

“P.S. - I’m white too”: The Legacy of Evolution, Creationism, and Racism in the United States

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Abstract

Despite decades of science education reform, creationism remains very popular in the United States. Although neither creationism nor evolution is inherently racist, creationists and evolutionists have used science to justify white supremacy. Powerful racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and popular racist advocates such as Frank Norris worked together to vilify evolution, promote racism, and begin the evolution-creationism controversy in the United States in the 1920s. The links between racism and creationism became explicit during *Epperson v. Arkansas*, in which the US Supreme Court ruled that laws banning the teaching of evolution in public schools are unconstitutional. Today, the relics of racism, evolution, and creationism persist in many forms, ranging from books such as *The Bell Curve* to educational institutions such as Bob Jones University.

The death, in late 1999, of civil-rights activist Daisy Bates reminded people of one of the pivotal events in blacks’ struggle for social equality: the integration of public schools. In 1957, Bates helped a group of 9 black students enter Little Rock’s all-white Central High School. In response, then-Governor (and outspoken Southern Baptist anti-evolutionist) Orval Faubus became a white supremacist folk-hero by ordering 1,200 armed National Guardsmen to block the students from entering the school, despite a federal court order approving desegregation of the school.¹ Despite his personal reluctance to endorse integration (Griffin & Doyle, 1995), President Dwight Eisenhower then ordered the same National Guard to escort the students to class and protect the students from thousands of furious whites who had come from throughout the South to block the students from attending class.² For the first time since Reconstruction, federal forces were sent to a state to help blacks and restore order. In recognition of their courage, the “Little Rock Nine” were honored with Congressional Gold Medals in 1999.

Often overlooked in retellings of Central High’s integration struggles is another struggle that occurred at the same school just 7 years after the racial turmoil began. That struggle was led by biology teacher Susan Epperson, who mounted the first legal challenge to an anti-evolution law since the trial of John Scopes in 1925. Despite the appearance that Epperson’s legal struggle had little to do with racial integration, the two issues were, in fact, closely linked.

Today, it is difficult for many people, especially scientists, to appreciate the links between science, creationism, and racism. After all, our definitions of races do not have a biological basis, but are instead based on our cultural interpretations of nature. Human races are recently derived, and the genetic differences between them are remarkably small and unimportant. Nevertheless, many creationists have been openly racist, as have been many scientists.

Here we discuss some of the historical links between evolution (a scientific theory liable to improvement and change), creationism (a non-scientific idea), and racism. Although several people have described how science has been twisted to support racism (e.g., Gould, 1977a, 1980, 1985, 1993), less is known about the more common and older use of creationism and the Bible to justify racism. In discussing this information, we do not attack religion or the Bible; rather, we try to

further our understanding of pseudohistory and pseudoscience. The links between evolution, creationism, and racism offer important insights into the creationism-evolution controversy.

Science and Racism

Throughout history, many scientists have twisted science to support claims of racial superiority. For example, in the late 1700s, German anthropologist J. F. Blumenback argued that whites were the most advanced race, and that non-whites had degenerated from the white race.³ This monogenist view was rejected by polygenists such as Harvard's Louis Agassiz. Agassiz, one of the greatest biologists of the mid-19th century, argued against orthodox interpretations of biblical accounts of creation, contending instead that all species of animals were not created at the same time and in the same place. According to Agassiz, God created animals in successive acts and in their own "natural provinces." Agassiz applied the same argument to humans by claiming that different races resulted from several different and simultaneous creations. Although Agassiz vehemently rejected natural selection and evolution, other polygenists were Lamarckian evolutionists who believed that each race evolved independently from different primates (e.g., Orientals from orangutans [McIver, 1994]).

Although Darwin lacked fossil evidence to support his hypothesis for human origins, he inferred that humans evolved in Africa and that our closest living relatives are chimps and gorillas (i.e., that live only in Africa). Many people found this to be repugnant and therefore unacceptable, for it implied that whites share a common ancestry with blacks. When Raymond Dart later found the first australopithecine in South Africa, his discovery was initially rejected, in part because it was made in the "wrong" place. Similarly, the initial acceptance of the spurious Piltdown man was partially due to the same prejudices; it fitted comfortably with ideas of white superiority and white ancestry, for it had a brain as big as ours and lived in England (Gould, 1985).

