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## **“A YEAR OF MONKEY WAR”: THE ANTI-EVOLUTION CAMPAIGN AND THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE**

by MARY DUNCAN FRANCE\*

**I**N THE SUMMER OF 1925, the world focused its attention on the sleepy town of Dayton, Tennessee, the site of the “Monkey Trial” of John T. Scopes. William Jennings Bryan, former secretary of state and the nation’s most zealous fundamentalist, and Clarence Darrow, the most famous trial attorney of his time, were the real antagonists, as they argued over the issue of the teaching of evolution. Both sides battled as if each believed the trial would produce the definitive statement on God and the creation of man.

Although Bryan’s death shortly after the trial ended seemed to mark the end of the anti-evolution movement, it proved only the lull before the storm. During 1926 the movement was invigorated by the passage of an anti-evolution law in Mississippi and the decision of the Supreme Court of Tennessee which upheld Scopes’s conviction. By 1928 every southern state except Virginia had debated or was considering legislation banning the teaching of evolution in the public schools. Similar bans were being discussed by the legislatures of Delaware, Minnesota, New Hampshire, California, and North Dakota.<sup>1</sup>

In Florida, the anti-evolutionists became extremely active during the 1927 legislative session. They worked for the passage of laws to eliminate the teaching of the Darwinian concept in the public schools and to establish close surveillance over textbooks. The anti-evolution movement had first become a significant force in Florida politics as early as the 1923 legislative session. Under the leadership of William Jennings Bryan, who held no office in Florida but played a viable role in state

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1. Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1964), 78-86.

politics, anti-evolutionists persuaded the legislature to pass a resolution condemning the teaching of evolution "as fact."

Bryan had first visited Florida in the summer of 1898 when the Third Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, in which he served as a colonel, spent about two and one-half months in Jacksonville. In 1912 Bryan took his ailing wife to Miami to escape the Nebraska winter. Perhaps persuaded by his cousin, Governor William S. Jennings of Florida, Bryan purchased property in Miami and built a winter home called "Villa Serena." At approximately the same time he built a summer residence in Asheville, North Carolina, but continued to maintain his legal residence and vote in Lincoln, Nebraska. Bryan never actually sold Florida real estate, but he lectured for profit on the glories of property ownership and his own holdings greatly increased in worth with increasing property values. When he sold "Villa Serena" and purchased a less pretentious home, "Marymont," in Coconut Grove, the bayfront property brought him a profit of between \$200,000 and \$300,000. Finally, on May 31, 1921, Bryan announced his decision to make Florida his legal residence.<sup>2</sup> Bryan enhanced his position as Florida's fundamentalist spokesman through his Miami Bible talks and his state-wide speaking tours. His Sunday morning sessions in Miami's Royal Palm Park often attracted thousands of listeners during the winter season.<sup>3</sup>

Florida offered a particularly receptive environment for the kind of message that Bryan enunciated. Unlike fundamentalist leaders such as John Roach Straton and Billy Sunday, Bryan affirmed religious conservatism while advocating economic and political progressivism.<sup>4</sup> Florida found that this type of "moderate

2. Samuel Proctor, ed., "From Nebraska to Florida—A Memorandum Written by William Jennings Bryan," *Nebraska History*, XXXVII (March 1956), 59-65; Jack Mills, "The Speaking of William Jennings Bryan in Florida, 1915-1925" (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1948), 2-4; Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith, William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915-1925* (New York, 1965), 236-42.

3. William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), 452; Mills, "The Speaking of William Jennings Bryan in Florida," 6-77.

4. John Roach Straton was a prominent New York Baptist preacher, influential in the fundamentalist movement. Billy Sunday was a controversial professional evangelist. Both men were pessimistic about attempts to redeem society and emphasized the importance of personal salvation. Straton spent his summers in West Palm Beach as a pastor in a local church. Sunday made several trips to Florida during the

fundamentalism" suited the times. Her citizens' aspirations were far from otherworldly; they were immediate and material. Floridians wanted progress and prosperity, but they had no thought of operating outside of a traditional southern Protestant framework. Bryan's amalgam of economic progressivism and religious conservatism may have been composed of mutually exclusive elements, but Florida found it appealing.

To most Americans in the 1920s the mention of Florida conjured up images of lush tropical forests and expensive beach resorts. And while the state retained its reputation as a vacation paradise, commerce grew rapidly.<sup>5</sup> The spectacular Florida real-estate boom which reached its peak during the summer and fall of 1925 constituted but a brilliant part of a land speculation fever which swept the nation after World War I.<sup>6</sup> Construction of all kinds received stimulation from phenomenal projects like George Merrick's model city of Coral Gables and D. P. Davis's Tampa suburb built on artificial islands. The boom mania was greatest in south Florida but its impact was felt everywhere. There was even an unusual speculative rush in Pensacola, Tallahassee, and Panama City.<sup>7</sup>

More than in other southern states, the aspirations of the business sector dominated Florida politics. Nevertheless, in some areas the "cracker" mentality continued to predominate and conservative southern Protestantism remained the acknowledged creed.<sup>8</sup> Bryan provided leadership for those who accepted this creed, and he led a crusade to persuade the Florida legislature to ban theories which conflicted with fundamentalist theology. When the legislature convened in April 1923, there was considerable public support for anti-evolution legislation. With behind-the-scenes guidance by Bryan, Representative S. L. Giles of Franklin County on April 17 proposed a resolution which declared, "that it is improper and subversive to the best interests of the people of this State for any professor, teacher or instructor in the public schools and colleges of this State,

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1920s where he created controversy by publicly chastising prominent citizens for their immoral behavior.

