Although the jury found Scopes guilty, the trial marked an embarrassing setback for fundamentalism. At the end, Scopes was only fined 100 dollars. This was seen as a slap on the wrist compared to what the fundamentalists were expecting. Meanwhile, although Scopes was proclaimed guilty, the media of the northern non-fundamentalist states declared a huge victory for Darrow and liberalism. A few days after the trial, Bryan died from a heart attack, which was seen as another setback for fundamentalists in the country. Supporters of the anti-evolution movement became more inactive as they were missing an important leader. Politically, Bryan’s type of fundamentalism, which had been extremely popular among the Democrats, began to lose prominence after 1925. Around the same time, fundamentalist politicians of the

Democratic Party started to become less favorable in the political arena. In the advancing years more progressive politicians stepped up for the Democratic Party.

Up until today, in the extant academic literature, hundreds of studies have been conducted about the Scopes Trial and its outcomes. However, only a few of them mainly connect the role of the Scopes trial with the decline of the fundamentalist wing of the Democratic Party in the 1920s. Certain books and articles enlighten the terms of “fundamentalism” and the “Democratic Party” in the 1920s, and relate these terms to the case of the Scopes Trial and William Jennings Bryan. For instance, Michael Lienesch’s successful work, *In the Beginning*, demonstrates how anti-evolutionists transformed their ideology into a counter political movement against modernists and liberals in the early 1920s. Although Lienesch supports the claim that anti-evolutionary movements increased with the number of anti-evolutionist bills around the country, he also admits that in the late 1920s, the Scopes Trial was one of the significant reasons for the decline of fundamentalism in American politics. In fact, some other sources support this argument as well. For example, Dorothy Nelkin, who commented in her article *From Dayton to Little Rock* that the politicians occupied with the economic depression during the 1930s had to place fundamentalist policies in the background, also commented that the effectiveness of the modernist wave during the 1920s over the fundamentalists might have put politicians under political pressure.

To explain the decline of the fundamentalists in the Democratic Party, several sources have been examined in detail. These sources are mostly related to the history of the Democratic Party and to the connection of the Scopes trial with changes in the Democratic Party’s political characteristics after the 1920s. For instance, in *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877-1962*, Alan Ware places considerable value to Bryan and the influence of Bryanism in the Democratic Party between 1896 and 1925. He defines Bryan as a debatable figure for the Democratic Party even though Bryan had been quite active in the party’s organization in the early 1900s. Bryan is also described as both an adored and contested political figure by the other party members in the party. Throughout his political life, Bryan worked towards maintaining a balance between northern urban voters and fundamentalist rural voters in the south. Nonetheless, Bryan was known as a champion of

the fundamentalists who would never hide his conservative aspects. Until 1925, he maintained his balance policy by pursuing a populist approach in politics and by not declaring war over any side. However, with the coming of the Scopes trial, he decided to come to the forefront as a public avenger for the Christian community by taking up a role as a social conservationist, which meant abandoning his original motto of egalitarianism. Bryan's motto mostly addressed the northern urban voters until the time of the Scopes Trial. Bryan took it upon himself to avenge fundamentalism in Dayton, but both he and his policy lost political ground after the Scopes trial. In addition to Ware's comments, Scott C. James mentions in *Presidents, Parties, and the State, 1884-1936*, that the progressive oriented leader Al Smith's nomination for the presidency in 1928 showed a clear transformation inside the Democratic Party.

In addition to the political consequences that the Scopes trial brought forth, its outcome also influenced social movements and affected the validity of fundamentalism in American society in the late 1920s. Several surveys approach this topic to discuss the outcomes of the trial and its effects on social movements and the validity of fundamentalism. John Fea, in his article "An Analysis of the Treatment of American Fundamentalism in United States History Survey Texts," delves into the role of fundamentalism in American politics, and he explains how important the Scopes trial was during this period. In addition to this article, Jeffrey Morgan's *Reading Race into the Scopes Trial* focuses on another social issue concerning the experiences and inferences that African-Americans had about the trial considering the fundamentalist ideology among them.