Much of the racism that typified many of Darwin's contemporaries was similar to that espoused by Robert Chambers in his much-criticized, but immensely popular and eccentric, book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chambers, 1844). In that book, Chambers invoked recapitulation when claiming that the various races of humans represented developmental stages of whites, which Chambers also claimed were the "highest" type of human.⁴ Chambers' views were later paraphrased by scholars who used fossils to argue that blacks are 200,000 years "behind" whites in evolution (see discussion in Marks, 1998). This "scientific racism" has been repeatedly exploited by segregationists, and was immensely popular in the final decades of the 19th century because it stressed biological differences as a way of determining the natural capacities and destinies of races (Fredrickson, 1981).⁵ Biology--and Darwin's theory in particular--was used as grounds for removing "inferior breeds" (Fredrickson). Ernst Haeckel--Darwin's advocate in Germany--and others used recapitulation to argue for white superiority, claiming that whereas blacks retained juvenile traits, whites advanced beyond those traits and were therefore superior.⁶

When the rise of Mendelian genetics led to the eclipse of the recapitulation theory at the end of the 1920s, scientists reversed themselves: instead of following their previous logic (i.e., and thereby concluding that blacks were superior because blacks were neotenic), scientists now claimed that blacks were inferior because they allegedly developed beyond juvenile traits. Scientists conveniently forgot their earlier arguments as they sought new "scientific" data to justify their racism and tell the public what it wanted to hear (Gould, 1977a, b). When this form of scientific racism was abandoned after World War I (as much due to thoughts of Hitler as to our expanding knowledge of genetics [Lewis, 1962]), many scientists continued to justify their claims of white supremacy with measurements of human skulls. Amongst the 19th-century forerunners of this

approach was the renowned Philadelphian physician Samuel Morton, who ranked human races by measuring skulls. Morton, a highly respected creationist and naturalist who called himself “a pioneer” in the study of animal hybrids, used the imprimatur of science to argue that each human race is a separate species, and that Genesis described the creation of only the white race (Stanton, 1960). Morton based many of his arguments on data derived from his collection of more than 1,000 skulls to produce books such as *Crania Americana* and *Crania Aegyptiaca*, which claimed that blacks have smaller brains than whites (Stephens, 2000). Morton then argued that slavery in the South was good. Although his methods were biased for whites and his arguments often were based on absurd information (e.g., impossible interspecific crosses), they were nevertheless influential. Morton’s work was praised by Agassiz and his views were shared by many influential scientists, including University of Michigan biologist Alexander Winchell. Although Winchell (1870, 1880) believed that whites had descended from non-whites, he also claimed that whites continued to progress while non-whites did not, thereby justifying white superiority (McIver, 1994).

When racist arguments based on skull measurements were discredited, they were replaced with intelligence tests. In the 1960s, Arthur Jensen used alleged differences in IQ to make his biases appear scientific (Gould, 1977a). From the early eugenicists to *The Bell Curve* (Hernstein & Murray, 1996), scientists have repeatedly used pseudoscience to support racism.

Many scientists have combined scientific and biblical arguments to justify racism (Haller, 1971). For example, Hasskarl (1898) used biblical and scientific evidence to argue for “theological racism”—that is, that blacks were created to serve whites. Hasskarl (1898), and other scientists since (e.g., Magne, 1970), have also argued that blacks are “beasts,” that blacks have no souls, that blacks are animals, and that race-mixing is evil and produces monsters. Some ministers endorsed these views (e.g., “A Minister Says,” 1899). Nott and Gliddon’s (1854) *Types of Mankind*, which included contributions by Agassiz and Morton, claimed that scripture and science prove that blacks are inferior to whites. Such arguments continue to be made today by a variety of individuals and creationist groups (e.g., Christian Identity, see below).

Although racism has long been popular among scientists and others, many biologists in Darwin’s day were not racists; for example, Darwin was a fervent abolitionist, and Alfred Wallace (the co-discoverer of natural selection) believed that all races have equal innate intellectual abilities (Gould, 1980, 1993).⁷ However, many biologists used creationism to cloak their prejudices. For example, Agassiz argued that God had created blacks and whites as separate species and that they had permanent “differences.” Although Agassiz believed that whites and blacks should be treated equally under the law, his racist beliefs were often exploited by segregationists.

Polygenists such as Agassiz accused monogenists of advocating evolution, a charge that most denied. Despite these criticisms, racist creationists such as Rev. Buckner Payne (1867) kept polygenism alive by claiming that blacks are beasts rather than descendants of whites. For example, Charles Carroll’s (1900) outrageously racist *The Negro a Beast: Or, in the Image of God* used the Bible to reject “filthy” evolution, deplore race-mixing, and claim that blacks, although not human, might be of service to their “master”—namely white people. Many of Carroll’s ideas about evolution and race (e.g., that blacks and whites do not have a common ancestor, that God made blacks to serve whites, that God demands segregation, and that evolution is atheistic, unscientific, and anti-biblical) were later recycled to stir opposition against integration (e.g., see Destiny Publishers, 1967).