5. Clara G. Stillman, "Florida: The Desert and the Rose," *Nation*, CXVII (October 31, 1923), 485.

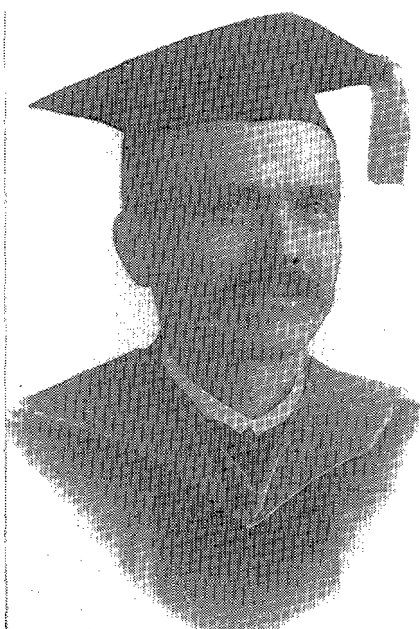
6. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday, An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York, 1931), 283.

7. W. T. Cash, *The Story of Florida*, 4 vols. (New York, 1938), II, 586.

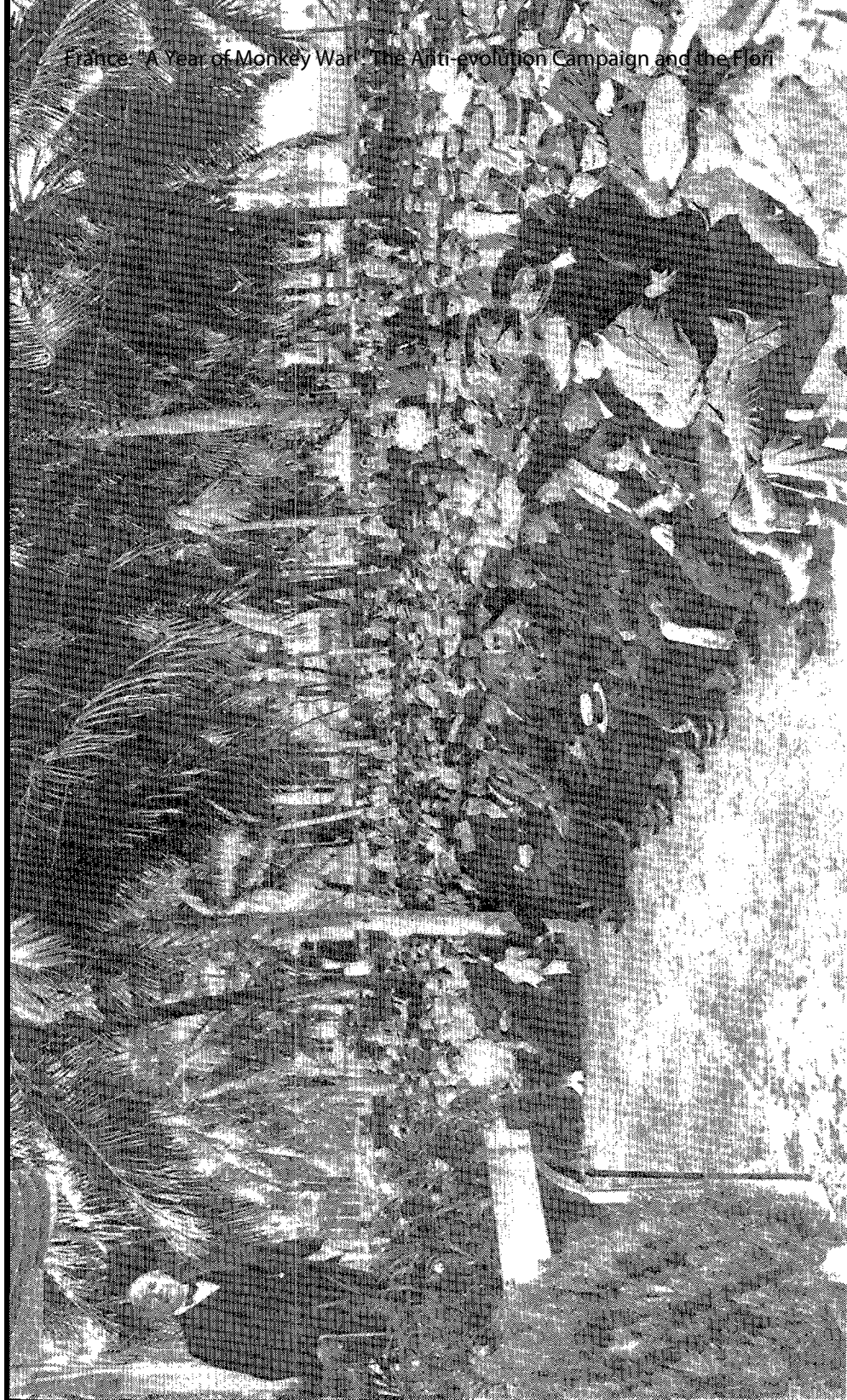
8. Stillman, "Florida: The Desert and the Rose," 486.



Albert Alexander Murpree.  
University of Florida yearbook, *Seminole*, 1928, p. 6.



Edward Conradi.  
Florida State College for Women yearbook, *The Flastacowo*, vol. VIII, 1921, p. 5.



William Jennings Bryan's Sunday school class in Miami's Royal Palm Park William Jennings

supported in whole or in part by public taxation, to teach or permit to be taught atheism, agnosticism, Darwinism, or any other hypothesis that links man in blood relation to any other form of life."<sup>9</sup>

The resolution met no opposition, and it received the necessary two-thirds vote for passage. According to a West Florida paper, the matter "came up before the legislature was awake and by the time it did wake up it had endorsed the Giles resolution." The liberal factions were able to generate enough protest to prompt a motion to reconsider by Representative Hugh Hale of Hernando County.<sup>10</sup> Although Bryan was away from Florida when the Giles resolution was introduced, he kept in close touch with his supporters in both houses. Early in the session, Bryan had urged W. J. Singletary of Marianna to help enact some measure to restrict the teaching of evolution "as fact."<sup>11</sup> Bryan also informed his close personal friend, President A. A. Murphree of the University of Florida, of the proposed legislation and the importance of including the phrase "to teach as true" in reference to the Darwinian theory.<sup>12</sup>

On May 11, Bryan accepted an invitation to address a joint session of the legislature on the teaching of atheism and Darwinism in the public schools and colleges. He endorsed the proposed resolution, but suggested that the phrase "or to teach as true" be inserted before the term "Darwinism." The following day, the house passed the amended version of the resolution. The senate concurred May 17.<sup>13</sup>

In 1925 anti-evolutionists in the legislature attempted to impose legal restrictions on the teaching of evolution. The 1923 resolution had been an expression of opinion only with no legal penalties for non-compliance. The failure of the resolution to discourage the teaching of evolution had convinced fundamentalists that more rigorous measures were necessary. But in 1925 Bryan's attention had shifted from Florida to the Scopes trial in Tennessee. The Florida anti-evolution bill, over-

9. Florida *House Journal*, 1923, 483.

10. *Ibid.*, 1853-54.

