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

by Edward Humes

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Conflicts between religion and science have been common for nearly a century. Some of the early unrest in education occurred with the Scopes Trial, pitting evolution and Genesis creation in a court case challenging a Tennessee law forbidding the teaching of Darwin's theory. Eventually, laws that required the science curriculum to include religious beliefs were found unconstitutional in the 1987 Supreme Court case *Edwards v. Aguillard*.

In a society that finds value in faith, this ruling was disconcerting. Creationism was not allowed to be taught in science classrooms because it was not science. Religious adherents had to find a new avenue to get their faith in public school classrooms, and this has become the hypothesis of intelligent design.

Intelligent design has a long history with the most well-known historical assertions coming from the early 19th Century theologian William Paley. Paley compared the evidence of design in living creatures with the apparent purpose of a watch. This idea has been extended in recent times by the work of Michael Behe, a scientist who sees design in

living features that he considers irreducibly complex. Behe, and others from the Discovery Institute, are pursuing a campaign to have intelligent design considered a serious scientific hypothesis.

Monkey Girl reviews the intelligent design movement by reporting on the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial in which Judge John Jones ruled on both the religiosity and scientific merits of an adopted school policy promoting this hypothesis. The trial found that the policy instituted by the Dover School Board was unconstitutional due to a religious motivation. In addition, Judge John Jones did something that the Scopes Trial did not; he weighed the evidence for both evolution and intelligent design, ultimately ruling that evolution was strongly supported by evidence and intelligent design was poorly researched speculation that required adherence to faith.

Monkey Girl covers the evidence presented at the trial, and this is important for administrators to be aware of in a political environment that often supports intelligent design. Intelligent design is not likely to fade anytime soon, and despite any personal beliefs,

an administrator should be aware of the problems associated with this idea. Unless intelligent design can separate itself from an inherent religiosity and create a scientific foundation, attempts to create policies related to it are likely to cost schools time and money. In addition, *Monkey Girl* illustrates the potential problems with a school board that acts on emotion, thus adopting policy without the advice of the teachers and administration.

The outlining of evolution and intelligent design, along with the story of a well-meaning school board making unintelligent decisions, makes *Monkey Girl* a worthwhile read for any school administrator. Politics and social concerns regarding religion make it likely that schools will address these issues again. Knowing the history of *Kitzmiller v. Dover* may prevent others from making the same mistakes.

Reviewer Biography

Wesley Hickey is a former high school biology teacher, middle school principal, and superintendent. He is an assistant professor in the University of Texas Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in Tyler, TX.

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