Creationism, Religion, and Racism

Creationists have long claimed that creationism cannot be racist because it teaches that all humans descended from Adam (just a few thousand years ago) and more recently from Noah. Conversely, creationists also claim that evolution is inherently and necessarily racist because natural selection results in “less fit” races succumbing to more powerful ones as stronger races try to dominate, enslave, or exterminate weaker races (Humber, 1987; McIver, 1994; Myers, 1990). Henry Morris (1982, 1984, 1989)--the most influential creationist of the 20th century--and others argue that whereas evolutionary theory has produced racism and virtually all societal ills (e.g., slavery, pornography, child abuse, abortion, and communism), creationism is a source of “Americanism.” Similarly, Larry Azar (1990) claims that evolutionism was the force behind the 20th-century totalitarianism and racist views of Adolph Hitler. Ken Ham (1987) of Answers in Genesis--a popular and well-funded anti-evolution organization in Kentucky--says that evolution conditions people to be racists. Creationists’ claims that evolution is inherently racist are only plausible because many racists have misused evolution to support their views.

Neither creationism nor evolution is inherently racist. However, just as many scientists have twisted evolution to justify racism (see above), so too have many creationists used creationism to support racism. These creationists have often appealed to the Bible to support their racist beliefs (e.g., that blacks are an inferior variety of our own species [Gould, 1981]). For example, Nathan Lord was removed from the presidency of Dartmouth College in 1863 for claiming that slavery should be accepted because it is sanctioned by the Bible (McIver, 1994), and creationist Stephen Hodgman (1884) argued that God used American slavers to civilize and convert the sons of Ham to Christianity (also see McIver, 1994). Morris (1984) justifies Biblical genocides by claiming that some races were so evil that they had to be exterminated to prevent other people from becoming polluted (McIver, 1994).

Many fundamentalists explain racial differences according to the Hamitic curse described in Genesis (9:20-27) and/or the dispersal of people from Babel. Pastor William Blessing’s *White Supremacy* (1952) claims that the Bible supports white supremacy and that Jesus was “pure white,” not Jewish. Later, C. R. Dickey (1958) and others (e.g., Odeneal, 1958) argued that the Bible denies the common ancestry of whites and blacks, and claimed that 1) racial segregation was imperative, 2) racial equality was communistic, 3) people promoting integration were anti-Christian, and 4) evolution is irrational, unscientific, and unscriptural (see below). Evangelist Herbert W. Armstrong (1967), founder of the Worldwide Church of God, told readers of his *The Plain Truth* that God demands racial purity and that evolution is a great fairy tale.

Gerald Winrod was a pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic creationist who founded Defenders of the Christian Faith. Winrod’s *Defender* magazine had a circulation of more than 100,000 and was openly racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-evolution. Another influential anti-Semite creationist was Gerald Smith, founder and editor of *The Cross and the Flag*.⁸ Smith denounced attempts to “mongrelize our race” with race-mixing (Roy, 1953).⁹

One of the most influential groups to explicitly link creationism with racism is the Arkansas-based Christian Identity Movement (recently renamed Kingdom Identity Ministries). Their theology is unwaveringly creationist and often claims that Jews are Satanic, that blacks are soulless beasts, that races were created separately, and that the Bible was written only for white people (Dowsett, 1991).

Other creationists have also been active in the Christian Defense League, an organization linked with Christian Identity theology and the Klan. Christian Identity books such as *Proof: God's Chosen Are White Adamic Christians* (O'Brien, 1974) are racist and ultra-creationist; they even reject "creation science" as being an unacceptable compromise with evolution. Many creationists based their claims of white supremacy on the Bible and biology.¹⁰

Creationism and the Ku Klux Klan

With few exceptions (e.g., William Bell Riley of Minnesota and John Roach Straton of New York), Southerners led the fight against Darwin. Similarly, just as the fundamentalist and anti-evolution movements in the US have been focussed in the South, so too has been much of the overt racism (e.g., Cash, 1941). The Klan and the anti-evolution movements in the South were authentic folk-movements supported by most Southerners (Cash). By the 1920s, the Klan was enormously popular and powerful; Klansmen and Klan-endorsed candidates were elected as governors, state and federal legislators, and sheriffs throughout the South, as well as in other states (e.g., CO, MN, OH, LA, & IN). Indeed, in the 1920s, the Klan dominated politics in states such as Arkansas, California, Oregon, and Texas. Anti-evolution groups such as The Supreme Kingdom and The Bible Crusaders, which were sympathetic to the Klan's causes, recruited members by repeatedly stressing to the public that evolution made blacks as good as whites (Cash). This tapped the deep roots of Southern racism; people who referred to blacks as "monkeys" were repulsed by the idea that whites and blacks could have a shared ancestry.

One of the most influential groups that promoted racism in the 20th century was the reborn Ku Klux Klan (Wilson, 1980). Although there was no formal connection between Fundamentalism and the Klan, both movements appealed to the same sort of people, and the Klan gave the anti-evolution movement powerful support (de Camp, 1968). The Klan's philosophy, like creationism, is a pure form of religious orthodoxy, and therefore defines itself by those it excludes. Not surprisingly, then, the Klan's philosophy overlaps significantly with that of many fundamentalists. For example, both advocate Bible-based racism by arguing that Christianity has "scientific proof" that whites and blacks have a separate origin (and that blacks are apes), that Genesis prohibits race-mixing, that God destroyed Man in a worldwide flood because Man had mixed races, that blacks should serve whites, and that evolution is the Satanic basis for racism and virtually all other societal ills. Similarly, both groups believe in the literal truth of the Bible, both want to mandate prayer and ban the teaching of evolution in public schools,¹¹ both support segregation (see below), both have a similar social agenda (e.g., they oppose communism and want a return to "law and order"), and--like many of today's creationist groups--both believe that "human reason bows" before the Bible (Maclean, 1994; Martin, 1996; Tucker, 1991).