11. William J. Bryan to W. J. Singletary, April 11, 1923, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

12. Bryan to A. A. Murphree, April 20, 1923, *ibid.*

13. Florida *House Journal*, 1923, 1840, 1853-54; Florida *Senate Journal*, 1923, 1529-30; *Laws of Florida*, 1923, I, 506.

shadowed by the events in Dayton, died in the education committee.

After the Scopes trial and Bryan's death, anti-evolutionist activity diminished for several months. Then during the winter tourist season of 1925, which brought several well-known Protestant revivalists to the state, the controversy was reactivated. One of those inspired by evangelical zeal was George F. Washburn, a Clearwater realtor. A long-time friend of Bryan, he became involved in the anti-evolution crusade after Bryan's death. He was already working as a fund raiser for Bryan Memorial University at Dayton, Tennessee, when in November 1925 a Methodist minister convinced him that he should lead a national anti-evolution organization so that "we may not have a church without a Christ, a pagan country without a Bible, and a humanity without a God."<sup>14</sup>

On November 20, 1925, at a mass meeting in Clearwater, Washburn announced he would head the Bible Crusaders of America, and conduct a national campaign to ban the teaching of evolution and "German philosophy" in tax-supported schools.<sup>15</sup> The plan called for a national movement which would first eliminate the teaching of evolution in Florida schools, and then sweep northward and establish a central headquarters in Washington.<sup>16</sup>

In December 1925, Washburn appealed to Governor John W. Martin to delete all references to evolution from Florida texts, or to remove offensive books from the schools.<sup>17</sup> When the governor failed to reply to this demand, Washburn tried to convince State Superintendent of Education W. S. Cawthon that it was illegal to teach evolution in public schools. He contended that the 1923 resolution was an interpretation of the constitutional prohibition against the teaching of religion in tax-supported schools.<sup>18</sup>

The fundamentalists particularly opposed Gruenberg's *Elementary Biology*, a text widely used in Florida's high schools. Cawthon bent to the pressure, and replaced it with a revised

14. *Clearwater Evening Sun*, November 21, 1925; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 1, 1925.

15. *Clearwater Crusaders' Champion*, December 25, 1925.

16. *Clearwater Evening Sun*, November 21, 1925.

17. *Ibid.*, December 28, 1925.

18. *Clearwater Crusaders' Champion*, January 15, 1926.



edition adopted in Tennessee after the Scopes trial.<sup>19</sup> The Crusaders' attack on textbooks and the move by the 1925 Florida legislature to prohibit the teaching of Darwinism were the beginning actions by these anti-evolutionists. Two years later the fundamentalists would try to stop completely the dissemination of evolutionary concepts in the classroom and to destroy books which mentioned Darwin's theories.

Educators were alarmed by these proposals and the support which Floridians seemed to be giving them. At their annual meeting in Tallahassee in December 1926, the Florida Education Association passed a resolution calling on the legislature to maintain the principle of separation of church and state and to defeat any measure interfering with the teaching of evolution in the public schools.<sup>20</sup> According to one Tampa paper, the educators hoped to discourage rumors that an anti-evolution measure would be proposed in the 1927 session. Three weeks after the Association acted, state newspapers were publishing a list of proposed bills for the spring session which included an anti-evolution measure. Despite the protests of these educators, Leo Stalnaker, representative from Tampa, announced that he would sponsor a bill to prohibit the teaching of any theory which stated that man had evolved from a lower order of animals. It would also ban all textbooks containing such concepts.<sup>21</sup>

Before the legislature convened, a Tampa paper polled twenty-eight lawmakers to determine their position on the Stalnaker bill. The majority favored its passage, but their reasons varied. Fred Davis, speaker of the house from Tallahassee, said such a law was not necessary, but he explained he could not "vote against a bill of this kind, because my people would approve of it." Another house member, J. D. Smith of Marianna, favored an anti-evolution law, if it were "reasonable." W. T. Hendry of Perry and L. J. McCall of Jasper endorsed restrictions on the teaching of Darwinism, but only in reference to the evolution of man. Representative B. M. Frisbee of Clay County supported the Stalnaker bill, claiming that the teaching of evolution violated the separation between church and state;

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19. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 5, February 9, 1926.

20. *Ibid.*, January 13, 1927.

21. *Florida House Journal*, 1927, part 1, 137.

he opposed "the teaching of Darwinism, or any other religious doctrine."<sup>22</sup>

Lawmakers opposed to the bill also differed on their objections. Senator T. T. Turnbull of Monticello felt that the Bible and "true science" were not in conflict. Senator Joe H. Scales of Perry wanted the legislature to delay action until a survey of state educators could be conducted to determine their views on evolution and religion. Pat Whitaker of Tampa argued that the measure would "only engender ill-feeling and accomplish no good." D. S. Gillis of Defuniak Springs dismissed the controversy as unworthy of debate; he would not vote for an anti-evolution law, "or any other legislation of that sort."<sup>23</sup>