One of the best sources on this issue is written by an eyewitness of the case, Henry Louis Mencken. He was a quite famous journalist of the time, who commented widely on contemporary movements. He arrived in Dayton to watch the case for his newspaper. He released a satiric book about the case called *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee*. In this book, he mercilessly attacked the fundamentalist approach and he predicted that the image of fundamentalism would remain mired in both politics and society for the following decades after the trial. Moreover, Heather Hendershot supports a similar claim as well. In her article, "God's Angriest Man," she states how this trial was a great blow to the fundamentalist politicians, who felt the forthcoming danger over

their ideology. She also adds that fundamentalists following the Scopes trial not only retreated from the political ground, but also retreated from the wider political culture in the country, ultimately building up their own separatist networks of schools, churches, and radio stations in their limited societies.

Lastly, John Farrell, a biographer of Clarence Darrow, presents good information in *Clarence Darrow: Attorney for the Damned* about Darrow's position and ideology in the Democratic Party. Farrell writes significantly about the trial and the Bryan-Darrow rivalry. According to Farrell, Darrow played a huge role in the change in the Democratic Party before and after Bryan's death. His efforts to fight for academic freedom in the Scopes trial ultimately turned the tide against fundamentalist ideology in American politics.

### **1. The Democratic Party in the Early 1920s**

On July 13, 1925, Clarence Darrow walked towards the judge and personally addressed the inequality of the case and the law. The law prohibited teaching evolution in public schools, while it did not in private schools. It was quite similar to banning the democratic equality of the people in the nation. Darrow said, "You cannot pass a law making it a crime for a corporation to discharge a man because he voted differently and leave private individuals to do it." For Darrow, judging people for their choices was considered as a clear act of discrimination. Darrow went on to say, "Up in our state it is the Republicans who do all that, and the wicked Democrats up here" ("The Scopes Trial"). In fact, with these words, Darrow was not only attacking the inequality of the system and limitation placed on free will, but also the Democrats who had rejected democratic virtues in Darrow's aspect.

Still, these words did not have much impact among the members of the Democratic Party before the trial. The Roaring Twenties brought forth many modern and liberal ideals to American society; however, the roar of the twenties was hardly felt among the constituents of the Democratic Party. According to Constance A. Clark (1277), Bryan's anti-evolution campaign of the early 1920s caught many people by surprise in American society, especially in the North, where modern, progressive, and liberal ideals had flourished. Furthermore, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, most scientists believed that fierce competition between evolutionism and religion had been resolved a long time ago. However,

debates on evolution had re-emerged before the trial. One reason could be that the widespread growth of liberalism had threatened the influential power of fundamentalists in American society. For the fundamentalists, fearing a potential loss of power in society could have been enough to spark a rivalry against liberal ideals. Indeed, during the 1920s, many people retained their faith in both science and progressive ideas. However, many others had begun to suspect science to be one of the most corrosive effects of society, also known as the “acids of modernity” (Lippmann 51). In addition to the theory of evolution having a place in school textbooks, the societies that wrote or talked about evolution might have been inclined to link the theory of evolution with cultural differences between rural and urban populations, debates about race, and especially with voting choices. Before the 1920s, Bryan seemed to try to avoid getting drawn into the debates between fundamentalism and science. Everytime he announced his nomination as the party’s candidate, he showed a neutral stance on these social issues.

Furthermore, the division among the Democrats was distinguishable before the coming of the trial. The fundamentalists, for example, were for the most part quite distinguishable from the rest of the party. While the Republican Party stood as the political fortress for white Protestantism outside the South, the Democratic Party received strong support from the rest of the southerners. The Democrats, when compared to the Republicans, were much more bitterly divided among the immigrants of the major urban centers and the white fundamentalists of the South. In the early 1920s, the split on moral and cultural issues was clear. For instance, the most vehement supporters and opponents of Prohibition tended to be Democrats, while others were liberals and progressives (Rae 633). This example reflects the battle between Bryan and Darrow. Moreover, the divided sides could not come to terms with a common name who would entirely embrace the Democratic Party. The bitterness of this division may explain the party’s abysmal record in past presidential elections from 1896 through 1928, with the exception of Woodrow Wilson.