The Klan was a vital organization of the religion of the South, and--not surprisingly--Southern ministers often led the attacks on evolution while defending the Klan and white supremacy (e.g., Cash, 1941; Campbell & Pettigrew, 1959; Swatos, 1998; Wilson, 1980). Many of the most popular evangelists of the early 20th century--Billy Sunday, and to a lesser extent Bob Jones, Sr., Frank Norris, and Bob Shuler--became rich and famous because they appealed to the interests and biases of the public. In the South, those interests and biases often involved promoting racism and attacking evolution.

Sunday and Shuler, like the Klan, condemned the teaching of evolution because they considered it a threat to moral integrity (Maclean, 1994); they equated evolution as atheism (de Camp, 1968).¹² Fundamentalist evangelists such as Sunday were openly supported by (and supportive of) the Klan (e.g., Jones accepted \$1568 from the Klan after a 3-week revival in Alabama [Wade, 1987]).

Sunday accepted the Klan's money and endorsed the Klan Creed that promoted white supremacy, a literal interpretation of the Bible, and the Klan's belief that fundamentalism was the most essential part of the Klan (Chalmers, 1965; Maclean, 1994). Sunday pleaded for a return to the Klan's version of "old time religion of our fathers" (Katz, 1986; Maclean, 1994; McLoughlin, 1955), just as Klansmen promoted Sunday's "straight American" social and religious attitudes (e.g., the evils of evolution, booze, and other ideas associated with modernism [Katz, 1986]). Sunday and other evangelists often used their sermons to praise the Klan, especially its anti-evolution stance (Alexander, 1965; Wade, 1987). Except for H. L. Mencken, few commentators deplored the Klan's seduction of fundamentalism and religion (Wade, 1987).

Bob Jones, Sr., the famed evangelist and avowed segregationist, founded Bob Jones University within months after the Scopes trial. The university was officially creationist, and banned the admission of blacks until 1970. Because of its widespread discrimination against blacks, Bob Jones University lost its tax-exempt status in 1983. Jones claimed that the Civil Rights Movement was "of the devil" and that modernists were trying to eradicate racial boundaries that God had set; the college even awarded an honorary doctorate degree to self-proclaimed racist and Alabama governor George Wallace for his "warring against the giant, Tyranny" (Dalhouse, 1996). Today, professors at Bob Jones University write pro-creationism textbooks that denounce evolution because it "destroys man" and produces immorality (McIver, 1994). Until a massive public-relations problem prompted the university to change its policy in 2000, the university banned interracial dating, which was viewed as "playing into the hand of the Antichrist" by defying God's will regarding the God-made differences among the races (Hebel & Schmidt, 2000; Schmidt, 2000).¹³ Today, Bob Jones University--an unaccredited university--sells satellite-delivered creationism courses to Christian schools and home-schooled students. A package of up to six courses costs subscribers more than \$11,000. Brenda Ball, the university's biology instructor, summarizes their approach: "We begin the classes with prayer and there is a strong teaching of creationism in my class . . . I try to draw a line and say that one has got to be right and the other wrong . . . I tell [my students] that if they hold the Bible as the basis of belief, then they need to hold to what the Bible says" (Carr, 2000, p. A 47).

William Bell Riley was an outspoken anti-evolutionist who founded the World's Christian Fundamentals Association in May, 1919 (Weber, 1990) and headed the Northwestern Bible Schools. In the 1920s, Riley founded the Anti-Evolution League of America, a fundamentalist group that campaigned vigorously against the teaching of evolution. In his later years, Riley became an avowed racist and anti-Semite who, like the Ku Klux Klan, promoted white supremacy and condemned race-mixing.¹⁴ His church often hosted anti-Semites, and he was instrumental in sending William Jennings Bryan to Dayton, Tennessee to help prosecute John Scopes.