When on April 11, 1927, Representative Stalnaker introduced his proposal to ban the teaching of evolution, public reaction was immediate. A letter in the *Tampa Morning Tribune* decried the attempt of a "young and zealous legislator" to take the task of curriculum planning out of the hands of qualified educators.<sup>24</sup> The paper's editor endorsed this point of view, declaring the proposed law was "harmful" because it would "bring upon Florida nation-wide laughter and ridicule and contempt, just as similar laws have resulted in Tennessee," and would waste "a great deal of valuable time this session."<sup>25</sup> The Annual Conference of High School Principals, meeting in April 1927, debated the evolution issue and the principle of academic freedom. In a preliminary statement, the officials avoided mentioning the anti-evolution measure, while affirming, "Only that education can be free which provides, complete liberty to seek the answer to any honest question."<sup>26</sup>

Although reluctant to become involved in political controversy, educators in both public and private colleges and universities issued strong statements condemning the anti-evolution bill. President Murphree of the University of Florida wrote Senator Edgar Waybright of Jacksonville, one of the bill's major supporters, assuring him that nothing was being taught at his

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22. *Tampa Daily Times*, cited in University of Florida *Florida Alligator*, April 9, 1927. Copy in University Archives, University of Florida Library, Gainesville.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, April 14, 1927.

25. *Ibid.*, April 15, 1927.

26. *Ibid.*; *Gainesville Daily Sun*, April 15, 1927.

institution that would endanger a student's religious faith. While insisting he was a "fundamentalist," Murphree denounced the Stalnaker bill which, he said, would subject Florida to derision.<sup>27</sup>

Stalnaker had placed the state colleges in a delicate position because their budgets were pending when the anti-evolution measure was introduced. He informed an interviewer for the *Florida Alligator*, the university student newspaper, that while he had always voted for increased appropriations, he might have to reevaluate his position if the university opposed his bill.<sup>28</sup> In spite of this warning, Representative Fuller Warren of Blountstown, who was also a student at the university at the time, urged defeat of the bill which he termed "a dangerous piece of legislation."<sup>29</sup>

The faculty and the president of Rollins College, a small school of liberal arts at Winter Park, lodged an official protest. President Hamilton Holt announced that while he respected the opinion of the anti-evolutionists who believed that the truths of religion must be preserved at all costs, he personally remained opposed to such a measure. The only way truth can be found, he insisted, is through freedom of intellectual process. The resolution as presented by Rollins College warned that if students were not free to seek knowledge in Florida, they would take their tuition dollars elsewhere.

Rollins College as a private school would not have been affected by its opposition to the bill. But Holt hoped that a strong stand by his college would encourage the officials of the state-supported institutions to be more outspoken in their opposition to Stalnaker's proposal. To emphasize further his concern for academic freedom, Holt revealed that he had refused a large endowment when the donor had demanded that evolution not be made a part of the curriculum.<sup>30</sup>

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27. Murphree to Waybright, April 25, 1927, box 75, folder 222, Albert A. Murphree Papers, University Archives, University of Florida Library, Gainesville. Hereinafter cited as Murphree Papers.

28. University of Florida *Florida Alligator*, April 23, 1927.

29. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 12, 1927. See also David R. Colburn and Richard K. Scher, "Florida Gubernatorial Politics: The Fuller Warren Years," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LIII (April 1975), 390.

30. *New York Times*, April 30, 1927; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 2, 1927; Warren Kuehl, *Hamilton Holt: Internationalist, Journalist, Educator* (Gainesville, 1960), 223-25.

The action by the Rollins College faculty and president encouraged many Florida newspapers to oppose the measure. According to the *Gainesville Daily Sun*, the only Florida daily voicing its support was the *Florida Morning State* in Tallahassee. A Palm Beach paper noted that subjects other than biology routinely taught in the state's schools contradicted the Bible and wondered whether the legislature would attempt to ban them as well.<sup>32</sup> The *Gainesville Daily Sun* praised the action of the Southern Methodist Educators' Conference which had adopted a resolution at a February 1927 meeting in Memphis, opposing all legislation which would interfere with the teaching of science "in American schools and colleges."<sup>33</sup> Playing down the controversy, the *St. Augustine Record* said that teaching that a contradiction exists between Darwinism and Genesis could only result in a disservice to both science and religion.<sup>34</sup> Assuming a similar point of view, the *Fort Myers Tropical News* warned that "the militant atheist in his attack on growing minds" would find his best ally in "the militant anti-evolutionist."<sup>35</sup>

If educators and the press opposed the measure, there was strong support for it. Many Protestant groups urged immediate enactment of the law. A typical example was the Wesley Brotherhood of the Clearwater Methodist Church, which endorsed the proposal and denounced evolution as detrimental to the "foundation of our American government which is founded on the faith in the Bible as taught and exemplified by our Pilgrim fathers." The group called on others to support Stalnaker's attempt to destroy atheistic and agnostic influences among the "rising generation in Florida."<sup>36</sup>

On April 19 the House Committee on Education held public hearings on the anti-evolution bill. Stalnaker opened the hearing, defending his proposal and denouncing the theory of evolution which, he affirmed, put man in the same class with swine and monkeys. He called for the removal of objection-

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31. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, May 9, 1927.

32. *Palm Beach Independent*, cited in *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 1, 1927.

33. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, May 4, 1927.

34. *St. Augustine Record*, cited in *Gainesville Daily Sun*, May 7, 1927.

35. *Fort Myers Tropical News*, cited in *Gainesville Daily Sun*, May 13, 1927.