During his third run for the presidency, William Jennings Bryan, the champion of the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, promoted fundamentalism as one of the cornerstones of his campaign. He had promised his voters to resist changes in the name of modernity, which also contained a fundamentalist approach as preserving strict,

unwavering interpretations of religious belief. He had many ardent supporters, such as the Southern fundamentalist Democrats who were determined to pass anti-evolution acts in their states. In fact, John Washington Butler, the creator of the Butler Act, was one of them. (Bailey 86-87)

Interestingly, in earlier times, Darrow and Bryan, to some degree, used to share the same political views. In 1896, they met in the Democratic National Convention at the Chicago Coliseum. Bryan delivered his famous “Cross of Gold” speech in that convention which might have helped him get nominated for the following presidential election. Bryan was great at entertaining and captivating the feelings of the populist at the convention by telling them what they wanted to hear. Throughout the four decades of his political life, Bryan had clear perceptions on religious topics, the gold standard, and common social problems. His popularity with the laymen earned him the presidential candidacy for the Democratic Party on three different occasions. Although he never won any elections, he generally received 45 to 48 percent of the popular votes. For some time, he also served as the U.S. Secretary of State for the Wilson administration. Despite the Democratic Party having lost its popularity in the early 1920s after Woodrow Wilson, Bryan did not lose any popularity among the masses. He still dominated the party and its members. Bryanism was largely popular among his constituents. In fact, he was regarded as a standing champion of conservatism and populism. In addition, Bryan supported fundamentalism and anti-evolutionism in the early 1920s. By doing so, he thought that he was giving the masses what they wanted. As for Darrow, it is quite difficult to discern his general position in the party. Darrow and his liberal fellows generally followed the party’s actions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century mostly in silence.

After World War I, the American perspective toward politics and civil life began to change. The Great War revealed many lessons about life, chaos, destruction and mass deaths, which enabled the general American public to ponder about the significance and value of living a free and safe life. The concept of luxury and liberty among urban Americans in the 1920s was extremely desirable. This desire among the urban population helped to shape the political tendencies of early 1920s. During the same time, the Democratic Party, inspired by Bryanism, recorded one of the two worst performances by a major party



in presidential election history. The party's unpleasant performance was largely due to the lack of support from urban voters. The Democratic Party, in 1920 and 1924, received 34.1 percent and 28.8 percent, respectively, of the total votes. In general, the Democratic party had faltered after Woodrow Wilson; however, victories in eleven southern fundamentalist states, including Kentucky in 1920 and Oklahoma in 1924, revealed the Democratic Party's political tendencies in the early 1920s (Ware 147). The election results showed that the Democratic Party at the time had done well with the states of the populist south. Furthermore, the leading figures of the party, despite not being in line with Bryan's ideology (Burner 12), had generally adopted a tone that condemned urban American cities and institutions, such as New York and Wall Street. For instance, William Gibbs McAdoo, who was Wilson's son-in-law, refused to embrace and accept both white Protestant supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan. William, unable to secure his party's nomination in 1924, reduced the likelihood of the Democratic Party to be in line with the modernist milieu. Before 1925, the kind of party strategy advocated by Bryan and McAdoo persisted as a strong element among the Democrats. According to Ware (160), the Democratic Party was stuck in the position as a party of the laymen in the South, the Midwest, and the West.

On January 20, 1925, Bryan's faithful friend Butler introduced a bill which would make it a felony to teach Darwin's theory of evolution in public schools in Tennessee. This controversial decision pulled the whole country into a great debate in the Dayton courthouse. Bryan showed great interest in the case from beginning to end and he accepted to be one of the fundamentalist prosecutors (McRae 163). Although Bryan secured an unconvincing victory in the trial, the great influence of the fundamentalist wing of the Democratic Party was broken due to the humiliating fine that Scopes was charged with. At last, the roar of the 1920s that brought forth liberal ideals to the general public had caught on with the Democratic Party after five years into the decade.

After the trial, the fundamentalist Democrats seemed convinced with the lean victory. With the closure of the Scopes trial, anti-evolutionists found themselves facing the challenge of transforming the trial into a glory for further political action. For the most part, anti-evolutionist politicians believed that this victory would be the beginning of the next phase of the anti-evolution movement and core

fundamentalist policies. As such, they rushed to introduce new bills into legislatures across the country. For example, John Roach Straton, who was another fundamentalist Democrat, confidently predicted that the southern states would be first to put such laws on their books of statute, causing western states to follow, eventually leading up to the northern and eastern states to enact similar laws (Lienesch 165). This wing of the Democrats were convinced about Bryan's victory as being a decisive signal for the progress of their fundamentalist ideals. Their excitement poured onto the headlines of news reports in the press. After the trial, Robert Small, who was a columnist in the *Chattanooga Times* from Tennessee, reported on the general opinion among the fundamentalists that Bryan would try to carry fundamentalism into the platform at the next Democratic National Convention. Furthermore, Doris Stevens, from *Chattanooga Times*, also conveyed that Bryan would use the issue of evolution to solidify a political base among conservative Christians in the South and West, and that he would turn his next political campaign into a gigantic national revival. Even some liberal newspapers, such as the *New Republic*, expressed some concern about how Bryan and his fundamentalist fellows could have made religion the central issue in the following election by stating that Bryan and his supporters could have succeeded in breaking party lines to secure a majority of the popular vote in a large number of states (219).

