PBS Study Guide Questions Over the Scopes Trial

Who really won the Scopes Trial? The trial is described as representing “one of the deepest and most persistent conflicts of modern American culture.” How does the 1925 conflict compare to current religion and science divides in American culture?

The response to modernism and the Scopes Trial also forced a split between liberals and conservatives, and created divisions and quarrels among Protestants themselves, as well as among Catholics and Jews, that still persist. What impact have those ideological fissures within religious groups had on them and on religion in America, and in what ways are the divisions still manifest in current debates over social issues?

How was America’s special relationship with God at stake in the Scopes Trial? Cynthia Lyerly suggests, “America’s covenant relationship with God was in peril.” How did the wreckage of World War I contribute to this fear? What other threats loomed? Do you agree with the suggestion that “Darwinism undermined the notion of what it means to be an American”?

How would you compare Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan religiously, temperamentally, politically?

While Darrow put fundamentalist Christianity itself on trial in Dayton, Tenn., fundamentalists felt, as Randall Balmer says, that “the integrity of the Bible” was on trial. What issues would you say were at stake in the Scopes Trial?

Why did religious conservatives withdraw from American culture and politics after the Scopes Trial? What happened to fundamentalism? What were the great divides that dominated the country at the conclusion of the trial?

How did the meaning and definition of “fundamentalist” change after World War I and after the Scopes Trial?