36. *Clearwater Sun*, April 15, 1927.

able texts used in Florida high schools, the University of Florida, and Florida State College for Women which he labeled "too vulgar to be mentioned before a mixed audience." Several persons declared the evolutionary doctrine responsible for the increase in campus suicides. Stalnaker himself said he would prefer that his children remain uneducated rather than have their faith destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

Following Stalnaker's speech, the floor was opened for debate. Senator W. J. Singletary agreed with Stalnaker and declared: "These highbrows that have more theory than they have sense . . . are infidels, atheists and agnostics." F. L. D. Carr, another Tampa representative, disagreed and denounced the bill as "foolish" and "needless," insisting that its passage would destroy the good name of Florida. He insisted that Stalnaker was expressing his own views and not those of the majority of people in Hillsborough County. To combat Stalnaker's narrow fundamentalist argument for the bill, his opponents called on Grosvenor Dawe to defend the theory of evolution. Editor of *Nation's Business* and former editor of the *Literary Digest*, Dawe insisted that the battle between fundamentalism and modernism had already been resolved. He condemned any new efforts to "curb free thinking and the advancement of scientific researches [*sic*]." In spite of the strenuous opposition, the committee passed the measure unanimously, with one member not voting.<sup>38</sup>

The house took up Stalnaker's proposal on May 11 as a special order of business, but immediately voted, fifty-five to thirty-eight, to recommit it to committee. Two weaker proposals were also presented to the judiciary committee as possible substitute amendments.<sup>39</sup> The proposed amendments reflected the varying attitudes of the legislators toward the teaching of evolution. Stalnaker's measure was designed to ban unequivocally the teaching of Darwin's theory. Although Representative W. A. MacKenzie of Leesburg had been a staunch supporter of the Stalnaker bill, when he saw it might fail, he indicated his willingness to compromise. His amendment would ban the teaching of any theory that denied the existence of God, the divine

37. *Tallahassee Daily Democrat*, April 20, 1927.

38. *Ibid.*; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, April 20, 1927.

39. *Florida House Journal*, 1927, 1, 2332-33.

creation of man, and "the sonship of Jesus of Nazareth." It emphasized the affirmation of a religious creed rather than the prohibition of a specific theory. Thus, MacKenzie's proposal appeared to be more moderate and less anti-intellectual than the original bill. Representative C. O. Andrews of Orange County proposed a second amendment that was even more general than the MacKenzie measure; it prohibited the teaching of any theory which conflicted with the Bible. Andrews said he did not accept Darwin's theories, but he condemned the banning of specific doctrines.<sup>40</sup>

The variety of bills seemed to confuse the legislators and to divide the anti-evolutionist forces. W. D. Bell of Arcadia announced his opposition to the Stalnaker bill, claiming that it was "unconstitutional." Sidney J. Catts, Jr., a West Palm Beach attorney and son of the former governor of Florida, voted against the measure. He said the effect of the proposed amendments could not be determined. By a vote of nineteen to eighteen, the judiciary committee opposed the measure.<sup>41</sup>

The *Florida Times-Union* stated that by its vote the committee had sent "Stalnaker's Anti-Evolution Meteor . . . Into Oblivion."<sup>42</sup> But backers of the bill were not willing to surrender so easily. On May 11, the same day the judiciary committee voted, supporters of the Stalnaker bill announced plans to hold a rally. Handbills were distributed throughout the city and surrounding counties announcing the meeting as one of the greatest gatherings and demonstrations ever seen in Florida. The crowd that assembled that evening in the Tallahassee High School auditorium was not as large as hoped for, but it was enthusiastic. George Washburn of Clearwater was selected as moderator. He introduced W. A. MacKenzie and W. J. Singletary who praised the Stalnaker bill and urged its passage. Former Governor Sidney J. Catts, who had announced his intention to enter the gubernatorial race in 1928, proclaimed his opposition to the teaching of evolution and pledged to ban the theory from the public schools if he were elected.<sup>43</sup> While Catts's favorable position on the gambling issue had eroded some

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40. *Ibid.*, 2332.

41. *Ibid.*, 2333, 2607.

42. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 12, 1927.

43. Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, May 12, 13, 1927.

of his support, he still commanded respect within the fundamentalist forces.<sup>44</sup>

On May 13 the "evolution Phoenix" plunged the House of Representatives into a state of chaos.<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding the judiciary's unfavorable report, there was strong legislative enthusiasm for an anti-evolution law. Supporters of the Stalnaker bill were preparing for a fierce battle on the house floor. At an evening session, which lasted past midnight, the debate over evolution stalemated. Anti-evolutionists were unable to muster the two-thirds majority needed to override the committee's report, and those opposing the Stalnaker bill could not secure enough votes to assure its defeat. The debate involving the bill and its amendments became so heated that Speaker of the House Fred Davis finally adjourned the assembly in order to allow tempers to cool.

In the early dawn hours of May 14, the bill's proponents met in caucus to plan the strategy for the upcoming special Saturday session. Stalnaker's supporters threatened to block passage of all other legislation until an anti-evolution measure was passed.<sup>46</sup> The bill which had become the "biggest surprise of the session" was finally returned to committee for reconsideration on May 14. In an attempt to quash debate, both sides agreed not to filibuster when the measure finally came up for a vote. Opponents of the Stalnaker bill decided to adopt the MacKenzie compromise rather than waste the remainder of the session debating the controversial issue.

On May 17 the house passed, by a vote of sixty-seven to twenty-four, the measure which prohibited teaching as fact, "any theory that denies the existence of God, that denies the divine creation of man, or to teach in any way atheism or infidelity, and to prohibit the use or adoption for use of any text book which teaches as fact any theory that denies the existence of God, that denies the divine creation of man, or that teaches atheism or infidelity, or that contains vulgar, obscene or indecent matter, and providing a penalty for the violation thereof."<sup>47</sup>

44. *Panama City Pilot*, May 10, 1928.

45. *St. Petersburg Times*, May 14, 1927.

46. *Ibid.*; *Gainesville Daily Sun*, May 14, 1927; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 14, 1921; *Tallahassee Daily Democrat*, May 14, 1927.

47. *Florida House Journal*, 1927, part 1, 3001.

Representative MacKenzie insisted that he was not "radical," but he wanted to put Florida on record as "believing in God" and the "divine creation of man."<sup>48</sup> Following approval, several house members were permitted to read into the record their opinions of the legislative action. Representative F. L. D. Carr, one of Stalnaker's harshest critics, attempted to illustrate the absurdity of the controversy with a poem.

I am now a legislator—  
Ah, woe to me!  
I'm between the Devil  
And the deep blue sea.

This bloody evolution  
Has already "got my goat."  
On the blasted, bloomin' question  
I don't know how to vote.