J. Frank Norris' biblical literalism drove his many radical attacks on teaching of evolution. Norris, a devout Southern Baptist preacher who believed that questioning the Bible on science was the most serious attack possible on faith, worked tirelessly to remove the teaching of evolution from public schools as well as private universities such as Baylor University. In 1923, Norris went to Austin, Texas to lobby the Texas legislature to pass laws banning the teaching of evolution because, as fellow Southern Baptist T. T. Martin had argued in *Hell and the High Schools*, evolution was not science because it wasn't logical. And, since evolution was not science, it was a sectarian belief and therefore should not be taught. Norris' argument didn't end there; he also claimed that evolution destroys morality, that evolution denies the Ten Commandments, and that evolution was a product of Germany, and that the teaching of evolution would lead to the breakdown of White Supremacy. Like many white supremacist groups of his time and today (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan), Norris linked creationism with not only a denunciation of blacks, but also with

a denunciation of Catholics by claiming that Catholics were in favor of equality for blacks. Although Norris was not an official member of the Klan, he recognized their common goals (e.g., a hatred of blacks and Catholics). As a result, Norris often praised--and was supported by--the Klan. His acquittal in 1927 for the murder of Ft. Worth lumberman D. E. Chipps was aided greatly by the Grand Dragon of the local Klan (de Camp, 1968). Norris, who published articles by Klansmen in his *Fundamentalist* magazine, claimed that people who denounced the Klan had been duped by the Catholic church (Hankins, 1996). Norris linked racial equality with the teaching of evolution and with communism, and said that communists, like Catholics, advocated interracial marriage to form a "mongrel race." Norris remained a racist creationist to the end. Indeed, just 2 weeks before his death in 1952, Norris (cited in Hankins, 1996) again made headlines with a speech that focussed on views of typical white Southerners: he equated civil rights with communism, denounced interracial marriage, condemned the teaching of evolution, and stressed the importance of White Supremacy by claiming that "God didn't make [blacks equal]. It's hard to go against God's laws" (p. 169). Norris, supporting William Jennings Bryan's claim that majority-rule should determine what is taught in schools, believed that people should not have to pay taxes to support integration or theories that they disagreed with (Hankins, 1996).

The anti-evolution and white-supremacy crusades in the South were championed by fundamentalists; indeed, perhaps 40,000 fundamentalist preachers joined the Klan (Cash, 1941; Feldman, 1999; McIver, 1994; Wilson, 1980). The Klan was predominantly Southern Baptist and Methodist (Feldman, 1999), and in many churches, racial heresy was more dangerous to a preacher's reputation than was theological speculation (Wilson). For every church that opened its doors to blacks, there were many more that tried to protect segregation (Ammerman, 1990; also see below).

Many Southern preachers, especially those in small towns,¹⁵ were Baptists sympathetic with and active in the Klan (McLoughlin, 1955; Mecklin, 1924; Wilson, 1980); they were officers in the Klan,¹⁶ regularly promoted the Klan (and vice versa) in their communications, and often officiated Klan funerals. Although a few politicians protested the links of these church officials with the Klan (Feldman, 1999), the links remained. When most religions denounced the Klan, Southern Baptists--who had split from other Baptists in 1845 over the slavery issue--did not speak out against the KKK (Bernard, 1926; Rosenberg, 1989). In 1872, the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention explicitly excluded Negro congregations from its statistical data (Bailey, 1964), and "theories of race were as much a part of Southern Baptist thinking as the Virgin Birth or the Second Coming" (Spain, 1961, p. 201). *The Alabama Baptist* proclaimed in 1899 that white people would rule the South (Spain, 1967). For Southern Baptists, the Bible-based hierarchy of social relationships--especially man/woman and white/black--could not be compromised. Relics of these beliefs persist today (see above). As Mecklin (1924) noted, "a fundamentalist would have found himself thoroughly at home in the atmosphere of the Klan ceremonies" (p. 100).

Southern Baptists overwhelmingly and vehemently opposed the theory of evolution; state Baptist conventions in North Carolina, Kentucky, Mississippi, Texas, and elsewhere denounced Darwinism. Meanwhile, Louisiana Baptists vilified Darwinism a godless, destructive atheist, and the 1922 Southern Baptist Convention advocated that science teaching be held to scrutiny of the Bible, claiming that an acceptance of evolution was contradictory to Christianity (Hankins, 1996). Not surprisingly, Southern Baptists also often led the fight against integration of schools. For example, during the crisis in Little Rock (see above), the congregation and pastor of a Baptist church of North Little Rock publicly protested Eisenhower's actions, and an association of 67 Baptist churches passed a resolution denouncing evolution and race-mixing (Campbell & Pettigrew, 1959). Another group of Baptist churches claimed that integration threatened national

security and was contrary to the teachings of God, and ministers meeting at the Central Baptist Church of Little Rock noted in their prayers that Eisenhower had acted unconstitutionally and that Governor Faubus was a peacemaker (Campbell & Pettigrew, 1959). Indeed, just as Christianity has been described by some historians as being racist (Wood, 1990), the mainstream of Southern Baptist thought was as racist as it was anti-evolution (Rosenberg, 1989). Southern Baptist churches, which had split from other Baptists in 1845 over the slavery issue (Torbet, 1963), were “a silent but powerful accessory to the segregation pattern” (*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, 1958, p. 1128) in the South and initially did little to eliminate racism from the region (*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*; Rosenberg, 1989).