Beyond all these debates, it is a fact that Scopes was fined just a 100 dollars for violating the law, and that this was not what many fundamentalists had expected from the beginning. Contrary to the fundamentalist press, many newspapers and columnists saw the final judgment of Scopes as a defeat for Bryan and his fundamentalist ideals. H. L. Mencken was one of the leading figures among the press who had perceived the outcome of the trial as Bryan's defeat. In his newspaper, *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, he wrote that Bryan had arrived in Dayton as a hero and three-time candidate for the presidency, but tragically failed into public disfavor after the trial. Furthermore, he ridiculed the claims that the south and mid-west fundamentalists would sweep off the votes once more (McRae 225). In fact, for the ones who watched the trial, there was no escaping from the conclusion that Bryan had broken down and lost the case. The titles of the fundamentalist newspapers were perceived as weak attempts to revive its followers. Ultimately, Bryan's popularity gradually decreased and the freedom of the opposing media to describe the triumphs of the Scopes trial caused a great effect across the country, at least in the bigger towns and cities. In fact, John Farrell underlines that

the American people had witnessed the triumph of science and progress, while Bryanism had lost its moral authority (279).

Despite the tough situation, the fundamentalist democrats were determined to support their champion once more for the presidential election of 1928. Signs showed that Bryan was eager to respond to this opportunity once again. He had claimed that the Scopes trial was already behind him with little consequence to delve upon (“The Scopes Trial”). However, just after the trial, Bryan unexpectedly died. This tragic event destroyed the hopes of the fundamentalist democrats. Mencken confessed that Bryan’s legacy was greatly respected by the Democrats, despite having never been elected as the president. He also predicted that the Democrats’ Bryanist delusion was coming to end with the death of Bryan (59).

## **2. Fundamentalism after the Mid-1920s**

The Scopes trial did not completely eradicate fundamentalism from the Democratic Party. The outcome of the trial, however, damaged the party’s reputation and ideological standing. Even after the trial, fundamentalism continued to rule most of the Midwestern and Southern states. Fundamentalist groups across the country decided to wage a total war on liberal approaches on many fronts. As indicated before, one of the primary targets was public education. In the 1927 edition of “A Civic Biology”, the most popular high school biology textbook, which was used by Scopes, the definition of “evolution” was bowdlerized and modified as “development” (Mirel 52). Furthermore, Nelkin explained that fundamentalists were persuading, sometimes threatening, publishers to exclude evolution issues from the textbooks or reorganize the statements (47). However, these efforts had little or no effects. Between 1921 and 1929, fundamentalist politicians tried to introduce anti-evolution education bills into the legislatures of 37 states. However, only three of them were passed (Mississippi, Arkansas, and Texas). In the end, the influence of fundamentalism over the education diminished.

In fact, fundamentalism was a twentieth-century phenomenon which gave birth to a manifestation that is best described as a religious and intellectual movement. Its followers hoped that this movement would have influenced education. According to John Fea, fundamentalism found its place in most of the textbooks, it was considered as an anti-movement to the intellectual and cultural changes of the 1920s, and its

expression was placed somewhere related to nativism, prohibition, or the Ku Klux Klan (206). Fundamentalism eventually stopped flourishing with its retreat from influencing education. Sources of fundamentalism tried to resist the growing trend of modernism in education, but the wave of liberalism was on the rise.

Fundamentalism in the early 1920s was quite reactionary and even somewhat militant towards its opponents. As it was witnessed during the Scopes trial, fundamentalism would have never fit into the new aspirations of Americans who headed towards a more progressive era. In addition to Fea, several other authors, such as John A. Garraty, who supported the outcome of the Scopes trial, concluded the significance of the trial as the zenith of the fundamentalist reaction towards change. He goes on to say that after that point fundamentalism was defined as an anti-scientific and backward movement which could not compete with new trends (416-417).