To gain my next election,  
I know the bill must pass,  
So I guess I'll ape the monkey  
By voting like an ass.<sup>49</sup>

Other opponents of the bill, exasperated with the time lost in the debate over evolution, ribbed each other about their performances on the house floor. Fuller Warren and R. E. Oliver of West Palm Beach asked the house to declare Carr "poet laureate on evolution."<sup>50</sup> Carr retaliated by proposing that the house hold a talking contest between A. W. Weeks, Fuller Warren, J. M. Lee, and W. A. MacKenzie, and award a medal to the legislator who could best "spout and shout" on their "individual favorite topic": "What I Have Accomplished in This Session of the Legislature."<sup>51</sup>

The anti-evolution bill was sent to the senate where it encountered a hostile reception by the education committee. Chairman John S. Taylor of Largo, a vice-president in the Bible Crusaders and a staunch anti-evolutionist, attempted to have the bill put on the calendar without reference. He had hoped to outmaneuver the opposition by bypassing the committee and moving directly to the senate floor where there was a favorable

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48. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 18, 1927.

49. *Florida House Journal*, 1927, part 1, 3002.

50. *Ibid.*, 3377.

51. *Ibid.*, part 2, 5082.



atmosphere. Since the bill was mentioned only by number, several members of the education committee were not aware of what was happening, and agreed to place it on the calendar. When Pat Whitaker of Tampa realized that Taylor was using a deceptive tactic to move the bill out of committee, he brought the controversial nature of the measure to everyone's attention. The committee then voted nineteen to fifteen to reconsider the measure. Because only eight days were left in the session and over 100 bills preceded it on the calendar, the committee's decision to reconsider killed the proposal. Sponsors of the bill attempted to persuade the senate to call the bill up out of order, but this action was also defeated.<sup>52</sup>

Although anti-evolutionists in the legislature had failed to obtain the passage of even the "anti-atheism" bill, their efforts during the session were not fruitless. On June 1, 1927, Senator Singletary secured the adoption of a resolution which called for an investigation of the textbooks used in the institutions of higher learning. "Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 28" stated that the legislature had been notified that certain textbooks used by state institutions were "inimical to good morals and healthy thought." The resolution provided for the establishment of a special four-member joint committee to scrutinize state texts and make recommendations on their use to the State Board of Education. On the committee's advisement, the board would remove all texts deemed "detrimental to good morals and clean thinking."<sup>53</sup>

The action of the Florida Senate was an ironic aftermath of the evolution controversy. It had failed to ratify the house bill which merely denounced the teaching of atheism, and yet originated a measure which gave a select committee extensive control over the institutions of higher learning. On April 29, 1927, A. W. Weeks of Holmes County had tried to attach an amendment onto the MacKenzie bill that would have banned certain books on biology and psychoanalysis. The house defeated this motion and also another effort by Weeks to establish a

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52. *Clearwater Sun*, May 18, 1927; Tallahassee *Florida State News*, May 19, 1927; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 26, 1927; *Florida Senate Journal*, 1927, 2416.

53. *Florida Senate Journal*, 1927, part 2, 4373-74; *Laws of Florida*, 1927, I, 1623-24.

textbook surveillance committee. The house supported a ban on the teaching of atheism but, unlike the senate, opposed an investigative committee.<sup>54</sup>

The *Florida State News*, a Tallahassee political daily, condemned the action of the legislature as a serious challenge to freedom of thought. It called the resolution a "pernicious bit of legislative insanity only one step behind smashing the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom." The paper also challenged the integrity of Singletary, demanding "to know what manner of person this self-appointed agent-provocateur is." According to the *Florida State News*, most members of the legislature were incompetent to teach grade school, let alone censor college texts.<sup>55</sup>

Singletary, who had been appointed chairman of the investigative committee, was infuriated by the paper's attack. He proposed a resolution barring Byron West, the editor, from the senate chamber, and denounced the editorial as "a pack of lies." West, he insisted, "was not fit to be running around loose, and ought to be in the penitentiary."<sup>56</sup> Singletary convinced the senate that the *Florida State News* had insulted both him and the entire legislature. The resolution was passed on a voice vote. Singletary tried to persuade the house to rebuke the *Florida State News* by omitting its name from the closing commendation. Besides the wire services, the only other state newspapers covering the legislature were the *Miami Herald* and the *Florida Times-Union*. When the list for commendation was read on the house floor, S. D. Harris of Pinellas County asked that the *Florida State News* be omitted, and this generated debate over the right of newspapers to criticize members of the legislature.<sup>57</sup> Clay Lewis of Gulf County insisted on the paper's right to criticize public officials, and even the most vocal anti-evolutionist in the house, A. W. Weeks, supported the action of the *Florida State News*. The paper also received strong support from other Florida journals, including the *Miami Herald*, *Jacksonville Journal*, *Gainesville Sun*, *Gadsden County Times*,

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54. *Florida House Journal*, 1927, part 1, 1422-23, 2578; part 2, 3493; Tallahassee *Florida State News*, April 30, 1927.

55. Tallahassee *Florida State News*, June 2, 1927.

56. *Ibid.*, June 3, 1927.

57. *Florida House Journal*, 1927, part 2, 6347-48.

and the *Lakeland Ledger*. Byron West thanked the state press for its support and announced his intention to investigate Singletary before he "cast the first stone."<sup>58</sup>

During that summer of 1927 officials from the University of Florida and Florida State College for Women were planning their defense against anticipated attacks on the use of controversial texts. Not only did the schools have to contend with Singletary's legislative committee, but they also were being forced to respond to the agitation of a citizen's group. L. A. Tatum, a Tallahassee businessman, had organized an anti-evolution group in 1926 which had conducted its own investigation of alleged heretical books in the library of the women's college. It demanded the removal of certain texts and it called for the dismissal of "unorthodox professors." Tatum had made his objections known to the Board of Control several times during 1926.<sup>59</sup> Neither the board nor the Florida Presbytery, however, took any action on his demands.<sup>60</sup>

