***Scopes: The Battle Over America's Soul***

**(JULY 21, 1925)**

**BACKGROUND:**

**The origin of the human species, and how to teach it, has long been a matter of debate in American society. When Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution became more popular in the 1920s, Christians throughout the nation argued that these theories countered the Bible’s teachings and should be forbidden. Favoring a creationist interpretation of the human species, states and local communities passed laws making it illegal to teach evolution in the classroom. This conflict came to a head in 1925 when a school teacher named John Scopes was arrested in Dayton, Tennessee for presenting Darwin’s ideas to high school studies.**

**Following from Scopes arrest, a high publicized trial dubbed “The Monkey Trial” mesmerized the nation. Broadcast live over the radio, people throughout the country and the world listened intently as a showdown between faith and reason ensued. Prosecuting attorney William Jennings Bryan passionately argued the creationist point of view while Clarence Darrow, backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, fiercely defended Scopes right to teach evolution.**

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT – Answer ALL SEVEN of the following questions:**

1. **Why do you think evolution became such a hot button issue in the 1920s? What else was going on during this period that explains the increased attention given to evolution?**
2. **At the time of the Scopes trial, Americans were divided about the issue of teaching Darwin’s theories. Explain these diverse views.**
3. **The Scopes trial was deemed the “Trial of the Century.” Why? How did most Americans learn about and follow the trial? Do you think it would have similar appeal today?**
4. **Describe the diverse views between the two lawyers on the case: Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. Do you feel that one had a stronger case than the other?**
5. **What was the central issue at stake in the jury’s decision to either convict or acquit John Scopes? Discuss.**
6. **The Scopes Trial was the first time court had been used to decide social issues. Do you think that court is the appropriate place to make such decisions? Why or why not?**
7. **Do you think these issues are still of relevance today? Discuss.**