After the mid-1920s, scientists launched their counter-crusade against fundamentalism. They decided to intensify their research and many of them believed that the time was ripe to respond to fundamentalist criticisms against the teaching of evolution. Wisely, the response was to reconcile with religion to take over fundamentalist approaches. Many organizations and institutions launched a campaign to serve that aim. Pamphlets with messages of harmony between science and religion were issued and distributed without creating much attraction and disturbance among the public. The principal of every public high school in the country received copies of these pamphlets as well. Even legislators at every level of government, many university chaplains, some 30,000 Protestant ministers and more than 1,000 carefully chosen scientists also received these pamphlets (Davis 256). In fact, five years after the Scopes trial, religious organizations on forty-one campuses, including Columbia, Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania, ordered these pamphlets in bulk. The statements of these pamphlets mostly explained that “there is actually no conflict whatever between science and religion when each side is correctly understood” (Millikan 8).

After the Scopes Trial and the campaign of the scientists, the Democrat fundamentalists retreated from the wider culture and built up their own separatist networks of schools, churches, Bible colleges and, of course, radio stations. Still, the disappointment among the fundamentalists was reflected through their disappearance from the

political public sphere after 1925. For example, Heather Hendershot explains this situation as one of the consequences of the post-Scopes reluctance which caused fundamentalists to withdraw from engaging with the problems of the world (388).

Firstly, the Democrat fundamentalists were truly broken and most of them became political separatists, leaving the Republican fundamentalists with the struggle to revive fundamentalism. For instance, social figures like Carl McIntire, a famous Republican fundamentalist minister and radio broadcaster, took up the fight against the new liberal sentiments. However, his attempts were rejected throughout the 1930s and 1960s. In addition to McIntire, Southern Republican and fundamentalist Barry Goldwater tried to run for the presidency in 1964. However, his opponent, Lyndon Johnson, won the elections by a landslide. The failure of Carl McIntire to revive fundamentalism, and the defeat of fundamentalist Barry Goldwater in the presidential election of 1964, are counted as prominent examples of the decline of fundamentalism after the Scopes trial. The fundamentalists could not conduct active public or political campaigns again until the 1970s.

Furthermore, while modernism advanced in American culture, skepticism against fundamentalist culture advanced as well. For nearly forty years, fundamentalism was a lost cause in American politics. In her well-known essay on the media's narration of the Scopes Trial, *Representing Fundamentalism*, anthropologist Susan Harding states that while progressive ideas were wide-spread, the disbelief about reactive and reactionary fundamentalism increased as well after the trial (374).

It is clear that fundamentalism lost the struggle in various areas during the late 1920s. Nonetheless, fundamentalist supporters did not completely disappear, but they were weakened in leadership and infrastructure. Their well-established status throughout the 1900s started to decline. According to Phillip Hammond (55), their place in society had begun to be replaced by their hated enemies, modernists. The forces of modernity started to step up in the mid-1920s by bringing into question religious hegemony over industrialization, urban centers, lifestyles, philosophy, and education. Ultimately, while the social structures of the United States began to change, political structures and the Democratic Party began to see change as well.

As pressure over fundamentalist politicians increased day by day, they became inclined to adopt new policies to preserve their position in

the party. Until the 1970s, fundamentalists preferred to stay away from politics, believing politics distracted them from their calling to bring people to Christ and deliver the message of salvation (Rymel). However, in the 1970s, new charismatic figures such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Jim Dobson, started to appear among the fundamentalist wing.

Recently, fundamentalists have played an active role in American politics. For instance, Republican candidates in the 2016 presidential election, such as Ted Cruz or Donald Trump spared an important part of their campaigns on Christianity and on controversial issues, such as homophobia and xenophobia. During the early period of Trump's presidency, he initiated an executive order called "Establishing a Government-Wide Initiative to Respect Religious Freedom", an initiative which has been believed to be a form to legalize discrimination in various aspects (Posner). Ultimately, this initiative ordered by Trump appeals to the fundamentalist Christians who helped him get elected as president.

### **3. Democratic Party after the Scopes Trial and Nomination of Al Smith in 1928**

In the early 1920s, the democrats recorded their worst performances in presidential election history. After Woodrow Wilson, they went through the 1920s without any presidential success. Before the 1920s, in order to secure victory, Wilson had taken advantage of the Republican split in 1913, which occurred between William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. For the 1920s, the main reason behind the Democrats' failure was the absence of suitable candidates to gather different wings of the party and voters. The defeats and decline of votes in the early 1920s motivated Democrats to change their political ways and target audience. For this to start, they needed a catalyst, and the Scopes trial paved the way for it.