After the enactment of the textbook investigation resolution, Tatum recruited Alphonse Pichard and several other deacons from the Tallahassee Baptist Church to assist in a renewed campaign against evolution. The Florida Purity League, under the leadership of Tatum and Pichard, vowed to rid all state libraries of objectionable publications and to eliminate "dangerous teachers" from the state schools.<sup>61</sup> In August 1927, J. G. Kellum, business manager of Florida State College for Women, informed President Murphree that Tatum was concentrating his efforts on the women's college because he had a "personal grudge" against Edward Conradi, its president. "I do not think he cares one hoot what is in any of the textbooks," Kellum insisted. Murphree replied that the time was not suitable for Conradi, the Board of Control, or himself "to go into public print on the subject." Murphree suggested that it would be more appropriate

58. Tallahassee *Florida State News*, June 4, 1927.

59. Florida Board of Control Minutes, April 12, 1926, 151-52; May 17, 1926, 166; June 14, 1926, 183; microfilm, Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

60. *Ibid.*; Presbyterian church in the United States, Synod of Florida, Florida presbytery, *Minutes* (n.p., n.d.), November 16, 1927, pp. 8-10, copy in P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida.

61. Raymond F. Bellamy, "A History of the Department of Sociology at Florida State University, 1928-1950," 29, unpublished manuscript, Florida Collection, Strozier Library, Florida State University.

to await reaction to a joint letter of explanation which the alumni of the two institutions had prepared to be sent to applicants and former students.<sup>62</sup>

In August 1927, Tatum appeared twice before the Board of Control requesting that certain books be removed from the libraries of the two state universities.<sup>63</sup> Murphree and Conradi defended the right of their faculties to determine the texts for their classes, but they agreed to restrict their use by students.<sup>64</sup> The two presidents agreed to have the books reserved for restricted use. They did not want them "to be abused as a result of the unfortunate advertizing [*sic*] they have received from the unfair and unjust criticism of Mr. Tatum."<sup>65</sup> At the University of Florida the books were enclosed in a wire cage behind the check-out desk and were available only to professors and to selected students who produced a written note from their teacher.

During the fall of 1927, Tatum's group made several unannounced visits to the two libraries looking for heretical material. Meanwhile, the Singletary committee had requested a list of the texts used in psychology and sociology.<sup>66</sup> In September 1927, Murphree was queried on the adoption of certain controversial texts, but he defended their use "to provoke discussion and present the other side of the situation." Murphree also rebutted charges made by Singletary against Lucius M. Bristol, chairman of the department of sociology at the university. The Marianna senator claimed Bristol had advocated uncritical acceptance of evolution. To reassure the committee, Murphree announced that every professor employed by the university affirmed a belief in God and the Bible.<sup>67</sup> Restricting the use of the texts satisfied the Singletary committee, but only their removal would have placated Tatum. According to Ray-

62. J. G. Kellum to Murphree, August 16, 1927; Murphree to Kellum, August 18, 1927; box 75, folder 220, Murphree Papers.

63. Florida Board of Control Minutes, August 16, 1927, 402; August 31, 1927, 407; microfilm, Strozier Library, Florida State University.

64. *Ibid.*, October 17, 1927, 444.

65. Murphree to Fred H. Davis, August 20, 1927, box 75, folder 222, Murphree Papers.

66. L. M. Bristol to Murphree, September 29, 1927, box 68, folder 139; Murphree to W. J. Singletary, September 30, 1927, box 75, folder 222, Murphree Papers.

67. Murphree to W. J. Singletary, September 30, 1927, box 75, folder 222, Murphree Papers.

mond Bellamy, sociology professor at Florida State College for Women, a threat to reveal improper conduct by Singletary deterred him from taking further drastic action against the state institutions.

Singletary, who was described as "a strikingly handsome man and a natural orator," often told a story to illustrate how college students were rejecting the faith of their parents. According to him, once while chaperoning a group of female students on a weekend outing he had tried to conduct a discussion on religion. Singletary declared that to his "utter amazement," he "found that out of twenty-seven girls who were there, twenty-one . . . did not even believe in God and scoffed at the Bible."<sup>68</sup> Professor Bellamy, irritated by Singletary's accusations, contacted the girls involved about the truth of the senator's tale. They claimed that "nothing of the sort had ever happened." Some of the ladies stated that his behavior had been ungentlemanly. One of the girls even said that she had kicked him because of his advances while they were swimming. These accusations were given to a sympathetic senator with the understanding that he would make them public if "Singletary became abusive."<sup>69</sup>

Tatum's Purity League was not satisfied with having the books placed under limited circulation, and continued to press the Board of Control to remove the controversial texts from the library. Under the advice of the board and the State Board of Education, the presidents of the two state institutions agreed to their restriction.<sup>70</sup> Although they met Tatum's demands, Conradi and Murphree defended the use of the banned material. Murphree presented a questionnaire to the board which had been sent to several colleges in the South. Of the eighteen church schools that replied, all had one to thirteen of the controversial books in their libraries.<sup>71</sup>

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68. Bellamy, "History of the Department of Sociology at Florida State University," 28; *Tallahassee Daily Democrat*, May 13, 1927.

69. Bellamy, "History of the Department of Sociology at Florida State University," 30.

70. Murphree to R. F. Maguire, October 17, 1927, box 75, folder 222; to Board of Control, October 14, 1927, box 68, folder 139; to L. A. Tatum and A. Pichard, October 28, 1927, box 68, folder 139, Murphree Papers.

71. Florida Board of Control Minutes, October 17, 1927, 444, microfilm, Strozier Library, Florida State University; Murphree to Spessard Holland, October 5, 1927, box 75, folder 222, Murphree Papers.