William Jennings Bryan, whose series of lectures entitled “Is the Bible True?” helped ignite the anti-evolution crusade in the South, abhorred many aspects of the Klan, especially its anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic bigotry. Although Bryan was not a member of the Klan, he shared the Klan’s opposition to the teaching of evolution, and he realized that the Klan was a resurgent force in American politics. As de Camp (1968) noted, Bryan--like most politicians from the South--was a white supremacist who seldom spoke out against the Klan because he knew that many of his followers were the sort of people who made up the Klan. Despite pleas for him to take a stand against the Klan, Bryan remained silent about the Klan; his attitudes about blacks were acceptable to strict segregationists (Smith, 1975). Bryan endorsed Klansmen in political races; for example, Bryan (with Bob Jones) had endorsed Bibbs Graves in his election race against Oscar Underwood (“Klan enemy number one”) for presidential electors in Alabama (Feldman, 1999). In return, the Klan promoted Bryan; for example, Bryan’s lecture-tour about “Is the Bible True?”--that is, the lecture tour that helped spawn the anti-evolution movement in the 1920s--was promoted prominently on the front page of *The American Forum*, a “Klan Paper for Province Number 5, Realm of Texas, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” (“Bryan Here Saturday,” 1924). At the 1924 Democratic National Convention in New York City, Bryan--by then the Party’s elder statesman and the convention’s main attraction--claimed that he wanted to end the Klan but kept himself in favor with fundamentalists by speaking passionately against an amendment to denounce the Klan (Alexander, 1965; Ashby, 1987; Chalmers, 1965; Rice, 1962).¹⁷ When Bryan died the following summer (in Dayton, Tennessee, 5 days after the Scopes trial), he became a Klan martyr because of his “softness” on the Klan and his outspoken support for banning the teaching of evolution. When learning of Bryan’s death, Klan leaders proclaimed that the Klan would continue Bryan’s crusade against evolution (Wade, 1987) and, in various parts of the country, burned crosses in memorial services for Bryan (Coletta, 1969; Werner, 1929). At the end of one ceremony, a large cross was raised bearing the inscription: “In memory of William Jennings Bryan, the greatest Klansman of our time, this cross is burned; he stood at Armageddon and battled for the Lord” (Werner, 1929). At an August, 1925 rally of 30,000 Klansmen in Washington, DC, the Klan laid a wreath at Bryan’s grave (Chalmers, 1965). The Imperial Wizard and Emperor of the Klan invoked Bryan’s oft-repeated creationism-based appeal to the sense that people were losing their basic values (Ginger, 1958). Interestingly, in 1925 the Klan became the first organization to urge that creationism and evolution be given equal time in public schools (Wade, 1987). Decades later, this argument would be taken up by other creationists and be ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court.

Many people, especially those in the South, believed that changes demanded by the Civil Rights Movement were unnatural (Ammerman, 1990; Orfield, 1969) and tried to forge a united front of opposition. Indeed, more than 200 statutes and resolutions were passed in the South between 1955 and 1960 to prevent integration (Griffin & Doyle, 1995). These laws did things like close public schools (as happened at Little Rock's Central High the year after blacks tried to attend), reapply states’ rights constitutionalism, establish private school tuition-grants where public schools were

closed, abolish state funding for integrated schools, and repeal compulsory attendance laws.¹⁸ When the influence of the Klan began to fade and the Civil Rights Movement began to dissolve some racial barriers, many anti-evolutionists and racists adopted new strategies to protect their children from the heresies of integration and evolution. Rather than continue to fight the government for segregation and the right to ban the teaching of evolution, many fundamentalist Christian churches--especially those in the South--established private schools. Many of these schools were initially started as Christian "segregation academies" designed to thwart the racial desegregation mandated by the federal government.¹⁹ By the mid-1970s, however, when a new private school opened every day, integration was no longer the only reason for the schools' popularity; more important were concerns about the banning of prayer and the teaching of evolution (Martin, 1996).²⁰

Racism and the Anti-Evolution Crusade: Epperson v. Arkansas

The links of racism with creationism were often explicit in the battles to integrate schools. Although not all anti-evolutionists fought school integration, many did; for many in the Bible Belt, banning the teaching of evolution from schools was part of a heroic battle to save the "Southern Way of Life" from "race mixers" and "atheists," who were equally evil in Dixie demonology (Irons, 1988). These feelings were widespread and often extended to politics, especially in hotbeds of racism and anti-evolution sentiment. In Georgia, for example, the state legislature considered the teaching of evolution to be not only improper, but subversive (Evans, 1925; Maclean, 1994). The Klan strongly endorsed this position, and considered the state's many memorials to the Confederacy to be "holy ground."²¹ Scores of Klan rallies were held in areas threatened with desegregation, and many communities built new "Negro schools" in the 1950s in an effort to ward off integration (Orfield, 1969; Virginia Council on Human Relations, 1966).