The Democrats were already aware that the votes from the south were not enough to win elections. For instance, in the 1880s, to win a majority in the Electoral College, it involved winning all the southern and bordering states. However, in the 1920s the Democratic Party needed to win states outside the fundamentalist south, specifically the northern and eastern states. However, according to Alan Ware (148), the Democratic Party was struggling to win votes in these areas. Votes from the big cities were making a relatively small contribution to the Democratic Party compared to the Republican Party. With Woodrow Wilson, the Democrats took advantage of the split among the Republicans in 1913.

When it came to the 1920s, the Democrats kept falling behind by the Republicans in votes gained from big cities outside the south. This turned out to be a great problem that they could not solve during the elections of 1920 and 1924. After 1925, the Democratic Party was quite eager to appeal to non-southern big cities and attract their votes. With very radical changes inside the party, they soon began to initiate a long-term change within the Democratic Party.

Until 1925, fundamentalists had a good amount of constituents in the party. However, after 1925, a remarkable transformation took place, which appealed to the urban Democrats. Many Democrats were looking for this transformation to continue within the Democratic Party. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a leading figure of this movement. He began to work behind the scenes to help to ensure the new reforms of the Democratic Party. Heather Wagner states that Roosevelt believed that the party was simply reacting to events in the Republican administration, hoping that the Republicans would make mistakes. Instead, Roosevelt urged that the party needed to become more proactive in creating new policies, reaching new societies and shaping an agenda rather than responding to Republican policies (68). With such a change, Democrat votes during the Midterm Elections brought good results from non-southern big cities.

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(Democratic Share of Vote in Large Cities Minus Republican Share of Vote) Minus (Democratic Share of Vote Nationally Minus Republican Share of Vote)	
1896	-10.8
1898	-3.7
1900	-0.5
1902	+0.2
1904	-4.0
1906	-3.9
1908	-5.7
1910	-1.8
1912	-5.4
1914	-3.2
1916	-5.5
1918	+12.8
1920	-0.5
1922	+7.2
1924	-0.8
1926	+13.1
1928	+10.7
1930	+7.6
1932	+3.1
1934	+7.1
1936	+8.7

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Table I: The difference between the Democrats' Performance in Congressional Elections in non-Southern Large Cities and their performance nationally in Congressional Elections, 1896-1938 (as the percentage of the total vote)

Above, a detailed comparison of the statistics of the presidential elections of 1924 and 1928 explain the changes in Democrats and the motivation of their voters. The first thing to notice is underlined as the great increment during 1928 in the votes for the Democratic Party in the northern states, such as New York and Illinois. In the southern states, Democrats maintained their lead (in Alabama, Arkansas); however, their margin of the votes decreased. Moreover, before the Scopes trial, Tennessee voted for the Democratic Party but this situation changed in 1928.

Another thing to mention is the distribution of the voting percentages. In 1928, the number of voters went up to 37 million, while it was 29 million in 1924. According to the statistics, this increase includes all the states. Ultimately, Smith and the Democrats benefited from the new votes. In the great cities, the Democrats and the Republicans were head to head in the race of 1928 (The American Presidency Project).<sup>1</sup>

The advent of liberal politics within in the Democratic Party resulted in the decline of rural votes. The 1920s census classified 54 percent of the US population as urban inhabitants. Statistically, the agrarian population had been prominent some time ago, but they started to lose numbers in population as more and more people moved to cities and urban areas (Shideler 284). This trend continued to shape and influence the Democratic Party's political tendencies in American society. For instance, while white-Protestants in rural areas protested this change, leading urban intellectuals of black societies started to identify and make transparent deep-rooted issues of racial inequality, oppression and discrimination. Jeffrey Moran states on this issue that concepts of north urbanism, secularism, and science were the opposite of the ignorant, racist south. He also states how the black elites motivated black societies to embrace modernity movements, just as the Scopes trial did (911). For instance, urban democrats started to increase their range of social groups, and mobilized the black voters during the mid-1920s as a way to build power. The social and political transformation in Kansas City during this time is a nice example of the change that was taking place (Ware 177).