When Murphree and Conradi confronted Tatum they always presented a united front, but they did disagree privately on how to handle the accusations. Although the University of Florida had been included in Tatum's first attacks in 1926, he directed most of his venom toward the women's college. Murphree privately called Tatum a "pernicious fool" with "just enough money to make trouble," but he always remained outwardly conciliatory toward the anti-evolutionists. Conradi, though, had refused to yield to Tatum's demands. His refusal to be intimidated intensified Tatum's antagonism and his conviction that Conradi was a dangerous man. Murphree believed that Tatum's crusade would have faltered in 1926 if Conradi had cooperated and had restricted the use of several sociology and psychology texts.<sup>72</sup>

When the Board of Control finally authorized the books removed from the libraries, twenty-one works were involved, including Floyd Allport's *Social Psychology*, Sigmund Freud's *General Introduction to Psychology*, A. L. Kroeber's *Anthropology*, and H. G. Wells's *Outline of History*. Although the evolution controversy precipitated the need to suppress "dangerous ideas," the ban also included such works as Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*.<sup>73</sup>

Tatum and Pichard and their cohorts were still not satisfied, and Bertrand Russell's works were added to the banned book list.<sup>74</sup> Murphree removed the volumes to a restricted area, but Conradi refused to comply. In a letter to Murphree, Pichard thanked him for his compliance and bitterly denounced Conradi: "You nor any other single individual will ever know of the real extent of the filthy, immoral, un-Christian and un-American instruction and propaganda in our Women's College, taught by perverted alien or anarchistic instructors shielded by an alien president whos [*sic*] evry [*sic*] word is evasive or otherwise."<sup>75</sup>

72. Murphree to W. B. Davis, May 25, 1926, box 68, folder 139, Murphree Papers.

73. Cora Miltimore to Murphree, October 4, 1927, box 68, folder 139, Murphree Papers.

74. Pichard and Tatum to Murphree, October 14, 1927; Murphree to L.A. Tatum and A. Pichard, October 18, 1927, box 68, folder 139, Murphree Papers.

75. Pichard to Murphree, October 21, 1927, box 68, folder 139, Murphree Papers.

On November 16, 1927, the Florida Presbytery heard the report of its investigative committee commissioned in 1926 to probe the use of objectionable texts at the state college. Edward Conradi had appeared before the committee on October 20, 1927. At that time he assured the assembly that the controversial books had been removed from the college and the library. The Presbytery agreed to discharge the committee when Conradi added that any teacher found teaching anything contrary to the "Word of God" and the "Christian Religion" would be reported to the Board of Control, and the president would recommend his or her removal. Tatum had protested that further purging of the college was necessary, but the committee had refused to hear his complaint.<sup>76</sup> Tatum no longer had denominational backing for his investigative efforts, and the legislative committee had remained inactive since September 1927. Although support for his campaign was diminishing, Tatum continued to distribute leaflets condemning the use of certain books and calling for the dismissal of "infidel" teachers.

In December 1927, Conradi informed a Pensacola newspaperman that nothing was being taught at the college that would undermine a student's belief in God or the Bible, or promote immoral sex or Bolshevik leanings. He admitted that the theory of evolution was studied, but he repudiated Tatum's contention that it was taught as fact.<sup>77</sup> Students at the universities in Tallahassee and Gainesville corroborated the testimony of their college administrators and protested the actions of Tatum and his group. An editorial in the *Florida Alligator* insisted that the citizen's committee possessed no ability to judge what should be taught and declared that the determination of the curriculum was best left to the faculty and the Board of Control.<sup>78</sup> The student body at the Florida State College for Women passed a resolution which denied that faculty members had advocated "free love, interracial marriage, or theories which undermine the Christian faith."<sup>79</sup>

The assurances of orthodoxy given by administrators, faculty,

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76. Presbyterian church in the United States, Synod of Florida, Florida presbytery, *Minutes* (n.p., n.d.), November 16, 1927, pp. 8-10.

77. University of Florida *Florida Alligator*, December 10, 1927.

78. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1927.

79. *Tallahassee Daily Democrat*, June 1, 1927.

and students at the state universities seemed to satisfy most Floridians, although evolution became a relatively minor issue in the gubernatorial campaign of 1928. In his bid to return to Tallahassee, Sidney J. Catts pledged to remove "obscene" books from the women's college even if he had to appoint a new Board of Control every month.<sup>80</sup>

Fundamentalists, however, were beginning to lose their fervor for the crusade to eliminate Darwinism from the public schools. By 1927 the anti-evolutionist forces in Florida were being led by militantly anti-intellectual fundamentalists like Catts and Tatum. Many Floridians who doubted the truth of evolutionary theory, nevertheless, saw the tactics of such men as a threat to academic excellence and as an embarrassment to the state of Florida. Many of the movement's most fervid critics were from the conservative rural areas of the state.

The political power of the anti-evolutionist movement disintegrated as, one by one, its leaders were rejected by Florida voters. Catts was soundly defeated in 1928 in his bid for the governorship. Stalnaker, who had become a municipal judge in Tampa following the 1927 legislative session, lost his reelection attempt by a two to one margin. Finally, when the Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, after years of hostility toward the women's college, rebuked Tatum and expressed its support for the institution, the last stronghold of active fundamentalist resistance in Florida was broken.<sup>81</sup>

Even though the anti-evolution movement in Florida had failed to secure the passage of a law barring the teaching of Darwin's theory in the public schools, it did leave an imprint on the religious and political life of the state. Legal restrictions on the teaching of evolution were rare, even on the local level. But the pressure exerted by citizens and church committees on the high schools and institutions of higher learning made the teaching of evolution a hazardous undertaking.

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80. *Ibid.*, May 25, 1928. Of the four Democratic candidates for governor in 1928—Doyle Carlton, Sidney J. Catts, W. A. MacKenzie, and John S. Taylor—only Carlton, who won the election, did not support the anti-evolution movement.

81. Bellamy, "History of the Department of Sociology at Florida State University," 34. For a more extensive discussion of the anti-evolution controversy in Florida, see the author's M.A. thesis, Florida State University, 1973.



Nevertheless, the victories of the fundamentalists were merely illusory. Rather than impeding the dissemination of information about evolution, the activities of its critics only succeeded in creating greater interest in the subject. The fundamentalists had attempted to stop the erosion of simplistic religion by banning scientific investigation. They had failed in their effort to restore the past, yet they had made the reconciliation between science and religion more difficult.