The links between racism and the anti-evolution campaign became explicit in the public's response to Susan Epperson's 1965 challenge to the Arkansas anti-evolution law (the only one of its kind to be passed in a public referendum). In 1965, Susan Epperson was a biology teacher at Little Rock's Central High School, which was still seething with racial tensions following its forced (and bitterly opposed) integration 7 years earlier (see above). When Epperson's challenge to the anti-evolution law was announced on the front-page of *The Arkansas Gazette* on December 7, 1965, Epperson began receiving hundreds of letters. Some of the mail was supportive; for example, John Roberts wrote to Epperson on December 9, 1965 that "I hope you win your case because students should know the truth." However, an editorial in *The Ohio State Lantern* on January 21, 1966 pointed out the obvious:

And as for [Governor] Faubus – who used National Guard troops to prevent integration of Little Rock Central High School in 1958 – he probably finds the theory [of evolution] distasteful because, among other reasons, it implies that Negroes and Caucasians came from the same ancestor.

Many people were outraged by such a shared ancestry and attacked Epperson, despite the fact that Epperson issued a statement affirming her Christian beliefs. Many of the people who attacked Epperson, apparently fearing that Epperson was an intellectual carpetbagger who was trying to force a new type of academic reconstruction on Arkansas' public schools, made explicit their links of evolution and racism. As an anonymous letter sent to Epperson on December 7, 1966 proudly proclaimed:

If . . . them cocoanut-heads [sic] up there want to believe there [sic] foreFathers [sic] are monkeys, apes, or gorillas, it [sic] OK, but don't let them shove it down our throat like Johnson did the Civil Rights law . . . If I was a teacher, the first nigger that walked in my classroom I would walk out . . . and don't think I wouldn't.

Others made more subtle, yet equally revealing, admissions. For example, citizen Dave Smith closed his letter to Epperson, dated "Easter Sunday 1966," with a telling post-script: "P.S. - I'm white too."

When Epperson's challenge to the Arkansas law prohibiting the teaching of evolution was argued before the US Supreme Court, the state of Arkansas claimed that the state's loss of control of the curriculum would lead to the same consequences as integration; namely, disorder and chaos. Epperson prevailed. With *Epperson v. Arkansas*--the first challenge of an anti-evolution law since the Scopes trial in 1925--the US Supreme Court declared that it is unconstitutional to ban the teaching of evolution in public schools.

Learning From History

Today, many people continue to link creationism and evolution with racism. For example, hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and related organizations argue that a separate creation of the human races provides a biological basis for their differential treatment and unequal rights. And in May, 2001, Louisiana state Representative Sharon Weston-Broome introduced legislation proclaiming that Charles Darwin is responsible for the racist ideologies of the late 19th century and for Hitler's persecution of Jews. Weston-Broome believes that Darwin argued that people of color are "savages" and that some humans have evolved further than others (Morgan, 2001).

Evolution is not racist, nor is creationism. However, both evolution and creationism have been given racist interpretations by various advocates of each. Indeed, racism has never required much excuse. Many creationist organizations have denounced their earlier racist ideas, as have some creationists. However, other creationists remain avowed racists who often equate their beliefs with Christianity and patriotism, and denounce evolution as the basis of evil.

Notes

¹ Segregation of public schools was mandated by the US Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, which was issued on 17 May 1954. Many schools throughout the South closed rather than comply with the *Brown* decision. Several states passed laws that defied *Brown*; the subsequent challenges of these laws, combined with strong opposition from the public, delayed integration of schools. As a result, *Brown* was not enacted until the late 1960s.

² Threats by the angry mob led to the withdrawal of the black students before the end of the day. The conflict was renewed the following year when the city's high schools were closed to prevent continued racial integration (Campbell & Pettigrew, 1959). Throughout the South, many cities closed their public schools rather than let them be attended by blacks.

³ Blumenbach believed that whites had originated near Mount Caucasus (conveniently near Mt. Ararat), and thus termed whites *Caucasians*.

⁴ The critical reception by the British establishment of Chambers, who claimed that special creation was ridiculous, warned Darwin of the dangers of advocating evolution.

⁵ For more about "scientific racism," see Groves, C. "The Science of Racism and Its Consequences" at http://www.onthenet.com.au/~stear/cg_science_of_racism.htm .

⁶ Biologists such as Charles White opposed slavery, but nevertheless ranked whites at the top (and blacks at the bottom) of a hierarchy (Gould, 1985).

⁷ Darwin was deeply troubled by slavery and viewed it as evil. However, FitzRoy (captain of the *Beagle*) defended racism as being Bible-based. Like FitzRoy, many people appealed to the Bible to support racism (e.g., see the pro-slavery arguments in Elliott [1860]).

⁸ Amongst the creationists who published articles in *The Cross and the Flag* were Marshall and Sandra Hall. The Halls also published a variety of anti-evolution books that linked evolution with masonry, astrology, and the metric system, and claimed that evolution is the basis for racism (including Nazism). In 1980 they declared evolution to be the country's enemy and proposed a national bill to ban the censorship of creationism.