By 1928, the Democrats nominated for the presidency Al Smith, a New Yorker, Catholic, and, anti-prohibitionist. In the presidential ballot he pushed out Southern and Midwestern nominees, such as Cordell Hull, James Reed, and Walter George. Basically, Smith was the clear opposite of the fundamentalist wing of the Democratic Party. Just four years before, Bryan was ardently supporting the prohibition, alerting crowds about the “menace of Darwinism” and defending the Ku Klux Klan at the 1924 Democratic Convention (Farrell 257). With Al Smith’s nomination in 1928, the liberal Democrats had hoped to suppress the social differences between the urban union immigrants of the North and the rural, Protestant, white voters of the South (Miller & Schofield 438). According to the results, Smith did well despite all the concerns. Smith received more votes in thirty of the 48 states compared to the previous Democratic candidate, John W. Davis (Robinson 312). Furthermore, Smith increased Democratic votes to six and a half million more votes than the previous election. However, he lost the elections in both Popular and Electoral votes. Smith’s identification with the city, his Catholicism and the alcohol constitution were heavy handicaps for him and it was too soon to embrace a candidate like him by all Democrats, says James Shideler (296).

Nonetheless, when the presidential elections of 1932 took place, victory was secured for the Democratic Party. It is necessary to the understand nomination of Al Smith as a milestone. In 1924, John Davis’s campaign was unsuccessful for the Democrats, however, four years later, Al Smith doubled the votes for the Democrats in 1928, even when he was up against the national hero of World War I and the “Great Engineer,” Herbert Hoover. Even after this, the Democrats began to take concrete steps in the economy by initiating new economic programs, such as price stabilization for agricultural products, the principle of parity, a federal farm marketing board, federal aid for the development of co-operative marketing associations, and a commitment to aggressively administer the federal rural credits to capitalize on western discontent as much as making a determined pitch for the progressives’ votes (James 210). Lastly, Smith brought a new profile compared to the previous Democrat candidates, which ultimately helped to set the new conditions for Roosevelt’s strategy.

In the end, the Democrats’ selection of an Irish-Catholic candidate might have imposed a heavy liability on the party’s national

electoral performance. Nevertheless, the election of 1928 revealed encouraging trends for the Democrats. For instance, the Democrats not only recouped their losses from 1924, but they also registered gains almost 40 percent higher than they had in the 1920 election, achieving approximately a share of 35.7 percent of the votes. In fact, Smith performed particularly well in counties that mostly voted for the Progressives in the previous election (James 210). With the nomination of Al Smith, the transformation of the Democratic Party was clear. After the Scopes trial, while Bryanists withdrew into their shells, Darrow spent months doing nationwide speaking tours for Smith's presidential campaign in 1928 (Farrell 306).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Even today the Scopes trial continues to stand as one of the most fascinating stories of the United States. "I believe that the Dayton trial marked the beginning of the decline of fundamentalism," says John T. Scopes, in his reflections after forty years (Reflections). Every passing year, people learn about the struggle of Scopes for liberty and academic freedom.

For historians or political scientists, the trial offered a good opportunity to see some of the most important components of the era, such as legislatures, interest groups, and political changes of the Democratic Party during 1920s in the United States. Despite awful election results in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Democratic Party kept its non-progressive stance until the event of the Scopes trial by misplacing their confidence on conservative/fundamentalist voters from the Southern states. However, their stance did not uphold for long against the liberal waves from the north. The Roaring Twenties changed many social aspects of American society. It was impossible for politics not to be affected by this wave of progressive change. The Democratic Party received its lesson from the Scopes trial. And the retreat of the fundamentalist politicians from the Democratic Party was the result of defeat and acceptance for inevitable political change.

This case also put an end to the fundamentalist political movements like the effective anti-evolution crusades of the early 1920s. It also highlights the importance of how ideas related to the relationship between science and religion can be reconciled. Finally, it showed how stereotypes about region, race, religion, and gender can easily change with progress and enlightenment.

In the end, the Scopes Trial was only one example of what the Roaring Twenties had brought forth. Many other changes in American society poured into politics, religion and education. They all caused great shifts and presented new challenges for Americans. Liberalism, urbanism, and equality were all concepts and characteristics that big cities in America desired. The Democratic Party did well to make a change and appeal to these social concepts. In 1924, Bryan addressed the progressives among the Democratic Party at the time by telling them: “You do not represent the future of our country” (Handlin 123). But in the end, they did. The Democratic Party changed from a strongly rural party to a party that appealed to the urban inhabitants, immigrants, and blacks.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Please visit [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1924/](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1924/) and [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1928/-](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1928/) for further statistical information about the elections of 1924 and 1928.

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