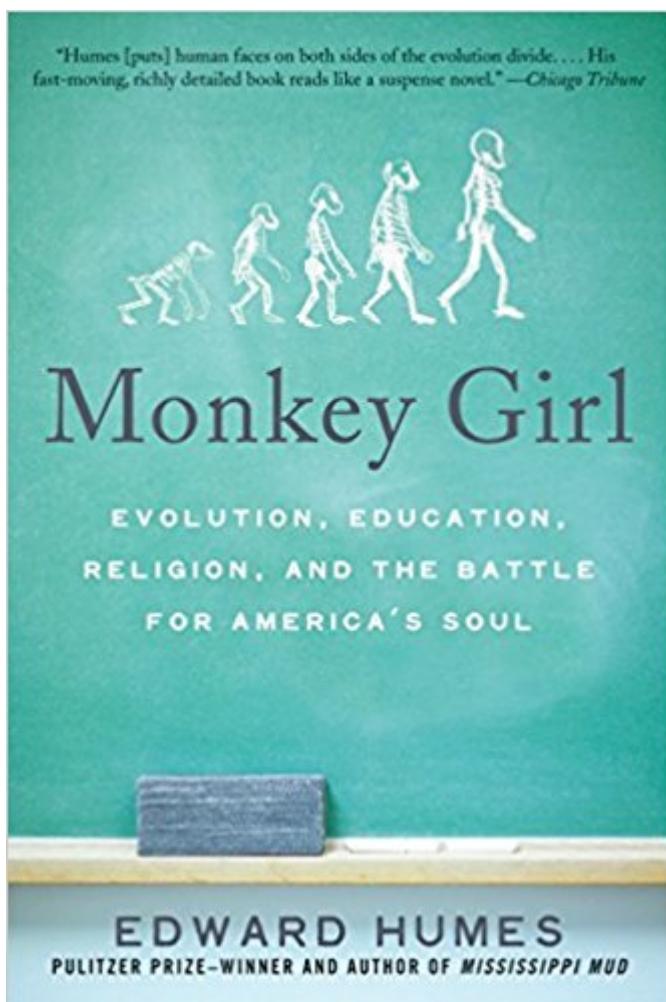


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Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, And The Battle For America's Soul



Synopsis

What should we teach our children about where we come from? Is evolution a lie or good science? Is it incompatible with faith? Have scientists really detected evidence of a creator in nature? From bestselling, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward Humes comes a dramatic story of faith, science, and courage unlike any since the famous Scopes Monkey Trial. *Monkey Girl* takes you behind the scenes of the recent war on evolution in Dover, Pennsylvania, when the town's school board decision to confront the controversy head-on thrust its students, then the entire community, onto the front lines of America's culture wars. Told from the perspectives of all sides of the battle, it is a riveting true story about an epic court case on the teaching of "intelligent design," and what happens when science and religion collide.

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Customer Reviews

The Pulitzer Prize-winning Edward Humes (*Mississippi Mud*, *School of Dreams*, *Over Here*) knows how to successfully tackle society's big issues and present them to the general reader. *Monkey Girl* is no exception. Humes writes clearly, makes complex scientific ideas accessible, and uses a novelistic approach to heighten the legal conflict and courtroom drama. Critics diverged only on a few points. While most thought Humes's account evenhanded (for example, his sympathetic portrait of the defense's star witness, Michael Behe), the *Wall Street Journal* called Humes "disappointingly self-righteous" in his criticism of intelligent design. And while most applauded his exhaustive reporting, a few cited a simplified narrative. *Monkey Girl* still stands as the best book for staying

current on the arguments for and against the teaching of evolution in our public schools. Copyright Â© 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc.

Some see the 2005 case of *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, concerning a small-town school board's adding an "intelligent design" (i.e., anti-Darwinian) text to the ninth-grade science curriculum, as the second Scopes trial. But whereas evolution lost in 1925, it won in 2005. Also, Kitzmiller was a federal and Scopes a state case. Yet as Humes sees it, Kitzmiller won't end the battle over evolution any more than Scopes did. That fracas, he opines, doesn't die; it evolves. Hence, religion was central in the earlier, science in the later, trial. While thoroughly presenting the personalities and events of Kitzmiller, Humes fills in so much of the story of evolutionary theory and literalist biblical reaction to it--especially the intelligent design, originally "creationist," then "creation science," movement--that the book is an engrossing community drama and a character-centered, topical history-of-science primer. Humes' clear reportorial style and sympathy for all the principals in Kitzmiller (except, perhaps, for the school board's hired-gun lead attorney) ensure the high interest of both aspects of the book. Ray Olson Copyright Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved

This book will give you, in the description of the evidence presented at the trial, one of the clearest explanations of the science of evolution anywhere in the lay literature. It will also give you a picture of the defense of "creationism" that you will, if you really read, find rather horribly compelling. If you understand what science is, and is not, and if you are willing to see what the study of evolution is and is NOT, this book will either inform you meaningfully or it will consolidate the information you have already studied on these topics. If you have ever argued with anyone whose mind is completely made up, who is unreachable by any thoughts or ideas outside their own persuasions, you will also see that this is a human predicament and that reason cannot reach such people. It won't explain why this is so. But it is so. I have taught classes and given presentations on biology for many years. For a long time, I could not use the word "evolution" without unleashing a torrent of abuse. So I used descriptions of the changing environment, and the words "adapting" and "developing" about changing patterns in biology and in behavior. I pointed out similarities in, for instance, all quadruped bodies, and so on. Recently, "evolution" and "evolving" have been moving back into the light. And the minds of most children seem to be more open than even 15 years ago. I seldom hear a child say, "My dad says you're wrong." The parts of the book that do not describe the science under question are devoted to a thorough and clear outline of the background of each of the

participants in this drama. That too is important, since both sides attacked the information and expertise of the spokespeople across the table from them. The trial was exhilarating - the storm in the aftermath, alas, was depressing. Someone described this book as "balanced," and it is, certainly, polite, a balance of sorts. But the writer is firmly on the grounds of evolution as a science - that is, a study that follows certain rules of testing hypotheses, and guidelines for continued research. The creationists, though, are neither polite nor clear, and they are frightening in their vitriolic responses to anyone who does not agree with them. It is doubly frightening, if indeed the author is correct that this viewpoint is widespread in this country.

When a local school board forced the concept of Intelligent Design into the local high school's science curriculum in order to teach the controversy with Darwin's Theory of Evolution (despite the objections of all the school's science teachers), the result was essentially a repeat of the Scopes trial (except with a different outcome). The developers of the theory of Intelligent Design claim that theory is science-based; but to make that claim, they also had to broaden the definition of science. Basically, the book is about a local school board that was ignorant (and purposefully chose to stay ignorant), about an organization whose motive was to inject the Christian religion into (or, perhaps from their perspective, purge atheism from) the public classrooms and about those who believe in the separation of church and state (and so believe both in freedom of religion and in freedom from religion). People who believe literally in the book of Genesis will hate this book. Anyone who believes religion has no place in a public school's science curriculum will probably like the book. The book is well organized and well written. But the Kindle version often broke up larger words by inserting a couple spaces between some of the letters (e.g., by writing "or ganization" instead of "organization"). That was distracting enough that I gave this Kindle version of "Monkey Girl" 4 stars instead of 5 stars.

If you think you have taken words like science, evolution and intelligent design for granted, read this book. This 21st century version of Scopes will give you a new and nuanced understanding. Well written, seems to peek under every stone and bring reason to an emotional and unanswerable question. However, it is not a smooth read because of unusual word breaks that occur periodically throughout the book. Also, I had a couple of page freezes that required me to shut down and start again. It could have been my Kindle, but because of the sloppy type treatment, I suspect not. Read the book. It is worth dealing with the distracting interruptions.

As a latecomer here to the comments section, I am impressed by what I read. It would seem that all important aspects of the book have been covered. Whatever I could add for my part -- other than expressing my appreciation for this extraordinary tale, told with exemplary civilized restraint, of a contest between science-based enlightenment and invincible ignorance in the heart of one of the most advanced countries on this planet - would seem to me akin to painting the lily. How amusing it is to discover that, in 2005, it came to light that US National Parks Service stores at Grand Canyon National Park were playing stupid by stocking and selling a creationist (i.e., religious) history of the Grand Canyon. This history holds that the Earth is only six thousand years old and ascribes the erosion of the Canyon to Noah's Flood. The crank "religious" beam of ungrounded belief intersected here with the "scientific" beam of evidence and skepticism and tried to zap the latter out of existence; and this, incredibly, in our modern era. One might have thought that the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial would have settled the question, but the interested reader will discover that such was not the case. The Dover trial, for its part, was a major victory for science and education in its own right, even more than Scopes; but history teaches that the question will never be considered settled in some sectors of society. Sadly enough ignorance is, indeed, virtually invincible.

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