⁹ Many racist creationists do not limit their beliefs to blacks. For example, many supporters of Holocaust revisionism are fundamentalist creationists. Herman Otten advocates Holocaust revisionism and is an avowed anti-evolutionist. Otten, who believes that evolution and the Holocaust are the two greatest hoaxes of our time (Otten, 1989, 1990), claims that evolution is a "Jewish lie."

¹⁰ *Freedom or Slavery* (Brooks, Crowley, Griffin, & Schieber, 1990) was written by authors sympathetic with the Christian Identity theology. One of those authors is Dale Crowley, Jr., who sued the Smithsonian because he alleged that it promoted evolution. Crowley now offers rewards for proofs of evolution and believes that Jews seek to destroy Christianity (see McIver, 1994).

¹¹ Although the Klan wanted to ban the teaching of evolution, it embraced the crudest form of Social Darwinism to explain and justify its racist view of the world. Like the "scientific racists" before them, the Klan believed that the genetic differences that made human races as distinct as breeds of animals were unrelenting biological determinants of all human actions, reactions, and destinies (Maclean, 1994). Attempts to mitigate these inequalities were condemned as "interfering" with natural laws (Lewis, 1962). Today, the Klan continues to link the fundamentalist (and anti-evolution) beliefs with racism; at their web-site you can buy "I love Jesus" pins and t-shirts proclaiming that the Klan stands for "God, Race, and Country."

¹² Sunday rejected evolution.

¹³ Bob Jones University continues to be critical of religions other than its own fundamentalism; for example, it denounces Catholicism as a satanic cult and the religion of the Antichrist. The university bans its students from going to movies and listening to popular music; it also bans gays from coming onto campus, and in 1998, the university threatened to arrest a gay alumnus if he visited campus (Carr, 2000; Cauchon, 2000; Schmidt, 2000).

¹⁴ Race-mixing has been a recurrent theme of anti-evolutionists and racists. For example, Vernon Grose, a creationist who triggered the *Framework* debate in California that led to the inclusion of creationism in California's public schools in 1970, was upset because he believed that evolution would destroy moral values, deny racial differences, destroy the distinction between men and women, and mix ethnic groups (Grose, 1974). States such as Alabama still have laws (albeit unenforced) that ban interracial marriages.

¹⁵ In the mid-1920s, less than 10% of Southern Baptist churches were located in places having populations greater than 2,500, and nearly 75% of all Southern Baptist church members lived in "traditional small communities" (Ammerman, 1990).

¹⁶ For example, in the 1960s, the Klan's Imperial Wizard was Robert Lee Davidson, the Director of the Baptist Training Union at a Macon, GA church (Rosenberg, 1989).

¹⁷ Bryan attended the convention as a delegate from Florida. One reason that Bryan had left Nebraska was his fear that the state's immigrant population might oppose his moral causes. After Bryan spoke against repudiating the Klan, he was booed roundly by large numbers of foreign-born Americans in the galleries (Ashby, 1987; also see "Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention," 1924).

¹⁸ Over the objections of Southern politicians, Congress in 1957 enacted the first civil-rights law since Reconstruction. *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958) was a sweeping reaffirmation of *Brown* and enabled federal courts to systematically void the legal props to Southern resistance to integration (Griffin & Doyle, 1995).

¹⁹ To sustain their fundamentalist, racist, and anti-evolutionist culture, these groups developed a host of their own institutions, including summer Bible camps, Christian vacation resorts, Bible colleges and seminaries, publishing houses, newspapers, magazines, recording companies, and radio stations. Having been excluded from many other social institutions they, like the Lutherans, Mormons, Jews, and other groups, created their own (see McLoughlin & Bellah, 1968).

²⁰ Other issues that contributed to the popularity of private schools were those associated with secular humanism, such as women's liberation, the Equal Rights Amendment, gay rights, abortion, and sex education. Today, an anti-evolution group called Citizens for Excellence in Education urges Christians to leave public schools.

²¹ The most sacred of these sites is Stone Mountain, GA, where the Klan was reborn on Thanksgiving night in 1915 (Chalmers, 1965). To commemorate the Confederacy's heroic cause, the Klan became a primary sponsor (and financial supporter) of the original Confederate Memorial that was to be carved there (Lutholtz, 1991). The Klan wanted sculptor Gutzon Borglum (who had designed portraits of Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and others) to carve profiles of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and a hooded Klansman in the mountain. When financial problems and other concerns arose in the 1920s, Borglum blew up his unfinished work and quit the project (he later worked on the famous Mount Rushmore carvings; see Lutholtz). In 1964, work on Stone Mountain's Confederate Monument resumed under the direction of a new sculptor (Walker Hancock), and was completed in 1969. That sculpture includes Lee, Jackson, and Jefferson Davis, but no Klansman.

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